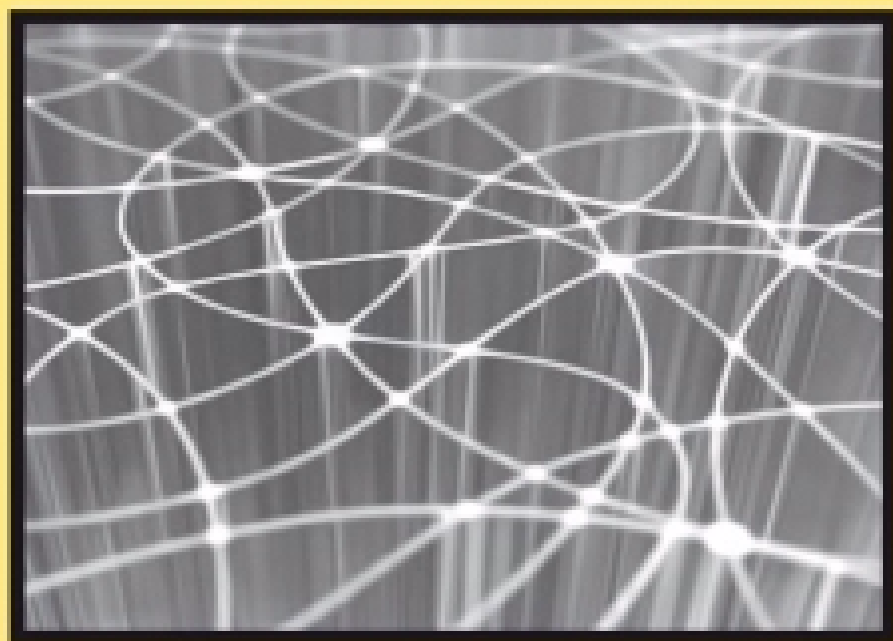


GRAZER BEITRÄGE
ZUR EUROPÄISCHEN ETHNOLOGIE

14



JÜRGEN BARKHOFF/HELMUT EBERHART
(EDS.)

NETWORKING ACROSS
BORDERS AND FRONTIERS



PETER LANG

INTERNATIONALER VERLAG DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

Jürgen Barkhoff, Helmut Eberhart

Introduction

This volume presents the proceedings of a Coimbra Group conference that took place at the University of Graz in Austria in September 2007. The Coimbra Group is a consortium of 38 leading, long-established, research-intensive universities from all over Europe, founded in 1985 at Coimbra in Portugal. One of its central aims is to encourage and foster international and interdisciplinary co-operation in research and the establishment of thematic research networks. The Coimbra Group carries out most of its work through its Task Forces, and this symposium was organized by the Task Force on Culture, Arts and Humanities. Within its broader remit it is one of the central missions of this Task Force to “raise awareness of the central contribution of culture to processes of identity formation, the self-definition of societies, and the reflection of their values”,¹ and an investigation into processes of networking across borders and frontiers in European culture and society certainly fits well within this remit. Overall the aim of this conference, to bring a range of thematic, disciplinary and methodological approaches from diverse intellectual traditions to a common topic that is of relevance for the Europe of today, is at the heart of the Coimbra Group’s mission.

In this spirit researchers joined together from many countries from all over Europe: Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland. Moreover and more importantly the conference assembled many disciplines across the Humanities and Social Sciences spectrum, from Cultural Anthropology, European Ethnology, History, Literary and Cultural Studies and Fine Arts to Peace Studies, Sociology and Political Sciences.

Networking across borders and frontiers in Europe can by its very nature only be explored in an interdisciplinary and international setting. It is also a particularly appropriate topic for investigation by a university network such as the Coimbra Group. Throughout their history, universities have been among the strongest and most influential networks in Europe. Moreover, the networking activities of wandering scholars long precede the establishment of universities and go back to the Middle Ages. One might think, for example, of the networking activities of Irish monks on the European continent, under the

1 Coimbra Group Task Force Culture, Arts and Humanities. Mission statement at: http://www.coimbra-group.eu/07_task_forces_3_culture.php.

auspices of the Church, which has itself in recent times rightly received attention as a network. These networks stretched from Ireland to Austria, to name but the two countries in which the organizers of this conference are working. More recent examples of networking among European scholars and students as a constitutive activity of academic life are among the themes discussed in this volume. Indeed, the Coimbra Group itself is the product of a networking strategy.

Within this context it was the intention of the organisers that the conference itself, in its interdisciplinary and international nature, could provide an example of the dynamics between disciplinary boundaries and transgressive intellectual networking. In the European history of knowledge disciplinary restrictions on the conceptualization of knowledge are themselves too often a reflection of national boundaries, for example in the fields of history and philology, where they can conceal the reality of cultural and disciplinary cross-fertilization and limit the potential of cross-disciplinary enquiry.

Borders, frontiers, classifications and demarcations were decisive concepts not only for the political and cultural topography of Europe in the 19th and early 20th century, but also for the structuring of knowledge and perception during this period. In contemporary discourse, however, it is easy to see how generalized the network concept has become. One obvious and well-researched reason for this is the increasing importance and indeed dominance of networking communication technologies like the Internet. A second, related trend that also has received much attention is the process of globalization, in which transnational networks are increasingly undermining and indeed replacing national structures in politics, economy, society and culture, and which brings with it the triumph of a world-wide connected lifestyle.

It is no exaggeration to say that networks have become a fundamental cultural technique of modernity. It is one of the puzzling characteristics of our topic that networks are at the same time an almost ubiquitous material reality both in nature and man-made technology, a social and systemic structure and a phenomenon of discourse, an epistemic concept that configures knowledge and imagination alike. Networks have become an absolute metaphor (Hans Blumenberg) that structures our perceptions and interpretations, and enables us to map our understanding of social phenomena, cultural processes, thought patterns and aesthetic matrices in a complex interaction between theoretical models, experimental practices and symbolic representations.

Based on these observations, the contributions in this volume test the capacity of the frontier-network binary for describing and analysing historical, cultural and political processes in the formation of European cultures and societies past and present, and across national and disciplinary boundaries. They analyse, mostly in the form of case studies, intercultural engagement in

Europe across boundaries in a range of contemporary and historical settings, examine movements of people, ideas and cultural practices through networks and the contribution of such movements to the construction of Europe. Thus this volume seeks to make a contribution to the establishment of the concept of networks of knowledge as a research paradigm which investigates structures and representations of knowledge across cultures, epochs and discursive fields. It traces the topographies of networks of cultural influence in Europe in the knowledge that Europe itself, in its historical and contemporary development, is perhaps best understood as a network of interdependencies across frontiers.

Manuel Castells's influential Network Society thesis, according to which transnational networks are increasingly undermining and indeed replacing national structures in politics, economy, society and culture, is possibly an overstatement. However, there can be no doubt that on a global scale, internationally linked interest networks (of capital, knowledge, the military or terror), each dealing in respective exchange currencies of goods, information and, above all, people, are constantly gaining importance. Especially in today's Europe we witness a strong dynamic between the defining and limiting effects of frontiers and the transgressive and connecting force of networks. Within the historical process of European unification and, more recently, in the context of the widening European Union, the political and sociological aspects of this dynamic have received more attention than the cultural ones, although the role of culture is central to the construction, legitimisation and reflection of identities, groups and discourses.

A number of general observations about the way our contributors have approached the topic need to be made.

1. The starting points of the research theme reflected in this volume are mostly current cultural trends, fuelled by sociological, political, economic and philosophical developments. However, the sheer scale and dynamism of these processes can lead us to underestimate their strong historical genesis. It is one task of the Humanities to raise awareness of the historical antecedents of the present situation, and a number of papers in this volume (Sigrist, Tikhonov-Sigrist, Knudsen) address this in order to deepen the understanding of current debates by putting them into historical perspective, working against an increasingly ahistorical *Zeitgeist*.

2. The papers in this volume aim to identify and distinguish the different theoretical and methodological approaches to our topic. The current proliferation of the network metaphor both in public and academic discourse entails the danger that its analytical value remains unclear. The reflection of the scientific advantages and disadvantages of specific models of network analysis is therefore paramount. At one end of the spectrum one might locate sociological and anthropological network analysis as empirical study of social interaction at the

micro-level of a social group (Holton); at the other end would be discourse theory or theories of intertextuality which disregard individual actors and examine the proliferation of paradigms, ideas and motives across interconnected discourses or within structures of aesthetic representations (Riou). This also includes an analysis of the travel of themes, motives, styles across genres and frontiers and identifies the network as a poetological principle in art and aesthetics, in literary and cultural narratives (Pöge-Alder, López-Aparicio Perez). Both approaches and many in between are represented in this volume.

3. In today's Europe we witness a strong dynamic between the defining and limiting effects of frontiers and the transgressive and connecting force of networks. It is perhaps an enduring legacy of the age of nationalism that the sharp dividing lines of frontiers and the notion of multiple borders are perceived to be of such vital importance for political and social systems, but also for cultural paradigms, the notion of heritage, for life-styles and the self-definition of societies. Against that background, the increasing attention paid to the fundamental hybridity of cultures, their heterogeneity and interrelatedness puts into sharp focus the concept of the network with its notions of connectedness, interdependence, plurality and openness. Undoubtedly frontiers were and still are necessary elements for the definition of selves, communities, disciplines and nations on multiple levels. But if human beings, social groups and fields of knowledge all need frontiers to define themselves, they equally need to trespass them. On close scrutiny frontiers always reveal their artificial, construct character, the networking of border identities occurs near frontiers. In this sense networks are generally accredited nowadays with a vital and largely positive function, enabling groups, peoples and cultures to overcome differences or communicative obstacles, and to organise knowledge and communicative processes in and across all fields of culture and society, but also in and across academic disciplines and the sciences.

There is, however, also a complementary and more threatening side to the increasing preponderance of network activities: globalisation, the merging of nations into wider political entities and the triumph of a world-wide connected life-style raises fears about a loss of identity and of increasing anonymity and fragmentation within such a system of interconnections. Globalization is thus complemented by a parallel return to the regional and local, to passions for small homelands, for rescuing heritages and a nostalgic revival of cultural traditions or obsolete autarchic dimensions. All these interrelated and partially contradictory processes need the attention of academic enquiry, and most of the contributors to this volume examine the importance of frontiers and networks in identity formation, the notions of demarcation vs. openness, local rootedness vs. global connectedness and the ensuing dynamics between self and other, inclusion and exclusion, uniformity and diversity, centre and mar-

gins and the redefinition of European borders as liminal spaces of contact and exchange, but also of demarcation and rejection (Barna, Mód & Virtanen, Österlund-Pötzsch, Patent, O Dochartaigh, Grilli & Mugnaini, Wylie).

In a far-reaching opening article, **Robert Holton** sets the scene by discussing central features of the morphology and functions of networks and by examining some of the theoretical dimensions of networks research. His focus on social networks of influence and agency enables him to distinguish them clearly from the widespread metaphorical use of the network concept. He places them as flexible, multi-centred and interconnected networks of influence between hierarchies and markets. He also develops a research matrix for the relationships between networks and frontiers and, by engaging with the influential theories of Manuel Castells, discusses some of the reasons behind the current prominence of discussions about networks.

In the section on **Networks of Knowledge** the focus is on historic networks that have contributed to the creation of European topographies of knowledge. Picking up Holton's focus on networks of social agency they investigate institutional and personal networks as decisive structures for the production and dissemination of ideas and knowledge across the European continent. Their horizons of investigation stretch from formal networking institutions like the Academies of Science and the networking strategies of scholars and students to the more informal international networks which influence the spread and development of ideas. **René Sigris**t's research into the creation of international scientific networks prior to the reification of strict national and disciplinary divisions in the later 19th century impressively demonstrates the dense correspondence networks of scientists of the 18th century. Sigris't empirical method allows him to identify the famous scientists of their age as the central nodes in scientific networks enabled by the leading communication technology of their time – letter writing. **Natalia Tikhonov-Sigris**t's equally empirical study complements this by presenting the networking strategies of migrant students that came from all over Europe and beyond to study in Switzerland between 1870 and 1914. Her article persuasively demonstrates academic migration as a key driver of internationalization and intercultural exchange in Europe at all levels. **Inge Knudsen**'s case-study of the early feminist and social critic Mary Wollstonecraft links the development of one of the most radical thinkers of her time to the various intellectual networks she belonged to and engaged with in pre- and post revolutionary England and France. Her article thus highlights the importance of the more informal networks of intellectuals for the dissemination of influential ideas.

The section **Connectedness versus Rootedness** presents two broad-based ethnological research projects that investigate the impact of social and cultural change on attitudes and mentalities following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and its political system and the re-integration of the people of Eastern Europe into the cultural and political topography of Europe. Of particular interest to both projects is the unfolding dynamic between the local and the global and between tradition and modernisation in societies that for forty years were isolated from global developments. The two contributions investigate *inter alia* to what extent the notions of connectedness and rootedness are mutually exclusive or indeed interdependent. **Gábor Barna's** article examines the effects of networking practices like migration and global mass communication on religious attitudes, practices and concepts in post-communist Hungary. In the emerging pluralistic religious marketplace within an increasingly secular society newly introduced world religions, supported by globally interconnected virtual communities, exist alongside and interact with local religious groups and peasant religiosity that fuse spirituality with nationalistic ideologies and essentialist definitions of culture. **László Mód** and **Timo Virtanen's** paper investigates everyday practices, rules and conflicts in changing village-town relations in the border zone of Hungary, Romania and Serbia. It focuses on the cultural representation of borders as well as the networking practices that transgress both national frontiers and the divide between rural and urban spaces.

The section on **Networking across Borders** presents two papers on ethnological research on border communities, the identities of which can best be conceptualized through the dynamic between the defining and limiting concepts of frontiers and the transgressive and connecting nature of networks. **Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch's** discussion of the in-between situation of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland highlights the tensions between linguistic and cultural markers of identity on the one hand and political and national ones on the other. It also shows how networking strategies are fundamental for negotiating in between them. **Kirsten Patent's** case study analyses the situation of two villages on the two sides of the German-German border during the decades before and after the fall of this most heavily armed border in the world. Before 1989 both communities had developed distinct strategies to reinforce the frontier between the two political systems and their ideologies in their mental topographies of the Cold War. Interestingly these included networking techniques like the sending of *Ostpakete*, food parcels from West to East which penetrated the border and strengthened both real and imaginary relationships, while at the same time underpinning western feelings of superiority. Equally, both processes can be observed since unification: socio-political as well as mental and symbolic reinforcements of difference and division persist and emphasize the continued relevance of the border within, while a dense

network of re-established contacts, relationships and interdependencies characterize the everyday exchange between the communities.

The section on **Networking and Demarcating Power** shows how fundamentally the establishment and maintaining of both frontiers and networks, be they real or imaginary, are connected to questions of power and control. **Gillian Wylie** looks at the processes of mental mapping that form the background to one of the most inhuman and destructive networks of our times, the trafficking of women in the pan-European sex trade. She demonstrates that within the cultural construction of a divided Europe, stereotypes of a backward and dangerous, but also exotic and alluring East are still upheld and perpetuated in Western media and in public discourse. Such 'orientalist' constructions reproduce discourses of Western superiority and form a vital element in the discursive strategies for enabling and tolerating practices of human trafficking. The paper also charts a research agenda on the practices and discourses around migration and human trafficking that would refute and disprove such damaging discursive reinforcements of an Eastern 'other' which have dominated the cultural construction of Europe for almost two hundred years and today are still virulent. **Simonetta Grilli** and **Fabio Mugnaini**'s far-reaching study on the increasing centrality of migrant women mainly from Eastern Europe in the structures of domiciliary care for the elderly in Italy today discusses a related phenomenon. It illustrates how migrant networking practices complement or indeed replace traditional family networks in order to uphold the social cohesion of Italian society. It links these developments to the socio-economic effects of globalisation and processes of social change within Italy and interprets them as part of the exploitative mechanisms of global market forces. However, the ethnological approach of this study additionally enables the authors to demonstrate how the multicultural dimension of such cultural encounters at the level of everyday social relationships challenge and transform the prevalent cultural frontiers and symbolic boundaries. **Niall O Dochartaigh**'s paper comes to a rather different conclusion. It examines the impact of Internet website communication on internal ethnic boundaries between two sectarian communities in Belfast in Northern Ireland. Contrary to the general expectation that the new communication technologies would contribute to a deterritorialisation of social interaction, the author convincingly demonstrates how these new networking techniques in many ways reinforce physical boundaries as locations for conflictive contact.

The final section on **Aesthetic Networks** offers a double perspective by pointing, on the one hand, to the importance of network patterns for aesthetic formations while stressing, on the other hand, the central contribution aesthetic discourses can make to our understanding of network structures and their interplay with frontiers. Folk tale and fairy tale research is one field in

which the intertextual travel of themes, plots and motifs across cultures and continents has received scholarly attention since the early 19th century. **Kathrin Pöge-Alder** introduces this important precursor to current networks research and extends her investigation to current storytellers, who have revived the tradition of oral transmission of tales and have established international networking organisations that, in some ways, mirror the way in which folk and fairy tales have transcended cultural and national boundaries throughout cultural history. **Jeanne Riou** focuses on another important dimension of networks aesthetics. She asks to what extent patterns of intersubjectivity and the aesthetic imagination can usefully be understood and represented as networking structures. Taking a number of literary reflections on death and connectivity from around 1900 as her material, she demonstrates the distinct ability of the aesthetic medium to express and interpret the scope and potential of the network concept. This is also thematized in the final contribution by **Isidro López-Aparicio Pérez**, in which he reports and reflects on the creation of a piece of network art within our workshop. His artistic intervention gave the participants the practical experience of performing the network by involving them as nodes in a network art installation which transcended the theoretical, historical and ethnological perspectives elaborated upon above. This provided us not only with a powerful visual metaphor, but even more so with an experience of aesthetic and social agency within a network and thus added the important dimension of experiential and aesthetic immediacy to our network discourse.

The editors of this volume are indebted to a number of people and institutions, without which this book and the conference on which it is based would not have been possible. We are greatly indebted to the University of Graz and in particular to its Vice-Rector for International Relations, Prof. Dr. Roberta Maierhofer and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Dr. Gernot Kocher, for generous financial support both of the conference and the subsequent publication. We also gratefully acknowledge a generous contribution to the publication costs from the Research Capability Grant Scheme of Trinity College Dublin. For the organisation of the conference we had the logistic support of colleagues from the Coimbra Group Office in Brussels and the Institute of European Ethnology at the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, especially Anna Quici and Katrin Knass. Furthermore we are enormously grateful for the manifold assistance we got in the preparation of this volume. Dr Edward Arnold and Dr Andrew Cusack of Trinity College Dublin helped with French and German translations, as did Susan Cox with the English language editing. We were extremely fortunate to be able to draw on Martine Maguire-Weltecke's experience and professionalism for the layout of the final manuscript.

We would also like to acknowledge the important contribution of the members of the Coimbra Group Task Force Culture, Arts and Humanities, and especially of its former chairman Professor Fabio Mugnaini to the definition of our research theme and to the design of the concept of this conference. Equally we wish to thank the contributors to the conference and this volume, who came from the various corners of the continent and brought the specific perspectives and competencies of their respective academic disciplines to our discussions. Finally we wish to express our gratitude to Peter Lang Publishing House and to the editors of the *Grazer Beiträge zur Europäischen Ethnologie* for inclusion in this series.