

Wolfgang Welsch, Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today

In his essay “Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today” Wolfgang Welsch illustrates the concept of transculturality which is, according to him, for descriptive as well as for normative reasons the most appropriate conception of culture today. In order to depict it, he opposes the concept of transculturality to the traditional concept of single cultures and to the more recent concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism.

I. The traditional concept of single cultures

The classical concept of single cultures was most influentially developed by Johann Gottfried Herder¹ in the late 18th century.

It comprises three main elements:

1. **Social homogenization:** A culture shapes its members in a way that makes them a distinctive part of itself. → *unificatory*
2. **Ethnic consolidation:** Culture as the “culture of a folk” → *folk-bound*
3. **Intercultural delimitation:** A culture as the culture of a folk is different from other cultures and thus persists severed from them. → *separatory*

However, today, the concept is both descriptively unsuitable and normatively precarious and unsustainable:

1. Modern societies are heterogeneous and multicultural in themselves. They aren't characterized by uniformity but by vertical and horizontal differences, encompassing various ways of life. The complexity of modern societies eliminates homogeneity as a basic (and obtainable) characteristic of cultures.
2. The concept of ethnic consolidation is critical: Cultures are not (and have never been) isolated nor are they avoiding contact with their environment. Moreover, there's a political danger to such folk-bound definitions.
3. The concept requires outer delimitation: In striving towards assimilation and uniformity within one's own culture, feelings of coldness and disdain for other cultures originate. The traditional understanding of cultures is simultaneously a concept of internal homogenization and external isolation. The sphere premiss and the purity precept not only render impossible a mutual understanding between cultures but also lean towards cultural racism.

II. Interculturality and Multiculturalism

The concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism are nearly as inadequate as the classical concept since they conceptually presume it.

¹ Most notably in “Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind”

1. Interculturality

The concept of interculturality premises the idea that cultures, constituted as spheres or islands, must inevitably clash. It tries to find a way of interaction between cultures in spite of this collision. It cannot provide any valid solution, however, since the sphere-premiss induces the intercultural communication problems. Thus it doesn't get to the root of the problem.

2. Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism seeks to find a solution for problems appearing between different cultures that exist within one society. It fosters tolerance and understanding, and strives for opportunities for avoiding or handling of conflicts. As this concept, too, acts on the assumption that each culture is homogenous and self-contained, it can neither accomplish a mutual understanding between the various cultures nor a transgression of separating barriers. By taking up the classic understanding of culture which underlies today's phenomena of separation and ghettoization, the concept of multiculturalism threatens to entail regressive tendencies.

The image of cultures as solitary spheres no longer applies today: "The old concept of culture misrepresents cultures' actual form, the type of their relations and even the structure of individuals' identities and lifestyles." Their present form is *transcultural* in that it *transcends* classical cultural boundaries. Nowadays, mixes and permeations constitute the main characteristics of culture. The concept of transculturality aims at depicting this modified nature of culture.

III. Transculturality

"Cultural determinants today - from society's macro level through to individuals' micro level - have become transcultural."

1. Macro-level: the altered cut of today's cultures

- a. "Transculturality is ... a consequence of the *inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures.*"
- b. "*Cultures' external networking*" outdoes the old separatist concept of culture: As a consequence of migration, the development of new communications systems and economic (inter-)dependencies, different cultures are highly connected with one another.
- c. The idea of 'foreign' disappears more and more: Nowadays many different cultures live together in the same countries and products and information are accessible worldwide. → *hybridization*

2. Micro-level: transcultural formation of individuals

The concept of hybridization also applies for the individual: Human beings are shaped by influences from several cultures - they are cultural hybrids.

Personal and cultural identity do not correspond to civic identity.

The formation of an individual's identity becomes more and more a transcultural process.

IV. Supplements and outlooks

1. Transculturality – already in history

Transculturality is not new historically. (Example: history of art - the development of new styles was mostly European and not the idea of just one country.)

2. Cultural conceptions as active factors in respect of their object

The 'reality' of culture is a consequence of our conceptions of culture.

3. Cultural annexability and transmutability

The comprehension of culture has to change: Instead of looking for cultural differences, we should look out for similarities to other cultures and possibilities to connect with them.

4. Internal and external transculturality

The acceptance of an individual's internal transculturality will lead to a better understanding and a greater acceptance of the societal transculturality.²

5. Link with Wittgenstein

Philosophically, Wittgenstein provides the greatest support for the concept. His pragmatic concept of culture is devoid of ethnic consolidation and inadequate claims for homogeneity. According to him, "culture is at hand wherever practices in life are shared. The basic task is ... interaction with foreignness."

6. Transculturality in relation to globalization and particularization

a. Uniformization or new diversity?

Does transculturality equal uniformization (accepting an increasing homogenization of cultures and the coming of a uniform world civilization)? No, in contrast, transculturality produces diversity. While the traditional diversity provided in the form of single cultures disappears, a new mode of manifoldness, the diversity of different cultures and life-styles, emerges from transcultural permeations. Due to points of overlapping it is easier to affiliate with one another for transcultural networks than it was for the old cultural identities.

b. Flaws in the globalization and the particularization diagnoses

The convenience of the transculturality concept is that it explains uniformization and intermixing processes as well as the emergence of new diversity. In contrast, the concept of globalization simply assumes that cultures worldwide are assimilating; it is "a concept of uniformization." Particularism, in turn, is a response to globalization processes: In order to

² Nietzsche was the first to recognize this coherence.

escape the globalized conformity and create a personal identity, people separate themselves from one another.

c. The advantage of the transculturality concept

As the concept of transculturality covers global and local, universalistic and particularistic aspects, it transcends the antithetic alternatives of globalization and particularism: Transcultural people consolidate an international and a local side.

7. Conclusion

Whereas the old concept of culture misrepresents today's cultural situation, the conception of transculturality expresses it very well as it presents the relation between cultures as one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness, encouraging exchange and interaction.

Kritik

- zu sehr auf Europa/den Westen bezogen
- zu idealistisches Menschenbild
- Keine Berücksichtigung von Machtkonstellationen und –asymmetrien
- Darstellung des Konzeptes der Transkulturalität als absolut
- Keine Berücksichtigung anderer Sichtweisen
 - Anderer Disziplinen
 - Andere Wissenschaftler
- Wandel in Konzept der Interkulturalität nicht beachtet – zeichnet sich nicht mehr durch die Vorstellung von Kulturen als Inseln aus
- Zu utopisiert → Welsch will sein Konzept der Transkulturalität als für die Praxis geeignet verkaufen

Andreas Hepp, Transkulturelle Kommunikation

Auf Grund technologischer Entwicklung von Infrastrukturen globaler Konnektivität ist heutzutage transkulturelle Kommunikation auf breiter Ebene möglich und kommunikative Mobilität wird zunehmend eine globale Erscheinung.

Konzepte zum Begriffsapparat d. transkulturellen Kommunikation:

- **Konnektivität** – durch Prozesse des „Herauslösens“ übersteigen die Reichweiten des menschlichen Handelns heutzutage den Bereich des Lokalen bei weitem
- **Netzwerk** – beschreibt Strukturierungsaspekte von Konnektivität (z.B. in Form von Kommunikationsnetzwerken)
- **Fluss** – fasst entlang der Netzwerke und über sie hinweg verlaufende Prozesse d. Kommunikation (bspw. Kommunikationsflüsse)

Hepp über Welsch:

Mit der Globalisierung der Medienkommunikation hat sich der Kulturbegriff verändert. Das Konzept der Transkulturalität beschreibt dieses Phänomen der Überschreitung der Grenzen der ‚alten Kulturen‘.

Literaturverzeichnis

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