



Communicating in the Third Space. Edited by Karin Ikas & Gerhard Wagner. (Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies No. 18). London: Taylor & Frances. 2009. 203 pp. ISBN 9780415963152.

This edited collection is the 18th volume to appear in the Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies series, which brings together recent findings in the media- and culturescapes ranging from the world-wide spread of karaoke to something called “deconstruction after 9/11.”

For *Communicating in the Third Space*, editors Ikas and Wagner have gathered just under a dozen essays by the likes of Homi Bhabha, one of the progenitors of the “Third Space” notion; Ulrich Beck; fellow Third Spacer Edward Soja; spatial semantacist Julia Lossau; and others, rethinking Bhabha’s widely divergent idea published in *The Location of Culture* 15 years ago. The idea of rethinking the third space is a means of bringing together inter- or transcultural communication in a post-globalized world.

As Ikas and Wagner note, despite the popularity of the Third Space and its cognates in postcolonial studies, the “liminality” of the concept itself has left a good deal of room for further exploration, especially in the realm of inter- and transcultural communication. The essays here, then, aim to provide elements of a methodology of research more appropriate to what might be seen as the replacement of the notion of globalization by a different concept that spans the broader range of social and cultural transformations in the wake (or wreckage) of globalization itself.

For instance, Ulrich Beck proposes that the current state of social science thinking is woefully out of touch with actual changes in contemporary multifaceted identities, relationships, logistics, and responsibilities. Beck offers up the old dream of cosmopolitanism, or the “cosmopolitical” as he prefers to call it, to grasp how the inclusion of the occluded other has been realized, but in deformed ways. In short, the virtue of the “cosmopolitical” for the social sciences is that it contains “a specific model of handling diversity” (p. 14). For Beck, a further epistemological turn is necessary to “dematerialize” the social sciences’ contemporaneity with the national, whose basic units and concepts are thus are at present unable to think through the collapse of the borderlines between internal and external, national and international, local and global, us and others. Replacing national ontologies with a cosmopolitical methodology provides, Beck claims, a new interpretive framework or normativity for thinking about the present.

The rest of the essays in the collection are elaborations of this approach’s possible implications. Edward Soja’s 1996 book *Thirdspace*, a selection of which is recomposed here, was one of the key texts of the so-called spatial turn that, in part, resulted from the translation into English of Henri Lefebvre’s work of the 1950s on modernity and the city. Other key sources in the spatial turn were postcolonial literary theory, not to mention 50 years or so of post-structuralism, in which the division of labour between time and space was upended, as geographer Julia Lossau notes, as “space and spatial language are hailed for opening up ways of seeing and communicating which keep together that which is different” (p. 63). But, Lossau points out, the spatial turn became “a buzzword,” and the resulting ambivalences went more unnoticed than not. Namely, while space itself may be sensitive to difference, from a system theoretic point of view, even a differential concept of space includes also a spatial unit that identifies, clarifies, and fixates. If the spatial initially was a way of repositioning dualisms, binaries, and essentialisms, the labile category of spatial differences risks not taking into account their own contingent and constrained character.

In the remainder of the collection, contributors take up the call to think through the gaps, pitfalls, and voids of both theoretical space, and the editors provide case studies of the California-Mexican border (Ikas), and of the relevance of postcolonial theory to the upheavals of Polish national history (Wagner). Robert J.C. Young observes that the third space of postcolonial theory is “not a space . . . at all” (p. 81), Bill Ashcroft struggles with the constrained ambivalences in postcolonial theories of language and identity, and Frank Schultze-Engler shows how the multitude of third spaces in the New Literatures in English can no longer be contained by today’s exhausted postcolonial studies.

In short, this is a very competently edited collection that usefully brings readers up to date as regards the state of “the third space” of the encounters between postcolonial theory and inter- and transcultural communication, as well as current debates and work in the changing culturespaces we inhabit as academics, as citizens, and as persons.

References

- Bhabha, Homi. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Soja, Edward W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

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