Session 7

Summary and Bridge: Song and National Culture

1. SUMMARY

See handouts sessions 2-6

2. SONG AND NATONAL CULTURE

„Scarborough Fair" and the Ballad Revival in the 19th Century

Francis James Child (1878):

> "These ballads were […] the creation and manifestation of the whole people, great and humble, who were still one in all essentials, having the same beliefs, the same ignorance, and the same tastes, and living in much closer relations than now. The diffusion of knowledge and the simulation of thought through the art of printing, the religious and intellectual consequences of the Reformation, the intrusion of cold reflection into a world of sense and fancy, broke up the national unity." (Child qtd. in Bell 1988, 292)

The return to ‚traditional ballads' is meant to provide ‚healing' for an alienated and fragmented ‚people'!

They serve to correct the aberrations of urban taste and the hegemony of foreign artifice in order to

> "recall a literature from false and artificial courses to nature and truth" (Child qtd. in Bell 1988, 290).

Ironies:

- Book culture is blamed for the loss of communal culture, but at the same time needed to preserve and distribute ballads (among the middle and upper classes).

- Analytical thought and „cold relfection" are blamed for the loss of communal culture, but needed to distinguish ‚true' from ‚false' ballads:

 "Widely different from the true popular ballads, the spontaneous products of nature, are the works of the professional ballad-maker, which make up the bulk of Garlands and Broadsides. These, though sometimes not without grace, more frequently not lacking in humour, belong to artificial literature – of course an humble department." (Child 1861, qtd. in Harker 2004, 45)

☐ **Ballad revival in the tradition of Romantic nationalism**

☐ **Search for *distinct* natinal traditions against the cultural ‚Other'**

Compare Johann Gottfried Herder:

 "Die Verschiedenheit der Sprachen, Sitten, Neigungen und Lebensweisen sollte ein Riegel gegen die anmassende *Verkettung* der Völker, ein Damm gegen fremde Ueberschwemmungen werden: denn dem Haushalter der Welt war daran gelegen, daß zur Sicherheit des Ganzen, jedes Volk und Geschlecht *sein* Gepräge*, seinen* Character erhielt. Völker sollen *neben* einander, nicht durch und über einander drückend wohnen." (Herder 1877-, vol. 18, 235-36)

3. TWO TIMES OF SINGING THE NATION

What is ‚National Culture‘, and how is it constituted?

> **Option a)** The relative stability of cultural traditions is based on a ‚deep structure‘ of underlying rules governing the cultural ‚competence‘ of its members

> **Option b)** There is no deep structure, but cultural tradition is traded through surface *iteration* (see Derrida, session 2) or repetition (often with a difference)

Option a)

- Philosophical roots go back to Plato and the idea of ideal essences behind the surface reality that we live in

- Crucially informs the languge philosophy and ‚transformational grammar of e.g. Noam Chomsky (competence vs. performance)

- Crucial in the social philosophy of e.g. Jürgen Habermas and many others

Option b)

z.B. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983):

> traditions, unless they are 'invented', depend on cultural practices "which seek to inculate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 1).

- Openness to change
- Stabilty through ambivalent **desire** to belong

!! Desire to nationally belong is enacted *against*, but also *from* postions of cultural Otherness !!

Linda Colley, *Britons* (1992):

> Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and in response to the conflict with the Other" (Colley 1992, 6)

→ For Colley, mainly the French in the 18th and 19th centuries!

Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness* (1996):

Gikandi claims that especially also the colonial

> "other was a constitutive element in the invention of Britishness; that it was in writing about it that the metropolis could be drawn into the sites of what it assumed to be colonial difference and turn them into indispensable spaces of self-reflection."

Yet at the same time,

> "the colonial space was to reconstitute itself in response to the imposition of Englishness; in inventing itself, the colonial space would also reinvent the structure and meaning of the core terms of Englishness, including Shakespeare and cricket" (Gikandi 1996, xviii)

Homi Bhabha and the **two times of the nation:**

‚Nation time' (the temporality of tradition) breaks up into

    a) the pedagogy of the nation where

      "people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event"

    b) **the performance** of the nation, meaning

      "process[es] of signification" where people are subjects, and which "must ease any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as the continuing process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process" (Bhabha 1990, 297).

For Bhabha, the most exciting cultural processes in a nation happen at its margins, i.e. in the performances of people who are, and are not part of nationlist pedogogy – e.g. religious outsiders, migrants, etc – who produce

    "[c]ounter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries [and] disturb those ideological movements through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (ibid., 300)

Britishness vs. Englishness

    "Englishness […] was dissociated from the legacy of empire as a pure cultural content from which Britannia drew the strength to rule the waves. 'British' was the name of the empire, the administrative name for the new subject people and the name for the cultural values exported beyond the British isles, while the 'English' identity of the home country of the green island was left untouched by possible contamination." (Wachinger 2003, 25)

    Britshness is the "cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of English dominance" (Young 1995, 3)

Works Cited:

Bell, Michael J. (1988). "No Borders to the Ballad Maker's Art: Francis James Child and the Politics of the People." *Western Folklore* 47.4 (October), 285-307.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1990). "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 291-322.

Child, Francis James, ed. (1957 [1882-1898]). *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. 5 vols. New York: The Folklore Press.

Colley, Linda (1992). *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Gikandi, Simon (1996). *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia UP.

Harker, Dave (2004 [1981]). "Francis James Child and the 'Ballad Consensus'." Simon Frith, ed. *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1: *Music and Society*. 4 vols. London and New York: Routledge, 43-62.

Herder, Johann Gottfried (1877-1913). *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Bernhard Suphan. 33 vols. Tübingen.

Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Wachinger, Tobias (2003). *Posing In-between: Postcolonial Englishness and the Commodification of Hybridity*. Frankfurt a.M. etc.: Lang.

Young, Robert (1995), *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.