The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World

Session Review

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SESSION REVIEW
The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World
Olga Sezneva, University of Amsterdam

What kind of project exactly is “cosmopolitanism”, and who may be its main “executive”? In what relation does it stand to the national project? What are the institutional repertoires in which national or cosmopolitan ideologies are articulated, their subjects consolidated, and the registers of speech and practice are perfected? Special session 271, titled “The Cosmopolitan Nation: The Politics of Cultural Representation in a Global World,” targeted these questions through four papers ranging in their topics from a French TV program promoting cultural patrimony in the ninety-sixties (Alexandra Kowalski’s “Circulating Immoveables: TVs, Cameras, Historic Sites, and the Birth of National Heritage in 1960s France”), to museums around the world struggling for cultural relevance in the twenty first century (Peggy Levitt’s “Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display”), to the revival of Jewish culture and identity in the ostensibly “monocultural” Polish society of today (Geneviève Zubrzycki’s “The Institutional Rediscovery of Jewish Poland and the Creation of Cosmopolitanism in a ‘Monocultural’ Society”), and to the global wave of media piracy of the last decade (Olga Sezneva’s “Pirate Cosmopolitics and the Transnational Consciousness of the Entertainment Industry”).

In spite of their thematic diversity and differences in theoretical toolkits deployed, the four papers pushed strongly the central claim of the session: cultural institutions create local, national, and global citizens at once, not in isolation or opposition to one another. The task that cultural sociology faces today when dealing with globalization, the papers suggested, is to theorize the national and the cosmopolitan in a relational and mutually constitutive way, rather than as opposites.

Olga Sezneva
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RUBIO

REFERENCES

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American football would be a very different practice if the ball were a different one. So how does his explanation coordinate or articulate with organizational isomorphic explanations that might help to make sense of what is equivalent between football, basketball and baseball in the US (e.g. dependence on public subsidies, presence of luxury boxes, reliance on hordes of assistants, engagement in data analytics), despite their obvious differences?

Fernando shows how machines went from being the inscribing object of culture to producers of culture themselves. How different is this new classificatory machine from the previous Hacking-friendly “constructivist” work of evaluating people and objects, in which agents that systematically engage in the production of categories are key participants in the production of those behaviors? Is there a role for human agents? Is this the augmentation of a pre-existing logic? And how do those algorithmic suggestions map out in relationship to pre-existing consumer “preferences”?

Thanks to Genevieve for organizing the ASA panel, and to the authors for presenting such interesting papers.

CHILDRESS REVIEW

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meanings. Sometimes by “meaning” I think we really mean “evaluation,” which sequentially may come right after meaning or — apologies for the pessimism to follow — come right before it. Other times, by “meaning” I think we really mean “frames,” which is a reasonable, if less intellectually sexy, substitute for meaning. Other times, by “meaning” what we really mean is “automated textual analysis,” which interestingly most typically also means “frames,” albeit frames we can ostensibly study more objectively by having uploaded God from the scholar and into the machine. As meanings are made collectively (says the sociologist), making meaningful studies of meaning is also a project that would probably best be engaged in collectively. The accumulated scholars on this panel got off to a rolling start.

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Comments by Peter Stamatov encouraged the presenters to reflect on the material in such a way that a robust conceptualization of “culture” could be devised across the institutional fields represented in the papers. Going back to the established theoretical tropes in cultural sociology, he argued, might prove productive. Are we looking at the “culture” of one and the same order, he asked, when the former is inalienable and the latter for sale? The discussion that followed probed into the adjacent areas of politics — asking, for instance, whether piracy can be interpreted as resistance to corporate appropriation, and how to balance the rights of a nation to protect its integrity, with the demands of cultural inclusion imposed by globalization. Together, the presentations, comments and discussion made up a lively session, the insights of which were appreciated by scholars of migration, transnationalism, religion, Jewish studies, and popular culture.