Transcultural in the Context of Contemporary Critical Theories

Mikhail Epstein

The following notes intend only to delineate the territory of transcult—
ture on the map of contemporary theories, not to present it in color
and detail.

Deconstruction and Multiculturalism

The project of transculture as applied to the Western postmodern condi-
tion grows from the latter's internal tensions and contradicctions. There
are two principal aspects of postmodern theory that are increasingly
found to be in fundamental disagreement: deconstruction and multicultu-
ralism.

The focus of deconstruction is the critique of essentialism, the refuta-
tion of the metaphysics of presence and origin. As we can read in Jacques
Derrida and his followers, neither writing nor any system of signs, in-
cluding culture as a whole, has any historical or physical origin that can
be fixed in a certain moment of time or in the presence of some material
body. Signs have relationship only with one another, and even the differ-
ence between signs and nonsigns constitutes still another level of the sign
system and its internal division and multiplication. There are no origins,
only traces left by these presupposed origins, only copies of the "origi-
nal," and there is no end to the progression or regression of signs to the
openness of the future or the past. "The trace is not only the disappear-
The contextualization of Western society has no more critical importance than does the expansion and development of social structures within which the society is situated. The social structures and institutions that form the basis of a society are not isolated from the broader social, economic, and political contexts in which they operate. They are interdependent and interact with one another in complex ways that shape the experiences of individuals and communities.

The concept of the "Westphalian" society, first introduced by the German geographer and sociologist Max Weber, has been central to the study of Western culture and society. It is based on the idea that Western societies are characterized by a strong emphasis on individualism, rationality, and the rule of law. This is reflected in the way that institutions such as the market, the state, and the family are organized and function.

However, it is important to recognize that the concept of the Westphalian society is not a fixed or universal one. It is subject to change over time and is affected by a wide range of historical, cultural, and political factors. As a result, it is important to approach the study of Western society with a critical eye, recognizing the ways in which it is shaped by power and inequality.

In conclusion, the study of Western society is a complex and multidisciplinary field that requires careful analysis and critical thinking. By exploring the social, cultural, and political contexts in which Western society operates, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which it is shaped by historical and contemporary forces.
From Identity to Difference

Mikhail Epstein

From Difference to Interference

Chapter 5