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Book Review

Mark Terkessidis, *Interkultur*. Berlin: Edition Suhrkamp, 2010.
Pp. 220. Paper, €13.00.

Journalist and author Mark Terkessidis develops the concept of "Interkultur" in his book by the same name, arguing for a programmatic change of perception in German society, which is today facing a diverse and complex reality. Terkessidis challenges the often polemic and reductionist debate about multiculturalism and integration by putting forward a pragmatic, radical, and long overdue attempt to transform institutional frameworks in order to foster an open, diverse society.

In the first chapter, Terkessidis explains the notion of the Para-polis, going beyond the classical concept of the polis, which implies the permanent settling down of its inhabitants. The Para-polis is the result of a change in urban demography, facing different dynamics and new forms of mobility. It is a multi-faceted city in movement. Diverse models of life and types of mobility challenge ideas about integrating immigrants into a stable urban community. Instead, urban diversity demands new figurations in order to promote participation in urban life, and to create solidarity and a feeling of community. Participation has become difficult due to increasing mobility. Thus, cities must develop an infrastructure and architecture of mobility in order to create mobilized urban spaces that are at the same time embedded in global networks. To pursue this project, the existence of migration needs to be accepted as a social reality in German cities, and not any longer as an exceptional circumstance. Too often do responsible authorities fail to grasp the new complexity of urban life and define migration as a problem of urban segregation and the loss of control within cities. Cities should therefore strive for creative solutions that take into account both the heterogeneity of society and individual needs, and aim to foster the active participation of their mobile inhabitants.

Terkessidis takes this new urban landscape as the starting point for developing his central critique of the paradigm of integration in the second chapter. Taking the reader from the historical evolution of the concept of integration in the 1970s to its revival around the year 2000, he explains its multiple definitions and meanings, which have overlapped in public discourse with the model of assimilation and multiculturalism. The model of integration starts with the idea of a supposedly homogenous, "native" society into which migrants are required to integrate—illustratively called the "container model." It is the impossible attempt to re-establish an imaginary socio-cultural unity. This concept tends to perceive the migrant as not engaged enough or even incapable of integrating into society, and therefore as the reason for the disruption of social unity. Migrants are said to be missing parts of their identity and to suffer from the rupture with their country of origin—a lack they could overcome by the act of integration. Those assumptions result from the fact that the notion of German culture or "being German" is, despite of the changing structures of German society, still surprisingly rigid and fixed. Supposedly "German" values are established in order to "prove" the cultural incompatibility of migrants. However, this discourse applies different scales to migrants and non-migrants, and thereby ignores the fact that an authentic German value system is nothing but an ideological myth.

Supporters of this concept seem to overlook the fact that society is transforming into a diverse, multifaceted one. Furthermore, this narrative of being incomplete can create negative feelings for migrants and have a socially destabilizing effect. Thus, the

strong dichotomy between immigrants and a host society needs to be abandoned and the emergence of a new "us" accepted and acknowledged. Terkessidis claims to overcome the notion of integration, and to aim for a post-integrative concept. Diverse social structures need to be taken into account, and the access to institutions and resources needs to be guaranteed for everyone. This means, for instance, on a practical level that the German educational system needs to be changed, its discriminatory structures having been criticized even by the UN.

The third chapter is a critique of racist mechanisms and cultural essentialism in Germany. Departing from multiple individual examples, Terkessidis points out how former migrants and their children experience daily exclusion, sometimes even due to simply naïve or friendly motives. The social discourse tends to create an imaginary border between the categories "Us" and "Them," putting migrants into the position of foreigners, which they cannot escape. Instead of open racism, we are today facing the phenomenon of cultural reductionism. This means that cultural attributes and stereotypes towards minority groups become predominant and serve as explanations for actual social problems. In addition, migrants become representatives of a whole group, which reduces them to a supposed cultural membership and limits their individual personality.

Racism also exists on an institutional level, not in the form of open hostility, but as mechanisms that perpetuate the figure of the stranger. Terkessidis criticizes the lack of coordination and continuity in the prevention of racism in the German context, which tends to see racist acts as exceptional cases. Here he is drawing a comparison to the UK. In the UK, institutional racism is recognized as a structural problem and programs are developed for the promotion of racial equality and education about citizenship issues. Terkessidis argues that in order to change discriminating mechanisms, racism has first of all to be acknowledged as a structural, institutional problem in German society. Furthermore, Terkessidis inspires readers to rethink ethnic categories and to question the way those are exploited for political purposes. He wants to transcend the dichotomy of minority and majority and look instead at the entire social context which creates cultural assumptions and racist prejudices.

In his last two chapters, Terkessidis tries to explain the actual program of "Interkultur" in order to offer theoretical and practical solutions to the problems and challenges presented in the preceding chapters. "Interkultur" stands for "cultures in between," a permanent state of transition in the positive sense of producing creativity and diversity—a term that is inspired by theoretical concepts of Deleuze and Guattari. Terkessidis critiques the German tendency of holding long and misleading debates, and the inability to undertake considerate political measures in time. The first step for coming up with solutions and accomplishing a permanent change is therefore to acknowledge—especially by the responsible political authorities—that structural discrimination and social complexity exist. Terkessidis tries to answer the question of how this intercultural opening can be implemented in a long-lasting and efficient way. As a first step, this project requires a radical transformation of public and private institutions, because they form an essential part of daily life. Terkessidis is well aware of the difficulties and efforts that this task demands, and maintains a realistic perspective. He does not demand a revolution, but rather an evolution of institutions by reforming and restructuring them in order to overcome institutional inequalities. Terkessidis' program aims for a barrier-free social and political reality. He takes his inspiration from the concept of a barrier-free environment that seeks to guarantee everyday access for disabled individuals, and transfers it to the topic of immigration. The change of institutions will ideally have an effect on all levels of society; this is

what Terkessidis calls "migration mainstreaming" on both individual and community levels. Following the idea of gender mainstreaming, this means that migration needs to be discussed on a larger scale and should not be restricted to certain designated areas.

According to Terkessidis' approach, intercultural transformation has to be implemented at different institutional levels to change the core of an institution. Therefore, it is crucial to begin by investigating the state and type of an institution and by taking into consideration the opinions of its employees. The first level is the general culture of the institution. Terkessidis recommends changing norms and rules by deciding on a corporate code in order to fix diversity principles permanently and officially. Strategies of recruitment need to be changed to avoid discrimination and to guarantee unrestricted access to jobs. Quotas and campaigns can help modify structural injustice in human resource management. Furthermore, the basic "material" conditions of an institution need to guarantee barrier-free access for every individual according to his or her specific needs, which Terkessidis refers to as "designing for diversity." Finally the strategies of institutions need to be changed profoundly to achieve a mainstreaming approach to diversity.

After elaborating those practical strategies, Terkessidis stresses the importance of adopting broad notions of participation and diversity in cultural institutions. This is especially relevant for migrant communities in which cultural production can be an important platform for participation and articulation. However, since works of cultural production, such as those of theater, film and music, have long been linked to the projects of nation building and identity formation, they lead to categories of unity and cultural purity. To overcome this reductionist concept, cultural spaces have to be opened to everyone, and the idea of cultural hybridity has to be incorporated. Yet Terkessidis warns against only creating special categories, such as so-called "migrant literature" or "migrant cinema." Instead, he claims that cultural institutions should take into perspective common daily practices in order to realize the formation of a new cultural and social space.

With this book Terkessidis pursues an explicit goal with relevance for politics and society—creating a profound change towards a diverse society and guaranteeing the same access conditions for every individual. He adopts a very pragmatic perspective by offering an attempt to change both society's institutions and the predominant paradigm of integration. Terkessidis sees institutional changes as a first step in the direction of profound social transformation, considering that individual beliefs and ideologies are very difficult to change. He motivates his readers to think beyond multicultural debates and discriminatory demands for assimilation, and to aim for real diversity and equal opportunities. Inspired by the Anglo-American tradition of cultural studies and by postcolonial theory (referring, in particular to Homi Bhabha and Raymond Williams), Terkessidis employs a notion of culture that focuses on practices and interaction rather than on notions of identity and ethnicity.

Interkultur combines a reflective theoretical framework with a wide range of empirical examples drawn from Germany's daily social reality. Those examples render the critical reflections very accessible to the reader and explain the book's popularity amongst political and administrative functionaries. In addition, Terkessidis' distinct, intelligent style make this book not only worthwhile and informative but also an enjoyable reading experience. At times, however, the book tends to be slightly repetitive, and the definition of the term "Interkultur" lacks a bit of lucidity. Despite this minor critique, Terkessidis' book is both an important contribution to the field of Migration Studies and an invitation to every reader to overcome prejudices and

rethink categories. It is an attempt to engage with the project of diversity, where cultural borders become more and more porous, and, as Terkessidis poetically puts it, "to construct a common building." Terkessidis' critique is sharp and productive, and it leaves the reader with a positive perspective on the future.

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