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Kollektive als Mittler einer komplexen Kulturwirklichkeit

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The Definition of Culture: An application-oriented overhaul

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Abstract

This article revisits traditional definitions of culture to establish a sound criticism of existing coherence-based approaches. By expanding the one-dimensional concept of culture to a four-field-matrix, a likewise contemporary and practical concept of culture is formulated which is also likely to supply reasonable answers to disputed questions regarding the formation of cohesion in society. It is finally argued that the prevalent diagnosis of *multicollectivity* should be expanded to a desideratum of *radical multicollectivity*, the goal of providing increasing individual access to ever more collectives, leading to an increase in both social stability and developmental dynamics.

1. The paradigm of *coherence* in the traditional concept of culture: that which unifies

Our everyday understanding of culture is characterized by an expectation of uniformity.

The most common understanding of culture is one that imagines a high level of internal uniformity within a social system. Previously, this concept was limited to contexts of ethnicity or nationality (e.g. "Italians dress smartly"), while today common characteristics are often ascribed to quite different social systems of various sizes (e.g."the liberal values of the Christian-European West," "Our customer-oriented corporate culture," "The cooperative leadership culture among women"). These formulations share a similar understanding of culture as an expression of *coherence*. The contradictory nature of these assertions becomes clear when we, for example, meet a sloppy Italian, when it occurs to us that the local janitor with dictatorial tendencies is indeed a European, when we reflect on the immense complexity of international companies, or even on our authoritarian class teacher who was far from cooperative and yet a woman, but this does not prevent us from continuing to seek that which *unifies* these groups.

The idea of cultural coherence has a long tradition. Herder imagined cultures based upon a unifying principle he called the *Volksseele* ("spirit of the people"), leading to comprehensive social homogeneity. The works of respected ethnologists from the first half of the 20th century continued this notion of uniformity, which led them to define culture in terms of "internal coherence" (Kluckhohn 1949:35) or as a "consistent pattern of thought and action" (Benedict 1934:42) within human groups. Even under later thinkers, culture is described as the "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede 1984:13) or as a "universal organization and typi-

cal orientation system for a given society" (Thomas 2003: 138). These so-called *cultural standards* appeared to provide a consistent description of structured general principles. Coherence as a sign of culture even drives certain managers within large corporate organizations as they attempt to standardize their corporate culture in the name of competitive advantage (cf. Peter / Waterman 1982) through the establishment of certain shared assumptions, values and artefacts (Schein 1995:30).

The concept of cultural uniformity has already been persuasively criticized within various scientific disciplines

In the field of sociology, Max Weber describes the fragmentation of social units due to internal functional specialization into a variety of "of ultimate positions toward the world" (Weber 1922/1980:499, translation by author). Cultural transfer research in the fields of linguistics and history has illuminated "various penetration and adoption processes" between national cultures (Espagne / Greiling 1996:13) and reveals national territories to be "artificial things whose own identity is legitimized not only through the foreignness evident between the categories of 'at home' and 'abroad,' but also through the appropriation of particular aspects of that very foreign thing" (Espagne / Greiling 1996:10). The postmodern philosophers also recognize a radical plurality of general cultural principles and lifestyles within contemporary societies (Lyotard 1986, Welsch 1991).

Subsequently, the bearers of culture to which the concept of cultural uniformity was usually attached have been dismantled or "deconstructed." This is especially clear in the narrower field of postcolonial studies in which cultural phenomena exist as the results of complex historical processes (Bhabha 1997:182) and the vehicle of civilization known as the "nation" is revealed to be a purely discursive construct (cf. Bhabha 1990). In the organizational sciences the concept of uniform business cultures is exposed as little more than the wishful thinking of managers seeking simplicity in a complicated and even contradictory corporate environment (Martin 1992). Even the assumed bastions of cultural consistency such as the division of human beings into two discrete gender groups with certain "cultural" signs has been called into question as a social construct by feminist research (Butler 2003).

To be able to examine cultural phenomena in an environment lacking uniformity, therefore, dynamic and highly-flexible concepts must be employed. Bhabha, for example, describes such a process in the communicative negotiation that takes place within cultures in defiance of internal uniformity as "hybridization" (Bhabha 1997:182ff.). Welsch likewise comes

to the conclusion that cultures are "internally characterized by the pluralization of possible identities" and externally show "contours that transcend traditional borders." (Welsch 1995:42, translation by author) As a result, Welsch offers a new perspective beyond existing limitations of cultural composition in his formulation of "transculturality."

2. The Stubbornness of the Coherence Paradigm - The lure of simplicity

"Today [the] assumptions of the traditional concept of culture have become untenable." (Welsch 1995:39, translation by author)

Although contemporary scientists - even in unrelated disciplines - would agree with the above statement, the coherence paradigm of the traditional definition of culture remains stubbornly in place. Besides the obvious fact that simple structures are easier to grasp than complex or even contradictory ones, two further reasons for the remarkable 'stickiness' of the coherence concept must be considered:

Cultural uniformity is politically expedient.

This assertion is nicely illustrated by two opposing concepts found in contemporary political discourse today, both being rooted in cultural models based on coherence.

The concept of *Leitkultur*, introduced by the political scientist Bassam Tibi (2002), describes the desideratum of a consensus in social values, that is, a homogeneity of shared values within a society. The term "German *Leitkultur*," for example, has been employed by conservative politicians in Germany in the context of the immigration debate to elicit feelings of a disappearing common national tradition and a longing for a presumably more pristine and homogeneous world.

The multicultural approach, however, frequently associated with the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1993), is aimed at the protection and the recognition of cultural differences by the state. This approach would, at first glance, appear to stand in clear opposition to demands of cultural uniformity and the notion of a *Leitkultur*. The connotations of exoticism and the implicit fascination with the foreign along with the strengthening of the rights of suppressed or marginalized groups have likewise become politically attractive especially on the political left. Few have made the observation, however, that multiculturalism is essentially a kind of "*Leitkultur* in sheep's clothing." Taylor's understanding of culture is anchored in the same traditional coherence paradigm, preferring "substantive agreement on value" and "sufficient in-

tellectual homogeneity" (Taylor 1991:52) while reducing social differences to the level of ethnic groups. Individuals are therefore always the "bearers of one and only one perspective" (Reckwitz 2001:183). They are unable to deny their membership in a discrete group, and they are forced to perpetuate this group's identity for the purposes of cultural preservation. "As an official codification of identities and traditions," multiculturalism demands, "not the preservation of negotiated forms of mutual recognition" but instead prevents the "debate between cultural groups regarding accepted or appropriate interpretations" (Bienfait 2006:38, translation by author).

In the political context, the implementation of either a *Leitkultur* or multiculturalism approach – both of which are obviously built upon a foundation of culture as *coherence* – is an easy one indeed. On the one hand, both can be implemented in policy without difficulty while both eliminate the need for potentially difficult discussions with external (i.e. "foreign" or "incompatible") elements.

Existing criticism of the coherence approach to culture is inadequate.

Another reason for the continued existence of the cultural coherence paradigm can be found in the very criticism of coherence itself. As mentioned above, much of the resistance to coherence as a viable approach to understanding culture rests upon the work of deconstructionists:

> "Unlike those forms of critique which aim to supplant inadequate concepts with, 'truer' ones, [...] the deconstructive approach puts key concepts, under of 'erasure' [...] But since they have been superseded dialectically, and there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them." (Hall 1996:1)

The existing criticism of the coherence approach has convincingly revealed the obsolescence of older definitions of culture and, at the same time, that of the associated political structures they support. However, the deconstructionists rarely offer positive alternative models from which social desiderata might then be derived.

To the critics themselves, this lack is also frequently evident. Reactions such as that of Spivak's *Strategic Essentialism* approach (Spivak 1993:3) betray an awareness of the inadequacy of their intellectual tools, while allowing them to be employed to offer discriminated groups a purely pragmatic means to empowerment. Spivak permits, therefore, the use of deconstructed approaches under certain political circumstances. In the long term, of course, such a model will remain ineffective because it describes no mechanisms for social development.

Another attempted solution to the coherence dilemma can be found in the supporters of *hybrid* or *transcultural* approaches. These perspectives recognize the quite plausible characterization of culture as a heterogeneous and dynamic product of communication. Rather than attributing this dynamic to the myriad influences that cultures exercise upon one another or through their mutual contact generally, proponents of the hybrid or transcultural approaches imagine idealized social and political phenomena: individuals should recognize that since cultures do indeed flow into and permeate one another, people should likewise be more tolerant and open (cf. Mae 2001 on Japanese society). In principle this position cannot be disputed. However, the illogical linking of a plausible diagnosis to (perhaps well-intentioned) social desiderata, it will be shown, ignores the familiar processes of human group formation while offering in its place little more than political pandering.

The goal of this article, therefore, will be the establishment of a sounder criticism of coherence-based approaches and, linked to this criticism, the formulation of a likewise contemporary and practical concept of culture which is also likely to supply reasonable answers to the questions regarding the formation of cohesion in society.

3. Differentiation of the Cultural - A Practical Analysis Matrix

A single definition for the concept of culture is insufficient.

The heated debates around "*Leitkultur*" and "multiculturalism" reveal the following: the concept of culture is charged with connotations both of belonging and of disenfranchisement, of inclusion and of overreaching (cf. Huntington 2006). When excessively politicized, the term exaggerates each simple folkloric characteristic into either elite criticism or a threat of impending loss. The tiny word "culture" bears extreme burdens of social order as well as delusions of every kind, so that it is hardly adequate any more for use in reasonable discussions. As a countermeasure, one could try to reduce the concept of "culture" again simply to the barest traditions of discrete groups, but the masking of the social power structure components that are always present in cultural practices would then lead to a purely *descriptive* understanding of culture that likewise would offer no clues for political action.

If culture as a single concept is pitched either too far or too narrowly, it becomes unsuitable for social debate. Therefore, in the following description, broader conceptual categories will necessarily be juxtaposed with the word "culture" in an

effort to formulate a more practical approach to the term. The inclusion of additional aspects provides an opportunity to reduce the overinflated idea of "culture" to a manageable scale and forms a more differentiated basis for further investigation.

In addition to standard cultural *customs, an application-oriented cultural concept must also consider the* collective *aspects of belonging and participation.*

The first conceptual addition which seems necessary in the reworking of the general understanding of culture is the broadening of the cultural perspective of human coexistence to include a *collective* perspective. Collectivity will here refer to the "formal and structural" aspects of human groups (Hansen 2009, translation by author). Employing this approach, the "cultural" can then be (carefully and self-consciously) reduced to its content, to the "customs" (or "habits" as in Tylor 1871:1) of individuals in interaction. This distilled understanding of culture is related to the pragmatic approach of Wittgenstein in which culture is most evident where one finds "shared practices" (Welsch 1995:43). The emphasis on customs and habits is a broad formulation and includes cognitive resources such as common knowledge references (*Wissensvorrat*) as well as patterns of behavior. Such customs may be inconsistent or even contradictory while being constantly subject to change. It is not necessary for the members of certain collectives to internalize these habits, nor do they have to be put into practice or even be generally accepted. In order for them to be called "culture," habits simply need to be familiar to the individuals in interaction. In contrast to personal idiosyncrasies, cultural peculiarities are a plural phenomenon. Culture begins, therefore, where people interact in groups. It ends with the characteristics of the individual.

In order to defend such a pared-down formulation of culture against accusations of simplicity or naiveté, it must be supplemented by a *collective* perspective which itself deals (in contrast to the simple group customs) with issues of group affiliation. Which criteria are employed to determine whether an individual is accepted as a legitimate and respected member of a group, a collective, or a society? Who possesses the authority and the influence to make such a decision, and conversely who lacks the same authority? Who controls access to the resources that empower people to make such decisions?

Questions of affiliation and participation have frequently been at the center of cultural criticism. Bourdieu's *capital theory* with its description of the malleability of economic, social, and symbolic capital delivers a set of tools useful in the

explanation of social power differences arising from the unjust distribution of cultural authority (Bourdieu 1982). Fraser's model of status recognition likewise distinguishes the authority of economic exclusion from its cultural value hierarchy in the disenfranchisement of certain groups despite their possession of economic capital (Fraser 1995).

These and similar attempts will not be treated here in detail. What is, however, crucial for the development of an application-oriented concept of culture is, above all, the division between an understanding of culture at the level of *cultural* customs and the related *collective* perspective at the level of belonging. Such a division is, of course, problematic since cultural practices as communicative codes always contain relationship cues that reach back to the collective level. Nevertheless, this division seems to be necessary from a theoretical perspective, since both levels do not necessarily develop in concert. Cultural customs *can* influence collective affiliations, however - as in the example of purely economic access conditions to groups –they *do not necessarily have to*. Furthermore, group theory demonstrates that shared cultural characteristics are *not* a prerequisite for the development of a group identity and the resulting phenomena of exclusion and devaluation of outsiders (Tajfel 1982).

Also from a practical standpoint, the separation of *cultural* and *collective* perspective makes sense because their mixture frequently leads to impasses in discussions of social matters. This is well illustrated by the recent headscarf (*hijab*) debates in France and Germany, for example. A headscarf can act, of course, on the level of the *cultural*, simply as a practical article of clothing like a baseball cap, protecting the individual who wears it from sun, wind, or rain. It may be nothing more than a fashionable accessory that fits nicely with the other articles of clothing an individual chooses to wear or, like a turban or a hood in certain instances, may indicate an adherence to certain religious doctrines. On the *collective* level, the headscarf may be interpreted like the team scarves common among European football fans as a tangible political sign of affiliation with a specific group or the rejection of another.

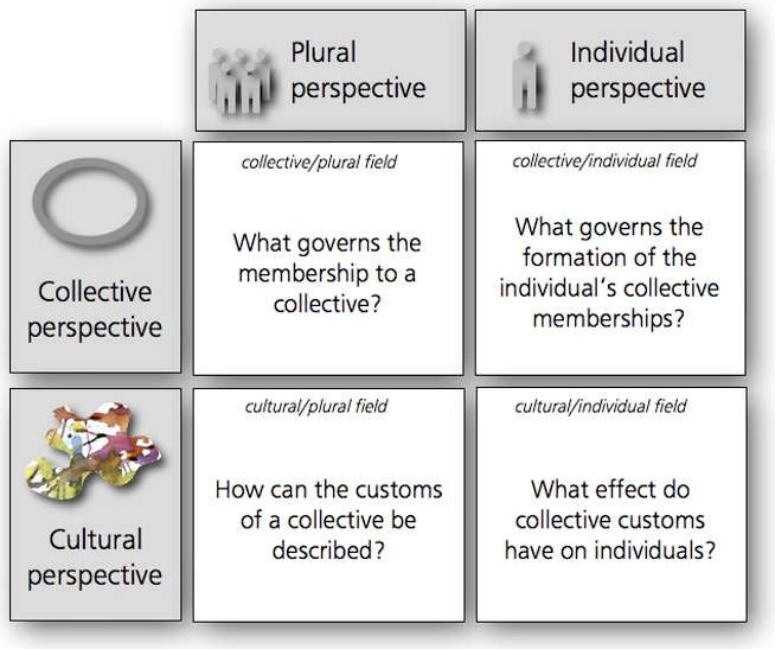
The social debate on this topic is seldom about the cultural custom of wearing a certain type of clothing, but rather about its assumed symbolic power, signifying either the demarcation of one group or the oppression of another. Mixing the cultural and collective levels leads to passionate discussions about headscarf bans (a serious encroachment into the cultural level), thus preventing - at the collective level - the necessary political examination of the suspected underlying problem: the social marginalization or oppression of groups.

An application-oriented concept of culture must furthermore distinguish between plural *and* individual *perspectives.*

Supplementing an understanding of the *cultural* with the *collective* alone does not supply a sufficient theoretical approach for a more sophisticated criticism of the coherence-based understanding of culture. Because culture, as explained above, refers to individuals in the plural, the traditional perception of culture often excludes the individual completely from examination. It thus avoids dealing with the dilemma that on a group level, the concreteness of cultural phenomena cannot be denied, while each individual member of a culture, however, is equipped with the freedom to process those cultural offers in a completely unique way.

The reduction of culture to the plural perspective alone hence encourages the well-justified criticisms of essentialism and totalitarianism. The radical deconstruction of culture as a collective phenomenon to a form that allows only individual claims elicits, however, accusations of naiveté, as it neglects the hard factors of collective membership.

Therefore, an application-oriented concept of culture must acknowledge the fact that belonging to specific cultures bears great influence on the individuals, but this influence is in no way deterministic. "Every element of a group (is) not only the member of a society, but is moreover, something beyond that " (Simmel 1983:283, translation by author), the individual is never completely subsumed in the group. It is, instead, "simultaneously inside and outside" (Ritsert 2000:71). To adequately illustrate this dialectic of individual and group, hence, the traditional *plural* perspective of culture must be supplemented (and not replaced) by an *individual* perspective.



Exh. 1: Culture as a matrix – The expansion of the traditional usage of the term "culture" to include the *collective* and *individual* perspectives

Considering these terminological requirements of the word culture, the result is not a single definition of the word that, as has been shown here, will be either too narrow or too broad. What becomes clear instead is in one sense an expansion of the scope of the *cultural* to include the *collective*. In another sense, the standard *plural* understanding of culture will include the *individual* as well. Culture as a complex holistic phenomenon can then be analyzed through the use of the four-field matrix shown above. Employing this tool, questions regarding the customs of certain collectives are addressed in the *cultural/plural* field while the *collective/plural* field can be used to investigate the rules of membership and participation in collectives. The *cultural/individual* field is dedicated to the interdependencies between individuals and culture, while the *collective/individual* field describes the individual's membership in discrete collectives. This article will demonstrate that such a differentiation of culture (rather than reliance on a one-dimensional definition) allows a much more precise description of cultural phenomenon while furthermore providing a more sound critical foundation against the traditional coherence-oriented understanding of culture.

4. Revision of the Coherence Paradigm - Almost Completely Wrong

In order to more clearly understand the mistakes of traditional interpretations of the term "culture," the assumptions of the existing coherence paradigm will be applied to each of

the single fields in the four-dimensional matrix. The second step then will be to replace the inadequate answers with more viable models.

The traditional understanding of culture is characterized by congruence between the cultural and collective levels.

Initially, it must be said that the traditional understandings of culture do not address the differentiation between the level of customs and that of membership or affiliation. Instead, a great deal of congruence between *culture* and *collective* is assumed. This then leads to the assumption that, on the one hand, customs or traditions end where the collective ends, while on the other hand there is little overlap between collectives and therefore smaller collectives arise within larger ones. This approach then assumes that a certain collective, like the German nation for example, could be adequately understood through certain attributes that are common to all Germans and are shared by members of no other collectives. Furthermore, one could claim that membership in a certain collective – a Bavarian shooting club, for example – necessitates the membership in certain other collectives as well: in this example, the Catholic Church, adult men, the Bavarian conservative political party, and fans of folk music.

The plural perspective of the traditional concept of culture is marked by internal coherence as well as border coherence.

Because the congruence of the cultural and collective levels is frequently assumed, findings that originate in a traditional, coherence-based understanding of culture are often the same for both levels. It is then often assumed that collectives and, by extension, cultures, are characterized by very clear and non-porous borders to other collectives and cultures. This will hereafter be referred to as *border coherence*. In the context of cultural customs, there is an expectation of homogeneity and assumed acceptance that hereafter will be referred to as *internal coherence*. According to these premises, it is not only absolutely clear who is German and who is not, who is a Berliner and who is not, who is a police officer and who is not, but it is also clear what values or behavior each group will display. According to the traditional understanding of coherence, therefore, if it says "German," "Berliner," or "police officer," on the package, there must be a "German," "Berliner," or "police officer," inside.

Internal coherence *is assumed to be the foundation of cultural continuity.*

The traditional coherence paradigm further extends the *diagnosis* of *internal coherence* to include the idea of coherence in attitudes or behavior as a necessary *demand* to preserve the group's continuity. This notion has become especially ap-

parent in the recent *Leitkultur* debates in Germany. On the one hand, it is postulated that a certain system of values actually exists to which everybody who can be identified as *German* subscribes. On the other hand there is a demand that everyone recognize this canon of values since failure to do so would lead to German culture going downhill. Another illustration of this same perspective can be found in the context of corporate culture that on the one hand presents itself in terms of coherence ("Our company is marked by certain values which all our employees share") while at the same time demanding that internal coherence be practiced ("Our enterprise can only be successful if all our employees live our culture") (cf. Rathje 2009 for a detailed representation of the *coherence paradigm* in the corporate culture debate). The logical contradiction contained in the above statements that indeed something self-evident cannot be demanded at the same time is simply ignored.

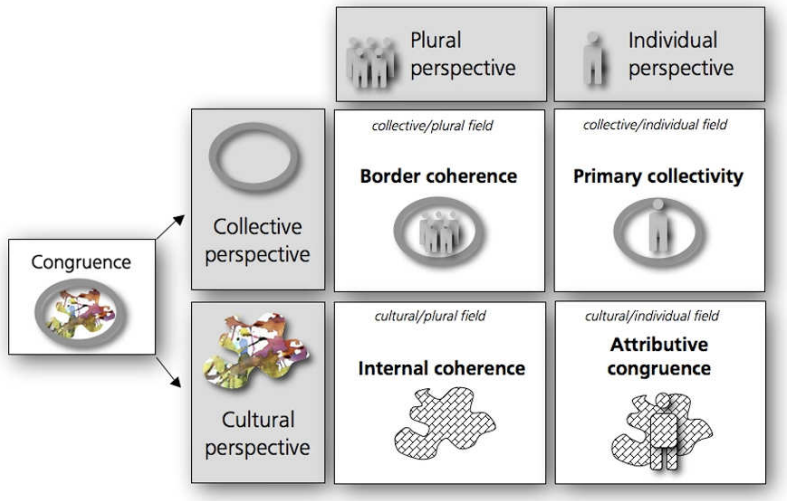
The individual perspective of the traditional concept of culture is marked by primary collectivity *and* attributive congruence.

As has already been demonstrated, the traditional understanding of culture is rarely concerned with the role of the individual. Accordingly, its findings concerning the individual's perspective turn out to be quite simple.

At the level of the collective, the traditional perspective prefers a diagnosis of *primary collectivity* which can be imagined as the individual's main collective allegiance – normally understood as the membership in a *national* collective. This assumption is so deeply rooted in daily experience that it is rarely questioned. Management guidebooks offering intercultural advice, for example, typically describe the "Czechs" or the "Chinese" without considering other group memberships such as academics, blue-collar workers, philosophers, engineers, thirty-somethings, or retirees. The German son of Vietnamese immigrants, for example, despite his passing of the bar exam, years of work in national politics, and lacking any experience with the homeland of his parents will still be asked by interview partners how he can cope with being "Vietnamese" in Germany. Even theoretical approaches like multiculturalism are founded upon the same primary collective assumptions in which an individual is assigned to one single collective.

At the cultural level, the traditional understanding presumes an observable *attributive congruence* in the individual. This is the assumption that since the characteristics within a collective are themselves coherent and furthermore, since an individual belongs primarily to *one* collective, it must follow that the characteristics of an individual are compatible with his or

her primary collective. Therefore, knowing that someone has grown up in the tradition of the "Christian/European West", certain assumptions could be made regarding his or her opinions on parliamentary democracy or on the Ten Commandments. Although this assumption would be rejected by most people as a terrible generalization, it dominates our day to day understanding of culture. It forms the basis for political assumptions comparable to the "*Leitkultur*" model and sometimes fosters some odd offspring indeed. In an informal study carried out by a television station on the quality of pizzerias in Berlin, for example, only the nationality of the cooks was examined based on the assumption that only Italian cooks – and all Italian cooks without exception – would be capable to make a reasonable pizza dough.



Exh. 2: The coherence paradigm in the traditional concept of culture

The following segment will be dedicated to the revision of the traditional concept of culture and its representations of *border coherence*, *internal coherence*, *primary collectivity* and *attributive congruence*.

The relationship between cultures and collectives is characterized by incongruence.

The starting point for this critical discussion will be an examination of the assumption of congruence between cultures and collectives. As mentioned above, there is already substantial evidence found, for example in the fields of Cultural and Post-colonial Studies, for the mutual influence and interpenetration of human customs. Such customs are not bound by the borders that tend to be drawn around discrete collectives. Likewise, these customs are not exclusively attached to certain collectives, but instead permanently branch out, evolve, fray, and create hybrid forms. They are capable of practically everything except for stopping at the borders between collectives. The well established concepts of *interculturality* and *transculturality,* which themselves were created in order to

illustrate and describe the processual nature of culture, are actually tautological terms since cultural processes always occur "between" or "through" others. The effects of such interaction are amplified today in an environment rich with novel opportunities for collective membership and collective cross fertilization. While it may have been possible in the past to assume that a West German coal miner will vote for the social democratic labor party, increasing social variety, geographical mobility, and access to global communication networks cause the borders of collectives to shift and overlap: Not all Bavarian Catholics will vote for the Bavarian Christian conservative party. Brazilian teenagers go crazy for a German pop group whose style is rooted in a Japanese youth movement. A woman and an African American can become the German chancellor or the US president. The assumption of congruence between collective and culture has simply become untenable.

Differentiation *and* multicollectivity *must be accepted as characteristics of a viable concept of culture rather than* internal coherence *and* primary collectivity.

Further analysis of the traditional concept of culture within the four-field matrix will begin in the "cultural/plural" field which has typically been characterized by a coherence of collective customs. This assumption has already been dislodged by the existing critique of the coherence concept. Acknowledged approaches that describe the development and perpetuation of culture - the concept of "cultural memory" (Assmann 1992) for example - have demonstrated that members of a culture have access to a heterogeneous pool of cultural resources. Depending on current needs of their groups they recall pieces of the past respectively. The content of a culture at any given moment can therefore never be categorized as coherent.

This principle can be illustrated with the variety of political orientations within a society. When, for example the various parties in Germany - including banned parties - recall elements of their common past, they reflect a wide spectrum of political orientations that influence German socio-political life. If, on the one hand, the German political landscape and the parties that inhabit it can be considered an integral component of German culture, it must also be accepted on the other hand that a fundamental feature of this culture is internal *differentiation*. This proof of heterogeneity, contradiction, and variety among the cultural customs also finds application in all other contexts of human interaction. Fundamental *differentiation*, therefore, must be recognized as a counterthesis to any postulation of internal coherence.

The claim of *differentiation* as a characteristic of cultural customs is closely related to the developments in the field of individual collective membership. While the traditional concept of culture understood this relationship between individuals and their collectives to be one marked by *primary collectivity*, the accelerating increase in the number of available collectives and their mutual influence demands a fundamental revision of this perspective. In the past, if an individual were born into a specific collective, he or she - under normal circumstances - would remain there as one of its members. Today it is increasingly difficult to predict how many or precisely to which collectives an individual may belong. Membership in the collective "German professors," for example, does not allow for further assumptions about whether a member of that collective also belongs to the collective of "news magazine readers," and/or "tabloid readers;" whether he or she is part of the "classical music fan" collective and/or the "rock music fan" collective. An American hedge fund manager can be an active member of the Catholic Church, he can vote left-progressive, and in his free time take a course in gourmet cooking with a world-famous French chef. Hansen terms the rather simple assumption that an individual belongs to many collectives at the same time "multicollectivity" (2000: 196). This finding is opposed to traditional models that prefer primary collectivity. Taken to its logical conclusion, the model of *multicollectivity* leads away from monolithic and essentialist views of individual identity that appears to be constantly endangered by variety and contradiction. Instead, multicollectivity offers an additive understanding of collective membership and cultural practices. Individuals are able to add collective memberships and cultural customs without having to sacrifice existing ones.

Collective cohesion *is nourished by an individual's multicollective identification with a variety of groups and the resulting familiarity with differences.*

While the traditional concept of culture looks to *internal coherence* as a source of stability, a revised understanding of culture, which assumes *differentiation* among cultural customs and individual *multicollectivity*, must find new explanations for the apparent cohesion of groups. The intuitive plausibility of the traditional perspective ("The more alike we are, the less likely there will be conflicts."), a familiar assumption easily gained from personal experiences in small groups like bowling clubs or work teams, certainly makes the exploration of questions regarding the cohesion of complex collectives be they businesses or nations very difficult indeed.

Nevertheless, closer consideration reveals that the sources of cohesion are to be found precisely in the concepts of *multi-*

collectivity and *differentiation* themselves. In this way the organizational sciences long ago were able to demonstrate that individuals who simultaneously belong to several organizational entities act as "Linking Pins" (cf. Likert 1967) between the groups they represented. Accordingly, individual *multicollectivity*, through its very variety, provides a network-like stability of greater group connections (Hansen 2000:196f.). Recent organizational science has furthermore been able to prove that familiarity with cultural differences forms a stable basis for organizational cohesion (cf. Rathje 2004). Transferred to a social context, these findings would indicate that it is not the *internal coherence* of customs that is vital for cohesion, but rather the familiarity with the differences creating a framework of normality that alone is sufficient for identification: "We recognize [...] [divergent] points of view, and when we hear them, we know that we are at home" (Hansen 2000:232, translation by author).

Radical individuality is the result of differentiation and multicollectivity.

Adhering to the claims of cultural *differentiation* and *multicollectivity*, attachments to the traditional assumptions regarding individual *attributive congruence* must also be abandoned.

The fact that individuals are simultaneously part of numeous collectives that produce divergent cultural practices will result in a radically individual processing of cultural offers due to reciprocal interaction with their unique biological and biographical foundations.

In this way, the collective memberships of an individual only allow for the conclusion which cultural practices that individual is familiar with, which patterns of behavior or rational concepts he or she is conversant with. What that individual makes of this peculiar constellation of influences, however, remains an open question. It is possible, for example, that a middle-class youth who takes cello lessons and learns Latin may grow up to become a star lawyer or possibly an urban squatter. A civil servant might begin as an idealistic patriot who thrives in the bureaucratic process or else he might secretly despise the inefficiency of the system and dream to himself of revolution.

Furthermore, studies on the effects of migration show that effectively processing cultural differences may not be the challenge it seems to be at first glance. Instead it belongs to an individual's "daily bread" of self-assurance and shaping one's identity. Thus the navigation of contradictory cultural norms or values by no means leads to confusion or disorientation (Auernheimer 1988, Hill 1990). It only becomes stress-

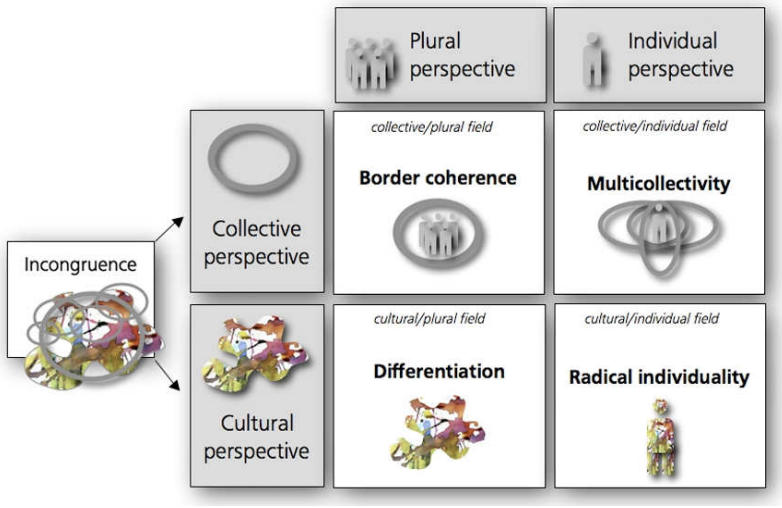
ful or otherwise burdensome if accompanied by discrimination or disenfranchisement on the collective level (Badawia 2002).

The diagnosis referred to as border coherence *must be retained in its traditional form.*

After *internal coherence, primary collectivity* and *attributive congruence* are replaced by *differentiation*, *multicollectivity* and *radical individuality*, the collective/plural field still remains to be examined.

The traditional concept of culture postulated the existence of *border coherence*, that is, the assumption that collective membership (but not cultural membership) is unambiguously regulated. Unfortunately, no modifications to this approach can be made within the broad revision of the traditional concept of culture. The diagnosis of cultural *differentiation*, *multicollectivity*, and *radical individuality* do not allow the borders between collectives to be seen as blurrier, more porous or even non-existent. Precisely this was the greatest flaw in recent coherence criticism: the posit of free-floating collective membership means throwing out the baby with the bath water. In order to be part of a culture, it is sufficient to be familiar with that culture's customs. In order to be the member of a collective, palpable criteria must be fulfilled.

Groups attach quite varied (explicit or implicit; standard or erratic) requirements to the membership and acceptance of the individuals within them. The investment in appropriate clothing or a cool story, for example, might gain an individual access to an exclusive club. A person's gender might support preferred placement in high-level management. Having academic parents facilitates access to higher education later in life. The result, however, the granting of recognition, participation, and respect is always unambiguous: one is either part of the collective or one is not. The mechanisms that, on the level of culture, are complex and blurry, following a kind of "x as well as y" logic, are indeed quite well-defined on the level of the collective. An individual can simultaneously be the member of many collectives, he or she can lose or refuse membership, but the same individual cannot be simultaneously part of and *not* part of the same collective. Either he has access to the group or he does not. Either she is accepted or she is not. Although the coherence paradigm is an obsolete tool in the understanding of culture it retains its usefulness in a collective context. Cultures overlap, intertwine, and influence one another, but the borders drawn by collectives are firm.



Exh. 3: Diagnoses of a contemporary concept of culture

5. Conclusions - the levers of radical multicollectivity

The expansion of the traditional, one-dimensional concept of culture to include three other fields in a larger matrix has enabled a thorough revision of the coherence paradigm. In the segment to follow it will become clear in what ways this new understanding of culture can be put to use in practical discussions of social issues. Special emphasis will be placed on much-discussed issues related to migration. An application-oriented concept of culture must be able to supply substantial starting points for the creation of more humane social conditions. The question then becomes, in which of the four fields of the matrix political efforts can be enacted to strengthen social cohesion.

Encroachment on the cultural/plural field is illogical and counterproductive.

The concept of *Leitkultur* is associated with the cultural/plural field and requires internal coherence or the adaptation of a certain group's customs to the customs of the supposed majority in the larger population. This demand for adaptation goes beyond the mere observance of laws that apply to every member of a society. Instead, it requires the acceptance of certain opinions, positions on specific issues, expressive fluency or even the acquisition and presentation of certain clothing styles.

Irrespective of the fact that such an approach that embraces uniformity is to be rejected under the diagnosis of *differentiation*, there are additional arguments against attempts to exert influence over the cultural/plural field.

Ethically such encroachment should be considered extremely problematic simply because it would represent an inadmissi-

ble interference with the freedom of various groups to establish their own lifestyles.

Here Habermas speaks of a "decoupling" of two "levels of integration:" a political level that protects legal behavior, and a cultural level. Only at the first level, a constitutional state may exercise influence, or demand conformity from its citizens (Habermas 1993:183ff.). Demands that themselves secure "the dominance of a particular *Leitkultur*," (Bienfait 2006:157) however, must be recognized as fundamentally illegitimate.

The recent example of the debates on headscarf bans in several European nations illustrates this fact especially clearly. The intention of a woman wearing a headscarf - how freely or how unwillingly she wears the garment and furthermore how this act is publicly interpreted is neither possible to determine nor is it justifiable. Even arguments of unjust oppression must end at the woman's own undeniable claim of individual autonomy. Otherwise, extending the faulty logic, unhealthy high-heeled shoes would also have to be forbidden arguing that they express women's status as victims of male sexual domination (despite the fact that they subject themselves to this obvious torture quite willingly) limiting their perception so strongly that they wear their chains with pride.

The rejection of organized interference on the level of culture should not lead to the assumption that cultural practices of all kinds should be embraced and are themselves off limits to criticism. On the contrary, cultural customs on the collective level frequently represent, as should already be quite clear, an expression of the dominance of one group over another. Nevertheless, changes in one group cannot be accomplished through the interference of another. Ethical considerations aside, such attempts have a specific practical limitation: they don't work. Social-psychological theories on the formation of social identity and group conflict (among others Tajfel / Turner 1995) prove convincingly that interventions at the cultural level lead to defensive actions within the subordinate group, accompanied by feelings of inferiority and separation from the dominant out-group. Typical consequences include an increased demand for internal conformity, disruption of communication and radicalization by depersonalizing the out-group.

Interference on the cultural level, therefore, typically elicits the opposite of what was intended.

Approaches in the cultural/individual field possess a patronizing character.

The same is true of potential approaches in the cultural/individual field. It has already been shown that the re-

sults of *radical individuality* originate in the unique processing of exposure to cultural *differentiation*. This can be considered as an individual's own initiative that "can neither be collectively shaped nor influenced politically" (Bienfait 2006:172, translation by author). This finding contradicts traditional multicultural perspectives that "cultivate political care of the individual identity and hold the government responsible for the successful self-discovery of the individual" (Bienfait 2006:172). Instead, the individuals create their own identities.

The well-known idea postulated by so many social scientists (cf. Wierlacher 2003) of something "third" evolving from the processing of two opposites is thus neither necessary nor helpful. To find their own identity, individuals need no "third spaces" (cf. Bhabha / Rutherford 1990) or "third chairs" (Badawia 2002) which implicitly recognize the outdated models of primary collectivity and internal coherence. Individuals add memberships and process cultural practices attached to them into something unique. Employing the above metaphors, they are constantly adding new space and stacking multiple chairs onto one another. Any efforts to interfere externally will be interpreted as a form of paternalism.

Influence in the collective/plural field possesses a purely appellative character.

Having demonstrated that interference with the cultural level is doomed to fail, the same must be said of any intervention in the collective/plural field. This has been the classical domain of critical theory that defends its position against the diagnosis of *border coherence* with its demands for equal discourse in the absence of dominance or oppression.

As noble and desirable as the demands of critical theorists are, they do not promise to be ever successful, because they fight against social conditions that appear to be a universal product of human group processes and thus cannot simply be abolished. Political influence in the collective/plural field that seeks to limit group dominance and in turn demands tolerance and openness has thus often been accused of encouraging "discursive civil utopia" (Eder 1995:276) lacking practical solutions:

> "The public discussion forums are not openly accessible, nor are the institutionalized decision processes themselves free of bias or party influence. One reason for the problems of recognition and acceptance is that the public debates are characterized by political marginalization which itself excludes any objection and contradiction of the subordinate group in question." (Bienfait 2006:153, translation by author)

Reasonable approaches promote multicollectivity.

Finally, we are left with a single field in which external political influence may indeed be possible: the collective/individual

field. While it seems impossible to change the amoral rules of collective membership, it may indeed be possible to offer an individual access to a broader range of collectives. The diagnosis of *multicollectivity* is thus expanded to the desideratum of *radical multicollectivity*, the goal of providing increasing individual access to ever more collectives.

Multicollectivity as a goal then offers an effective diagnostic foundation for the evaluation of political efforts. Concepts worthy of political support therefore, are those that promote and expand an individual's inclusion into additional groups. Conversely, programs that prevent or limit individual access to certain collectives should be recognized as counterproductive.

Accordingly, the existence of certain concentrations of ethnic or other groups - Turkish communities or graduate student housing - is to be considered as "neutral" in a multicollective sense, as long as members of these groups have the ability and means to come and go freely. A demand for political action arises when it comes to a concentration of poverty and high crime rates preventing e.g. children from getting access to higher education and thus isolating and locking them out from membership in a range of collectives from the start. Encouraging access to civic activities by, for example, promotion of plural citizenship represents an effort to increase *multicollectivity* and therefore should be worthy of support. Forbidding the headscarf, on the other hand - irrespective of the previous discussion of the ineffectiveness of manipulation on the cultural level - should be recognized as a mistake, since it would lead to the elimination of access for a certain group (in this case women) to certain social functions (schools and public places). Efforts to bring children of different social and national background together in common projects - be they violin lessons, soccer matches or even efforts to encourage girls to become more active in math and science - should be encouraged as they foster *multicollectivity* without disenfranchising other groups, and so forth.

As a political concept, the encouraging of *multicollectivity* fosters and accelerates a variety of desirable social processes.

Multicollectivity, on the one hand, provides stability and cohesion. As the collective memberships of a single individual increase, the stabilizing strength of the collective network likewise increases. The familiarity of the cultural differences within society is multiplied and the likelihood that another individual will be looked upon as a possible member of a shared collective is also intensified. Tolerance and willingness to compromise rise accordingly since individual radicalization is only possible through extreme limitation of collective membership. It is no accident, for example, that cults and terrorist

organizations isolate their members and prevent them from engaging with groups outside their own.

On the other hand, encouraging *multicollectivity* increases the developmental dynamic of a society. The more access individuals have on the collective level to a wide variety of social groups, the more intensive the competition among cultural customs will become. The expansion of access to collectives allows individuals to develop familiarity with alternative ways of life leading to a constant examination of one's own. They are provided with the possibility to autonomously appropriate something that fits or reject it if it doesn't. Thus, the selection of customs that themselves have been able to withstand repeated testing is accelerated. Collectives, then, that are committed to their own customs (and which collective isn't?) cannot rely on missionary work to persuade others. They can instead offer access to others and trust that their practices will prevail when they are made known and acquire a level of familiarity. Likewise, they must accept if this does not happen. For *radical multicollectivity* cannot be ideologically manipulated: The result of expanded collective membership always remains open and its effect on the individual stays radically individualized.

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