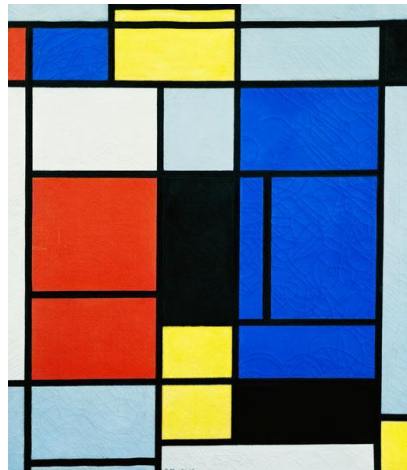


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IDEAS FOR  
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## Europe and Cosmopolitanism: An Epistemological Perspective

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If the concept of cosmopolitanism has long been associated with the normative philosophy of the enlightenment (Cloots 1792, Kant 1795), today the term is mobilized by an increasing number of researchers in social sciences and in the humanities as an analytical category. The word serves at the same time the description of social globalization and an epistemological perspective aiming at understanding recent social mutations.

This recent reflection has been mostly carried by the sociology of risk and by works on the globalization of the holocaust memory (Beck 2014, Beck & Sznaider 2006, Levy & Sznaider 2006). Furthermore, the re-actualization of the concept cosmopolitanism is closely linked to the tensions and the renewal, during the last twenty years, of epistemological thought in the humanities and in social sciences: weakening of “nationalist methodology”, contestation of area studies, endless debates on global history and world literature, rise of transnational studies and cultural transfers. Those tensions impact at the same time the modalities of scientific

production (idiographic vs nomothetic approaches), and disciplinary order (interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, cultural area studies).

Convinced that the major issues addressed to the formation of a European higher education area are articulated to these observations, and stating that the reflection on “cosmopolitan methodology” nourishes theoretical renewal in social sciences and humanities, several questions lead our discussion: are there any differences between, on the one side, cosmopolitan representations in European societies and, on the other, universalist, relativist, multicultural or post-modern perspectives? What does the term cosmopolitanism mean in its epistemological dimension? does this concept help to describe modern societies, to formulate its critics (Giddens 1991, Touraine 1992), or to study its recent transformation?

To push forward these questions, we articulate our debate thanks to two thematic axes aiming at first to discuss social representations, and second, to find out specific methodological elements for its study.

Through empirical data, we addressed a critical look to the recent contributions of transnational approaches and to the study of social circulation and cultural transfers, to which the notion of cosmopolitanism is closely linked.

Second, attention has been paid to recent researches on mobility and displacement; notions that involve crossing borders, whether symbolic or concrete, and where interactions, exchanges, contacts and frictions can occur. In this regard particular attention has been dedicated to individual and collective displacements understood as civic engagement.

Lastly, attention has been paid to the relations of cosmopolitanism and the nation state. More precisely, we discussed the link between cosmopolitanism and the pluralistic regime of national legitimation in Europe - liberal democratic, romantic and conservative, (Pomian 1990, Ducreux 2004) and questioned the extent to which national specificities interfere with the vernacular comprehension of European cosmopolitanism.

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