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RESEARCH PROGRAMME; THE ONTOLOGY OF MEDIATION

Programme Module 2. Intercultural mediation

In philosophers and social scientists' attempts to articulate the structures that mediate human experience, the concept of 'culture' has played a major role for over a century. Globalization, the rise of 'multicultural societies' and the growth of various information and communication technologies, especially in the North Atlantic region, have made us identify the interplay between such postulated 'cultures' – that is: 'interculturality' – as a major component of the contemporary experience which any 'ontology of the present' would seek to identify and to think through. One of the main goals during the period under review has been to analyze, criticize and re-evaluate the traditional concept of culture and to explore the conditions (conceptual and empirical constraints) under which we may meaningfully speak of interculturality. Van Binsbergen, Oosterling, Tiemersma, Loose, and De Mul have contributed to this research line with a series of articles and monographs, for example Oosterling and Kimmerle's *Sensus communis in Multi- and Intercultural Perspective. On the Possibility of Common Judgements in Arts and Politics* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), and Van Binsbergen's *Intercultural Encounters* (LIT Verlag, 2003), and (co-edited) *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global culture* (Brill & African Studies Centre, 2003). Next, two PhD-projects have been successfully completed (Sengers, 1999; Raasing, 2001), and five others are under way (Duran-Ndaya, Duysens, Meilink, Sypkens-Smit, Woudhuizen). Moreover, several members have been very active in (inter)national debates on the multicultural society. Given the still growing (inter)national importance of this theme, this line of research will be continued. As information and communication technologies play an increasingly important role in intercultural processes, part of this research will be integrated into the aforementioned book project on the mediatic turn.

The historical roots of interculturality are a subject of research as well. Tiemersma, who has a long practical experience with Indian spirituality as a yoga teacher, has contributed to the notion of interculturality from the perspective of Indian traditions, especially Advaita Vedānta. In this context he not only wrote several articles and books on themes like bodily experience, the relation self-other, psychotherapy, media and the boundaries of mediation, but also organized three national Advaita Vedānta conferences and edited the subsequent book publications (Leusden, 2001, 2002, 2003). Oosterling also has a practical background. He studied budo/martial arts in Japan and has published on budo-philosophical topics (2000). In 2005 two new books on intercultural philosophy, edited by Oosterling, will be published, one on the relation between eastern and western philosophies (*Met drie ogen*, Asoka) and a monograph on the work of Heinz Kimmerle (*Interkulturalität im Denken Heinz Kimmerles*, Bautz Verlag). Van Binsbergen recently started a new project that merges his lifelong empirical experience as a cultural anthropologist in the Ancient Near East and Africa with his philosophical work of the last decade. It consists of the exploration of the socio-historical, intercultural, and media conditions under which philosophical thought (with its very specific language patterns) has arisen. This research (now crystallizing into two volumes scheduled for publication in 2005-2006) seeks to trace, through a combination of philosophical conceptualization and historical and comparative empirical research, very early and near-universal forms of human thought, seeking to answer Max Black's question as to the existence of universal structures of symbolism. The focus will be on the emergence, 5000 years ago in the Ancient Near East, of fundamental forms of mediation that have since – especially through their potential for what might be called 'routinized transcendentalism' – had a profound impact on the human world (writing, the state, organized religion, and science). A complementary line of research will be devoted to the philosophy of myth, where Cassirer, Kolakowski and Deleuze & Guattari offer major philosophical inspiration to explore the wealth of mythical material from Africa (with special emphasis on leopard-related themes) and to detect, once more, underlying general patterns of thought there that highlight both continuity and specificity of particular periods and regions. In connection with this project an international conference will be organized, to which alongside Van Binsbergen several other members of the group will contribute.