

Bergen Transculturation Studies' seminar series, spring 2011

5 APRIL, 12.15 – 14.00, AUDITORIUM Q:

Professor John McLeod (Leeds University):

"Sounding Silence: Thresholds of Transculturation"

Abstract:

'This presentation explores the possibilities and problems of the concept of "transculturations" in contemporary critical contexts, especially the current vogue for challenging the legitimacy of postcolonialism in debates about globalisation and cosmopolitanism. I begin by offering a recent tangible example of a transcultural threshold as a way of raising a number of issues concerning the limits of transcultural encounters. I then proceed to consider critically the emerging critical enthusiasm for globalisation and cosmopolitanism (by thinkers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah) and suggest that they do not necessarily offer the most productive means for bearing witness to the difficult conversations which globalised cultures engender. Drawing upon the wisdom of postcolonial thought, too easily dismissed these days as of decreasing value, I argue contrariwise for a concept of transculturation which sounds both the standpoints and silences of cultural interaction, and which recognises the ongoing challenges of conducting conversations at cultural thresholds. Drawing upon a couple of recent literary examples, ultimately I argue that the necessity of attending to the inexpressibility of cultural singularity is too quickly bypassed in some important influential criticism – a matter to which the notion of transculturation might productively attend.'