

## *Configurations of the Third (Cambridge, August 2005)*

### **PANEL 2: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES**

**Joachim Fischer**, Dresden

*The Other and the Third: A systematic Consideration of an Innovation in Social Theory*

All humanities and social sciences (since they appear as a specific group of academic disciplines) require a social theory (or theory of intersubjectivity) as a key theory epistemologically as well as ontologically. The relevance of the otherness (“alterity”, “ego-alter ego”, “double contingency”) distinguishes humanities and social sciences from other disciplines: the natural science (approaching its “object” (nature) in a subject-object-relationship), the philosophy (transcendental approach within self-relationship of subjectivity) and theology (approach within the revelation of the extramundane Third).

The well elaborated social theory of the “Other” (“Verstehen”, “Anerkennung”) is accompanied by the turn to the “Third” - the mundane “Third” - within different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (especially linguistics, psychology, sociology, literary studies). Thus my paper concentrates on distinguishing and systematizing four arguments, which push forward the turn to the Third as a methodological and ontological innovation at the basis of social theory:

1. *The argument of formal communication in language*: By a merely dyadic theory of intersubjectivity the entire system of personal pronouns (as a core of communication roles of every language) could not be made accessible.
2. *The material argument of family or triangulation*: Human socialisation is only possible and completed by “triangulation” (internalization of the third perspective)
3. *The argument of transition from interaction to institution*: The social theory needs the figure of the personal Third in order to reconstruct the phenomenon of “institution” or “system” or “discourse”.
4. *The argument concerning the richness of the Third*: Literature tells that every socio-cultural world already configures itself in a lot of structures (translator, messenger, rival, trickster, mediator, judge, scapegoat, coalition, “the real winner”, agent, divide et impera, parasite, majority/minority), which neither can be explained by a merely dyadic interaction nor need a fourth (party/person).

If these four arguments, which cannot be reduced to each other, are able to establish the figure of the Third or “tertiary” (“Tertiarität”) in the basic social theory, one can draw consequences for the methodological and ontological innovation of the humanities and the social sciences.