

“*Re-thinking Artistic Knowledge Production: Global Media Cultures—Distributed Creativity.*” An Introduction

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This section, “Re-thinking Artistic Knowledge Production: Global Media Cultures—Distributed Creativity,” features two contributions chosen from a symposium with the same title¹ that took place May 23–24, 2013 based on a collaboration between members of the DFG research network “Medien der kollektiven Intelligenz” (2011–2014, University of Konstanz)² and hosted by the chair of global art history at Heidelberg University.³

An investigation of distributed forms of artistic, or more generally of aesthetic, knowledge production in times of global connectivity calls for a transcultural perspective. Such a perspective presents an academic challenge at two levels. At the level of empirical research, targeting transculturality in the global field of artistic and aesthetic practices requires researchers to trace various—often intricate or obscure—trajectories when analyzing how art works, concepts, or aesthetic practices travel from one location to the other and how their agents and technological mediation actively promote or refuse to negotiate cultural differences at specific moments. At a more reflexive level, the transcultural lens calls for a critical and historical awareness of how the very research

1 See the symposium’s program, “Re-thinking Artistic Knowledge Production: Global Media Cultures—Distributed Creativity.” http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/newsevents/events/archive/event-view/cal/event/view-list?page_id-456/tx_cal_phpicalendar/2013/05/23/re_thinking_artistic_knowledge_production_distributed_creativity_global_media_cultures.html [Accessed on 17. November 2015].

2 For a comprehensive overview of the activities of this interdisciplinary research network see “DFG-Research Network ‘Medien der kollektiven Intelligenz.’” <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/mki/> [Accessed on 17. November 2015]. For the interdisciplinary results of the network see, among others, Mathias Denecke, Anne Ganzert, Isabell Otto, and Robert Stock, eds., *ReClaiming Participation: Technology—Mediation—Collectivity* (Bielefeld: Transcript, forthcoming 2016).

3 As guest editor of this section and co-organizer of the symposium “Re-thinking Artistic Knowledge Production: Global Media Cultures—Distributed Creativity,” I would like to thank both authors and their peer reviewers, as well as the journal’s editors for their meticulous work and joint academic efforts, which ensured that a significant part of the inspiring symposium discussion is now reflected in publication.

methodologies that we apply to study these trajectories are part of epistemic formations that cannot be separated from culturally specific practices of knowledge production. This obliges us to re-consider post-colonial theories that called for a paradigmatic self-reflexive change in research, which would acknowledge and overcome the epistemic violence that the use of “Western” analytic frames or concepts brings with it when answering questions of artistic or aesthetic knowledge production.

In the last decade, scholars discussing the critical potential of a transcultural perspective to respond to this epistemological challenge have built on this agenda. They take post-colonial theory’s earlier call for an institutional critique seriously,⁴ but are concerned about its tendency to absolutize the dichotomy of Western vs. other epistemic frameworks. Consequently, they seek to avoid imposing the theoretical findings resulting from a politically informed engagement with (post-)colonial power structures on historically and regionally different and very diverse socio-political and cultural contexts.

In the wake of the “global turn” of the late 1990s, scholars of art history,⁵ visual (cultural) studies, and visual and media anthropology⁶ have begun to critically discuss and constructively overcome those cultural assumptions, as well as nationally or civilizationally defined, static units of research, which have historically shaped these disciplines and crucially (in-)formed their

4 For surveys of the post-colonial turn, see for example Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).

5 The state of critical art historical meta-reflection regarding the so-called global turn in the German speaking region is summarized in Matthias Bruhn, Monica Juneja, and Elke Anna Werner, eds., „Universalität der Kunstgeschichte?“ *Kritische Berichte: Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften* 40, no. 2 (2012). A more recent overview of disciplinary positions is offered by the public lecture series “Global Art History,” 7 October 2015 to 27 January 2016, at Linz University, Austria. <http://ku-linz.at/universitaet/aktuelles/details/article/gobal-art-history-ringvorlesung-im-wintersemester-201516/> [Accessed on 17. November 2015]. For an edited volume that features the state of critical discussions in the Anglo-American research community, see for example: Jill H. Casid and Aruna D’Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn and Clark Studies in the Visual Arts* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014).

6 Among the key texts associated with the reflexive turn in anthropology are: Bob Scholte, “Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology (1969),” in *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1973); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Jay Ruby, ed., *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

methodological approaches. To take the example of art history, this multi-fold engagement has brought forth a range of very instructive, innovative case studies,⁷ theoretically highly engaging monographs,⁸ and manifesto-like writings.⁹

The research on constellations—both contemporary and historical—of “collaborative” or even “collective” artistic knowledge production reflects a dialogue among and across disciplines, as demonstrated by the contributions from an art historian, Samantha Schramm, and a visual anthropologist, Cora Bender. Their articles address both the epistemological legacies of such knowledge, and the ways in which scholarly work on these processes might (only) be nested in specific localities, nurtured by certain cultural beliefs, and shared by particular agents, despite the involved and resulting notions of (globally) shared and/or “distributed creativity.”¹⁰ Yet, while the latest media

7 See for example Monica Juneja, “Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation’,” in *Global Studies: Mapping the Contemporary*, ed. Hans Belting (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 274–297, in which she critically asks if art history can be made global in reference to earlier, less self-reflexive attempts such as James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global? The Art Seminar* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Her article is representative of the latest critical approaches, in that the theoretical reflection on the epistemological challenge is constructively answered by means of specific case studies from non-Euro-American regions—in this case, contemporary art from South Asia. The analysis highlights the crucial, long-standing cultural entanglement and shared discourse of non-European artistic centers, and the status of Europe and North America as the dominant centers of the modern academic discipline.

8 See for example Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2012), in which she provides a study that critically explores the modern Western approach that conceives of art as a binary proposition and relates it to identification.

9 In Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, *Art Is Not What You Think It Is*, Wiley Blackwell Manifestos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), Farago and Preziosi have explicitly framed their equally critical consideration as a “manifesto” to mark the disciplinary urgency with which they call for art historians to engage in a productive meta-reflection.

10 Axel Bruns, in *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Prodsusage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 230–231 provides a useful definition of “distributed creativity” based on creative and web-based processes of “prodsusage,” in which user-led productions and content-creation are generated in decentralized and distributed ways: “Whether users are directly collaborating in the creation of collective works of art, or collaborating somewhat more distantly in the sharing and mutual critiquing of the individual work and its collection and exhibition in creative communities, we can generally describe such practices as forms of distributed creative work. [...] The term of the artist, especially in the romantic idea of the ‘great artist,’ however, also points us to the wider effect of the collaborative aspects of prodsusage in this and other cases: artistry and creative work, and the idea of the creative work, are substantially affected by community-based prodsusage efforts, as these undermine the idea of the work itself as a complete, finished, and defined entity just as they undermine the idea of the industrial product as a complete, finished, and defined package. Prodsusage [...] has no fixed products, but only temporary artefacts of the ongoing process; creative prodsusage, then, does not generate artworks, not even artworks ‘in progress,’ but instead offers a creative process which may generate temporary artefacts along the way.” Compare note 13 for a related definition of the “prosumer.”

paradigm of the worldwide web and its impact on professionals as well as amateurs, who are engaged in a vast, increasingly overlapping field of creative practices, has prompted academics to reconsider issues of participation and collaboration in art and artistic practices,¹¹ cross-culturally or even transculturally framed studies of these issues have remained rare.¹²

The two authors rise to this challenge by each offering a detailed analysis of two very specific and not directly related cases: the historical role of indigenous people in shaping modern North American popular culture, and a contemporary exhibition project that socially engaged (with) a Spanish-speaking neighborhood in New York. Both texts zoom into complex phenomena of collaborative creative knowledge production as they reflect on the methodological decision to limit their scope to one region or an even narrower urban locale. The articles thus demonstrate that an analysis that addresses both collaborative practices at a micro level, and the new media technology that supports actors in their local settings, is invaluable when attempting to answer the large question of transculturality. Both articles take North America as the main geographical context, and consider conceptions of “globality” that obviously changed over the twentieth century. The articles innovatively address two recent academic discourses and explore their existing, but largely understudied connections: on the one hand, media-related research on aspects of collectivity (as foregrounded by the symposium sub-title “global media cultures”), and on the other hand, art-related research on aspects of transculturality (as a specific connotation of the symposium sub-title “distributed creativity”). Both articles address the subject of artistic knowledge production from the related vantage points of a) collective authorship in processes of distributed creativity and b) transcultural phenomena in shared or even collective creative/artistic practices, while at the same time framing these points as particularly prominent aspects of (modern or contemporary) global media cultures.

Samantha Schramm’s contribution focuses on the exhibition *The People’s Choice. (Arroz con Mango)* (New York, 1981) by the artists’

11 Particularly prominent are attempts to define participatory art and a relational understanding of artworks, their makers, and their viewers: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 1998); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); Rudolf Frieling, “Towards Participation in Art,” in *The Art of Participation 1950 to Now*, ed. Rudolf Frieling et al. (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art/London: Thames & Hudson), 33–49. An introduction to this discourse is in Samantha Schramm, “Arts and Media: Participation and Relation,” in Denecke, *ReClaiming Participation*, 175–181.

12 Among the few monographs that come to mind are: Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) and Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

collective Group Material as a case study to analyze processes of cultural transformation in collaborative artistic practices that raise questions which go beyond the notion of (single) authorship. Her article relates to forms of shared knowledge production shaped by the artists themselves, who made such practices a subject of explicit reflection on the level of the display. At the same time, Schramm considers how the objects from private homes that were put on display in *The People's Choice* refer also to cultural everyday-life practices on a larger scale. Taking her cue from Bruno Latour's notion of the circulating references of objects, she asks how transcultural collectivity is shaped by the circulation and transformation of the objects themselves, which become creative mediators in processes of transcultural knowledge production.

Cora Bender's article extends the temporal and geographic horizon of the section to include the beginning of the twentieth century and post-frontier American popular culture. She analyzes entanglements of newly emerging media technology (especially photography and film), rapid industrialization, and the invention of leisure time on the one hand, and the opening up of the vast American interior for touristic exploration following the end of the "Indian Wars" on the other. Her study demonstrates how new arenas of cultural representation such as rodeos, fairs, and exhibitions went hand in hand with a shift in American politics towards a more or less forced integration of the diverse American populace under the umbrella of American patriotism. Yet, despite the violence involved in this integration, Bender argues from a media anthropological point of view that indigenous actors played a crucial role in bringing forth the new creative forms which marked this era and then subsequently evolved into what is nowadays called "global media culture." Her article provides a strong case study to learn how the imagination of a community and the new media-based distribution of its representations can actually include as well as cover up many, often conflicting voices and creative agents without them necessarily contesting the overall imaginary.

Bender's argument that native people "were not hapless victims of mediatization," but that "they were *there* when media first happened, and they collaborated in making them happen" does indeed challenge the concept of cultural appropriation (Aneignung) that is so prominent in media and communication studies. While such a position does not contradict the other symposium contributors' scepticism regarding today's media user—aptly

called a “prosumer”¹³—and his/her inability to maintain strong cases of independent and creative authorship,¹⁴ it affirms the overall impression that historical as well as contemporary media developments and related cultural practices attest not only to forms of cultural “appropriation,” but to that of a cultural “cooperation” between locally situated agents, (digitally) inter-connected media, and increasingly global communicational networks.

A comparative reading of Bender’s and Schramm’s articles makes clear that the specific power relations within each of the socio-political and historical settings is a key factor in explaining how forms of cultural appropriation as well as cooperation evolve, change, and might continue to (in-)form distributed creativity across further locales and times. Taken together, the articles also provide partial but complementary answers to some of the symposium’s lingering questions, while highlighting the need to address those questions that only appear as an afterthought of a comparative reading: Are there new ways of collectively producing and sharing artistic knowledge in the broadest sense, which would transcend earlier practices by which artist groups and networked amateurs alike, as well as artistic or simply creative media, were able to overcome the (modernist) ideals of single authorship? Or do we see historical conflicts of “authentic” authorship, unequal power relations, and cultural misunderstandings taking on a new look and becoming viral on a new, global scale?

13 The term was coined by American futurist Alvin Toffler, who predicted the blurring of the demarcations between producers and consumers in highly saturated marketplaces. Such markets would trigger the mass production of highly customized products that, in turn, would require consumers to actively participate in the production process, for example, when specifying design requirements. As a consequence, the consumer would at least partially assume the conventional role of producers as content-providers, see Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow* (New York: Bantam, 1980). Later, the term was more narrowly applied to people who create value for companies without receiving wages, see George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital ‘Prosumer’,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10, no. 1 (March, 2010), 13–36. Compare note 10 for a related definition of the term “produsage.”

14 Such was the case in the joint symposium contribution by Klaus Schönberger and Christian Ritter (Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)), “Zwischen Aneignung und Hacking. Umnutzung/Umformung/Transformation popkultureller Codes.” The issue was also addressed by Henry Keazor (Heidelberg University) in his paper, “ASI or ASO? Artistic Swarm Intelligence vs. Artistic Sell Out in the Era of the Web 2.0,” and by Asko Lehmuškallio (University of California Berkeley/Helsinki Institute for Information Technology (HIIT)), in his paper, “Cameras and Translocal Practices: Embodied Looking Relations and Medium-Specific Differences.” Compare note 1.