

Editor's Note

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Transcultural exchanges are a constituent element of any culture. While such exchanges have dramatically increased in volume, speed, and diversity over the last two hundred years, cultures have, from the earliest times, continuously enriched themselves and others through these exchanges. The transcultural perspective is therefore not tied to the present or the recent past.

An overemphasis on nation-state borders and media differentiation has marginalized these exchanges in the humanities and social sciences everywhere. An increasing number of scholars, however, have come to realize that the nation-state "default mode" and its retroactive imposition on earlier history has little support in the sources, processes, relations and objects they study.

Transcultural Studies has been set up by the University of Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows" to provide a platform for contributions from such scholars. As an e-journal, *Transcultural Studies* allows contributors to make full use of the internet's publishing options by offering the possibility of supplementing their work with images, video, sound, and links. We invite you to peruse the journal, join the conversation, and contribute your research, critiques, and suggestions.

Our first issue opens with Arjun Appadurai's essay on "the circulation of forms and the forms of circulation," which is based on a talk he gave at the official opening of the Cluster. In it, he explores the uneasy interaction between the different facets of globalization—from currency markets to drug smuggling rings, from the spread of the notion of human rights to the empowerment of marginal groups to impose their will on majorities. He calls for a methodology that facilitates the study and conceptualization of the dynamic tensions and interactions between the different sectors ("scapes"), as well as the forces and locations ("local" or "global") involved, instead of burying them in diffuse categories such as "hybridity."

In his meticulous study of a concept's transcultural development, Douglas Howland traces the way in which the concept of neutrality in international law gradually gelled into a generally accepted legal norm during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This process, he argues, was driven by actual conflicts in Europe (German-French war) and East Asia (French and Japanese wars with China), and the resulting term "neutrality" came to

circumscribe a state's attitude towards an inter-state conflict in which it was not directly involved. Diplomats and jurists had to define their understanding of "neutrality", while new players such as Japan and China needed to be heard and have their stance respected by other powers. While we have some studies on the migration of concepts to other languages and cultures, this article is a pioneering effort to study the formation of a global legal category in a wider transcultural process.

Gennifer Weisenfeld's contribution is the first in a series called "Multi-centred modernisms-reconfiguring Asian art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries," introduced by Monica Juneja, the Cluster's professor of global art history. Weisenfeld joins the conversation with Appadurai from a different angle by exploring the artistic and political tensions between the projections of a Japanese modernity anchored in the "tradition" of Edo urban entertainment as an essentialized marker and one that emphasizes a break from tradition and diversity. These differences can be observed globally in the presentations of Japanese art at the Venice Biennales and other contemporary art exhibitions, where institutional actors come into prominence—the curators, whose problematic role in setting international standards have been highlighted by John Clark.

In the second contribution to the series on multi-centered modernisms James Elkins tests the plausibility of Clark's efforts to overcome the college-book master-narrative, which firmly situates the coming of "modernity" in painting in Europe (including Russia) and North America. While remaining sympathetic to the motive of overcoming the evident eurocentrism of most studies following this narrative, Elkins questions whether it is possible and meaningful to write a history of modernity in painting (or, one might add, in fiction) that would include twentieth century painters in, for example, Panama, Australia, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia, Austria and Japan. He explores the viability of different analytical frames such as "ethnic," "national," or "authentication" versus "origination," in view of the overwhelming evidence for the exposure of artists from the "periphery" of the master narrative to works by artists inhabiting its "center." The title of his last section, "Just give up", warns the reader that no easy solution is in sight and that perhaps the initial question of how a proper "master narrative" might look had been wrong.

This issue is a good beginning. We hope that you find reading it useful and that you will join the endeavor by subscribing, by recommending it to other scholars, and by contributing your own research.

For the Editorial Board,
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