

Transcultural Humanities – Between Globalization and Postcolonial Re-Readings of History

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Conference Report

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In his keynote address “Decolonial Humanities and Corporate Values,” **Walter Mignolo** (Duke) elucidated the development of the university from its beginning as an institution to what he called the corporate university. His brief sketch of this development was supposed to prepare the ground for his elaborations on the task and the possibility of what he termed intercultural and transcultural decolonial humanities. Following Mignolo, what is referred to today as the university was created in Western Christendom, and later on in Europe, between the end of the eleventh and the end of the thirteenth centuries. The official language of these universities was Latin, and the master epistemic frame was theology. Mignolo underscored that the universities in Western Christendom ought to be seen as one particular way of fulfilling the needs of Western Christians as far as education and the transmission of knowledge to future generations were concerned. He called it one particular “house of learning” using one particular language among numerous other “houses of learning” using different languages and being governed by different epistemic frames. In view of this plurality of possible ways of understanding the task and the status of universities, the question inevitably arises as to why the Western model of the university has become the model to be expanded all over the world.

On Mignolo’s account, since the Renaissance the history of Western universities has followed two parallel and complementary paths. The first point that ought to be mentioned is the transformation of the Medieval university into the Renaissance university. While this development took place within Europe, the second aspect worth considering concerns the beginning of the imperial/colonial expansion of Western universities. Regarding this colonial history of the university, one should see that slowly but steadily British and French imperial or colonial expansions took over the roles formerly played by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that due to this

epistemological imperialism former houses of learning were displaced or radically reduced in importance by Western models which took their place. The next point Mignolo addressed in his talk was the transformation of the Renaissance university into the Enlightenment (or Kantian-Humboldtian) university. He put a premium on the fact that this form of university was supposed to serve the interests of a new social class and of the emerging nation-states. According to Mignolo, a parallel process could be observed in the colonies where a transformation of the colonial/Renaissance university into the colonial/Enlightenment university was apparent. This kind of development could be observed in many places around the world, with the founding of European universities in India, China, Japan, the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mignolo used his brief history of the development of the Western university in order to illustrate three main points. First, he called attention to the aforementioned transformation of the Kantian-Humboldtian university into the corporate university, a transformation which took place in capitalist and imperial countries. Mignolo's contention was that since World War II the principles that had animated the Kantian-Humboldtian model and that had established its relation to the modern nation-state had been displaced by the principles of the corporate university. Whereas the primary concern of the Kantian-Humboldtian university had been the formation and education of the citizens, the main goal of the corporate university was the training of experts who would contribute to the growth and expansion of the capitalist market(s). The second point whose importance Mignolo emphasized was that the corporate university followed the path of the histories of imperial/colonial expansion and was taking over the Renaissance and Enlightenment histories of colonial universities in South America, North and South Africa, China, India, and Japan. Finally, he maintained that an obvious pattern of a de-colonization of knowledge had already begun. Mignolo submitted that this de-colonization of knowledge could take place, and was actually taking place, within as well as outside the university as a Western and colonial/imperial institution.

Mignolo closed his talk by directing attention to the necessity of creating a new type of university. This new kind of school he called a pluri-versity. A pluri-versity has two primary goals. First, a de-colonization of knowledge and of being, that is, the attempt, as Mignolo put it, to help learning to unlearn in order to re-learn and to learn to be (again). Second, a contribution to the development of a pluri-national state (while the Kantian-Humboldtian university was intimately interwoven with the idea of the nation-state). Mignolo's suggestions culminated in a brief discussion of the potential of an intercultural or transcultural de-colonial humanities. This de-colonial and transcultural project ought to be

developed, within the university, by faculty and students, graduate and undergraduate, and also by nonacademic intellectuals. It must not be managed from the top, that is, by university managers. De-colonial humanities, as Mignolo made unequivocally clear, signifies that education is not supposed to be at the service of the state or the corporation, but at the service of the formerly disempowered. It is a new form of empowerment which refuses to succumb to the power of the state and the mechanisms of the capitalist market.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Berkeley) began his talk “The Role of Ethnic Studies in the New Humanist Revolution” with an elaboration on the complexity of the term “decolonial humanism.” His suggestions concerning this “new humanism of the condemned,” which is supposed to change the West’s understanding of what it means to be human, prepared the ground, as it were, for the main topic of his talk: the role ethnic studies ought to play for the development of what he termed the new humanities. Expanding on the context in which ethnic studies emerged, Maldonado-Torres argued that it first came to prominence in the late 1960s. It was part of larger demands from the Black Student Union and the Third World Student Front at San Francisco State University and at the University of California, Berkeley. The year 1969, as he underscored, should of course be seen in the context of what is commonly referred to as the end of the Age of Europe, the anticolonial struggles after the Second World War, and the civil rights movement.

Maldonado-Torres’s contention was that ethnic studies in general ought to be interpreted as a massive intervention into the Kantian-Humboldtian understanding of the task the university has to fulfill. Ethnic studies strove to offer a new conception of study in the humanities, that is, it sought to develop new possibilities for the production of scientific methods and, above all, it called attention to the crucial nature of a new relationship between academic work, socio-political problems, and community life. Maldonado-Torres stated that the meaning of ethnic studies could not be properly grasped without taking into consideration its relation to larger shifts in Western thought, or to what he called previous humanist revolutions. Ethnic studies, on his account, belongs to a set of political and epistemological interventions that promote a new humanist revolution which offers the possibility of radically questioning and rethinking the concept of the human, as well as the hierarchies, structures, and axioms of the traditional human sciences. Throughout his talk, Maldonado-Torres maintained that the idea of utopia was of utmost importance for the new identity politics. In other words, ethnic studies should be considered a utopian site within the humanities.

In his talk “‘Ici est un autre’: Writing ‘After’ Migration and Survival Knowledge in Cécile Wajsbrot and Sherko Fatah,” **Ottmar Ette** (Potsdam) discussed two novels written by

children of migration. The protagonist and first-person narrator of Wajsbrot's *Mémorial* (2005) belongs to the second generation of immigrants, that is, she is a child of migration seeking to make a new home. As Ette demonstrated it is crucial to see that the children of migration, who have never experienced the movement of flight from one place to another, do not dissolve completely in the new "here," but carry within them the "there" which once was their parents' and ancestors' "here" of a homeplace. In other words, these children grow up feeling that something is not quite right, something is missing, and that there is moreover something which cannot be named. The old flight routes and migrations, the stories of the refugees, the expelled, and the rootless, are stored in the memory transgenerationally and constitute what Ette called a vectorial (family-) memory at precisely the moment when their parents intend their children to adapt to a new "here," to start a new life in a new place. However, the new "here" is another one: "Ici est un autre." Here ("ici") is another place, a there ("là-bas"). Ette's contention was that *Mémorial* ought to be regarded as contributing to the depiction of the current living conditions on a planet shaped by countless migratory movements, movements of flight caused by persecution, expulsion, and annihilation.

In spite of all the hopes invested in her by her parents, and in spite of her intimacy with the French language, the nameless narrator of Wajsbrot's novel does not feel rooted in France. She does not have a fixed abode. Ette submitted that a text like *Mémorial* called attention to one central task of literature, namely, to reactivate the voices from the past, to transport them into the living present and thereby to make them audible again. In this literature of migration, the past and the present are firmly linked in a highly complex polylogue. To put this somewhat differently, Ette argued that "ici" and "là-bas" not only had to be understood in a spatial but also in a temporal way. In his opinion, the "there" in *Mémorial* was made audible in the "here," the past in the present, and the "you" in the "we." In this context one ought to understand that it is the challenge of the narrator's generation to translate the first generation's survival knowledge into the life knowledge of the second generation. As Ette underscored, the narrator had to escape from the reduction to only one time level and to strive to creatively reconnect past, present, and future. Furthermore, she had to become fully aware of her own life, and writing, without a fixed abode. This urges us, if we follow Ette, to realize the need for a new kind of literature governed by the notions of polyphony and mobility, a literature, that is, which is not committed to one single space, not even a place of memory, but which rather chooses everywhere as its playground.

While *Mémorial* tells the story of a child of migration looking for the traces of her family history and that of her community and trying to develop a sense of identity, Sherko

Fatah's *Im Grenzland* (2001) deals with a smuggler who seeks to secure his family's income by transporting illegal luxury goods across a border that has actually become impassable. Both texts center on a journey to or through the borderlands, through a mined territory (literally and metaphorically). Moreover, both deal with liminal experiences and the possibility of survival (knowledge). Ette argued that both texts might be used to show that writing "after" migration is still writing against the background of migration. This writing without a fixed abode is not only characterized by the multilayered complexity of transspatial, transtemporal, and transcultural structures, but it also should be seen as a form of writing that neither dissolves in the space of what is commonly referred to as national literature nor can it be subsumed under the category of world literature. As Ette made clear at the end of his presentation, one of the primary future tasks we as humanities scholars have to face is to rethink philology in terms of movement.

Madina Tlostanova (Moscow, Bremen), in her talk "Between Intellectual Mimicry and Neo-Imperial Revival: The Humanities of the Ex-Second World in the Global Epistemic Context," contended that contemporary subaltern theorists often neglected the ex-second world, or ex-socialist block, because of its particular status. While the ex-Third World, as she argued, had become "fashionable," Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union appeared as Others to both worlds, the West and the non-West. Hence, this ambivalent positioning offers the possibility of developing another, truly different perspective which no longer seeks to imitate the Western or non-Western model. It is crucial to understand that it is from this position, ambivalent, uncertain, and unpredictable, that the mechanisms of neoliberal globalization might be critiqued, that is, the difference of the ex-second world allows one to deconstruct the impact of globalization on culture, on the humanities, on the production of knowledge, and on the understanding of epistemology. The last aspect was of primary concern to Tlostanova. She advanced the argument that Russia's subaltern positioning was not so much a question of economics or politics, but that it was expressed epistemically. She spoke of an epistemic and intellectual colonization of Russia by Western Europe in this context. By this she meant that Russia had sought to copy the system of education and the university as an institution from Western Europe. The Western model appeared simultaneously as an unattainable ideal and as a rival to catch up with. This had also contributed to the somewhat schizophrenic attitude of many Russian intellectuals.

Elaborating on the development from the Kantian/Humboldtian model of the university to the corporate university in Russia, Tlostanova throughout her talk underscored that the humanities and social sciences in Russia were suffering from the fact that they did not

offer something original, but rather were governed by Eurocentric paradigms. In order to further illustrate this change from the Kantian/Humboldtian university to the corporate one, she briefly discussed a text by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos: “The University in the Twenty-First Century: Toward a Democratic and Emancipatory University Reform” (2004). In this piece, Santos points out three forms of crisis of the modern university: the crisis of hegemony, the crisis of legitimacy, and what he calls the institutional crisis. All three crises direct attention to the present metamorphosis of the university due to the impact of neoliberal globalization. Tlostanova discussed these crises with special regard to Russian developments.

As a solution to the present crisis of Russian humanities Tlostanova proposed what she termed the development of critical border perspectives and a critical border thinking. Intellectuals, if we follow her suggestions, are supposed to take the position of what she calls border alternative thinkers, that is, they ought to seek to negotiate a way between the cultural metropolis and the colony, and at the same time they are supposed to deconstruct both the dominating Eurocentric paradigm and forms of nationalist or religious fundamentalisms. Wishing to reduce or even stop the effectiveness of epistemic mimicry typical of Russian intellectuals, Tlostanova admitted that this kind of border mentality often was expressed more productively in cultural artifacts such as novels, movies, theater, and forms of linguistic and cultural hybridity than in the realm of the humanities. In her opinion, Russian and post-Soviet intellectuals ought to finally get rid of the chains of mental Eurocentrism, find their own independent voice, and seek to enter into a dialogue with non-Western epistemic models. According to Tlostanova, this deimperialization and decolonization of the minds of Russian intellectuals, this gesture of rejecting their secondary Eurocentrism, together with the change in their attitude toward the ex-Third World and its epistemic legacy, is the only possibility of contributing to an intellectual renaissance in Russia.

The talk of **Gabriele Dietze** (Berlin) centered on the question of “Critical Occidentalism.” She discussed the following points: Germany as an immigration country; the fact that Germany still considers itself to be monocultural; the dialectics of Occidentalism and Orientalism; the present-day situation of Orientalism in Germany; cultural neo-Orientalism and its sexual politics; the rhetoric of racism in Germany and the question of biological racism; as well as the construction of the Occidental man and woman. Dietze’s contention was that critical Occidentalism might be used to describe Germany as a transnational and multicultural society. Her primary focus was to elucidate the possibility of transferring border thinking and postcolonial thinking to Germany.

In his talk “Repetition With A Difference – New Humanities and New Masters,” **Jean-Paul Rocchi** (Paris) focused on Transcultural or New Humanities and the question of epistemological ruptures. Right at the beginning of his presentation he warned against the danger that transcultural humanities might eventually produce new master narratives which are satisfied with offering new conceptual frameworks utterly divorced from the world of practice, the realm of social change and political struggle. On Rocchi’s account, epistemic ruptures which were supposed to prepare political and social change often only sought to emulate those patterns and structures and signs of domination they had set out to deconstruct in the first place. As examples he named the masculinism and homophobia typical of some approaches in the field of African American Studies and the racism that can be detected in some versions of feminism.

In spite of the fact that the so-called Other has gained such prominence in the humanities today, some questions are still being avoided. The most crucial of these, as Rocchi underscored, center on the intricate interwovenness of power, knowledge, and identities. Even a radical epistemological critique ought to be aware that it is constantly in danger of becoming another quest for authority, legitimacy, and recognition. In order to illustrate the complexity of this problem, Rocchi termed epistemological ruptures the pharmakon of the humanities. It seemed perfectly legitimate to consider them a cure since they offered new perspectives, but it was also possible to advance the argument that those ruptures better be regarded as a poison since they subordinated thinking to the fantasy of the theorist’s social ego. What Rocchi repeatedly stressed in his talk was that epistemological ruptures must not be divorced from the world of practice, or what he called mundane realities, that is, the new humanities must not be satisfied with simply bearing witness to social and political transformations. Furthermore, in order to prevent a new transdisciplinary praxis from becoming a new universalism in the guise of cultural relativism, the new methodology had to call attention to the necessity of the researchers’ self-interrogation. According to Rocchi, authors such as Fanon, Baldwin, and Du Bois made us realize the importance of emotions, pain and pleasure, exhilaration and madness for the endeavor to develop a new mode of thinking and a new consciousness. The attempt to decolonize the mind offered the possibility of grasping the importance of this kind of still living experience which was much more than raw material to be rationalized. Moreover, decolonizing the mind was about inventing a new subject to whom consciousness would also be about desire, doubt, and affects. Where, Rocchi asked, was the place for desire, pain, pleasure, doubt, and affects, for personal introspection and critical self-interrogation, in the work of theorists (including those commonly associated with the new humanities)?

The production of knowledge, as Rocchi made unequivocally clear, had to be located in the too often neglected or even ignored mundane realities. The newness of the new humanities depended upon whether or not they would eventually prove themselves to be capable of confronting what the traditional humanities had been seeking to suppress for so long – the failure to know. While this kind of limitation was seen as a severe problem in the field of theory, it played a crucial and positive role in the field of art and literature. Rocchi mentioned a new generation of anglophone black writers, such as Rozena Maart, Essex Hemphill, Assotto Saint, and Melvin Dixon, who had contributed to the development of a radically new understanding of identity. Making sexual desire the vehicle of excess, this new literary practice should be understood as a critique of any kind of predetermined identity. Novelists, poets, and artists attempted to cross gender-related, sexual, racial, and national boundaries and to introduce new perspectives. This black literature of post-identity defied territorialization, and it illuminated the effects of a desiring consciousness which opposed any form of determinism, teleology, and normativity. The subject's new agency, as Rocchi averred, ought to be seen as a politicized gesture of dissent, originating in the subject's life choices and aesthetic motivations, which opposed culturally imposed allegiances to race, nation, gender, and normative sexuality. In contrast to the texts of (most) theorists, in the work of post-identity writers desire could be interpreted as the textual space of an ongoing self-interrogation and self-transformation.

Manuela Boatca (Eichstätt) started her presentation “Narcissism Revisited: Social Theoretical Implications and Postcolonial Antidotes” with a brief discussion of the most radical changes in modern epistemology and in the intellectual development of modernity in general. As the most decisive changes she named the Copernican revolution, or what she also termed the cosmological blow to the universal narcissism of man, Darwin's theory of evolution as a biological blow, and Freud's discovery of the unconscious as a psychological blow. Following Boatca, this depiction of the Western epistemological tradition is a common reference point for most stories about the intellectual development of modernity, yet it completely ignores what she called the geopolitical blow to occidental narcissism. By this she meant the European discovery of America which signified a severe blow to Western thought and the modern self-consciousness. Underscoring the significance of this geopolitical blow for postcolonial studies, she contended that it was by ignoring, or rather suppressing, the radical alterity of the New World that the categories of analysis developed by European social sciences and used for the study of social reality could claim universal relevance.

Boatca made clear that the primary aim of her talk was to elucidate the possibility of developing a social theory which was transcultural and cosmopolitan, and that this task required one to unthink and radically question contemporary theoretical models. For postcolonial theories it is of utmost importance to understand the development and function of Western abstract universalism. The aforementioned geopolitical blow offers the possibility of grasping that this abstract universalism of Enlightenment thought is a means for coping with the experience of radical alterity. In other words, the discovery of the New World forced Western thinking to confront the notion of alterity, and the result of this confrontation was an abstract universalism which glossed over forms of difference, otherness, incommensurability, and heterogeneity which did not fit into the master narrative. Furthermore, as Boatca maintained, the idea of an abstract universalism goes hand in hand with the notion of a universal history subsuming the whole of mankind under the project of Western modernity and at the same time providing the legitimating rhetoric for further colonial expansion. The universalizing paradigm of Western modernity has always sought to hide its local history, that is, the fact that basically it is just another form of particularism.

A postcolonial re-reading of history, at Boatca pointed out, would not only have to pay attention to the differences of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation silenced by Western abstract universalism, but it would also seek to reveal the negative global consequences which the expansion of Western modernity has had as far as the hierarchization of races and systems of economic, political, and religious organization is concerned. At the end of her presentation, Boatca underscored the possibility, and necessity, of combining insights from postcolonial studies, on the one hand, and dependency theory and world-systems analysis, on the other. She argued that the development and the expansion of the global capitalist system required the combination of ideological and cultural mechanisms, which were supposed to establish new hierarchical structures and which seemingly effortlessly turned particularity into universality, with economic and political conditions which were needed to prepare the conditions for implementing those structures in the first place. A postcolonial theoretical approach, as Boatca averred, had to be capable of adequately grasping the complexity of this combination.

In his presentation “Deprovincializing Sociology: Postcolonial Contributions,” **Sérgio Costa** (São Paulo, Flensburg) tried to contribute to the dialogue between sociology and postcolonial studies. While many sociologists have seemed somewhat reluctant to establish a dialogue between these two fields, Costa’s contention was that they did not seem incompatible at all. The insights of postcolonial studies do not necessarily lead to a

destabilization of sociology, but may on the contrary enrich it. At the beginning of his talk, Costa focused on what he called the West-Rest dichotomy or polarity. He used this term to call attention to the fact that in sociology the characteristics and specificities of non-Western societies are often regarded and interpreted as an absence or incompleteness since they are deduced from those societies that are commonly referred to as Western. The West appears as civilized, sophisticated, advanced, and good, whereas the Rest is seen as wild, underdeveloped, and bad in comparison. This West-Rest polarity has also prepared the ground, of course, for the Western grand historical narrative which reduces modern history to a success story of the urgently needed Westernization of the world. That this success story does not leave room for the idea of different temporalities, historicities, and desires goes without saying. According to Costa, postcolonial strategies are particularly useful as far as the theoretical endeavor of deconstructing this West-Rest dichotomy is concerned. At the center of his discussion was the question of what sociology could learn from postcolonial studies.

In his discussion of the possibility of deconstructing the West-Rest dichotomy Costa concentrated on three aspects. First, the critique of sociology's teleological understanding of history. Second, the search for a hybrid site of enunciation. Finally, the question of a new understanding of subjectivity. Regarding the first aspect, he pointed out that the postcolonial critique of sociology's teleological definition of modernity was to a certain extent justified. However, he also underlined that the particular target of this critique was not sociology as such, but rather a specific sociological school, namely, the macrosociology of modernization. In Costa's opinion, it is crucial to realize that this kind of critique can also be found in the field of sociology itself, that is, the radical rhetoric of postcolonial studies competes with and adds to a critique of macrosociological categories, their universalism and teleology, that has been proposed within the framework of sociological theories that have developed a new understanding of modernity and modernization. Concerning the question of hybridity, Costa's elaborations were unequivocal. Hybridity and hybridization are of no interest to sociology. Not only did he advance the argument that Bhabha's concept of a Third Space seemed to be without relevance for sociology, he also maintained that while hybridity might be investigated as a discourse of actors, as a normative or analytical category it was innocuous.

Postcolonial studies are of primary importance to sociology, if we follow Costa, because they urge us to reconceptualize our understanding of the relation between difference, the subject, and politics. Authors such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy demonstrate that the notion of a decentering of identity must not necessarily seek to imitate the postmodern and poststructuralist complete fragmentation of the subject. Furthermore, the new decentering

ought to avoid the reification of the Western subject typical of contemporary sociology. Costa argued that it was a question of discovering the multiple differences, the subtleties, within binary differences, as well as of recovering the intersections between race, class, gender, and ethnicity. When sociology and postcolonial studies fruitfully come together, as he made clear, the relation between the subject and discourse might be theorized in a new manner. Moreover, the new understanding of subjectivity also offers the possibility of fully grasping the importance of what he called the space of creativity of the subject.

The question that was of primary concern to **Markus Wachowski** (Bremen) was the application of an occidental theory in the analysis of a non-occidental phenomenon. In his talk “Shiite Islam: Being Rational Within the Irrational: A Weberian Approach Beyond the Occidental Bias,” he briefly summarized a central aspect of his dissertation project which analyzes a small Shiite branch of Islam called Isma’iliya. Wachowski is mainly interested in the relation between the intellectual rationalization or conception of the world typical of this version of Islam, on the one hand, and the adherents’ worldview and their conduct of life, on the other. In order to elucidate this relation, he applied a Weberian approach. He drew attention to the question of whether it was possible to use Weber’s theoretical framework in order to develop a possibility of depicting non-protestant cultures and religions which went beyond Weber’s occidental bias. Wachowski pointed out that most of what Weber had said about Islam was negative, and that one might speak of a fundamental misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Islam on Weber’s part. In a part that discussed Weber’s notion of rationality, Wachowski differentiated between Weber’s use of rationality in a purposive sense (“zweckrational”) and in an objective sense (“richtigkeitsrational”). In this context, he elaborated on the notion of “objectivity” or “objective truth” in connection with the Western definition of science, and he moreover put a stress on the fact that Weber’s understanding of rationality was highly biased and inevitably led to the establishment of hierarchies in asymmetric relations (rational and objective science and its power of definition).

On Wachowski account, the meaning of rationality in Weber’s framework becomes more obvious when one asks how this concept is related to its alleged opposite, irrationality. It is precisely this latter concept, as Wachowski contended, that is of utmost importance if one seeks to conceptually grasp Weber’s contemporary significance for an analysis of non-Western phenomena. In Weber’s studies of the concept of rationality, irrationality remains a blank. Irrationality in Weber, following Wachowski, has two functions. First, it serves as what Wachowski called a dead end, that is, it serves as that which has to be overcome. Irrationality denotes the disorientations of, for instance, sufism and certain forms of salvation religion lost

in mysticism and otherworldly spheres. Irrationality in this sense is the exact opposite of the desired disenchantment of the world, it blocks the road to the firm establishment of occidental rationalism. The latter in turn is indispensable as far as the fulfillment of capitalist desires is concerned. To put this somewhat differently, Weber's theory can be used, as Wachowski demonstrated, in order to illustrate the intimate and at the same time powerful connections between rationality (primarily in the sense of objective knowledge and truth), protestantism, and capitalism.

Wachowski called the second meaning of irrationality the wild card. Under this category can be subsumed everything that escapes from the grasp of rationalization and abstraction, that is, the irrational in this sense means contingency, the world of practice, and of daily desires. Since the world of abstraction and the world of practice are linked through what Wachowski termed an ethical rationalization process, one has to confront the problem that the more rational a worldview becomes, the more prominent its irrational aspects become. Rationality, in other words, cannot be had without irrationality, and the history of rationality can only be written by considering the impact of its dialectical twin, as it were, irrationality. Wachowski closed his remarks by drawing attention to the fact that his discussion of Weber's notion of rationality had led him to the idea that rationality could no longer function as a means to implement hierarchies between cultures. Moreover, his re-reading of Weber had led to the suggestion that the traditional Western concept of modernity was obsolete and that one should rather speak of multiple modernities, each with its own understanding of rationality and irrationality.

Anja Bandau (Berlin) divided her presentation "Circulating Theory: The Concept of US-Mexican Border Literature and the Analytical Tools of the Transcultural" into two parts. First, she offered a brief history of the field of border studies, the way the concept of the border has been contested and reinterpreted, and she also addressed the question of whether one might advance the idea that this concept seems overused and too undifferentiated. In the second part of her talk, she presented the literary production on the US-Mexican border as a case study in order to illustrate her main ideas. According to Bandau, it was due to the impact of border studies, which had reached center stage in the 1980s, that one was offered the possibility of grasping the complexity of the idea that borders were more than geopolitical dividing lines. In other words, border studies called attention to the fact that borders were more than physical, geographical, or material entities; national space was also characterized by those borders that were inscribed on bodies by race, class, gender, ethnicity, and age. Accordingly, the borderlands can be interpreted either as a concrete and delimited territory or

as a space governed by cultural flows, negotiations, and intersections. Since the 1980s, border studies has become increasingly prominent and important. Together with hybridity, it has become a powerful master concept, as it were, dominating other conceptual frameworks, shaping comparative studies, and even structuring the perception of everyday life.

Bandau stressed that the celebration of border studies, as well as the praise of the concepts of hybridity and difference, ought to be seen critically. In order to avoid a certain exhaustion of the concept or the idea of border studies, she argued for the necessity of what she termed the co-concepts of gender, class, and ethnicity. Rendering the conception of border studies more complex by introducing these additional analytical categories offers the possibility of combining an analysis of space (as borderlands), an analysis of the political and cultural processes effective in this space, an analysis of the agents, and an interpretation of the cultural products produced by these agents.

In order to clarify the meaning of border literature, Bandau elaborated on the complexity of Chicano literature. Referring to the work of the Mexican critic Miguel Rodriguez Lozano, she contended that border literature was not necessarily synonymous with Chicano literature and that one should not ignore the literature of Mexico's Northern region. While Chicano literature metaphoricizes the border and homogenizes the border space, the literature of Mexico's North represents the border as heterogeneous and immediate. The different positions also become clear when one considers that Chicanos write from a diasporic situation, referring to an imaginary homeland which they strive to "repossess" by symbolic strategies, whereas the literature written on Mexican national territory is written from inside the national space, as it were, and thus can refer differently to this territory. Bandau argued that what made Rodriguez Lozano's perspective so important was that he saw the conceptual appropriation of the borderlands as reductive and metaphorical and that he moreover urged one to realize that what was celebrated as an innovative reconceptualization north of the border was severely critiqued south of it. In order to further illuminate the meaning of border literature, Bandau closed her talk with a brief discussion of Luis Humberto Crosthwaite's *Luna siempre es un amor dificil* (1994).

Right at the beginning of her talk "Transcultural Projects: A Challenge to the Humanities," **Sabine Broeck** (Bremen) stressed that she understood transcultural studies in the humanities as a genuine reformation of the humanities. She averred that transcultural studies were supposed to be much more than a sort of comparative hermeneutics that eventually turned out to be utterly incapable of criticizing traditional borders, fields, and institutions. One of the primary concerns of transcultural studies, according to Broeck, was

the attempt to read beyond the imperatives of individual cultures. Broeck sought to elucidate the necessity of what she called reading on the cuts, that is, a reading of the in-between that would lead to a radical reorganization of knowledge production (new epistemologies, new agents of knowledge, and new objects of culture).

Elaborating on the implications of a new transcultural studies, Broeck mentioned four aspects. First, she contended that borders of national canons had to be radically questioned. Second, she maintained that disciplinary borders had to be critiqued. Third, language barriers had to be broken down. The final point she mentioned in this context concerned the question of traditional epistemologies which had turned out to be compromised and severely limited and hence had to be retheorized. In order to further illuminate the implications of her suggestions, Broeck briefly discussed the new field of Black European Studies for which she and others have been preparing the ground in the last years. Not only was research in this field expected to lead to what she called a critique of white asymmetry in philosophy, political studies, and historiography, but Black European Studies would also, on a broader scale, contribute to a profound recomposition of the academic landscape.

Broeck underlined the importance of flexible academic networks, including workshops such as the Duke-Bremen Series and also summer schools, for the development of transcultural studies. At the same time, she called attention to possible difficulties and dangers transcultural studies most presumably would have to confront. Those reach from questions such as the place of transcultural studies in the corporate university and in the neo-liberal and/or neo-conservative political culture in general, to that of simply providing people with transcultural skills or an understanding of chic and cool hybridity in order to enhance their mobility and flexibility (and thereby completely forgetting about the critical and counterhegemonic energy typical of transcultural studies). Throughout her presentation, Broeck insisted on the fact that one must not forget precisely this critical energy. She closed her remarks with a few words about a necessary return to ethics, and she also reminded her listeners of the significance of Derrida's *L'université sans condition* for the project of developing a sophisticated transcultural humanities and transcultural studies.

At the center of **Alexandra Karentzos's** (Trier) talk, "Optical Encyclopaedism: A Critical Encounter Between Postcolonial Art and Art History," was the "Fondation Arab pour l'image" (FAI) or "Arab Image Foundation." This archive, which was founded by the artists Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, collects photographs from the Middle East and North Africa, some of the material going back to the 19th century, and presents them to the public. The question that preoccupied Karentzos in her presentation was whether the work of the FAI

ought to be considered a mere addition to objects generally noticed by the West. Or does it, on the contrary, possess the potential to be regarded as a radical critique of Western ordering and classification systems, those systems that structure and govern knowledge? On her account, it does possess this potential, and her primary concern was to show to what extent these artworks disclose and question the basic Western structures of classification and ascription, as well as the mechanisms of ethnic exclusion.

Following Karentzos, the colonizers introduced photography to the Middle East in the mid-19th century. This kind of photography, as she stressed, produced mainly stereotyped images of exotic motifs, landscapes, and antiquities. These typically “exotic” photographs in turn reached Europe and had of course a profound impact. While this exotic imagery still shapes our understanding of the Middle East, the fact that there has also been an independent photography in the Middle East, producing utterly different photos, has hardly been registered in the West yet. In order to illuminate the importance of this different kind of photography, Karentzos discussed the project “Mapping Sitting” by Zaatari and Raad. In this project, the artists-curators used commercial photography from the 1950s, for instance, studio passport photographs or institutional group portraits. Showing various photographs from this project, Karentzos underscored that the FAI had to be considered as a kind of counter-archive to the Western corpus of knowledge about the “Orient.” Furthermore, she contended that the project, as the title indicated, took up the themes of posing, measuring, and mapping. Those structures that allow the medium of photography to generate and transport knowledge also offer the possibility of localizing, classifying, and identifying ethnicity. It is crucial to grasp, as Karentzos made clear, that “Mapping Sitting” radically, and at the same time playfully, deconstructs these photographic and archival principles. Regarding the passport photographs, the artists group the photos in a way that the resulting work parodies the classification system of the archive. In one series of photos, for instance, women are classified according to the print pattern of their blouses, that is, the order relies on and is governed by an utterly contingent feature. To put this somewhat differently, the artists challenge the foundations, seemingly firm and reliable, of the Western ordering system.

By playfully deconstructing the Western logos, Raad and Zaatari create new orders and open up new meanings. They parody those mechanisms working in colonialism that classify people according to ethnic and religious categories. The works discussed in Karentzos’s presentation do not simply supplement the Western art discourse, but they rather challenge or radically question traditional epistemology and axioms of knowledge. Karentzos, at the end of her talk, drew a parallel between the art of the FAI and postcolonial theories.

Insisting on the importance of irreducible diversity and not offering a synthesizing or totalizing perspective, the art of the FAI strives to offer a many-voiced, genuinely pluralistic counterpoint reading. Hence, it ought to be regarded as a strategic intervention aiming at political consequences.

Following **Christoph Singler** (Besancon), it is crucial to realize the importance of the question of whether a thing like postcolonial or transcultural visual studies exists. Singler began his talk “Frontiers of Visual Culture: Power of Taste, Taste of Power?” by briefly elaborating on the pictorial turn. Radically questioning the predominance of the linguistic paradigm, visual culture is often considered as a means to transgress national boundaries. With regard to the recognition of non-Western art forms by Western art history, Singler argued that in contemporary visual arts the line that Western aesthetics had drawn between high and low, popular and elite, and Western and non-Western arts had been abolished. The contemporary art scene, as he stated, welcomed non-Western artists if they concentrated on issues that were of interest to postcolonial studies or postcolonial visual studies, for instance, identity and transculturalism, migration, racism, the integration of modernity and archaic social structures, etc. It was in this context that Singler insisted on the importance of an urgently needed reexamination of the concepts of “otherness” and “cultural difference.” What is the meaning of radical “otherness” in intercultural (art) discourses if the Western discourse seemingly has problems in accepting non-Western criteria in its attempt to illuminate and appreciate non-Western arts?

In order to clarify his argument Singler chose three examples of non-Western art. First, Havana Myths, from the Humboldt Series, by Atelier Morales. In his discussion of this picture Singler raised the question of whether one needed a completely different debate regarding the standards of Latin American arts. Inevitably the question arises of whether we have really abandoned the various clichés which often govern our approach to this kind of art. Furthermore, one must not avoid the question of who defines which art forms are legitimate with regard to which culture. How is marginality established in the realm of high art? All these positions, if we follow Singler, are established on the basis of characteristics typical of Western modernity. As his second example Singler chose the work of the Cuban artist Guido Llinás. In Llinás’s work, as Singler averred, blackness as otherness is removed. Insisting on his artistic autonomy, that is, on one of the primary characteristics of Western modernism, this Cuban artist forces us to interpret blackness as a Cuban political issue and not in terms of otherness. However, his genuinely modern position as far as aesthetics is concerned must not be interpreted as an apolitical gesture since he tries to locate black artists inside the modern

project, as active participants and not as passive figures on the margin. In his discussion of the work of Vicente Pimentel, his final example, Singler contended that this artist strove to direct attention to the importance of a common origin of black and white and at the same time to the obvious denial of this shared origin by Western culture.

All three examples, in an either playful, ironic, or satirical manner, question any simplistic understanding of the meaning of “otherness.” Thus, they urge one to rethink the alleged necessity of this Western concept for the discourse of visual studies. Whereas Pimentel finds the origin of mankind in African artwork, Singler agreed with Michelle Wallace’s suggestion that we need more research in African art if we want to show that Africa is more than just a myth constructed in diaspora. According to him, one should look at non-Western art without too many (Western) concepts in mind. One should seek to examine the strategies of black artists, their desires and difficulties, instead of simply defending or judging them within a Western theoretical framework. Singler emphasized that it was impossible to understand the complexity of present-day art without the help of art history, yet at the same time he proposed that new approaches to art history were indispensable.

Bernal Herrera (Costa Rica), in his talk “Modernity and Colonial Worlds,” suggested a reconceptualization of modernity. At the center of his discussion was the relation between periphery and metropolis. Following Herrera, it is quite common among philosophers to advance the idea that peripheries did not participate in modernity. Moreover, many historians have argued that the peripheries’ primary function was to stimulate metropolitan processes. What unites these two positions is that colonial worlds are radically reduced in their historical importance. Even postmodern theoretical approaches have excluded colonial worlds from modernity. Although they stress the crucial nature of difference, margins, and peripheries, they tend to regard colonial cultures not as integral parts of modernity, but as a form of otherness which is excluded from modernity and which thus offers a perspective from which to analyze and criticize it. By contrast, Herrera’s reconceptualization of modernity sees it as the development of two separate but interdependent poles of action: colonial and metropolitan. Herrera emphasized that according to his reconceptualization, colonial worlds were an integral part of modernity. On his account, the Iberian colonial undertakings in America, beginning in the 16th century, ought to be seen as the initiation of the colonial pole.

Herrera argued that his conception of modernity, which was governed by two poles, did not imply a bipolar structure of opposing elements. The colonial pole and the metropolitan pole are linked by numerous hybrid processes which include common elements from both poles. Moreover, the poles cannot be reduced to specific geopolitical milieus, that is, colonial

developments can be detected in metropolitan societies and vice versa. At the same time, however, one must not ignore the fact that at the macro level some cultures have clearly functioned as sociopolitical and intellectual metropolises, whereas others have acted as colonies and peripheries. Herrera underscored that his suggested reconceptualization of modernity inevitably led to a reinterpretation of processes that had hitherto been read from a metropolitan perspective. In other words, such a reconceptualization would lead one to stop seeing the peripheries' marginality as a mere disadvantage. On the contrary, it would urge one to understand that it offers an epistemological advantage since it allows one to ask questions and to propose answers which the metropolises have so far neglected, ignored, or suppressed. Central to Herrera's argument was that the colonial pole had appeared one century before the metropolitan pole. Furthermore, there could be detected no difference as far as the degree of articulation was concerned. According to Herrera, the colonial pole was more successful in achieving its goal than the metropolitan pole, because the attempt to dominate the colonial populations was more successful than the one to liberate the metropolitan ones.

What all this boils down to, if we follow Herrera, is that the colonial pole in many respects made the metropolitan pole possible. Concerning the consequences of his proposed bipolar conception of modernity, Herrera named two. First, the reconstitution of modernity's textual canon, that is, the inclusion of those authors in the colonial worlds that have so far been marginalized or ignored. Second, an emphasis upon the necessity of the attempt to grasp the complexity of colonial modernity. What this means is that the lack of deployment of the metropolitan pole in the peripheries should not be interpreted as an absence or imperfection of modernity, but rather as the development of a colonial modernity in a genuine sense. This modernity is as modern as the metropolitan one, yet it strives to achieve different goals. Herrera's bipolar version of modernity thus introduces a reading that centers on three aspects. First, it offers the possibility of imagining and depicting the colonial pole as modern. Second, it calls attention to the partly obvious, partly subtle or opaque relationships with the metropolitan pole. Finally, it lets us read the metropolitan from a peripheral point of view, or rather, from a genuinely critical perspective.

The final presentation of the conference was by **Louise Meintjes** (Duke): "Sound Knowledge and Global Flow: Zulu Repercussions in a South African Studio." Offering a case study, Meintjes discussed the aesthetics of singing in Zulu ngoma song-dance. Three steps were central to her talk. First, she focused on the timbral qualities of the lead singer. Second, she linked his singing to the practice and body aesthetic of ngoma dancing, thereby underlining the importance of the question of how to get at body knowledge aesthetically (or

how to develop ways of thinking the body). Finally, she placed her analysis in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as experienced in a rural community in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. What preoccupied Meintjes in her presentation, in which she showed film footage shot by herself, was the importance of the voice in the context of withering bodies, as well the function of the voice in the context of forms of silence about disease.

Governing and giving direction to her presentation, as Meintjes emphasized, was the question of how to achieve an ethical, socially responsible, dialogical, and transcultural humanities. Her contention was that a careful and detailed analysis of aesthetic form could contribute to AIDS prevention and care work since aesthetic expression offered a valuable insight into ways of knowing and into forms of appreciation. In general, as she maintained, the study of art, or work in the field of aesthetics, could assist biomedical and social scientists of HIV who seek to change behavior and find ways of protecting and sustaining social life. Following Meintjes, the importance and the complexity of the possibility of linking aesthetic experience to social performance must not be ignored.