

Roundtable: The Global Before Globalization

David Joselit: The term “globalization” is often used loosely and with a “presentist” bias, which assumes that an international or even global consciousness belongs exclusively to the modern era, or even just the last ten or fifteen years. But the notion of inter-regional or international exchange is hardly new—in fact it has been experienced at different scales practically from the beginning of human history. So I thought it might be interesting for modernists to hear from major scholars in the late-medieval and early-modern periods about how these concepts function in their areas of expertise and also to reflect on how or whether the term “globalization” has in fact migrated back into early modern histories on account of its prestige among modernists, or whether modernists have just seized upon a methodological perspective that has been in use for a very long time in art history.

Christopher Wood: I would like to start by drawing a distinction between networks that connote random, often chaotic and contingent circulations of objects and people in general (related to the work of Bruno Latour) and networks as historically specific kinds of infrastructure like the Internet or the telephone or mail system.

Barry Flood: Latour actually uses the railroad to make the distinction between the local and the global, invoking it as a translocal (but non-universal) network that is local at all points. However, Latour’s network model is very problematic for dealing with so-called premodernity, since it is in thrall to the idea (derived from Deleuze and Guattari) that the extent of pre-modern networks was limited by the need to assert and maintain the territorial claims of political formations. This sharp distinction between modernity and premodernity based on the opposition between territory and network is already present in Immanuel Wallerstein’s work on world systems, which emphasizes a difference between world economies and world capitalist economies. According to Wallerstein, the former were limited by the territorial reach of political authorities (typically, imperial formations), while the latter are

characterized by a tendency to break down or transcend the limits imposed by notions of territorial integrity. Among the many recent works that pose a challenge to this identification of pre-modern economies with the limits of political power are Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1991) and Anthea Harris' edited volume *Incipient Globalization? Long-Distance Contacts in the Sixth Century* (2007).

Mimi Yiengpruksawan: I agree. I'm sure you've encountered Andre Gunder Frank's *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998), one of the more substantial of the earlier forays into renegotiating the terms of global economic models that usually leave Asia—specifically India and China—out of the frame despite their demonstrable centrality to commerce and exchange over several millennia. There too he's drawing a distinction between world systems and global trade sometimes based on a Europe-centered world and sometimes on a China-centered world. His formulation pivots on an economic axis that is cyclical as opposed to dialectical (thus his repudiation of Weber) and embraces world-systems theory with China currently on the cyclical upswing to economic world dominance. This formulation may not necessarily offer the kinds of information or theorizations that we use to identify modern globalization, however, which leads, me to a question of definition: are we talking about the seventeenth century as the onset of a global modernity, as is increasingly claimed, or has it already begun in the sixteenth century?

Wood: By modern, aren't we talking about avant-gardism and—

Yiengpruksawan:—the nineteenth century!

Wood: Well yes, and right up to the present. I think that avant-gardism points to a real tension in the modern era between the terms “global” and “network.” Because the network as Latour, following Deleuze, would have it, is ultimately detotalizing. That's true about telephone or railroad networks as well. They don't aim for coverage, whereas the global presumes comprehensive scope.

Alessandra Russo: Maybe, along with the tension and difference between “network” and “global,” there is also another, more historical, difference to be pointed to, which is that between how to think the “global” before the globalization that started at the end of the fifteenth century and after.

Wood: Why can't you have the global before the discovery of America? Global just means some notion of finitude, whereas networking never closes, that's its whole point.

Russo: I think that a critical distinction for us is that made by Serge Gruzinski, in *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation* (2004), where he differentiates, in French, between “mondialisation” and “globalisation.” In fact, French has two different words (as any other Latin language: in Italian, *mondializzazione/globalizzazione*; in Spanish, *mundialización/globalización*; in

Portuguese, *mundialização / globalização*), while English doesn't. So "*mondialisation*" defines for Gruzinski a larger and multidirectional phenomenon of diffusion of ideas, things, and people. In this sense, one can speak of an Islamic *mondialisation* before the beginning of the Iberian *mondialisation* in the fifteenth century, and one could even speak of an attempt of Chinese *mondialisation*. What characterizes the mechanisms of a *mondialisation* is the fact that it always provokes local reactions and *métissages* (another word that is nonexistent in English and which borrows the Spanish "*mestizaje*"). For instance, the *mondialisation* of Christianity provokes in New Spain (colonial Mexico) the writing of religious plays in Náhuatl (*The Destruction of Jerusalem*, *The Last Judgment*, etc.). Or, with the *mondialisation* of Renaissance cartography, Nahua, Mixtec, or Otomí painters in New Spain respond to the formats and conventions used in Renaissance maps but from the vantage point of Mesoamerican cartography. These are examples of how *mondialisation* leaves "open" so to speak the network of local reactions. On the contrary, *globalisation* is for Gruzinski, another form of *mondialisation* but functions only "one way." It is "closed" or "finite" in the sense that it is without exchange, without *métissage*, without any possible local or indigenous reaction. *Globalisation* corresponds for him to the imposition on the entire planet, from the end of the fifteenth century, of *Western* models—even if sometimes these models come partially from or are filtered via Islam. Unlike the characteristic "openness" of *mondialisation*, which allows response, in *globalisation*, Western models remain impermeable to local conditions; they do not allow any reaction, so they do not provoke any *métissage*. You can take for instance as an example the globalization of the Latin.

Wood: Just to go back to this question of what's modern and what role avant-gardism plays: avant-gardism seems to be a global project. It is a conversion project.

Yiengbruksawan: Conversion to what?

Wood: Conversion to the avant-garde project. If you are an art producer anywhere in the world and you're unwilling to get onboard with that project, you are going to be excluded. You are going to be provincial; you're not going to be global. So that's the tension here between a transnational or global avant-garde and the idea of a network in a Latourian sense, which is ultimately non-totalizing. It is ultimately not compatible with an avant-gardism.

Eugene Wang: I think we need to be very clear about our explanatory models—about what we call "modern." I've been following the literature on the Silk Road, which is a unique instance of the global, ranging from China to the Mediterranean world. If you examine the analytical constructs applied to this transnational network, you find that they can be anachronistically mod-

ern and oftentimes driven by contemporary agendas, such as nationalism. For example, in Japan during World War II, Silk Road scholarship was consistent with Japanese imperialism through the notions of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. Scholarship was harnessed to illustrate this idea of the Silk Road that begins at the Mediterranean and goes all the way to Nara and Kyoto, subsuming China along the way. Japan thus becomes the terminus point and almost end of history in Japanese Silk Road scholarship before and during the Japanese invasion of China. More recently, Chinese scholarship has asserted, with varying degrees of credibility and sometimes a stretch, that the Silk Road extended to China's east coast (the Shandong region). So you find scholars on China's east coast pushing vigorously for this notion that the Silk Road stops on the east coast instead of China's Central Plain, more specifically, Xi'an (Chang'an). In the same way, this offers what the Japanese offered in the 1920s and '30s—the co-opting of the Silk Road in the service of contemporary claims for political legitimacy and regional importance. The materials may be very ancient but actually the scholastic apparatus is very modern and very politically charged.

Yiengbruksawan: Eugene, I think you've made some really key points. Today, for instance, the Chinese government is actively constructing museums and sponsoring discussion about the role of the Silk Road in Chinese culture and politics and thus claiming as its own those regions that have resisted Chinese occupation for centuries. In effect the Chinese have been like the Japanese in claiming the Silk Road region as a cultural protectorate, with sites and peoples conserved as part of a putative Chinese cultural sphere to which they did not necessarily belong. We all benefit from the current policy because Chinese government resources are now plentiful for sustaining Silk Road sites, but we must be mindful of the realities of that plenitude. But I want to bring the discussion back to the opposing models we're discussing—linear networks versus territories. We now know that the Silk Road is not one particular line that stretched from Rome to Nara. In fact it was a mishmash of seemingly erratic routes that disappeared in some places, and appeared in others, dictated by the oases that marked the nodes of exchange across an otherwise often inhospitable landscape. I have a palpable sense of the integrated circuitry necessary to cultural exchange in the Silk Road territories having visited personally so many sites that are currently disappearing into the sand or have temporarily vanished (perhaps to reappear with climate change). It's only in the nineteenth century and among European explorers—many contemporary with that moment of avant-gardism that we've been discussing—that the idea of a single thread reaching all the way across from the ancient Mediterranean world to China emerges.

Wood: I think it is striking how little art historians resist this network model,

whether linear or nonlinear. It is the same in the Western field among medievalists and early modern scholars. What alarms me about the pre-modern globalization discussion is that it's so easy to embrace. Everyone wants to work on the circulation of objects. When you describe something that's nonlinear or rhizomatic, everyone's delighted. There's a facility in this model that's troubling: objects communicating with one another under the radar of politics and ideology, serving as surrogates for people who, in reality, are always at odds with one another while these things in motion are idealized almost as our better selves.

Wang: I absolutely agree with you. In fact, we would do better to see the limitation of the Silk Road as an analytic model from a historical point of view. Attractive as it is, this model, if handled crudely, really flattens out objects so much that it assumes this one-dimensional, linear, horizontal flow from one place to another, reducing the richness of the works themselves. If you look at when the Silk Road was first started, it was not for silk, but for the purpose of establishing military alliances. While we should embrace the cross-cultural exchanges as a historical reality worth exploring, we should also be judicious in deploying the Silk Road as an analytic model for art historical inquiry, because you see a certain amount of scholarship that rather arbitrarily picks up objects here and there, just to prove this flow goes on. But it is such an uninteresting linear flow.

Alexander Nagel: It seems to me that what is left out of the discussion of the circulation of goods in the late medieval or early modern interchanges between Europe and the East are all the temporal interfaces at play when these goods get exchanged.

Joselit: Could you explain what you mean by "temporal interfaces"? What is your interest in asynchronicity?

Nagel: Well, if we study this simply as a market in luxury goods then we tend to assume that everything is contemporaneous, but I think the challenge is to see that there is no contemporary plane on which these objects meet. When objects cross geographical boundaries they enter into different temporal registers. Many Byzantine and Islamic objects "became" antiquities when they reached Western collections. To get back to the Silk Road, I think we have to grapple with what happens when fine stoneware from China, for instance, arrives in Basra around 800, where inventions in cobalt blue glazing get applied, after which the ceramics are re-imported to China, which then exports them back to places like Turkey, eventually as real porcelain. All of this feedback packaged into them is then opened up in new ways when these objects show up in Europe and get taken up into European images. When porcelain ware appears in an Adoration of the Magi by Andrea Mantegna or in a Feast of the Gods by Giovanni Bellini, or as the vessel used by John the

Baptist, it is hard to know whether it is Turkish or Chinese. More important, that is the wrong question to ask: the object has taken on retroactive life as part of an ancient life-world. Importation produces temporal instability, and that instability is only pushed further in the realm of representation.

Wood: What makes these suspenseful encounters possible is that the objects you're describing came without metadata. That's one of the key differences with regard to the contemporary scene. The objects you are describing came as they were. Today, works of art come enveloped in a discourse, with instructions for use.

Flood: To return to Alex's point about the temporal dimensions of exchange, it should be borne in mind that encounters and exchanges of various kinds often occur (or, more correctly, are represented as occurring) within trans-historical continua of various sorts. These idealized continua can sometimes offer ways of mediating a dubious dichotomy between modern and pre-modern traditions. Islam, with its foundational notion of a "global" community of believers, the *umma*, is a case in point. The idea of the *umma* is articulated in different ways and with different degrees of success through time, but it consistently denotes not simply a territorial empire, but a kind of imaginary within which all Muslims from Morocco to China are linked.

Yiengpruksawan: That's the Dharma in the Buddhist context, as manifest specifically in the monastic and lay communities, who in their social and cultural practices perpetuate it as "the Buddhist Law," a very similar world mapping, which is inclusive and yet differentiated.

Joselit: It does seem to me that religion is one of the ways that one thinks a world—maybe "world" is a better term than "global."

Russo: Yes, and in fact it would be interesting to rethink how different societies define what they mean by "world." This is why in this case, I like better the use of the word "world" rather than "global."

Joselit: Can you give an example, maybe from your own work?

Russo: Take for instance Antonio de Morga, a royal official of the united crowns of Spain and Portugal at the turn of the seventeenth century. As the Alcalde of Criminal Causes, in the Royal Audiencia of Nueva España and Counsel for the Holy Office of the Inquisition, Morga was sent to Manila—the Philippines were part of New Spain. In his *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, which was published in Mexico in 1609, Morga describes and "maps" the two main distinct "routes" of the Iberian domination. Even if in those years the two crowns were united, he still differentiated the route "by the way of Portuguese India" (from Manila to Lisbon through the Indian Ocean) and the Spanish route, sailing west from Spain to America, and then continuing west (having crossed New Spain overland, from Veracruz to Acapulco) to the Pacific Ocean and then to the Philippines—in short, the route taken by the famous Galion of Manila. However, the major idea for Morga is that the two

itineraries can be *joined* together in Manila: “the one and the other route meet in these islands traversing the world in opposite directions,” he says. This is a good example, I think, of how one can think the world at the turn of the seventeenth century: for Morga, and for many other Iberian authors, the *mundo* is something that can be traversed in two opposite directions and yet that *joins* at some shared point, at a kind of new center—here, it’s the Philippine Islands, whereas in other texts, such as Bernardo Balbuena’s *Grandeza Mexicana* (1604), this “center” is New Spain, and even more precisely Mexico City, where Spain and China “join together.” As we know, the “world” described by Morga or Balbuena in these texts is one that has enormous consequences for the circulation of objects, but also for the creation of new ones.

Nagel: This brings us back to the question of “metadata” raised by Chris. When you ask how the circulation of objects was understood within a particular world, we must understand the historically specific concept of that world.

Joselit: So how do you deal with such a multiplicity of possibly irreconcilable worlds? Do Islam or the Silk Road, for instance, transect several worlds rather than forming a single linear or “flat” network?

Nagel: There are different configurations in different historical periods. For the West after the fall of Rome, and even at the end of the Roman Empire, everything is configured in relation to a center—Jerusalem—that is very distant and very difficult to access. So a relay structure is built into the history of Christian art in the West, with Constantinople being a crucial way station. And that means that deterritorialization and dislocation are encountered regularly, often in a very physical sense, as for example in objects like reliquaries. In this context the conception of a world is basic to thinking about art—you have to conceive of an elsewhere and how it may be represented. In western Christian culture, most people never experienced the real center of their world except through art.

Yiengpruksawan: Speaking of worlds, there’s a very interesting and relevant, I think, Buddhist cosmological model that places four continents—one of which is ours, “Jambudvīpa,” or “Island of the Rose Apple Tree”—in a great ocean around a vast mountain, Meru, that rises up into the heavens atop a cylindrical plinth (held together by the karmic winds of desire—how Lacanian!). In this Buddhist scheme of things the world we inhabit is part of a massive series of circles and spheres that constitutes a world system, suspended among myriads of other such world systems in a vast universe that is infinitely expanding in space and time. As sentient beings, we transmigrate continuously through this matrix and its worlds, which themselves cycle endlessly from nothingness into existence and then back to nothing. All peoples and places, whether they are Buddhist or not, are incorporated into the one

world system that they inhabit, perhaps living on another of the four continents than we do, but part of the world system nonetheless; and together they share the fate of their world system, which is destined to wind down and disappear. When for instance the Japanese statesmen Fujiwara Michinaga, writing in 1007, dedicated a set of sutra transcriptions to a local mountain deity near Kyoto, he signed off as “Fujiwara Michinaga, living in Japan, on the continent of Jambudvipa.” In short, he imagined himself in a world system that extended well beyond the borders of his own country, indeed out into the imaginary spaces of Meru and its formless upper reaches that opened onto the cosmos beyond. This would have been typical of any person living in a Buddhist community of his time.

Russo: And while, in the eleventh century, a Japanese writer had a Buddhist notion of the world, another author can have a Christian notion of the world.

Joselit: How does the work of art bring this world into being—does it function as an emissary, or is it the very materialization of a world?

Wood: These objects come with limited data around them. And when that happens—if that happens—there tends to be a high premium put on qualities of workmanship and material, material value and material aesthetic, which are potentially universally legible. Just look at them, there’re beautiful, they could travel thousands of miles and still be held in value. It is much more difficult for the works to transport with them a whole set of premises and assumptions, which would make them truly articulate. I’m talking about objects that are highly valued because they are not very articulate and they don’t say anything very interesting.

Flood: I’m not sure I agree. Bound up with the circulation and transregional (or transhistorical) reception of objects are questions of hermeneutics or translation. This dimension of reception often mediates between the local and the global or between different worlds.

Nagel: It seems that we’re talking about two levels: one is the circulation of objects per se, and the other is something that we in the current global culture are more attuned to, and that is the constant designation of objects as representatives of a world, of a worldview. It is not at all clear that people were thinking in earlier times about objects as representative of a world. In fact, you can argue that people started thinking about their own objects as representative of a worldview only in encounters with other objects, only at an advanced level of recursivity in the circulation of objects.

Flood: Among the phenomena that might pose a challenge to this view is the case of selective looting, the targeting of specific artifacts (or classes of artifacts) in war for their representational potential, a quality often related to knowledge of their function or meaning in primary contexts. For example, in the

later twelfth century, a pair of large golden birds were looted from the rajas of Ajmir in western India and carried a considerable distance to be set atop the palace of the sultans of Afghanistan. Contemporary sources identify not only the source of the birds and the context in which they traveled to Afghanistan, but also their original role as signifiers of kingship in India. It was this knowledge (or belief) about the original status of the golden birds that permitted their secondary interpretation as signifiers of royalty within an Afghan context. In other words, their assimilation to Persianate discourses of kingship was premised not only on materiality or rarity, but also on the metadata that traveled with the statues.

Wood: Are you putting emphasis here on the continuity of interpretation between, on the one hand, the moment of making and the source culture and, on the other, the moment of reception and the receiving culture? Or is it discontinuity you're pointing to?

Flood: I'm trying to qualify the exclusive emphasis on materiality that I'm hearing in this conversation. I would not argue for the *necessity* of either continuity or discontinuity. What's important is an object's assimilability.

Wood: But that's exactly the point I was making: because they don't come with a readymade interpretation they are free to be interpreted and reinterpreted.

Flood: But in the example that I just gave (and I could give others), knowledge is carried with the birds regarding where they were taken from, and their royal associations. This is crucial to their reception in Afghanistan.

Wood: But very often there is little metadata accompanying an object. Most of the artworks that circulate in the Mediterranean Middle Ages or in the ancient world get pretty quickly detached from their origins. People don't know where they came from—they just see a splendid gold vessel, for instance. Who knows what tomb it was robbed from.

Nagel: Then there's the issue of when metadata is part of the object, as in inscriptions. Here's where you can track whether you're dealing with relatively free-floating circulations of objects or a self-conscious exchange of world-views as encoded in those things. I'm fascinated by illegible language, and especially when language is represented as unintelligible—for example, where you get Arabic script copied in Chinese porcelain and then copied back as gibberish in Ottoman Turkey, or when "eastern" scripts of various kinds appear on the hems of garments worn by saints in Western art. That seems to be an extraordinary moment, because it represents untranslatability, local untranslatability. It is pseudo-metadata if you will, whose message is: this comes from elsewhere, and you can't understand it.

Flood: I would just say that that illegibility comes into play in how Arabic inscriptions function on objects even in their primary contexts. These things are

often very difficult to read and they are often full of spelling mistakes. Errors are common even on very high-quality objects. So there are questions about who actually read these things and how legible they were. You also have pseudo-scripts used on objects that are produced in the Islamic world for consumption by Arabic speakers. It is clear that these are pseudo-scripts, but their function is a whole other question. It should perhaps be emphasized that the semiotic potential of script extends well beyond its semantic content: script signifies by its form, placement, and scale. What may in fact enable the reception of inscribed objects outside of their source culture is that you have aspects of untranslatability already encoded in them.

Russo: To go back to the question of untranslatability, I would like to address the specific meaning that I give to this term, since it precisely allows us to discuss the complexity of the several kinds of “metadata” that accompany the objects. Take for instance the different descriptions of the “treasures” sent by Cortés from Veracruz in 1519 to the future Charles V. There are at least two texts listing them: the description of the objects annexed to Cortés’ Letter to the King that same year and the description written in Náhuatl and in Spanish—several decades later—in the Florentine Codex. Both texts enumerate and describe the objects in a reciprocal and endless—and in this sense *untranslatable*, according to the meaning given by Barbara Cassin to this term—tension between the rhetoric and the style of a Spanish inventory, and the linguistic complexity of the Náhuatl oral tradition with poetic repetitions, etc. Even more interesting is that both texts witness the complexity of addressing unexpected situations such as the offering of these objects to the Spaniards. For Cortés, the problem is how to incorporate the novelty of local materials into the category of treasure and to demonstrate the “value” of the conquest’s project to the King; for the Náhuatl writers of the Florentine Codex, the question is how to still empower a posteriori these same objects through a specific language and to give them the force to represent the extension of the Mexica domination to the Spaniards. This is to say that not only do we often dispose of *some* data, but that we can have *different* data, so we have several interpretations of the same objects “in circulation.” This is why to speak about the circulation of objects is not enough. How we interrogate these written sources and their *reciprocal* effects is, I think, another question.

Joselit: Can you give an example? Are you suggesting that an object that goes from point A to point B will have metadata relating to both contexts, A and B, and that they’re in competition?

Russo: I do not know if they are in competition, but at least they are simultaneous and this simultaneity needs to be taken into account. I give the example of the Mexica feather mosaics sent from New Spain to Europe in the sixteenth

century. Going back to the sources I just mentioned: you have the Mexica who gave specific values to these materials—what we can grasp from the Náhuatl text of the Florentine Codex—then you have Renaissance men such as Cortés who gave other values to these same objects, but then you have the subsequent transformations of these sources that give a third, fourth, or fifth interpretation. So feather objects were not only sent from Mexico to Madrid or Rome (but also to Asia . . .)—no, they arrived with a variety of written sources: sources such as the Florentine Codex or Cortés’ inventories and letters, but also other written sources that already reinterpreted these same materials and these previous sources from the vantage point of the Christianization. Bartolomé de Las Casas and his pages on the feather objects in his *Apologética Historia Sumaria* are very rich in this sense. Asserting the absolute novelty of these object, he takes a position in what was a crucial debate over whether the Indians were Jews or not. In fact, other authors had interpreted (and will keep interpreting) the presence of these feather objects as the perfect proof of a Jewish descent of the Indians (through a doubtful exegesis of Exodus, where God gives precise indications to Moses to create the curtain of the tabernacle *opere plumario*). So in thinking about networks it is interesting for us to go beyond the mere networking and circulation of objects and interrogate the variety of texts written on them—what Chris has called “metadata.” How we work on these kinds of written sources—that are, if we wish, another sort of literature of art—is as crucial as our study of the objects themselves.

Wood: But it is true even today. What you are describing is this endlessly tangled, open-ended process of misunderstandings, unprofitable understandings, moments of epiphany, which I would just call “art” or “communication.” It is characteristic of a complex system, but not globalizing.

Wang: I want to return to the question of avant-gardism, and particularly avant-gardism in China. The case I’m working on makes me aware of how complicated and multifaceted this process can be. Of course intellectually, we can trace it back to the original avant-gardism in Europe in the 1830s.

Yiengpruksawan: Was not the emergence of Chinese avant-gardism directly related to the government’s embrace of capitalism? It would seem to me that the link between the avant-garde and late capitalism is well demonstrated by the Chinese case.

Wang: What is interesting to me is that sometime in the 1980s, avant-gardism occurred in China, and made very literal the dynamic between military strategy and art that is, of course, implicit in the European history of the term “avant-garde.” There’s something very interesting about the hype around the avant-garde in China in the 1980s. To make things even more complicated, you could argue that in the 1970s, the Cultural Revolution was an avant-

garde practice that art of the 1980s reversed despite the fact that the latter advertised itself as an avant-garde art movement, and you see all these marches and in the art shows, actions like artists shooting at an installed telephone booth, apparently alluding to the military. Then there was stage two, when capitalism and commercialism really took off in the '90s.

Yiengpruksawan: But doesn't the term "avant-garde" inherently imply a limiting European bias? Such a bias may also account for my resistance to the term "globalization," although I don't reject out of hand distinctions between the local and the global in earlier frameworks.

Wood: It was precisely in the Enlightenment that the local had to be overcome. The promise of humanity was the idea of humanity itself and that's Kant's idea—an eighteenth-century idea. It was the first time in the West that anyone conceived of humanity as a common term. At that point, it was a powerful globalizing idea that has turned around completely now so that, for me at least, "globalization" has a purely negative connotation.

Russo: I think that we should return to the question of what theoretical model we can invent. The concepts of *globalisation* and *mondialisation* are very useful in constructing new archives and in thinking about new ways of teaching art history. Today a student cannot simply study art of the Spanish Golden Age or of Mannerism without knowing about the Galion of Manila, the Florentine Codex, or Simon Pereyns' paintings in New Spain. But on the other hand, an exhaustive global coverage is unmanageable, because students cannot deal with the arts of Japan, China, Italy, Mexico, etc., simultaneously. The risk is paradoxically to fall into a dry "world art" history. This is a very difficult challenge for teaching. I think that for art history it is still important to refocus these larger panoramas on specific questions.

Joselit: Do you want to propose something?

Russo: It is still a work in progress, but this year I have designed a graduate seminar entitled "Visions from Afar, Visions from Nearby," where we will work on the tension between distance and proximity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This tension had a crucial role in the production of objects. How the De Bry "enterprise" in Frankfurt could produce such complex images of America, Asia, and Africa, without the engravers having personally seen any of the parts of the world recreated in their copperplates, fascinates me. But on the other hand, you also have numerous people traveling to the most remote parts of the world to produce drawings, texts, and diaries "from nearby." What is paradoxical, however, is the fact that even when they are produced *in loco*, texts and images can be reinterpretations of visions produced from "afar." When the artists of Book XII of the Florentine Codex painted the history of the conquest of Mexico around 1570, they probably already had in their hands sources written and illustrated in Europe on the

history of the conquest. Why? Because, these sources, once published, had already reached the New World. An interesting aspect of this phenomenon has been brilliantly studied by the Japanese art historian Hiroshige Okada in an article titled “Inverted Exoticism?” (2006). He shows that when local Andean artists paint in churches elements that are supposedly “indigenous” (parrots, monkeys, etc.) they are in fact transforming European sources such as atlases and engravings using these same elements to portray and signify the New World. In this sense, it is an *inverted* exoticism. But De Bry, on the other side, uses the drawings that John White had made in Virginia, and the engraver of the Map of Tenochtitlan published in 1524 in Nuremberg also uses sketches made *in loco*. Barbara Mundy has even proposed that one of his sources is an indigenous map. These are only a few examples of a very creative, and I think *new*, tension between the “afar” and the “nearby.”

Joselit: The tension between distance and proximity introduces the further question of scale. There are quantitative terms, not often associated with art history, that I think might be productive for us—like distance, proximity, scale, speed.

Wood: It seems to me that in the past objects never traveled faster than people. They had to be transported by people. They could serve as surrogate people and they could even conduct conversations for people in various kinds of exchanges. Now images are traveling much faster than people. That’s the only distinction.

Russo: But I think in the sixteenth century objects also traveled faster than people. When the Spanish or the Portuguese, but also the French or the German, arrived in parts of the New World that were considered savage and completely unexplored, they often found “samples” (in the Spanish texts, “*muestras*”) that demonstrated how objects also traveled at a different speed than people. Take the case of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca’s account—the *Relación* later known as *Naufragios* (shipwrecks) published in Spain in 1542—relating the “survive travel” of the shipwrecked from Florida to Tenochtitlan, passing through what is today Texas and Northern Mexico. In his “*quijotesco*” text, Cabeza de Vaca reports how, with his fellows, he often had been surprised to see the presence of strange things that clearly indicated a previous (direct or indirect) contact with the Spaniards. For instance, he observes a strange jewel on the neck of an Indian: the buckle of a sword bell to which a horse nail had been sewn. Another example, more recent, is the beautiful necklaces created and worn by the Kadiwéu women in Mato Grosso (Brazil) but composed with twenty *reais* coins coming from the other part of the frontier, Paraguay. Under the perspective of “object speeds,” one could even rewrite the history of the contact.

Flood: Another aspect of the speed issue is that different objects move at different

speeds. And yes, it is literally true that objects can move faster than people, but people move at different speeds as well. So, for example, if you are the person delivering central Asian watermelons to the caliph in Baghdad in the ninth or tenth century, you can get the melons packed in ice, dispatched, and onto the table in Baghdad while they are still fresh. Other objects don't move at that speed, a distinction that is perhaps relevant to the discussion.

Yiengpruksawan: Are we saying that what happened in the past just got sped up?

Wood: Yes, and that it makes a huge difference. Moreover, things come wrapped in layers of discourse and, as a result, contemporary global art isn't as exciting as premodern global art.

Flood: Might concerns about circulation and speed also relate to the questions of materials and materiality that we just mentioned? When you press the button to send a digital image or an email (often with an image attached) there is nothing strictly material being sent, but when you print it, there is. This is a distinction that has come to the fore in interesting ways in recent discussions among Muslim theologians about religious proscriptions on images in the era of digitization. The more liberal interpretations of the relevant proscriptions hold that the image is perfectly acceptable on the computer screen, but once you press the button to print, you cross a boundary, transforming electrical impulses into material objects that may circulate at reduced speeds, but are theologically more problematic.

Yiengpruksawan: That puts me in mind of the incongruous experience I've had in summers in northwestern China where you visit someone at home, in what is essentially an adobe structure, but there's a satellite dish. From the outside, everything else looks like it came out of the eighth or ninth centuries, but you go inside and there's an Andy Warhol print on the wall. That incongruity fascinates me, and I wonder if such examples from our contemporary experience might help us understand what it was like when objects were carried outside their original context in the past. I purposely avoid using the term "metadata" to describe the information and habits of viewing pertaining to those objects because it seems to imply the digital. I am not convinced that thinking digitally is helpful because the binary ("0 and 1" and "this or that") implications seem to be incommensurable with our goals here. It might be useful to take note of those incongruities of viewing and interpretation that we encounter daily in the field and extrapolate from them what similar experiences might have meant hundreds of years ago for the materials with which we engage today; how encounters with objects out of context might have yielded random but nonetheless imaginative readings for their new context(s).

Wang: That's restaging what ethnographic Surrealism was doing in Paris—

Yiengpruksawan:—right and it yielded something so fascinating that we're still grappling with it now.

Nagel: I think that this has been happening all along. But I do think that the era of the temporary art exhibition in which we are living—which began, let’s say, with the King Tut exhibition of 1978—has had the effect of making the “slow” objects from the past available for consumption at the speed of electronic media. But that is impossible, and the result is friction, and friction equals damage. Why have we been living in an exhibition culture for the last thirty years? I think it has to do precisely with trying to interpret the boundaries of our new mode of being—what we might call “globalization.” Certainly in the museum we are encountering the “real” work of art but these things have had to travel to reach us so we also experience their fluidity. Strange things happen in the exhibition setting: the objects, which have to be the authentic ones that have come from far away—because why else would you do an exhibition—begin to feel like reproductions, almost like documents of themselves.

Wood: In my view, exhibitions of contemporary art that aim for a global reach are the very opposite of the creative disjunctions that Mimi is talking about—the gathering together of incongruous objects and the delight that that brings. At a biennial or at Documenta, everything is in tune, not just because the exhibition has been curated by one or two people, but because the artists are all in tune with each other and in lockstep; they are all reading the same magazines, which is profoundly depressing and has nothing to do with genuine encounters.

Joselit: So does acceleration undermine the experience of difference? I think globalization’s association with synchronicity is fundamental—the sense that things are moving so fast that temporal differences no longer register. As historians, how do we reintroduce the strangeness of asynchronicity that Chris feels has been lost in contemporary exhibitions?

Russo: I want to try to answer your question from a historical perspective. One of our tasks is to give visibility to this strangeness and analyze the coherence of worlds that seem completely unfamiliar to us. By coherence I do not mean a “structural” essence or logic, but rather the unexpected articulations between objects, words, attitudes, etc., that seem today “surrealist” or absurd. Mimi gives the example of the Chinese adobe house with a satellite dish and a Warhol print on an adobe wall. In the sixteenth century you have the New Spain townships of *pueblos de Indios* (Indian Villages)—also composed of adobe houses!—commissioning and *paying* Flemish painters, such as Simon Pereyng, to paint altarpieces for their churches. This is the case of the famous Indian chapel of Teposcolula, in the present Mexican state of Oaxaca, where Pereyng left a piece rarely taken into account by Flemish art history. To have a Flemish painter in Colonial Mexico commissioned and paid by the indigenous elite of Teposcolula is, historically speaking, completely

coherent, but for us, today, it is rather strange or even unthinkable (also because of the weight of categories, such as “subaltern,” that do not help at all to approach these complexities). I would like to propose that we need to work on making such unfamiliar, but perfectly coherent, situations visible. Maybe this visibility is one of the major challenges of a more “global” art history.

Wang: The invisible is at the core of our project. When we study medieval Chinese art, for instance, we only see the tip of the iceberg of a whole world of ghosts and spirits. Oftentimes our task is to take these cues and reconstruct the whole world and trace its events. The problem that interests me is how to capture the psychological aspect of these worlds. So far we’ve been dealing with things in the world, and how they travel at different speeds and with different degrees of knowledge encoded in them. But there are objects that evoke a whole psychic life, a kind of underworld.

Yiengbruksawan: You speak of the world of ghosts and spirits . . . I am reminded of Bruno Latour’s statement that what he calls the “invincibility of the moderns” makes it impossible to conceive of a space of mediation, translation, networks; such a space is now unthinkable, it is “the unconsciousness of the moderns.” So we conjure up ghosts and the uncanny . . .

Flood: I want to return to Alex’s point about the attempt to speed up “slow objects.” There’s a corollary to that: what about those circumstances in which objects don’t travel (such as objects that a museum will not circulate or materials in an archive), such that you have to travel to them? In a way, these “immobilized” things also open onto the processes of globalization since we now have the means to travel quickly and fairly easily to the various institutions, libraries, and sites that house them. And yet, in these cases, travel becomes a kind of anticipation of and preparation for an experience of the object, engaging further dimensions of temporality. If, therefore, we are going to talk about the strangeness of things (which sounds remarkably like the notion of *aura*), we might include those cases where people make long journeys (secular pilgrimages?) to be in the presence of uniquely resonant artifacts.

Nagel: It occurred to me that there is one major premodern model or context for the current discussion of globalization and that is the end of time. All discussions of globalization seem to engage with an end game—time is running out, space is running out, this cannot go on. And all end-game talk produces a global consciousness, a need to tie all things together into one story. In premodern millennialism, which survives in any number of forms today, one of the things that you do when you’re nearing the end of time is to look at past forms and ask what they reveal. So perhaps this discussion comes at such a moment.

Yiengbruksawan: In the eleventh century people were writing in their diaries that

the end of history was at hand as the world system wound down in what was called the “End of the Dharma”—

Wang:—well, earlier in China as well.

Wood: As far as I can tell no one today is thinking millennially at all. They are not thinking what a common human experience might be; instead they are thinking about difference—about the local, the singular. But where’s the common humanity?

Nagel: The entire talk about globalization is just such an effort.

Wood: Is it? When people talk about globalization they talk about the proliferation of markets, and so forth, not about a common family of man. That discourse has been discredited.

Nagel: Well of course, but the talk about markets is supposed to be to a further end, which is to understand how we might live in an integrated world. Are you referring to the actual process of globalization or its theorization? Because the theorization is quite millennial.

Joselit: I understand that Enlightenment notions of the universal are rooted in human rights and human capacities, but it seems like the dominant universal term of the era of globalization is, as Katherine Hayles has put it, *posthuman*, since universality is believed to inhere in markets, or technologies, like the Internet.

Wood: As art historians we are interested in interactions between people and things. Our “thing-ness” and our humanness are codependent—that’s what art history is about. So the universal market is not a satisfactory model.

Joselit: Markets seem related to a kind of technological sublime whose opposite number in the present is an equally global phenomenon of religious fundamentalism. Alex didn’t mention this when he brought up contemporary millennialism, but that’s what occurred to me. All this seems to revise profoundly the eighteenth-century notion of the universal. The question lies in how one acts on these new universals: they have proven both to be horribly destructive, and in other ways, politically enabling.