

### Things that Connect: Pathways of Materiality and Practice

**Veranstalter:** Monica Juneja / Birgit Kellner / Diamantis Panagiotopoulos on behalf of Research Area D „Historicities & Heritage“ of the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“ in cooperation with CRC 933 „Material Text Cultures“ coordinated by Markus Hilgert

**Datum, Ort:** 10.10.2012–12.10.2012, Heidelberg

**Bericht von:** Zara Barlas, Graduate Programme for Transcultural Studies; Richard Fox / Sabine Neumann, Collaborative Research Centre „Material Text Cultures“; Markus Viehbeck, Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“

Questions of the materiality of things, the power these exercise, and their complex relations to human action were the main focus of the fourth Annual Conference of the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, held at the Karl Jaspers Centre, Heidelberg University. Titled „Things that Connect: Pathways of Materiality and Practice“, the conference was organised jointly by the Cluster’s Research Area D „Historicities and Heritage“, headed by Monica Juneja (Heidelberg), and SFB 933 „Material Text Cultures“. After the welcome address by Madeleine Herren-Oesch (Heidelberg), Acting Director of the Cluster, and an introduction to the concept of the conference by Monica Juneja, the conference took off with a keynote lecture by NEIL MACGREGOR (London), Director of the British Museum. Drawing on examples from the British Museum, MacGregor demonstrated how objects acquire new meanings through the course of their variegated histories, which can be manipulated by a variety of factors and claims including those made by nation states. Tracing the trajectories of meaning, he emphasised how the knowledge embedded in objects could be used in multiple contexts, and discussed the uncertainties that could arise from these processes. He stressed the general need to lay bare invented histories which are made to serve particular interests. MacGregor argued that the university has a supremely significant role in

this, particularly because the museum, often a state institution, could be constrained by institutional and political factors.

Lines of resistance were a key theme of the opening panel, aptly entitled „The Obstinacy of Things“. Contributions emphasised the extent to which prevailing approaches tend to overlook the ways in which objects go beyond the intentions of both their producers and users, as well as their scholarly interpreters. Complexity was also a key theme. While HANS P. HAHN (Frankfurt am Main) emphasised the embeddedness of cultural objects within historically situated practices, PHILIPP W. STOCKHAMMER (Heidelberg) drew our attention to the twofold „Wandelbarkeit“ through which objects are transformed at once by human and non-human agencies, a theme further developed through DIAMANTIS PANAGIOTOPOULOS’ (Heidelberg) discussion of differing ideas of ‘foreignness’ in antiquity. The second session showcased three case studies of objects, ranging from medieval Japanese picture scrolls with adapted text and image (MELANIE TREDE, Heidelberg), to the various depictions of Hokusai’s Great Wave on differing media (CHRISTINE GUTH, London) creating a „transnational identity“, as well as a group of various items from East Asia in a Swiss collection (HANS THOMSEN, Zürich) as an example of „histoire croisée“, which provided insights into the social, political, and devotional implications of one subject matter and how it was transformed and translated over time. One key point was the movement of a motif or the object itself into another cultural or temporal context, where the objects found different reception, absorption and transformation according to the environment.

In a session on the cultural dimensions of global commodities, chaired by ROLAND WENZLHUEMER (Heidelberg), speakers focused on economic and cultural histories, taking interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the cultural and societal implications and associations of these commodities. Using the example of soybean imports in the US, INES PRODÖHL (Washington DC) demonstrated how societal perceptions were interwoven with economic needs and political decisions. BERND-STEFAN GREWE (Freiburg) and

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FRANK GRÜNER (Heidelberg) spoke about the smuggling of gold in India and trafficking and consumption of opium in Harbin respectively, both emphasising the assimilation of these commodities within their respective societies and histories through processes of trade and cross-border activity. Different aspects of the materiality of manuscripts were discussed in the afternoon panel „On the Use and Re-use of Manuscripts: Materiality, Textual Practice and Changing Values“. The first two talks investigated texts from a philological perspective: MARTIN DELHEY (Hamburg) unpacked the intricate history of a medieval Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript from Nepal, while VITO LORUSSO (Hamburg) presented three examples of, mostly, Aristotelian texts from the collection of Cardinal Bressarian and their structural organisation. BIRGIT KELLNER (Heidelberg), in contrast, showed how usage of manuscripts can exhibit the attribution of different values, as found, e.g., in the case of Indian manuscripts in Tibet.

A session on the notion of public justice embodied in objects chaired by THOMAS MAISEN (Heidelberg) focused on a series of institutional practices involving a drum or bell placed near the king's quarters, offering an avenue of complaint for those who felt justice had been thwarted. MONICA JUNEJA (Heidelberg) cited examples of travelling narratives and their recasting in South Asia to shoe the ways in which ideals of justice and good governance rendered through objects adapt to conditions in specific localities. ANTJE FLÜCHTER (Heidelberg) and RUDOLF G. WAGNER (Heidelberg) developed similar arguments in their respective treatments of European reports on the Mughal court and Chinese institutions of public justice. Things in the domain of religion were addressed in the panel „How Material is the Immaterial? Sacred 'Things' Transferred“. PETER J. BRÄUNLEIN (Göttingen) explored notions evoked by Kuka'ilimoku, a Hawaiian war god, kept in the ethnographic museum of the University of Göttingen. UDO SIMON (Heidelberg) investigated the complex relation between materiality and immaterial aspects of religious texts by examining critical settings such as the touching, disposing, and translating of the Qur'ān. That also a bride can be an object was shown

by ASTRID ZOTTER (Heidelberg) in her talk about recent changes in marital practices in urban Nepal.

Reflecting on the use of paper in various cultures, a panel introduced by AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAZNY (Hamburg) dealt with its ancient and medieval history, tracing the pathways of paper through scientific research methods on paper material. The appropriate use of various paper materials, sizes and forms to mediate a second level of meaning transcending the 'meaning' of a given text through the choice of paper in medieval Islamic societies was elucidated by REBECCA SAUER (Heidelberg). The panel was concluded by CARLA MEYER (Heidelberg), who emphasised the „silent upheaval“ of paper in medieval European society by tracing the few medieval sources in contrast to the widely recognised invention of the printing press in the 15th century. Contemporary artistic practices were explored in their historical and cultural contexts in a session chaired by GERALD SCHRÖDER (Bochum/Heidelberg). FRANZISKA KOCH (Heidelberg) investigated the concept of *les objets sonores* in Nam June Paik's early TV works, which enabled subjects to connect with objects in new ways, challenging traditional concepts of material artworks and alluding to the artist's theoretical fascination with „interdeterminism and variability“. In discussing the works of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, BIRGIT HOPFENER (Berlin) argued that these artists adopted the „real“ to critically examine the relation between life and art and to negotiate the ambiguity between passive and active. Schröder added that these two artists are dealing with real traumatic experiences in China and could perhaps be seen as a contribution to a process towards recovery.

The second keynote lecture, delivered by IAN HODDER (Stanford), conceptualised the relationship between things and humans in terms of entanglement conceived of as a complex and ever-increasing net of interdependencies. This view, Hodder showed, can not only offer a theoretical background for reading developments at archaeological sites such as atalhöyük in Turkey, but also for world history – a position which in its apparent scope and directionality was questioned in the subsequent discussion. The evening

poster session featured a series of outstanding presentations from students and researchers working in the Cluster, the Material Text Cultures SFB and the Department of Digital Humanities. Topics ranged from magical amulets in Roman Egypt (LAURA WILLER) and representations of Genghis Khan in German literature (JULE NOWOITNICK) to the creation of a computer platform for compiling and cross-referencing metadata associated with archived video and images (MATTHIAS ARNOLD, ERIC DECKER, CORNELIA KNAB, all Heidelberg). In keeping with the broader trends of the conference, the poster presentations were resolutely cross-disciplinary and trans-regional.

A panel on „Material text cultures on the move“ brought together ancient coinage, whose legends and images transcended Greek communities settling at the edges of the defeated Persian kingdom after the campaign of Alexander the Great, and medieval diacritics in the Hebrew bible, the Masora, often taking on zoomorphic forms in the presented case study. JULIA LOUGOVAYA-AST (Heidelberg) closely examined cases of development, adaptation, amalgamation and exploitation of coinage, while HANNA LISS (Heidelberg) explored commentaries in the Bible forming pictures with words. Thus, both case studies showed the shifting forms of text and image in relation to their function. Focusing on the metamorphoses and placements of texts in early China, PAUL NICHOLAS VOGT (Heidelberg) explored bronze vessels, taking up inscriptions as „materialised messages“ of royal ideology. A wooden tablet (gaodi ce) was presented by GUO JUE (Western Michigan) as a „materialised death ritual“ and the question by ENNO GIELE (Heidelberg) of the relationship and function of bamboo versus wooden slips as a vehicle of administrative documents showed various metamorphoses of meaning and provided access to the life and characteristics of the objects on differing media.

The afternoon panel, „‘Votive Stupas for the (Post-)Colonial Nation State’ – Inquiries into the Performative Practice of Cultural Heritage“, discussed the transformation of religious sites in colonial and post-colonial contexts. MICHAEL FALSER (Heidelberg) provi-

ded the historical context for the two succeeding papers by explicating the spread of replicas of the temple that commemorates the awakening of the Buddha. In her case studies of the transference and relocation of objects from Buddhist and Hindu temple sites in Java, MARIEKE BLOEMBERGEN (Leiden) showed how things connect or exclude people. Falser concluded with his investigation of the colonial exploration of Angkor Wat and the performative importance of heritage sites for nation-building projects. In the panel „Things that connect, divide, and transform: The materiality and performance of religious conversion in the early modern period“, speakers discussed the significance of material objects in cultural construction and performance of religious conversion. TOBIAS GRAF (Heidelberg) highlighted the importance of the turban, kaftan and circumcision in conversions to Islam in the early modern Ottoman Empire, which simultaneously contributed to the identity of „Turkishness“. MANJA QUAKATZ (Münster) similarly focused on the importance of material objects in the conversion of a Muslim man to Catholicism under the Holy Roman Empire, showing that the convert functioned as an object, playing an essential role in the staging of the triumph of the Christians over the Turks. GAURI PARASHER (Heidelberg) explored the significance of dress as a definition of identity in legal cases in the French settlement of Pondicherry, India. Sacred spaces of three religions were linked in a panel showing the dynamic process of adapting the Roman Mithras cult in architecture and imagery in different areas (DARIUS FRACKOWIAK, Heidelberg), the forms of root-taking of Nestorian Christianity in central and eastern Asia concentrating on art and architecture with the example of the bilingual Nestorian Stele (MATTHIAS AULENBACHER, Heidelberg), as well as the contrast of originally „shared ‘religious idiom’“ that developed into a „nationalisation“ and „denominalisation“ of sacral sites that could be observed in the Near and Middle East in the 20th century (ROBERT LANGER, Heidelberg).

The academic section of the conference concluded with a roundtable discussion chaired by BIRGIT KELLNER (Heidelberg). Participants included JOSEPH MARAN (Heidel-

berg), SARA FRASER (Heidelberg), ALOKA PARASHER-SEN (Hyderabad) and MARKUS HILGERT (Heidelberg). The discussion was wide-reaching, but there was general consensus on a series of concluding points, including the importance of more nuanced attention to cultural complexity, the historical transformation of meaning and the 'entanglement' of human beings and things – both material and otherwise. Also, contributors seemed to agree that, however useful from an heuristic perspective, the Actor Network Theory associated with figures such as Bruno Latour went 'too far' in erasing the gap between inanimate objects and their thinking counterparts. Following the roundtable discussion participants in the conference were treated to an extraordinary performance by the Duo Seidenstrasse. The pair, ZHAO CHANYUAN (zheng and vocals) and BENJAMIN LEUSCHNER (marimbaphone and percussion), brought together an assemblage of instruments and musical sensibilities from Europe and Asia. The lecture-recital opened with the haunting sounds of „Wüstenhochzeit“, a piece exploring Arabic influences on Chinese music, and proceeded through a series alternately sad, playful and romantic. Crossing boundaries of genre and tradition, the duo's performance was a fitting conclusion to the conference.

### Conference Overview

Welcome: Madeleine Herren-Oesch, Acting Director of the Cluster „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“

Things that Connect - Introducing this year's Conference of the Cluster: Monica Juneja, Professor of Global Art History, Speaker Research Area D

*Keynote Lecture I: Trajectories of meaning: the shifting power of things*

Chair: Monica Juneja // Speaker: Neil MacGregor

*Panel I: The Obstinacy of Things*

Chair: Philipp W. Stockhammer // Discussant: Ian Hodder // Speakers: Hans P. Hahn, Philipp W. Stockhammer, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos

*Panel II: Multiple Materialities: Local, National, Global*

Chair: Melanie Trede // Discussant: Monica Juneja // Speakers: Melanie Trede, Hans Thomsen, Terry Milhaupt, Christine Guth

*Panel A (Session I): Soy, Gold and Opium: Cultural dimensions of global commodities*

Chair: Roland Wenzlhuemer // Speakers: Ines Prodöhl, Bernd-Stefan Grewe, Frank Grüner

*Panel B (Session I): On the use and re-use of manuscripts: materiality, textual practice and changing values*

Chair: Markus Hilgert // Speakers: Martin Delhey, Vito Lorusso, Birgit Kellner

*Panel C (Session I): A Eurasian Story about Public Justice Told by a Drum or a Bell*

Chair: Thomas Maissen // Speakers: Monica Juneja, Antje Flüchter, Rudolf G. Wagner

*Panel A (Session II): How Material is the Immaterial? Sacred 'Things' Transferred*

Chair: Udo Simon // Speakers: Peter J. Bräunlein, Udo Simon, Astrid Zotter

*Panel B (Session II): Unvalued transculturality. The hidden pathways of paper from Orient to Occident in premodern times*

Chair: Antje Flüchter // Discussant: Michael Friedrich // Speakers: Agnieszka Helman-Wazny, Rebecca Sauer, Carla Meyer

*Panel C (Session II): How do we connect with things? Concepts of materiality in modern and contemporary artistic practices across Asia, Africa and Europe*

Chair & Discussant: Gerald Schröder // Speakers: Birgit Hopfener, Franziska Koch

*\_Keynote Lecture II: From Materiality to Entanglement.*

Chair: Diamantis Panagiotopoulos // Speaker: Ian Hodder

Introduction to the Poster Presentation by Kerstin von Lingen. Young researchers from the Cluster's graduate programme and the Cluster's Digital Humanities division (HRA) together with young researchers of the SFB Material Text Cultures present their projects to the interested academia

*Poster Presentation & Small Reception*

*Panel III: Material Text Cultures on the Move*

Chair: Diamantis Panagiotopoulos // Speaker:

kers: Julia Lougovaya-Ast, Hanna Liss, Ludger Lieb

*Panel IV: Materializing Messages: Metamorphoses and Placement of Texts in Early China*  
Chair: Enno Giele // Discussant: Olivier Venture // Speakers: Paul Nicholas Vogt, Guo Jue, Enno Giele

*Panel A (Session III): „Votive stupas for the (post-)colonial nation state“ - Inquiries into the performative practices of cultural heritage*

Chair: Christiane Brosius // Speakers: Marieke Bloembergen, Michael Falser

*Panel B (Session III): Things that connect, divide and transform: The materiality and performance of religious conversion in the early modern period*

Chair: Antje Flüchter // Speakers: Gauri Parasher, Tobias Graf, Manja Quakatz

*Panel C (Session III): Between uniformity and individual needs. Sacral architecture and imagery in religions from „the East“ and the process of its adaption in different regional contexts*

Chair & Discussant: Christian Witschel // Speakers: Darius Frackowiak, Matthias Aulenbacher, Robert Langer

*Concluding Roundtable*

Chair: Birgit Kellner // Discussants: Joseph Maran, Sarah Fraser, Aloka Parasher-Sen, Markus Hilgert

*Material Encounters: Musical practice between Asia and Europe - A Lecture-Concert*

Chair: Barbara Mittler // Duo Seidenstrasse: Zhao Chanyuan (Zheng & Vocals), Benjamin Leuschner (Marimbaphone & Percussion)

Tagungsbericht *Things that Connect: Pathways of Materiality and Practice*. 10.10.2012–12.10.2012, Heidelberg, in: H-Soz-Kult 19.02.2013.