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Spaces of Difference (Part II)

Seeing Global

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Figure 1 — Section of the Dunhuang star atlas, mid-seventh-century (early Tang Dynasty), displaying from the north circumpolar region, down to a celestial latitude of about $+50^\circ$ (Map 13, Dunhuang Star Atlas, Or. 8210/S.3326, British Museum).

You are looking at a section of a Chinese scroll containing the oldest complete atlas of the heavens that has been preserved from any civilisation.¹ It is a seventh-century

¹ In comparison, the Farnese Atlas, the second-century (all dates in this essay are Christian Era) Roman statue of Atlas holding the celestial globe—famously replicated at Rockefeller Center in New York City—is scientifically naive. Considered to be a copy of a Hellenistic original, it shows the Western constellations from a god-like perspective of the outside looking

(Tang Dynasty) star chart, discovered near Dunhuang, an oasis town on the Silk Road where two main branches of the western network of trade routes converge and continue eastward to China's capital city of Xi'an.² While the purpose of the Dunhuang atlas was astrological divination (celestial events were believed to mirror those on Earth³), it was based on accurate scientific observation. Beautiful to look at, it is a remarkably precise astronomical document. Its multiple panels are a graphic depiction of the entire visible sky. The scroll displays unambiguously the position of 1,500 stars within the traditional Chinese constellations. Its panels are a sequence of circumpolar regions in azimuthal projection, a method of measurement still in use today.⁴

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in and without the positioning of individual stars. Ptolemy's second-century text, *Almagest* (Arabic for "Great Constellation") included a catalogue of 1,022 stars but unlike the Dunhuang atlas, without their position in the sky. Lost to Europe until the twelfth century, the *Almagest* catalogue of stars was used by Dürer to depict the Western constellations in 1515.

2 The Dunhuang Star Atlas was found nearby the town in Mogao, a Buddhist holy site known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas cut into the rock of a cliff. Discovered in 1907 by Aurel Stein, this scroll chart is now in the British Museum. A detailed description of the manuscript was published in 2009 by astrophysicist Jean Marc Bonnet-Bidaud and the astronomer François Praderie, working together with Susan Whitfield, Director of the International Dunhuang Project at the British Museum. See "The Dunhuang Chinese sky: a comprehensive study of the oldest known star atlas", http://idp.bl.uk/education/astronomy_researchers/index.a4d (downloaded 24 December 2010).

3 "Astronomy in China was an essential imperial science as the divination based on the sky events taking place in the celestial mirror image of the empire was the way to rule the state", Bonnet-Bidaud *et al*, *op. cit.*

4 An azimuth (from the Arabic *as-simt*, "direction") is an angular measurement in a spherical coordinate system.

ecuted copy of an imperial original, which, as portable, would have been useful for caravan navigation.⁵ Visibility changed with the seasons, but along the East-West trade routes that were roughly the same latitude,

Silk Road travellers and residents saw the same stars whether they were on the shores of the Mediterranean or the borders of China, and knowledge of the stars was disseminated along its length.⁶

Star charts measured distance in time, the movement of the heavens, allowing caravans to traverse space. With an eye on the stars, one did business on Earth.

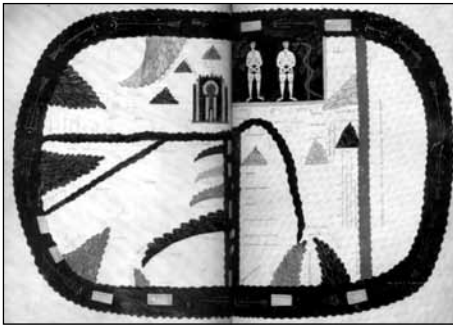


Figure 2 — T-O Map, *Silos Beatus*, Andalusian illustrated manuscript from the monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos 1106 AD, British Library, London.

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Figure 2 is a European Map of the World (*Mappa Mundi*) that was produced by Christian monks in an Iberian monastery three centuries later, at a time when most of

5 “It is possible that we have in hands [sic] not a scientific text intended for scientists only but a product of more general use which existed in several copies for several users (...) [T]he purpose of such a scroll could have been to help travelers or warriors on the Silk Road who needed both predictions of the future from the aspect of the clouds [images of cloud types were included in the scroll] and assistance in their travel from the aspect of the night sky.” Bonnet-Bidaud, *et al*, *op. cit*.

6 Susan Whitfield, *The silk road: trade, travel, war and faith*, Exhibition catalogue, The British Museum, London, 2004, p. 35.

the peninsula, then called Al-Andalus, was under Muslim (Umayyad) rule. The type is known as a T-O Map, because of its shape: a circular (O) depiction of the inhabited world surrounded by ocean, with Jerusalem, the navel (*umbilicus*) of the Earth, pictured at the centre above a T formed by the Mediterranean Sea, the River Nile to the south and River Don to the north. These three major waterways separate the world into the known continents. Asia is above, with Europe on the left and Africa on the right, and there is a fourth continent below Africa, described as “not known to us because of the heat of the sun.”⁷ This T-O map appears in one of a series of illustrated commentaries on the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, that describes in calamitous detail the apocalyptic end of a fully Christianised world. The copiously illustrated manuscript series (of which there are 26 extant copies) is known as the *Liébana Beatus*, after the monk who produced the (lost) original prototype in 785 AD. It is a Christian perception of the whole of Earth’s space imagined in terms of time, from Adam and Eve to the End of Days that would come after

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7 This description is from Isidore, Bishop of Seville, whose writings are among the sources used by Beatus, the eighth-century monk of Liébana who wrote the original commentary. Isidore adds, “It is said the legendary Antipodes live there, a fabulous people whose feet are positioned in the mirror image of our own, and who, included on some of the Beatus maps, are depicted as *Sciopods*, ‘shadow-footed men’ whose leg is lifted overhead as a parasol;” See John Williams, “Isidore, Orosius and the Beatus Map,” *Imago Mundi*, 49, 1997, p. 7-32. The definitive (if still debated) study of the 26 extant variants of the *Liébana Beatus* is the 5 volume work by John Williams, *The illustrated Beatus*, a corpus of illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse, Harvey Miller, London and Turnhout, 1994-2003.

the world was fully exposed to Christianity through the apostolic missions. China, the Orient, is the Garden of Eden and beginning of the world, as you can see clearly in the *Silos Beatus* variant of the *Liébana Beatus* series.

The Christian, symbolic meaning of space as time, the eschatological depiction of the history of the world, placed little value on scientific accuracy. Indeed, “Christianity began with the announcement that time and history were about to end.”⁸ Within these temporal limits, geographical measurement of space was not a theological concern.⁹ Compare the T-O map with the *Mappa Mundi* in the *Tabula Rogeriana* by the Muslim geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi (Figure 3), created only half a century later in 1154.

Descendent from a Moroccan family of Princes and Sufi leaders, Al-Idrisi studied at Cordoba in Muslim Andalus (now Spain) at the same time that Christian monks to the north were still at work, diligently copying the prototypes of the *Liébana Beatus*. He had access to the extensive work of contemporary geographers, and himself travelled widely in Africa, Anatolia and parts of Europe before settling in Sicily at the court of the Norman King Roger II, who commissioned him to create this map. The King, whose

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8 Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45, 1991, p. 151-83 (p. 151).

9 The *Liébana Beatus* series was also a commentary on current events, given the arrival of Muslim rulers in the early eighth century, and given the fact that the Prophet Mohammed appeared to re-open the tradition of prophecy that the book of Revelation had announced as closed. Just what meaning contemporaries were to take from the juxtaposition of the advent of Muslim rule and the book of Revelation is left open in the commentary, which is an amalgam of previous interpretations.

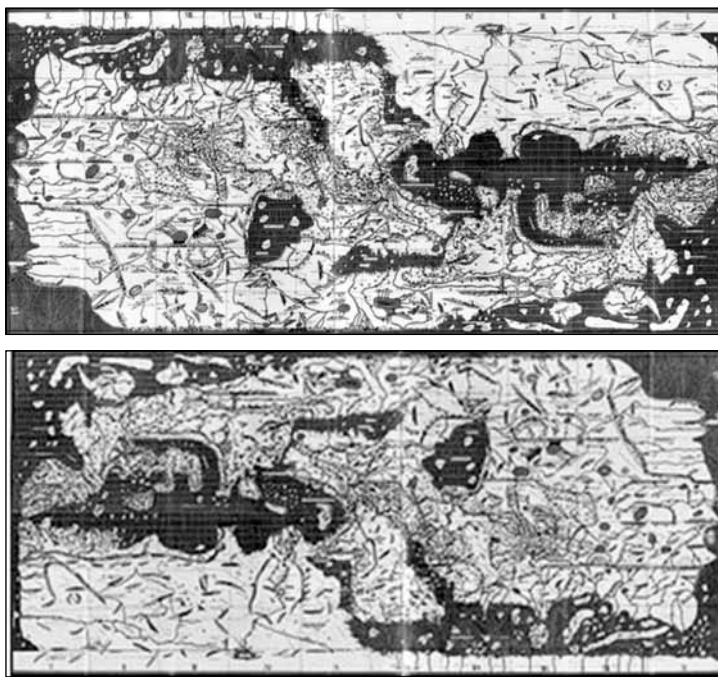


Figure 3 — Fifteenth-century copy of the *Mappa Mundi* in the *Tabula Rogeriana*, 1154, by the Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi (North was at the bottom, the convention for Arab maps, shown here in inverted form to facilitate reading.) Bibliotheque nationale de France (MSO Arabe 2221), <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TabulaRogeriana.jpg>.

Norman father (Roger I) had overthrown the previous Arab rulers of Sicily, welcomed Muslims whose scientific knowledge he valued, thereby maintaining Sicily's multicultural culture. Roger II commissioned Al-Idrisi to create this map and others as part of an encyclopaedic text incorporating knowledge of Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Far East, gathered by merchants, explorers and cartographers from various civilisations. It is considered "one of the most exhaustive medieval works in the field of physi-

cal, descriptive, cultural, and political geography.”¹⁰ Al-Idrisi’s map remained the European standard for accuracy for the next three centuries. Accuracy, however, while necessary for trade or plans of conquest, did not displace maps with more lofty theological values.



Figure 4 — Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, ca. 1300, Hereford Cathedral, England (Wikicommons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hereford_Mappa_Mundi_1300.jpg).

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The Hereford *Mappa Mundi* (Figure 4) is a Euro-Christian version produced more than a century later (ca. 1300). While the geographical detail makes this map more topologically convincing, it is still a classic T-O map with Jerusalem at centre, the Orient on top, Europe at bottom left, and Africa, bottom right, and spatial significance marked according to theological understanding. In other words, even when geographic space was known scientifically, Christians per-

10 Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, “Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi,” in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, *The history of cartography*, v. 2, Book 1: *Cartography in the traditional Islamic and South Asian societies*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 160.

sisted in depicting the world in the eschatological terms of space as time.



Figure 5 — Da Ming Hun Yi Tu (Great Ming Dynasty Amalgamated Map), 1389. 大明混一圖 Wikicommons: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Da-ming-hun-yi-tu.jpg> Image enhanced by contributor: http://geog.hkbu.edu.hk/GEOG1150/Chinese/Catalog/am31_map1.htm.

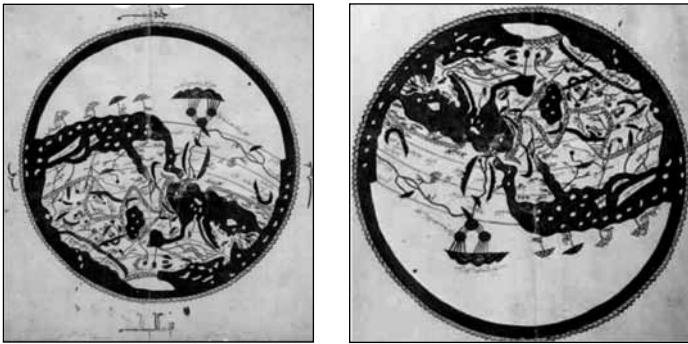
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Figure 5 is a section from the *Ad Ming Hun Yi Tu* (Great Ming Dynasty Amalgamated Map). This is the oldest surviving, Chinese world map.¹¹ Benefiting from Islamic science and geographic knowledge, it is a detailed and sophisticated rendering, painted on silk in 1389 AD but with Manchu language captions on paper slips superimposed on the Chinese several centuries later.

We might be tempted to remark how backward Western and Christian Europe seems! But it would be wrong to limit our own historical understanding of the history of cartography in terms of a *telos* of scientific progress. The experts warn against the distortions caused by “scientific chau-

11 It is currently kept in protective storage at the First Historical Archive of China in Beijing. A full-sized digital replica was made for the South African government in 2002. The degree of “Chinese” knowledge of world geography is debated. Much of the controversy would disappear, perhaps, if knowledge were not presumed to be the possession of a particular civilisation. Maps were translatable tools, not ethnic expressions. While the necessary knowledge took effort to acquire, it was held in common.

vinism” that judges past maps anachronistically according to the modern value of accuracy of measurements, erasing theological and historical meaning and replacing them with the secular goals of science, whereby the history of cartography is made to chart the rate of progress among competing civilisations, a history written as “the saga of how the unmappable was finally mapped.”¹² If we consider later copies of the *Mappa Rogeriana*, the distortions of scientific chauvinism become evident.



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Figure 6 — Variant of Al-Idrisi’s map of 1154, from a Cairo manuscript dated 1348 and attributed to the Balkhi school of map-makers (inverted here to facilitate reading) This is the only known version without the more “scientific” latitudinal markings of climate boundaries.

Figure 6 shows a variant that was produced two centuries later by a different tradition of Muslim map-makers, the Balkhi school, named after the tenth-century geographer Ahmed ibn Sahll al-Balkhi. Here, the map’s decorative aspects appear to overpower scientific description. Indeed, Is-

12 J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *The history of cartography*, v. 1: *Cartography in prehistoric, ancient, and medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 3-4.

lamic world maps with stylised spatial features similar to the T-O maps were produced by the Balkhi school. But even more to the point: what we call scientifically “advanced” in Al-Idrisi’s *Mappa Rogeriana* was actually tied to the past: the 1,000 year old tradition founded by the second-century Greek geographer, Ptolemy, that had been lost in Europe but remained alive and was made more accurate by Muslim cartographers as early as the ninth century under the patronage of Al-Ma’mun, the great Abbasid patron of philosophy and science, and would continue unabated within the Muslim world, despite multiple changes in that world’s theological and political orientation.¹³

13 “Essential to an understanding of the Arabs contribution to mapmaking is their approach to geodesy—the measurement of distances on the curved surface of the earth. Such distances can be measured either in linear units, such as the Arabic mile, or in angular units—longitude and latitude. To convert from one to the other one must know the number of miles per degree or, equivalently, the radius of the earth. In the Greek classical period, before the general use of latitude as an angular coordinate, the inhabited areas (the *oikoumene*) was [sic] divided into zones, or climates, according to the length of the longest day in the central part of the zone. Thus Ptolemy, in his *Almagest*, takes seven boundaries in steps of one-half hour, running from thirteen to sixteen hours. The practice continues in Islamic mathematical geography (...). Simultaneous observations of a lunar eclipse in two places provide in principle a means of determining the difference of longitude between places.” Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, “Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi,” J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *The history of cartography*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, Book 1, p. 175-6. For Europe’s renewed reception of Ptolemy, see Kathleen Biddick, “The ABC of Ptolemy: mapping the world with the alphabet,” in Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (eds.), *Text and territory: geographical imagination in the European Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, 1998, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 268-93.

In short, when it comes to map-making, its history does not fit the narrow conception of history as progress. In fact, none of the ordering binaries of modernity (science v. art,¹⁴ religious v. secular,¹⁵ Occident v. Orient¹⁶) enable us to grasp the empirical history of maps that had multiple traditions, and that were used simultaneously by theologians, court astrologists, imperial conquerors, travelling scholars, religious pilgrims and merchants of trade. The contrast being made here is a limited point of comparison. Star maps and land maps charted space in a way that allowed one to traverse space in time, as opposed to the theological approach whereby divine history—time—was mapped as the space of the world. In terms of the philosophy of history, the Christian depiction of space as time can be seen as proto-Hegelian: the beginning of time is in the East, the “Orient,” and the end, the highest stage, is in the West.

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14 Al-Idrisi wrote that his maps were both aesthetic and scientific, “a true description and pleasing form.” Ahmad, in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *History of cartography, op. cit.*, v. 2, n. 1, p. 163.

15 In China, accuracy of astrological prediction was necessary for the religious legitimacy of imperial rule, and divination by star charts was based on the belief that events in heaven could be read as a reflection of those on earth. In the Islamic world, “the concept of sacred direction (*qibla* in Arabic and all other languages of the Islamic world) in ritual, law, and religion, applying wherever the believer was, (...) gave rise to the charts, maps, instruments and related cartographic methods,” but this religious belief produced a “dual nature of science,” on the one hand “folk science,” advocated by legal scholars that was “innocent of any calculation,” and on the other “mathematical science,” derived mainly from translations of Greek sources, “involving both theory and computation.” Ahmad, in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *History of cartography, op. cit.*, v. 2, n. 1, p. 189.

16 Ptolemaic science was fundamental to both Eastern and (after the twelfth century) Western traditions; O-maps centred on Jerusalem existed in Christian and Islamic forms.

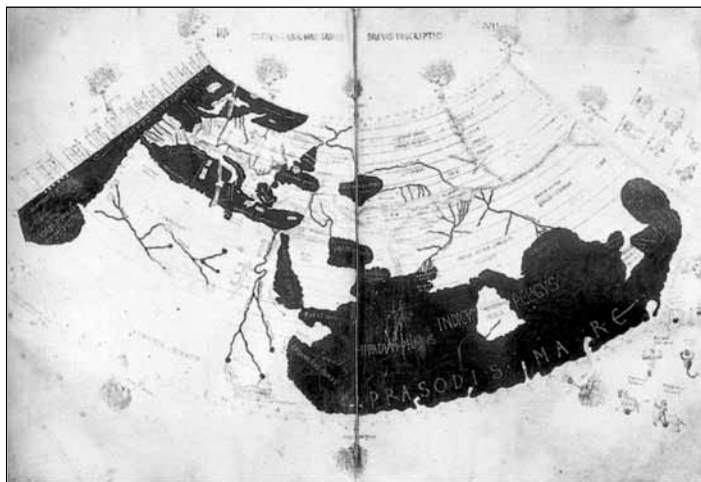


Figure 7 — Ptolemy's world map, redrawn in the fifteenth century from Ptolemy's *Geographia* (ca. 150 AD), indicating 'Sinae' (China) at the extreme right, beyond the island of 'Taprobane' (Sri Lanka, oversized) and the 'Aurea Chersonesus' (Southeast Asian peninsula). The British Library Harley MS 7182, ff 58v-59 Wikicommons: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PtolemyWorldMap.jpg>.

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Now to make this small point, why have I submitted you to all this cartographical data? It is to show you that the deeper one delves into empirical history (and this is generally true of historical research), the more the material evidence overthrows unilinear narratives of cultural developments belonging to particular civilisations. When empirical facts are not presumed from the start to belong to the histories of different political territories or religious spaces, the findings go against the conventions of history as a discipline. What I would like to propose is a different construction of history altogether—to cite the past, as one might sight the stars, bringing elements of it together within con-

stellations of meaning that relate to our own time as the vanishing point.

Constellations

In August 1966 the US moon satellite Lunar Orbiter II transmitted the first picture of Earth shining over a lunar landscape. Two years later the first manned spacecraft, Apollo 8, orbited the moon and took this picture (Figure 8) that was named *Earthrise*.



Figure 8 — *Earthrise*, first image of the whole Earth taken by humans (Bill Anders on Apollo 8), 24 December 1968 http://www.archive.org/details/297755main_GPN-2001-000009_full.

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The timing—Christmas Eve—was not accidental. The scientists were politically pressured to meet that deadline so that the crew of Apollo 8, orbiting the moon ten times, could make a Christmas Eve television broadcast in which they read the first ten verses from the book of Genesis (from the King James version of the Biblical text). So much for the so-called secular West! (Figure 9).¹⁷ Landing on the

¹⁷ “By television, people saw the earth from a distance of 313,800 kilometers. They saw the moon’s surface from a distance of 96.5 kilometers and watched the earth rise over the lunar horizon. (...) [“Then followed on Christmas Eve one of mankind’s most memorable moments. ‘In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.’ The voice was that of Anders, the words were from Genesis. ‘And the Earth was without form and void

moon took place one year later. This was a triumph of modernity as the technological dream of human progress.¹⁸ It was the apogee of American power. In a real sense, however, this culmination was also an ending.



Figure 9 — US postage stamp, 1969.

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and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and God said, 'Let there be light,' and God saw the light and that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness.' ["Lovell continued, 'And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters. And let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made firmament, and divided the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And evening and morning were the second day.' ["Borman read on, 'And God said, 'Let the waters under the Heavens be gathered together in one place. And the dry land appear.' And it was so. And God called the dry land Earth. And the gathering together of the waters he called seas. And God saw that it was good.' Borman paused, and spoke more personally, 'and from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas and God bless all of you—all of you on the good Earth.'"] Accessed June 24, 2011: <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/SP-4204/ch20-9.html>. The flight recording is available on audio: http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/image/apollo8_xmas.mov.

18 The Soviets began the Cold War competition by sending the first human, Yuri Gagarin, into space in 1961.

German historical philosopher Hans Blumenberg writes that the American moon landing initiated a transformation in human consciousness that “took place rapidly and almost silently.”¹⁹ It was the stream of transmitted pictures of the Earth that marked the world significance of this event—not the political staging, not the words, “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind”, and not even the images of the first moonwalk (a visually pitiful, even dubious event), but rather the images sent back to us of Earth. Blumenberg writes: “Perhaps it would not have been necessary to send people to the Moon at all if what was to be brought back was, above all pictures.”²⁰ He called this event the end of the Copernican Age. Rather than looking out into space, human beings look back from it, and see themselves. Images of the Earth are returned to us in the cosmic mirror and, for the first time, humanity sees its whole body reflected. It is a body in pieces.

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If, in Blumenberg’s sense, the event of seeing the planet Earth, a “cosmic exception,”²¹ marks an end to Copernican modernity, let us claim the right to authorise this lunar vision of Earth as the origin of a new era, one entered into in common by Earth-dwellers, and name it the Era of Globalisation.²²

19 Hans Blumenberg, *The genesis of the Copernican world view*, translated from the German by Robert N. Wallace, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1987, p. 678.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 676.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 679.

22 That such a right is an act of sovereign power is the claim of Kathleen Davis in her recent book, *Periodization and sovereignty: how ideas*



Figure 10 — Liu Kuo-song,
The Sun is coming, 1991.

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Others were paying attention to this event of the birth of globalisation. One was the Taiwanese artist Liu Kuo-song. Liu was inspired by the Apollo 8 space mission to paint a series of images depicting the newly visible realities by fusing traditional Chinese brush techniques with those of contemporary hard-edged abstraction (Figure 10). He was one of the co-founders of the Wuyue Huahui (Fifth Moon Group) a painting society of Taiwanese artists active in the sixties. Liu taught in Hong Kong in the seventies and eighties, and was a visiting artist and professor in the United States on several occasions. Invited to Beijing in the eighties, he has since become well known on the mainland. A major retrospective

of Feudalism and secularization govern the politics of time, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. But if, as Fredric Jameson suggests, we cannot *not* periodise, then let us extend the “we” to a communal (dare I say Communist?) inclusiveness with this inaugural event. See Fredric Jameson, *A singular modernity: essay on the ontology of the present*, London and New York, Verso, 2002, p. 94.

exhibition of his work was held at Beijing's National Palace Museum in 2007.

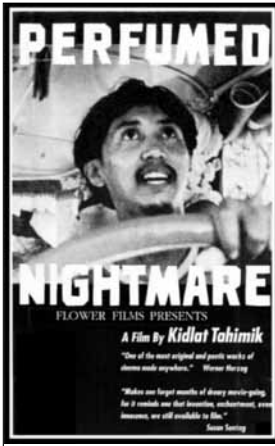


Figure 11 — Poster for *Perfumed Nightmare*, film by Kidlat Tahimik, 1978.

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A second artist, the filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik (Figure 11), was a young man at the time of the moon landing, living in a small village in the Philippines. He produced a film about that experience, which he describes as awakening from the “cocoon of American Dreams.”²³ Entitled *Perfumed nightmare* (1978), it received numerous international awards. In the film, Kidlat tells of his youthful enthusiasm when hearing reports from the Voice of America of Apollo 8 on his portable radio. It was the time of the US military occupation (and the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos), and Kidlat became the founder and head of the village fan club for Werner von Braun, the rocket scientist whose brilliance made the space voyages possible.

23 <http://www.focus-philippines.de/kidlat.htm>; accessed October, 2010.

But that is not the whole Von Braun story. Before being recruited to the American space effort as its director, he worked as a scientist in his native Germany. Having joined the Nazi party in 1937, he became a German SS officer during the war. If we bring these three human beings into the same constellation under the sign of the 1968 lunar vision of Earth, we get an idea of just how fragmented the now globally visible body of humanity was (and, of course, still is).

310 Hans Blumenberg, whose description of the moon landing is the climax of his lengthy philosophical history, *The genesis of the Copernican world*, was a student in Germany during the Hitler years. A Catholic, he was labelled a half-Jew by the Nazis, spent some time in concentration camps and was hidden by his future wife's family toward the end of the war. (He does not credit, or even mention Werner von Braun in his book.)

Blumenberg was born in 1920, Liu in 1932, Tahimik in 1942. If we were categorising them according to nationality, chronological age or the genre of their work, they would never come into contact with each other. Blumenberg was a Western modernist, Liu merged modernism with traditional landscape painting, Tahimik's *Perfumed nightmare* was singled out by Fredric Jameson as a Third-World example of postmodern cinema, coming out of a neo-colonised formation.²⁴ But rather than keeping them in place within existing mappings of the intellectual landscape, within a global constellation, these three figures are allowed to converge.

24 Fredric Jameson, *The geopolitical aesthetic: cinema and space in the world system*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992.

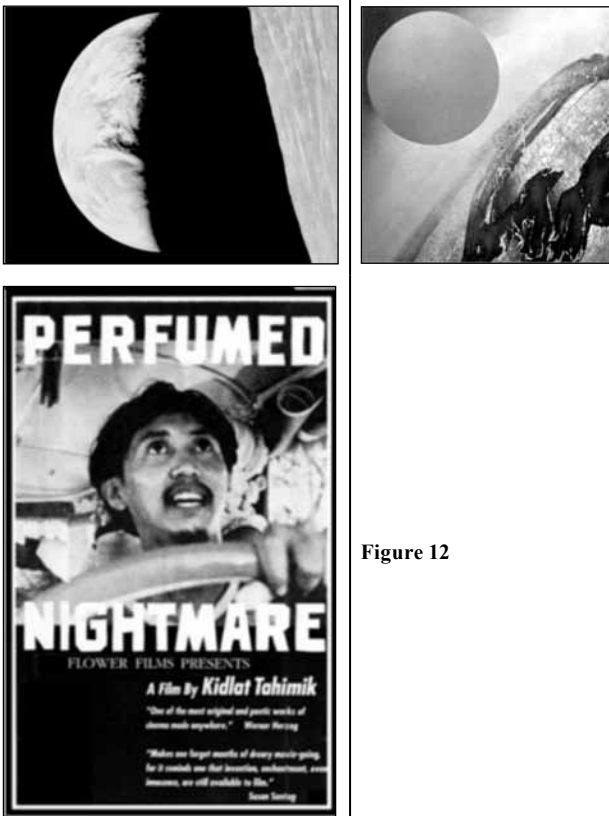


Figure 12

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Globalization as a historical era—a time, not a space—entails a transformation of consciousness. “Think global, act local” has become the political slogan for an alternative to the present world order, a mandate to think through what it means to inhabit a physical planet, not a composite of political states. It is proving surprisingly difficult to do so. We are hindered in re-imagining the present because our sense of historical time has been structured in terms of col-

lective distinctions—nations, cultures, civilizations. Rather than trying to add up these partial stories into a massive world history, the model of constellations encourages us to refigure the historical armatures that hold the past together across such narrative divides. These armatures need to be flexible, allowing historical fragments to enter multiple, changing relationships, and, in the process, training our own consciousness and suppleness of thought.

Conceptualising the Global

“Art teaches us to see things. It is training in observation.” (Walter Benjamin.)

312 A book published in 2006 under the title *Is art history global?* debated whether the study and teaching of art could, or should, be global in terms of its methods, its contents and its canon. James Elkins, the book’s editor, questioned the extreme position of Mieke Bal, a founding figure in the field of visual studies, who was seemingly content to dissolve the disciplinary boundaries of art history completely. Elkins favoured, instead, turning to (Western) theory as the foundation of a global discipline of art. He finds exemplary the work of specific art historians: T. J. Clark, who grapples with Hegel; Michael Fried, who does the same with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein; Michael Camille with Derrida; and Didi-Huberman with Lacan. While supportive of non-Western art practices, Elkins concludes, “I think it can be argued that there is no non-Western tradition of art history, if by that is meant a tradition with its

own interpretive strategies and forms of argument.”²⁵ His evidence: Chinese specialists are not hired to teach art in Western universities on the basis of their ability to deploy indigenous—that is, specifically Chinese—historiographical methods.

The Bal-Elkins debate will not concern us here.²⁶ We take a detour around art history as a discipline, with its established, undeniably Western-centric traditions, and, side-stepping the interdisciplinary/non-disciplinary concerns and internecine struggles of the academy, push ahead by changing the question. Rather than considering the relevance of theory for art historians, we will look at how *looking at art*, studying art, making visual connections and cross-references among art works and artists, can help us *conceptualise the global* in a different way. Cultural production thus conceived as global is not world culture, where-

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25 James Elkins (ed.), *Is art history global?*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 9. This is the third volume in *The art seminar*, an ongoing, international programme held at the Stone Art Theory Institute under the auspices of the Chicago Institute of Art. This volume took as its starting point David Summers's book *Real spaces: world art history and the rise of western modernism*, New York, Phaidon Press, 2003. The rapid obsolescence of Summers' approach to questions of global art history (based on lectures given in the preceding decade) indicates how quickly the picture has changed. Several of the contributors to Elkins' volume make the point we make here, that the answer to these questions will not come from the West and its traditions.

26 Elkins himself has modified his position. The next volume in the series, *Art and globalization*, co-edited by Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska and Alice Kim (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2010) shows not only how assumptions change, but more, how the global art world has produced a counter-culture of resistance to its own hegemonic practices.

in universality is understood as inclusion—expanding the existing art canons around abstract terms that imply universality, giving equal time to civilisations or cultural differences or arranging the art of civilisations in a chronology that culminates in a universalised, globalised modernity. Rather, global aesthetic imagination, the capacity to apprehend artistic production in a new way, emerges at a particular time, marked by certain common historical experiences.

314 These experiences have their origins not in the West, but in the postcolonial world. Acknowledging this shift in location requires a conceptual break *between* the modern and the global. “The modern” is locked into a Western concept of time, one that itself is not at all modern, but dates back to the mediaeval T-O maps that I showed you and that conceives of space itself as a teleological progression, so that some parts of the globe are judged to be forward and others are backward, trailing behind. The teleological imprint on aesthetic and political modernity is encapsulated in the concept of the avant-garde. To be modern is to *be* avant-garde, at the cutting edge of historical time, economic development and political progress—all three. Western theorists have named the sequel to Western modernity “postmodernity”—a feeble term if ever there was one. Postmodernity as a stage in a teleological sequence can take us nowhere. The West’s self-understanding leads to a conceptual dead end. But globalisation is allowing the emergence of a new, planetary imaginary and the discovery of a new temporality, one that belongs, potentially, to all of humanity—that post-Copernican humanity which, coeval and diffuse, appears to us now as a body in pieces.

In the postcolonial world, as Elizabeth Giorgis has recently argued, aesthetic modernity was intrinsically bound up with national projects of modernisation. Even countries not colonised accepted the conceptual equation of modernity and West—which meant that they shared in the conscious attempt to mimic Western historical patterns of urban-industrial development and nation-state formation.²⁷ From this perspective, the only way to be modern as an artist was by Western standards that, while claiming universality, were in fact quite specific. Moreover, by those standards, non-Western artists would always be found lacking, *their* modernity always belated, derivative, mimetic. At best, artists were able to catch up with an avant-garde that had already arrived at a future to which the whole world was heading. As a consequence, postcolonial artists were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they were part of the national political project. They were relied upon to produce a separate, national identity as part of what it meant to arrive as a modernised nation state. On the other hand, that national cultural identity would need to be based on indigenous aesthetic traditions that were, by definition, *not* modern.

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In the struggle to be both new and national, artists developed transnational strategies that rescued past traditions by subjecting them to a radical transformation. In the process—and this is the decisive point—they emerged from the

27 Giorgis claims that whereas Ethiopian intellectuals insisted on the uniqueness of Ethiopia as a country never colonised, they were under the sway of colonial intellectual hegemony, accepting Western definitions of modernisation and modernity as universal. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism: a subaltern perspective*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2010, p. 8-9.

postcolonial dilemma into new territory, a common ground belonging to no nation, no culture exclusively, opening up to a new, universally accessible (and in this new sense, *communist*) aesthetic. It is in this space, I am arguing, that an incipiently global consciousness emerges out of the modern and, in the art works themselves, comes into view.



Figure 13 — Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle*, 1943.

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A key figure in this development is the African-Chinese-Cuban artist Wifredo Lam. Only as an international figure who spent years in Spain and France and was befriended and promoted by Picasso, André Breton, and others, did Lam come back to Cuba with a thoroughly modernist sensitivity to the African heritage that he sought to rescue from two fates. One was its dehistoricised appropriation by European modernists; the other was its historical erasure from Cuban national identity.²⁸ The painting *The*

28 This was a widespread dilemma, experienced between the world wars in New York's Harlem Renaissance by Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Alain Locke and others. "[T]he challenge (...) was to establish their identi-

Jungle (Figure 13) that Lam produced in 1944 after his return to Cuba was both figural and abstract, both nationally specific to Cuba and anticipatory of a new, transnational consciousness of *Négritude*.²⁹



Figure 14 — Skunder Boghossian, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight (Juju's Flight of Terror and Delight* (Nourishers Series), 1963.

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There are striking parallels between this strategy and that taken by the Ethiopian artist Skunder Boghossian (Figure 14). Within Western histories of art, if Boghossian is considered at all (which is rarely), it is as a late arrival to the Surrealist tradition, as dreamlike and primitive—in short, *ahis-*

ty in an era when they were expected to draw on their African heritage but when that heritage had already been appropriated, decontextualized, and ‘essentialized’ in the service of modernism.” Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the international avant-garde, 1923-1982*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002, p. 218. On Locke’s non-essentialising, universally humanising conception of the New Negro artist, see Michelle René Smith, *Alain Locke: culture and the plurality of black life*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2009.

29 The importance of *Négritude* in the postcolonial context cannot be overestimated, its African identity leading dialectically to the emergence of a global subjectivity, tying Afro-American artists to Caribbean theorists (Frantz Fanon), to the Algerian anti-colonial movement, and beyond.

torical. But that was not Boghossian's intent. "I am aware that I am a witness to my time, other times. I am just time itself," Boghossian stated, and the time of the modern for him meant developing imagery that, as Giorgis, writes, presents a "critical account of the political culture of the colonial and postcolonial eras," involving a 'conceptually complex' dialogue between nationalism and transnationalism and anticipating the kind of "hybridisation" that has been claimed by postmodernism, exhibiting the latter's anti-essentialist qualities *before* the metropolitan West.³⁰

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Like Lam, Boghossian spent time in Paris, an experience that was less a pilgrimage to the European centre for colonial artists than a meeting place with others in their situation.³¹ Boghossian recalled seeing drawings by Wifredo Lam in a Paris gallery window as he was passing by, "that actually gave me a bodily shock."³² It was, again, the all-important decade of the sixties, when Frantz Fanon was also in Paris and Boghossian's circle included the African Martinique—born philosopher Aimé Césaire and the Senegalese Muslim—born historian Cheikh Anta Diop, who carved out transnational political positions that condemned French colonialism and existing African regimes, both at once.³³ Bog-

30 Cited in Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

31 Lam returned to Paris in the fifties, settled in Albisola, Italy, while still spending time in Havana, New York and Paris.

32 Cited in Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

33 As Giorgis notes, echoing Walter Benjamin, this doubly problematic contemporary reality, not some primitive past, was the collective dream out of which Africa needed to a historical awakening. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Boghossian returned to Ethiopia to teach at the Fine Art School for three years in the late sixties, leaving a

hossian's 1969 painting, *Juju's Wedding*, is a fusion of African animism and Christian divinity, idols and icons, showing the influence of traditional Ethiopian magic scrolls that Giorgis compares with the influence on Lam of the Afro-Cuban cult of Santería.³⁴

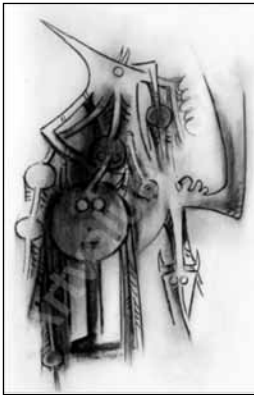


Figure 15 — Wifredo Lam, *Totem*, 1968.

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lasting impression on young Ethiopian artists before moving to the United States, where he was active in the civil rights movement. He joined Howard University in 1972 as a colleague of Jeff Donaldson, initiator in 1968 of the Afri-Cobra movement of black visual art and black power. Like Lam, multinational experiences were reflected in his art, defying any simple cultural categorisation. Lam compared himself to a Trojan horse, smuggling elements of Santería and Lucumí into European modernism. See Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the international avant-garde, 1923-1982*, *op. cit.*, p. 223. Boghossian “acknowledged the ruptures and discontinuities which constituted precisely his uniqueness.” See Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

34 Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 108. “‘Influence’ here should be understood as a contemporary aesthetic and critical interest, rather than a desire literally to return to the past. Wifredo Lam delighted in the fact that that the Afro-Cuban symbology in his work could ‘disturb the dreams of the exploiters’ while insisting, ‘I have never created my images according to a symbolic tradition, but always on the basis of poetic excitation.’” Cited in Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the international avant-garde, 1923-1982*, *op. cit.*, p. 217.



Figure 16 — Skunder Boghossian, *Ju-ju's Wedding*, 1969.

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Giorgis describes this simultaneity of history and modernity as a Benjaminian sense of time, in which “the meaning of the past is realized in the present.”³⁵ This particular use of the past in order to *be* modern, whereby the aesthetic power of historical objects is released within a contemporary force-

35 Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 83-6. Giorgis makes us realise that if Boghossian's images were dreamlike, if they could be described as “spiritual,” then it is in Benjamin's sense, as an *historical* image, and not one that is universal and unchanging (Carl Gustav Jung), or individual and ontological (Jacques Lacan). She points out that the rescue of tradition in Boghossian's paintings is in opposition to its treatment by Western art historians, who classify early Ethiopian Christian art within the Byzantine world (whereas Africanists ignore this early Christian-identified art). Hitherto, the histories of Ethiopian art have been written by Europeans most of whom did not know Amharic and therefore could not carry out original historical research. The standard text, *Major themes in Ethiopian painting* by Stanislas Chojnacki, classifies the paintings into two periods: “mediaeval” and Gonderane. Giorgis criticises “the complete omission by European scholars of transcultural influences from the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda, which Boghossian easily fused into many of his works, and which one can easily identify in Ethiopian Christian traditional paintings and architectural forms.” Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

field that is crisscrossed by multiple currents of politics and culture, produces a non-sequential temporality and is exemplary of the new, global imagination.

Within this same historical constellation is Sadequain (Figure 17), who became the founding figure of Pakistani national art.³⁶



Figure 17 — Sadequain, *The Red Couple*, 1960s.

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Like Lam and like Boghossian, Sadequain became nationally famous only after a sojourn in Paris (1961-1967) and some degree of international success. Like Lam and like Boghossian, he appropriated elements of modernity for very different purposes than artists of the West. The Parisian exhibitions of modernist painters were his *musée de l'homme*—a toolbox of raw materials, and with this toolbox he returned home to become the leading artist of the newly created Muslim nation of Pakistan.

36 Much of my material on Sadequain Naqqash (1930-1987) stems from the recent book by Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia (Islamic civilization and Muslim networks*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Called upon by the Pakistani government in the sixties to construct murals in public buildings, Sadequain painted historical panoramas that matched in their monumental sweep the Mexican murals of David Siqueiros and Diego Rivera.³⁷ His relation to the nation-building project was complicated by the intertwining of modernity with the national hegemony of Islam as the form of cultural identity.³⁸ Surprisingly, it was not in his murals but in his most personal, most Parisian paintings that references to Islam were decisive.

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37 Siqueiros and Rivera belong to an earlier generation of artists who went to Paris and returned home to become nationally identified artists. Sadequain's inspiration was Persian thinker Muhammad Iqbal (some of whose poems he illustrated). Iqbal, born in British India, studied in Britain and Germany (where he read Nietzsche with appreciation), and after the founding of Pakistan became the country's most nationally revered poet. Sadequain's murals depicted the histories of multiple civilisations. They included *Treasures of time* (State Bank of Pakistan), depicting the ascent of human intellectual life from Plato and Euclid to al-Ghazzali and Rumi, from to Shakespeare to Goethe and Marx, and from Confucius to Iqbal and Einstein; *Saga of labor* at the Mangla Dam project (built in the sixties as the twelfth largest dam in the world; and a series of ceiling murals at the Lahore Museum, described thematically as man struggling to overcome the infinitude of space. In the eighties he painted several murals in India, including 99 calligraphic panels of *Asma-e-Husna* (the beautiful names of God) at the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies at Delhi (1971-1972). He completed a mural for the power station in Abu Dhabi in 1980.

38 This was a difference between Sadequain and the Mexican muralists, whose point of departure for transnational subject matter was Marxist in inspiration. Both had an audience with Stalin, arranged by Mayakovskii, in 1928; travelling home together, they quarrelled divisively over Trotsky, whom Rivera supported. Like the Mexican muralists, Sadequain, too, meant his work for "the people," including Islamic elements precisely for that reason. Dadi notes that the artist exhibited his paintings of Qur'anic verses on sidewalks and public spaces in an industrial area in Karachi "with the intent that they would be viewed by poor laborers." Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, p. 175.



Figure 18 — Sadequain:
the artist in his studio.

In the sixties he produced a series of self-portraits of the artist in his studio that clearly echo the work of Picasso (Figure 18), but with the not so minor difference that the artist is depicted with his head in his hand—an intentional self-reference to the seventeenth-century Sufi mystic Sarmand, who wandered about naked and wrote transgressive verses that got him in trouble with the political authorities. Sarmand was beheaded in 1661 under the charge of heresy.

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Figure 19 — Sadequain, *Self-Portrait*, from the booklet, *Sadequain: sketches and drawings*, 1966.

Figure 19 is Sadequain's self-portrait, naked, with sheltering hands that in their branch-like expanse, spell out the name Allah. Arabic calligraphy, that may appear to be non-representational abstraction in Western eyes, is filled with historical, cultural *and* political content for those who are able to read it.³⁹ The artist accomplished a revival of the art of Arabic calligraphy with a distinctly modernist sensibility. Its appearance in his *Self-Portrait* is vegetative rather than textual, setting up a circuit of meaning that moves between nature and history mediated by the artist's own subjectivity.⁴⁰ Iftikhar Dadi has called such uses of hand writing in art "calligraphic modernism," characterised by the affective, gestural communication of the brushstroke itself, the emotive quality of which can be appreciated despite linguistic obscurity.⁴¹ At the same time, in other parts of the Islamic

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39 Dadi writes that while Sadequain never adopted an official ideology (nationalist, Islamist, or Communist), the political strength of his work lay in the fact that his "singular persona continued to serve as a reminder of the personal, sexual, and Sufistic surplus that could not be contained in [General] Zia's coercive and austere Islamization project." Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

40 He claimed to have "found the essence" of calligraphy in the late fifties in the silhouette form of cactus plants growing in Pakistan's seaside landscape: "Everything that I have painted since then—a city like Rawalpindi, buildings, a forest, a boat, a table or a chair, a man, a mother and child, or a woman—has been based on calligraphy, which in itself issues from the structure of the cactus." Cited in Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 150. The mural paintings have cactus-like forms in the landscape and in the drapes of clothing. Illustrations of Persian poems, including his own, integrate textual calligraphy directly.

41 Iftikhar Dadi, "Ibrahim El Salahi and calligraphic modernism in a comparative perspective," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, v. 109, n. 3, 2010, p. 555-76. As a modernist method, it allows us to compare the work of various artists from multiple nations and cultural sites, from Sadequain in Pakistan to

world artists were using the traditions of calligraphy to negotiate the postcolonial tensions between national belonging and a new consciousness that was, in Dadi's words, "larger than the iconography of any single nation state."⁴²



Figure 20 —
Sadequain,
illustration, 1960s,
from *Rubiyat-e-
Sadequain Kuliya*,
published in 2010.



Figure 21 — Madiha
Umar, Baghdad, n. d.

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A decade before Sadequain, the Syrian born artist Madiha Umar explored the formal elements of Arabic calligraphy

Franz Klein in New York City. See also Iftikhar Dadi, "Sadequain and calligraphic modernism," Chapter 3 of *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 134-76.

42 Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 161. Artists working "not collaboratively or possibly without even knowing much about each other's work" were creating through calligraphy "an aesthetic of Muslim cross-national modernism" that "bears some correspondences" with the transnational Black aesthetic of Négritude.

(Figure 20). “Modern” in Umar’s work (Figure 21) is the way she breaks apart the letters into their visual components, a destruction of literate-ness that has been described as working to “free the Arabic letters from its bondage.”⁴³

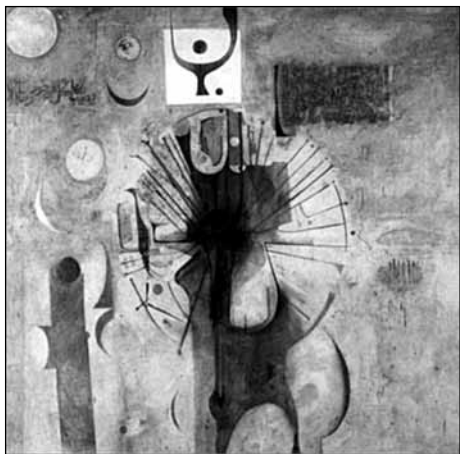


Figure 22 — Ibrahim Mohammed El-Salahi (Sudan), *The last sound*, 1964.

By the sixties, calligraphic modernism as a practice that de-emphasised literal meaning became widespread, allowing artists to communicate to each other across national and linguistic divides. The Sudanese artist El-Salahi created an

43 The first woman to receive a scholarship for international study from the Iraqi government in the thirties, she lived in Europe and the United States before returning to Iraq, and was in dialogue with Western art historians (Richard Ettinghausen, for instance) on the significance of calligraphy for Islamic aesthetics more generally. See Faye Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American artists*, Greenwood, Westport, Connecticut, 2007, p. 256. Dadi also acknowledges Umar as a forerunner, but would question calligraphy’s role as the determining figure in a uniquely Islamic history of art, rather than seeing the emergence of Islamic calligraphic as a distinctly modernist practice, allowing global comparisons to other artists of the time. Compare with Giorgis’ critique of Ethiopian historians of art, above, footnote 37.

interplay between calligraphy and figuration, combining African motifs with calligraphic elements, and celestial bodies with animate forms in the 1964 painting *The last sound* (Figure 22). While the work's title refers to a specific Islamic practice of reciting prayers for the dead and dying to accompany the soul's passing from the corporeal to the celestial, it is "manifestly modern" in its dynamic integration of forms.⁴⁴ El-Salahi's experimental practices, rejected in the salon culture of postcolonial Sudan, engaged with "a more democratic and vernacular visual culture."⁴⁵

It was El-Salahi's use of Arabic calligraphy that inspired the Ethiopian artist Boghossian (when the two were in Paris) to create his *Feedel series*, which incorporated the forms of Amharic letters (the script of the Ethiopian Christian church), intentionally merging the oppositional moments of abstraction and realism, the sacred and the profane.⁴⁶ In Iraq, and Iran as well, the Arab cosmopolitanism of "calligraphic modernism" was, writes Dadi, a progressive aspect of the return of artists to tradition: "the abstract/calli-

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44 Iftikhar Dadi, "Ibrahim El-Salahi and calligraphic modernism," *op. cit.*, p. 555-6. El-Salahi was educated at London's Slade School of Fine Art in the fifties; in the sixties he travelled in West Africa, Europe, Mexico, and (with extended fellowships) in the United States.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 563. Dadi writes, "As [El-Salahi] describes it, this transformation demanded breaking open the Arabic letter and exploring the new aesthetic universe that emerged from the fragments and the interstices."

46 Boghossian "started working on calligraphy in Paris, heavily influenced by Ibrahim El-Salahi of Sudan, who at the time was working on Arabic calligraphy. Boghossian joked that an Ethiopian always wanted abstraction with a bit of realism, and is the reason why he started creating the *Feedel series*." Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 89-90.

graphic mode pries open the boundaries of the nationalist frame,” cutting “across temporality and geography, thereby propelling this body of work into the present.”⁴⁷

Interestingly, a parallel revival of calligraphy also took place in East Asia in the sixties.



Figure 23 — Liu Guosong,
Which is Earth?, n. 9, 1969.

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The *Moon series* by Liu Guosong, which we have already considered, evinced a similar technique (Figure 23), combining the brush techniques of traditional landscape painting with the cosmopolitan potential of calligraphy. Liu wrote that he discovered abstraction precisely within the brushstroke of traditional Chinese landscape painting that often incorporated calligraphic forms.⁴⁸ China, it should

47 Iftikhar Dadi, “Ibrahim El-Salahi and calligraphic modernism,” *op. cit.*, abstract and p. 567.

48 David Clarke, “Abstraction and modern Chinese art,” Kobena Mercer *et al.* (eds.), *Discrepant abstraction*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT

be noted, was a politically fractured landscape, including the Maoist People's Republic of China, the British colony of Hong Kong, and the nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan—areas whose residents speak such different dialects that only *through* writing is communication possible. Yet for Liu as well, the familiar calligraphic shapes, released from literal meaning, became visual forms that have affinities with the natural world. His description of the process echoes the motivations of Boghossian, Sadequain and El-Salahi, treating the past, as a modern painter, in order to break away from it. In 1965 he wrote, “We are neither ancient Chinese nor modern Westerners. If copying ancient Chinese paintings is forgery, so is producing modern Western paintings.” His goal was to achieve a new kind of painting altogether: “‘Chinese’ and ‘modern’ are the two blades of the sword which will slash the Westernized and traditionalist schools alike.”⁴⁹ In all of these examples of calligraphic modernism, language—that element in social life which is experienced as most exclusionary—leaves textual rootedness and even semantic legibility, and allows artists to participate globally in the creation of something new.

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There is another shared aspect of the new global aesthetic that deserves comment, the fact that in the various instances we have been considering (from orbiting the moon to postcolonial art), the reproduced image has been fundamental in the emergence of a global sensibility. Temporal simultaneity and spatial coexistence on a global scale are

Press, 2006, p. 80.

49 *Ibid.*

“experienced” only virtually, mediated by the image. For postcolonial art, the importance of the reproduced image is striking. While the artists we have been considering spent a significant period of time training and working in the West, their first exposure to modernism was mediated. Wifredo Lam first became familiar with the work of Picasso and Matisse through magazines brought back from Paris by friends.⁵⁰ Dadi writes that “Sadequain had formed his initial impressions of European modern art from magazine reproductions,” a decontextualisation that allowed for “mistranslation” of the European modernist works, freeing them “to be perceived in the Pakistani context without their ideological baggage.”⁵¹

330 Again and again we find documentation of this fact.⁵² The technologies of reproduction—camera and film, illustrated magazine and televised broadcast—allow the image

50 Lowery Stokes Sims, “The postmodern modernism of Wifredo Lam,” Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan modernisms*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2005, p. 89.

51 Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 150 and 153.

52 Mitter, writing on Indian modernism, notes, “From the 1920s onwards, as modernist ‘technologies’ like cubism came into India, and were adopted, we need to examine how art reproductions in books and magazines contributed to the reinterpretation of cubism that was specific to the Indian context (...) [T]he main sources used by colonial artists were reproductions (...)” Partha Mitter, “Reflections on modern art and national identity in colonial India: an interview,” in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan modernisms*, *op. cit.*, p. 26. Pakistan-born London artist Rashid Areen recalls being introduced to modern art in Karachi “through the information we used to get in the magazine and books imported from the West (...)” *ibid.*, p. 162. Perhaps, echoing Blumenberg (see above), it would not have been necessary to send artists to Paris after all if what was to be brought back was, above all, images!

to meet the beholder halfway (to paraphrase Walter Benjamin⁵³). And far from being a problem for artists, far from degrading artistic production through a loss of aura, these widely dispersed images decreased the authority of the metropole over the postcolonial artist, for whom modernist techniques, ripped out of their original contexts, became useful tools within transnational networks producing intercultural solidarities. The anti-auratic appropriation of the image via technological reproductions is foundational for a global aesthetics.



Figure 24 — Sadequain, *Martin Luther King* (Christ series), 1960s.

53 “Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway.” Walter Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt (ed.), translated from the German by Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 220.

Not only artistic but also political experiences circulated through images, bringing issues of social justice to world visibility in a global public sphere. Since the sixties, no political issue has been merely national (Figure 24), and yet international solutions have remained elusive. Postcolonial societies learned during the Cold War that US foreign policy all too often sacrificed democratic ideals for national self-interest. At the same time, postcolonial movements attracted to Marxism became disillusioned by the Soviet Union's equally self-interested policy of backing brutal dictatorial regimes.

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All of the artists we have been considering experienced the political ambiguities that the Cold-War rhetoric of absolute differences disavowed. None of them compromised their creative independence to back a particular political regime; none of them followed the whims of the art market; all of them risked the existential security of a simple national or cultural identity as a consequence. But the political significance of this art *for us* is not limited to the intention of the artists. By rescuing local traditions as a way of being global, they anticipated the political challenges of our time.

Conclusion

To return to the question is art history global?, the answer calls for remapping time as well as space, and questioning the most basic categories of our historical narratives—ones that privilege the sorting out of aesthetic production by national, civilisational or cultural identities. It

demands that we question models of explanation based on causal influence, defining creativity in terms of an authentic original, disseminated mimetically in the form of degraded copies. From a global perspective, what is primitive about the modern is precisely the opposite of the mythic or the archaic. “Primitive” here is fully historical: it means originary, the first stage, describing *Urforms* of the global present and possibilities of a time to come.⁵⁴ What is called for is nothing short of a transformation of scholarship, its empirics, its theories, but also, and perhaps most significantly, the social relations of art as property (of the artist-creator, or the culture/nation/ethnicity to which s/he “belongs”) that underlie both theoretical conceptualisations and the empirical research that sustains them.

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Elkins’ comment regarding Western universities not hiring Chinese-trained historians of art is valid within the given frameworks of knowledge. But if the established disciplines cling to their foundational narratives that lead into the *cul-de-sac* of postmodernism, then Western universities will find themselves irrelevant and no self-respecting intellectual will want to teach at them. But the alternative is not to get on the bandwagon of art’s present globalisation—commercial markets, museums and biennials as currently arranged. No rupture with the past would jus-

54 *Urform* (primordial) means primitive in this sense. The term has a scientific correlate: the “primitive” streak is the beginning of life: “a faint white trace at the uppermost end of the germinal area, formed by an aggregation of cells, and constituting the first indication of the development of the blastoderm.” See the *American illustrated medical dictionary*, p. 702.

tify totally jettisoning the history of art as just too much excess baggage, in favour of a continuous contemporaneity that flatters the already amnesia-prone profession, and lulls artists, critics and art promoters into believing that their blissful ignorance is liberation. We need history, now more than ever, but it will involve a transnational expropriation of the cultural heritage, a rescue of history in the communist mode.

334 Today we hold the world in our hands, but only virtually. Modernity's hoped-for "family of man" remains a body in pieces. The creative forces of the present explode the structures of history, scattering fragments of the past forward into unanticipated locations. These fragments have multiple affinities that cannot be known beforehand, which is a good thing. Their juxtaposition in the present produces unforeseen constellations, providing new readings of the past as a way of charting a different future. Entering multiple constellations, they shine the brighter for it.⁵⁵

In the early twenties, with the rise of European modernity, Georg Lukács lamented the fact that modern society had lost every image of the whole. Influenced by Hegel, he believed that the totality of the past could only be grasped as a sequence of stages that led all of humanity from feu-

55 If the reader detects in this conclusion a theological inflection after all, I admit to having in mind Walter Benjamin's description of utopia, in the context of his philosophy of history: "[N]othing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history," *Illuminations*, p. 254.

dalism to capitalism and beyond. *This* trajectory of history has indeed come to an end. But the history of humanity, far from over, may be just at the beginning.

