

Comparativism from Inside and Outside: Not only a matter of viewpoint

Review of:

Comparativism in Art History, edited by Jaś Elsner, London & New York: An Ashgate Book, Routledge, 2017, ISBN 978-1-472-41884-5 hardback, 234 pages with 84 B&W illustrations. £76

John Clark

This is a very heterogenous book with many different kinds of approaches, all of whose writers are found solidly within existing Anglo-American art historical, anthropological and archaeological institutions. There is no writer from a non-Euramerican institution, and the two writers of Asian background – Stanley Abe and Wu Hung - are already well-emplaced in the US' academic world. The publishers state on their web-site blurb for this book that,

Art history is less a single discipline than a series of divergent scholarly fields but all with a visual emphasis on the close examination of objects.¹

It may be that, for some of these authors, art history is about the historically aesthetic character of art works and only tangentially about the social meaning art works carry, that it relegates as outside consideration those forces which are external to art productions, is unconcerned with other-cultural constructions, and consequently de-emphasizes the institutions of the art world which constrain these. The 'Acknowledgements' make a reference to an undated 'conference' under the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Institute of Fine Arts, New York University [vii], a grant awarded in a programme which apparently ran for the years 2011-2016,² but except for a further reference in the introduction [1], the reader is given no further details of the conference, its participants and papers, and therefore can make no direct appraisal of the linkage to those in the present volume. Of present writers Stanley Abe is revealed to have been a 'blind' academic reader subsequently invited to be 'outed' by Elsner [vii], to contribute his own paper, and to co-edit the introduction. To the interlaced, genealogical fabric of these placements may be

My thanks to Stephen Whiteman for some useful critical reaction to a first draft.

¹ <https://www.routledge.com/Comparativism-in-Art-History/Elsner/p/book/9781472418845>

² See <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/fineart/research/mellon/IFA-MellonInitiative-report.pdf>. The report indicates that the project called '*Pathways to the Future* represents the culmination of a four-year project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation' which was initially granted in 2010. So the book we now in 2017 examine called *Comparativism in Art History* is part of project to re-evaluate the training of art historians and their knowledge base some eight years ago.

added the twist that the publisher and publishing team changed during the final editing.

This collection thus has a somewhat bewildering set of cross-links which might be supplemented by the book's apparent genuflection to the notion of a world art history. The introduction includes a note on recent contributions [some of which include texts by me] [13], but then remarks almost casually at the end,

Little of this literature has really taken on board the complex of methodological and historiographic comparativist issues that necessarily underlie any global art or world art scholarly agenda. [14].

Maybe the world view of participating art historians has moved on somewhat since the original conference[s], but this book was surely the place at which a summary of the literature on world art history should have been offered. A critique might have been presented from the perspective of the current authors, if only as a clarification of difference and not just as a casual aside which discards the opportunity to take up many aspects of the art historiographical issues of writing about world art. The reader will very soon realize the collection is a series of scholarly and well thought-through examinations of the art history of the classical European world in comparison with the Mediterranean, with Han/Tang China, with Islam, and with a few tribal art cases thrown in. The reader will not find a systematic analysis of comparative world art history from the positions the authors represent. Indeed, since this book still remains normative art history from a Euramerican standpoint, despite apparent good intentions toward the global. It denies in principle the idea that there might be a world art history already present outside Euramerica. Did no-one in Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea – to give a few of the obvious lacunae - write any art history of a comparative nature worth considering here, many in languages other than English? There is a slightly pitying air made evident:

There is nothing (but hard work) to prevent modern scholars producing models that belong within non-European cultural frames and categories, for thinking about images within given cultures, as opposed to using only imported categories borrowed from European art history (like iconography, style, form, historical context and the rest of the normal box of tricks with which art historians work and in which they are trained. [10]

No intellectual patience is required with this sort of ignorance. Some non-Euramerican cultures may lack the academic institution of art history or have only established it relatively recently along Euramerican lines. This does not mean they lacked writings which we can only now term art historical or artists and scholars who *worked art historically*, since the 9th century in China and the 16th century in Japan, to name some notable cases.³ Thus the preposterous statement that,

³ One can even make the case that art historical art began in the 6th century with Gu Kaizhi and the subsequent copying of his work. For texts assembled see, *inter alia*, Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai Minghua Ji* [Record of Famous Painters of all Dynasties], assembled by 847 CE. In

there exist no equivalent collections [of art documents] for the arts of the Islamic world, India, China or Japan [9/10]

These comments should have been excised by an informed editor. If this is the case for peoples with written documents, it is also for those with deep oral cultures. Do we think art history only belongs to those who operate inside religious iconographies or later museums with bureaucratic cultures integrated by a written ideology? It is not only some rhetoric of post-colonial guilt that acknowledges that peoples without written texts also have oral texts or oral genealogies which comprise a very deep historical sense, even if this is not a Euramerican literalist and chronological one. There are also already a good few texts even in European languages which assault the Eurocentricity of such an art history from which they try to escape. Sometimes they end up being re-encapsulated by Euramerican frames, but they have changed the terms of the discourse within it.⁴

I suspect it is because the authors are not principally concerned with the modern that they think of art history as a discipline of interpreting objects which transcends the temporal context in which art history is now placed. Perhaps

English see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, compiled and edited, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. See also Zheng Wuchang, *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* [a complete history of Chinese Painting Theory, Chen Peiqiu selected, original 1929], Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2001; Yu Jianhua, ed., *Zhongguo Hualun Leibian* [A Classificatory Compendium of Chinese Pictorial Theory], Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1957. 2nd ed, 1986. From Japan there are, *Tôhaku Gasetsu* [Hasegawa Tôhaku, Theory of Painting] 1595, notes by Miyamoto Toyomune, place of publication unclear, Wakô Shuppansha, before 1965; *Honchô Gashi* [A Kano house book, A History of Painting in Japan], 1691. Kasai Masaaki et al ed, Kyoto: Dôhōsha 1985; recent Japanese texts are assembled in Akai Tatsurô, Shimizu Zenzô, Tanaka Hisao, Yoshida Tomoyuki, *Shiryô Nihon bijutsushi*, [Materials on the History of Japanese Art] Kyoto: Sun Purinto, 1983, and Nakamura Kôji, Kishi Fumikazu eds., *Nihon Bijutsu wo manabu hito no tame*, [For those who wish to learn Japanese Art], Kyoto: Sekaishisôsha, 2002, including extensive analysis of historical documents, 345-416.

⁴ Unfortunately they seem to have escaped the attention of the authors of these essays. They include my own work in *Modern Asian Art*, Sydney: Craftsman House & Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, and *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai art of the 1980s and 1990s*, Sydney, Power Publications, 2010. There are a plethora of analyses of indigenous Australian art and a wide range of reconstructions of what it meant to have a European art in Australia, surely directly relevant to the comparativist themes of the present essays. These include: Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, London: Phaidon 1998; Ian McClean, introduction and editing, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*, Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art & Sydney: Power Publications, 2011; Ian McClean, *Rattling Spears, a history of indigenous Australian art*, London: Reaktion Books, 2016, now assiduously criticized by Ann Stephen in 'On Rattling Spears', *Art Monthly Australasia*, issue 298, May 2017, 62-64 [online at <https://reader.exacteditions.com/issues/56389/spread/65>]

For a recent critical understanding of art historiography in Australia which might be of reference in comparativist art history see the biography of Bernard Smith, Sheridan Palmer, *Hegel's Owl: The life of Bernard Smith*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2016, and papers from a commemorative conference, Jaynie Anderson, Christopher R. Marshall and Andrew Yip, eds., *The Legacies of Bernard Smith: essays on Australian Art, History and Cultural Politics*, Sydney: Power Publications & Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2016.

comparativist art history always requires special justification when there is no apparent aetiological connection between the art cultures compared. But there should be no special privilege for art history which deals with the modern and contemporary which is always already implacably relativist and comparative. The problem may be that the unspoken naturalness of art work series is not called into question by many pre-modern comparativist studies when these series are essentially the construction of collection or museum cultures. The methodological difference between art history of the aetiologically unconnected pre-modern and the intricately and clearly interlinked modern is also partly because the premise of the modern is to bracket or create a contradistinction of the 'modern' from the naturalized 'customary' and constructs thereby a pair of back-to-back concepts, 'the modern' and 'the traditional'.⁵

To benefit from the authors' considerable rhetorical skills in the domain of art history, one must look further for what they point to: what comparativism is as a basis for art history or as an aspect of art historical procedures from the standpoint of the authors, and what their positive understanding and negative exclusions clarify. There are 'substantive problems in how the sub-fields can speak coherently to each other' and their examination is 'urgent since the shift from an art history centered on the western tradition to one that is consciously global'.⁶ Since some essays are different in approach, rather than now in review adumbrate overall positions which would require considerable qualification in some cases, it may be easier for the reader if I proceed by going through the essays in sequence.

Introduction: some stakes of comparison: Stanley Abe and Jaś Elsner

Abe and Elsner's Introduction is full of claims about the consequences of the arrival of global art history on Eurocentric models, and I have already discussed how in the outcome this issue is unaddressed. But there are acknowledgements of where within the Euramerican continuum relativism was addressed, as for example by Riegl, and how the earlier and still implicit Euramerican claims for mono-cultural genealogy as a source of intellectual authority and indeed methodological control in art history have to be set aside. This is indicated, but all its consequences not quite worked through.

Part of the radical dissonance of the new comparativism has to be the break with arguments that take ancestralist linkage as a positive and self-evident teleology of value, as well as the willingness to place comparative genealogies side by side without preference for one of them [4]

⁵ See the many contributions by Terry Smith, including *Transformations in Australian Art: Volume One: The nineteenth century –Landscape, Colony, and Nation; Volume Two: The Twentieth Century: Modernism and Aboriginality*; Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002; and by Geeta Kapur in *When was Modernism, Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2000.

⁶ See again <https://www.routledge.com/Comparativism-in-Art-History/Elsner/p/book/9781472418845>

Indeed both Wu Hung and Jeremy Tanner will later refer to the obvious cultural ecumene-transcending issue in the figural representation which arises in 5th century BCE Greece and late 5th century CE six dynasties China [after Han, before Tang] to which I will return. The problem with the abandonment of exceptionalism is: whose exceptionalism? Because one can very easily observe cultures which are on the receiving, implicitly oppressed, side of art historical understanding quite simply insisting that their models – even only implicit ones – and their art historical realities are different from Euramerica, and that Euramerican universalism is the exception. There is no simple way out of this loop. It could result in an imaginary and intellectual gap, but denying exceptionalism per se is to ignore cases where accepting it may be required because of local cultural authority.

As we have seen above Abe and Elsner state that the way to depend less on Eurocentric models is to devise local models and apply them locally. The rather convenient catholicity of their position sets aside all the work on deriving and applying those models already done by the late 20th century. The proposition might be better put culturally the other way around and rephrased as,

There is nothing but the absence of our own linguistic and cultural hard work which will prevent our recognising modern scholars producing models that belong within non-European cultural frames and categories.

Of course the people able to work with this kind of cultural insight and linguistic skill are restricted in number as are the resources to achieve them, but one might think the task is not quite as insuperable as Abe and Elsner suggest, nor indeed is it the case that these skills and research results are entirely lacking, even from Anglophone discourse. Indeed if the book had cast its net more widely wouldn't it discover this achieved scholarship in its own postgraduate and research professor communities?⁷ If the comparativists seek to go beyond bi-cultural juxtaposition, shouldn't the existing work which has done this be more recognized beyond the Global Ancient Art Center at Chicago or the Empires of Faith programme in the UK with which Elsner is associated and which he details in three pages [11-13] of the introduction? Elsner claims not to sing the praises of any one of

⁷ To list the titles of some recent PhD theses in Sydney, in no particular sequence, these include: *State of the Art and Art of the State: Komuro Suiun (1874–1945) and Nanga in Imperial Japan*; *Avant Gardes Nationalism and the emergent nation in Indian art, 1880-1960*; *Singapore Modern Art*; *Post Modernism in Malaysian Art of the 1980s*; *On ghost stories and narrative style as origins for modern Manga*; *Ink Painting in China during the 1980s and 1990s*; *Makers and Models: Decorative Lintels of Khmer Temples, 7th to 11th centuries*; *Installation art in SE Asia*; *The discourse of modernity in Japanese dress*; *Fashion masking and gender in Japan*; *Xingwei Yishu Performance art in Post-Mao China*; *On Human form: aesthetic alternatives for painting in modern China*; *Out of the mould: contemporary ceramic sculpture in Vietnam*; *Propaganda as Art in Singapore*; *Women's Art in Taiwan from the Japanese Occupation to Provincial Exhibitions*; *National expression and Modern Chinese Art*; *Chasing Phantoms: the progressive cinema in Japan, 1926-1936*.

these projects [13] but isn't that exactly what concentrating on this small group of projects does?

Our literal speed: Our Literal Speed, a text and art enterprise in Selma, Alabama, [constituted by Christopher Heuer and Matthew Jesse Jackson, 4]

A textualization of a performance given at the original conference in New York [5], Abe and Elsner state that,

This published version is itself a kind of inadequate or at least differently experienced record [5]

One can only agree with the editors since this text includes performance descriptors which do not add up to prose –*does air quotes*, [23]; *in a demonstrative pompous voice* [23]- and deals with questions of comparison and conversational positioning as an art historical method. It raises serious issues but as here textualized affects a theoretical-theological mode that not only jars, it does not present open discussion:

As a hyper-mediated world of half-forms, and quasi-content surrounds us via the Internet, the textual/interpretive bias of art historical scholarship has the inadvertent effect of disregarding the signifying structures of most non-textual activities. [19]

Maybe this is true, and certainly the expression of the idea is clear enough, but like a sermon or a patriarchal speech in an Ibsen play, it hardly leaves room for constructive disagreement by the reader.

Locations of comparison: Wu Hung

Unlike other essays interested in comparison as method, Wu Hung is interested in art historians as comparison makers from different locations. This background affects their methods and viewpoints. Indeed one might propose that comparative art history was always involved when 'Western' concepts were applied in China, or Chinese art historians with a background in Chinese art historical methods and concerns moved outside China. The latter move, sometimes accompanied by multilinguality and involving not just a binary switch between English and Chinese, made such art historians profoundly translingual, like many other Asian and Near Eastern art historians who worked in Europe and North America. The recurrent comparative model is the problem of representation of the human figure in space as a three-dimensional projection into a two-dimensional pictorial frame together with its symbolic functions for pictorial discourse.⁸ Wu Hung also proposes three concepts to bridge regional art histories: temporal bridging and a return to

⁸ See Wen Fong, 'Prologue: Chinese Calligraphy as Presenting the Self' in Wang Yuchi et al, *Chinese Calligraphy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 1-31, and Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 261-280.

comparative ideals in the distant past as in 'classicism'; rupture, as in the cutting of the supposed continuity of tradition; and finally, relative speed, accelerated and decelerated transitions in art responding to social change, and in art theatrically exaggerating the scale of such transitions for art's own symbolic needs or pattern of discourse.⁹

Bivisibility: Whitney Davis

Davis reprises an earlier distinction of his between *visibility* and *visuality*.¹⁰ His particularly contorted definition of this distinction [43] in a six-line sentence with four bracketed parentheses indicates, perhaps, the difference between what can be seen *within* a cultural frame and what can be constructed to be seen *by means of* that cultural frame, particularly when the visuality concerns a special class of works we call art works. The visual field is always larger than the restricted or directed uses to which cultures put the visual, and which may do so at the same time as the visual field is recognized; that is, art history is always comparative because it is based on this simultaneous bivisibility. This distinction is not ultimately so daunting:

Visibility and visuality are not opposites. They are not natural kinds that differ in essential respects. Rather, visuality is one historical aspect of visibility [44]

Davis later sees one of the dominant rhetorics in North American art history to be interculturalist with doubts about its realization remaining. As often is the case, a rather straightforward formal analogy between two series of art works - the Greek *kouroi* and their putative Egyptian predecessors - becomes a peg on which to hang a simple theoretical distinction, one with nonetheless considerable indicative power for interpretation. Whether objects and the art historical issues their series present are to be culturally separated seems more a question of the power relations between the objects current 'owners' than one of art historical formalism. At least the latter is very often deflected into and occluded by the former, be it a nation seeking after 'classic' antecedents, or be it the longing for a post-hegemonic, post-colonial identity to be achieved by a bifurcation in the mind, if not in the series of art objects in the world.

Redundancy, transformation and Impersonation: Margaret Olin

⁹ Wu Hung has written eloquently on ruins in a way which allies art historical understanding with the theorization of contemporary art practice in *A Story of Ruins, presence and absence in Chinese art and visual culture*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

¹⁰ Using the metaphor of a 'Chinese' pilot landing on an unknown 'Western' airfield, Davis puts this more succinctly in Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, 36:

The forms of likeness of these objects are clearly distinct for the two agents *even if the objects themselves look exactly the same* [Davis' italics] –indeed, even if the objects *are* the same. The same objects can have many forms of likeness, possibly distinct and even incompatible forms of likeness, depending on the visual-cultural history of the agents who see them; that is, who recognize the same, overlapping, or wholly different aspects.

Olin thinks that,

..comparison made in descriptions can be seen as forms of dialog that cross time and space and migrate from one discourse to another. They can also be seen as forms of art. [60]

Olin is really unconcerned with the other-cultural origins of art works which are compared to make an inter-cultural, comparative art history possible, but more via her understanding of Alois Riegl, to think of,

The work of art as a primary source whose infinite value it is the scholar's task to unleash, then the scholar needs to interpret, or translate, the work for an audience. If the audience for an art historical explanation is really to understand the work, it will have to make the work its own, and it will then remain primary. [75]

She thus belongs to that school of art historians who think, or the implications of whose thought are to think, that art objects originate in culture-free spaces governed by artistic choices and are thereby able to stand as a series origin which itself is not culturally constrained. This may be all very well if the cultural spaces are presumed to be cognate, but what if they are not? In Olin's essay, there is no journeying out into those inter-cultural lacunae or in-between states which characterize all comparison across cultural boundaries, and knowledge of which is the basis for dissolving their boundary impediments.

The object in the comparative context: Ittai Weinryb

Weinryb sees comparative research as uncovering peculiarity and the pursuit of its connections as explained by transregional exchange. He compares the reception of the knowledge of an Arab astrolabe into the form of a stone sculpture in medieval Europe and, by reference to more recent critics, evaluates the historical comparativism of Marc Bloch, advanced originally in 1928, and applied originally to rituals explained by George Frazer.

Sculpture: a comparative history: Stanley Abe

Abe says there was no concept of sculpture in China until the nineteenth century invention of a notion of 'Chinese sculpture'. This position conflates the terminology of classification and its underlying concepts with the terms used for objects to be called 'sculpture' in the later art historical distinctions. Abe reinforces as 'Chinese' non-ideas of sculpture which were those of the 'literati', as if their collection would have sanctified the presence of 'art' in non-Chinese terms.

Zaoxiang ['made images', sculpture] were for veneration or protection. They were practical (and superstitious) objects inappropriate for the collections of refined, educated connoisseurs. [96]

But we [should] know from the sculpture in a neighbouring culture, Japan, that not only was Buddhist sculpture venerated because of the institutional base in temple society, it achieved a realism capable of critical comparison in the terms of European art history themselves with that of renaissance Europe.¹¹ I think Abe has misconceived the problem, after his long, erudite book on decorative or Chinese relief sculpture,¹² and has not recognized a pre-modern space into which conceptual discourse about sculpture between 'Europe' and 'China' can be brought. Is this a negative consequence of art historical comparativism? 'They' didn't have series of works [collections] or concepts [words we recognize as allowing us to typify these] and therefore 'we' don't need to ask where their works were/are comparable?¹³

Intersecting historiographies: Henri Pirenne, Ernst Herzfeld and the myth of origin: Avinoam Shalem

Shalem carefully analyses the essentializing tendencies of Pirenne whose controversial book - the gist was published as an article in 1922, completed in 1935 and published in 1937 - *Muhammad and Charlemagne*, [111], was fascinated like many other scholars in these essays by the gap between the classical world and the European Middle Ages, and sought to imbricate in this the rise of Islam in the Middle East. The problem was which Islam? Where was its rise and the formation of its art? Herzfeld considered Islamic art sprang almost from nowhere and presented a uniformity throughout its whole world. [118] His attitude

..assumes that Islamic art has a distinct and special identity, one that is generalizable forever thereafter, in the very moment it attains its first appearance as novel or different, which comes to mean original and distinctive. [119]

Seeing a cultural ecumene as having one kind of art both in its origins and at a final, developed stage, is a problem of much comparativism in art history which tends to unify what was in the world more diffuse and discontinuous, even in the historical record as assembled in museums [some would say especially so]. Shalem at the end of his essay cites Terry Allen's clarification which can also apply to many kinds of comparative art history:

¹¹ See the essay 'Style in Buddhist Sculpture', by Kato Shuichi, in *Form, Style, Tradition: Reflections on Japanese Art and Society* [tr John Bester], Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, 59-126.

¹² See Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

¹³ The question can be posed in reverse with similar adverse consequences for comparativism, such as Kuki Shūzō, *An Essay on Japanese Taste - The Structure of Iki*, [with a foreword by Nakano Hajimu, translated by John Clark, Co-edited with notes by John Clark and by Sakuko Matsui], Sydney, Power Publications, 1997, and my critique of Kuki's cultural aggressiveness is found in 'Sovereign Domains: *The Structure of Iki*', *Japan Forum*, vol.10, no.2, 1998, 197-209, reprinted in *Modernities of Japanese Art*, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

We tend to see early Islamic Art as radically new not because it was, but because we collapse the time scale over which it developed new forms, and we identify the end product, later Islamic art, with its origins. [125]

Comparativism in anthropology: big questions and scale comparison – an illusive dream?: Susanne Küchler

For Küchler comparativism has ceased to be a defining paradigm in anthropology, tending to be replaced by ‘styles of comparison’, [131] due to a shift by a postcolonial requirement to engage the specificity of emergent cultural landscapes, and a shift from the investigation of social facts in their own right to their conceptualization as constructions. [131] Of course academic intellectual discourse is involved in seeing the limitations of previous paradigms, and it does seem necessary for art history to keep a close eye on shifts in anthropological debates, since anthropology is inherently comparativist and multi-disciplinary. Anthropology as a discipline and anthropologists as its human practitioners, cross the boundaries of very differently situated worlds, ones where the consequences of moving can produce unusual, or heteronormative results such as,

... an Ocean world, where invisible currents and winds define the fate of a journey, the canonical position [the description of prototypicality in the hylomorphic model which links material and form] is as unlikely to be significant in calculating effective relations as it is that relations between artefacts are confined to what is observable. [140]

This is a very useful reminder as art history becomes more global, at least in its self-recognition.

Was Knidia a statue? Art history and the terms of comparison: Richard Neer

For Neer the comparativist impulse,

...identifies a culturally specific, religiously motivated experience as integral to the encounter with pre- or non-modern images; what the beholder of an efficacious cult statue actually experienced – so the reasoning goes – was not an anodyne, deracinated ‘image’ but the awesome power and presence of godhead. [145]

For Neer the problem of the comparative approach is a conflation of godhead and image, frequently by slippery use of the words for either, and reversibly for the other. [147]¹⁴ Conflation makes problematic the strong historicism of images: if we are not dealing with the same belief or concept what difference does it make that the

¹⁴ Aside from the perennial debate about illusionism or symbolic space, the debate about godheads or theologically interpreted art recurs many times in the ‘Christian’ world, including most recently in Thomas Crow, *No Idols: the Missing Theology of Art*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2017.

images might have a formal lineage across time? If the comparativist is cosmopolitan enough he or she can see across time and cultural difference by making allowances for this in their interpretation. [152] The discipline of art history,

... relies upon the transcultural, ahistorical recognition of depictions as a criterion of identity for its objects of study. [152-153]

The discipline is one where seeing is a logical and not an historical *a priori*, and the rulebook of associations is so familiar it does not have to be acknowledged in practical knowledge. [159-162]

Christian Marclay's real-time fiction: Robert Slifkin

Slifkin sees the history of modern art as motivated by a dynamic between modernism and mass culture.¹⁵ Marclay's work [*The Clock*] exemplifies,

..the ways in which recent artists have extended and complicated the comparativist paradigm of art and life that has occupied central strands of artistic practice throughout the history of modernism. [166]

In Post-modernism through appropriation and by the notion of simulacrum, representations (art) rather than presentations (life) serve as the foundational material for curatorial production [166].

Narrative, naturalism, and the body in Classical Greek and Early Imperial Chinese art: Jeremy Tanner

Tanner's essay is the most important in this book because it faces head-on the actual issues of comparativism between two distant cultural areas, Classical Greece and Early Imperial China. Perhaps readers should look at this essay first because it does what some of the other writers only talk about. He poses Bryson's view of naturalism as a symbolic construct against Gombrich's notion of an illusion gradually refined by the processes of making and matching. The parallel and historically distant development of naturalism in the Greek world and what we now call China, might mean against Bryson, that

These depictive strategies may not be arbitrary conventions but, as Gombrich might suggest, are somehow grounded in universal features of human perception? [183]

Against Gombrich, Tanner argues that the same tendencies were found in Chinese art that had appeared in Classical Greek art, but without in China a tradition of epic poetry and with an autocratic state unified under one emperor.

¹⁵ Following Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, where he analyses how the avant-garde performs 'a necessary brokerage between high and low', 35.

Wen Fong looked to calligraphy theories from the late Warring States to Tang [3rd century BCE to 7th century CE, anachronistically, since naturalism historically preceded calligraphic theory] as providing their own terms on which Chinese could master making and matching.¹⁶ Tanner seeks to resolve the conundrums between Classical Greek and Han Chinese naturalism by a more systematic comparison, by elucidating both Greek and Chinese narratives around the bodily base which allowed them to be articulated. These arguments are detailed and in full possession of the visual material in two cultural environments, including mastery of ancient language and scripts.

Tanner concludes that comparative approach allows a sharper understanding of 'naturalism', and that

the narrative art of both Classical Greece and Early Imperial China drew in a similar set of affordances of the body and of visual perception in formulating artistic styles and iconographies that permitted a much richer articulation of the relationship between persons represented interacting in such narrative... [211]

The comparative approach tells us why naturalism became a preoccupation of both traditions, one which stands against provincial isolation and its studies. Not only were new codes of behaviour the effective base for new types of representation, they provided conceptually for parallel development of body-state analogies. [214]

Conclusions of this review

This anthology is compiled from conference presentations by good writers but lets slip the chance to have an overview of world art history that problematizes exactly what intellectual differences separate these new tendencies from the assembled scholars. There may be such work done on non-Euramerican art histories which could allow their products recognition by the Euramerican lineage or hierarchy but it has not yet entered the Euramerican discourses.

¹⁶ The cross-cultural arguments about 'making and matching' are complex and rarely productive of simple comparativist art history conclusions given Gombrich's admitted ethno-centrism [to me at an Art Historians' Association Conference in the late 1980s] but in *Art and Illusion: A study of the psychology of pictorial representation* (1961) Gombrich explained that,

Archaic art starts from the schema, the symmetric frontal figure conceived for one aspect only, and the conquest of naturalism may be described as the gradual accumulations of corrections due to observations of reality.

This citation is via Wen Fong 2008, 13, but the room for comparativist, cross-cultural argument is shown immediately by Wen Fong's application of the notion of a matched outline in the following phrase:

Once the basic schema of the archaic Han image of the prancing horse was established, later Chinese artists followed toward the perfection of mastering realistic [sic=naturalistic] representation. Wen Fong, 2008, 13.

To take the counter-case of the art historical practice in Japan since the 1880s,¹⁷ the journal *Kokka* [the flower of the nation] was founded in 1889 and continuously published thereafter. Some will say this journal just comprises repeated connoisseurship studies of particularly valued collection works, but really no-one can say they are not based on an art historical perspective, even if often an implicit or nationalistic one. If there is a comparator it is either a non-specific *Seiyô* [West] or an equally idealized but supposedly much more familiar *Kara* or *Shina* or *Chûgoku* [China]. *Bijutsu Kenkyûjo* [Art Research Institute, the forerunner of today's Tokyo Cultural Properties Research Institute which inherited its library] was founded by Yashiro Yukio in 1930 on lines he had inculcated from his teacher Bernard Berenson, and with funds taken over in part from the bequest of the oil painter Kuroda Seiki who had returned to Japan in 1893. There are Chinese art historical studies from the 1920s and 1930s,¹⁸ and certainly in both the Chinese mainland and Taiwan from the 1950s¹⁹.

Really, distinguished scholars do the art historical sphere little service by not noticing how relatively old this research in an art historical mode is, let alone how very ancient some of the historical works and their documentation are which these scholars rely on. The *Zhou Li*'s mention of mural paintings is from the 6th century BCE.²⁰ We have Japanese documentation on distinction between *kara-e* and *yamato-e*

¹⁷ Some of which is evident in the writings of Okakura Kakuzô. See the section 'Categories of Art History' in my essay, 'Okakura Tenshin and Aesthetic Nationalism', in J. Thomas Rimer, ed., *Since Meiji: perspectives on the Japanese visual arts, 1868-2000*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, 229-234.

¹⁸ See inter alia, Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo Huihua shi* [History of Chinese Painting] completed in Shanghai in 1936, Xianggang: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1962, 1974. According to the compilation by Zhou Ji, *Yu Jianhua Meishu Lunwen xuan*, [A selection of Yu Jianhua's essays on art] Jinan: Shangdong Meishu Chubanshe, 1986, Yu Jianhua started publishing art historical essays as early as 1928.

¹⁹ Among which one might include on 'Chinese' painting, Fu Baoshi, *Zhongguo gudai shanshuihua shi de yanjiu*, [Research on ancient Chinese landscape painting history], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1960, or for 'Western' painting, Li Zhao, *Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi*, [The History of Early Period Oil Painting in China], Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2004. For Taiwan there are also many original contributions including Yan Juanying, ed., *Taiwan Jindai Meishu Dashi Nianbiao*, [Modern Taiwanese Art, Chronology of Main Events] Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu, 1998, and Xiao Qiongrui, *Wuyue yu Dongfang, Zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou Taiwan zhi fazhan (1945-1970)* [Fifth Moon and Eastern Painting Societies: The movement to modernise Chinese Art, its development in post-war Taiwan (1945-1970)], Taipei: Dongda Tushu, 1991.

²⁰ The *Zhou Li* includes a court official 384-456 BCE stating that, the word for depiction [*tu*] contains three concepts. The first is the representation of principles and the forms of the hexagrams as such.. The second is the representation of knowledge and the study of written characters has to do with this. The third is the representation of forms, and this is painting.

As given in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, compiled and edited, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 51. The narrative paintings with moral illustrations of the Duke of Zhou were seen by Confucius in the 6th century BCE. See Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, 27.

[Paintings in the Chinese manner and in the Japanese manner] from at least the late 10th century CE,²¹ a distinction perfectly familiar to the female writer of what might well be called the world's oldest novel, *Genji Monogatari*, ca.1010 [The Tale of Genji], for which there are now four published English translations and several in French and Chinese.

As to small art historical centres in Australia, and no doubt other parts of the world distant from Euramerica in, for example, India, Iran or Argentina,²² the fact that studies have been made between at least two and often four languages and cultures, only parts of which had a Euramerican language for their expression, should have attracted some attention in any study of 'comparativism' in art history. How they all add up to a global art history remains a story for another time, and another reviewer.

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²¹ See Akiyama Terukazu, *Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyû*, [English title: Secular Painting in Early Medieval Japan] Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kôbunkan, 1964, 31-65. *Karae* as a name is traced to CE 894 and *Yamatoe* as a name to references from 999-1018. See also Ienaga Saburô, *Jôdai Yamatoe Zenshi* [A complete history of Yamato-e in the Ancient Age], Takagiri Shoin 1946, new edition, Tokyo, Meichô Kankôkai, 1998, and his *Jôdai Yamatoe Nenpyô* [A Chronology of Yamatoe in the Ancient Age], Tokyo, Meichô Kankôkai, 1998. See also Chapter Four, 'Secular painting from the Ancient Age to the Late Medieval Transition' in my *Japanese Painting: The Basic Sources*, unpublished, 1996.

²² See more recently Gabriela Siracusano & Agustina Rodríguez Romero (Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires), 'Materiality between Art, Science, and Culture in the Viceroyalties (16th-17thCenturies): An Interdisciplinary Vision toward the Writing of a New Colonial Art History', *Art in Translation* vol.9 2017, 69-91, Published online: 07 Apr 2017 at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2015.1058000>