

## The Form of Value in Global Traditions

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At the same time that scholars have questioned the totalizing opposition between “the global” and “the local,” a great deal of academic research of late has focused on tensions between vast movements of people, capital, culture, germs, goods, and forms of violence across space and the distinct, often unpredictable ways that wide-spread phenomena inhabit particular places. Scholars now tend to focus on what channels, limits, and sometimes blocks processes that were formerly over-generalized as “globalization.” George Yudice suggests that cultural forms have been thoroughly commodified, converted into goods that are exchanged globally. He suggests that attempts to challenge social, economic, and political subordination undertaken by social movements and impoverished communities now often take the form of efforts to shape how “their” cultural forms are commodified and gain part of the income derived from their capitalization. In the face of the restructurings of value initiated by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), free trade agreements, and transnational corporations, intellectual property rights become a key locus of efforts by the powerful to monopolize the extraction of value and for the poorer and less powerful producers of cultural forms to lay claim to their own creative products. How forms proliferate and travel and how value is created and controlled are both shifting rapidly in the twenty-first century.

Since the late seventeenth century, projecting a new evolutionary period or phase always seems to involve new recourse to the demise of tradition. Anthony Giddens thus defines “reflexive modernity” negatively as “post-traditional,” reiterating the familiar trope of tradition as being oral, ritualistic, the social glue of the premodern world, and the antithesis of individualism—“modernity,” he writes, “destroys tradition.” This characteristic framing denies the self-awareness to be found in more careful attention to premodern cultures. By the same token, it fails to recognize its vision of tradition as modernity’s own projection, to say nothing of traditionalization as a key practice of the modern nation-state.

As has been true for three centuries, moreover, new epistemologies, technologies, and dispersions of people and culture are resulting in new sites and practices of traditionalization. Indeed, the post-9-11 climate of fear and insecurity has augmented postmodern feelings of fragmentation and dislocation, thereby promoting new nostalgias—and thus emerging regimes of traditional value. Nestor García Canclini suggests that producing new modernities involves creating new traditionalities; the nation-state continues to be one locus of this process, but sites of creativity and

contestation now extend far beyond national borders and are shaped by institutions, elites, and social movements whose scope is global, at the same time that they occupy niches generated by the fragmentation of nation-state projects.

These processes have created powerful new dynamics in the relationship between form and value. Technological/aesthetic transformations in the music industry, for example, blur lines between production and reproduction, as practices of sampling and mixing decontextualize “traditional” cultural forms vis-à-vis connections with particular artists and places in the process of exploiting and transforming their formal properties. One sort of example is provided by the way that musical group Deep Forest appropriated a field recording of a Solomon Islands song and converted into a global hit that generated huge revenues—but not for either performer Afunakwa or ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp. On the other hand, changes in the way that music is recorded, reproduced, and distributed enables artists without access to corporate production and marketing outlets to make their own CDs and sell them via street peddlers, thereby creating “new” modes of production and consumption for “old” cultural forms. At the same time that UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage provides a regime for traditionalizing cultural forms on a global stage—as executed by nation-states—internal refugees in Colombia are creating individual archives of “traditional” forms from the regions they were forced to flee on their laptops, as Ana María Ochoa has written. New modes of producing and reproducing forms in generating value are tied not just to efforts to “preserve” what are considered to be “traditional values” and extract revenue but to strategies for constructing nation-states, national elites, transnational corporations, and international organizations as ethical and humane.

A new coalition of leading scholars from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States has formed in order to forge new perspectives on these issues. Folklorists have long been in the business of converting form into value. From the antiquarians of the seventeenth century to the heritage professionals of the twenty-first (with the academic discipline of folklore taking shape in the intervening centuries), practices of collecting, cataloguing, entextualizing, archiving, exhibiting, publishing, and popularizing have taken old rubbish—the flotsam on the stream of modernity, as E. P. Tylor defined folklore—and converted it into national treasures. As servants of the nation-state or advocates of alternatives to it, folklorists have been intimately complicit in the revaluations that make culture a resource in times of political or economic change. They recognize their own cast-off thinking in the notion, found in much contemporary scholarship and policy, that severing cultural forms from specific places and performers is somehow novel and possibly nefarious; having tracked the dislocation and travel of cultural forms for over a century, folklorists can offer vital critiques of the limited historical and analytical visions that often inform such discussions.

At the same time, although following cultural forms and regimes of value around the globe is important, it is also crucial to gain detailed knowledge of what Anna Tsing refers to as the “friction” that is generated by local and national economies, political schema for regulating culture, social relations, and scholarly traditions. The dominance of academic institutions in the United States and Europe tends to provide a Eurocentric filter

that stifles potential contributions by scholars from other regions, rendering them as “data” that must be analyzed using models produced in the North. The group will thus work on different manifestations of these transnational processes, examining the particularities of how they come to form “global assemblages” in specific places that are shaped by specific sets of interlocking and competing epistemologies. At the same time that this coalition will draw on the strengths of folkloristic perspectives on relations between form and value as lodged in processes of traditionalization, it will create a collective and globally visible locus for imbuing the discipline with new intellectual and institutional strength and help challenge its Eurocentric base. Nevertheless, its audiences will extend far beyond folklorists. Specifically, we propose to:

- Establish a network of electronic communication that will provide on-going links between members, along with their colleagues and students, for sharing project information and materials on relevant classes, events, and projects
- Conduct collaborative research projects exploring shared themes and cultural phenomena in different sites and from contrastive perspectives
- Engage in collective analysis of results and production of collaborative texts, fostered by annual retreats
- Conduct graduate seminars jointly through teleconferencing, thereby linking students to faculty members and students in other regions
- Promote short-term and long-term exchanges of faculty and students
- Organize international summer courses, involving intense exchanges between graduate students and faculty members
- Enable faculty members to offer short courses in partner institutions
- Hold two conferences per year in different sites to foster contact between group members and impact audiences in host universities and communities
- Seek funding for these collaborative activities