

Book Review

**Review of Chris Hudson and Bart Barendregt
(Eds.), *Globalization and Modernity in Asia:
Performative Moments*
(Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018)**

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The cover of Chris Hudson and Bart Barendregt's 2018 anthology features a picture of a fiberglass sculpture of Barack Obama. The image appears to reflect a current nostalgic bent for images of the former president, a champion of globalization. Ironically, as Leonie Schmidt reveals in her contribution, "Unearthing the Past and Re-Imagining the Present: Contemporary Art and Muslim Politics in a Post-9/11 World," the 2009 sculpture originated as a critique of Obama's policies. This visual artwork and other case studies constitute *Globalization and Modernity in Asia: Performative Moments*. Arising from a symposium held in Barcelona in 2014 and a collaboration between the University of Leiden and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the anthology features articles by academics from across a number of disciplines, from political science to anthropology to visual arts. As indicated by the title, the majority of the authors' scholarship focuses on the study of performance in Asian cultures.

Globalization and modernity belong to a set of theoretical frameworks which tend to define them by what they are not. The title of the anthology juxtaposes these two terms, most often characterized as movements, and redefines them as "performative moments." The dialectical nature of the title then reflects what the editors suggest gives shape to the definitions of globalization and modernity. Hudson and Barendregt draw on the work of globalization theorists, such as Ulrich Beck, to make the case that these terms generate meaning through

dialectical tensions, rather than by relying on a fixed sense of meaning. For the editors, “performative moments” are capable of exemplifying the ways in which “new artistic and aesthetic interventions might generate a social imaginary” where “the local can be transformed by the global and in which the problematics of both domains may be interrogated.”¹ The nod to the “social imaginary” originates from Manfred Steger’s concept of the “global imaginary,” which places an emphasis on the subjective aspects of the experience of globalization.²

The introduction then expands on these key terms to provide a framework for case studies that, at least in terms of content, prove extremely varied. In their examination of the term modernity, Hudson and Barendregt acknowledge its historical iterations, as well as the fluidity of its contemporary meanings. They also take note of the changing nature of the performance and the public, facilitated through the proliferation of technologically mediated and, hence, performed moments. Their intervention focuses on “performative moments,” not the performances themselves, but rather the “acting as well as its social function.”³ At the same time, they emphasize the dialectical tension between the “local and the global,” identifying larger trends in localized case studies.⁴ Though President Obama features on the cover, they emphasize a move away from the traditional East/West dichotomy in studies of globalization in an Asian context. To decenter the narrative from the West, the case studies focus on “interAsia and the Global South,” hence “recentering” the narrative of modernity and globalization in Asia.⁵

The anthology remains impressive in the sheer range of performances analyzed. The majority of the analyses rely on the authors’ field research and close readings of the respective visual texts and performances. In his “Introductory Reflections” to the anthology, political theorist Terrell Carver alludes to the problematic “power relations” inherent in an Anglophone text presenting the “exotic” to readers. He moreover situates the text firmly in 2018 by citing “anti-democratic blowback” to globalization, implicitly drawing reference to the rise of right-wing populist movements across the globe.⁶

In the first case study, Craig Latrell uses Bali to draw entertaining

connections among the “tourist destination weddings, *Eat, Pray, Love* yoga tours, and Grindr,” focusing on the use of the Internet to both facilitate and challenge “traditional social structures.”⁷ Peter Eckersall’s article, “Super Premium Soft Double Vanilla Rich and the Ideal of Convenience in Japan” examines the depiction of Japanese *konibini* (convenience stores) in the plays of Okada Toshiki and the artwork of Nakamura Masato. The *konibini* functions as a microcosm of the modern through its interrogation of the mundanity of the mechanized everyday.⁸ Leonie Schmidt’s aforementioned article conducts a close reading of a ritualized destruction and repair of an Obama sculpture. Shifting from Walter Benjamin’s “ragpicker” to Pierre Nora’s “sites of memory” as a frame of theoretical reference, Schmidt then performs a close reading of the installation piece *11 June 2002*.⁹ In “Keeping Communists Alive in Singapore,” Chua Beng Huat reads the distribution and censorship of film as a method to silence political dissent and rewrite historical memory.¹⁰

One of the strongest articles in the collection, Tania Lewis’s “Performative Pedagogies: Lifestyle Experts on Indian Television,” interrogates the “mediascape” in modern India through the television performances of “lifestyle gurus.”¹¹ In “Performing Cities: The Philippines Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai International Exposition,” William Peterson muses on displays of authenticity and the cultivation of the tourist experiences.¹² Chris Hudson’s “Mobile Performance and the In-Between: Yogyakarta Comes to Melbourne” looks at the use of the imported *grobak* (Indonesian food cart) to cultivate a sense of connection between two locales through the formation of a “thirdspace.”¹³ A Malaysian flash mob, as well as the nature of its performance, undergoes a close analysis in Bart Barendregt’s “An Islamist Flash Mob in the Streets of Shah Alam: Unstable Genres for Precarious Times.”¹⁴ In “Pure Love?” Jeroen de Kloet conducts a close reading of the gender politics and the nation through “sanitized modernities” in three contemporary romantic comedies.¹⁵ Finally, in “Yogya on Stage,” Barbara Hatley follows the collaborative efforts of a German-based theater company and the local Yogyakarta theater company, Teater Garasi. She proposes *100% Yogyakarta* as a catalyst for questioning the unrecognized marginalization of several

social communities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.¹⁶

The major point of concern for this anthology lies in the uneven academic rigor of the articles. As mentioned, Hudson and Barendregt do excellent work in the introduction, grounding the chapters in a theoretical network. In terms of organization, aside from the introduction and Carver's introductory remarks, the chapters themselves do not enter into dialogue with each other. There seems to be no set trajectory in terms of its thematic concerns, geographical, or historical, which, perhaps, was the intention of the anthology. Carver also seems, to a certain extent, out of step with the other contributors, with allusions to "religious zealotry" in the abstract.¹⁷

Furthermore, a few of the articles rely too heavily on anecdotal or tangential evidence to reinforce their arguments. A couple of them cite the "feelings" of the author in reaction to a performance, and, while valid, they do not contribute to an academic reading of the piece. Additionally, rather than counterbalancing anecdotal evidence with peer-reviewed secondary sources or theory, several articles use academically suspect sources. For example, Latrell relies on Wikipedia to provide a definition for the Grindr app, where a description or quotation from the app's promotional materials would have sufficed.¹⁸ While the general trend in academic writing certainly leans towards the conversational and is layperson orientated, a few of the authors take it to excess. For example, the phrase "national boner," while potentially a funny alternate title for Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (alluded to in several chapters), seems out of place in an academic anthology.¹⁹

Though the anthology professes to remove itself from the East/West dichotomy of globalization, the fact remains that it markets itself to an Anglophone audience. To the editors' credit, Carver addresses the problematic power dynamics in these case studies; however, not all of the articles carry this level of self-awareness. Some, such as Latrell's and Peterson's, continue to engage in a certain level of exoticization. For example, Peterson bemoans that the Shanghai Exposition "reduced [him] against [his] will to playing the role of the tourist" when visiting it.²⁰ Not only elitist, the author, in his professed sense of victimization, also fails to examine his own problematic claim to knowledge and access to

cultural authenticity.

Overall, despite its unevenness with respect to scholarly rigor, the book certainly remains a welcome contribution to performance, visual art, and film studies. The book's greatest strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach. On the whole, the anthology proves fascinating in drawing attention to a number of "performative moments" that interrogate the changing nature of performance, as well as representations of the self and the global.

Thanks to its cross-disciplinary approach, this anthology would work in courses in a variety of subject areas, including theater, communications, cultural studies, and the visual arts. It would also be appropriate for upper-level undergraduate research seminars or for a graduate-level survey course on performance studies. It should also appeal to scholars interested in expanding their knowledge of performance studies framed through the lens of globalization.

Notes

¹ Chris Hudson and Bart Barendregt, eds., *Globalization and Modernity in Asia: Performative Moments* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 14.

² Ibid., 12.

³ Ibid., 12.

⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., 89.

¹¹ Ibid., 125.

¹² Ibid., 129.

¹³ Ibid., 162.

¹⁴ Ibid., 169.

¹⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹⁶ Ibid., 215.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹ Ibid., 211.

²⁰ Ibid., 139.