

Composite Modernity (online, 23–24 Sep 25)

Online, Sep 23–24, 2025

Marte Stinis, The Hague

“Cultures are never unitary in themselves,
nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Others.”

Homi Bhabha, 1988,
'The Commitment to Theory'.

TFISM (Transition: Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies into Modernity) has already organised two previous conferences, “Reflecting/Reflected Modernity” (2021) and “Ugly Modernity” (2023). Following on these projects, which were concerned with the formation of modernity within the humanities from a cross-disciplinary perspective, our new forum will comprise “Composite Modernity: The Compressed and the Displaced” (23-24 September, 2025), extending our discussion of contradictory moments of modernity.

Modernity is not a stable concept. Instead, it is highly fluid and multi-constituent, bridging multiple disciplines and discourses. We apply ‘composite’ as a postcolonial scope to relocate a given culture’s relativist intertextuality, which develops along with intercultural modernism as a global phenomenon. Within this postmodernist realism, we have consistently failed to conceive modernity as a fixation with any predetermined sources. Rather, within the complex enunciation of humanity, modernity/modernities are multi-centred, open-ended, and hybrid. The postmodernist scope problematises the approach to a sharp-edged modern culture, which is no longer valid for interpreting concrete experiences in dynamic variations of the differences. Our conference, “Composite Modernity: The Compressed and the Displaced”, therefore attempts to enable a retrospective view of considering Otherness by problematising any predetermined definition of cultural boundaries.

We invite scholars working in the humanities, therefore, to consider ‘composite’ as a term denoting hybridity, multiples, and as a collectivist effort by many cultures rather than any monocultures. ‘Composite modernity’ aims to unfeel the illusion of ‘unity or totality’ of culture in the Self/Other dualism, envisioning the ambivalence in a continuous integrated process with open-ended semiotic transformation. The cultural-historiographical engagements in the sites of the compressed and the displaced probe methodologies to decipher rather than mythologise narratives of hybridity. We include the terms ‘compressed’ and ‘displaced’ as addendums to modernity, with compression denoting an acceleration of the modern transactional transition, as mentioned in Chang Kyung-Sup’s *The Logic of Compressed Modernity* (2022). Modernity’s postcolonial contradictions become a coexistence of antithesis and complicity, both of which are necessary to describe its plurality, its hybridity, and its syncretism. The ‘displaced’, then, refers to geographical or cultural exiles and movements which correlate with notions of being out of place and, like Edward Said

writes in *Out of Place*, something irrecoverable, a feeling of dissonance, and an inability of finding your identity in one particular place.

For instance, Orientalism has been sustained by a dual structure that often perpetuates a mythologised sign of authenticity with an assumption of collectivity. Perceived as a static, constitutive structure, this framework fails to represent the endless transformation of a hybridised subjectivity (of displacement, ambivalence, or mimicry), which “both belongs and does not belong to the history of Western rationality” in Grace Lavery’s terms.

The composite nature of modern identity is particularly prevalent when discussing visual artists. This holds true for, for example, the case of the Indonesian artist Raden Saleh, who the Dutch colonial government-sponsored, then possessing the ‘Dutch East Indies’, to become a painter in Europe. Similar to Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of mimicry, Saleh imitates and subverts western painting to be both a romantic Europeanised artist as well as the colonised intellectual who is now heralded as Javanese artistic modernism. Or Raja Ravi Varma, who brought European history painting to British-owned India and so mythologised his country’s history. From a European perspective, the dialectic of Self and Other is often more violent. An act of consumption concerning that considered Other, the objectification of cultures and their use in universal exhibitions was particularly prevalent during the nineteenth and early twentieth century; indeed, when modernity was shaping itself.

In the field of English literature, many critics have developed and even challenged the concept of modernism/modernity. As a co-authored essay “The New Modernist Studies” (2008) in *PLMA* by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz puts it, they have “expanded” the scope of modernist studies, employing more global perspectives. In responding to this new scholarly trend, for example, Johan Ramazani (2009) finds “more complex patterns of assimilation and resistance” in post-colonial relationships suggested by Edward Said. Modernism and modernity, thus, should be understood in a more dynamic but also a more nuanced way.

How can we decipher the modernist myth? How do we mobilise intercultural experiences in specific contexts with ongoing instability and constantly reshaping social identities? How can individuals in an era of so-called compressed modernity relocate differences and yet still feel specific fixations of Otherness? How do cultural, artistic, and literary activities react or resist the discrepancy to retain a liberal domain in the post-historical era? How can we consider culture as a result or product but equally remain aware of its tendencies to awaken or suppress potential social revolutions?

The programme is as follows:

Day One - 24th Sep (Wed)

10:00 - 10:15 Opening Remarks

10:15 - 11:45 Panel One: Hybrid Gaze

Gwen Haller, University of Edinburgh

“Hybrid Narratives, Hybrid Creators: Leonora Carrington’s Tapestries”

Lyudmila Georgieva, Tokyo University of the Arts

“The Art of Kudo Tetsumi as a Challenge to Postwar Modernity: Abjection of Humanity and Intercultural Displacement”

Teresa Heinzlmann, Goethe University

“Before Pissarro Was Pissarro: Jewish-Caribbean Entanglements and the Making of a French Impressionist”

11:45 - 13:15 Lunch Break

13:15 - 14:45 Panel Two: The Self in Motion

Dr. Andrés Calderón Ramos, Università degli Studi di Perugia

“Rethinking Composite Modernities through the Epistemic Challenges of the Haitian Revolution”

Shu Wan, University at Buffalo

“Transfer and Translation: The Deaf-mute Primer (聋哑哑字) and the Introduction of Deaf Education into Late Qing China”

Diletta Haberl

“Alternative Modernities along the “Via degli Abruzzi”: Travel, Temporal Disjunction, and Cultural Displacement in Nineteenth-Century Central Italy”

15:00-16:30 Roundtable Session

Spirituality and Materiality: A Postcolonial View through Yanagi Sōetsu

Dr. Kazuki Inoue, Saitama University

“Adapting the Western Spirit Materialisation: Sōetsu Yanagi and Global Spiritualism”

Dr. Louise Yu-jui Yang, Taipei National University of the Arts

“Tangible or Intangible? The ‘Thing’ in Terms of Arts and Crafts and Ethnographic Objects”

Ariana Torres, Mingei International Museum, San Diego

“Expanding Mingei: Generational & Contemporary Global Craft at Mingei International Museum”

Day Two - 25th Sep (Thur)

10:00 - 11:20 Keynote Speech

Prof. Michael White

Head, The Department of History of Art department, University of York

11:20 - 11:40 Break

11:40 - 13:10 Panel Three: The Crystallised Visuality

Dr. Nicola Baird, Centre for the Study of the Networked Image, London South Bank University

“Composite Modernity: The Case of David Bomberg, the Ben Uri Gallery and the Sarah Rose collections”

Dr. Kateřina Štroblová, University of Ostrava; University of Finance and Administration

“Central-Eastern Modernities: Socialist Architecture Between Utopia, Memory, and the Aesthetics of Ruin”

Chu Ting-Li, Taipei National University of the Arts

“Collecting Contemporary Art In Taiwan: A Study of the Collecting Practice at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts”

13:10 Closing Remarks

Registration:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/composite-modernity-tickets-1577347070549?aff=erelexpmt>

Reference:

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