The panel “Diversity and Otherness in Corpo-realities” focuses on the multiple ways in which bodily difference is represented in various contexts, thereby contributing to its social, political or cultural standardization. From a theoretical perspective the panel aims at emphasising the tension between homo- vs. heterogeneity in various bodily representations of diversity and otherness, in the present as well as in the past. Furthermore it shall analyze how symbolic practices establishing a correspondence between corporeal characters and particular ideologies contribute to deconstruct or, on the contrary, to strengthen hegemonic – political, social etc. – representations of diversity and otherness.

As to the past, Susanne Marten-Finnis (University of Portsmouth, UK) will examine the physical representations of oriental otherness displayed in the Ballets Russes and in the so-called Oriental Ballets (Scheherazade, Cleopatra, Thamar) at the beginning of the 20th century. Italian fashion will offer a second transdisciplinary field of inquiry for investigating the historical stratification of foreign and self-related representations and their profound links to sociopolitical and artistic spheres (Dagmar Reichardt, Latvian Academy of Culture, Riga). “The self” and “the other” appear hybridized in the work of the Chinese new media artist Miao Xiaochun, who re-writes icons of Western painting by transforming them into avatars inserted in a 3D environment. Isabel Selinger (independent scholar and visual artist, Berlin) will present critical insights into Miao’s transnational, interethnic, cross-gender and interspecies bodies and their respective hybrid identities. The negotiation of difference and contemporaneity in (European) dance will be at the core of the performative presentation by the independent scholar and choreographer Sandra Chatterjee (Vienna), who explores, physically and intellectually, the intersections and tensions between (performing) (ethnicized) difference, contemporaneity and “the traditional”. As a counterpoint to current discourses on contemporary European dance, the last talk by Claude Jansen (Hamburg) will highlight the transcultural multiplicity and diversity of practices relating to the term „African Dance“.
By including a wide range of cultural practices and contexts the panel intents to compare, inter- and transdisciplinarily, transcultural approaches to bodily difference, and to stimulate a discussion across professional environments. This shall highlight, among other aspects, how transcultural practices offer, or offered in the past, a valid starting point for emancipatory processes of negotiation in various contexts, as for example in scientific, political or artistic environments or in daily life.

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In May 1909, the Ballets Russes performance of the Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor whipped the Parisians to sheer hysteria. Never before had their senses indulged in such scintillating music, such barbaric hues and rebellious gestures: the germ of destruction, the spirit of unrest, the embodiment of lawlessness. No one in the West had imagined that men could dance like this. The imagined warrior-dancers from the Asian steppes and the tent-and-tribe approach of its decorator Nicholas Roerich fuelled Western fantasies of Russia as a country that was inhabited by barbaric, tribes with an innate passion to dancing. During the years to come, this perception was consolidated by the physical representations of oriental otherness displayed in the so-called Oriental Ballets (Scheherazade, Cleopatra, Thamar) staged between 1909 and 1912. They established in the West a strong association of Russia with the cosmopolitan cities of its Asiatic periphery rather than the folklore of its European centre.

The motivation for such self-presentation has been attributed to Ballet Russes impresario Sergei Diaghilev who maintained that Western adulation of oriental barbarism and exotism on stage was easier to transfer into money than original Russian rustic culture. However, Diaghilev’s argument cannot be a complete explanation for the correspondence between corporal display and Western perceptions of Russia.

My proposed paper will deconstruct the symbolic practices displayed by the Ballets Russes, and relate them to a school of thought among Russian intellectuals who looked towards Asia, rather than Europe, for self-identification. They considered Russia to be uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between Orient and Occident, an aspiration that received a strong impulse during the last third of the 19th century as a result of the Russian annexation of Turkestan and the Caucasus. Russia needed to reconcile this huge oriental space with the cultural historical space the Russian nation had traditionally called its own.

An important part of Russia’s approach to this task was ethnographic enquiry; to study the mores in these lands, almost entirely Muslims, and to complete the fragmentary information already available. Russian politicians and intellectuals could agree that, as a civilized empire, Russia had the duty to unravel and document the complex and poorly understood customs of its new subjects in order to understand their ways of life and beliefs. As a result, ethnographers, linguists and geographers rose to prominence, with a remarkable artistic upsurge during the
Silver Age (1898-1914), when many artists were on the lookout for inspiration from the East. Among them were the members of the St. Petersburg World of Art group who volunteered as artist decorators in Diaghilev’s enterprise.

Departing from Russia’s appearance on the Western stage, my proposed paper will trace back the path of Russian self-presentation and self-identification, historically and geographically, to the realms of the ancient Silk Route, and flag two things: the novel research methods of Russian Orientalist scholarship, ethnographic enquiry in particular, both pre- and post-revolutionary, and more generally, Russia’s contribution to post-colonial studies.
This conference investigates the modes of cultural transfer within the world of Fashion. Focusing on the case study of Italy and transcultural lifestyle, the core of the theoretical question is: How has body language been translated into the sociopolitical and artistic sphere from past to present, and what kind of communication has this history created in the course of its evolution from today’s perspective?

In fact, fashion has always acted as a bonding force between individuals and society as well as a “world language” sui generis on various levels, just like Italian food, music, architecture, design, visual arts or sports. It melds and combines various aspects such as economic parameters, nation branding and personal identity, the representations of race, class and gender, power discourses and metaphoric decodable Zeitgeist. Its complex polyphony and trans-medial structure show the transcultural and also didactic potential of fashion discourses, while – as will be shown – every single dress can be read and explained as if it was a poem.

Spanning from studies about Roman Antiquity (Anne Hollander) and the Renaissance (Elizabeth Birbari) to the general semiotic interpretation (Roland Barthes), the paradoxicalness (Elena Esposito) and the unavoidability of fashion (Karl Lagerfeld), some theories have tried to explain its vital, historic, symbolic, sociopolitical and aesthetic-artistic impact. The differences between North and South, Orient and Occident were always reflected and merged in how people dressed and mentioned textile elements in Italian literature, cinema, arts, theatre and language.

While, up to now, the scientific Otherness of this domain restrained scholars of Italian and Transcultural Studies from including expressively fashion discourses into their research fields, evidence is given by political and artistic environments, as well as by daily life experience about how close world societies feel to the polymorphic languages of Italian fashion, which thus embraces a wide range of diverse cultures and layers of meaning. With my talk, I will try to bridge this research gap and illustrate the transcultural dynamics of Italian fashion by following two steps:

1) First, after having briefly summarized the historical background pinpointing fashion as a semiotic language, I will state that fashion equals history. This axiom will be supported by indicating relations between fashion and traditional – even stereotyped – Italian habits, and by tracing performative, life-related and trans-medial bonds between Italian fashion and literature.
2) Second, with the aim of opening an innovative and interdisciplinary field of research, the transculturality of fashion *made in Italy* will be discussed by applying a set of theoretical approaches (M. Foucault, N. Goodman, R. Barthes, H. Bhabha, W. Welsch) and presenting 5 theses regarding fashion, gender and society within Modern Italian Studies that have been neglected by academia so far.

Summarizing the key-role of fashion made in Italy today, if seen as a historical result of foreign and self-related interactions as well as a significant didactical vehicle, we can conclude that – speaking with Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias (1980) – the *habitus* (i.e. the individual appearance and performance in public and private) of Italian fashion, in postmodern and globalized times opens out into a “nomadic” way-of-life, thus embodying a sociological term first coined by Deleuze/Guattari (1980) within the conflicting domains of capitalism and anthropology.
since the year 2005, internationally acclaimed new media artist Miao Xiaochun (born in 1964 in Wuxi, China) has been using a 3D visualization program to recreate famous paintings from European art history which he subsequently enters, migrates through and inhabits in the form of a 3D avatar. By traversing and interacting with canonical Western painterly icons in a 3D virtual environment, Miao’s avatars enact the global crossing of cultural and visual boundaries, illuminating the condition of contemporary art as marked by migratory and transcultural flows. In the course of their transpictorial movements, Miao’s virtual clones display increasing mobility and flexibility, resulting in the modification of their physical forms. As different aspects of their virtual bodies intertwine, heretofore unknown identities coagulate and re-emerge in novel intervisual landscapes.

In their capacity as virtual agents, Miao’s avatars initiate contact, exchange, and transformation in their host images. Moving from one painting to another, they become conduits for the
negotiation and resolution of contact, i.e. difference, tension, desire, and conflict, which leads to a new integration of their virtual shapes and identities. During this process the avatars progressively intermix physiological markers, moulding virtual forms into complex displays of assimilation, resistance and self-enhancement.

Miao’s transpictorial migratory movements may be interpreted as the re-viewing and re-writing of central Western painterly icons, as well as the de-centering of their grand narratives of culture, history, and the subject, resulting in the emergence of new concepts of self, gender, and agency under global (art historical) conditions.

With regard to the condition of the female gender, Miao removes all the female figures from the original paintings for each of his 3D icons — a decision which stands out in contrast to the dominant role of the female nude in modern European painting. Paradoxically, increasingly feminine-connoted gestures, postures, and even body shapes can be detected among the avatars. The evolution of the avatars’ feminine forms is further magnified in the computer animation Restart (2008-2010), where Miao dissolves the demarcation between male and female clones. The abolition of gender difference is especially evident in Miao’s design of an avatar that floats through the air displaying a full, seemingly pregnant belly, intimating fecundity and pregnancy as part of the masculine avatar experience.

Apart from dissolving borders between male and female clones and between the human and vegetal realm, the successively disintegrating European masterpieces also release historical representations of human-animal connections. One such example is the heroine of Pieter
Bruegel the Elder’s *Dull Gret* (1562) who, depicted as a humanoid with an animal head, effectively destabilizes the human figure, pointing perhaps to transgressive physical relations or the heightening of female power in a post-human condition.

Miao Xiaochun
*RESTART* (2008-2010)
3D Computer Animation
Courtesy MIAO XIAOCHUN STUDIO, Beijing

My paper describes how Miao re-orient different art historical narratives of identity by placing them outside conventional categories such as style, school, and national origin, as well as the manner in which his alter-Asian avatars — marked by impermanence, non-duality, mobility, and self-renewal — deconstruct and de-colonize the aesthetic figure on the representational canvases of Western high art.
Kulturelle Übersetzungsmodelle sind seit Längerem (vgl. u. a. Bachmann-Medick „Cultural Turns“, Kap. 5 Transnational Turn) und verstärkt insbesondere seit Homi K. Bhabhas vielzitiertem 'third space' Gegenstand kulturwissenschaftlicher Fragestellungen. Konzepte von Übersetzung setzen zunächst meist die langlebige Dichotomie von Identität und Differenz (dem Eigenen und dem Fremden) voraus. Ebenso wurde Übersetzung bislang ausschließlich im Bereich des Repräsentativen (Schrift, Sprache, etc.) verortet, einem linearen Prozess folgend, was die Kritiker*innen eines solchen Konzeptes zunehmend in Frage stellen, da hier Grenzsetzungen markiert werden, die als Erbe abendländischer (kolonialer) Kategoriebildungen betrachtet werden.

Mit diesem Vortrag möchte ich ein erweitertes, transkultureelles Übersetzungsmodell vorstellen, das sich aus den dichotomen repräsentativen Konzepten herauslöst und (kulturelle) Übersetzung zu einem Beziehungsmodell erklärt, das jederzeit und an jedem Ort zwischen menschlichen und nichtmenschlichen Akteur*innen praktiziert werden kann.

Am Beispiel einiger ausgewählter Tanz-Performances (Mamela Nyamza, Südafrika; Germaine Acogny, Senegal; Faustin Linyekula, Kongo; Koffi Kôkô, Benin), möchte ich darstellen, wie sich die Tänzer*innen durch Interaktionen mit sichtbaren und unsichtbaren, menschlichen und nichtmenschlichen Akteur*innen durch Möglichkeitsräume bewegen, die dem 'betrachtenden Auge' häufig im Verborgenen bleiben.

Die hier dargestellten empirischen Forschungsergebnisse werden im Folgenden in eine (transkulturelle) Debatte überführt, die in den theoretischen Ansätzen gegenwärtiger Animismusforschung, Posthumanismus, Animal Studies und New Materialism verortet wird. Diese Studien sind vornehmlich dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass sie die anthropozentrischen Sicht- und Handlungsweisen in Frage stellen, ins besondere die in der abendländischen Moderne etablierten Hierarchien, Kategorien und scharfen Grenzsetzungen.

Wenn sich also das Konzept von Übersetzung dahingehend verändert, die Kriterien und Codes neu zu definieren, d.h. wenn Übersetzung sich zunehmend von den symbolischen,
metaphorischen und repräsentativen Ordnungen verabschiedet und zu einer Praktik erklärt wird, die unendlich viele Möglichkeiten situativer Interaktionen offenlegt, kann möglicherweise auch das Projekt der kulturellen Übersetzung transkulturell neu gedacht werden.