Christian Huck, Stefan Bauernschmidt (eds.)

Travelling Goods, Travelling Moods

Varieties of Cultural Appropriation (1850–1950)

campus

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Preface

We wake up in Swedish beds and Bangladeshi pajamas, shave using American razors and put on French perfume; we eat Danish pastry for breakfast, drink coffee from Ethiopia or sip tee from India; we put on Italian clothes and drive to work in Japanese cars; we communicate using Finnish cell phones, work on American computers and eat lunch at a Mexican restaurant; when we come home we have Thai take-away and an Australian Chardonnay for dinner before we read a Norwegian crime novel, listen to British pop music and return to our Swedish beds. *Does this sound familiar to you?* One of the most immediate and directly felt effects of globalization—at least in the West—can be experienced in our daily encounters with consumer goods. Supermarkets, warehouses and online shops offer consumer goods from all over the globe: one click, and products once thought of as foreign, exotic and almost impossible to obtain are now delivered straight to our doorstep. Today, goods seem to travel light, and it appears to be easy to make the foreign our own.

However, not all of these 'travelling goods' travel the same way, and not all are foreign in the same way. Ikea's Swedish designed beds are mostly produced in China; Honda's Japanese cars are manufactured in plants all around the world, and some ingredients of French Chanel No. 5 are fabricated in Bitterfeld, once the capital of the chemical industry in East Germany. Whereas tee and coffee are indeed grown in their respective countries of origin, our Danish pastry has been made at our local bakery, though according to a recipe created in Vienna, Austria. While the Italian origin of our suit and the Britishness of our music might be of specific importance to our personal identity, the fact that our smart phone is a Finnish product seems less relevant. At the same time, while we all know that our computers and shelves most likely have been produced in China, their American or Swedish provenance matters to us nonetheless.

Why does it matter where things come from—even when they do not *actually* come from there? Goods partake in specific networks: they are

conceived by certain people in certain places, they are produced from specific materials using specific techniques and machineries, they are used by certain people in certain ways and they are named and described in relation to similar, familiar things. In short, they are embedded within a specific culture, part of a specific, albeit contingent, fabric of meaning, practice and materiality. Apparently, things are nothing without a context, and by their association with context they are attuned to a certain mood, a certain disposition. When we encounter goods we cannot but react to these moods.

The questions that this volume asks seem simple: what happens to the mood of a good once it travels from one culture to another? What happens to the original mood of a good within a new culture? Is it maintained, dismissed or transformed? Does this process change the good? Does it affect the cultures involved? The process that decides what place a thing shall have within a culture, and at the same time decides on the mood of a good, is what we term *(trans-)cultural appropriation*. What happens when a culture makes an alien good its own?

To answer these questions we examine an historical period (1850–1950) when processes of globalization and the consequent presence of foreign goods on local markets were not as widespread as today, but when this presence was all the more heavily and controversially discussed. The goods we concentrate on in this edited volume fall into three categories: food, books and machines. These represent anthropological necessities (*food*), key cultural products (*books*) and technologies central to modern civilizations (*machines*). Each section comprises three essays preceded by a short introduction outlining the general characteristics of the good in question and the particular perspective of each individual contribution. The volume opens with an introduction to the concept of cultural appropriation by one of its foremost theorists, the ethnologist Hans Peter Hahn. The closing text, by the editors of this volume, revisits the theory of cultural appropriation, taking into consideration what the case studies assembled here can contribute to the understanding of the concept.

In order to comprehend assorted processes of cultural appropriation, research into it must not only be transcultural, but also transdisciplinary. We therefore bring together researchers from anthropology, ethnology, history, media studies, sociology, and from American, Asian, English, German and Scandinavian studies. Accordingly, the different contributions display a wide assortment of approaches to the phenomena in question. We hope this melee of cultures, disciplines and approaches does not confuse readers but inspires

them to scrutinize processes of cultural appropriation from a multiplicity of angles. We hope the varieties of cultural appropriation we present here open new perspectives on such travelling goods and travelling moods as readers may encounter them in their research and everyday life.

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