

A boundary is not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting. – Martin Heidegger

Designers are ‘geographic beings.’ We are concerned with objects, messages and ideas, and their relationship in space, whether material or virtual. We recognize the importance of borders as well as their limits and acknowledge that they exist only when people find them to be meaningful. This contingent aspect of borders is complicated by their paradoxical identity. Every border is at once an extent and a threshold; it simultaneously activates the space that it defines and the area that lies beyond it. On a global scale such liminal zones are varied and numerous. Transnational rather than international, they are relational and dynamic spaces that resist the familiar identifications and investments that are defined exclusively through nationality. Although some thinkers conceive of transnational spaces as neutral and transcendent regions, where economic capital, political power and cultural ideologies flow unrestricted, such spaces are increasingly understood to be reflexive, provisional and plural zones that comprise a wide global network where goods and knowledge are not merely transferred, but analysed, questioned and transformed in the act of encounter.

This special issue of *Iridescent* considers design and design education through the varied contexts of this transnational terrain. The authors included within this special issue first conceived of their papers as presentations for the conference *Geographics: Design, Education and the Transnational Terrain* that took place at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa in December of 2012. That conference examined the ways in which contemporary designers dispel the notion of locations as discrete entities that, in ancient times, could be distinguished typologically – and in modern times, distanced politically – from their neighbours and conquering nations. The design disciplines have become increasingly fluid, and today’s designers, their concepts and their practices connect distant regions of the world with unprecedented constancy and complexity. The *Geographics* conference featured 78 design professors, authors and practitioners working from 15 countries who presented papers within thematic strands titled “Projects,” “Ideas” and “Institutions,” allowing some to share examples of projects and programs that they had implemented within transnational contexts, while allowing others to present theoretical positions about what it has meant, historically or in the present, to design within such contexts. Many of the presenters analysed the design process as a strategy for surmounting geographic or cultural obstacles, while for some the activity of boundary crossing itself, whether professionally or recreationally, provided them with experiences that later invigorated their design practices.

Central to the convictions that speakers presented throughout the conference was the belief, gained through experience, that communities unfamiliar with one another can share design information, resources and sensibilities across divides. The variety of entities described included study-abroad programs, indigenous peoples, multinational corporations and international expositions. Some of the exchanges were tangible encounters while others were printed or virtual; some designers presented provisional research, some presented finished projects, and others pondered indefinite conclusions. The conference revealed that a conceptual structure, a manner of working or a teaching practice that has functioned successfully for one designer and his or her recipient community might not translate lucidly for others. Yet that designer's insights may still offer value as a methodology for designing across difficult boundaries within untried contexts. Once any designer begins to settle into a transient or cooperative working experience, be it across regions, cultures, or identity groups, she may also find herself countering forces of ideological or political difference. It is the examination of the objects, messages, or ideas that transpired through a process that positioned collaboration and integration against constraints of opposition that distinguishes the four papers that we have selected for publication within this volume.

Ariyuki Kondo describes the life and contributions of the design historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner by demonstrating the facility with which Pevsner encountered and crossed cultural barriers throughout his life and within his writing, despite the difficulties of doing so as a German-born Jew during the 1930s. Within the article 'Pevsner on Graphic Design: Transnationality and the Historiography of Design,' Kondo conceives of Pevsner's scholarship as a product of his unique transnational influences, and recognizes Pevsner as a historian who accordingly developed his most influential work outside of the European Modernist mainstream. Kondo reveals the complex ways in which Pevsner's own movement across Europe's pre-war political boundaries, and his ability to distance himself from patriotic affiliations, paradoxically reinforced his recognition of the national sensibility, or 'Englishness,' that characterized English art and design.

If the international students arriving in Oaxaca, Mexico to attend Raul Cabra's Oax-i-fornia studio-abroad program were not conversant in Spanish, they would need to explore creative ways of exchanging knowledge across language boundaries upon being paired with local artisans as collaborators and housemates. The cooperative working relationships that Cabra presents in 'Oax-i-fornia: Generative Intersections and the Design of Craft' reveal that transnational ways of making have been continuously evolving within a tradition of cultural exchanges that Cabra calls 'generative intersections.' These intersections not only allowed the students and their hosts to craft innovative objects together; they also transformed their understanding of travel, material culture and the creative process.

When Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl travelled overseas to begin teaching Masters-level design students at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, she found herself working against cultural constraints that she did not experience when teaching Chinese expatriates at institutions within the United States. In ‘Hubris, Humility & Confucius,’ Poggenpohl describes the ways in which her engagement with the Western theories of hybridity and the habitus and a deep reading of the philosophies of Confucius enabled her to teach beyond the familiar behaviours that have dominated within many Western classrooms since the time of the European Enlightenment.

Nicholas Zimmermann examines the diverse group of multinational investors and architects who have been partnering with Shanghai’s urban leaders to reinvent the city’s Pudong District skyline. As Zimmermann develops in ‘Better City, Better Kitsch: Marketing Faux-Modernity in Contemporary Shanghai,’ these collaborators have been striving to represent the city as a global centre of affluence and innovation but rather have designed their buildings to duplicate an early-Modern futurist sensibility that denies local cultural difference. Zimmermann reveals that these transnational affiliations have failed the city because they ignore the possibility of an aesthetic that would allow the municipality’s residents to confront Shanghai’s timely and potentially oppressive realities.

In offering these samples of transnational collaboration in design, our goal has not been to present a comprehensive overview of such collaboration or to suggest that the contributors assembled have articulated the only ways to approach the subject. As recent research on globalization has shown and the conference itself has demonstrated, the transnational context of design is, at best, complex and often contradictory terrain. What we do hope to achieve with this special issue of *Iridescent* is to showcase the expanding geography of design education and practice and encourage thinking about how and why design crosses borders as well as the opportunities and problems that such transit inherently presents.

We are grateful to the institutions and people who helped to bring the conference and this special issue of *Iridescent* to life. Support from the AIGA and Adobe Systems was fundamental to the conference as were the unflagging efforts of our colleagues on the conference committee: Chae Ho Lee, Lucille Tenazas and Karen Zimmerman. We also thank everyone who participated in the conference. Although a fuller documentation of the rich debates that took place over the three days of the event was impossible in the limited space of this issue, we hope that many will recognize aspects of their conversations in the sampling provided here. We are profoundly grateful to Raul Cabra, Ariyuki Kondo, Sharon Poggenpohl and Nicholas Zimmermann for developing their papers into essays for this special issue. We thank Teal Triggs for offering *Iridescent* as a space to disseminate these essays and Jovana Milovic for keeping us on track.