

LEARNING AND DISLEARNING TO BE GLOBAL: QUESTIONS AT 44°53' N, 93°13' W AND 22°54'24" S, 43°10'21" W

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A true world traveler involved in the critical understanding of globalization ought to indulge in the utmost experience of uniformity and difference: eating a meal at McDonald's in every country visited. One might enjoy a MacChicken with molho caipira in Brazil or a Big Mac with exquisite Thai sauce in Bangkok. This adventure is reassuring to foreigners, letting them feel at home while experiencing the "local." Since the 1960s, Latin American artists such as Luis Camnitzer, Cildo Meireles, Antonio Manuel, and Antonio Caro have used Coca Cola as a symbol of economic imperialism and the negation of cultural difference; yet Coca Cola is now a must on the McDonald's global menu.

How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age is rooted in the experiences of the global advisory committee of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (44°53' N, 93°13' W). This multidisciplinary forum is composed of curators and professionals in several fields from the museum itself and advisors from different parts of the world coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and political practices. Consequently, the exhibition articulates a curatorial praxis that involves expanded research, connecting with local advisors abroad and the social fabric in which the artists live.

More than eighty languages are spoken in the public education system of the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Thus, Minneapolis is a crux of dissemination in its own right.¹ The home page of the Walker's Web site carries a work by Lawrence Weiner: Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole (1991). Avoiding totalization or uniformity, the Walker, an institution that claims such a semblance of a whole, is making a critical assessment of its own cultural practices. The museum strives for the inclusiveness of cultures by challenging the political limits of such an endeavor. It understands that because of the ethnic multiplicity of the Twin Cities, being Minnesotan means being global in the sense of being all-inclusive. A semblance of a whole is the Twin-community itself with its intercontextual articulation of which this exhibition is just one part.

Curating is part of the "time of gathering" described by Homi K. Bhabha. The Walker avoids fixidity in cultural circulation as marked by immigration, diasporas, exchanges, (dis)encounters, hybridization, contamination, deterritorialization, and multicontextuality. Addressing the historical issue and the contemporary reality of mass movements of people, Julia Kristeva writes that "strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns 'we' into a problem."² If How Latitudes Become Forms aims for any "semblance of a whole," it is by understanding its own potentiality and limitations as a contrast to the old Western "universalism" or the mechanics of multiculturalist inclusiveness. One might say that the exhibition addresses the question: When is multiculturalism the blind mirror of globalism?

1 See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, chapter 8 (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

2 Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Is the coining of “glocal” (global + local) the construction of a euphemism? If so, a euphemism for what? The Web site Heavens-Above.com contains a database of more than two million locations, nearly every town and village around the world. How Latitudes Become Forms is not a geographic survey attempting to sum up such a multitude of “local places.” Rather, it is a constellation comprising “localizations” of artistic practice developed by the individual experience of each curator. It presents not a homogenization but a poetical semblance of the parcours. How Latitudes Become Forms grasps places/latitudes/longitudes without leveling cultural differences. It seems to follow Jorge Luis Borges’ proposal that for literature to be inventive it should transform the mirror into a lens. Thus, instead of a mirror, the show becomes a lens for examining latitudes and specific cultural practices. Its antisurvey format does not search for a totalizing concept of the world, an approach that would be a surefire recipe for intellectual failure in this case.

If curating implies making discerning judgments, choices, and implicit exclusions, then the present text, written in Rio de Janeiro (22°55' S, 43°12' W), will use the opportunity to discuss other curatorial possibilities and some artworks that, even though not included in How Latitudes Become Forms, present an agenda of parallel issues through different approaches. The open intellectual climate of the Walker invites such a confrontation with its own curatorial framework and acknowledges alternative models, not one of which claims the monopoly of being “right.”

The Walker Art Center could be taken as a paradigm of the cosmopolitan experience with an eye on the margins and edges.³ Umberto Eco called the universal exhibitions of the nineteenth century a “pacific arena” for dispute among the colonial empires. The primal biennial, the I Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte held in Venice in 1895, reflected that model. How Latitudes Become Forms finds distance from that format and its origins in international and intranational disputes. It avoids the issues raised in Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, including regional disputes (“the narcissism of small differences”), and resists the forces of internal colonialism. Instead, it proposes a solidarity of knowledge that extends beyond any geographic borders and beyond any politics of domination. The organizers of How Latitudes Become Forms began from the point of view of a stranger, but did not act from the idea of cultural strangeness or the Freudian notion of the uncanny. Kristeva has problematized certain notions of belonging: “The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.”⁴ One option for an exhibition such as this might be to look at the global, at latitudes, within its own community. However, How Latitudes Become Forms takes an approach different from Tolstoy’s formula for universality, namely, the universal in your own village.

In 1519, Lopo Homem, a cartographer in Lisbon (38°43' N, 9°8' W), drew a mapa mundi showing Africa, America, Asia, and Europe all connected by a continuous land strip in the southern latitudes. Homem was trying to depict the logical “necessity” of territorial continuity to account for the dispersion of the descendants of only one couple (Adam and Eve).⁵ His intention was to reconcile a metaphysical “truth” to the new geographic reality of his time. Curating, too, is about establishing crucial links. At what point do curatorial activities do the super-structural job of mapping out the symbolic groundwork needed for the capitalist expansion drive? Although How Latitudes Become Forms proposes no aesthetic truth to rule “bits & pieces” of the world, one might ask: Is globalization a mandatory violent passage for all societies and individuals in the five continents? Did the ideology behind the expansion of capital and global territory become the contemporary metaphysical truth? What are the cultural wars being fought within globalization? Who wins them? Who resists? Some artists operate in contexts of resistance or are dealing with unreconcilable attitudes toward globalism. Many fight against art becoming a pawn of diplomatic strategies or a weapon for cultural wars in a new world order. How latitudes (and longitudes) become forms is obviously not the same process as how latitudes (and longitudes) lose their forms.

³ See for example the Walker Art Center’s exhibition Painting at the Edge of the World (2001), curated by Douglas Fogle.

⁴ Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, p. 1.

⁵ It took Portugal more than a century to develop the nautical and cartographic technology that made possible the European navigation in open oceans to reach the “four continents.” From the perspective of this time and belief system, the native peoples of the Americas, lacking the skills for that type of navigation and yet being descendants of Adam and Eve, could never have reached their continent except by crossing firm land.

It took an artist such as Öyvind Fahlström, born in the Third World (São Paulo, at 23°33' S, 46°38' W) of Swedish origin, to create in the early 1970s a cartographic model of the world revealing the perverse articulation of economic interests and power across the world. His world map resembles a jigsaw puzzle or a quilt of territories of influences and anticipates the mapping of globalism (despite the Cold War division between capitalism and communism inherent in his vision of the world in which he lived). At about the same time, German artist Hans Haacke, living in New York (40°47' N, 73°58' W), exposed the “unfinished business” in the reductive relationship between corporations and art. **At what point does globalization become a form of imperialism? Is globalization renewing ethnocentrism? What are the roles for curators here?** If globalization is a manifest destiny of post-Cold War mankind under a uniform imperial Pax, then where is the place for true dissent? Against all odds of the reigning Eurocentric perspective in the 1960s, three Brazilian critics—Mário Pedrosa and the poets Haroldo de Campos and Ferreira Gullar⁶—carried through the unfinished battle of affirming that artists in the Third World had true possibilities for developing innovative, nonderivative art. Their arguments were supported by theoretical references to Engels and Lukacs and by the actual cultural production in underdeveloped countries.

Fahlström developed a military, political, and economic cartography—displaying the all-latitudinal reach of power. His maps included sources of energy, geopolitical divisions, oppressive regimes in Brazil, China, and South Africa (countries of origin for a number of artists in *How Latitudes Become Forms*), and sites of military intervention by the United States (host country for the show). Curating does not mean the neutralizing of meaning, but it can be a somewhat disjunctive process for establishing knowledge. The current exhibition, however, rejects monoglot curatorial channels. **It allows room for inquiring why some people see in globalization the chance for a new world and others see the risk of an unprecedented oppression. Will the global world be uniform? Or will it be inventive and diverse, creating new identities, imagining new mestizages?**⁷ The irony of *The Blonde Africa* (2000) by Guillermo Kuitca, an artist from Buenos Aires (34°32' S, 58°23' W), is built from the unexpected ambivalence between architectural configurations and world maps. In it, the world is shaped like a housing project. Countries or continents become part of a construction plan in which the shape, size, and proportions of regions change. “Obese” countries appear when architecture disappears: cartography becomes a statistically proportionate space as the artist gives more area to countries with higher levels of accumulation of wealth. If Kuitca sees architecture as the blind spot of geography,⁸ *How Latitudes Become Forms* aims to not become the blind spot of art. Curators cannot be cartographers, but rather are voices in the intercultural dialogue.

Artists raise numerous dissident perspectives about “this possible globalization.”⁹ In *Marulhos* (1997), Cildo Meireles, an artist from Rio de Janeiro, presents the voices of all kinds of people speaking a single word in many languages: acqua, água, air, biyo, eau, nuróc, pani, voda, wai, wasser, water, etc. Meireles argues that “the idea of a country, a nation dissociated from the idea that we are all in the same boat” is unthinkable. He relentlessly points out that globalization serves to benefit large capital and acts within an “inertial situation.” Meireles’ oeuvre apprehends vast spaces: the cosmos, ideological circuits, ghettos, currency, and worldwide radio waves. His *Babel* (2001) is a tower made up of hundreds of radios tuned in to stations from around the world. “Dat fiind articularea precisa a ‘poeticii spatiului,’ lucrarea Babel a lui Meireles se apropie mai mult de Monumentul Internationalei a Treia a lui Tatlin decit de Turnul Babel a lui Brueghel.”¹⁰ *Babel* has some autobiographical connotations for the artist, since “imisakazo kwakuyimithombo ethembekile yokuxhumana e Brazil ngesikhathi sokukhula sika Meireles.”¹¹ Discussing the history of communications, Finnish curator Maaretta Jaukkuri has noted that “radio on alkusoitto maailmanlaajuiselle media-aikakaudelle alkua. Sillä on selkeät yhteydet inter-

6 See Mário Pedrosa, “Vicissitudes do artista soviético,” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), August 28, 1966; Haroldo de Campos, “Da razão antropofágica: diálogo e diferença na cultura brasileira” (1980), first published in “A Poesia Concreta e a Realidade Nacional,” *Tendências* (Belo Horizonte, Brazil), no. 4 (1962); and Ferreira Gullar, *Vanguarda e Subdesenvolvimento, Ensaios sobre a Arte* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1969).

7 These questions derive from Roger-Pol Droit, “Mondialization et inventions culturelles,” a review of Arjun Appadurai’s *Après le colonialisme*, in *Le Monde*, Dossier sec., December 7, 2001.

8 Guillermo Kuitca in conversation with the author, August 9, 2002.

9 All statements by Cildo Meireles are from a conversation with the author, August 14, 2002.

10 (“With its sharp ‘poetics of space,’ Meireles’ *Babel* is more akin to Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* than to Brueghel’s *Babel Tower*.”) Paulo Herkenhoff, “Babel,” in *ARS 01*, exh. cat. (Helsinki: Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), p. 157; translated into Romanian by Roxana Marcoci.

11 (“Radios were potent instruments of communication in Brazil during Meireles’ childhood.”) *Ibid.*; translated into Zulu by Walter Chakela.

nettiin ja satelliittikanaviin ja kaikkiin näihin meidän ympärillämme kuhiseviin medioihin.”¹² Paul Virilio warns us about the development of “Grand-Scale Transhorizon Optics,” which would be “the site of all (strategic, economic, political ...) virtualization. Without it, the development of [globalitarianism](#), which is preparing to revive totalitarianism of the past, would be ineffective.”¹³ [Babel](#) and [How Latitudes Become Forms](#) are situated between the all-encompassing sign of [Aleph](#) and the all-encompassing desire in Borges’ [Library of Babel](#), between the essential and the excessive.

Meireles’ tower of transmissions reminds us that since the thwarting of Babel and the scattering of peoples, a single universal language that “would allow for pursuing one common project” is impossible. Embracing that multiplicity, Meireles resists the impending disappearance of half the existing languages in the world. A global humming is transmitted in [Babel](#) and in the work of Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, an artist based in Chicago (41°53’ N, 87°38’ W). His installation [Climate](#) (2000) is a techno-political machine. In contrast to Walter Benjamin’s hopefulness, Manglano-Ovalle’s skepticism expects no progressive social change to occur through the refunctioning of communication technology. The artist points out the scarcity of critical social discourse in our times. The continuousness of global market information generates the entropic loss of latitude. Manglano-Ovalle’s use of military and communication technologies in real time, or through night vision, creates a calculated “synchronized global access,” as in [Nocturne](#) (2002). His work contains anxiety emerging in virtual space and in the experience of a telematic horizon of solitude of individuals and the abandonment of social groups. This could be a portrait of the dystopic curator of “how forms lose their latitudes.” Manglano-Ovalle’s use of omnipresent techno-politics matches Virilio’s description of the “the end of the space.”¹⁴ [How Latitudes Become Forms](#) gives visibility to a scenario for the emergence of art. This experience eschews that anxiety of the omnipresent curatorial gaze and the all-encompassing eye that captures every change in art in real time or through an all-powerful night vision. Curating is not like the humming of an artistic world-climate forecast through which everywhere is turned into a communicational nowhere.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Tseng Kwong Chi performed as a communist tourist. Latitudes did not become form; he traveled around the world to take his picture at well-known sites, always dressed in the “Chinese communist” uniform. Like a “foreign agent,” he developed no real relationship to the locales, be it Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin (52°27’ N, 13°18’ E), Cristo Redentor in Rio, Notre Dame in Paris (48°49’ N, 2°29’ E), or the Statue of Liberty in New York. In a recent series of videos, Kim Soo Ja deals with the specific moods of various cities: Tokyo (35°41’ N, 139°46’ E), Shanghai (31°12’ N, 121°26’ E), New Delhi (28°35’ N, 77°12’ E), New York, and Lagos (6°27’ N, 3°24’ E). This artist from Seoul (37°34’ N, 126°58’ E) applies a single formula to all these places: she stands in an immobile yoga position and is filmed from the back. The crowds in each town pass by her like a river. The viewer is able to discern differences in cultural attitudes within the social psychology of each city and a corresponding set of individual behaviors within the mob’s interaction with the artist: indifference, curiosity, friendliness, playfulness, thievery. The imaginary becomes active when latitudes become desire. Artist David Hammons’ sale of snowballs might make more sense to inhabitants of the Tropics than it did to his confused New York customers. In [Turismo](#) (2000), Judi Wertheim and Leandro Erlich play on the Cuban fascination with snow. In this work, members of the public in Havana (23°8’ N, 82°21’ W) have their pictures taken in a wintry Alps setting, with bemused bewilderment.

What are the “productive assets” in different cultural latitudes? In “Aesthetics of the Third World” (1969), Arthur Barrio noted “a growing trend in the field of visual arts in the First World to use materials considered expensive to my reality, by our standards within the socioeconomic reality of the Third World (including Latin America), since these industrial products were not ours, were not within reach.”¹⁵ Instead, Barrio proposed the use of perishable and cheap materials to problematize the inscription of art production in [economic](#) latitudes, “since creation cannot be conditioned, but has to be free.”

¹² (“Radio is the beginning of the media age in a wider context, so it has connotations to internet and satellite channels and all these media buzzing in the air today.”) Maaretta Jaukkuri, quoted in *ibid.*; original quote in English and Finnish.

¹³ Paul Virilio, [The Information Bomb](#), trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Arthur Barrio, in [Barrio](#) (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Nacional de Arte, 1978), p. 5. Translation by the author.

Some women have called for responsibility in the face of social oppression (individual latitudes). In Mineirinho (1962), Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector asked herself what her own social responsibilities were in the face of urban violence, and Jamaica Kinkaid, in her book A Small Place (1988), confronted white people about post-colonial racism in her native Antigua. In the late 1980s, North American artist Adrian Piper distributed her business cards with inquiring observations on racism to the public at art exhibitions. In her short and fast-paced video Meditation on Vacation (2002), Nigerian artist Fatimah Tuggar, born in Kaduna (10°33' N, 7°27' E), contrasts expropriation within the First and Third World polarity with modern strategies of appropriation in art by incorporating a large number of citations in a collage of images taken from films and from the Web.

The mechanisms of global articulation include immigration, drugs, Coca Cola, terrorism, communications, weapons smuggling, capital, omnipotent governments, weather, man-made global warming caused by dumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, natural catastrophes, asteroids, disease (including the insect-transmitted variety), sex and AIDS, tourism, and art. Curatorial mobility becomes part of the tourism industry; criticism is reduced to a function of the market; collecting is investing; biennials are strategies within regional disputes over power or visibility. Focusing on the specificity of places and the singularity of artists and their practices, How Latitudes Become Forms disrupts the idea of curatorial practice as tourism, cultural shopping, or the researching of token artists for geopolitical purposes. The etymology and meaning of the word latitude is: a transverse dimension; breadth; width as opposed to length; also occasionally spaciousness. Unlike the old Northern Hemispheric system of compiling “world surveys,” which occasionally incorporated artists from Latin America or Africa as long as they lived in the metropolitan countries, curating a show such as How Latitudes Become Forms requires actual traveling and personal engagement by curators.

Florian Pumhösl has been following the dispersion of modernity in unexpected places, from Armenia to Uganda. Working from Vienna (48°15' N, 16°22' E), with its indoor-modernism invisible to tourists, he has created a selective portrait of Kampala (0°18'45" N, 32°34'12" E) that shows the city's planning, building, and destruction by civil war. Whereas urban planning in Kampala reflected social and ethnic division and separation, modern architecture marked the passage from colonial status to independence. Pumhösl works with an ethos that refers to the model of exhibition spaces. He conceptually “remodels” history, using the character of architecture as a platform for other political ideas. As he concludes, “modernization is not a local phenomenon but it has local effects.” Kampala, like Vienna and Yerevan (40°10' N, 44°31' E), has a discontinued history. All three localities provide parallel scenarios to the mainstream history. According to Pumhösl, “The Viennese understanding of modernism does not seem to take it very serious if ideas or things really exist(ed). It is more about generating images of modernity which can be used whenever needed.”¹⁶

As for Latin America, modernism was a process of overcoming the colonial past. The discussions about post-modernity were exhausted even before modernity arrived to large portions of the Latin American population.¹⁷ An age of the articulation of differences might now be supplanting Eurocentric art history. But the end of history was announced before the excluded artists and movements (many simply because of their geographic origin) were able to be included in that art history. How Latitudes Become Forms seems aware of the warning provided by Fredric Jameson: “How the various ‘ends of art’ are now to be coordinated philosophically and theoretically with this new ‘closing’ of the global frontier of capitalism is our more fundamental question, and the horizon of all literary and cultural study of our time.”¹⁸

Does globalization correspond in art history to the consolidation of the process that has reduced every other production around the world to minimalism or Pop? Setting a poetical framework, and in contrast to virtual visions, the curatorial process of How Latitudes Become Forms makes its contribution to a worldwide time of exchanges through a concrete approach to artistic realities. It opposes universal voyeurism. It defies the visual

16 Florian Pumhösl, quoted in Paulo Herkenhoff, “Vienna d’ Austria,” in Gerald Matt, Lebt und arbeitet in Wien / Living and Working in Vienna, exh. cat. (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2000), p. 81.

17 See Néstor García Canclini, “Redefinitions: Art and Identity in the Era of Post-National Cultures,” in American Visions/Visiones de las Américas: Artistic and Cultural Identity in the Western Hemisphere, eds. Noreen Tomassi, et al. (New York: American Council for the Arts, 1994), pp. 160-171.

18 Fredric Jameson, “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History?’” in The Cultural Turn: Selected Writing on the Postmodern, 1983-1998 (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 92.

illiteracy that is constructed from within ethnocentric art history: an incapacity to adequately perceive other art practices in the context of different cultural processes.¹⁹ The utopian character of *How Latitudes Become Forms* resides in its taking the model of a world without a center as a poetics and an epistemology of curating. The creation of significant art is no longer the monopoly of one country or one city. “L’art n’est plus la propriété d’une langue,” Régis Michel has affirmed.²⁰ Nor is art the property of a center,²¹ a place, a people, a class, a gender, an ethnic group, a notion of history, a style, a taste, a state, the West, a longitude, or a latitude.

19 One case of that is Neoconcretismo, with artists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark never having had a one-person show in New York.

20 (Art is no longer the property of one language.) See Régis Michel, “The Saturn Syndrome or the Law of the Father: Cannibal Machines of Modernity,” in *Núcleo histórico: antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: XXIV Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), pp. 120–134.

21 See Paulo Herkenhoff, “Monochromes, the Autonomy of Color, and the Centerless World,” in *Painting at the Edge of the World*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), pp. 93–112.