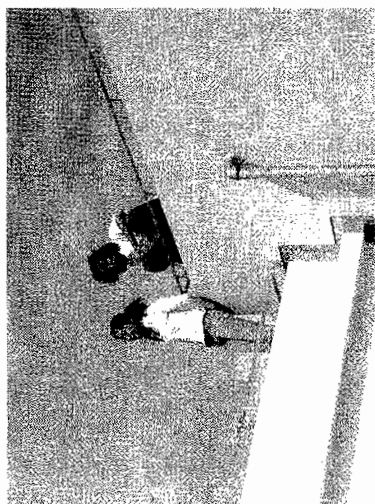
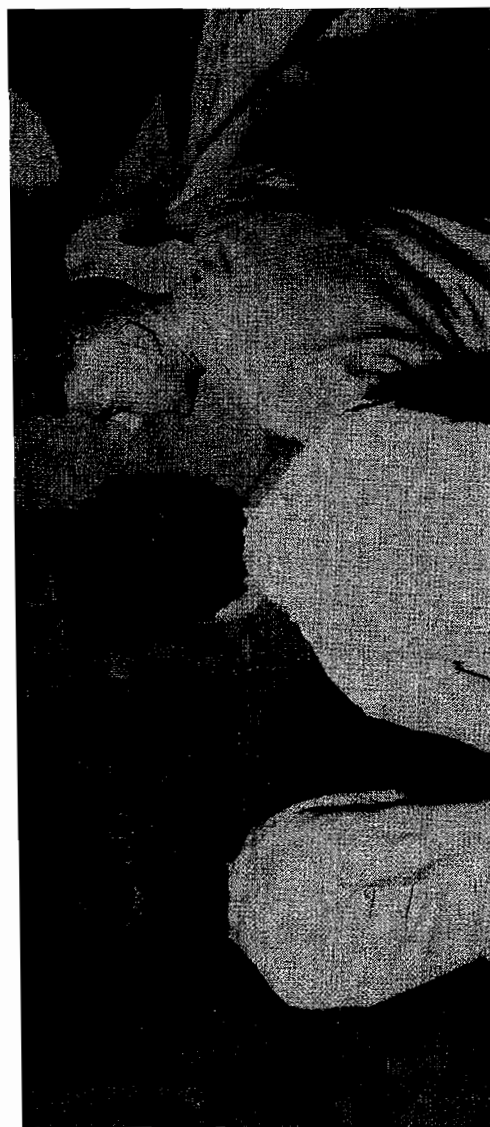


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Opposite page, clockwise:
 2nd Biennial de São Paulo
 Francesca Comencini
 film in 35 mm, 63 min
 International Istanbul Film
 Festival (detail), 1999
 Fluttes, Jasmine Jam
 Nation 2003, Istanbul

BOUNDARY ISSUES

THE ART WORLD UNDER THE SIGN OF GLOBALISM



You could call it a pathology of self-definition. Either that or a severe case of "boundary issues." For close to ten years now, that ambient phenomenon known as the art world has been hit by what amounts to an identity crisis, more often than not figured under the sign of globalization. Flip through the catalogues and magazines, survey the principal actors and bit players, track the ever-proliferating biennials—from São Paulo to Shanghai to Istanbul—and witness the art world's struggle to rethink its audiences and range of influence, its norms and procedures. But just how precisely has the art world addressed the conditions of "multiplicity, diversity, and contradiction"—the defining characteristics of the contemporary experience, according to Francesco Bonami—coextensive with the processes of globalization? There is the lurking suspicion shared by many longstanding art-world participants that "the Global" has simply assumed the throne formerly held by likes of the Postmodern, the Multicultural, the Simulacra, and the *informe* (and not unlike the operations of formlessness, globalization's neoliberal consequences may prove thoroughly abject).

I would argue that the way the art world conceives of itself determines its treatment of globalization. Indeed, the conventional understanding of the term "art world" betrays a set of prejudices under threat by the very global conditions the contemporary art world seeks to represent. In common parlance, the "art world" signifies a society of individuals and institutions—a social, cultural, and economic world organized around museums, galleries, and the art press and the legions of artists, critics, collectors, curators, and audiences who have truck with such sites. The image of this world

is typically one of gala openings and social privilege—at once a specialized community and the locations that community would occupy (the New York art world, for example, or the gallery scene in Los Angeles)—and decidedly Eurocentric in its orientation. So it makes perfect sense that the art world thus conceived would seem stricken by both geopolitical anxiety and a peculiar giddiness about the current state of global affairs. For one thing, as demonstrated by the numerous high-profile exhibitions on the topic, the art world now appears embroiled in a turf war, in which its official institutions (namely, museums, those loci of art-historical knowledge) are imagined to defend their proprietary interests from global "outsiders" and their curatorial incursions. By the same token, something of a colonial logic underwrites the expansion of the art world's traditional borders, as

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Lucas Negreira Garces, *Governor of São Paulo, with Pablo Picasso's Guernica*, 2nd Biennial de São Paulo, 1953. Photo courtesy of Fundação Biennial de São Paulo, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo. Francesca Comencini, *Carlo Giuliani, Ragazzo (Carlo Giuliani, a Boy)*, 2002, still from a black-and-white and color film in 35 mm, 63 minutes. Yelena and Viktor Vorobyev, *Classics' Farewell to People*, 1999, Installation view, 6th International Istanbul Biennial, 1999. Photo: Muammer Yılmaz. Allen Sekula, *Waiting for Tear Gas (white globe to black) (detail)*, 1999–2000, color photographs and slide projection, dimensions variable. Yang Fudong, *Flutter Flutter, Jasmine Jasmine (detail)*, 2002, video installation. This page: Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Stateless Nation*, 2003. Installation view, 50th Venice Biennale, 2003. Photo: Roman Mensing/artdoc.de.

if the art world itself were gleefully following globalization's imperial mandate.

We can hardly avoid using "art world" in the everyday sense of the term—it's simply too convenient, too deeply embedded in our vocabulary—but a brief look into its provenance as a philosophical term of art might be instructive in analyzing the current struggle to effectively engage the global problematic. Perhaps the most influential postwar articulation was formulated by Arthur C. Danto in 1964. Taking Warhol's Brillo boxes as his case study, Danto's essay "The Artworld" asked after the first principle of philosophical aesthetics: What separates a work of art from non-art, the readymade from the commodity? The art object, he argued, must exist in an "atmosphere of interpretation" with other artworks, which would in turn serve as comparative vehicles of interpretation. As he put it, "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decay—an atmosphere of something the eye cannot decay—a knowledge of history of art: an artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artistic world." Danto argued that an object is granted the status of art if it can be conceptually linked to objects already deemed art; and a theoretical claim—an aesthetic theory—was required to justify that linkage. "There is no art without those who speak the language of the artworld," Danto reasoned. "The artworld stands to the real world in something like the relationship in which the City of God stands to the Earthly City." The art world, this Augustinian analogy implies, is a theoretical paradigm; and what comes to count as art today must necessarily find its "place" in that divine city. Like all good paradigms, however, the art world must necessarily shift with the times; it must be able to accommodate new languages and ideas in a perpetual state of conceptual readiness. "The world has to be ready for certain things," Danto wrote nearly forty years ago, "the artworld no less than the real one."

Danto's approach proves useful in parsing the global problematic, as it underscores the need for a theoretical paradigm equal to the task of accommodating the vast changes witnessed in the art world and artistic production at large over the course of the past decade. But whether the art world is a theoretical atmosphere or an institutional elite (complete with the secret handshakes that grant membership into its society), the question remains: What happens to the art world when the world itself is progressively aestheticized under the regime of global spectacle? And, further, what happens if the art world's institutional context has expanded beyond measure, in excess of the nationally inscribed institutions of the "official" art world (i.e., Europe and the United States)? On the surface of things, the institutional art world claims no separation at all from the global "outside"; the language of crisis and contradiction underwriting our current transnational frenzy suggests that exactly the opposite is the case. Moreover, the ways in which the art world has generally represented issues around globalization—as in last summer's Venice Biennale or in the Whitney Museum of American Art's "The American Effect"—suggest that a troubling distance between the art world and the global order still remains.

No doubt a big part of the art world's problem in treating the global issue revolves not only around defining globalization itself but around evaluating the political consequences that stem from its procedures. Fredric Jameson usefully, if broadly, defined globalization as "the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market," speaking to the postwar integration of communicative, economic, and geographical forces and offered claims about the collapse of traditional conceptions of space and time with the emergent geopolitical order. The art world's account of the term "globalization," however, suffers from a certain fuzziness relative to its own practices. To be sure, the words "globalization," "globality," "the global" and "globalism" (the "ism" here connoting either an ethos, an aesthetics, or a kind of period style—take your pick) bear the peculiar distinction of being both ubiquitous and amorphous: ubiquitous because inescapable to any semi-informed world citizen and yet amorphous because subject to infinite shape-shifting, especially in the mainstream press. Of course, the student of the global knows full well that globalization



THE ART WORLD HAS RESPONDED TO CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS LARGELY THROUGH REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GLOBAL. BUT THIS TACK REFLECTS AN ARTWORLD THAT STILL SEES ITSELF AS DISTINCT FROM THE "REAL" WORLD.

does mean many things, bound up at once in the rhetoric of galloping free markets and in the lingering specter of Marx, simultaneously producing homogenization (read: Americanization) and radical hybridity. What's more, the fallout of such processes has sparked ferocious debate concerning globalization's political ends—whether or not it serves progressive or reactionary purposes. Where exactly *should* we stand vis-à-vis a New World Order that gives rise to the Battle in Seattle and to the so-called War on Terror? To the "multitude" and the Nike army alike? The lack of consensus around globalization's terms and implications is arguably what endows it with both its acutely anxious charge and its capacity to be generalized to the point of meaninglessness. Like the art world's treatment of postmodernism two decades earlier, the semantic stalemate around globalization is typically resolved by conceding to the plurality of its definitions. And that's part of the problem as well: In the art world's weakest iterations of the topic, it all seems like so much old-school pluralism, the bad dream of the postmodern that Hal Foster long ago characterized in terms of the world market. "The pluralist position," he presciently wrote, "plays right into the ideology of the 'free market.'" Globalization, to follow this model, translates into "the far-flung from all over," an "anything goes" approach to recent art in



convey the expediency of markets, the freedom (or trauma) of placelessness, and the cultures of immigration and tourism than the alien space of the airport terminal? The kinds of pairings that result from this iconography doubtlessly underscore the business of "conflict" and "contradiction" emblematic of the global question, but too often, the superficial emphasis on image and theme comes at the expense of critical readings of the work. Shots of cargo containers by the Milanese artists' collective Multiplicity propose quite different things from an Allan Sekula series involving the same. You can lump together a picture of a tarmac by Andreas

which floating the buzzwords "conflict," "tension," and "contradiction" may be enough to move some less than compelling product.

Typically, the ways in which the art world has addressed the global question rest with the logic of representation. Representation assumes several meanings in this context: It pertains, first, to the institutional visibility of the discourse around globalization, the degree to which museums, galleries, critics, artists, and cultural consumers feel the need to pay attention to the topic, and, second, to the diversity of artists, locations, and cultural perspectives increasingly included in the art world's discourse. It goes without saying that this is no small thing, neither the opening of the art world to artists typically shut out from it (i.e., artists from Asia, Africa, Latin America appearing in biennials located in Johannesburg, Tirana, and Havana) nor the instrumental role played by curators and critics in that very opening. For those once embroiled in the culture wars, such institutional arrangements in response to global demands for representation may recall the struggles over identity politics that marked the late '80s and early '90s. And what the multiculturalism

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Opposite page, top: Allan Sekula's "Fish Story" (1987-95. Bottom: Plexiglas, and aluminum, 57 7 1/2". Bottom: Marthe Rosh's "The Public," 1981-98.

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Gursky with a Martha Rosler photo of an airport lounge, but the comparison will be spurious at best, the kind of category error art historians rightfully brush off as "pseudomorphology."

The art world, in other words, has responded to contemporary geopolitics largely through representations of the global and its thematics. Its approach is a kind of *globalism*, what I earlier referred to as an aesthetic or "period style." But this tack offers a relatively limited picture of the sociopolitical situation, reflecting an art world that still sees itself as distinct from the "real" world "outside" it, analogous, say, to the way that a figure is positioned in relation to its ground. Apart from the nods we dutifully make to expanding networks of communication and the broad recognition that globalization may change the way we go about our art history, we must keep in mind that globalization is as much a process as a thing and that the "atmosphere of theory" which Danto identified as the "artworld" may move us closer to thinking critically about our relationship to those processes. Case in point: Consider how we all contend with the banality of the airport (aside from its glossy image in the iris prints that regularly turn up at galleries). By now, any number of people have noted that citizenship in the art world is measured by the number of frequent-flyer miles one chalks up in the service of the business. A few months ago, I conversed with a well-known artist about his extensive international travel; and the staggering number of miles he sheepishly volunteered confirmed this thesis without his being familiar with it. The point, basic though it may be, is that the activities constitutive of the art world's horizon are indivisible from the activities of globalization itself. What we treat as a given to our métier is, in fact, immanent to the processes we usually associate with the emerging transnational order.

And if it's a theory of immanence we're looking for, we might take a page from the most cherished manifesto of the antiglobalization movement, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* (2000). Let's admit these are strange days when a book that makes ample reference to Spinoza, Machiavelli, Deleuze, and Duns Scotus accrues a kind of pop-culture stardom. Strange, too, is Negri's celebrity in art-world circles, given the book's relative quiet on the subject of art (the one art-historical reference in the book's

478 pages is—appropriately enough—Serge Guilbaut's canonical *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* [1983]). Nevertheless, Negri's art-world acclaim was much in evidence at Documenta 11—for which he had contributed, with Hardt, an essay to one of its "platforms" on democracy—no less than at last summer's Venice Biennale, where the phantom presence of *Empire* was all-pervasive (and hardly a stone's throw from Padua, where the autonomist movement with which Negri was associated in the '70s committed some of its most violent acts). Should we take the book's energetic rhetoric of multitudes and counter-Empire seriously, however, we need acknowledge the particular language of immanence it borrows from Spinoza and Deleuze. A theory of immanence stresses the here and now against the dialectical or transcendent; as it is thought through the logic of globalization, it suggests that there is no longer any global "outside," no Archimedean point from which to survey the workings of globalization with cool, critical distance. It bears saying that numerous critics have challenged Negri and Hardt on this point, but for the immediate purposes of discussing the art world, the plane of immanence finds metaphorical expression in a telling (and in this context, uncanny) turn of phrase. On the coming of counter-Empire, Hardt and Negri write, "This is the founding moment of an earthly city that is strong and distinct from any divine city."

One is loath (or at least seriously reluctant) to equate the workings of the art world with the multitude or the earthly city (and while some of us may well be self-identified cultural laborers or even simply workers, far too many others would seem to rule by sovereign decree). Regardless, the unintended reversal of Danto's Augustinian metaphor forces us to confront our methodological shortcomings on the global question, bringing the art world down to earth, so to speak. Indeed, our most urgent challenge is to account more critically for the way the art world has internalized the conditions of the global as its daily habitus: its institutional, political, and economic imperatives as well as its artistic and critical ones. And we need to productively rethink the "art world" as itself a mode of immanent global production, not just as a passive mirror reflecting the sweeping geopolitical changes thought to remain outside of it. Let me repeat Danto's words as an injunction to our own practices as artists, critics, curators, historians, and audience members: "The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one." This "atmosphere compounded of artistic theories" must be ready for the day when the art world's traditional borders are indivisible from those of the global order we are inclined merely to portray. □

Pamela M. Lee is associate professor of art history at Stanford University.



Opposite page, top: Allan Sekula, *Panorama, Mid-Atlantic*, 1993, color photograph, 33 1/2 x 62 1/2". From the series "Fish Story," 1987-95. Bottom: Francesco Jodice/*Multiplicity, What We Want, Naples*, 1996, color photograph, Plexiglas, and aluminum, 57 x 74 1/2". This page, top: Andreas Gursky, *Schiphol*, 1994, color photograph, 6' 1 1/2" x 7' 1/2". Bottom: Martha Rosler, *Untitled (JFK)*, 1990, color photograph, 26 1/2 x 40". From the series "In the Place of the Public," 1981-98.