ART HISTORY IN THE WAKE OF THE GLOBAL TURN

CLARK STUDIES IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Edited by Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza
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With essays by Esra Akcan, Jill H. Casid, Parul Dave-Mukherji, Aruna D'Souza, Talinn Grigor, Ranjana Khanna, Kobena Mercer, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Steven Nelson, Todd Porterfield, Raqs Media Collective, Kishwar Rizvi, David J. Roxburgh, and Alessandra Russo

With globalization steadily reshaping the cultural landscape, scholars have long called for a full-scale reassessment of art history's largely Eurocentric framework. This collection of case studies and essays, the latest in the Clark Studies in the Visual Arts series, brings together voices from various disciplinary and theoretical backgrounds, each proposing ways to remap, decenter, and reorient what is often assumed to be a unified field. Rather than devise a one-size-fits-all strategy for what has long been a divided and disjointed terrain, these authors and artists reframe the inherent challenges of the global—most notably geographic, political, aesthetic, and linguistic differences—as productive starting points for study. As the book demonstrates, approaching art history from such alternative perspectives rewrites some of the most basic narratives, from the origins of representation to the beginnings of the "modern" to the very history of globalization and its effects.

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EPILOGUE
Turning the "Fearful Sphere": Prepositional Tactics in and for the Global

Jill H. Casid

Yishai Jusidman’s oil and egg tempera painting on wood (fig. 1), eighth in the series The Economist Shuffle (2006), alters the terrain of global practice, turning up the temperature reading of “global warming” and peeling off the cool blue surface of the earth’s aquatic bandage to expose an uncontainable and uninhabitable molten core. Thinking with such disorienting and reorienting visions of the fractured global in terms of spatiality, temporality, and movement, helps us to repose not just the question of the terrain of global practice but also and again what is the work of art history—its objects, theorizations, praxis (including political praxis), and methods of analysis—in an age so often characterized as transnational or global and in a moment marked by profound precarity and shaken by economic, social, and environmental crises focused in part on heated contestatory zones of commerce and assembly (Occupy Wall Street, Tahrir Square) and the warming of the globe but turning as well on the agonistic questions of biopolitics and the forms of life and death? But, further, if the global is neither unitary nor a given nor even a static thing, if the world is, as Jean-Luc Nancy formulates it in The Creation of the World, praxis (becoming-world and taking place), what tactics might we prompt to emerge in the wake of the global turn or, in other words, what might the work of an exploded art history without borders become?

Tactics, as Michel de Certeau would describe, are those practices without proper place that take advantage of fleeting moments in time and insinuate themselves fragmentarily and without taking over. Via the
navigated, yet untranslated, cross-currents of words in Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Sea of Poppies*. Aruna D’Souza has emphasized the ways in which the frictions of negotiating radical differences of language in the dynamics of encounter including the misrecognition of the parts of speech (is it adjective, noun, or verb?) may offer their own productivities—among them the inventive deformation of languages in parts. I would like to push the plea for the promise of part languages and languages in parts, by returning to and concluding with the proposition of a set of five tactics premised on that part of speech that does the work of encounter, placing and displacing bodies, things, events, and concepts in dynamic and altering contacts of relation. This suggested set of tactics in and for the global is a matter of prepositions—prepositions that forge relation in and across differences without turning them into the solidities of either sameness or hardened difference. These prepositional tactics might be understood as restating the question of the tactics for the global in terms of the fluctuations and movements in the intonations of languages that might yet make all the difference.

Intonation, literally a change in tone, is a minor part of the performance of speech that, nonetheless, shifts what language does as a matter of the changing and even tipping points at which the stress of a rise or lowering in tone may fall in syntax. Intonation also affects the fall of language, its gravitational pull, if you will, in the space and time of the world. It is not incidental, for example, that Michel Serres, in *Angels: A Modern Myth*, develops philosopher and physicist Lucretius’s theorization of declination and inclination—the whirling differences in curve and fall as the origin of the world to posit prepositions which are operative of declension—as world-making inflections. To demonstrate the power of prepositions, Serres provides a diagram of his own making, a montage of prepositions handwritten over a meteorological photograph of the earth’s surface showing stormy whirlwinds in the process of formation over the coast of Africa. Prepositions are the material and the instigators of such world-making tactics.

Confronting the ambitions and the folly of the dream of total knowledge, German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher’s diagram of the instability of the earth’s position from the 1679 treatise *Turris Babel* (fig. 2) takes the device of the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel (the passage from Genesis in six different languages—Latin, Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic all flutter around the pillar of aspiration) to poke phallic fun at the dangerous limits of technological ambition, a reach so absurdly high that the tipping point weight of its materialized hubris in attempting to reach heaven (here the moon) knocks the earth out of its
natural place at the fixed center of the cosmos, splintering the tower into a cacophony of languages.

In “The Fearful Sphere of Pascal” (1951), Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges composes a kind of microhistory of the itinerary of a particular figure: the sphere and the spherical cosmologies it projects from god as an eternal sphere for Xenophanes of Colophon and the sphere as the most perfect and uniform of figures (one in which each point is equidistant from a common center) in Plato’s Timaeus through the Ptolemaic astronomy of the earth as a fixed point at the center of the universe “preserved” in Dante’s Inferno. But this micro-history of the figure of the sphere is also more profoundly a meditative intervention in the writing of universal history. Indeed the micro-history or “chapter,” as Borges calls it, opens with an evocative prepositional characterization of what that history consists of: “It may be that universal history is the history of a handful of metaphors.” And yet Borges’s tour of the various turns given the sphere concludes with an even more resonant prepositional “of”: “It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors.” The very different intonation of the metaphor of the “fearful sphere of Pascal” with which Borges titles his microhistory gives us an image for doing the global that holds in tension the seemingly impossible: the concept of the sphere within, and not despite the profound fear of, its incompassability and explosion into a multiplicity of centers:
In that dispirited century [the seventeenth], the absolute space which had meant liberation for Bruno, became a labyrinth and an abyss for Pascal. He abhorred the universe and would have liked to adore God; but God, for him, was less real than the abhorred universe. He deplored the fact that the firmament did not speak, and compared our life with that of castaways on a desert island. He felt the incessant weight of the physical world, he experienced vertigo, fright, and solitude, and he put his feelings into these words: "Nature is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." Thus do the words appear in the Brunswich text; but which the critical edition published by Touneur (Paris, 1941), which reproduces the crossed-out words and variations of the manuscript, reveals that Pascal started to write the word effroyable: "a fearfrrl sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."  

I would like to suggest that this sphere between the infinite and the fearful, the ever expansive and the frightful limitation and even abandonment, this sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere projects a figure of and for the practice of the global in and with a difference in intonation that offers a difference in relation. That is, the "fearful sphere" offers a vision of the global that does not disavow but rather reckons by putting us into relation with our fear, our precarity, and the fragility of the incompassable (in the sense of fluctuating and expanding) and exploded without giving up hope in the decentered and multi-centered and ultimately unbounded, fractured and yet perhaps still sustainable globe.

Thus, I shall put five prepositional tactics into play.

Prepositional Proposition One: From whence it comes (transcultural genealogies and hybrid origins)
First we might begin with beginnings, with the prepositional from and the not at all simple problem of origins in the familiar task of attribution in the question where does it come from and the "in relation" established or troubled by the itineraries and implied narratives of its answer. This "from" implies a narrative and most problematically stories that, when not unidirectional single-origin tales, nonetheless, wittingly or unwittingly represent encounter "between" as contamination of the "from." While many of the key terms for thinking and doing the global might
seem to insist on thinking processes such as hybridity, métissage, créolité, mestizaje, and transculturation to name just a few, we must also consider how to practice the global beyond the narratives of purity and spoiling mixture that also haunt the terms of encounter and crossing.

I would like to suggest that reconsideration of Fernando Ortiz’s Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar (first published in 1941) and specifically its narrative deployment of the term transculturation to posit a transcultural genealogy for modernity may give us a very different way to intone the “from.” ⁸ Cuban Counterpoint provides an alternative account of the development of modernity that situates Cuba or the plantation colony not as an outpost or passive recipient of technology transfer but instead as a “geographic laboratory” for the making of the modern capitalist system out of the slave plantation. ⁹ In a global flow re-characterized as an huracán of white powder and spiraling smoke, Doña Azucar and Señor Tobacco are transformative agents, that not only remake Cuba or the “New World” but also storm back across the ocean to fundamentally alter in substance something called European modernity. Whipping between production and consumption, between planting and the colonial sites of manufacture, and from indigenous practices and belief systems and the slave labors of supply into the bottomless wants of the pipes and cups of metropolitan and imperial demand, the wind-up death dance of these commodity actors on the global stage of the colonial plantation machine profoundly questions the claimed scientific rationality and civilizing force of capitalism’s commercial traffic. Furthermore, such transformative consumption is not merely a matter of raw materials (as in sugar and tobacco) but rather the origins of Europe’s claim to reason, imagination, and refinement.

In a tactical reading of various early modern European prints including the frontispiece to Richard Brathwaite’s The Smoaking Age (fig. 3), Ortiz does not merely suggest that contact with the Americas altered the course of European development long before the twentieth or twenty-first century but rather that the very core of ostensible European difference and identity was constituted out of that contact: “One might say that reason, starved and benumbed by theology, to revive and free itself, needed the help of some harmless stimulant. . . . For this, to help sick reason, tobacco came from America.” ¹⁰ Through a lengthy and carefully plotted sequence, Ortiz’s Cuban Counterpoint, packs indigenous belief and ritual into the sheaves of tobacco sent across the Atlantic and into the pipes of, for example, the English dandies and roaring men, reading the twirling clouds of smoke as an imitation of “Cuban abolition” or the Indian manner of smoking and
Fig. 3. Frontispiece to The Smoking Age (London, 1617), by Richard Brathwaite (English, 1588–1673). The British Library, London
the curls of Latin text as a sign of the curls of thought, gestures of the imaginative thinker, performances of elegance and taste, and acts for claims to masculinity that could not have been exercised without the transculturating influence from the indigenous peoples of the Americas and specifically the Taíno and Ciboney of Cuba. Thinking with such turnabout storytelling devices as Ortiz’s storm of counterpoint may yet prompt new narrative tactics in which the question from whence does it come entails complexities in relation that promise to undo and rewrite the (neo)imperial priorities and imagined purities in space and time.

Prepositional Proposition Two: In the wake of (counter-histories and identities in the break)

After reading Sigmund Freud’s last work Moses and Monotheism in Mexico, Frida Kahlo painted a response in oil on Masonite (fig. 4) to Freud’s articulation of the internal limits or breach of Jewish identity, the way in which that identity could never be fully incorporated into one unitary whole for, according to Freud’s counter-archeology, the founder of Jewish identity, Moses, was an Egyptian.11 Kahlo wrote of her landscape version of history in which the ostensible great male protagonists of old and New World historical cosmologies are pushed to the periphery of the molten orb of sunflower-sun (part planet, part botanical specimen) that, “What I wanted to express most intensely and clearly was the reason that people need to invent or imagine heroes is because of their unmitigated fear—fear of life and fear of death.”12 In this synoptic view of history in the wake of multiple diasporas and the colonization of the New World, two dark hands embrace skeletons that frame three variations on fertilization that concresce human embryo, fruit, fetus, and seed pod—putting the viewer not merely in a confrontation with the enfolding of life and death but even more starkly the spectacular emergence of hybrid forms of life and death and with them the materialization of internal and irreducible differences in the break that they do not repair.

The prepositional phrase “in the wake of” troubles any absolute break between pre- and postcolonial but does not patch over the traumatic ruptures. Rather, “in the wake of” begins to chart a tactics of writing history in and with the ruptures and discontinuities of time. In his last book Freud and the Non-European (2003), the late Edward Said thinks with the secular wound of irreconcilable difference in Freud’s Moses and Monotheism to begin to imagine the tactics for another kind of history writing that does not override or repress the flaw and that also
offers the possibility of new formations, of worlds to come. “History being always that which comes after,” Said asks, “can so deeply undetermined a history ever be written? ... Can it aspire to the condition of a politics of diaspora life? Can it ever become the not-so-precarious foundation in the land of Jews and Palestinians of a bi-national state in which Israel and Palestine are parts, rather than agonists of each other’s history and underlying reality?” Said answers the affirmations nested in these questions with the hope he finds in the “pains” taken to elucidate the condition of history and identity formed around irreducible and irremediable fracture and trauma. This is a tactic in and of the wake, of history writing that does not fill in or patch over but, instead, practices a kind of painstaking care or mourning without end.
Prepositional Proposition Three: Catachrestic displacement toward

As Said’s hoping toward worlds to become already suggests, this prepositional tactics of “in the wake” and the mourning without end need not homogenize time or look only with the ever backward glance. Gayatri Spivak has characterized the postcolonial condition as one of catachresis or the effect of the mixed metaphors produced by the displacements and reconnections of matter and bodies. But we could also argue that the seemingly out of place is also a matter of the out of time or displacements in time that may yet also call up or unfold different futures. That is, the catachrestic condition of being “in the wake of” may also demand a tactics that refuses to ask simply what it is or to what time and place does it belong, but rather puts these questions in necessary transformative relation with what they may yet become (as in Said’s own emphasis on the “can it ever become . . .?”).

A beaded zemi (fig. 5) now in the Pigorini Museum in Rome is hailed by the catalogue to the Museo del Barrio’s 1997 exhibit on pre-Columbian art and culture from the Caribbean as “the finest surviving Taíno work of art produced in the decades between the arrival of Columbus in 1492 and the disappearance of the Taíno culture in the first half of the sixteenth century.” At once god, ancestral spirit, the shaman who incarnates and mediates those gods, and the sculptural

Fig. 5. Zemi, front and back views, c. 1510–15. Wood, cotton, shell, and glass, 12 1/2 x 7 1/4 in. (32 x 19.5 cm). Museo Nazionale Preistorico ed Etnografico ©_S-MNPE “L. Pigorini,” Rome
object that may provide a place of dwelling for those spirits, this zemi was acquired for the Cospi family, along with other New World objects (including an Aztec ritual book and sacrificial knives) in the seventeenth century. This zemi is an object in and of encounter—an instance perhaps of what Serge Gruzinski has termed the cloud-like and unpredictable forces of mestizo invention. First identified as an African fetish, this zemi has, since the early 1990s, attracted interest for its inventive incorporation of styles and materials that would seem to come from different places: Amerindian grammars of dualism such as the twinning of life and death and New and Old World materials, imported Venetian glass and African rhinoceros horn, and locally acquired Caribbean conch-shell discs, cotton, and cold-hammered, placer-mined gold. An object produced out of the displacements of colonization, Taino trade, and European collecting, the zemi may not just condense the life/death transformation of the living dead shamans of the Taino who took hallucinogens to raise the fecund possibilities of dead ancestors; but may also cross the time of stylistic influence, the story that would say the Taino are dead, with the more magical or spiritual time of what such objects promise to materialize and animate. But it takes a further tactics of catachresis to push the mixed metaphors of contact and encounter toward present and future possibilities beyond the either/ors of live or dead natives and live or dead cultures.

**Prepositional Proposition Four: Love in prepositions or affect in relation**

But these prepositional tactics are insufficient without consideration of the wishes, hopes, and fantasies that animate these tactics of relation and the affects and desires produced in these encounters. That is, what happens to consideration of the forces of subjectivization, to the interrogations of the bounds of the human, to the matter and matterings of gender, sex, race and racialization, to attachments, desire, the passions and the complexities of affect, to the biopolitics of life, to the powers of the senses, to the precarity of bodies, environments and life-worlds in the wake of the global turn and how might attention to desire, fantasy, and the transmission of affect in our positioning in relation to others bring some of these textures back in?

Argentinian artist Jorge Macchi’s installation *Still Song* for the “Experience of Art” exhibition curated by Maria de Corral at the 2005 Venice Biennale suspends a revolving disco ball in a room empty except for the exploded shrapnel of mirrored fragments dispersed across the ceiling, walls, and carpeted floor (fig. 6). A 2009 article by Jennifer Allen for *Frieze* magazine takes the disco ball’s revolving and refracting mirrors as a dazzling device of the global that makes the
globalized dominance of the society of the spectacle appear natural and inevitable, concluding that “looking automatically makes you part of its universe, whether you’re standing still or doing the hustle.”

However, it is precisely from within the spectacle of the exploded that we may find prepositional tactics of possibility such as the mobilizing currents of affect in relation developed, for example, in the late Gary Fisher’s 1996 prose poem “Love in Prepositions,” from *Gary in Your Pocket*, a posthumous elegy of sorts collected and published with an introduction by the late queer theorist Eve Sedgwick after Fisher’s death from AIDS. Enacting its demonstration of the power of prepositions to forge the very relations they might seem to describe, Fisher’s marvelous meditation on the affective labor prepositions can perform does its work by leaving the bodies, the Is and the yous, unmarked by the usual cuts of difference (the sharp lines of race, gender, sex, nationality). Instead the Is and the yous are specified only by and in their relation:
I want your prepositions. I want the little yous. I could list them here:
in, on, around, under, over; between, near; next to, on top of—now
it's getting too large; the little yous is all I want, probably all I need. I'll
list them again for you, but in context, with body (validity, actors and
objects of prepositions and with vigor; at least implied): I want you
in me; I want you on me; I want you all around me (forgive the little
flourish there); I want you under me (on occasion anyway, but mainly)
I want you over, over top of me, on top of me (to flesh out that earlier;
2nd earliest scene, still more) . . . I want to remember you as you were
in relation to me.19

While this final turn risks making the other significant only in relation to the self,
(the you mattering only in relation to me), there is, at the same time, something
vital in its exercise of the prepositional power of affect in relations that are, at
once, highly specific (this you, this I), differentiated (the you is not the same as nor
becomes the I), and yet also push beyond the identitarian bounds of the socially
legislated forms of being and desiring.

Prepositional Proposition Five: The potentiality in and from the surround—
even just a little
Much has been made of the prepositional possibilities of the geopolitical “around”
from the circum-Atlantic to the routes around the Pacific Rim for the ways in
which history, culture, and identity are made and remade in the dynamic move-
ments of contact around the flux of space and time, but I would like to give
this “circum” at least one more turn. There is another prepositional tactic of the
“surround” that does not describe a pre-existing geography (such as the circum-
Atlantic or Pacific Rim) but rather reckons with what gestures around the injus-
tices, trauma, and damage of the seeming geopolitical givens might yet transform
them, that might start to bring that altered, more just world into being. Palestin-
ian artist Rana Bishara’s installation Homage to Childhood for the 2009 exhibition
“Palestine, Creativity in all its States” at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris fills
a room furnished only with a single spare and bare mattress with a profusion of
pink balloons each surrounding a photograph of a displaced Palestinian child in
the delicate bubble of a party toy while overhead a materialized heaven of halos
formed by barbed wire and gauze netting threaten to puncture any aspiring bal-
loon that floats to the ceiling (fig. 7).
"Surround" might sound monumental and mighty like a military strategy of absolute protection and/or complete occupation: the phalanx or battlefield formation that admits neither entry nor retreat. But surround may also gesture toward a tactics in excess of secular modernity, its wars, and contestatory politics enacted as the war machine. In the little chapter "Halos" in *The Coming Community* (1993), Giorgio Agamben offers a figure and even a practice of potentiality that does not defer the dream of a world more just than this one to the utopia that has no place in the here and now or to the messianic world that can only come after this one, but rather, elaborating on the tactics of the tiny implicit in the account of an altered world from Walter Benjamin phrased as a world in which "everything will be as it is now, just a little different," Agamben suggests the possibilities inherent in the contingencies of what is at hand, the traces of what might have been and might yet be otherwise. And this small shift or displacement or alteration in tone and effect is a supplement but one that already glimmers around the edges of the unstable and fractured form of things as they are. This flicker or glow is a prepositional tactics of the surround. Agamben writes:
One can think of the halo... as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility... This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo.20

As with other aspects of Agamen’s work—particularly the essay “Form-of-Life” in Means Without End, Agamen understands form here as non-constrictive and metamorphic and, at the same time, inseparable from the questions of the good.21 But beyond the question of the relation between matter and form and the inherent malleability of form, there is also an issue here of scale and the possibility that even a tiny change might have great effects. Finally, this tactics of the surround that initiates the tiny displacement or shift that may yet make all the difference offers a prepositional relation of effort but with humility, the kind of small work of listening in and across our differences but also training and retraining for the coming community, an exploded art history without borders in which rather than asserting property claims over the turf of experts we continue to make the effort to translate and to learn.

6. Ibid., 192.
7. Ibid.


19. Ibid.
