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Curatorial Essay for Transitio_MX, New Media Biennale, Mexico City

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“The Influence of Non-places in the Concept of Latin America”

The following text was written for Transitio _MX 03, which took place in October 2009. The text has not been published or released online. Its publication in Errata is the first time this text is released publicly. The text eventually will be published in Transitio’s catalogue in the near future. The text is contributed because the concept of non-places, which is the foundation of my curation, is recurrent and pervasive not only in Latin America but other parts of the world.

The works included in “Autonomies of Disagreement” were selected to reflect on glocality versus locality in Latin-American production in relation to the concept of non-place. Glocality is commonly defined with the saying, “act local, think global.” With this concept as a cultural foundation, my curatorial approach was developed to support what I consider a key element of Transitio_MX 2009’s theme of “Autonomies of Disagreement”, as evaluated in the Festival Statement, which is to keep in mind the relevance of geopolitical differences that shape the use of appropriation and technology in artistic practices.

The term non-place is applied here after the theory of supermodernity introduced in 1992 by Marc Augé in his book *Non-places, Introduction to an Anthropology of*

Supermodernity. Augé views non-places as areas of transition, such as airports, conditioned with a familiarity that is homogeneous. He also extends his concept to spaces that need not be visited, but named, or referenced through pervasive images. He argues that people eventually become familiar with such places by mere reference.¹

Auge's premise was revisited in 2002 by Hans Ibelings in *Supermodernism, Architecture in the Age of Globalization*. Ibelings views the homogeneity of tourism initially examined by Augé to be best expressed in the spectacular architecture of Las Vegas, which metaphorically speaking, names or cites a place.² In other words, Las Vegas is architectural simulacra of other places in the world.

The Internet also has non-places of its own. Yahoo, Google, YouTube, Facebook and all other major portals and social networking sites help users navigate online spaces with interfaces that, like the airport, can be considered places of transition, of constant flow and change. Users in turn feel more comfortable with the material that is accessed because individuals are often allowed and even encouraged to customize their interfaces with bookmarks and various forms of tagging for ongoing access. Latin American art production is informed by such developments as well as the physical mobility of people from

¹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Trans. John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 94-95.

² Hans Ibelings, *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalization* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2002), 143-160.

different countries.

The art projects I selected for *Transitio_MX*, in varying degrees, are informed by the current stage of networked culture; they also expose contradictions of global trends of migration. Given this focus, not all the artists are "Latin American" but rather their work has an intimacy with issues that are relevant to Latin America as a concept that moves across borders as a collective of complexities that are difficult to define. This approach opens up a space to discuss how cultural identification today is even more multi-layered than before, which is why the selected projects share questions on how locality and glocality are terms that may be interchangeable according to a person's particular position in both class and culture--closely defined by education and accessibility to technology. "Glocality," as the ability to function locally with a global awareness, is a term that only a certain number of people, unfortunately, are able to contemplate at the moment. This obviously needs to change, and the works chosen for *Transitio_MX* aim to demystify this elitism. Glocals are people invested in the actual production of a global culture at an informational level—the most important level in which meaning is currently produced and controlled. The artists participating in *Transitio_MX* are part of this small, selected group, and as such have to be conscious of their practice as a critical tool that can ultimately endorse the global system.

Within this critical framework, *Another Day (three monitors)* 2003, by Paul

Ramírez-Jonas (Honduras/ United States) depersonalizes and universalizes the ongoing travel that takes place around the world, by making the sun the traveler. The video *Maquilápolis* 2006, by Vicky Funari (United States) and Sergio De La Torre (Mexico/United States) aims to expose the contradictions at play in the global economy on how goods are produced with unfair labor laws. *Translator II: Grower*, 2004-06, by Sabrina Raaf (United States) exposes the tension, or discord of dislocation that can be superceded if the migrating subject is willing to come to terms with the displacement of the body by way of mechanical labor. *I THINK I GOT IKEA'D: Finish Fetish and other projects*, by Carlos Rosas (Chile/United States) expose how location can become abstracted in terms of painting or sound, while still providing a sense of concreteness by mere citation of concepts. And *Anemophilous Formula for Computer Art*, by Owen Mundy (United States) and Joelle Dietrick (United States), literally takes apart the concept of non-place, by recontextualizing a paper-wall image of a national park located at an airport lobby.

In what follows I reflect on Augé's theory of non-places in dialogue with Ibelings' reinterpretations to evaluate how artists and other cultural producers share an international language that in part has its roots in architecture from the first half of the twentieth century. What will become evident after such examination is that locality and glocality while closely bound by networked communication at the moment, still depends on a specific understanding of one's physical surroundings, which when considering Ibelings's analysis of architecture in the

1990's under the umbrella of supermodernity, will shed light on how the selected artists' works are the products of a contention between informational and corporeal experience.

From Non-places to Online-spaces

As previously mentioned, Augé considers areas of transition as places conditioned with a familiarity that is homogeneous. This tendency has been extended and is vital to the industry of tourism, in which a global aesthetic of entertainment has been developed to provide the tourist traveler with a generic and safe experience of a place rather than an immersion in the actual local culture. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, this tendency is supported by various transnational corporations such as Mc Donald's and Starbucks, as well as major hotel chains including Hilton, and Holiday Inn (or their subsidiaries), among many others, which can be found in any major tourist center around the world. The end result is that tourists can visit important landmarks, staged to appear authentic, which are complemented with familiar restaurants and hotels. Therefore, it does not matter where one wants to go, because one will always have something familiar to consume, thus making the experience psychologically and physically safe. Consequently, tourists are never truly in the space they imagine themselves visiting, but rather in a screened interpretation of such space that was created through careful media

manipulation, designed by the global tourism industry.

All this is possible because, as Augé observed, visitors, and even locals, come to terms with the physical space by way of discourse, that is by negotiating places according to cultural politics linked to selective citation of history in support of economics; the culmination of this, as has already been noted, is a tourist attraction, which, as Augé argues, any visitor will approach with a preconceived idea that will only be fulfilled when the traveler takes a picture in front of the place.³ In other words, there must be some proof that the person has been to a space with which tourists and other potential travelers are familiar; it is never enough to say to others one has visited and enjoyed a major tourist attraction. In my view, this tendency is linked to the necessity in contemporary culture to cite, to name places and things as a means for legitimation of all forms of activities. It is a major element in social networking sites, where large part of the content (if not all) is material that proves that members have participated in various activities, from travels to local social gatherings. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the tendency to document everything is becoming a default part of daily communication among individuals who are coming-of-age with growing up with social networks.

For Augé the act of naming is intimately linked with the concepts of space and place, with the displacement of the here and there, shifting how people experience the world: cultural experience becomes in large part mediated by our

³ Augé, 86-87.

dependence on media (image, sound and text) as our primary forms of discourse, which turn into our primary forms of defining the environment. As noted in the introduction, all that is ultimately needed, Augé argues, is mere reference:

The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the meditation of words, or event texts. We know for a start that there are words that make the image – or rather, images: the imagination of a person who has never been to Tahiti or Marrakesh takes flight the moment these names are read or heard.⁴

This premise has obvious links to the current state of online information exchange, which in turn has affected offline experience. Architecture, a field often thought of primarily in terms of the body's relation to specific environments may well be the best area of cultural production in which to examine how mediation through words, texts, and images come to affect one's conception of spaces and places as non-places.

In 2002 Hans Ibelings considered how architecture is affected by concepts of supermodernity. He views the homogeneity of tourism initially examined by Augé to be quite evident in the spectacular architecture of Las Vegas, where physical space is shaped by the tendency to name or cite a place. I interpret Ibelings's update to view Las Vegas as a way of citing physically other places in the world.

⁴ Ibid, 94-95.

As I previously noted, Las Vegas is architectural simulacra. In my view, people need not go to Paris, since in Las Vegas they may experience Parisian culture as a *footnote* in a full day of casual entertainment. Ibelings notes that such spaces tend to function independently of the greater cultural context that surrounds them. In the case of Las Vegas, it is evident that the city was built in a desert—a space particularly resistant to aggressive urban development. As radical as this gesture may have appeared at first, as Ibelings explains, the tendency to create autonomous spaces that reference other spaces is becoming more and more common, which means that Las Vegas has turned into the default template of cultural representation. The more common example of this occurrence, according to Ibelings is the North American Mall, where shops of all types are included providing people an escape from their specific localities into a world that shares an internationalized aesthetic created with transnational entities.⁵ (Some critics might argue that this is watered down culture.) Another more selective example is places like Universal City Walk which was conceived as a Las Vegas-like space that encapsulates the aesthetic of Los Angeles: shops and restaurants are carefully designed to echo different areas of the city. As in Las Vegas, people do not need to travel to the actual spaces, but go to City Walk, where each place is pristinely cited under a well-controlled environment.⁶

Ibelings links Augé's views on image and text to architecture as a means towards a supermodern, non-descript aesthetic that appears homogeneous and

⁵ Ibelings, 150 – 54.

⁶ Ibid, 72-78.

uninterested in its surroundings, but which in effect exposes a complex layer of globalization, that of a shift from production to consumption: “For the sake of tourism, architects, restoration experts, town planners and landscape architects in many places around the world have laboured hard in recent decades in order to produce the sought-after pristine image.” Such image is obviously universal, part of an international language to be shared by all people who participate in world travel. There is meaninglessness in this occurrence, Ibelings argues, one that is informed by three elements: “An abundance of space, an abundance of signs (in today’s society everybody is constantly bombarded with information), and an abundance of individualization.”⁷

The abundance of signs becomes particularly crucial in supermodern production and consumption as it informs geopolitical differences that shape the use of appropriation and technology: issues of interest for *Transitio_MX*. Signs become influential by way of naming, citing, and repeating media in ever-growing platforms of social networks. In this sense, there is a direct link between the physical space of architecture and the borderless space of the Internet. This can be found in the global minimal aesthetic that supermodern architecture acquired, as Ibelings further argues:

This autonomy applies to much contemporary architecture and urbanism, and not just in the United States. Enclaves are springing up all over the place, turning cities and urbanized regions into a succession of autonomous worlds that have little or nothing to do

⁷ Ibid, 65

with their surroundings.⁸

Imagine a series of buildings around the world that look the same, regardless of place. Imagine computers across the world being used for individual interests that can connect people locally or globally, regardless of place. These computers are not designed with a mind set of complementing a particular culture, but rather to function efficiently within many cultures. They are designed to be recognized, and used by people anywhere, much like a major transnational product such as Coca-Cola that is designed to be consumed everywhere. The computer, then, becomes the generic vehicle: the global, supermodern device that is able to function according to the minimal, self-encasing aesthetic of supermodernity, which currently informs social media. This is the culmination of non-places, according to Kazys Varnelis:

Non-place, then, is only a brief transitional entity and Supermodernity only a way-station on the way to a network culture. As the vast collective reading/net surfing room of OMA's Seattle Public Library or the tubes that reveal the infrastructural underpinnings of Toyo Ito's Sendai Mediatheque begin to suggest, the new architecture for the twenty-first century will be less concerned with sensation and affect, less obsessed with either the box and the blob, and more concerned with a new kind of place-making, enabling us to dwell more creatively in both "real" and network space.⁹

Following Varnelis's argument, there is a new kind of place making being developed, to which the works I selected for *Transitio_MX* contribute.

⁸ Ibelings, 78.

⁹ Kazys Varnelis, "Goodbye Supermodernism," *Varnelis.net*, http://varnelis.net/blog/goodbye_supermodernism, accessed on September 2, 2009.

Geopolitical Differences, and Glocality in Art Practice

As Augé and Ibelings cite the airport as a popular non-place, it made sense to include a work of art that actually comments on the airport as a transitional space. Paul Ramírez Jonas' *Another Day (three monitors)*, is a video installation that consists of three monitors that show the sunrise taking place in different cities around the world. It is designed in a format that refers to the function of such device not only in airports, but also in train stations. Thus Jonas appropriates the aesthetic of informational travel devices to display the "arrivals and departures" of the sun for 90 cities around the world. The metaphor here is of the traveler who is in constant movement; only in this case it is not people but the sun that is moving from city to city. *Another Day* depersonalizes and universalizes the ongoing travel that takes place around the world. At the same time, by detaching the human subject from the process of moving from city to city, Jonas is able to expose how global travel is linked to identity. In this sense the concept of a traveling Latin American, is no different than a traveling Asian, or a traveling European. This is a form of negation of the individual experience, which turns generic. Thus, the project does away with airports and train stations and focuses on the concept of non-place, itself: the gallery visitor can project her own experience, and cite a place in their minds, much how Augé noted that the mere citation of a city's name can bring certain images to a person's imagination. *Another Day* offers a critical window to consider the complexities of traveling, specifically in terms of meaningless constant and never ending relocations. Like

Capital, Jonas's installation is always adaptable to the needs of diverse and even opposing frameworks; its purpose is to live up to the expectations of specific cultures, while also showing how a template can become universal.

There is an elaborate process behind the development of world travel and its relation to non-place, which is linked to labor. This process is pushed to the periphery, and made invisible to those who consume all types of material goods as well as services. Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre's *Maquilápolis* is a video documentary about the maquiladoras in Tijuana. Women who worked at the maquiladoras were trained for six weeks on how to shoot video and document themselves. Their footage was then used to complete the documentary. For *Transitio_MX*, *Maquilápolis* is included to expose the production that goes behind the realization of non-places, and to reflect on how the industry of the maquiladoras supports the global economy. The film's purpose is to juxtapose the contradictions at play in the globalization on how goods are produced with unfair labor laws. This project makes evident yet another element of disagreements of the global economy that has contributed in part to the concept of "glocality." Maquiladoras are built all over Latin America, and, like supermodern architecture, they are designed to function independently of its surroundings; they even look similar, and are often constructed with the same systematic approach to ensure maximum profitability. *Maquilápolis* exposes the process behind the realization of non-places developed specifically as spaces of service. The documentary demystifies the naturalized appearance

of pristine spaces, demonstrating that the minimal aesthetic of supermodernity is dependent on hard physical labor.

However, with the rapid growth of networked culture, labor has become quite complex. For some time now, physical labor has been redefined by our dependency on machines; in the past, people performed physical activities that are now assigned to machines. Sabrina Raaf's *Translator II: Grower*, 2004-06 is an automated Robot that responds to a carbon dioxide reading of the gallery space. It draws green lines on a special paper or the gallery wall. The drawing can be understood as a metaphorical reference to a field of grass. In this project nature is the subject of contemplation and critique. The robot's acknowledgment of gallery visitors through the reading of carbon dioxide levels can be viewed as a critical gesture on behalf of Raaf on the displacement of the body with the rising pervasiveness of information and its deployment through global connectivity, which is one of the elements experienced by most people who migrate from their place of origin to another part of the world. This anxiety, which now is a global phenomenon, shared by many cultures, not just in Latin America, is reflected in Raaf's robot. The art installation exposes the tension, or dislocation that can be superceded if the migrating subject is willing to come to terms with the displacement of the body as a means towards an autonomy informed by our transition from globalization to "glocalization"--a state that partly allows localities to become intimate through networked connectivity. The work also exposes an ongoing modification of labor, not only physical, but also informational. In relation

to this, Enrique Dussel has noted that as global culture develops, human labor itself is turning into an obstacle, because it is not efficient enough to keep up with the increasing pace of a capitalist economy, which constantly searches for new forms of optimization that increasingly favor labor by machines over humans.¹⁰ In this sense the labor performed in Maquilápolis falls under a type of action that cannot be performed solely by a machine, but which is not always honored in the same way that less physical and more intellectual labor is. This shift is made apparent in Raaf's robot. This is further complicated by a new type of labor that is not necessarily white collar but *grey*, composed of individuals who instead of putting together machine parts in a factory, sit in front of computer screens, answering phone calls for transnational corporations, or performing diverse types of online customer service. Sometimes this takes place in an actual office, or at home. Due to the growth of this sector, at the moment the development of the informational layer of the growing global economy is what is celebrated; thus physical labor is seen as something that must be done by "someone" if not "something" and machines are constantly designed to meet this demand. Consequently, Raaf's robot becomes a commentary on how the labor that takes place behind constructing nature is becoming automated as new technology develops. While this is a concern for laborers from Latin America, this is an issue shared by other countries as well, thus becoming a glocal issue. The robot's act of creating a drawing that makes reference to a natural environment is a direct commentary on the supermodern aesthetic at play in new media projects

¹⁰ Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism," *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 19.

produced in a time that the physical is defined by networked culture and vice versa. Consequently, as previously noted, the robot at times does not draw on the actual wall, but on a paper attached to the wall, which in turn can be thought of as modular. The paper becomes a stand in of a building, which can be placed anywhere. The robot travels to different places in the world, producing the same drawing, regardless of the space in which it encounters itself. In this sense it is autonomous, and shares the aesthetic of supermodern architecture, as defined by Ibelings.

The aesthetic of networked culture in terms of supermodernity is directly expressed in work of Carlos Rosas as forms of abstraction. *GPS Pallet Series: (Coordinate) Paintings/I think I Got IKEA'd Project, Bulls on Parade: Protest Remixes*, as well as *Step and Repeat Cycles: Live/Networked Installation and Remixed Sessions*, expose how location can become abstracted in terms of painting or sound, while still providing a sense of concreteness by mere citation of places as concepts.

Rosas's *IKEA'd* is a set of industrial-minimal paintings created according to GPS coordinates he attains randomly from places around the world; *Repeat Cycles* is a projection obtained from the GPS locations which Rosas used to develop his paintings. And *Bulls on Parade* is a sound installation of remixes of protests from different parts of the world that can be played back by gallery visitors from two ipods; the sound comes through a pair of bullhorns that hang from the neck of

two mannequins dressed in athletic gear. These projects dislocate the original source material and turn it into supermodern abstractions. Rosas's installations as part of *Transitio_MX* question the position of a traveler vs. a tourist, as he himself travels to these places to gather the material with a critical conscience about the spaces. Some of the spaces are remote, meaning that they are not usually visited by tourists; by abstracting them into solid monochromatic paintings composed of several thin metal bars, he turns the geographical place into a modular, portable space that can be taken anywhere around the world as minimal abstract painting. Paintings have always had this function, in a way, but the fact that the paintings are composed of a single color that deliberately references the GPS coordinates of a geographical place points not only to our daily dependence on networked technology, but also the minimal pristine aesthetic of the supermodern, which Ibelings has noted in relation to architecture. The projections, which consist of an ongoing remix of images taken from some of the same random places, also include at other times social events, such as the openings in which the installations have participated. *Bulls on Parade* complement the other two installations by enabling the user to play sound recordings of protests organized for different motivations that range from unfair labor laws to unfairness of governments. Rosas's installations open a critical space to reconsider the notion of a non-place as an ideological imposition by the pervasiveness of glocalization. He demonstrates that with the privilege position of critical distance any subject can be safely embellished with a pristine, minimal supermodern aesthetic. On the other hand, gallery visitors are able to evaluate

how individuals have the power to contribute to the contextualization of identity in a cultural reality that increasingly consists of constant movement from one region of the world to another, at times out of necessity, and at others due to the privileged position held by the individual. The former, until recently, had been the stereotype of Latin Americans who traveled north, often to the United States for a possible better future. However, this tendency, as Rosas evaluates in his installations, is now global and is shared by countries in Africa and Europe as well as other continents.

Airplane travel and airports, which have been a key reference in the theory of non-places by both Augé and Ibelings finds direct commentary in *Anemophilous Formula for Computer Art*. This time-based work consists of a photograph of the Tallahassee Airport Check-in area, which hosts a wall sized reproduction of Mclay Gardens National Park. In front of the wallpaper image we find: on the left hand side a plant in a pot and on the right a portable fan, next to three airport-line-dividing-poles which are connected with a dividing strip, and a dolly cart at the far end. The photograph of the actual lobby is projected on the wall along with a series of numbers, located at the bottom of the screen's frame, complemented with an algorithmic simulation of Tree Pollen falling surrealistically, while a sound track of birds plays in a loop. In essence the airport check in lounge is turned into a staged moment where the reproduction of a natural environment is treated as a mere decoration.

In *Anemophilous Formula for Computer Art* the airport as a non-place is taken apart. The image is not only commenting on how parks are careful orchestrations of nature to fit human ideals, but also exposes how this aesthetic has entered the airport, a space of transition, in order to make people feel comfortable upon their arrival or departure. If one tries to believe that what one is looking at is real nature, or even a meta recording of nature, one only needs to notice that the pollen is falling just a bit too perfectly, executing an algorithm meant to appear naturally, magically. This orderliness, this pristine aesthetic, as in the other four selections has a direct link to the control that is inherent in supermodernism: “This boundless space is no dangerous wilderness or frightening emptiness, but rather a controlled vacuum, for if there is one thing that characterizes this age it is total control. The undefined space is not an emptiness but a safe container, a flexible shell.”¹¹ *Anemophilous Formula for Computer Art* exposes the type of activity that more privileged migrants perform—those unlikely to work in maquiladoras or any other blue-collar job. Therefore, the wall projection is a commentary on the growing supermodern aesthetic of glocalization, and thus a critical commentary on a specific activity that is ingrained as much in Latin America as well as other regions. Viewers can project themselves into the computerized image, and feel comfortable in the virtual airport lobby; whether the viewer may potentially be in Japan or Mexico is irrelevant because the language of non-places has transcended space in this sense. And therefore makes the conceptualization of a constant migration an issue of class rather than identity.

¹¹ Ibelings, 62.

This state of flux is viable due to a system of substructures that Capital has developed. On this subject, Dussel argues that the current capitalist system consists of specialized fields that can function independently. He states that some of these fields are spaces in which to reflect critically on the system.¹² This is the case with criticism that takes place in media, as well as academia. A way to view this is as cells of resistance that can develop and function successfully to some degree (at least to voice their disagreements) without disturbing the flow of the economic system in any major level. In this sense, specialization is modular, and can be compared to the aesthetics of software that have affected every facet of capitalist production. It is because each module can function independently why there can be conflictive positions active in such a system. *Transitio_MX*'s theme on "Autonomies of Disagreement" falls within this argument. The global network of information exchange consists of such a modular structure. At this point the ideological support of globalization is directly linked to the informational structure that allows artists to practice by means of critiquing the very system that enables them to validate their practice, not only locally, but most importantly globally. All of the works use information aesthetics within the physical space. Therefore, while viewers become aware of social and economic global exchange through the five works, one also realizes that it is our bodies that have to negotiate the mediated content, whether this one is remote or immediate.

Appropriation and Geopolitical Differences in *Transitio_MX*'s Autonomies

¹² Dussel, 17.

of Disagreement

As it becomes evident in the selected works, the festival's theme of "Autonomies of Disagreement" are closely linked to the complexity of the supermodern. The relevance of geopolitical differences that shape the use of appropriation and technology in artistic practices, which is a key element in the festival's mission statement, is possible because naming, citing and reciting, and even remixing have become the default, and expected forms of cultural production, not just in the arts, but culture at large. Artists, then, are expected to produce material that is sensitive to the flux of meaning between the material and ideological world, which is heavily dependent on emerging technologies. Networked technology is the most obvious example of this reality, and as noted, it has evolved directly shaped by the aesthetic of non-places: one can be anywhere in the world and send an e-mail. The addressee will not know (unless she looks at the actual logs of the server, which demands great effort) from where the message was sent, which means that the from/to become points that can shift according to the locality of the correspondents; this is direct development of glocality, as concrete spaces becomes places of passing from which to communicate as travelers move from point to point. This is particularly true of artists participating in *Transitio_MX*; their art practice involves producing work while moving from one country to the next.

Even when these or other artists are not traveling, constant connectivity allows them to communicate (and more often than not), share work in ways that were

impossible before the first decade of the twenty-first century. Further, the Internet, while used as an actual vehicle of dissemination can also be used as an aesthetic medium proper. With such options, artists who live in different parts of the world and consider themselves Latin American, because of varying reasons, are able to participate in a “Latin America” that is more like a non-place (a place in constant transition and redefinition)—an idea that can be re-enacted in different places according to the tendency of the locality. Thus, Varnelis’s observation of a “place making” taking shape between the real and network space is helpful to keep in mind in order to understand how art practice is now intimately informed by the relation of online and offline production and consumption. Art, then, even when produced with a local aesthetic is likely to end in a glocal context as soon as it gets noticed outside of its immediate context. This reality informs the concept of “Autonomies of Disagreement”, for disagreeing discourses at play side-by-side share the same space, or more importantly, begin to borrow from each other. The most obvious example would be the way that private activities for the sake of profit are able to thrive along with and even appropriate elements that just thirty years ago would have been considered part of a socialist agenda in the collective development of open source on to social spaces like Facebook or Flickr.¹³ Richard Barbrook has noted that the concept of free, as part of network collaboration, took hold of the World Wide Web and helped develop the current global system:

[...] it is common sense to describe the Net’s economy as a mixed

¹³ Kevin Kelly, “The New Socialism: Global Collectivist Society Is Coming Online,” *Wired*, May 22, 2009, http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/17-06/nep_newsocialism, accessed August 12, 2009.

economy. Information is shared and sold. Copyright is protected and broken. Capitalists benefit from one advance and lose out from another. Users get for free what they used to pay for and pay for what they used to get for free. In 2005, the dotcom commodity economy and the hi-tech gift economy are – at one and the same time – in opposition and in symbiosis with each other.”¹⁴

In such a network where disagreements can function side by side, the concept of place becomes modular. Much like supermodern architecture, private and public models can function autonomously along with surrounding elements that may be conflictive; in such a space citing, naming, and recontextualizing in terms of non-places becomes the default form of cultural production. Consequently, at the time of this writing, Latin America can be *cited*, anywhere around the world not so differently from how Las Vegas cites different parts of the world. What is evident of this symptom is that such occurrence is not unique to Latin American culture; instead, this tendency is shared by other cultures that are affected by globalization. In this way, Latin America as a diaspora enters a new cultural stage in which it becomes mashed up with other cultures to the point that it might be hard to evaluate it in both terms of hybridity or purity. Geopolitical differences then cannot be defined in binary, or intercultural terms any longer.

The current stage of global cultural exchange, then, demands a new approach to concepts that define individual and collective identities that are encapsulated in the term Latin America (which in itself consists of a number of diverse cultures). Can one participate or contribute to an exhibition that calls attention to a specific region of the world, even when one may not be “Latin American” in any sense of

¹⁴ Richard Barbrook, “The High Tech Economy,” *First Monday*, 1998 and 2005, <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/631/552>.

the word? *Transitio_MX*'s focus on Geopolitical differences therefore informs this question, by focusing on the preoccupation of having a voice from a specific region that is in turn shared by other parts of the world that are also evaluating their own cultural history; and for this reason I consider the works of art I selected for the biennale's theme of "Autonomies of Disagreement" to be representative of how art production is affected by the growing dependency on the concept of non-place, as a means to take apart the complex motivations that displace and ask for reconsideration of concepts of nationality and identity; this shift leads to the development of cultures around the world that become more similar than ever before. In this sense the preoccupation with geopolitical differences becomes eroded; therefore, hegemony is still an issue that is relevant in the critical analysis of globalization.

Based on the flux of online and offline production and consumption, and as a means to demonstrate the complexity of national and geographical identification, it might appear feasible for me to select works that are strictly informational—meaning that they privilege networks over actual physical objects with the purpose to re-evaluate the meaning of terms such as "Latin American"; however, because art production has assimilated the practice of naming and citing from supermodernity as another creative element, such an approach would be limiting to the complexity of new media art production. Therefore, my selection consists of artists who are aware of how emerging networked technology affects their reality on both conceptual and formal layers. I chose

artists that encapsulate the complexity of glocality within the discourse of “Autonomies of Disagreement,” as complemented with the occurrence of non-places. The artists are aware of the power of citation, and therefore their projects are points of departure for viewers to reflect upon how local experience is bound and defined by references that cross geographical borders; the art projects are glocal works of art, meaning that they demand concrete understanding of local concerns, or concerns of specific places, while being defined by global aesthetics.

Conclusion: the Ubiquity of Non-places

At the time of this writing it is not possible to look at non-places as spaces void of meaning; on the contrary, they are *the* places to examine in order to understand what may be meaningful in spaces that can claim autonomy, and become iconic references anywhere around the world. As Ibelings himself notes in his own conclusion in considering Las Vegas a place where something was created in an unlikely place for urban development:

That this someplace consists of a totally conditioned Strip and a rapidly growing sprawl made up for the most part of gated communities, is perhaps not the most promising of signs. What it does show is that tourism does not necessarily always have to result in an erosion of the sense of place, but that it is possible for a form of urban life to develop out of nothing, even if it is a different form from the one we have known.¹⁵

Geopolitical differences then become appropriated for an international language.

¹⁵ Ibelings, 156.

Technology that makes globalization possible enables art practices to develop critical positions that may not encounter real opposition from certain points of view. These are the good and the bad parts of modularity. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a skeptic, more than ever, may be able to state that “anything goes” as it is true. At the moment, everyone is entitled to opine. Everyone has a blog, everyone has a Flickr account, everyone twits: everyone produces in order to consume. The five works selected to evaluate how supermodernity may find a new form in networked culture, as Varnelis argues, expose how the constructive possibilities of disagreement, being considered an important critical tool, may be in danger; because if everyone can really opine, than everyone can also create noise. On the one hand the projects are able to show the contradictions at play in the ongoing development of global culture; on the other, they make evident that, even if one is truly bothered by such reality, one’s opinion will not shake the entire structure because globalization is able to function modularly; for this to happen mass organization is needed. The one question that the works do share and which the current state of globalization may not be able to answer is, can this ongoing modular optimization at play in software, material culture, and economics be hacked, even at the expense of losing the privilege to disagree autonomously as the system currently makes possible? And should it be? Do artists and other critical producers who wave the flag of progress and resistance against concepts such as hegemony be willing to truly hack the system? Or are they simply content with functioning within their own specialized subsystem that comfortably fits global development

as a module? To some degree, this question lingers unresolved in the five works selected; this may also very well be the case for the real effectiveness of disagreement in a system that appears to embrace any criticism for the sake of its own production.