

# The Global Block System

**Laura Foxman**

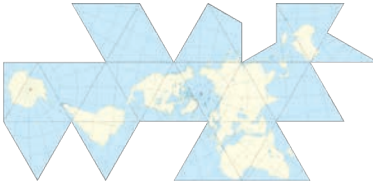
Pennsylvania State University

The global coordinate systems of latitude and longitude need to be rethought, replaced. The twentieth century saw the conceptualization of global space through projects like Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Map and Superstudio's Continuous Monument. Recent advancements in satellite and interactive technologies offer new possibilities in mapping the globe in plain data, but such advances still do not allow us to easily grasp the impact of earth events. The Global Block System borrows inspiration from these previous mapping projects and technologies, while conceptualizing its relationship to the big data frontier, where data sets are so vast they require tools beyond traditional processing to realize their potential.

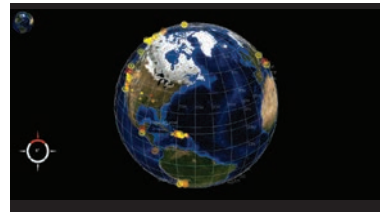
The Global Block System suggests that measurability and familiarity are possible on a global scale. The Global Block System partitions the earth into 260 equal blocks, each uniquely titled. We need a new global coordinate system that allows people to easily understand the significance and extent of natural and manmade disasters. Students across the globe could memorize the blocks as they would states or cities in their own countries. The areas in the middle of oceans would no longer be perceived as no man's lands, but as knowable areas that can be compared to local environments, to cities across the world, and to places like the Sahara Desert. Territories like the Great Pacific Garbage Patch would no longer be abstract entities, but rather understood as occupying numerous global blocks and watersheds.

The implementation of an easily understood global coordinate system would be an invaluable in preparing the world for natural disasters and creating broader understandings of global predicaments. Architecture design and inquiry has the opportunity to play a central role, to be at the forefront of this kind of innovation.

**HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MAPPINGS OF THE PLANET**



# TOWARDS A GLOBAL BLOCK SYSTEM



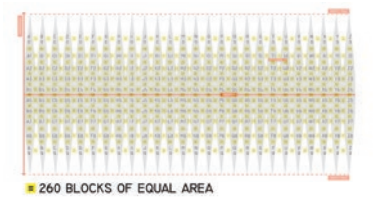
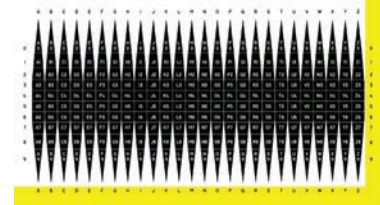
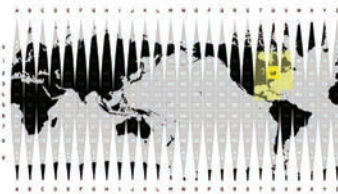
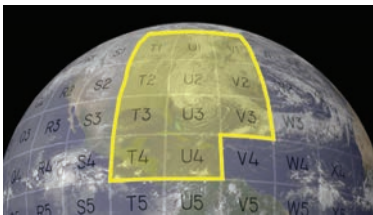
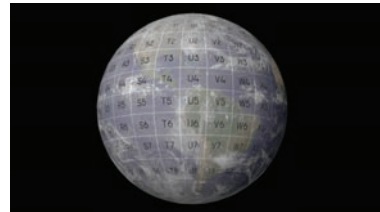
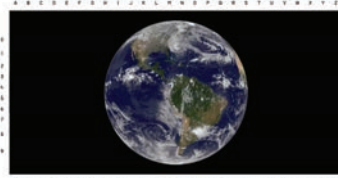
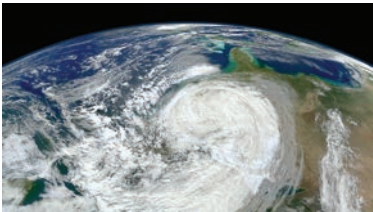
Research for the project began with explorations of the historical development of mapping the world. The age of exploration produced maps that allude to measurability and global connectedness through networked waterways and discovery. Over the centuries there has been an abundance of maps that survey the globe's shape and human settlements. Many of these maps also catalog sovereign power, chart weather and document topography. Additionally, the latter part of the twentieth century saw a rise in conceptual approaches to global space.

Advancements in satellite and interactive technologies offer new possibilities in mapping the global community in plain data, but such advances still do not allow us to easily grasp the impact of earth events. We need a new global coordinate system that allows people to navigate and easily understand the significance of particular earth events. The Global Block system, a new information structure, would fill this need.

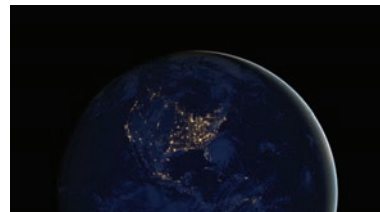
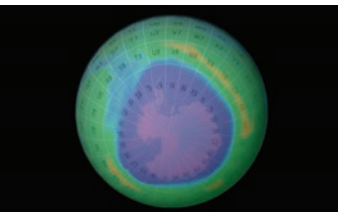
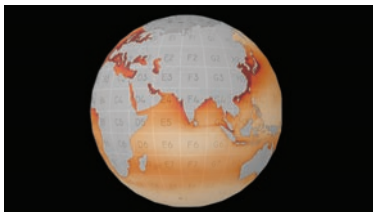
From upper left (images courtesy of identified organizations):

French Exploration of the Eastern United States (1690) / Library of Congress  
 465024: Dunn, Samuel. A General Map of the World (1787) / Map Division, The New York Public Library  
 Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Map interpreted / Wikipedia  
 Paraná River Flood Plain satellite image / NASA Visible Earth  
 Earth events diagrammed interactively (2013) / NASA World Wind

**THE GLOBAL BLOCK SYSTEM WITH HURRICANE SANDY (OCTOBER 2012) AS A PROTOTYPE CONDITION**



260 BLOCKS OF EQUAL AREA



The Global Block system offers measurability and familiarity on a global scale. The system utilizes the Latin alphabet — 26 letters and the numeral system from 0-9. These blocks correspond to 260 equal areas, each uniquely titled. Natural disasters like 2012's Hurricane Sandy can be understood as moving through multiple countries and as having affected at least 11 global blocks.

Increasingly people see themselves as global citizens. This system will allow them to compare their local environments to cities across the world, to areas in the middle of oceans and to places like the Sahara Desert.

The Global Block System offers a new global community of collective effort. The system broadcasts and indexes local, communal needs in the face of global dilemmas. The needs are grouped according to category. Local communities could mutually benefit from sharing recently gained knowledge and expand their expertise through dialogues with distant communities in parallel dilemmas. The implementation of an easily understood global coordinate system like The Global Block System would be an invaluable tool in preparing the world for natural disasters, creating broader understandings of global predicaments, as well as forwarding the borderless nature of our global community.

Above: Images for the photomontages courtesy of NASA and NOAA. The photomontages depict Hurricane Sandy (October 2012) at various scales; and diagram air pollution, the depleted ozone layer and light pollution (bottom row, from left).