

# Interstitial Thinking

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**Abstract.** This paper offers a response to Mieke Bal's 2022-2023 College de France lectures, engaging in a dialogue with her concepts, in particular the concept of the *inter-*, which she also calls the 'being-between' (*être-entre*). My aim is to take Bal's concepts in directions that reflect current and emerging topics of concern, notably the question of the orientations and potentials of art in a planetary age.

**Keywords.** art • difference • interstitial • planetary • thought

## Interstitial thinking

I would like to begin this *inter-change* with Mieke Bal with a focus on the question of the 'inter', rather than the terms that are related through it - such as (to cite examples that Bal focuses on in her College de France lectures) media or culture, nationality or discipline. Taking off from Bal's concept of the 'inter-ship' as that which 'brings together all activities qualified with the preposition *inter-*' and where each noun newly refracts the sense of the preposition, I wish to probe what is at stake in the experience and address of the *inter-*. I understand the 'interstice' as a betweenness that does not only designate connection, but which is always in excess to the states and the things between which it exists. And I call 'interstitial thinking' that thinking propelled by the experience of the excessive, differential zones of the in-between. Interstitial thinking does not just stop at this registration of difference, but invests such experiences as conditions of inquiry, and thinking anew.

Locating or attributing interstitiality, or the condition of 'being-between' (*être-entre*, as Bal has called it), to named or nameable things, situations or objects can lead to fixations or essentialisms of identity, binary oppositions and divisive thinking. As Bal (2023: unpaginated) puts it, the hyphen of the *inter-* 'can connect two different things, but then turn the new "intership"' into a boundary to keep out other things'. Instead, what is most fertile about

the interstitial is its excess to any betweenness designated as connecting distinct things and, in turn, its mobilizing impact on those terms with which it is associated or conjoined. For instance, Bal argues that intermediality is not simply a state of connecting different or distinct media, but a reservoir of media potentials that draws attention ‘to the fundamental “impurity” of media’. Interculturality ‘is a socio-political conception in favour of the promotion of relations, (being-between) between groups traditionally considered to have different cultural identities’. Internationality is also the being-between, the relationality between nations, which includes all those who live in a continual actual state of betweenness, such as refugees, immigrants and the exiled. And interdisciplinarity, the encounters between disciplines, is the effect of studying art in porous and mobile socio-cultural contexts, of cultural analysis.

For me, the notion of the interstitial bridges the orientations of Bal’s work to the preoccupations of the present – where questions of culture, the social, and the human are increasingly seen as inextricable from questions of the environment, ecological, and the nonhuman, where questions of ontology and epistemology are reframed in terms of the crossings of species, the correspondences of organic and inorganic elements, and the forces of the geological, and where the arts, humanities and social sciences are being opened to the natural and earth sciences. It has been said that our time is one of entanglements. And perhaps more than any other, this word ‘entanglement’ binds many contemporary theorists and writers.<sup>1</sup> There is an intensifying recognition that our time – understood as the time of the *planetary* – projects the entanglements of being into the vastly expanded, non-anthropocentric domains and scales demanded by acknowledging the perspective of the earth-system (see Chakrabarty, 2021). Today, the interstitial must be understood as that zone where the different designations of the human, nonhuman, organic, inorganic, molecular and cosmic entangle. The concept of interstitiality and interstitial thought need to confront itself to this expanded sense.

### **Inter- as difference in-itself**

Etymologically, the prefix *inter-* designates ‘between’, ‘among’, and ‘amidst’. Its French equivalent is *entre*. *Inter-* has to do with the potency of difference *in-itself* in distinction to the ‘many things’ of the *multi-*, the internality of the *intra-*, or the ‘across’ of the *trans-*. Interstitiality, then, is not simply about crossing borders, interiority, or pluralism. And interstitial thinking is not about collating many different points of view or bypassing them in favour of a perspective that traverses them. Rather, it concerns an affirmation of the interstice as a site of fecundity. This potential stems from the quality of excess, for the between is not simply the negative of points or terms already identified, but a reservoir of difference. In this sense it is not just between, but beyond.

Interstitiality posits itself against the identitarianism that will always take the side of one or the other. It announces difference *in-itself*. I take this notion from Gilles Deleuze, for whom 'to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation that reduce it to the same' is to register an 'intense world of differences', the way something differs from itself rather than something else (Deleuze, 1994, xix). The task is to think difference in positive terms, in a way not determined by possibilities already given by a system or state of affairs, but outside them. Interstitial thought, the registration of difference *in-itself*, disturbs the structures that support thought's recognition of itself and its objects. Rather than thinking *about* difference, there is an affirmation of difference as the nameless, imperceptible, unrecognizable. Habits of thinking are disrupted; familiar and recognizable things are made strange. Thought jettisons what is implicit, tacit, inherent, innate and presupposed in itself, abandoning the images through which it recognizes itself and its objects. Instead, interstitial thinking, thought 'without image', unbound from given presuppositions that imprison creative thought through images it gives of itself in advance, is impelled by those encounters with difference *in-itself*, the radical alterity that escapes all recognition. Art – which Deleuze and Guattari understand as neither an institutionalized reality nor an ontological distinct object of experience – has the capacity to offer such conditions, in its exposure of unnameable forces and intensities, of worlds in genesis that ordinarily go undetected, in confronting us to sensations that exceed images (Vellodi, 2019).

### **Art as interstitial being**

In inquiring about how the interstice, or in her words, the 'being-between' (*être-entre*), might be accessed or produced, Bal places us in the terrain of art. For her, the artistic interrogations of Doris Salcedo and Nalini Malini, amongst others, invent ways of inhabiting or mobilising the interstice, experimenting with relationality and difference in ways that inspire what she calls the 'travelling of thought' (Bal, 2002). In the works of these artists, the intermedial and the intercultural intertwine, presenting intense worlds of differences that ordinarily go undetected.

In Doris Salcedo's monumental work *Palimpsest* (2013-17) the names of forgotten refugees and migrants, those drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, those dying in the liminal site between lands, move in and out of visibility with the movement of water. To this expression of mourning, where the earth cries tears against the failure of achieving 'interculturality', the intermedial interstices between water, stone, and sand, and those between installation, sculpture, and drawing, play an important role. Nalini Malini invests the interstitial zones of figures between animal and human together with intermediality that is not only about superimposing media but of liberating

the material differences within the image in its ‘imperfection’, liberating the multiplicities and self-differing of the image and unleashing its force, its violence, its strangeness.

In the context of the study of ‘world art’, this notion of strangeness as a marker of the reciprocal inter-cultural gaze was remarked upon two decades ago by the British art historian John Onians, who was pivotal to the emergence of World Art Studies in Britain. From a ‘world perspective’, he said, a portrait in oils is as strange as a New Guinean ritual mask; European art becomes ‘strange and puzzling’ when seen through a panoramic lens. What is discerned as common between different artistic and cultural expressions is ‘strangeness’ (Onians, 2006: 7).

Unfortunately, the tendency of disciplinary practice is to impose intelligible frameworks that render such strangeness coherent, bringing difference back to the same. Onians chose geography as his schema for *The Atlas of World Art* (2004), an ambitious collective mapping of the artistic and cultural productions of the world that redressed ‘otherness’ in terms of geographical differences. To construct a geo-history of art was applauded as a means of recalibrating hierarchies, challenging the hegemony of chronology and going beyond dualisms of West/Non-west, centre/periphery, global/local, etc. (see Elkins, 2023: 54-7); a way of seeing European cultures as decentered within the world, of ‘provincializing Europe’ in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s important formulation.

But Chakrabarty’s notion that thought is always related to place, of course never implied that thought is identifiable with or bound to actual or specific places. It was, rather, projected as a critique of how categories in the European intellectual tradition are presumed to be universal without a due examination of the potential imprint left on them by the places of their emergence (Chakrabarty, 2008: xiii). The experience of difference is of course not simply an empirical question – it is an epistemological one, a question of how we think and the conditions and presuppositions underpinning our thought. The *Atlas* and other similar cartographic projects might consider themselves dynamic and relational because they map the movement of peoples, materials, ideas, objects, and artistic influences via trade routes and migration, or attend to cross-fertilisations and transitions of styles and symbols, artistic movements, concepts or genres. But movement is, through its very representation, converted to an arrested case; a ‘trade route’ becomes as frameable in time and space as a portrait, presenting as an object of representational thinking. Categories of geographical areas or chronological periods restore identity as the means of registering and potentially representing cultural differences and dynamisms. And, even if unintended, a consequence of this may be that divisions are retained.

## Exhibiting interstices

Indeed, was it not the categorisation and the representation of difference that was so controversial in the reception of the 1989 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, *The Magicians of the Earth* (*Les Magiciens de La Terre*), the first exhibition to present the impact of postcolonial thought on the framing of global contemporary art, and still a crucial reference point for any discussion of relations between art and difference today? For Rasheed Aareen (2014[1989]: 133), the binarised concept of the show – split into on the one hand, a modernist avant-garde belonging to European artists and, on the other hand, traditions (folk, indigenous) attributed to non-European peoples – reinforces inequalities and ‘othering’ leading to a ‘cultural mummification’ (on ‘othering’ as the process by which an imperial discourse creates its others, see Spivak, 1985). What the exhibition overlooked, as Aareen and others argued, was an *interstitial* category: non-European artists practicing in transnational modernist avant-garde and contemporary idioms and genres, a space within which he located his own practice.

However, the naming of the content of the interstice only exacerbated the problems. Whilst Aareen’s own critical response, with his exhibition *The Other Story* at London’s Hayward Gallery of the same year, may have broken with one particular binary by representing a new category of difference, namely, Asian, African and Caribbean artists in post-war Britain, he also ended up mummifying difference, here in terms of ethnic origins (Araeen, 1989).

Whilst such framings have become outdated, and postcolonial framings and theorisations of difference within contemporary art have undoubtedly complicated since then, the tendency to identify interstices persists. Indeed, it has arguably intensified. In its curatorial statements, the 2024 Venice Biennale, titled ‘Foreigners Everywhere’, repeats this inevitably exclusionary identification of the interstitial, identifying the ‘foreigner’ with the outsider artist, the indigenous maker, the queer artist, the exiled, the immigrant, the displaced, but overlooking the notion of the nonhuman. As the curator Adriano Pedrosa (2024: 53) writes, ‘the backdrop for the work is a world rife with multifarious crises concerning the movement and existence of people across countries, nations, territories, and borders.’ Not only is this categorisation and naming of the ‘foreigner’ troubling and immediately restrictive, but the lack of any mention of war, genocide, or the climate crisis, and the anthropomorphic perspective on the world’s ‘multifarious crises’, is striking (Fowkes, 2024). Demonstrating the way art so often overspills and reveals the limits of its discursive representations and categorisations, many of the practices in the Biennale, including those not unproblematically classified as ‘indigenous’ – such as Santiago Yahuarcani, Archie Moore, Sandra Gamarra Heshiki, Pierre Huyghe and Josèfa Ntjam – do express the inextricability of our multiple current crises. Indeed – and this is the crucial point – art exposes the ways

in which crises exceed specific representations and can't be exhausted by naming. In naming the interstice, the Biennale curatorial concept re-frames difference within the logic of representation and identity. The task, however, is not to include more named crises and reduce the climate crisis to yet another signifier that can apparently be represented. Rather, it is to acknowledge, with and through art, the nature of crisis as an extreme experience of difference, difference in-itself that confounds representation and its structures and pushes thought beyond what can be thought. It is art that reminds us that to think and experience interstitially is to de-territorialize, to unhinge things from the given frameworks of intelligibility through which representations can be staged and generate new affective registers of sense.

Indeed, this was how Homi Bhabha developed the notion of the 'interstitial perspective' in texts such as 'Beyond the Pale. Art in the age of multicultural translation' (1993), and *The Location of Culture* (2012[1994]: 2-3): 'It is in the emergence of the interstices', Bhabha writes, that 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interferences or cultural value are negotiated'. Rather than the representation of difference as a reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the 'fixed tablet' of official traditions, a move that corresponds to the essentializing impetus of multiculturalism, the inter-functions as the zone of intersections and negotiations, an enacting of cultural difference across 'open borders', through reinscriptions, displacements, relocations and translations of what is 'culturally incommensurable or strange' (Bhabha, 1993: 62-3). As an example, Bhabha cites the way in which the African-American artist Renée Green challenges the essentialization of blackness and the naturalization of its representations in her 1990 work *Sites of Genealogy*, which used architecture's interstitial spaces, in this case a stairwell, to disrupt binary conceptions and open an interrogatory, interstitial space. Green was just one of a group of artists working between the 1970s-1980s, along with Jimmie Durham and Rikrit Tiravanija, who were investing objects and sites that were hybrid, marginal and in-between. The interstitial became a mode of addressing the diasporic, the nomadic, the exilic, displacing the modernist framing of otherness with difference.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us back to Bal's distinction of inter-culturality, as the inhabitation of the betweenness of groups traditionally considered to have different cultural identities, from the multiculturalisms based in division that can generate resentments and fears of alterity, hostility and defence, ethnocentrism and racism.<sup>3</sup> In Deleuzian terms, the interstice as a zone of difference in-itself signals a world beneath the qualitative diversity through which we distinguish entities from each other as identities. It demands registration of the way a person, thing, or group differs from itself, the intensive nature of difference, and not only how it differs from other things. And it demands that

the encounter with the interstitial is a disturbance of the given structures that support thought's recognition of itself, enforcing new thought beyond representation.

A work that I find a particularly moving testimony to interstitial thinking as self-differing is Shirin Neshat's film *Soliloquy* (1999). This double-screen colour video projection explores, in Neshat's words, 'exilic identity' (Neshat has lived in the United States, as an exile from Iran since the 1990s). The two videos are projected on opposite walls, facing each other, usually within enclosed spaces. A woman in a hijab, Neshat herself, takes parallel journeys through two cultural landscapes. In one, she is in an unidentified middle eastern city – we imagine somewhere in Iran, the country of her birth. In the other, she is in a western metropolis – we imagine, the United States, where she emigrated to begin her study as an artist. The two videos, the two Neshats, are in dialogue: when one moves, the other stops, and watches, and the viewer in turn must look back and forth across two different worlds, across an irreducible interstice, a gap between which there is nevertheless contact. Neshat has described the work as an expression of living in a state of the 'in-between'.<sup>4</sup> Intermediality and interculturality emerge as effects of the work's interstitiality, its affirmation of differing as an intensive condition and its interrogation (rather than representation) of identification as, in Bal's words, 'an act', 'a choice' and 'a voyage'.

## Quotation as interstitial

One of the artistic techniques that Bal has considered regarding this interstitial travelling of thought is quotation, an integration of different media across time. Taking us beyond any reverence to a 'tablet of tradition' (identitarian thinking), quotation enacts a repetition that exposes the fecundity of the source and catalyzes registration of the interstice itself. That is, for Bal (2027), quotation as integration produces a 'union based on relation' rather than a 'fusion where differences disappear' (as in the case of 'assimilation').

Drawing on what Julia Kristeva (1980: 64–92), in the wake of Mikhail Bakhtin, articulated as the 'intertextual', 'that condition where each text becomes a mosaic of quotations, absorptions and transformations of others', Bal reconceptualizes artworks as media products that frustrate art historical methods like iconography, which attempt to stabilize interstitial effects (on the conjoining of the intertextual and the intercultural, see also Mercer, 2013). In Malani's work, quotations of Indian visual traditions and European art jostle together, embodying instances of the intertextual that, for Bal, facilitate encounters with cultural difference. Salcedo's *Palimpsest* confronts us with the quotation of the names of those forgotten peoples, each singular and unique, where the motility of water signals the palimpsestic quality of quotation itself,

forever appearing and disappearing, concealing and revealing, and, in this process, intensifying the sensations of the source, in Bal's (2022: 359) words, 'a space of intensity' that is the 'affective work of art'. As soon as one name forms, it ebbs away, and another appears superimposed over the former's trace, 'like a mother's grief, which repeats over and over', as Salcedo tells us.

In Bal's reading, when Walter Benjamin (1999: 458) wrote about the work developing 'to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks' he was gesturing towards the way quotation becomes the tearing out of context, becoming a thought fragment that blasts the continuum of history, exposing the difference within the source and concentrating that which repeats differently each time. Bal (1999: 1) develops this intuition: quotation enables an inter-temporality, a type of anachronism or preposterous history, that actively intervenes in history, complicating the idea of precedent as origin: 'quoting Caravaggio changes his work forever.' One could say, again with Deleuze, that this repetition retains the difference of the past, as singular and without equivalent or equal – it keeps Caravaggio strange. Circling back to the inter-cultural (and the concept of integration (in its distinction from assimilation) is of course, for Bal, vital for thinking Europe in the plural), we could take Utagawa Sadahide's quotation of European portraiture within his print *A French Woman of a Yokohama Merchant House Enjoying Goldfish* (1861). The quotation of a European tradition (the tradition of painting portraits in oils) renders both 'traditions' strange: the peculiar, oversized portrait which could be a window frame, the 'European' faces taking on traits of Ukiyo-E stylization, the aesthetic disjunction between the image and the Japanese script. There is here a reciprocal differing that does not simply settle or coalesce into a new intelligibility, a new assimilated syncretism, but retains its differences in the suspension of the interstice, sustains its strangeness, and polyphous registers of sense.

## **The perilous unthought**

Of exploring the interstice between China and the West (he uses the term *l'écart* rather than *entre* to signal a distancing that can't be reduced to the identification of difference), the French philosopher and Sinologist François Jullien has remarked that 'I do so not to construct separate worlds and make China serve the role of the "other" but rather "as a means to return to the unthought", "that on the basis of which we think [...] and which as a result we do not think" (Julien, 2021: 2-9). The encounter with difference offers an occasion to stand back from one's own mind, to shift normative habits of thought, to become unstuck from the things that make us cohere, and reconfigure the field of the thinkable as a common but differentiated zone. Zigzagging between one side and another – through translation, through the creation of 'extraordinary words', through writing – destabilises terms and categories (such as the 'Nude' or 'Landscape'), producing a new reciprocal scrutiny and holding in tension that which is separated, whilst exposing the heterogeneity of every culture (Julien, 2009: xvi; 2015: x).

The interstitial thinker is asked to be a perpetual beginner, to displace themselves from what they know, to suspend expertise and embrace being an outsider to a field, continually looking 'around the corner' (in Bal's words), becoming 'a foreigner in one's own language' (Deleuze, 1997: 109-110). To conceptualise the interstice as that which is 'unthought within thought', outside the images of thought through which we already think, is to think without referring to a position already within the world from which to think. To stay with Deleuze: 'once one steps outside what's been thought before, once one ventures outside what's familiar and reassuring, and one has to invent new concepts for unknown lands, then thinking becomes, as Foucault puts it, a 'perilous act', a violence whose first victim is oneself.<sup>5</sup>

Salcedo's work reminds us that such interstitial construction is always collective. '[E]very time I want to start a piece' she tells us, 'I need to be a different person. I need to do a lot of reading to understand something that I didn't before, and to be able to step in a different place to have a different perspective on the issues. So, I see my work, in a way, as a "collective work" involving others, and signalling somebody else's experience. When I'm addressing that experience, I have to place myself outside of myself' (Jordan, 2023: unpaginated). Some of these works, such as the sewing of human hair into wooden tables, are, she adds, 'almost impossible to make. I push myself to the limit' and this impossibility is intimately related to 'the impossibility of the conditions, the extreme difficulties that victims, refugees, and now all of us are facing'. Difference is not elsewhere, it is within, shared and yet belonging to an outside that marks the extremities of the liveable.

As theorist and artist, Bal continues to provoke us into inventing new 'interships' for our contemporary world. I would like to now offer some reflections on where interstitial thinking may be heading. For the question of how to think difference, how to affirm the interstitial without collapsing into pluralism, relativism, essentialization, or generalisation, is today being recalibrated in terms of the ecological crisis facing our planet. That is to say, the question of interstitial thinking assumes new senses and potentials, refracting ever further as interrogations of the intercultural are put into dialogue with the questions of the planetary. Planetary thought takes us beyond the intercultural as the interstitial is expanded beyond the anthropocentric.

## **Planetary interstices and art**

'Human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies' (Bennett, 2009: 108).

'The epoch we have entered into is one of indivisibility, of entanglement, of concatenations.' (Mdembe, 2022: unpaginated).

'[T]he planetary library will of necessity be a theory of the interface. . . shared with all humans, nonhuman actors, and self-sustaining systems' (Mbembe, 2021:39).<sup>6</sup>

'Interspecies entanglements that once seemed the stuff of fables are now materials for serious discussion among biologists and ecologists, who show how life requires the interplay of many kinds of beings' (Tsing, 2015: vii).

'The more you know about something the stranger it grows . . . and the more you realise how entangled you are' (Morton, 2010: 17).

Alterity is today no longer frameable as a being-between of human beings, societies, cultures; alterity is recalibrated on a planetary scale, reciprocally impacting the borders of the human, troubling its fixity. From this perspective, what Bal (1999) calls 'preposterous history' becomes preposterous time, not only destabilizing the human measure of chronology, but integrating nonhuman scales of time; deep, geological timescales marking the overlapping existences and presences of minerals, microbes, plants, nonhuman animals, technologies and humans. Interstitial thinking focused on relations of cultural, historical and social anthropocentric framings are today refracted within a non-anthropocentric milieu that newly calibrates the human as a geological force (Chakrabarty, 2021: 14-15).

We need to be careful not to misunderstand the stakes of this entanglement. The planetary is not about substituting one set of coordinates for another. It is not about cosy intimacies, an emerging awareness of our similarities with other species, naming, inclusion, or familiar recognition.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing comfortable about the planetary predicament. It is extreme, violent, and destabilising. For Tim Morton (2010: 29-31), the ecological crisis has obscured our reference points. We have moved from the 'world' – a location, a background against which our actions become significant – to a 'mesh', an immeasurably vast, disorientating complex of interconnections of the living and the non-living in which a person is entangled.<sup>8</sup> What he calls 'ecological thought' (2010:7, 14) needs to 'think big or think different scales together – to think of the massive scale of extinction and global warning, and even of space itself, beginning with the encounter with radical alterity: seeing Earth from space is the beginning of ecological thinking since it initiates the sight of the Earth as 'an alien world'. Here, difference is not what can be brought under extant forms of thought. It is not worldly, lived, or even liveable; it is not given to experience. We don't have direct experiential access to the deep histories of the planet, the existence of microbes, or – and this is a salient point – the experiences of other human beings. Difference in-itself, the unthinkable, demands thought at the limits, at the limits of what is possible to think. The logic of recognition and representation is displaced by a persistent sense of the ungraspable. So for Morton (2010), not only are the entities in the mesh 'strange', but getting

to know them makes them stranger still, exposes them as 'strange strangers' at the limits of our imaginings (see Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). Life on the planet must be lived, in Gayatri Spivak's words, 'as the call of the wholly other', its 'radical alterity' mysterious and discontinuous, an experience of the impossible.<sup>9</sup> Displacing the homogenisation of globalisation (the equivalence of exchange in the 'gridwork of electronic capital'), the alterity of the planet 'cannot be related to any named grounding', and Spivak describes herself as 'resolutely against' any reduction of the ethics of alterity to a politics of identity.

The planetary demands that thought become an infinite movement in straining to think the excess in experience, the difference that ungrounds and collapses existing referents and initiates a decentred, non-anthropocentric thinking. Common sense cannot help us here and something *unnatural* is introduced into thinking as we become other. Interstitial thinking under the conditions of the planetary does not just occur 'in' the mind, but expands the mind through a becoming, a radical intimacy (but not identification) with other beings, animal, vegetable and mineral that keeps difference in suspension.

Aspects of these ideas are not new. Already, half a century ago, Deleuze and Guattari were offering a philosophy of the cosmic, conceptualising thought in terms of non-anthropocentric becomings. The thought of difference in-itself as violent, ungrounding, even an involuntary act beyond anything innate or given, catapults thought into a becoming that involves non-human dimensions. This thought without image, a 'Nature-thought', affirms the infinite movement of thought beyond the reference points of object and subject, and 'calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable *terra incognita*.' Once again, Deleuze and Guattari (1987[1980]: 345) show themselves ahead of their time: 'The earth is now at its most deterritorialized: not only a point in a galaxy, but one galaxy amongst others. The people is now at its most molecularized: a molecular population, a people of oscillators as so many forces of interaction. The artist discards romantic figures, relinquishes both the forces of the earth and those of the people'.

Deterritorialization is relative insofar as it concerns the historical relationship of the earth with the territories that take shape and pass away on it, its geological relationship with eras and territories, its astronomical relationship with the cosmos and the stellar system of which it is a part. But deterritorialization is absolute when the earth passes into the pure plane of immanence of a Being-thought, of a Nature-thought of infinite diagrammatic movements. Thinking consists in stretching out a plane of immanence that absorbs the earth . . . Deterritorialization of such a plane does not preclude reterritorialization but posits it as the creation of a future new earth. (1994[1991]:88)

Art, in this view, has the capacity to confront us with encounters that provide a glimpse of these extremities, capturing liminal experiences, differential states, and 'nonhuman becomings' at the edges of what we can know and see. Exposing matter in its intensities, fluxes and forces, art shows us the world as we do not see it in ordinary life. The artist becomes a 'cosmic artisan' who leaves 'the milieus and the earth' – the terrain of the lived – to become the bearer of a new world and new subjectivities (Deleuze and Guattari, (1987[1980]: 345).

A growing number of contemporary artists are taking up the challenge of capturing or evoking forces beyond human referent, agencies beyond human control, and even what Morton (2013) calls 'hyperobjects', states/realities that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans, whose presence can only be inferred, and which compel non-anthropomorphic thinking, like black holes or the Solar System. Take for instance, the work of Julian Charrière, including his 2016 photo series, *First Light*, which captured idyllic Pacific Island sunsets – islands that have been linked to America's nuclear testing in the Cold War. What looks like stars are in fact bursts of radioactive light. Charrière (2016: unpaginated)

wanted to give a visual presence to the invisible radioactive decay, which I did by gathering contaminated sand and scattering it onto the plate negative. . .the tropical imagery is highly paradisiacal, but then you have the presence of the radioactivity, effectively co-producing the work. This was central to the project, to stage an encounter with the radiation as a way of acknowledging its agency.

As art historian Susan Ballard (2021: 4) has noted, art increasingly does not treat the Anthropocene as an object, but instead invents new entangled processes that can capture 'the transforming multispecies worlds of humans, nature, and the planet'. These relational practices are not just about connection and identity, but about the strange, the radically different.

Always acutely sensitive to the present, Salcedo's work also shows us art's potential to expose the interstitial in all its violent strangeness, within the inextricability of the intercultural with the planetary. Her work, *Uprooted* (2023), an installation of 800 dead trees that looks like a burnt home, 'an impossible home that cannot be inhabited', alludes to the ineluctable inseparability of migration and the climate crisis. Salcedo has stated that while she began the work with the thought that the countries creating the largest number of migrants are also those most affected by climate, those brutalised by imperialism and colonialism. She adds that 'once the piece was finished, I realised I was not only addressing the condition of the migrant, or of the global south, but I was addressing the condition of all of us. We are losing our common home' (2023, unpaginated). 'We are all in this together',

she continues, 'it's a fairly small planet. And everything that is happening in one place is connected to another place'. From this perspective, Europe seems small indeed! What Bal calls, borrowing the concept from Juri Lotman, the 'semiosphere', must today take as its orientation not the provincialization of Europe, but, in Chakrabarty's words, the provincialization of the human.<sup>10</sup> The idea of a 'Europe in the plural', in Bal's words, must today open itself to the alterity of the planetary, which, as Chakrabarty writes (2023:6–7), is also both differentiated and unitary, both a 'dynamic ensemble of relationships' and one.

Such recalibration is an abiding interest of the artist Pierre Huyghe's ongoing project, where the entanglements of human and nonhuman worlds and multispecies intelligences is reshaping the agency of artworks and exhibition forms as strange, liminal, porous and estranging environments.<sup>11</sup> Huyghe's installation *Umwelt* (2018) integrated artificial intelligence and nonhuman animals in the imaging of human thought to create vast, porous and uncategorisable environments in which the natural and artificial, organic and inorganic, the human, animal, microbial and machine interplay and integrate into new, co-produced mental images that are not really images of anything. For Huyghe, 'what is made is not necessarily due to the artist as the only operator – instead it's an ensemble of intelligences, of entities biotic or abiotic, beyond human reach, and is not addressed to anyone, is indifferent' (Huyghe, 2019, 362). Whence the radical alterity of the planet; as Chakrabarty (2021:70) writes, 'to encounter the planet in thought is to encounter something that is the condition of human existence and yet remains profoundly indifferent to that existence'. But this strangeness should not estrange, or make us indifferent, like the indifference of Europe to the plight of migrants signalled in Salcedo's *Palimpsest* (2013–2017). The planetary must surely intensify common concern and sense of responsibility for all beings in the realisation that we are all connected, coexisting in the interstices. Facing the planetary, art, and what Bal has called the 'living cultures of visual images', has a vital role in reminding us of this horizon of possibility.

## Notes

1. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, Tim Ingold, Timothy Morton, Achille Mbembe, Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, Isabelle Stengers, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Anna Tsing.
2. In his curatorial and artistic work of the 1990s, Gavin Jantjes (1998: 16) put to work this displacement of modernist conceptions with the language of hybridity, multiplicity, and interculturation, describing internationalism as 'a transaction of thoughts and actions... [where] reciprocity and syncretism liberates us from the binary notion of a European culture tap-rooted in Athenian classics', avoiding both 'the constraints of tradition and the myopia of nationalism', not to inscribe a new grand narrative but to activate the international as a site of heterogeneous inscriptions from a broad range of cultural practices.
3. Here Bal's work overlaps with a number of theorists working from the 1980s onwards across the social sciences and the humanities theorising internationalism and interculturality beyond the local and the national. For a good chronology of developments, and a framing in relation to ecocritical concerns, see Heise (2008), 3–17.

4. See Neshat commentary: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/neshat-soliloquy-t07970>
5. Deleuze (1995:103). We might also note Foucault's (1997: 273) remarks on the history of the commonplace book, the function of collecting quotations and other *hypomnemata* (which for the ancient Greeks included aphorisms, sections of texts, and other fragments and notes), not to understand the meaning of the original but to construct a new set of propositions for oneself, a shaping of the self.
6. The planetary evokes 'what we call in French *le vivant*, which in English is something like "the living world." *Le vivant* is, for me, the planetary in its multiplicity, in its animate and inanimate forms, as it undergoes its endless process of transformation' (Mdembe, 2022). He (2022) adds that the planetary library may also draw on different world cosmogonies like those of the Dogon or Yoruba to affirm the principle of animation, the sharing of vital breath that connects human and nonhuman worlds.
7. Although some theorists have taken this quite far: Miyoshi (2001:295) argues that common bonds to the planet need 'to replace the imaginaries of exclusionary familialism, communitarianism, nationhood, ethnic culture, regionalism "globalisation", or even humanism, with the ideal of planetarianism.'
8. On the disorientation of the Anthropocene, see Latour and Hartog (2020:23). Ballard (2021: 116) writes that 'the Anthropocene is more than climate change; it is the moment where the categories and taxonomies of the order of things break down. The breakdown in the order of things connects what it means to be human with what it means to be geological.'
9. Spivak (2003: 72-73). In addition, she (2012: 346-9) argues that the planetary imperative must assume and thereby efface 'an absolute and discontinuous alterity comfortable with an inexhaustible diversity of epistemes'. Both the dominant and the subordinate must jointly rethink themselves as intended or interpreted by planetary alterity, articulating the task of thinking and doing from different 'cultural' angles. Following Spivak, others have made this distinction between the global and the planetary; of particular note, see Song (2011) and Chakrabarty (2023: 4, 2021: 19) who argues that 'the global is a humanocentric construction; the planet decenters the human'.
10. Bal (2023) defines the 'semiosphere' as 'a domain necessarily fluid, unfixable, of which the borders are areas of negotiation rather than limit-lines'. She uses the term to conceive of 'modes of meaning-making, beyond, or through the differences among languages' and the possibilities they imply for thinking and inventing a Europe that is both plural and unified.
11. For his 2019 show at London's Serpentine Gallery, Huyghe spoke of his interest to generate an intelligence 'that exists on its own', passing through human, animal and machine as hosts; 'for something not species- centric, a post-symbolic communication between different types of intelligence that would bypass the languages and modes of expression specific to each one' (Hantelmann, 2019: 362). Intelligence becomes an interface, a thought that leaks from agents. As Huyghe explains: 'I'm interested in the vital aspects of things, in the way an idea, an artefact or a language can flow into contingent, biological, mineral and physical reality. It's not a matter of showing something to someone so much as showing someone to something' (Ballard, 2021:56).

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