

Editorial

Africa is experiencing a momentous technological turn and undergoing vast spatial and temporal reconfigurations, which have to do with the acceleration of the dynamics of mobility and circulation, structural demographic shifts and attendant issues of social health, the emergence of new urban forms and life styles, as well as innovative artistic and cultural practices. Furthermore, and contrary to long-held representations, it is increasingly assumed that the continent is the last frontier of capitalism, a key laboratory of the world in the making, and a place where the future of life itself, of the Earth and of the human and other species might be played out (Mbembe 2016).

This issue of *From the European South* intends to foreground and discuss some of these transformations from a variety of viewpoints, both continental and diasporic. It observes in particular what increasingly appears as “the planetary turn of the African predicament” and assesses the latter in relation to broader issues facing the earth at large.

‘Planetary’ seems to offer an alternative way of regarding large-scale social, cultural and artistic phenomena. In the final chapter of her *Death of a Discipline* (2003) titled “Planetary,” critical theorist Gayatri Spivak calls for an end to the division of the planet through a cartographer’s eyes. She argues that, as humans, we are transfixed with viewing our planet with a ‘one-world’ mindset. By shrinking our field of vision, we allow a mixture of colonization, globalization and consumerism to create political boundaries and divide humankind. Spivak suggests an alternative to this ideology, for which she coins the term “planetary.” She asks us to consider ourselves first and foremost as planetary beings, and embrace the many differences that have the potential to separate us (Spivak 2003, 77). Spivak uses planetary as a way of returning small-scale lived experience to the domain of large-scale thinking:

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of the Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided “natural” space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. [...] The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit on loan. (2003, 72)

Responding to Spivak’s ‘overwriting’ proposal, Emily Apter comments that she seems intent on forging a model that will impede globalization’s spread, its financialization of the globe and

proselytism of orthodoxies of likeness and self-same. “Planetarity engages with world politics and an ethical vigilance against environmental catastrophism in an age of remote responsibility; it understands the subject as a provisional place-holder on this earth” (Apter 2005, 203).

With Spivak, Black British sociologist Paul Gilroy also prefers the term “planetarity” to globalization, because it “suggests both contingency and movement” and “specifies a smaller scale than the global, which transmits all the triumphalism and complacency of ever-expanding imperial universals” (2005, xv). Planetarity thus indicates an emphasis on local ways of imagining and navigating world space.

To the scholars in this volume, it offers an approach that resists ‘erasing the African’, and helps to ask if and how, from the vantage point of the continent and its diasporas, we can extend our conceptual and theoretical imagination and produce alternative images of thought and representations that can hopefully help us live a different life in common. Conceived as a ‘forum’ of voices sparked by the visionary work of Cameroonian philosopher, historian and social scientist Achille Mbembe, *FES 4* collects, around and against Mbembe’s own voice, contributions from the humanities and the social sciences, with forays into the science and technology sectors that further extend the journal’s transdisciplinary approach to embrace the complexity of the topic at hand.

A.O.

References

Apter, Emily. 2005. “Responding to the *Death of a Discipline*: AnACLA Forum.” *Comparative Literature* 57 (3): 201-206.

Gilroy, Paul. 2005. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2016. “Africa in the New Century.” *The Massachusetts Review* 57 (1): 91-104.

Spivak, Gayatri C. 2003. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press.