

I decided to discuss with thinkers and curators working on planetaryity, because I believe in large scale thinking and I also believe most of us stumble over the scale of today's most engaging phenomena, such as the climate crisis, rise of border regimes, neoliberal globalization and return of fundamentalism. I thus thought that speaking with those, who try to embrace the large scale will give us a sense of the large perspective for discussions on weaknesses, criticality and psychogeographic practice.

Guests: Joanna Warsza, Tim Waterman

Host: Ewa Majewska

About:

Joanna Warsza

Stadtkuratorin of the city of Hamburg for the years 2024-2029, curator working internationally, mostly on large public art group shows (Berlin Biennale, Autostrada Biennale, Manifesta Petersburg, *Radical Playgrounds* at Martin-Gropius Bau; public program Munich, *Stadium X*, Warsaw; Polish Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale with the work of Roma artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas). She worked as the curatorial studies coordinator at the Kunstfack of Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden.

Tim Waterman

Professor of Landscape Theory and Inter-Programme Collaboration Director at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. His research addresses imaginaries: moral, political, social, ecological, radical, and utopian. This forms the basis for explorations of power and democracy and their shaping of public space and public life; taste, manners, belief and ritual; and foodways in community and civic life and landscape. He is the author of *The Landscape of Utopia: Writings on Everyday Life, Taste, Democracy, and Design* and editor of *Landscape Citizenships* with Ed Wall and Jane Wolff, *Landscape and Agency: Critical Essays* with Ed Wall, and the *Routledge Handbook of Landscape and Food* with Joshua Zeunert.

Ewa Majewska

Associate professor at the SWPS University in Warsaw, Poland. I am a feminist critical theorist of culture, working in the fields of cultural, feminist and critical studies, and researching the vast fields of social, political and artistic agency to discuss resistance and avant-garde, in their non-heroic, ordinary and weak formats. As a feminist scholar, I am sure that another resistance - one that had not been shaped accordingly to the masculine privilege and socialization, is possible, and I have conceptualized it as weak resistance. The notion of weak avant-garde quickly followed, as an offspring of my research into feminist, queer and other minoritarian strategies of negotiating and resisting the canon.

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Transcript:

Ewa Majewska

0:03

Welcome to the seventh episode of the podcast So post-critical psychogeographies from weak resistance to weak avant-

garde, which was hosted by me, Eva Majewska, with the generous support of Sergio Frutos, who is working with website and sound engineering, which is sponsored by the grant of Polish Minister of Culture.

And today we're going to discuss planetarity, the notion that gains enormous recognition following the groundbreaking work from Gayatri Spivak and many other theorists, and which is incredibly important not just in academic sciences or theory, but also in curating. So for that reason, we're going to have two very exciting guests. The first is Timothy Waterman, the professor at the Bartlett College of Youth, University of London. He's working in theory of architecture and landscape, specializing in utopia and utopia of landscape is one of his key topics. But he's also a great queer studies scholar and fantastic friend. And planetarity became in the last months pretty the crucial point of his conceptualizations. So I'm very, very happy to hear his thoughts. We're going to have like 10 minutes, maybe 15 minutes of conversation with Tim.

And then, without further interrupting, we're gonna jump into the little interview I recorded with Joanna Warsza, the Polish curator who lives in Berlin and who was last year selected to be the curator of this city of Hamburg, which in itself is an important and fascinating position. And she uses the concept of planetarity centrally in her work, together with Patricia Reed, with whom the interview I also made for this episode. Unfortunately, the quality of the recording was so bad that I decided to skip it this time and to make another interview with Patricia Reed on another occasion. So the recordings I made were already prepared in February and March this year. but due to all kinds of circumstances and also the episode was supposed to be following the pilot but due to different circumstances I had to change the topic also I thought introducing weak avant-garde first and then planetarity is gonna make much more sense so we're gonna discuss with Joanna Warsza and Tim Waterman about planetarity and endemic resistance. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did please feel welcomed to this episode.

Hello, I would like to introduce you to my fantastic colleague and friend and also an amazing, amazing scholar working in the fields of landscape studies, of utopian studies, of queer theory and many other interesting topics and fields. Timothy Waterman, who is a professor at the Bartlett College at UCL in London, in UK. And I decided to ask you some questions about planetarity team because I think that this is an amazing, amazing topic and also for the podcast that I'm just beginning, so forgive me all the lack of professionalism. I thought of a large scale. I thought, ok, maybe not even if it's not cosmos yet, it's still planetarity. So it's quite big. So I would like to ask you what planetarity is for you, if you could give us like two, three major, major features of the problem of planetarity and also maybe why you decided to engage yourself and your scholarship into that thematic.

Tim Waterman

3:50

Of course, and thank you for speaking to me. The concept of planetarity is one that really has been promoted and championed by Gayatri Spivak in her work. There's a complex and distanced way that Spivak regards planetarity and speaks about it. She writes that planetarity is in the species of alterity. says it's something that is outside of human experience and we can't really quite hope to connect with it meaningfully and fully. So this is the idea that the planet exists in time scales and spatial scales which are totally outside of the scope of human imagining. And this is a very critical theory, inspired and critical approach to epistemology. Humans don't have access to whatever happens beyond their species, which is a lot. Who is in planetarity, I suppose, although I never studied it. But I'm curious precisely, like if we don't have access to it, then why does Spivak want to investigate it? And why do you want to investigate it if it's so alter, if it's so different, if it's so other? Well, I think there's something slightly off-putting about the way that Spivak describes this as something outside of human experience, because after all, we do live on the planet. We live on a habitable planet with a living, breathing biosphere, and all of us in our own way, everywhere we are, have an intimate relationship with the planet in one way or another. Um, so I think Donna Haraway, for example, using the concept of partial knowledge would say, actually we can connect, can connect with ideas of the planetary. We can connect with planetarity in ways that involve a kind of understanding that we can only ever get partially there, but we can get closer also through collective forms of knowledge. through the ways that we think together and act together and research together, all of these bring us closer to a sense of planetarity.

One of the things in my work that I use very much is the work of the geographer, Dennis Cosgrove, who in his book, Apollo's Eye, talks about the different valences of the terms that we use to describe the planetary, so he talks about earthliness, for example, and there's a very grounded sense of, you you can feel the soil in the idea of being earthly. Worldliness talks about the world of knowledge, to be worldly is to be connected to a cultural and intellectual sphere. And then, globality is the more abstract and cartographic. realm of knowledge, which really propelled colonialism and imperialism, but also which has its own kind of poetic and beautiful registers as well. So in my work, what I've tried to do is just to say, okay, well, planetarity then is a frame through which we can organize these other resonances, earthliness, worldliness. Globality and planetarity can all be kind of grouped together as ways of knowing the world, knowing Earth, knowing the globe, knowing the planet.

Ewa Majewska

8:02

I'm kind of thinking about the post-criticality, first of all. this idea that the critical theory has to really brace itself and sort of limit its, on one hand, skepticism. And this was very resonant in what you just said, basically. we actually do have this experience of living in the planet, so we might understand and have reasonable access to some parts of that experience. So I was thinking to what extent the work of Bruno Latour or Rita Felski, the people who were most engaged with the limitations of critical perspective, to what extent that part of the Spivakian sort of field of planetarity is interesting to you. And to what

extent perhaps, also still remaining on the epistemic level, the sort of weak epistemologies, whether such entity, whether such notion makes any sense in planetarity. Because I'm thinking obviously from the perspective of marginalised groups and marginalised narratives and epistemic strategies, and I'm wondering to what extent planetarity is different, you know, for you, for me, for an immigrant trying to get to Europe as we speak on a boat through Mediterranean and other people who might find themselves in very different conditions, in very different class, ethnic, gendered situations. Then so does planetarium have like common epistemology or is it a diversified situation?

Tim Waterman

9:49

Planetarity is necessary as an adjunct to regional thinking and regionalism. That to situate ourselves within substantive landscapes and then to situate those landscapes within larger bioregional and planetary connections is really important. as far as the way that that connects with critical thinking or post-critical thinking, I have always or I have long tried very much to write and teach that theory is in the world. That theory is in the relations we have in the spaces in which we dwell, can include the cosmos, of course, can include the planetary. But I'm not sure that's post-critical because we can find critique in all of those relationships. They all contain modes of critique and forms of criticality that come through the collective experience of inhabiting a particular space. I guess in terms of weak epistemologies, what comes to mind most perhaps is, I believe he's Uruguayan, the scholar Rollo Zebachi has an excellent book called Territories and Resistance. And he speaks about forms of Latin American resistance, which are essentially invisible, that they actually gain their power. from being completely outside of the scope of power. And if they were to come together and organize and become visible, they would be crushed, you know, or co-opted.

Ewa Majewska

12:03

There's a strategic invisibility rather than being condemned, or both perhaps, or the condemnations would have created a strategy, right? This is, yeah. This sounds great because I'm thinking of the relations between territory and weakness and weak strategies, which is a very Deleuzian way of thinking. Because this is exactly where we meet perhaps the weakest species in Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism and schizophrenia. This is terrified child. This is where territory starts, basically. A terrified child starts to sing a lullaby, a ritornel, a refrain. themselves in order to guide themselves out from a moment of fear, of weakness, of being abandoned also and lonely. So this song becomes a relational tool because of course then you can make connections with it or they can make connections with it. But first they have to connect with themselves which is something that fear really takes away. But somehow my thinking of territory and therefore also planetarity is very much embedded in this Deleuzian connection that he made, or they made with Guattari, actually, between the territory and the the weak subjectivity, the small, terrified human who is trying to build something up and create. And therefore, this little child connects themselves with the world by singing. So I don't know if this is a trope, but somehow it seems to me that there is a lot of humbleness in this planetarity theorizing, not only coming from the fact that the planet is such an alien or stranger or other, but also because those who, I mean, I remember Spivak, but I also remember Achille Mbembe, who wrote about necropolitics and who is basically a excellence, a post-colonial thinker, a very anti-hegemonic. And somehow all these people, they built quite powerful images of planetarity. But they come from perspective of minority, they come from perspective of like weak language. So that's also another reason why I decided that this weak resistance, weak avant-garde that I'm so focused on might have something in common because of this, what I would call a humble approach to epistemology and epistemic powers. But I don't know whether that resonates with you.

Tim Waterman

14:35

No, it definitely does. The idea of kind of singing a place and seeing a place of safety is a very sort of situated form of thinking and acting. And I think that direct relation with place is something that we find on the kind of lowest rungs of the social ladder. And in particularly in sort of peasant movements and land based movements.

Homi Baba writes in the Location of Culture that, I think it's in the Location of Culture, that territory is something that people are frightened off of. So there's an etymological link between territory and the idea of terror. that's not, I don't think that's the same kind of terror that we're talking about that's visited on places by colonialism and imperialism, example, by the genocide and ecocide, for example. What is talking about is those acts of bounding and defending, which are often very, very local, but which tie together through forms of ritual that resonate from place to place and culture to culture. And I think when you look at the local scale, and start thinking across different indigenous forms of place making.

What you find is that there's an incredible amount of commonality between human cultures and the way they inhabit place. And so the peasant movements where they really gain their power is actually the opposite of what Zibakshi is talking about, about invisibility. They allow people to see each other and discover commonality in their practices and realize that what they do on their small piece of land is something that connects them to the planet. And to planetary practices which have resonance across the world.

Ewa Majewska

17:03

It's actually super interesting and on the endings, very short conversation, I would like to point to a tarot card. I'm a tarot reader, very eager tarot reader, and tarot has a card for that specifically. It has a card which signalizes the territory making, which is the four of sticks or four of wands, you can also say. Traditionally, it is represented by chupa, so this Jewish

traditional piece of equipment for marrying couples, which is four sticks and a piece of cloth that covers them, that sort of signalizes their home. And for a long time I was thinking about it as like making territory. But then I realized that this is not just making territory, it's making territory by means of invitation to a wedding party. And that's interesting because that's very different, very alternative to, for instance, making territory via colonization, via expropriation, via war and terror, this you throw a wedding party in order to signalize my land is from here to there, but you are very invited. So, you know, this can also be a tricky and perhaps also aggressive strategy. However, it's by means of play, of song, of togetherness, of enjoying ourselves that this young couple signalizes their territory. So I don't know whether you like this image, but I think it sort of fits in some hippie way. It fits really nicely. is it?

Tim Waterman

18:37

I do. Amusingly, what it makes me think of is the recent work of Annie Sprinkle and her partner, where she has married the ocean and...

Ewa Majewska

18:53

Oh, has married plenty. She married the mountain, you know, she married everything. That's fantastic.

Tim Waterman

19:00

I think that there is real beauty in that, like silly, crazy, funny, lovely beauty. And the notion that play is a fundamental part of what she calls ecosexuality. I think is a beautiful way of thinking about the ways in which the queerness and craziness of the human body actually connects us much more certainly to the craziness, play, and beauty of the ecologies that we find in the world. So for me, that's a lovely example of the kinds of rituals that we might make that feel good on every level and that help us to be more planetary as well. So it's funny that we should have started with Spivak and ended with Sprinkle because they, I mean, they're both wonderful, powerful feminists.

Ewa Majewska

20:21

Exactly. I really like that you made this accent on the diversity within feminist activism and feminist agency more generally. Thank you so very much for this short conversation. It was lovely listening to you as always.

Ewa Majewska

20:38

Hello. Welcome to the second episode of the post-critical psychogeography podcast. I would like to welcome you, Anna Warsza, the amazing curator and activist, I would say also, as your interventions often have political and social impact, who has been elected to become the curator of the city of Hamburg in Germany and who takes planetarity as the main, I don't know how to even say it, the main topic, the main context, the main strategy for your curatorial label. So my first question would be how does planetarity fit in the work of a curator? How do you use it? What do you focus on? What kind of contexts and collaborators does it imply?

Joanna Warsza

20:30

Yes, hi, Eva. Thank you for your question. I have to say I'm in the beginning of my five years journey in the city of Hamburg. And of course, when you're a curator of the, let's say, whole city, you have this amazing mission. You need to take into account many factors and who you are speaking to and in which way. And I was asking myself, what is the bare common denominator of the public sphere? because of course in the recent years we see more and more how big the necessity for pluralizing public sphere is and not seeing it as a space of meeting of mostly cis men, but so many communities, so many languages, so many people with different needs. And so I ask myself, what is it that we really share? Truly sugar.

And this led me to... something very simple and yet very complex, namely the theory of five elements or four elements, depending on the culture. What is important is that this is not Eurocentric theory. It's not something that you like. Enlightenment was invented in Europe to patronize others or to show some kind of moral superiority. It is basically a way of understanding and organizing the world through elements. that has different variation in various cultures all around the planet. Because as human beings, as non-human beings, as all living entities on this erring star called the Earth, we need a few basic resources to survive and maintain life. And those resources were organized and called those elements.

So there are elements the basic elements are water, air, fire, air, and depending on the culture sometimes also ether or cosmos or wood. In the Chinese culture, the wood is very important. And so looking at those elements and also knowing the time in which I'm invited to work in Hamburg, which is five years, I thought why not to... Yeah, think of my presence there through those elements in those years. So I divided every year through different elements. And this also links to my longer reflection about biennials and you know how biennials are this very accelerated formats that very often leave a void behind them. how on one hand have the thrill of the biennial, have the beauty of the meeting of the biennial, of interdisciplinary discourse, and on the other hand, how to do it in a more sustainable way. So in those coming five years, starting with the summer and starting with the element of cosmos, we will look at the paradigm of planetarity. The planet was something I would call planetary public sphere.

Ewa Majewska

24:42

Fantastic. So that's... That sounds great and actually I'm wondering because when I spoke with Tim Waterman I was asking him about epistemology of planetarity because he was talking about addressing the experience of living on the earth so that's his preoccupation with planetarity, the major focus and I was curious whether there are differences between those epistemic experiences whether humans have it differently from animals and plants, whether... between humans, there are different epistemologies that allow or mediate this access to the experience of planetarity. And he said that obviously, yes, he was referencing at his pivot and her concept of planetarity and alterity or as alterity. So I'm wondering how you would situate it, how you would answer to the question about the different, are the epistemic experiences different? And if yes, then how? And whether you can speak of the public sphere, planetary public sphere and maybe counterpublics as well, know that I'm very interested by counterpublics and throw it into that. So what kind of counterpublics does this public sphere generate, et cetera, et cetera? So do you have anything to add on that?

Joanna Warsza

25:59

Right, of course. No, I mean, basically, you know, among many other different readings, I understand planetarity as a paradigm shift necessary for us humans. to think how we inhabit this planet and what is our relation to the resources on that planet. you know, as I know from the books of my 10 years old son at school, and not only, humans have appeared on this planet in the one minute before midnight, if we take a scale of one hour, right? and yet are contributing, we of course know it, but in a way, how can we really tackle it with art?

How can art help us to understand that we really are on the edge of a deep necessity to either stay in a respectful way where we have been born or perish in some sense. And how can we celebrate the being here and how can we look also a different vernacular indigenous cultures that have dealt with this element since time immemorial and take it into account. How, for example, can we, artist we're working with this summer, Kite, she's combining indigenous knowledges from regions of Dakota with artificial intelligence. And how could artificial intelligence be fed by this very early knowledges about stars and organization of cosmos.

So planetarity for me is not a topic to address, you know, in an exhibition in which you will go and see some panels and feed yourself with the reflection about it. It's in a way to experience with five senses. So there are five elements, there are also senses and planetarity for art could also mean to go away from the rational understanding of art and untouchable contemplative object, but to live with air, to live with and through water, or to live with and through cosmos. So when you ask me about the differences, yes, I mean, you know, those are very basic facts. So we all need air to breathe. And yet, of course, we do not breathe the same air. And why do we not breathe same air? Because of some economical interest, zone of influences, know, exploitation. suppressing, etc.

Ewa Majewska

28:41

Also some of us are trained in yoga or in other strategies to breathe in a specific way. So there are also kind of more positive or less negatively created strategies of that experience that I believe you want to. But when I listen to you, I have this one reflection which I think you might like and you probably thought about it. I'm going to discover it for our listeners. which is that basically you have been, since I've met you since 2003 or so, you have worked with performance and somehow this overcoming of art understood as a closed object, untouchable closed object, by the performative strategy. So experiences are performances, It's more of a performative experience, but not only on the side of the artist, but also on the side of the viewer. So I think what you are doing is basically expanding the concept of performance into, I would say, a kind of experienced performance or even participatory performance. And like that, this planetarity has a very active, very practical, very practical dimension. I'm not sure if I understand you correctly, but that's what I understood until now.

Joanna Warsza

29:50

Yes, no, absolutely. I mean, of course, performative is because I'm originally coming from theatre studies. So I brought into art this, you know, thinking, understanding of art thought in minutes and not square meters. For me, art is not something to feel in the space, but in a way, yes, it's an experience to stage, right, to put up. And when we speak about performative, and I think we spoke about it in another interview, and also thank you, Eva, for accompanying me since we met in 2003, but performative has also one of the meaning of performative is also like utterances with words, right, to make things happen. To make things happen, that's one of the linguistic understandings on being performative. Putting something in the world, right? The very famous one, declare you man and wife. The language is the way of this ritual to happen. So definitely I'm interested, you know, pushing it a bit further in performative planetarity. How planetarity can be put out in the world through art to actually rethink our relation between ourselves and the planet and all its beings.

Ewa Majewska

31:05

Thank you so very much. believe that this is going to be a fantastic note for us to close this little interview. And I will be very happy to return to you and also to Patricia Reed with whom we collaborate on the topic of planetarity in one of the next episodes of the podcast when we will discuss more in detail this curatorial strategy and this approach. So thank you so very much for this interview and for this conversation.

Ewa Majewska

31:34

This was the second episode of the podcast Post-Critical Psychogeographies From Weak Resistance to Weak Avant-Garde hosted by Ewa Majewska with the generous support of Sergio Frutos who helps with the website and sound engineering and sponsored by the grant of the Minister of Culture of Poland. Our guests were Joanna Warsza and Timothy Waterman. And in next episode, we're going to discuss the inhabiting of the canon. So we're going to look at the relation between being a part of an avant-garde, weak avant-garde and otherwise, and the canonic situation, whether joining the canon, how differently we can inhabit the canon. And our examples are going to be the artwork of Marina Abramovic on one hand and Marta Rosler on the other. So stay tuned. Have a good evening or day or night. and hope to have you as listeners very soon. Bye bye.