

Belonging

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The multiple crises affecting the contemporary globalised world, such as increasingly violent narratives and far-right rhetoric, neocolonial discourses, authoritarian capitalism, human-induced climate change and the Covid-19 health emergency have one thing in common, as argued by Roland Wenzlhuemer (2022), *'they are deeply embedded in processes of globalisation, past and present'* (emphasis in original). As much as these crises share interconnected, global networks, they generate, in addition to entanglements, multiple disentanglements, the 'disruptive phenomena that *corrode* networks' (Wenzlhuemer 2022, emphasis in original). The reciprocal co-constitution of connectivity and dis:connectivity reframes trajectories of globalisation, which offers an opportunity to rethink the experiences and politics of belonging through a transnational feminist lens. Foregrounding affect, subjectivity, collectivity and embodiment, this generates new directions towards equal and reciprocal futures disrupting Eurocentric paradigms of socio-economic, political and cultural superiority that drive global structures of power that exacerbate violent and oppressive practices. Attentive approaches to belonging highlighting the significance of intersectional, and in particular gendered, encounters with the global by, for example, Marsha Meskimmon and Dorothy C. Rowe (2013) or Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) emphasise the unequal distribution of vulnerabilities and precariousness. They call for a negation of the global as a shared condition that potentially erases differences in favour of transnational and relational solidarity. The specificity of places and spaces activates care *for* and *about* situated struggles and neglected absences while paying close attention to the spaces in-between and acknowledging that belonging is not uniform and that it generates multiple and context-specific spatial politics of inclusions and exclusions.

The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines belonging as being in the right place and feeling comfortable in a situation. In the context of the largest movement of migrants and refugees since World War II in Europe and increasing and multiple forced or voluntary displacements worldwide, whether due to armed conflicts, economic reasons or climate change, I propose to pluralise the concept of belonging, drawing on Meskimmon's (2010) understanding of 'be(long)ing' as a form of cosmopolitanism. This is 'premised upon an embodied, embedded, generous and affective form of subjectivity in conversation with others in and through difference' (Meskimmon 2010, 6). Belonging signifies a spatial experience of movement and becoming. As materially specific and relational, it reimagines dislocated subjects, private spaces and citizenship as agentic beyond fixed geo-political borders. Meskimmon (2010, 6–7) defines belonging as 'making yourself at home' through

dwelling and hospitality, and connection through dialogue in ‘response-ability to our responsibilities within a world community.’ Similarly, Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005) writes about belonging in relation to places, being here and there alongside the other. Such positioning of belonging captures the global dis:connections examined in this volume that are generated through dispersions and dislocations, interruptions and resistances, and the new beginnings they inspire. The use of the colon by the Editors is suggestive of an alternative global epistemology to disrupt the binary thinking that divorces connections from disconnections. Instead, they propose attending to the tensions and the passages that are relational.

Burcu Dogramaci (2022, 2023) reflects on the dis:connective engagement with histories of cross-border relocations, whether forced or voluntary. Tracing exile stories of objects and persons, specifically attending to the book *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* (1932) and its author, a literary scholar Lili Körber, Dogramaci (2023) explores the global dispersions (of matter and people) in the context of publication landscapes in the Weimar Republic and beyond and the book burnings under National Socialism. Elsewhere, mapping interfaces between the history of photography, migration and mobility, Dogramaci (2022) addresses dis:connectivity and mediatisation of movements to foreground a new approach to global history, ‘which focuses neither on interconnectedness nor on deglobalisation exclusively’ but instead pays attention to the tensions between entanglements and disentanglements emphasized by Wenzlhuemer (2022), but also the passages in between. These threshold spaces illuminate the complexities of dis:connectivity she uncovers through a close reading of two photographs taken in 1939 by Hans Günter Flieg before he left his home in Germany in search of a new one in Brazil to escape anti-Semitic persecution. Dogramaci (2022) flags up the non-linearity of time before, during and post exile characterised ‘by the difference and divergence of experiences and of cultural and linguistic spaces.’ Her spatio-temporal framing of dis:connectivity and emphasis on passage as a figuration that enables another possibility of becoming is critical to the contemporary understanding of belonging, its affects and matter.

Be(long)ing is a passage that captures the dis:connectivity between being, longing and belonging manifested through spatial alliances. Its imaginative positionings are articulated through artistic practices concerned with world-making. I draw below on three specific examples that intersect art, transnational feminism and transversal politics, and align with Meskimmon’s (2020, 52) proposition that artistic practice through its processes of materialisation can offer provocative insights into belonging with others in the world. This is of critical significance to the rethinking of globalisation from pluriversal and intersectional perspectives as a means to understand agency *and* subjectivity in a globalised world through multifaceted and multi-layered connections. The interface between the transnational

and belonging as a manifestation of processes of becoming that is generative of new forms of difference are articulated in the book *Transnational Belonging and Female Agency in the Arts* I co-edited with Catherine Dormor (2022, 1–15). Through a range of artistic case studies, contributors to the volume address a multitude of subject positions navigating geographies of difference against universalising politics of globalisation. The key role of the arts in imagining alternative methods of enquiry in the humanities is also prioritised by the Käte Hamburger Research Centre *Dis:connectivity in Processes of Globalisation* (global dis:connect) (gd:c 2023). Given the elusive nature of the dis-connective phenomena, they can benefit from the analytical and communicative potential of the arts. The method of dis:connectivity offers an opportunity to approach the concept of be(long)ing via the arts.

To be: to exist, to occur, to take place

‘To be’ signifies being visible, acknowledged, respected and heard. To be is to have agency and a voice; not to be marginalised and/ or excluded. In January 2023 during the Sydney Festival, the Barangaroo waterfront featured a temporary installation of Gurindji/Malngin/Mudburra artist Brenda L. Croft’s *Naabami (thou will/shall see): Barangaroo (army of me)* (2019–2022). The project, including sixty large-scale photographic portraits of contemporary First Nations women and girls photographed in Canberra and Sydney from 2019 to 2022, honours Barangaroo (c. 1750–1791), a Cammeraygal woman known for her determination and commitment to her sovereign homelands. The photographs portray leading contemporary Indigenous women, Barangaroo’s sovereign avatars, as Croft explains, who carry her spirit and guide the artist’s determination to firm her cultural knowledge. Created using the 19th century process of wet collodion and then digitally printed on metal, the photographs were anchored with sandstone blocks cast-off from local colonial buildings. Croft attends to the invisibility of women and Aboriginal peoples but also the silenced stories and the knowledges that have been erased from the cultural memory and public spaces through processes of violent settler colonisation. Her artistic practice is committed to attentive and reparative noticing, witnessing and recording, exposure of denials and recognition of absences. To be is to exist relationally with others (human and other-than-human) across differences towards reparation.

To long: to have a yearning desire, to crave something

Longing complicates spatio-temporal tensions, linking yearning and distance and a desire for a connection. Affects generated by longing are embroidered by Viktoriia Tofan, a Ukrainian artist living and working in Poland. Her series *Alfabet* (2021) tells stories stitched through reinforced paper to give agency to silenced bodies, and particularly to individuals with hearing impairments. The violent gesture of

perforating the paper with a needle and a red thread reflects the struggles in articulating one's identity and longing to be understood. When Tofan arrived in Poland, she began working with the deaf community to explore notions of strangeness, foreignness, and marginalisation. While she was recording the stories of deaf Polish people discriminated against within their own culture, she noticed the complexities of learning written and spoken Polish not only for deaf Poles but also for herself as a migrant. The artist developed a new alphabet and a new phonic language to articulate issues of belonging and violence embedded in processes of assimilation and adjustment, also experienced when learning and trying to communicate in a new language. Stories of the deaf community are embroidered with care and attention in an attempt to belong beyond the differences and dichotomies of deaf/hearing, migrant/native, us/them. Tofan writes the other, longing towards spaces of equal belonging in which all voices are mutually constitutive and heard.

To belong: to be in the right place, to be comfortable as part of a particular group

Belonging generates effects of attachment and rootedness in a community. Such embedding in a place interlaced with its deep understanding is mobilised by an Australian, Rebecca Mayo in her project *The Plant Sensibilia Machine: Acacia longifolia* (2022–2023), a collaboration between the Plant Sensibilia Machine, Aunty Deidre Martin and the plants and lands of the Dharawal and Dhurga Language Groups, custodians of the Bundanon land. The video by Sammy Hawker records Aunty Deidre Martin, a Walbanga woman of the Yuin Nation, reading her poem *Acacia longifolia* while Mayo activates the Plant Sensibilia Machine to hold the poem on a length of cloth printed using a heat dye bath. Martin's voice interlaced with Mayo's labour and the sounds of Bundanon map the interconnected life cycles of the place with attention to the relations between plants, and specifically *Acacia longifolia*, the weather patterns and the seasons. The project motivates belonging within spaces for communal care, unravelling the modernist vision of progress orchestrated by humankind. Mayo reimagines belonging as a collective spatio-temporal concept that generates accountability, co-dependencies and co-responsibilities.

Be(long)ing

Thinking *with* the projects by Croft, Tofan and Mayo and the notion of belonging, invites reflection on who is to be and to become relationally in a planetary perspective that departs from the global and other categories, such as the world or the earth, which have been applied to organise modern history. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2021, 3–4) calls to us to orient ourselves to what we understand as the globe and how this becomes complicated by a new historical-philosophical entity called the

planet, or the Earth system, as proposed by Chakrabarty. He writes, ‘Ours is not just a global age; we live on the cusp of the global and what may be called “the planetary”.’ While the globe is a humanocentric construction, the planet decentres the human, encouraging us to consider various forms of life from the perspective of deep history. Chakrabarty’s conception of the planetary as related to but different from the global captures processes belonging to the deep histories of Earth and the interconnectedness of co-actors, both human and nonhuman.

Framing belonging as a ‘politics of relation’, a ‘constellation of self, other, connection, consciousness’, Carrillo Rowe (2009, 2) considers new possibilities for a collective subjectivity. Like Meskimmon (2010), her approach foregrounds becoming as a function of belonging, which acknowledges the communal conditions of our agency but also our accountability, ‘in this oscillation between here and there, that “I” and “she” and “we” are becoming’ (Carrillo Rowe 2009, 1). It is a movement of expansion and contraction across power lines which she calls ‘differential belonging’ (Carrillo Rowe 2005; 2008, 179–180). The relationality of belonging attests to the affects and materialities, and the stories that, as Carrillo Rowe notes, become us, through (dis)entanglements I may add. It is in this context that ‘Belonging is political’, constituting how we see and share the world (Carrillo Rowe 2009, 1). The sites of intimate collective connections are where alliances are forged mapping experiences of becoming to learn ourselves *in relation to* another, and not speak for them or represent them in other ways.

As the projects by Croft, Tofan, Mayo and many other artists demonstrate, art inspires alternative imaginations of spatio-temporal framings for the body (whether human or other-than-human) to explore differentiated configurations of belonging as transitory, interrelational and affective. Embracing posthumanist insights, in particular queer, ecofeminist, new materialist and Indigenous perspectives, such projects offer a profound challenge to the conventional understanding of belonging as limited to a fixed nation-state and/or birth-right. They empower us to extend such thinking towards forms of belonging that are (dis)entangled and agentic *with* others. Writing about the relations between subjectivity, participation and positionality framed through a transnational feminist lens, Meskimmon (2010, 72–73) notes, ‘We learn to belong, how to live together in difference by questioning our assumptions about ourselves and others and finding spaces, forms and figurations through which to imagine and inhabit the world in new ways.’ As a representation of a passage, belonging enables embodied, inter-subjective and situated spatial alignments that negotiate connections and disconnections and communicate across multiple differences to open ourselves *towards* others. The transitive and relational politics and ecologies it inspires create opportunities for more inclusive and capacious lived experiences of be(long)ing *in* co-presence.

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