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Lisa Taliano, Independent Artist

As global temperatures and sea levels rise, and our hopes of diverting the catastrophic consequences of climate change fall, our concept of the earth as a fixed framework and backdrop to human activity spirals into unfamiliar and shifting ground. As Bruno Latour says, we've become disoriented in space, time and agency. In recognition of the need to reorient ourselves, this paper takes seriously Bruno Latour's challenge to replace the blue marble with a better representation of the earth. Latour makes the provocative claim that we need to replace our conception of the earth from the well-worn planetary view, defined and accepted since the beginning of modern science, in order to shift our attention away from the globe to the surface of the earth, to the critical zone where all life exists. The problem with the globe is that it's a view of the world from the outside; in order to address the problems that are currently threatening life on the planet we need to replace this outside view of the world with a new representation from the inside.

In this paper, I will examine Latour's new representations of the earth, produced with a group of contemporary artists and critical zone scientists, and presented in his performance/lecture, *Inside*. Through it, I will explore the powers and limits of representation, focusing on the question: can philosophy, art and science, by working together, change the way we know the world? Can our relationship and attitude towards the world be changed by successfully changing our representations of it? As an artist, I am particularly interested in the artist's role in re-imagining the world. I contend that the inside/outside problem is a problem of representation; and, the only way to change our relationship to the world is to get beyond representation through a practice of art that produces new forms of subjectivity.

The globe is a view of the earth from the outside. It has no resemblance to the terrestrial place where we actually live and tells us nothing of the way we experience our life on earth from the inside. We've adopted the globe as a way of seeing the world from modern science, as conceived in Europe in the sixteenth century. In this worldview, modernity makes a distinction between inert matter on the one hand, which follows the strict laws of nature, and society on the other, which is made up of free agents, creating a subject/object, inside/outside polarity which severs us from nature, and turns the world into an object. At that point in human history, people took for granted that there would always be air, water, land, and space for us to pursue our life, liberty and happiness. Latour points out that:



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what happened in the second half of the last century is that modernism disappeared in the exact measure where the life supports were made more explicit, one after the next. Ecological crisis, in such a view, are the slow and painful realization that there is no outside anymore. (Latour 2008, 9)

Drawing on the philosophy of Peter Sloterdijk, he goes on to state that:

to define humans is to define the envelopes, the life support systems...that make it possible for them to breath...We are enveloped, entangled, surrounded; we are never outside without having recreated another more artificial, more fragile, more engineered envelope. We move from envelopes to envelopes, from folds to folds, never from one private sphere to the Great Outside. (Latour 2008, 9)

If we accept that we are not outside, and we will never get outside, Latour argues that one of the most powerful images that we have, the representation of the earth as the blue planet, becomes problematic. This beautiful image gives the illusion that we can step outside of ourselves, and outside of our atmosphere, and get an objective, God's eye, view of the world. The irony is when viewed from this distance, all life disappears. The attempt to produce knowledge by standing outside the object of observation, that is, to be objective, as modelled by traditional science, is not only a distortion, but at this point a threat to our continued life on the planet. Science is clearly important, but we need science to shift from the globe, a way of seeing that 'grasps all things from far away, as if they were *external* to the social world and completely *indifferent* to human concerns [to a way of seeing that] grasps the same structures from *up close*, as *internal* to the collectivities and *sensitive* to human actions, to which they react *swiftly*'. (Latour 2018, 67) These are two very different ways of doing science, philosophy and art.

The Gaia Hypothesis, originally conceived by James Lovelock and Lyn Margulis, is one such immersive scientific theory. Lovelock and Margulis argued that the earth's atmosphere would not be possible if we had no life on the planet: in other words, it's not the atmosphere that allows life to occur on earth, life *makes* the atmosphere. The living forms which co-evolve together with their inorganic counterparts are not in an environment, they are the environment. In Latour's conception of Gaia 2.0, the earth differs from our traditional scientific conception in three significant ways: 1) The world has agency, as do all the living and non-living entities which compose it; 2) The world is not separate from the living forms that produce it; and 3) Nature is not one. It is heterogeneous on every level, and can't, strictly speaking, be considered one system.



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Making concrete the notion of Gaia, Latour turns to another concept, the notion of the ‘critical zone’. The Critical Zone (CZ) is the ‘thin, porous and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter by activating or catalysing physical and chemical reactions’ (Arènes 2018, 2). Everything that we’ve ever known or experienced exists within this tiny zone which measures a few kilometres up and a few kilometres down from the surface of the earth. The CZ has only recently been recognised as a distinct, heterogeneous, co-evolving entity driven by physical, chemical, and biological processes, bringing together scientists from different disciplines that don’t necessarily share a common language, encompassing timescales from milliseconds or less to millions of years (Brantley 2017). Compare this to the globe which is grasped in a glance and appears homogenous. By contrast, we have no visual images for the zone in which we reside, which is one of the major challenges facing critical zone science today. Latour argues that a major source of skepticism or indifference to climate change comes from the absence of a shared representation for life in the critical zone. How do we visualise where we are? What imagery can we use to represent the critical zone as opposed to the globe?

Inside: A Performance/Lecture

In recent years, Latour has been collaborating with critical zone scientists and visual artists to come up with the visual imagery to re-imagine the world as Gaia. In a performance/lecture, *Inside*, which toured across Europe and the U.S. in 2018, Latour presented the results of this science, art, philosophy collaboration. The primary work presented to replace the blue marble image of the earth was *Energetic ‘Maelstrom’* (2018) by Alexandra Arènes.

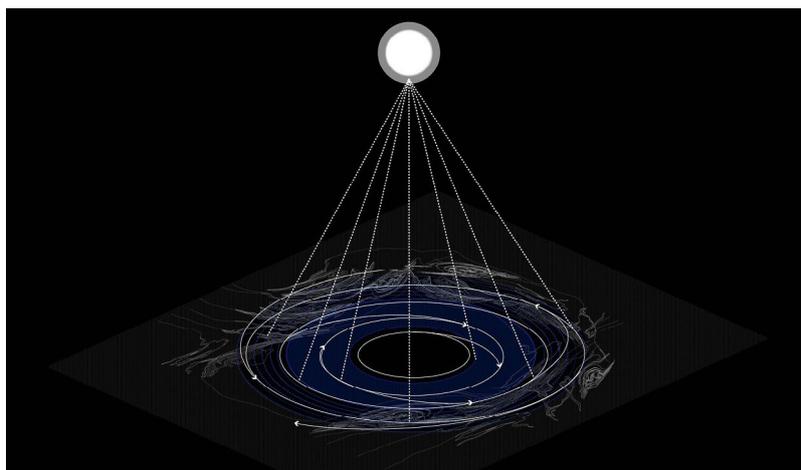


Fig. 1. Alexandra Arènes, *Energetic “Maelstrom”*. *Géohéliocentrisme*. 2017. Retrieved from <https://gaia-graphy.tumblr.com/image/166321881332> (permission to reproduce work granted by Alexandra Arènes)



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Energetic 'Maelstrom' is an anamorphosis of the world from the inside as represented by the dynamic geochemical cycles driven by living organisms and powered by the energy of the sun and the deep earth rock (Arènes 2018). The artist arrived at this image by cutting the globe in two, turning it inside out, and flattening it into a thin skin. Within the series of nested circles, the earth's core is on the outside and the CZ is in the centre. This gives life its central importance while at the same time, by encircling us, it conveys the feeling of being inside. In between the circular envelopes are vectors representing different geochemical cycles spiralling in both directions creating a vortex. Focusing on the transformation of matter by living organisms and the chemical circulation from one circle to the next, the earth as represented in its dynamic processes renders the difference between biotic and abiotic meaningless. It is through the agency of life forms that atoms are at times constituents of living organisms and at others associated with inorganic elements. This representation is described as a cosmogram and is the basis of 'a speculative scheme, not yet a model' used to develop a grammar in which to gather, organise and represent data coming from an actual critical zone laboratory (Arènes 2018, 5).

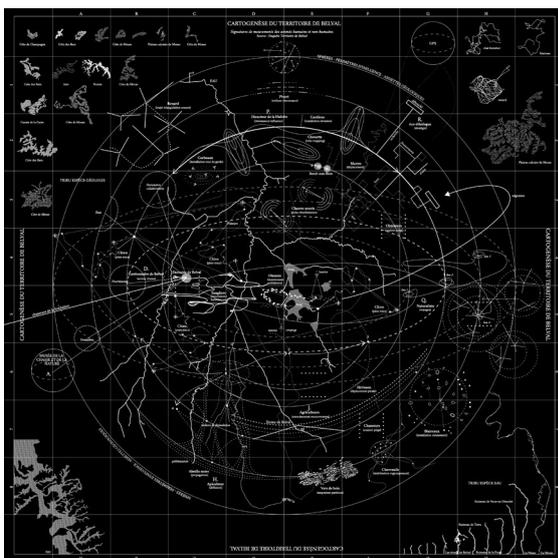


Fig. 2. Alexandra Arènes, *Cartogenesis of the Territory of Belval -- Mapping the Living*. 2017. Retrieved http://s-o-c.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Arenes_Cartogen%C3%A8se_NOIR.jpg (permission to reproduce work granted by Alexandra Arènes)

The second major work presented as a replacement for the globe, *Cartogenesis of the Territory of Belval*, is an animated map by Alexandra Arènes and Sonia Levy. The focus of inquiry shifts from the global biogeochemical level to the local, tracking the movements and effects of all the animated entities, human and non-human, on the surface of the earth in this particular location. It emphasises the notion that the CZ is not a given framework in which life occurs, but that life creates the earth or the framework in which it subsists. Arènes says:



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it is not a map for anyone wanting to reach a place for the first time, but an aboriginal map that tries to show the complexity of bonds and attachments of beings to a territory. The aim is to render visible the multiple agents making the shape of the earth through biogeophysiological actions or 'terraformation', all the human and non-human activity modifying the chemical composition of the Earth, as asserted in the Gaia Hypothesis. (Arènes 2017)

Do these representations succeed in fulfilling the requirements set forth by Latour's conception of the earth as Gaia? Are they successful representations for supplanting the image of the globe? What does it mean to view the world from the inside, and do these images succeed in taking us in?

The Problem of Representation

In a paper published in 1988, 'Visualization and Social Reproduction', Latour identifies two very different representational regimes in Western culture: one originally used in religious worship and the other used by science. The first re-presents something that is always present but needs reminding, the second representation stands in the place of an absent object. In the first, the representation is the thing. In the second there is a gap between the thing and its representation; the representation is a model of the world not a re-presentation. The shift from the first regime to the second began with the advent of modern science. Latour attributes this shift to innovations in writing and imaging that enabled reality to be turned into data and transported over space and time. He calls the new inscription types 'immutable mobiles' because they can be recontextualised without changing their shape and internal relationships. They are our marks, signs, prints, maps and diagrams that can be reshuffled, superimposed and combined to become 'simpler and simpler inscriptions that mobilize larger and larger numbers of events in one spot' (Latour 1986, 17) to produce knowledge. Immutable mobiles are powerfully political because they can be used to create allies and build coalitions around an idea. They act as a force that produces shifts in belief and behaviour. Presumably it is the lack of appropriate immutable mobiles that is challenging for critical zone scientists, and what Latour and his team have set out to rectify. He goes on to describe how the logic of immutable mobiles has come to dominate all forms of representation in contemporary western culture and laments that 'the regime of Presence has been turned into that of Absence', but concludes with the hope that our post-modern world has the capacity to reclaim 'an optically coherent space in which we will be able to represent all our different regimes of representation' (Latour 1988, 34).



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Artist Barbara Bolt compares Latour's conception of the two regimes of representation to Heidegger's critique of representationalism. In his essay 'The Age of the World Picture', Heidegger designates 'the Modern epoch as the era of representation' (Bolt 17). Bolt makes the connection between Heidegger's modern epoch and Latour's second regime and shows how Heidegger traces this form of representation, as does Latour, back to early modern science. According to Bolt, Heidegger argues that Descartes inaugurated a new paradigm of representation that converted the world into a picture. What Heidegger means by a picture here is not the everyday sense of the term as a copy or an image of the world, but rather as a system of organising the world, by which the world is reduced to a model. Heidegger sees representations as positing a particular relation to, or way of thinking about, the world, by which it establishes a frame that produces the objectification and mastery of the world by man-as-subject. By turning the world into a picture, humans become the centre over and above all other possible centres. Through our ability to represent or model the world, we secure the world as a resource for our own use. It is this objectification of what-is by man-as-subject that constitutes the central focus of Heidegger's critique of representation:

Things in the world exist out there, ready to be collected, quantified and calculated, turned into representations, so that man may use them in his quest to master the world. [Furthermore] Heidegger suggests that through its ability to reduce everything to an object, science as research enframes us; it sets limits on what and how we think. (Bolt 22-23)

Rather than merely describing things, it actually prescribes them by setting them up as models. Since it constructs the objects it proposes to recognise, it only discovers that which it produces. Heidegger contrasts this way of representation to art, a way of knowing and relating to the world that doesn't reduce everything to an object. In its openness to what-is, art multiplies possibilities, rather than reducing them. Artistic representation is characterised as an emergent quality rather than constituting something known in advance, freeing us of enframing.

In light of Heidegger's critique, I argue that the problem of the globe, the problem of the inside and outside, the subject/object distinction, is the problem of representation. In order to get beyond understanding the world from the outside, we need to get beyond representationalism. I argue that art can escape the limits of representationalism by operating on a pre-theoretical level through concrete dealings with things in the world, but only as long as it takes the world simply as it is and not as a means to an end. When art is characterised by an openness to what-is, it has the potential to proliferate possibilities rather than reducing them.



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Latour and the Limits of Representation

How can we understand Arènes' images in light of Latour's analysis of the two regimes of representations he identifies? In his performance/lecture is Latour presenting these representations merely as scientific diagrams? That is, does he consider them as models of the world, 'immutable mobiles', or as a re-presentation of the world, or both? On the one hand, the images are considered as working scientific representations to be used in the field and for political purposes. On the other hand, in the lecture/performance and in other artistic venues, the representations are presented as works of art. They are used both as scientific representations and artistic re-presentations, and therefore must be seen as an attempt to fuse the two regimes.

Clearly these works are cognisant of the problems of scientific representation and try to overcome them - albeit from within representationalism - in that they are committed to capturing the flow of life, dissolving boundaries between the inside and the outside, subjects and objects, and weaving the social into nature. The images attempt to represent the world in such a way that we are no longer standing outside and in front of it as subjects. Nevertheless, they hit the limits of representation and fail to take us in. By replacing one form of science with another, they remain a model of the world. They do not become re-presentations, or a form of artistic representation in which the representations acquire a transformative power and become the thing they represent, as does Australian Aboriginal art, for example, which I will show below.

The globe is a powerful symbolic image, and the blue marble photograph triggers a deep emotional response in us. To replace it would require an image with the same power and capacity to move us. *Energetic 'Maelstrom'*, according to Arènes and Latour, is an exercise in the artistic imagination coming to the aid of new scientific concepts (Arènes et. al. 2018). Rather than a re-presentation, it is a translation of the world into data. It is not an image that invites us to feel, qualitatively, the vitality of Gaia; it does not re-present a way of being in the world. *Cartogenesis* on the other hand does something different. In moving away from a 'global' totalising image to a local representation of a specific location, it can be thought of as a mutable mobile staying open to different forms of representation, and not limiting or fixing us into one framework. Whether or not it takes us all the way in, the mapping of the critical zone and its association with Australian Aboriginal 'maps', points to a productive direction.

Arènes likens her mapping of the critical zone to Aboriginal mapping and Bolt describes the very different type of mapping used by Australian Aboriginal artists. Traditional Aboriginal paintings are maps of land, but not maps in the ordinary sense. Traditional Aboriginal artists, according to Bolt, used them to traverse the plane between the human and the divine, and to 'ensure that the



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balance between the human and the divine was maintained (Bolt 140). In this sense, they are not merely representations, they are performative, in that they do not simply have symbolic value, they have real transformative effects. Through painting, Aboriginal people establish direct contact with ancestral beings, those who through their activity gave shape to the earth. Art in the form of maps enables them to participate directly in that world. Paintings allow them not to re-enact or represent these events but to make them part of the present. By keeping alive the presence of ancestral beings, they ensure the regeneration of the landscape and the fertility of the land. (Morphy 1998, 100) This connection to the land is reestablished and experienced through painting, through songlines, through dance and through bodies. Constructed by means of movement through the landscape, where seeing and moving are one, a haptic dimension is infused into the materiality of the work.

By contrast, Arènes maps are purely visual, disembodied images. They illustrate the concepts of the dissolution of the individual and being-in-the-world as representations, but they fail to actually go beyond representation. Because the images do not embody the concepts, the physical connection isn't made. They are a solution to an intellectual problem. By removing the body as a unit of measure we are once again removing ourselves from the equation. A convincing image of the shape of the earth from the inside will incorporate a sensory, immediate, 'lived evaluation' as a unit of measure that proceeds from the human body; one that incorporates the situatedness of our bodies in the world, our "being-in-the-world".

There is a risk when artists work within the domain of an intellectual problem that their work serves as a means to an end and fails to become an aesthetic re-presentation. It is, as Heidegger would argue, an enframing knowing in advance, not an openness to what-is. Although these artists are working with scientists in the field, the works presented are based on data recorded and collected by instruments built on scientific models made within a specifically modern model of scientific knowledge production, with little or no attention given to affect and the role of the body. The artist's way of knowing (imagined as different from this) is eclipsed by the scientific method with its compulsion to data collection, the sophisticated instrumentation used to listen to the earth, and the formidable authority of the scientist - philosopher.

It's easy to be seduced by the power of representation since it gives rise to our power over nature and over other beings. Latour's Gaia 2.0 endeavour of producing models - immutable mobiles - to raise awareness and ultimately manage the effects of global warming through technology and science remains caught in that paradigm. In his attempt to use these representations politically, Latour instrumentalises art and thereby deprives art of its power to go beyond representation and



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reconnect us with the world in a different way. I argue that he prioritises a scientific way of knowing over an artistic way of knowing, using artistic images as a means to an end. Paradoxically, this means those new renderings of the world remain within the regime of scientific representation and fail to bring us into the world, to reconnect us from the inside.

The challenge is for those of us working within a modern (western) paradigm to aspire towards a different way of being, a different way of seeing. We can change our understanding of the world only in so far as we switch our thinking from mastering to responsiveness as a different way of relating to the world. In so far as Latour and his collaborators see the world as having agency and position themselves as listening to the earth, they move us forward. But by approaching the world with a preconceived model, they don't take us all the way there. In order to get beyond understanding the world from the outside, the challenge is perhaps not to invent better representations, but to escape representationalism altogether. As a painter, my claim is that one way to do this is through a direct engagement with the material of the world, through performativity and affect.

Art Beyond Representation

Although from a historical standpoint, painting can be accused of teaching us to see the world as a subject confronted by objects, as Latour does in his essay for *Reset Modernity!* (Latour 2016, B1), western painting has in fact been working in a non-representational mode since at least the turn of the last century and, according to Svetlana Alpers, well before that in seventeenth century Dutch painting (Alpers 1984).

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty first, painting moved from rendering of objects to the re-presentation of sensations and the underlying processes of perception and reality. Influenced by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), European artists defined the highest form of art, Dionysian art, as a work that unveils the illusions of representation and dissolves the distinction between subject and object. Similar to Barbara Bolt, my argument is that painting can escape representationalism, dissolve the inside/outside, subject/object, distinction, and produce an image of Gaia that is a better image of the world than the current globe, one in which the representation becomes the thing, by means of a dynamic productivity of material practice. That is, in a material exchange that occurs between bodies, through sensation, perceptions and affect, the artist, open to what-is, can escape representational enframing, encounter the heterogeneous multiplicity inherent in possibilities, and create the conditions for something transformative to emerge.



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Through the performative act of painting, bodily responses are focused on the demands of the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the material interaction of the paint and the canvas in such a way that the creative gesture becomes a reaction that is released from conceptual ways of thinking. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the world is filled with 'multiplicities' and 'singularities' for which there exists no 'abstract' model or type. I would add that we can open up to this pre-theoretical mode of being through art by means of affect. Affect is the sensations produced as our bodies respond and resonate to the physical world around us. Deleuze and Guattari make an important distinction between personal emotions and affect. Artist Simon O'Sullivan in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari emphasises this point. He states that affect is not personal feelings, instead affect is independent of subjects, moments of intensity, on the level of matter occurring on an a-signifying register. 'They are not the representation of experience to oneself; or the self as constituted through representation (O'Sullivan 128).' Affect is 'trans-human', in that they involve a moving beyond the individual, rendering the subject/object distinction meaningless and making self-overcoming possible. Art can function in this way to transform us, to switch our intensive register, out of our ordinary way of thinking, to reconnect us with the world. By opening us up to the non-human universe that we are also part of we can begin to define new forms of subjectivity. O'Sullivan points out that this is what Deleuze means when he says he is interested in 'modes of individuation beyond those of things, person or subjects: the individuation, say of a time of day, of a region, a climate, a river or a wind, of an event (Deleuze 1995, 26).' In throwing ourselves into the world with an openness to pure sensation, the artist is engaged in an activity that precedes representation, described by Deleuze as a state of chaos that occurs through the collapse of visual coordinates (Deleuze 2002, 82).



Fig. 3. Lisa Taliano painting, New York City, 2020.



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Let us not be too quick to find a solution for our current disorientation, it is in this chaos that something new emerges. We need representation of the underlying relationships and processes in the world, yes, but not only map coordinates based on a specific dataset. We need art that disrupts expectations; art in which the artist enters into and participates in this unlimited haptic space of rhythms and forces, and returns to give us a transformative image that embodies this experience. In this way art can work with science and philosophy on its own terms, on equal footing, and make an original contribution.

In our openness and sensitivity toward non-human others, in our direct engagement with them, a caring and inter-dependent relationship to the earth can replace our need to control, moving us away from mastering nature to a responsiveness towards it. We put ourselves aside and let the materials speak for themselves. Here the world is no longer conceived representationally as an object for a subject, nor is it a resource for use by humans as a means to an end. As Latour teaches us, the world becomes an actor in the drama of existence, and we recognise ourselves as actors engaged in shifting combinations of hybrid assemblages made up of human and nonhuman, biotic and abiotic, entities.

Although the images Latour offers in *Inside* may have been lacking in affect, Latour's performance did not. In his style and passion-infused philosophy, he can be seen as going beyond the representational, producing real effects on various planes, inspiring us towards new possibilities and change. What we need is a collective mapping of the critical zone, a dynamic assemblage of different ways of knowing and representing, similar but different from Latour's wish to find 'an optically coherent space in which we will be able to represent all our different regimes of representation' (Latour 1988, 34). The challenge for artists is to allow the earth and all the living and non-living entities to speak through our representations, through a responsiveness to them and an awareness of co-responsibility and indebtedness. We need to render ourselves and others sensitive to the place where we live, the substratum on which the continued life on the planet depends, by finding a multiplicity of new ways of representing our connections from the inside in all their entangled, heterogeneous, multi-dimensional, fluctuating, fragile glory.

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