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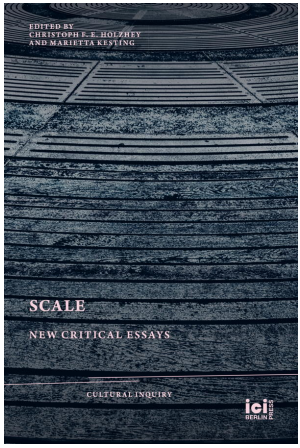

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Affects of Multiscalarity

Rhetorics of the Too Big and Too Small across the Global and the Planetary

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ABSTRACT: This essay engages with a rhetorical understanding of scale and argues that disorientation pairs with multiscalarity when emphasis is put on the gap between scales big and small. This 'scalism' travels across heterogeneous discourses: in theoretical accounts of globalization, we see it operating behind local/global binaries; in theorizations of the planetary, it has been used to justify the relegation of the political.

KEYWORDS: scale rhetorics; scalism; global and planetary; local–global; politics of the planetary; scale and affect

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FEDERICA DI BLASIO

INTRODUCTION

Thinking of scale as a rhetorical 'apparatus' implies thinking 'generally' about what scale can do within heterogeneous discourses.[1] This is Joshua DiCaglio's proposition; however, in this essay I wish to develop the same proposition in an alternative direction. A primary question addressed here is how we can think about scale in general, multidisciplinary terms by integrating an awareness of scale emerging from discussions of geographic scales, in contrast with DiCaglio's focus on the invariance of measuring scales and his tangential take on geographic scales as 'layers'.[2] I build on this approach while appropriating DiCaglio's notion of 'scalism' to think about the rhetorical effect that an emphasis on the gap between the 'too big' and 'too small' creates in different discourses.[3]

1 Joshua DiCaglio, *Scale Theory: A Nondisciplinary Inquiry* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), p. 11.

2 Ibid., p. 49.

3 Ibid., p. 26.

Inspired by the scalar manipulations in Mina Gorji's poetry on scale, I will argue that dramatic juxtapositions of big and small scales generate a sense of confusion and disorientation, and a loss of resolution at the level of intermediate scales, which, in theorizations of the planetary such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's, but also in DiCaglio's own *Scale Theory*, happen to coincide with the scales of the human.[4] I develop my reflections by bridging the theoretical debate on the planetary and the Anthropocene that has grown around the work of Chakrabarty on the one hand, and the multidisciplinary reception of Fredric Jameson's take on globalization on the other.[5] The global and the planetary are two instances of 'scalar projects' (Gabrielle Hecht) that Chakrabarty keeps distinct — or develops 'in parallax' — as he theorizes the planetary.[6] This essay proposes, instead, to connect them formally through the apparatus of scale.

The theoretical implications of the essay are threefold: first, a rhetorical understanding of scale that crosses discursive boundaries between theory and poetry, as well as within theory, points towards an affective dimension that enriches our awareness of the scale apparatus and increases the portability of this analytical tool across different scalar discourses; second, by prioritizing the affective dimension of scale, it is possible to maintain a hold on geographic scales as scales proper while addressing the physical multiscalarity of the planetary, notwithstanding the instability of their object, or, rather, on account of it; third, rhetorical patterns across different scalar discourses suggest that the intermediate scale is often overlooked when the emphasis is placed on the too big and the too small. This tendency should be kept in mind when, in planetary discourses, the intermediate scale happens to coincide with the scale of the human, and the political is presented as suddenly insignificant. Overall, the essay suggests that embracing the

4 Mina Gorji, *Scale* (Carcanet, 2022); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

5 Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347–57; and *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. by Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Duke University Press, 1998).

6 Gabrielle Hecht, 'Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence', *Cultural Anthropology*, 33.1 (2018), pp. 109–41 (p. 111). <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.05>.

multiscalarity of the planetary does not necessarily imply losing sight of the political; multiscalar theorizations of the global can teach us to refine our understanding of the rhetorical apparatus of scale to avoid this misstep.[7]

SCALE RHETORICS

> SCALE
>
> The map reveals
> so many stars —
> two constellations
> in the shape of bears,
> a peacock, Pavo,
> in the southern hemisphere,
> the spaces between galaxies,
> the emptiness,
> the not-quite emptiness
> it doesn't show,
> the single
> atom
> H
> in every cubic meter —
> the atom
> that is
> not quite
> still —
> how cold it is
> between galaxies,
> the snowdrops in the garden
> the morning after frost.[8]

Mina Gorji's poem 'Scale' visually creates the illusion of a descent from an extremely big scale to an extremely small scale, by juxtaposing galaxies and constellations with an atom, nested at the centre of the poem

7 This contribution originated as a set of notes on the relevance of geographic scales for transnational Italian studies presented at the American Association for Italian Studies Conference in 2021, and the Modern Language Association Convention of 2025. The notes were later expanded into larger theoretical reflections fuelled by discussions and events at the ICI Berlin. The project has benefited from the generous feedback of the ICI academic staff and co-fellows; among them, I particularly thank Filippo Bosco, Kirill Chepurin, Manuele Gragnolati, Marietta Kesting, Magdalena Krysztoforska, Tobi Haslett, Christoph F. E. Holzhey, and Claudia Peppel.

8 Gorji, *Scale*, p. 15.

in the form of a bare 'H'. Cartographic representations and scalar units make the 'out-of-reach' scales of stars, galaxies, and atoms accessible to human imagination, but in the poem, they are associated with a sense of partiality, abstraction, and possible imprecision ('the map reveals [...] it doesn't show'; 'the emptiness, the not-quite emptiness; the atom | that is | not quite | still'). In the second part of the poem, rapid scalar shifts bring us back from the atom to the galaxy, then from the galaxy to snowdrops, cold creating a smooth transition in between. At the end of the poem, through the framework of a human-made space (the garden) and a human timescale (the morning), the poet brings this multiscale imaginative trip back to a terrestrial point of view.

In 'Scale' — both this poem and elsewhere in the homonymous collection — Mina Gorji dramatizes distances and the need to be attuned to a world extending beyond the limits of the human 'I'. As she plays with the readers' perception and invites them to see the natural world from different angles, scale is at the same time an object of the imagination and an essential trick in the poet's toolbox:

> I very deliberately created, I hoped, a kind of narrative starting with the red door opening [first poem of the collection], moving through and shifting scale between poems, small to large space to smaller insect [...] I did think very hard about the juxtaposition of poems to create certain kinds of effect through the book [...] Zooming effects can be productive and poetic [... when they are used to call] something into question.[9]

Gorji's scalar poetic practice purposely shifts from big to small scales and vice versa to question assumptions about the world — an alleged hierarchy of beings, and the distances between them. Through her poetic praxis, Gorji challenges Bruno Latour's admonition that 'good artists do not believe in zoom effects'.[10]

Gorji gestures towards a rhetorical dimension of scale where scale, as a rhetorical tool, can produce effects that are specific and possibly

9 Mina Gorji, explaining the juxtaposition of scales large and small, both within the same poem and between poems. See Mina Gorji, 'Poetics of Scale', lecture, ICI Berlin, 29 September 2025, video recording, mp4, 01:37:16 (1:02:38, 1:04:52, 1:23:20) <https://doi.org/10.25620/e250929>.

10 Bruno Latour, 'Anti-Zoom', in *Scale in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Michael Tavel Clarke and David Wittenberg (Springer, 2017), pp. 93–101 (p. 94) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64242-0_4>.

predictable. Moreover, in Gorji, scale is invested with a transformative potential in regard to the reader's self-awareness and knowledge. Similar terms are used to place the rhetorical dimension of scale centre stage in Joshua DiCaglio's 2021 *Scale Theory*, where scale is 'inevitably rhetorical in the sense that it is about and requires a transformation or reconfiguration of our understanding of reality'.[11] DiCaglio's book develops a scalar terminology not tied, in principle or at least ambition, to any specific discipline. It defines scale as a 'situated dislocation' that reveals the practice of observation and clarifies that difference lies not at the level of the objects observed but at the level of the observer's perspective.[12] Whereas rhetoric is intended by DiCaglio in 'a more philosophical sense as the study of the effects, constraints, and possibilities of communication', assuming scale as a rhetorical apparatus implies navigating 'its own rules, conditions, and possibilities'.[13]

DiCaglio's investigation encompasses an impressive range of scalar discourses and succeeds in facilitating a conversation about scale across disciplines.[14] However, DiCaglio's theory relies heavily on the invariance of measuring scales, and how their invariance, despite their conventional nature, can help coordinate various scientific disciplines.[15] The number of 'scale domains' considered to offer a significant scalar shift are limited to the quantum, atomic/molecular (nanometres), cellular/unicellular (micrometres), bodily/normal (metres), planetary/ecological, solar system, galaxy, and observable universe, with geographic scales from the body to the planet being

11 DiCaglio, *Scale Theory*, p. 9.

12 Ibid., p. 32.

13 Ibid., pp. 12, 27.

14 See ibid., p. 14. For a cross-disciplinary approach to scale, see also *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*, ed. by E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert (University of California Press, 2016), pp. 1–21.

15 DiCaglio acknowledges that objective measurements are the result of social convention but takes a stand against theories of scale as 'constructed', arguing that those theories, while significant in their own terms, are not about scale per se. See DiCaglio, *Scale Theory*, pp. 64–65, where scale domains are charted according to powers of ten, and also p. 161: 'The products of scale are indeed variant: at one moment we rally around bodies as products of DNA, at another as parts of an ecosystem, at another we tie the two together through multinational corporations manipulating the flows of genes. But scale itself is not variant; if it were, again, we would be unable to track what we are even talking about.'

reconfigured as 'layers' or 'scalar relations' and not recognized as scales proper.[16]

DiCaglio's study aims to be inclusive of different approaches to scale, but its normalization of the bodily-to-planetary scale makes it difficult for social scientists and cultural critics to sit with a model where geographic scales are thought to bring epistemic 'limitations' to the very understanding of scale, with human-to-national-to-global scales — with all their complex and conflicting social and political tensions — remaining, quite literally, out of focus.[17]

That said, DiCaglio's theory can be brought both constructively and critically into a conversation that thinks of scale as a rhetorical tool that connects, rather than separates, different scalar projects. If one agrees to 'think as generally as possible' about how scale works in heterogeneous discourses, looking, if not for rules, then at least for patterns of how scales are articulated in such discourses, then the bringing to bear of an awareness of scale within narratives of the global and planetary may also yield some form of cross-disciplinary scalar literacy.[18]

Specifically, I am interested in DiCaglio's notion of scalism, which, in conversation with Derek Woods, he defines as the 'privileging of any given scale'.[19] While, for DiCaglio, a prime example of scalism is

16 Ibid., p. 49.

17 Joshua DiCaglio, 'Scale Tricks and God Tricks, or The Power of Scale in *Powers of Ten*', *Configurations*, 28.4 (2020), pp. 459–90 (p. 479) <https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2020.0021>: 'While geography has perhaps the most extensive conversations about scale, geographers import into their conception of scale three additional delimitations. First, their conception of scale is largely based on human activity, a limitation that may be attributed to the fact that the conversation arose primarily within human geography. [...] Second, their schema of scale domains is largely based on human concerns: the body, the local, regional, national, and global. I'd argue that this represents only one shift in scale domain: from the body to the global. [...] Third, geographers seem to largely agree that scale is socially constructed [...] In the conception of scale I am outlining here, scale is socially constructed only in the sense that it is a tool used by *Homo Sapiens* for identifying, accounting for, and comparing their observations in a consistent way. In contrast, ideas about scale, including ways that *Homo Sapiens* articulate their own actions, the way they might prioritize or designate scales of relevance, and the ways they attempt to mobilize, resist, or interact with other scales, may or may not align with this scalar accounting.'

18 DiCaglio, *Scale Theory*, p. 11.

19 Ibid., p. 26. On scalism, see also the work of Derek Woods, who uses the term to indicate 'the ontological privileging of one scale domain, with its specific qualities and

the privileging of the metre-scale reality of humans, I use the concept oppositionally and propose to look at a different type of scalism, where the emphasis lies instead on the very big and the very small — and the hyperbolic gap between the two — at the expense of intermediate scales. I would argue that this particular form of scalism comes with specific rhetorical effects, which condition different discourses in comparable ways. Specifically, the present essay points at feelings of confusion, disorientation, and even states of paralysis associated with discourses that conflate the too big and the too small. These effects need to be clearly spelled out when the medium scale happens to coincide with the dimensions of the human and the emphasis on the too big versus the too small generates a politically problematic oversight.

Affect intersects with the rhetorics of scale in a variety of ways. Lisa Messeri emphasizes, in her interview elsewhere in this volume, how her ethnographic research on the 1:1 scale model finds in pleasure a 'telling heuristic' to identify different degrees of knowledge.[20] DiCaglio himself reconducts the 'disorientation provided by scale' to the realm of mysticism and the 'horror' or 'acceptance' that come with 'connecting the vast to the here'.[21] In DiCaglio, where, incidentally, disorientation correlates with the loss of focus on human-to-global scales, there is an emphasis on the transformative potential of scale in relation to the human subject; however, subjectivity is mostly articulated in the singular form: 'mysticism helps clarify the rhetorical elements of scale by accounting for how scale transforms the one who scales.'[22] By removing geographic scales from the picture, what is lost is precisely an understanding of how the transformative power of scale acts upon a plural subjectivity which can take the form of a nation, a village, or the globe. Reintroducing geographic scales as scales proper, and not as

constraints, as a model for all the others'. Derek Woods, 'Epistemic Things in Charles and Ray Eames's *Powers of Ten*', in *Scale in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Clarke and Wittenberg, pp. 61–92 (p. 79). In my take on scalism, I think more in terms of scalar resolution than about modelling.

20 See Lisa Messeri, 'The Pleasure of the 1:1 Scale', interview by Filippo Bosco, Federica Di Blasio, and Marietta Kesting, in this volume, pp. 375–82 (p. 382).

21 DiCaglio, *Scale Theory*, pp. 14, 103.

22 Ibid., p. 20. See also p. 243: 'While the rhetorical tradition has primarily focused on convincing other people, this rhetorical task is a matter of persuading oneself — or what one thinks one is — of a radically different configuration toward existence.'

derivative elements of scalar discourse, seems to be a productive way, in my view, to enhance our awareness of scale as a rhetorical apparatus. Moreover, focusing on specific affects correlated to the scalism of the too big and too small enhances our understanding of how affect operates within and through the apparatus of scale.

SCALE AWARENESS AND THE PLANETARY: THE 'FALLING' OF THE POLITICAL

Pace Latour, zooming effects are popular not only in art but also in theoretical discussions, especially those, from the global to the planetary, where an awareness of multiscalarity is presented as key to grasping the complexity of contemporary existence and knowledge. A prominent example can be found in Chakrabarty's essays collected in the 2021 volume *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, where he draws on the category of the planetary, previously introduced by Gayatri Spivak, to suggest that we are now living 'on the cusp of the global and the planetary'.[23] Centring the question of anthropogenic climate change, and the implications of the Anthropocene — a concept that he theoretically embraces — Chakrabarty confronts the need for 'thinking on very large and small scales at once, including scales that defy the usual measures of time that inform human affairs'.[24] For Chakrabarty, the cipher of the Anthropocene lies in the everyday 'awareness that what seems "slow" in human and world-historical terms may indeed be "instantaneous" on the scale of earth history'.[25] While, as a historian, Chakrabarty thinks of scale mostly in temporal terms, his observations embrace all scales of the non-human from viruses and microbes to the macro scales of deep geology.[26] What is central to his inquiry is the disproportion between small and big scales — a disorienting, hyperbolic scale-gap that Chakrabarty associates with the idea of falling:

> The conscious conjoining of different scaled chronologies produced in me a feeling that I have often likened to that of falling.

23 Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 204.

24 Ibid., pp. 50–51.

25 Ibid., p. 179.

26 Temporal scales are also central to Gorji's poetry. See, for example, 'In Ice', the second poem of the collection *Scale*, in Gorji, *Scale*, p. 10.

> It was as though as a humanist historian interested in political issues of rights, justice, and democracy, I had fallen into 'deep' history, into the abyss of deep geological time. This falling into 'deep' history carries with it a certain shock of recognition of the otherness of the planet and its very large-scale spatial and temporal processes of which humans have, unintentionally, become a part.[27]

In Chakrabarty, much like in Gorji's poem, dramatically different scales are juxtaposed. When read together, however, one notices that Gorji purposely introduces this (dis-)orienting effect in her poem, whereas in Chakrabarty the falling sensation caused by the hyperbolic gap in scale is the starting point that needs to be conceptualized, the springboard from which to rethink the place of the human *vis-à-vis* the deep history of the planet.

Especially at its early stage, much of Chakrabarty's theorizing of the Anthropocene goes hand in hand with his insistence on the limitations of the political. This explains why scale, despite appearing conceptually minimal, can harbour deep theoretical controversies. Critics of the idea of the Anthropocene have been very quick to warn of the danger of approaches that, as in the case of Chakrabarty, question the value of humanism and political thinking. While, for Chakrabarty, the political 'keeps acting as an anxious prohibition on thinking of that which leaves us feeling "out-scaled"', Jason Moore attacks the Anthropocene as a 'fundamentally bourgeois concept' which attempts to create a universal 'Anthropos' to be blamed for the disastrous environmental effects of capitalism.[28] Similarly, Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg flag the concern that 'species-thinking on climate change is conducive to mystification and political paralysis'.[29]

It is due to the scalar nature of these discourses that critics of the concept of the Anthropocene often recentre the diversity of human perspectives and the human body. Kathryn Yusoff, for example, unveils

27 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 15.

28 Ibid., p. 179; Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44.3 (2017), pp. 594–630 (p. 598) <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036>.

29 Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, 'The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative', *The Anthropocene Review*, 1.1 (2014), pp. 62–69 (p. 67) <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019613516291>.

the connivance between racism and geology — and how the boundaries of the 'inhuman' have been drawn at the expense of Indigenous and Black communities by negating their own 'Anthropocenes'.[30] Recalling that feminism is by definition a 'war on scale', Claire Colebrook presents Anthropocene narratives as a shift 'from indifference to difference' and asks what alternative forms of existence could keep humans in the realm of scalar unreadability, or of the indifferent — or, in other words, could resist the exceptionalism of humans in their ecosystem.[31] Though, in the light of these as yet unresolved debates, Chakrabarty takes note of these concerns and admits that 'the political question, What is to be done in a climate emergency?' remains 'for humans alone', his conclusion holds that the global and the planetary coexist 'in parallax'.[32]

SCALE AWARENESS CONNECTING THE GLOBAL AND THE PLANETARY

I want to draw attention to multiscalarity and the 'awareness of scale' raised by discourses on the Anthropocene to suggest that this scalar awareness connects — more than divides — discourses on the global and the planetary. In her 2000 article 'The Global Situation', Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing similarly brought an awareness of scale centre stage, writing: 'We live in a time of self-consciousness about units and scales: Where shall we draw the boundaries of regions? How are local communities composed? And, most important […], what is this thing we call the globe?'[33] The global and the planetary — distinguished, by Chakrabarty, for their ability to either centre or decentre the human

30 Kathryn Yussof, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); and Kathryn Yussof, *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race* (Duke University Press, 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478059288>. See also Janae Davis and others, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, … Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises', *Geography Compass*, 13.5 (2009), e12438 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12438>.

31 Claire Colebrook, 'We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 1–20 (p. 9).

32 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (Brandeis University Press, 2023), p. 12.

33 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 'The Global Situation', *Cultural Anthropology*, 15.3 (2000), pp. 327–60 (p. 327) <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2000.15.3.327>.

— are in fact both examples of what Gabrielle Hecht calls 'scalar projects'.[34] They are distinguished for their situatedness and historicity, but comparable inasmuch as they 'reveal or hide'.[35] I am also receptive to Hecht's suggestion that scalar projects, such as the Anthropocene, should be 'reflexively assembled' with the purpose of identifying 'interscalar mechanisms for keeping the planet and all of its humans in the same conceptual frame'.[36] How can a certain awareness of scale, championed in discourses of both the global and the planetary, serve us once we establish that scales can be generative of heterogeneous and even possibly conflicting discourses?

While rebutting universalizing narratives of the Anthropocene with the idea of the 'Capitalocene', Moore sketches a suggestive comparison between the academic debates generated around the Anthropocene and globalization. His comparison is based on the interdisciplinary appeal of these two concepts: 'Like globalization in the 1990s, [the Anthropocene] has come to mean all things to all people.'[37] Behind this broad appeal, I would add, is the fact that both discourses solicit articulations of scale, where scale, following Tsing, is not 'a neutral frame' but rather 'a way of seeing the world', arising from epistemic and practical conditions of multiplicity and contingency, and as such susceptible to being 'brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded as well as taken for granted'.[38]

Debates on globalization and the Anthropocene are comparable inasmuch as they activate the scale-making rhetoric of discourse — in relation to the global and the planetary scale, respectively. And if it is true that scale as a rhetorical apparatus travels across disciplines and discourses (DiCaglio), the semantic multiplicity of scale can hopefully be brought into use without stumbling into the incompatibility of physical (conventionally invariant) versus social definitions of scale.[39]

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34 Hecht, 'Interscalar Vehicles', p. 111. Hecht uses this formula for the Anthropocene; I extend it to both the Anthropocene and globalization to propose a rhetorical investigation of patterns of scale-making.

35 Ibid., p. 114.

36 Ibid., p. 135.

37 Moore, 'The Capitalocene, Part I', p. 5.

38 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 58.

39 On the social construction of scale in DiCaglio, see n. 15 above.

While distinguishing between physical and social scales is necessary and consequential, focusing on the rhetorical handling of the relational gap between big and small scales can, I suggest, be one way to mediate between different orders of scale. Thus, a formal comparison between scalar projects relying on different definitions of scale can be predicated on the activation of similar scalar dynamics. This possibility of formal comparison rests on the fact that multiplicity is embedded in the very idea of scale — either physical *or* social — since, as Derek Woods notes, one needs at least two scales to even see what scale is about.[40] Scalar multiplicity facilitates a formal comparison between theorizations of the global (relying on a social definition of scale) and the planetary (relying on a physical definition of scale) inasmuch as both discourses have dramatically extended the range of scales for which our 'awareness of scale' needs to account.

SMALL AND BIG SCALES OF GLOBALIZATION: LOCAL/GLOBAL 'STRUCTURES OF FEELING'

To develop the comparison between discourses of the Anthropocene and globalization to which Moore alludes, I now turn my attention to specific instances within debates on globalization where, I argue, we can see local and global scales activate scalar dynamics that formally resonate with the tension between the too small and the too big that I have identified in Gorji's scalar poetics and Chakrabarty's theorization of the planetary. To be sure, this is *one* interpretation of the local-global plurisemantic nexus, but the tension between macro and micro that I wish to point out here is significant enough to be at the heart of the pro-/anti-scale debate that preoccupied geographers in the 2000s.[41] My point is that rhetorical scalisms, such as the emphasis on the gap

40 As he writes, 'You need two scales to talk about scale at all' (Derek Woods, 'Scale Critique for the Anthropocene', *The Minnesota Review*, 83 (2014), pp. 133–42 (p. 133) <https://doi.org/10.1215/00265667-2782327>).

41 As Sallie A. Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward write, 'over the past 20 years, political and economic geographers have tended toward macro pronouncements that assigned the global more causal force, assumed it to be more orderly (if not law-like) and less contingent, and, by implication, relegated its other to the status of case study' (Sallie A. Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward, 'Human Geography without Scale', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30.4 (2005), pp. 416–32 (p. 421) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2005.00180.x>). For an introduction to this debate, see John Paul Jones III, 'Scale and Anti-Scale', *The*

between the big and the small, can be observed in different contexts (generalizing and simplifying enough to abstract comparable formal scalar models from their specific semantic implications).[42] While the work of Fredric Jameson and its reception will be the focus of my analysis, I will first provide a brief historical contextualization of globalization discourses and weigh the ontological and epistemic instability of local and global scales, contending that this instability does not stand as an impediment to their scalar rhetorical expressivity.

Scholarship on globalization has evolved in the wake of major events of recent decades — the 2007–08 financial crisis and Covid-19 pandemic, among others — and with the growing geopolitical instability fuelled by a context of war. While terms such as 'deglobalization' or 'slowbalization' have been introduced to describe a turning point in the evolution of neoliberalism, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's work is particularly useful for my purposes as it centres the thresholds touched by a new phase of open transition in global capitalism, while also stressing the continuity of deep processes of change.[43] Their 2024 volume *The Rest and the West*, for example, presents the current geopolitical instability fuelled by a transition towards multipolarity and war not just as a concatenation of crises but also as a new stage in the history of capitalism, wherein conflicts intensify for control over the spaces and flows of globalization.[44] Their 2013 book *Border as Method* already described a scenario in which borders have proliferated worldwide to exclude, and at the same to selectively (but still

International Encyclopedia of Geography, ed. by Douglas Richardson and others (Wiley, 2017) <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg1104>.

42 I will identify intermediate or medium scales relationally, as whatever stands between the smallest and biggest scales emphasized in the discourse (that is, not as big as x, not as small as y). While I speak below of nations or cities as medium/intermediate scales in relation to the individual or the global, I am not advocating for a 'nested scale' philosophy here (this pertains to the specificity of the geographic debate on scale, some conclusions of which I also report in this essay); rather, I limit myself to observing how multiscalarity is handled rhetorically.

43 See, for example, Adam Tooze, 'Chartbook #192 On Deglobalisation and Polycrisis', *Chartbook*, Substack, 1 February 2023 <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-192-on-deglobalisation> [accessed 14 July 2026]. For Mezzadra and Neilson, I draw on Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013); and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *The Rest and the West: Capital and Power in a Multipolar World* (Verso, 2024).

44 Mezzadra and Neilson, *The Rest and the West*, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 31–123).

violently) include, contrasting sharply with the emphasis on flows, hybridization, post-nationalism, and smooth space that had characterized the early 1990s, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall.[45] The historical conjuncture illustrated by Mezzadra and Neilson offers a vantage point from which the specific moment of globalization debates identified by Moore, to which I shall return, appears to have ended. In that context, the utopia of a borderless world was still circulating, though it was contested, in a way that contrasts with the wary tenor the debate has assumed today. Moreover, in contrast with the current emphasis on multipolarity, earlier debates conceived globalism as 'nearly synonymous with American power'.[46]

In the debates that proliferated from the 1990s to the early 2000s, notions of the local and global were used contrastively — in formulas such as 'the local-global nexus', or in the condensed formula 'glocalization' — to describe processes of change brought by the increase in transnational communications and financial investments, as well as international technological standards, cultural exchange and hegemony, labour movement, travel, and so on, and, more specifically, to articulate the *tension* between the different poles invested in such processes.[47] It should also be noted that the more that theoretical debate has advanced in the direction of seeking to define what 'local' and 'global' mean, the more the two concepts have appeared undefined:

45 Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, p. 61.

46 Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 89. On the utopia of a 'borderless world', see also Jameson and Miyoshi, eds, *The Cultures of Globalization*, p. xiii.

47 See, for example, Roland Robertson, *Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture* (Sage, 1992); Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time–Space and Homogeneity–Heterogeneity', in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (Sage, 1995), pp. 25–44; *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. by Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson (Duke University Press, 1996); *Geographies of Power: Placing Scale*, ed. by Andrew Herod and Melissa W. Wright (Blackwell, 2003) <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773406>; Erik Swyngedouw, 'Neither Global nor Local: "Glocalisation" and the Politics of Scale', in *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*, ed. by K. R. Cox (Guilford Press, 1997), pp. 137–66; Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity', in *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*, ed. by Anthony D. King (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 19–39; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 63; and Arif Dirlik, 'Place-Based Imagination: Globalism and the Politics of Place', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 22.2 (1999), pp. 151–87.

the local and the global are never given, but have to be made (Latour); the global is always anchored to and expressed through localized contingencies (Latour, Saskia Sassen, J. K. Gibson-Graham, Sallie A. Marston, and others); no local exists without a larger network of connections to the outside world (James Clifford), which makes each instance of locality virtually lean towards the global (Doreen Massey); the local and the global are defined on the basis of what they are not, or might as well even be overlapping (Arif Dirlik).[48]

The local and global are thus rather unstable epistemic categories, but this is not to the detriment of their scalar expressivity. Indeed, the currency of local/global discourses remains persistent — in theory and in everyday use — even though closer theoretical scrutiny has called for their dismissal. Thus, for example, Tsing recommends ethnographers not to rely on local/global binaries while also admitting: 'I find myself doing it.'[49] Ursula Heise has commented on the articulation of multiple scalar environmental discourses, arguing that the 'advocacy of local, national, or global forms of identity, given the impasse these discussions have reached, may no longer make much sense at a very general and abstract level'.[50] However, she also concludes that this theoretical impasse does not mean that these categories have stopped making sense in particular cultural and historical contexts.[51]

Similarly, I argue that we can cast a historicizing look on the rhetorical multiscalarity found in scalar projects attempting to give shape

48 See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 186, 176 <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199256044.001.0001>; Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton University Press, 1991); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1997); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Polity Press, 1994), pp. 146–56; and J. K. Gibson-Graham, 'Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics outside the Binary Frame', in *Geographies of Power*, ed. by Herod and Wright, pp. 25–60 (p. 32) <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773406.ch1>. See also Manuel Castells, 'Toward a Sociology of the Network Society', *Contemporary Sociology*, 29.5 (2000), pp. 693–99; Alan Latham, 'Retheorizing the Scale of Globalization: Topologies, Actor-Networks, and Cosmopolitanism', in *Geographies of Power*, ed. by Herod and Wright, pp. 115–43 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773406.ch4>; Marston, Jones, and Woodward, 'Human Geography without Scale'; and Dirlik, 'Place-Based Imagination', pp. 152–60.

49 Tsing, *Friction*, p. 58.

50 Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 7–8.

51 Ibid.

to processes of globalization through the local and the global, despite the fact that these categories are epistemically and ontologically unfixed. Within this framework, the tension between the local and global (which I signal typographically with the use of the slash: 'local/global') can be seen as operating between the regimented form of 'world-views' or 'ideologies' and the more fluctuating affective dimension of 'structures of feeling', as an attempt to give shape to changes still in the making, which can be traced both in theoretical discourses and cultural texts. Here, I use Raymond Williams's notion of structures of feeling to emphasize both the ongoing processes of social and cultural change that the binary category of the local/global has been employed to describe, as well as the ambiguity of scales in their susceptibility to reconfiguration but also their tendency to take on a real — institutional, political, or symbolic — social form.[52] In this tension between the constraints of established forms and constant openness towards transformation and generation, I also see how the local and the global channel what Mezzadra and Neilson call the 'volatile and determining' nature of geographic scales, which they see, echoing Neil Smith, as an expression of geographic scales' malleability, intensified by globalization.[53]

Instability seems to be the quality of geographic scales that emerges most firmly from debates on globalization, contrasting with the (conventional) invariance of measuring scales foregrounded by DiCaglio. This instability is also at the core of the deep connection that geographic scales maintain with the sphere of the political. Perceptions of the 'small' and the 'big' connected with the local

52 Raymond Williams, 'Structures of Feeling', in Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128–35 (p. 132).

53 For Mezzadra and Neilson, globalization intensifies the 'contradictory capacities' of scales 'to contain social activity and to shift and mutate as a result of social activity' (Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, p. 63). Smith writes: 'Scale distils and expresses the oppressive as much as the emancipatory possibilities of space, its deadness as much as its life' (Neil Smith, 'Scale Bending and the Fate of the National', in *Scale and Geographic Inquiry*, ed. by Eric Sheppard and Robert B. McMaster (Wiley, 2004), pp. 192–212 (p. 197) <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999141.ch10>); and elsewhere: 'however fixed these scales are made, they are subject to change, and it is through the continual determination and internal differentiation of spatial scale that the uneven development of capitalism is organized' (Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1984), p. 181).

and global activate the expressive potential of the apparatus of scale to describe a constantly changing social landscape defined by hierarchical structures of power and the ongoing struggle to reverse them. Rather than being derivative or secondary to our understanding of the rhetorical apparatus of scale, geographic or socially defined scales are revelatory when it comes to weighing the transformative potential of scale in relation to our knowledge and experience of the world.

SCALE AWARENESS AND THE GLOBAL: A DISORIENTING MULTISCALARITY

With a historicizing approach in mind, I turn now to the scholarship of Fredric Jameson as a scalar articulation of globalization wherein the local/global binary is particularly apparent, and where a dramatic gap between small and big scales inferred by this binary creates rhetorical effects that resonate with the destabilizing effects I have noted in Chakrabarty and Gorji. I begin my observations with Jameson's contribution to a collective volume on the cultures of globalization that he co-edited in 1998, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', published at a time when, again, optimistic outlooks on globalization were still on the table for some and globalism was for the most part seen as equivalent to a process of standardization pushed by US geopolitical influence.[54]

Jameson's direct comments on globalization draw on his very matter-of-fact observations of the effects of the GATT and NAFTA agreements on the national cultural industries of Western European countries, among others, which he sees as having been severely compromised by the export of American film and television.[55] He clarifies that his observations are mainly relevant for the direct area of influence of the Anglo-Saxon world and takes note of contrasting evidence of the state of affairs in Latin America, as well as in diasporic cultures

54 Fredric Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. by Jameson and Miyoshi, pp. 54–78.

55 Ibid., pp. 60–63. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), signed in 1947, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into force in 1994, were international agreements instrumental to the liberalization of trade, the latter specifically addressing trade in North America.

(his reference is to Stuart Hall).[56] In the end, Jameson is prompted to draw a model articulating a tension between the global force of Americanization and localized differences threatened by this force. The role of the nation-state in this paradigm is not fixed, since it can operate either as the site of a despotic identity (*vis-à-vis* internal minorities) or as a positive site of the resistance of local particularity (against Americanization). The model changes according to the 'level' from which globalization is observed:

> everything depends on the level at which a malign and standardizing or despotic identity is discerned. If this is to be found in the existence of the State itself, as a national entity, then to be sure, a more micropolitical form of difference, in markets and culture, will be affirmed over against it as a force for the resistance to uniformity and power [...] However, when one positions the threats of Identity at a higher level globally, then everything changes: at this upper range, it is not national state power that is the enemy of difference, but rather the transnational system itself, Americanization and the standardized products of a henceforth uniform and standardized ideology and practice of consumption.[57]

Jameson does not exclude the 'intermediate' scale of the nation, but the binary local/global logic that he applies to his model renders it such that the role played by the nation is not clearly defined, whereas the extremely small scale of localized differences and the extremely large scale of the homogenization set in train by Americanization both are. The intermediate scale as such does not have full theoretical consistency in Jameson's model because he is thinking in one-on-one oppositional terms, driven by the threat of a 'malign and standardizing or despotic identity'. The general 'small' and 'big' characterizations of scales applicable to the local and global function here to express a disproportion in power, agency, and influence (as emphasized by the capital 'I' in 'Identity').

Jameson's take on globalization is a coherent development of his previous remarks on late capitalism as the era of the 'multinational network' in the renowned essay 'Cognitive Mapping'.[58] The gap be-

56 Ibid., pp. 71–72.

57 Ibid. p. 74.

58 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 350.

tween small and big scales in the theorization of cognitive mapping is particularly dramatic as Jameson here emphasizes the individual's disorientation in understanding their class position *vis-à-vis* the global scale of the social totality. The concept of cognitive mapping adapts to a global level a concept previously modelled by Kevin Lynch at the urban level.[59] But because the emphasis is on the 'incapacity to map socially', and the 'disorientation of the saturated space', the extremely localized experience of the individual and the global scale of the social totality are pushed to the fore in a binary articulation that leaves the intermediate scales of both the city and the state behind: 'late capitalism' appears as

> a moment in which not merely the older city but even the nation-state itself has ceased to play a central functional and formal role in a process that has in a new quantum leap of capital prodigiously expanded beyond them, leaving them behind as ruined and archaic remains of earlier stages in the development of this mode of production.[60]

Jameson's use of geographic scales relies on his interest in 'quantum leaps' to describe the enlargement of capital as generating distinct types of spaces at different historical stages: from the Cartesian organization of space, through the Enlightenment, to the remote colonial fronts of imperialism, and finally to the saturated space of late capitalism. In this context, the city and the nation are thought less as intermediate scales and more as historically alternative (or *temporally* intermediate) stages in the evolution of capitalism. To the extent that the global comes to coincide, rhetorically, with the 'too big' of the social totality, in relation to which the individual's attempt to understand their phenomenological reality — the scale of the individual — comes, implicitly, to be seen as 'too small', a pedagogical aesthetics and scaled-up political strategy is needed, in Jameson's view, to oppose a socialist 'counterform' to the 'form' of capitalism.[61]

Looking at the interdisciplinary reception of Jameson's texts (where it is easier to spot different approaches to scale), one notices

59 Ibid., p. 353.
60 Ibid., p. 350.
61 Ibid., p. 356.

responses, such as that of J. K. Gibson-Graham, calling against the rigidity of his binary model as well as the gendered 'domineering' tone with which he characterizes the global, at the cost of disempowering or invalidating the local.[62] Alternative models have since moved in the direction of emphasizing contingency and the plural coexistence of different, often contrasting, globalist visions. Thus, for example, Tsing (as previously recalled) warns against falling into the trap of easy dichotomies, whereby ethnographers might find sufficient data to articulate a tension between local consumption and global circulation, or between local resistance and global capitalist structures and visions: 'By letting the global appear homogeneous,' she argues, 'we open the door to its predictability and evolutionary status as the latest stage in macronarratives.'[63] In her later work, Tsing goes so far as to challenge the very idea of scalability.[64] The big/small scale dynamics contested here therefore concern a power differential that brings epistemic limitations to the very possibility of envisioning a world outside capitalism.

What I find most revealing about Jameson's local/global scalar vision is that his neglect of the intermediate scale (or its complete absence) is particularly apparent when contrasted with coeval or later approaches, where multiscalarity is embraced without negating the role of intermediate scales within the process of globalization. An explicit theorization in this direction comes from Saskia Sassen, for whom the global should not be defined as that which is outside or in contest with the nation, but rather as endogenous to it. According to Sassen, globalization occurs through a process of selective denationalization, where only a few sectors of government begin operating at a global level, while others remain strongly in the grip of the national authority as a way to bolster the globalization process itself. Moreover, Sassen works against the fixity versus mobility binary that implicitly operates

62 J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 125. Against the 'macro', see also Marston, Jones, and Woodward, 'Human Geography without Scale'.

63 Tsing, *Friction*, p. 58.

64 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 'On Nonscalability: The Living World Is Not Amenable to Precision-Nested Scales', *Common Knowledge*, 18.3 (2012), pp. 505–24 <https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-1630424>.

in Jameson's model. Attending to the infrastructures and channels that moderate flows of circulation, and mediating between small and large scales, she outlines a complex architecture that sustains globalization or contests it in different ways.[65]

Other approaches, such as Stuart Hall's, develop the ambiguity of the nation's position diachronically, predicting a resurgence of rampant nationalisms in the immediate future. A passage from Hall's article 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity', from 1997, reads thus:

> The erosion of the nation-state, national economies and national cultural identities is a very complex and dangerous moment. Entities of power are dangerous when they are ascending and when they are declining and it is a moot point whether they are more dangerous in the second or in the first moment. The first moment, they gobble up everybody and in the second moment they take everybody down with them. So when I say the decline or erosion of the nation-state, do not for a moment imagine that the nation-state is bowing off the stage of history. 'I'm sorry, I was here for so long. I apologize for all the things that I did to you — nationalism, jingoism, ferocious warfare, racism. I apologize for all that. Can I go now?' It is not backing off like that. It goes into an even deeper trough of defensive exclusivism.[66]

65 Sassen writes: 'The global is endogenous to the national rather than a formation that stands outside and in opposition to the national'; and: 'The global is not simply defined as that which is outside and in contestation to the nation, nor is the global only that which is part of a space of flows that cuts across borders. There are components of globalization that we keep coding in national terms, and there are global actors whom we think of as local because they are immobile and do not move across borders, thus lacking the markers of what have become dominant representations of the global for both the supporters and the critics. If we understand the global as indeed partly endogenous to or endogenized into the national, we expand the range of actors who are conceivably global. We can then include even those who are immobile, resource poor, and not able to travel global circuits' (Saskia Sassen, 'The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics', in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. by Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 82–93 (p. 82)). The centrality of global cities in Sassen's work can also be highlighted here, although it could be argued that, in her view, global cities challenge the very idea of intermediate scale, on account of 'their capability for producing global control', and the non-nested, multiscalar reach she attributes to locality proper (Sassen, *The Global City*, p. 6). Still, Sassen's model deploys a complex, multilayered multiscalar vision that multiplies the sources of tension shaping a plural global network.

66 Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global', p. 25.

Both Sassen's and Hall's interpretations of globalization embrace the ambiguity of the nation-state but grant enough resolution to the intermediate scale to recognize a certain dynamism at the national level; the strength of their models lies in the fact that they each highlight how nation-state sovereignty performs different functions within the same geopolitical context and acts differently upon different subjects, generating different levels of subordination, inclusion, and exclusion.[67]

Jameson's insights on the way in which postmodern disorientation creates fertile ground for the thriving of conspiracies are no less relevant today than Stuart Hall's warnings concerning the defensive return of nationalisms.[68] My aim in recalling and contextualizing Jameson's take on globalization, however, has been to show that his scalar narrative insists on the small and the big — and the disorienting gap between the two — whereas other scalar takes, either somehow in conversation with Jameson's, such as Hall's, or coming from other disciplines, such as Sassen's, use different scalar approaches, where the dynamism and functioning of the whole scalar process hinges upon the active involvement of the intermediate scale.

Jameson's emphasis on the too small and the too big, and their association with a sense of disorientation and confusion, replicates a correlation that we have seen in formally comparable, although qualitatively different scalar discourses (Chakrabarty, Gorji, and even DiCaglio). Moreover, Jameson's leading critical texts exemplify why the local/global binary has been so pervasively adopted 'in the present tense' of globalization, and why this binary, as analytically misleading as it might be, is so productive when scale is used, methodologically, as a cultural lens.[69]

67 On the importance of the intermediate scale in overcoming the paralysis of the political, see also Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organization* (Verso, 2021), p. 33. I thank Lindsay Caplan for pointing out this reference to me.

68 See Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 57.

69 On culture in the present tense, see Williams, 'Structures of Feeling', pp. 129, 132.

CONCLUSIONS

My aim in this essay has been to compare the ways that different discourses manage multiscalarity, in order to understand recurrent patterns in scalar rhetorics. From Mina Gorji's unsettling scalar shifts from galaxy to atom, to the falling sensation that motivates Dipesh Chakrabarty to write about big and small physical scales, and to Fredric Jameson's discussion of the disorientation of the individual faced with the increasing complexity of the global scale of capitalism, we can discern comparable rhetorical scalar practices juxtaposing the too big and the too small, and relying on the destabilizing effect, or affect, that these zooming rhetorics provoke.

While social scientists from Bruno Latour to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing have taken stances against the zoom, or versions of the small/big binary, it remains noteworthy that vertiginous contrasts between scales big and small are used in heterogeneous discourses despite or perhaps because of their destabilizing effects. At the same time, awareness of the 'apparatus' of scale equips us to see what specific articulations of scale can either reveal or hide. The emphasis on the too big and the too small can be seen as a form of 'scalism' — in the cases I have examined here, and plausibly beyond — inasmuch as it predictably correlates with a loss of focus at the level of intermediate scales.

Such formal patterns in the management of multiscalarity should be kept in mind especially where the loss of resolution at intermediate scales might imply the dismissal of the political domain where scales from the bodily to the global are articulated. In the humanities, theorizations of the planetary such as Chakrabarty's have, at least in their original formulations, steered the interpretation of scales towards the physical realm, but with the risk of establishing the irrelevance of human/social scales, now 'outscaled' by larger transformations and phenomena; similarly, Joshua DiCaglio's theorization of scale, while operating cross-disciplinarily, *de facto* excludes the relevance of geographic scales.

The disorienting perception of scale that accompanies these perspectives, I have argued, is not accidental. When emphasis is on the big and the small, with a loss of resolution at the intermediate scale,

disorientation can be expected. Supportive of this thesis is the fact that poets like Gorji consciously create these effects in their verses, while social accounts of scales, as we find them, for example, in Jameson, present similar scalar articulations despite speaking of different objects of observation and activating a different (strictly social rather than physical) 'order' of scales.

Drawing a formal comparison between global and planetary discourses, I second Gabrielle Hecht's recommendation that social and physical scales should be kept in the same framework when discussing the planetary. Moreover, *contra* DiCaglio, I have argued that geographic scales should be considered proper scales, regardless of the instability of their object — in fact, this very instability is essential for understanding how the apparatus of scale can be transformative for the plural subject, whereas DiCaglio's focus seems to be on the individual observer. Rather than being limited in their understanding of scale, geographic debates, especially those related to the local/global, offer a model to observe how the small-scale/big-scale binary, or, we might say, the too small/too big binary, is a privileged scalar formula for expressing disorientation, as expressively effective as it can be analytically misleading.

As much as the poet's, the theorist's toolbox can count on the apparatus of scale to create certain rhetorical effects. When an emphasis is placed on the contrast between big and small scales, it is worth asking: 'What about intermediate scales?' A way to rethink the mission of the humanities within a planetary framework could spring from this question, not to legitimize the exceptionalism of humans above other beings or scales (the scalism DiCaglio talks about, and which Gorji's poetry goes against), but to grant appropriate resolution to the intermediate human scales (from the bodily to the global) that scalar projects building on the idea of the 'human species' abstract as the neutral starting point from which to measure other scales, big and small.

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