

What is a World Question? Before and in COVID-19

PAPERS FROM THE SEMINAR Selected and introduced by Terry Smith

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|---|--------------------|
| 1. World Questioning in Pittsburgh: Reflections on a Seminar | Terry Smith |
| 2a. Some Thoughts: A COVID-19 Diary; 2b. Figures | Isaiah Bertagnolli |
| 3. Tracing a Nation by Candlelight | Nikhil Titus |
| 4. Notes on Living with the Disaster | Silpa Mukherjee |
| 5a. Worlding contemporaneity in Argentina; 5b. Figures | María Llorens |
| 6. World Listening: Decoloniality, <i>Tianren heyi</i> , and Ethnomusicology in China | Shuo Yang |
| 7a. Post-Truth Rhetoric and Modern World Picturing; 7b Figures | Max Dossier |
| 8. Thinking an Opposite World Through Facebook's VR Vision | Gabriel Guedes |
| 9a. James Castle's Art of World Picturing; 9b. Figures | Brooke Wyatt |
| 10. CS Common Seminar SYLLABUS, Spring 2020 (REVISED due to COVID-19) | |

WORLD QUESTIONING IN PITTSBURGH: REFLECTIONS ON A SEMINAR

TERRY SMITH

During the Spring semester of 2020 the Cultural Studies Common Seminar was entitled “What is the World’s Question? Long Histories, Concurrent Politics.” One goal of the seminar, a pedagogical one, was to bring to the University of Pittsburgh, where I have taught since 2002, the kind of seminar we conduct at the European Graduate School where I joined the faculty in 2016. Pittsburgh/Saas-Fee. Western Pennsylvania/Valois. Steel City/Alpine resort. Pitt was founded 1787, as a local college. Became a top-ranked, state-related, comprehensive, international university, with 34,000 students and 2,500 faculty. EGS began, in 1994, as a school for Expressive Art Therapy. Became known for its small-scale, intensive, shared work-in-progress, cross-disciplinary seminars conducted by eminent philosophers, artists, curators and critical theorists, among them Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler. At EGS, I have offered seminars in “The Contemporary Condition: Composition, Planomena, Worlding” (Saas-Fee, 2016), “Deconstructive States and the Post-contemporary Distraction” (Valetta, Malta, 2017), “Difference and Concurrence” (Saas-Fee, 2018), and “Exhibitionary Times: Art Against Spectacle” (Saas-Fee, 2019). 1

At Pitt, I regularly teach an Introduction to Contemporary Art course to 100 students, most taking it as a general education requirement. This responds to a fine policy for a public university: that first year students should have the opportunity to study with the best-known researchers, and the most experienced teachers. In turn, those faculty are obliged, often, to grapple with the challenges of explaining—without prerequisites—their field, its topics, and their approaches to those with no prior knowledge of these things. In contrast, my graduate seminars at Pitt have been shaped by constraints and possibilities located, seemingly, at the other end of a learning spectrum: the professional practice of a loose cluster of disciplines—art history, mostly, but also criticism, curating, art theory, visual culture studies, film studies, global and cultural studies, and critical theory—especially their theories and methods, their histories, their recurrent crises, their current concerns. The

seminars invite students to share in rethinking these fields, exploring their centers—the places where the cluster of family resemblances works its convergent magic—and its edges, where the constellations begin to fray. The curriculum of a Department of the History of Art and Architecture requires this, as it should.

As does my own work, which is driven in significant part by the radical reflexivity that has, since the early 1970s, characterized the most innovative art historical work. This is true whatever place or period is the focus, including something previously impossible for the discipline: taking historical perspectives towards art as it is being imagined and produced around you. Parroting contemporary art's contemporaneity is the job of its marketeers, its promoters. Our task, as historians, theorists, critics and curators of modern and contemporary art, is to discern what the larger world is asking art to do, and to evaluate how well it is responding. And to discern what art is asking of the world, and how it is responding. My seminars at Pittsburgh always ask about the implications of these worldly demands. So, this pattern: "Modernity's ends" (2006); "Time, Space, and Being" (2008), "Theories and Histories of Contemporary Art" (2010), "Theories of Contemporaneity" (2011), "Curating Contemporary Culture" (2013), "Coeval Connectivity in Contemporary Conditions" (2016), "Contemporary Composition" (2017), and "Cotemporalities in the History of Art and in Exhibition-Making" (2019).

One earlier Pitt seminar was less directly tied to the needs of art history graduate students. "World Picturing and Placemaking in Contemporary Visual Cultures," offered as a Cultural Studies Common Seminar in 2006, addressed the Program's desire "to engage, through interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary lens, the problematics of culture." ² These prior courses fed into the 2020 seminar. Finally, as preliminary reading, I suggested my essay "Defining Contemporaneity; Imagining Planetary," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 49-50 (2015): 156-174, which sets out a tentative framework for what I call a planomenal approach to thinking worlds-within-the-World.

With the hope of returning to it at the end of our discussions, we began with this question: *How do we move from the current state of affairs in which the contemporaneity of divisive difference prevails to a world in which we work together to construct the kinds of coeval*

communality that are necessary—and, hopefully, will become sufficient—for our survival? In the seminar synopsis, I glossed this as follows:

Let us—hypothetically, of course (although, in fact, *this is serious*)—call this “the World’s question.” And regard it as the question that everything that makes the world possible as a world, everything that is actual within it, is asking of itself, of every other thing, and about their relationships to each other, right now. There are, of course, many other questions that seem as large, or as opening onto questions this big. Among them: Is there a viable alternative to capitalism as an economic driver, within nations, between them, and outside them? Will the United States and China hold back from plunging global geopolitics into a new Cold War? Does the persistence of authoritarian rule and the rise of reactionary populism within many nation states signal the permanent decline of democracy as a model of social organization? Which of the following most presciently imagines our future: *Crash*, *Children of Men*, *Babel*, *Tree of Life*, *Melancholia*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Avatar*, *In Time*, *Tomorrowland*, *A Touch of Sin*, *Ten Years*, *Blade Runner 2049* or *Black Panther*? (Insert your favorite TV series.) How do we create or recreate a free public sphere in our town, our city, our country, between nations, and on the Internet? Can global warming be mitigated sufficiently to save our species? Answers to questions like these, I suggest, depend on answering a question of this kind: How do “we” become “our,” how does “mine” and “yours” become “ours,” for each of us and on a planetary scale?

Anticipating that the first, and most natural response to such a question would be to reject it as unaskable, I added that, of course, every element in such a question—each word, concept, relation and every connotation—calls itself and every other term into question and requires explanation and qualification. Soon, however, it becomes necessary to *reassert* a question of this kind as pointing to what needs to be said, and what needs to be done, right now. Thus, in January 2020, we arrived at the goal of the seminar, as stated in the Syllabus: “to explore modes of world questioning that are operative today within and between several disciplines with a view to assessing their contribution to the formulation of a differentiated, open mode of world questioning that might be widely shared.”

For each week, I chose a particular example of conscious, reflexive world questioning. These took specific forms: an artwork, a text or set of texts, a practice of thought, a statement within public discourse. All are, or were, powerful in themselves. Each was influential, strongly so, in its context, and remains so more broadly. We found that no less than *ten* modes of world questioning can be identified as having significant purchase on the present, as possessing potential for thinking forward. All are worth exploring, we came to believe, for precisely these qualities. In themselves and in their contention. And for what they might offer to our emerging consciousness of planetarity.

Nine months later, these hopes, and this language, seems so Pre-Covid-19. But it was already framed by prior, at least as massive, transformations of the world condition: we might be in the midst of Covid-19, but we are, also, still post-1989, post-9/11, post-2008, and post-2016. These dates say much, although not everything, about what counts as a world-picture changing moment, about what eventualities precipitate a new round of world questioning. Yet they do tell us, at a glance, that the changes are coming at us faster, and that each one is bigger, more world-entailing, than those before it. Or so it seems.

Now was a good time, I proposed, to go back in order to go forward (“Always historicize!”—Fredric Jameson). It is good to work against this grain of accelerated, expansive change, of unpredictable but certain crisis (“Always criticize!”). It is good to do so together, collectively and coevally (“Make your ends your means!”—Kant, “Only connect!”—Foster). We know that crisis will not go away, so we begin from the knowledge that we will have to return to confront it. We set out to do so, by accumulating, in the weeks that followed, as prepared a tool kit as possible.

Discover uncertainty in where you are. Leave, go far, come back; depart from a place, travel the wider world, return to it, changed. The seminar as a journey, a quest, and a homecoming to what is now a different place...perhaps.

The first three weeks were structured around discussions of material drawn from a book in progress on world questioning, presented to the seminar as texts-in-progress, mini-lectures

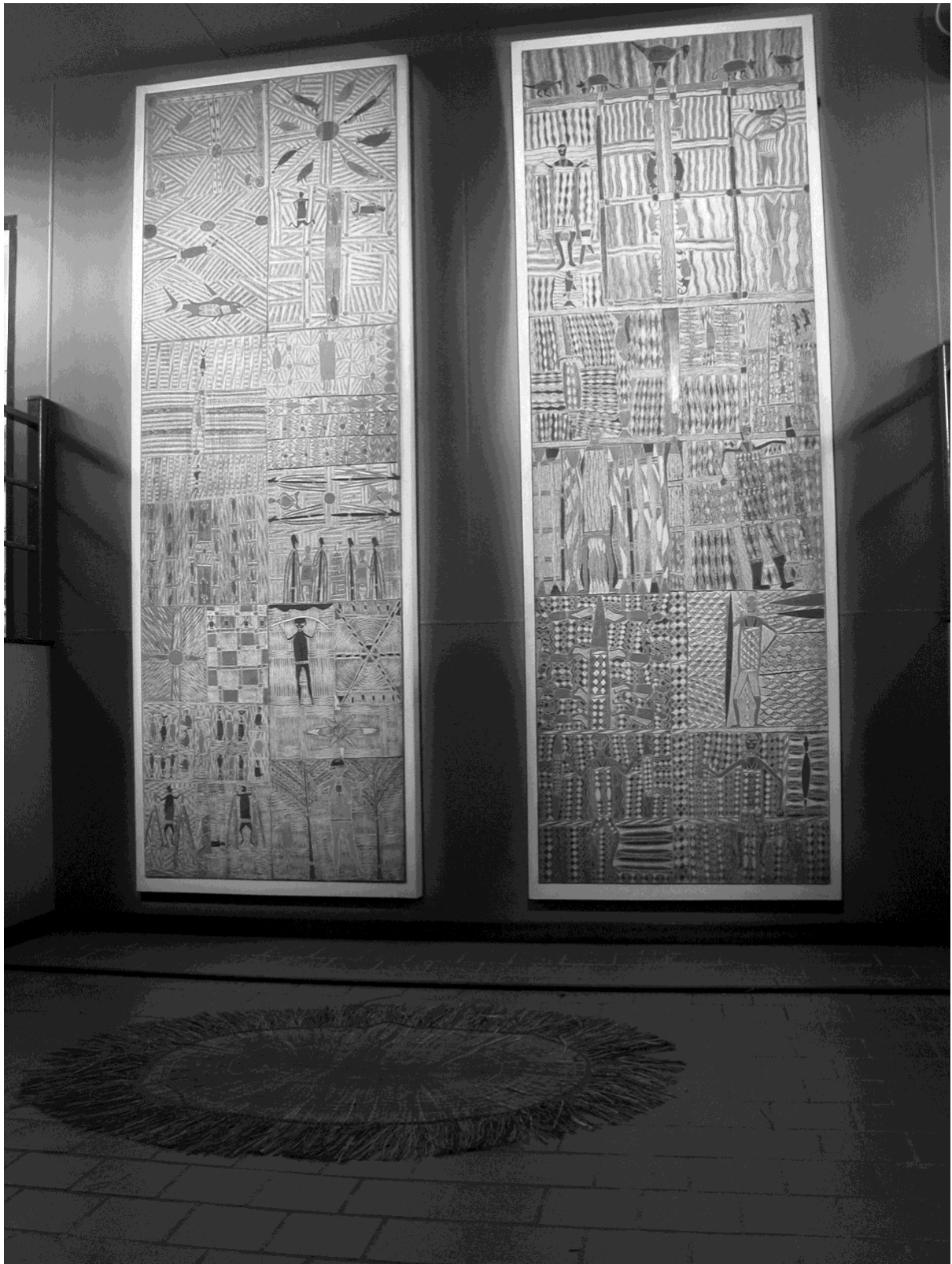
that invited commentary. Sessions 1-3 of what follows summarize material from some of the prologues and chapters in my manuscript. Sessions 4-9 were based around close readings of texts by other, mostly recent and contemporary authors. By session 10, the world had sent an unmistakable message to those who refuse to question it and their place within it: Here is a pandemic, go practice!

We began, as my book will begin, against most expectations, from a time and place far away from room 201, Cathedral of Learning:

1. An Indigenous Perspective

In 1963, the Yolŋu clans from the area known by the *balanda* (white people, in Yolŋu language) as the Gove Peninsula, part of North East Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory of Australia, made a collective visual statement that answered a question then being urgently posed to their world. Was their answer valid only for that time and place, for those circumstances, in that situation? Or does it have something to say to our question about world questioning now?

What became known as *The Yirrkala Church Panels* were painted using natural ochres onto two hardboard (Masonite) panels, each twelve feet high and four feet wide, in the months of 1962-3. Supported by the Reverend Edgar Wells, the Methodist minister and Superintendent of Yirrkala, Yolŋu elders painted “something of their own choosing” to be displayed in the church. Wells was outraged that both government and church officials were deceiving the locals about the nature and extent of a plan to mine bauxite on their land. 3 Anthropologist Howard Morphy argues that the Yolŋu artists “decided how they would use their art in communicating with outsiders and how their sacred law could be presented in public contexts,” and that they wanted to “show that Yolŋu had their own sacred heritage and to emphasize its connection to land and land ownership... Visitors to the church would be able to see the ways in which the paintings mapped their rights in land and also apprehend the sense in which land was a sacred endowment.” 4 The very existence of the panels makes this case: this was the first time (at least as known to *balanda*) that most of the clans of the region used the pooling of their most sacred knowledge to work together for a single, focused, shared purpose.



The Yirrkala Church Panels, 1962-63, natural ochres on hardboard, two panels, each 12 ft. x 4 ft., courtesy the artists and Buku-Larrngay Art Center, Yirrkala, Northern Territory. Left: Dhuwa panel. Right: Yirritja panel. Photograph Howard Morphy.

The Yirrkala Church Panels reflected the basic division within Yolŋu society into two distinct but complementary moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, each represented on one of the paired panels. The key stories of each clan group within the moieties appear in a defined section of each panel. The Dhuwa panel (left) was painted under the direction of senior elder Mawalan Marika. Cross-hatching predominates within Dhuwa representation. Each clan has its distinctive way of rendering the closely similar shapes, and each uses a particular sequencing of the ochre colors. These generate signature styles, instantly recognizable to other Yolŋu. Members of the Marika family, led by Wandjuk Marika, painted the major sections (lower) showing the most revered Creator Being, Djan'kawu, appearing at Burralku, a mythical island from which he and his sisters came to the mainland, creating all geological formations, lifeforms, and phenomena. Djan'kawu and the sisters travel throughout the region, encountering much existent phenomena, which they react to or change. Sections tell specific moments of this journey in detail. On this panel, saltwater regions dominate at the bottom and the top, although the sections at the center left, painted by Larritjana Ganambar, show the small fish and grassland of the freshwater countries of the Naymil and Dätiwuy clans.

The Yirritja panel (right) was overseen by Birrikitji Gumana, the acknowledged leader and custodian of their ritual legends, with Narritjin most likely the designer of its integrated format. Ten large sections, in five pairs, on either side of a central band—what Wells insightfully calls a “tree of life” that changes according to the creation stories in the sections around it, until it reaches almost to the top where, capped like the screen in a church, and topped by curious birds and animals, wavy lines designate “the ether—the heavens—back to the beginning to Burralku.”⁵ The bottom right section shows Barama, today regarded as the most eminent of the four Creator Beings, emerging from the sacred waterhole at Gängan. Alongside him another of the Beings, Galparimun, is depicted, while above him a section shows a third, Lany'tjun. The diamond shapes ubiquitous in Yirritja representation originate from the first appearance of these crocodile-like Beings: foamy water running off their bodies as they emerge from the sea, from their weed covered bodies as they emerge from waterholes. Sunlight shining through these droplets, represented by white paint, signals sacred presence, like a lightning of the sky, in a flash, during a monsoonal storm.

The diamonds, when slightly modified in shape, can also represent honeycomb, fire, running water, or be a mortuary sign. Each section evokes specific aspects of how their lands were created and what constituted that creation: in the second section from the bottom at left, the Ancestors convene to devise Yirritja law; in the central panels, freshwater regions cede to saltwater ones; while in the top third the landscapes of clans in which female Ancestors are most highly venerated are shown. The artists of these sections were, respectively, members of the Gumana, Wunungmurra, Yunupingu, and Maymuru families.

What is most striking is that all of these figures—the most sacred—are being shown at the moment they are doing the most important thing that was ever done, and would be done, that is, create *this* place, this world. The Creator Beings are being presented as they first appeared, when appearance became possible, when there was first something to see, something to be seen (by other Creator Beings, and by the humans and animals they created). For Yolŋu, this creation is perpetual in the sense that it keeps on resonating through the present. The invitation to contemporary spectators, in 1963, and since, is to witness the creation of these places, this world, as it happened, in the first instance, and since.

In October 1963, the panels were on prominent display in the Yirrkala church during a visit of parliamentarians charged with making recommendations for or against mining. One of them, Kim Beazley Snr, a Labor Party politician from Western Australia, recommended that the Yolŋu use the concept as the basis for a petition to Parliament. Which they did, mounting their typed text on two bark panels, one Dhuwa and the other Yirritja, surrounding them with images painted by some of the same elders who did the Church panels. While unsuccessful in stopping the government's granting of the lease, publicity around the bark petition raised public consciousness that Indigenous people believed that their relationship to their land was one of primary ownership. It took until 1992, in the case brought by Eddie Mabo of the Mer Island in the Torres Strait, for the High Court of Australia to rule that native title existed. Such title remains contested, but artworks continue to be recognized by the courts as the basis for the claiming of such title. In 2007, the Ngurrara peoples successfully sued for recognition of their ownership of 29,000 square miles of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia. In 2008, in the Blue Mud Bay Case brought by the

Yolŋu, the High Court of Australia recognized that their land rights extended into the sea to the extent of the low water mark. This followed an extensive national tour, begun in 1997, of the exhibition *Saltwater: Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, that included works depicting many of the same places as on the panels, but many more from the region, such as that of the Mdarrpa clan associated with the ancestral crocodile Bāru, painted by Djambawa Marawili. The Yirrkala bark petitions are regarded as among the “founding documents” of the Commonwealth of Australia and are displayed in Parliament House, Canberra. 6

What have the Yirrkala panels to tell us about the kinds of world picturing we need now? We might review this story in terms of its value, scaling from place to planet. The first showing of the panels might be said to mark the appearance of the clans *as Yolŋu*, the historical moment when they all came together, for the first time, to declare their shared identity. Yet “historical,” here, comes too close to the claim that only registration in the narrative of European world expansion, colonization, universalization counts as history. But the Yolŋu, like Aboriginal peoples across the continent, had always known who they were, had known who and what made them so, where that happened and why it keeps on happening. This is what the panels confirmed to Yolŋu in 1962 and 1963. At the same time, they were an affirmation of Yolŋu placemaking, in another sacred context, that of the church—which is, after all, located in their place, on their land. As well, in a broader secular context, that of the land rights case, which has its connections to elsewhere—to the distant sources of power, those that stand ready to exercise their force locally—the panels declare the unique clan specificity of the processes of world making that keep on making place, processes that mining the land will disrupt, disturb, scar, and, to a degree, destroy. But not stop. We are witnessing the assertion of Yolŋu sovereignty in forms that the modern colonizers might understand and, eventually, acknowledge as possessing a legitimacy coeval with theirs. Similarly, the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart requested that a First Nations Voice be enshrined in the Constitution of Australia, in the form of an assembly of Indigenous people acting as advisers to the elected parliament. It asked for a *Makarrata*—a coming together after a time of struggle—to bring that about. 7

Coeval communality, we might infer from the Yolŋu example, will definitely entail thinking together, feeling together, experiencing together. It will also entail talking and listening

together, having meetings, writing documents, painting murals and the like. But mostly, Yolju tell us, it will be about making places, many of them, adjacent to each other, through processes of world weaving: coming from the earth, moving across it, returning to it. Coming together, after a time of struggle...for which the Indigenous word is *Makarrata*. It is the first tool in our kit, the fundament of how to form an answer to the world's question.

2. European Universalism, Modern World Picturing

Although he never travelled more than thirty miles from his birthplace, Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, in a Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea), Immanuel Kant's thought was fundamentally cosmopolitan, driven by belief in the principle that world government was, for all the obstacles in its way, the natural goal of humans as a species. Inspired by Hobbes, Locke, and especially Rousseau, he thought systematically about the conflicting, paradoxical needs that drive humans to form societies, constitute states, create alliances between nations, and dream of a cosmopolitan world order. As the most rigorous thinker within the European Enlightenment as it was manifest in the German states, he is the natural target of those who would, for good contemporary reasons, resist its current inheritances, such as the tendency toward categorical closure in the ways it reasoned about reason, and, for the same reasons, seek to expose its blind spots, its darker sides, and the historical catastrophes perpetrated in its name. Yet neither Kant nor Hegel, the Enlightenment's great systematizer, or Marx, its best political economist, or Nietzsche, its most searching internal critic, can be ignored today, if we are to have all the tools we need to think in a planetary way. ¹ So, yes, let us acknowledge the limits of Kant's thought, precisely as it is exposed by the clarity of his thinking about thinking. And let us mark the exclusions that attend it as silent shadows. We must do both if we are to glimpse what might be rescued from Enlightenment cosmopolitanism for the construction of planetary thought. I proposed to the seminar that revisiting the four kinds of society, or levels of social constitution, envisaged by Kant might help us to imagine a fifth, the planetary perspective that we must take today if we are to go further towards answering the world's question.

Kant's cosmopolitanism was an abstraction, to be made real, against many odds, by those who made their own freedom. We know from two references in his writings that he did not believe that this capacity was available to Indigenous peoples. Gayatri Spivak pinpoints one

reference, Principle 67 in *The Critique of Judgement*, where he considers things fit to purpose, such grass being “required as a means of existence by cattle, and cattle similarly, by man.” “But,” he goes on immediately to say, “we do not see why after all it should be necessary that man should in fact exist,” there being no such obvious fitness. Man, therefore, is his own categorical necessity. He then adds an aside, admitting that this is “a question that might not be so easy to answer if the specimens of humanity we had in mind were, say, the New Hollanders or Fuegians.”⁸ The British having only recently claimed the continent, one that was first “discovered” by Dutch seaman, who colonized the islands nearby known today as Indonesia, “New Hollanders” was a term for Indigenes. (As we saw, “Balanda” is the Yolŋu rendering of “Hollanders,” Dutch traders begin the first white people they encountered.) Kant is acknowledging, in this casual concession, that it would be too far-fetched to conceive that they, or the Southernmost Americans, might be *men*, and thus qualify as ends in themselves.

Another blind spot appears in Kant’s 1784 essay *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent*. He sketches some of the landmarks in “a general world history according to a plan which aims at a perfect civil association of mankind.” If, he suggests, we take Greek history as that through which “all older and contemporary history has been preserved or at least certified,” then trace its influence on the “body-politic of the Roman people,” whose civilization in turn influences “the *Barbarian* who destroyed their empire,” then we have what he calls a “*system*” for thinking such a history—indeed, history as such. Other peoples become historical when they enter this evolution: “...the history of nations which lived beyond that frame can only be started with the time that they entered it.” His example is the Jewish people, on the occasion of Greek translations of the Bible. What makes history “in our part of the world” the only true history is that it is “a regular progression of improvements in constitutional government.” It is, moreover, one that will “probably give laws to all other [states] eventually.”⁹ The idea of the West, as a quest for universal human freedom, with ancient Greece and Rome as its prefiguration, is coming into being here. Unfortunately, this quest is almost always accompanied by the qualification of that freedom when it comes to designated others.

Movement from a “state of nature” to “a perfect civil association of mankind” is, of course, anything but straightforward. The surprise of Kant’s essay is his argument that the perfect cosmopolis would be the outcome of not of good will and rational planning but is precipitated by us having to deal with the “stupidity, childish vanity,” and the “viciousness and destructiveness” that abound in the everyday relationships between people (119; numbers in Kant, *Basic Writings*). Therefore, “*In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural predispositions which aim at the use of reason shall be fully developed in the species, not in the individual*” (120). Here is a natural law: the shortness of human lives requires intergenerational transfer that secures the longevity of the species. In a parallel way, it is the antagonism of men towards each other faced with the practical limits on unfettered self-interest that requires men to generate societies, through “a *pathologically enforced co-ordination*” (123). Lawfully ordered, civil societies come about due to these uncivil needs. Kant acknowledged that, in his time, no society had quite reached this goal, so a “master” was needed to obligate citizens to be “free.” As it is in the contested relationships between individuals and the society they form, so it is in the relationships between different states. The same paradoxical antagonisms apply: “*The history of mankind could be viewed on the whole as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect constitution: since this is the only state in which nature can develop all the predispositions of mankind*” (128). Remarkably, he concludes by observing that “our later descendants” will view our efforts according to one criterion: “what nations and governments have contributed toward world government or how they have damaged it” (132).

Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch, written in 1794, is an elaboration of these ideas. It was written as the French Revolution was turning vicious internally and waging war across Europe in order to spread “freedom,” in both regards exemplifying Kant’s theories. The *Sketch* offers Kant’s most succinct summary of his vision of the interrelated tiers of world government. We found this passage most relevant to our inquiry:

There are three kinds of constitution under law as far as concerns the persons who belong under it: (1) the constitution according to the law of national citizenship of all men belonging to a nation (*ius civitatis*); (2) the constitution according to

international law regulating the relations of states to each other (*ius gentium*); (3) the constitution according to the law of world citizenship which prevails insofar as men and states standing in a relationship of mutual influence may be viewed as citizens of a universal state of all mankind (*ius cosmopolitanum*). 10

By this stage he had few illusions about the justice or probity of the colonial enterprise, but his overall projection remained optimistic, and the essay concludes with this hopeful estimation:

The narrower or wider community of all nations on earth has in fact progressed so far that a violation of law and right in one place is felt in *all* others. Hence the idea of a cosmopolitan or world law is not a fantastic and utopian way of looking at law, but a necessary completion of the unwritten code of constitutional and international law to make it a public law of mankind. Only under this condition can we flatter ourselves that are continually approaching perpetual peace. 11

For us, the underlying question that arises is this: can we, like Kant, still identify a (cosmopolitan, or any other universal, historical) state of affairs that will, whatever spanners human and non-human actions throw into the works, inevitably come about as the effects of a set of causes operating through the history of the world? These could be taken as the armature of a planetary order, a given framework that we might be able to shape into a sustainable system. Or, as has been suggested since Nietzsche, do we have no option but to try to create such an order with the materials to hand and in current flux, with no guarantee of its inevitable success?

Some provisional answers were discussed in the seminar. While the case for Nature *necessarily* bringing about advancement toward de facto just constitutions at each of the three levels was not, we believed, convincingly made, Kant's argument in these essays has elements that remain relevant for a time when, while many millions among us believe that the operations of fate, providence, or divine will determine our futures, there is no prospect of consensus about which ones will do so. Among the relevant Kantian elements are alertness to paradox, and to coexistent antinomies; the emphasis on antagonism leading

inadvertently to positive outcomes; the stress on contemporaneous differentiation as fundamental to human and natural intentions and effects; and the foregrounding of hospitality as the basis of all kinds of association on each of its levels or planes. We concluded with the hope that these terms will resonate as we face up to the limitations of the Earth as a home for the species and as we work towards what will become a constitution for us here on this planet, and, beyond Kant, an interplanetary one for the universe.

World Picturing, Authentic Being

Martin Heidegger's famous essay "The Age of the World Picture," published in 1938, is centrally concerned to pose a set of questions about world picturing:

When we reflect on the modern age, we are questioning concerning the modern world picture [*Weltbild*]. We characterize the latter by throwing it into relief against the medieval and ancient world pictures. But why do we ask concerning a world picture in our interpreting of a historical age? Does every period of history have its world picture, and indeed in such a way as to concern itself from time to time about that world picture? Or is this, after all, only a modern kind of representing, this asking concerning a world picture?" 12

After explaining that world picturing, "when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture," he laments that "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture," as distinct from the preferred relationship, which, in his formulation, is one of "openness-to-Being." 13 This openness, he believed, was achieved then lost in Greece. 14 It could, he hints in an appendix, be in the process of rediscovery, in his own time, in some aspects of National Socialism.

How might Heidegger's thinking during the 1930s, those years of crisis, of disaster heaped upon disaster, help us think about worlds today? Perhaps we could ask the same *kind* of question: What *contemporary* sense can we find for these ways of worlding, one false (world picturing), the other authentic (being-in-the-world)? Given his struggles with

authenticity, we will, perhaps, need to place his formulations in doubt—hopefully, the doubt authentic to them, and then to our situation. 15

In this and other essays, Heidegger is scathing about symbolic picturing, yet he ends with some strange passages about the “struggle of world views” that he sees as a sign that “the modern age first enters into the part of its history that is the most decisive and probably the most capable of enduring.” 16 Specifically, he says that “everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic is making its appearance,” as is, simultaneously, “the tendency toward the increasingly small,” as in atomic physics. He is not, he says, talking about “the catchword ‘Americanism’,” but “a remarkable kind of greatness,” that is distinctive of the modern age, and was conceived by this age. The modern rage to calculate everything has, he believes, precipitated everywhere a shadowy state of incalculability. Heidegger concludes his essay with a passage from a poem by Hölderlin, which he introduces with these comments:

Man will know, that is, carefully safeguard into its truth, that which is incalculable, only in creative questioning and shaping out of the power of genuine reflection.

Reflection transports the man of the future into that ‘between’ in which he belongs to being and yet remains a stranger amid that which is. 17

These comments have resonated often since then, not least in Giorgio Agamben’s reflections on contemporaneity in his 2007 lecture at EGS. 18 We are on the path towards a contemporary sense of “openness-to-Being.”

In the aftermath of the second world war, Heidegger returned to these questions in his 1951 essay, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” In contrast to his earlier condemnation of seeing the world as picture, now he is showing how the lifelong quest to grasp the nature of being is present in dwelling, building, and thinking if they are carried out in their most authentic ways. The summary statement is this:

To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals—this fourfold preserving is the simple essence of dwelling. In this

way, then, do genuine buildings give form to dwelling in its essence and house this essential unfolding. 19

So, *this* is what the world does when it is not representing itself as, or being seen as, a picture, when Being—as Heidegger puts it—*unconceals* itself, and we mortals are open to this unconcealing.

Who is speaking here? In the most obvious sense, it is Heidegger himself, on August 5, 1951, at a symposium at Darmstadt on *Man and Space*. Yet throughout the essay, as throughout much of his writings, he strives to let Being be, to spare it, free it, save it...in a word, to hear it speak. More specifically in this essay, such letting be is located in the ways human beings (mortals) are urged to stay with *things*, to preserve them.

Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the essence of the fourfold into things. But things secure the fourfold only *when* they themselves *as* things are let be in their essence. How does this happen? In this way, that mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not grow. 20

To illustrate this *constructing*, Heidegger evokes the work of a bridge, concretely the Old Bridge over the Neckar at Heidelberg, saying that bridges do not merely “connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream...The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows...[it also leads peoples, connects towns, is a node in a network of highways, and is, he claims in his Roman Catholic mood, a passage to “the divinities,” such that] the bridge *gathers* itself in *its own way* earth and sky, divinities and mortals.” 21 In doing so, it creates a site, a location, boundaries, allows spacing, marks distance, and takes us to it when we think of it, thus merging the *ding an sich* with our perceiving it. Heidegger recalls the ancient German word for assembly, *dinge*. He could have added the ancient Norse word *þing* (thing), famously embodied in the *Alþing* in Iceland, where gatherings of the ruling tribes and eventually the national parliament were held from 930 AD until 1798.

When he speaks of “nursing and nurturing the things that grow” Heidegger comes close to a consciousness that could even in his day be identified as ecological: “Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal.” But, he immediately goes on to say, “When we say [save the] earth, we are already thinking of the other three along with it [that is, of receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities, and initiating the mortals], but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.”²² “Simple oneness” recurs in the essay as a kind of incantation, a drawing of attention to what we *should* be thinking about, of what thinking itself should be: reflection on the incessant folding of the four into each other—which, he is saying, is the basic working of the world as it constantly makes and remakes itself.

To illustrate his final point—“*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*”—he invites us to “think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants.”²³ He was most likely sitting in such a place when he wrote these words, the hut at Todtnauberg that he bought in the 1920s and regularly worked in for the rest of this life. Against this ideal, peaceful, imaginary place he sets the question: “What is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?” This is a world question of the kind we are pursuing. Heidegger praises action to remedy the postwar housing shortage but argues that “the real plight of dwelling” is “older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase in the earth’s population and the condition of the industrial workers.” It lies, fundamentally, in the fact that “mortals must ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*.” From within our given “homelessness,” he concluded, we must draw on the “the workshop of long experience and incessant practice” in order to “build out of dwelling and think for the sake of dwelling.”²⁴

These prescriptions pit a profoundly conservative, pre-modern ideal of worldly community against the precarity then present. They do not, as we must do now, seek to build within our contemporary divisiveness a concurrence of diversities. This is because, for all of his awareness of other kinds of thinking (Buddhism, his dialogue with Japan), Heidegger was never in doubt that his thought, that was so profoundly provincial in its rootedness, was universal in force and import.

Was this not true, also, at Yirrkala in 1963? In these two sessions, we have placed worldmaking as so magnificently manifest by Yolŋu against that theorized so thoroughly by Kant and Heidegger. In doing so, what have we done?

One thing is that we are continuing the great postcolonial project of provincializing European thought, as Chakrabarty enjoined us to do (with Heidegger foremost in his mind as a flawed but necessary resource).²⁵ At the same time, we join in the project of internationalizing Yolŋu thought, something that the contemporary Yolŋu fiercely desire, as is demonstrated by the *Maḡayin* project: an exhibition of more than 100 bark paintings by descendants of those who painted the Yirrkala Church Panels that will travel the US during 2021 and 2022.²⁶ Each of these projects is good in itself, each adds to the tool kit.

Absorbing the lessons of both does something more: by de-essentializing each of them, it brings to light the operations of a historical dialectic between Europe (the contending Europe-based imperialisms) and those whom it (they) colonized. In the following session, we turned to the field on which this dialectic has operated since the sixteenth century, to ask how it did so then and how it does so now.

3. Nation/Colony

The field is usually named “modernity,” but to cut to the most relevant chase, it is imperialism and colonialism that should be our focus, starting with the concept of “nation.” Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) remains the reflex reference for most discussions of this topic. Why should we return to it now? Not least because, now as in the years around 1980, he is right when he says,

The reality is quite plain: the ‘end of nationalism,’ so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.²⁷

Today, we find ourselves shifting from a period in which the “end of nationalism” seemed to take the form of nation states evaporating in the face of the spread of economic globalization, a set of forces that were multi-national in character and led by companies that, while mainly based in the North Atlantic, were essentially international in their operations. As globalization recedes, however, insistence on nationality is reappearing. While it seems to take some of the same forms as that which preceded globalization, it also has some new elements, and the mix is stirring in surprising directions. Can nation states today claim legitimacy—in their self-defining localities and in the “international” context that their adjacency creates—in the same ways that the modern nation state did? Contemporary “nation-ness” seems distinct. A world question arises: has the multiplicity of its divergences from the modern model become so great as to change the world-wide field within which nationality itself is being asserted? If so, how might this multiplicity shift our thinking about the kinds of world governance needed now?

These are post-Kantian questions for contemporary times. Anderson’s ideas are a bridge between then and now. He offers an amusing description of the paradoxes that regularly bedevil efforts to define nationalism:

- (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.
- (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, ‘Greek’ nationality is *sui generis*.
- (3) The ‘political’ power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. 28

Against those who would see nationalism as always, or only, an ideology or as a shared social pathology, he proposes a relatively neutral, or as he puts it, “anthropological,” definition: “it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Nations are necessarily *limited* because “No nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind.” They are *sovereign* because “the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordered,

hierarchical dynastic realm.” Above all, they are imagined “as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, but be willing to die for such limited imaginings.” 29

This definition of a nation as “an imagined community” has become itself canonical, but too many of us forget his other main argument, that the first imaginings of a separate community of this kind were those of the later generation colonizers in South America who sought some degree of autonomy from distant, often incompetent, metropolitan governance while they went about the business of securing their interests inside the colonies themselves. Inspired by both the French Revolution and the revolt of the Thirteen Colonies of North America, in 1791 Toussaint L’Ouverture led an insurrection of black slaves on Saint-Domingue that by 1804 resulted in the establishment of an independent republic in what became known as Haiti. Soon after, Simon Bolivar in Grand Colombia and San Martin in Peru created independent states that resisted Spanish overlords and gave some recognition to indigenes and slaves, while reserving power for settler colonists. Anderson poses the puzzle:

Why was it precisely *creole* communities [he includes the Revolutionaries of the Thirteen Colonies among these] that developed so early conceptions of their nation-ness—well before Europe? Why did such colonial provinces, usually containing large, oppressed, non-Spanish-speaking populations, produce creoles who consciously redefined those populations as fellow-nationals? 30

The modern nation state, in this sense, begins less from revolutionary violence against the aristocrats—that was to come, in Europe itself—more from the violence of land grabs, slavery, and systemic exploitation of Indigenous peoples and resources *inside* the South American colonies.

Spanish oppression and the spread from Europe of enlightenment ideals are two probable causes of revolutionary change, but they in themselves do not predict a nationalist

response. The key to an answer, he believes, is structural in the same sense that he has already suggested in his basic definition of a national community. Why did the settler colonists, or creoles, when they achieved independence, resist from reshaping the boundaries set by the imperial centers? Anderson's answer is subtle: although this relationship varied according to the colonizer, the system vitally depended on maintaining a distinction between officials born in the home country and those born in the colony. The former could act as governors, viceroys, and in other high positions in the colonies for a time, but they could not stay at risk of "going native." Those among the latter deemed skilled enough undertook training through circuitous service (Anderson quaintly calls it a "pilgrimage") in parts of the empire, including their home states, but were rarely appointed to the most powerful positions in either a colony or their home country. No surprise, then, that it is typically intellectuals among these colonials, working with property-owning locals, who became the revolutionaries and the nation-builders. While increasing numbers of them were, over time, of mixed race, subalterns rarely lead modern revolutions, although some were fought in their name. Anderson concludes:

What I am proposing is that neither economic interest, Liberalism, or Enlightenment could, or did, create in themselves the kind, or shape, of imagined community to be defended from these regimes' depredations; to put it another way, none provided the framework of a new consciousness—the scarcely-seen periphery of its vision—as opposed to the centre-field objects of its admiration or disgust. In accomplishing *this* specific task, pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen played the decisive historical role. 31

Unless we see these processes at work, unless we locate the origins of the modern nation state in the decolonizing Americas, both South and North, we remain trapped within belated Eurocentric models, falsely treating them as universal, or worse, as the norm. Furthermore, while we must not overlook the struggles between classes within the nation states formed in Europe in the later nineteenth century, or the ethnic cleansing that accompanied nationalism in almost every case, focus on the European experience turns us away from the fact that nation-building—the foundation of what we call modernity in

general and capitalism when we name its economic structure—was an imperial enterprise, one that depended fundamentally on the racist exploitation of other peoples and places.

It is to these peoples that we must look for the critical tools to overcome this enterprise. Recently, in Central and South America, decolonial critique has sought to distinguish itself from postcolonial critique as a more indigenous mode. Maori anthropologist and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith offers a succinct summary of the object of critique: “Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power.”³² A loose association of intellectuals based in several Central and South American countries and in the United States—among them Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, Catherine E. Walsh, Javier Sanjinés, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Walter D. Mignolo—known as the modernity/coloniality or, more recently, the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research project has attempted to theorize decolonization. According to Mignolo, postwar and Cold War decolonization has since evolved into a new kind of struggle in the present conditions of contemporary globalization. It is *against* “Westernization,” that is, the continuing colonial matrix of power which declares that it is pursuing a universal social formation which, when successfully replicated, would amount to an ideal world order, while actually maintaining structures that ensure the continuing dominance of the historical colonizers. It is *for* the coexistence of many worlds, including those in which wealth, knowledge, and freedom are equitably shared rather than accumulated by a few. “Decoloniality, therefore, means both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist.”³³

This is a restatement of our opening “world question,” the one that seems to underlie all other more specific ones, in terms that pick up the necessity to acknowledge the continuing resonances of imperialism and colonialism, while also heralding the need to build what several theorists of decoloniality, Enrique Dussel most prominent among them, call “pluriversity.” Against conceptions of “undifferentiated or empty universal cultural identity, an abstract universality” that has been natural to modernity, Dussel argues that what the world needs now is “a *trans-modern pluriversity* (with many similar elements in common:

European, Islamic, Vedic, Taoist, Buddhist, Latin American, bantu, etc.), one which is pluricultural, and engaged in intercultural dialogue.” 34

Theorists of decoloniality place great store in returning to the Indigenous ways of world being and knowing that were attacked by colonization, distorted and degraded but not destroyed by it. Indeed, Indigenous forms of decoloniality have been taken up by influential sociologists in South America and applied to policy by some governments in the region. Félix Patzi Paco, an Aymara sociologist, and briefly Bolivian Minister for Education, developed national policy on the model of the *ayllu*, a traditional form of extended family community that collectively works a common territory, notably in the Bolivian highlands. 35 Similar ideas inspired Evo Morales, himself an Aymara man, head of the Movement for Socialism Party in Bolivia, and President of that country from 2006 to 2019. Morales attempted, against extraordinary odds, to transform his country into a plurinational, more equitable, less racially divided nation, to bring several South American states together in accordance with these principles, and to persuade the international geopolitical community to adopt them. In a 2009 address to the United Nations he proposed four rights: the right to life of every element of the eco-system; the right of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) to “regenerate her bio-capacity” instead of being a natural resource useful only when transformed into commodities; the right to a clean life, free of pollution; and the right to “harmony with all and among all.” 36 The constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador embody these aspirations: they are the only nations among the nations to do so, the only ones to aspire—during the presidencies of Morales (2006-2019) and Rafael Correa (2006-2017)—to be truly decolonial, at least within their own borders. While internal dissension and external pressures led to the defeat of Correa in 2017 and the deposition of Morales in 2019, aspirations such as these remain models for the region and for decolonization in the wider world.

Some members of the seminar were familiar with these situations. They told us that these concretizations of Indigenous values, as part of a broader effort to construct pluriversal societies by including the cultures of the subaltern within those of the modernizers, did succeed in some circumstances and on some levels while succumbing to concerted opposition on others. In Bolivia and Ecuador relative success for a decade or more has recently fallen victim to local elites, who rapidly and ruthlessly resumed power when the

election cycle offered the opportunity and when international economic and political conditions changed.

There was discussion about the divide within Latin Americanists between those who took a Subaltern studies approach, relying on adaptations from postcolonial critique as it has developed most thoroughly in India, in response to imperialism and colonization in South and South-East Asia, and the theorists of decoloniality whose texts we examined. The subaltern studies approach, represented by the work of our Pittsburgh colleague John Beverley, understands the Indigenous peoples of the South American nations to be subaltern, and in centuries long conflict with the *mestizo* elites and external interests. 37 Beverley argues that the weakening of US hegemony in Latin American after 9/11 and the *marea rosa* of Leftist governments has led to different configurations of power in the region and in its several nations. 38

Theorists of decoloniality were credited with arriving at the right question, or at least the most pointed form of the required world question, but faulted for the gestural, utopic, abstract quality of their suggested moves towards answers. Our discussion benefited from the intervention by Fabian Mosquera Calle, graduate student in the Hispanic Languages and Literatures Department.

Seminar member Shuo Yang alerted us to the potential of Taiwanese scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen's book *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), especially his introduction and chapter 5, "Asia as method." He begins from the flat statement that "Postcolonial cultural studies are at an impasse. The central problem lies in its obsessive critique of the West, which bounds the field by the object of its own critique." Asia as method is this: "the historical process of imperialization, colonization and the cold war have become mutually entangled structures, which have shaped and conditioned both intellectual and popular knowledge production. Through the use of Asia as method, a society in Asia may be inspired by how other Asian societies deal with problems similar to its own, and thus overcome unproductive anxieties and develop new paths of engagement." He believes that this method of engagement has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history. He sets out the following strategies: 1. From Naoki Sakai:

Western universalism cf. Japaneseness, are both essentialisms, so we must start again afresh, for real translation to become possible is. 2. “de-universalize, provincialize, or regionalize the West, so that the experiences of the West are limited to only one part of the globe.” Chakrabarty’s seeing modernity as a joint construction of Europe and “third world nationalism,” not a primarily European enterprise. 3. From Ashish Nandy: India already had developed structures that welcomed those employed by the colonizer and persisted after independence. An argument from civilizational essences, and thus problematic. 4. Third-world nativism. 5. Chen’s position: The West as “bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalizing, way. The local formation of modernity carries important elements of the West but is not fully enveloped by it.” Best if applied as an “internationalist localism” not fully identified with what the local nation-state has done or might do. Instead, “multiply frames of reference in our subjectivity and world-view, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward.”

At this point, the seminar felt that our discussion of decolonial critique had, again, identified the exercise of a kind of subtle critique which has done its critical work but arrived at an appeal to an abstract form of open-endedness, which is better than anything else but not enough to be going on with. But at least we have picked up the valuable suggestion that prospective imagination be not limited to that which the (local) nation-state, however modestly or radically reformed, might be able to do.

4. Globalized Overviews

From this point onwards the seminar became a matter of reading the assigned texts together, with the question in mind about who and what gets to pose which world question, how, why, and with what effects? We devoted the next session to identifying the world pictures that prevail today and asked in whose interests did they do so. What follows are my summaries of the main arguments of these texts, along with comments on them by members of the seminar.

Hans Rosling's "The Best Stats You Have Ever Seen?," delivered on February 2006, is the most viewed of all TED talks, with 14, 608, 509 views as of June 30, 2020. 39 The tag reads: "In Hans Rosling's hands, data sings. Global trends in health and economics come to light. And the big picture of global development—with some surprisingly good news—snaps into focus." Rosling was a professor of global health at the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm. His world question: Despite appearances and experiences to the contrary, is it possible that human life on the planet is steadily and inevitably improving, getting better for more and more of us? His answer: YES, and I can prove it. 40

He sets out to debunk the conception that the world is basically divided into two zones, a "Western World" that his students characterize as meaning "long life and small family" and a "Third World" defined by "short life and large family." He is right that raw generalizations of this Eurocentric kind are widely held as the basic constituents of many more specific world pictures. He compares United Nations, national and NGO public data for fertility rates in each nation to those for life expectancy to show that, in 1962, assumptions as to a fundamental difference of this crude kind was broadly correct. By 2003, however, the statistics show that the relationship between the two in most countries had improved so much that, he claims, "We have a completely new world." (Sustained applause follows, a high point of his video performance.) Social change, he says, led economic change: mid-way through this period, the imams in Bangladesh supported family planning, as did the Communist Party in Vietnam, leading to smaller families and greatly improved life expectancies in those countries. World income distribution as measured by family income and GDP per capita tells the same story: there is no significant gap between rich and poor countries. "It's a myth," he says, while his graph shows that, in 2003, the poorest 20% of people take 2% of the world's income, the middle 60% take 24%, while the top 20% take 74%! Breaking this down into regions shows that, while African countries fill most of the lowest percentile at less than \$1 a day up to \$15, where OECD countries begin and go up to well over \$100 per day, other regions (Latin America, Asia) spread across the scale. Income compared to child survival percentages indicate huge gaps, but he compares different countries within each region to argue that those which have opened up their economies (Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Singapore, UAE) have closed that gap significantly. This leads to "a more mainstream appearance of the world where all countries tend to use their money

better than they used it in the past.” A US-China comparison re income 1960 to 1999 shows the vast population of the latter looming “like a ghost (chuckle)” over the former. He briefly acknowledges that measures to improve the world’s health must occur inside national economies, given the vastness of their internal range. No details about that. At the end of his presentation, Rosling presented charts that tracked the number of Internet users since 1990 per 100,000 populations in the countries of the world, his animated PowerPoint heralding a rapidly rising curve for nearly all. His conclusion: the new technology fits so well, “It’s as if the world is flattening off, isn’t it?”

Seminarists were outraged. One had used UN statistics in comparing educational outcomes, another was part of a Pitt research team supplying the UN with information re gender equity measurement in public administration. Both stressed the conditional nature of the fact-gathering, and the unreliability of UN data before 2005, and thus of the aggregations on which Rosling was relying. Comment on his graphics noted that the contraction of quantities in their lower right quadrants visually underrepresented the massive gaps between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor people within them. His insistence that all statistics be “contextualized” was welcomed, but his conclusions were attacked for omitting any reference to, for example, the impact of the austerity policies insisted on by the IMF and World Bank as a condition of their loans to poor countries. This statistical validation of how open markets had been lifting millions out of poverty, and would inevitably bring about health, wealth and happiness for all humankind, struck us as vacuous.

Rosling’s TED talk is now fifteen years old. Its viewer numbers, however, show little sign of diminishing. His outlook remains the default position for those who still believe that the sets of forces larger than those that our world pictures can encompass are continuing to tend toward Progress. For example, *Spectator* columnist Matt Ridley argued in December 2019 that “We’ve just had the best decade in human history. Seriously.” 41

We next considered a key text by another prominent apologist for globalization, *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman, his book *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2005). His world question: After 9/11, I thought the most important dynamic was the tensions between regressive

fundamentalism in the East and the continuing growth of the West, but perhaps a change even more basic and far-reaching has been occurring “While I Was Sleeping” (the title of his first chapter)? His answer: Yes, globalization has morphed into a phase in which the West now incorporates the modernizing energies of the East into what could be a worldwide cooperative venture of shared growth. Friedman describes his visit to the global conference center in the Infosys headquarters at Bangalore where he was confronted by the forty digital monitors connected to company offices around the world, all combined into one flat screen. The Infosys CEO explained to him that this was a manifestation (“the largest in Asia”) of the convergence of outsourcing, broadband connectivity, cheap computers, search engine software and apps that occurred around 2000: [which] “created a platform where intellectual work, intellectual capital, could be delivered from anywhere. It could be disaggregated, delivered, distributed, produced, and put back together again...Tom, the playing field is being leveled.” 42 Friedman’s epiphany: “The global competitive playing field was being leveled. The world was being flattened” (8). He calls this “Globalization 3,” a postmodern world that is open to players from all over the globe (11). He then reports on visits to a call center —“A cross between a co-ed college frat house and a phone bank raising money for the local public TV station” (21), a school that trains operators in call centers, accountants completing tax returns for Americans, a center condensing news reports for Reuters, a software design center, all in India. He then repeats the process across Asia, including a visit to troops in Afghanistan where he sees footage from a drone, directed by an operative in Las Vegas, tracking “jihadists” in Iraq. Finally, he lands back in the US where he meets a young man using a cellphone to act as his own reporter, journalist and publisher. His conclusion?

We are entering a phase where we are going to see the digitalization, virtualization and automation of nearly everything. The gains in productivity will be staggering for those countries, companies, and individuals who can absorb the new technological tools. And we are entering a phase where more people are going to have access to these tools—as innovators, as collaborators, and, alas, even as terrorists...That’s why I introduced the idea that the world has gone from round to flat. Everywhere you turn, hierarchies are being challenged from below and transforming themselves from top-down structures to more horizontal and collaborative ones...that is why the

great challenge of our time will be to absorb these changes in ways that do not overwhelm people but also do not leave them behind. None of this will be easy. But it is our task (45-6).

Having worked in call centers and similar jobs in the gig economy, several people in the seminar were angered by Friedman's naivete toward the actual conditions of outsourcing, which they experienced as institutionalized discrimination and exploitation. He takes it as an inevitable aspect of Globalization 3, not for what it is, a choice by employers based on seeking the lowest possible labor costs irrespective of the consequences for those so employed and those elsewhere unemployed. The round/flat metaphor is oblivious to the widespread usages of other, more accurate imagery, such as the rhizome, the matrix, and the network, which is near ubiquitous in several discourses, including newspaper columns. Friedman's "flatness" implies that democracy, freedom of choice, and equality of opportunity has become the new normal, courtesy the magic of the globalization of new technologies. One seminarist shared that this dream inspired millions in India who, like him, were educated in India and the US during the 1990s. It powered an aspirant middle class, while at the same time provoking a resurgence of nativist nationalism among the multitudes. Friedman's world picturing seemed oblivious to these kinds of contradiction.

The World is Flat profiled the world picture as its author saw it 15 years ago. His response to the changes since then has been to maintain his faith in the markets, the technologies, and liberal values while at the same time plumping for the Green New Deal, a phrase that he coined and popularized. 43 Much developed by others, it has become policy for many members of the Democratic Party. On February 7, 2019, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey introduced a resolution proposing it to Congress. 44 Appalled by the increasingly disastrous Trump presidency, Friedman has moved politically to a position where, in July 2020, he advocates the counter slogan: "Respect science, respect nature, respect each other. Biden 2020. It's the only way to make America great again." 45

What kind of world question is being asked by the current leaders of Globalization 3—Mark Zuckerberg, for example? On February 16, 2017, he posted a statement entitled "Building Global Community." 46 It was headed by a panorama image of him addressing a large

crowd of employees in the open air at 1 Hacker Way, Menlo Park, CA. His statement was headed “To our community,” presumably those shown in the image who work at Facebook. He began with a world question: “In our journey to connect the world, we often discuss products we are building and updates on our business. Today I want to focus on the most important question of all: are we building the world that we all want?” He then switches to a more inclusive “we,” taking as an unspoken bridge the then 2.006 billion viusers of the platform, to address humanity itself. Friedman-like (but also Rosling-like, Bill Gates-like, techno-prophetic style), he opines: “Our greatest opportunities are now global—like spreading prosperity and freedom, promoting peace and understanding, lifting people out of poverty, and accelerating science. Our greatest challenges also need global responses—like ending terrorism, fighting climate change, and preventing pandemics. Progress now requires humanity coming together not just as cities or nations, but as a community.” Facebook, he goes on, stands for this. In bold: **“In times like these, the most important thing Facebook can do is develop the social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us.”** Admitting that building a global community is a task too large even for Facebook, he is nonetheless implying that his company’s services offer the best platform for such an undertaking. The company wants to become the world’s primary means of communication, more ubiquitous than the use of language itself. “Research suggests the best solutions for improving discourse may come from getting to know each other as whole people instead of just opinions—something Facebook may be uniquely suited to do.” With its ability to predict user preferences already its most valuable commodity, implicit here—a wish, a dream, a real possibility?—is a central role for Facebook in world governmentality.

More readily achieved, however, if its users and everyone else believed that the company shared the values that are necessary to building genuine global communality. Zuckerberg is happy to spell them out and to insist that they will arise in a total, collective (“wisdom of crowds”) effort to answer these questions:

How do we help people build **supportive communities** that strengthen traditional institutions in a world where membership in these institutions is declining?

How do we help people build a **safe community** that prevents harm, helps during crises and rebuilds afterwards in a world where anyone across the world can affect us?

How do we help people build an **informed community** that exposes us to new ideas and builds common understanding in a world where every person has a voice?

How do we help people build a **civically-engaged community** in a world where participation in voting sometimes includes less than half our population?

How do we help people build an **inclusive community** that reflects our collective values and common humanity from local to global levels, spanning cultures, nations and regions in a world with few examples of global communities?

Above him a LED screen showed five symbols, each minted to stand for the five ways in which, he proposed, Facebook could help in building global community. In each, lines are drawn between four cursor-like points to evoke, in turn, a mother-figure with children (supportive), a heart (safe), two overlapping screens/thought bubbles/maps of the USA (informative), a classical façade (civics), and a globe (inclusive).

The WWW.1 dream of the Internet as a freely accessible, transparent, participant managed, crowd-sourced, open-ended communicative space—democracy in its purest state—is here writ large into a Panglossian cosmopolitanism, at once profoundly conservative and resolutely futuristic while reducing contemporaneity to the current mess of (as yet) unsolved problems. The list does, however, identify threats more precisely than in the earlier platitudes. Threats: declining respect for tradition, terrorism unleashed by distant others, too many voices, alienated citizens (especially in the US), and a lack of models of successful, sustained community. Solutions, too, are named: strengthening traditional institutions, crisis management, information sharing, promoting public political participation, and inclusive communality. We might expect a social media company to promote the third and fifth of these solutions, but the others? They read like the conditions desired by any large corporation, not one that, like the other Alphas (Google, Microsoft,

Apple, Amazon), thrived on rupture. At least, they did when entering their markets. Now, dominance achieved, stability and monopoly are their primary goals.

Yet, as Zuckerberg's gloss goes on to show, Facebook must grapple with the unmanageable edges of the behemoth it has become, while still seeking to expand so as to become truly ubiquitous. In mid-2020, Facebook viusers numbered 2.6 billion. A staggering number, but it shows that take-up is slowing, especially among younger people who were coming to prefer Instagram (soon absorbed by Facebook, as was WhatsApp and Messenger), and several smaller sites, which seem to be proliferating rather than dying in the face of the giants. During the 2016 Presidential elections, Facebook's News Feed copped a lot of justified flack for hosting hate speech, trolls, divisive political advertising, and fake posts by Russian intelligence hackers aimed at exacerbating social discord. The mood-altering experiment in 2012, the Cambridge Analytica voter profile scandal, and the sell-out to Chinese authoritarianism did not go unnoticed. In 2018 the European Union imposed fines for its flagrant breaches of data privacy laws. 47

In each of the five community-building categories, Zuckerberg identifies something that Facebook already does to help bring about the desired kind of community. 100 million users are members of "very meaningful groups" (those sharing a disability for example). Amber Alerts signals missing children, Safety Check enables people to share news of relatives and friends after a crisis, reviewers take down Fake News, and the platform was used to organize the uprisings in Tahrir Square and the Women's March. He admits to the company having difficulty with community standards re posted content—due, he says, to the differences as to what counts as offensive within places, cultures, and between both, and because AI is not yet developed to the point where it can read complex images and statements in order to discern whether they offend given standards. Speaking as the head of the empire that he commands, he confesses that

In the last year, the complexity of the issues we've seen has outstripped our existing processes for governing the community. We saw errors in taking down newsworthy videos relating to Black Lives Matter and police violence, and in removing the historical Terror of War photo from Vietnam. We've seen this in misclassifying hate

speech in political debates from both directions—taking down accounts and content that should have been left up and leaving up content that was hateful and should have been taken down. Both the number of issues and their cultural importance has increased recently.

Deeming it uneconomical to employ the reviewers in sufficient numbers to monitor the flow, his solution is, of course, to outsource it to Facebook users themselves. Perhaps we could offer you a choice among options, like movie ratings, that enable you to exclude posts in the categories you find offensive. Users do the work of community building, provided of course that they use our tools (and be subject to paid advertisements and surveillance collection of private data as they go).

Members of the seminar objected that Facebook, contrary to its hackerist, family-friendly façade, is actually designed so as to make fulfilling these goals impossible. Its site has encouraged a domain in which actual debate is effaced in favor of a virtual, substitutive politics. It constantly becomes its own story, even in our discussion of it, which is part of its reproductive chain. Its rhetoric, which celebrates the uniqueness of individuality and the diversity of the whole, is based on an architecture that is always reducing both to data classified according to binaries, market stereotypes, and commodification. Prioritizing virality (that which is “trending” in harmless-speak) when it is known that speed, violence, rule-breaking, danger, threats, and the like trigger greater attention alerts in humans than their opposites has been a recipe for creating the dystopia that rules in many Internet domains, including many within Facebook. In McKenzie Wark’s terms, the hacker ethos has become vectoralist. 48

Zuckerberg is so wedded to Facebook’s technology, so much a creature of the hybrid that he initiated, that he cannot envisage it operating according to another logic. Perhaps a desperate appeal lies hidden deep inside the “Building Global Community” manifesto? Given that the system will not permit a core transformation of itself, perhaps he senses that only a fundamental change in human nature would solve the problems that Facebook and the like have (not created but certainly) exacerbated. Only a change on a species-wide scale (back to what Rosling and Pinker, against the evidence of the net itself, say has already

occurred) would excite attention in ways opposite to those that prevail now, thus pushing the algorithm away from dystopia and in acceleratingly utopic directions.

On more mundane levels, Facebook has clearly failed to live up to its 2017 goals of becoming a leading community builder. While regularly making far-reaching promises to “do better,” it makes only minor changes. Meanwhile, its leadership conducts business-as-usual with the powers that be. Jared Kushner schmoozed Zuckerberg into being a supporter of Trump, himself a major user of the platform. 49 Hypocrisy and hubris in perfect harmony, scaled up to heights previously unimaginable. But with a fragility exposure that is readily seen. The logic of business self-interest means that Facebook, like most other major enterprises, has already, in mid-2020, begun to turn away from Trump, as his re-election prospects begin to fade.

Commentators are beginning to wonder whether the social media platforms, like the prison system and policing in the US, has reached a point that it is beyond reformation. “The architecture of the social network—its algorithmic mandate of engagement over all else, the advantage it gives to divisive and emotionally manipulative content—will always produce more objectionable content in a dizzying scale.” 50 The scale at which misinformation, hate speech, alternative facts, fake news, pornography, vileness and stupidity is out there constantly reproducing itself, is so great that millions are quitting the platform as an intolerably toxic environment. Of the sixteen members of the seminar, only two were regular users (to communicate with their parents). In early July 2020, several major companies (Coca-Cola, Pfizer, Unilever) announced that they were withdrawing their advertising (for a month) due to the company’s failure to control hate speech. 51 A “Civil Rights Audit Report” commissioned by the company faulted it for “not doing everything in its power to prevent its tools and algorithms from driving people towards self-reinforcing echo chambers of extremism, and that the company must recognize that failure to do so can have dangerous (and life-threatening) real-world consequences.” Zuckerberg meets with representatives from the NCAAP, the Anti-Defamation League and Color of Change but, they report, he fails to listen to them. 52 Having consumed its users for so long, is Facebook consuming itself?

The whole Alphabet soup has to go. Social media needs to be reinvented, ground up. Coeval communality requires it. An urgent world question arises: how do we do that?

5. Deep Histories

Dipesh Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History: Four Theses," which appeared in *Critical Inquiry* in 2009, remains the most-read essay ever published in that journal.⁵³ Known for his path-finding study, *Provincializing Europe; Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), a classic of postcolonial critique, in this essay Chakrabarty attempts to define the challenges that "the current planetary crisis of climate change or global warming" pose for history as a discipline, for thinking historically as such. Noting that "The discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience," he does not quite say that, lately, the planet Earth seems to have other ideas and is insisting on them. But he implies as much by beginning with Alan Weisman's thought experiment: imagining *The World Without Us*.⁵⁴ He frankly confesses that "As the crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and post-colonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture in which humanity finds itself today."⁵⁵

Accepting the weight of scientific opinion regarding anthropogenic theories of climate change (in 2009, there existed skeptics about the extent of the change and about human responsibility for it, many of them in powerful positions in business and government), he presents his propositions as four theses:

1. Anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history.
2. The idea of the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch when humans exist as a geological force, severely qualifies humanist histories of modernity/globalization.
3. The geological hypothesis regarding the Anthropocene requires us to put global theories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans.

4. The cross-hatching of species history and the history of capital is a process of probing the limits of historical understanding.

He says that the latter theses follow from the first. In fact, they attempt to show how historical thinking and thinking historically (and critically) might continue, albeit radically changed, under the recent radically changed circumstances. Not the least of which is that we humans must acknowledge that the planet has a “deep history” of its own, one that is now impacted by us as a “geological force” but is not the same kind of history as those we have written about ourselves. He arrives at his world question: “How do we relate a universal history of life—to universal thought, that is—while retaining what is of obvious value in our postcolonial suspicion of the universal?” He goes on: “The crisis of climate change calls for thinking simultaneously on both registers, to mix together the immiscible chronologies of capital and species history.” 56 This is turning out to be very hard to do. He has no doubt that we will experience the consequences of climate change, however much we might develop plans to mitigate them, and to act on those plans. But he denies that we can ever conceive of ourselves as a species, that is, reflect on our total experience of species-being, or experience ourselves under such a concept. 57 Evoking Benjamin’s dialectical image, he concludes:

Species may indeed be the name of a placeholder for the emergent, new universal history of humans that flashes up at a moment of danger that is climate change. But we can never *understand* this universal. It is not a Hegelian universal arising dialectically out of the movement of history, or a universal of capital brought forth by the present crisis...

Nevertheless, a world question is posed (albeit, in rather vague terms):

Yet climate change poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world. It is more like a universal that arises from a shared sense of catastrophe. It calls for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity, for, unlike a Hegelian universal, it cannot subsume particularities. We may provisionally call it a ‘negative universal history.’ 58

The image of the world without humans prompted intense discussion. Apocalyptic imagery abounded. For example, a species-wide sterilization effect induced by an undetectable disease, a pandemic of impotence. *Children of Men* was mentioned, along with Saramago's *White Blindness*. *Mad Max* and similar apocalypica. Counter imagery also abounded. Of corporate capitalism, faced with this prospect, attempting to combat climate change by reverse-engineering the world's natural processes. Of a world run by natural forces that have evolved to keep enough humans around to manage the continuous meltdowns of the remaining nuclear power plants from among the 450 working today. Of cyborgs evolving to do such jobs. Of the patriarchy as the root cause of these developments, and now incapable of solving the mess that it has created. Of citadel capitalists such as Richard Brandon and Elon Musk conceding that the Earth will not be able to sustain inevitable population growth, so new planets must be colonized, starting with Mars. Citadel capitalism transposed to a place with no oxygen.

Can a world community for this planet that is not human-centric be imagined? If Western or Enlightenment history often prioritizes telling stories of the desire of peoples for freedom, do natural forces similarly desire freedom, or desire freedom differently? Do animals, insects, plants have a different sense of history? Or of species-being? (Think ant "colonies," or flights/flocks of birds, or forests as imagined by Richard Powers in *The Overstory*.) "Deep history" needs something to write with/on: is that the fossil record? Or is it every visible thing? Indigenous peoples, such as the Yolngu, seem to have thought of all this already.

6. Planetary Questioning

Chakrabarty has written two follow-up essays for *Critical Inquiry* that tackle some of these questions, and that frame them more broadly as worldly—more precisely, planetary—ones. "Climate and Capital; On Conjoined Histories," published in 2014, begins:

Anthropogenic global warming brings into view the collision—the running up against one another—of three histories that, from the point of view of human history, are normally assumed to be working at such different and distinct paces that they are treated as processes separate from each other for all practical purposes: the history

of the earth system, the history of life including that of human evolution on the planet, and the most recent history of industrial civilization (for many, capitalism). Humans now unintentionally straddle these three histories... 59

He goes on to explore the “rifts” that occur when we try to think, as we must, on these three scales at the same time. Risk assessments of probabilities based on the interaction of measurable factors—highly developed scientific and professional strategies, on which businesses and governments heavily rely—are limited in the face of the many unmeasurable factors entailed by global warming. Especially if these studies are organized, as they must be, around the tipping point at which such warming would be catastrophic for humans. When it comes to developing worldwide strategies for facing the crisis, dilemmas that highlight current inequities abound. For example, “without coal, on which China and India are still dependent to a large degree (68-70 percent of their energy supply), how would a majority of the world’s poor be lifted out of poverty on the next few decades and thus be equipped to adapt to the impact of climate change?” 60 And, “Only a few nations (some twelve or fourteen, including China and India in the last decade or so) and a fragment of humanity (about one-fifth) are historically responsible for most of the emissions of greenhouses gases so far.” 61 Yet permitting every nation to use fossil fuels in the same way to bring about Western living standards for all would exacerbate the crisis beyond planetary capacity and human adaptability. So would a continuous growth in population at current rates, or even at the reduced rates actually anticipated. Populations of humans, like those of plants and animals, can only migrate so far: other plants, animals and humans stand in their way. A world question to humans emerges: “by what right or on what grounds do we arrogate to ourselves the almost exclusive claims to appropriate for human needs the biosphere of the planet?”

Increasing awareness of the size and scope of the threats clustered under the generic term “global warming” means that the scale on which world questions need to be asked must itself expand. Chakrabarty reminds us of the important step towards this end taken by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1997:

I propose the planet to override the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered with latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided “natural” space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interests of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. (I have been insisting that to transmute the literatures of the global South into an undifferentiated space of English rather than a differentiated political space is a related move.) The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say “the planet, on the other hand.” When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition. 62

In her entry, “Planetarity,” in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Spivak reports that her key assertion—“The planet is in the species of alterity”—was an iteration of *sub specie aeternitatis*. She then repeats the above remarks and adds: “Since to be human may be to be intended toward the other, we provide for ourselves transcendental figurations (“translations?”) of what we think is the origin of the animating gift of life: Mother, Nation, God, Nature. These are names (nicknames, putative synonyms) of alterity, some more radical than others.” It follows that

If we think planet-thought in this mode of alterity, the thinking opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names, including but not identical with the whole range of human universals: aboriginal animism as well as the spectral white mythology of postrational science.

And

If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away—and thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we render through metaphor, differently, as outer and inner space, it remains that what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. 63

The third essay in Chakrabarty's trilogy, published in 2019, takes up this identification of alterity as the key to "planet-thought." He suggests that each of the major terms in play to date (especially, "earth," "world," and "globe") have taken humanity—its character, fate, condition, or history—as their primary point of reference. "Planet" is other to the orientation toward humanity that these concepts imply: "To encounter the planet is to encounter something that is a condition of human existence and yet profoundly indifferent to that existence." 64 To continue his project of bringing together the very different timescales of "the history of the planet, the history of life on the planet, and the history of the globe made by the logics of empires, capital, and technology," Chakrabarty takes his cue from the overall enterprise of Earth System Science, to him the most developed way that humans have yet devised to understand their location within these competing histories. 65

Some steps toward this bigger picture. Earth Systems scientists, Chakrabarty explains, tend to distinguish between the biomass oriented around the Earth's surface (known as "the critical zone"), and the rocky, hot, molten interior of the Earth as a planet, one among countless others in the Universe. The first has been the domain of human activity. It has had, and is having, we believe, a "life," many dimensions of which are graspable by us. The second appears as earthquakes and other disasters, including meteorite strikes. The idea of the Anthropocene suggests that humans, in our globalizing mode, have become a geological force comparable to past rupturing then domination of the critical zone. In contrast, "deep history," that of the planet, is unfolding according to its own very much longer terms logics. It follows that "The word *globe* as it has appeared in the literature on globalization is not the same as the word *globe* in the expression global warming." 66

Another important step: "...the chief protagonist of the story that EES tells is not humans or human life but complex, multicellular life in general." 67 The paradox lies in the attempt to develop a humanistic perspective from outside, as it were, to track the impacts on human life of non-human forces, as geologists and evolutionary scientists routinely do. Since the Apollo 17 mission in 1972, the Blue Marble iconotype has come to overlay the continents and oceans map as a primary world picture, just as the latter ousted local mapping when exploration and contact made the presence of distant others a matter of significance. But these iconotypes are simplifications, illusions of a wholeness that cannot be encountered physically. The "earth system" itself is an interconnected series of what Timothy Morton has named "hyperobjects" (the most obvious one today being the climate itself). Data models of the climate are classically proximal representations. Telling Lovelock's story of the moment of his Gaia epiphany, Chakrabarty uses a Heideggerian verb to aver: "What we see in the history of ESS, however, is not an end to the project of capitalist globalization but the arrival of a point in history where the global *discloses* to humans the domain of the planet." 68 (We discuss this idea in session 8.) A more political gloss on this would say: capitalism has evolved to a point where its affordances have revealed (by being unable to disguise them) the truly planetary scale of the disasters it has engendered. In turn, "Nature" has rejected the "contract" we, in our capitalist and socialist formations, our modernity, have tried to impose upon it. On a planetary scale, it is not merely human life that modern progressivism radically endangers, but most life—a Sixth Extinction, or at best a recursion to more primitive forms of life, looms within a foreseeable future. 69 The habitability of all lifeforms, not merely the sustainability of human development, becomes the minimal goal (implying that in some "reasonable utopia" their "flourishing" would be the maximal goal?).

Chakrabarty returns to his beginning, a world question for intellectuals: "What would it mean for us to bring together in our thought all of these different timescales...and face them?" 70 In another formulation, how might Prometheus hasten to Gaia's assistance? 71 Noting that "Any theory of politics adequate to the planetary crisis humans face today would have to begin from the same old premise of securing human life but now ground itself in a new philosophical anthropology, that is in a new understanding of the changing place of humans in the web of life and in the connected but different histories of the globe

and the planet,” he concludes that the required form remains that of an interrogation, a worldly question about world questioning:

If one reads ESS as providing an (auto)biography of humans when humans have become a question for themselves, what indeed is the question that motivates this narrative? The question itself remains unasked, but many second-order derivative questions swim around its gravitational field...Such questions—not yet answerable yet gaining force very day—mark out how the category *planet* enters humanist thought, as a matter of human-existential concern, even as we come to realize that the planet does not address us in quite the same way as our older categories of *earth, world and globe*. 72

With these observations, we are back to the opening of the seminar, its starting point. The question “What is the world question today?” is reframed as one that must be asked and answered from a planetary perspective. Both our beginning and Chakrabarty’s ending acknowledge that “the world” has not found that perspective as yet, but also note that several “second-order derivative” questions are emerging. Despite their evident contention, and at least partly because of it, it has become possible that these questions may cluster into the lineaments of a planetary perspective.

7. The Multi-Voiced Body

In Chakrabarty’s three essays, the “governance question,” as he names it, receives only passing reference in a footnote that evokes “planetary sovereignty” as “some kind of world government or world order that will manage global warming.” 73 The United Nations is the organization that could come closest to this possibility, although its operations are constantly vitiated by internal warring between the five, veto-power wielding permanent members of the Security Council—the victors in World War II (China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States)—and between them and the other 187 members, themselves always weaving or tearing a fragile fabric made up of competitive nationalisms and shifting alliances. By 2015, however, the threat of global warming had caused a degree of alarm so great that the member states signed on to two unprecedented

agreements, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Convention on Climate Change*. 74

The remarkable thing about these agreements is that they are the closest humanity has come to speaking in what might be called a “world voice.” For all their faults, contradictions, and shortcomings, they represent the most developed outcomes to date of official, governmental efforts to find shared answers to the questions, shared responses to the challenges, most effecting the world—that is, globalized humanity, the biosphere, and the planet—today.

The Sustainable Development document is a blueprint for resolving the “rifts” between the three histories that Chakrabarty identifies. Geopolitically, it is the agenda of the majority of the UN members outside the Security Council. In practice, it is being riven by the internecine strife that attends every effort of the United Nations to transcend national interests. Such strife is also wearing down the ability to meet the goals agreed to in December 2015, at the Paris Convention on Climate Change, which came into force as international law on November 4, 2016, when the threshold of ratification by 55% of the member nations was achieved. Of the 197 possible parties to the Convention, now, in mid-2020, it has been ratified by 193. (President Trump infamously initiated the withdrawal of the United States, an action that may be trumped after the elections of 2020.) It is worth revisiting the language of the 2015 Convention, not least to hear the sound of the “world’s voice,” so rare, but so necessary to any viable future.

A succinct summary of the situation, the nature of the response and its specific goal may be found in the preamble to the proposal to adopt the Agreement:

Recognizing that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet and thus requires the widest possible cooperation of all countries, and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, with a view to accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions... 75

The Agreement itself consists of several articles spelling out the goals more specifically, the means through which they would be realized, and the manner. Article 2 states the main goal:

1. This Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the Convention, including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, including by:

(a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;

(b) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production; and

(c) Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

2. This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

The second section of this article—the how to get from ought to is—is elaborated in several passages, including many that reflect the values of micro-nations and Indigenous peoples (in this case the intervention of then President of Bolivia, Evo Morales):

Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of “climate justice”, when taking action to address climate change.

The preamble also included a passage that appears in most UN documents:

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

We see here the expansion of rights from the relatively few declared in Tahiti, France, the United States and elsewhere toward the end of the eighteenth century, to the thirty codified by the UN in its “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (1948), and on to the proliferation of rights today, each adhering to group identities and collective interests (in principle all such entities). The rights listed in the above passage after “human rights” foreground the needs of those who are currently deprived of the quality or condition that is named, and who see that their only chance of securing a positive change is by claiming that quality or condition as a universal right, one that all humans should share. Even “development” is here claimed as a right. In these documents, the UN, speaking for all political subjects (citizens), via our representatives, acts as what Fred Evans acutely names a “multivoiced body.” 76

Bruno Latour’s reaction to the Paris Convention was more cynical. He brushes aside the likelihood that the sovereign states, once they returned home, would slide back to business as usual, something that did indeed happen in many cases. More interestingly, he suggests that when the delegates began adding up what each nation had outlined as its development goals, within which they would offer their Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to mitigating climate change, it became obvious that “there was no credible planet capable of absorbing all of those wishes...the Globe or the Global, has no terrestrial existence.” 77 Instead of panicking, Latour says, their reaction was to pop Champagne and celebrate the fact that they had all signed a document committing world governments to reducing the emission of greenhouse gases to below a level at which they were already close to reaching. He likens us all to passengers on a plane who are told by the pilot that the assumed destination no longer has an airport at “Globe Global.” Some passengers had already decided against that destination, preferring to return to the (Reinvented) Land of Old, to join the elites in their citadels, under whatever conditions they can hope to find admission, and damn the rest of us. But this, too, is unrealistic, its exclusions simply too many for it to remain viable, despite the efforts of the currently resurgent Right in several societies. That airport, too, has closed to all but a few planes.

The upshot is the realization that the modernization of all nations is no longer possible without the destruction of all; no other shareable goal has taken its place; none but the

divisive strategy of saving as much as we can that is workable from within the present wreckage; the future has vanished; we have only an imploding but relentlessly on-going present. “We,” no matter how many voices we have, are a fragile construct. Latour proposes a third option, the Earth properly understood as Gaia, the multi-layered but “thin pellicle,” the “critical zone” we experience as the inhabitable Earth, the myriad qualities of which we are only beginning to understand. Getting to know Gaia is our only way to continue to be. He concludes with the slogan: “Another end of the world is possible.” He does not think that those seeking to implement the 2015 Convention on Climate Change are capable of creating such a world.

8. Other ends of the world are possible

At base, the UN Convention on Climate Change seeks to wrap action to manage climate change within an existent mode of world being—the geopolitical world order and universal human, animal and natural rights—that is believed to be great enough to encompass it. Speaking for/as the Catholic Church, Pope Francis does the same in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*. Citing St Francis of Assisi, he speaks of “our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us.”⁷⁸ He holds out St Francis as a model for the present: “I believe St Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians.”⁷⁹ Francis’ appeal: “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”⁸⁰ Who has the main agency here? The Creator is added to Humanity as most responsible for how the world develops and changes. Christian history is driven by God’s world-making, Christ’s example, the stories of those who did and did not follow it, and the prospect of His eventual Return. To Francis and other Christians, this story is longer and larger than the three histories that Chakrabarty identified—those of human societies, the biosphere, and the planetary system. It totally encompasses them. So, too, for believers in other religions, or in universalizing life forces, such as Zhi or Qi. The obvious

problem is that only one of these totalizations can be true, only one can be the right pathway, yet they have each failed to prevail, against each other and against unbelievers. For believers, this does not disqualify them: they remain the source of the ultimate answers to the world's question. Unbelievers remain unimpressed.

James Lovelock's *Gaia* concept, so named for the Greek goddess of the Earth, brings together two ideas that came to him in the early 1950s while pursuing interplanetary studies as a NASA scientist. That the Earth, since its origins, has been a "biosphere" that constantly modifies itself, and everything with which it comes in contact, in order to sustain a variety of life forms. It is an organic, "intelligent" system active primarily above and below the Earth's surfaces, including its relatively narrow atmosphere and its relatively thin soil covering. It includes what we understand to be humanity (whose unique capacity is to conceptualize our experience) as well as what we call "Nature."⁸¹ We noted that Lovelock's hypothesis has become increasingly accepted, even by skeptics such as Bruno Latour, despite it being an unfalsifiable generalization. We wondered if that would be the fate of Lovelock's latest big idea, as set out in his book *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence*.⁸² It envisages another purpose for Gaia within the planetary system: to manage a biosphere that now includes artificial intelligence, the next step in the advance of conceptualization. This is the current world picture, according to him. With a scientist's detachment, he contemplates the possibility that AI will evolve beyond its current cyborg state, to a point where human bodies and human consciousness will no longer be necessary, leaving it to negotiate its survival and growth within a world consisting entirely of different kinds of interacting information.

We are in an imaginative space that is already heavily populated by the future worlds of popular entertainment, from *Transformers* to *Avatar*. The most powerful critical thinking about cyborgs in recent decades has been that of Donna Haraway, especially her 1985 essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Later Twentieth Century" and Katherine Hales, notably her 1999 book, *How We Became Post-Human*.⁸³ Both authors show how prosthetic devices of several kinds, from those necessary to maintain life to those that enhance its taking, merge previous boundaries between humans and machines to transgress those between people and animals, organic

beings and inanimate things. Both highlight the abusive destructiveness that results, along with the erotic energies of unusual couplings. They carefully parse how these outcomes vary according to the dimension on which they are carried out, that is, to the degree of actuality or virtuality involved. Boundary finding, and boundary breaching, these are the desires in play, especially when science is conducted within the masculinist modes that have prevailed for centuries. Feminist perspectives, especially, can re-route these desires, from fixed goals to emergence as its own end, and from willful, machine-driven exploitation of natural process to shared exploration of interspecies possibility.

Cyborgs are not either prosthetic-dependent humans or characters in Sci Fi fictions, movies and comics, but crucially both. Countless millions exist. They are at once entities and metaphors; actors within imaginative narratives and living beings. Haraway and Hales, as much as Lovelock and Latour, imagine the merging of both into another, increasingly generative, and pervasive domain. For the latter, women have a token role. For the former, they are its leading transformers. This is becoming a very lively territory, now populated by several active species. They are mapped in Haraway's recent book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. 84

9. Everyone is asking world questions, and answering them

"-cene" has become ubiquitous as the suffix to the one-word answer that theorists of all kinds now offer to the world's question. In her book *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey lists the terms generated by a "robust dialogue" about the major drivers of environment crisis, all of them viable alternatives to "Anthropocene":

...the dominance of capitalism (Capitalocene, Econocene, Necrocene), transatlantic empire (Plantationocene), patriarchy (Manocene), European/white settler colonialism (Eurocene), twentieth-century globalization and its regimes of disposability (Plasticene), or all of the above and their engagement with a frightening alterity (Chthulucene). 85

In the seminar, we discussed the key texts of those who proposed these terms and debated their respective merits. We noticed a constant tension between the desire to capture the complexity of the situation within one word, to envisage a cluster of actual concepts, forces, events, and processes that could themselves be encapsulated by one word, and the spillage of the elements of any cluster, especially one that might adequately fit the description “world.” Colonizer and postcolonial critic; masculinist and feminist; universalist and particularist; theorist and empiricist...these binaries resonated in everything we were reading. But they were also, and fast, coming to seem like echoes from a vanishing past.

Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* is a subtle take on these changes, but even she cannot resist proposing her own word, one so odd, perhaps, that she knows will never be widely adopted. “Chthulucene” compounds the Greek words for now-time and being that, she suggests, together “name a kind of time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth...Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute. I imagine chthonic ones as replata with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair.” 86 Explaining her title, she says that “The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as settle the troubled waters and rebuild quite places...as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.” 87

We were reading these words—that seemed to sum up the answers to “the world’s question” we had accumulated to date, to describe the variegated contents of our tool kit—when another world question appeared.

10. Kelley Cabrera, The Bronx, April 2020

Misheard, during the first peak of the pandemic...a cross-cultural misunderstanding, simple sounds uttered under intense stress, mangled...a moment of mistranslation flashes up a figure of contemporaneous condensation, illuminating the night sky of this dangerous time,

like a firework display that, against the grain of spectacle, actually shows us something worth seeing.

Kelley Cabrera, an emergency room nurse at the Jacobi Medical Center, The Bronx, is interviewed for the *60 Minutes* program broadcast on April 12, 2020:

Kelley Cabrera: Prior to this, prior to coronavirus, we would have been reprimanded for doing the things that we're doing now. We're walking around with medical waste from room to room, from patient to patient.

Bill Whitaker: Did I hear you say, you're walking around from room to room wearing medical waste?

Kelley Cabrera: That's correct. That's what it is. We're wearing stuff that is, it's dirty. The fact that we're given a mask to wear for five days, it's, it's wrong.

One of her fellow nurses, Freda Ocran, has died. Another was put on life support. And a young ER doctor was admitted to the ICU.

Bill Whitaker: And yet you go back to that hospital every single day.

Kelley Cabrera: If we don't go, who's gonna take care of these patients? I mean, I think we're getting to a spot where, where people are, are really, I mean, it's a very difficult moral question, you know? It's like, do I not show up to work and protect myself? Or do I show up with and do the best that I can with what I have to help other people? A lot of us are speaking out, because we realize that this problem is so much bigger than our individual hospitals. 88

I heard her say “*world* question,” not “moral question.” “Moral”/ “world.” English spoken with a Bronx inflexion, “Mawrwal”/“Warwrld.” Or a Hispanic one. I heard her without accent, or, more accurately, with my tacit presumption that, while I speak with a (received English) Australian accent, my hearing is unaccentuated. It is unlikely that the transcription, posted on the CBS website, is inaccurate. But it doesn’t matter. During this crisis, her world, and the entire world, is for her concentrated in that question. (As it was for Kant: “Act towards others as you would want everyone to act towards you”—the categorical

imperative still prevails as the default for getting from *is* to *ought*, for relating individual acts to world situations.)

COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic. All media are filled with stories of its unsystematic but seemingly unstoppable spread, including vivid evocations of its surges, its hotspots, its virulence in live markets and meat-processing plants, in places of vulnerability (senior citizens homes), against minority populations (in the US, African-Americans), the poor and the homeless, and against “less developed” countries. It is as if a dye was introduced into the globalized world precisely in order to make visible its nodes and its fault lines on the X-Ray of Everything. Mapping the spread and intensity of the virus in the mass media and online does exactly this, day by day, 24/7.

On March 31, when Cabrera was first interviewed, reported cases of infection in New York had reached 10,000 per day, and deaths were recorded as 8,000 per day. Most were in Harlem, The Bronx, and Queens. Her question is not an either/or. She kept showing up for work, cutting up plastic garbage bags into “protective” gowns, which she shared with the nurse on the next shift, and re-using masks until they crumbled. But she also paced up and down on the lawn in front of the hospital, carrying signs, and speaking to the media, in eloquent protest. She answers her own moral question by her actions, of showing up for work, and of protesting the conditions of her work. Disaster unionism fights back against disaster capitalism; a commitment to care against colossal carelessness. 89 She poses a world question by asking what kind of world has brought about these conditions. “We’re on a suicide mission. Trump has blood on his hands. I can’t be more blunt than that.” 90

Some bad answers were ready and waiting. Interviewed on the same *60 Minutes* program, economist Peter Navarro—special assistant to President Trump for trade and manufacturing, with particular responsibility for organizing the supply of equipment to fight the coronavirus, specifically getting Personal Protective Equipment to the nation’s health workers—said this:

Peter Navarro: We wouldn't be having this problem if we had the domestic production of essential medicines, medical countermeasures, medical supplies like

masks and medical equipment like ventilators. If we made it here, we wouldn't be faced with this. That was, that was the original sin.

Navarro spoke to us from Washington, D.C. With the strategic national stockpile now depleted, he was put in charge of the defense production act, to mobilize American industry to meet the demand for medical supplies.

Bill Whitaker: I'm here in New York. And we hear daily the hospitals are running out of masks, they're running out of gowns, they're running out of gloves. My question is: how did we, the United States, the most powerful, the wealthiest country on earth, get blindsided like this?

Peter Navarro: It's the global --globalization of production through multinational corporations, who salute no flag, who love cheap sweatshop labor, and who love the massive subsidies that the Chinese government throws at production to bring it from here to there.

Navarro is an architect of the Trump administration's trade war with China and is one of the biggest proponents of its "America First" policies. Now, in the wake of the outbreak, more than 70 countries across the world are restricting the export of products U.S. doctors and nurses desperately need to treat COVID-19.

Bill Whitaker: We have a nurse that we've been speaking to. The nurse asked what has taken you so long?

Peter Navarro: What is taking...

Bill Whitaker: You're talking about ramping up and the Defense Production Act. And she's on the front lines having to reuse masks and gowns.

Peter Navarro: We're moving in Trump time, which is to say as swiftly as possible. If you look at the trajectory of events we-- we-- we-- we learn about the potential for a pandemic. We're not sure what the scope of it will be. The Trump administration starts rapidly mobilizing. But-- but it-- this-- this is the 500-year flood. And it takes

time.

Bill Whitaker: I have seen reports that the intelligence community was notifying the administration back in January that this was happening.

Peter Navarro: This is, like, like, the fake news stuff. It's, like, okay, somebody said...

Bill Whitaker: It's not fake news, sir.

Peter Navarro: It's like, show me the money here. What exactly did they say? Did they say, "There's gonna be a global pandemic that's gonna shut down the entire global economy."

Well, it turns out Navarro himself said almost exactly that. A few days after our interview the news site Axios published this memo Navarro wrote in late January, in which he warned the White House National Security Council the China-born virus could cause a global pandemic, take a "half-million American souls" and cost the economy "\$5.7 trillion." He told us he does not contest its authenticity.

Peter Navarro: No apologies here from this administration. We are, we are doing better and more than any other president could've done.

Bill Whitaker: Sir, this is the best you can?

Peter Navarro: You say, "This is the best you can?" It's, like, oh, somebody coulda done better. Really? Who coulda done better on this? I mean, really, think about this.

60 Minutes gave Kelley Cabrera the last word. She questions the world as it is:

Kelley Cabrera: And I know it's a pandemic, and we, it's just really hard for us to accept the fact that this is the best that we can do. I wouldn't wish this upon anybody. We're running out of supplies that, it's not just the PPE and ventilators. We're running out of IV pumps. We're running out of stuff that we never ran out of

before. And it is unacceptable that in the United States of America, the richest country in the world, we are struggling like this.

I heard her say “world” because I have been, for several years, thinking about world thinking, about how we struggle to imagine the multiple connectivities between our instinct toward place making within and against what we sense is always a layering of closer and more distant worlds, each with powers that have effect on us. I am particularly interested in the kinds of questioning that we do to try to grasp those connectivities, as they operate now, as they have operated, and as they might work in the worlds to come. I know a world question when I hear it. Even when I mishear it.

Kelley Cabrera’s last comment is also worth parsing. No question arises in a neutral setting, as if it were asking: why is not every element before me in perfect equilibrium, manifesting the total equality that is the natural, universal state of affairs? She is shocked that “the richest country in the world” cannot cope with everything that hits it, every crisis it faces, or, at least, does not have ready to hand the equipment necessary to do so. “Unacceptable” implies that the US finds itself in a situation common in less rich countries. Disparity does not surprise her. She would find it, normally, in multiple forms, each day, on her way to and from the hospital. But never before inside the hospital itself, a modern machine that presents itself as dedicated to the generation of health, not (except in the once relatively rare cases where it must) to the processing of death.

In a perverse sense, however, Navarro is right. By outsourcing production from EuroAmerica to the rest of the world, to factories that function more cheaply because they do not take on at least some of the costs of protecting workers in their work places and enabling them to build safe lives in their homes, then by accelerating the circulation of products and people around the world with few checks and no barriers, globalization is, in effect, also circulating random elements of the collateral cultures of those off-shore sites throughout the network. Including, in this case, the side-effects of a local trade in wild animals, such as bats, at the Wuhan “wet market,” or an unlikely accidental leak from a local infectious diseases laboratory that studies such animals. Whatever the immediate occasion of the

animal-to-human infection that precipitated this coronavirus, the root “cause” is the relentless pursuit of greater profits by the network that throws incompatibilities together, consequences be damned, as long as one part fits the chain. This has been occurring since the 1980s, when globalization came to dominate world economic and political agendas: so, we get SARS, Ebola, etc. But it also has a longer history, as we noted in the seminar: that of European colonization of South America and the Caribbean, of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Neoliberalism has reduced this system to its base elements, occupying a terrain on which they must compete with other basic ecosystems, each of which is alive to itself but confronts the other as an invasive virus. Navarro’s solution, however, is an impending disaster of at least equal proportions. Against it we might prefer Edouard Glissant’s suggestion, that continental modes of thinking the world in order to possess it should be replaced by archipelagic thinking *with* the world—that is, of sharing the world’s natural disposition toward questioning, not imposing our necessarily limited answers upon it. 91

Essays by the seminarists

The required coursework took the form of two assignments, one written partway through the seminar, the other presented as a paper towards the end then submitted as an essay. These were the terms:

1. What kind of world question is being asked by the objects of your research, and how is world questioning taking place in your research process? (2,000 words)
2. The question of world questioning: what is your understanding of it how it is being asked, and how it should be asked, in the wider world today? (3,000 words)

All fifteen members of the seminar presented papers for both assignments. Eight have been chosen as representative of the seminar’s work. The first three (Bertagnolli, Titus, and Mukherjee) respond directly to the pandemic, to the sudden necessity that we all—that is, everyone living in the world now—must respond in some way to this threat to the lives of each of us. We all have to think about the same thing. And to ask, at the same time, what does this mean for me AND for our species AND for living beings on the planet? Isaiah

Bertagnolli kept a COVID-19 diary, replete with facts, panicked “post-truths,” charts, and personal affects. Nikhil Titus reflects on the almost comically inadequate effort of Indian Prime Minister Modi to conjure a sense of communality within an inherently internally diverse nation, one that has recently been actively divided by his own Hinduist policies. Film Studies PhD Silpa Mukherjee shares reflections about world picturing that arose for her when she attempted to cope with the lockdown by submerging herself in binge watching of several different kinds of film.

Other essays reflect on the impact of world questioning approaches on their author’s areas of research and on their own research questions. María Llorens revisits an earlier crisis, that which engulfed Argentina in years around 2000, to show how constructive collectivity can emerge from such seemingly catastrophic situations. Ethnomusicologist Shuo Yang tests out the comparative relevance of Western scholarly protocols, decolonial theory and the ancient Chinese theory of *tienren heyi* for the study of music made by the nationalities within China. Communications student Max Dosser probes the deliberate construction of a “post-truth” climate by organizations dedicated to climate change denial, and by the Trump administration, then shows some ways in which such misinformation is being countered. Gabriel Guedes explores the operations of surveillance capitalism through the example of Oculus, a VR device soon to be marketed by Facebook, and asks whether different forms of VR platforms might be envisaged for the world in the aftermath of neoliberalism. Finally, Brooke Wyatt takes us into the visual imagination of James Castle, an untrained, “outsider” artist who pictured aspects of the life of people and objects on and around his family’s farm in rural Idaho. Place imagined as a world, in sharp but gentle contrast to the anxious sense of larger worlds invading my place that pervades the other essays.

World: “There is no way we can shut everything down in order to lower emissions, slow climate change and protect the environment.”

Mother Nature: “Here’s a virus. Practice.” —Anonymous. 92

1. See Terry Smith, "The Contemporary Condition: Composition, Planomena, Worlding," August 23, 2016, EGS videos at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=durNqyZPx-g>; "Deconstructive States and the Post-contemporary Distraction," October 12, 2017, EGS videos at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irb2aDwG01A>; "Difference and Concurrence," August 14, 2018, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a9AXAif7m0>; "Exhibitionary Times: Art Against Spectacle," August 16, 2019, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8mvqnMat3M>.
2. See <https://www.culturalstudies.pitt.edu/about> and <https://www.culturalstudies.pitt.edu/about/mission-and-history>. Founded in the 1980s by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, led subsequently for many years by Nancy Condee, and now by Ronald J. Zboray, the program is the most comprehensive in the US.
3. Edgar Wells, *Reward and Punishment in Arnhem Land, 1962-1963* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1982), 58-9; Anne E. Wells, *This is Their Dreaming: Legends of the Panels of Aboriginal Art in the Yirrkala Church* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1971), 41. I discuss the panels in some detail in "Making Places, Cross-Hatching Worlds: The Yirrkala Panels," *e-flux journal*, # 111, posted September 2020 at <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/111/345649/marking-places-cross-hatching-worlds-the-yirrkala-panels/>.
4. Howard Morphy, "Acting in a community; Art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia," *Humanities Research Journal*, vol. XV, no. 2 (2009): <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p14881/html/frames.php>, "The bite in the bark."
5. "Yirrkala Church Panels, 1962-63," *Saltwater, Paintings of Sea Country, The Recognition of Indigenous Sea Rights* (Yirrkala: Baku-Larrngay Mulka Art Centre, [1999], 2nd ed. 2014), 25.
6. See <https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-did-104.html>.
7. See [https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/ULuru Statement From The Heart 0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/ULuru%20Statement%20From%20The%20Heart%200.PDF), and https://law.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2791940/ULuru-Statement-from-the-Heart-Information-Booklet.pdf.
8. Immanuel Kant, *Basic Writings of Kant*, Allen W. Wood ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 326; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9.
9. See Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent*, in *Basic Writings*, 131.

10. Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, in *Basic Writings*, 440.
11. Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, in *Basic Writings*, 450.
12. Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," [1938] in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland, 1977), 128-9.
13. Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 134 and 154.
14. See Martin Heidegger, "The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics," *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1962), chapter 1, based on a 1935 lecture.
15. The following remarks are drawn from "Difference And Concurrence: World Picturing By Contemporary Artists," a lecture at the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, August 14, 2018.
16. Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 134, with reference to Appendix 11, the one that might evoke the prospect of a Superman, possibly a National Socialist one.
17. Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 136.
18. Giorgio Agamben, "On Contemporaneity," Lecture at the European Graduate School, 2007; in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?* and *Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39-56.
19. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," [1951], in David Farrell Krell ed., *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 336-7.
20. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 329.
21. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 330-1.
22. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 327.
23. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 338.
24. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 339.
25. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe; Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
26. *Maḍayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Bark Painting from Yirrkala, Australia* is curated by Yolŋu artists from the Buku-Larrnggay Art Center, Yirrkala, Northern Territory, and curators from the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia. It will also include a six-screen video installation by Ishmael Marika and the Mulka Project, which is based at Yirrkala. The exhibition will open at the Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, NH, in September 2020, and complete its tour at the Fralin Museum, University of Virginia, in January 2025. See also Michael Jackson, *At Home in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke

University Press, 1995) for a moving evocation of what it is like to think Existentialism, in the Central Desert of Australia, with the Warlpiri.

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28. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.
29. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
30. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
31. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 65.
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34. Enrique Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation," *Transmodernity*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring, 2012): 50. See also Bernd Reiter ed., *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
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48. McKenzie Wark, *The Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).
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