

2019 Seminar Abstracts:
World, Globe, Planet: Macrocoscopic Thinking in the Age of Shakespeare
Joseph Campana & Ayesha Ramachandran

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“All This World at Once”: “Cosmic Views,” *Paradise Lost* and the Capitalocene

The wager of this paper is that there is something to be learned for ecologically sensitive world-making (or “planetarity”) today from the many shifts in, and plays of, scale in *Paradise Lost*. I will focus here on one prominent strategy of world-making through attention to scale in the poem: the “Cosmic View” that many currently-influential—especially assemblage-oriented--strands of theory denounce. Milton’s poem, however, does not reject the “cosmic view,” at least not altogether. To explore the work of the poem in interrogating what used to be called “standpoint,” I discuss the various perspectives of Satan, God and the Poet in *PL*, as constellated in Book III, to show how complex, mobile, contested and yet, at the same time, effectively irreducible, a “cosmic view” turns out to be in (and for) the poem. Engagement with nuanced literary treatments of cosmic views can help remind eco-concerned humans, I suggest, of aspects of dialectic that are often forgotten today, as more and more theorists appear to accept uncritically the tendentious parody of dialectic Bruno Latour and others straw-man in their work. Armed with a dialectic that is actually dialectical-- that is, dynamic and carefully historicized-- humans, I argue, would be better equipped than they are with assemblage theories alone to transform in a liberatory way their own uneven-- but nonetheless collectively destructive-- participation in a planetary ecology that they share inextricably with nonhumans.

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Soiled Belonging: Drayton’s Autochthonous Poetics and World History

Following George Bush’s 1991 proclamation of a “new world order” following the Gulf War and amid the increasing growth of global markets and their circulation of capital and peoples, the European right reasserted their local, national identities by turning to the ancient Athenian myth of autochthony—a response that anticipated the reprisal of fascistic politics in recent years. A tradition that locates a people’s origin in the soil of their country, autochthony promises, as Peter Geschiere describes, an “ur-belonging.” Autochthony produces a claim of authenticity separating the citizen from the stranger, a xenophobic claim that modern political parties from Belgium’s New Right to France’s National Front have used in response to the migrations global capitalism has spurred. Autochthony posed a problem rather than a solution for early modern writers concerned with globality. Early modern European world histories sought to comprehend the world’s inhabitants within a euhemeristic biblical and classical genealogy, a project autochthony frustrated. Writers rejected and ridiculed the tradition. Jean Bodin asks, “What more stupid . . . or more impious [history] can be imagined than” autochthony? Tracking autochthony in world histories spatializes these historical narratives, revealing corresponding macrocosmic spatial

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forms. For example, the Jacobean poet and clergyman William Slatyer saw autochthony as a hiccup in the global westward migration, or *translatio*, of empire. William Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* as developing a poetics of autochthony through his prosopopoeic British topography. By focusing on accounts of British antiquity in the *Poly-Olbion*, I want to rethink autochthony in Drayton as not simply participating in a poetics of nationhood—an anticipation of the tradition's recent chauvinistic return—but rather as forming an unresolvable dialectic between the local and global, the part and the whole, through which Drayton's songs celebrate Britain's antiquities and “glocalize”—to borrow Roland Robertson's inelegant though useful formulation—the landscape.

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Death and Worldly Deterioration in King Lear

The early modern English ars moriendi tradition frequently draws on the world as a tool to gauge the nature of mortality, asking questions about how we experience or inhabit the world as we die: as Epaphroditus, Thomas Becon's dying protagonist in *Sick Man's Salve*, puts it, “What a world is this?” Ars moriendi texts often searchingly inquire about similar concerns, asking, in the moments of dying, does our experience of the world deteriorate, or does its vivacity increase? I will explore these questions specifically within *King Lear*, a play that, alongside ars moriendi writers like Becon and William Perkins, investigates the nature of worldly experience in one's dying moments. My essay takes a phenomenological approach to worldly experience and sensation, drawing on figures such as Hannah Arendt, Alva Noe, and Elaine Scarry in order to frame concepts like the durability and availability of the world, as well as the “constantly diminishing world ground” of the dying. From Edgar's orchestration of Gloucester's distorted worldly perception, to Lear's steady retreat from worldly awareness as a “poor, bare, forked animal,” I will explore when and how, in *King Lear*, one's sense of the world in the face of death collapses or endures.

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‘The World is But a Word’: *Timon* and Universal Truth

This paper primarily focuses upon conceptions of expansion, contraction, and containment of the world in *Timon of Athens*, in light of the question that opens the work: ‘POET. how goes the world? | PAINTER. It wears, sir, as it grows’ (1.1.3-4). The painter presents the world as a material and ideological construct that weakens as it expands—a relentless softening of the boundary between growth and deterioration that renders it as an increasingly unsuitable habitat. The continuous expansion of the world's ills, as voiced by the Painter, is demonstrated in part by the ‘great flood of visitors’ (1.1.51) who visit Timon. Where Timon is figuratively drowned by the avarice of these

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parasitical men, the poet's capacious artistic ability allows him to freely and safely express himself in 'a wide sea of wax', ultimately demonstrating how Timon is 'a man | Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug' (1.1.53-55). The corrupted world of earthly luxury completely delimits the conditions of Timon's identity. He is captive to the vacuous ideals that underpin Athenian society, yet, the artists who benefit from Timon's patronage are able to move fluidly through this world (and are at license to depict its limitations). The lowly figuration of 'man' and world is reaffirmed later in the play when, in the midst of selling his extensive lands, Timon is reminded by Flavius that 'the world is but a word' (2.2.170). Here, the scope and value of both 'man' and 'world' are rendered in a manner that emphasises their diminutive and inconsequential nature, since the world can be unfolded and eradicated in a single word. The true nature of the world—its vacuity—is elucidated through the ease, ephemerality, and insubstantial nature of linguistic utterance.

This paper draws upon such exchanges to clarify how the disclosure of the truth (*aletheia*) of the world's constitution in *Timon* and elsewhere in early modern writing is predicated upon the disenchantment of *logos* (as 'word', and as the site of transcendental reason/meaning). I place, for instance, this play's concern with being, *logos*, and the world in distinction to the sentiment expressed in the closing couplet of 'Sonnet 109', where the act of naming the beloved provides the grounds by which meaning itself is constituted in the poetic speaker's own universe: 'For nothing this wide universe I call, | Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all' (Sonnet 109, ll. 13-14). Here, 'the world' is indeed 'but a word', though this utterance manages to conjure, rather than expel, meaning from the world. I trace the conceptual links between *Timon* and other writing of the period that seeks to similarly question or diminish the world's relevance (including and beyond works concerned with eschatological interpretations of the universe, or those informed by the *contemptus mundi* tradition). William Jewell's *The Golden Cabinet of True Treasure* (1612), William Drummond's, *A Midnights Trance* (1619), and William Cowper's, *A Defiance to Death* (1610) are used for this objective, alongside familiar texts like Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* (1615).

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The Planetary Scale of Political Feeling in Richard Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity

In *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker represents nonhuman animals and objects in curiously political terms. Each element, stone, and creature serves the good of the whole world according to that which Hooker describes as a "compact." Everything obeys the law of nature. The moon circles the earth. Plants grow and reproduce. Each part of the world joins together to compose a universal polis merely by doing what is natural and good for itself. Each part, that is, except for humans. Too often, we fail to act according to the law of nature. We strive toward it, but do so imperfectly, often acting in service of our individual interests rather than for the benefit of the whole. How then are humans to be understood as the political animal, when we are the least reliable constituent of God's political ecology? Despite our unique deficiencies, Hooker nonetheless affectively orients humans toward a planetary collectivity.

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Notwithstanding his critique of human selfishness, Hooker develops a discourse of preconscious, impersonal political feeling that aligns us with God's universal polis. While political scholarship on the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* has tended to explore Hooker's representations of sovereignty, consent, and corporations, this paper will consider passages in Book One that describe the global orientation of human political feeling that exists at the threshold of our perception.

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World, world, O world: Spherical Predominance in *King Lear*

King Lear begins with a map but is littered with spheres. Some of *Lear*'s spheres are small: eggs, eyes, seeds, "rounded wombs." Others are macro-spheric: orbs, planets, globes, worlds. What Edmund decries as "spherical predominance" structures human thought across the early part of the play, but, as Edmund also suspects, this only reveals a limited vantage point. A be-stocked Kent beckons the sun to "this underglobe" to enable him to read Cordelia's letter and praises its "comfortable beams"; yet the light is insufficient, Kent remains trapped in "shameful lodging," and the letter is unread. Lear commands the thunder to "Strike flat the thick rotundity of the world" in the middle of the storm; yet however loud the thunder, the world's "rotundity" remains "thick," its "germens" unspilled. Gloucester interprets "the late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us"; yet his reading of celestial events is undermined by the fact that "the bond cracked 'twixt father and son" is precipitated by Edmund's plotting, not Edgar's. Indeed, Gloucester not only has the wrong son but also the wrong event—the bond between him and Edmund has long been "cracked" (being kept "out nine years" will do that to a father-son bond) but it will take eye gouging to make him see it. But it is not quite right to say that the spheres do not impress themselves on human events (as Edmund seems to contend): rather, in calling on them to act (benignly, violently) or understanding them to have acted (as a way to understand the world's affairs), humans claim to be able to measure order in the world (even in disorder), and hence understand themselves (at least partially) to be outside the spheres that they are invoking (because they can will or read the sphere's effects). Yet the play insists not only that humans are in the thick of these spheres but that they also cannot experience them as objects discrete from themselves: the problem is not that they assume "spherical predominance" but that they misidentify its effects. In short, they cannot see the sphere they're in.

This paper analyzes the spherology of *King Lear* through three overlapping modes of enquiry. Considering *Lear*'s spheres calls to mind Timothy Morton's concept "hyperobjects"—"things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans," that evade spatiotemporal specificity, and whose totality cannot be fully comprehended. As such, the play seems to provide us with an absurdist allegory of the hyperobject. They also call to mind the "Sphärologie" of Peter Sloterdijk, who posits that "sublime imaginary constructs of wholeness were doomed to vanish with the beginning of the modern age," and marks the transition at the first circumnavigations and the cartographies that followed—when "the human location, the planet

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Terra, took on increasingly explicit contours.” *King Lear*, which evokes a map’s airless futurity at its very beginning and a globe’s increasing obsolesces at its middle, seems to dramatize this vanishing of totality, delivering us in act four scene six at a Dover Cliff that is neither Dover nor Cliff. But if absurdism diagnoses this disappearing act as something of a cosmic joke, in its latter stages *King Lear* seems to posit an altogether different sphere, one not determined by geography and measurement, but rather by atmospherics, in what Tim Ingold calls “the weather-world.” This sphere is experienced not through the distancing rhetoric of attempted comprehension but through immersion and perambulation—through an opening up to the elements rather than a closing off. *King Lear* famously takes place in the open—unlike other tragedies of claustrophobic interiors—and it is walking through the weather-world that offers Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia, and Edgar some salve, even when “All [is] dark and comfortless.”

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**“Earth without Humans:
Edward Topsell and the Early Modern Roots of Interspecies Theory”**

Prominently examined by animal studies scholars for his *Historie of Four-Footed Beasts and Historie of Serpents* (1608), Edward Topsell was, in his own time, best known as a respected Protestant cleric who published his own and others’ sermons and meditations. A frequent topic of these devotions was the status of meek or small creatures and the overwhelming impact they could have on the larger world. Indeed, in *The Historie of Adam, or the Foure-fold State of Man* (1606), Topsell imagines what the globe will look like after revelation when human souls have been redeemed to heaven or damned to hell: “the sea shall not worke nor bee tossed with windes, nor destroy any of the creatures renewed upon the face of the earth.” From his perspective, then, as human leave the planet, animals will be freed of the domestication, slaughter, or oppression they have faced. This essay will examine Topsell’s work from the perspective of animal studies, particularly in relation to the concept of precariousness, the notion that animal lives and deaths are subject to human inclinations that are largely driven by economy and diet. It will then situate Topsell’s theories on human and nonhuman coexistence in relation to contemporary considerations of our ecological epoch. In particular, Donna J. Haraway’s notion of the Chthulucene as “a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying... on a damaged earth” offers a generative means of solidifying kinship among species to resist ecological devastation driven by colonization and capitalism. As I will argue, Topsell’s sermons not only create an avenue for understanding early modern ecological thought, but also establish a valuable early modern foundation for contemporary feminist interspecies theory.

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“Imagining illusory worlds with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* & Abhinavagupta”

I would my father looked but with my eyes,” says Hermia, when in the beginning of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, we find the principal characters of the play caught in a seemingly unresolvable conflict. The issue of perspective is deep and pervasive in the play—this is not simply a question of finding something right or wrong, their very world-views seem to be in tension. European early modernity was aware of how views and visions in general, but worldviews in particular, could be creative, “poetic,” even. In this paper, I seek to show how aspects of one’s subjective, microcosmic vision, perception and experience determine and define the macrocosms of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. To a spectator, the play presents several interlaced levels of reality, which betray the epistemological tensions simmering in the period. In many ways, then, epistemology foregrounds ontology in the play.

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"Beyond Worlding: Shakespeare's Strawberries"

This paper shows how Shakespeare reaches beyond worlding when he references strawberries at key textual moments of political upheaval. In pre-Linnaean botanical texts, the strawberry confuses classifications dependent on the great chain of being due to its rhizomatic growth and taxonomy as at once native and transplanted, wild and cultivated. This confusion colors the epistemological labors of practical herbalists such as Hugh Plat (1552-1608), whose pocket manual *The Garden of Eden* counters the formal, universalizing work of "Theorists" by "writ[ing] briefly and confusedly, with those that seek out the practical and operative part of Nature" (13). Plat's text, which begins with strawberries, is an example of how empirical botany celebrates entanglement as crucial to collective flourishing. Plat's text also helps explain Ely's description of the newly-crowned king of *I Henry V*: "The strawberry grows underneath the nettle / And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best / Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality" (1.1).

The physical and intellectual confusion driving both Plat's practical herbalism and Henry's royal cultivation is antithetical to worlding, a system grounded in rationalization and separation: Tim Morton explains that theories in which "world fits mind, and mind fits world" are "hostile to inassimilable difference.... Worlds have horizons: here and there, inside and outside." By contrast, "interdependence implies differences that cannot be totalized. The mesh of interconnected life-forms does not constitute a world.... [it] undermine[s] worlds."¹ In this way,

¹ Timothy Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125.2 (2010): 273-82; citations on 278.

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early modern empirical botany resists ontological violence by undermining the primacy of comprehension. It undercuts the relation between delight and edification at the heart of humanism -- a system that justified societal and colonial inequities by radically excluding those who/that don't "fit" the category of the human -- to instead joy in that which one cannot understand.

My essay demonstrates how Shakespeare thinks with strawberries in *I Henry V*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, and *Titus Andronicus* to reexamine the parameters of what we term "life," and the ethics of who and what has the right to participate in it. I explore, in Heideggerian terms, his interrogation of the division between Sein (being) and Dasein (being-there): the difference between the dwelling place of fruits, and the kinetic sphere of human and animal activity. Strawberries signal moments at which Shakespeare contrasts anthropocentric categories of excellence such as integrity, mobility, strength, and willfulness with the distinctively vegetable virtues of openness, passivity, stasis, and vulnerability. By concentrating on the universality of the vegetative soul -- a philosophical recognition of humanity's intrinsic connectedness with flora -- Shakespeare expands topographies of the living in order to reassess the nature of the political itself.

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Cosmic Faustus

From its opening references to eternal life to its astrological ruminations, from the titular character's travels across the globe to his conjuration of figures from the past, Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* seems intent on dramatizing what, following the provocation of this seminar, we might term the worldly, the global, and even the planetary. In this paper, I aim to explore how such different versions of macroscopic thinking intersect on the early modern stage. In particular, I am interested in tracing how various contemporary epistemological debates—on astronomy, on magic, and on the new science—shape the macroscopic aspects of the play. Drawing on such discourses, *Faustus*, I propose, stages a form of cosmic worldmaking, one that stretches both the temporal and the spatial contours of what is theatrically possible: the haunting presence of eternal damnation expands the temporality of the play beyond the chronology of lived experience, and Faustus's travels and the play's intimations of astronomical shifts underscore a perennially expandable spatial imagination. Focusing on these cosmic technologies as the engines of *Faustus*' formal innovations can not only highlight how macroscopic thinking is at the heart of early modern theatricality—with its capacious imagination of time and space—but also has the potential to foreground how large-scale concepts can be a useful methodological paradigm for new work in early modern literature/science studies.

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Bringing Out Tambur-Lame: Marlowe and Source

Reading Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* in relation to its source material, the historical "Timur-the-Lame," I argue that the play's desire to bring out Tamburlaine as "other"—monstrous, disabled—creates queer manifolds in the epic time of the play, suggesting not only alternatives to the epistemology of the closet that informs normative reading practices but also cartographic and relational imaginaries at odds with Tamburlaine's "world." *Tamburlaine*'s cartographic (East-West) imaginary spatializes and thus "crips" the linearity of time and narration; consequently, what we "see" via Tamburlaine's "disability" is not so much the truth of premodern disability but rather the nomadic assemblage of affects, materials, and ecologies that form and deform dis/abled existence in Marlowe's history.