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Moraru, Christian, Elias, Amy J.

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Decompressing Culture
Three Steps toward a Geomethodology

CHRISTIAN MORARU

Everything begins with Houses, each of which must join up its sections and hold up compounds—Combray, the Guermantes’ house, the Verdurins’ salon—and the houses are themselves joined together according to interfaces, but a planetary Cosmos is already there, visible through the telescope, which ruins or transforms them and absorbs them into an infinity of the patch of uniform color.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What Is Philosophy?

The world has moved back to [the] centre of political consciousness, not in the traditional sense of the “earth as garden,” but as new technologically worlded and pneo-stoic cosmopolitical percept of the “earth-as-planet” . . .

—Neil Turnbull, “The Ontological Consequences of Copernicus”

Let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes.

—Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom

“The face of the earth”: have you ever pondered the idiom? If thousands of years of use have worn it thin, the dawn of the third millennium is witnessing the old chestnut’s semantic reset. This makes you wonder what the phrase is conveying nowadays. Tying some of us down to exploit, disenfranchise, and otherwise “expel[!] from the narratives of futurity,”1 globalization is also drawing more and more of the earth’s denizens farther and farther afield, and so it bears asking: How is our historically unmatched familiarity with the beyond-the-familial rekindling the syntagm in casual conversation, in popular media, and in the humanities? How might we defamiliarize its all-too-familiar words privately and publicly, colloquially and academically, as we chat, fantasize, roam the biennales, write, or cuddle up with our favorite
books? Conversely, while windows are opening wider and wider onto the world—whether in Microsoft or, no less innovatively, in Frédéric Beigbeder’s 2003 9/11 best-selling *Windows on the World*—what kind of figures are the earth’s places cutting in our digital and fictional frames? And, along the lines of the global-planetary imbrications and tensions tackled throughout this collection, what is the tired locution’s awakening teaching us as techno-economic, sociopolitical, and cultural trends of unprecedented magnitude impact on and are impacted by those places? How is the earth’s face revealing us, in and across those locales, something that globalization often obfuscates and stymies while planetarization forefronts and nourishes?

Undoubtedly timely, the questions boil down to a critical act, to interpretation. Generally speaking, they all invite renewed scrutiny of the earth’s fast-changing figure in the aftermath of the planet’s latest, themselves multifaceted reconfigurations. More specifically, more practically, and thus more closely to our private homes and disciplinary abodes, the sheer existence of the socioeconomic layout, saliently interconnective logic, and courto or longue durée etiology of the in-progress world-system are not at issue here, or not in the first place. As far as I am concerned, the overall global narrative is legible enough both diachronically, as an evolutionary rationale, and synchronically, as a present if still evolving “form.” In plainer English, whereas the roots of the geocultural framework contextualizing the planetary visions—the primal scenes of planetarity—adduced later in this essay admittedly push deep into the early Renaissance’s transcontinental travels, “discoveries,” and redistributions of territory, community, affect, and capital, this framework, this worldly form of the present, remains no less unparalleled for that; the historical uniqueness of this “physiognomy” strikes me as hard to ignore. I call it macroscopic because it breaks forth and appears accessible, not to say obvious, from above or afar—from technologically enabled, spatial-evaluative positions and postures—but also because of its scope, of its scalarity. Indeed, it implies and often is a distant judgment, a large-scale representation, image, or photo. This is the proverbial bird’s- or, more accurately, astronaut’s-eye view; the interval-informed approach and what this yields; what “appears” and what one makes out from the physical-intellectual distance that brings into relief, without always rendering “evident,” the cross-territorial, integrative-interlinking, and world-systemic operations coming loosely under the heading of “planetarization.”

The Infinite and the Infinitesimal

Yet again, the issue at hand is not, or is solely in part, the macroscopic. Our problem, or at least the problem my intervention is wrestling with, falls chiefly under the *microscopic*. It is of the order of the infinitesimal. This is where the rubber meets the road and the material landscape the road runs through. But,
as I shall reiterate, the micro focus does not involve a complete shift away from the macro, from the cosmic perspective of the NASA (“Apollonian”) “gaze” and the “infinite” it gestures toward while paradoxically construing Earth as one, limited “unit.” The macro and the micro work—must work, of necessity—as the two arms of the analytical scissors.

Consequently, in the era of the “big picture,” of a picture taken by a see-it-all—and see-it-as-all—eye-in-the-sky, the challenge to the discerning observer is the indiscernible or, better still, the planet’s unsettlingly ambiguous encryption in it, the macro’s murmur in the vernacular of the micro, in the tiny, the local, and the humble. For, fraught with distinctions and codifications of planetarity, the indistinguishable is or looks so only at first glance. To pick up the gauntlet, therefore, is to try and ascertain what entails to work out cultures’ fine print with this planetary configuration, figure, or face as master framing device; what it takes to attend geoaesthetically to the endur-ingly enticing arabesque of “small things” alongside and through their godly and human handlers, venues, and styles; in brief, what it means to us, now, to read “with” the planet: to read it, namely, not as a reductive totality—a wrongheaded, unethical, and futilely globalist undertaking—but, in reading against that ominous oneness, to read the planet with and ultimately for the myriad of places, archives, and artifacts of which its fragile, pluricentric, and makeshift whole consists.

My premise, in other words, is that the planet is swimming into the critic’s ken. On a less Keatsian tone, the earth’s face is coming into view in its fully tangible dispensations and cultural-intellectual affordances complete with their sometimes uneven, contradictory, and plainly deleterious upshots. Controversially complex, this development is nevertheless bringing about a “discontinuity” in how we understand ourselves and others and, in that, has all the makings of an event. As such, it is an occasion not so much for uncritical cheering as for earnest and sustained interrogation. For instance, does the earth have a face to begin with? Has it ever had one, and, if so, how visible was or is that face? Of course, our earth does have a surface. It has had one all along, if not a solid one ab ovo. This is not what I am talking about, though. Primarily a matter of geometry, geodesy, and, more basically, geology—after all, “earth” supplies here a geological synecdoche for “planet”—the earth as surface is, so to speak, sur-facial, hence culturally superficial, impassive. This blank, faceless face is pre-figurative, as geological vastness, or post-figurative, as one big riverbed for liquidities. Either way, it is aesthetically “asleep,” as Michael Ondaatje might say. Less an expression than sheer expanse, this unmarked flatness—this “undented” plane, Bertrand Westphal might gloss—lacks in cultural volume as it does in variety. Thus, the mysteries it harbors are either hollow or redundant. Depthless, smooth, and uniform, this is not a face proper but a geographical façade, indifferent theater for the drama of difference rather than the “semiosphere” in which discourse is engendered and exchanged. And, since this a-, proto-, or
post-semiotic superficiality, quantifiable as it is, does not feature a topology, it makes no provisions for a typology or principle of classification either, that is, for a language, for a locus-minded logos; the face of the earth so conceived is scarcely a site of meaning.

**Turn of the Planet, Turn to the Planet**

However, it may turn into one. After all, as several critics in this book remind us, turning is what the earth does as a planetary body, in both senses. It turns (planâ, in Ancient Greek) to gyrate, concomitantly around other celestial objects and its own axis. But, by the same movement quite literally, it also turns to change, turning in order to change and thus into a changed world order itself, the earth’s revolutions bound up with the twists and turns in human history, revolutionary or less so. On one side, then, the earth’s whirling through space as the planet physically revolves and evolves, and as space on earth itself stretches out, shrinks, is redistributed, and is mapped out in step with the systoles and diastoles of human civilization; on the other side, our own pirouettes, swerves, and about-faces, marking how we shuffle around the world, how we transform it, how we ourselves change in the wake of worldly changes, and how the latter call on us to revisit our *Anschauungen* of the spinning Welt and of ourselves in it: all these turns matter a great deal. What is more, they do so together, for they have been demonstrably intertwined through the ages. If geography—the earth’s human writing into cartographic as well as topo-material visibility, the planet’s life within and without disciplines and human practices—is subject to becoming, then “the becoming” of such fields, discourses, and the culture they speak to “is geographical” too according to Deleuze’s tribute to the “Superiority of Anglo-American Literature.” On this ground, no anthropology or ethnography without a geophysical chapter is ever complete; no cultural history or paradigm shift account that overlooks the earth’s own motions, cycles, and crises passes muster; no posthumanism still treating the planetary as inert context or backdrop to the human text or figure fulfills its promise; and, more broadly, no philosophy that does not operate “geophilosophically” is worth its salt.

As Deleuze and Guattari posit, not only is thought’s measure the ability to “create” its concepts, but this creation also requires an “earth or deterritorialization” as its “foundation.” Note too that, for the two thinkers, the earth and its historical de-, re-, and, we shall discover, under-territorializing dynamics are mere figures of speech neither ontologically, “out there” in the world, nor philosophically, inside the reasoning apparatus of the “Geophilosophy” chapter of *What Is Philosophy?* Or they are figures etymologically, as it were, inasmuch as they designate *aspects* in a fairly palpable, phenomenological fashion, ways in which the earth and
thought *look and should be looked at*, once again, correlative, together. Equally significant is that this togetherness, this mutuality of planetary complexion and thought’s complexities, fluctuates across time. Thus, while the illuminating codependence of the earthly and the philosophical has always been in play, the post–Cold War years have enhanced and foregrounded it spectacularly. No other chapter in history, I contend, has literalized the planet’s figure so extensively, making it so ineludible in its ubiquitous physical immediacy, so non-figurative in its concrete, geocultural presence, and so productive conceptually, so consequential for how one thinks—for how “immanent” to thinking *thinking with the planet* has become of late across disciplines.

This “immanence,” this philosophical instrumentality of the planet, derives, as Deleuze and Guattari also comment on Martin Heidegger, from a planetary turn, given that “by virtue of its structure,” Being “continually turns away when it turns toward,” to the point that “the history of Being or of the earth is the history of its turning away.” For one thing, this movement is to no negligible degree trans- (and, some might add, post-) statal; arguably, Henri Lefebvre has guessed wrong when, back in 1975, he assured his readers that planetarity—*la mondialité*—would be a “planetary extension of the State.” For another thing, this has been a turn away from, and accompanied by the subsequent opening up of, territorial units, polities, policies, patri-monies, and paradigms heretofore neatly circumscribed—“territorialized” in terms of administration, coverage, and meaning—by national jurisdictions, nationalist mythologies, and related epistemological claims and descriptive models, or just so advertised. These complex turns trace the ambivalently distancing or “detrimentalizing” by which the planet de facto draws closer to us, to the little places of our lives but also to that hub of human reflexivity where it becomes effectively “immanent” to thought or becomes thought *tout court* so as to involve thought itself in the “double becoming” that would make it planet-like—“earth,” write Deleuze and Guattari—and thereby transform it radically.

In the multimillennial, interweaving histories of the world and thought, we stand, as Kostas Axelos would probably alert us, at the decisive juncture at which the coextension and co-implication of planetary spatiality and thought—the “devenir-pensée du monde” and “devenir-monde de la pensée”—render how the world shapes representation and how representation plays out planetarily in scope, structure, and content two faces of the same coin. For, if the planet turns away, it does so only to return, turning back toward us ontologically and analytically, as existential grit and interpretive grid, working itself into the everyday and its material heterologies at the same time that it turns into the pivot or “plane” around which thought and comprehension themselves gravitate. This way, the planet’s turn lays out, still in Deleuze and Guattari’s lingo, a “plane of immanence.” “Clearly not a program, design, end, or means,” this plane nonetheless “constitutes,”
today more than ever, “the absolute ground of philosophy,” the foundation on which, in accord with the planet’s cycles, thought warrants re-founding.\textsuperscript{15} The sciences and the arts too, I suggest, are responding to these challenges, making similar moves on their own thinking planes and in their discourse-specific languages.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, the planet serves, increasingly and with historically unrivaled force, as a level, matrix, or condition of possibility for a \textit{forma mentis} whose purview covers the conceptual (philosophical), the referential (scientific), as well as the aesthetic (imaginative).

This is how the planet is turning to us to \textit{concern} us all, thinkers and artists, specialists and laypersons, irrespective of where and what we are, to sponsor novel forms of world writing and reading, of imagining, figuring, and figuring out the world-as-world. Otherwise put, this concern works both ways. We are concerned, “looked at” by the planet as it is turning to us so we can see the earth’s face, but this turn invites ours; we ourselves have to turn to the planet. The earth has entered the picture as planet and, in the geocultural dimension of planetarity, shows its face to us. This face is meaningful, but it will not be \textit{readable}—it will remain fairly meaningless for us—unless we too face it. Because the turn of the planet subsumes thought itself, it calls for an intellectual turn to the planet; the reciprocity of planetarization and thought—of thinking on the planet and of thinking of the planet as planet—presupposes apposite “concerns,” a certain planetary consideration on \textit{our} part. This is as much as saying that, besides the world cast variously identified as multitude (Antonio Negri), Crowd (Alain Badiou), “global soul” (Pico Iyer), cosmopolitan (jet-setting or not), and, if somewhat disconcertingly, “nowhere man” (Iyer, Alexandar Hemon), the planet affords itself a receptive consciousness.\textsuperscript{17} In turning to the planetary spectacle of meaning, this consciousness takes in the world homologically, availing itself of a methodology germane to its planetary object, moment, and environment. In that, this methodology is a \textit{geomethodology}. In it, objective and subjective concerns, context and text dovetail. Its major constitutive steps and tightly interrelated thrusts are as follows:

The first is principally topological. As such, it latches onto planetarization as spatialization of the world and of aesthetic routines alike.

The second is, in the main, structural or relational. It homes in on a segment, locus, or facet of one or more artworks to tease out—to “decompress” analytically—their \textit{planetary inscription}, namely, the “here”—“there,” “we”—“they,” “part”—“whole” relatedness structure folded into them. This “folding,” I submit, is the common denominator of emerging planetary culture. Otherwise, “planetary culture” is far more befitting because there is no one-size-fits-all folding or compressing mechanism but only folding or compressing codes, which differ a great deal from one cultural site, practice, or agent to another. In decoding cultures, in showing how “here” is \textit{co-imagined}—pictured inside, alongside, and more broadly “with” “there,” and vice versa—\textit{geomethodology} proceeds as a reverse engineering of sorts,
characteristically activating a reading-with or a with-reading: it reads these works and their subsequent topo-cultural “partialities” with the planetary “whole.”

The third is predominantly ethical. Building on the previous two, it reaches beyond the descriptive by retooling the “with” as a twofold critical-deontological “for”: geomethodology is not only geared toward tracing symptoms of planetarity “in territory,” in this film or that novel; it also reads for the planet, on its behalf. This is where planetary interpretation and planetary stewardship become one and also where, at its most exhortative, my intervention comes closest to the rhetorical vivacity of a manifesto.

Below, I walk us through these three geomethodological components in this order.

The Space of Method

This methodology is a geomethodology first and foremost insofar as the earth’s planetary becoming—the turn of the planet—is spatial. As Lefebvre, David Harvey, and others have noticed, one way or the other, planetarization works through, brings about, and, once more, “appears” as a trans-territorialization—dislocation, reallocation, and novel aggregation—of space and its meanings on earth. Felt by the planet, carved into the earth’s body in the form of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century boundaries, passageways, itineraries, and geopolitical units of exchange, discourse, communality, and contestation, this turn cannot be thought of independently from the planet’s geophysical shifts even though its logistics remain largely anthropological. Seemingly a natural category, a given (to us, humans), space has been, in reality, as Lefebvre would also insist, subject to well-defined production technologies. Occurring in and through human history, the planet’s turn is thus inseparable from our spatial footprint on earth.

As Westphal maintains in *Le monde plausible*, the historical scene of this turn is postmodernity or, in my estimation, whatever postmodernity we have left—or, better still, whatever post-postmodernity may have arisen—after the Cold War. If the “spatial imagination”—across the humanities as well as across the world “out there”—is older than postmodernism, the “spatial turn” has undeniably and dramatically picked up speed during the Cold War’s last years to culminate, inside the academy, with a “hyperspatialization” of postmodern theory through interventions by topo-theorists, ecocritics, and literary cartographers such as Michel Foucault, Harvey, Marc Augé, Edward W. Soja, Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise, Franco Moretti, and Brian Jarvis, and, outside, with a planetary spatialization of the postmodern paradigm itself. Postmodernism’s planetarization was a Pyrrhic victory: the postmodern went places only to self-displace and eventually dissipate through dissemination, creolization, and failure after failure to meet non-Western
exigencies. Noteworthy here is what made it possible—what helped postmodernism travel—in the first place: its “place fixation” itself (if you indulge the pun) or perhaps the opposite, that is, postmodernism’s bottomless appetite for unfixing and loosening, for setting things adrift and for deferral, the transgressive, intertextually digressive *furor topologicus* that bows to neither center nor inside because the marginal and the outside, along with the “outside the text” (*bors-texte*), have lost their contours on its maps. In this light, postmodernism’s anti-logocentrism is a “lococentrism”; a pleonastic yet insatiable “fixation” on *locus* makes it, indeed, twice *loco*. But the postmodern’s re-centering around space rests on a core-periphery dialectic redolent of Pascal’s *Pensées*, where the stable, “rooted” center-circumference dichotomy gives way to multiple, ubiquitous, shifty, and “rhizomic” spatialities. This plural and fluid topology has been—was, some might rejoin—postmodern, terminally postmodern perhaps, before becoming not only a theoretical-aesthetic but also a geocultural “dominant” of planetarity. In response to this topology, authors from Don DeLillo, Andrei Codrescu, Paul Auster, Joseph O’Neill, Iyer, Orhan Pamuk, Mircea Cărtărescu, Michel Houellebecq, and Teju Cole to David Hollinger, Thomas L. Friedman, Jean-Luc Nancy, Masao Miyoshi, Michael Hardt, and Negri—all fiction writers, critics, and philosophers representative of both paradigms or, more accurately, of the *transition* from one to another—dwell on the “disappearance of the outside” and of those “hiding” places where territory-bounded and culturally “cloistered” individuals and groups struggle to opt out of one of our time’s sea change scenarios.

Imperfectly accommodated by the spatial-discursive model of postmodernism, new kinds of painting, moviemaking, writing, reading, and thinking are made possible, and the world they conjure up becomes intellectually, ethically, and aesthetically “plausible” once the planetary turn has been completed or, more realistically for now, has reached a point of no return. As I have expounded in my book on cosmodernism, in carrying us past this moment the contemporary is taking us beyond the postmodern, for it weaves the present and those present in it into a chronotopically novel fabric. Marking the fast-evolving structure of presentness temporally, this quasi-ecumenical *fuite en avant, this rush forward of the world itself*, shrinks the playground of “now” also known as contemporaneity down to a more modest interval: the time lapsed since the end of the Cold War. Spatially, one registers, at the same time, a compensatorily amplifying and juxtaposing “positional” pathos that unpacks the historically discontinuous category of “here” and the attendant notion of self so as to set forth the effective presence “in our midst,” in the immediate proximity, or in the mediate, at-distance propinquity of those once upon a time “out there,” not “from around here,” or not like “us.” My point is not simply that Harvey’s “time-space compression” model covers just a slice of a more complex world reality subject to a range of simultaneous, spatiotemporal contractions and expansions, but that
what sets our epoch apart is a radical geosocialization of places and of place generally. Even though its intensity and cultural markers shift from one place to another, this process obtains on a scale as conspicuous as it is planetary. In this respect, as a “trend,” the cosmodern is to the United States and most Euro-Atlantic cultures what the planetary is to the entire world, including the late postcolonial. Put differently, the Western cosmodernization of the postmodern represents a world-fractal phenomenon, is part and parcel of a development or turn of planetary proportions. This turn comes down to a planetarization of world places.

Granted, there are exceptions to this phenomenon. But because what I want to point up is the worldwide, documentably topocultural dominant, it is worth stressing that this planetarization or planetary spatialization stands out as a defining reality of the third millennium. What our hyperconnected world has been “specializing” in, and also what distinguishes it, is worldly spatialization itself, which bears on how we are in this world, what we do in it, and what we make of it. A perennial attribute of Heidegger’s Da-sein, being-in-the-world, with others, has been heightened by the accelerated “de-distancing” of the world’s places, people, and cultural practices. Thus, as previously disconnected or loosely connected regions have brought closer together modernity’s world en miettes, the spatiality (Räumlichkeit) tied into Being ab origine has now become planetary spatiality. Already instituted—rendered present—by the Heideggerian Welt, presence sets itself off and is legible in planetary co-presence.

**Getting the Picture: Rationality and Relationality**

Spatialization works by way of an ample repertoire of cultural sites, vectors, and materials; planetary spatialization operates, via the same arenas and socio-aesthetic rites, planetarily. The ever-expanding contiguity and co-articulation on a planetary scale of formerly stand-alone—or so imagined—agents, discourses, and settings are hallmarks of our worlding world. But, to reemphasize, what “worlds” (weltet, in Heidegger) this world, and what “welds” its “independent” statements and clauses into a worldly syntax, is a world picture (Weltbild) that must be grasped both objectively (empirically) and subjectively (cognitively). Reflective of the world’s “worlded” form or “built,” this Weltbild facilitates reflection on this world, helps us “get the picture” of the world. It is in this multiple sense that the planet has entered the picture: topologically, as spatial extension of the human; historically, as a certain point in time when the planetary picture comes about—the time of the planet or the Heideggerian “age of the world picture”; and “spatiologically,” in Lefebvre’s terminology, or, in mine, geo-methodologically—as a planetarily minded approach in the humanities and beyond.
Critical of the interpretive arsenal and sociocultural aggregation model of “methodological nationalism,” this approach cuts across traditionally territorialized—territorially bounded or pictured—societies. Its algorithm works out readings through strategies of semiotic spatialization, namely, through telescoping, meaning-making associations that, besides the unavoidable if cautious at-distance ratiocinations, also venture, as I will momentarily, semantically microscopic decompressions—self-distancing interpretations—of local and proximal spaces and of their aesthetic renditions. Not completely unwarranted, the Heideggerian qualms about our attempts to reterritorialize our purchases on particular places and occurrences therein by bridging the distances and divides between them and otherwise trans-territorializing their locations and significations do not capture our present historical circumstances. What Heidegger did not factor in is a crucial mutation distance as concept and world spatial habitus has undergone over the last half a century: due to the planetary spatialization of places, distance itself has been so thoroughly displaced and placed, territorialized, inside places, territories, and cultural microdomains that dwelling on distance, on this kind of structural or structure-embedded distance, no longer means throwing your lot with globalist-totalist ideologies. To the contrary—and on this ground—“distant” reading can play out as close reading, “thick description” of spatial and aesthetic distance-laden sites. In “The Age of the World Picture” and elsewhere, the German philosopher is taken aback by the anthropocentric arrogance behind wide-sweeping, culturally-politically coopting, and technologically assisted “calculations” about remote objects, their positions, meanings, and our physical-intellectual access to them. No doubt, thinks Heidegger, there is something to be said about the “gigantism” (“Americanist” or not) of our “distant” topo-interpretive élans. But, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others have proposed, the planet and the reading model based on it may override the “globe” and the globalist claims that assimilate the far-flung and its others into the selfsameness makeup of the world’s political and cultural centers. Where globality rationalizes to shrink the earth’s topo-epistemological interspaces by a “top-heavy” comparison that “impos[es] the same system of exchange everywhere,” planetarity relationalizes to link up and read side by side, as well the worldly insides of, non-interchangeable entities and thus allow for the Heideggerian “incalculable,” the aesthetically immeasurable, and the culturally asymmetrical. Typically geomethodological, this relational—correlational and intrarelational—move overcomes the local-global “theoretical stalemate”—and Spivak’s North-South antinomy no less—by crossing the gap of difference without annulling it; much like the planetarity that makes it both “necessary” and “impossible,” the move delineates an analytical back and forth between either spatially distinct, though connectable, meaning units (works, genres, authors, movements) or from one meaning level to another within the same unit or cluster of adjacent, partially overlapping, or wholly coextensive units.
Not infrequently, critics who have taken the former road have assumed that those units are not only external to each other but also organized into a self-evident hierarchy of space (“centers” vs. “margins”), culture (“origins”/“originals”/“sources” vs. “imitations”/“replicas”/“echoes”), and power (“capitals”/“metropolises” vs. “provinces”/“colonies”). Rearing its head even in a more democratically run world republic of letters such as Pascale Casanova’s, this geoaesthetic pecking order antedates the planetary turn. With a long disciplinary history behind it, the modus operandi underpinning it has yielded notoriously mixed results especially within the “influence studies” variety of comparative literature. Eminently driven by a “macro” kind of logic—in fact, excessively “macrological” at times—it risks shortchanging the micro; wielded from afar or above, and habitually from unacknowledged hubs and heights of political and cultural capital, this panoramic view of the faraway and the atypical provides for a “distant reading” where distance is not only a “condition of knowledge” but also its stumbling block. If the cavalier dismissal of “close reading” is license for playing fast and loose with the idiomatic richness of the infinitesimal, then whatever planetary picture the “distant” critical procedure paints may not differ significantly from the “totalistic” brushstrokes of the globalist model.

The Telescopic, the Microscopic, and the Planetary

More picturesque, planetarily speaking, is the latter road. Less traveled and more recently cut, it is better marked not only with the usual road signs but also with the planet’s lush and variegated ontology—w ith meaningful life. What with its high speed, uniformly designed ramps, exits, rest areas, express tollgates, and lookout points over distant if awe-inspiring scenery, the other road is an autobahn. The critical traffic it fosters remains geared toward covering the distance physically rather than uncovering the geocultural minutia of the in-between locales. The highway is just that, a high road to—at times even a bypass around—the problematica of the planetary trivia, the horizontal counterpart of a telescopic exclusively and unambiguously sold on the ideology of tēle (“at distance,” in Ancient Greek). No less necessary, it must be treaded carefully, as thinkers from Heidegger to Deleuze and Guattari to Paul Virilio counsel. At the very least, planetary critics must supplement it with the long-winded detour whose critical microscopy may help us better descry the planet’s face—the roar of the bigger world—in the wrinkles of the apparently isolated, in the cultural grimaces, historical modes, and stylistic mood of unambitious, “cosmically” shy, or politically disenfranchised topographies. Thus, not only does this critical itinerary prove analytically safer sometimes—for we risk missing less as we stop by, look out the window, or take pictures—but it also is more emphatically ethical because it encourages us to “relate” to those we meet along it. To continue in the same Frostian
vein, this road can literally make all the difference. Here, the journey pulls the world together and draws out spatially and intellectually the planet's togetherness by zooming in on the different, the off-the-beaten path, and the small. The distance is neither absent nor purely figurative. Its geographical dimension is still in play. But this expanse has been encoded discursively as the interstice between the work’s outer and deeper layers, and then critically, as the scopic-interpretive gap between a first and second glance, between what we have in sight as we turn to look and as our gaze caresses the work’s surface, and what comes into clearer focus as we complete our turn and inspect deeper, that is, the kind of planetary picture we might be able to come away with as we develop, quasi-photographically, the cultural negative of the novel or painting in question.

The highway, the astronaut, the satellite, the GPS, and their maps and vistas are elevated both attitudinally and altitudinally. In their more mechanical applications, they betray a twofold hauteur of standpoint, a perspectival loftiness of geopositioning and topography as well as of judgment. Quite high on their macro agenda is the barely disguised ambition to corral the infinite into various distant readings, measurements, and conjectures, whereas the back road is, less assumingly, a portal to the infinitesimal. A dromological version of the microscope, this route runs more emphatically—to paraphrase Gregory Bateson—through a geography of the mind before trekking across the planet’s terraqueous body. In other words, it is predicated on a geoesthetic order, on a homological, world and artwork model alike in which the Stoic, macro universe of ever-expanding circles of belonging of the Stoic, macro universe slide into one another and, together, into the particular, into the “located” work, and into the micro as their generic category.

It is in this sense that the micro telescopes—shrinks down to size to compress and encapsulate—the macro, which makes the opposition far less cut-and-dried. For, in this sense too, the microscope is an epistemological telescope, a sense-making machine. Harnessing its magnifying capabilities, the microscopic reading technique subsequently decompresses meaning, spreads out the world’s bigger canvas folded inside the little picture, holds up to view the whole in the fragment, the planetary curled around or nestling inside the omphalós of the indigenous, the dialectal, and the place-bound. The idea behind this compression-cum-decompression reading optics is not to abolish or transcend distance in order to annex the destination. As noted earlier, the classical telescope—a variety of the hegemonic, rationally ordering “Enlightenment eye”—skips over places to cover, in hopes of canceling out, great distances. Instead, the microscopic connects vastly separated cultural dots by affirming and “working through” place after place, beginning with that starting point into which worlds seem to have collapsed. In tarrying with it diligently—in tracking the cultural specimen’s Brownian motion closely—the critical microscope pursues the planetary spatialization of the geocultural sample under scrutiny, thus setting forth the “inherently
relational” constitution of that place or locus as intersectional communality or trans-communitarian locus communis. An aesthetic site where “here” and “ours” are spatialized into “distant kinship” with “there” and “theirs,” this place and its cultural haecceity—this individual place or aesthetic locus and their this-ness—are no longer opposed to planetarity but apposite to it, a scaled-down with-world. Characteristically, this site cites (“telescopes”) the planet spatially and intertextually, “sites” (situates) and quotes—with one word, embodies—worldly relationality in ways that may or may not be right away noticeable. Watermarked with the planet’s figure, this “sitational,” textual-spatial formation lends itself, accordingly, to a reading with this figure, across the panoply of local figurations serving as the figure’s cypher and vehicle. This reading is, to invoke Westphal again, a lecture du monde in the strong sense of the world as worlded or relational mundus, in short, a with-reading poised to face and shed light on the “with-ness” makeup of this world. To that effect, planetary reading turns to the latter’s relational structure—to the planet’s “mondiality”—microscopically, scanning the micro for signs of the macro.

If the close reading handed down to us by the New Critics all too often purports to “resolve” the contradictory by simplifying the complex, planetary close (or micro)reading seeks to complicate the illusorily simple. More to the point, this kind of interpretation does the planet’s bidding epistemologically—and thus instantiates what Axelos pinpointed as the planet’s “thought-becoming”—by spotting the worldly multiplicity of place, time, and discourse in the deceptively monistic, the distant relatives, the exogenous, and the incoherent genealogies placed under erasure by institutionalized culture and officially endorsed by the nation-state’s endogenous fantasies. In this form, culture is a cover-up operation. Therefore, simulation is hardly the issue here, Jean Baudrillard’s variously rehearsed case notwithstanding; to the contrary, dissimulation is the problem. “Streamlined” culture does not so much simulate as it dissimulates, conceals, disregards, or short-shifts the many that have gone into the cobbling together of the one, of the same, of the nation, and the like. Countercultural because cross-cultural, reading with the planet exposes, first, the compilation itself, the outsourcing of nativist mythologies, and the heteroclite underbelly of the putatively all-of-a-piece, and second, the worldliness of the bricolage. Whistleblowers of sorts, planetary critics leak culturally classified information about the recycled material’s planetary provenance or, conversely, about the worldly affiliation of presumably discrete traditions and autonomous identities by laying bare the worldly relationality the fast-expanding planetary imaginary has threaded into descriptions of allegedly self-subsistent singularities. What these critics enact, then, is a protocol of perusal driven by a fractal logic. They look, that is, for the totum in parte, contemplate the “all”’s face in filigree, in that which seems to be facing no one else but itself. Does this mean that they rely too much on a reading against the grain? Not quite. In practice, their
reading is also one with the grain. What is more, this reading often fleshes out the insights of worldliness turning up in U.S. and other literatures with symptomatically increased frequency since the late 1980s. Post–Cold War narrative stages so insistently the retraining of the gaze on the planetary all carved into the apparently second-fiddle, minuscule, cloistral, ingrown, and otherwise unworldly that some of the most emblematic fictions of our time can be read as geomethodological blueprints.

**Intimations of Cosmallyogy**

Mircea Cărtărescu’s *oeuvre* is a case in point. If Hungarian author George Konrád confesses in his 1984 book *Antipolitics* that “the world is one; and it is more interesting than Budapest,” the Romanian writer feels, around the same time and a few hundred miles east of Konrád’s Budapest, the pull of worldly oneness *in situ*: not only does this oneness exist, but it can be *lived out* locally, in and as his hometown. “I truly love my world, the world of Bucharest,” he declares elsewhere, “yet I am fully aware that Bucharest is concomitantly all, the Aleph.” To get a grip on the many-sided Borgesian allusion, it is important to remember that, at the time, the regime was seeking to expunge Romania’s capital from the world’s cultural and political script and turn it, along with the rest of the country, into what the dissidents were calling “internal exile.” Pushing back against this agenda, the “cultural resistance” movement (*rezistenţa prin cultură*) of the Romanian 1980s marked one of the most cosmopolitan periods in East European history.

In the vanguard of this struggle, Cărtărescu fights off the twin incarceration of his beloved city and of himself in it by opening it out onto what his 1985 poetry volume calls the “All” (*Totul*). Drawing from this and other earlier works, his 1993 novel *Nostalgia* sketches an astoundingly holistic vision of planetarity. From a site of and argument for worldly belonging. In Cărtărescu’s work, the city and its people reclaim their seat in the bigger world. They are, we gather, part and parcel of this world; they spend their lives in its nurturing embrace, although not out in the open, for politics and policies of cultural lockdown have all but deterritorialized the greater outside—or, more exactly, have *underterritorialized* it. But, from beneath the defaced surface of Ceauşescu’s “golden-age” Bucharest, the writer summons strange faces and the very face of worldly strangeness: the face of the planet, the figure of that incoherent and raucous oneness, of the planetary being-with or worldly Mitsein fractured by the Berlin Wall, by the country’s heavily militarized borders, and more generally by the disjunctive geopolitics of the Cold War. From within the maze of concrete housing projects, the author conjures up cosmic panoramas by bridging...
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physical and metaphysical gaps. In dialogue with E. T. A. Hoffmann, Franz Kafka, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, and other modern and postmodern masters of the fantastic, the absurd, and magical realism, Cărtărescu unearths a maimed metropolis whose heart throbs in the world’s wider body and whose idiosyncratic mix of squalor and “Paris of the Balkans” charm he flips over to display unsuspected depths and gateways into the hidden, the elsewhere, and the otherwise—into the world’s larger assemblage. Where the Western mindset relegates his city to an alien geography overrun by strays and ruled by vampiric dictators razing entire neighborhoods to make room for their sepulchral headquarters, Cărtărescu unfolds a borderless dreamland. The oneiric politics of Nostalgia’s urban imaginary was lost on Cărtărescu’s readers neither when the book first came out in spring 1989, under the title Visul (The Dream) and butchered by censorship, nor a few years later, when it was reissued in unabridged form. Its staggeringly world-relational toposophy went head-on against officially upheld “tradition,” an exceptionalist-solipsistic notion redolent of early twentieth-century, agrarian-Orthodox and nationalist-chauvinist doctrines, on which the Communist Party was falling back in the late 1980s to ward off perestroika. The novel symbolically liberates the city’s body politic by linking it with other urban bodies and bodies of work, with other places, topoi, styles, texts, and contexts. An other to the city and its officially sanctioned corporeality thus coalesces beyond the closed-off self, community, and place, an other into whose capacious agglomerating texture Nostalgia’s main first-person narrator weaves himself and his kin.

The weaving spider is, in fact, Cărtărescu’s signature mise en abyme. A motif in the story, it also designates, metafictionally, the novel’s multiply intertextual fabric and, inside it, the web of Kabbalah-like copulas between stages and layers of existence where the individual brain is plugged into other brains and their projections into other worlds and the worlds behind those, ad infinitum. As in one of the novel’s sections, the narrating writer-in-the-novel plays the spider sliding up and down the threads of various plot lines. He gets in and out of the minds of his dramatis personae, transforming into his characters while telling us about their own changes into others. At the same time, he shows how the phylogeny of these metamorphoses (another Cărtărescu trademark) rehearses cosmic ontogeny by recapping a whole cosmology—an entire cosmology. Indeed, what he ultimately puts up is a planetary spectacle of the All and of those without whom this whole’s wholeness would fall short, a performance of self and—and as necessarily with—others (álloi in Ancient Greek).44

People’s bodies; Bucharest’s crumbling body; the nation’s hyperterritorialized bulk; and the world’s geocultural corpus: these are Nostalgia’s concentric circles, the network-mundus. Whatever takes place in this planetary web must take place first topologically and, we will see before long, ethically, to
wit, must take its place from another place and place-giver “not here.” For, explains Giorgio Agamben, no matter where it happens, what ontological seat in the planetary amphitheater gets assigned to it, this place-taking occurs as one “eases” into a place, into a residential “easement” that is both one’s own lawfully and “always-already” an adjacency within the private property in which the proprietorial and the exclusive are consequently premised on another’s presence, on the shared, and the communal right-of-way. Owners and the finite space where their ownership is exercised are founded, as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida press home ever so often, on hospitality, its guests (others), and the luminous infinity bathing the face-to-face of hosting. Innately ek-static, beings thus depend on—rest on and have “always-already” internalized—a literally vital outside. Their realm and modality is a horizontally as well as vertically spatialized relation. A priorily adjacent, traversed by visible and invisible “easements,” here-ness only apparently takes hold just “here,” on one level of existence.\(^4\) What happens on one level unfolds or can unfold Kabbalistically on the rest as a drama of All-ness, of quasi-mystical partaking of the All. Everything—this very All—is a matter of scale, scope, and perspective. Matter itself is no exception because what defines it is extension and “situation” in a space where all locations communicate and so make up a continuum. How and what things are hinges on where they are, but they can mutate abruptly because their places are (or are not) theirs insofar as these are spliced together or border on other places across, near, inside, beneath, or above them.

Ontology is topology, then; position, an inherently relational spatial coordinate, ultimately turns into an ontological category while ontology too becomes, as Soja would say, spatialized.\(^4\) Therefore, one can shuttle back and forth between different levels of life. One can “overcome” ontological difference, run the whole gamut of being and thus be in “other” ways and worlds topologically: here, one changes by simply changing one’s place, status, or classification. By the same token, this ontology is political. Nostalgia’s planetary imagination marshals beings polemically by reshuffling the segregationist-insular biogeography of Cold War Romania along the lines of flight of a two-pronged onto-spatial rhetoric. On one side, this rhetoric is metonymic; it sets people and objects next to people and objects in whose vicinity they have neither been nor are supposed to be. On the other side, it is synecdochic. Treating individuals and locales as subsets of greater units stretching above and athwart the Party-State’s immediate, totalitarian totality and ossified taxonomies, this pars pro toto planetary figuration only reformulates, from the vantage point of the part, the totum in parte of fractal reading. Thus, either way, Cărtărescu’s characters act out a drama of being—they are—as they are in relation to others, thence de-terminated, at the same time bounded and freed by the proximity to others and their modes of being. Propinquity, the terminus that both limits and assigns the self a contiguous meaning, also liberates it, brings it forth and across. Political
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through and through, topological and cultural relatedness is thus *Nostalgia’s modus essendi*. Bucharest’s “little context” reflects the shape of bigger places and units or feeds into them without warning. Unlike the more jejune constructions of “local” and “global,” the micro and macro worlds are similarly built but neither repetitious nor opposed. In broader bodies, venues, and sequences, the self does not run into versions of itself but into others. An ontological alloy—made of *álloi*—the All’s structure is non-allergic, cosmologic. This constitution features others and calls upon the self to acknowledge them both outside and inside itself. Further, if the All is indeed the Alpha and Omega of “little” existential forms and, further, if these forms mirror the whole’s own form, then they are its microcosm; further still, because the levels of this ontology interface and overlap, the microcosm is not only isoform and juxtaposed to the macrocosm but also a portal to it, an *Aleph*.

“Mondializing” the City: Blueprints and Constellations

In calling the small, the finite, the shut-in, the incarcerated, the city and its bodies *Alephs*, the Romanian writer also calls out to Borges, interpellates and interpolates his “*Aleph*.” Another homology comes into play here via the Argentine author’s holistic (“*Allistic*”) model of intertextuality: the Babel Library. In it, literature and place are limitless in number and extent and so coextensive, one. Therefore, the universal library and the universe overlap too. In “The Library of Babel,” “*The Book of Sand*,” “The Total Library,” and other Borgesian *fictiones*, the library, the book, and the textual show off the universe qualitatively, best illustrate its fabric, its “textile” makeup. Conversely, they also hint that, if the cosmos is like a book, all books are infinite. That means that every book holds the rest of the holdings, is an *Aleph*, “one of the points in space that contains all points.” What defines “bookness” is infinitude as well as inter-textuality, cosmic boundlessness and inside boundlessness. Underlying the latter is, fundamentally, otherness, the others and their books’ presence in a particular book. This book, which *Nostalgia* emulates, does not only “put up” with a “parasitic” other to it within itself; the book simply cannot have a self, an identity, cannot be “original,” in short, cannot be what it is without that “alien” presence inside it, without having its roots, its origin, somewhere else, in another text. It follows that the Aleph is not just unlimited and intertextual—and intertextual because unlimited, transgressive, liable to cross over to the other side time and time again—but also “alterial,” a repository of alterity. It is being that is while also being what it is not, its other, much like the Aleph includes its “counterpart,” the Zahir, and everything else between the A (Alpha) and Z (Omega) of existential, cultural, and political “alternatives.”

Borges’s “*Aleph*” is not only the novel’s primary intertextual ingredient but also the Kabbalistic-cosmological trope and cultural stratagem through
which Cărtărescu reveals his cosmology as cosmology and Bucharest as an Aleph, a site of astonishing otherness and size locked inside the nation-state’s paranoically policed borders.49 A carceral space, the Romanian capital is also “une ville devenue monde,”50 a city made into world—“mondialized”—by the writer’s planetary imaginary. Describing Los Angeles as the epitomizing world-city and utmost sample of postmodern urban geography, Soja notices that the metropolis is a cosmopolis because it “reproduces in situ the customary colours and confrontations of a hundred different homelands.” A microcosm of the illimitable and itself without limit, bursting with “fulsome” heterogeneity, Soja’s LA is, in his own formulation, a Borgesian “LA-leph,” at once “everywhere” and “the only place on earth where all places are.” And they are there because, as the critic implies apropos, again, of Borges, the Aleph is a “radically open,” “all-inclusive simultaneity” sheltering a whole panoply of otherness.51 This makes the Californian Aleph so mind-bogglingly “global” that it defies critical survey.52 Instead, Cărtărescu’s Aleph stimulates and entices, leading on and out of the all-too-limited. Not the Balkans’ Paris any more, Bucharest has yet to become their LA. The stakes of its planetary projections are different. If in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 Oedipa Maas follows real roads, signs, and maps to famously “project a world,”53 in Cărtărescu the geoiagramic blueprint of Bucharest is jarringly at odds with the plans drawn by the city’s rulers. De facto, their world picture does not include Bucharest, and, truth be told, there is no world picture to speak of either. Not so in Nostalgia’s camera obscura. Here, a world picture slowly forms, one in which Bucharest registers.

More memorable yet is the other image, which the writer develops “microscopically” from the city’s negative: the world’s own face across and amidst the faces, facets, and petals on Bucharest’s wet, black bough. But this is not just the by now banal view from above. Nor is it the view from nowhere, as critics of “universalist” cosmopolitanism might quip. A view from within, inside, or underneath a temporally and spatially anchored locale, this is a “consideration” of place that takes in and honors this place as “situated” or placed planetarity, an effort to account for the world relationality intrinsic to place and subsequently to do away with the pseudo-disjunctions of place and planet, micro and macro, and so forth. For, as Tariq Jazeel echoes Doreen Massey, “place is not opposed to the planet. It is instead an ongoing assemblage, constellation, and agonistic coming together of narratives and trajectories that are in themselves insufficiently conceptualized as either local or global.” Thus, “the spatialization of place, in this sense, provides the sphere of the possibility of existence of multiplicity. . . . The negotiation of difference in place is always a process of, and invitation to, reconstellate the ‘we,’ and place’s geographical challenge thought this way is precisely that it is never closeable.”54 To “reconstellate” this “we”—the spatialized communality of the polis—the critic must look not only around and over the nation-state’s fences, horizontally, but, as Robert T. Tally Jr. acknowledges
in his *Planetary Turn* essay, also over the horizon, up, where the constellations turn and the earth itself turns into Earth by trading its topographical surfaciality for geosemiotic voluminosity. A triangulation of place in the *micro mode* susceptible to withstand parochial, clannish, and authoritarian attempts at cordonning off cultural sites, the critical maneuver likely to redraw, à la David Hollinger, the Theophrastian circle of “we” for the twenty-first century actually depends on macro (“Apollonian”) vistas and their “mondial” mental pictures. To be more exact, this dependence is an interdependence. For the macro itself collapses, Aleph-like, into the micro, but, upon geomethodological “decompression,” it becomes readable in the culture’s “small print” as much as the Stoics’ innermost circles of selfhood and family present themselves as ripple or butterfly effect—outer circles—of far-off, incongruous, and “eccentric” “we”-constellations.

**Snowflakes: The Imagination as Geopositioning Technology**

Amplifying exponentially across the post–Cold War novel, the thematization of the dialectic of micro and macro world pictures becomes more transparently political in Cărtărescu’s later work (*Orbitor* [Blinding]), but also in DeLillo (*Underworld*, *Cosmopolis*, *Falling Man*, and *Point Omega*), Chang-rae Lee (*Native Speaker*, *A Gesture Life*, *Aloft*, and *The Surrendered*), Cole (*Open City*), Gish Jen (*World and Town*), Jonathan Safran Foer (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*), Nicole Krauss (*The History of Love*), Hemon (*Nowhere Man*), Gary Shteyngart (*The Russian Debutante’s Handbook* and *Absurdistan*), Bharati Mukherjee (*The Holder of the World*, *Desirable Daughters*, and *Miss New India*), Jhumpa Lahiri (*Namesake*), Colum McCann (*Let the Great World Spin*), O’Neill (*Netherland*), Ondaahtje (*The English Patient*), Houellebecq (*Les particules élémentaires* [The Elementary Particles], *Plateforme* [Platform], *La possibilité d’une île* [The Possibility of an Island], and *La carte et le territoire* [The Map and the Territory]), Alexandru Mușina (*Nepotul lui Dracula* [Dracula’s Nephew]), Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, and *NW*), Ian McEwan (*Saturday*), Dubravka Ugrešić (*The Ministry of Pain*), Christos Tsiolkas (*Dead Europe*), Brian Chickwawa (*Harare North*), and Orhan Pamuk (*Kar [Snow]*), to list only a few of the Romanian writer’s kindred spirits.

In Pamuk’s 2002 novel, for example, contemporary Istanbul, a mere three hundred miles south of Cărtărescu’s Bucharest, then, farther away, eastern Anatolia’s town of Kars, and entire Turkey with them claim “accessions” to wider geopolitical aggregates such as EU and are simultaneously reclaimed by forces of religious, regional, and separatist entrenchment dead set on rescinding Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s secularist legacy. Historically between a rock and a hard place, Pamuk’s country finds itself trapped between incompatible options: the greater world of NATO (since 1951) and Europe (an increasingly
conflicted aspiration), for which the Young Turks’ modernity-bent reformism had paved the way, and, pulling in the opposite direction, Iran-backed Islamists and, yet in another, radical Kurdish autonomists (PKK). Turkey’s predicament, Pamuk hints, lies in what might be called the extraneous fallacy: the assumption that, first, such options, positions, affiliations, and the cultural-religious models derived from or attributed to them are indomitably external to each other, following as they allegedly do distinct trajectories in space and time; and second, that they are mutually exclusive as a matter of course. Nowhere is this antinomic worldview more ingeniously refuted than in the “telescop ing” episode where Ka, the protagonist, tells us about “All Humanity and the Stars,” the “constellating” poem he composes in reaction to his companion’s comment that “the history of the small city [of Kars] has become as one with the history of the world.”56 “In the notes he made afterward,” we learn, “Ka described [the poem’s] subject”

as the sadness of a city forgotten by the outside world and banished from history; the first lines followed a sequence recalling the opening scenes of the Hollywood films he had so loved as a child. As the titles rolled past, there was a faraway image of the earth turning slowly; as the camera came in closer and closer, the sphere grew and grew, until suddenly all you could see was one country, and of course—just as in the imaginary films Ka had been watching in his head since childhood—this country was Turkey; now the blue waters of the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus and the Black Sea and the Nişantaş of Ka’s childhood, with the traffic policeman on Teşvikiye Avenue, the street of Niğar [sic] the poetess, and trees and rooftops (how lovely they looked from above!); then came a slow pan across the laundry hanging on the line, the billboard advertising Tamek canned goods, the rusty gutters and the pitch-covered sidewalks, before the pause at Ka’s bedroom window. Then a long tracking shot through the window of rooms packed with books, dusty furniture, and carpets, to Ka at a desk facing the other window; panning over his shoulder, the camera revealed a piece of paper on the desk and, following the fountain pen, came finally to rest on the last letters of the message he was writing, thus inviting us to read:

ADDRESS ON THE DAY OF MY ENTRANCE INTO THE HISTORY OF POETRY: POET KA,
16/8 NIĞAR THE POETESS STREET,
Nişantaş, İstanbul, Turkey

As the narrator adds in a reference to the snowflake-shaped cosmic diagram he comes across in one of Ka’s notebooks, “discerning readers will already have guessed” that Ka’s address “is located on the Reason axis but
positioned to suggest the power of the imagination.” Intersecting Reason and Memory, the Imagination re- or geo(-)positions Ka[r(s)]—the artist, the place, and Turkey with them—planetarily, across worlds, rationalities, and individual-collective memories. By a mix of zoom-in and zoom-out scenes, Pamuk and his authorial alter ego both locate their places in the outside worlds and make out these worlds in the Turkish quotidian, lying inside one another like so many Chinese boxes, overlapping, or crisscrossing each other to weave the Alephic fractality—the “snowflake”—of planetarity. Ka does not have to invent the “little things” that his compatriots live and die for, for these things are already there, in the Universal Studio picture of the turning planet. But he needs to turn to the picture an eye trained for this kind of planetary “detail.” The magnifying-glass workings of the microanalysis also makes possible the macroanalytic flip side, which helps him detect the world’s multitudinal footprints in snowy Kars. It is, arguably, all a matter of scale, of a revisionary scalarity no longer wedded to national-linguistic territoriality but willing to take the risk of another mapping. Both imaginary and real, so vivid in Kars’s Turkish-Kurdish-Iranian-Armenian-Russian-West-European urban potpourri and so subtly reinforced by Pamuk’s Brechtian-Pirandellian intertextual games, this is a complex cartography in which place, affect, faith, gender, ethnicity, and governance “crystalyze” to gel, snowflake-like, into aggregates of culture inside, outside, and astride statal and sectarian turfs.

“Where the print is finest”

One of the more heartening points O’Neill drives home in his 2009 Pen/Faulkner Award-winning Netherland is that this cultural meteorology might bring about social climate change in the post-9/11 United States by way of everyday community practices as leisurely and unassumingly plebeian as sports. For cricket, the Turkish-Irish-American author teaches us through his Dutch protagonist Hans van der Broeck and especially Hans’s West Indian friend, Chuck Ramkissoon, is more than a pastime. It is not in the past either. Its time has not passed. Or, if it has, so has the exceptionalist-autonomist temporality in which American communality has sometimes pictured itself. As a community, Chuck believes, the United States still has to pass the geopolitical and cultural-demographic test of the planetary present. Popular with Americans since the early eighteenth century but gradually elbowed aside by baseball’s modern “hegemony,” the game of cricket is thus more than a trope or fictional ploy. It is a concrete, athletically embodied modality of presentifying or updating an America that, in the September 11, 2001 aftermath, must reconstellate itself as community so as to work through the meanings of not only the World Trade Center tragedy but also of the planetarization without which the traumatic event would remain meaningless. A community driven to the limit by the violently worlding world, the United States cannot afford
not to use its new, liminal position to think through its communal cultural-ethical limits and spatio-political limitations. Cricket, implies Faruk Patel, one of the rumored financial backers of Chuck’s New York Cricket Club project, uniquely brings together liminality, Americanness, and understanding, or, less redundantly, simply brings together. Chuck’s basic idea was to build a team, a field and its facilities, and socialize with teammates, opponents, fans, and the cricketers’ families, in a nutshell, to deploy cricket as a twenty-first-century ritual of American togetherness. There may be, as Faruk opines, “a limit to what Americans understand,” and that “limit” may well be, as he goes on, “cricket” itself. But if that is true, then the game ceases to be trivial. Instead, it takes on a sociocultural and, we shall see, political “consequentiality” beyond the inconsequentially ludic because it opens up the agonistic venue where Americans might recontest practically the meaning of being in the world. Accordingly, in this space, they may not limit themselves to theoretical de- and re-limitations of territory, culture, and identity inside somewhat less rigid boundaries and categories, to mere reconceptualizations of what it means to be in the world; here, they may and in a sense must also “experiment” with worldliness, that is, with being-in-the-world as a community-fostering modality of being.

Hans and others are aware of the “laboratory experiment” underway. But the laboratory, Chuck maintains, is not limited to the cricket field because the latter’s liminal condition necessarily marks and unmarks this terrain as a strict enclosure, ad quem limit or terminus. Thus, the field and surrounding grounds set themselves up as an American microcosm. Or, with another metaphor pressed into service by my geomethodological reading, the laboratory is also a photo lab—better yet, a socio-photo lab. In it, not only “developers” like Chuck but also Americans at large, players, crowds, and the whole body of socii give themselves another chance to learn or relearn how to develop, from the ludic negative of the cricket community, a new picture of the United States and of the world inside and outside the country.

“The bigger you think, the crappier it looks. . . . So this is going to be my motto—think small,” Theo announces in McEwan’s 2005 novel Saturday as the world’s “big things” are encroaching on his private world and concerns. “My motto is, Think fantastic,” Chuck lets Hans know with one of the novel’s frequent nods at The Great Gatsby. As logicians might note, this is a one-way contradiction because Chuck’s plan is not to import, from the outside, worldly “bigness” into cricket-reconstellated American smallness. He just does not envision worldliness as an outside; not an optional, flavor-enhancing additive to the American melting pot, the world is neither external nor supplemental to the United States. He has two goals. The first is to flesh out the big already tightly packed within the small, the history burrowed inside our seemingly ahistorical contemporaneity, the potential future with which the flat present is thus interleaved, the macro within the micro. The second is to help Americans visualize this multilayered structure, picture their
home as, with, and of the world and the world as and deep inside it, in brief, turn to the planet by turning meaningfully, self-analytically and ethically, to each other, their country, and its renewed hospitality. As he tells Hans, if “you ask people to agree to complicated rules and regulations,” the sport might just be the answer because, in spite of its colonial history, it has served and can serve again as a “crash course in democracy. Plus—and this is key—the game forced [players from the warring tribes of Papua New Guinea] to share a field for days with their enemies, forced them to provide hospitality and places to sleep.” “Hans,” he carries on, “that kind of closeness changes the way you think about somebody. No other sport makes this happen.”

When Hans wonders if his friend thinks of Americans as “savages,” Chuck rejects the implication by bolstering not only his “fantastic” vision’s import as a world-communal picture but also the planetary relationality over whose filigree, specifically and deliberately, the world picture is laid palimpsest-like. “I’m saying,” he elaborates, “that people, all people, Americans, whoever, are at their most civilized when they’re playing cricket. What’s the first thing that happens when Pakistan and India make peace? They play a cricket match. Cricket is instructive, Hans. It has a moral angle. I really believe this. Everybody who plays the game benefits from it. So I say, why not Americans?” The question is timely because, as the 9/11 attacks proved to Chuck and others, “Americans cannot really see the world. They think they can, but they can’t. I don’t need to tell you that. Look at the problems we’re having. It’s a mess, and it’s going to get worse. I say, we want to have something in common with Hindus and Muslims? Chuck Ramkissoon is going to make it happen. With the New York Cricket Club, we could start a whole new chapter in U.S. history. Why not? Why not say so if it’s true? Why hold back? I’m going to open our eyes.”

To open our American eyes in order to see and “get” the world picture is thus to “fulfill [our] destiny,” in other words, to re-become the hospitable community for which cricket can provide a model morally urgent, practical, and plausible. This plausibility is to be taken once again in Westphal’s sense and, beyond it, in the sense in which, as Deleuze and Guattari postulate, “the other is a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it and takes shape in a language that gives it a reality.” The community, what it is and can possibly be, in its present or plausible future, shines through the faces of others. The only “white man [he] saw on the cricket fields of New York,” Hans is surrounded by “teammates” who “variously originated from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka,” with “Hindus, Christians, a Sikh, and four Muslims” drawing together “into a circle for prayer” before the match. In this circle of “we,” a new communality becomes readable at long last. “I’ve heard,” Hans confesses, that social scientists like to explain such a scene—a patch of America sprinkled with the foreign-born strangely in play—in terms of the
immigrant quest for subcommunities. How true this is: we’re all far away from Tipperary, and clubbing together mitigates this unfair fact. But surely everyone can also testify to another, less reckonable kind of homesickness, one having to do with unsettlements that cannot be located in spaces of geography or history, and accordingly it’s my belief that the communal, contractual phenomenon of New York cricket is underwritten, there where the print is finest, by the same agglomeration of unspeakable individual longings that underwrites cricket played anywhere—longings concerned with horizons and potentials sighted or hallucinated and in any event lost long ago, tantalisms that touch on the undoing of losses too private and reprehensible to be acknowledged to oneself, let alone to others. I cannot be the first to wonder if what we see, when we see men in white take to a cricket field, is men imagining an environment of justice. (italics added)

The passage draws the fine distinction between immigrant “subcommunities” and communities that could be called planetary—sodalities in which planetarization can be “experienced” and witnessed socially, but also experienced with, observed as if under a microscope. Typical of earlier, postcolonial diasporas, the former cohere around ethnos, more specifically, around effectively or imaginarily separate and competing ētherne, where “competition” tends to be disjunctive and topoculturally exclusionary, further prying the competing bodies apart and spacing them out literally or figuratively across intervals of territory, faith, feeling, belonging, and cultural practice. What matters is ethnos-as-gamesmanship; the communality game is played on a field athletically and socially finite, limited as to what the players might do and mean together. Gathering around one, trans-ethical ethos—the ethos of cricket—the latter group category is cross- or supra-communal, integrative. In its finitude of time, space, skill, and membership, an infinite, because infinitely definable, communality awaits. An agonistic protocol of togetherness, its ludus is multiply ethical, in fact: it relies on cricket’s civic behavior injunction and play-by-the-rules principle; it works as a language conveying “others,” playfully, quasi-ineffable emotional states (“tantalisms”) that, by the same movement, can be either sublated or “mined” for bonding purposes; and, since it is inclusive of winners and losers, hosts and guests, Americans and “foreigners,” main actors and family extras alike, it is also, if not already just, then a template for justice. At premium in this playful zone is ethics-as-sportsmanship; here, the contest is not primarily a face-off but a face-to-face preamble. While the tiny relational community of cricket is not and cannot substitute itself to the world, this world’s face is legible in Chuck’s contractual vision, where the contract’s “print is finest”—where, in making sense of the Van Cortland Park cricket “picture” (“it looks like a Brueghel,” exclaims Hans’s wife), one makes sense of the planet.
Reading for the Planet: Criticism and Stewardship

Face the world’s face. This is what Chuck urges us, if not in so many words. Let us do so. Popping up among the players’ faces, the planet’s Arcimboldian face also shows itself in all its confounding hodgepodge, unflagging shiftiness, and self-contradictory mien around Cărtărescu’s Bucharest, Ugrešić’s Amsterdam, Foer’s New York, Houellebecq’s Paris, and Zadie Smith’s northwest London, as well as in Mușina’s Brașov, Pamuk’s Kars, and Mukherjee’s Gauripur—in the world, its cities, its less glamorous towns, and everywhere in between them; indeed, this face has become a “world and town” staple, as Jen suggests in her 2010 Chinese-Cambodian-New Englander Riverlake saga.

Ubiquitous as this enigmatic profile may be, it is also a fragile one, anguished, unstable, precariously balanced. O’Neill has no illusions about it. His take on things, American and otherwise, is hardly Pollyannish. As we seek and perhaps recognize this face, let us remember that Chuck’s handcuffed body gets dumped in the Gowanus Canal. The inevitable question, then, is whether his vision ends up in the same place. My answer is that, although Hans leaves New York to join his family in the United Kingdom, the reunion with his son Jake, his estranged British wife Rachel, her parents and his former colleagues, Londoners, strangers, and even with his own past and long-passed mother, farther and farther away spatially, temporally, and empathically from the inner circle of “we,” enacts what Chuck describes as cricket’s “lesson in civility.”

This lesson is important. But no less important is this: as in Cărtărescu, whose characters keep climbing up on the roofs of their apartment complexes to hug the world, or in Jen, whose small town has its own observation (“twin”) towers, or in Lee’s vol d’oiseau surveys from Aloft, the at-distance, macro pedagogy of aerial-theoretical planetary togetherness and empathy can only do so much. But what it does do, the onto-scopic opening that it marks, matters. Its distant self-positioning sows, dialectically, the perspectival “micro” seeds of nearness, closeness, intimacy, and being-with. We shoot up and above in space to draw near and see our place anew, but then we pull back to come back, enlightened: with Cole, McCann, and the later Pynchon (Against the Day), we uncover the world, rise to bask in the planet’s aura above cities, above the horizon, so we can recover our humanness on the ground and in ways that may also reground us; with DeLillo’s earlier “Human Moments in World War III” story, we ascend to our “orbital” stations to reconceptualize the big things, to de- and re-think them so we can “talk about small things, routine things”; with Lee’s Hector (The Surrendered), we screen, from such intellectual altitudes, “tumultuous world history” for also small but intensely private moments; we temporarily and tactically decouple so we can recouple, rejoin, regroup and “reunite,” relate and endure in our relations. True, with McCann, we get reports that the
“ontological glue” is thin up there. But this is why that is where we must walk first, alone on our tightropes, in our Skylabs, in our space suits, or, with Joseph McElroy’s cyborg hero Imp Plus (Plus), in our hi-tech space bodies: so we can fight the gravity-like pull of trite notions and navel-gazing whims and walk the earth with others again, “feel” what it truly takes to be a couple, with the loved ones and family, but also with those who are not relatives, not from “around here” and yet related to us.75

As Houellebecq jokes in The Map and the Territory, the “satellite image” may not be God’s viewpoint. To be sure, the reasons to doubt the picture’s divine provenance abound.76 Think only about how the world’s spatial technology-enhanced visual availability has led to increased vulnerability to surveillance, control, space weaponization, and military “targeting.”77 Authors like O’Neill do want us to think about the world panopticon. So let us do this too. But they also push us to envisage a world demotikón, a world of multitudes. They prompt us to follow the dialectical ontology of the macro and micro all the way to its ethical end, where the world’s face turns—and turns us as well—to the faces of those around us and to the problematic of care “in” or, better still, across “territory,” to a responsibility idea and practice notionally and nationally reterritorialized, extended conceptually and physically to other spaces and people. This is where the geomethodology dramatized by planetary fiction should take us: to the point at which reading with the planet turns itself into reading for the planet and criticism into a “moral” enterprise, into planetary stewardship. “Decompressed” along these lines, Netherland’s final pages decline to work like Deleuzian-Guattarian uniformity-inducing, picture-“ruining,” “bad”-infinity-keyed telescopy.78 If they telescope the world, they do so in the term’s opulent, fundamental amphibology. That is, they simultaneously condense and enlarge a world. They bring it closer and spread it out so we can contemplate its dazzling gallery of faces.

The romantic sublime of at-distance contemplation bounced the aloof gaze back to itself. This is what happens to Caspar David Friedrich’s solitary hero in the 1818 canvas Chalk Cliffs on Rügen, and this is what Friedrich Nietzsche fancies we see as we stare into the famous abyss of Beyond Good and Evil: the depths reflecting our look straight back to us.79 Instead, the planetary sublime is refractive rather than steriley reflective. If the planetary gaze comes back to its origin, it does so ethically, not by reinforcing the self-same’s epistemological cocoon through a scopically self-centered, repetitive pantomime, but through a detour. The “alternative” route is just that: an alternate trajectory optically and ethically, an itinerary across alterity that acknowledges others and their faces. It may start out in a telescopically distancing mode, as does one of the “Google scenes” in O’Neill’s book, with the “satellite image” of the earth’s a-semiotic crust, on which “a human movement is a barely intelligible thing . . . no signs of nations, no sense of the work of man.”80 Or it may begin, also in a classically telescopic fashion, up
Decompressing Culture

in a gondola of the befittingly named London Eye, where Hans, Jake, Rachel, and their German and Lithuanian companions—the world’s ambassadors to Hans’s private moment—climb higher and higher to the zenith so that once again the city and the world of humans with it “become[e] . . . less recogniz-able.” But the episode is part of an act that comprises a second scene, which the novel’s ending both directs (builds, shapes theatrically) and directs us to it, “denudes” and places under the microscope for us.

Thematically and structurally, the stage for this scene is laid by another “telescopy,” that of the human dramas stratified in the season’s texture. “The English summer,” writes O’Neill on the previous page, “is actually a Russian dolls of summers, the largest of which is the summer of unambiguous disaster in Iraq, which immediately contains the destruction of Lebanon, which itself holds a series of ever-smaller summers that led to the summer of Monty Panesar and, smallest perhaps, the summer of Wayne Rooney’s foot.” And so, inside the Ferris Wheel ride lies, in other time and space, another (Staten Island) ferry ride, which Hans took with his mother one September evening years before. On the deck, after admiring the “world lighting up” in front of them as the Manhattan sunset was “concentrating” that “world” in the “lilac acres of two amazing high towers going up above all others,” Hans and his mother instinctively turned their smiling faces to each other. Back on the Ferris following this quick flashback and after his capsule “reach[es] the top of our celestial circuit . . . to a point where [we] can see horizons previously unseen, and the old earth reveals itself,” Hans “come[s] to face his family with the same smile” while “Lithuanian ladies” ask about London landmarks and Jake “befriends a six-year-old boy who speaks not a word of English.”

This instant is, as Deleuze and Guattari would probably call it, aesthetic in that it ultimately “create[s] the finite,” the little situation, the tiniest “Russian doll” of human life, or the infinitesimal that “rediscover[s],” “restores,” and shows off the “infinite.” Neither the infinite nor the infinitesimal is anterior/posterior or superior/inferior to the other, and, one more time, this non-hierarchical chronology and axiology is anything but the centerpiece of the local-global debate. “The town,” the philosophers stress, “does not come after the house, nor does the cosmos after the territory. The universe does not come after the figure, and the figure is an aptitude of the universe.” They are telescoped inside each other, available—reluctantly perhaps—to our geomethodological microscopy. The figure figures a universe because there is a universe to be figured and figured out, and the universe itself is a figure, a representation and a face of many faces, all alongside one another and often-times all in one or in one place.

Let us be mindful of this because it sums up geomethodology’s basic tenet, from which the decompressing technique of reading follows. It is the kind of distancing-cum-de-distancing technology Levinas welcomed in his “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us” essay against Heidegger’s apprehensions about the
fast-growing human capabilities of “measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole.” As Michael Lang explains in a 2003 essay on Heidegger’s “planetary discourse,” for the German thinker the new, de-distancing technologies wind up supplanting human relationships. The only relationships left are technological or, in the more extreme, Pynchonian formulation from Gravity’s Rainbow, techne’s relation to itself. In the Heidegger-Harvey line of thought, Lang demonstrates, this de-distancing is tantamount to circumventing the human and its undergirding relatedness. Eventually, this leads to a “compression,” congealing, and preordaining of everything in this world, including the material texture and the meanings of the post-Enlightenment West and of the whole globe with it, now seized mechanically and “totalistically” as a passive reflection (“globalization”) of the Western model. Not only does Heideggerian technology de-spatialize; it does so unethically. The resulting Weltbild globalizes the planet and its understandings.

What Levinas admires in the astronaut’s “feat” is a completely different technology. This technology spatializes ethically. It “redistricts” place planet-wide to help both the comfortably placed and the displaced to relate and come together in potentially countess ways. Less “dangerous than the spirits [génies] of the Place” that, throughout history, have placed so as to include, shelter, and help thrive, but also to exclude, control, and enslave by “splitting . . . humanity into native and strangers,” this is a distancing technology liable to renew the earth as a common home. “What counts most of all, Levinas says, is that [Gagarin] left the Place,” the Earth as Place. In Levinas’s assessment, the Soviet cosmonaut rose “beyond any horizon” but only to open up new horizons, within which the planet’s mystery, its many facets, and the faces and relations in which they are all necessarily entangled in the world at large and in the world’s Kars and Riverlakes are reaffirmed and cared for rather than fatuously mastered.

Or, perhaps a mastery of sorts is in play here, after all. It is the more subdued mastery of the mystery that fleetingly brushes our faces when we turn to the planet’s face and to the countless faces glued together, mosaic-like, in neighborhoods, cantinas, and playgrounds, at bar mitzvahs, in Ferris wheel cabins, and in other little places. Advancing critically on the trail blazed by this technological breakthrough, geomethodology allows that this mystery, the enigma of the planet’s others, may—and in effect must—persist as such, in plain sight and undefaced, protected by the very “nudity” of the face in which it comes forth. As Levinas never tires of reminding us, we are with those others in the world so that we ourselves can be. This is the core precept of his ethics-before-ontology argument and also the reason reading with the planet is or ought to be not only an analytical scenario but also a model of exemplary sociability. For, if we turn to the planet’s face right, “with” follows suit, turning into “for.”
Notes


3. In his article “Spatializing Difference beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures” (*Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 5 [2011]), Tariq Jazeel relies on Denis Cosgrove’s 2001 book *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* to claim that photos of the Earth such as those taken by Apollo 17 in 1972 attest to an “Apollonian gaze” (81), which, Jazeel would have us believe, betrays an imperial, culturecentric, and totalizing “reverie” redolent of cosmopolitanism’s “one-worldist” thrust (87). As it turned out, NASA pictures are no different from those taken since the 1970s by hundreds of other space missions, shuttles, orbiting stations, and satellites belonging to a steadily growing number of countries, Western and non-Western. While the meaning of these images has shifted somewhat in the post–Cold War era, it would be safe to say that even back in the 1970s they meant and suggested much more than Cosgrove and others thought or think they did. Equally reductive is Jazeel’s grasp of cosmopolitanism. Finally, the scalar synergy of the macro and micro categories also plays out in the argument Wai Chee Dimock makes in her own *Planetary Turn* essay.

4. On the “event” as discontinuous and ambiguous occurrence, see Alain Badiou’s *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 118, 132.


10. Ibid., 41.

11. Ibid., 95.


16. In their essay on Deleuze and Guattari’s “plan d’immanence” from Le vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze edited by Robert Sasso and Arnaud Villani (Nice, France: Les Cahiers de Noesis, 2003), Maurice Élie and Arnaud Villani observe that “distinct from the plane of reference, which characterizes science, consists of ‘actuals’ [actuels], and gives up on the infinite, and also distinct from the plane of consistence, which characterizes art, consists of affects and percepts, and brings about the finite so as to regain the infinite, the plane of immanence consists of concepts and recovers the infinite [directly]” (272) (my translation).

17. On “multitude,” see Antonio Negri, Art and Multitude: Nine Letters on Art, Followed by Metamorphoses: Art and Immaterial Labour, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity, 2011), 7, 75; on “Crowd,” Badiou’s Handbook of Inaesthetics, 31–32. See also Pico Iyer, The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home (New York: Random House, 2000) and “The Nowhere Man,” Prospect 30, no. 3 (February 1997): 30–33; and Alexandar Hemon’s novel Nowhere Man (New York: Random House, 2002). Also, as pointed out in the introduction to this collection, Masao Miyoshi was among the first to draw attention to, but also to argue for, a turn to the planet in a sense that he determined as enabling culturally, politically, and otherwise. On this topic, see, one more time, his article “Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality,” in Comparative Literature 53, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 283–97.


23. Ibid., 307–16.


25. For the evolving meaning of “world” as verb (welten) in Heidegger, with particular emphasis on the philosopher’s early work, see Françoise Dastur, “Heidegger’s Freiburg Version of the Origin of the Work of Art,” in Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s, ed. James Risser (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1999), 129, 140.


31. Ibid., 30, 72.


33. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 82, 92. On the local-global “theoretical stalemate,” see Ursula K. Heise’s groundbreaking *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Planet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7–13. Heise’s “eco-cosmopolitan” solution to the impasse is to look, in contemporary culture and thinking, for “ways of imagining the global that frame localism from a globalist environmental perspective” (9). While sticking to my stronger distinctions between the global and the planetary, I am sympathetic to the critic’s attempt to salvage at least some of the global paradigm’s terminology and content. I also second her plea “for an increased emphasis on a sense of planet” (59). A major contribution to ecocriticism, Heise’s argument reads, repeatedly and proficiently, local manifestations of culture against the backdrop of the global scenarios in which they are “imbricated” (59). At least during its initial stages, the cultural telescopic on which my own argument rests tends to do the opposite by X-raying the local for planetary “engravings.”


36. Moretti also makes his rather unpersuasive and, to my mind, unnecessary case against close reading in “Conjectures on World Literature,” 57. N. Katherine Hayles has recently argued, in a different context, for an integration of close and distant reading into a synthetic model apropos of Foer’s experimentalism (“Combining Close and Distant Reading: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes* and the Aesthetic of Bookishness,” *PMLA* 128, no. 1 [January 2013]: 226–31).


42. Mircea Cărtărescu, *Totul* (*All*) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1985).

43. *Visul* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1989) was republished in complete form in 1993 (Bucharest: Humanitas) and has been translated into a number of languages. For the English version, see *Nostalgia*, trans., with an afterword, from the Romanian by Julian Semilian, introduction by Andrei Codrescu (New York: New Directions, 2005). Later prose works such as novels like *Travesti* (*Disguise*) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), the *Orbitor* (*Blinding*) three-volume series (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996–2007), and the short pieces gathered in the best seller *De ce iubim femeile* (*Why We Love Women*) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005) detail *Nostalgia’s* description of Bucharest.

44. *Állos* (masculine plural *álloi*) is “another” in Ancient Greek. It may designate either another *like* the self (by and large an other of the same sort) or an other *to* this self, in which case its meaning is closer to *héteros*. “The other of two,” the latter marks the other’s otherness more emphatically. In Latin, *alus* and *alter* enact roughly the same distinction. While unquestionably significant, the difference between *állos* and *héteros* is not instrumental to my argument.


48. On the Zahir as “an unbearable symbol of the infinite, painful circularity, an[ ] obsessive counterpart of the elusive Aleph,” see Matei Calinescu’s *Rereading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 12, 11–16.


55. David Hollinger, *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity*, 73, 36.


57. Ibid., 306–7.

58. See Ka’s cosmic “snowflake” in Pamuk, *Snow*, 283.

59. I thank Jeffrey J. Williams and John McGowan for pointing out to me the divergent readings to which O’Neill’s *Netherland* lends itself. Williams touches on this issue briefly in his article “The Plutocratic Imagination,” which came out in *Dissent* (Winter 2013), http://www.-dissentmagazine.org/article/the-plutocratic-imagination.


64. Ibid., 211.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 210.


69. Ibid., 120–21.


71. O’Neill, *Netherland*, 10. My comments on this place in *Netherland* also allude to Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.


81. Ibid., 252–53.

82. Ibid., 254–56.

84. Ibid., 196.