The Cosmopolitan Geospatial Imaginary of the Anthropocene: reimagining planetarity as a response to global consumption and blame[[1]](#footnote-2)

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Abstract: I argue that the Anthropocene becomes a part of political discourse, collapsing blame and responsibility though a cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary. Furthermore, I suggest that is a reaction against this cosmopolitan spatial imaginary which prominent figures are able to “tap” into in order produce configurations of exclusionary, “us” vs. “them” politics, even if these exclusionary discourses may hide economic initiatives. In this project, I, first, connect the spatial imaginary of the Anthropocene to the spatial imaginary of Cosmopolitansim. Following Tariq Jazeel’s argument that cosmopolitanism must be thought of geospatially, and critiques that even within its many attempts to pluralize, cosmopolitanism ultimately cannot escape its own historically western spatial imaginary, collapsing difference, and that “mechanisms and political imaginations for living together might in fact gain much by stepping out from cosmopolitanism’s long conceptual shadow” (77). I further this critique, maintaining that it is a cosmopolitan spatial imaginary that ultimately allows us to collapse blame within Anthropogenic politics. Second, I look at the reactions against or denial of the Anthropocene in the continued rise of right-wing nationalism and exclusionary identity politics, whose most obvious face is “Trump” politics. Finally, I attempt to ask, in the wake of these two conflicting responses, spatial imaginaries, and identity formations, what would a planetary future look like that does not either collapse, nor exclude? What kind of theoretical lifting would be needed for a neo-spatial imaginary? What would this look like socially, politically, and ethically?

Jose M. Alcaraz, Katherine Sugars, Katerina Nicolopoulou, Francisco Tirado recently suggested that as “[i]nitially developed in the natural sciences (Earth-systems sciences, resilience theory, social-ecological systems), the Anthropocene offers powerful *new insights to think about the-planet-as-the-“cosmos”-of-cosmopolitanism*” (315). Or, that taking a cosmopolitan perspective towards the epoch now defined by the changes and influences by humans, that is, the Anthroprocene, may illicit a more ethnically and socially responsible approach towards global climate change when we consider the “distant other.”[[2]](#footnote-3) Towards these ends they align their work with Tariq Jazeel’s 2011 article, “Spatializing difference beyond cosmopolitanism: rethinking planetary futures,” from which they reference that “[t]he planet is the ‘cosmos’ of cosmopolitanism, its ‘geographical imagination’, its ‘heart’ – from which the mechanisms and political imagination for living together need to be crafted,” and that their paper also engages with “the “geographical imagination” of cosmopolitanism” (Alcaraz et. al 315). But what gets left out of this framing is that while Jazeel *does* argue that cosmopolitanism should be thought of in geographic terms, that he is primarily concerned with what thinking of cosmopolitanism in terms of geospatial concerns *allows us to do,* which, for Jazeel is to demystify “the view from nowhere” from which cosmopolitanism view the world and that “thinking spatially about cosmopolitanism is precisely what offers the capacity to prize apart some of the concept’s unthinking Eurocentrism” (77)[[3]](#footnote-4). Ultimately, for Jazeel, despite many

“attempts to pluralize our understandings of cosmopolitanism ultimately serve to reinstantiate the liberalism, rationalities and taxonomies of thought that are tethered to the concept’s irredeemably European and universalizing set of values and human normativities. In other words, cosmopolitanism’s pluralization does little to open a Eurocentric critical intellectual imagination up to differences not proscribed by a centre that sets the parameters for difference. As I argue, mechanisms and political imaginations for living together might in fact gain much by stepping out from cosmopolitanism’s long conceptual shadow” (77).

First, I am sympathetic towards Alcatraz et. al’s connection of cosmopolitanism and the Anthropocene, but not as cosmopolitanism is a response towards global climate change, instead I argue that the geospatial imaginary of the Anthropocene is already cosmopolitan, or even, it is an already inscribed cosmopolitan view of the world which produces the “Anthropocene” as a response or reaction to the scale of environmental disaster. Although not emphasizing the geography of the Anthropocene or Cosmopolitanism, Gerard Delanty and Aurea Mota reference what they call the “Cosmopolocene” (11). However, *I* do mean to stress the geographic, and as such, any notion of a Cosmopolocene must be done by also acknowledging the historical power relations which are performed, even in this future-oriented condition.

I suggest that the Anthropocene is produced within a Cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary as they both follow what Denis Cosgrove refers to (and Jazeel also references) as the Apollonian gaze, a “gaze, which pulls diverse life on earth into a vision of unity, is individualized, a divine and mastering view from a single perspective” (xi). This “view from nowhere” served historically through imperial and colonial cartographic practices, and continues in our current view of “globalization.” As Cosgrove states:

[g]lobaization—economic, geopolitical, technological, and cultural— is widely regarded as a distinguishing feature of life at the second millennium, actualizing the Apollonian view across a networked, virtual surface. Resistance from the solid ground of earth, characteristically located at the spatial and social limits of Apollo’s conventional purview proclaims the limitations of its male-gendered Eurocentrism, a globalism hopelessly bound to exercising and legitimating authority over subordinate social and natural worlds (3).

As such, “the ‘cosmos’ of cosmopolitanism is no geographically innocent signifier,” and I suggest that if this is to hold for cosmopolitanism, then it must also hold for our geospatial understanding of the Anthropocene (Jazeel 78). That is, “[t]he Anthropocene as a cultural model is not then a politically neutral concept, but contains strong normative elements, including imaginary significations” (Delanty and Mota 24).

Tim Luke has written that “[r]apid global climate change is a set of real geophysical and biochemical realities. Yet, it also is now a rich political imaginary pulling together complex clusters of signs, symbols, and stories” (“The climate change imaginary” 280). Luke’s article highlights the use of images of receding glaciers, deforestation, and emphasizes of easy, rising CO2 submissions used by politicians such as Al Gore, that is to say Luke highlights the use of PowerPoint ready materials whose purpose is to persuade individuals, a collective “all of us,” to undertake changes that might aide in reversing the ever-impending doom of global climate change. But as “the politics of global warming often seek a false finality in looking for more data about the phenomenon or resort to easy evocations of living more simply, idealistically or ethically. While they are a first step, these reactions are inadequate” (“The climate change imaginary” 282). More drastic measures are necessary. Large corporations have known for sometime now of the environmental affects of the operation and/ or productions, but “[i]t has been in their interest, however, to stall responding to the climate crisis, and they have known about it for decades. As they continue to realize greater profit by not changing anything in ‘the way we live our lives’ to promote the liveability of the environment, Gore’s parade of ugly pictures to see the climate crisis as a moral issue fall flat” (“The climate change imaginary” 285). I, of course, contend something must be done, but that there are also problematic signs, symbols, and stories that we should acknowledged and work through before a more viable response might be possible. Specifically, in this piece I consider a spatial imaginary that is continually reproduced, often now, through objective, western scientific knowledge, but that has a historical referent nearly as old as a signified ‘West.’ I speak of Cosmopolitanism, the collective “all of us” that is called upon in the face of global climate change, and the geospatial imaginary which produces the Anthropoocene and a singular, political space of the “The Environment.”

How does climate change and the discursive formation of ‘the environment’ as a political entity become a space for the practices of exclusionary politics and collective identity formations? I argue that the Anthropocene becomes a part of political discourse, collapsing blame and responsibility though a cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary. Furthermore, I suggest that is a reaction against this cosmopolitan spatial imaginary which prominent figures are able to “tap” into in order produce configurations of exclusionary, “us” vs. “them” politics, even if these exclusionary discourses may hide economic initiatives. In this project, I, first, connect the spatial imaginary of the Anthropocene to the spatial imaginary of Cosmopolitanism. Following Jazeel’s argument that cosmopolitanism must be thought of geospatially, and critiques that even within its many attempts to pluralize, cosmopolitanism ultimately cannot escape its own historically western spatial imaginary collapsing difference, and “mechanisms and political imaginations for living together might in fact gain much by stepping out from cosmopolitanism’s long conceptual shadow” (77). I further this critique, maintaining that it is a cosmopolitan spatial imaginary that ultimately allows us to collapse blame within Anthropogenic politics. These collapses within spatial imaginaries are consistent with Henri Lefebvre’s question regarding contradictory space, of ‘whose environment?’ Second, I look at the reactions against or denial of the Anthropocene in the continued rise of right-wing nationalism and exclusionary identity politics, whose most obvious face is “Trump” politics. Finally, I attempt to ask, in the wake of these two conflicting responses, spatial imaginaries, and identity formations, what would a planetary future look like that does not either collapse, nor exclude? What kind of theoretical lifting would be needed for a neo-spatial imaginary? What would this look like socially, politically, and ethically?

*The Unifying and Collapsing Politics of a Cosmopolitan Anthropocene*

What goes unquestioned in my introduction to the Cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary of the Anthropocene is the notion that the Anthropocene does not neutrally describe a state of nature by agentic influences by humans. While also describing a particular geographic time, the Anthropocene also indicates a social system and theory that has historically developed within a very particular knowledge production. Gerard Delanty and Aurea Mota note that the Anthropocene therefore involves questions of temporality, conditions of subjectivity and agency, knowledge production, and issues in governance (10). Given all of these pieces, we can also consider the Anthropocene as a geographic condition. Taking the Anthropocene into geographic consideration allows us to explore “the relationship between biopolitics and the emerging ‘geopolitics’ of our new epoch; the patterns of inequality and difference emergent as part of the Anthropocene’s universalizing ‘anthro’; the limits of political subjectivity, agency, and technological managerialism; and innovative methods for socio-ecological practice” (Johnson and Morehouse 440-441). Moreover, taking a geographic considerations means that we ultimately must consider the Anthropocene as it emerges within a cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary.

Elizabeth Johnson and Harlan Morehouse ask “[w]hat is the geographical landscape brought into being by the Anthropocene – is it one that erases difference in its universalizing of the human and naturalization of human history? Or does it help to bring to light the global inequalities of fossil fuel consumption and its effects?” (440). I maintain that both of these articulations are possible in the production of the Anthropocene, however, it seems that inequalities in production and consumption of resources is only in so much as it operates within a cosmopolitan imaginary, so any potential in radical engagement of inequalities is already compromised.

I suggest that as I argue for the cosmopolitan imaginary of the Anthropocene that it should be no surprise that “[o]ver the past two decades, more or less alongside the growing concern with climate change, cosmopolitanism has developed to become one of the most influential approaches in a variety of disciplines” (Delanty and Mota 26-27). Gerard Delanty and Aurea Mota overview that:

“[t]he basis of cosmopolitanism is that it is in the encounter with the other that the self undergoes change. This can only come about when self and other engage in communication, which can be said to be constitutive of subject formation. This cosmopolitan sensibility accords with the deliberative understanding of democracy. Moreover, it affirms the centrality of agency and an ethic of care and responsibility. For all these reasons, the political challenge of the Anthropocene is very much one that can be cast in the terms of cosmopolitics” (37).

Indeed, “cosmopolitan” is often invoked when considering ethical responses to the Other, the stranger, what we may even consider, particularly as more and more individuals face the threat of displacement, the hospitality of climate change. However, cosmopolitanism cannot be the ideal response for the Anthropocene when we consider the historical power relations that allow each to emerge in their geospatial imaginaries. Or rather, that they are produced as the same geospatial imaginary. We cannot question one without questioning the other, that they in fact are produced within the same historical continuum. Discussions of Cosmopolitanism, such as Delanty and Mota’s, which seeks to find an ethical response to the other, does not also understand that “such attempts to pluralize our understandings of cosmopolitanism ultimately serve to reinstantiate the liberalism, nationalities and taxonomies of thought that are tethered to the concept’s irredeemably European and universalizing set of values and human normative. In other words, cosmopolitanism’s pluralization does little to open a Eurocentric critical intellectual imagination up to differences not proscribed by a centre that sets the parameters for difference” (77). Notions of the ethnical consideration of the Other, of hospitable claims, do not question from whose imaginary and narrative the notion of hospitality emerges. A Cosmopolitan spatial imaginary functions to collapse difference, and it is precisely this view which operates to collapse blame and responsibility within the Anthropocene.

Both Cosmopolitanism and the Anthropocene work only by a “willing transcendence” to a global, geotechnical planet. For example, Tim Luke observes that, in part, that studies on the Anthropocene produces “various networks of scientific and technical experts once again position themselves to administer *from above and afar* any collective efforts to mitigate or adapt to rapid anthropogenic climate change” (“On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 141). This political distancing by scientific and technical experts not only signals the space necessary to produce 'objective' knowledge (a clear separation from subject and object), but also parallels Tariq Jazeel's critique of the geospaitial imiginary of cosmopolitanism. It is exactly this geotechnical eye that collapses and transcends what Donna Haraway has referred to as a “God Trick” and the “view from nowhere,” that is, “[v]ision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put myth into ordinary practice. And like the god trick, this eye fucks the world to make techo-monsters” (581). The view which “fucks the world” collapsing and erasing any semblance of ruptures “with the political pre-occupations of territoriality, racialization, or culture. Instead, it is the achievement of an imperial effort to design universality; an effort whose idiom is entirely continuous through the fashioning of a self-confident European, and Enlightenment, ‘planetary consciousness’…” (Jazeel 82). Luke additional provides a parallel critique, highlighting what this techno-planetary view does is allows us to conceive that a solution is possible, that all we need is a scientific achievement. Indeed, Kant’s Enlightenment is nearly on the teleological, technical horizons. Luke states, “[s]tanding out amid the spreading desertification, coastal flooding, or rising temperatures of rapid climate change, sustainability science makes precisely the appeal needed to see the planet as an omnipolis ready to be geoengineered” (Luke “On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 162). Moreover, it may be these ruptures, these radical differences, that allow us to imagine an alternative planetary consciousness which does not collapse under the weight of its own historical production.

I maintain that even as Anthropogenic science attempts to collapse both difference, and subsequently blame, for the good of the spatially defined global environment, that this is also nothing new. Climate change has always been about inequalities (Roberts & Parks 194). J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks argue that climate change is all about inequalities in terms of “who will suffer its effects most, who is most responsible for the problem, and who is willing and able to address the problem” (194). These inequalities, as can be expected, not only follow the imagined and produced geographic formations of the Global North and Global South, but also only furthers their devisions. That is, “[t]hese compounding inequalities overlay an already polarized North–South debate and enmesh rich and poor countries in an adversarial negotiating environment. As such, it has become exceedingly difficult to broker a mutually acceptable international agreement that would stabilize the climate” (194). Not only does the discussion of climate change in terms of the Anthropocene collapse these differences, blame, and inequalities, but it also masks the discussion of climate change in terms of economic production, looking instead through the lens of geological formations. In terms of global ‘fairness,’ and the right to economic prosperity (a promise given through decades of development discourse) there are of course differences when it comes to the outlook of who is to blame. For example, Roberts and Parks further articulate for the Global South that the belief is “they are unjustly suffering the consequences of the North’s profligate consumption” and/ or “believe that they are entitled to pursue ‘cheap’ economic growth using fossil fuels and other natural resources at hand, since now wealthy countries did the same at their early stages of development” (194). And the Global North “have suggested that if they continue to bear the weight of sustaining global economic growth and international financial stability, it would be both unfair and unrealistic to expect them to make sharp and immediate reductions in their carbon emissions” (195).

Furthermore, this universalizing, collapsing spatial imaginary is congruent with what Luke refers to as the “unreal universality of the Anthropocene,” which he additionally suggests “hides the profane practices of degraded capitalist individuality in the detritus left by the machinic means of personal lives defined by the alien powers of commodification. These new Anthropocenic chronicles also estrange Man from nature, himself, and species-being” (“On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 146). This alienation from “nature” may also disrupt from possible alternative imaginaries for the relationships between the conceptions of the human, Otherness, and the non-human. Again, it is the cosmopolitan spatial imaginary which produces humanity as a singular collapsed “Man,” as a production of and within “Nature,” and does not allow for the radical pluralism that might exist in imaginaries between the human and non-human. As it is a problem that “Man” faces, qualifications of blame and responsibility of vastly unequal energy consumptions and emission productions fall short. But “it is not “Man” as such but rather only some men, in a few places at different times, who have structured the evolving urbanthropogenic changes of the Earth in such ways that its arcological spatiality now is more degrading, toxic, and unsustainable (Luke, “On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 146). The view from nowhere is all too objective, and at the same time is all too human. It is made subjectively-objective by the position, looking at the earth from above, the imagined human eye on the world, and what that eye sees is not its own humanity but its own collapsed erasure. What appears in the view from nowhere is the absent human, but the presence of the human emerges in the non-human. It is precisely the collapse of the human that allows it re-emerge as a universal one-ness, a whole unified humanity. But as Luke indicates this subject as humanity is not all “Men”, but rather a selected few. A cosmopolitan imaginary allows us to imagine all humanity, but only as it is “our,” that is to say a historically western version/ narrative of humanity. As Luke further explains:

[w]ithout saying it as critically or directly as Marx, the “Man” at work in these networks of earth scientists is not all of humanity as such, but instead a familiar, more mystified face. That is, he/she is basically the technological, scientific, modern, commercial, and acquisitive men/women at work, and/or enduring the pressures, in the projects of Western nationbuilding, empire-expansion, and capitalist-development leaping out of the past 250 years in Crutzen’s Anthropocenic instant in geological time. The Anthropocene concept becomes, in part, an urbanthropocentric exercise that simultaneously bemoans and celebrates the agency of these displaced chronocentric and ethnocentric figurations of “Man” in the world’s rapid citification” (Luke “On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 152).

Luke’s critique highlights a subsequent issue present in Anthropocentrism, that is, a recycled view of humanity and nature “a view of the planet as shaped by human beings who through science and technology have become its masters” (Delanty and Mota 22)[[4]](#footnote-5).

Delanty and Mota maintain that “[t]he Anthropocene idea draws attention to the need for society today to form a new relation to nature” (21). However, my point is that not only is a new social relationship to nature and the non-human necessary, and the subsequent spatial imaginaries that map the spaces of humanity and the non-human, but that the Anthropocene and any "new" or alternative relationship, must be done at the expense of the Anthropocene itself. This means taking into consideration its Cosmopolitan production.

Simon Dalby observes that “[n]either the global economy (which is an increasingly large part of the ecological system), nor the global ecological context (which is being remade by that economy) fits easily into the administrative framework of the state system” (Johnson et. al 443). As Marx observed the material productions (which includes productions of the ‘sensual world,’ which we might consider to be “nature”) of civil society both exceeds and defines the state. It is perhaps no accident that both the global economy and the “environment,” or the Anthropocene all function within a Cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary, all are produced from the similar historical productions of western knowledge production. But if the suggestion is, towards an alternative imaginary and subsequent social imaginary, a reaction directly against Cosmopolitanism, then we’ll find that it is an imaginary not so easily redirected, especially as we consider that perceived antithesis of the cosmopolitan is the nation state.

*The Exclusionary Politics of a Cosmopolitan Anthropocene*

The recent 2016 US presidential election indicated, as they do, ongoing discursive power formations, one of many including the politics of global climate change and climate change denial. Many feared that moving into 2017, that Presidential-Elect Donald J. Trump would roll back or alter many of the policies and regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Malakof et. al 1364). Trump indicated that he would put leaders of the fossil fuel industries into key positions, possibly leaving international agreements, and of course there was also the, now, infamous tweet that “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive” (not to mention numerous other tweets in 2013 and 2014 insinuating that “The con artists changed the name from GLOBAL WARMING to CLIMATE CHANGE when GLOBAL WARMING was no longer working and credibility was lost!”) (Malakof et. al 1364; <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com>).

Additionally, among these concerns were possible changes that the administration might make towards an economic measure called the social cost of carbon (SCC), “which attempts to quantify the economic damage associated with carbon emissions and the climate change they drive” (Malakof et. al 1365). The goal is to provide a discount rate indicating how much could be spent now to avoid higher costs in the future, and the accruing damage that goes along with these. For example, the Obama administration worked with calculations with a range from 2.5% and 5%, leaning towards the lower end, which means as Malakof et. al indicates that this meant in “2020 the SCC is $62 per ton at a 2.5% rate, but $12 per ton at 5%. So moving to a higher rate makes rules appear less beneficial” (1365). The concern was the administration would start operating on a higher rate, which would require less capital and less regulations now, although of course potentially at a higher cost later. Attached to the SCC, and most importantly for our concerns here, is a geographic component. The Obama administration based their percentages off of global considerations, and not just what would benefit the United States, which of course is also consistent with a cosmopolitan imaginary of Anthropogenic climate change.

I suggest that it is exactly a reaction against the Cosmopolitan imaginary of the Anthroprocene, as a continued reaction against globalism, which has not only seen a rise in rightwing nationalism (as indicated by the US 2016 election, the UK Brexit vote, as well as the rise of several nationalist parties across Europe) (Haidt 46; Wodak & Krzyżanowski), but is now a part of the reactionary politics of climate change. For example, Malakof et. al quote Ted Gayer, “an economist at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., who has been critical of the global approach,” that “[a]n effort to narrow the scope of the SCC could fit in with Trump’s nationalistic leanings, ‘If you put it in the perspective of the Trump campaign and ‘America first,’ it makes sense’” (1365)[[5]](#footnote-6).

However, it is not only in the regulations around the SCC that we see instances of discursive formations emerging between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but a similar geospatial dialectic was at work as President Trump announced his decision to withdrawn from the Paris Climate Accord. As the President spoke on June 1, 2017, “in order to fulfill my solemn duty to protect America and its citizens, the United States will withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord…As President, I can put no other consideration before the wellbeing of American citizens. The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries” (“Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord”). The rhetoric here is not only nationalistic, but articulates a exclusionary “us” vs. “them” dynamic, where the American citizen must be protected from the “bad deal” of taking the responsibility of the rest of the world. We could arguably trace the effects of environmental changes with not only by the production of technological changes (e.g. the Industrial Revolution and our current production emissions), but the economic relations that are inimitably connected with them. The deep connections between capital, material productions (in terms of both commodities and waste), and the “environment” is played out once again, but here it is the priority of protecting the rights of American industries, such as coal, to thrive and to not be reigned in by the impending “climate change” rhetoric by the rest of the world. As once again, the President stresses, “The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country’s expense. They don’t put America first. I do, and I always will…I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris” (“Statement”). By emphasizing “Pittsburgh” over “Paris,” Trump directly reacts against a geospatial imaginary of Cosmopolitanism. This reacted spatial imaginary does not seek to collapse blame, by acts of exclusion it works to deny it all together. Although it seems increasingly difficult to roll back the spatial imaginary of either climate change or the global capitalist economy. For example, in his description John Bellamy Foster connects the spatial reach of capitalist system emerging as climate change itself, “[t]he capital-accumulation system, however, has now expanded its operations to encompass the entire planet, disrupting the biogeochemical processes of the Earth system itself, most dramatically in the form of climate change” (4). Moreover, he also asks, “monopoly-finance capitalism—with Donald Trump as its authentic representative—contributing to this impending planetary catastrophe?” (Foster 1-2).

To speak of contemporary spatial imaginaries is to also acknowledge the extension of capitalism into space, not only within pre-existing space, but now capitalism also produces its own spaces. This observation by Henri Lefebvre follows what he sees as “new contradictions generated by the extension of capitalism to space have given rise to quickly popularized *representations.*” By being able to calculate cost of climate change, not just as a metaphoric implication, but an actual quantity, as well as, the ongoing production of nature within capitalist representations, only indicates moments when the Anthropocene also becomes the “Capitalocene” (23). Although Delany and Mota, who reference the term, make a point to distinguish that not all of human activity can be explained by capitalism, however I would suggest what is productive is to consider how often it, especially currently is, in our production of the Anthropocene (23). Delanty and Mota indicated different time periods that are marked as the “origin” of the Anthropocene, including referred to as the “Orbis thesis” by Masline and Lewis who put the point of 1610, and the changes in population, species, foodstuffs, and deforestation during Western Imperialism in the Americas (14). While I am less interested in “when” the Anthropocene began, I find this example productive as it highlights the continued historical implications of western imperialism, but also as this history is directly tied to economic exploitation as well. Therefore, as a cosmopolitan spatial imaginary extends and blurs the differences and boundaries of diffierated and available space, when it comes to its overlay on the Anthroprocene we must also see how this spatial extension is also the spatial imaginary of the global economy. Which seems appropriate, as it is the modernizing and industrial geopolitical processes which extend, for example, the right to greenhouse gas emissions within ‘developing’ (often postcolonial) states.

Referencing what Jacque Derrida called “cosmo-*politics,”* here, the cosmopolitics of global climate change or the imagined space of the Anthropocene invariably involves issues of identity, as well as, claimed and imagined spaces of identity. The US does not have a monopoly on discussions of nationalisms and debates on sovereignty. The geopolitics of and questions of national identity and sovereignty is also an overt concern of many small island nations where rising sea levels threaten to submerge these countries. We may need a more fluid understanding of nationality and sovereignty if and when these individuals are forced to migrate to alternative geographies, that is to say, alternative identifying spaces. Towards these ends Carol Farbotko, Elaine Stratford, and Heather Lazrus conceptualize “geographic identity as performative” particularly in the anticipation of a climate crisis, reflecting “on whether there is a collective embrace or rejection of the idea of mobility in performances of identity among island peoples facing various scenarios of migration” (547). Geopolitical formations of the nation state and the cosmopolitan spatial imaginary of the Anthropocene oscillate back and forth in responses and reactions to a perceived global threat whose only source of players is on the scale of nation states and world actors. Amidst questions of blame, exclusionary politics, forced migration, as well as, any other concerns, the moral dilemma of changing geographies and spatial imaginaries, also becomes apparent.

Additionally, Derrida’s notion of cosmo-politics is directly connected to questions of hospitality. The question being, where is the hospitality for the cosmopolitan, “[w]hether it be the foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person (the task being as much to distinguish prudently between these categories as is possible)” (4). As the question of migration and forced displaced by changing climates, this notion of cosmos-politics will only continue to develop within the cosmopolitan imaginary of the Anthropocene. This of course, as has been seen in the response to Syrian refugees, will involve a continued reaction of populism and nationalism. Foster also makes the argument that “Trump’s promise to ‘build a wall. along the border with Mexico to block “illegal immigration” can be read at least in part as a reaction to climate change, even as the latter is being denied—just as sea walls are hypocritically being proposed by climate deniers in parts of the South as a means to protect coastal real estate” (11).

In terms of approaches and perspectives on responses towards global climate change where a cosmopolitan imaginary collapses, a isolationist or nationalist stance excludes. I suggest that exclusionary politics of climate change, however, is not an answer for the historical issues connected within the development of cosmopolitan spatial imaginary of the Anthropocene, but I argue instead that instances of nationalist polities and discourses, whose most obvious face, now, is ‘Trump’ or “America First” politics for the United States, is a response and reaction to exactly this cosmopolitan spatial imaginary. Therefore, nationalist policies do not negate a cosmopolitan geospatial imaginary of the Anthropocene, but only operates to confirm it. That is to say, the reactions against global social guilt, blame, or responsibility is still made in relation to a Cosmopolitan imaginary, by recoiling they also simultaneously confirm its presence. Furthermore, given, once again, the historic development of cosmopolitanism within a situated Western consciousness, the exclusionary principles of nationalism is not contradictory to a cosmopolitan imaginary or democratic principles, but only serves to confirm the exclusionary principles in the foundations in Western liberal democracies. As understood through Jazeel, the issue of a cosmopolitan geographic imaginary is that it does not first tackle the articulations of identity in liberal Western thought before collapsing them. These articulations, as Chantal Mouffe argues are based on acts of exclusion, and that “[i]n the West the meaning of democracy was founded on the differences established between its own system of governance and those of the ‘other’ that rejected it,” and argues that “[t]he political cannot be grasped by liberal rationalism as it shows the limits of any rational consensus, and reveals that any consensus is based on acts of exclusion” (105, 106). We now are witnessing the historic baggage that is the development of identity production in Western liberal democracies, now playing out in the understandings and reactions to a changing climate.

Critically thinking of the Anthropocene as a particular geospatial imaginary indicates that responses are just as historically positioned within particular power relations. It ultimately becomes a question of the presence of the nation state. The nation state is either transcended or collapsed within a cosmopolitan geographic identity, or it reifies in reaction against the presence or possible presence of this imagined space. Neither seem adequate enough to elicit a response necessary enough for planetary doom, or at least, as we understand planetarity to be a human inhabited space. Luke gives an example that, ironically, in some of the graphics used by such noted activists such as Al Gore that they “tend to ignore the national sources of greenhouse gassing, like those of China or the USA, but then his images reduce the complexities of rapid global warming to a simple image of them all cascading their ill effects upon the USA. Indicting ‘human activity,’ it ties global warming to carbon-intensive fuels burned everywhere” (The climate change imaginary 285-286). By highlight the fact that US will experience the negative effects of the carbon-intensive fuels burned everywhere, it offers the US a chance to step into a global, leadership role to combat climate change, re-confirming the role of the nation state, at the same time that it also absolves them for having to take blame for the production of emissions to begin with, re-confirming the cosmopolitan spatial imaginary of Anthropogenic climate change. Therefore, it is not simply enough to suggest that “methodological nationalism cannot be allowed to continue and the ethnocentric conceits of sociological reason are ready to be re-written on a worldly scale which is both different and better” for which Paul Gilroy suggests “that a cosmopolitanized sociological outlook which would be uniquely able to grasp the entanglements wrought by cosmopolitization processes currently accelerating around us” (620). Because as Jazeel also critiques (reviewing from another one of Gilroy’s work on cosomopolitanism):

Paul Gilroy’s cosmopolitanism-from-below, like so many other new cosmopolitanisms, is so far removed from these exalted, classically European configurations that this kind of critical engagement at first seems hardly necessary. But the broader point is that a certain normalization of cosmopolitanism as the mechanic for achieving just modes of alterity in a common present fixes a particular kind of planetary space as that which gives us ways of glimpsing universal humanity and, importantly, vice versa. This is a geographical tension that sits in the very belly of cosmopolitanism… (85).

These questions of geospatial imaginaries and cosmopolitanisms are not abstract extrapolations, but as the politics of climate change indicate, they have real effects/affects in the world, and, given the implications, it is not too much to say that the question or even fate of the human itself is stake.

3. *Hybrid, Rhizomatic, and Nomadic Identities and Spatial Imaginaries*

Tim Luke has said, “[p]lainly, the creation and circulation of the new analysis swirling around in the Anthropocene debate must be approached, conceptually and discursively, as more than academic squabbles over paleontological stratigraphy” (“On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 142). As I have indicated, when we consider the geospatial imaginary of the Anthropocene we are forced to question the historical emergence of its conceptualization in terms of Cosmopolitan narrative and imaginary. Again to referencing Jazeel, “mechanisms and political imaginations for living together might in fact gain much by stepping out from cosmopolitanism’s long conceptual shadow” (77). Discussions and responses to changing climates must be included within these mechanism and political imaginations, and our conceptualizations of the Anthropocene would do well to step out of Cosmopolitanism’s long conceptual shadow.

To reference from the introduction, Roberts and Parks suggest that a “‘hybrid justice’ proposal” is necessary in order to account for the multiple positions and “[r]ather, divergent principled beliefs are a consequence of more fundamental root causes: incongruent worldviews and causal beliefs, persistent global inequality, and an enduring deficit in North–South trust” (204)[[6]](#footnote-7). What I would like to pull out of this suggestion is the necessity for a “hybrid” response, but I would like to emphasize here is not just the need for a response that considers needs and responsibility across imagined geographical formations and imaginaries, but towards these ends we many need to think of hybridity in terms of a need for radical perspective(s). That is, in relating towards how poscolonialist thinkers understand the production of hybridity as a fluid oscillation and position, responses, outlooks, and discourses towards climate changes must be multiply unstable. Chantal Mouffe also argues for an emphasis on hybridity as he argues for a “politics of nomadic identity,” stating that “[b]y accepting that only hybridity creates us as separate entities, it affirms and upholds the nomadic character of every identity” (111). Hybridity values multiplities in identities, subsequently this includes political and geospatial narratives, something that also has been long emphasized in postcolonialism. For example, Jazeel indicates how postcolonial thought has helped and continues to help “interrogate privilege, power, and inequality in our world,” as well as, bring “into view both the spatial interconnectedness of our common world and its irreducible mixed-up-ness—what postcolonial theorists call ‘hybridity’,” as he “emphasizes throughout .. on the potential that postcolonialism offers for a critical and inquisitive undoing of our received geographical knowledge; what [he] refer[s] to as geographical unlearning” (“Postcolonialism” 4). I suggest that an emphasis on hybridity not only confirms a possible radical relation to one another, but that a nomadic perspective might also move beyond notion of identity but allow us to identify multiple and various perspectives towards changing climates and responsibilities of our own life worlds.

Hybrid responses may also indicate the importances of inter/trans disciplinary concerns as well, for example, we may question environmental spatial narratives with ecopoetry or even geopolitics (Lidström and Garrard; Last). Susanna Lidström and Greg Garrard suggest that poetry, over other forms of narratives, may be particularly indicative of such critiques as they tend to be have more “open-ended, multiple and even contradictory levels of meaning. This makes them especially interesting to look to for images that challenge established patterns of environmental thought and address complex, labyrinthine twenty-first century human-environment relations between local and global, social and ecological, perception and imagination” (37). However, even as poetics might provide a mode to play or even imagine alternative spatial imaginations and ecological relations, it would appear that more and multiple hybrid collaborations would be necessary. After all, our current vision of earth comes from a historically western lens, culminating over hundreds of years of western expansion, imperialism, scientific knowledge production.

Echoing the basis for this critique of the Anthropocene, Anna Tsing begins *A Mushroom at the End of the World* stating that “[e]ver since the Enlightenment, Western philosophers have shown us a Nature that is grand and universal but also passive and mechanical. Nature was a backdrop and resource for the moral intentionality of Man, which could tame and master Nature. It was left to fabulists, including non-Western and non-civilizational storytellers, to remind us of the lively activities of all beings, human and not human” (vii). Although, I would at first caution against potential positionings that places the non-western, the subaltern, or the indigenous as the subject that is ‘closer’ to nature, a move that reifies old dualistic notions of civilized, western “man” and development/ progress. The point that should be given attention, is that there were/ are other stories. The footing for this next move is less stable. To suggest or even imagine alternative responses or political discourses for the environment(s) of the world, also, then, requires alternative geospatial imaginaries.

Tsing also imagines what nature might be after capitalism, and suggests that whatever the environmental future might be that it not be thought of as a progressive future with an endpoint (viii). Following Jazeel again, this means moving beyond and out of western shadows, both in terms of imagined futures and spatial imaginaries and narratives that remain radically plural, not subsumed under the same production with different names. The mushroom may be one such story, a fittingly rhizomatic gift, “an open-ended assemble” (2, viii). That is, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have found value in rhizomatic structures, ones that, through processes of reterritorlizations “ceaselessly establish connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (7). This is what Tsing gives us, as she follows the mushrooms’ own species entanglements, anti-capitalistic productions, through the lines of flight; “[t]hey tangle with and interrupt each other—mimicking the patchiness of the world [she is] trying to describe” (viii). This may be one way among among many that allow us to imagine an articulation or response towards our agentic productions and responses to our world that does not either collapse nor exclude. What is needed an emphasize on the spaces between, the liminal and hybrid, the open-ended assemblages, the bodies without organs, or perhaps what Mouffe describes as a politics of a nomadic identity. What might such a geospatial imaginary operate as?

All of this once again reiterates that our social and political narratives and imaginaries are discursive productions,

Natural and social reality do not just exist as such for human beings. Its tones and textures must be made, and then remade in use through discursive cultural development. In all of the ways that everyday language captures and contains meaning, its textual totalities stabilize what people believe actually ‘is’ and ideally “ought to be” through the discursive representations of such ontological groundwork. Who makes these ontographic representations? For whom? Deploying what processes of production? Any means that can be found to shake, shock, or stop the logic of their workings would disclose a great deal about the ontopolitical reach of thought and action” (Luke “On the Politics of the Anthropocene 147-148).

As we question the cosmopolitics of representation in the Anthropocene, it also requires the on-going, continually attempted project of decolonization of western thought, which somehow allows both cosmopolitan imaginaries that collapse difference and liberal politics of exclusionary principles, these two modes exist simultaneously. In looking for an alternative to exclusionary identity politics, Mouffe suggests that the important question is not “how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion, or how to create an ‘us’ which would not have a corresponding ‘them,’ but rather it is how to establish this ‘us’ and ‘them’ discrimination in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy” (108). Therefore, as Mouffe argues for a politics of a nomadic identity and allowing the tensions within hybridity (which is of course always already a part of identity) not to be stifled but to be the basis for an identity politics that does not claim, but one that is constantly “re-created and renegotiated,” I maintain that such a nomadic identity must also considered the spatio-political imaginaries that circulates between identities (112). Conceiving of a nomadic identity might also allow us to consider the politics of planetarity; “[p]lanetarity poses the challenge to decolonize our knowledge of the world by extending an invitation to know it from outside the categories of western thought” (88). Jazeel asks us to consider what ways of knowing are “radically incompatible with the Apollonian image and cosmos,” positions such as “aboriginal animism, Buddhist attainments of non-selfhood, or Sufi mysticism” (88). However, we must also consider our own sheer inadequacies to conceptualize or grasp these formations “on terms true to the singularity of those differences” (88). We do not have the language necessary to conceive of the other without collapsing nor excluding. We need a way for the Other“ to “no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as a ‘counterpart’ who could be in our place in the future” (Mouffe 108). Jazeel’s suggests “that part of the new cosmopolitanism’s futurity must now necessitate imagining a future of living together beyond cosmopolitanism. A truly subaltern cosmopolitanism might now look to its own undoing” (95). For now, at least, in order to imagine the Other in her futurity, we might find a way towards the Anthropocene’s own conceptual undoing.

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1. *Note to Discussant: This is a first draft, and I appreciate any and all feedback. I apologize if the amount of quotes is distracting, I tend to draft this way.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Alcatraz et. al ’s discussion of the ‘distant other’ they contribute to Chatterjee, D. (2004), The Ethics of Assistance, Morality and the Distant Needy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 337-355. and Dobson, A. (2003), Citizenship and the Environment, Oxford University Press, New York, NY. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This is of course a reference to Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges:The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective,” which Jazeel uses to indicate that the technological gaze of the world is not neutral, but has developed within particular historical power structures. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Luke also critiques individuals like, Paul Crutzen, who “uncritically recycles Enlightenment-based ontographies for nature/culture, humanity/technology, subject/object, man/environment relations as stratigraphic operational assumptions” (“On the Politics of the Anthropocene” 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. For now the SCC is still being calculated, despite an executive order by the now-President Trump “disbanding the interagency working group that calculated the dollar value on the effect of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet and society” (Hess 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Roberts and Parks also reference their work here: Roberts, J. T. & Parks, B. C. (2007) A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North–South Politics, and Climate Change (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). Their call here for a “hybrid” solution acknowledges the various other agreements and positions that have been enacted or proposed for dealing with the inequalities of climate change, including “grandfathering” (the 1997, Kyoto Protocol is an example of this), carbon intensity (with an emphasis on economic grown with low carbon emissions); a global per capita norm (where those countries whose consumption of fossil fuels was well below the average, would be allow room/ time to develop and emit), and proposals for historic responsibility (which obviously effect many in the Global North, specifically here Britain and the United States) (199). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)