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Climate Parallax and our Common Home: Some Thoughts on The Search for
Words, Politics and Ecologies involving Chakrabarty's "*One Planet, Many Worlds:
The Climate Parallax*"

Gerard Kuperus

Making Kin

Parallax: the last word of the title of Chakrabarty's rich and thought-provoking book, *One Planet, Many Worlds*, refers (among other things) to the effect resulting from viewing the same object from two different positions. When viewing our planet from different worlds, the planet's meaning will be determined in a variety of ways. Those worlds can collide, even within oneself, as we find demonstrated in a short section, at the very end of the book. Here, Chakrabarty turns to Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and in particular to her discussion of the "grammar of animacy" as she finds it in her native language. Different from English and many other Western tongues, her language expresses the animate nature of the natural world. Since Kimmerer speaks different "languages"—as both a western scientist and an Indigenous person—Chakrabarty calls her situation an example of "how to speak across real and difficult differences that exist within her [...] Intellectual kin-making does not erase differences and produce identities. Like entanglements, it allows us to be plural inside, intellectually."¹ More than one world can exist, even within ourselves. Using Žižek's concept of the parallax, we can recognize the possibility of plurality, of rifts between positions that do not need to be resolved (or, perhaps, the "resolution" could consist of the recognition of heterogeneity). Such a parallax could provide fruitful possibilities for living with one another on the same planet, even while coming from very different positions.

My first comment on this passage relates to the intellectual aspect of kin-making. The example of Kimmerer's two different approaches to the natural world (or the planet) can indeed be explained as, respectively, a western and an indigenous intellectual approach. Yet, the recognition itself and what is recognized lies well beyond the intellectual. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer herself ends the

¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *One planet, many worlds: the climate parallax* (Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2023), 105.

chapter on the grammar of animacy with a reference to one of her elders, who points out that one does not have to speak the native language fluently: what is important is that you have to speak this language from your heart. Making-kin is exactly the kind of activity that steps beyond intellectual activity: “What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.”²

Indigenous thinking has often been regarded as myth, overcome by Western science, and thus I appreciate Wall Kimmerer’s important move to pull indigenous languages into the realm of the intellectual, and likewise to recognize indigenous wisdom as science. Chakrabarty provides throughout the middle sections of the book plenty of reasons to reappraise non-western cultures that have been drowned by modernity. Nonetheless, I am worried that Chakrabarty may misread some of Wall Kimmerer’s insights, since by overemphasizing the intellectual aspect, we miss aspects of empathy and feeling. This is especially significant because our (Western) rational approach has not been very helpful in *being with* the non-natural world. We want to know and explain the mysteries of the universe using scientific theories. Feelings have no place in the scientific paradigm. The idea of the parallax suggests that different perspectives or worlds can co-exist in their incommensurability. Intellectual endeavors tend to be dualistic, not allowing for differences. So perhaps the form of kinship suggested ought to be a move towards non-dualism, which allows for intellect, and wisdom, to be grounded in the heart.

Politics

A second comment is related to the first, and refers to the idea of the politics of being-with, as discussed by Chakrabarty, and tied to kinship. I think few will consider politics to be primarily an intellectual endeavor. Even disregarding the day to day irrational power-play in places such as Washington DC, Brussels, or in any city hall, political decision-making is, for better or worse, often driven by irrational motives. Other than what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the state, the sedentary, and territorial, a politics of kinship is a politics of *being-with*. Following, again, a non-binary approach, Chakrabarty suggests that the state and nomadology are not

² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013), 49.

mutually exclusive.³ The notion of kinship proposed here is an inclusive one, deterritorializing, and certainly in Kimmerer's approach lies well beyond the human world. Thus, I am wondering: how inclusive is the approach of kinship as a political being-with in *One Planet, Many Worlds*?

To further deterritorialize we can begin with Bruno Latour's emphasis that the earth itself has become an agent.⁴ In articulating the difference between the planetary and the many worlds, Chakrabarty situates the political in the many worlds, as this is the place, or these are the places, where we are differentiated.⁵ In my *Ecopolitics: Redefining the Polis* I have articulated a shared overarching (planetary) politics. This is not the one we find at a COP meeting. It is a politics we find, first of all, in animals collaborating in structures we could recognize as political, and which in Chakrabarty's terminology would be the many worlds. I am, secondly, proposing a shared politics, a planetary politics. Even the biological urge to belong to a group can be found across species, from ants and salmon to the homo sapiens. If the whole planet consists of networks of agencies, we can consider ourselves as one of the many political animals on the planet. Latour suggests this, among others, through the idea of the spokesperson, while I suggest in *Ecopolitics* that different species organize and collaborate in (both nomadic and sedentary) political structures. We can compare this to the somewhat problematic but interesting image of the breathing earth which makes it possible for us to breathe.⁶ Moreover, if we, following the Gaia hypothesis, regard the planet itself as an agent, I like to think of our politics as one of the many expressions of the planet's political capacities (of which ours is arguably a very poor one). This is valuable in the sense that it suggests that everything we do belongs to the earth, that we belong here, and that this earth is a home we have in common. In short, different from *One Planet* in which politics is located in the realm of the many worlds, I suggest that politics is shared and also

³ Chakrabarty, *One planet*, 84-87.

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, "Conflicts of Planetary Proportion – A Conversation" (Journal of the Philosophy of History 14, 2020), 432.

⁵ Chakrabarty, *One planet*, 8.

⁶ Chakrabarty, *One planet*, 13. I recognize Chakrabarty's criticism of Nail's idea that we have to expend the earth. Nail takes a problematic anthropocentric turn and makes the earth belong to us. Yet, the image of the breathing earth is – I believe – a valuable one.

found at the planetary level. My move decentralizes and de-anthropocentrizes politics, while Chakrabarty regards politics as a human activity.

Our Common Home

If we interpret the notion of “many worlds” as political, would this yield a sense of unity for the planet? As Latour argues in *Facing Gaia*, since the Copernican Revolution (the result of another parallax) it seems that our planet is just another planet, without any special status.⁷ While a phrase such as our common home, or the idea of Gaia, connects us in intricate and essential ways, the word “planet,” even the phrasing “one planet,” opens the way to underestimating the unique aspects of our common home. Latour reinvigorated the term Gaia, in order to emphasize the particularity of the earth. An alternative I would want to propose is to think about our worlds in terms of *ecologies*, as is done in integral ecology, an approach in which natural ecologies are regarded as related to human ecologies (such as social, cultural, and economic). Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* uses integral ecology and speaks then of “our common home” as the shared common entity. Maybe the important tension of the parallax is less obvious in integral ecology, yet what we miss in the planet and the planetary is a sense of home and belonging amidst all the tensions. What is beautiful and powerful about home, *oikos*, is the shared name in ecology. What is common is also separated into many ecosystems. And it is a collectively shared “our.”

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⁷ Bruna Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the Climate Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 79.

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