The Sea (El mar) is one of Jorge Luis Borges’ sonnets. It opens with the following lines:

Before dreams (or terror) wove together
Mythologies and cosmogonies
Before time contrived itself into days
The sea, the always sea, already was¹

The tension in these lines hinges on the opposition between two temporalities, that of humans (the speaker of the poem) and that of the sea. Borges astutely underscores the temporality of the sea by turning an adverb into an adjective—“the always sea”—which “already was.” This temporality of the sea nears the eternal and it is indifferent to human history, which contrives itself into days. Dipesh Chrakrabarty’s urgent essays in his One Planet Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax, evoke the opposition of timelines in Borges’ poem. As a fitting metaphor, the parallax’s disorienting effect displaces two timelines from each other: the uneven timelines of human histories and the more undisturbed temporality of the planet; the planet as a geological and cosmological entity opposed to the globe in all its cultural, political, historical, and social multiplicity.

Chakrabarty’s groundbreaking Provincializing Europe nuanced European modernity’s pretense of temporal totality and linearity by positing the diversity of histories present in the experiences of postcolonial subjects, as these subjects wrestle with the life forms produced by capital. The advent of capitalist modernity and the ensuing and exponential growth of middle classes in postcolonial countries, like India and China, come with patterns and flows of consumption that have aggravated, to

almost a point of no return, the climate crisis. This point of no return is referred to as the Great Acceleration. In light of the effects that the Great Acceleration has had on the planet, Chakrabarty ponders what to provincialize. His reply: “I provincialize the human.”

By provincializing the human, Chakrabarty creates a *mise-en-abîme* of sorts, the frames of which are constituted by his intriguing distinctions between the planet and the global. The many histories forged by humans thrive in one singular planet, no matter how different and conflictive these histories are. Chakrabarty’s “provincializing” of the human comes with the conviction that we can no longer be oblivious to the planetary. To a large extent this is true because humans are living in the *Anthropocene*, an epoch in planetary history where humans are the defining geological force. Never has this convergence between the planetary and the global been as distressing as with the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in 2020. Citing David Morens, Chakrabarty convincingly argues that “human beings are the ultimate cause of pandemics.”

Ironically, the very demands that lead to human “flourishing” are ravaging entire ecosystems in the planet. The exponential increase of zoonotic diseases is undeniably linked to anthropogenic causes. In the Anthropocene, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the exchange of pleasantries (the phatic function of language) like comments about the weather we exchange when we run into each other in public places, can no longer happen with indifference towards the microbial world and the planetary timeline. The timeline of everyday life converges with the timeline of the planet, which we, humans, have shaped from our situated cultural locations and from our situated histories.

The pandemic could well be ciphered in Walter Benjamin’s allegory of the ruin, along with its captive temporalities, its transiency, fragility and decay. When Chakrabarty states in a compelling phrase that “[i]n the pandemic the future arrives as

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nostalgia,” the imbrication of present, past and future implied in the phrase is evocative of the temporalities contained in the ruin: the dusty shells of the dreams the past had of its future. The pandemic and its harrowing toll on our bodies and our world embody in the present this ruination; nostalgia is an idealized evocation of the past as dreamscape. If in the pandemic the future arrives as nostalgia; specifically, a nostalgia for a return to pre-pandemic normalcy, this hope is already forlorn. Ironically, a nostalgia for pre-pandemic normalcy is not only impossible given the convergence of the everyday and the microbial during the pandemic, but the nostalgia for such normalcy features the indifference to the microbial that led us directly into the pandemic. With their foreboding mix of dialectical materialist insight and prophesy, Benjamin’s allegories—like the ruin, and the angel of history, (propelled to the future by a blast while looking at the past as catastrophe)—seem fitting images to underscore the apocalyptic tone foregrounded by Chakrabarty when he addresses the post-pandemic chimera of a future that arrives as nostalgia: a future that might not arrive at all. This is what is at stake!

If, as Chakrabarty asserts, for Hannah Arendt our politics is reduced to the politics of survival in the face of planetary fury, and if politics is no politics at all when morality is absent, then a planetary politics should perhaps be articulated in relation to the ethics of truth events as Alain Badiou defines them. Badiou argues that we humans—otherwise unattractive bipeds—become subjects—ethical subjects—when in the face of a truth event we commit faithfully, and to the end, to the truth event.

The most telling aspect of a truth event is the “break” it produces with previous instituted knowledge and previous symbolic constructions. As Badiou states by referring to Jacques Lacan, a truth process “…punches a hole [trouée] in these knowledges.” In Jacques Ranciére’s terminology it is a rearrangement of the sensible as we know it. This is precisely what the Anthropocene faces us with, a break with which we are grappling and for which we attempt to find a language, a hole that the

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4 Ibid. p.26
planetary punches on the surface of the global. Fidelity to the event invites the birth of a new subject, a reinvention:

To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by thinking the situation (...) ‘according to’ the event. And this, of course—since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation.⁶

In Provincializing Europe Chakrabarty has produced discourses that excavate the ways in which diverse human communities with diverse histories have impacted and, in turn, been impacted by the flow of capital and by hegemonic ideas of modernity embedded with imperial power. In attempting to reframe these concerns within the Anthropocene, Chakrabarty in One Planet Many Worlds wrestles with the need to create a new language, evident in his warning to register the presence of the planetary in the global. In doing so he “moves within the situation” and calls for a planetary politics that can avert our own destruction.

Truth events, for Badiou, happen in four realms: Arts, Sciences, Love, and Politics. Framing Badiou’s ethics in the now-co-present duality suggested by Chakrabarty between the global and the planetary, Badiou’s four realms belong to the global. Given the awareness and proximity of the planetary in the Anthropocene, perhaps, the planetary should be advanced as its own truth event and as a new realm in Badiou’s ethical model. A politics emerging from the planetary as a realm of truth events could potentially call for acts of fidelity through which new subjects and new languages are reconstituted, in order to deal with the burning demands the Anthropocene poses.

Addressing temporality in the event, Allain Badiou states that in the face of a truth event, a subject might be reactionary and become involved in a repetition of the past, an idealization of tradition; or become a denialist and advocate various forms of mythology as redemptive solutions projected onto the future. One can think, for

⁶ Ibid. p.42
instance, of climate change deniers in American politics and of leading figures in the world of technology who entertain the mythology that technology will redeem humans from climate change devastation, in this earth or in some other planet. But for Badiou, both of these options, the future projection of a denialist and the repetition of the past of a reactionary subject, disavow the world and install us in a “worldless” world. It is only by committing to a truth event that the real present time emerges. Badiou refers to the present time of the event a temporal torsion. The present as torsion does not blindly follow the past and tradition, but rewrites it instead; it also sees aspects of the future in the present. In this sense the torsion of the present time is reminiscent of the imbrication of temporalities perceptible in the ruin, where the subject perceives in a dialectical image the now ruinous dreamscapes the past had of its future. In the implicit recognition of the planetary as a truth event one finds in Chakrabarty’s One Planet Many Worlds a reckoning with the real present as torsion, as such temporality embodies the consequences the planet has suffered due to a conception of “progress” overly reliant on carbon consumption. The present that emerges from fidelity to the planetary as a truth event also reveals chilling traces of the future that is sure to come, unless we change the very definition, to use Benjamin’s words, “of that which we call progress.”

In The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, Amitav Ghosh exhorts fiction writers to overcome the solipsism of discursive and expressive regimes in the contemporary novel, which features front and center what John Updike called “individual moral adventure.” Instead, he calls for the creation of a new rhetoric in fiction that can not only represent our collective predicament in the Anthropocene, but also do what fiction does best: imagine the unimaginable: “[...]. The great, irreplaceable potentiality of fiction is that it makes the imagining of possibilities. And to imagine other forms of human existence is exactly the challenge that is posed by the climate crisis [...].” Fiction in general, including science fiction—which according to Ghosh is relegated to the realm of non-serious literature by the appointed cultural
arbiterst—displays a disposition to move through conflicting, paralleled, proleptic and analeptic temporal lines. Incidentally, Borges, *Ficciones* have made temporal games a central concern. The affirmation of the new rhetoric of fiction urged by Ghosh is evident in the emergence of the subgenre termed cli-fiction (literature on the climate change) of which Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry of the Future* (2020) is a lucid example. The novel embodies both, a fidelity to the planetary as a truth event in the realm of fiction writing and the embodiment of the present time as torsion. The novel begins with a chilling account of a devastating heatwave in a small town in India in the near future, witnessed by Frank May an aid worker futilely trying to save lives. Mary Murphy heads the Ministry of the Future, a fictional institution charged with saving humanity from climate change. The novel is a true polyphony of voices that weaves together discourses from politics, hard sciences, economics, and literary genres. Its imagining of a terrifying future delivered by the unfettered excesses of carbon consumption in the past is, yes, dreadful, but the reader also closes the novel with a glimmer of hope. The novel’s deliberate polyphony, its intersectionality of multidisciplinary discourses is a fitting illustration of the need for a new rhetoric, the new symbolic required to imagine ourselves in and out of the climate predicament in the midst of the Anthropocene. This novel is but one example among many that illustrates Ghosh’s exhortation for a new literature and thus a fidelity to a truth event (the climate crisis) in the realm of the planetary.

Another example, which I cannot resist myself from citing is this fragment from *Here*, (Tutaj) a whimsical poem by Polish writer Wislava Szymborska. Her exquisite irony about our obliviousness to the planetary is quite evident in these lines:

*And as an extra, added feature,*

*you spin on the planet’s carousel for free*

*and with it you hitch a ride on the intergalactic blizzard*

*with times so dizzying*

*that nothing here on Earth can even tremble*
Just take a closer look: (...)⁸

Isn’t that, perhaps, the way in which fidelity to a truth event in the “planetary” should start?: Just take a closer look!

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