

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
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PARTIAL EARTH: UNSETTLING THE MODERN GAZE

Abstract

This is an ongoing thesis that examines the intersection of space imaginaries, cosmology, decolonialization and myth within the context of design theory. The work draws from philosophy, critical theory, and postcolonial studies to unpack our relationship to the cosmos and through it, to the planet.

The work begins with a central frustration at Space 2.0, or NewSpace, which seems to increasingly align with the logics of capitalism whilst perpetuating colonial legacies. We are already grappling with the alarming reality of colossal ecological disaster unfolding on a planetary scale. The relentless cycle of production, consumption and exploitation would only further ecological catastrophe and socio-economic divides which run the risk of seeping into the future and now, even beyond our Earthbound existence. To examine this, the thesis turns to paradigmatic cosmological representations to trace the historical genealogy that reinforced this mindset.

Chapter 1 focuses on the paradigmatic “Whole Earth” images – Earthrise, Blue Marble and Pale Blue Dot. The view of Earth as “whole” and from the “outside” was anticipated to be an ego-shattering blow, similar to the one brought forth by the Copernican turn. But contextualizing Whole Earth - by highlighting its universalist tendencies and its reinforcement of human centrality - makes apparent how created the conditions for the endured continuity of colonial capitalist modernity.

Chapter 2 draws on the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bruno Latour, Lukáš Likavčan, Timothy Morton and Benjamin Bratton. It advocates for a reconceptualization of Earth narratives grounded in “planetary” and explores the significance of the first black hole photograph as a catalyst for reimagining humanity’s place in the cosmos. It challenges anthropocentric perspectives by foregrounding alterity and exteriority in cosmological representations, emphasizing the unknown and the ineffable.

Chapter 3 (ongoing) focuses on possible narrative conditions to construct a renewed cosmogram of the planet that prioritizes a decentering of the human and untangles itself from historical Earth figures. Here, the thesis explores on fictioning and mythopoesis as a mediating strategy to navigate the complexities of renegotiating with the unknown. Thereby presenting a “sky tale” of Earth as an inhuman, indifferent, monstrous entity that pushes against conventional notions of stability and grounding in an attempt to get closer to the Planetary.

The thesis does not attempt to come to a firm conclusion, but aims to open up space to explore the possibility of untangling ourselves from the dominant narratives that made our age one of ecological catastrophe.