If there is one question that haunts every other question being asked today, it might be this: How do we move from the current state of affairs in which the contemporaneity of divisive difference prevails to a world in which we work together to construct the kinds of coeval communality that are necessary—and, hopefully, will become sufficient—for our survival?

Let us—hypothetically, of course (although, in fact, this is serious)—call this “the World’s question.” And regard it as the question that everything that makes the world possible as a world, everything that is actual within it, is asking of itself, of every other thing, and about their relationships to each other, right now. There are, of course, many other questions that seem as large, or as opening onto questions this big. Among them: Is there a viable alternative to capitalism as an economic driver, within nations, between them, and outside them? Will the United States and China hold back from plunging global geopolitics into a new Cold War? Does the persistence of authoritarian rule and the rise of reactionary populism within many nation states signal the permanent decline of democracy as a model of social organization? Which of the following most presciently imagines our future: Crash, Children of Men, Babel, Tree of Life, Melancholia, Cloud Atlas, Avatar, In Time, Tomorrowland, A Touch of Sin, Ten Years, Blade Runner 2049 or Black Panther? (Insert your favorite TV series.) How do we create or recreate a free public sphere in our town, our city, our country, between nations, and on the Internet? Can global warming be mitigated sufficiently to save our species? Answers to questions like these, I suggest, depend on answering a question of this kind: How do “we” become
“our,” how does “mine” and “yours” become “ours,” for each of us and on a planetary scale?

Of course, every element in such a question—each word, concept, relation and every connotation—calls itself and every other term into question and requires explanation and qualification. Soon, however, it will become necessary to reassert a question of this kind as pointing to what needs to be said, and what needs to be done, right now.

The seminar will explore modes of world questioning that are operative today within and between several disciplines with a view to assessing their contribution to the formulation of a differentiated, and open mode of world questioning that might be widely shared.

The syllabus below enables us to read examples of many of the most influential modes. I am open to substituting others at your suggestion. Please send me pdfs so that I may read them. We also have flexibility with the format of the last three sessions of the course.

Assignments are outlined at the end of the document. The invited visitors are also noted.

SYLLABUS

* = core reading, the focus of seminar discussions. The other texts are supplementary, for reading if you have time, or are pursuing this topic in depth. Scans of each text may be found on Courseweb in the folder for each session, or a link is provided for you to access them.

Preliminary and background reading or viewing:


1. January 8 Introductory and Indigenous Perspectives


2. January 15 European Universalism, Modern World Picturing


3. January 22 Colonization, Decolonization


4. January 29 Globalized Overviews


5. February 5  Deep Histories


February 12  No seminar due to national conference: Reading week, first assignment writing time

6. February 19  Ecology, Dark Matter


7. February 26 Cyborgs to Chthulucene


8. March 4 Contemporary Composition


**SPRING BREAK**

9. March 18  SEMINAR CANCELLED

**CHANGES FROM NOW ON.** All seminar session will be held at the usual time via Zoom meetings. Meeting ID is 384-175-478.

Readings for weeks 9 and 10 are combined. We will focus on discussing those that are asterisked.*  Readings originally assigned for week 11 should be understood as background material. Weeks 11, 12, and 13 will be devoted to presentations of your work-in-progress towards the second assignment.

10. March 25  World Representing and Name the System! (readings combined)


**Read the following texts in your own time as back-up readings.**

**Activism in Post-Truth Times**

President Donald J. Trump, Inaugural Address, January 20, 2017 at https://www.whitehouse.gov/b Briefings-Statements/the-inaugural-address/


11. April 1  Presentations of work in progress on assignment 2 (5 x 30 minutes each)

12. April 8  Presentations of work in progress on assignment 2 (5 x 30 minutes each)

13. April 15  Presentations of work in progress on assignment 2 (5 x 30 minutes each)

Presentations will be made through Zoom meetings. Please indicate if you will be using Powerpoint or wish to post texts via Zoom’s Share Screen function. If you wish to share your essay in progress with the seminar beforehand (for more focused discussion) you are welcome to do so, via me as an email circulation. Those who have not yet discussed with me their plans for second assignment and who wish to do so, please email and we will set up a time for a Zoom meeting.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. What kind of world question is being asked by the objects of your research, and how is world questioning taking place in your research process?
2. The question of world questioning: what is your understanding of it how it is being asked, and how it should be asked, in the wider world today?

Assignment 1 should be approximately 2,000 words and is due on **February 23**.

Assignment 2 should be approximately 3,000 words and is due on **April 22**.

VISITORS (Unable to come, Chakrabarty due to previous engagements, Wark due to COVID-19, Silverman due to retirement.)

The Cultural Studies Program provides for visitors to the Common Seminar each year. Invitations have been extended to

**Dipesh Chakrabarty**, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor in History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and the College, at the University of Chicago. A founding member of the editorial collective of *Subaltern Studies*, a consulting editor of *Critical Inquiry*, a founding editor of *Postcolonial Studies*, he has served on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review* and *Public Culture*. He is the author, among other books, of *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; second edition, 2008).


TS revised 3.18.2020