

***To Write the Earth:* Law, the Global, and Planetary World-Making**

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Cartography literally means “to write the earth.” If maps write rather than mirror the world, they function as world-making texts that narrate space, distribute authority, and normalize particular orders under the guise of spatial precision. Modern international law is deeply shaped by this cartographic inheritance: sovereignty, territory, and jurisdiction rest on a vision of the earth as a continuous surface partitioned into polygonal units under human control. That this image appears natural is itself a political achievement. It is a way of writing the world that has come to stand in for the planet itself.

Yet this anthropocentric world-writing is neither exclusive nor inevitable. Many other modes of composing the earth exist and have persisted across time: indigenous cosmologies, ecological and multispecies ontologies, oceanic and atmospheric imaginaries, logistical and digital infrastructures, climate and earth-system models. These do not merely represent different geographies; they articulate distinct assumptions about agency, relation, obligation, and the grounds of authority. The challenge is not simply to add the non-human or other-than-human to existing legal frameworks, but to recognize that the very scale and composition of the world shift when humans are no longer presumed to be its sole authors and agents.

As climatic destabilization intensifies, the language of the “planetary” has emerged as a conceptual alternative to the “global”, which had itself emerged as an alternative to the “international”. Yet these semantic shifts remains superficial if they do not grapple with the deeper conceptual question: How is the earth written, by whom, and to what ends? And how is it written through law? What, precisely, distinguishes the planetary, the global, and the international—and how might these distinctions matter for legal thought and practice? What does it mean to think of the planetary as something other than the global enlarged? How does “planetary law” depart or intersect with other naming projects such as “global law” and “transnational law”? And what forms of law and authority become possible when the earth is understood as a site of multiple and contested writings?

Attending to these shifting modes of earth-writing also requires attention to legal and other expert crafts. Planetary and global projects are made and remade through the expert practices of drafting, interpreting, standard-setting, contracting, modelling, litigating, and enforcing. Asking how the earth is written therefore also means asking who writes these norms, in which institutional sites, with what materials and procedures, and how they travel, sediment, or are resisted.

This workshop invites participants to examine how diverse practices of earth-writing—cartographic, legal, literary, scientific, ecological, and infrastructural—stabilize or unsettle the relationship between law, the global, and the planetary. The workshop is substantively and methodologically interdisciplinary: no single field possesses the conceptual resources required to rethink world-making at planetary scale. It brings together scholars in law, international relations, geography, anthropology, history, political theory, STS, and critical environmental studies to collaborate experimentally.

Suggested and Interacting Themes (To explore possible themes of coherence)

1. World-Making and International Law’s Anthropocentric Inheritance

How international law historically linked its ordering project to human-centered concepts (sovereignty, peoplehood, jurisdiction). What happens when ecological and more-than-human processes are no longer background conditions but legal participants?

2. Colonial and Imperial Earth-Writings

How imperial mapping, surveying, and classificatory practices produced the “global” as a legible whole. What forms of erasure, enclosure, and extraction are reproduced in contemporary legal frameworks?

3. Writing Planetary Codes

How existing legal doctrine is being, and can be, rewritten for planetary purposes. Has work on global and planetary legal thinking paid sufficient attention to doctrine and professional legal work? Can close attention to legal craft and doctrinal imagination open spaces within international, global, and transnational legal thought to reshape legal frameworks towards fairer environmental futures? What would such changes look like, down to the level of doctrinal detail?

4. Approaches Beyond the Human: Rights of Nature, Post-Human Legalities, and Planetary Scholarship

How emerging thought experiments and legal interventions (rights of rivers, ecological personhood, relational ontologies, multispecies jurisprudence) reconfigure who or what can bear authority.

5. Imagining Planetary Legal Orders

What conceptual tools, narrative forms, and representational practices might enable legal thought to respond to planetary transformations without reproducing global cartographic logics. How might plural earth-writings co-exist without collapsing into universalism? And what would such orders look like in legal detail?

6. The Persistence of the Social

What risks being obscured by the rise of the language of the planetary. How might projects of planetary law governance remain accountable to questions of redistribution, labour, care, and welfare, historically understood as core responsibilities of the (sovereign) state?

Workshop Format

This workshop is structured as a collaborative research laboratory rather than a venue for presenting finished papers. Participants will circulate short working papers or conceptual position pieces (2,000–4,000 words) in advance. Sessions will proceed through shared reading, roundtable discussion, and collective conceptual exploration. Our aim is to develop new analytic vocabularies, methodological approaches, and research directions that render planetary world-making newly thinkable. The workshop will culminate in the co-development of an edited scholarly volume, *To Write the Earth*, extending the inquiry initiated in the workshop.

Call for Contributions

Interested scholars are invited to submit an abstract of **250–500 words** outlining their proposed contribution. Please include your name, institutional affiliation, and a brief biographical note (2–3 sentences). We strongly encourage PhD researchers and postdocs to apply as well as more senior colleagues. There is a limited budget for the workshop, and those submitting abstracts should be prepared to finance their own travel and accommodation.

Submit abstracts by 15 January 2026 to: n.m.rajkovic@tilburguniversity.edu
In the subject title: “To write the Earth, Abstract submitted by [Your Name]”

Due to limited human resources, only acceptances and invitations will be communicated by 3 February 2026.