



University of
Western Sydney

CENTRE FOR
CULTURAL RESEARCH

Date

September 2, 2010

Time

2pm - 3:30pm

Venue

Gallery
Female Orphan School
Building EZ
Parramatta Campus
([view map](#))

RSVP

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Apologies

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[View 2010 Seminar
schedule](#)

CCR Seminar Series 2010

Pheng Cheah

(University of California at Berkeley)

The physico-material bases of cosmopolitanism

The problematic of cosmopolitanism and the world-wide solidarity it entails has primarily been posed in terms of the deficiencies of vision, perception and the imagination. While we can imagine the bounded community of the nation, it is more difficult to imagine common humanity. This is exemplified by the difficulties of implementing human rights instruments, insofar as they require a common acknowledgment among individuals and sovereign nation-states alike that we all belong to the same world community and must abide by its norms. Marx argued, however, that cosmopolitanism was not merely an ideal nor even a perspective embodied in institutions of right but something that had been made actually existing by virtue of the global mode of production and the world market created by industrial capital. This paper suggests that we must locate the physico-material bases of cosmopolitanism at an even more fundamental level: in the biopolitical making of concrete human beings with all their capacities and needs who can subsequently recognized that they thereby have human rights. It then examines how these physico-material bases of cosmopolitanism radically challenge conventional philosophical understandings of human rights.

Pheng Cheah is Professor in the Department of Rhetoric, University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (Columbia University Press, 2003) and *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2006). He has co-edited *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (Routledge, 2003), and *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (Duke University Press, 2009). He is currently working on a book on world literature in the age of global financialization and a book on the concept of instrumentality.