

# “There is no Earth corresponding to the Globe”

An Interview with Bruno Latour by Lars Gertenbach, Sven Opitz and Ute Tellmann<sup>1</sup>

*In the last few years you have been working on two major projects. You have published your comprehensive book, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence (AIME)*, which has also given rise to a web-based collaborative research platform.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, you have produced several articles and talks focusing on the planetary environmental crises of the Anthropocene, the most extensive in this respect being the Gifford Lectures entitled *Facing Gaia: A New Enquiry Into Natural Religion* delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 2013. How are these two bodies of work connected?*

**Bruno Latour:** I started working on *Modes of Existence* almost 30 years ago, long before I got interested in ecology. My main aim was to introduce ontological pluralism into the modernist constitution. And this idea came in handy when I developed my interest in ecology for a simple reason: What could be called “the ecological threat” seems to be difficult to handle in the very narrow ontological framework we have – “we”, the Moderns, who have never been modern in *practice*, but we are in *theory* since we oppose *Nature* to *Society*. In this sense the two strands that you are mentioning are related.

In my more recent work, including the exhibition *Reset Modernity!*, I became increasingly intrigued with Gaia. As a character Gaia is so interesting, so bizarre and has so many different features. In a way I am drifting away from my inquiry into the modes of existence because of the necessity to give a face to Gaia.<sup>3</sup> This implies collaborations with chemists, hydrologists and geologists. Here, the crucial figure is of course that of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene allows me to draw a connection between lots of things I did in the past: It contains the completely banal insight from actor-network-theory that humans and nonhumans are connected. Finally, everyone got the point, not because of me, of course, but because of the Anthropocene! More importantly, the Anthropocene forces us to rethink the notion of territory – like some of your work does as well.<sup>4</sup> The Anthropocene reterritorializes or re-grounds politics, industry and economy in radically different ways. I found that so exciting that I am now drifting more and more back to the ground.

*In Reassembling the Social you have put forward a relational ontology. How does this fit together with the notions of earth-space and territory that you are now employing? Usually planetary space is associated with an image of wholeness, whereas territory is generally understood in topographic terms. In this sense, both notions seem diametrically opposed to the space of the network.*

My Gaia – which is, of course, Lovelock's Gaia – indicates a non-global, a non-total vision. I was giving a lecture the other day on Gaia and Tim Lenton was in the audience. Lenton had been one of Lovelock's students and today holds a chair in earth systems science at Exeter. He confirmed that *my* Lovelock actually *is* Lovelock! [Laughs] Anyway, the important point per-

1 The interview took place in April 2016, preceding the opening of Bruno Latours exhibition *Reset Modernity!* at the *Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie* in Karlsruhe.

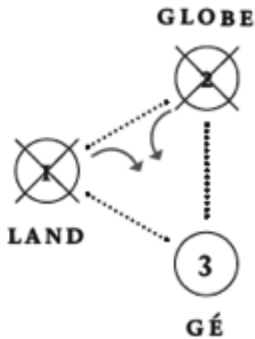
2 <http://modesofexistence.org/> (accessed 27 July 2016).

3 With this formulation Bruno Latour implicitly refers to one of the more popular books published by James Lovelock, the biophysicist and inventor of the Gaia-hypothesis: *The Vanishing Face of Gaia. A Final Warning*, New York: Basic Books, 2009.

4 Opitz, Sven and Tellmann, Ute: “Global Territories: Zones of Economic and Legal Dis/Connectivity”, in: *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 13(3), 2012: 261-282.

tains to the opposition between the globe and the earth. The globe and the earth imply two fundamentally different forms of occupying a territory. Whereas the Moderns had the globe as a horizon in the Husserlian sense, now we are suddenly re-territorializing and re-grounding. This is completely different from the globe: in terms of legal difference and also in terms of cartographic difference, as you can also see in the “Museum of Oil” at the ZKM in Karlsruhe.<sup>5</sup> Gaia's earth is 3-D instead of 2-D.

Figure 1: Three versions of territory<sup>6</sup>



I am obsessed by this little triangle here [Figure 1]. It circumscribes three different definitions of territory: Beside the globe, we have this older figure of the land, which corresponds to Husserl's *Ur-Arche Erde* and which has disappeared.<sup>7</sup> It's a little unfair to Husserl, but the title of his book “*La terre ne se meut pas*”<sup>8</sup> (the land does not move) expresses exactly the opposite of our current state – we're in *la terre que se meut* (the land that moves). When we were modernizing, we departed from the land in the direction of the globe. But now the globe has disappeared, we fully understand that the globe has been a fiction. As a consequence, everybody is trying to get back to the old land again. In Germany, you have this extreme right wing party, in France the Front National, in England the Brexit-people, Donald Trump in America. This is the tragedy that we face! The globe, where we were supposed to go, is not there; that is why we try to return to the old land, but it is a fiction.

But there is a third pole in the diagram: the earth (Gé). The earth is also a territory. It shares many features with the older land and also has some features of the globe, but it is a different

5 The exhibition *Territorial Agency: Museum of Oil* is part of Peter Weibel's *GLOBALE* and also a “module” of Bruno Latour's exhibition *Reset Modernity!*

6 This figure is taken from the field book of the exhibition *Reset Modernity!* at the ZKM in Karlsruhe (April 15 – August 21, 2016); Procedure D: From Lands to Disputed Territories. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/681> (accessed 27 July 2016).

7 Husserl, Edmund: “Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Räumlichkeit der Natur”, in: Husserl, Edmund (Ed.): *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1940, pp. 307–325.

8 “*La terre se ne meut pas*” is the French title of Husserl's article referred to in the previous footnote. The article was only published posthumously and was originally untitled. It was included in an envelope with the following note: „*Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation. Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht [The ur-arche does not move; La terre se ne meut pas]. Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Körperlichkeit der Räumlichkeit der Natur im ersten naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne. Alles notwendige Anfangsuntersuchungen.*“ (Ibid., p. 307).

beast. This is precisely why I am interested in Lovelock, which is something that many people do not understand, since they never read Lovelock carefully. Or more precisely, they do not read Lovelock together with Margulis. It's very important to link the work of the two, that is, to link the idea of what a cell is with the earth.<sup>9</sup> Lovelock and Margulis have, indeed, provided basic discoveries about the particular kind of land on which we are all supposed to land! But we don't know yet what it is.

***How can we distinguish the territoriality of the earth from the territory of modern politics? Would it be apt to say that you understand territory in topological terms, as a "topological territory?" We have the impression that the territoriality of the earth is not a topographical space, and it is also not a nomos in Carl Schmitt's sense, a term that you started using in your most recent works.***

But it shares some features with the *nomos* in the Schmittian sense: it is a concrete order! It is not by coincidence that several recent publications have started reading Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth* from the perspective of ecology. Until recently, the *nomos* has only been understood as a legal term.

***But how, then, would you distinguish the territory of what you call the "old land" from the territory of the earth?***

The old land is a myth. All three are figures – the land, the globe, and the earth are figures of movement. We consider the land to be old since we left it behind when we were modernizing. In agriculture it would be the farm of our great-grandfathers and ancestors. It doesn't have any existence, it is the thing we know we left behind when modernization became our horizon. But modernization can only be a horizon when there is enough land and an earth to accommodate the globe. This is why the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris was so important: All the representatives of the 190 countries were there, together in one room – having to concretize their visions of the future. They had to realize that no earth corresponds to that trajectory. We all realized that there is no earth corresponding to this globe! There's no earth for China, India, America, France or Germany. So, what do you do?

I am not a political scientist, but it's easy to sense that there is a wave of reaction everywhere: "Oh, now you are telling us that there is no globe? Then, at least, give us a safe haven of some sort." People have been forced to sacrifice a lot of things for modernization, and suddenly they are told that modernization is over because there is no earth that corresponds to this project. In this situation, I imagine you want to fall back on something which has boundaries. However, you cannot simply fall back on the old land, since while you were modernizing, the thing you've left has disappeared. You end up having turned from one utopia, which was a globe, towards another utopia. Even the Brits want to return to their local island, it's extraordinary!

***We have the impression that the notion of politics has assumed a more central role for you. But it appears in different guises. In An Inquiry into Modes of Existence, politics is only one of many modes, whereas in your recent writings on Gaia and the Anthropocene, politics seems to be everywhere. Is there now a primacy of the political for you?***

Well, in AIME, politics is just one mode of existence among others, and it is characterized by its scarcity. Politics happens infrequently; it is not easy to achieve. This is, in my view, proven by the difficulty that now exists in politically absorbing the ecological crisis. I just read an article in the *New York Times* that made a very interesting argument about Donald Trump. The

9 Lynn Margulis, who developed the Gaia-hypothesis in collaboration with James Lovelock, argued that the evolution of cells with nuclei ("eukaryote") is the result of symbiotic mergers with bacteria.

author went to a pre-election party where he realized that every concern raised by Trump's supporters was lacking any object. He observed people talking mainly about their feelings, they were constantly saying: "I feel, I feel, I feel, I feel..." This indicates a sort of fascination for something that remains indeterminate. In France, to give you another example, we have a movement based on the poorest of all possible slogans called "Indignez-vous!"<sup>10</sup> Again, no object! Such phenomena underpin my suspicion that politics could actually disappear as a mode of existence, just as religion has before. People seem increasingly unable to argue *politically*. They appear to have difficulties making any statement which is political in the sense of a highly specific mode of existence.

Now, on the other hand, you're right that under Gaia "everything becomes political" in the sense that we have to re-ground, to reinvent every aspect of our existence under the conditions of the Anthropocene: energy, water, the materials our computers are made of and so on and so forth. This is all, in fact, very banal by now. The problem, however, is that both tendencies apply simultaneously. Just at the moment in which we need to re-start politically, the moment in which we need to re-sort politically every single detail of our existence, the political mode of existence as a certain way of arguing and articulating has shrunk dramatically. It has shrunk to the point where you might encounter masses of people who are not engaged in any political talk. As a consequence, all the important issues – climate, water, you name it – have been left to technology and bureaucracy. We are captured in a dilemma: At the very moment in which individualization is, so to speak, at a maximum, the collective task that you have to accomplish politically is also at a maximum. Timothy Mitchell makes that point very convincingly, and I think in German social theory there are also many concepts for expressing the same dilemma. The discrepancy is massive, and in-between these two poles the Green Party has disappeared. Of course, I should not say this here, in Baden-Württemberg. The last elections were a triumph for the Greens, but this is the world exception.<sup>11</sup>

***With regard to our initial question about the primacy of the political, we thus take from your answer that there are two different notions of politics in your work.***

Yes, the one is politics as a particular mode, and the other is politics as a horizon of things to take into account. This is an object-oriented politics that revolves around what I call "matters of concern." Both notions of politics are actually linked: the question pertaining to the "what" of the object of concern and the process of assembling around it, which is basically what we did at the ZKM, more than ten years ago, with the exhibition *Making Things Public*.

***The matters of concern would then be "the task," so to speak, to be accomplished by the political mode?***

I would say that the problem entails two very different approaches. One of them is the attention to the object of concern, the matters of concern. The other one is the ability to assemble, and for assembling you need to perform a circular movement in which a collective determines itself. This circle is very difficult to achieve if you have lost political skill. You have to turn in circles around matters of concern. You cannot have matters of concern and not turn around them, just be sitting there, fascinated. Again, this is why following the call for indignation – as in *Indignez-vous!* – is the silliest way to do anything about matters of concern.

10 Hessel, Stéphane: *Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!*, New York: Twelve 2011.

11 In the state of Baden-Württemberg Winfried Kretschmann of the Green Party has been Minister President since May 2012. With the election of 2016 the Green Party, for the first time in German history, has become the largest party in State-level election results.

***How does the distinction between politics and cosmopolitics relate to this?***

Diplomacy, which is a key notion in Isabelle Stengers' *Cosmopolitics*, is a meta-term in my enterprise. It should not to be mixed up with the political mode of turn taking, of moving in circles around matters of concern. Diplomacy is a skill that is needed in our current crisis to enter into relations with other collectives. If we now have to re-territorialize, to re-ground on earth, then we need the ability to negotiate with many other collectives who have gone through the same situation – that is, mainly through extermination and destruction. Diplomacy is therefore not a substitute for politics. It is a term for saying: If we have never been modern, but have come to understand ourselves according to the premise of ontological pluralism – as I have proposed in AIME – then we can approach collectives not as cultures, but in a different way. This is slightly embarrassing for the Moderns, because we are now developing the possibility of saying: "Oh, you too have lived in the ruins, even for a longer time than us, so we might share some of the experience of what this is like." This is Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's line, he is the specialist with regard to the extermination and rebound of the American Indians.<sup>12</sup>

***According to the common political understanding of the term, a diplomat is a representative of a sovereign state who negotiates matters of foreign policy with representatives of other sovereign states. How does your concept of diplomacy differ from this standard view on diplomacy? Who is a diplomat in your account, or how may we even become diplomats?***

To begin with, my definition is not too far from the common or current meaning. Actually, I had a discussion with an expert on military fight at the *École du Guerre* in Paris about *Facing Gaia*.<sup>13</sup> He basically said that all the questions raised in the book are major topics of discussion at the *École du Guerre* because the territorial nation states are no longer the main entities at war. Which also means that they are no longer those entities who can enter peace negotiations. Today, there are lots of other fights than those between nation states.

However, the defining feature of diplomacy for me is the absence of a final arbiter that may settle the conflict between the warring parties. This is what I take, again, from Isabelle Stengers. I am of course not quite sure whether you can pass the exam for the diplomatic schools of Germany with such an understanding. But for me the absence of a final arbiter is the crucial aspect of cosmopolitical diplomacy. The Moderns, in contrast, never had diplomacy in this sense. They always had an arbiter, which were basically the laws of nature or reason. Both were functioning as a court of final appeal.

So, who is the diplomat? Diplomats are the ones who realize that, if *they* adhere to the ontological pluralism of *their* collective, they do not meet others on the ground of reason. Those who are doing this right now are some of my anthropologist friends. Eduardo Kohn, for instance, is entering a negotiation about forests between the Indians and the forestry industry in Bolivia.<sup>14</sup> And he explicitly says that he is doing diplomatic work. Why is he a diplomat? Because he is not approaching the Indians in terms of cultural representation: as people who say "interesting things" that are indicative of their culture. If you get out of representation, then you are entering diplomacy.

12 For a discussion of the notion of diplomacy with regard to Latour's AIME-project see: Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo (2015): Who is afraid of the ontological wolf? Some comments on a recent anthropological debate, in: *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, S. 2–17.

13 So far, the book based on the manuscript of the Gifford Lecture is only available in French, cf. Latour, Bruno: *Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique*, Paris: La Découverte, 2015.

14 Kohn, Eduardo: *How Forests Think. An Anthropology Beyond the Human*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2013. For a review of Kohn's main work cf. Latour, Bruno: "On Selves, Forms, and Forces", in: *HAU – Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(2), 2016: 261–266.

***Diplomacy seems to be a question of conduct, maybe even of “tact” as Helmuth Plessner<sup>15</sup> has put it.***

Yes, tact. I would like to hear more about Plessner, this sounds very interesting. The point for me is that in order to be a diplomat you need to be two. You have to achieve something which is actually very difficult: the people in front of you have to recognize you *not* as the representative of the modernist destiny, so to speak. I learned that when I was working with Tobi Nathan at the AIME-symposium on the beings of metamorphosis [MET]. Diplomacy is not an encounter between a psychologist and an archaic guy with a strange idea in his head. The others have to say: “I see, you are not a modernist, you are on the same ground.” It’s only anthropologists who are doing that right now. They are the ones for whom the modernist epistemological version of what it means to encounter the other has vanished – today, the two sides realize that they are on the same disappearing ground. Nastassja Martin just published a book on the Alaskan Indians, which is for me the epitome of that situation.<sup>16</sup> So for me, diplomacy was very strange as long as you had powerful representatives of the Moderns trying to interpret an Indian. But since both sides now find themselves on the same disappearing ground, it is getting interesting. In a recent interview I argue that such a situation provides for a new symmetry which justifies diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Of course, this symmetry still includes relations of power and asymmetry, but after all we have to realize that there is a new situation – we are all disappearing.

***You were just mentioning that you are indebted to Isabelle Stengers’ work on cosmopolitics. Reading the two of you together, the proximity is indeed very obvious. But do you also differ regarding your understanding of politics? How would you describe such differences if they exist?***

Well, to begin with, she is infinitely more intelligent than I am. And she is a leftist – which I am not. She also believes that Deleuze is a great writer on politics, on left politics, to be more precise – which I think is not true. Apart from that, her intuition is much better than mine.

***Do you know the definition of the Left that Deleuze gives in his abécédaire, where he specifies the distinction between left and right as a matter of “perception?”<sup>18</sup>***

Well, that’s precisely the one that I think is completely ridiculous. It is one of the many ways in which politics as a mode has been emptied because of his idea that one could find out as a matter of principle what stupidity or intelligence is about. To me, that is still a remnant of the old left politics. I always sensed that the distinction between left and right politics belongs to the modern movement between the two myths of the land and the globe, which corresponds to the attempt of organizing politics either around the economy or morality. Today we realize that the old categories of left and right offer no selecting mechanism for re-grounding ourselves. At the same time, the old argument of the ecological movement that they are neither left nor right was also wrong when we take it to mean the middle ground between the mythical land and the mythical globe. We are in a very different spot: we are hanging in the middle between the globe and the earth. If we realize that we have to re-ground, the distinction between left and right leaves us with no guidance.

15 Plessner, Helmuth (1999): *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism*, New York: Humanity Books, pp. 149-170.

16 Nastassja Martin: *Les âmes sauvages. Face à l’Occident, la résistance d’un peuple d’Alaska*, Paris: Edition La Découverte 2016.

17 Latour, Bruno and Miranda, Carolina (2016): “A Dialogue About a New Meaning of Symmetric Anthropology,” in: Charbonnier, Pierre; Salmon, Gildas and Skafish, Peter (Eds.): *Comparative Metaphysics. Ontology After Anthropology*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, in print, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/146-CERISY-DESCOLA.pdf> (accessed 27 July 2016).

18 Deleuze, Gilles and Parnet, Claire: *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2012.



***Are you saying that the political vocabulary of the Left has no terms for reclaiming the earth?***

There are many different lefts and some have offered such vocabulary. For example, we now see a return of the notion of the common, which stems from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I find the resurrection of this term very interesting. To me it is an example of an attractor for re-grounding. But at the same time, the notion of the common belongs to different lineages and movements, which is bad in a way. But nevertheless, it could give all the political movements, which currently lack a "complément d'objet" – such as the Occupy movement or the Indignez-vous movement – their proper object. Indignez-vous *of this!* Occupy *this!* That would be different because it offers you mechanisms for selection. There are hundreds of examples of such attempts to reground and reclaim the common – the movement for Notre-Dame-des-Landes is a typical case, the transition towns or the Zapatistas are other examples.<sup>19</sup>

But in general, the Left is still organized along the modernist line from the land to the globe. This is the reason for the paralysis or disappearance that befalls the Social-Democrats in Germany or the socialist party in France. In a way, this is good, because they have been organizing their gradient along the wrong line. They find themselves trenched between two utopias. In this situation, those who mobilize politics around the question of ethnicity win. I am not a political scientist, but it seems fairly understandable. It is a reaction to the realization that there is no globe. If you have sacrificed everything in order to be modernized and globalized while sensing – without being told explicitly – that there is no globe, you try to go back to the caricatures of the old native land. Of course, this is a completely bizarre idea and it involves a neo-native notion of history. But when people complain that this is populism, they forget the shock of those who have been asked to modernize and to orient themselves to the globe while simultaneously realizing that it does not exist. There is no earth corresponding to the globe. No earth could be big enough for the horizon of the globe.

***You have always emphasized that the composition of the common knows no neutral arbiter. Instead, we are faced with a pluriverse of different agencies, each trying to articulate and define their ecologies of living. This sounds like a Nietzschean world, in which forces, struggle and power are the final arbiters of existence. But curiously, in your most recent work on ecology and politics, the notion of power is almost absent. Why is this the case?***

Nietzsche absorbed, like everybody else seems to have done for the last 150 years, what Darwinism is about. And so I thought, like everybody else: do I need to take the trip? But my Darwin is more like Lovelock, which makes a big difference. For Lovelock, there is no struggle between species, but an entangled environment. Let's say, it is a neo-Darwinian notion of evolution and struggle for life that replaces an external environment with a notion of entangled species. In this sense, there is a link to Nietzsche. In fact, the first philosopher I read was Nietzsche, in a Jesuit school, which is strange enough.

The notion of power is an obsession of sociologists. It always struck me that power is the dangerous half of something else, which ninety percent of the time is reason. I criticized this notion from the beginning of my career. I found powers everywhere including in places where sociologists never put them, namely in the sciences. Instead of localizing power in places where you have a distortion of reason, I distributed power everywhere. I do not believe in the distortion of reason. But I did not succeed in convincing the sociologists that this was a friendly move. It was not out of ignorance regarding asymmetrical relations of power, but the opposite: I offered a way to reinterpret and register the asymmetry without making the distinction between

19 Latour refers to the protests against the *Aéroport du Grand Ouest Project*, a plan to build a new airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes near Nantes (département Loire-Atlantique in the region Pays de la Loire) in western France.

power and something else. But in terms of the outcome, the argument I made almost forty years ago was a complete failure.

***In Politics of Nature you describe the political task of composing the common world. You emphasize the necessity to define a hierarchy of values, to exclude those one cannot live with, and to define what counts as optimal distribution. These political acts seem to involve relations of power – don't they?***

*Politics of Nature* was written in the mood or in the genre of political theory. It is a sort of Rousseauist political theory with a Schmittian aspect. It dates back to 1999 when I was still hoping that the ecological question could be treated like hygiene – as a local problem that could be absorbed. That was very naïve of me. Now I think exactly the opposite. Hence, I keep talking about war and peace. People are now criticizing me, not because I do not use the notion of power, but for taking politics to be a question of war and peace. That is my Schmittian moment. I moved from Charybdis to Scylla, but now it is more complicated because I think it is really important to declare a situation of violence. To me it is obvious, but people still worry that ecology becomes too polemical. For me this is exactly what it is: it is polemical.

***We have identified two tendencies in your discussion of Schmitt's concept of the political. In a very basic sense, the political is closely related to what you have called the lack of a common arbiter. This is, so to speak, the formal criterion of the political: The political is the opposite of police since it only exists in the absence of a purportedly neutral party that settles disputes authoritatively. This is also where diplomacy comes into play. At the same time, you follow Schmitt in adapting the notions of enmity and war for characterizing this situation. Accordingly, images of mutual destruction and killing for the sake of one's own existence gain prominence. Can you elaborate a bit on these two tendencies?***

Well, first of all, Carl Schmitt is a poison to be used in small dosages. But despite all the problematic aspects of his work, I have no reason to dispense with the important Schmittian premise, that there is no arbiter. There is no arbiter with regard to the question of our planet; at the climate conference in Paris, there was no arbiter! Of course, there was Monsieur Fabius, but his role was only to make sure that the negotiations followed the protocol.<sup>20</sup> The lack of the final arbiter puts us in a political situation of war and peace which cannot be solved with reference to neutral principles.

In addition, I took from Schmitt the notion of *nomos* as a “concrete order” to be found in *The Nomos of the Earth*. I know that it is dangerous to take that from Schmitt. But after all, the reactionaries usually have a better sense of what is at stake in politics than people like Deleuze – exactly because they feel that there is something inherently dangerous. Relating the absence of a final arbiter to the question of the earth in the way I do is, for sure, very different from what Schmitt had in mind. To me, the link between the lack of the final arbiter and the notion of the *nomos* provides such a powerful tool for reinterpreting what the composition of a common world could mean that I would be silly not to use it! It allows me to politically address Gaia and the practices of socio-technical composition that actor-network theory has spelled out.

One of my key motives in turning to Schmitt lies in how he enables one to counteract the inability of the Moderns to see their land grab as an act of war. In my view, this justifies a dosage of Schmittian thought: “You believe, you are on a civilizing mission? Sorry, you are at war. And, if you are at war, please say so explicitly. Do not turn your *hostis* into an *inimi-*

20 Laurent Fabius, former French minister of foreign affairs, was chair of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris.



cus.<sup>21</sup> That is, do not transform your enemies into horrible people to destroy." Being able to make this argument is so powerful, it trumps everything else. I probably should not say this in Germany, but here lies the courage of Schmitt. This is not to deny that Schmitt also gets into all these completely reactionary ideas about the *Führer* and all of those other things, which are hopefully, but not necessarily, dated. Moreover, it is clear that in the context of 1945, Schmitt was on the "bad side." Now, however, in the context of the ecological crisis, I want to be able to say: "Monsanto, you are at war. Don't say that it is a civilizing mission, don't say it's modernizing, don't say it's agricultural progress or whatever – you are at war. Tell your friends from your enemies!"

***This is exactly where we perceive a tension in your work. On the one hand, you subscribe to the Schmittian understanding of war and enmity. In Facing Gaia you speak, on the other hand, about the necessity of installing feedback mechanisms that redirect the harm I do to other entities back at me. Using sensing technologies for making myself sensitive for the damage my way of living does to others seems absolutely crucial for the kind of cosmopolitics you have in mind. From a Schmittian perspective, however, such a concern is almost incomprehensible. After all, why should I make myself sensitive for the effects that my actions have on an enemy?***

Because you have to compose a common world, you have to negotiate.

***Who is forcing me to negotiate?***

You have no territory to get out of! The climate is the new thing which Schmitt would have been extremely interested in as a jurist. After all, giving a legal status to the climate must be intriguing for a jurist. It is a difficult task, since the climate is a common but at the same time not a common at all. The climate was *res nullius* and is now becoming a political entity. For sure, besides the climate Schmitt would have also been fascinated by the drone. Yet it is easy to see what he would have made of the drone, he probably would have described it as a sort of aerial extension in warfare. Climate, in contrast, would have caused him to rethink how the distinction between friend and enemy may still apply. For instance, it is becoming very difficult to exclude the enemy from the territory, simply because there is no outside.

***In Schmittian terms, the climate introduces a new element that is neither land nor sea. The climate therefore changes the constitution of the political scene.***

Yes. Schmitt already took into account the submarine, but where would you put climate? Maybe the first time this problem was registered was in the early discussions about the effects of nuclear war. I am thinking especially of the argument about nuclear winter presented by Carl Sagan.<sup>22</sup> People suddenly realized that the ability to bomb does neither stop the enemy nor produce solidarity. It made them aware that the enemy is the one with which you are going

21 Schmitt clarifies the distinction between *hostis* and *inimicus* as follows: "The enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. The enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus* in the broader sense." Schmitt, Carl (2007): *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, p. 28.

22 Sagan, Carl: "Nuclear War and Climatic Catastrophe: Some Policy Implications", in: *Foreign Affairs* 62(2), 1983/84: 257-292; Turco, Richard P.; Owen B. Toon, Thomas P. Ackerman, James B. Pollack and Carl Sagan: "Nuclear Winter: Global Consequences of Multiple Nuclear Explosions", in: *Science* 1983 December 23; 222(4630): 1283-1292.

to negotiate! In a way, this is already implied in Schmitt's definition of the enemy, who is not necessarily the one you hate, the one who you find disgusting, etc.

At the moment, however, I am much more interested in Eric Voegelin, with whom Schmitt was actually a friend. Just at the time when Schmitt went into his legal-catholic fury with the *Führer*, Voegelin developed his important notion of immanentization.<sup>23</sup> In fact, I believe that this notion may help us explain the indifference of our civilization vis-à-vis the ecological crisis. We fully believe that the crisis cannot happen to us. We do not accept the idea that we have no globe. And we sit in front of the news day after day – literally every day! – deeply indifferent, but not indifferent in the sense of being paralyzed because it's all too much. Instead of being overwhelmed into passivity, we are actively indifferent. To my knowledge, the only one who put a finger on such a condition is Voegelin with his concept of immanentization. It resonates with a position to be found quite frequently in contemporary American politics: the view that we have passed beyond the possibility of apocalyptic catastrophe. Sarah Palin just endorsed a new film against climate change which is illustrative in this sense.<sup>24</sup> As if we are saying: "Nothing can happen to us, we are on another land! We are in the promised land for good!" How else can you make sense of our behavior? How can you understand that we remain indifferent to the news that the sea level will be rising two meters until the end of the century? You would do something, if you really believed in it. New York, London, Hamburg probably, Shanghai, half of Vietnam, big parts of Bangladesh, all will disappear in the water. We hear the news, but we listen with diffidence. It doesn't register politically.

***Do we lack the political mode that would enable us to address the ecological catastrophe?***

But why is it so? Because after all, we usually do act if something threatens us, or our loved ones. For example, if our children are sick, we run to the doctor very quickly. But why do we not act in the face of such overarching threats? I think that Eric Voegelin points out the problem in a very precise manner. In "The New Science of Politics" he makes clear that it all hinges on our relation to materiality. Materiality is something, which does not count deeply for us, since we have been fusing materiality with a sense of apocalypse that is beyond us. But we need a sense of the now in order to act. I have included a whole chapter on Voegelin in the English version of the Gifford Lectures. Voegelin offers a perfect political theory. *The New Science of Politics* is a stunning book. It is really strange that political theory has not granted him a more prominent position. Of course, the reason for this is the fact that he took religion seriously and that is enough to be abandoned.

***Reading your lectures, one might get the impression that you favor a crossing between politics and religion – or, alternatively, that you believe that one cannot avoid such a crossing. How do you understand the term and the role of political theology that you mention frequently in your Gifford Lectures?***

As is well known, there is Schmitt's argument that everything in political theory is a secularized theology. But I side with Eric Voegelin who poses the crucial question regarding political theology: Why is it the case that we cannot have a material, secular, banal, mundane earth? Why is it the case that we confuse it immediately with materiality, which is a gnostic term, as Voegelin puts it. This is one of the many reasons why the ecological crisis does not register with us. Our denial of the ecological crisis is due to a certain political theology. The symptom of this political theology is the fact that everyone who is actually taking the ecological crisis

23 Voegelin, Eric: *The New Science of Politics. An Introduction*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press 1987, pp. 107ff. (Chapter IV, "Gnosticism: The Nature of Modernity").

24 In April 2016 Palin promoted the movie *Climate Hustle*: [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/15/sarah-palin-bill-nye-climate-change-hustle-film](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/15/sarah-palin-bill-nye-climate-change-hustle-film) (accessed 27 July 2016).

seriously is accused of being apocalyptic. This is a very telling sign, because only those who believe that we are beyond and out of the reach of apocalypse accuse the others of being apocalyptic. But the belief to not live at the time of apocalypse is itself a version of political theology, which presumes that the apocalypse will never be our present that we have to act on. This is a restatement of Günter Anders' argument on what he called the "atomic holocaust" fifty years ago. Those, who say "we are secular and we do not want to hear about religion" subscribe to a religion of ignorance. And now Pope Francis is the one who calls the earth a "sister" – what a move.<sup>25</sup> I was writing *Facing Gaia* and suddenly I find that I have the Pope as my ally. Which is actually a miracle!

***In the Gifford Lectures you argue that Gaia is a secular figure able to assemble a demos. It opens the possibility of constituting "the people of Gaia." But at the same time you also say that Gaia is our enemy we are at war with. What is Gaia to you?***

Gaia is a strange figure: we are both in it and not; we don't know where we are in respect to Gaia. The Pope is audacious when he calls Gaia a sister "who governs and sustains us."<sup>26</sup> We still have to find out what Gaia is. This is a job of political philosophy. I started the catalogue of the exhibition *Reset Modernity!* with the strange exclamation that was made by François Hollande at the end of the climate conference, which goes something like "vive la planète, long live the planet."<sup>27</sup> This sentence does not make reference to countries, a government or any other arbiter. The climate conference had to call up an authority, because without an authority there would be no reason to sign a climate agreement. But what kind of authority is this? It is a presence, which has some dignity—I use the old Latin word "majesty" to address this type of authority.<sup>28</sup> It is not a state, not a governor, not a sovereign. It is simultaneously something we are in and which is stronger than us. And yet, at the same time, it does not exist, because it has no unity. It is our job to learn to live and understand what it means to be on earth. It does not mean to go back to divinities—what do we know about divinities anyway? So we have to do the job, only history will tell. *Reset Modernity!* is in its entirety and argument about re-grounding. What we will find there is surprisingly unknown, which is strange for people who are supposed to be materialist and earthly. We are not earthly at all, we are global. But it is the end of the global.

***A phrase from Samuel Beckett's Endgame is: "We are on earth and there is no cure for that."***

That's a good one, thank you.

- 25 Pope Francis: *Encyclical Letter – Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican Press, 2015 (commonly referred to as "Pope Francis's Environmental Encyclical"). Latour relates to the following passages: "Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life" (p. 3) "These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years." (p. 39).
- 26 The Pope refers to a quote from Francis of Assisi: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs" (Pope Francis 2015: 3).
- 27 In his closing speech at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, Hollande concluded with the words "Il est rare d'avoir dans une vie l'occasion de changer le monde, vous avez cette occasion-là, de changer le monde. Saisissez-la pour que vive la planète, vive l'Humanité et vive la vie. ("Very rarely in a lifetime one has the chance to change the world. You have this opportunity! Seize it! Long live the planet, long live humanity, long live life!") The speech is published under: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/intervention-du-president-a-la-cloture-de-la-negociation-de-la-cop2-2/> (accessed 27 July 2016).
- 28 Latour, Bruno: *Let's Touch Base!*, in: Bruno Latour (ed.), *Reset Modernity!* Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2016, pp. 11–23, p. 22.

