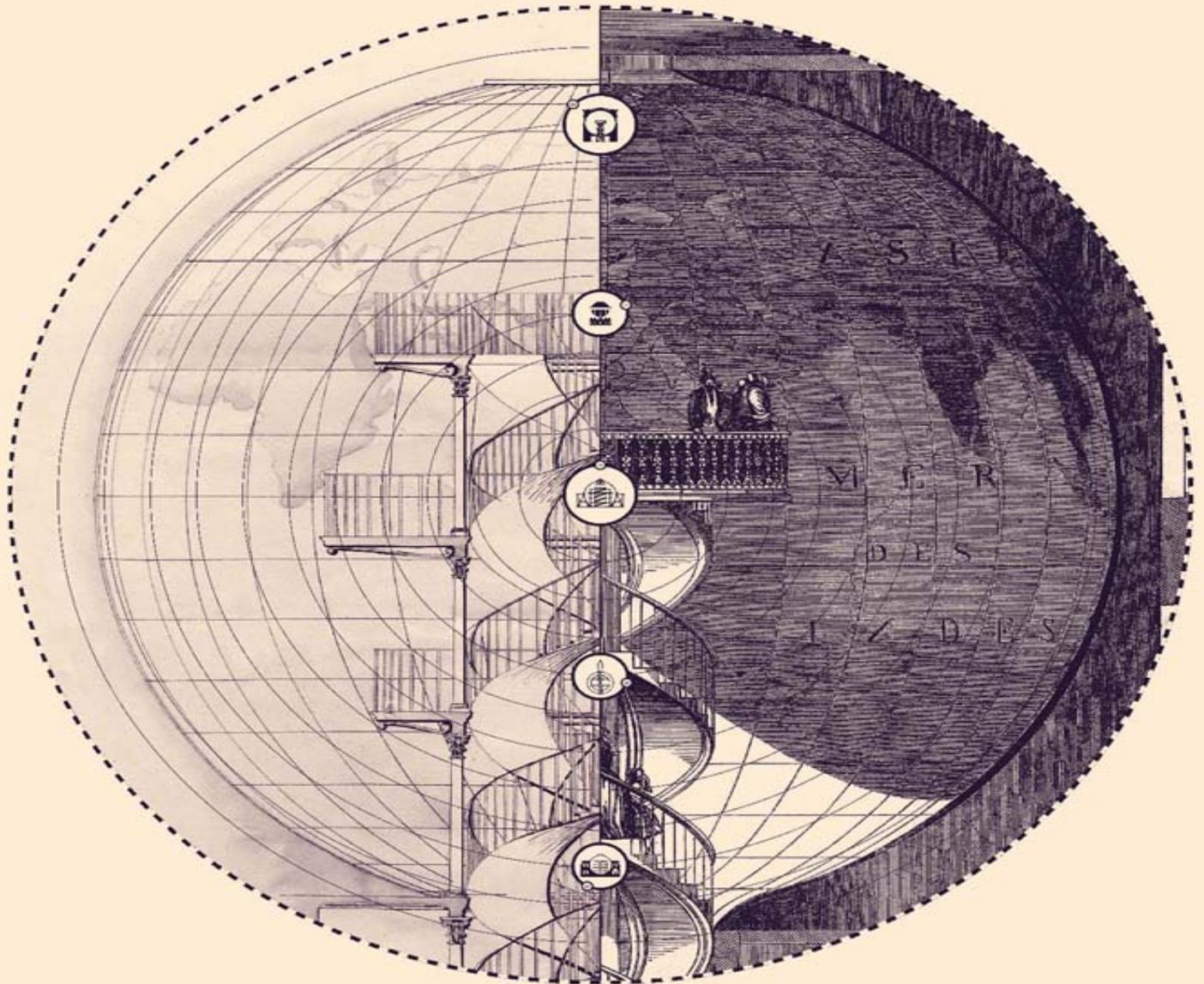


Bruno Latour



Down to Earth

Politics in the New Climatic Regime

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[1. A hypothesis as political fiction: the explosion of inequalities and the denial of climate change are one and the same phenomenon](#)

[2. Thanks to America's abandonment of the climate agreement, we now know clearly what war has been declared](#)

[3. The question of migrations now concerns everyone, offering a new and very wicked universality: finding oneself deprived of ground](#)

[4. One must take care not to confuse globalization-plus with globalization-minus](#)

[5. How the globalist ruling classes have decided to abandon all the burdens of solidarity, little by little](#)

[6. The abandonment of a common world leads to epistemological delirium](#)

[7. The appearance of a third pole undoes the classical organization of modernity torn between the first two poles, the Local and the Global](#)

[8. The invention of "Trumpism" makes it possible to identify a fourth attractor, the Out-of-This-World](#)

[9. In identifying the attractor we can call Terrestrial, we identify a new geopolitical organization](#)

[10. Why the successes of political ecology have never been commensurate with the stakes](#)

[11. Why political ecology has had so much trouble breaking away from the Right/Left opposition](#)

[12. How to ensure the relay between social struggles and ecological struggles](#)

13. The class struggle becomes a struggle among geo-social positions
 14. The detour by way of history makes it possible to understand how a certain notion of “nature” has immobilized political positions
 15. We must succeed in breaking the spell of “nature” as it has been pinned down by the modern vision of the Left/Right opposition
 16. A world composed of objects does not have the same type of resistance as a world composed of agents
 17. The sciences of the Critical Zone do not have the same political functions as those of the other natural sciences
 18. The contradiction between the system of production and the system of engendering is heating up
 19. A new attempt at describing dwelling places – France’s ledgers of complaints as a possible model
 20. A personal defense of the Old Continent
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Down to Earth

Politics in the New Climatic Regime

Bruno Latour

Translated by Catherine Porter

polity

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We've read enough books. Jared Kushner¹

1.

This essay uses the occasion of Donald Trump's election on November 8, 2016, to bring together three phenomena that commentators have already noted but without always seeing their connection. Thus, they fail to see the immense political energy that could be generated by drawing them together.

In the early 1990s, right after the victory over Communism symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall, just as some observers were claiming that history had run its course,² another history was surreptitiously getting under way.

This history was initially marked by what is called "deregulation," a term that has given the word "globalization" an increasingly pejorative cast. The same period witnessed, everywhere at once, the start of an increasingly vertiginous explosion of inequalities. These two phenomena coincided with a third that is less often stressed: the beginning of a systematic effort to deny the existence of climate change – "climate" in the broad sense of the relations between human beings and the material conditions of their lives.

This essay proposes to take these three phenomena as symptoms of a single historical situation: it is as though a significant segment of the ruling classes (known today rather too loosely as "the elites") had concluded that the earth no longer had room enough for them and for everyone else.

Consequently, they decided that it was pointless to act as though history were going to continue to move toward a common horizon, toward a world in which all humans could prosper equally. From the 1980s on, the ruling classes stopped purporting to lead and began instead to shelter themselves from the world. We are experiencing all the consequences of this flight, of which Donald Trump is merely a symbol, one among others. The absence of a *common world* we can share is driving us crazy.

The hypothesis is that we can understand nothing about the politics of the last 50 years if we do not put the question of climate change and its denial front and center. Without the idea that we have

entered into a New Climatic Regime,³ we cannot understand the explosion of inequalities, the scope of deregulation, the critique of globalization, or, most importantly, the panicky desire to return to the old protections of the nation-state – a desire that is identified, quite inaccurately, with the “rise of populism.”

To resist this loss of a common orientation, we shall have to come down to earth; we shall have to *land* somewhere. So, we shall have to learn how to get our bearings, how to *orient* ourselves. And to do this we need something like a *map* of the positions imposed by the new landscape within which not only the *affects* of public life but also its *stakes* are being redefined.

The reflections that follow, written with deliberate bluntness, explore the possibility that certain political affects might be channeled toward new objectives.

Since the author lacks any authority in political science, he can only offer his readers the opportunity to disprove this hypothesis and look for better ones.

2.

Donald Trump’s supporters should be thanked for having considerably clarified these questions by pressing him to announce, on June 1, 2017, America’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord.

What the militancy of millions of ecologists, the warnings of thousands of scientists, the actions of hundreds of industrialists, even the efforts of Pope Francis,⁴ have not managed to do, Trump succeeded in doing: everyone now knows that the climate question is at the heart of all *geopolitical* issues and that it is directly tied to questions of injustice and inequality.⁵

By pulling out of the Paris Accord, Trump explicitly triggered, if not a world war, at least a war over what constitutes the theater of operations. “We Americans don’t belong to the same earth as you. Yours may be threatened; ours won’t be!”

The political consequences, and presumably the military consequences – or in any case the existential consequences – of what the first President Bush had predicted in 1992, in Rio, have thus been spelled out: “Our way of life is not negotiable!” There we have it. At least things are clear: no longer is there an ideal of a world common to what used to be called “the West.”

A first historic event: Brexit. The country that had invented the wide-open space of the market on the sea as well as on land; the country that had ceaselessly pushed the European Union to be nothing but a huge shop; this very country, facing the sudden arrival of thousands of refugees, decided on impulse to stop playing the game of globalization. In search of an empire that had long since vanished, it is trying to pry itself away from Europe (at the price of increasingly inextricable difficulties).

A second historic event: Trump’s election. The country that had violently imposed its own quite particular form of globalization on the world, the country that had defined itself by immigration while eliminating its first inhabitants, that very country has entrusted its fate to someone who promises to isolate it inside a fortress, to stop letting in refugees, to stop going to the aid of any cause that is not on its own soil, even as it continues to intervene everywhere in the world with its customary careless blundering.

The new affinity for borders among people who had advocated their systematic dismantling is already confirming the end of one concept of globalization. Two of the greatest countries of the old “free world” are saying to the others: “Our history will no longer have anything to do with yours; you can go to hell!”

A third historic event: the resumption, extension, and amplification of migrations. At the very moment when every country is experiencing the multiple threats of globalization, many are having to figure out how to welcome onto their soil millions of people – perhaps tens of millions!⁶ – who are driven by the cumulative action of wars, failed attempts at economic development, and climate change, to search for territory they and their children can inhabit.

Some will claim that this is a very old problem. But no: these three phenomena are simply different aspects of one and the same

metamorphosis: *the very notion of soil is changing*. The soil of globalization's dreams is beginning to slip away. This is the truly new aspect of what is discreetly called the "migratory crisis."

If the anguish runs so deep, it is because each of us is beginning to feel the ground slip away beneath our feet. We are discovering, more or less obscurely, that we are all in migration toward territories yet to be rediscovered and reoccupied.

This is because of a fourth historic event, the most important and the least discussed. It took place on December 12, 2015, in Paris, just as agreement about the climate was being reached, at the end of the conference called COP21.

What counts as a measure of the event's real impact is not what the delegates decided; it is not even whether or not the agreement is carried out (the climate change deniers will do their utmost to eviscerate it); no, the crucial fact is that, on that December day all the signatory countries, even as they were applauding the success of the improbable agreement, realized with alarm that, if they all went ahead according to the terms of their respective modernization plans, there would be no planet compatible with their hopes for development.⁷ They would need several planets; they have only one.

Now if there is no planet, no earth, no soil, no territory to house the Globe of globalization toward which all these countries claim to be headed, then there is no longer an assured "homeland," as it were, for anyone.

Each of us thus faces the following question: Do we continue to nourish dreams of escaping, or do we start seeking a territory that we and our children can inhabit?

Either we deny the existence of the problem, or else *we look for a place to land*. From now on, this is what divides us all, much more than our positions on the right or the left side of the political spectrum.

And this is just as true for the *old inhabitants* of the wealthy countries as it is for their *future inhabitants*. The first, because they understand that there is no planet suited for globalization and that they will have to change their ways of life completely; the second,

because they have had to leave their old devastated lands: they, too, have to change their ways of life completely and learn new ones.

In other words, the migratory crisis has been generalized.

To the migrants from *outside* who have to cross borders and leave their countries behind at the price of immense tragedies, we must from now on add the migrants *from inside* who, while remaining in place, are experiencing the drama of seeing themselves *left behind by their own countries*. What makes the migratory crisis so difficult to conceptualize is that it is the symptom, to more or less excruciating degrees, of an ordeal common to all: the ordeal of finding oneself *deprived of land*.

This ordeal accounts for the relative indifference to the urgency of the situation, and it explains why we are all climate *quietists* when we hope, while doing nothing about it, that “everything will be all right in the end.” It is hard not to wonder what effect the news we hear every day about the state of the planet has on our mental state. How can we not feel inwardly undone by the anxiety of not knowing how to respond?

It is this unease, at once personal and collective, that gives Trump’s election its full importance; without that, we would merely be reading the script of an exceedingly mediocre TV series.

The United States had two choices: by acknowledging the extent of climate change and the immensity of its responsibility, it could finally become realistic and lead the “free world” away from the abyss, or it could plunge further into denial. Those who conceal themselves behind Trump have decided to keep America floating in dreamland a few years longer, so as to postpone coming down to earth, while leading the rest of the world into the abyss – perhaps for good.

3.

The question of landing somewhere did not occur earlier to the peoples who had decided to “modernize” the planet. It arose – ever so painfully – only for those who for four centuries had been subjected to the impact of the “great discoveries,” of empires,

modernization, development, and finally globalization. They knew perfectly well what it meant to find oneself deprived of land. And they even knew quite well what it meant to be chased out of one's land. They had no choice but to become experts on the question of how to survive conquest, extermination, land grabs.

The great novelty for the modernizing peoples is that this territorial question is now addressed to them as well as to the others. It is less bloody, less brutal, less detectable, perhaps, but it is indeed a matter of an extremely violent attack destined to take away the territories of those who had up to now possessed land – most often because they had taken it away from others during wars of conquest.⁸

Here is something that adds an unexpected meaning to the term “postcolonial,” as though there were a family resemblance between two feelings of loss: “You have lost your territory? We have taken it from you? Well, you should know that we are in the process of losing it in turn ...” And thus, bizarrely, in the absence of a sense of fraternity that would be indecent, something like a new bond is displacing the classic conflict: “How have you managed to resist and survive? It would be good if we too could learn this from you.”⁹ Following the questions comes a muffled, ironic response: “Welcome to the club!”

In other words, the sense of vertigo, almost of panic, that traverses all contemporary politics arises owing to the fact that the ground is giving way beneath everyone's feet at once, as if we all felt attacked everywhere, in our habits and in our possessions.

Have you noticed that the emotions involved are not the same when you're asked to defend nature – you yawn, you're bored – as when you're asked to defend your territory – now you're wide awake, suddenly mobilized?

If nature has become territory, it makes little sense to talk about an “ecological crisis,” “environmental problems,” or a “biosphere” to be rediscovered, spared, or protected. The challenge is much more vital, more existential than that – and also much more comprehensible, because it is much more direct. When the rug is pulled out from under your feet, you understand at once that you are going to have to be concerned with the floor ...

It is a question of attachment, of lifestyle, that's being pulled out from under us, a question of land, of property giving way beneath us, and this uneasiness gnaws at everyone equally, the former colonizers and the formerly colonized alike. But actually, no, it upsets the former colonizers much more, as they are less accustomed to the situation than are the formerly colonized. What is certain is that all find themselves facing a universal lack of shareable space and inhabitable land.

But where does this panic come from? From the same deep feeling of injustice felt by those who found themselves deprived of their land at the time of the conquests, then during colonization, and finally during the era of "development": a power from elsewhere comes to deprive you of your land and you have no purchase on that power. If this is globalization, then we understand retrospectively why resisting it has always been the only solution, why the colonized have always been right to defend themselves.

This is the new way in which we can experience the universal human condition – a wicked universality, to be sure, but the only one available to us, now that the previous universality, promised by globalization, seems to be receding from the horizon. The new universality consists in feeling that the ground is in the process of giving way.

Isn't this new universality enough to allow us to understand one another and prevent future wars over the appropriation of space? Probably not, but it is our only way out: discovering in common what land is inhabitable and with whom to share it.

The alternative is to act as though nothing were happening and to protect ourselves behind a wall while we prolong the waking dream of the "American way of life" – from which, as we know, what will soon be nine or ten billion humans will be unable to benefit.

Migrations, explosions of inequality, and New Climatic Regime: *these are one and the same threat*. Most of our fellow citizens underestimate or deny what is happening to the earth, but they understand perfectly well that the question of migrants puts their dreams of a secure identity in danger.

For the time being, fully aroused and worked over by the so-called “populist” parties, these citizens have grasped the ecological mutation in just one of its dimensions. The climate crisis is forcing people they do not welcome to cross their frontiers; hence the response: “Let’s put up impenetrable borders and we’ll escape from the invasion!”

But it is the other dimension of this same mutation that they have not yet fully grasped: the New Climatic Regime has been sweeping across all our borders for a long time, exposing us to all the winds, and no walls we can build will keep these invaders out.

If we want to defend our affiliations, we shall have to *identify* these migrations also, migrations without form or nation that we know as climate, erosion, pollution, resource depletion, habitat destruction. Even if you seal the frontiers against two-legged refugees, you cannot prevent these others from crossing over.

“But then is no one at home any longer?”

No, as a matter of fact. Neither state sovereignty nor inviolable borders can take the place of politics any longer.

“But then everything is open, we are going to have to live outside, without any protection at all, tossed about by the winds, mixed in with everyone else, fighting for everything without any more guarantees, moving around endlessly, losing all identity, all comfort! Who can live like that?”

No one, it is true. Neither a bird, nor a cell, nor a migrant, nor a capitalist. Even a Diogenes has the right to a barrel, as does a nomad to his tent, a refugee to her asylum.

Don’t be fooled for a second by those who preach the call of wide-open spaces, of “risk-taking,” those who abandon all protection and continue to point to the infinite horizon of modernization for all. Those good apostles take risks only if their own comfort is guaranteed. Instead of listening to what they are saying about what lies ahead, look instead at what lies behind them: you’ll see the gleam of the carefully-folded golden parachutes, of everything that ensures them against the random hazards of existence.

The most basic right of all is to feel safe and protected, especially at a moment when the old protections are disappearing.

This is the meaning of the history that remains to be discovered: how can we reweave edges, envelopes, protections; how can we find new footing while simultaneously taking into account the end of globalization, the scope of migration, and also the limits placed on the sovereignty of nation-states that are henceforth confronted by climate change?

Above all, how can we reassure those who see salvation only in the recollection of a national or ethnic identity, always freshly reinvented? And, in addition, how can we organize a collective life around the extraordinary challenge of accompanying millions of foreigners in their search for lasting ground?

The political question is how to reassure and shelter all those persons who are obliged to take to the road, even while turning them away from the false protection of identities and rigid borders.

But how can they be reassured? How can these migrants be given the feeling of being protected without relying at once on an identity based on an idea of origins, autochthonous races, secure borders, insurance against all risks?

To reassure them, we would have to be able to succeed in carrying out two complementary movements that the ordeal of modernization has made contradictory: *attaching oneself to a particular patch of soil* on the one hand, *having access to the global world* on the other. Up to now, it is true, such an operation has been considered impossible: between the two, it is said, one has to choose. It is this apparent contradiction that current history may be bringing to an end.

4.

What is meant, at bottom, by the ravages of globalization? It would seem that globalization is the source of all evils, that it is against globalization that the various “peoples” have suddenly “revolted” in a supreme effort of “consciousness-raising” that has, it is said, “opened their eyes” to the excesses of the “elites.”

It is time to pay attention to the words we are using. In “globalize” there is a good deal of “globabble,” to be sure, but there is also the word “globe,” just as in Donna Haraway’s “worlding” there is also the word “world.” It would be a real shame to have to do without them.

For 50 years, what is called “globalization” has in fact consisted in *two opposing phenomena* that have been systematically confused.

Shifting from a local to a global viewpoint ought to mean *multiplying* viewpoints, *registering* a greater number of varieties, *taking into account* a larger number of beings, cultures, phenomena, organisms, and people.

Yet it seems as though what is meant by globalization today is the exact opposite of such an increase. The term is used to mean that *a single vision*, entirely provincial, proposed by a few individuals, representing a very small number of interests, limited to a few measuring instruments, to a few standards and protocols, has been imposed on everyone and spread everywhere. It is hardly surprising that we don’t know whether to embrace globalization or, on the contrary, struggle against it.

If it is a matter of *multiplying* viewpoints so as to complicate all “provincial” or “closed” views with new variants, it is a fight that deserves to be fought. If it is a matter of *decreasing* the number of alternatives regarding the existence and the course of the world, the value of goods and the definitions of the Globe, it is clear that we have to resist such simplifications with all our might.

On balance, it seems that the more one is globalized, the more one has the impression of having a limited view! Each of us is ready to pull away from our own little plots of land, but surely not in order to be subjected to the narrow vision of another little plot that is simply farther away. So, from here on let us distinguish between globalization-*plus* and globalization-*minus*.

What is going to complicate any project of landing someplace is that this definition of the inevitable globalization will lead, in a backlash, to the invention of the “reactionary.”

The advocates of globalization-minus have for a long time accused those who resist its deployment of being archaic, backward, thinking only of their own little parcels of land and seeking to protect

themselves against all risks by remaining enclosed in their own little homes! (Ah! the taste for wide-open spaces preached by those who are sheltered wherever their frequent flyer miles will take them ...)

It is to stir up this backward-looking people that globalizers have subjected them to the great lever of modernization. For two centuries, the arrow of time has made it possible to locate on one side those who are moving forward – the modernizers, the progressives – and on the other those who remain behind.

The battle cry “Modernize!” has no content but this: all resistance to globalization will be immediately deemed illegitimate. There is no need to negotiate with those who want to stay behind. Those who take shelter on the other side of the irreversible forward march of globalization will be disqualified in advance.¹⁰ They are not only defeated, they are also irrational. *Woe to the vanquished!*

Advocacy of this type of modernization defines, by contrast, the taste for the local, the attachment to the land, the maintenance of traditions, the attention to the earth. No longer treated as a set of legitimate feelings, these stances are accused of merely expressing nostalgia for “archaic” and “obscurantist” positions.

The call to globalization is so ambiguous that its pliancy contaminates what can be expected from the local. This is why, since the beginning of modernization, any attachment to any soil at all has been read as a sign of backwardness.

Just as there are two entirely different ways of viewing globalization, of registering the variations in the Globe, there are thus at least two ways, equally contrasting, to define the attachment to the local.

And here is where the elites who have so greatly profited from globalizations (-plus as much as -minus) have so much trouble understanding what upsets those who want to be held, protected, assured, reassured by their province, their tradition, their soil, or their identity. The elites accuse them of giving in to the sirens of “populism.”

Refusing modernization may be a reflex born of fear, lack of ambition, inborn laziness, yes, but, as Karl Polanyi saw so clearly, society is always right in defending itself against attacks.¹¹ To reject

modernization is also to *resist courageously* by refusing to trade one's own province for another – Wall Street, Beijing, or Brussels – that is even narrower and above all infinitely remote, thus much more indifferent to local interests.

Is it possible to make those who are still enthusiastic about globalization understand that it is normal, that it is just, that it is indispensable to want to preserve, maintain, ensure one's belonging to a land, a place, a soil, a community, a space, a milieu, a way of life, a trade, a skill? Precisely so as to remain capable of registering more differences, more viewpoints, and above all not to begin by reducing their number.

Yes, the “reactionaries” are wrong about globalization, but the “progressives” are also surely wrong about what keeps the “reactionaries” attached to their customs and habits.

Let us distinguish, consequently, the local-*minus* from the local-*plus*, just as we have to distinguish globalization-minus from globalization-plus. In the end, what counts is not knowing whether you are for or against globalization, for or against the local; all that counts is understanding whether you are managing to register, to maintain, to cherish a maximum number of alternative ways of belonging to the world.

We'll be told that this is splitting hairs and introducing artificial divisions, the better to hide some old ideology of blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*).

To offer such an objection is to forget the massive event that has intervened to put in danger the great modernization project. If the project has become impossible, it's because there is no Earth capable of containing its ideal of progress, emancipation, and development.¹² As a result, *all forms of belonging* are undergoing metamorphosis – belonging to the globe, to the world, to the provinces, to particular plots of ground, to the world market, to lands or to traditions.

We must face up to what is literally a problem of dimension, scale, and lodging: the planet is *much too narrow and limited* for the globe of globalization; at the same time, it is *too big*, infinitely too large, too active, too complex, to remain within the narrow and limited

borders of any locality whatsoever. We are all overwhelmed twice over: by what is too big, and by what is too small.

And thus no one has the answer to the question “how can one find inhabitable land?” Neither the advocates of globalization (-plus as well as -minus) nor the advocates of the local (-plus as well as -minus). We don’t know where to go, or how to live, or with whom to cohabit. What must we do to find a place? How are we to orient ourselves?

5.

Something must have happened, some truly extraordinary event, for the ideal of globalization to have changed valence so quickly. Fleshing out an earlier hypothesis with a political fiction allows us to situate this event more precisely.

Let us suppose that, from the 1980s on, more and more people – activists, scientists, artists, economists, intellectuals, political parties – have grasped the increasingly endangered status of the formerly more or less stable relations that the Earth maintained with humans.¹³ Despite the difficulties, this avant-garde has managed to accumulate evidence that those stable relations could not last, that the Earth, too, would end up resisting.

Earlier, everyone saw quite clearly that the question of limits would inevitably arise, but the shared decision, among the Moderns at least, had been to ignore that question bravely by a very strange form of disinhibition.¹⁴ One could go ahead and grab land, use it and abuse it, without listening to the prophets of doom, since the ground itself kept more or less quiet!

And yet, little by little, we find that *under* the ground of private property, of land grabs, of the exploitation of territories, *another ground*, another earth, another soil has begun to stir, to quake, to be moved. A sort of earthquake, if you like, that led the pioneers to say: “Watch out, nothing will be as it was before; you are going to have to pay dearly for the return of the Earth, the outburst of powers that had been tame until now.”

And here is where the hypothesis of political fiction comes in. Suppose that other elites, perhaps less enlightened, but with significant means and important interests, and above all with extreme attentiveness to the security of their immense fortunes and to the durability of their well-being, had, each and every one of them, heard this threat, this warning.

We have to assume that these elites understood perfectly well that the warning was accurate, but did not conclude from the evidence, which had become more and more indisputable over the years, that they were going to have to pay, and pay dearly, for the Earth's turning back on itself. They would have been enlightened enough to register the warning, but not enlightened enough to share the results with the public.

On the contrary, we must suppose that they drew two consequences from the warning, which resulted in the election of the Tweeter-in-Chief to the White House. "First, yes, we shall have to pay dearly for this upheaval, but *the others are going to pay* for what is broken, certainly not we ourselves; and, secondly, as for this less and less debatable truth about the New Climatic Regime, *we are going to deny its very existence!*"

These two decisions would make it possible to connect three phenomena: what since the 1980s has been called "deregulation" or the "dismantling of the welfare state"; what since the 2000s is known as "climate-change denial"¹⁵; and above all, what for the last 40 years has been a dizzying extension of inequalities.¹⁶

If the hypothesis is correct, all this is part of a single phenomenon: the elites have been so thoroughly convinced that there would be no future life for everyone that they have decided *to get rid of all the burdens of solidarity as fast as possible* – hence deregulation; they have decided that a sort of gilded fortress would have to be built for those (a small percentage) who would be able to make it through – hence the explosion of inequalities¹⁷; and they have decided that, to conceal the crass selfishness of such a flight out of the shared world, they would have to reject absolutely the threat at the origin of this headlong flight – hence the denial of climate change.

To go back to the well-worn metaphor of the Titanic, the ruling classes understand that the shipwreck is certain; they reserve the lifeboats for themselves and ask the orchestra to go on playing lullabies so they can take advantage of the darkness to beat their retreat before the ship's increased listing alerts the other classes!¹⁸ For a clarifying episode that is not metaphoric in the least: Exxon-Mobil, in the early 1990s, knowing full well what it was doing, after publishing excellent scientific articles on the dangers of climate change, chose to invest massively in frenetic extraction of oil and at the same time in an equally frenetic campaign to proclaim the non-existence of the threat.¹⁹

These people – whom we can call the obscurantist elites from now on – understood that, if they wanted to survive in comfort, *they had to stop pretending, even in their dreams, to share the earth with the rest of the world.*

This hypothesis would make it possible to explain how globalization-plus has become globalization-minus. Whereas until the 1990s one could (provided that one profited from it) associate the horizon of modernization with the notions of progress, emancipation, wealth, comfort, even luxury, and above all rationality, the rage to deregulate, the explosion of inequalities, the abandonment of solidarities have gradually associated that horizon with the notion of an arbitrary decision out of nowhere in favor of the sole profit of the few. The best of worlds has become the worst.

Looking down from the ship's rail, the lower classes, now fully awakened, see the lifeboats pulling farther and farther away. The orchestra continues to play "Nearer, my God, to Thee," but the music no longer suffices to drown out the cries of rage ...

And it is indeed of rage that we must speak if we want to understand the reaction of defiance and incomprehension in the face of such a betrayal.

If the elites felt, starting in the 1980s or '90s, that the party was over and that they would have to build more gated communities²⁰ so they would no longer have to share with the masses, especially not the masses "of color" that would soon be on the move throughout the planet because they were being chased away from their homes, one

can imagine that those left behind also understood very quickly that if globalization were tossed aside, then they too would need gated communities.

The reactions on one side led to reactions on the other – both sides *reacting to another much more radical reaction, that of the Earth*, which had stopped absorbing blows and was striking back with increasing violence.

This overlapping seems irrational only if we forget that we are dealing with one and the same chain reaction whose origin must be sought in the Earth's reaction to our enterprises. We are the ones who started it – we of the old West, and more specifically Europe. There are no two ways about it: we have to learn to live with the consequences of what we have unleashed.

We understand nothing about the terrifying growth in inequalities or about the “wave of populism” or the “migration crisis” if we do not understand that these are three different responses, basically comprehensible if not effective, to the powerful reaction of the Earth to what globalization has done to it.

In the face of the threat, according to our political fiction, a decision has been made not to face up to it but to flee. Some glide into the gilded exile of the 1% – “The super-rich have to be protected above all else!” – while others cling to secure borders – “Have pity, let us at least have the guarantee of a stable identity!” – and still others, the most wretched of all, take the road to exile.

In the final analysis, they are all the “left-behinds of globalization” (-minus) – which is beginning to lose its power of attraction.

6.

The obscurantist elites, according to this narrative, have taken the threat seriously; they have concluded that their dominance was threatened and have decided to dismantle the ideology of a planet shared by all; they have understood that such an abandonment could under no circumstances be made public, and consequently that the scientific knowledge that underlay their whole movement would

have to be obliterated under conditions of the greatest secrecy – all this in the course of the last 30 or 40 years.

The hypothesis appears implausible: the idea of negation looks too much like a psychoanalytic interpretation, too much like a conspiracy theory.²¹ It is not impossible to document it, however, if we make the reasonable assumption that people are fairly quick to suspect what some are seeking to hide from them, and are prepared to act accordingly.

In the absence of flagrant evidence, the effects themselves are quite visible. At the moment, the most edifying of these effects is the epistemological delirium that has taken hold of the public stage since the election of Donald Trump.

Denegation is not a comfortable situation. To deny in this fashion is to lie cold-bloodedly, and then to forget that one has lied – even while constantly remembering the lie after all. This is draining. We may well wonder, then: what does such a tangle do to the people who are caught in its net? The answer: it drives them crazy.

And in the first place this “people” that the official commentators seem suddenly to be discovering. Journalists have seized on the idea that the populus has become attached to “alternative facts” to the point of forgetting all forms of rationality.

Commentators set about accusing these good folks of complacency in their narrow vision, their fears, their inborn suspicion of elites, their deplorable indifference to the very idea of truth, and especially their passion for identity, folklore, archaism, and borders – and on top of all that, for good measure, a condemnable indifference to the facts.

Whence the success of the expression “alternative reality.”

But this is to forget that this “people” *has been coldly betrayed* by those who have given up the idea of actually pursuing the modernization of the planet *with* everyone, because they knew, before everyone else, that such modernization was impossible – precisely for want of a planet vast enough for their dreams of growth for all.

Before accusing “the people” of no longer believing in anything, one ought to measure the effect of that overwhelming betrayal on

people's level of trust. Trust has been abandoned along the wayside. No attested knowledge can stand on its own, as we know very well. Facts remain robust only when they are supported by a common culture, by institutions that can be trusted, by a more or less decent public life, by more or less reliable media.²²

And people to whom it has never been announced openly (although they suspect it) that all the efforts to modernize for the last couple of centuries are at risk of collapsing, that all ideals of solidarity have been thrown overboard by their own leaders – these people are expected to have the confidence of a Louis Pasteur or a Marie Curie in scientific facts!

But the epistemological disaster is just as great among those who are in charge of carrying out this extraordinary betrayal.

To become convinced of this, it suffices to observe on a daily basis the chaos that has reigned at the White House since Trump's arrival. How can one respect the best-established facts, when one has to deny the enormity of the threat and wage, without acknowledging it, a full-scale war against all the others? It is like cohabiting with the proverbial "elephant in the room," or with Ionesco's rhinoceros. There is nothing more uncomfortable. These big animals snore, cackle, roar, crush you, and prevent you from thinking straight. The Oval Office has become a real zoo.

For denegation poisons those who practice it as well as those who are presumed to be duped by it. (We shall look at the form of deception peculiar to "Trumpism" later on.)

The only difference, albeit a crucial one, is that the superrich, of whom Trump is merely the intermediary, have added to their flight a crime for which there is no atoning: their obsessional denial of climate change. Because of this denial, ordinary people have had to cope within a fog of disinformation, without anyone ever telling them that the project of modernizing the planet was over and done with, and that a regime change was inevitable.

Ordinary people already had a general tendency to be skeptical; now they have been incited, thanks to billions of dollars invested in disinformation, to be skeptical about one massive fact – the

mutation of the climate.²³ The truth is that, if there were to be any hope of dealing with this fact in time, ordinary people would have had to have confidence in its solidity very early on, in order to push politicians to act before it was too late. At a point when the public could have found an emergency exit, the climate skeptics stood in their way and denied them access. When the time comes to judge, this is the crime for which charges will be brought.²⁴

The public does not fully realize that the issue of climate-change denial organizes all politics at the present time.²⁵ When journalists talk about “post-truth” politics, they do so very lightly. They do not stress the reason why some have decided to keep on engaging in politics while voluntarily abandoning the link to the truth that (rightly!) terrified them. Nor do they stress the reason why ordinary people have decided – and rightly so, in their case too – not to believe in anything any longer. Given what their leaders have already tried to make them swallow, it is understandable that they are suspicious of everything and don’t want to listen any more.

The reactions of the media prove that the situation is no better, alas, among those who boast of having remained “rational thinkers,” who are indignant about the indifference to facts of the “Tweeter-in-Chief,” or who rail about the stupidity of the ignorant masses. These “rational” folk continue to believe that facts stand up all by themselves, without a shared world, without institutions, without a public life, and that it would suffice to put the ignorant folk back in an old-style classroom with a blackboard and in-class exercises, for reason to triumph at last.

But these “rational” sorts are just as caught up as the others in the tangles of disinformation. They do not see that it is useless to be indignant that people “believe in alternative facts,” when they themselves live in an alternative *world*, a world in which climate mutation occurs, while it does not in the world of their opponents.

It is not a matter of learning how to repair cognitive deficiencies, but rather of how to live in the same world, share the same culture, face up to the same stakes, perceive a landscape that can be explored in concert. Here we find the habitual vice of epistemology, which consists in attributing to intellectual deficits something that is quite simply a deficit in shared practice.

7.

If the key to the current situation cannot be found in a lack of cognitive abilities, it has to be sought in the form of the world to which those very abilities are applied. Now here is precisely where the problem lies: there are now several worlds, several territories, and they are mutually incompatible.

To simplify, let us suppose that, up to now, all persons who had once agreed to go along with the project of modernization could now rediscover where they belong thanks to a *vector* going from the local to the global.

It is toward the Globe with a capital G that everything would begin to move, the Globe that simultaneously delineated scientific, economic, and moral horizons, the Globe of globalization-plus. A marker that was both spatial – represented by cartography – and temporal – represented by the arrow of time pointing toward the future. Carried along by this Globe, which aroused enthusiasm for generations because it was synonymous with wealth, freedom, knowledge, and access to a life of ease, was a certain definition of humanity.

At last, the open seas! At last, a way out of the confines of home! At last, the infinite universe! Very few have been immune to this appeal. Let us try to measure the enthusiasm to which it gave rise among those who profited from it – without being surprised at the horror that it arouses among those it has crushed along the way.

What had to be *abandoned* in order to modernize was the Local. This term, too, calls for a capital letter so that it won't be confused with some primordial habitat, some ancestral land, the soil from which native populations have sprung. There is nothing aboriginal, nothing native, nothing primitive in this territory reinvented *after* modernization had done away with all the old connections. It is a Local through contrast. An anti-Global.

Once these two poles have been identified, we can trace a pioneering frontier of modernization. This is the line drawn by the injunction to modernize, an injunction that prepared us for every sacrifice: for leaving our native province, abandoning our traditions, breaking with our habits, if we wanted to “get ahead,” to participate in the

general movement of development, and, finally, to profit from the world.

People were of course torn between two contradictory injunctions: to move forward toward the ideal of progress, or backward toward the old certainties; but this hesitation, this tug-of-war, ultimately suited them pretty well. Just as Parisians know how to determine where they are along the course of the Seine by noting the sequence of odd and even numbers in their streets, we knew how to locate ourselves in the course of history.

There were of course protestors, but they were located *on the other side* of the modernization front. They were the (neo-)natives, the antiquated, the vanquished, the colonized, the subaltern, the excluded. Thanks to that touchstone, one could treat them unassailably as reactionaries, or at least as anti-moderns, as dregs, rejects. They could certainly protest, but their whining only justified their critics.

It was brutal, perhaps, but at last the world had a direction. The arrow of time was going somewhere.

Such a positioning was all the easier in that this was the vector along which the Left/Right distinction – now in question – had been projected.

This projection was not uncomplicated, because, depending on the topics under dispute, Left and Right often went in different directions.

When the economy was in question, for example, there was a Right that always wanted to go farther toward the Global, while there was a Left (but also a more timid Right) that would have preferred to set limits, slow down, protect the weakest against the forces of the Market (the capital letters serve as reminders that we are dealing with simple ideological markers).

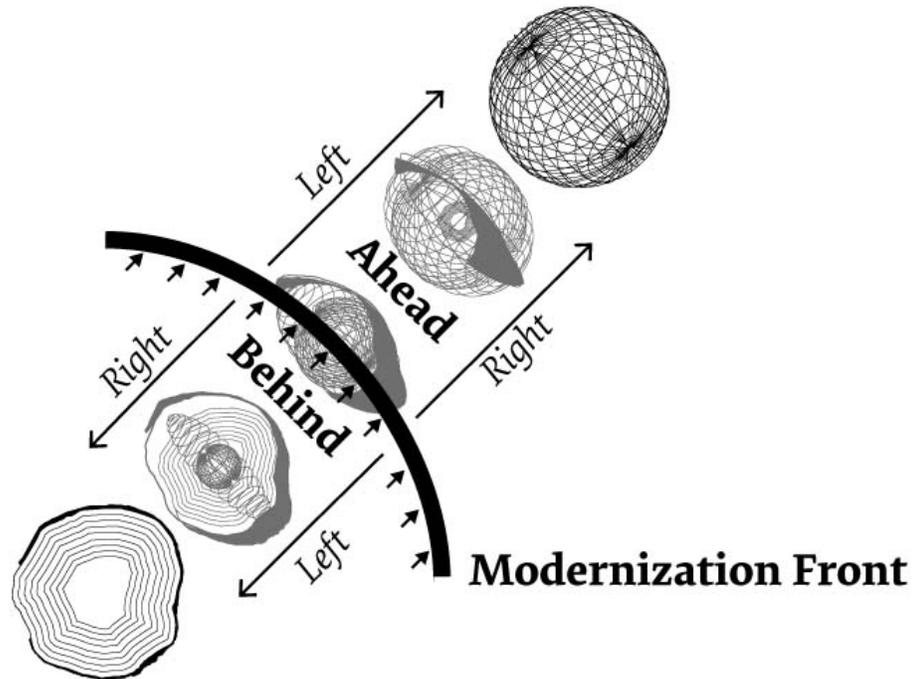
Conversely, when “liberation of morals,” and sexual issues in particular, were under discussion, there was always a Left that wanted to move ahead toward the Global, while there was a Right (but also a Left) that firmly refused to be dragged down that “slippery slope.”

This sufficed to complicate somewhat the attribution of labels such as “progressive” and “reactionary.” But one could nevertheless find true “reactionaries” – at once against the “market forces” and against the “liberation of morals” – and true “progressives,” a compound of Right and Left, whose wish to free both the forces of capital and the diversity of moral standards spurred their affinity for the Global.

These subtleties aside, people ended up finding common ground in spite of everything, for the good reason that all these positions continued to be situated *along the same vector*. Which made it possible to identify them the way one reads the temperature of a patient by following the gradations of a thermometer.

The direction of history being a given, there could be obstacles, “regressions,” “rapid advances,” or even “revolutions” and “restorations,” but no radical change in the general ordering of positions. Depending on the topics under dispute, the *import* of the positions could vary, but there was always *a single direction* that derived from the tension between the two poles of attraction, the Global and the Local. (Once again, these are only convenient abstractions.)

Attractor 2 – Global-of-modernization



Attractor 1 – Local-to-be-modernized

Figure 1 Canonical schema of the Moderns' orientation

As the matter is going to become complicated very quickly, a schematic rendering will be useful. The canonical form ([figure 1](#)) allows us to situate the Local-to-be-modernized and the Global-of-modernization as two *poles of attraction* labeled attractor 1 and attractor 2. Between the two, there is the modernization front that clearly distinguishes between what is ahead and what is behind, as well as the projection along this vector of the various ways of being associated with the Right or the Left, necessarily simplified.

This particular pairing of Global and Local obviously leaves out all the other ways of being local and global that have been revealed to us by anthropology but that remain invisible to the Moderns and thus do not belong to the schema – at least for now. To be modern, by definition, is to project onto the others at every turn the conflict between the Local and the Global, between the archaic past and the future – a future with which the non-moderns, it goes without saying, have nothing to do. [26](#)

(To be complete, we would need to add an infinite extension to the project of attractor 2, to accommodate those who want to escape from the problems of the planet by moving to Mars, or teleporting themselves into computers, or becoming truly post-human thanks to the marriage of DNA, cognitive science, and robots.²⁷ This extreme form of “neo-hyper-modernism” only speeds up the old vector vertiginously and is thus of no importance for what follows.)

What happens to this system of coordinates if globalization-plus becomes globalization-minus? If what has been the pole of attraction drawing us with the force of self-evidence, pulling the whole world in its direction, becomes a counterforce that pushes us away, leaving us with the confused feeling that only a few will profit from it? Inevitably, the Local, too, in a counterreaction, will become attractive again.

But at this point it is no longer the same Local. To the headlong flight toward globalization-minus there is a corresponding headlong flight toward the Local-minus, the Local that promises tradition, protection, identity, and certainty within national or ethnic borders.

And herein lies the drama: the made-over Local is no more plausible, no more livable than globalization-minus. It is a retrospective invention, a rump territory, the remains of what has been definitively left behind by modernization. What is more unreal than Kaczyński’s Poland, the National Front’s France, the Northern League’s Italy, Brexit’s shrunken Great Britain, or Trump’s deceitful great-again America?

Nevertheless, this second pole attracts as powerfully as the first, especially when things are going badly and the ideal of the Globe seems to be more and more remote.

The two poles of attraction have finally pulled so far apart that we no longer have the luxury of hesitating, as before, between the two. This is what the commentators call the brutalization of political discourse.

For the modernization front to have a certain credibility, for it to organize the direction of history in a lasting way, the actors all had to live in the same place, or at least they had to have something like a common horizon, even as they were pulling in different directions.

Now those who supported globalization, like those who advocate returning to the past, have all begun to flee as quickly as possible, competing in their lack of realism. Bubble versus bubble; gated community versus gated community.

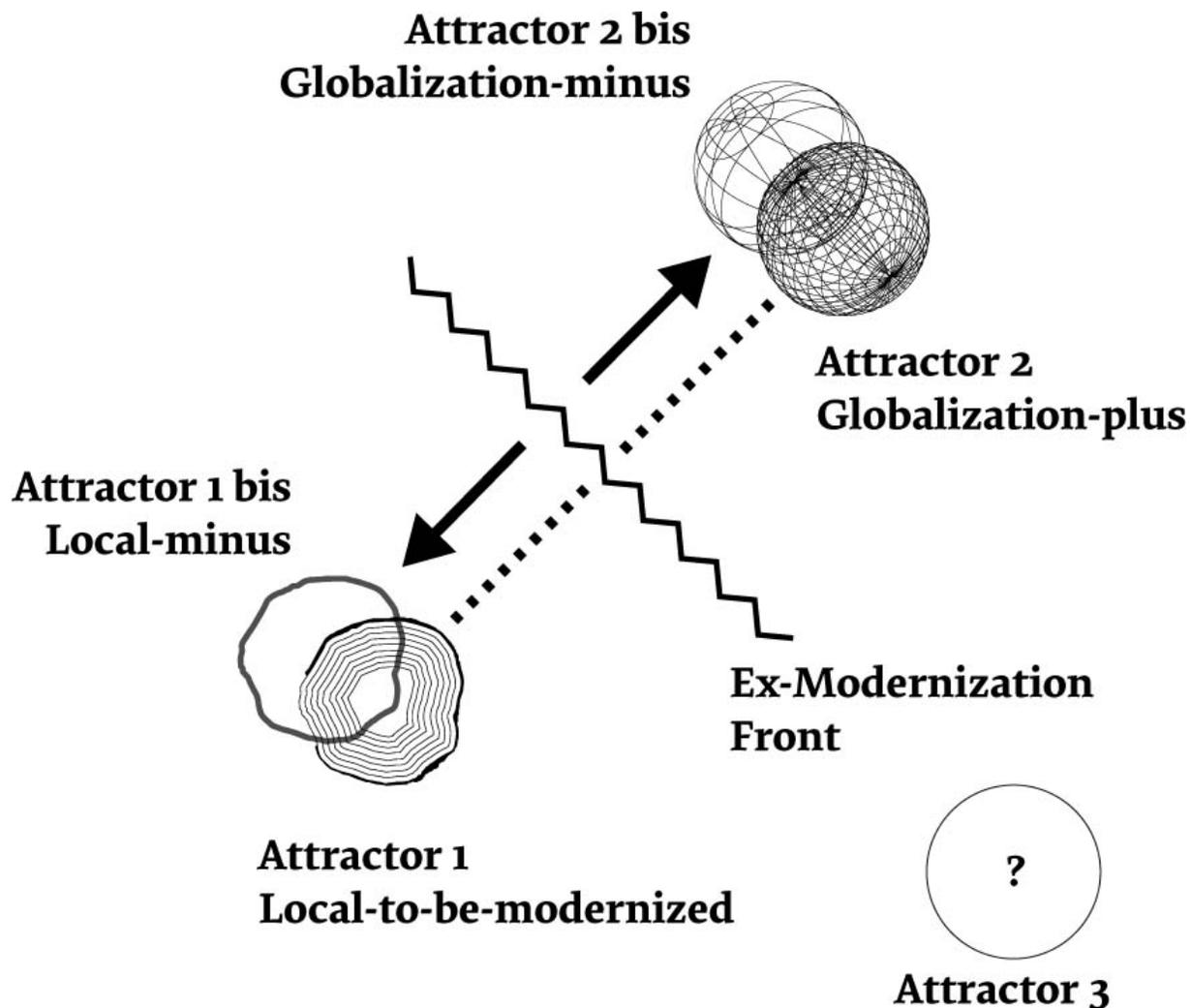


Figure 2 The Moderns' customary system of coordinates shattered by the irruption of a third attractor

Instead of tension, there is henceforth a yawning gap. Instead of a front line, we see only the scar of an old battle for or against the modernization of the whole planet. There is no longer a shared horizon – even to decide who is progressive and who is reactionary.²⁸

People find themselves in the situation of passengers on a plane that has taken off for the Global, to whom the pilot has announced that he

has had to turn around because one can no longer land at that airport, and who then hear with terror (“Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain speaking again”) that the emergency landing strip, the Local, is also inaccessible. It is understandable that these passengers would press against the plane’s windows to try to see where they are going to be able to attempt a crash landing – even if they are counting, as in Clint Eastwood’s film, on the reflexes of a Captain Sully.²⁹

So, what has actually happened? We have to suppose that something has come to twist the arrow of time, some at once ancient and unexpected power that initially worried, then disturbed, and finally dispersed the projects of the aforementioned Moderns. It is as if the expression modern *world* had become an oxymoron. Either it is modern, but has no world under its feet, or else it is a true world, but will not be modernizable. We have reached the end of a certain historical arc.

Abruptly, it is as though, everywhere at once, a *third pole of attraction* has come in to turn aside, pump out, absorb all the objects of conflict, making any orientation along the old flight line impossible.

And it is at this point in history, at this juncture, that we find ourselves today. Too disoriented to array the positions along the axis that went from the old to the new, from the Local to the Global, but still incapable of naming this third attractor, fixing its position, or even simply describing it.

And yet the entire political orientation depends on this step to the side: we shall really have to decide who is helping us and who is betraying us, who is our friend and who is our enemy, with whom we should make alliances and with whom we should fight – but while taking a direction that is no longer mapped out.

There is nothing, in any case, that authorizes us to re-use the old markers such as “Right” and “Left,” “liberation,” “emancipation,” “market forces.” Or even the markers of space and time that have appeared self-evident for so long, such as “Local” or “Global,” “future” or “past.”

Everything has to be mapped out anew, at new costs. What is more, this is an urgent task that must be carried out before the sleepwalkers, in their blind headlong rush forward, have crushed what we care about.

8.

If it could be claimed, at the beginning of this text, that the US decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord clarified the new political situation, it was because the idea behind the course proposed is so *diametrically opposed* to the direction that ought to be taken that it defines quite well, but by contrast, the position of this third attractor!

To assess with some confidence the extent to which the situation is being clarified, it suffices to imagine the state of conversations if the Brexit campaign had failed in June 2016, if Hillary Clinton had been elected, or if after his election Trump had not withdrawn from the Paris Accord. We would still be weighing the benefits and drawbacks of globalization as if the modernization front remained intact. Fortunately, if such an adverb can be used, the events of the past year have made this still less attractive.

“Trumpism” is a political innovation of a rare sort that needs to be taken seriously.³⁰

In fact, the shrewd maneuver of those who support it consisted in building a radical movement based on the systematic *denial* that climate change exists.

It is as though Trump had managed to identify a *fourth attractor*. This one is easy to name: it is the *Out-of-This-World* ([figure 3](#)), the horizon of people who no longer belong to the realities of an earth that would react to their actions. For the first time, climate change denial defines the orientation of the public life of a nation.

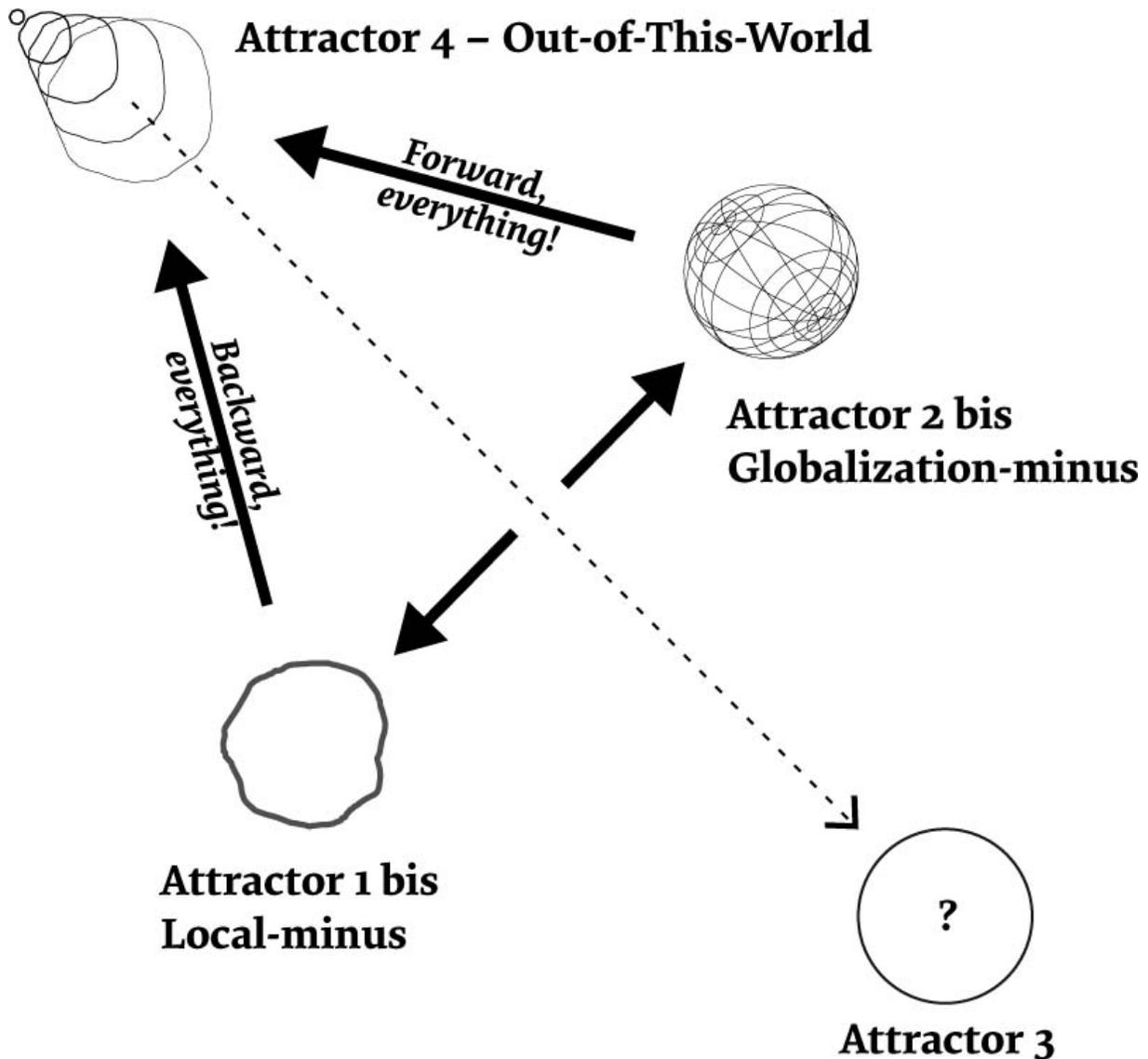


Figure 3 “Trumpism” as the political invention of a fourth attractor

It is unfair to the Fascists to compare the phenomenon of which Trump is the symptom to the movements of the 1930s. The only thing the two movements have in common is that each was an invention, unforeseen within the gamut of political affects, that left the old elites totally disoriented, at least temporarily. What the Fascists had managed to put together unfolded along the old vector – the one that goes toward modernization starting from ancient cultural grounds. They managed to amalgamate the return to a dreamed-of past – Rome or Germania – with revolutionary ideals and industrial and technological modernization, while reinventing a

picture of a Total State – and of a State at war – against the very idea of individual autonomy.

None of this figures in the current innovation: the State is in disgrace, the individual is king, and the urgent governmental priority is to gain time by loosening all constraints, before the population at large notices that there is no world corresponding to the America depicted.

Trump's originality is to link, in a single gesture, first the *headlong rush* toward maximum profit while abandoning the rest of the world to its fate (billionaires are called upon to represent "ordinary people"!), and second, the *headlong rush backward* of an entire people toward the return of national and ethnic categories ("Make America Great Again" behind a wall!). Instead of opposing the two movements – the advance toward globalization and the retreat toward the old national terrain – as was done earlier, Trump's supporters act as though they could be conflated. Such a fusion is obviously possible only if the very existence of the conflict between modernization, on the one hand, and the condition of being terrestrial, on the other, is denied.

Hence the constitutive role of skepticism about climate science, which is otherwise incomprehensible (let us recall that up to Clinton's presidency, Republicans and Democrats agreed on questions of political ecology³¹). We can well understand why denial prevails: the total lack of realism of the combination – Wall Street pulling millions of members of the so-called middle classes toward a return to protection of the past! – is unmistakable. For the time being, the project depends entirely on the requirement of maintaining utter indifference to the New Climatic Regime while dissolving all forms of solidarity, both external (among nations) and internal (among classes).

For the first time, a large-scale movement no longer claims to address geopolitical realities seriously, but purports to put itself explicitly outside of all worldly constraints, literally *offshore*, like a tax haven.³² What counts above all for the elites behind this movement is no longer having to share with the others a world that they know will never again be a common world. They do all this while maintaining the American ideal of the Frontier – while taking

off toward unreality! – and acting as if they wanted to get as far away as possible from the third attractor, the specter that haunts all politics and that “Trumpism” – this is its strength – has clearly detected!

(It is quite remarkable, moreover, that this invention comes from a real estate developer who has been constantly in debt, racing from failed deal to failed deal, and who became famous by way of reality television, another form of unreality and escapism.)

Upon promising those who were heading toward the Local-minus that they were going to rediscover the past, while also promising themselves immense profits that would stem from depriving these same voters *en masse*, the elites hardly need to quibble over empirical proofs!

It is quite useless to become outraged on the pretext that Trump voters “don’t believe in facts.” They are not stupid: it is because the overall geopolitical situation has to be denied that indifference to the facts becomes so essential. If the massive contradiction between advance and retreat had to be taken into account, one would have to prepare oneself to come back down to earth!

This movement defines the first government totally oriented toward the ecological question – but backwards, negatively, through rejection! This is easy to visualize if we look at [figure 3](#), place ourselves behind Trump’s back and draw a line that leads directly to where we need to go!

To be sure, “ordinary people” must not have too many illusions about what comes next in the adventure. Those for whom Trump is working are precisely those tiny elites who had grasped starting in the early 1980s that there would be no room for them and for the nine billion left behind. “Let’s deregulate: let’s rush to pump out bigtime everything that still remains to pump. Drill, baby, drill! We’re going to win in the end, by betting on this nutcase, we’ll get 30 or 40 years of respite for us and our children. After that, the deluge can come; we’ll be dead by then anyway.”

Accountants are quite familiar with entrepreneurs who defraud investors: the innovation of Trumpism is to have the greatest nation in the world take that step. Trump as the country’s Madoff?

But we must not overlook a factor that explains the whole business: Trump presides over the country *that had the most to lose* from a return to reality. Its material infrastructures are the most difficult to reorient quickly; its responsibilities in the current climatic situation are the most crushing. Most enraging, it possesses all the scientific, technological, and organizational capabilities that could have led the “free world” to take the turn toward the third attractor.

In a sense, Trump’s election confirms, for the rest of the world, the end of a politics oriented toward an identifiable goal.³³ Trumpian politics is not “post-truth,” it is post-politics – that is, literally, a politics *with no object*, since it rejects the world that it claims to inhabit.

The choice is mad, but it is comprehensible. The United States saw the obstacle and, as one says of a horse that is ridden to a fence but refuses to jump, it simply refused to proceed – at least for the time being.

Given this situation, there is a chance for everyone to wake up, or so we can hope. The wall of indifference and indulgence that the climate threat alone has not managed to breach may be brought down.

Failing this, one does not need to be an anointed expert to predict that the whole business will end in a fiery deluge. This is the only real parallel with Fascism. Contrary to Marx’s dictum, history does not go simply from tragedy to farce, it can repeat itself one more time in a tragic farce.

9.

It seems ridiculous to advance the claim that we have no more precise indications about the third attractor than the one offered by those in flight from it – as if we Moderns had never recognized the general framework of our action as well as the general direction of our history, as if we had had to wait until the end of the last century to notice that, in a way, our projects were floating in a vacuum. And yet is that not precisely the situation we are confronting? The Global (Global-plus as well as -minus) toward which we were heading up to now, the horizon that allowed us to project ourselves into an

indefinite globalization (and, in reaction, the growing number of localities that were seeking to escape from this seemingly unavoidable fate), all that has never been grounded in any reality, any solid materiality.

The terrifying impression that politics has been emptied of its substance, that it is not engaged with anything at all, that it no longer has any meaning or direction, that it has become literally powerless as well as senseless, has no cause other than this gradual revelation: neither the Global nor the Local has any lasting material existence. As a result, the first vector identified above ([figure 1](#)), a straight line along which one could locate retreats and advances, resembles a freeway without any beginning or end.

If the situation is becoming clearer in spite of everything, it is because, instead of being suspended between rejection and acceptance of modernization, we now find ourselves, in a 90° shift, *suspended between the old vector and a new one*, pushed ahead by two temporal arrows that are no longer going in the same direction ([figure 4](#)). The main concern is to establish what makes up that third term. In what way can it become more *attractive* than the other two – and why does it appear so repellent to so many?

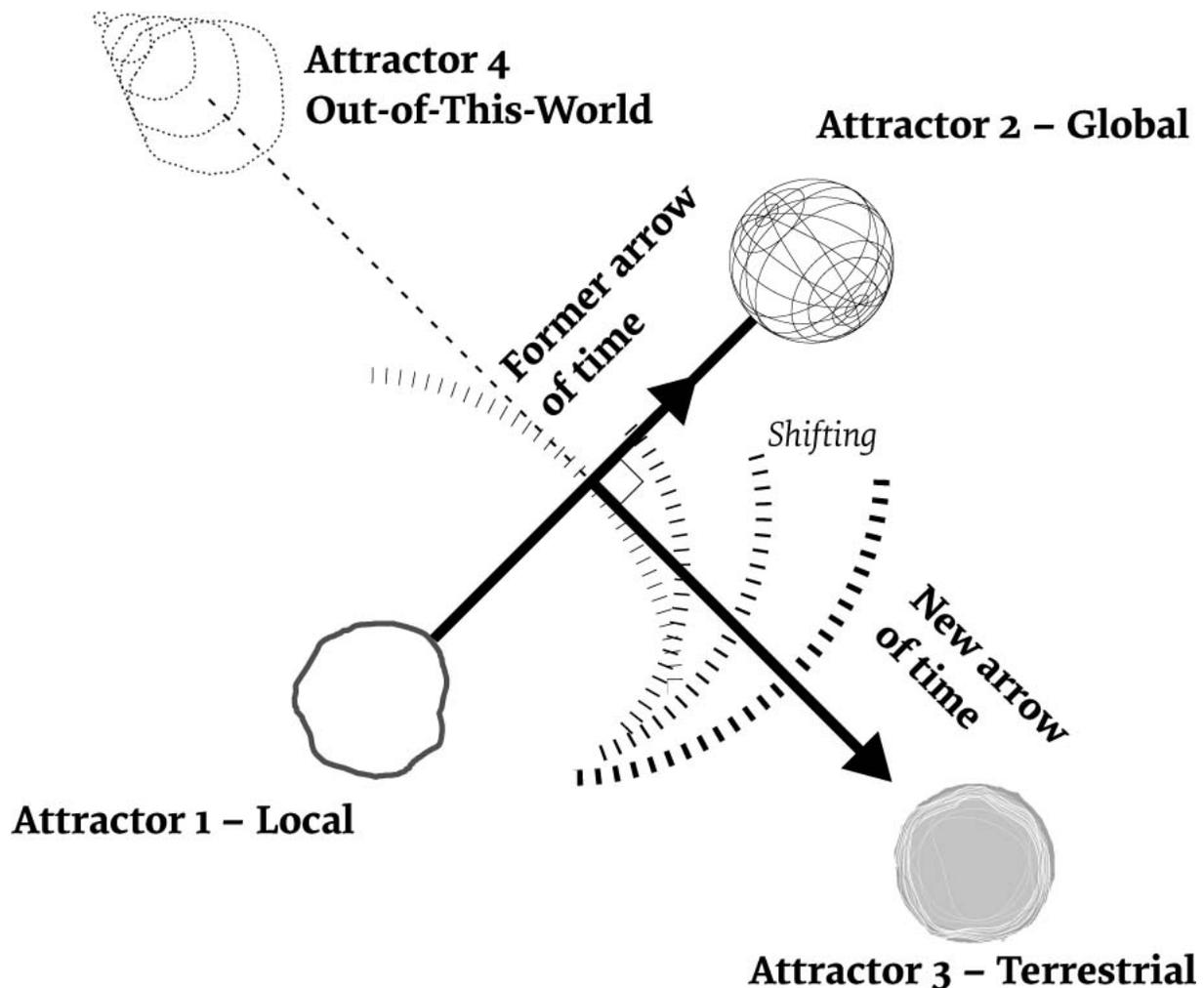


Figure 4. A reorientation of the site of politics

The first challenge is to give it a name, one that will not let it be confused with the two other attractors. “Earth”? This will be read as a reference to the planet as seen from space, the famous “Blue Planet.” “Nature”? This would be much too vast. “Gaia”? This would be appropriate, but it would take pages and pages to spell out the reasons.³⁴ “Land”? This would be ambiguous. “World,” yes, of course, but it might be too easily mixed up with the old forms of globalization.

No, we need a term that encompasses the stupefying originality (the stupefying longevity) of this agent. Let us call it, for now, the Terrestrial, with a capital T to emphasize that we are referring to a concept, and even specifying in advance where we are headed: the Terrestrial as a new *political actor*.

The massive event that we need to sum up and absorb in fact concerns the power to act of this Terrestrial, which is no longer the milieu or the background of human action. People generally talk about geopolitics as if the prefix “geo” merely designated the *framework* in which political action occurs. Yet what is changing is that, henceforth, “geo” designates an agent that participates fully in public life.

The current disorientation derives entirely from the emergence of an actor that reacts and will continue to react to human actions and that bars the modernizers from knowing *where they are, in what epoch,* and especially *what role* they need to play from now on.

The geopolitical strategists who pride themselves on belonging to the “realist school” will have to modify somewhat the *reality* that their battle plans are going to have to face. Formerly, it was possible to say that humans were “on earth” or “in nature,” that they found themselves in “the modern period” and that they were “humans” more or less “responsible” for their actions. One could distinguish between “physical” geography and “human” geography as if it were a matter of two layers, one superimposed upon the other. But how can we say where we are if the place “on” or “in” which we are located begins to react to our actions, turns against us, encloses us, dominates us, demands something of us and carries us along in its path? How are we to distinguish from now on between physical geography and human geography?

As long as the earth seemed stable, we could speak of *space* and locate ourselves within that space and on a portion of territory that we claimed to occupy. But how are we to act if the territory itself begins to participate in history, to fight back, in short, to concern itself with us – how do we occupy a land if it is this land itself that is occupying us? The expression “I belong to a territory” has changed meaning: it now designates the agency that possesses the possessor!

If the Terrestrial is no longer the framework for human action, it is because it *participates* in that action. Space is no longer that of the cartographers, with their latitudinal and longitudinal grids. Space has become an agitated history in which we are participants among others, reacting to other reactions. It seems that we are landing in the thick of *geohistory*.³⁵

To proceed toward the Global was previously to keep advancing toward an infinite horizon, to keep pushing outward a limitless frontier. If, on the contrary, one turned in the other direction, toward the Local, the hope was to recover the old security of a stable frontier and an assured identity. If it is hard to understand, today, what epoch we belong to, it is because this third attractor is at once known to everyone and completely foreign. The Terrestrial is a New World, to be sure, but it does not resemble the one the Moderns had “discovered” earlier while depopulating it in advance. It is not a new *terra incognita* for explorers in colonial headgear. It is by no means a *res nullius*, ready to be appropriated.

On the contrary, the Moderns find themselves migrating toward an earth, a land, a country, a turf, whatever one wants to call it, that is already occupied, that has been populated from time immemorial and that has more recently undergone *repopulation* by the multitude of those who have felt, well ahead of the others, the extent to which it was necessary to flee posthaste from the injunction to modernize.³⁶ In this world, all modern minds encounter a kind of exile. They are going to have to learn to cohabit with those whom they used to deem archaic, traditionalists, reactionaries, or simply “locals.”³⁷

And yet, however ancient such a space may be, it is new for everyone, since, according to the reports of climate specialists, there is quite simply *no precedent* for the current situation. Here it is, that “wicked universality,” that universal lack of earth.

What is called civilization, let us say the habits acquired over the last ten millennia, has come about, the geologists explain, in an epoch and on a geographic space that have been relatively stable. The Holocene (this is what they call it) had all the features of a “framework” within which one could in fact fairly readily distinguish human actions, just as at the theater one can forget the building and the wings to concentrate on the plot.

This is no longer the case in the Anthropocene, the disputed label that some experts want to give the current epoch.³⁸ Here, we are no longer dealing with small fluctuations in the climate, but rather with an upheaval that is mobilizing the earth system itself.³⁹

Humans have always modified their environment, of course, but the term designated only their surroundings, that which, precisely, encircled them. They remained the central figures, only modifying the decor of their dramas around the edges.

Today, the decor, the wings, the background, the whole building have come on stage and are competing with the actors for the principal role. This changes all the scripts, suggests other endings. Humans are no longer the only actors, even though they still see themselves entrusted with a role that is much too important for them.⁴⁰

What is certain is that we can no longer tell ourselves the same old stories. Suspense prevails on all fronts.

Go backward? Relearn the old recipes? Take a new look at the age-old wisdom? Learn from the few cultures that have not yet been modernized? Yes, of course, but without lulling ourselves with illusions: for them, too, there is no precedent.

No human society, however wise, subtle, prudent, and cautious you may think it to be, has had to grapple with the reactions of the earth system to the actions of eight or nine billion humans. All the wisdom accumulated over ten thousand years, even if we were to succeed in rediscovering it, has never served more than a few hundred, a few thousand, a few million human beings on a relatively stable stage.

We understand nothing about the vacuity of contemporary politics if we do not appreciate the stunning extent to which the situation is unprecedented.

At least it is easy to understand the reaction of those who have decided to flee. How can anyone agree to turn voluntarily toward the third attractor when one was headed tranquilly toward the horizon of universal modernization?

To agree to look unblinkingly at such a situation is to position oneself like the hero of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "Descent into the Maelstrom."⁴¹ What distinguishes the sole survivor from the drowned victims is the cold-blooded attention with which the old sailor from the Lofoten Islands observes the movement of all the debris swirling around the vortex. When the ship is pulled into the

abyss, the narrator manages to survive by attaching himself to an empty barrel.

One has to be as astute as that old sailor to believe that escape is possible, to keep paying close attention to all the wreckage as it drifts: such attention may make it possible to understand suddenly why some of the debris is sucked toward the bottom while other objects, because of their form, can serve as life preservers. “My kingdom for a barrel!”

10.

If there is any subject that deserves lucid attention, it is that of the condition of ecology in the modern world. This territory, so ancient and so tragically new, this Terrestrial on which one would need to land, has already been crisscrossed in all directions and in all senses by what can be called the “ecological movements.” These are the “green parties” that have tried to make it the new axis of public life, and who, from the beginning of the industrial revolution and especially since the post-war period, have pointed to the third attractor.

Whereas, for the Moderns, time’s arrow pulled everything toward globalization, political ecology tried to tow everything toward that other pole.

We must note in all fairness that ecology succeeded so well in transforming everything into vigorous controversies – from beef to the climate, by way of hedges, humid zones, corn, pesticides, diesel fuel, urban planning, and airports – that every material object has taken on its own “ecological dimension.”

Thanks to ecology, no development project fails to arouse a protest, no proposition fails to elicit an opposing one. A sign that does not deceive: the political actors who are most readily vulnerable today are the ecological militants.⁴² And it is of course on the climate that the full force of the climate change deniers’ rejection is focused.

Ecology has thus succeeded in running politics through its mill by introducing objects *that had not previously belonged* to the usual preoccupations of public life. It has successfully rescued politics from

an overly restrictive definition of the social world. In this sense, political ecology has fully succeeded in changing what is at stake in the public sphere.

To modernize or to ecologize: this has become the crucial choice. Everyone agrees about this. And yet, ecology has failed. Everyone agrees about this too.

The Green parties remain rump parties everywhere. They never quite know what foot to put forward. When they mobilize around questions concerning “nature,” the traditional parties oppose them by claiming to defend human rights. When the Green parties mobilize around “social questions,” these same traditional parties ask: “What business is it of yours?”

After 50 years of Green militancy, with a few timid exceptions, people continue to oppose economics to ecology, the demands of development to those of nature, questions of social injustice to the activity of the living world.

To be fair to the ecological movements, it is expedient to situate them with respect to the three attractors in order to grasp the cause of their provisional failure. The diagnosis is fairly straightforward: the ecologists have tried to be neither on the right nor on the left, neither archaic nor progressive, without managing to get out of the trap set by the Moderns’ temporal arrow.

Let us begin with the difficulty that the triangulation reveals thanks to our simple-minded schema. (It will become apparent later on why the very notion of “nature” has frozen the situation.) There are in fact at least two ways to get beyond the Right/Left division. One can take a position *in the middle* between the two extremes by settling in along the traditional vector (spine 1-2 in [figure 5](#)). But one can also redefine the vector by attaching oneself to the third attractor, which makes it necessary to redistribute the range of Left/Right positions according to another viewpoint (spines 1-3 and 2-3 in [figure 5](#)).

Numerous parties, movements, and interest groups have claimed to have discovered “a third way” between liberalism and localism, open and closed borders, cultural liberation and market economics.⁴³ If they have failed, up to now, it is for want of imagining a system of

coordinates other than the one that reduced them to impotence in advance.

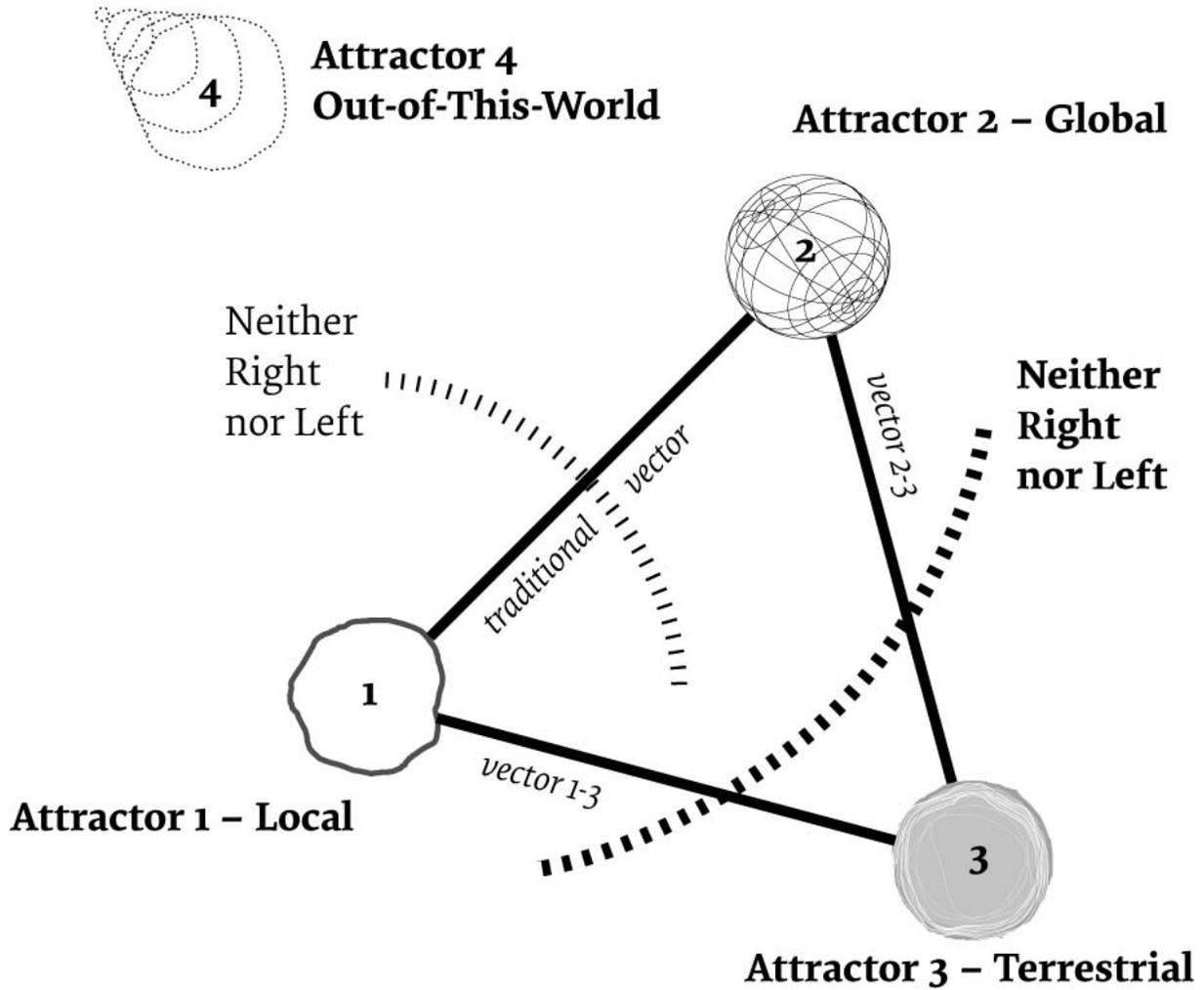


Figure 5 Two ways of locating the same slogan, neither Right nor Left

If it is really a question of “getting out of the Left/ Right opposition,” it is not at all so that we can position ourselves *at the midpoint* of the old spine while blunting the capacity to discriminate, trim, and divide. Given the intensity of the passions that the act of calling the Left/ Right gradation into question always arouses, we must not confuse it with a new center, a new swamp, a new “soft belly.”

Quite the contrary: as we see on the triangle in [figure 5](#), it is a matter of *tilting the front line* while modifying the *content* of the disputed objects that are at the origin of the Right/Left distinction – or rather of the various Rights and Lefts, so numerous today and so

intermingled that not much remains, when these labels are used, of the ordering power allowed by this classic system of coordinates.

Strangely, people claim that it is impossible to change the Left/Right vector, that it is inscribed in marble, or rather has been inscribed in the hearts of all citizens – French citizens, at least – for two centuries, even while they acknowledge that those divisions are obsolete. This proves that, for want of another vector, they persist in taking up the same old division – a repetition all the more strident in that it has less and less pertinence, like a circular saw cutting through thin air.

11.

Nevertheless, there must be a way to shake up this *mental hemicycle* that sets up like a row of toy soldiers first the far left, then the left, the center, the right, and finally the far right. The pattern was set in France in 1789, when elected officials fell into the habit of presenting themselves in this order before the chair of the session to vote on some obscure question involving the royal veto.

And yet, however rudimentary and contingent it may be, this gradation organizes every poll, every political proclamation, and every categorization; it is operative in every election as well as in every historical narrative, and it governs even our most visceral reactions. So much weight inheres in the terms “Right” and “Left,” “conservatives” and “liberals,” such floods of emotion are expressed in judgments like these: “But that guy is on the far right!” “Watch out for her: she’s a leftist!”

It is hard to see, at least for the moment, how to get along without such affect-laden terms. Public action must be oriented toward a recognizable goal. However open to dispute the word “progressive” may be, it is highly unlikely that anyone can be mobilized by a call to “regress.” With the “end of progress,” the prospect of living less well than one’s parents, the project of learning to shrivel up slowly is hardly going to electrify crowds.⁴⁴

If the goal is to adopt a new orientation in politics, it is probably wise, in order to ensure continuity between past struggles and those

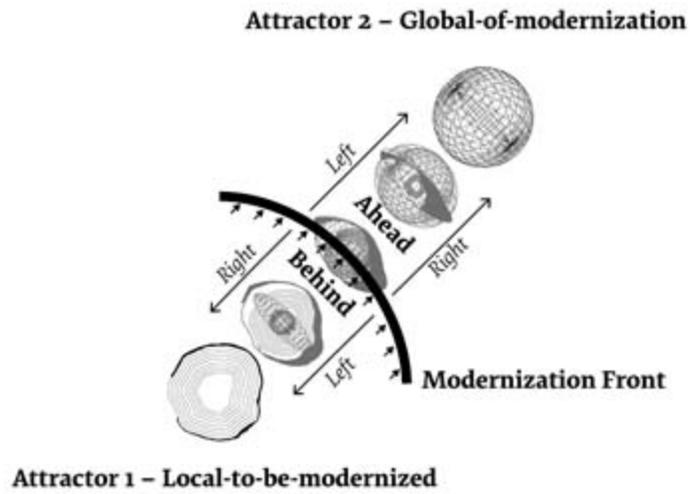


Figure 1

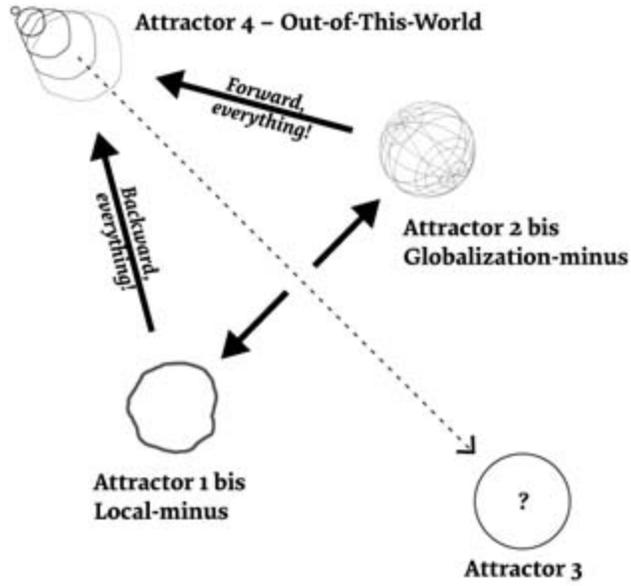
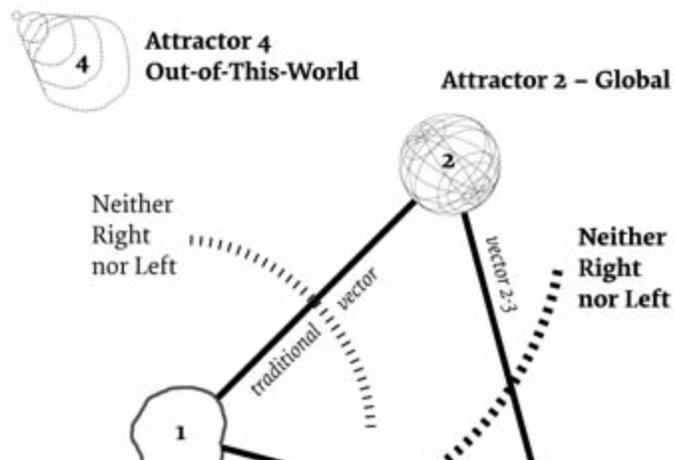


Figure 3



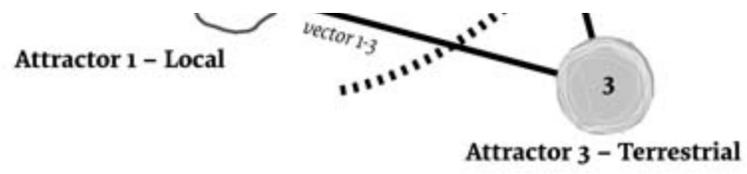


Figure 5

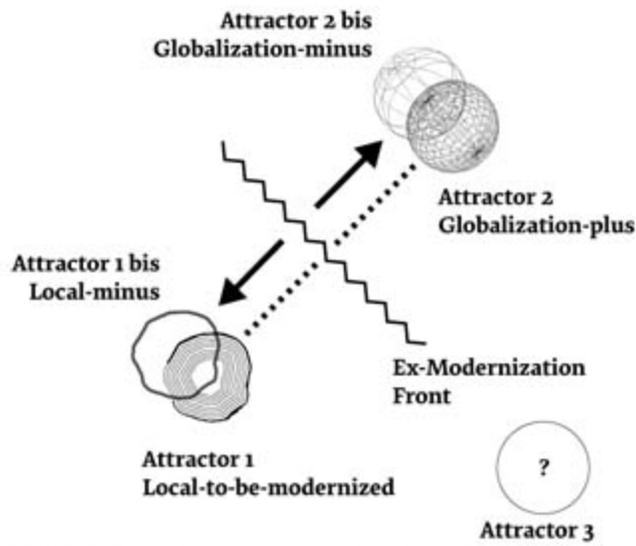


Figure 2

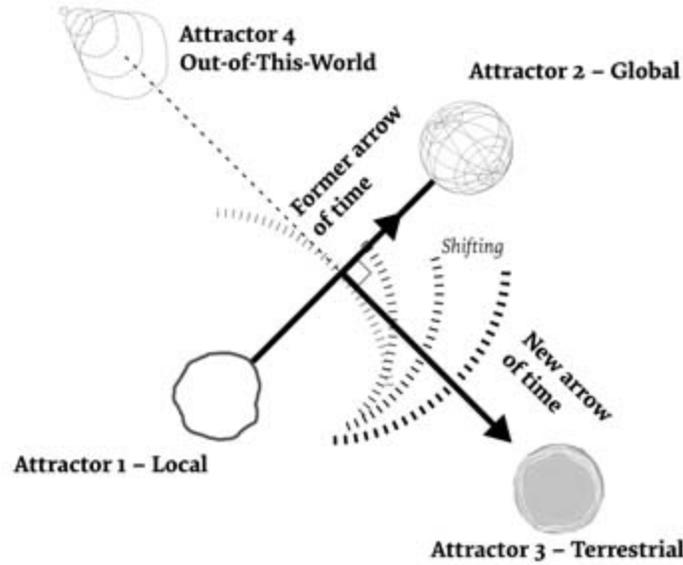
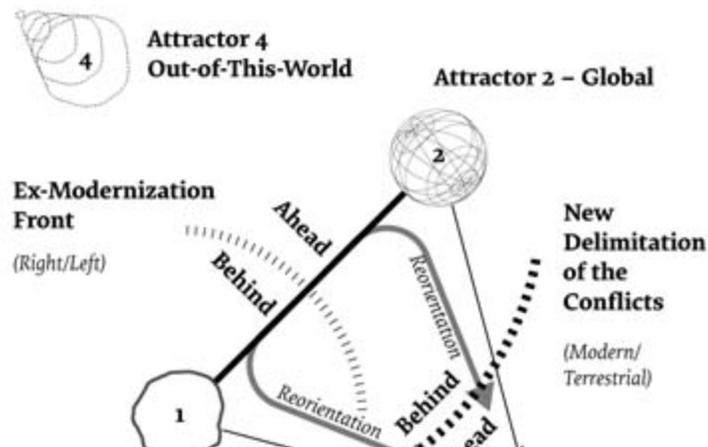
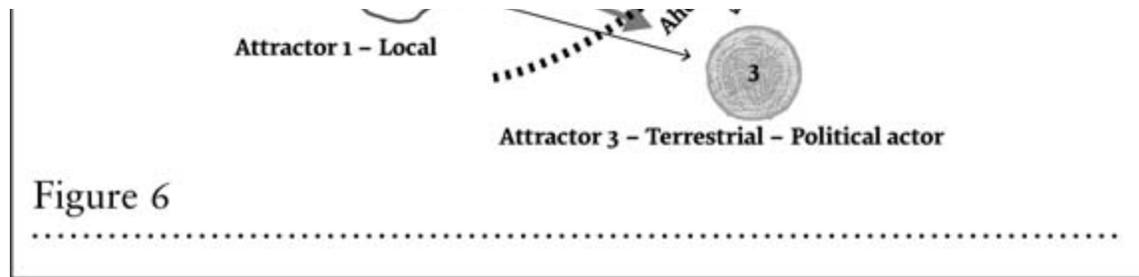


Figure 4





Notes

1. Remark made by Donald Trump's son-in-law, cited by Sarah Vowell, *The New York Times*, August 8, 2017.
2. See in particular Francis Fukayama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
3. The expression "New Climatic Regime" is developed in Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017 [2015]).
4. Catholics have done everything they could to ignore the link between poverty and ecological disasters that is clearly articulated, however, in Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si!* (Vatican: Holy See, 2015).
5. Even French President Macron, who has been indifferent to these questions, felt obliged to take them in hand when he introduced #MakeTheEarthGreatAgain barely two days after Trump's announcement.
6. Dina Ionesco, Daria Mokhnacheva, and François Gemenne, *The Atlas of Environmental Migration* (London: Routledge, 2016).
7. See Stefan Aykut and Amy Dahan, *Gouverner le climat? Vingt ans de négociation climatique* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015). The text of the INDC (Intended Nationally Determined Contribution, in UN jargon) that had been prepared for COP21 presents each country's development projects (see www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-

france/climat/paris-205-cop21/les-contributions-nationales-pour-la-cop-21, accessed August 7, 2017).

8. The wicked universality of losing one's property is well documented in Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
9. Hence the aptness of the expression "learning how to live in the ruins," from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's very important book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
10. The idea of a modernization front and the way it parcels out political affects is developed more fully in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]).
11. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957 [1944]).
12. This text follows a convention according to which the lower-case term "earth" corresponds to the traditional framework of human activity (human beings in nature), while the upper-case "Earth" indicates a power to act in which we begin to recognize, even if it has not been fully instituted, something like a political entity.
13. On this history, see especially Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
14. See Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2016).
15. See Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

16. This dating is obviously quite vague, but it does not contradict the data provided by Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014 [2013]), and the very meticulous exploration by Dominique Pestre of the way economics has absorbed and euphemized ecology. See especially Dominique Pestre, “La mise en économie de l’environnement comme règle, 1970–2010. Entre théologie économique, pragmatisme et hégémonie politique,” *Ecologie et Politique* 52 (2016): 19–44. The reactions to the 1972 Club of Rome report can serve as a milestone in this whole business of chronology. See Élodie Vieille-Blanchard, “Les limites à la croissance dans un monde global. Modélisations, prospectives, réfutations,” thesis, EHESS, Paris, 2011.
17. In *The World Inequality Report: 2018* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018), Facundo Alvaredo et al. confirm that the turning point is around the 1980s, as was shown so brilliantly in David Leonhardt, “Our Broken Economy, in One Simple Chart,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2017.
18. For an astonishing psychological portrait of the Titanic’s owner, who survived the shipwreck, see Frances Wilson, *How to Survive the Titanic: The Sinking of J. Bruce Ismay* (New York: Harper, 2012).
19. See David Kaiser and Lee Wasserman, “The Rockefeller Family Fund Takes on Exxon Mobil,” *New York Review of Books*, December 8 and 22, 2016. See also Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, “Assessing Exxon Mobil’s Climate Change Communications (1977–2014),” *Environmental Research Letters* 12, no. 8 (2017).
20. See Evan Osnos, “Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich,” *The New Yorker* (January 30, 2017): <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/30/doomsday-prep-for-the-super-rich>. For a striking portrait of the building of this offshore world, see the Paradise Papers published by the *International Consortium for Investigative Journalism* in 2017: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/paradisepapers/>.

- 21.** The problem with conspiracy theories, as Luc Boltanski has shown, is that they sometimes correspond all too well to reality (Luc Boltanski, *Mysteries and Conspiracies*, trans. Catherine Porter [Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014]). It is tempting to believe this if one reads Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017).
- 22.** This is the common tenet of sociology of science and technology (STS). See, for instance, Ulrike Felt et al., *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, 4th edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
- 23.** See James Hoggan, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009).
- 24.** See the very short and very disturbing book by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
- 25.** This does not mean that commentators are aware of it. In a manifesto published in book form in 12 languages that brings together what intellectuals have to say about the "great regression" – in other words, the surprise they feel at the "rise of populism" – only one chapter, mine, deals with this question: see Heinrich Geiselberger, ed. *The Great Regression* (London: Polity, 2017).
- 26.** Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice* (New York: Zone Books, 2000).
- 27.** See the site of Singularity University, <https://su.org>, accessed August 7, 2017, and for a frightening description, see Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016).
- 28.** The multiplication, on the left as well as on the right, of more and more strident demands for identity politics in the name of non-negotiable values shows that the second pole, that of the Globe,

has ceased to exercise the power of attraction that once made it possible to fuse the two in a project of universality.

29. I thank Jean-Michel Frodon for this link to the film *Sully* (2016).
30. This is different from conservative thinking, as Jeremy W. Peters suggests in “They’re Building a Trump-centric Movement. But Don’t Call It Trumpism” (*The New York Times*, August 5, 2017).
31. Only at the very end of the twentieth century did the issue of the climate become as essential a theme defining Republicans as abortion or anti-Darwinism. The strategy of Trump’s appointee as director of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, aimed at obliterating knowledge about climate questions, seems to follow a more coherent policy than that of the president.
32. Offshoring had existed as an important sociological phenomenon (see John Urry, *Offshoring* [London: Polity, 2014]) but it was not meant to be practiced by a whole nation!
33. This is what Kyle McGee calls “heathen”; see *Heathen Earth: Trumpism and Political Ecology* (Goleta, CA: Punctum Books, 2017).
34. As was done in *Facing Gaia*, 2017.
35. The theme of geohistory was introduced in a well-known article by Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35. (Winter 2009): 197–222.
36. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Ganet, and Heather Anne Swanson, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
37. This figure of the modern mind undergoing retraining was sketched by Michel Tournier with his Crusoe to whom Friday has to explain patiently how to behave on his island in order to stop being a stranger, as he was at first. Another inversion of the ties between possessor and property, so complete that Crusoe decides in the end to remain on Speranza Island! See Michel Tournier,

Friday, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969 [1967]).

38. See Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (London: Routledge, 2015).
39. See the remarkable presentation in Timothy Lenton, *Earth System Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
40. Hence the lively dispute over the comeback – or not – of the human figure as principal actor. To take two extremes: Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), and Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017).
41. I thank Aurélien Gamboni and Sandrine Tuxeido for making this connection between Poe's tale and the climate crisis.
42. See www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/dangerous-ground, accessed August 7, 2017.
43. From Blair to Macron. But also, more seriously in social theory. See Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (London: Polity, 1994).
44. This is the problem of the affects triggered by the theme of de-growth. On the modern horizon, one cannot adopt de-growth without regressing. Or else one has to change horizons. Hence the importance of proposing other terms, perhaps that of *prosperity*. Along the new vector, if one cannot progress, at least one may hope to *prosper*.
45. Anna Tsing has offered a better schema than this one; hers consists in taking any stake at all as being tugged in different directions by the four attractors. This would indeed be more realistic, but harder to present in a simple drawing. Personal communication, Aarhus, June 2016.

46. See Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
47. See Noortje Marres, *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics* (London: Palgrave, 2012). It is to Marres that we owe the fine slogan: “No issue, no politics.”
48. The acronym ZAD for the French *Zones à défendre* has given rise to “zadist” as a label for activists who are trying to stop the construction of an airport near the city of Nantes. Their strategy has been to occupy the land to be “developed” for the projected airport and to ally themselves in new ways with farmers and other activists.
49. According to the neologism offered by Donna Haraway to distinguish the world from the globe of globalization.
50. The difficulties that the sociologists of the social have simply locating the sociology of associations (also called actor network theory or ANT) provide in a reduced form an almost perfect parallel with the slowness of the socialist movements in figuring out how to deal with ecological questions. Let us recall that “collective” is the term that can replace “social” while extending the range of associations that are thus *collected*. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
51. The term signals the exponential growth of the impact of human activity on the planet, conventionally deemed to have begun in the wake of the Second World War. See Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration,” *The Anthropocene Review* 2 (2015): 81–98.
52. A blockage further highlighted by the continual complaints about “the end of the revolutionary spirit,” about the need to “invent new utopias” or to propose “new mobilizing myths” – so many ways of continuing to dream aloud of the same historical trajectory.

53. See Pierre Charbonnier, “Le socialisme est-il une politique de la nature? Une lecture écologique de Karl Polanyi,” *Incidences* 11 (2015): 183–204.
54. Here I am returning to the question raised by Naomi Klein’s title, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), trying to understand just why so few things are changing because of the stability of political reference points – and in particular because of the numbing effect of the term capitalism.
55. Or else they are not managing to exit from a model that naturalizes the question once again. This is the problem of any biological metaphor, such as “metabolism.” Hence the importance of going back upstream to reconsider the notions of nature so as to be sure that they are not going to extinguish precisely the politics that some were seeking to relaunch. See Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015); the book’s title restates succinctly the problem that I am trying to circumscribe here.
56. Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).
57. Trump’s obsession with a return to coal (“King Coal”) is an almost perfect illustration of the new geopolitics: a dreamed-of smoking utopia with all the associated social relationships on an earth that no longer exists and in an epoch outdated by 50 years.
58. A link forcefully pursued for many years by Mike Davis, e.g., *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002).
59. I am borrowing this contrast from Michel Lussault, *De la lutte des classes à la lutte des places* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), but in a somewhat different sense, as will become clear later on. I recognize that “geo-social” maintains the dualism and makes the hyphen do all the work. This is a case in which we need to put new wine in old skins.

- www.reporterre.net/Nous-ne-defendons-pas-la-nature, accessed August 7, 2017.
61. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
62. The whole point of Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy* is to make clear how a science of scarcity was turned into a science of boundless cornucopia. There is a pattern here: when ecology insists on the existence of limits, economic sciences find a way to invent a limitless future.
63. Leaving to one's grandchildren a world less inhabited than the one into which they were born, living with the idea that one is an agent of the sixth extinction – these are some of the preoccupations that tilt all ecological questions into tragedy.
64. The term was introduced by Edmund Husserl. The theme of the infinite universe goes back to the classic work of Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957).
65. See the magnificent three-volume work edited by Dominique Pestre, *L'histoire des sciences et des savoirs* (Paris: Seuil, 2015). This collection succeeds in historicizing the producers of universality and especially in situating them geographically.
66. See Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. Daniel L. Smith (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1993]).
67. See Isabelle Stengers, *La vierge et le neutrino* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2005), especially the annex.
68. The paradox is that a machine in no way obeys the principles of mechanics, which remain a form of idealism; Gilbert Simondon developed this theme in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2017). That machines are not mechanistically made is shown in Bruno Latour, *Aramis, or the*

Love of Technology, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

69. In *Nature as Event: The Lure of the Possible*, trans. Michael Halewood (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), Didier Debaise gives a particularly illuminating version of the philosophical history of this bifurcation.
70. The term “naturalist” has been defined in a now canonical way by Philippe Descola in *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
71. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).
72. An obsession on the part of reactionary thought with the risks posed by migrations that would come in and replace a people autochthonous “by birth” with an allochthonous group. Like all popular obsessions, this one symbolizes and displaces the presence of another phenomenon, another great replacement: the change of land.
73. Hence the effort to make the contrast between Planet and Terrestrial visible thanks to cartography, as in the project undertaken by Frédérique Aït-Touati, Alexandra Arènes, and Axelle Grégoire, *Terra Forma*. See <http://cargocollective.com/etherrestrategiclandscape/TERRA-FORMA>
74. Hence the importance of the second and less-well-known part of Descola’s *Beyond Nature and Culture* on modes of relation, especially the passages on production.
75. An abrupt transformation of the gaze which makes us read as avidly Nastasja Martin, *Les âmes sauvages: Face à l’Occident, la résistance d’un peuple d’Alaska* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016) as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s stunning *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.
76. See Sébastien Dutreuil, “Gaïa: Hypothèse, programme de recherche pour le système terre, or philosophie de la nature?”

(doctoral thesis, University of Paris I, 2016); a book is forthcoming. See also Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*, and Timothy Lenton, *Earth System*.

[77.](#) James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (New York: Norton, 1995).

[78.](#) This point has been developed further in Bruno Latour, “Why Gaia is not a God of Totality,” special issue, “Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 34.2–3 (2017): 61–82.

[79.](#) Alexander von Humboldt’s return to favor is a symptom of this shift toward the earth sciences differently conceived. See Andrea Wulf’s best-seller, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt’s New World* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

[80.](#) This scenario of metaphorical teleportation is explored among others in the survey proposed by Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in *The Ends of the World*, trans. Rodrigo Nunes (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

[81.](#) This term is used by a network of researchers in earth science to compare equipped sites – often in catchment basins – by combining the results of disciplines that previously worked separately (<http://criticalzone.org/national/>). In the singular, the term Critical Zone designates the thin layer in which life has radically modified the earth’s atmosphere and geology – as opposed either to the space beyond or to the deep geology below. See Susan L. Brantley et al., “Designing a Network of Critical Zone Observatories to Explore the Living Skin of the Terrestrial Earth,” *Earth Surface Dynamics* 5 (2017): 841–60.

[82.](#) A major part of Isabelle Stengers’ work lies in slowing down that disqualification but without diminishing the importance of the sciences: this is what she calls “civilizing.” See her recent *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Andrew Goffey (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015).

[83.](#) Examples abound, but see especially Charles D. Keeling, “Rewards and Penalties of Recording the Earth,” *Annual Review*

of Energy and Environment 23 (1998): 25–82, and Michael E. Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

- [84.](#) The idea of an active production of ignorance has been popularized in the case of tobacco by Robert Proctor, in *Golden Holocaust: Origins of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for Abolition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).
- [85.](#) “The communist question has been badly framed, first because it has been raised as a *social question*, that is, as a *strictly human* question. Despite this, it has never stopped disrupting the world.” Comité Invisible, *Maintenant* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2017), p. 127.
- [86.](#) See Will Steffens et al., “Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet,” *Science Express*, 2015.
- [87.](#) The myth of American Republicans according to which climate science is a Socialist or Chinese plot to dominate the United States provides a quite explicit figure for this power, recognized as intentional and directly geopolitical – indicating that the adherents to an alternative reality are, in spite of everything, capable of designating with a certain precision the reality that they are confronting.
- [88.](#) Clive Hamilton’s *Defiant Earth* raises the important question of a necessary return to anthropocentrism.
- [89.](#) Suggested in Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 55.
- [90.](#) The success of works that reveal the agency of beings as different as forests, intestinal bacteria, chimpanzees, mushrooms, or soils, attests to the great swerve in the definition of what acts. It is this change of paradigm that Vinciane Despret has documented so well. See, in particular, *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, trans. Brett Buchanan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016 [2012]).
- [91.](#) Hence the importance of the philosophy of the organism developed by Whitehead and renewed by Isabelle Stengers in *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*,

trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011 [2002]).

- [92.](#) The term *point de vie* (in French, it nicely parallels *point de vue*) has been proposed by Emanuele Coccia in *La vie des plantes: Une métaphysique du mélange* (Paris: Payot, 2016).
- [93.](#) See Michael Callon, *L'emprise des marchés: Comprendre leur fonctionnement pour pouvoir les changer* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017), a development of his earlier *Laws of the Market* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- [94.](#) Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 139.
- [95.](#) Here, in a sense, we come back to the old word “law” as Montesquieu understood it; he linked it explicitly, moreover, to the notion of “climate.” This term, long misunderstood itself until the advent of the New Climatic Regime, would oblige us to write something like “the spirit of the laws of nature.” I am grateful to Gerard de Vries for his interpretation of Montesquieu.
- [96.](#) Hence the weirdness of watching Macron and Trump together saluting the troops parading along the Champs-Élysées on July 14, 2017.
- [97.](#) As many people have done after seeing the documentary film by Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, *Tomorrow*, produced by Bruno Levy, 2015: <https://www.tomorrow-documentary.com>.
- [98.](#) The text by the “Comité invisible [Invisible Committee],” *Maintenant*, which is at once revolutionary and bizarrely full of Christian spirituality, offers little in the way of practical conclusions beyond “smashing some cops” in order to take the lead in demonstrations.
- [99.](#) Readers may recall that *Empire*, a book by Michael Hardt and Tony Negri (Paris: UGE, 2004), ended curiously by praising St. Francis.
- [100.](#) See Starhawk, *Parcours d'une altermondialiste: De Seattle aux Twin Towers*, trans. Isabelle Stengers and Édith Rubenstein (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2004).

- [101.](#) By investing in the magnificent project of Marc Robert and his group; see the article by Heng Rao, Luciana C. Schmidt, Julien Bonin, and Marc Robert, “Visible-Light-Driven Methane Formation from CO₂ with a Molecular Iron Catalyst,” *Nature* 548 (2017): 74–7.
- [102.](#) As in the project outlined by Baptiste Morizot, *Les Diplomates: Cohabiter avec les loups sur une nouvelle carte du vivant* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2016).
- [103.](#) A typical example is the success of the Soil Care Network created by Anna Krzywoszyńska, <https://www.soilcarenetwork.com>.
- [104.](#) See Marie Cornu, Fabienne Orsi, and Judith Rochfeld, eds., *Dictionnaire des biens communs* (Paris: PUF, 2017).
- [105.](#) This anti-zoom standpoint is an essential aspect of actor-network theory; see Valérie November, Eduardo Camacho-Hübner, and Bruno Latour, “Entering a Risky Territory: Space in the Age of Digital Navigation,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 581–99.
- [106.](#) See Hannah Landecker, “Antibiotic Resistance and the Biology of History,” *Body and Society* (2015): 1–34. I thank Charlotte Brives for bringing this astonishing article to my attention.
- [107.](#) Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
- [108.](#) See Philippe Grateau, *Les Cahiers de doléances: Une lecture culturelle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001).
- [109.](#) Bruno Latour, “Some Advantages of the Notion of ‘Critical Zone’ for Geopolitics,” special issue, “Geochemistry of the Earth’s Surface, GES-10, Paris, France, 18–23 August, 2014,” *Procedia Earth and Planetary Science* 10 (2014): 3–6.
- [110.](#) Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 2008 [2000]).

[111.](#) Peter Sloterdijk, *Si l'Europe s'éveille* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003 [1995]).

[112.](#) The term was introduced in a different sense by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[113.](#) As Angela Merkel put it after Trump abandoned the Paris Accord, on May 28, 2017: “We Europeans must take charge of our own fate.”