

FACING
GAIA
WITH THE
RESOURCES OF
APOCALYPSE
AND ART

— ERIK BORDELEAU —

FAIRE FACE
À GAÏA
AVEC LES
RESSOURCES
DE L'ART ET
DE L'APOCALYPSE



GAÏA GLOBAL CIRCUS
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*Il existerait donc une forme d'énonciation originale qui parlerait du présent, de la présence définitive, de l'achèvement, de l'accomplissement des temps, et qui, parce qu'elle en parle au présent, devrait toujours se décaler pour compenser l'inévitable glissement de l'instant vers le passé [...]*¹

« Les sciences » ne peuvent donner l'impression d'exister qu'en faisant de leur existence un miracle permanent².

« Dans leur fuite vers le futur, les Modernes sont absents à eux-mêmes. » Bruno Latour a prononcé cette phrase durant le colloque Gestes spéculatifs organisé par Isabelle Stengers et Didier Debaise à Cerisy-la-Salle en juillet 2013. Dans ses conférences Gifford intitulées *Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature*, lues quelques mois auparavant à Édimbourg, Latour a précisé ce qu'il entendait par cette description plutôt énigmatique des Modernes : « Contrairement à ce qu'ils disent souvent d'eux-mêmes, les Modernes sont des créatures qui regardent vers derrière bien plus que vers l'avant. C'est pourquoi l'irruption de Gaïa les prend tant par surprise. Puisqu'ils n'ont pas d'yeux derrière la tête, ils refusent du tout au tout de reconnaître qu'elle s'en vient vers eux, comme s'ils étaient trop occupés à fuir les horreurs des temps passés. On dirait que leur vision du futur les a aveuglés quant à là où ils s'en allaient ; ou plutôt, tout se passe comme si leur idée du futur n'était faite que de ce qu'ils rejettent du passé, sans envisager aucun contenu réaliste en ce qui a trait aux "choses à venir" (le français fait une distinction pertinente entre "le futur" et "l'avenir")³ ».

1. Bruno Latour, *Jubiler – ou les tourments de la parole religieuse*, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris, 2002, p. 140.

2. Bruno Latour, *Irréductions*, La découverte, Paris, 2001, p. 324.

3. Bruno Latour, « War of the Worlds: Humans against Earthbound », *Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature*, p. 106. [Trad. libre]

*So, there exists a form of original utterance that speaks of the present, of definitive presence, of completion, of the fulfilment of time, and which, because it speaks of it in the present, must always be brought forward to compensate for the inevitable backsliding of the instant towards the past ...*¹

"Science" only gives the impression of existing by turning its existence into a permanent miracle.²

"In their flight toward the future, the Moderns are absent to themselves." Bruno Latour uttered this sentence during the Speculative Gestures colloquium organized by Isabelle Stengers and Didier Debaise at Cerisy-la-Salle in July 2013. In his Gifford Lectures entitled "Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature," pronounced just a few months before in Edinburgh, Latour explained what he meant by this rather enigmatic description of the Moderns.

Contrary to what they often say of themselves, Modernists are not forward-looking, but almost exclusively backward-looking creatures. This is why the irruption of Gaia surprises them so much. Since they have no eyes in the back of their head, they deny it is coming at them at all, as if they were too busy fleeing the horrors of the times of old. It seems that their vision of the future had blinded them to where they were going; or rather, as if what they meant by the future was entirely made of their rejected

1. Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing or the Torments of Religious Speech*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 118.

2. Bruno Latour, "Irreductions," in *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 217.



GAÏA-GLOBAL CIRCUS, COMÉDIE DE REIMS, 2013
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Latour a donné chair à cette suggestive image de pensée par l'entremise d'une courte chorégraphie qu'il a commandée dans le cadre de ses conférences Gifford. Filmé par Jonathan Michel et mettant en scène Stefany Ganachaud, *L'ange de la géohistoire* montre une femme marchant à reculons, la tête tournée vers le passé. À la différence de l'ange de l'histoire de Walter Benjamin emporté par une tempête venant des tréfonds du passé, qui le propulse vers le futur à son corps défendant, l'ange de la géohistoire de Latour finit par se retourner et porte son regard vers le futur (et vers la caméra). L'expression sur son visage immédiatement se transforme : la danseuse est maintenant prise d'horreur et d'effroi. L'ange change de direction et retourne à pas accélérés d'où elle arrivait, les yeux fixés sur la menaçante Gaïa soudainement révélée à l'inattentive Moderne, qui ne s'était jusqu'à présent préoccupée que de ce qu'elle laissait derrière elle.

Cette chorégraphie fait partie du *Gaïa Global Circus*, une expérimentation théâtrale qui cherche à poser le problème du troublant écart entre la gravité de la crise écologique à laquelle nous faisons face et notre incapacité à y réagir de manière appropriée. Nous sommes témoins à l'heure actuelle, dit Latour, d'un mouvement de « recul compréhensible devant l'apocalypse qui vient¹ ». *Gaïa Global Circus* est une tragi-comédie climatique qui ne se contente pas de représenter la crise écologique en cours, mais aspire également à nous plonger dans le « drame interne des sciences ». En effet, pour Bruno Latour, cette œuvre représente un rigoureux effort de dramatisation des problèmes scientifiques, suivant le principe selon lequel « une bonne expérience est une situation théâtrale de dramatisation² ». *Gaïa Global Circus* se propose ainsi de contribuer à la

past without any realistic content about 'things to come.' (French usefully distinguishes between '*le futur*' and '*l'avenir*.')³

Latour gave flesh to this suggestive image of thought through a short dance choreography video he curated as part of his Gifford Lectures. Starring Stefany Ganachaud and filmed by Jonathan Michel, *The Angel of Geostory* shows a woman walking backward, facing the past. Unlike Walter Benjamin's angel of the past irremediably blown over by a storm coming from the depth of history and pushing him relentlessly towards the future, the angel of *Geostory* does at some point turn its gaze toward the future (and toward the camera). The expression on her face immediately turns into absolute horror. She then changes direction and starts moving from where she came, her eyes glued on the threatening Gaïa suddenly revealing itself to the inattentive Modern who had only been concerned, up until now, with what she was leaving behind.

This piece features in the *Gaïa Global Circus*, an ambitious theatrical experiment created in 2013 that seeks to address the discrepancy between the gravity of the ecological crisis and our inability to react appropriately to it. We are witnessing, Latour says, a movement of "understandable withdrawal in front of the coming apocalypse."⁴ *Gaïa Global Circus* is a climatic tragicomedy that not only tries to represent the current ecological crisis, but attempts at plunging into the internal drama of science. For Bruno Latour indeed, the piece is a rigorous effort at *dramatizing* the problems of science, following the principle according to which "a good

1. Bruno Latour, « L'apocalypse est notre chance », *Le Monde*, 20 septembre 2013, www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/09/20/bruno-latour-l-apocalypse-est-notre-chance_3481862_3232.html.

2. Bruno Latour, « Gaïa Global Circus, une tragi-comédie climatique », *Philosophie magazine*, 11 novembre 2013, www.philomaq.com/lepoque/brevets/bruno-latour-gaia-global-circus-une-tragi-comedie-climatique-8472.

3. Bruno Latour, "War of the Worlds: Humans against Earthbound," *Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature*, 106. www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/GIFFORD-SIX-LECTURES_1.pdf, accessed October 10, 2014.

4. Bruno Latour, "L'apocalypse est notre chance," *Le monde*, September 20, 2013, www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/09/20/bruno-latour-l-apocalypse-est-notre-chance_3481862_3232.html (author's own translation), accessed October 10, 2014.

mise en œuvre d'une esthétique commune de laquelle puissent émerger des capacités de réaction plus adéquates à la crise en cours – un partage du sensible renouvelé qui vienne élargir « l'étrécissement du répertoire de sensations » et de concepts dont nous sommes équipés pour relever les défis de l'ère de l'Anthropocène.

Comment générer une relation active avec le futur ? Cette question se situe au cœur des plus récents travaux de Bruno Latour. Étonnamment, il place sa réflexion sous le signe, à première vue un peu désuet, de l'apocalypse. Pour Latour, l'apocalypse est intimement liée à la façon dont les Gaïens posthumains ou, pour utiliser un terme qu'il préfère, les *Earthbouds*, pourraient renouveler leur manière d'envisager le futur et d'habiter le présent. C'est un ingrédient historique essentiel qui, estime-t-il, ne devrait pas être laissé de côté dans notre tentative de tisser autrement « les différents fils de la géohistoire ».

Latour propose une définition pratique de l'apocalypse qui rejette son assimilation usuelle à l'idée de catastrophe, mettant en avant sans le mentionner explicitement son sens original de « révélation » : « Il ne faut pas se tromper sur le sens du mot "apocalypse", cela ne veut pas dire catastrophe. L'apocalypse signifie la certitude que le futur a changé de forme, et qu'on peut faire quelque chose. C'est comme si la forme du temps avait changé et que l'on pouvait donc maintenant enfin faire quelque chose. C'est une pensée pour l'action contre la sidération et la panique. [...] l'apocalypse c'est la compréhension que quelque chose est en train d'arriver et qu'il faut se rendre digne de ce qui vient vers nous. C'est une situation révolutionnaire, en fait ».

Cet extrait pourrait donner lieu à une exégèse théologique approfondie. Je vais être aussi bref que possible, en m'en tenant à définir comment Latour traite de l'idée d'apocalypse en rapport à une relation transformée – activée – au futur. La certitude dont Latour parle en regard du changement qui affecte le temps présent comporte une surprenante similarité avec la conception catholique de la foi comme *ce qui rend le futur présent* chez le sujet qui croit⁶.

Bien qu'il parle de certitude dans sa propre conception de l'apocalypse, Latour rejeterait fort probablement une définition de la foi qui fasse intervenir une dimension de croyance. « La foi et la croyance n'ont rien à se dire », souligne-t-il d'ailleurs avec véhémence. C'est qu'une composante essentielle de son travail anthropologique vise

scientific experimentation is like a theatrical situation of dramatization."⁵ *Gaïa Global Circus* wants to produce a common aesthetics from which a renewed capacity for responsiveness might emerge, a sharing of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) that could enlarge the inadequate and "limited repertoire of concepts and feelings" with which we are equipped to face the Anthropocene era that has just begun.

The question of how to generate an active relation to the future is crucial to Latour's work. Surprisingly, he places his reflection on the matter under the sign of apocalypse. Apocalypse for Latour ties in closely with how post-human Gaïans or, to use Latour's preferred formulation, the "Earthbound," might envisage the future and inhabit the present in a renewed way. It is an essential historical ingredient that, he suggests, should not be left aside in our attempt to weave in new ways "the various threads of geostory."⁶

Latour proposes a practical definition of apocalypse that rejects its common assimilation with the idea of catastrophe, bringing forth without explicitly mentioning its original meaning as "revelation."

"Apocalypse signifies the certitude that the future has changed shape, and that we can do something. It's as if the form of time had changed and that, therefore, we could now at last do something. It is a thought for action against stupor and panic. ... apocalypse is the understanding that something is happening and that we must make ourselves worthy of what is coming to us. It is, in fact, a revolutionary situation."⁷

This passage could allow for an extended theological exegesis. I will try to stay as brief as possible, focusing on how Latour envisages the idea of apocalypse in relation to a transformed—activating—relation to the future. The certitude of which Latour talks with regard to the change that affects present time bears surprising

similarity with how Christianity conceives of faith as *what makes the future present* in the subject who believes.⁸

Even though he talks about certainty in his own account of apocalypse, Latour would most certainly contest a definition of faith that involves a dimension of belief. "Faith and belief have nothing to say to one another"⁹ Latour vehemently maintains; a distinctive component of his work aims precisely at debunking the notion of belief. The entirety of



GAÏA GLOBAL CIRCUS, COMÉDIE DE KJIPMS, 2013.
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6. Bruno Latour, « Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene », *New literary History*, vol. 45, n° 1, 2014, p. 15. [Trad. libre]

7. Bruno Latour, « L'apocalypse est notre chance ».

8. Pour plus de détails à ce sujet, lire l'étonnamment stimulante encyclique papale de Benoît XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 2007.

9. Bruno Latour, « Thou Shalt Not Take the Lord's Name in Vain: Being a Sort of Sermon on the Hesitations in Religious Speech », *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, n° 39 (printemps 2001), p. 231.

5. Bruno Latour, « Gaïa Global Circus, une tragi-comédie climatique », *Philosophie magazine*, November 11, 2013. www.philomag.com/lepoque/breves/bruno-latour-gaia-global-circus-une-tragi-comedie-climatique-8472, accessed October 10, 2014

6. Bruno Latour, « Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene », in *New Literary History* 45, No.1 (2014): 15.

7. Bruno Latour, "L'apocalypse est notre chance."

8. For more details, see the unexpectedly thought-provoking *Spe salvi* (2007), Benedictus XVI's encyclical letter about hope.

9. Bruno Latour, "Thou Shalt Not Take the Lord's Name in Vain: Being a Sort of Sermon on the Hesitations in Religious Speech" *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 39 (Spring 2001): 215–34 (231).

précisément à démonter la notion de croyance. Un livre comme *Sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches*, par exemple, est entièrement voué à montrer qu'« est moderne celui qui croit que les autres croient¹⁰ ». Il s'agit de se débarrasser d'une catégorie qui produit une indésirable distinction entre intériorité et extériorité, passivité et activité, théorie et pratique. Et de fait, la catégorie de croyance est trop réductrice et subjective pour rendre compte – avec ce qu'il faut d'ambition, de sens du fantastique et, en fin de compte, de réalisme – que le monde, tel que nous le découvrons et en faisons l'expérience, est composé d'événements indivisibles, irréductibles à la division sujet/objet.

Latour ne mobilise pas les ressources de l'apocalypse au nom de la religion comprise comme une sorte de « supplément d'âme » pour répondre à la désolation du monde « matériel ». Il ne cherche d'aucune façon à spiritualiser ou à ré-enchanter le monde – présenter les choses ainsi signifierait que nous aurions perdu le monde toujours-déjà enchanté. À l'inverse, comme Latour le dit joliment, « le symbolique est la magie de ceux qui ont perdu le monde. C'est le seul moyen qu'ils aient trouvé pour rétablir, "en plus" des "choses objectives", cette atmosphère spirituelle sans quoi les choses ne seraient selon eux "que" de la "nature"¹¹. » En dernière analyse, Latour veut attirer notre attention sur la dimension de (réelle) futurité qui insiste dans chaque présent. En ce sens, la foi concerne l'entretien d'une disposition noble et spéculative à l'égard du futur, qui participe de manière décisive aux arts pluriels de l'attention immanente.

Le remarquable ouvrage de Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, souligne comment, pour Latour, la religion est un exercice éthique d'attention immanente visant à rester « avec le trouble » historique (comme dirait Donna Haraway) – un entraînement à vivre et à parler à partir des choses. « La religion, écrit Miller, est ce qui brise notre volonté de se détourner¹². » Allant à l'encontre de l'association habituelle entre la religion et l'outre-monde, Latour affirme que « c'est la religion

his book *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* is dedicated to showing that "a Modern is someone who believes that others believe,"¹⁰ and how we should do without a category that produces an undesirable distinction between interiority and exteriority, passivity and activity, theory and practice. And indeed, belief is just too reductive and subjective a category when it comes to giving a proper—that is, fantastic, ambitious, and in the end, realist enough—account of how the world as we experience and discover it is composed of indivisible events irreducible to a strict subject-object division.

Latour doesn't mobilize the resources of apocalypse in the name of religion understood as some sort of *supplément d'âme* for a desolated "material" world. He doesn't want to spiritualize or re-enchant the world—presenting things in this way would mean that one has already lost the (ever-enchanted) world in the first place. On the contrary, as he nicely puts it, "The symbolic is the magic of those who have lost the world. It is the only way they have found to maintain in addition to "objective things" the "spiritual atmosphere" without which things would "only" be natural."¹¹ If anything, Latour wants to bring our attention to the dimension of (real) futurity insisting in every present. In this sense, faith is about nourishing a noble and speculative disposition towards the future, one that participates decisively to the plural arts of immanent attention.

Adam S. Miller's remarkable *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* underlines how, for Latour, religion is an ethical exercise in immanent attention aimed at staying with the historical trouble—a training to live by and speak *from things*. "Religion, Miller

says, is what breaks our will to go away."¹⁴ Against the grain of the usual association of religion with the other-worldly, Latour affirms that "it is religion that attempts to access the this-worldly in its most radical presence"¹³ Inversely, he can't seem to have harsh enough words for any form of escapism: "The dream of going to another world is just that:



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10. Bruno Latour, *Sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches*, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond/la découverte, Paris, 2009, p. 20.

11. Bruno Latour, *Irréductions*, La découverte, Paris, 2001, p. 282. Cet extrait fait écho à ce passage éloquent d'un autre ouvrage : « [Les antimodernes] se chargent de la tâche courageuse de sauver ce qui peut l'être : l'âme, l'esprit, l'émotion, les relations interpersonnelles, la dimension symbolique, la chaleur humaine, les particularismes locaux, l'interprétation, les marges et les périphéries. Admirable mission, mais qui serait plus admirable encore si tous ces vases sacrés se trouvaient bien menacés. » Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes : essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La découverte, 1997 [1991], p. 168.

12. Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, p. 145. [Trad. libre]

10. Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, trans. Catherine Porter and Heather MacLean (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

11. Bruno Latour, "Irreductions," in *The Pasteurization of France*, 187. One can also think of this famous passage from *We Have Never Been Modern*: "They [the antimoderns] take on the courageous task of saving what can be saved: souls, minds, emotions, interpersonal relations, the symbolic dimension, human warmth, local specificities, hermeneutics, the margins and the peripheries. An admirable mission, but one that would be more admirable still if all those sacred vessels were actually threatened." Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 123.

12. Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 145.

13. Bruno Latour, "Will Non-Humans Be Saved? An Argument in Ecotheology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15 (2009), 459–75 (464), cited in Adam S. Miller *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, 157.

qui cherche à accéder à ce monde-ci dans sa présence la plus radicale¹³. Inversement, il ne semble pas trouver de mots assez durs pour signifier son dégoût des postures escapistes : « Le rêve de s'enfuir vers un autre monde n'est que ça : un rêve, et probablement aussi un profond péché¹⁴. » Cette conception immanentiste de la religion est finalement très proche de l'idée deleuzienne de croire au monde. Ce qui importe dans les deux cas, c'est la façon d'introduire les valeurs dans le monde de sorte qu'un certain mode d'existence est intensifié et amené à sa limite créative¹⁵.

Nous avons réuni suffisamment d'éléments pour proposer un résumé à peu près satisfaisant de la conception qu'a Latour de la fuite en avant des Modernes. Les Modernes sont damnés en ce qu'ils croient que la voie véritablement rationaliste d'être au monde consiste à écraser la futurité contre la pure ligne chronologique du temps. En ce sens, le matérialisme est l'ultime idéalisme. La *matière* représente cette substance illusoire qui, à les en croire, s'écoule purement « du passé vers le présent¹⁶ », cette chose d'outre-monde en laquelle « les conséquences sont déjà là dans la cause » et pour laquelle donc il n'y a pas de « suspens auquel s'attendre, de transformation soudaine, de métamorphose ou d'ambiguïté¹⁷. » Dans leur nihilisme illimité, les Modernes aussi voudraient eux-mêmes se voir couler sans friction du passé vers le présent. Leur conception d'une matière dé-animée se confond avec la plus destructrice des ascèses, celle de faire de soi un pur et irréel flux d'information sans transformation ni interruption.

À rebours de ce pseudo-matérialisme et contre toute attente, Latour présente une vision de l'apocalypse qui s'intègre à une compréhension complexe et, à première vue du moins, paradoxale, de la façon dont « dans le monde réel le temps coule du futur vers le présent¹⁸. » La vie apparaît ainsi comme une zone de rencontres éminemment contingentes, métamorphiques, voire miraculeuses. Agissant comme une sorte de prophète séculier de l'inquiétante Gaïa, la déesse qui personnifie ce désastre programmé qui se présente aussi sous l'appellation Anthropocène, Latour nous met face à un choix civilisationnel. Il nous appelle à nous élever à la hauteur du défi que pose une conception de la *matérialité* animée et intrinsèquement dramatique, une matérialité qui est produite et reproduite par l'entremise d'un jeu d'adresses temporelles constamment renouvelées qui commandent « une définition réaliste des multiples *occasions* à travers lesquelles les agentivités sont découvertes¹⁹. » Et ainsi s'ouvre un formidable drame réaliste de la présence, où les choses sont lancées dans cette entreprise risquée d'exister et où les « organismes-qui-personnent » prolifèrent joyeusement.

[Traduit de l'anglais par Erik Bordeleau]

13. Bruno Latour, « Will Non-Humans Be Saved? An Argument in Ecotheology », *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 15, 2009, p. 464, cité dans Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, p. 157. [Trad. libre]

14. *Ibid.*, p. 156. [Trad. libre]

15. Pour plus de détails concernant le croire au monde conçu comme une puissance d'activation et de mise en œuvre, voir mon « 无间道 (wu jian dao): Deleuze and the Way without Interstices », dans Paul Patton (dir.), *Proceedings of the 2012 Kaifeng International Deleuze Conference*, Henan University Press, Kaifeng, 2013.

16. Bruno Latour, « Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene », p. 10. [Trad. libre]

17. *Ibid.* [Trad. libre]

18. *Ibid.*, p. 13. [Trad. libre]

19. *Ibid.*, p. 14. [Trad. libre]

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a dream, and probably also a deep sin.¹⁴ This immanentist conception of religion is closely related with Deleuze's idea of believing in the world. What matters here is how value is introduced in the world, or in other words, how a certain mode of existence is intensified and brought to its creative limit.¹⁵

We have gathered enough elements to give a concluding, if not entirely satisfactory, account of how Latour conceives of the headlong rush of the Moderns. Moderns are damned insofar as they believe the truly rationalist way to be in the world is by flattening futurity. In this perspective, materialism is the ultimate idealism. Matter is that illusory substance that supposedly flows purely "from past to present,"¹⁶ that other-worldly thing in which "the consequences are already there in the cause," and for which therefore there is "no suspense to expect, no sudden transformation, no metamorphosis, no ambiguity."¹⁷ In their unbounded nihilism, Moderns too would like to simply flow from past to present. Their conception of de-animated matter conflates with the most insane of ascetics, that of becoming a pure and unreal flow of information without transformation.

Inversely, and against all odds, Latour includes the notion of apocalypse within a complex and, at least at first sight, paradoxical understanding of how "in the real world time flows from the future to the present."¹⁸ Life thus appears as a zone of contingent, metamorphic, and always somehow miraculous encounters. Acting as some sort of secular prophet of the puzzling Gaia, Latour exposes us to a civilizational choice. He calls us to stand up to the challenge posed by an animated and inherently dramatic *materiality*, one that is produced by a constant and active re-addressing of time that commands "a realist definition of the many *occasions* through which agencies are being discovered."¹⁹ There opens a realist drama of presence, in which things are thrown in the risky business of existing and "organisms-that-person" proliferate joyfully.

14. Bruno Latour, "Will Non-Humans Be Saved? An Argument in Ecotheology", 473, cited in *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, 156.

15. For more details about belief in the world as an artful and activating power, see my "无间道 (wu jian dao): Deleuze and the Way without Interstices." *Proceedings of the 2012 Kaifeng International Deleuze Conference*, ed. Paul Patten (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2013).

16. Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," 10.

17. *Ibid.*, 10.

18. *Ibid.*, 13.

19. *Ibid.*, 14.

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ÉDITO

2

Sylvette Babin

La prégnance du religieux
The Prevalence of Religion

RELIGIONS

4

Boris Groys

Religion in the Digital Age
La religion à l'ère du numérique

14

Emily Rosamond

Transfusing Abstraction: Darren
Harvey-Regan's *Metalepsis*
Metalepsis ou l'abstraction
transfusée

22

Nathalie Desmet

Abraham Abraham
et *Sarah Sarah*
Abraham Abraham
and *Sarah Sarah*

28

Vanessa Morisset

Red Room : La pop religiosité
des années à venir selon
Arseniy Zhilyaev
Red Room: The Future's Pop
Religiosity According to Arseniy
Zhilyaev

36

Erik Bordeleau

Facing Gaia with the Resources
of Apocalypse and Art
Faire face à Gaïa avec les
ressources de l'art et de
l'apocalypse

42

Pierre Rannou

Du paradis perdu à la religion
de l'art
From Paradise Lost to the
Religion of Art

PORTFOLIO

48

Mehdi-Georges Lahlou

ARTICLES

56

Ariane De Blois

Romeo Gongora, *Just Watch Me*

60

Jean-Philippe Uzel

Michael Blum, *Notre
histoire || Our History*

64

Jane Sammuels

Radiabolus: Notes on
the Melodic Violence of
Recruitment

68

Anne-Marie St-Jean Aubre

Voir : un acte d'interprétation
informée. Quelques notes sur le
Festival Actoral

72

Emily Rosamond

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: *Obra
Sonora*

SCHIZES en compagnie de Pinocchio

76

Michel F. Côté /

Catherine Lavoie-Marcus

Tout du long du nez, un encan

COMPTES RENDUS

REVIEWS

78

Peter Flemming

Montréal, Galerie B-312

79

Noa Bronstein

Toronto, Ryerson Image Centre

Maud Jacquin

New York, MoMA PS1

80

Chantal Boulanger

Saint-Jean-Port-Joli,
La Biennale de sculpture

81

Nathalie Desmet

Paris, Backslash Gallery

Vanessa Morisset

Paris, Galerie Nivet-Carzon

82

Katrie Chagnon

Parachute: The Anthology,
Les Presses du Réel

*The Contemporary, the Common:
Art in a Globalizing World*,
Steinberg Press

83

Ariane De Blois

Auto/Pathographies,
Sagamie édition d'art

Katrie Chagnon

moi aussi,
Éditions les petits carnets

The Avery Review

Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary

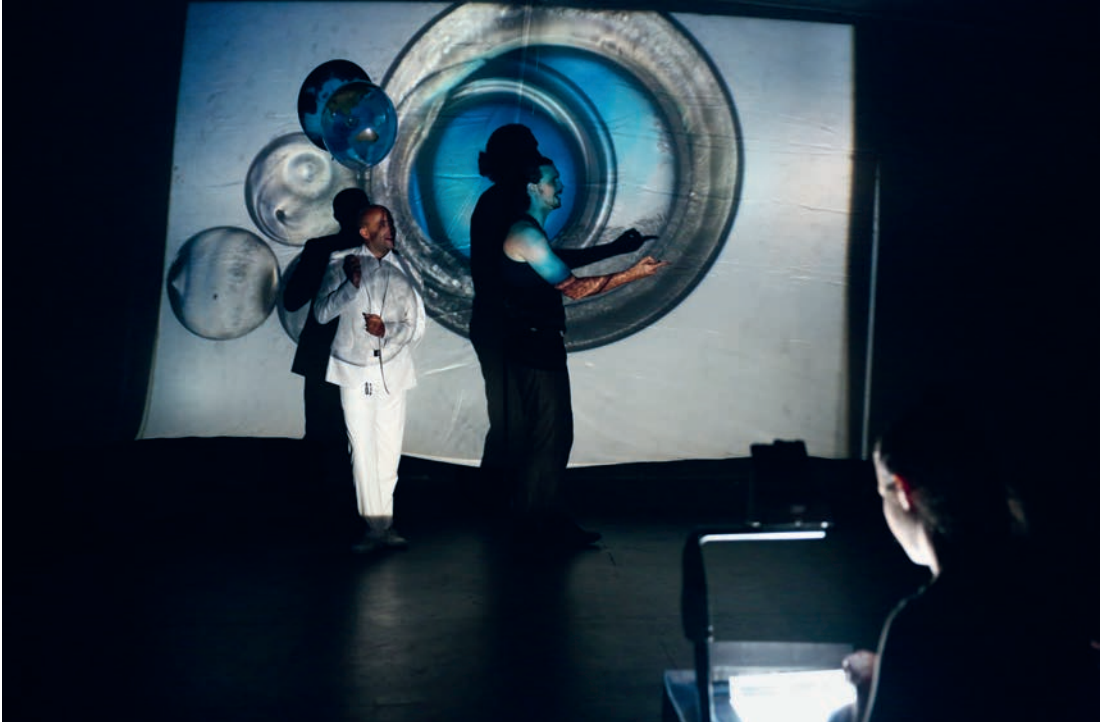
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Gaïa Global Circus: A Climate Tragicomedy

RANIA GHOSN AND EL HADI JAZAIRY



All images in this essay are of *Gaïa Global Circus*, project by Bruno Latour, play by Pierre Daubigny, directed by Frédérique Aït-Touati and Chloé Latour, Compagnie AccentT and Soif Compagnie, at The Kitchen, 2014. Photographs © Paula Court, courtesy of The Kitchen.

WHAT SORT OF STORY IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

Gaïa Global Circus takes aim at the deficiency of our emotional repertoire for dealing with the climate crisis—a condition that this theatrical event’s conceiver Bruno Latour describes as the “abysmal distance between our little selfish human worries and the great questions of ecology.”¹ This experimental play can be seen as a confluence of two areas of interest: On the one hand, the director and artists sought to reanimate the theater’s historic connection with the cosmos, and on the other, the public scholar questioned how he might best address environmental disasters beyond the usual apocalyptic cultural imaginary. These two groups share a sense that the great challenge facing the debate around climate today is one of new forms and forums of eco-political engagement. And both also address a shared concern: If the threats are so serious, if we worry once again that the sky might be falling on our heads, how is it that we are all so little mobilized?

In her analysis and critique of the abstract images produced by experts in the discourse of climate change, Birgit Schneider elaborates on problems of perception as well as of scale. People observe daily weather changes, she notes,

1

Laura Collins-Hughes, “A Potential Disaster in Any Language: ‘Gaïa Global Circus’ at the Kitchen,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/theater/Gaia-global-circus-at-the-kitchen.html>.

but they do not perceive climate—which is, according to its modern definition, a statistically created, abstract object of investigation with a long-term assessment period. Furthermore, people can experience local weather but not the global effects of climate change, which would require no less of them than to perceive the world as a whole.² How do we think about something as intangible and invisible as climate? What are the aesthetics and tone of narrating climate change, and to what ends? If environmental issues are un-representable in their scale, their ubiquity, and their duration, then perhaps it falls to works of art (which are still works of thought) to present them to the senses.³

Gaïa Global Circus belongs to the genre of the arts of climate change. This rapidly emerging body of work explores the interplay between climatic knowledge and aesthetic experience to engage with the temporal and scalar dissonances of the issue at stake, and to acknowledge and deal with the effects of environmental processes upon life. Such practices deploy a range of aesthetic formats to explore our chaotic relationship with Gaia, be they Olafur Eliasson's ice installations (the most recent of which was at the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference), Ursula Biemann's video essays, or the *Climate Changed* graphic novel book by Philippe Squarizoni, to name only a few. Latour and his collaborators envisaged a play that commands a new approach to science, politics, and nature by combining varying tones of tragedy, comedy, and ritual.⁴ Theater, by their estimation, is uniquely capable of exploring the dramas and emotions not elucidated in public discourse. Their intention was to make sensible our thing-world by creating a collective aesthetic experience, which in turn implies the possibility of new configurations of climatic publics. Their concerns resonate with Ulrich Beck's "emancipatory catastrophism," the term by which he proposes that we can and should turn the question on climate change upside down—not to ask "what can we do for climate change?" but rather, "what is climate change good for?"⁵

POLITICAL ARTS: FROM ABSTRACT KNOWLEDGE TO COLLECTIVE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Latour proposes that climate change calls for a new worldview, one that includes the figure of Gaïa as a new personage on the theater of the world. In his view, the assumed divide between nature and society—and the accompanying focus on deanimate, disembodied, undisputed reason—has led directly into the current ecological crisis. We do not live on a "Blue Marble," insofar as that famous image of our planet symbolizes an objective, holistic, impersonal earth made visible by our own technological achievements. Such metaphysics of technological progress, Latour argues, should now be countered by a redefined assemblage of *values*, so as to extend beyond the critique of the modern objectification of the Earth to a new ecological belief-system in the embodiment of Gaïa. This carries a scientific as well as a mythological dimension—Gaïa derives from technological processes of modeling and measurement but also incorporates an abundance of mythological connotations, as its name evokes the Greek goddess of Earth. Gaïa is an "odd, doubly composite figure ... the Möbius strip of which we form both the inside and the outside, the truly global Globe that threatens us even as we threaten it."⁶ Latour cites *The Revenge of Gaïa* (2006), in which James Lovelock discusses positive feedback "tipping points" leading to significant and irreversible climate system changes.⁷

2

Quoted in
Antonia Mehnert,
"Climate Change
Futures and the
Imagination of the
Global in Maeva!"
by Dirk C. Fleck,"
Ecozone, vol. 3, no.
2 (2012): 28.

3

Gaïa Global Circus,
[http://www.
bruno-latour.fr/fr/
node/359](http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/359).

4

The collective work
was undertaken
with Chloé Latour
and Frédérique Aït-
Touati (directors),
Claire Astruc, Jade
Collinet, Matthieu
Protin, and Luigi
Cerri (actors), and
Pierre Daubigny
(playwright).

5

Ulrich Beck,
"How Climate
Change Might
Save the World,"
*Development and
Society*, vol. 43,
no. 2 (2014):
169–183.

6

Bruno Latour,
*An Inquiry into
Modes of Existence:
An Anthropology
of the Moderns*
(Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University
Press, 2013), 9f.



7

Lovelock defines Gaïa as “a biotic-planetary regulatory system. Over 30 million types of extant organisms, descendant from common ancestors and embedded in the biosphere, directly and indirectly interact with one another and with the environment’s chemical constituents. They produce and remove gases, ions, metals, and organic compounds through their metabolism, growth, and reproduction. These interactions in aqueous solution lead to modulation of the Earth’s surface temperature, acidity-alkalinity, and the chemically reactive gases of the atmosphere and hydrosphere.” See James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaïa: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

Beyond the accumulation of scientific knowledge, Gaïa embodies questions of representation, of what the issues are and where we stand vis-à-vis those issues. For Latour, “the Big Picture is just that: a picture. And then the question can be raised: in which movie theatre, in which exhibit gallery is it shown? Through which optics is it projected? To which audience is it addressed?”⁸ Beyond the big picture, the absorption of this concept of Gaïa in the public consciousness requires a new and different rhetoric that connects political ecology with the energy of collective aesthetic experience. Latour calls for a new worldview that might “counter a metaphysical machine with a bigger metaphysical machine.” He adds: “Why not transform this whole business of recalling

8

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187.

9

Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 25.

modernity into a grand question of design?”⁹ His response calls for crafting the “political arts”—an experimental method for conceiving and responding to the problem of climate change. If politics is the art of the possible, then the multiplication of the possible requires a reconnection with the many available formats of the aesthetic. The project of the political arts fits into Latour’s broader quest for a new eloquence with which to engage political ecology. In his books *Making Things Public* (2005) and *Politics of Nature* (1999), both of which include the word “democracy” in their subtitles, Latour explores the gap between the importance of the politics of representation in politics and ecology and the narrow repertoire of emotions and sensations with which we understand these issues. He asks what would happen if politics revolved instead around disputed things, atmospheres, natures, and what techniques of representation might help make them public. In his recent book *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013), Latour demands nothing less than to overcome the modern preoccupation with objective scientific truth and to rediscover the plurality of vastly different modes of existence (like religion, morality, or law). Latour repeatedly states the reason for which this is needed at this very moment: “Gaïa approaches.”¹⁰

10

Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 13.

THE THEATER: MAKING CLIMATE PUBLIC

Latour argues that the assembly, the model of political accord organized according to a very particular architecture (for example, Étienne-Louis Boullée’s Cenotaph for Isaac Newton) has disappeared. Which assembly, then, are we in now? What spaces could stage a totality, especially when that whole is opaque, fragmented, contradictory? In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour outlined the *panorama* as a historical visual practice and space that stages such a sense of wholeness. From the Greek *pan-* (all) and *-rama* (spectacle), the panorama is a view of totality. Installed in rotundas, panoramas were immense 360-degree paintings that hermetically surrounded the observer. From a darkened central platform, the observers found themselves completely enveloped in visual illusions illuminated by concealed lighting. These “sight travel machines” transposed the visitors into the image, be it simulations of distant lands, familiar cities, or catastrophes of nature or wars.¹¹ Struck with enchantment in the middle of a magic circle, the spectator is sheltered from unwelcome distractions all while being immersed in a foreign landscape. Latour found these contraptions quite powerful, particularly as they solved the question of staging totality and nesting a range of scales, from the micro to the macro, into one another. However, he also points to their limitations, in that “they don’t do it by multiplying two-way connections with other sites.” A panorama designs a picture with no gap in it, “giving the spectator the powerful impression of being fully immersed in the real world without any artificial mediations or costly flows of information leading from or to the outside.”¹²

11

Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

12

Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 187.

The limits of the panorama as a form of composing totality led Latour to explore other modes of representation, particularly those that stage their own technology and capitalize on their distance from the real. In describing controversies and scientific evidence, Latour has worked on what he calls “the theater of proof”: how evidence is made *convincing* in the eyes of the witnesses. This is not to jeopardize the actual qualities of the evidence but rather to show what motivates scientists to develop *effective* evidence. This research

in turn interested Latour in the reverse process: how the stage might help scientists, especially climatologists, follow the threads of what makes convincing proof—a crucial issue at a time when climate skeptics have such influence on public opinion.¹³ Hence the idea that he could explore, onstage, all the dissonances of climate change with an “older and more flexible medium than philosophy.” For Latour, “only the theater can afford to explore the range of passions corresponding to contemporary political issues.”¹⁴

HOW DO WE TALK WHEN WE TALK IN CLIMATE THEATER?

The Theater is thus the collective aesthetic equivalent of the Parliament or the Congress. It appropriates the technologies of the “image machine” to place the story of climate change, a story that is difficult both to tell and to hear, at the center of the “Theater of the World.” The theater is neither theory nor teaching; it is a practice that makes possible through the medium of the stage a thought experiment that is done in public, not just in the head.¹⁵ This form of communication addresses environmental matters by sharing them in full scale and in real time with an audience that is assembled in small collectives. It responds to the accelerationist temporality of climate change, a phenomenon well represented in recent short videos on human-induced climate change. One such example is *Welcome to the Anthropocene*, a three-minute roller-coaster ride through the latest chapter in the story of how one species has transformed a planet. Commissioned by the London Planet Under Pressure conference, *Welcome to the Anthropocene* provides a data visualization of the state of the planet. It opens at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. As the camera swoops over Earth, viewers watch the planetary impact of humanity: cities, roads, railways, pipelines, cables, and shipping lanes, until finally the world’s planes spin a fine web around the planet.¹⁶ Contrary to such representations of acceleration, *Gaïa Global Circus* slows down thought to ground it in the immediacy of the present. Latour’s piece also adopts a different narration tone. Rather than a foretold tragedy as it unfolds in disaster movies and short films, *Gaïa Global Circus* is a tragicomedy that blends those opposing but complementary genres with decorum, in order to prevent the listeners from falling into the excessive melancholy of what is at stake.

With monsters, storms, a modern-day Noah, scientists, and divinities onstage, the theater is the setting in which the performance and speech of nonspeaking and nonhuman entities operate as devices of estrangement. *Gaïa Global Circus* counters the familiarity of disaster satellite images that numb the senses into a “feeling of vaguely blasé nonchalance.”¹⁷ The piece animates an era when humans recognize their transformation into a climatological entity, all while foregrounding the frictions and dissonance of cross-scalar, multispecies, and intertextual thinking. It is a show that reflects on the tensions between the cacophony of human positions on ecology, our own contradictions in relating to them, and what encompasses and surpasses them. These various threads trace, watch, project, worry, make astonishing discoveries, and knit together the voice of Gaïa—a voice that has many interpretations, because it emanates from a complex and non-unified figure. *Gaïa Global Circus* animates the earth in an era when humans recognize their transformation into a climatological entity, all while hindering the possibility of a simple identification with the characters in the play. It

13

Gaïa Global Circus,
<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/359>.

14

Bruno Latour, A propos de Gaïa Global Circus (GGC) Réponses à quelques questions fréquentes (FAQ), http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/FAQ%20GAIAGLOBALCIRCUS_0.pdf.

15

Gaïa Global Circus,
<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/359>.

16

See *Welcome to the Anthropocene*, <http://www.anthropocene.info/short-films.php>.

17

Frédérique Aït-Touati and Bruno Latour, “The Theatre of the Globe,” *Exeunt*, February 13, 2015, <http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/the-theatre-of-the-globe>.



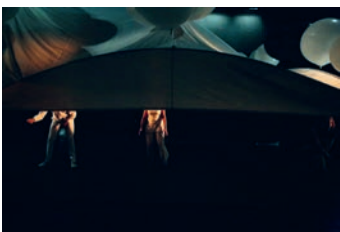
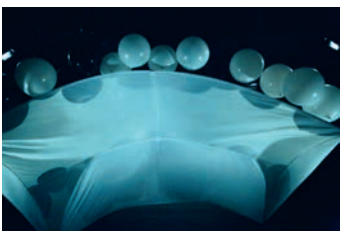


invites the audience to engage the performed actions and utterances on an aesthetic and cognitive plane, rendering them astonishing in intellectually challenging and sometimes frightening ways.

Faced with this inaudible speech, the theater intervenes with its proper tools: thought experiments in the form of scenic and mental images are active fictions of a world yet to come. This model of the theater resonates with Donna Haraway’s concept of “worlding” as a process of actively reimagining a non-anthropocentric world. “These knowledge-making and world-making fields,” Haraway observes, “inform a craft that for me is relentlessly replete with organic and inorganic critters and stories, in their thick material and narrative tissues.”¹⁸ The model of the world that *Gaïa Global Circus* projects moves away from the dominant discussion of technical fixes for the climate, which focus on the improvement of technology, information, and policy incentives as means to “manage” or even “reverse” climate change. Rather, it proposes to advance new hypotheses and cultivate thinking about what current technologies, theories, or habits can’t yet solve. It is not “the job of theatre to find a solution,” Latour notes, but to play with “the dialectic between philosophical reasoning and theatrical experiment ... It is a dance, rather than an argument.”¹⁹

A NEW PERSONAGE HAS ENTERED THE THEATER OF THE WORLD

In his article titled “La Non-invitée au Sommet de Copenhague”—roughly translated as “Who Wasn’t Invited to Copenhagen?”—Michel Serres points to the one empty seat at Copenhagen’s Parliament of Things: that of Gaïa. He wondered how to make it possible for her to sit, speak, and be represented. What is the Gaïa equivalent of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*’s frontispiece? The challenge of governing the climate is that we are addressing the global without a world state, requiring a form of representation to think through the new geopolitics of climate change.



18

Donna Haraway, “SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, so Far,” Pilgrim Award Acceptance (2011), <http://people.ucsc.edu/~haraway/Files/PilgrimAcceptanceHaraway.pdf>.

19

Jonas Tinius, “‘All the World’s a Stage?’ A Review of Bruno Latour’s *Gaïa Global Circus*,” March 3, 2015, <http://alleglaboratory.net/all-the-worlds-a-stage-a-review-of-bruno-latours-Gaïa-global-circus>.



Gaïa Global Circus responds to this provocation by borrowing from techniques of the Baroque theater. It deploys the ancient theater of shadows and more contemporary optical machines to imagine a *theatrum mundi* for our time. The scenography makes sensible the scalar dissonance between the human and nonhuman, and explores a possible relationship with the environment in which the human is no longer the center. The play takes place in a circus tent, with the audience occupying one part of the arena on stepped rows of seats. Both actors and spectators are under a canopy on which different atmospheres are projected—similar to other world representations like a geodesic dome or planetarium. The stage becomes an actor in its own right. It seeks to capture the issue of an environment that no longer surrounds us because it has become a player on the world stage. The centerpiece of the décor is a translucent canopy floating in the air and suspended by helium balloons. This mainsail device (measuring some 20 by 25 feet) enables the actors to transform the stage area at every moment, as it can be moved like a canopy over any portion of the theater. When a storm from what seems like the end of the world rumbles through, the floating canopy envelops the audience, as a comfort object or a security blanket. Both a model of the world and a wonder object in itself, the “flying tent” is both an effort to put the world onstage and an attempt to question our perception of Nature. Mobile, changing, and unpredictable, this décor-actor is a living object moved by the actors, which transforms the stage and constantly produces atmospheres and climates. At every performance, this flying machine seeks a collective experience of another relation to our common world, at the scale of the theater. “In a way,” Latour notes, “this canopy screen is the lead actor in the play.”²⁰

20

Bruno Latour,
Frédérique
Aït-Touati, and
Chloé Latour,
“Material for Stage
Writing Within
the Framework of
the Project: *Gaïa
Global Circus*,”
trans. Julie Rose
(May 2011),
[http://www.
bruno-latour.
fr/sites/default/
files/downloads/
KOSMOKOLOS-
TRANSLATION-
GB.pdf](http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/KOSMOKOLOS-TRANSLATION-GB.pdf).

GAÏA, THE URGENCY TO THINK AND FEEL

Just as a geologist can hear the clicks of radioactivity, but only if he is equipped with a Geiger counter, we can register the presence of morality in the world provided that we concentrate on that particular emission. And just as no one, once the instrument has been calibrated, would think of asking the geologist if radioactivity is “all in his head,” “in his heart,” or “in the rocks,” no one will doubt any longer that the world emits morality toward anyone who possesses an instrument sensitive enough to register it.

—Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* ²¹

Why is Gaïa the lead actor in the play? Because global warming, the most important event concerning us (according to climatologists and environmentalists) is also the symptom of the emergence of this new controversial figure called Gaïa. *Gaïa Global Circus* appeals to affective, aesthetic, and media practices in an effort to address the cognitive dissonance between the scale of the issues to be addressed and that of the set of emotional and experiential states that are associated with the task. It is one appeal for an aesthetic practice to engage the contemporary pressing matters of the world. “If theatre is to become, once again, the theatre of the globe,” Latour observes, “then it must re-learn, like Atlas, how to carry the world on its shoulders, both the world and all there is above it.”²² It must relearn the pleasure of a collective aesthetic experience of connecting our individual dynamics of hope, fear, and desire to a larger scale of environmental, planetary, and ultimately cosmic dynamics of the same order. At the core of *Gaïa Global Circus*, you find a fundamental question about the fabric of reality, the forms of knowledge that frame that reality, and the impossibility of ever fully knowing or comprehending it. Yet, to quote Isabelle Stengers, a philosopher and longtime interlocutor of Latour’s, Gaïa has the urgency to induce thinking and feeling in a particular way.²³

21

Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 456.

22

Aït-Touati and Latour, “The Theatre of the Globe.”

23

Isabelle Stengers, “Gaia, the Urgency to Think (and Feel),” *Os Mil Nomes de Gaia* (September 2014), <https://osmilnomesdegaia.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/isabelle-stengers.pdf>.

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Latour and Balloons:
Gaïa Global Circus and the
Theater of Climate Change

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ABSTRACT: *Gaïa Global Circus*, a theatrical performance that interrogates the contemporary climate change crisis, is the product of a collaboration between Bruno Latour and the playwright Pierre Daubigny that emerged from his activities with SPEAP, the Sciences Po—Experimentation in Art and Politics program. This review essay analyzes the September 22, 2014, performance of the play in New York in relation to Latour’s lectures on the Anthropocene, *Facing Gaïa: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017), as well as the fuller range of public-facing scholarship Latour has been involved with through SPEAP and museum collaborations in recent years. This essay also situates *Gaïa Global Circus* in the context of activist environmental theater, from Bread & Puppet Theater’s *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* to Arm-of-the-Sea Theater’s eco-spectacles about the Hudson River watershed.

I have been thinking about Bruno Latour and balloons since the week of September 22, 2014. I had taken in a lecture he gave at Columbia about the climate change crisis, gone to a theatrical performance he produced the next night entitled *Gaïa Global Circus*, and then did a bit of reading in preparation for a short paper I wrote up about it for a conference a few months later. Latour had brought the circus to town—literally—and I had a front-row seat to this most curious spectacle performed under a hovering big top, so I thought something ought to be said about it. At the time, it was nothing more than a bit of academic hustle and bustle, and then a harmless release of hot air—at most a minor airborne event.

And yet the work intrudes, calling itself back to mind, demanding that it be reckoned with, recurring at a cadence that has only increased over time. Three years later, I was at that same conference again, this time in Orlando, and I remember sitting in the hotel restaurant, watching the sparkle of light on placid lake waters, and becoming utterly transfixed by that scene of distinctly unnatural beauty. For in the Land of the Mouse, as Aphra Behn's Doctor Baliardo once said of the world in the moon, "that's just as 'tis here!"—only more so.¹ Nature/Culture are bungled together inextricably: in the precisely negligent curve of the artificial lake dug out of Orlando's eternal swamps; in the secular temples to hyperconsumption dotting and scoring the low, soggy landscape; in the forced cheer of Disney Springs™ where we were compelled to forage our after-panel dinners. Recalling Latour and his balloons again in Orlando seemed to demand that I reckon in some way with that nonnatural scene spread out before me, and, beyond it, with the slow-motion disintegration of the natural and political orders that continues to unfold in the blur just beyond the stopped-down depth of field where we live and work so as to make the living and the working tolerable. In full view of that monstrous scene, within shouting distance of the grim news that bleated from ubiquitous public TV screens perpetually tuned to CNN, just what the hell is teaching and writing good for? I asked myself that then, and still do. How long can I avert my eyes from the greater catastrophes to get on with academic work, or to just be content to let the pretty sun warm my shoulders?

These questions—and the sinking feeling that perhaps they have no good answers—keep calling me back to a consideration of Bruno Latour. His theoretical wit—or, as he would more recently have it, his deployments of "risky diplomacy"²—have structured my own thinking of how to be and know in this world, whether it is his productive dispersal of agency in his various writings about Actor Network Theory, or his compelling critique of modernity in *We Have Never Been Modern*, with its diagnosis of the "modern contract" that leads us to reify a partitioning of the world into absolute nature and wholly autonomous culture.³ But the irritant, the sand in the Vaseline, was my encounter four years ago with *Gaïa Global Circus*.

1. Aphra Behn, *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), p. 283.

2. Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), p. 151.

3. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

This magnificent folly was produced at the New York City Off-Broadway theater The Kitchen on September 24 and 25, 2014, as part of a series of events produced by the Brown Institute for Media Innovation at Columbia University. It followed an open-air public lecture, “Gaia Intrudes,” in which Latour employed his signature critical jiu-jitsu to recover James Lovelock’s Gaia theory not as an external regulating entity—a “hand on the tiller” or a global “thermometer”—nor as a sentient life-force—a god or a system or a market or any number of other theological ontologies—but instead as a “connectivity without holism,” a distinctly Latourian Gaia Theory that insists on the interpenetrating and mutually constitutive interrelation of organism and environment.⁴ The lecture Latour offered to the festival crowd that surrounded him on the pleasant plot of Furnald Lawn in front of the Columbia J school was of a piece with the one he gave a week earlier in Rio de Janeiro at an international conference on “The Thousand Names of Gaia,” pointedly subtitled, “From the Anthropocene to the End of the World.” They emerged from his 2013 Gifford Lectures on the subject of “natural religion,” and they have appeared, at last, in something like a final form this past year in his volume, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017). Indeed, after completing *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (2012), in many senses the culmination and systematization of the major philosophical threads that have engaged him from *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) through *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour wrote that he realized that the project “turned out to be under the more and more pervasive shadow of Gaia.” And so he has since turned the full force of his efforts to a wide-scale reckoning with the emergence of the Anthropocene and its dark, bleak effects. Latour asks, how will we be able to know and secure truth—how shall we be able to safeguard the very viability of the human species—under the “New Climatic Regime” that is upon us?⁵

The performance that followed—praxis to the previous day’s theory—was the product of collaboration between Latour, the playwright Pierre Daubigny, and a company of French actors, with Chloe

4. Bruno Latour, “How to Make Sure Gaia Is Not a God of Totality, with Special Mention of Toby Tyrell’s Book, *On Gaia*,” lecture delivered at the September 2014 conference, “The Thousand Names of Gaia,” Rio de Janeiro, p. 16, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/138-THOUSAND-NAMES_0.pdf.

5. Latour, *Facing Gaia* (above, n. 2), p. 3. Cf. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); and *Reassembling the Social: And Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Latour, his daughter, and Frédérique Aït-Touati, the seventeenth-century scholar and author of *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (2011), serving as directors.⁶ *Gaïa Global Circus* emerged from Latour's provocative claim that the inability of contemporary society to *do* anything meaningful in response to the cataclysmic reality of climate change is rooted in a failure of affect. In 2015, Latour wrote of being "dumbfounded by the almost total disparity between the emotions we should feel when faced with ecological problems . . . and the feeling of worried, yet vaguely blasé nonchalance with which we greet each increasingly devastating item of news."⁷ This is a failure that critique cannot fix, and thus the resort—or is it the embrace? or the return?—of science studies critique to the theater.⁸

In fact, Latour has been profoundly engaged in this kind of creative work as a central component of his larger critical/philosophical project. As the Director of SPEAP, or the Sciences Po—Experimentation in Art and Politics master of arts program, Latour is the prime mover in an experiment that attempts to bridge the gap between the academy and the public, between the thinking experts and the feeling and doing—or, more troublingly, the unfeeling and do-nothing—regular folk. Before and after the *Gaïa Global Circus* roadshow, iterations of which were also performed in Toulouse (October 2013), Reims (December 2013), London (February 2014), and Calgary (September 2016), Latour has been experimenting with a range of public-facing initiatives that have sought to mobilize his philosophy and find productive ways to bring it out of the academy and into the wider culture where it might just do some good—that is to say, where it might just have some meaningful impact on public sentiment and political action.

Back in 2002, Latour curated an art exhibition at the ZKM (Center for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe, Germany, under the direction of Peter Weibel. Entitled *Iconoclash*, the exhibition and subsequent catalog attempted to intervene in what Latour termed the "image wars" by

6. Frédérique Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

7. Bruno Latour and Frédérique Aït-Touati, "The Theatre of the Globe," *Exeunt Magazine*, September 13, 2015, <http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/the-theatre-of-the-globe/>.

8. My book, *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), explores early science both in and as performance. From its moment of emergence, experimental natural philosophy was staged in the theater to articulate its radically new discoveries and methods as matters of concern subject to critique.

presenting an “archeology of hate and fanaticism” stretching back to antiquity that has seemingly only accelerated since that time, finding its most chilling recent expression in the 2015 devastation of Palmyra.⁹ Probing the origins and damaging effects of “an absolute—not a relative—distinction between truth and falsehood, between a pure world, absolutely emptied of human-made intermediaries and a disgusting world composed of impure but human-made mediators,” the exhibition sought to rewire the futile, self-renewing circuits of iconoclasm, which ensure that potent images “always return again, no matter how strongly one wants to get rid of them.” With their collection of “heterogeneous objects that [were] assembled, broken, repaired, patched-up, re-described,” Latour and his collaborators posited instead the critical pose of “iconoclasm,” which is to say, the state of mind “when one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further enquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive.”¹⁰ What is notable here is the typical Latourian move of calling out the modern ideologies of purification, whether they function in religious or scientific discourse, and the resulting operations of critique, *ressentiment*, and violence that form its problematic affective response. A more sober, more generous state of mind is required, with greater respect for the agency of objects.

Building on that project, in 2005 Latour turned from investigating the crisis of representation in art and religion to the crisis of representation in politics with his *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* exhibition at the ZKM, where he began articulating—and attempting to envision—a new problematic: “what would an *object-oriented* democracy look like?”¹¹ In his prefatory essay to the remark-

9. Stuart Jeffries, “Isis’s Destruction of Palmyra: ‘The Heart Has Been Ripped Out of the City,’” *Guardian*, September 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/isis-destruction-of-palmyra-syria-heart-been-ripped-out-of-the-city>. Isis militants blew up the two-millennia-old Temple of Bel in the city, an UNESCO World Heritage Site that had been one of the region’s most significant and best-preserved sites from antiquity. Irina Bokova, Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, called it an act of “cultural cleansing” in Robbie Gramer, “UNESCO Fights Back as ISIS Tried to Stamp Out Culture,” *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/12/unesco-united-nations-isis-islamic-state-cultural-antiquities-trade-irina-bokova-refugees-heritage/>.

10. Bruno Latour, “What Is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars,” in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 16–38, at pp. 16–17.

11. Bruno Latour, “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public,” in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM Press, 2005), pp. 4–31, at p. 4.

able companion volume he produced for the exhibition—which includes brief essays from some one hundred artists, philosophers, and critics on how we might resituate the *res in res publica*—Latour singled out Peter Sloterdijk’s inspired *Pneumatic Parliament* exhibition. Sloterdijk’s prototype—“including 3D simulations, a model and a very credible brochure for the project’s commercial exploitation”¹²—showed how a crucial infrastructure for democratic processes might be air-dropped by the US Air Force within twenty-four hours of a successful “liberation” campaign, “unfold[ing] and inflat[ing] like your rescue dinghy is supposed to do” in a plane crash at sea.¹³ It is easy to grasp the sardonic “lesson of this simile,” Latour explained: “to imagine a parliament without its material set of complex instruments, ‘air-conditioning’ pumps, local ecological requirements, material infrastructure, and long-held habits is as ludicrous as to try to parachute such an inflatable parliament into the middle of Iraq.”¹⁴

While the art projects betray a fundamental concern with “rematerializing” politics by extending the polis to “things” and not just the impoverished and limited category of “human” “subjects,” we can trace a decided turn in Latour’s extramural advocacy efforts toward the theater, which he sees as a better and more proper medium for grappling with recalcitrance of political affect. In 2008, Latour and his SPEAP collaborators staged a performance that recreated a seminal but unrecorded event in the history of sociology, the 1903 debate between Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim, at the *École des hautes études sociales*. The intention was not simply to deduce the lost content of the debate by stitching together quotations drawn from the theorists’ subsequent publications. Rather, they had two PhD students in character carrying on a learned debate in order to stage a living dialogue between what they wittily identified as the “the two systems of sociology.” This self-conscious allusion to Galileo’s famed *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* signals their attempt to redeploy a lost style of sociable and conjectural knowledge-making in “a manner somewhat reminiscent of the philosophi-

A companion to the visual art exhibition, the catalog includes brief essays from over one hundred thinkers on the implications of “rematerializing political representation” through the reintroduction of “things” into politics.

12. Peter Sloterdijk, Gesa Mueller von der Haegen, and Dierk Jordan, *Instant Democracy: The Pneumatic Parliament*, International Film Festival of Rotterdam, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://iffr.com/en/2006/films/instant-democracy-the-pneumatic-parliament>. Cf. also the website for Global Instant Objects, Sloterdijk’s start-up that prepared the simulation and proof-of-concept: <http://www.g-i-o.com/pp1.htm>.

13. Latour, “Realpolitik to Dingpolitik” (above, n. 11), p. 7.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

cal dialogues of the Enlightenment.”¹⁵ Indeed, Latour returned to mine the power of role-play in his most recent theatricalized critical intervention: the COP21 conference “Make It Work / The Theater of Negotiations.” Styled a “pre-enactment device,” the event brought a host of youths from over thirty countries to Paris ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) to stage a simulation of the impending conference, albeit one with a decidedly Latourian twist. As the SPEAP website indicates, the project “takes its origin in the belief that the failure and procrastination of these conferences on climate change are the consequence of representation issues: representations of the problems at stake and representations of the different communities of people and beings on earth involved.”¹⁶

The curious texture of this new representation is made clear in the final lecture of Latour’s *Facing Gaia*, where an account of the simulation takes pride of place in his argument, offering a prototype for the kind of truly “constitutive” collectivities and diplomacies that might be up to the task of reckoning with the New Climatic Regime. For alongside the nation-states that one would anticipate being a party to this simulated negotiation about the climate and what to do about it, there were also nonstate—and, indeed, nonhuman—agents mustered in this uniquely Latourian Model UN roll call: “‘Forest’ after ‘France,’ ‘India’ next to ‘Indigenous Peoples,’ the ‘Atmosphere’ delegation before ‘Australia,’ ‘Oceans’ after ‘Maldives,’ each one introducing itself with pride, equal in sovereignty to all the others.”¹⁷ If that sounds fantastical, well, that is effectively Latour’s point: “the concept of a new *nomos* of the Earth cannot appear as anything other than a fiction,” and he insists that “this seemingly pedagogical episode,” this “reduced model . . . [was] *more realistic* than the real world at full scale, especially in comparison to the famous Conference of the Parties (COP)” shortly to be held in that same city.¹⁸ What a prodigious fiction it was, Latour reminds us, to invoke the notion of the sovereignty of the “people” just a few centuries ago, and what prodigious work was required to naturalize the recognition of such an actor.

The admission of nonstate actors, both nonhuman (“Endangered

15. Isabelle Darmon and Carlos Frade, “Theatrical Dialogue in Teaching the Classics,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 17:2 (2017): 77–86, at pp. 80–81.

16. “MAKE IT WORK / Le Théâtre des négociations,” *SPEAP* (Sciences Po—Experimentation in Art and Politics), May 15, 2015, <http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/speap-eng/>.

17. Latour, *Facing Gaia* (above, n. 2), p. 255.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–258.

Species”) and not (“International Organizations”), was a strategy of at once following through on both the scientific and political implications of an actor-network-theory inflected worldview that Latour has been hailing since his evocation of a “Parliament of Things” in *We Have Never Been Modern*.¹⁹ By interpolating natural actors as well as the shadow actors and “mafias” who work the levers of power in darkness without accountability, the exercise also served to re-define the stakes of what was being negotiated and how it might be transacted. To take seriously the competing and equal claims to sovereignty made by “Australia” and “Ocean,” or to separate out and explicitly recognize the agency of “Non-Governmental Organizations” and “Cities,” and then to attempt to diplomatically negotiate the impacts each makes upon the other’s domain, is to grant each actor the right to say “we are defining the limit of our territory and *we are redefining the shape of yours*.”²⁰ Latour would say that this scheme enables us to accurately re-represent the state of play in the New Climatic Regime, and to recompose a polity capable to reckoning with its challenges.

Perhaps above all, these theater-games and simulations create conditions that, as Isabelle Darmon and Carlos Frade have perceptively written, nourish “the living character of thought,”²¹ and that attempt what Max Weber has named “the most difficult pedagogic task of all”: the presentation of complex problems “in such a way that an untrained but receptive mind can understand them and—crucially—go on to think about them independently.”²² Latour’s goals here are not to engage in debate or further a polemic, but rather to enact a transformative dialogue. Darmon and Frade, making reference to Alain Badiou’s recent *Entretien platonicien*, nicely articulate the stakes and high aspirations of the project: “the dialogue, as a form of investigation . . . is such that if the ego or self remains the same after the dialogue, then one can say that the dialogue has not happened. In other words, no true dialogue can take place which does not lead to a general modification of the thinking subjectivity.”²³

19. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (above, n. 3), pp. 142–145.

20. Latour, *Facing Gaia* (above, n. 2), p. 262 (emphasis in original).

21. Darmon and Frade, “Theatrical Dialogue” (above, n. 15), p. 78.

22. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber’s Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis, trans. Gordon C. Wells (New York: Agora, 2008), p. 30; cited in Darmon and Frade, “Theatrical Dialogue” (above, n. 15), p. 79.

23. Darmon and Frade, “Theatrical Dialogue” (above, n. 15), p. 82, paraphrasing Alain Badiou and Maria Kakogianni, *Entretien platonicien* (Paris: Lignes, 2015), pp. 60–61.

* * *

So: back to Latour's balloons.

Just what kind of performance was this, what kind of dialogue did it engender? Segmented into redolent, dreamlike sketches, the play, performed entirely in French, was composed of highly evocative scenarios that channeled what felt like the entire range of affective responses, political ideologies, and mythic resonance that are capable of being summoned up by climate change. As I watched it—or, rather, as I alternated between watching the play and scanning the English subtitles that were displayed on a TV screen to the side of the stage—the scenes flashed by, as if in a dream, or perhaps in a weirdly overeducated sketch comedy show. Here was Noah unsuccessfully applying for a bank loan to finance the construction of his ark—it seems the bank manager had a problem with his business plan. There was the earnest climatologist attempting to navigate a treacherous televised “debate” with a “paid climate skeptic” who baffled her attempts at reasoned discourse with oily effrontery and bad-faith double-speak before she finally lost her cool and blurted out, “Tell your masters the scientists are on the warpath!” And here was the delicious parody of a climate summit press conference, with politicians bloviating while a sign language interpreter threw magnificent shade through the skillful deployment of a few well-timed winking motions, the international symbol for “you have got to be shitting me, Jack.” And then there was the visceral spectacle of the players thrashing about the stage in a violent hailstorm of empty water bottles—“a powerful visual representation of the chaos unleashed by overproduction, abetted by the jarring sounds of stomped-upon plastic” in the words of one reviewer (fig. 1).²⁴

And all of this transpired beneath a tremulous canopy of white silk, held aloft by a network of oversized black and white balloons that just hovered there, undulating, subject to the minute variations of the theater biome: vectors of temperature and pressure making filigree traceries in the silk through stirrings of air from duct works and bodies in motion. As Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy eloquently put it in the *Avery Review*, this “mainsail device,” which provided the circus tent for this most exceptional of circuses, was “both a model of the world and a wonder object in itself,” a “flying tent” that “enable[d] the actors to transform the stage area at every moment, as

24. Eva Diaz, “Environmental Hazards,” *ArtForum*, October 1, 2014, <https://www.artforum.com/performance/eva-diaz-on-bruno-latour-s-gaia-global-circus-at-the-kitchen-48465>.



Figure 1. Scene from Bruno Latour's *Gaia Global Circus*, September 24–25, 2014 at The Kitchen. Photo © Paula Court, courtesy of The Kitchen.

it [could] be moved like a canopy over any portion of the theater.”²⁵ As such, it represented “both an effort to put the world onstage and an attempt to question our perception of nature.” It was a screen, a

25. Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy, “Gaia Global Circus: A Climate Tragicomedy,” in *Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary*, ed. James Graham with Caitlin Blanchfield (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016), pp. 52–60.

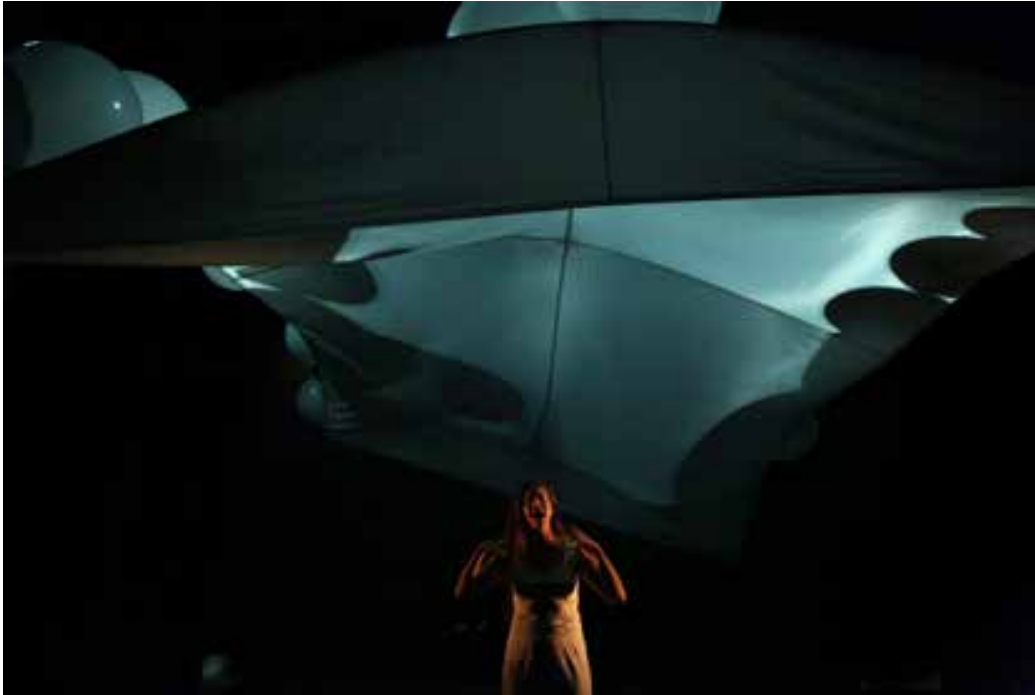


Figure 2. Jade Collinet performing in a scene from Bruno Latour's *Gaïa Global Circus*, September 24–25, 2014 at The Kitchen. Photo © Paula Court, courtesy of The Kitchen.

shelter, a shade, a big top, a safety blanket, a funeral shroud. A floating climate model if there ever was one (fig. 2).

So far, the author of the play, Pierre Daubigny, had demurred from publishing the text, so all we have to go on are the traces that remain of this ephemeral performance—the vignettes that arrested reviewers enough to memorialize in their postperformance accounts, and the scraps and shards that viewers like myself retain, those bits that proved so resonant they have made a permanent home in our imaginary.²⁶ And yet despite its shadowy dreamlike presence in memory—or perhaps because of that—*Gaïa Global Circus* was magnificent. So many moments in the performance sparked insight and forged uncommon connections. The farcical slapstick, the unexpected moments of sentiment, the allegorical devices and mythic allusions, all of this served to provoke, even shock, the auditor to confront the immense, the unthinkable, the inescapable reality of climate change, a phenomenon ordinarily out of scale of human regard. “The reality of climate change is in a way a kind of Lacanian real,” wrote Eva Dias

26. An earlier iteration of the project, a radio play entitled *Kosmocoloss: A Global Climate Tragic Comedy*, written by Chloe Latour and Frédérique Aït-Touati in 2011, appeared on German and French radio. Transcripts of this performance have been published on Latour's website, Bruno Latour, accessed November 5, 2019, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/358>.

in her *ArtForum* review, “the zone of the unspeakable and unrepresentable beyond human agency . . . that erupts into consciousness in spite of attempts to stifle it.”²⁷

At times, *Gaïa Global Circus* did seem to operate that way, although in fairness, it seemed the mechanism was more gentle, more humorous, and perhaps a quantum more hopeful. For Latour’s point is that climate change is at once both “beyond human agency” and entirely within it—or, to be more precise, it is the birth pangs of a new model of distributed agency within which humans act amid a panoply of other actors, both human and nonhuman. When *Gaïa Global Circus* worked, it unstitched the modern contract and re-entangled bare nature and instrumental science and political awareness. It was, in short, an attempt to enact climate change as a matter of concern: surfacing and drawing attention to the inextricable linkages that crisscross hard facts and realpolitik and modes of speculative and imaginative knowing.²⁸ And when the performance gathered to a climax, when the fears of global death and the cadences of narcissistic know-nothing anthropocentrism precipitated out of the dramatic solution in the form of a cataclysmic storm, the roaring tempest sound effects did not subside until the Gaia canopy drifted out over the audience and settled down low, just over our heads (fig. 3).²⁹

Oh, but what folly. To think of this as praxis, as something that might engender Gaia social consciousness and enact hopeful, emotional environmental engagement. As one reviewer wrote, “*Gaïa Global Circus* presupposes an affirmative and consensual audience—one that throws out the climate change sceptic rather than engage him in debate.”³⁰ Indeed, I suspect that the play had all the effect of a Bernie Sanders endorsement in *The Nation*. And while all good ecocitizens were encouraged to take a balloon home with them, what,

27. Eva Diaz, “Environmental Hazards” (above, n. 24).

28. Cf. Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (2004): 225–248; and “What Is the Style of Matters of Concern?,” in *The Lure of Whitehead*, ed. Nicholas Gaskill and A. J. Nocek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 92–126. Christopher F. Loar has analyzed eighteenth-century georgic poetry as an analogous site for the assembly of matters of concern: “Georgic Assemblies: James Grainger, John Dyer, and Bruno Latour,” *Philological Quarterly* 97:2 (2018): 241–261.

29. Other viewers found this moment similarly arresting. Cf. Laura Collins-Hughes, “A Potential Disaster in Any Language,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/theater/gaia-global-circus-at-the-kitchen.html>.

30. Jonas Tinius, “‘All the World’s a Stage?’ A Review of Bruno Latour’s *Gaïa Global Circus*,” *Allegra Lab: Anthropology, Law, Art, World*, March 3, 2015, <http://allegralaboratory.net/all-the-worlds-a-stage-a-review-of-bruno-latours-gaia-global-circus/>.



Figure 3. Bruno Latour at the conclusion of *Gaïa Global Circus*, September 25, 2014, at The Kitchen. Author photo.

really, could I say when I spotted one the next day tied to the back of a stroller at the Hancock Playground in my rapidly gentrifying corner of Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, USA?

“Amazing show, wasn’t it?”

“So what campus do you teach at?”

“Nice day, isn’t it?”

* * *

I bring back to mind *Gaïa Global Circus* because I think that there should be a few more words about it on the record,³¹ and because Latour’s experiments in extramural philosophizing merit careful consideration. But I also cannot get over the idea that this was intended to function as some form of meaningful praxis. I mean, good for Latour and his players. Good for all of us, frankly, who got a chance to see it. But Al Gore appearing on *30 Rock* is going to have a bigger effect on our politics than anything that goes down in front of one

31. Latour has said that *Gaïa Global Circus* is a “red thread” that runs through his *Facing Gaïa* lectures, yet there appears to be little discussion of it in print. Latour, *Facing Gaïa* (above, n. 2), p. 16.

hundred academics on West-West-West 19th Street. Whose minds could be changed by this? What practical impact could it possibly have?

In pondering this question—which, I now realize, is what has really been bothering me about this show—I am put in mind of another, more venerable and influential eco-political pageant: that counterculture phenomenon, Bread and Puppet Theater, which surely provided a source of inspiration for Latour and his collaborators. A performance troupe founded in New York City in 1963 by Peter Schumann, the group staged puppet shows as a form of social and political activism, eventually organizing massive, blocks-long street processions to protest the Vietnam War. They featured a cast of hundreds employing a *mélange* of music, sculpture, dance, and massive papier-mâché puppets as part of their agitprop performances, and they always included the free distribution of Schumann's home-baked sourdough bread. In 1974, the group moved to Vermont, first for a residency at Goddard College and then to their permanent home on a farm in the remote Northeast Kingdom of the state, where they began staging an annual festival of performances, puppetry, and activism entitled *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*. Performed in a massive natural amphitheater carved out of a hillside, the spectacle grew in scale and attendance steadily over the years, eventually drawing some forty thousand attendees by the time of its final performance in 1998. As Scott Stroot explained in his feature article in *Art New England*, the cycle of performances that made up *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* was truly something to behold:

A little bit Grateful Dead concert (with some Un-Dead rules: no drugs, no dogs, no alcohol), a little bit Rainbow gathering, a little bit religious celebration, and a little bit political be-in, each year's event follows the same format: afternoon *sideshow*s featuring a variety of simultaneously performed small skits and stories, followed by a more focused, larger-scaled puppet *Circus* featuring a succession of longer, more interconnected narratives in the early evening, and finally, as the sun sets, the *Pageant*, featuring a procession of multi-operator giant puppets, usually culminating with the immolation and resurrection of one preeminent giant puppet figure.³²

According to John Bell, a professor of dramatic arts at the University of Connecticut and a long-time collaborator with the troupe, ever since the very first *Resurrection Circus*, which offered an apocalyptic history of the United States ending with the war in Vietnam, these

32. Scott Stroot, "Radical Beauty in the Northeast Kingdom: The Bread and Puppet Theater and Museum," *Art New England* 19:6 (1998): 15.

elaborate Bread and Puppet productions were “both more and less than a history: more in that it constantly sought to make bigger sense of events by using the automatically evocative abstract symbolism of puppets and masks, and less, in that it always had room for silly jokes, pratfalls, and sheer nonsense.”³³ And as one can readily see from the list of themes that each year’s *Circus* explored and exploded, the project was rooted in a holistic and *nonmodern* (in Latourian terms) conception of human affairs in a global context, wherein the political and the social are inextricable from the ecological and cosmic: “The Fight against the End of the World” (1981); “Central America and Liberation Theology” (1984); “The Hunger of the Hungry and the Hunger of the Overfed” (1986); “The Triumph of Capitalism” (1991); “The Green Man” (1992); “Frogs and Ludites” (1994); “Maximum Security Democracy” (1997); and “Unite! (Anniversaries of Brecht, Hildegard von Bingen and the *Communist Manifesto*)” (1998).

Bell’s insightful analysis of the final, stupendous *Circus* does indicate the practical limits of this kind of mass-spectacle as a form of social activism and consciousness raising—it was rumored, he said, that some of the hordes of revelers that descended on Glover, Vermont, never even made it out of the hippie souk that gathered in the campgrounds down the road. He lamented that “by the mid-1990s, the ‘Bread and Puppet idea’ of an alternative to American capitalist culture became inextricably mixed with a different, more ‘mainstream’ vision of counterculture, often at odds with what we intended with our performances.”³⁴ Indeed, by that point, the jam band Phish had already recruited Bread and Puppet alumni to help create large-scale multimedia spectacles at festival concerts held on decommissioned Air Force bases in upstate New York and Maine in 1996, 1997, and 1998.

Fast forward two decades, and one can see Bread and Puppet’s patrimony in Burning Man, the alternative community and DIY arts festival that brings upwards of sixty-five thousand “burners” to the Nevada’s Black Rock Desert every summer for an eight-day experiment in “radical self-expression and self-reliance.” Participants, working independently, collaborate on the fabrication of a dream-city of mind-blowing sights, sounds, and experiences, an anarcho-steam-

33. John Bell, “The End of *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*: Bread and Puppet Theater and Counterculture Performance in the 1990s,” in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 52–70, at pp. 54–55. See also Francoise Kourilsky, “Dada and Circus,” *TDR (The Drama Review)* 18:1 (1974): 104–109.

34. Bell, “End” (above, n. 33), p. 62.

punk-hippie utopia that culminates in the immolation of a gigantic Burning Man effigy on the final night. While the community's core philosophy insists that all commercial transactions be forbidden in favor of a culture of "gifting" on the playa,³⁵ the event has grown far beyond the scale and scope of the earliest events, the first of which was little more than a "family picnic" attended by some fifty people on a San Francisco beach.³⁶ Longtime burners have begun complaining that the event is being hijacked by a "parasite class" of tech entrepreneurs, global elites, and "EDM tourists." This resentment boiled over at the 2016 burn, when activists vandalized the private White Ocean camp, cofounded by Timur Sardarov, the son of a Russian oil magnate.³⁷ With tickets to the festival now priced at upwards of \$850, not to mention the considerable expense of providing shelter, food, and water for a week while also planning and executing elaborate artistic contributions, it can prove extremely costly to spend a commerce-free week of gifting and radical self-expression in the Nevada desert. In fact, the current scale of Burning Man is unimaginable without the economic engine of Silicon Valley and its libertarian, futurist, tech-bro culture. And while it would be foolish to dismiss the transformative power of a mass event like Burning Man today or *Our Resurrection Circus* two decades prior—minds have been, and continue to be, blown—it does raise the question, just what kind of change, just what kind of political impact can be traced, long after the last slices of sourdough are passed around in Glover, Vermont, and the last bits of MOOP ("matter out of place") are raked up and packed out from the Black Rock Desert floor?

That is why I have had another Bread and Puppet descendant on my mind since experiencing *Gaïa Global Circus*. Employing the same kind of signature large-scale puppets and employing similar storytelling elements of myth, alternative history, and ecological consciousness in its performances, Arm-of-the-Sea Theater has been producing playful and provocative puppet spectacles in public venues up and down New York's Hudson River Valley since 1982. A regular recipient of state and federal arts grant funding, the troupe performs its shows in public parks, state fairs, college campuses, seasonal fes-

35. "The 10 Principles of Burning Man," Burning Man, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles/>.

36. "Timeline: 1987," Burning Man, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://burningman.org/timeline/1987>.

37. Damien Gayle, "Luxury Camp at Burning Man Festival Targeted by 'Hooligans,'" *Guardian*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/sep/05/luxury-camp-at-burning-man-festival-targeted-by-hooligans>.

tivals, and other settings throughout the year, having cultivated a wide following and broad institutional and community support from a diverse range of publics and constituencies. Over the years, their performances, which read less as agitprop than kid-friendly and pedagogical, are more focused on local history and local matters of concern. Their plays dramatize the political and ecological realities that confront the communities that are arrayed along the Hudson River Estuary, an “arm of the sea” that experiences alternating tidal flows from New York Harbor to Albany, which lead the Native American peoples who lived along it to call it Mahicantuck, the “river that flows both ways.”³⁸

The group takes inspiration from that indigenous awareness of cyclical return and interdependence, the knowledge one cannot help but always be stepping into the same river twice, modelling a form of what Donna Haraway has called *response-ability*, an acknowledgment that not only are human and nonhuman actors part of an integrated network, but that humans have the responsibility to recover their ability to respond in kind.³⁹ One can get a fair sense of Arm-of-the-Sea’s artistic project from a work like *The Rejuvenary River Circus*, “an allegorical tale that follows Malakai the water carrier and messenger as he travels between Mountain Peaks and the Deep Blue Sea,” meeting various creatures who offer “insights into their particular role in a watershed’s ecosystem services. When the old man falls ill, his granddaughter Rachel is confronted by the challenge of restoring her grandfather, the River, back to health.”⁴⁰ Also exemplary is *The City That Drinks the Mountain Sky*, a mythic retelling of the building of the epic NYC aqueduct system, which the group’s promotional material reminds us is the “largest publicly-owned, unfiltered water supply system in the world” that relies on “equal parts human ingenuity and the eco-system services of the Catskill Mountain forest” to

38. Cf. “The Hudson Estuary: A River That Flows Two Ways,” New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4923.html>.

39. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 105–115. Cf. Martha Kenney’s review of Haraway’s book in *Science and Technology Studies* 30:2 (2017): 73–77, which suggests that the work is best understood as a series of “fables of response-ability”; and Martha Kenney, “Fables of Response-ability: Feminist Science Studies as Didactic Literature,” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5:1 (2019): 1–39, which situates Haraway’s discussion of response-ability within a wider field of feminist science studies exploring the concept.

40. “The Rejuvenary River Circus,” Arm-of-the-Sea Theater, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.armofthesea.org/project/the-rejuvenary-river-circus/>.

provide clean water to nine million city-dwellers. Tailored for school children, the group performed it for free at various outer-borough parks throughout the summer of 2018.⁴¹

Founded by Marlena Marallo and Patrick Wadden, the group is in fact one of a large number of ecological arts and advocacy groups located in the Hudson Valley, which arguably trace back to the building of the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater* by Pete Seeger and his collaborators in 1969.⁴² A replica of the Dutch sloops that provided the commercial and informational infrastructure for the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Clearwater* has provided educational sails for generations of schoolchildren from Long Island to Albany while also serving as a floating platform for environmental advocacy, most notably leading the fight for the cleanup of toxic PCBs from the estuary in the 1980s and 1990s, and more recently for agitating for the closure of the Indian Point nuclear power plant. Arm-of-the-Sea performs each year at the Clearwater Organization's Great Hudson River Revival music and arts festival, sharing its creative vision with and drawing strength from a wider community of environmental artists and activists that Revival and other Hudson Valley cultural events bring together, forming a vital part of the region's character and sensibility.⁴³ Alongside newer organizations like Riverkeeper, a lobbying and advocacy watchdog group whose patrol boat monitors ecological conditions on the river while their attorneys pursue lawsuits against polluters in court, Arm-of-the-Sea is part of a diverse confederacy of locally focused environmental arts and advocacy groups in the region that all share some salient characteristics and priorities. These groups tend to focus their efforts on bringing true "matters of concern" (in Latour's sense) to the public's attention by addressing phenomena (such as clean water, overdevelopment, and industrial pollution) that directly impact local communities. They situate those material, scientific realities within a larger web of state, federal, and international political and economic forces, weaving together spectacles that stubbornly insist on the

41. "The City That Drinks the Mountain Sky: Part 2," *Arm-of-the-Sea Theater*, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.armofthesea.org/project/city-that-drinks-the-mountain-sky/>. A 2006 production, *La Cosecha / The Harvest*, is a "magical-realist puppet play about an 'undocumented' farm worker." It emerged from workshops the troupe conducted with migrant farm worker families in the Hudson Valley.

42. "The Sloop," Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc., accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.clearwater.org/the-sloop/>. Full disclosure: I crewed on *Clearwater* in 1997–1998, and a damn fine time it was.

43. "The Great Hudson River Revival," Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.clearwaterfestival.org/about-the-festival/>.

continuing relevance and presence of past histories of migration, settlement, colonialization, and industrialization in the region.

It is worth pointing out that when the families from South Bronx and Northwestern Queens gathered on Randall's Island on June 9, 2018, to watch the *The City that Drinks the Sky*, or when I watched Arm-of-the-Sea cast CO₂ as the villain in a modern-day morality play about acid rain back in 1997, the insights of Latourian Actor-Network-Theory had already been circulating and percolating in the populist discourses of environmental theater for some time. We should also note that the reach and impact of the radical Latourian notion that the world is a vast decentralized network of human and nonhuman agents is far, far greater here, when it emanates from the stage of a performing group like Arm-of-the-Sea, than I suspect it ever will enjoy thanks to the high-art avant-garde theatricals of SPEAP.

Deploying a complex, nuanced vision of Gaia consciousness, underpinned by an implicit philosophical framework inspired by Native American culture that exemplifies the most radical and forward-thinking ontologies of leading science studies theorists like Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, even as its hyperlocal performances and broad networks of popular and governmental support stitch its work firmly into the cultural fabric of the Hudson Valley region, Arm-of-the-Sea Theater is doing the kind of work that one suspects Bruno Latour dreams of for his philosophy. And while Latour has been successful in building out an institutional infrastructure to mediate and "scale-up" his philosophical project on an international, cross-disciplinary level through SPEAP, so too has Arm-of-the-Sea been seeking to expand its presence and broaden the forms of advocacy it uses to generate change in its local community in a move that might provide a productive counterpoint to Latour's high-art forays.

In recent years, Arm-of-the-Sea Theater has been pursuing a plan to build a performance and educational facility on the banks of the Hudson. According to the request for design and engineering proposals it issued in September 2017, "the Tidewater Center is a waterfront revitalization project to transform a former mill site on the tidal Esopus Creek into a landmark center for arts, science, and local history. Located on the Esopus floodplain in the Village of Saugerties . . . it has lain abandoned for half a century—dominated by the ruins of the Sheffield/Diamond Paper Company."⁴⁴ The site is of significant importance in the history of industrialization in the

44. "Arm-of-the-Sea Productions, Inc. Issues Solicitation for 'Arm-of-the-Sea Tidewater Center Design and Engineering,'" *US Official News*, September 28, 2017.

Americas, insofar as industrial operations here trace back to Henry Barclay's paper mill, established in 1827. These millworks were the first in the United States to employ machinery for producing paper in continuous rolls. According to local historians, "The mill and nearby iron works, powered by waterfalls and piping from the Esopus Creek, were at one time the largest water-powered industrial complex in the world."⁴⁵ Originally purchased by the Clearwater organization as a potential winter maintenance facility for the sloop, the parcel is the rock upon which Arm-of-the-Sea is seeking to build a permanent platform for its own work while also economically and culturally revitalizing a historic Hudson River town. While the project is backed with \$74,000 from the Village of Saugerties, who put up the funds to back the engineering study, the project has a long way to go before it becomes a reality. Construction and on-going operational funds are going to have to materialize from one source or another, and then there is the not-insignificant challenge of building something lasting and meaningful on this spit of land forgotten by time and reclaimed by Gaia: "the land is honeycombed with the cavities of flow channels that once vented water from the water-powered turbines. All of this is under a dense overgrowth, rooted in the layers of brick debris, obscured from public view."⁴⁶

In framing the scale and scope of the ecological crisis in the first lecture of *Facing Gaia*, Latour offered a taxonomy of the insanity brought on by the New Climatic Regime that is "driving us crazy." He ticked off those whose insanity leads them to shrug their shoulders and assume it will all work out some way or another, as well as those "geo-engineers" bent on finding new technological hacks to save us from our fate who, like Swift's projectors, "instead of being discouraged . . . are fifty times more violently bent upon prosecuting their schemes, driven equally on by hope and despair."⁴⁷ Swift said that, of course, but Latour might as well have. He saves a special pity for the madness of "those who appear to believe that they can do something despite the odds, that it isn't too late" believing that "one

45. David Gordon, "Performance Center for Arm-of-the-Sea Theater Will Occupy a Site with a Grand History," *Saugerties Times*, March 26, 2018, <https://hudsonvalleyone.com/2018/03/26/performance-center-for-arm-of-the-sea-theater-will-occupy-a-site-with-a-grand-history/> Cf. also Audrey Klinkenberg, "History (Town)," Town of Saugerties, Accessed November 5, 2019, <http://saugerties.ny.us/content/History>. Klinkenberg does not cite a source for this assertion, but the site is of doubtless importance in the history of industrialization in America.

46. "Solicitation . . . for Design and Engineering" (above, n. 44).

47. Latour, *Facing Gaia* (above, n. 2), p. 12; and Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Claude Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 165.

has to be able to think rationally with eyes wide open, even in the face of threats as serious as these, while respecting the framework of existing institutions."⁴⁸ Smash the idols! Raze the temple! The only way forward, he seems to be saying, must begin with a radical renegotiation of the modern contract and the institutions and ontologies it props up. Latour does note that there are probably "a few people left to escape these symptoms . . . but don't think for a moment that means they are of sound mind! They are most likely artists, hermits, gardeners, explorers, activists, naturalists, looking in near total isolation for other ways of resisting anguish." In response to futile hope, which smacks too much of the Projectors of Lagado for his taste, Latour would have us "dis-hope" to get us in a frame of mind where we can avoid "despair."⁴⁹

Latour seems all too ready to give up on hope, but what else do we have? Especially when not all of those mad artists, gardeners, and naturalists are cloistered in mountain hermitages, or apparating and disappearing in a week-long desert mirage. I certainly hope that Latour mounts a follow-up to *Gaïa Global Circus*.⁵⁰ But mostly I hope that Arm-of-the-Sea get to actually build the Tidewater Center.

48. Latour, *Facing Gaia* (above, n. 2), p. 12.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

50. In fact, I could envision a public-facing version of *Gaïa Global Circus* that might function along the lines of *The Laramie Project* or *The Vagina Monologues*, where college and community theater troupes would host unique adaptations of the play. Strategic decisions about casting and venue could take on local significance, and the design, fabrication, testing, and deployment of the canopy device would call for productive collaborations between artists, theater technicians, and scientists.

On Active Grounds

PHOTO ESSAY

AGENCY AND TIME ON ACTIVE GROUNDS: A MEMOIR OF BRUNO LATOUR AND GAÏA GLOBAL CIRCUS

Robert Boschman



(FIGURE 1: LOOKING FOR THE K-T: Bruno Latour, Geological Time, and the Geosocial. Robert Boschman, 2016)

Photo Essay

**AGENCY AND TIME ON ACTIVE GROUNDS:
A MEMOIR OF BRUNO LATOUR AND GAÏA GLOBAL CIRCUS**

Robert Boschman

In the Fall of 2016, the French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour visited Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada to give a keynote address at *Under Western Skies 2016*, an interdisciplinary conference on the environment. The biennial gathering was begun at a time when Calgary had come into global view as a point of corporate head quartering for the Athabasca Oil Sands, and the conference has involved a complex confluence of agencies with speakers coming from environmental humanities backgrounds



but also from the sciences and business, on a campus sponsored in part by energy interests. Latour was intrigued and brought with him from Sciences Po, Paris, a troupe of actors called Gaïa Global Circus, under the direction of Frédérique Aït-Touati, to perform an eponymous drama about Global Climate Change and its increasingly urgent political and ecological realities (Figure 2). A tragic-comedy written by Pierre Daubigny and performed a final time at *Under Western*

(FIGURE 2: Actor Claire Astruc, Gaïa Global Circus. Robert Boschman, 2016)

On Active Grounds

Skies 2016 after a three-year tour, Gaïa Global Circus is a drama rich in allusions that extend across millennia to Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. As the co-founder of an environmental company of actors and writers, Bruno Latour was already heavily invested in the core message of the play: On a global scale, time is running out on changes first wrought by humans a long time ago.

At the core of *Oresteia* is the quest for and development of community justice on the summit of the Parthenon rather than in its subterranean depths where the Furies demand vengeance, and out of which families and communities are caught in endless cyclical destruction. Indeed, it is the Furies, with their horrifying masques, who in *Oresteia* preside over what to the Greeks of Aeschylus's time was an already ancient form of retributive justice. As Agamemnon returns to Mycenae after the Trojan War with the captive seer Cassandra, she despairingly foretells their demise in a never-to-be-resolved cyclone of archaic politics.

In both plays, the hazards involved in offending and then making reparations to Gaia or Artemis (Nature) are repeatedly demonstrated, although Gaïa Global Circus contains a single and telling difference that heightens the current crisis. In both plays, the broad human community is given voice—fragile, anxious, ignorant—from the Chorus of *Oresteia* to the series of actions in public spaces that Gaïa Global Circus evokes. In both plays, moreover, geopolitical formations are prominently featured, from the Parthenon in *Oresteia* to a United Nations Climate Change Conference somewhere in Europe. Both acutely recognize how human life takes place in what Latour in his keynote address called *phusis*, the biospheric shell of earth, air, fire, and water in which all life exists. The human collective, Latour argues, lives *in* the earth, not *on* it. Also, both dramas explore anarchy and violence, restorative justice, and human relations within the context of weather, climate, and the anger of Artemis,

On Active Grounds

the ancient Greeks' goddess of nature. Finally, both plays portray flawed male protagonists. As a violent, headstrong warrior king, Agamemnon in his core dramatic act—sacrificing his adult daughter in order to alter the weather in *his* favour—is inherently anthropogenic, a precursor to the blind, violent will-to-power of the capitalist Ted portrayed in Gaïa Global Circus. Agamemnon is Ted and Ted is Agamemnon. While over two thousand years separate these plays, the storm that allows Agamemnon to bring his massive Greek fleet to Troy is arguably the same storm with which Gaïa Global Circus begins.

Yet here is the latter play's new and significant addition to the intertext: when the massive helium-infused canopy of Gaïa Global Circus sails out over the audience, it extends the stage at the same time as it portrays both audience and stage as actors—and as *actants*—thus representing Western human history as agentive and complicit in its own destruction. As the audience witnesses the climate canopy swing overhead, its members understand their own agency in the roiling and turbulent climate events occurring now. The play makes clear that climate change is not some detached, transcendent event “out there” but emerges instead from human actions within the earth system itself. Even to say that “we are a part of this” does not fully capture the point that agency *per se* is deeply, relationally, materially, and temporally part of biospheric phenomena.

After the conference, an unexpected opening appeared. Latour did not want a cab to the airport for his immediate return flight. Instead, he asked what we could do the next day. So I laid out options along traditional lines for most visitors to Calgary: Banff National Park, an alpine drive or hike, something sublime, a westward day trip.

“No,” said Bruno, slightly smiling. “Let's do something else.”

On Active Grounds

It turns out he was interested in *down* not *up*—in the downward depths of soil, earth, rock, and geological strata inhabited (in Aeschylus) by the ancient Furies and forming the bases of the *phusis* that Latour had just spoken of in his conference address. I wondered if we could head west to see the Burgess Shales, a site which interested Latour but requires site-exploration permits we did not have time to obtain. It occurred to me that eastward from Calgary along an isolated, winding grid road (#848) a traveler will discover a rupture in the prairie, a sudden opening that extends downward multi-directionally and from the air appears like a fractal design along the Red Deer River (Figure 3). This constitutes an extraordinary sight that captures the sheer materiality of human and non-human agencies. Descend from the lip of that opening on 848, where wind turbines compete with oil derricks in a complex landscape that, in my experience, has at times invoked the sublime, and you are

On Active Grounds



(FIGURE 3: Alberta Badlands Aerial View.

Robert Boschman, 2016)

eventually below the K-T Boundary layer, which signifies the abrupt end of the Cretaceous Period and of dinosaur life 65 millions years ago. Here are hoodoos, multi-coloured layers of the earth representing geological time, and the fossils of large animals long extinct. Here too is the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. I suggested this as an eastward daytrip and Bruno, from whom exuberance radiates without interruption, said yes.

We were joined by Bruno's colleague, Olivier Vallet, the design mind behind their collaborative theatre project, and started driving straight east in my car along the Trans-Canada Highway through Strathmore. In staggered fashion, we made our way north and east

On Active Grounds

to the 848 grid road and began to descend gently to the edge of the Badlands. Where the road departs from the surveyor's rule laid down by the Dominion Survey over a century ago, we could see our road winding below us until it seemed to disappear into the geological depths of deep time, until I realized that it was actually doing so and that what I was seeing was not a metaphorical movement of matter in time.

I stopped the car and we all got out to look. Bruno and Olivier stood in the middle of the road and gazed east (Figure 4). A nearby oil derrick prompted a brief discussion of the sublime, in its conventional sense defined as “an encounter with an object or phenomenon of such overwhelming power, grandeur, and immensity that it is almost beyond comprehension” (Kover 2014, 125). Could this scene, with its extensive, humbling view, but one that also included energy extraction, be considered sublime? For Latour, the oil derrick obviated such



(FIGURE 4: Bruno Latour and Olivier Vallet Look East. Robert Boschman, 2016)

On Active Grounds

an experience and, if anything, now produced guilt and regret. Here, in the middle of the Saskatchewan River Basin, where coal formations had been exploited for a century, before giving way to the search for oil and gas, human agency had, he argued, made the sublime an artifact of history. As he states for the record in *reset MODERNITY!*'s "Procedure 3: Sharing Responsibility: Farewell to the Sublime," "[Y]ou realize, at least if you consider the earth, that you, you the human agent, have become so omnipotent that you have been able to inflict definitive changes on its system" (2016, 169).

To feel the sublime you needed to remain "distant" from what remained a spectacle; infinitely "inferior" in physical forces to what you were witnessing; infinitely "superior" in moral grandeur. Only then could you test the incommensurability between these two forms of infinity. Bad luck: there is no place where you can hide yourselves; you are now fully "commensurable" with the physical forces that you have unleashed; as to moral superiority, you have lost it too! Infinities today seem to be in short supply! You are now entering an "era of limits." The question is no longer to take delight in the contradiction of infinite matters and infinite soul, but to find a way, at last, to "draw limits," this time voluntarily, because the world is no longer a spectacle to be enjoyed from a secure place. Such is the reset. (170)

Indeed, in addition to the oil derrick, my car and the road we traversed, with its ditches and barbed-wire fencing, also had to be taken into account. And along the bottomlands highway to Drumheller and the Tyrrell Museum, there was infrastructure installed to create a built environment for viewing the expanse of geological time: parking lots, stairs, safety rails, refuse bins (Figure 1). These constitute what Latour has called "the social" and has spent decades intricately describing, portraying, and theorizing in its complex relationship to and intersections with "nature."

When we stopped by the side of Highway 570 to see the Hoodoos, we found the Social waiting for us in the small plaque explaining this scene of geological forces, just below the exposed K-T Boundary (Figure 5). We could look up and pinpoint the iridium-rich layer marking the abrupt end of dinosaur life 65 millions ago. The K-T is, where we stood, only

On Active Grounds

inches high but conspicuously black with what geologists call “shocked minerals.” In



(FIGURE 5: The Social: A Plaque Stands Just Below the K-T Boundary. Robert Boschman, 2016)

comparison, the Anthropocene layer—what humans will leave for a distant future—indicated by the residue of our modified environs, will also be both measurable and visible. That is the point of the term’s inclusion in current discourse, although perhaps this Anthropocene layer will be not so much “shocked minerals” as “stocked plastics,” a refined petroleum compote, slightly irradiated. Writing for *reset MODERNITY!*, Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the Anthropocene “a thought experiment among geologists [that is] based on stratigraphical evidence” (2016, 191): “There is a certain chutzpah and perversity to the concept, no doubt. For geological periods are usually named long after they are gone. Here scientists are trying to convince themselves and other scientists that stratigraphic evidence already exists for us to be

On Active Grounds

able to imagine the geological history of this period from the point of view of both geologists of the present and those who may come—in human terms at least—in the very, very distant and probably posthuman future” (191).

Our next stop was the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, just outside Drumheller, an early twentieth-century coal -mining hub that has found new life in tourism



(FIGURE 6: Spinning the Devonian, with Bruno Latour and Olivier Vallet. Robert Boschman, 2016)

as visitors from around the world are drawn to its rich fossil discoveries, its multi-story T-Rex, and of course its renowned museum. I was curious to watch Bruno expertly inspect the museum. Just inside the entrance is a very large globe that, as you spin it, turns through geological time. A titan struggle would presently ensue here, as a little girl appeared who insisted on spinning the world counter to Bruno Latour. Their respective pairs of hands brought the globe to a dramatic stop while diplomacy and her parent resolved the issue. Soon

On Active Grounds

Olivier and I watched as Bruno returned to his examination of the Devonian Period (Figure 6). I knew from our discussions in the car that he deeply admired James Lovelock, who posited the Gaia Hypothesis in the 1970s. In fact, Bruno had just published an article and book that explored and defended Lovelock's hypothesis. An American scholar named, oddly enough, Tyrrell had provoked the article, "Why Gaia is not a God of Totality," sifting and clarifying this concept of Gaia. Under the heading, "The Same Prefix: Two Opposite Reactions," Latour relates a playful provocation on his meeting *geoscientists*, asking them why not *Gaia*. After all, "geo- and Gaia share exactly the same etymology: both come from the same entity *Gè*, actually a chthonic divinity much older than Olympian gods and goddesses" (2016, 1).

[T]he somewhat wild proliferation of the prefix 'Gaia' exactly parallels the transformation of how the distant presence of the earth has been formatted in public discourse: what, as far as we remember, had constituted a solid but distant and faithful background for various *geosciences*, and for staging the usual drama of *geopolitics*, has now become, no matter which political persuasion you come from, an *actor*, at least an *agent*, let's say an *agency* whose irruption or intrusion upon the foreground modifies what it is for the human actors to present themselves on the stage.

Whereas you could consider 'geo' from the outside standpoint of a disinterested observer, with 'Gaia' you are inside it while hearing the loud crashing of outside/inside boundaries. To be a disinterested outside observer becomes slightly more difficult. We are all embarked in the same boat – but of course it's not a boat! (2)

I have visited the Tyrrell Museum many times. As a photographer, I find it a fascinating venue for studying answers to the fatigued and increasingly problematic dichotomy of subjects and objects—of "disinterested outside observers" and "the loud crashing of inside/outside boundaries." This is especially the case, I've noticed, as one approaches the Preparation Lab, where visitors can observe a fossil preparation laboratory in action. My photo instincts were heightened as Latour approached this part of the museum

(Figure 7) and I opened and closed the shutter just as he and Olivier, along with a number



(FIGURE 7: The Collection: Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, Drumheller. Robert Boschman, 2016)

of other people, moved toward and then away from the lab. I did this swiftly just as we passed a mirror, in order also to include myself. The resulting image merges subjects and objects in a museum devoted to the spatio-temporal. It suggests the Latourian emphasis on *phusis* and the enmeshment within it of materialities, mentalities, agencies, and temporalities, both on site and, by implication, throughout the biosphere. The image expresses the *at-onceness* of existence that the introduction to this volume suggests is necessarily characteristic of Environmental Humanities research. As a photographer and academic in the Environmental Humanities, I find that such images themselves carry a form of agency, as kinds of assemblages (as Trono also suggests in his chapter in this volume), with the message of this

On Active Grounds

specific image evoking what Latour means when uses the term *collective* and speaks of *composing a common world* (2005).

When he finally noticed the lab itself, Latour pulled out his iPad to take a photo. I quickly pressed my shutter button again (Figure 8). In my own recent visits to the museum with my children, I'd contemplated the Preparation Lab repeatedly as a zone where the nature-culture complex (previously imagined as bipartite) is properly understood as ontologically uniform. As a Latour reader, I had wondered to myself what the founder of



(FIGURE 8: Bruno Latour and The Composition of Facts. Robert Boschman, 2016)

Science Studies would do when encountering this working lab among the museum's exhibits. As it turned out, he also chose to create an image but I do not know why. Perhaps he had in back of mind work by his compatriot Gilles Deleuze who writes in *Cinema 2: The Time-*

On Active Grounds

Image about the connections between concepts, their planes of immanence, and the forms of time that fuel conceptual creativity.

Visiting the Alberta Badlands is, I like to think, a kind of time travel. Entering and leaving, I experience the stratigraphic realities of the earth system—Gaia—as a temporal and material complex that is fluid. Ever in motion, it is in its history of movements here in this place both emphatically revealed and intimately accessible. Otherwise to experience so closely the revelation of temporal geological processes, you’d need to live through an earthquake, as the young Charles Darwin did in Chile in 1835: “A bad earthquake at once destroys our oldest associations: the earth, the very emblem of solidity, has moved beneath our feet like a thin crust over a fluid;—one second of time has created in the mind a strange idea of insecurity, which hours of reflection would not have produced” (323).

Driving out of the valley and west toward Calgary on our return, Olivier, Bruno, and I could have stopped at any number of points, gotten out, and crossed the roadside ditch to place a finger on the “shocked minerals” of the K-T Boundary. Instead we drove on till we saw Horseshoe Canyon off to the right and parked in its muddy lot to view this badlands tributary, this last opening in the earth for the traveler heading west.

All around Horseshoe Canyon, farmland extends as far as the eye can see and farmyards dot its edges. In summer, tourists can buy a ride in an orange helicopter and wander in circles over the canyon (Figure 3), shaped indeed like the piece of iron that immigrant European farriers attached with nails to their horses’ hooves during the colonization of the Americas. Even if we’d had the time to walk down into this canyon, though, a steady rain that day made it difficult to venture farther than the horseshoe’s edge (Figure 9). Our footwear

On Active Grounds

became instantly caked and we spent ten minutes just scraping our soles before returning to the car.

Both the Chilean Earthquake of 1835 and, much farther back in time, the formation of the K-T Boundary took place very quickly: the former caused by the sudden shifting of tectonic plates, the latter quite likely by an incoming asteroid of sizeable proportions. Darwin imagined how a large earthquake “in the dead of night” would impact England— it would



(FIGURE 9: Horseshoe Canyon, Alberta. Robert Boschman, 2016)

become “at once bankrupt” and “[i]n every large town famine would go forth, pestilence and death following in its train” (326). The sciences that inform us now about earthquakes and asteroids, which strike quickly, are also warning repeatedly of another event—Global Climate Change—not as an instantaneous shock in time but rather moving slowly in the current of the years, centuries even, largely unnoticed at first but now gathering momentum enough for concerned citizens to witness for themselves, apart from the sciences and their incoming facts.

On Active Grounds

The sciences repeatedly inform us that the cause of these changes, and they are as drastic globally as any earthquake can be locally, is a human one. We have altered the planetary exchange of gases and changed the balance enough to warm Earth, with consequences that are actual and measureable. If Global Climate Change were to occur in an instant, like an earthquake, it wouldn't just be England—or Alberta or Paris—but all the globe's hemispheres that would become “at once bankrupt” (Darwin, 326)

On Active Grounds

The forces of negotiated resolution and agency are central to Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the trilogy of ancient plays that begins with *Agamemnon*. The drama's overarching narrative demonstrates how, for the ancient Greek peoples, retributive justice could not be replaced with communal jurisprudence until the chthonic Furies were satisfied—not by ongoing vendetta but instead, in a pivot, by human resolve and jurisprudence. Only the latter may justly foreclose on acts of violence and their consequences. While the force of human agency at a pivotal moment in history constitutes the beating heart of *Oresteia*, it is no less central to the drama of Gaia Global Circus. When at the close of the play, the actor Claire Astruc lies on the stage and pulls the atmosphere down to meet with and enclose her form while looking directly at the audience, the audience is meant to understand its own material, collaborative role as actor as well (Figure 2). Represented by a massive tarp floated by heavy-duty black-and-white balloons infused with weather-grade helium, the “atmosphere” created by Olivier Vallet blends not only with the human troupe but also with the ground: *phusis*. Vallet's invention was used for the final time on September 29, 2016, at the Bella Conservatory Theatre at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada. Gaia Global Circus's three-year tour would end here. In the cleanup and packing after the performance, the actors became the crew. They worked expertly and quickly, having done such work many times before. This time, however, they gave all the balloons away (Figure 10).



(FIGURE 10: Gaïa Global Circus: Post-Finale Packing. Robert Boschman, 2016)

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« Dire le neuf avec du vieux » :

Ancienneté du théâtre et nouveauté du matériau

Le cas du *Gaïa Global Circus*¹

Matthieu Protin

Dans son *Histoire du Théâtre en France*, Jeanyves Guérin s'interroge sur le retard constant du théâtre par rapport aux autres arts, et dans la sphère littéraire, aux autres genres². Julie Sermon et Jean-Pierre Ryngaert, travaillant sur le personnage dans le théâtre contemporain, en font aussi le constat : la nouveauté d'une écriture se confronte parfois aux attentes et aux schémas de pensée des acteurs, ou du public, dont « les attentes majoritaires [...] paraissent immuables. »³ Et lorsque l'on se tourne vers le spectateur, on observe, comme le souligne Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux un même phénomène, la nouveauté du spectacle se résorbant parfois sur la scène intérieure des spectateurs: « Notre conclusion est très simple : même si un spectacle n'est pas "dramatique", même s'il n'a fait l'objet d'aucune construction dramaturgique consciente ou inconsciente de la part des créateurs, les spectateurs le dramatiseront – ou s'ennuieront, ou partiront. »⁴

Aborder la nouveauté dans le domaine artistique provoque donc souvent une légère hésitation, qui remonte à loin. Si la science est très vite apparue régie par le progrès, l'art a toujours entretenu, avec la nouveauté, un rapport ambigu. C'est la raison pour laquelle, en allant chercher du côté de la science ou des innovations techniques et technologiques, la nouveauté paraît plus assurée. Le sujet dont nous nous emparons dans *Gaïa Global Circus* (GGC) est donc marqué du sceau de la nouveauté : il s'agit à la fois du « Nouveau régime Climatique »⁵ et de l'« Anthropocène »⁶, deux notions profondément liées au changement climatique et à son origine anthropique et plus généralement à la théorie « Gaïa » de James Lovelock⁷. Mais de la nouveauté

¹ Texte de Pierre Daubigny, mise en scène par Chloé Latour et Frédérique Aït-Touati, sur un projet de Bruno Latour, avec Claire Astruc, Luigi Cerri, Jade Collinet et Matthieu Protin, joué notamment lors du festival Reims Scènes d'Europe 2013 et encore en tournée.

² Jeanyves Guérin, *Le Théâtre en France. 1914-1950*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2007, p. 11.

³ Jean-Pierre Ryngaert, Julie Sermon, *Le Personnage théâtral contemporain : décomposition, recomposition*, Montreuil, éditions théâtrales, 2006, p. 11.

⁴ Marie Madeleine Mervant-Roux, *Figurations du spectateur, Une réflexion par l'image sur le théâtre et sur sa théorie*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.

⁵ Bruno Latour, *Face à Gaïa*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015, p. 11.

⁶ Christophe Bonneuil et Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *L'Évènement Anthropocène*, Paris, Seuil, 2013.

⁷ James Lovelock, *Gaïa. Une médecine pour la planète. Géophysologie, nouvelle science de la terre*, Paris, Sang de la terre, 2001. Nous aurions aussi pour citer les ouvrages de Valérie Masson-Delmotte ou de Naomi Oreskes, dont les travaux nous ont accompagnés tout au long du processus de création.

thématique, il n'est pas forcément aisé de passer à l'affirmation qu'il y a là un nouveau matériau pour le théâtre. D'une part car la science n'est pas, sur la scène, une nouvelle venue⁸. D'autre part, car c'est précisément la capacité du théâtre à rendre sensible le rapport de l'être humain au monde qui a fait naître chez Bruno Latour, philosophe et sociologue des sciences, la conviction qu'il y a, dans ce bouleversement, matière à théâtre.

Nouveauté du message, ancienneté du médium, nous voici au cœur d'une tension : comment dire du neuf avec du vieux ? Ainsi s'inaugure un trajet qui nous mènera du premier état du texte consacré à la question du réchauffement climatique, *Kosmokolosse*⁹, au spectacle représenté, *GGC*.

Une première étape textuelle : Kosmokolosse de Bruno Latour

Ce texte fait apparaître en premier lieu la principale difficulté propre au traitement d'un sujet nouveau : le nécessaire passage par du connu, avant d'aborder l'inconnu, qui travaille l'ensemble des schèmes argumentatifs. La situation est donc abordée à travers celle issue d'un fond culturel commun : le Déluge. Situation catastrophique, pour ne pas dire catastrophiste. La scène donc, est celle d'un chantier, celui de l'arche. Les acteurs sont principalement les membres du chœur, l'humanité travaillant à la construction du vaisseau, et différents personnages qui s'adressent à eux : Joyeux, tenant d'un discours climatosceptique, Noé, le prophète, et différents scientifiques, dont James Lovelock et Clive Hamilton. A ce dispositif antique, où le chœur fait face à des protagonistes qui sont individualisés, s'ajoutent deux « décrochages » vers des œuvres plus anciennes : *Œdipe*, où l'homme est responsable de son propre malheur, et *Frankenstein*, où l'homme de science voit sa créature se retourner contre lui. Ces fictions abordent une problématique contemporaine, celle des boucles de rétroaction qui sont au cœur du réchauffement climatique.

La nouveauté est présente, mais principalement par le biais de citations : des entretiens ou des conférences sont intégrées à la pièce. Le thème est nouveau, pas sa mise en œuvre. On reste principalement dans une structure dialogique interpersonnelle, et la dramaticité demeure régie par une causalité, qui, en dépit des décrochages, reste un principe structurant comme dans ce passage où un discours scientifique entraîne une réaction du chœur qui enclenche à son tour un passage d'*Œdipe Roi* de Sophocle, où Tirésias finira, dans les dernières répliques, par être remplacé par

⁸ Voir notamment Liliane Campos, *Sciences en scène*, Rennes, PUR, 2012.

⁹ Ni cette pièce, qui est depuis devenue une pièce radiophonique, ni celle de *Gaïa Global Circus* n'ayant été éditées, nous ne donnons aucune référence bibliographique.

Clive Hamilton. Ce scientifique débute ainsi par un exposé, « Quatre diapositives pour annoncer la fin du monde », qui provoque le désespoir du chœur :

Hobimé, bobimé, qu'allons-nous devenir ? Les fruits de la terre périclitent, encore enfermés dans les bourgeons, les troupeaux de bœuf languissent, et les germes conçus par les femmes ne naissent plus. Brandissant sa torche, la plus odieuse des déesses, Gaia, pire que la peste, s'est ruée sur nous et a dévasté la Terre des hommes.

C'est cette réaction, qui emprunte à Sophocle à la fois les cris de désespoir « *Hobimé* » et le propos inaugural du prêtre de Zeus, qui entraîne une reprise intégrale de l'échange entre Œdipe et Tirésias, comme le signale la didascalie : « *Deux des acteurs [...] se déplacent en avant du chœur en imprécateurs en s'adressant à la zone où se trouvait Hamilton. Ils jouent Sophocle d'une façon volontairement archaïque, en citation.* »

Enfin, un dialogue s'établit entre le chœur et Tirésias, qui apparaît alors sous les traits de Clive Hamilton :

Clive Hamilton. – Quelle divination fut jamais aussi précise que celle-là ? Tout cela c'est votre œuvre et votre œuvre entièrement. Apollon, le Soleil à l'arc d'or, n'y est pour rien. C'est à vous et à vous seul qu'il faut vous en prendre.

Le chœur. – Nous n'avons rien fait de mal, nous avons fui la misère, tiré de l'abjection des milliards d'humains, déchiffré une à une toutes les énigmes du monde, dominé la Terre et nous régnons maintenant sur elle.

Clive Hamilton. – Etrange maître que celui qui ne s'aperçoit pas qu'il est capable de pareils forfaits qu'il accomplit en fuyant — et pour faire mentir l'oracle !

L'écriture dit la nouveauté, mais ne l'intègre pas, ni textuellement, ni dans le dispositif scénique envisagé : le chœur, dans un espace circulaire, fait face à des travées où interviennent les personnages principaux, reprenant l'opposition entre *orquestra* et *proskenion*. Ceci explique sans doute que lorsque ce texte fut abordé au plateau, dans le cadre d'une résidence de création à la Chartreuse en 2011, il fut rapidement délaissé et renommé : « matériel pour *Gaïa Global Circus* ». Son abandon était symptomatique : cette pièce n'était pas de l'étoffe dont se fait le théâtre aujourd'hui. Ou n'était pas de l'étoffe dont *nous* avons envie de faire du théâtre aujourd'hui.

L'écriture au plateau de GGC

Nous sommes donc repartis du sujet, pour l'explorer et le façonner au plateau, sous l'égide des deux metteuses en scène, Chloé Latour et Frédérique Aït-Touati, avec Pierre Daubigny en tant

qu'auteur, et Bruno Latour en tant que dramaturge. Changement révélateur. Bruno Latour n'est pas un auteur de théâtre, et il n'a jamais prétendu l'être. Sa connaissance en est livresque et s'y ajoute son fort intérêt les controverses scientifiques. Pierre Daubigny quant à lui est non seulement auteur, mais comédien et créateur lumière. A travers ce changement une seconde étape s'entame : faire de la nouveauté scientifique un matériau théâtral. Par le théâtre, et *du* théâtre.

Cela a dans un premier temps conduit à dramatiser, non pas sur du long terme, il n'y a pas de mise en intrigue à proprement parler, mais de façonner des noyaux de dramaticité, très courts, qui explorent, pendant quelques minutes, la façon dont on peut dire la nouveauté de notre situation à partir de situations concrètes : ce fut ainsi le cas d'une réunion de procrastinateurs qui remettaient sans cesse à demain, pour des raisons diverses, l'exécution d'une action politique de grande ampleur ou d'une personnification de Gaïa sous les traits d'un huissier, venant demander aux humains des comptes sur l'exploitation des ressources, et saisissant la voiture, la télévision, le frigo. Et ce ne sont là que quelques cas des nombreuses heures d'improvisation auxquelles donna lieu la question de l'anthropocène, de la théorie Gaïa, et du Nouveau Régime Climatique.

Certaines d'entre elles vont en effet devenir une partie du texte final, majoritairement constitué de fragments de tableaux, qui apparaissent un instant pour s'évanouir ensuite, comme cette scène où un malade apprend qu'il a le cancer et doit donc s'abstenir de fumer, et n'en fait pourtant rien, témoignant d'un mécanisme psychologique qui joue, dans l'apathie face au changement climatique, un grand rôle. Le texte de la pièce met ainsi en regard l'annonce faite à la télévision par un scientifique que l'évolution du climat témoigne d'une tendance de la terre à se débarrasser de nous, et la scène entre le médecin et sa patiente :

Wolff – De là où je suis je peux le voir : la terre est un organisme vivant. Nous avons cru que la Terre était à nous. Qu'elle était destinée à être exploitée pour le bien de l'humanité. Et maintenant il est trop tard. La terre a la fièvre.

L – Trop tard ?

C - Les humains ont gâté l'eau de leur puits. Ils ont empoisonné leur maison. Laisse s'avarier la récolte. Déféqué dans la mangeoire. Même les porcs ne viennent pas manger là où ils ont chié. Les humains ce n'est pas une assemblée de copropriétaires qui doivent décider d'un gros effort financier pour faire ravalier la façade. L'homme va mourir.

J - Et la femme aussi.

L - J'ai vos radios. Vous voulez vous asseoir ?

J - Je suis prêt docteur, allez-y.

L - Ce n'est pas une pneumonie. C'est plus grave.

J - D'accord. Combien de temps ?

L - C'est difficile / à dire.

J - La vérité, Docteur. Pas de blabla. La vérité.

L - C'est un...

J - Vous pouvez tout me dire.

L - Eh bien le diagnostic est / formel.

J - Je peux tout / entendre.

L - Vous allez rester ici. On va mettre en route la thérapie. Ce sera long, et sûrement difficile à supporter.

J - Non.

La première partie du discours, tenu par Wolff, reprend les principaux points de la théorie Gaïa élaborée par James Lovelock. Le second, où sont évoqués les humains, est dit, toujours par la même actrice, qui jouait Wolff, mais cette fois en son nom, et multiplie les différentes images, à la fois avec des accents prophétiques, « Ils ont empoisonné leur maison » et des métaphores plus courantes, celle des copropriétaires. Enfin, à partir de l'intervention de Jade, se met en place un échange entre le médecin et sa patiente, qui dramatise l'information initiale. Le processus à l'œuvre lors de la création au plateau se trouve ainsi repris à même la scène, en trois étapes, depuis l'information initiale à sa dramatisation, du thème scientifique au matériau qui en est issu. La présence du discours scientifique dans l'ensemble de la pièce est d'ailleurs largement réduite par rapport au texte initial, et le spectacle convoque bien d'autres tableaux et d'autres figures que celles du scientifique. Notre insistance sur celui-ci naît de la nécessité de rendre plus claire l'évolution qui conduit du premier texte au second, en opposant le phénomène citationnel de la première pièce à son incorporation par le plateau dans l'écriture de la seconde. Apparaît alors ce qui marque un passage du thématique au matériau : le discours scientifique n'est plus simplement énoncé, mais véritablement agi et mis en jeu à même la scène. Il devient « une composante » du spectacle, et non plus simplement un thème.

Le texte ainsi élaboré dans des allers-retours incessants entre le plateau, les improvisations, et l'écriture, présente plusieurs caractéristiques : d'abord il ne donne lieu à aucune situation stable, autre que celle du théâtre. La pièce, à l'instar du nouveau roman, cesse d'être l'écriture d'une aventure, pour devenir l'aventure d'une écriture, ou plus précisément, la monstration d'une tentative pour donner forme à un propos complexe. Nous sommes sur scène, et nous allons tenter de construire des micro-fictions pour donner à voir, à entendre, et peut-être à comprendre ce qui se joue ici et maintenant. Cette logique de la « présentation »¹⁰, davantage que de la « représentation », se traduit textuellement par l'alternance entre le mode dramatique et le mode narratif, où alternent la construction du propos et sa mise en jeu :

¹⁰ Ce terme, forgé notamment par Denis Guénoun dans *Le Théâtre est-il nécessaire*, Circé, Paris, 1998, est repris dans plusieurs analyses du théâtre contemporain, dont celle de Jean-Frédéric Chevallier, « Le geste théâtral contemporain : entre présentation et symboles », *L'Annuaire théâtral*, n° 36, 2004, p. 27-43.

Virginie. – Je ne suis pas ici pour vous parler de ce qui va arriver si nous ne nous mettons pas d'accord pour réduire nos émissions de CO₂. Il n'y a plus de si. Je vais parler au futur d'événements qui ont déjà eu lieu. Je vais parler au futur, mais je ne fais ni une prévision ni une prédiction. Il s'agit d'un futur qui ne sera pas évité. Ce futur va être.

C - Pause. Elle boit un verre d'eau, placé à la droite du micro sur le pupitre de plexiglas.

L - Le desk.

C - Comment ?

L - Le desk.

C - Le desk, oui. Elle repose son verre d'eau sur le desk.

J - Je me suis aperçue qu'il y a un problème avec le mot futur. Parce qu'on dit futur, on croit que ça veut dire « qui pourrait être et qui pourrait aussi bien ne pas être », ou bien on croit que ça veut dire « mieux qu'aujourd'hui et vachement mieux qu'hier », ou bien futur ça veut dire « science-fiction ». Mais nous avons oublié ce que c'est que le futur.

C - Le silence du début a laissé place au crépitement des claviers. Les blogueurs sont au travail, pense-t-elle, ils enregistrent, ils découpent. Smartphones, tablettes, ultraportables.

L - C'est comme des extensions de la main.

C - De la jambe, de l'oreille, du cerveau.

L - Des appendices.

C - Des prothèses.

J - On ne la laisse peut-être pas rêvasser ?

C - Oui, quelque chose se produit.

L - Exactement. Elle a cru voir au milieu de la salle l'éclair d'une lame. Son œil cherche l'origine du reflet. Une montre. Énorme. L'homme qui l'arbore à son poignet lui envoie le rayon dans l'œil.

On passe ainsi d'une adresse de Virginie au public, avec la reprise du dispositif de la conférence scientifique, et la description de la scène à travers les paroles des autres acteurs, qui façonnent la fiction en même temps qu'elle se joue. Cette séparation apparaît d'ailleurs à travers les différentes désignations des locuteurs, les uns étant désignés par l'initiale de leur prénom, l'autre par le recours à un nom de personnage, qui a été créé un peu plus tôt :

C - Elle est très tendue.

L - Qui ? Gaïa ?

M- Virginie.

L- Virginie. Depuis seize ans, elle fréquente les universités, les séminaires, les laboratoires, les colloques.

M- Australienne. À l'âge de 28 ans, elle obtient une bourse de recherche aux États-Unis. Trois ans plus tard on lui propose un job très bien payé. Elle refuse, rentre en Australie retrouver son mari. [...] Elle se fout du pognon. Elle aime le rock.

On retrouve ici un phénomène propre aux formes théâtrales contemporaines avec « cette fable qui ne préexiste pas à l'interprète et que celui-ci doit de surcroît inventer à chaque instant » et qui « est tout sauf une action fictionnelle indépendante du plateau, qui serait imitée par les outils de l'acteur et de la théâtralité », comme le précise Anne Monfort¹¹.

¹¹ Anne Monfort, « Après le postdramatique : narration et fiction entre écriture de plateau et théâtre néo-dramatique », *Trajectoires* [En ligne], 3 | 2009. URL : <http://trajectoires.revues.org/392>

Une troisième étape, le texte à la scène : le spectacle GGC

Mais en rester au seul texte occulte le principal procédé par lequel a été rendu sensible la nouveauté de notre situation : celle qui est désignée par le concept d'anthropocène, et l'idée que l'être humain est la principale force d'influence sur la nature – qui, en retour, agit sur lui. En effet, la révolution engendrée par le Nouveau Régime Climatique concerne avant tout la façon dont on définit le rapport entre l'homme et la nature, un rapport qui s'exprime dans les conférences de Bruno Latour par une métaphore théâtrale : l'homme n'est plus devant la nature comme un décor fixe¹². Cette image devient, dans le spectacle, une réalité. Il n'y a pas de décor fixe, mais, au-dessus des acteurs, une vaste canopée mouvante, suspendue par des ballons d'hélium, et maintenue en place par des fils accrochée à des poids. Ces fils offrent aux acteurs la possibilité de faire jouer ce décor, à la façon d'une marionnette, et avec ce paradoxe inhérent à l'art de la marionnette, où le manipulateur devient à son tour manipulé.

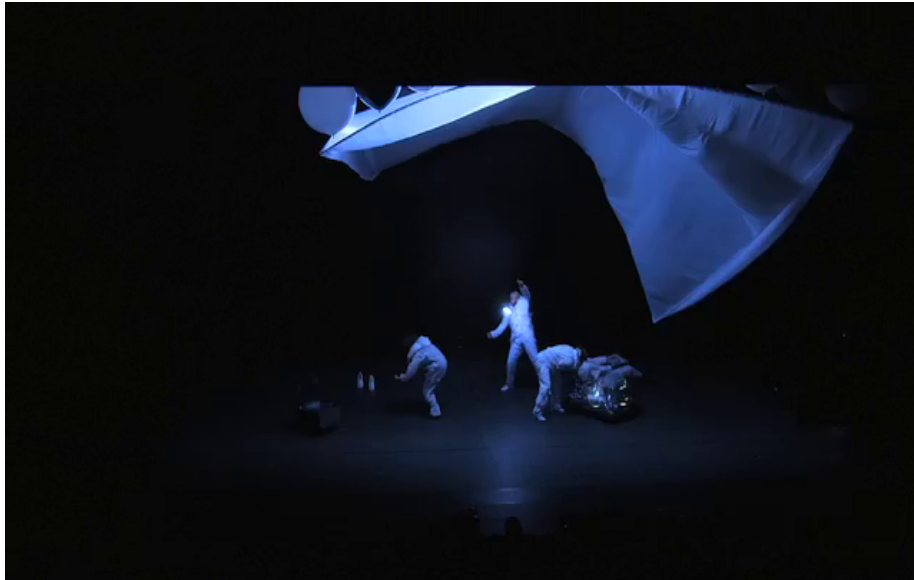


1 (c) David Bornstein

Cette invention scénographique est due à la fois à Frédérique Aït Touati et à Olivier Vallée, tous deux très intéressés par les machines théâtrales du XVIIe. Ils ont ainsi donné une apparence concrète à une situation en apparence abstraite. La pièce s'ouvre par une tempête du chapiteau et s'achève par l'entrée du chapiteau dans la salle, recouvrant le public, et donnant alors à ressentir la

¹² Bruno Latour, *Face à Gaïa, op. cit.* L'image est récurrente au fil des conférences, voir par exemple p. 80, 145 ou 146.

nouveauté de la situation en rompant avec l'habituelle fixité du décor, ou du moins son cantonnement à une sphère bien identifiée, celle de la scène.



2 (c) David Bornstein

Cette équivalence est d'ailleurs posée d'entrée de jeu par le prologue de la pièce, qui présente ce chapiteau comme l'équivalent théâtral d'un modèle scientifique, une façon de dire le monde sans cependant l'y réduire :

L - Mesdames et Messieurs, ce que vous voyez au-dessus de nous, c'est le monde. Enfin, une copie, parce que le monde il est là, dehors, et franchement ça ne donne pas envie de le mettre ici. [...] Alors je sais que ça va être difficile, mais il va falloir croire que ce, cette, bref ça, c'est ce qu'on a trouvé de mieux pour savoir ce qui arrive à la terre. Et à nous aussi. Ce que vous voyez là, c'est un modèle climatique. Si la température monte ou descend un peu trop dans cette salle, il peut tomber sur nous. Ou au contraire partir là-bas, très loin. Si on augmente trop le taux de certains gaz pendant la soirée, il peut aussi être affecté. De même s'il y a des courants d'air, donc ne sortez pas.

Notre rapport à la terre est un rapport d'interdépendance : c'est ce que donne à ressentir ce chapiteau volant. De la nouveauté du sujet, on est alors passé à un matériau nouveau, non seulement thématiquement, mais esthétiquement, en concrétisant ce qui initialement relevait d'une métaphore :

[...] nous sommes contraints de voir des humains obstinément sourds et impassiblement assis, immobiles, tandis que l'ancien décor de leurs anciennes intrigues est en train de disparaître à une vitesse effrayante ! Sublime ou tragique, je l'ignore, mais une chose est sûre : ce n'est plus un *spectacle* que l'on puisse apprécier à distance ; nous en faisons partie.¹³

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 145.

Et pourtant, en faisant de la scène le lieu d'une représentation du monde, nous n'ignorions pas non plus que nous renouions avec un antique *topos*, celui du *theatrum mundi*. Si partir du matériau évite de se confronter à la multiplication des étiquettes – postdramatique, néo-dramatique – la nouveauté, abordée à l'aune d'un art aussi antique que le théâtre, n'en reste donc pas moins problématique. Oui, il y a bien, ici, un risque de déjà-vu, qui tient moins au spectacle en lui-même, qu'au regard du spectateur. La nouveauté apparaît toujours susceptible d'être appréhendée comme une résurgence. Il me semble donc qu'elle doit moins s'aborder comme une caractéristique stable, absolue – « voici du nouveau » – que comme une idée, une ligne directrice. Dans sa perpétuelle tension avec la résurgence et les échos du passé, la nouveauté reste nécessaire à convoquer pour aborder ce théâtre d'aujourd'hui, dont nous voyons bien, sans toujours réussir à le dire précisément, qu'il n'est plus celui d'hier.

Matthieu PROTIN

21 275 signes espaces compris