

# ***Diplomacy in the Face of Gaia***

Bruno Latour in conversation with Heather Davis

A March 2014 article in *The Guardian* predicted that industrialized civilization will collapse due to anthropogenic climate change within the next hundred years. The piece has gone viral, but the message does not come as breaking news for Bruno Latour.<sup>1</sup> For decades Latour has been making the argument that modernization has been on a warpath, and has most recently called for a revitalization of politics under the threat and promise of Gaia in the 2013 Gifford Lectures. Originally trained as an anthropologist, Latour has spent his career analyzing the practices of science in order to re-situate the epistemological assumptions of objectivity that subtend the subject-object divide. What he has shown is the utter inconsistency of such an orientation by elaborating the multiple actants within a given network that assert ontological plurality. These epistemic concerns are not benign or neutral, as they cannot be disentangled from politics, or from our very sense of being.

At least since the *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (2004), Latour has been insisting upon the necessity for the modernization project to cede to what he calls “ecologization,” or the understanding of our interconnected dependence upon the non-human world in which we are embedded and of which we are composed. His most recent work, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (AIME, 2013), can be seen as an extension and elaboration of *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991), flipping the argument on its head in order to take stock of our modern values in order to begin the difficult work of composing a people capable of facing Gaia.<sup>2</sup> This project could not come sooner, as the effects of climate change are beginning to be felt acutely across the globe, and are only predicted to get much worse. I had the opportunity to sit down with Bruno Latour in the AIME office in Paris to discuss these ideas; what follows is an edited transcript from our conversation in February 2014.

**Heather Davis** I want to begin with a statement you made in an interview for the Anthropocene Project at the Haus de Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin. You claim that one of the things that the Anthropocene provokes is the necessity to understand the interrelationship of science and politics, and that because of this set of ecological catastrophes we no longer have the luxury of believing in a clear division between these two domains. Do you think we are seeing, as a result of this collapse, a broader epistemic shift in the sciences towards alternate world-making devices, such as narration and storytelling?

**Bruno Latour** I think it's wishful thinking on the part of the people from the humanities that the sciences have changed that much. But it is a useful kind of wishful thinking because it is a way to move the argument out of the standard situation where you have people like us in science studies saying that science and politics have always been intermingled and most scientists, the vast majority, still saying we should separate them as much as possible. There is a change of mind of *some* scientists involved in ecology and climate on this question because they realize their usual defensive position—that is, maintaining science as separated as possible from politics—simply does not wash anymore. I am not sure they welcome the alternative that we propose, but at least they are listening to it in a way that is different from the previous characterizations of science studies as either dangerous or friendly relativism. So, in that sense there is a change, which I think is discernable among many scientists who are themselves attacked by other scientists in the name of science. The usual defense of “well, we are just doing science” is moot.

A second important thing is that the statements we now make about the world, about Gaia, are now framed as a warning. It is very, very difficult now to maintain the old idea of a division between statement of fact and statement of value when you say that “there is now 440 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.” Even if you say it as coldly as possible, it sends a message that you should do something. So, the division between fact and value, which is the traditional way of handling these questions, is weakened.

Third, because of the very logic of the Anthropocene, you are inserted into the phenomena you study in a way that is unexpected and still unfathomed. The idea of a science that emerges from the dispassionate study of external phenomena is now much more difficult to sustain. The very distinction between the social and natural sciences breaks down because the argument that you are not supposed to be involved in what you study can no longer be maintained. A chemist working on CO<sub>2</sub> is fully integrated into a feedback mechanism, whatever he or she does, in a way that resembles an economist involved in policy, or a sociologist involved in statistics. So that's the third reason why the distinction between science and politics, and the old constitution of separating the two, seems in great need of an alternative. Now, I believe we have an alternative, but to say that it has been enthusiastically embraced by scientists would clearly be wishful thinking.

**HD** Do you believe the alternative is in the mode of diplomacy or the mode of narrativity?

**BL** Well, that is what I want to distinguish. Narrativity is another problem which is linked, but it's a much more puzzling philosophical question that is far less acceptable for the scientists, even those I've just mentioned, although it is of course very interesting for the humanities. But, when you consider that science is not about an abstract idea of “Data,” but about data that have been obtained through a long process involving lots of instruments and carried out by the whole institution

of science with agents throughout the world, then you can trace your way back to the origin of the scientific revolution, where the distinction was made between storytelling and data production. From that standpoint, it might be possible to imagine other things: entangled narratives or quali-quantitative data sets, there are lots of ways of approaching these questions. But, I think this argument would be more difficult to accept for the scientists. They are ready to move from the scientific-political question, but are they ready to move to the question of narrative? It is difficult because these words, like rhetoric, are difficult to implement positively. You can do that with Donna Haraway, but it's very hard to do that with my friend the CO<sub>2</sub> scientist from Paris VII, even when he is completely ready to abandon the idea of science and politics as separate domains and to talk about the "geopolitics of CO<sub>2</sub>." I don't think you can move in the direction of narrative, even though when you add geopolitics, policy, alternative futures, and alternative cosmologies, you might nudge scientists in this direction.

There is a very important aspect of this discussion for the literary people, which is the source of my interest in collaborating with the novelist Richard Powers. The question is: are data a subset of narratives, or an opposition to narratives, or are narratives inside data? It is a question that you can approach from many different angles, such as the scientific, or quantitative study of literature. The literary study of science is of course something that interests me a lot, and that is not very surprising because there are lots of scientific traditions that feel perfectly at ease with this, especially natural history. In a way, it's one of the reasons why sciences of climate, let's say the Gaia sciences, are so strange to the eyes of other scientists and physicists—because they look a lot like natural history. [Alexander von] Humboldt would have understood them without difficulty. But, if it is close to natural history, then it is close to natural philosophy; this is actually very surprising for scientists and has become the cause of many of the worries of the physicists and mathematicians who are against the science of "climate responsibility" (a term itself that hovers on the distinction between fact and value). Those scientists are often against climate science because they say we cannot have made all the progress in basic science to end up back in natural history, where we were at the time of Humboldt and the European discovery expeditions. They are completely puzzled when they see that Charles D. Keeling got his data from the Hawaii Center by being there everyday for thirty years, or even fifty years.<sup>3</sup> So, when it doesn't look like big science, and it doesn't look like basic science, and it doesn't look like fundamental science, what then? It's the science of care, and it's as surprising for physicists and mathematicians as it is in women's studies. What does care do? What is care? With an instrument you do the same exercise every day; that doesn't look like particle physics. That is one reason why people—and I don't mean the people who are paid by the oil industry and coal industries, I'm not talking about those guys—are surprised, disappointed, worried that after the twentieth-century achievements of big science and basic science, science has "regressed" to model building (which they often see as an inferior science), to natural history, and to care. So that is one reason why there is skepticism. But, of course, in the history of science, many, many

natural sciences have been, first of all, powerful narratives and very humble piecemeal constructions. As Simon Schaffer always says: if the philosophy of science had started with agriculture and not with physics it would be very different; that sort of prejudice under the division of labour between the humanities and the sciences has allowed these questions to be forgotten, but it is important to re-make the link.

**HD** You have shown in much of your work, most notably in *We Have Never Been Modern*, that within the epistemological assumptions of objectivity there is a tremendous effort exerted to assert the inanimacy of natural objects and animals, even while the liveliness of the world appears in the language of scientific documents. There is a revealing tension between trying to de-animate “facts” while at the same time relying upon the animism of the world.

**BL** Yes, the de-animation argument... I have never seen a scientist who would easily get into it, even though I’ve made it for a long time. There is a limit here. You have to go to semiotics, which I think is impossible for a practicing scientist. You have to consider the text like semioticians do; no matter how literate, or cultivated, or open scientists are, that move is very, very difficult. That’s really a skill you learn when you are coming from the humanities. So, if I show them that their scientific paper on volcanoes or CO<sub>2</sub> is full of agents, actants, beings-transformed, etc., and that it might only be in the last line that all this is said to be just a set of causes and effects, you can show them that and they will agree, but it won’t sink in. This is what we learn from having done PhDs in exegesis, literature, the humanities, etc.: narrative is hard to approach through literature for scientists. To me, it’s much better to encourage this shift when you go into the detail of an experimental setting. You can help scientists attune to many of the features that they usually do unconsciously, or unwittingly, in their prose. We have a case that interests us a lot here about ants. Because ants and ANT (Actor Network Theory) are very related, we are always interested in ants. If you look at research about ants, many people would say that ants are not directed by any sort of superior entity—the organicist version—and that it is only “individual” ants that do the acting. But, we in the humanities are trained to be attentive to the dozens of cases where, in the texts of the same scientists who say we have abandoned the idea of a super organism, in fact, ants appear as a character, an actant, they are doing the job of a society, of a big organism, precisely what was not supposed to be there. There it works when you can show scientists that the semiotic aspect of a narration is actually carrying them where they don’t want to go. They say, “I don’t want to have a second degree with a society and a superior organism.” Then I’ll say “Look, here, twenty-five times in the text you wrote that a society, or a nest, or the colony is actually acting. Is this not a nice contradiction?” But they protest that it is only a matter of language and writing. And, I reply, “Yes, exactly!” So, you can do this, but it’s a micro-negotiation.

Of course, there is a third level—complete metaphysics—which is inaccessible to humanities people and to scientists—the question of whether the world itself is narrated. I don’t mean narrated by a human, but has itself an articulation that

makes it accessible to words. And that would be more of a basic metaphysics. But that's not something you can put into the public because it's an esoteric argument. My argument would be that the world *is* articulated, so that narration is just one of the many ways to frame it. There is in the world, in the pulsation of the world itself, something that lends itself to articulation by speech. So, there are different levels to the argument.

To answer your question, what's interesting in the Anthropocene is that we pose all of those questions for scientists, as well as for those on the side of politics, the humanities, and art. Because of the Anthropocene situation there are lots of connections that were superficial before, where people would say "yes, it's nice to have a link between artists and scientists, they are creative," but now these are more directly connected. We had a meeting last year, last October in Toulouse, where we had the artists Tomás Saraceno and Adam Lowe, plus a musician, a graphic novelist, a physicist, a modeler, an oceanographer, philosophers, sociologists, etc., where we were all trying to understand how to handle the Anthropocene in our respective languages.<sup>4</sup> And it was clearly not at all the sort of discussion I organized maybe thirty years ago in San Diego, where you would have had artists capturing some sort of aesthetic aspect of science. Here, we are talking about the common articulation of the Anthropocene. That has changed. So in that sense, you're right, there's a narrativity, and an urgency also, shared by people who are completely different in their approach. I do think the conversation has changed, so that is why this experiment around the Anthropocene is so exciting.

**HD** One of the things I've been curious about in your work is how you are thinking about Gaia in relationship to the Anthropocene, particularly because they are each loaded with very specific ideological constructions—one from the realm of the deities, and the other from scientific discourse—that don't necessarily cohere. In your work, what do these two conceptualizations of the present environmental catastrophe do? Do you see a tension in using them together?

**BL** First, in terms of the history of concepts, they're not within the same time-frame. I mean Gaia exists before the Anthropocene; that is, in a deeper history, rather than being contemporary. In terms of agency, Gaia, if we follow Lovelock's argument, used to be indifferent to us. It's very complicated, even for Lovelock it's complicated. The traditional version, I mean the 1970s version of Gaia, is indifferent to humans. Now, of course, the Anthropocene makes the loop so tight that it might no longer be true that Gaia is indifferent, we certainly act on it or her in some profound ways. For me, I'm using these two concepts philosophically because I'm not an earth scientist, even though I read a lot of this work. Gaia is the localization of nature, that's what's so interesting and completely disturbing for scientists and natural scientists—it doesn't apply to Venus, it doesn't apply to the moon (well, that's not completely true). And, it's a restricted conception of nature, so there is what I call the infra-lunar aspect to Gaia. Then there are the highly complex dynamics of Gaia, for which there are lots of metaphors, none of which are very good: one

organic, one cybernetic. But there are a lot of studies now on the weakness of those metaphors. I use Gaia as the name of a mystery or problem surrounding the question of composition of all these agents that are connected in some way, which I try to articulate, not to my satisfaction, in the Gifford Lectures. I hope I will do better in the published essays. But what is so interesting in Gaia is quite independent from the human race. Gaia was interesting 10,000 years ago; even two millennia ago, Gaia was still interesting.

Now the Anthropocene is a kind of fabulous acceleration of one of the many connections inside Gaia around the question of the human. If Gaia is local, the Anthropocene is even more local: it is local in time. It is the result of one species, and it's impossible not to be anthropocentric about it. So, it's about one species, and one small time span. That is what interests Dipesh Chakrabarty so much—it's simultaneously a deepening of history, because it now moves CO<sub>2</sub>, plate tectonics, pollution, etc., but in an extraordinary restriction, because it is basically describing a period of only 200 years, or even sixty, which provides a very different view of history. I think it is very important to maintain the distinction between the two, even though you can consider that the Anthropocene is an acceleration, a sudden acceleration, a tipping point of Gaia's history. Because of the Anthropocene, the destiny of Gaia is connected to ours in a way that's not predictable, which would not have been predicted by Lovelock twenty years ago. There is this argument from James Hansen, a scientist and activist from NASA who retired recently, who put forward a scenario that because of us the earth could become like Mars: that is, a dead planet. It's one of the scenarios; in that sense, Gaia is linked to us in a way whereby it or she cannot be indifferent to us.

**HD** But in a mode of bleak optimism, I think it's important to remember all of the previous mass extinction events on the planet: although the current extinction is happening at an amazing rate, life will go on.<sup>5</sup>

**BL** But the Mars scenario is really a dead planet. This is why it is a bleak optimism, because in most Lovelock scenarios we disappear along with many other species, but life goes on. But, the point of view of bleak optimism is actually a view from nowhere. I don't think we require a scenario of disappearance. I think that's a mistake, because futures are multiple and there are many ways in which humans will cope. The question is what politics anticipate the catastrophe sufficiently so that these futures stay open. And that is, of course, one of the reasons why so many people, like Isabelle Stengers, are worried about the word Anthropocene—because its political acumen will make it disappear very quickly. I take it as a very, very mobilizing term. But I hear what other critics say: the Anthropocene can be highly demobilizing because of its re-naturalization of the human, which is also the idea that many geologists have. So we are back to another kind of reductionism, except now we, the humans, are the geological force. The human as geological force can also be read as another dialectic revamped; it could be the dialectics of nature. I mean, you read Engels and you just modify a little bit the expansion and the intensity and you have exactly the same story; so it's a dangerous term.

And then there is the third immense danger, which Clive Hamilton has studied: geo-engineering, or a sort of optimistic version of the Anthropocene.<sup>6</sup> There are people who welcome the Anthropocene and say, “great, we are finally at the scale of the phenomenon that we want to obtain.” What the father of the H-bomb, Edward Teller, wanted to do was to create great works of infrastructure by building dams and cavity seas to re-engineer the Earth. There is even a little bit of that perspective in Sloterdijk. So, there are a lot of ways of welcoming the Anthropocene, just as there are a lot of ways of re-naturalizing the Anthropocene. For me, the critique that’s the most troubling to consider is that the human is already unified under the sign of the Anthropocene. Of course, politically that’s absurd. There is no human able to play the role of the *anthropos*. So, in that sense, I am not completely sure that the Anthropocene concept will last. I can see why it is interesting now, but the moment of interest might be short-lived because there are many reasons why it’s counterproductive.

**HD** I completely agree with your hesitations. It is also a concept that has picked up speed very quickly in theoretical and art circles, and has become a capturing device, or a collecting term. It’s a very seductive concept, which I think is both its strength and weakness.

**BL** It has a couple of advantages. One is that you don’t have to say anything about science studies anymore. At the time of the Anthropocene, you don’t have to show again that science and politics are related, so that speeds things up. But to re-present this question at the time of the Anthropocene, nothing is simplified, because all the apparatuses of Man—Man dominating Nature—come back, except it takes a slightly dystopian version, which can be shifted a little bit and it becomes utopian again. Then we say: “Oh great, we’re so strong that we can re-make the planet”; we’ve become the engineers of the planet. I don’t think it’s a concept that’s going to last, but while it’s here we should use it because it is a connector, and it brings together artists, scientists, and philosophers. That’s why we’re commissioning this monument to the Anthropocene by Tomás Saraceno in Toulouse; once it’s built, I will forget about the Anthropocene. We will use other terms.

**HD** I want to return to the question of politics because I think that the strength of your most recent book, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, is to unravel all of the primary institutions that you identify—law, religion, politics, economy—in order to recompose a modality where we can begin to rebuild the political systems that are necessary to confront what is coming towards us. But clearly, not all of us are going to be affected by the force of climate change equally.

**BL** That is why the *anthropos* is not the right agent of history.

**HD** Exactly, but isn’t the proposition about the people of OWAAB (Out of Which We Are All Born) that you discuss in the Gifford Lectures—that is, of a people ready to

face Gaia—caught in the same problem as the *anthropos*?<sup>7</sup> Don't we need to account for environmental justice?

**BL** There is the obvious geopolitical question, which is raised by everybody working on this issue, and that is the complete inequality of the impact of ecology. All of the negative impacts are intensified for the people who are not responsible. That is basically true. All the people who are not responsible, or the least responsible, or are only now becoming responsible, are the ones most affected. For example, even the Chinese, who, because they are no longer poor, share some responsibility, feel an impact infinitely greater in terms of living conditions than those in the US. So, that's a geopolitical question to which I have nothing in particular to say, because it's obvious. The question is: how do you do politics in a way that leads to a different type of work. How do you re-present the issue? How do you break down the national state system of negotiation so that you can actually build what Carl Schmidt called leagues, or lines, which are different from nations? So that is very interesting, but it's another topic for debate.

The project of AIME was conceived before the concept of Gaia became a symbolic figure for a new politics. I had read Lovelock, of course, many, many years ago, but the project of AIME is twenty-seven years old. From the beginning it was inspired by ecological politics and the environmental movement. But there is preliminary work to be done on what a collective is before you can turn your interests to what is required by Gaia. Of course, the AIME project is only a horizon, a horizon of a possible sovereign—or sovereignty as I developed it in the Gifford Lectures—something that weighs on you in a way that was not the way nature was before. So it's a very complicated new role that I think we have to politicize in terms of political philosophy, but this is very difficult to do. What is the request of Gaia? That's where the fact that Gaia is the name of a goddess is especially interesting. So a whole elaboration of what Gaia is becomes necessary.

But in AIME, the solution is simpler. Whatever you describe as ecology, the responsibility largely weighs on those who have invented what we call modernization. This is hard to contest when modernization is now everywhere, including India, China, and Brazil. So, my argument is quite simple. It is to ask what has happened as modernization. It's pretty important that we have an idea of what that means, especially because then you can open a negotiation with the other collectives whose responsibility is very minimal, but whose ways of life and organizing their polity and their cosmos are very important as a resource for us. You cannot enter the world of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's American Indians without having done this preparatory work because otherwise it will remain a dispute about modernizing or not modernizing.<sup>8</sup> So my attempt in AIME is preparatory to meeting Gaia. It is to say, when the former modern will finally understand what we have done and also what we are worth—not only flagellating ourselves—we might be able to build other connections with all of the other ways of being, including those in the modern's own collective. Because there are many other ways of being which have never been

modern, even inside. Then the question of turning to Gaia becomes interesting. That is what the whole project is about; we will publish another version of the book that just goes through all the crossings.<sup>9</sup> There is one table entirely of the aims of AIME throughout the whole book, and it's quite amusing because then you see the preparatory work required to meet Gaia. The book attempts to change the view of technology in a way that is not the way of mastery, which then allows you to modify the ways which law and religion are understood, and then you can begin to negotiate with other techniques. But it's also a slightly bizarre project because it asks, in a time of urgency, to think slowly about what we have done. That's what we'll do in Montreal in March with our meeting with Eduardo Kohn and others. We will simulate the negotiation. If we, the Westerners, present ourselves with AIME's terms, how does it change our connection with other collectives? How can we read the literature differently so that it's not just about beliefs? And, of course, this is completely fanciful...

**HD** ...completely fanciful but deadly serious. Throughout the book I was thinking about the question of the diplomat and diplomacy. This position seems necessary, in terms of composing a new kind of collectivity, but I was also hesitant about how the figure of the diplomat seems already to presume two, or more, opposing sides. And the diplomat itself is—you highlight this—slippery, not quite trustworthy...

**BL** ...it is someone who betrays.

**HD** Yes. Diplomacy is an incredibly useful mode of connection, and it is always a kind of betrayal. Were you thinking of the diplomat as a betrayal of the moderns? The diplomat itself seems to be such a modern idea.

**BL** No, but betrayal is part of diplomacy because the diplomat betrays those who have sent him or her precisely because he or she modifies their values. He or she sees that the official attachment is not the one to be ready to die for. So, betrayal is a necessity; it introduces a margin and a space to manoeuvre. But the reason why diplomacy is the metanarrative of the project is because it's not science. It's a diplomatic project about how to compose—in all senses of the word composition. So, to say that there is a horizon of diplomacy is to say we have to state our agreement or disagreement. We are scientific peers, learning what it is to be together. And that's one of the problems for AIME because the project is not a scientific project, the inquiry is more like an inquest, even though inquest is a legal term. We present AIME, and then it's judged by my peers, which is ridiculous because the thing will explode immediately. That's what the Americans are doing when they discuss the book, they just say: "This guy has not read Hannah Arendt and yet he speaks about politics... he doesn't even cite Heidegger." Of course, it's not a scientific project! It's a diplomatic project where the diplomatic figure is actually part of one mode, which is the mode of [PRE] or preposition.<sup>10</sup> Some people say that it is only philosophy, but it's a philosophy à la Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway; it's a philosophy of composition. It's a diplomatic philosophy. It's not a neo-realist or neo-rationalist

definition of philosophy. It's still uncertain, but the position is that we won't be able to face Gaia if we are modern. I mean there is no place for moderns and for Gaia; one of us has to cede.

It's perfectly possible that with geo-engineering and re-modernization we might actually go one step further and delay the catastrophe to the next century; this is completely possible. But let's say we succeed in establishing that modernization has to be re-modernized—this is Ulrich Beck's argument—it has to be deeply modified. How do we do that? Well, we do that by putting on the table the values we think we are beholden to for the first time. Then we can open the negotiations because we don't mistake our values for our metaphysics, so to speak. This enables us to defend science without defending epistemology, to defend politics without defending Hobbes, and so forth. So that gives a margin of manoeuvre. When we have re-opened this connection with the collective we can say that what we used to call ecology or ecologization can now be a synonym for civilization, or a new form of globalization, but in a very, very different form than just an extension of modernism. That's what I call composition. Of course, it's absurdly big. But the advantage of thinking big here is that you simultaneously see all the problems. And, for the few people who are interested in the project, this is what interests them—that you simultaneously, for once, make an inventory of values.

**HD** Near the end of the book, in the chapter on economy, you discuss the way in which the world itself emits values, how the world emits morality. You write, "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".<sup>11</sup> This idea isn't disconnected from previous thinkers, such as Jakob von Uexküll, for whom values are necessary for organisms to differentiate between the things in their environment and to adapt to them. But, for me, morality is such a loaded term, tied to a history of good and evil, which Nietzsche's philosophical project was dedicated to eliminating. Why return to morality?

**BL** Value is in the world. That is a general principle for all the modes, it starts with [REP], which is Whitehead's argument.<sup>12</sup> Value has been withdrawn from the world as a modernist operation, which is very bizarre—even for the moderns in practice—and, of course, very bizarre for all other collectives. Value is a property of the world. I use morality because there is morality in all of the modes—there is an inner fiction. The difference between good and bad is what defines the mode. And law has a different definition of morality than religion, etc.

But there is one mode that is very difficult to disentangle, and that is the economy, which is a big problem. As long as we cannot disentangle economy, economies, and economics, it's very difficult to move out of the modernist situation because it's very difficult to encounter the other agencies. This problem does not occur in

biology, chemistry, or physics, where very few people encounter the world. Even though the naturalist, scientific reductionist worldview weighs heavily, its weight is nothing compared to that of the economy. So the real enemy is the economy. Not because it's a bad science—it's an interesting science—but because it makes so many assumptions about what it is to be political, what it is to be legal, what it is to be in the world, and so forth. So morality is one way of re-visiting the question of the optimum, which has been placed at the centre of the economy. It's one way of revisiting scruples. Morality in this scheme of things, even though it's the last one on the list, has a somewhat grandiose position—although it's simultaneously a local one—because there is morality all over the place, in many different modes. I'm very interested in the morality of law and religion. I thought it was useful to re-emphasize that when we arrive in this domain of economy, the first absolutely essential question is morality, not under any sort of final definition which would be a calculation—that's the behavioural definition, the calculation of pleasure and pain, invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century—but as worry, doubts, scruples. I try every time to find a very traditional definition, and to give it a little twist. So the scruple about ends and means is very traditional, but it was unfairly limited to humans.

I have to say that the whole part on the economy is the one that is in the most need of re-drafting, because I went at it too bluntly. I tried to be subtler in the other chapters, but here I approach it fighting, in part because the enemy is so strong. The question of science is, in fact, a piece of cake compared to the economy, because we are more deeply entrenched in second nature than in first nature. When I was in Karlsruhe last week, I showed my students a Greenpeace campaign that said, "If the world was a bank, it would already have been saved." This is a magnificent motto.

So, ethics is a beautiful way to organize philosophy, but the aim here is very small, which is to say, if you want to re-populate the economy, you have to re-populate the passionate interests, or everything difficult to access from economic theory or an anthropology of economy. To re-populate organizational theory is extremely difficult because organizational theory is very difficult to foreground. How do you allocate resources to take an economic turn—the place where the numbers of people interested in it would be maximum, and where the people mobilized is minimum. That's the part where morality has to take over, so to speak.

But your question is important. The argument is actually that morality is a sum of all the other modes, because every one of them carries this difference between good and bad which does not wait for the mode of morality to arise. The great difficulty with the project in general is that many terms are multi-modal, and yet specialized by the way they have been elaborated into history. The reading has to be transversal. We are now imagining other ways to do this, to get into the writing. What Christophe Leclercq, the project manager for AIME, did recently was publish all the crossings in one column on the AIME website, so you can see all the interconnections, which gives another idea of the project.<sup>13</sup>

**HD** In your Royal Academy Lecture in the Humanities and Social Sciences called “The Affects of Capitalism,” you make a strong argument for how the economy, under a capitalist framework, now occupies the position of a modern transcendent principle.<sup>14</sup> Can you say more about the relationship between capitalism and economy?

**BL** I’m getting at this question from the scientific studies of economics, of economics as a science, and not from the fight against capitalism on the left. I’m deeply suspicious of the massive agency that is attributed to capitalism, which is a bit like Gaia. So, I think that this Greenpeace slogan “If the world was a bank it would already have been saved” is very true, but true because of a philosophical investment made in capitalism by both the enemy and by the proponent. My line has been deflationary. Let’s limit the numbers of things that you can attribute to capitalism and let’s distribute them and see what’s actually happening. This is what the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde did, and I published a little book on Tarde in relation to that.<sup>15</sup> I take this approach out of an irritation towards leftism, but also an irritation regarding the empirical realm. I mean, how do you study capitalism if it’s too big, if it’s too powerful, if it’s too integrated, if it’s too coherent? When there are so many things attributed to capitalism, there is also the danger of paralysis. This is dangerous when you link it to geo-engineering, Gaia, and the Anthropocene because there is an irreversible trajectory built around the link between capitalism and geo-engineering as an answer to the crisis as a Plan B (one I hope might be reversible). Hacking, cutting into pieces, distributing, banalizing, and limiting capitalism is, for me, the same sort of thing I did with science. I mean: don’t overdo it, don’t exaggerate what you grant, even if you are fighting it. With science, it’s clearer; people who fight against the expansion of objectivity and the danger of techno-science, even though they think it’s a critique of science, say nothing about science itself. Science is linked to networks and small things. My bourgeois, provincial, French attitude is that when something is networked, you can do something to it and something against it; but you cannot do anything against what is assumed to be overpowering, immense, definitive, and gigantic.

## Notes

- 1 Nafeez Ahmed, "Nasa-funded Study: Industrial Civilisation Headed for 'Irreversible Collapse?'" *The Guardian*, 14 March 2014, [www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists).
- 2 Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). The digital platform includes notes, bibliography, index, glossary, and supplementary documentation at [www.modesofexistence.org](http://www.modesofexistence.org).
- 3 Charles D. Keeling was a chemist whose research measuring CO<sub>2</sub> levels at the Mauna Loa Observatory led to the discovery of anthropogenic climate change. See Charles D. Keeling, "Rewards and Penalties of Monitoring the Earth," *Annual Review of Energy and the Environment* 23 (November 1998): 25–82.
- 4 "What Aesthetic for the Sciences of Gaia?" Festival La Novela, Toulouse, France, 9 October 2013.
- 5 Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014).
- 6 Clive Hamilton, *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
- 7 Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature*, 2013 Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/486>.
- 8 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 9 See [www.modesofexistence.org/crossings](http://www.modesofexistence.org/crossings).
- 10 [PRE] is defined as that which "is necessary in the inquiry since it allows us to go back to the interpretive keys which allow us to prepare for what comes after: in the [NET] mode, which describes networks, it allows for the definition of the minimal metalanguage necessary for the deployment of modes." See Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.
- 11 Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 456; emphasis in original.
- 12 [REP] is the abbreviation for reproduction, "a particular mode of existence that does not overlap in any way with the notions of world, nature or the physical, but which brings out existents' capacity to provide for their subsistence by running the risk of reprise and reproduction. Even though this mode has been shaped by the question of forces and living beings, it bears on all societies and thus on institutions, corporate bodies etc., too." See Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.
- 13 See [www.modesofexistence.org/questions-common-to-each-of-the-crossings](http://www.modesofexistence.org/questions-common-to-each-of-the-crossings).
- 14 This lecture is online at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i-ZKfShovs&ntz=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i-ZKfShovs&ntz=1).
- 15 Bruno Latour and Vincent Antonin Lèpinay, *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009).