Critiquing Latour’s Explanation of Climate Change Denial: Moving Beyond the Modernity/Anthropocene Binary

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Abstract
The concept of the Anthropocene has reintroduced politics of denial at the centre of critical studies of international relations. This article interrogates Bruno Latour’s explanation of climate change denial with reference to an ontological difference between Modernity and the Anthropocene, together with his advocacy for a new language beyond the Modern gaze. Our aims are twofold: to disclose how Latour’s posthuman critique risk reproducing prevalent forms of climate change denial in the global North, and to question what falls outside Latour’s dualistic frame: the heterogenous ways through which climate change and the Anthropocene is met across the globe; the ambiguous relation with nature through which modernity was formed; the modernist genealogy of Anthropocene discourse, and lastly how discourses of global governance have absorbed posthumanist critique in its attempt to naturalise postcolonial power relations. At stake, we argue, is critical theory’s paradoxical complicity in the denialism it seeks to critique.

Keywords
Anthropocene, modernity, Latour, climate change denial, posthumanism, resilience

Résumé
Une critique de l’explication de Latour sur le déni du changement climatique : dépasser l’opposition modernité/anthropocène
Le concept de l’anthropocène a remis la dimension politique du déni au cœur des études critiques en Relations internationales. Cet article examine l’explication donnée par Bruno Latour sur le déni du changement climatique, laquelle fait référence à une différence ontologique entre la modernité
et l’anthropocène, ainsi que son plaidoyer pour un nouveau langage dépassant la perspective moderne. Notre objectif est double : premièrement, montrer comment la critique post-humaine de Latour risque de reproduire des formes courantes de déni du changement climatique dans l’hémisphère Nord ; deuxièmement, interroger ce qui échappe au cadre dual posé par Latour : l’hétérogénéité des positions sur le changement climatique et l’anthropocène à travers le monde ; la relation ambiguë qu’entretient la modernité avec la nature, et par laquelle elle s’est constituée ; la généalogie moderniste du discours sur l’anthropocène ; et enfin, comment le discours de la gouvernance mondiale a absorbé la critique post-humaniste en cherchant à naturaliser les relations de pouvoir postcoloniales. Ce qui est en jeu, selon nous, c’est la complicité paradoxaute de la théorie critique avec le « dénialisme » qu’elle entend critiquer.

Mots-clés
déni du changement climatique, anthropocène, modernité

Resumen
Crítica a la explicación de Latour sobre la negación del cambio climático: más allá de la dualidad Modernidad/Antropoceno
El concepto de Antropoceno ha reentroducido las políticas de la negación en el centro de los estudios críticos de las relaciones internacionales. Este artículo cuestiona la explicación que hace Bruno Latour de la negación del cambio climático con referencia a la diferencia ontológica entre Modernidad y Antropoceno, junto a su defensa de un nuevo lenguaje más allá de la mirada moderna. Nuestro propósito es doble: revelar cómo la crítica poshumanista de Latour corre el riesgo de reproducir formas prevalentes de negación del cambio climático en el Norte global, y cuestionar lo que queda fuera del marco dualista de Latour: las diferentes formas en las que se encara el cambio climático y el Antropoceno en todo el mundo; la ambigua relación con la naturaleza en la que se fraguó la Modernidad; la genealogía modernista del discurso sobre el Antropoceno; y finalmente cómo los discursos sobre la gobernanza global han absorbido la crítica poshumanista en su intento de naturalizar las relaciones de poder postcoloniales. Lo que está en juego, sostenemos, es la paradójica complicidad de esta teoría con el negacionismo que pretende criticar.

Palabras clave
negación del cambio climático, Antropoceno, Modernidad

Introduction
In discussions of the Anthropocene, we are often told that the Human Age is no place for binaries. In contrast to standard portrayals of the Modern world (with a capital M), the Anthropocene is frequently described as an interconnected, complex, holistic, and relational world, rendering the modernist dependence on binaries obsolete.1 In this framing,
the Anthropocene is often presented as ontologically different from a homogenising Modernity, a decolonial and posthumanist project in and of itself. According to Bruno Latour, the Anthropocene represents an acute rejection of what he defines as the central aim of the Modern project: to detach and estrange humanity from ‘nature as a process’, to divide wholes and relations into binary parts, and to create a separate and purified human realm. For Latour, the omnipresence of the Modern gaze today constitutes the principle cause of climate change denial: ‘an exotic vision of nature that Europe, and then more generally the West, has sold to the rest of the world as the real, earthly, natural, material world’.

In this article, we aim to question the attention afforded to climate change denial as an epistemological practice that Latour and others articulate. By doing so, we hope to question the hopes placed in disclosing the limits of our Modern epistemology and to problematising the notion that beyond Modernity invariably lies an ethical and decolonial figure of posthumanity. In other words, we aim to query into what politics the Modernity/Anthropocene binary presuppose, produce, and in particular deny. Our ambition is to shine light on some of the limits that the focus on epistemic climate change denial places on our politics, epistemologies, and subjectivities; to show how a particular style of critique, exemplified and influenced by Latour, risks reproducing the climate change denial that we all so desperately seek to disclose.

In contrast to Latour’s framing of climate change denial either as a form of propaganda that is being peddled to the global commons by a loosely defined ‘elite’ or as a cognitive blind spot inherent to the Modern gaze, we define denial not as ignorance – a lack of, or limit to knowledge – but rather as a socially mediated organisation of knowledge. In this, we follow Kari-Mari Norgaard’s seminal analysis of climate change denial in the global North, in which she conceptualises denial as an intermediary variable that is located in-between epistemology and politics. According to Norgaard, denial operates not to block established knowledge on climate change, but to minimise ‘the psychological, political or moral implications that conventionally follow’. As Norgaard convincingly argues, denial is ‘a skill, an art’ mediated by ‘cognitive traditions’, or moral codes, whose principal effect is not necessarily the rejection of knowledge, but guidance on how to live in, and at times enjoy, a consumerist capitalist society with the knowledge that one’s actions are to detriment of the planet.

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2. Bruno Latour, Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 71.
3. Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’.
4. Ibid., 319.
5. Rothe Delft, ‘Global Security in a Posthuman Age? IR and the Anthropocene Challenge’, in Reflections on the Posthuman in International Relations: The Anthropocene, Security and Ecology, ed. Clara Eroukhmanoff and Matt Harker (Bristol: E-International Relations Publications, 2017), 87–101.
6. Ibid.
7. Kari Marie Norgaard, Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 11.
8. Ibid.
To analyse how the Anthropocene/Modernity binary, and its use to explain and define denial, contributes to the ‘art’ of denial that Norgaard speaks of, we engage in a close reading of Latour’s key discussions on climate change denial: His 2017 monograph *Down to Earth*, in which he discusses the strategic use of climate change denial in political discourse; his keynote at the 2016 Millennium conference on Failure and Denial in World Politics, which Anna M. Agathangelou has described as a ‘genealogy of International Relation’s denial’ of the Anthropocene, and lastly Latour’s 2017 intervention in *Theory, Culture and Society*’s special issue on Geosocial Formations, in which Latour places his hopes in the formation of a new language, capable of transgressing the epistemic limits of Modernity. The object of our critique is not Latour’s oeuvre as a whole, but rather the perception of and explanation of denial that he has articulated in recent years. While his exposition of denial builds conceptually on previous works, it is important to note that it at times diverges from it. In particular, the ‘paradox of the moderns’ that Latour astutely identifies in *We Have Never been Modern*, is articulated to a lesser extent in these works. We focus on Latour because of the privileged position his work on the Anthropocene, as well as on denial, has attained in the field of International Relations (IR). To showcase this influence, and to exemplify the style of critique that Latour contributes to, we supplement our reading of Latour with the rejoining articles of both the two special issues in which Latour’s interventions were published.

To be sure, not all articles published within these special issues are examples of the style of critique we direct attention to in this article. Indeed, included in both special issues are explicit problematisations of the Modernity/Anthropocene binary. Building in part on these contributions, an emergent body of critical studies has begun to question the Modernity/Anthropocene binary and its hold on both academic and popular imaginary. As these studies have shown, the relationship between modernity (with a lower case letter) and the Anthropocene is complex, varied and historically interconnected. Some commentators have even questioned the terminological use of the Anthropocene in the singular,
calling rather for the recognition of ‘Multiple Anthropocenes’\textsuperscript{14}. This article aligns itself with and builds on this emergent critique, contributing with a discussion of how the Modernity/Anthropocene binary inadvertently risks presupposing and consolidating a hegemonic form of climate change denial expressed across the contemporary global North.

Our method is discourse analytic. In other words, we read Modernity, the Anthropocene, and denial as signifiers, in order to examine how the Anthropocene as a geological era unfolds and takes place in our current political vocabulary. We do this by tracing which signifiers these notions are associated with, and by searching for competing, potentially conflicting articulations. Inspired by Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the ‘threshold’\textsuperscript{15}, our goal is to showcase and make visible ‘zones of indistinction’:\textsuperscript{16} to unsettle meanings and binaries that at first may appear solid (between Modernity and the Anthropocene, denial and knowledge respectively). Our methodology departs from a simple recognition: that the Anthropocene is not a neutral concept. In Simon Dalby’s words, it signifies less a distinct geological period than ‘a lightening rod for political and philosophical arguments’.\textsuperscript{17} Not only is there ubiquitous contention as to the Anthropocene’s origin\textsuperscript{18} (and if it has even arrived\textsuperscript{19}), as a concept and a reality, the Anthropocene is mired in power relations, both colonial and biopolitical.\textsuperscript{20} Given its elusive and elastic character, it is, we believe, of utmost importance that we attune ourselves to how the Anthropocene is framed. As Dalby notes in an influential article on the Anthropocene’s framing, framing matters in political and academic discussion; it organises thought and facilitates certain forms of identity and conduct.\textsuperscript{21} According to Judith Butler, frames function not only as a guide to interpretation, they also bring forth that which they mean to capture, to frame. As such, frames hold a performative dimension.\textsuperscript{22} For Butler, frames enact this function by producing boundaries, thus inevitably invoking a ‘certain leakage’, an ‘outside, which ma[kes] the very sense of

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\item \textsuperscript{14} For e.g. Jack Amoureux and Varun Reddy, ‘Multiple Anthropocenes: Pluralizing Space-Time as a Response to “the Anthropocene”’, \textit{Globalizations} 18, no. 6 (2021): 929–946.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Giorgio Agamben, \textit{The Coming Community} (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 66.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Simon Dalby, ‘Framing the Anthropocene: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’, \textit{The Anthropocene Review} 13, no. 1 (2015): 34. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019615618681
\item \textsuperscript{18} Scott Hamilton, ‘The Measure of All Things? The Anthropocene as a Global Biopolitics of Carbon’, \textit{European Journal of International Relations} 24, no. 1 (2016): 45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116683831.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Simpson, ‘The Anthropocene as Colonial Discourse’, 54; Cameron Harrington, ‘The Ends of the World: International Relations and the Anthropocene’, \textit{Millennium: Journal of International Studies} 44, no. 3 (2016): 482. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816683745
\item \textsuperscript{20} Harrington, ‘The Ends of the World: International Relations and the Anthropocene’, 483–4; Agathangelou, ‘Bruno Latour and Ecology Politics: Poetics of Failure and Denial in IR’, \textit{Millennium: Journal of International Studies} 44, no. 3 (2016): 321–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816643173
\item \textsuperscript{21} Dalby, ‘Framing the Anthropocene’, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Judith Butler, \textit{Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?} (New York City and London: Verso, 2009).
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the inside possible and recognisable.\textsuperscript{23} In our analysis, we follow Butler’s conceptualisation, interrogating what is placed inside and outside the frame, as well as the points where the inside and the outside come into contact.

With this methodological stance, we undoubtedly risk reproducing some of the things we critique Latour and others for – the focus on language, epistemic limits, and the potential denial of our own complicity in climate change denial. Nonetheless, we believe this is a task worth undertaking as it enables us to direct attention to a series of issues that we hold to be of political and epistemological import. If, as Latour puts forth in his Millennium keynote address, the defining task of Modernity consists of hiding the mutually constitutive, entangled and ambiguous relations in and through which we are formed\textsuperscript{24}– then, we argue, the epistemological binary between a singular Modernity and a politically singular Anthropocene remains distinctly modernist – a part of the very project that Latour seeks to critique. As such, we contend that the use of the Modernity/Anthropocene binary renders invisible the bricolage\textsuperscript{25} that is our world: i.e. the complex and plural realities of both the Anthropocene and modernity; the ambiguous and entangled relation with nature through which modernity historically has been formed; the modernist genealogy of Anthropocene discourse, not to mention how contemporary discourses of global governance’s have made use of Anthropocene language to naturalise postcolonial power relations. As we will argue, the delineation of the world into parts – drawing boundaries between who denies and who is open to the Anthropocene – further risks concealing the universality of climate change denial in the global North, mistaking recognition of climate change for political agency.

Our argument is structured as follows. First, we analyse how denial is framed in critical IR studies of the Anthropocene, paying particular attention to Latour’s definition of denial, as well as to the hopes Latour and others place in a new language beyond the human-nature distinction. Secondly, we discuss what is left outside of the Modernity/Anthropocene binary, relating, inter alia, Latour’s exclusions to the forms of denial observed by Norgaard. We close the article by engaging the political and epistemological stakes actualised in and by this particular framing of the Anthropocene.

Inside the Frame: The Modernist Globe vs the Anthropocene Earth

On the outset, it is important to note that for Latour climate change denial is neither a periphery nor a separate issue of global politics. On the contrary, as Latour underscores in his most explicit engagement with climate change denial, \textit{Down to Earth}, global politics writ large is permeated and overdetermined by climate change denial.\textsuperscript{26} According to Latour, ‘we can understand nothing about the politics of the last 50 years if we do not put the question of climate change and its denial front and center. Without the idea that we

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\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{24} Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 311.

\textsuperscript{25} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference} (London: Routledge, 2001), 360.

\textsuperscript{26} Latour, \textit{Down to Earth}.
have entered into a New Climatic Regime, we cannot understand the explosion of inequalities, the scope of deregulation, the critique of globalization, or, most importantly, the panicky desire to return to the old protections of the nation-state’. Given these stakes, it is curious to note that Latour does not offer a single coherent definition of denial. On the contrary, as we will attempt to showcase, he discusses denial in three related, yet potentially conflicting, ways: 1) As an effect of human agency, as expressed in his analysis of contemporary political communication. 2) As an effect of human ignorance, as expressed in his discussions of Modernist epistemology, and 3) as an effect of geological agency, as expressed in Latour’s thoughts of the emergence of the Anthropocene as the underlying cause of climate change denial. In this section, we discuss the first two definitions of denial – which Latour locates in politics of Modernity. Latour’s third form of denial will be discussed in the subsequent section, where we will argue that it destabilises the seemingly straightforward distinction between the Anthropocene and Modernity that the former two definitions rely upon.

**Strategic Denial**

In *Down to Earth*, Latour talks most frequently of denial in strategic terms, as an effect of human agency. Denial is here defined as an information campaign orchestrated by an unspecified ‘elite’, the ‘superrich’ who have invested ‘billions of dollars’ in order to keep the world’s ‘ordinary people’ within ‘a fog of disinformation’, ignorant of ‘one massive fact – the mutation of the climate’. Former US President Donald Trump is repeatedly addressed as the symbolic figure of this form of denial, and he represents for Latour the first explicit rejection of both the ‘concept of globalization’ and that of ‘solidarity’. More than once, Latour describes the global masses as being separated from reality, as enjoying their own demise, ignorant of the fact that they are being led into ‘the abyss’. Metaphorically, he refers to the masses as ‘floating in dreamland’ and as relishing ‘the waking dream of the American way of life’.

The political effects of this strategic form of denial are plural, Latour argues. On the one hand, denial is taken to reduce the plurality of the world into one, imposing ‘a single vision, entirely provincial, proposed by a few individuals, representing a very small number of interests, limited to a few measuring instruments, to a few standards and protocols’. According to Latour, this vision not

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27. Ibid., 1.
28. Ibid., 17.
29. Ibid., 24.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 4.
34. Ibid., 18.
35. Ibid., 7.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 9.
38. Ibid., 12.
only homogenises the world, it also separates humans from one another other, intensifying and producing global divisions. Within this vision, perceived fears – of migration\(^\text{39}\), of loss of identity\(^\text{40}\), of rising inequality\(^\text{41}\) – are associated with certain populations rather than with a changing climate, leading to the rise of populist politics\(^\text{42}\) (‘Trumpism’, in Latour’s terminology\(^\text{43}\)) and in extension to the installment of walls and ‘impenetrable borders’\(^\text{44}\). Moreover, Latour maintains that the strategic form of denial separates the global populace from the Earth, detaching the world’s ‘ordinary people’\(^\text{45}\) from ‘the material conditions of their lives’\(^\text{46}\) thus naturalising the larger Modernist project in which Latour situates this form of strategic denial. Rehearsing a traditional definition of Modernity as based on a distinction between human and nature,\(^\text{47}\) Latour speaks of denial as a loss of ‘sensitivity to nature as a process’\(^\text{48}\): ‘a great displacement’\(^\text{49}\), through which Modernity has been able to ‘tear [it]self away from the primordial soil’\(^\text{50}\).

**Epistemic Denial**

In his keynote address at the 2016 *Millennium* conference, Latour engages this sense of displacement at length, locating within it the ‘genealogy of denial’\(^\text{51}\) that he observes as the founding element of both Modernity and of IR as an academic discipline.\(^\text{52}\) Less an effect of current human agency, expressed in the form of particular political information campaigns, Latour articulates this second form of denial as a static, consistent and foundational facet of Modern epistemology. For Latour, denial in this more foundational sense is located in Modernity’s ‘confusion between the Globe and the Earth’.\(^\text{53}\) While the *Globe* signifies, according to Latour, the modern view of nature as fixed – ‘a universal, unproblematic, and uncoded category that is supposed to mean the same thing for everybody’\(^\text{54}\) – the Anthropocene *Earth* is described as something that can only be ‘experienced’.\(^\text{55}\) In Latour’s framework, the *Earth* happens to us – and with us. It intervenes in us, it is lived, emergent and becoming. For Latour, it is this becoming that the modernist *Globe* denies, exacting an ‘enormous price of breaking with all reasonable experience’\(^\text{56}\).

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 10-20.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{47}\) Hamilton, ‘Climate Change Signals the End of the Social Sciences’.
\(^{48}\) Latour, *Down to Earth*, 71.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 72.
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
\(^{51}\) Agathangelou, ‘Bruno Latour and Ecology Politics’, 322.
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
\(^{53}\) Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 307.
\(^{54}\) Agathangelou, ‘Bruno Latour and Ecology Politics’, 308.
\(^{55}\) Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 319.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 319.
In contrast to the Earth, the concept of the Globe supports a fantasy that the natural world can be controlled, categorised, and divided into distinct ‘parts’, with neat causal chains located between them. Human manipulation of these chains is described as a Modern fantasy. Indeed Latour defines such practices as the principal activity of modern sovereignty and of the sovereign gaze: a practice of localisation, through which ‘any entity – human or non-human – is defined as distinct from any other and as occupying a certain chunk of space [. . . purporting] the idea that entities are impenetrable to one another, and are, for that reason, delineated by precise boundaries that define their identity’. As Latour notes, the modern sovereign gaze perceives the world as a machine, and as such, it also presupposes a ‘constructor, a planner, or some antecedent overbearing figure; some instance that plays the role of assembling the parts in advance’. According to Latour, this position has historically been given to and claimed by Europe, making, as we shall see, Modernity a colonial project by default and the Anthropocene à priori decolonial.

In his keynote address, Latour refers to the Modern form of life through the well-known figure of Homo oeconomicus, a figure he claims is naturalised in Modernity: ‘the link between the Economy, naturalism, and globalization is so profound that the name of a species of human has been given to Homo oeconomicus, worthy successor in biological evolution to its outdated predecessor Homo sapiens’. In his recent comments on the global response to the coronavirus pandemic, Latour defined statistics – i.e. ‘population management on a territorial grid seen from above and led by the power of experts’– as the principal method through which Homo oeconomicus is governed and governs. Here we also learn that this figure blocks us from our true humanity, namely our relationality and codependence to humans and non-humans alike: ‘the associations between many actors, most of whom do not have human forms’. Such descriptions articulate not merely a radical separation between humanity and nature in Modernity, but more fundamentally, that humans in Modernity have taken the place of nature. For Latour, Modernity invariably produces a dislocation between our experience of the Earth and the concepts and tools through which we engage the Globe. Through our modernist epistememe, the Earth is translated into the Globe, and ultimately into ourselves, Homo oeconomicus: the ‘great displacement’, which Latour refers to in Down to Earth.
language – initially employed to understand both the world and ourselves – has, according to Latour, now become a cognitive and political limit, one that we are called upon, from across the field of critical theory, to transgress. As Latour argues, there is an urgent need to ‘detach the figure of the emerging Earth from that of the Globe’.  

Climate change denial is in this second form articulated in both epistemological and ontological terms. To live in denial is not simply a question of lack of understanding or of being irrational, it is, as Latour proclaims in *Down to Earth*: ‘not a matter of learning how to repair cognitive deficiencies’. Rather Latour perceives denial as a matter of living ‘an alternative world’, placed within a Modern *Globe* by the Modern gaze. To reject this world, politics becomes a question of perception, of rejecting the Modern gaze, in contrast ‘perceiving a landscape that can be explored in concert’. Such words give testament to the performative dimension that Latour attributes to both epistemology and language, which is why Latour places great hopes in the establishment of a new language, famously exemplified by James Lovelock’s writings on Gaia (a concept that Latour describes in terms similar to *the Earth*: heterogeneous, plural, complex and interconnected). The stakes of this new language are high, Latour informs, because without it, we will not only remain dead to the world, we will also continue to ‘empty [. . .the Earth/Gaia] of any meaning’. In opposition to Lovelock’s ‘new language’, Latour describes the old and self-proclaimed neutral universal language of science as ‘perverse’, blind not only to the contingent and interconnected world in which we live (dividing it up into parts) but also to the limitations inherent in language itself, what Latour refers to as the ‘tropism’ of language: the paradoxical and insurmountable gap between language and reality, the inevitable contingency and incompleteness of any language.

In words that contrast significantly to his descriptions of Modernist language, Latour describes Lovelock’s prose as a language that is open to its ‘tropism’, to its own limitations: ‘a fully reflexive attempt at including the difficulty of writing in the writing itself’. If *the Earth* is contingent and adaptable, so is Lovelock’s prose, Latour informs us, directing our attention to how ‘ceaselessly’ Lovelock ‘modifies [his] metaphor’ and how often he ‘change[s] his position’. Most importantly, if the *Earth* is interconnected – made up not of parts, but of relations – then Latour maintains that Lovelock’s prose allows us to see and identify these relations, as well as to enable them: to dissolve the distinctions between parts and wholes, between ‘the inside and the outside of any given entity’. This is the promise of Lovelock’s prose, according to Latour: not only a new language, but a toolbox, a method, that would open up humanity to *the Earth*, as

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66. Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 308, emphasis in the original.
67. Ibid., 25.
68. Latour, *Down to Earth*, 25, emphasis in the original.
69. Ibid, emphasis added.
70. Bruno Latour, ‘Why Gaia Is Not a God of Totality’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 69. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276416652700
71. Ibid., 69.
72. Ibid., 71.
73. Ibid., 70.
74. Ibid., 70.
75. Ibid., 72.
well as transform the human **Globe** into the earthly **Gaia**.76 According to Latour, ‘Lovelock describes a planet that is alive because his prose is alive’77, again directing attention to language’s performative dimension. By adopting a living language, rather than science’s ‘technical and literal language’78, it is as if the **Earth** comes to life. Elsewhere, Latour has described the formation of this new language as our most fundamental task: ‘The problem becomes for all of us in philosophy, science or literature, how do we tell such a story?’79

If we gaze outside of Latour’s writings, we find numerous examples of this style of critique throughout the 2016 *Millennium* special issue and beyond. Cameron Harrington’s characterisation of the field of International Relations as a ‘failure [. . .] to think of a different world; not in a utopic sense of building a perfect political community, but of thinking through the realization that we exist in a world that is far more complex, interactive, and varied than IR has yet imagined’80, is but one article that makes this argument explicit. Other eloquent examples include Anthony Burke, Stefanie Fishel, Audra Mitchell, Simon Dalby and Daniel J. Levine’s widespread manifesto for a new Planet Politics: for a ‘political imagination that can rise from the ashes of IR’s canonical texts’81 as well as Kathryn Yusoff’s stipulation that ‘geopower [i.e. the Earth’s agency] names a zone of indetermination that **challenges us to invent a whole new language** for what happens when strata are mixed in geosocial relations’82. Worth mentioning is also Elizabeth Grosz’ call for social

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76. Lovelock’s method of observation and decomposition is described by Latour in the following passage: ‘Step 1, choose an entity A to start with – a phenomenon like bacteria respiration, or crustal rock weathering; step 2, shift attention to its surroundings (precisely, as we shall see, what Tyrrell, intoxicated by the metaphor of “selfish genes”, forbids himself to do); step 3, detect in those surroundings what transformation the entity A has induced; step 4, detect in those surroundings what transformation they have on A; step 5, compound the reciprocal effects by a gross use of the notion of negative or positive feedback, not because you believe there is a machine and an engineer (more of this later), but just to make sure the two are “closely coupled”; step 6, a tricky step, now, choose this ersatz of a feedback loop as the new starting point; step 7, start again so that “entity plus surroundings” are now replaced by loops interfering with other loops; step 8 (the most important one in my view), anxiously revise the description so as to make sure the loops upon loops are not added to one another as if they were one Whole above the entities you started with. (This is why the terms “non-additive” and “partially coherent” in Haraway’s definition quoted above are so important.) If you keep using such a trick, what will happen? The distinction between the inside and the outside of any given entity will be erased.’ For more details, see Bruno Latour, ‘Why Gaia Is Not a God of Totality’, 72.

77. Ibid., 73, emphasis added.

78. Ibid., 70.

79. Bruno Latour, ‘Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene’, *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 3. Available at: http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/128-FELSKI-HOLBERG-NLH-FINAL.pdf. Last accessed October 25, 2021.

80. Harrington, ‘The Ends of the World’, 481.

81. Anthony Burke et al., ‘Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 523. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816636674

82. Kathryn Yusoff, ‘Geosocial Strata’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276416688543
science to not ‘write for and of objects’, but ‘with them, or between them’\textsuperscript{83}. Together these articles make visible a shared desire within critical IR studies and beyond, a desire towards a new language, one that would not only attune ourselves more correctly to the world, but in the process also alter the human condition, ushering in a ‘new humanism, or posthumanism, that can grapple with the reality that we exist as subjects who must rely upon an environment that does not need us as much as we need it’\textsuperscript{84}, as argued by Burke et al. For Grosz, this new language represents a possibility to move ‘beyond biopolitics’\textsuperscript{85}, to open the human condition to the ‘inhuman, the geologic and the inorganic’\textsuperscript{86}. Grosz describes the language of posthumanity as a form of resistance in and of itself\textsuperscript{87}.

Although the contents and expressions that this new posthuman subject will take remains a topic of debate – as the Planet Politics manifesto asks: ‘What values must this new subject have? What must it love and protect?’\textsuperscript{88} – It is throughout these articles ubiquitously referred to in singular terms. At least in terms of its political effects, which more often than not is pre-defined as opposite to the politics of separation, homogeneity and exploitation taken to characterise Modernity. As Eva Lövbrand et al. has observed, many have been optimistic about this new figure of humanity, seeing in it the possibility of a ‘“post-social ontology” that merges all human difference and plurality into a single notion of planetary Anthropos’.\textsuperscript{89} Scott Hamilton’s observation that the subject of the Anthropocene ‘encapsulates a deepening shift in the way that a human self represents itself, ontologically and epistemologically, in the world today [. . .] a shift away from subjectivity as we know it, into something new: from the subjectivity of the individual, Cartesian ‘I’, to the subjectivity of the collective, planetary “We”’\textsuperscript{90} is another clear example of this logic. In previous remarks, Latour has argued similarly, calling for the establishment of a ‘common geostory’\textsuperscript{91}, often described as demanding an active ‘re-imagining [of] a non-anthropocentric world’\textsuperscript{92}.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{grosz} Elizabeth Grosz, Kathryn Yusoff, and Nigel Clark, ‘An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz: Geopower, Inhumanism and the Biopolitical’, \textit{Theory, Culture & Society} 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276417689899
\bibitem{burke} Burke et al., ‘Planet Politics’, 523.
\bibitem{grosz_interview} Grosz et al., ‘An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz’, 137.
\bibitem{ibid} Ibid., 138.
\bibitem{ibid_2} Ibid., 137.
\bibitem{burke_planet} Burke et al., ‘Planet Politics’, 523.
\bibitem{lovbrand} Eva Lövbrand et al., ‘Who Speaks for the Future of Earth? How Critical Social Science Can Extend the Conversation of the Anthropocene’, \textit{Global Environmental Change} 32, (May 2015): 211–18, quoted in Scott Hamilton, ‘I Am Uncertain, but We Are Not: A New Subjectivity of the Anthropocene’, \textit{Review of International Studies} 45, no. 4 (2019): 609. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260215019000135. See also Eva Lövbrand, Malin Mobjörk and Rickard Söder, ‘The Anthropocene and the geo-political imagination: Re-writing Earth as political space’, Earth System Governance 4, (June 2020): 3–4 for a discussion on the normative dimensions of this style of critique, which they dub the ‘entangled world’ discourse.
\bibitem{hamilton} Scott Hamilton, ‘I Am Uncertain, but We Are Not’, 609.
\bibitem{latour} Latour, ‘Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene’, 3.
\bibitem{ghosn} Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy, \textit{Geostories: Another Architecture for the Environment Design Earth} (New York: Actar, 2018), 21.
\end{thebibliography}
Latour perceives the articulation of this story as decolonial by default, a ‘revolt’ not only of colonial subjects but also of ‘colonial objects – namely the ecological mutation’.93 The outcome of this story, Latour informs in Down to Earth, is the replacement of Modernity’s ‘statist’ and ‘unifying’94 Globe, with a ‘common’95 and ‘shareable’96 ‘atmospheric’97 (93) Earth.

In sum, what unites these accounts is their localisation of climate change denial in the seeming epistemological incommensurability of Modernity and the Anthropocene: in what Burke et al. describe, following Timothy Morton, as ‘a giant hole in the fabric of our understanding’.98 In doing so, they all, perhaps inadvertently, describe both Modernity and the Anthropocene as separate worlds, each following one uniform logic and one specific political temporality, each producing different and antithetical forms of lives: the Newtonian figure of Homo oeconomicus vs. the figure of a plural, relational, yet politically singular posthumanity. In other words, such descriptions depict Modernity and the Anthropocene – to borrow Latour’s terminology – as parts: ‘impenetrable to one another, and, for that reason, delineated by precise boundaries that define their identity’.99 Given the centrality that the delineation of wholes into parts is for Latour’s definition of Modernity, this logic of argumentation seems paradoxical, to say the least – an expression of the Modernity that Latour himself aims to recall. If Modernity is defined by its blindness, by its ability to see only itself, then, we argue, Latour’s continued dependence on binaries, on parts, not only risks reiterating Modernity’s particular biases, it also carries with it a series of additional slippages – issues of both political and epistemological weight that falls outside of the frame that Latour and the strand of critique influenced by him articulates. With reference to a diverse and growing critique of the Anthropocene/Modernity binary, we wish to address these slippages below.

Outside the Frame: Denial and the Ambiguous Relationship between Modernity and the Anthropocene

In particular, we wish to draw attention to three issues related to the Modernity/Anthropocene framing and its use to explain climate change denial. With the first issue we seek to problematise Latour’s description of the Anthropocene and Modernity as uniform parts, united by a shared vision, as in the case of Modernity, or by a shared political telos, as in the case of the Anthropocene. Here we argue that the dualistic binary precludes empirical studies of the heterogenous and multiple ways that both the Anthropocene and Modernity is enacted in and through contextualised practices. Our second concern relates to the ambiguous and constitutive relation between Latour’s

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93. Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 310.
94. Latour, Down to Earth, 93.
95. Ibid., 94, 101, 106.
96. Ibid., 98
97. Ibid., 93.
98. Burke et al., ‘Planet Politics’, 523.
99. Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 311, emphasis in the original.
alleged parts, which we claim is rendered invisible by the framing of a radical difference between Modernity and the Anthropocene. In particular, we relate this omission to Latour’s conceptualisation of climate change denial. Our third concern speaks to the hope Latour and others place in a new language that moves beyond the human-nature binary. In contrast to this hope, which is based on a view of Anthropocene language as decolonial by default, we contextualise the emergence of this new language in colonial ideational history and locate its current expression not in decolonial political action, but in key policy discourses within the global North.

**Parts**

Firstly, while Latour and others place great emphasis on the multiplicity that characterises the Anthropocene, as detailed above, we would argue that Latour’s dualistic binary nonetheless precludes empirical studies both of Modernity and the Anthropocene as a lived reality in the here and now, as well as of the politics actualised by the advent of climate change. Latour’s reliance on ideal types, on parts, renders his methodological practice remarkably similar to the practice of localisation that he so readily has criticised. As such, we submit, he risks rendering invisible, in his own terminology, the network of relations through which given objects, subjects and experiences are actualised. Prioritised instead are how such objects, subjects and/or experiences are positioned in relation to pre-existing theoretical models (i.e. Modernity or Gaia respectively). Latour’s discussion of climate change denial is a case in point, in which Latour argues, without empirical validation, that the entirety of the world’s populace is kept ignorant of climate change, subjected to a totalising information campaign designed by the ‘superrich’.

Another example is his discussion of green parties, who are diagnosed universally as inescapably Modern, unable to ‘get out of the trap set by the Moderns’ temporal arrow’. In contrast to such descriptions, a growing body of literature has attempted to make visible the varied practices and forms through which climate change and the Anthropocene is met across the globe. Rather than assume that the Anthropocene’s heterogeneity entails ‘a single set of normative implications’, or, for that matter, that a totalising vision of Modernity overdetermines all attempts at facing climate change, this literature has sought to give testament to ‘the multiplicity of experiences of climate change and extinction along with visions of political and ethical response’. As Audra Mitchell has argued, ‘between the two extremes suggested by our interlocutors – a radical, eliminative posthumanism and a relapse into unreflective humanism – there exists a wide space of relations’. As such, it is likely, as Bronizlaw Szerszynski

100. Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, 24.
101. Ibid., 46.
102. Ibid., 87.
103. Jack Amoureux and Varun Reddy, ‘Multiple Anthropocenes: Pluralizing Space – Time as a Response to “the Anthropocene”’, *Globalizations*, 16, no. 6 (2021): 929–946. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1864178
104. Audra Mitchell, ‘Posthuman Security: Reflections from an Open-ended Conversation’, in *Reflections on the Posthuman in International Relations: The Anthropocene, Security and Ecology*, ed. Clara Eroukhmanoff and Matt Harker (Bristol: E-International Relations Publications, 2017), 12.
cautions, that ‘the new epoch of the Earth will be “noisy”’,106 riven by power relations, old and new.107

As this literature has amply observed, examples of this variation abound. Delf Rothe, for one, has identified three competing discourses of the Anthropocene articulated within the global North.108 Interestingly, for the purposes of this article, Rothe associates one of these, planetary realism, with Latour’s writings on *Gaia*, which Rothe contextualises in an emerging governance paradigm centred on promoting resilience110. We will return to this context below, in our ambition to contextualise the hope Latour places in a new language. It is also worth mentioning Philippe Descola’s influential observation (referenced in David Chandler, Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden’s response to ‘Burke et al. Planet Politics Manifesto’)111, that human relations to nature can be represented by ‘four ontologies – animism, totemism, naturalism, and analogism’112 as well as Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright’s identification of four potential social formations emergent as a result of climate change. Notably, only one of Mann and Wainwright’s future scenarios, ‘Climate X’, appears to be decolonial in and of itself.113

Another body of literature looks not to predefined models – regardless of how many one might conceive – of how humans relate to nature, but see the relation as constituted performatively. The concept of ‘biocultural diversity’,114 which is gaining traction for instance in research on urban greenspace planning, attempts to capture this constitutive role, showcasing how human interaction with ‘nature’ is inherently heterogeneous, complex and takes on different expressions in different localities, modern or otherwise. While these different expressions are not isolated from grand narratives of modernity and geopolitics, they are neither reducible to them. As David Mosse has argued, no ideas – not Modernity, nor the Anthropocene – has ‘a life of their own, [no idea] can be mapped apart from [the] institutions, persons and intentions’115 that perform them.

106. Bronislaw Szerszynski, ‘Gods of the Anthropocene: Geo-Spiritual Formations in the Earth’s New Epoch’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276417691102
107. See Angela Last, ‘We Are the World? Anthropocene Cultural Production between Geopoetics and Geopolitics’.
108. Delf Rothe, ‘Governing the End Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 48, no. 2 (2020): 143–64.
109. Ibid., 154.
110. Ibid.
111. Chandler et al., ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene and Liberal Cosmopolitan IR: A Response to Burke et al.’s “Planet Politics”’, 206.
112. Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).
113. Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, ‘Climate Leviathan’, *Antipode* 45, no. 1 (2013): 5. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01018.x
114. Sanna Stålhammar and Ebba Brink, “‘Urban Biocultural Diversity’ as a Framework for Human–Nature Interactions: Reflections from a Brazilian Favela’, *Urban Ecosystems* (2020): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11252-020-01058-3
115. David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 10.
Perhaps paradoxically, Latour’s discussion of strategic denial arguably presupposes the performative dimension that Mosse identifies, in that it affords to human agency a constitutive, albeit paradoxical, role in respect to the Anthropocene. According to Latour, what characterises the global ‘elite’\textsuperscript{116} that he so readily criticises, is that they, in contrast to the world’s ‘ordinary people’\textsuperscript{117} have registered the impact of climate change: how a re-awakened Earth ‘has begun to stir, to quake, to be moved’\textsuperscript{118}. According to Latour, ‘we have to assume that these elites understood perfectly well that the warning [of global warming] was accurate’\textsuperscript{119}, and moreover, that they were ‘enlightened enough to register the warning, but not enlightened enough to share the results with the public’\textsuperscript{120}. Climate change denial is here presented both as an active human choice, and as an effect of Earthly agency, disturbing the neat dichotomy between the Modern Globe and the Anthropocene Earth. This is the third form of denial that we have identified in Latour’s writings. In this form of denial, Latour’s ‘elites’ seemingly occupy a position in-between the Globe and the Earth: too enlightened to be determined by the Modernist episteme – which, according to Latour, takes for granted a fixed and stable geology – yet not solidaric and open enough to land on Earth: ‘to register, to maintain, to cherish a maximum number of alternative ways of belonging to the world’\textsuperscript{121}. In this framing, the modernist Globe is not simply articulated as a distinct part, ontologically separated from the Earth/Gaia, but is rather portrayed as one of several potential effects of Gaia’s emergent movement. The human-nature dichotomy, which Latour claims is undergirding Modernity, thus appears less as a fixed binary (either present as in Modernity, or absent as in the Anthropocene) but rather as an elastic relation. As such, a multitude of potential performative expressions are made possible, one of which, if we are to believe Latour, is a totalising information campaign designed to normalise climate change denial among the global populace. It is, we would submit, the responsibility of critical social science to bear witness to this elasticity and to the multiplicity that comes with it – the noise and to the plurality of power relations of which it consists – rather than to reduce it into two predefined logics, posthuman or Modern.

Relations

Our second concern relates directly to the relation between Latour’s alleged parts, and how including this relation inside the frame, rather than placing it on the outside, drastically reformulates our definitions of denial. In this section we wish to direct attention to how modernity historically has been formed through an ambiguous, troubling, conflicting, and mutually constitutive relation with nature. As Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff’s historical exposé discloses\textsuperscript{122}, discourses of modernity (in the plural) never conceived of nature as merely lying outside of humanity as Latour and others maintain. Nature was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Latour, \textit{Down to Earth}, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 24.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 17.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 18.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 17.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 16.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Clark and Yusoff, ‘Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene’.
\end{itemize}
neither simply perceived as ‘a universal, unproblematic, and uncoded category that is supposed to mean the same thing for everybody’, as Latour proclaims in his keynote\(^1\), nor was it simply assumed to be a ‘backdrop to the human drama’, as per Harrington’s account\(^2\), or a mere ‘context’ that geopolitics could ‘take for granted’ as argued by Dalby\(^3\). Quite the contrary, as Clark and Yusoff submit: ‘questions of what it means to inhabit a deeply stratified, self-transformative and potentially catastrophic planet may be as constitutive of Western modernity as they are signatures of contemporaneity’\(^4\).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Michel Foucault’s periodisation of modernity coincides not only with the redefinition of the human as formed through dynamic biological processes but also with the geological discovery that the Earth itself – the ‘bands of rocky material’\(^5\) on which the Earth’s upper crust is composed – is equally historically and ontologically contingent. At the advent of modernity, Clark and Yusoff note, ‘geologists underwent a shift from classifying rocks as ‘natural kinds’ to categorising them based on the processes of historical formation they shared’\(^6\). In other words, what geoscience discovered was a ‘geosocial’ world: ‘a dynamic earth with multiple possibilities beyond its ‘actual’ state’\(^7\). As Clark and Yusoff argue, this recognition – that the Earth is radically contingent – was present in the very formation of modern social sciences, albeit with different emphases: From Hegel’s identification of the ‘long intervals between [geological] revolutions’\(^8\), via Fernand Braudel’s ‘systematic layering of the eventful “microhistory” of everyday life over the slower rhythms of material life’\(^9\), to more recent theorisations such as Donna Haraway’s Chthulucene\(^10\), and of course Latour’s Gaia-thesis\(^11\).

In other words, if Hegel’s attempt to establish a separate sphere of human experience indifferent to and isolated from geology is indeed exemplary of modernity, as Clark and Yusoff argue\(^12\), then we should understand modernity’s relation to nature, we submit, not simply as a relation of pure difference, but rather, borrowing from Agamben, as a relation of abandonment. This is important, we would maintain, as Agamben’s concept allows us to conceive of denial as an active and continuous suppression of knowledge, rather than as a state of ignorance or epistemological blindness, as per Latour’s account.

123. Latour, ‘Onus Orbis Terrarum’, 308.
124. Harrington, ‘The Ends of the World’, 488.
125. Dalby, ‘Framing the Anthropocene’, 33.
126. Clark and Yusoff, ‘Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene’, 5.
127. Ibid., 11.
128. Ibid., 11.
129. Ibid., 13.
130. Ibid., 4.
131. Ibid., 12.
132. Donna Haraway, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin’, Environmental Humanities 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–65. Available at: www.environmentalhumanities.org. Last accessed October 25, 2021.
133. Bruno Latour, ‘To Modernize or to Ecologize? That’s the Question’, in Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium, eds. N. Castree and B. Willems-Braun (London: Routledge, 1998), 221–42. Available at: http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/73-7TH-CITY-GB.pdf. Last accessed October 25, 2021.
134. Clark and Yusoff, ‘Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene’, 4.
In Agamben’s definition, abandonment is a relational and performative process, in which that which is articulated as inside remains in relation to that which is placed on the outside. There is no pure inside or outside in a relation of abandonment, making the line separating the two, in Agamben’s words, a constitutive threshold, on which the outside is included in its exclusion.\(^\text{135}\) This means that the establishment of a pure human realm – as Hegel attempted to produce – is conditioned upon an active and continuous denial of the threshold on which this realm is located, i.e. humanity’s interdependence on a contingent nature. Hence Hegel’s need to articulate and proclaim humanity’s independence from geology, rather than simply take it for granted.

From this perspective, the Globe and the Earth appear not as distinct parts, as Latour tells us, but as formed in a mutually constitutive, and historically mostly antagonistic, relationship. It is this paradox (which, curiously, Latour elsewhere has both identified and critically discussed\(^\text{136}\) that falls outside Latour’s framing of denial: the ambiguous relation between humanity and nature, as well as the continuously iterated practice of denying this relationality.\(^\text{137}\)

Importantly, this practice of denial – expressed in Latour’s work through his definition of denial in epistemic terms, as a form of ignorance or limit to knowledge – in important aspects mimics Norgaard’s observation of how contemporary climate change denial works across the global North today. According to Norgaard, denial is often understood, in both popular and academic discourse, as based either on a lack of information, as a failure to grasp complex scientific knowledge, as an effect of unpersuasive or misguided information campaigns or as based on incorrect media framings.\(^\text{138}\) With reference to Harriet Bulkeley\(^\text{139}\), Norgaard calls this approach the ‘information deficit model’.\(^\text{140}\) To be sure, the information deficit model mimics traditional liberal perspectives on climate change denial, which seek on the one hand to individualise denial, turning it into a question of who holds the most knowledge of climate change, and on the

\(^{135}\) Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 66; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998), 22; Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Mathew Coleman, and Kathryn Yusoff, ‘An Interview with Elizabeth Povinelli: Geontopower, Biopolitics and the Anthropocene’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 169–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276417689900; Mikkel Krause Frantzen and Jens Bjering, ‘Ecology, Capitalism and Waste: From Hyperobject to Hyperabject’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 37, no. 6 (2020): 87–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276420925541

\(^{136}\) For a discussion on ‘the paradox of the moderns’, see Latour’s *We Have Never been Modern*, 12.

\(^{137}\) As an abandonment, we can also understand Latour’s observation, made elsewhere, that modernist elites have readily recognised the dictates of climate change while simultaneously investing heavily in disseminating climate change denial to render technologies of survival, such as planetary escape, exclusively private. See Latour’s *Down to Earth*.

\(^{138}\) Norgaard, *Living in Denial*, 1.

\(^{139}\) Harriet Bulkeley, ‘Common Knowledge? Public Understanding of Climate Change in Newcastle, Australia’, *Public Understanding of Science* 9, no. 3 (2000): 313–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/096366250000900301

\(^{140}\) Norgaard, *Living in Denial*, 1.
other hand, to frame denial in socio-economic terms, portraying knowledge of climate change into a prerogative of a well-educated upper and middle class in the global North, what Peter Dauvergne recently has called an ‘environmentalism for the rich’. As Norgaard observes, the focus on (the lack of) knowledge has caused environmentalism to become an identity question, a way to identify and distinguish oneself as environmentally aware, in comparison to others deemed less moral, less enlightened.

While Latour explicitly rejects that denial is based on a lack of cognitive capacities, and of course also questions the liberal belief in a greening of the economy, his reference to a global elite ‘enlightened enough’ to understand the science of climate change, as well as his repeated description of ‘ordinary people’ as made ‘ignorant’ reproduces significant aspects of the information deficit model. As does Latour’s insistence that the world is blind to both climate change and to the Anthropocene, in spite the ubiquity of climate change in contemporary political debate, signalling a new ecological Zeitgeist.

In contrast to the information deficit model, and to Latour’s dualistic framework, Norgaard argues that the hegemonic form of climate change denial in the global North is less a matter of cognitive ignorance – or an epistemic blind spot – than a question of how our knowledge of climate change is socially organised. For Norgaard, denial and knowledge are not mutually exclusive properties. One is not simply in denial, and one does not simply have knowledge, nor does one act from one given epistemological perspective. Quite the contrary, to live in denial of climate change is to live in paradox, Norgaard observes – at least in our current political climate. It is to lead a double life, characterised by a paradoxical conflation of knowledge and denial. As one interviewee conveyed to Norgaard: ‘We live in one way, and we think in another. We learn to think in parallel’. Much like Agamben’s notion of abandonment as formed on a constitutive threshold, denial, in this sense, exists in a constitutive and ambiguous relation to knowledge. For Norgaard, there is no necessary and immediate link between our epistemology and our politics, on the contrary, denial can take on a plurality of forms. As Norgaard convincingly argues, the parallel thinking that constitutes today’s hegemonic form of denial is a skill we need to train, a capacity produced by continuous labour and socialisation. As argued in this article’s introduction, society teaches us what to pay attention to, for example, by establishing codes of morality, by distinguishing which acts are deemed morally offensive or morally acceptable. The politics of denial that the Anthropocene/Modernity binary directs attention to is part of these moral codes, we

141. Peter Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 66. https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii127/articles/nancy-fraser-climates-of-capital. Last accessed October 25, 2021.
142. Norgaard, *Living in Denial*, 88.
143. Latour, *Down to Earth*, 25.
144. Ibid., 46.
145. Ibid., 25-124.
146. Nancy Fraser, ‘Climates of Capital’, *New Left Review*, February 21, 2021. Available at: https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii127/articles/nancy-fraser-climates-of-capital. Last accessed October 25, 2021.
147. Norgaard, *Living in Denial*, 6.
148. Ibid., 5.
149. Ibid., 6.
submit, as it directs moral attention to the question of who recognises or denies the Anthropocene’s demands for a new epistemology, on who is open enough to see or land on the Earth in a potential future – rather than to our present material and agential complicity.

In this sense, there is a paradoxical form of hope embedded in the style of critique offered by Latour, Burke et al. and many other critical commentators of the Anthropocene, one that Norgaard’s conceptualisation of denial does not offer. This hope is actualised not because this style of critique paints a positive future – far from it, as is the case of Burke et al.’s manifesto, which describes the world in mostly apocalyptic terms – but because their framing allows us to dissociate ourselves from the destructive world that we invariably are a part of, allowing us to feel like we take part in the establishment of a new future and a new form of posthuman life. In this sense, there is a stark difference between hope and optimism, as theorised by Terry Eagleton. While optimism is built on a sense of certainty, a blind faith that the future will follow a pre-defined path, go according to plan, hope is preconditioned on ontological uncertainty, on the potential to break from linearity and path-dependency. It is, we argue, this notion of hope as a punctual temporality, a sense of rupture from the past, that the Modernity/Anthropocene binary makes possible. Its articulation makes possible an experience of being moved – in spirit – from denialism to enlightenment, from the Globe to the Earth. As Latour proclaims: ‘There is a chance for everyone to wake up, or so we can hope. The wall of indifference and indulgence that the climate threat alone has not managed to breach may be brought down’.

Language

The sense of rupture that this form of hope is conditioned upon can of course be produced through misrepresenting the past, rather than through heralding a new future. Which brings us to the third issue that we fear slips outside the frame established by the Modernity/Anthropocene binary: the modernist context and history that surrounds Latour’s hopes for a new language. In this section, we seek to contextualise Latour’s hope, as well as the language of the Anthropocene, within both colonial history and in contemporary forms of global governance.

As Michael Simpson makes visible, the origins of Anthropocene discourse – of a language that rejects the human-nature binary – originated from within modernism, an ideational legacy that Latour’s presentation of Lovelock’s language as a rupture of modernity conceals. As Simpson’s historical exposé of early Anthropocene discourse makes visible, modernity’s relation with nature was not one-sidedly antagonistic or suppressed. On the contrary, embedded within modernity’s varied and conflictual ideational history was the evolutionary idea of an essentially harmonious and interdependent relationship between ecology and modernism.

Simpson finds this harmony expressed primarily in Edouard Le Roy’s and Vladimir Vernadsky’s idea of the noösphere. For Le Roy and Vernadsky, those very same traits

150. Terry Eagleton, Hope without Optimism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 3.
151. Ibid., 114.
152. Latour, Down to Earth, 38, emphasis added.
153. Simpson, ‘The Anthropocene as Colonial Discourse’. 
that Latour describes as decolonial per se (i.e. the co-constitutive relation between the human and nature) were rather perceived as an object of modernist desire, the epitome of European civilisation.\textsuperscript{154} In the \textit{noösphere}, Western civilisation had, according to Vernandsky, reached a status similar to that of God, a geological force that because of its ‘scientific knowledge’ and ‘civilized humanity’ would steer the world into an evolved geological state. For Simpson, Vernandsky and Le Roy’s ideas exemplify not only that early Anthropocene discourse was articulated in a context of colonial conquest, but also that it actively reproduced notions of Western superiority and global stewardship.\textsuperscript{155} In Vernandsky’s words, quoted by Simpson, ‘Western democratic ideals’, were articulated as ‘in tune with the elemental geological processes, with the laws of nature, and with the \textit{noösphere}, and that the whole history of mankind is proceeding in this direction\textsuperscript{156}. Importantly, for Le Roy and Vernandsky, the power of human (Western) consciousness to shape the Earth’s ontology originated from the biosphere, of which humanity was perceived to be a part. As such, they defined the \textit{noösphere} as a pre-determined end-state inherent in natural geological and biological processes.

The intimate link between discourses of the Anthropocene and those that undergird global power relations is further demonstrated by Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper’s genealogy of the concept of resilience – a central concept in hegemonic academic and policy discourses of the Anthropocene. Walker and Cooper’s analysis confirm Simpson’s critique, showing the shared conceptual origin between resilience and neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{157} Indeed, in the economic realm, resilience was embraced by neoliberal theorist and Nobel Prize laureate Friedrich Hayek, who employed critical terms of systems ecology – such as complexity, crisis, adaptability as well as C. S. Holling’s critique of a natural geological equilibrium – in his attempt to articulate an idealised neoliberal market; dynamic, contingent and adaptive (if left free from government regulation).\textsuperscript{158} According to Walker and Cooper, geological discourse entered economic discourses to critique ideas of financial and economic government regulation and to advocate for the globalisation of free markets. Inspired by Hayek, as well as by an emergent critique within the life sciences of the Cartesian subject (rational and bounded), the definition of life centring economic discourse began to shift.\textsuperscript{159} Increasingly, economic discourses now employ terms similar

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper, ‘Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation’, \textit{Security Dialogue} 42, no. 2 (2011): 143–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611399616
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{159} Catherine Malabou, \textit{What Should We Do with Our Brain?} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, \textit{The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live} (London: Routledge, 2009); Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached, \textit{Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); David Chandler, ‘How the World Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Failure: Big Data, Resilience and Emergent Causality’, \textit{Millennium: Journal of International Studies} 44, no. 3 (2016): 391–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816636673
to Latour’s thesis. Not only resilience, but words like complexity, relationality and plasticity are commonly used to identify, describe, and govern the economic subject. Openness to the environment is commonly recognised as central to the human condition. Because of this, Rothe has argued that resilience thinking ‘perfectly resonates’ with Latour’s posthumanism. Brad Evans and Julian Reid are of a similar conviction. ‘Neoliberalism’, they argue, ‘as distinct from classical liberalism, is grounded in a post-human understanding of the nature of life itself’.

As such, discourses of resilience emphasise neither the figure of *homo oeconomicus* that Latour is so preoccupied with, nor the desire for a stable identity that Latour insists shapes discourses of global governance. Instead, we increasingly find within such discourses the promotion of a subject that accepts change, that sees itself as a relational being, and is capable of evolving in tandem with a changing and potentially volatile environment. To that end, indigenous knowledges that are perceived to break with the Modern nature/culture dichotomy have increasingly been heralded as sources of inspiration to life in the global North. While some commentators welcome this change of language, others have critiqued the framework of resilience – and its affinity for vulnerability – for rendering invisible the structural causes of global poverty and for romanticising among the world’s most vulnerable populations. In Rothe’s words, resilience renders suffering and poverty into ‘a resource of survival’: a guidebook for the survival of Western White lives in a dystopic Anthropocene future. It is in part for these reasons that the framework of resilience has been critiqued for reproducing and sustaining both post-colonial power relations and global structural inequalities.
Critiques like these highlight the power relations enacted when discourses of global governance engage the language of the Anthropocene. Importantly, they also highlight the transformative character of neoliberal modernity, as well as its ability to absorb terminology and practices once deemed different to itself, including shifts in human-nature relations. As Evans and Reid argue, ‘neoliberalism is not a homogeneous doctrine, nor are its particular forms of dogmatism homeostatic. Its powers of persuasion and discursive prosperity depend on its own resilient capacities to adapt to the hazards of critique’.\footnote{David Chandler, \textit{Resilience: The Governance of Complexity (Critical Issues in Global Politics)} (London: Routledge, 2014); Chris Zebrowski, \textit{The Value of Resilience: Securing Life in the Twenty-First Century} (London: Routledge, 2016).} If we want to study what the Anthropocene \textit{does}, rather than what it \textit{is}, i.e. how the Anthropocene is practiced, politicised, lived – then it is imperative, we believe, that modernity’s transformative capacity is included in our definition of denial, rather than denied from the outset by reference to predefined models of Modernity and the Anthropocene proper. That way, we would neither risk opposing such transformations by default to climate change denial, nor treat them as signs of a new decolonial language beyond a uniform and homogenising figure of Modernity.

\section*{Conclusion: Against a New Language}

Emerging from the discussion above is a series of issues of both epistemological and political weight that are made invisible both by the idea of a radical difference between discourses of modernity and the Anthropocene, and by the definition of denial that Latour deduces from it. As we have attempted to show, this style of critique risk reproducing a hegemonic form of climate change denial prevalent in the global North today. Following Norgaard, we see this form of denial as constitutive of a double life, characterised by its capacity to simultaneously recognise and deny climate change. We have also discussed how the dualistic framework employed by Latour and others risks precluding studies of modernity and the Anthropocene as a lived present, as well as of modernity’s changing and adaptable character. As such, we have argued that the Modernity/Anthropocene binary rejects questioning of Latour’s claim that the central subject of modernity is necessarily \textit{Homo oeconomicus} (bounded, rational, individual). Finally, our reading has troubled Latour, Burke et al., and Grosz’s identification of Anthropocene discourse as necessarily decolonial by default, finding its genealogy rather within discourses of modernity, colonialism, and neoliberalism.

With this, however, we do not wish to imply that all aspects of our current Anthropocene discourses are effectively modern, neoliberal, or colonial. On the contrary, we should no doubt be equally sceptical of claims that Anthropocene discourse is colonial by default, as we have been of claims that it is inherently decolonial. Instead of pre-defining all present articulations of humanity’s relationship with nature as either colonial or decolonial, as either remnants of Modernism (with a capital M) or as a radical rupture of said Modernity, we argue for a theoretical framework that studies how the relationship between modernity and the Anthropocene is performed, experienced and acted upon in the present. In short, we need, a framework that is open to variation.

\footnote{Ibid.}
This much we have learned from the philosophy of Jacques Derrida\textsuperscript{172}: discourses do not have a metaphysical existence that overdetermines each action and expression. On the contrary, discourses come to presence through repetition, through being practiced and performed. Importantly, as Derrida informs us: in every repetition, or ‘substitution’\textsuperscript{173}, lies the possibility not only of variation but also for a more realistic change than hoping for a new language could ever offer. According to Derrida, the notion of such an original and singular language is not only a ‘myth’,\textsuperscript{174} it is also historically embedded in modern Enlightenment discourse’s quest for what Latour in his keynote refers to as a ‘constructor’\textsuperscript{175} and what Derrida, following Claude Levi-Strauss, calls an ‘engineer’\textsuperscript{176}: ‘a subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it “out of nothing”’\textsuperscript{177}. Rather than through a new language, Derrida leads us to acknowledge that political change is actualised incrementally, performatively – by reassembling and reorganising the language available to us at any given time. Following Lévi-Strauss’ engagement with the ‘savage mind’\textsuperscript{178}, Derrida calls this strategy of imperfect repetition \textit{bricolage}, underlining the im/possibility of modernity to fully constitute itself. In the bricolage, Derrida finds not only a ‘critique of language’, but also ‘critical language itself’.\textsuperscript{179} This has been our ambition in this piece: to engender a vantage point from which this variation – the \textit{bricolage} that is modernity’s entangled relation with the non-human world – is not denied but instead becomes a central part of our object of study. From such a vantage point, the relationship between modernity and the Anthropocene appears to us as a question, a site of empirical inquiry, not a given fact. To achieve this, we submit, we should not forget what our focus on denial itself engenders and/or closes down. Or alternatively, as we have phrased it in this article: what falls inside or outside the frame.

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