

Down to Earth: politics in the new climatic regime

Onde aterrar? Como se orientar politicamente no Antropoceno

Dónde aterrizar: cómo orientarse en política

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Released in Paris in 2017 by La Découverte, following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, with a Portuguese translation published in 2020 in Brazil, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* is Bruno Latour's latest book. Author of innovative works in the fields of humanities and social sciences, such as *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour, 2013); *Politics of Nature – How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Latour, 2019); and *Reassembling the Social – An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Latour, 2012), in *Down to Earth Politics in the New Climatic Regime* Latour (2020) offers a hypothesis (or political fiction, as he calls it) to understand the current panorama of the geopolitical crisis faced worldwide. Though short, the 150-page *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, is a dense book that offers readers a political-philosophical reflection that has already been well-developed by the author.

The hypothesis defended by the French thinker is that we shall not understand anything about the political positions adopted in the past 50 years if we do not bring climate change – and its denial, to the forefront of contemporary discussion. According to Latour, the deregulation of States after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the explosion of social inequalities in all capitalist countries, and the denial of the existence of a climatic change are symptoms of the same historical scenario: we are living in an era when the elites have concluded that there is not enough room for them and the rest of the planet's inhabitants.

For the author, when in the 1980s the obscurantist elites realized that a global collapse caused by the scarcity of resources was bound to happen, they decided to: (i) not pay the price they cost the Earth, (ii) not share that information, (iii) build *walled communities* and (iv) escape the imminent end by retreating into bunkers. As such, the idea of globalization was abandoned and/or denied – first by the elites and then by their followers.

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Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris agreement in 2017 and the advent of Brexit in England are two milestones that reveal the stance of escaping the globalization game. According to the author, Trumpism is the first political movement to be guided by ecology – although it is substantiated by its opposite, that is, the complete denial of that matter. Latour argues that Trumpism was only possible in the USA in the context of the climate change denial. The author defines this political stance as a movement to escape Earth (escapism), as it no longer points to the construction of a common reality or future, but to a world that does not exist (or that exists only as a component of that group's illusion).

Latour sustains that if there was previously a dispute for the project of the future between the progressive and reactionary poles, or the Left and the Right, we currently have an abyss that leads both sides to retreat into their bubbles (or walled communities) and to avoid identifying with each other completely. We are living in a war of incompatible worlds. Therefore, the impasse between the old political stances needs to be reoriented by the new attractors (the Terrestrial and the Out-of-this-world), so that we can understand the current political context and create new alliances between former leftists and reactionaries. Political stances and affections are based on the defense of territories (whether ideological or geographic). The Anthropocene – the discovery that the biosphere is endowed with agency – poses challenges that need to be faced with a new way of doing politics. Staying in the world or escaping from it are the positions outlined by the author.

Among these new political attractors, the Terrestrial, or land system, is the one that, after the beginning of the Anthropocene, has become the main agent that mobilizes humans to rethink their actions on the planet. Conversely, the Out-of-this-world represents a movement that is no longer moving towards a common future, but a reality based on a provincial and nationalist vision, of returning to a certain Place (or restoration of a golden era), proposed by a few individuals and representing a very small number of interests.

To live outside this world, it is necessary to deny the truth of global climate change and, consequently, scientific rationality. Latour explores the argument that faced with the need to hide the evident finitude of resources, the elites have deliberately opted to create the atmosphere of negativism, confusing the popular classes as to the nature of the facts and financing fake news to delay the awareness of these classes, while producing their walled communities. The denial of science is a key part of that strategy. In the author's words, is not "'post-truth', it is post-politics – that is, literally, a politics with no object, since it rejects the world that it claims to inhabit" (Latour, 2020, pp. 49-50).

By stating that, Latour argues that we need to guide science and rationality towards the Terrestrial attractor. All this time when they have been focused on the Global and the universe outside has led to an attitude of disdain concerning the Terrestrial knowledge and the notion of "viewing the Earth from inside". The Earth "viewed as if from Sirius" (a metaphor created by the author to illustrate an exogenous perspective adopted by the natural sciences) overlooks some of these crucial points that science perceives as unreal and irrational for they do not achieve the expected levels of "objectivity". For the philosopher, scientists who believe in objectivist epistemology – advocating that "the facts would stand up all for themselves" –, also contributed to the current confusion by avoiding the construction of a common world with the participation of the popular classes. While the "rational thinkers" step aside and perceive the atmosphere of denial as absurd, while attributing the problem to the lack of intelligence of the popular classes, the obscurantist elites manipulate the information, thus buying time to escape. For Latour, this is not about a cognitive problem of the popular classes, as some of the "rational" individuals claim, but "[...] how to share the same culture, face up to the same stakes, perceive a landscape that can be explored in concert" (Latour, 2020, p. 36).

This book resumes debates from other Latour's works, such as the questioning of the idea of "nature", the agency of non-humans in the causality of planetary relations and political ecology, aiming to propose a solution to the lack of ground on which to land our political convictions. As a final proposal, the author suggests the shift from a production (modern and capitalist mode) to a generation system, in the sense of the genesis of a Terrestrial with all human and non-human beings that are part of it. Latour argues that to come down to Earth, we first need to map our dependencies on the condition of beings in this world. That is, through the detailed description of our dependencies (what really matters to us, our possessions, and whatever owns us), we shall have earth to land on and come down to, so that we can take political positions in this new soil of geosocial battles. It is about mapping the political geography of each being (inventory of bonds, interests, and dependencies); according to Latour, how we shall situate ourselves in our collectives (relatively organized cosmos of beings) and how we see the possible realities that can be shared with our peers.

The book is a useful input for the study of organizations, starting with the possibility of exploring Bruno Latour's ontological pluralism and his sociology of associations (actor-network-theory), anchored in the examination of reality as a changing result of agency between humans and nonhumans that constitute collectives uninterruptedly. This path allows us to understand the geopolitical context in which organizations are generated and towards which they are oriented. Latour also sends out an invitation to us¹. He proposes that we become able, individually or as groups, to carry out an inventory of what we are attached to, the chains that we are willing to break free from or rebuild, as well as those that we have decided to interrupt. We must rebel and collectively envision new cosmopolitics² for the *organization*.

Undoubtedly, every established system is endowed with structural inertia that makes it appear unshakable. Yet, we cannot fail to acknowledge that our current system is leading to worse outcomes every day. We now face an organizational disillusionment epidemic. There is a crisis of purpose and lack of perspective for collective engagement, as we feel suspicious about the current hegemonic forms of organization (institutions, companies, families, etc.). This customary hesitation washes away the favorable soil for democracy but also engenders a transformative awareness, sensitive to the complexity of the cosmos, which is a seed for new organizational models. Perhaps one of our most important tasks as researchers in Organizational Studies as a field of critical knowledge – committed to the flourishing of just, inclusive, peaceful, and ecocentric societies – is to contribute to the decolonization of our collective imaginary, taking part in the rebellion of the future that has already come³.

¹ "What protective measures can you think of so we don't go back to the pre-crisis production model?". By Bruno Latour, in the attachment to *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, written in March 2020 and originally published on the Analyse Opinion Critique website [A.O.C] (Retrieved from <https://aoc.media/>).

² Isabelle Stengers suggests that to produce knowledge – that is, to do science and produce knowledge about organizations, etc. – is to create concrete and singular worlds. Therefore, by expanding this concept to the work of Latour, we can suggest that the new organizational policies should incorporate the practices of Earth as a living organism, as well as the current and pertinent specificities of each territory.

³ Inspired by one of the maxims of the *Free the Future* movement (Retrieved from <https://liberteofuturo.net>), co-organized by journalist and activist Eliane Brum: "The rebellion of the future is in the present".

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