

# How to remain Human in the Wrong Space? A comment on a dialog by Carl Schmitt\*

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For Adam Tooze

In his important new book, *Abondance et Liberté*, Pierre Charbonnier takes up Karl Polanyi's argument that it is only because of contingent historical reasons that attachments to the land have been appropriated by conservatives on the Right of the political spectrum. In principle, the resistance of society to the religion of the market, as Polanyi says, should have started by saving the land from the deadly grasp of economics, just as much as labor and money, the two other "factors of production".<sup>1</sup> Such an attempt to extract land, soil and earth from the grasp of rightist ideologies takes an even greater importance today with the emergence of what Chakrabarty calls the "planetary" and that I call Gaia.<sup>2</sup> Every country now is torn apart between the "world they live in" and the "world they live from", to use Charbonnier's term. Hence the interest of having a second look at those thinkers from the Right who have given to the land and to land grabs the pride of place in their cosmology.

None of those thinkers is better known than Carl Schmitt. It might be worthwhile to retrieve from Schmitt the tiny bit of wisdom about space that he had turned into such a powerful poison while he was alive. It would be imprudent to ignore his views today, when there are people everywhere who

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<sup>1</sup> Charbonnier, Pierre. *Abondance et liberté. Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques*. Paris: La Découverte, 2020. (to be published in English by Polity Press).

<sup>2</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category." *Critical Inquiry* 46. Autumn (2019) ; Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton. "Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia Is So Hard to Understand." *Critical Inquiry*. Spring (2019): 1-22.

are concocting explicitly similar schemes to occupy the space of others in order to survive against others.<sup>3</sup> Which people, which others, which soil, which space? Those are questions that can no longer be ignored now that a whole civilization is looking for ways to land somewhere without crashing.

Let me start with a quote, forgetting for the moment that the author is Carl Schmitt:

« The change in the concept of space is underway today in all areas of human inquiry and activity with powerful depth and breadth. The great geopolitical events of the present, too, contain at their core such a change in hitherto existing conceptions of space and presuppositions of space that the only useful historical comparison we have for them is that shift in the planetary picture of space that took place four hundred years ago. (*The Großraum Order of International Law (GO)* P. 118)<sup>4</sup>

This is not a quote from an historian of science, nor is it taken out of Dipesh Chakrabarty's work. Schmitt's words offer us a striking parallel to the question that is raised today about what I have called the New Climatic Regime.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that a deep change in the "planetary picture of space" is "underway in all areas of human inquiry and activity".

In the following comments I want to take the opportunity of a subtle contrast in tone between the argument made in the *Großraum* piece in support of the Third Reich's claim of a right of domination, and the deeper and less polemical version given in the short, lighter and even funny *Dialog on New Space* written in the postwar period (funny, that is, in a sort of dark and heavy Schmittian way).<sup>6</sup> Just as in *Land and Sea*, Schmitt repeats his fantastic mythology of the way in which England was able "to meet the

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance the interpretation of Trump's politics in my *Down to Earth. Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (translated by Cathy Porter). Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Schmitt, Carl. "The *Großraum* Order of International Law with a Ban on Intervention for Spatially Foreign Powers: A Contribution to the Concept of Reich in International Law (1939-1941)." *Writings on War* (translated and edited by Timothy Nunan). Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. 75-124. I will cite only from Section VII "The Concept of Space in Jurisprudence".

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (translated by Cathy Porter). London: Polity Press, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Schmitt, Carl. *Dialogues on Power and Space* (Edited by Andreas Kalyvas and Federico Finchelstein) (translated with an introduction by Samuel Garrett Zeitlin). Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

challenge of the oceans”, in the *Dialogue* he offers the same argument to meet the challenge of the new age by exploring how to be “of this earth”. What interests me is that in both texts the problematization of space is the main topic, but in the second, because it is much less well known, it might be more permissible to detect the kernel of truth that I wish to extract.

“The industrial revolution is the logical second stage of a transition toward maritime existence, and this transition toward maritime existence was the great **historical answer of the island England to the question or the provocation or the challenge**—as you wish— of **the world oceans opening themselves.**” (*Dialogues on Power and Space* (DPS) p 75)<sup>7</sup>

Please note that it is the oceans that are “opening themselves” and that are launching the “challenge” to the humans, not the other way around. I claim that we need to get out of Schmitt, with great care and with the right dosage, the concepts that will allow us to answer the challenge and provocation of how Gaia opens itself to us. Gaia, which is *neither land nor sea*, but something I have defined as “critical zones”, is a novelty that entirely deserves the name of “new space” and is certainly the cause of a “new provocation” to humans.<sup>8</sup> The point at issue is not to clear Schmitt of what he did, but to establish a *parallel* between the world wars in which he took part and those in which we are taking part — in the hope that we might choose a side that is less criminal than his...

I agree there is something most bizarre in transforming Carl Schmitt into a deep thinker of political ecology, because his kind of depth is precisely the *opposite* of what people usually attribute to “deep ecology”. My argument is that thanks to his view of space and power, we finally escape the *depoliticization* that to this point has so often accompanied ecological concerns. I claim that by *repoliticizing* space in the most radical way, Schmitt allows us to see what went wrong in the *depoliticization* of space implied by concepts borrowed from “nature”, a point well emphasized in the important book by Claudio Minca and Rory Rowan when they write:

“For Schmitt, political order necessarily involved what we call the *spatialization* of the political or, put simply, the *mapping* of political difference against a foundational division in space. The

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<sup>7</sup> All bold emphases are mine.

<sup>8</sup> Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel, eds. *Critical Zones. The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press & ZKM, 2020.

spatialization of the political was the means by which war could be contained as it established clearly bounded political units. Sovereign was the power that had the capacity to produce and maintain this spatialization of the political and decide on any exceptional threat to its integrity from within or without.” p. 245.<sup>9</sup>

The gist of Schmitt’s work is well expressed in its final moment when the character representing the author ironically parts company with the two other protagonists who have mocked him all along for being a man of the past:

“You shall both have noted that I remain **with the earth and upon the earth**. For me, the human is a son of the earth, and so he shall remain **as long as he remains human**. I would like to hope that both of you **shall remain human as well**; you, MacFuture, on the moon and on Mars; and you dear Dr Neumeyer, in the depths of the sea!” p 81

The task for us is to fathom the moral of Schmitt’s dialog that it is actually difficult to *remain human in the wrong sort of space*.

It is worth going through the various stages of the dialog to detect what exactly is the new challenge that we have to meet in this “new space”. Simply stated, the arc of the dialog is literally to go “back to earth” in order to remain “human” against the utopia of science and technology that has led maritime powers to a position of momentary domination.

It begins with what we imagine to be Herr Doctor Professor Altmann, described simply as an “Old Historian”, provoking a certain Dr. Newman (actually M. Neumeyer, a “Chemical Physicist” in the text) with the shocking affirmation that the Bible, from the first word to its last, is biased against the sea.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Claudio Minca and Rory Rowan. *On Schmitt and Space*. London: Routledge, 2015, but I disagree with their conclusion: “In this sense, whilst Schmitt might provide a perceptive analysis of modern spatiopolitical relations, he provides few tools for grasping the nature and complexity of the present” p 249. Tools, maybe not, but a radical departure from older notions of space, certainly.

<sup>10</sup> Except when mentioned otherwise, all quotes below from the *Dialog on New Space*.

“The sea is foreign and inimical to the humans. It is no living space (*Lebensraum*) for the humans. Living space (*Lebensraum*) for the humans is, according to the Bible, only dry land”. (p. 54)

This is an affirmation that seems very odd to the mind of a scientist such as M. Neumeyer. But M. Altmann persists by quoting the Apocalypse:

“Have you heard [St John]? The sea was no more! Upon the purified and transfigured earth there is no ocean. Along with sin and evil, the sea disappears as well. That is the end of the New Testament. **From an account of creation from the first book of Moses to the end of the Revelation of Saint John**, the Bible maintains the opposition between land and sea.” (p. 56)

The goal of M. Altmann’s provocation is to force M. Neumeyer to dismiss any of those arguments as pure mythology and thus to build the contrast between Schmitt’s conception of space and the spaceless and timeless conception of the physical chemist steeped in his scientific world view. Even though the exchange is as unbalanced as Plato’s dialogs, the scientist’s retort is given some weight at first:

M. Neumeyer — “All of this is the ideological progeny of a purely **terrestrial** existence, the **fantasies** of shepherds and peasants; myth, pardon me poetry, poesy, Rilke.” (p. 57)

And when M. Altmann insists that geopoliticians are backing him up and that no less than a famous admiral explains that all wars are waged between sea and land people, M. Neumeyer dismisses this as professional distortion:

“That is the book of an admiral. That is how world history appears to admirals. For admirals world history is a history of sea wars and sea battles. (...) that’s **unscientific**.” (p 58)

M. Altmann’s ironic response is a typical case of what I will comment below: for Schmitt, scientists are never allowed to escape from their historical situation and when they maintain the scientific/unscientific divide, it is always hypocritical:

“I shall not ask you, dear M. Neumeyer, how you think about world history. **Chemistry and physics are, in the end, also a job**.” (p. 59)

The argument is soon repeated when M. Neumeyer fails to be swayed and insists that M. Altmann’s elucubrations are lost on him:

M. Neumeyer — “To me it seems that everything that you draw into world historical phenomena or constructions, (...) is only the form of appearance of an **historically bounded picture of the world.**” (p. 62)

This time Schmitt’s answer is more pointed:

M. Altmann — “Careful dear M. Neumeyer! Ultimately, your **own picture of the world** is probably **bound to an historical situation.** Even exact natural science and even unencumbered technology **do not stand outside of history.** (...) Do you perchance believe that physicists, chemists and technicians dreamed no dreams, produced no myths and were immune to **anachronisms?**” (p. 63)

In his response, Altmann begins to direct the conversation away from M. Neumeyer’s unsituated standpoint and toward a specific historical situation within which science and technology are bound. This is exactly the opposite of where Neumeyer wishes to flee to so as to be able to judge history and mythology as mere outdated poetry in contrast to science.

The way M. Altmann ridicules the scientist’s view from nowhere is to point at a materiality different from what is visible from the scientific world view. A materiality that the scientific world view glosses over. The nuance is subtle but it is clearly detectable in the moment when, after having said that science is a “job” just like that of admiral or jurist, M. Altmann continues:

“In any case, the opposition between land and sea also contains **natural scientific ingredients.** Land and sea and air are different **aggregate states.** They are physically, meteorologically, geologically and geographically different and consequently entail **different environments for the life forms that live in their domains.** That again causes biological contrasts which you cannot well deny. **The human is a mammal not a fish** which breathes through gills. That too ought to be **of interest** to a natural scientist”. (p. 59)

Schmitt’s intention is clear enough: scientists pay no attention to the *real nature of natural history.* He gives a lesson in materiality to a physical chemist by stressing the “natural history” of humans *without naturalizing them.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This antecedence is the main focus of Romantic science with its contrast between geography on the one hand and *Erkunde* on the other. Müller-Sievers, Helmut. "Tidings of the Earth. Towards a History of Romantic

“Elements” and “aggregate states” as well as “environments for life forms” or “domains” and “biological contrasts” are all expressions pointing to a natural history that is *antecedent* to the scientific worldview. Those terms are supposed to load the description of the real earthly world so as to avoid any escape in a conventional definition of the natural world! Quite a feat. Schmitt directs our attention to “life forms” so that the emergence of science and technology (to which he adds this mysterious adjective “unencumbered” I will analyze below) becomes an *historical puzzle to be solved* and *not an undisputable voice over the rest of history*, a voice allowing anyone to dismiss war on land and sea as mere poetry and mythology.

The point will not be lost on any specialist of science and technology studies, because it is only when sciences are *added* to the world instead of roaming above it for an eternity that the question of their irruption in history can even be raised. As soon as science and technology are reinserted into society, it is impossible to take them as an unproblematic unfolding of the true nature of the natural world. For sociologists of science as well as for Schmitt, science and technology, instead of being the obvious destiny of progress and reason, are a puzzle to be solved — indeed *the puzzle of history*.

The point is nicely made by Altmann with his usual tongue-in-cheek when he stresses that his antagonist’s use of the adjective “obsolete” to describe M. Altmann’s archaic embrace of mythology, is actually a proof that M. Neumeyer’s view, in spite of his claim to speak from nowhere in particular, is fully dependent on history:

“Did you not yourself work earlier with the historical sense, when you declared the ancient conceptions of land and sea **anachronistic**? Anachronistic, that is to say: no longer appropriate to the time and situation. You yourself definitely do not wish to renounce **being in step with your times**, i.e. being **appropriate** to the time and to the situation.” (p. 63)

With this the stage is set for the second part of the dialog: we have moved away from cumbersome divides between scientific and unscientific world views; between what is mythological and what is factual; what is anachronistic and what is timely. The only question now is to define what is “appropriate to the situation”. Freed from false problems, the rest of the conversation may focus on the real one: what is the genealogy of the old spatial conditions soon to be replaced by the new call and the new challenge?

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Erdkunde." *Rereading Romanticism*. Ed. Helfer, Martha. Amsterdam: : Rodopi, 2000. 47-73. I owe this reference to Joseph Koerner.

Before following how the dialog on space is going to turn, I need to emphasize once again the peculiarity of Schmitt's understanding of that most troubling term: space. For reasons that I leave historians to fathom, Schmitt has avoided sharing the universal belief that space is a neutral container *inside which* objects and people are then located.<sup>13</sup> For him there is no empty neutral space: spatialization is always the result of what could be called a *vector* that is directed by one sort of power *against* some other sort of power.

Whereas anyone looking at a map sees first of all an empty vessel and then locates places, roads, names inside or on top of it, Schmitt traces crisscrossing vectors through which one entity *locates* another one further afield. Politics and spatialization, then, are two sides of the same coin. As is well known, this is made most explicit in the *Großraum* paper:

“Seen from the standpoint of international jurisprudence, space and political ideas do not allow themselves to **be separated** from one another. For us, there are neither spaceless political ideas nor, reciprocally, spaces without ideas or principles of space without ideas. It is an important part of a determined political idea that a certain nation carries it and that **it has a certain opponent in mind**, through which **this political idea** gains the idea of the political.” (GO p. 87)

For Schmitt, background and foreground are reversed: who exercises power against whom comes first; the resulting space, second. Space is bypassed; you don't start from it, you *reach* it only after having foregrounded the vectors making the occupation of space expand over some other power. More polemically, whenever someone qualifies real space to be “empty” and “neutral”, we are called upon to understand that for some reason some power has *emptied and neutralized the territory* of someone else. Yes, it is paranoid, but it has the great advantage of rendering readers *agnostic* to the

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<sup>13</sup> The influence of German geography as well as Schmitt's peculiar theology have to be taken into account as well as deep changes in mathematics at the turn of the century, to which should be added his borrowing of some biology (see below).

belief that there exists some outside frame of reference that would dispassionately locate everything else in the world.<sup>14</sup>

The crucial point of such agnosticism, however, is that Schmitt does not fall into the usual phenomenological trap of replacing *res extensa* with a lived space originating from the intentionality of humans or due to the imposition of Kantian categories of understanding. To doubt the relevance of empty space does not lead to an interest in the *human view* of space. By using terms, myths, symbols, and metaphors, Schmitt directs our attention to the *rematerialization of space* that *precedes* the bifurcation between empty space and lived space. *Grossraum*, *nomos*, concrete order, sea and land; there are many such terms in his work. None of them are understandable if they are grasped by using the dichotomy between “real space” and “lived space”. The content of those concepts is fully *ontological*. It is the real stuff out of which the world is made.<sup>15</sup> And Schmitt uses this “stuff” against *both sides* of the dichotomy: against the idea of humans residing inside a neutral landscape as much as against any idea that there could exist a neutral landscape that had not already been generated by the interlocking of powers.<sup>16</sup>

Neutral space is replaced by what is generated in the course of the movements of life forms. Hence the possibility of rendering spatialization problematic again:

“Even more meaningful for our **new concrete concept** of space are the **biological investigations** in which going beyond the **space-abolishing problematization of the concept of space**, another concept of space has found acceptance. According to this theory, ‘movement’ for biological knowledge does not proceed in the hitherto existing space of natural science, rather movement *produces the spatial and temporal arrangement*. The spatial as such is produced only along **with and in** objects, and the spatial and

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<sup>14</sup> A STS point which the digital has made easier to follow: see Valérie November, , Eduardo Camacho, and Bruno Latour. "The Territory is the Map - Space in the Age of Digital Navigation." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 581-99.

<sup>15</sup> “Bifurcation” is Whitehead’s term. In many ways Schmitt does for jurisprudence and State sovereignty what Whitehead does directly for the physical definition of space. The common target is the idea of simple localization. On this see Whitehead, Alfred North. *Concept of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920.

<sup>16</sup> This position has been missed by those who have tried to link the *Nomos* to ecology but by choosing only one side of the bifurcation. This is the limit of Minca, Claudio, and Rory Rowan. *On Schmitt and Space*. London: Routledge, 2015.

temporal orders are no longer **mere entries in the given empty space**; they correspond, rather, to an actual situation, **an event**. It is now that the conception of an **empty dimension** of depth and a merely **formal category** of space are conclusively overcome. **Space becomes an achievement space.**" (GO p. 123)<sup>17</sup>

The contrast that I am interested in extracting from Schmitt, no matter what, is that between people who, as he said, embrace "**a space-abolishing problematization of the concept of space**" and, on the other hand, those who bring space-making activities center stage. In one case, space is naturalized and taken for granted as the universal framework of all localizations; in the other, you never lose sight of the ways and means, of the "event" through which localizations are generated. In one case, by believing in "neutral and empty space" you miss the whole preliminary groundwork that was necessary to launch the act of localizing; in the other, you are able to follow what has been *emptied* and what has been *neutralized* as *res extensa* has expanded. In one case, space is the unproblematic starting point of any project; in the other, space-making is the first blow of some enemy against you! It is not difficult to understand the vast difference it could make in our understanding of political ecology if we choose one politics of space over the other.

Because Schmitt's position on space is so extreme and so polemical, it helps to point out what has been missing all along in the notion of space associated with most ecological thought. Before criticizing Schmitt for his dark vision of space, let's understand why ours has worked so badly each time we have tried to let beings of nature enter into politics.

It's characteristic of the way Schmitt treats science that he always foregrounds the scientists associated with scientific results as well as the *instrumentarium* necessary for making the discoveries. Schmitt's views are not only compatible with but strikingly similar to recent reconstructions of how the *res extensa* has come to be extended since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is as if Schmitt

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<sup>17</sup>The reference here is to the biologist Viktor von Weizäcker which renders even more interesting the sort of "biological events" Schmitt has in mind. This can be read as a new form of naturalization, but we are free to read it today as referring to the space-making and event-triggering development of Gaia in the sense proposed in Timothy Lenton, Sébastien Dutreuil, and Bruno Latour. "Life on Earth is hard to spot." *The Anthropocene Review* <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019620918939> (2020).

had read Simon Schaffer, Frédérique Ait-Touati or Ayesha Ramachandran!<sup>18</sup> For Schmitt, relocalizing and resituating science as a trade (even a “job” as we have just seen) inside precise moments in history and with a great attention to the technology of the time, is the path that leads to the rematerialization of space. When geography is alluded to, it always comes with the geographers, cartographers, globes, ships, calculations, maps and academies with which those professionals expand their sway.<sup>19</sup>

The rematerialization of space-making activity by one power over another is connected, interestingly enough, with the theater and the display of authority, an essential connection for understanding the German meaning of *Raum*.

“Today it is easy to recognize that this still complete formulation [plot of land and State as stage of the imperium] stands under the influence of Baroque and representative concepts that thought the soil of the nation as a **sort of theater stage** on which the **play** of the public, state, exercise of power was **performed**.” (GO p. 121)<sup>20</sup>

The main interest for me is that at no point is science allowed to “eternalize” itself or to be left unmoored in some spaceless view from nowhere. *Landnahme* is a word that could work for geopolitics as well as for

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<sup>18</sup> Schaffer, Simon. "Newton on the Beach: The Information Order of Principia Mathematica." *History of Science* 47 (2009): 243-76 ; Frédérique Ait-Touati, Alexandra Arènes, and Axelle Grégoire. *Terra Forma: Manuel de cartographies potentielles*. Paris: B42, 2019 ; Ramachandran, Ayesha. *The Worldmakers. Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> “All the intellectual streams of this area have made their contributions in different ways: Renaissance, Reformation, Humanism, and Baroque; the changes in the planetary picture of the earth and world through the discovery of America and the circumnavigation of the world; the changes in the astronomical picture of the world as well as the great mathematical, mechanistic, and physical discoveries — in a word, everything that Max Weber designated as ‘Occidental rationalism’ and whose legendary era was the 17th century.” (GO p.122)

<sup>20</sup> Olwig, Kenneth. "The Duplicity of Space: Germanic ‘Raum’ and Swedish ‘Rum’ in English Language Geographical Discourse." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* (2002) and his Olwig, Kenneth Robert. "All that is landscape is melted into air: the ‘aerography’ of ethereal space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29.519-532 (2011). Ait-Touati, Frédérique. *Cosmopoetics. Seventeenth-century cosmological literatures*. Cambridge: Trinity College, 2006.

the empire of *res extensa*. More exactly, empty space and abstract epistemology are always criticized in the same breath.<sup>21</sup>

The same goes for the role given to technology in modifying the force vectors that are generating conflicting spatializations. Ships, planes, submarines, steam engines, tanks, atomic bombs, etc. are always included in Schmitt's narrative to explain how and why there have been changes in the way powers extend over one another in new ways. Follow the techniques through which any power overlaps any other power and you will discover how law and sovereignty are being transformed. This is most forcefully stressed in Schmitt's rendering of the conquest of America, especially in *Nomos*, but it is also present at each step in the metamorphosis of legal and military aspects of wars.

To conclude this section, it should be clear that Schmitt's paranoid extension of war and enmity to the basic frame of space and time allows us to take the measure of which concrete events have generated the mere idea of a neutral and empty space. We can now see, by the contrast that has been set out, why anything that is described inside such a frame is being *emptied* of any politics: enmity has disappeared. Space is neutralized and so is the ecological politics that has used such a frame unproblematically. No wonder that when we wish to expand politics to natural entities, they too have been emptied, neutralized and naturalized. It does not mean that we have to embrace Schmitt's dark polemical definition — nor to share his even darker religious background.<sup>22</sup> But because he offers the most radical retort to space-abolishing concepts, Schmitt points to a possible solution for overcoming the depoliticization of nature. My contention is that this dark space might shed a paradoxical light on the failure of “green” space.

To trigger an original answer to the question, the dialog abruptly introduces a third character who is supposed to barge in after having overheard the discussion up until this point. In an act of divination, Schmitt calls him “MacFuture”, anticipating Big Macs as well as Apple! The new protagonist is a prototypical American of the 1950s who, amusingly enough,

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<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Tarde, another jurist, had exactly the same conception of space made by the sciences as added to the world and not roving above it. It seems that for a jurist the notion of laws of nature is always grounded in a casuistic. Thanks to Dorothea Condé for pointing this out to me.

<sup>22</sup> Based on the original sin, as so brilliantly shown by Heinrich Meier *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy* (translated by Marcus Brainard and Robert Berman). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011..

sounds just like a modern-day Elon Musk! The brutal Yankee tries again, just as M. Neumeyer did earlier, to box M. Altmann not only into being stuck in the past but also into being a poor guy limited to the ridiculous horizon of the puny planet Earth. Now, MacFuture states proudly, is the time for space exploration!

“Don't you see that humans and earth, land and sea, air and fire have changed? Indeed, every school child knows how laughably small our earth has become **and how human forces ascend to infinity** (...) Thus we have found ourselves for quite some time in a new world, **in a Beyond**, if you will. You only have yet to notice it.” p. 65

I am reminded of course of the famous exclamation in the first scene of Brecht's *The Life of Galileo*.<sup>23</sup> It is the same urge toward “infinity” that we see called upon in the name of progress and expressed in the great intoxication with the great “beyond”; the Cold War and the Space Age are in full swing. Since then, of course, we have learned a lot about the history of this period that has been called, and rightly so, the *Great Acceleration*.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, everything moves to infinity and beyond but, we now realize, not *ad infinitum*... That's why you would need more than a Boy Scout from America to intimidate a M. Altmann. It takes him just a few pages to slow down M. MacFuture and to bring him to consider not his intoxication with infinity, but *what sort of geopolitical conflicts this push toward infinity and space tries to resolve*. At first, MacFuture doesn't sense the trap and answers unabashedly:

“The West, with its maritime peoples, has a certain **advantage** technologically and industrially. This is related to the industrial revolution and the progress of technology. In the maritime West, the industrial revolution has **progressed** further than in the terrestrial East. **That is all**. This East must allow itself to be developed by us.” (p. 67)

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<sup>23</sup> ANDREA “It's like a cage. (...) GALILEO “I like to think the ships began it. (...) They used to hug the coasts and then all of the sudden they left the coasts and spread over the oceans. A new age was coming (...) We are pulling out of that contraption. (...) By that time, with any luck, they will be learning that the sun, and that their mothers, the captain, the scholars, the princes and the Pope are rolling with it.” Bertold Brecht. *Life of Galileo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980. (p. 48-49)

<sup>24</sup> Steffen, Will, et al. "The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration." *The Anthropocene Review* (2015): 1-18.

This sounds like a direct echo of the *Grossraum* piece: in the same way as the Third Reich tried to conquer the Soviet Union, now the Yankees are on the way to a conquest of the East. With this we are now back where we had ended in the first section with M. Neumeyer. We have shifted from a celebration of progress and expansion in neutral space toward a highly specific geopolitical occupation by one space — the USA — of someone else's space — Russia and Asia.

Now Schmitt is finally at work: what everybody else takes as a natural and undisputed frame of reference, he points out to his interlocutors is simply a force vector inventing a highly specific space and time for some people against some other people. Space has become a historical situation requiring a decision:

“Let us ask dispassionately: where does this revolution come from, which is our **fate**? What is its **origin** and its **home**? What is its point of **departure** and its **innermost drive**?” (p. 67)

And here he briefly recounts the mythology of *Land and Sea*, explaining to his puzzled interlocutors the role England played in inventing the industrial revolution and how science and technology followed its conquest of space. They witness how Schmitt replaces the spaceless progress of reason with a host of highly local and highly provisional decisions made by a small island fighting against all other nation-states so as to “meet the challenge of the oceans”.

“All European discoverers **took only land**. **England took the sea**. Only England dared to make the great leap and **completed the transition from the land to the sea**, from the terrestrial existence to the maritime existence”. (p. 71)

Faced with such a fanciful genealogy, the two other protagonists try to resist, but Schmitt is now using the powerful link between space and time that is his trademark:

M. Neumeyer — “That I find fanciful! Why couldn't the industrial revolution just as well have emerged upon the continent?”

M. Altmann — Your “couldn't” and your “just as well” I find far more fanciful. (..) The **great events are unique, irrevocable and irretrievable. An historical truth is true only once.**” (p. 71-72)

What is this specific truth that occurred only *once*? It is the association of technology with the adjective “*unencumbered*”. Such a conjunction was in no way necessary: it is a twist of history. And most importantly, this aptitude of England to be true to the situation will be true only once.<sup>25</sup> This is the real heart of the dialog and, in my view, its most interesting contribution since we are all today trying to come to grip with the immensely *cumbersome* weight of our techniques:

“Technological inventions are made everywhere and at all times. Nor was the technological talent of the English greater than that of other peoples. All that matters is what is made out of the technological inventions, and that depends on the frame, that is to say; in which **concrete order the technological invention falls into**. Within a maritime existence, **technological discoveries are developed more freely and with fewer restraints** than when they fall into the **fixed order of a terrestrial existence** and in which they are grasped and bounded. (...) I want to say this: the discoveries, with which the industrial revolution sets in, could only lead to the onset of an industrial revolution **where the step toward a maritime existence had been taken**” (p. 72-73)

The argument in a nutshell is that when you are on a ship (a mythical ship of course) you are able to *externalize* the consequences of your technical inventions — you just throw them overboard! —, while on land (a mythical land) it is impossible: everything thrown out will be there the day after! Ships have an outside; land doesn't.<sup>26</sup> From this odd argument, Schmitt draws a genealogy of the absolutization of techniques that he finds typical of the Anglo-American space of empire.

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<sup>25</sup> If Brexiters had read Schmitt and heeded his lesson, they would not have imagined replaying, once again, the great movement toward the sea and would have known that their idea of founding again a great British empire by themselves was as fanciful as M. MacFuture's dream of finding a new land to occupy and pilfer on his way to Mars (p.78). Here the repetition of the word “once” would have destroyed the fantasy of “Global Britain”.

<sup>26</sup> In addition, maritime existence implies that everything is taken as a resource to be used not as something you have to care for: “In consequence,...the humans on the ship have a different kind of social relations both to one another as well as to their external world. They have an essentially different stance toward nature and above all to animals. **The terrestrial human tames and domesticates animals**: elephants, camels, horses, hounds, cats, oxens, donkeys and all that is his. **Fish, on the contrary, are not tamed but only consumed.**” (p. 74)

“The **terrestrial** order, in whose center stands the house, necessarily has a fundamental different relation to technology than a mode of existence, in whose center a ship sails. **An absolutization of technology and of technological progress, the equivalence** between technological progress and **advancement as such**, briefly, all that allows itself to be brought together in the phrase ‘**unencumbered technology**’, develops only under the presupposition, only on the breeding ground and in the climate of a **maritime** existence.” P. 75

In a very striking way, “unencumbered” is a synonym of what a recent historian of environment calls “disinhibition”, that is, the historical movement in the West that predicted all the catastrophic consequences of technology, but decided nonetheless to ignore them in the name of the inevitability of progress.<sup>27</sup> The key contribution of England as a maritime power is this “equivalence” between unfettered techniques and progress. No matter how strange such a genealogy is, it has the great advantage of focusing on what difference it would make if we were shifting from a maritime to a *terrestrial* existence. It is toward this contrast that the dialog is now leading.

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Let’s slow down so that we don’t lose the thread of the “great question” and of the “challenge” we have to meet.

“In reality, an entire island detached itself from the mainland and took the step toward maritime existence; from this there followed the industrial revolution **and the removal of impediments to technological progress**. With this, I have given you the **answer to the question** concerning the great question and have told you what the industrial revolution **answers: it answers to the call or the challenge** that was raised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; it is one part of the answer that England **gave to the call of the world oceans** as these **opened themselves to the humans in the age of discoveries.**” p 76

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<sup>27</sup> Fressoz, Jean Baptiste. *L'Apocalypse joyeuse. Une histoire du risque technologique*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2012. Bonneuil, Christophe, and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. *The Shock of the Anthropocene. The Earth, History and Us* (translated by David Fernbach). New York: Verso, 2016.

First, the challenge of oceans; second, the answer England gave to such a challenge; third, the “removal of impediments to technology”; fourth, the industrial revolution; fifth, the global imperium of Anglo-American nations states; and sixth (implicitly), the defeat of Germany....

Funnily enough, this version of history is deeply negative for Schmitt, while M. MacFuture misunderstands it as fully positive! The American believes that the United States is now asked to do for space exploration exactly what England had done in the past, without realizing that he is going to fall into the trap M. Altmann has set for him. At first, he enthusiastically endorses that genealogy

M. MacFuture — “You see, at that time, during the age of the great discoveries, daring humans ventured forth and found a new world. Today **we stand within an age of discoveries much greater** than that of four hundred years ago. (...) Today, the **infinite spaces of the whole cosmos** open themselves to us. (...) “How small the spaces were at that time, in the age of so-called discoveries! How great, by contrast, are the spaces that today **open themselves to us**, be they in the stratosphere or be they beyond the stratosphere in the universe” (p.76-77)

But, of course, M. MacFuture is one of those “space-abolishers” mocked earlier; he does not see that a space without antagonism is not space at all for M. Altmann. Hence the latter’s cruel answer that dampens M. MacFuture’s enthusiastic drive to infinity and beyond.

“Where is the call or the challenge **from the cosmos**? I only hear and see that with the means and methods of unencumbered technology you **despairingly knock** at the spaces of the cosmos and seek with all your powers to penetrate into them. **But I hear and see nothing of a call or a provocation**, with the exception, at best, of **flying saucers.**” (p. 77)

Lost on M. MacFuture is the irony of using “flying saucers” as a fanciful way to imagine an enemy that would render space *politically interesting*. He can only imagine the possible chance of finding another continent while star trekking in empty space:

“Thus, we shall perhaps discover now a **fully planetary body on the way to the moon or to Mars**, that nobody has the slightest notion of before.” (p. 78)<sup>28</sup>

This is exactly the sort of reprise of history Schmitt has criticized before, this idea that history can repeat itself, and that the contingent luck of Westerners in occupying America could be repeated again and again as if that was its “manifest destiny”. But there is no Providence nor is there a Western predestination.

M. Altmann — “But it becomes ever clearer to me, dear MacFuture, that you perceive of your breach into the cosmos as an amplified and intensified **new edition of the discovery of America**.

M. MacFuture — Is that not precisely a proof that I am right? You, honorable M. Altmann, with your historical sense, must understand that best.

To which Schmitt answers with dry irony:

The human has an almost irresistible need to **eternalize his last great historical experience**. Precisely my historical sense **keeps me from such reprises**. My historical sense proves itself above all in that it reminds me of the **irretrievable uniqueness of all great historical occurrences**. (p.78)

For him, to situate anything in space is always to situate it in time, at a certain moment in history. And the same reversal of background and foreground that is requested from space obtains for time as well. This is

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<sup>28</sup>The same absurd replay of the “discovery of America” is taken up again in the foreword of the *Nomos* with the same effect: “The traditional Eurocentric order of international law is foundering today, as is the old *nomos* of the earth. This order arose from a legendary and unforeseen discovery of a new world, from an unrepeatable historical event. Only in fantastic parallels can one imagine a modern recurrence, such as men on their way to the moon discovering a new and hitherto unknown planet that could be exploited freely and utilized effectively to relieve their struggles on earth. The question of a new *nomos* of the earth will not be answered with such fantasies, any more than it will be with further scientific discoveries.” *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* Translated and Annotated by G. L. Ulmen. New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006 (p. 39).

where Schmitt presents his philosophy of history in a magnificent quote with five repetitions of the word “once”, ending with the cruelest cauda:

“**An historical truth is true only once.** But also the historical call, the challenge that introduces a new epoch **is only true once.** It follows, too that the historical answer that is given to a unique call is only true *once* and only right *once*. (...) And above all: the victor won’t easily grasp that even his victory is **only true once.**” (DPS p. 79) (Schmitt’s italics)

At which point M. MacFuture, no matter how dense he is, finally gets it, as he answers rather meekly:

“With this perhaps you wish to say that I’m providing an **old answer to a new historical call?**” (p. 79)

Indeed, this is exactly what Schmitt wanted the American Boy Scout to confess! In a way, this is the turning point of the dialog since M. MacFuture, after M. Neumeyer, is now aware that their common ideas of future progress as well as reason and space are simply giving “old answers” to a “new historical call”. This new call might be as important as that of the oceans to which England answered in the past, but it cannot possibly be answered in the same way *again*. Trying once more to keep “infinity” and “beyond” as the main drive is “like putting new wines in old wineskins” with the same result as what is stated in the Gospel: “else the wineskins break, and the **wine** runneth out (Lc, 5-29).

M. Altmann — “In addition, all continuations and exacerbations of this erstwhile answer go awry and are useless. (...) None of this will **do any good** faced with the reality of a **new historical call.**” p. 79

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..

We are now reaching the end of the dialog and it is about time that we learn from the author *what* the new call consists of, the call that would not be simply be some useless reprise of a former episode taken as a rule when it was nothing but an exceptional piece of luck.

M. Altmann — “You said earlier, MacFuture, that modern technology has made our earth laughably small. The **new spaces**, out of which the **new call comes**, must therefore **be found upon our earth** and **not outside** in the cosmos. (p. 80)

We now know both what the new space will be made of and the direction of its vector: *earth*. But it is the consequence of this reorientation down to *earth* that is most important: by abandoning cosmos as well as sea, we also abandon the illusions of “unencumbered technology”. The answer is given rather indirectly by an appeal to the mythological figure of a “new Hercules”:

M. Altmann — “The one **who manages to restrain the unencumbered technology, to bind it and to lead it into a concrete order** has given more of an answer to the contemporary call than the one who, by means of modern technology seeks to land on the moon or on Mars. The **binding of the unencumbered technology** – that for example would be the **labor of a new Hercules**. It is from **this direction** that I hear **the new call**, the challenge of the present.” (p. 80)

Binding technology, restraining it so that it stops going to “infinity” in a foolish effort to go “beyond”, is the way in which the “new call” is heard by M. Altmann. That it will not be an easy matter is underlined by the allusion to a thirteenth herculean task, less grandiose than landing “on the moon or Mars” but founded “on our earth” and ending with the creation of a “concrete order”. There is something in earthly existence requesting that we *restrain* progress and that we *embed* technology. Any other drive is not only foolish but also criminal for a reason that is now made explicit.

It is only at the very end of the dialog, in the passage quoted at the end of the first section, that we get the most radical and the most pointed barb: there is now a link between being “upon the earth” and *remaining* “human”. While M. Neumeyer and M. MacFuture are happy to continue heading away into their own spaceless space and wishing farewell to the poor old historian who is due some pity for being stuck in one place, Schmitt delivers the barb’s venom I quoted at the beginning but which can now realize its full meaning:

“To me, you need wish nothing new. You shall both have noted that I **remain with the earth and upon the earth**. For me, the **human is a son of the earth**, and so he shall remain as long as **he remains human**. I would like to hope that both of you shall **remain human as well**; you, MacFuture, on the moon and on Mars; and you dear Dr Neumeyer, in the depths of the sea!” (p. 81)

How shocking to see that it is no less than Carl Schmitt, the jurist who has condoned a radically *inhumane* policy of space occupation at the most terrible moment of 20<sup>th</sup> century history, the jurist who had covered the crimes of the

Third Reich with his appeal to the *Großraum*, who now dares to accuse the two representatives of the Anglo-American space-building powers of risking *the loss of their humanity by occupying the wrong space*.<sup>29</sup> And yet this is just the moment in the dialogue that most parallels our situation as we are faced with the irruption of the new space of Gaia. It is impossible to doubt that the question of who is “human” is reconnected, in the most direct and tragic way, to *where on earth you reside and which planet you have decided to inhabit*.<sup>30</sup>

“Just so, I believe that the human shall awake one morning after a hard night threatened by atomic bombs and **similar terrors** and shall gratefully recognize himself again as **the son of the firmly grounded earth**” (p. 82)

The dialog ends there. And while it is true that we don’t yet clearly understand the new challenge, we do know its scale and we also know that it will not resemble the former one — space, conquest, progress, unencumbered technology and flight from this earth. “Historical truths are true only once”.

Today we sort of know which are the “similar terrors” that indeed look a lot like those promised by the “atomic bombs”. It is called the climate chaos.<sup>31</sup> Even if it is clear that for Schmitt “firmly grounded earth” isn’t in any way what we now call Gaia,<sup>32</sup> it remains that he has detected with great clarity that our remaining human depends on resisting the polemical ways of building an emptied and neutralized space.

Naturally, by now every ecologist, every activist knows that they cannot be human in the “wrong space”. They certainly don’t need Schmitt to remind them of that. It is just that his mythopoietic obsession with the difference between land-based and seafaring powers takes on a striking relevance once you realize that the challenge today comes neither from the sea nor from the land — nor of course from the cosmos — but from “critical zones” which

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<sup>29</sup> Schmitt, Carl. *Ex Captivitate Salus. Expériences des années 1945-1947* ( traduit et commenté par André Doremus). Paris: Vrin, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Bracing for a fight, indeed a war between humans and Earthbounds, was one of the possible results of Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (translated by Cathy Porter). London: Polity Press, 2017. And for a terrifying example of what it means to be spaceless and timeless, see Connolly, William. *Capitalism and Christianity American Style*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Stengers, Isabelle. In *Catastrophic Times Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (translated by Andrew Goffey). Open Humanities Press, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Latour, Bruno, and Timothy Lenton. "Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia Is So Hard to Understand." *Critical Inquiry*. Spring (2019): 1-22.

“open themselves” to a completely different challenge. This is so because they are made of different “aggregates”, generated by life forms that have made it a different “achievement”.<sup>33</sup>

What I find important in Schmitt’s notion of “new space” is that meeting the challenge defines who is the power that will occupy the space. For instance, in Schmitt’s view, England exists because it answered the oceans that had opened themselves to it. Similarly, answering the Earth’s call will define *what sorts of power* will emerge to meet the present situation. It is in that sense that I proposed in *Facing Gaia* to call the new situation a new climatic *regime*, because it does connect the question of natural history with those of jurisprudence and the invention of new types of sovereignty.

It is easy to dismiss my interpretation by objecting that I have projected onto Schmitt a proto- and pseudo-ecological thought that he never held. Still, I’d like to entertain the possibility that he had detected in the Anglo-American conception of space, jurisprudence, sovereignty, absolutization of technology and imperialism, a form of deep hypocrisy — claims to domination masquerading as universal rights— that is a direct precursor of what we criticize today as a flight away from the earth in the official politics of the United States, Brazil, Australia or Russia.

The reason why I stick to this politicization of space in spite of its possible irrelevance, is linked to the present reinterpretation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the return of the old political question of people and land. Even if, at the time, Schmitt’s position looked *infinitely more criminal* than the positions of the winners, are we so sure today, now that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is revealing its true nature, of the lasting asymmetry between the two? After all, 1945 is also the preferred date for marking one of the beginnings of the Anthropocene,<sup>34</sup> and for sure, that of a Great Acceleration.<sup>35</sup> To the crimes committed in the name of the *Großraum* and *Lebensraum* might now be *added* those committed in the name of a flight away to the Globe. In many ways, it can be said that ever since 1918, by refusing to heed the lessons of the global catastrophe until the 1990s, when the climatic mutation became fully visible, a whole century has been wasted trying to ignore what it means to be *human on*

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<sup>33</sup> Tsing, Anna L. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Zalasiewicz, Jan, et al. "When did the Anthropocene begin? A mid-twentieth century boundary level is stratigraphically optimal." *Quaternary International* (2015).

<sup>35</sup> Steffen, Will, et al. "The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration." *The Anthropocene Review* (2015): 1-18.

earth.<sup>36</sup> It might be more honest to confess, like M. MacFuture, that we risk “providing an old answer to a new historical call.” In which case the time might have finally come to abandon Schmitt and his *Großraum* altogether and to begin the search for and the settling into the new spaces capable of rendering us human again: the *Terrestrial*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Latour, Bruno, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Conflicts of planetary proportions– a conversation." *Philosophies of History*. Eds. Tamm, Marek and Zoltan Boldizar Simon 202-

<sup>37</sup> A large part of *Critical Zones* (2020) op cit is dedicated to calibrate what is meant by the terrestrial. See chapters by Isabelle Stengers, Emilie Hache, Donna Haraway, Vinciane Despret, Sarah Vanuxem and others.