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Climate Change and the Adaptation of the Political

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In the face of climate change, along what path might we attempt transformation that could create a just and livable planet? Recently we proposed a framework for anticipating the possible political-economic forms that might emerge as the world's climate changes. Our framework outlines four possible paths; two of those paths are defined by what is called "Leviathan," the emergence of a form of planetary sovereignty. In this article we elaborate by examining the adaptive character of emergent planetary sovereignty. To grasp this, we need a theory that can see through our ostensibly "postpolitical" moment to grasp not the disintegration but the adaptation of the political. What does it mean to say the political adapts? Reduced to its essence, it is to say that if the character of political life prevents a radical response to crisis, then it is the political that must change. A materialist attempt to elaborate on this question must begin by reflecting on the manifest inequalities of power in the current mode of global political-economic regulation. After doing so, we conclude by arguing for a return to the concept of natural history. *Key Words:* climate change, futures, political, theory, sovereignty.

面对气候变迁，我们能够依循什么样的道路，达到可以创造公平且宜居的地球之转变？晚近我们提出期待可能的政治—经济形式之框架，这些形式或许会随着世界气候的变迁而出现。我们的框架概述四条可能的路径：其中两条路径以所谓的“利维坦（Leviathan）”定义之——一种地球主权形式的浮现。我们于本文中，透过检视浮现中的地球主权的调适特徵来阐述之。为了进行理解，我们需要能够透视我们显着的“后政治”时刻的理论，以领会政治的调适，而非政治的分解。政治调适意味着什麼？以简化的本质而言，政治调适意味着，如果政治生活的特徵阻碍了对危机的激进回应，那麼此种政治便必须改变。阐述此一问题的物质主义尝试，必须始于反思在当前的全球政治—经济规范模式中，显着的权力不均。此后，我们在结论中主张回归自然历史的概念。关键词：气候变迁，未来，政治，理论，主权。

Frente a la realidad del cambio climático, ¿de qué manera podríamos intentar la transformación que pudiese crear un planeta justo y habitable? Hace poco propusimos un marco que anticipara las formas político-económicas que podrán aparecer a medida que cambie el clima del mundo. Nuestro marco de predicción esboza cuatro posibilidades; dos de éstas se definen como "Leviathanes," la emergencia de una forma de soberanía planetaria. En el artículo nos extendemos un poco examinando el carácter adaptativo de la emergente soberanía planetaria. Para captar esto, necesitamos una teoría que pueda ver a través de nuestro momento ostensiblemente "pospolítico" que opte no por la desintegración de lo político sino por su adaptación. ¿Qué se quiere decir con que lo político se adapte? Concentrándonos en lo esencial, se quiere decir que si el carácter de la vida política previene una respuesta radical a la crisis, entonces lo político es lo que debe cambiar. Un intento materialista de elaborar alrededor de esta cuestión debe empezar reflexionando sobre las manifiestas desigualdades de poder en el modo actual de la regulación global político-económica. Después de hecho lo anterior, concluimos abogando por un regreso al concepto de historia natural. *Palabras clave:* cambio climático, futuros, político, teoría, soberanía.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) opened its 2012 World Energy Outlook with the following warning:

The global energy map is changing, with potentially far-reaching consequences for energy markets and trade. It is being redrawn by the resurgence in oil and gas production in the United States. . . . By around 2020, the United States is projected to become the largest global oil producer. . . . The result is a continued fall in US oil

imports, to the extent that North America becomes a net oil exporter around 2030. . . . [T]he climate goal of limiting warming to 2°C is becoming more difficult. . . . [A]lmost four-fifths of the CO₂ emissions allowable by 2035 are already locked-in by existing power plants, factories, buildings, etc. If action to reduce CO₂ emissions is not taken before 2017, all the allowable CO₂ emissions would be locked-in by energy infrastructure existing at that time. . . . No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world

is to achieve the 2°C goal, unless carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology is widely deployed. . . . Geographically, two-thirds [of proven reserves] are held by North America, the Middle East, China and Russia. These findings underline the importance of CCS as a key option to mitigate CO₂ emissions, but its pace of deployment remains highly uncertain. (IEA 2012, 1–3)¹

In other words, a rapid and massive change in the geographies of energy production and consumption is presently underway. In a bid for energy security and a repatriated stream of profits, some of the world's largest consumers of energy are turning to friendlier, ideally domestic, suppliers. Big oil's gaze has turned north (to the Arctic), deeper (offshore), and dirtier (tar sands). If the Middle East still holds most of the world's oil reserves, it nonetheless accounts for only 31 percent of current global production (Bridge and LeBillon 2013, 15). These centripetal forces are reconfiguring the world's political geography.

There are at least two likely, and profoundly significant, political conclusions we can draw from these developments. The first is that the winners of this geopolitical game, already the world's most powerful states, will become even more dominant via a concentration of political and economic power, military force, and energy resources. The second and perhaps more profound consequence of this shift is that it signals the end of any hope for meaningful carbon mitigation. Unconventional hydrocarbons are much more carbon-intensive sources of energy than Saudi oil (Bridge and LeBillon 2013, 9).² Their development guarantees massive increases in greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, the geographic and political-economic distribution of these resources deepens the global division of wealth and power, exacerbating geopolitical inequalities and further destabilizing what little ground international negotiations have cleared for cooperation on climate-related concerns.

The IEA does not say mitigation is no longer possible and, to be sure, some sectors, firms, and localities have reduced emissions (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] 2014). Green energy has expanded in certain instances. But the IEA's emphasis on the desperate need for CCS surely means it recognizes the insurmountable obstacles to CO₂ emissions reductions on the necessary timelines (i.e., "before 2017").³ The possibility of rapid global carbon mitigation as a climate change abatement strategy has passed. The world's elites, at least, appear to have abandoned it—if, of course, they ever really took it seriously. Davis (2010) might prove prescient. In what

he called a "not improbable scenario," mitigation "would be tacitly abandoned . . . in favour of accelerated investment in selective adaptation for Earth's first-class passengers."

The goal would be the creation of green and gated oases of permanent affluence on an otherwise stricken planet. Of course, there would still be treaties, carbon credits, famine relief, humanitarian acrobatics, and perhaps the full-scale conversion of some European cities and small countries to alternative energy. But worldwide adaptation to climate change, which presupposes trillions of dollars of investment in the urban and rural infrastructures of poor and medium income countries, as well as the assisted migration of tens of millions of people from Africa and Asia, would necessarily command a revolution of almost mythic magnitude in the redistribution of income and power. (Davis 2010, 38)

What does this mean for how we conceive the political today? This question is the focus of what follows. The momentous socioecological transformations to which Davis refers, and against which the global climate justice movement might enact a "revolution of almost mythic magnitude," is best grasped as a moment of transition in the planet's natural history. This is in no way to suggest it is beyond politics. On the contrary, in the midst of these changes the urgent questions concern not merely a transformation in politics—more representative proceduralism, for example, or more precautionary environmental policy-making—but a transformation of the political. To ask via what paths might we undertake political transformations adequate to something like a just and livable planet is necessarily to ask not only what political tools, strategies, and tactics might achieve this but also what conception of the realm of the political might render adequate tools, strategies, and tactics imaginable. What conceptions of the political legitimate the warming norm, and what alternatives can provide some grounds for genuine alternatives?

Such questions preoccupy many geographers today (e.g., Yusoff 2009; Johnson 2010; Swyngedouw 2010; Bond 2011; Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2012; Labban 2012; Dempsey 2013; Braun 2014). We recently proposed a framework for anticipating the possible political-economic forms that might emerge as the world's climate changes (Wainwright and Mann 2013), to broadly outline the paths that humanity faces. Two of those paths are defined by an emergent form of planetary sovereignty capable of deciding how to save the world—a "climate Leviathan"—that "exists to the precise extent that some sovereign exists

who can decide on the exception, declare an emergency, and decide who may emit carbon and who cannot . . . for the sake of *life on Earth*" (Wainwright and Mann 2013, 5).

As Lohmann (2012) notes, however, an ambiguity troubles our argument. In our focus on the question of who may emit carbon and who cannot, we seemed to premise the possibility of Leviathan on the necessity of carbon mitigation, whereas the failure of global efforts makes it clear that any emergent Leviathan will be principally a beast of adaptation. Our only mention of adaptation hardly addresses the problem: "The elite transnational social groups that dominate the world's capitalist nation-states certainly desire to moderate and adapt to climate change—not least to stabilize the conditions that produce their privileges" (Lohmann 2012, 4). Although we emphasize throughout the *emergent* character of planetary sovereignty—that is, we do not conceive of it as operated by an on–off switch—we did fail to emphasize its *adaptive* character.⁴ With the tacit acceptance of runaway climate change, Leviathan might be expected to (1) enable efforts to profit from it (Funk 2014), for example via newly accessible resources in the Arctic, while (2) organizing cross-territorial forms of adaptation that augment elite social groups' power and security (e.g., military-coordinated geoengineering). Neither of these tendencies are new: they only intensify existing dynamics. To come to grips with them, we must see through our ostensibly postpolitical moment (Swynge-douw 2010).⁵ The problem is neither the disintegration nor the terminal crisis of the political but its distinctive adaptation.

Leviathan and the Adaptation of the Political

It is all about politics. Climate change is the hardest political problem the world has ever had to deal with. It is a prisoner's dilemma, a free-rider problem and the tragedy of the commons all rolled into one. . . . [Hum]ankind has no framework for it. ("Getting warmer" 2009)

What does it mean to say that the political adapts? It clearly presumes the political has a history—perhaps even a natural history—but it also presumes it has a specificity. To speak of the political, and of its adaptation, is to say the political constitutes an analytically distinct region of the social. There is no shortage of debate to which one could turn to enrich this discussion. Virtually every prominent radical philosopher

these days has written about the political, and most tell the story of its demise or the onset of the postpolitical (Mouffe, Rancière, Badiou, Žižek, and others). As Žižek (2011, ix) puts it, we witness everywhere the emergence of "a new bipolarity between politics and post-politics." Like Mouffe, Badiou, and Rancière (in his "hatred of democracy"), Žižek (2011, xv) demands we endorse an "agonism" that revels in opposition and struggle for their own sakes: "to engage in struggle means to endorse Badiou's formula *mieux vaut un désastre qu'un désêtre*."⁶

Here, the political refers neither to a particular political condition or set of institutions (e.g., liberal democracy or the parliamentary system) nor to the existential fact of struggle (although this is always implicated) but to the very grounds on which such conditions, institutions, or struggles arise and are formulated. The political is not, therefore, a relational concept in the way "relational" is typically used by geographers.⁷ Nor is it merely the realm of the clash of interests, nor of agonistic confrontation and collective or individual self-actualization. Rather, it defines a relation *tout court*; that is, the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. The political is definitely not the arena in which hegemony imposes its interests and the subaltern resists but the grounds on which the relation between the dominant and dominated takes form. (*Grounds* is thus an apposite term because, as geographers know, implicit in any mode of the political is a spatiotemporal context in which it unfolds and helps shape.)

On this point, we find the writings of Poulantzas especially important. In a discussion of hegemony, Poulantzas ([1965] 2008) makes the crucial decision to found his analysis in the historical separation (or "regionalization") of the political and the effect this process has had on modern state formation. Although an early work, already in this essay Poulantzas emphasizes a point most often associated with his influential later debate with Ralph Miliband, namely, "the state crystallizes the *relations* of production and *class relations*. The modern political state does not translate the 'interests' of the dominant classes at the political level [as is often suggested in economic or instrumentalist accounts], *but [rather] the relationship between those interests and the interests of the dominated classes*—which means that it precisely constitutes the 'political' expression of the interests of the dominant classes" ([1965] 2008, 80). For Poulantzas, the "*specifically political character* of the capitalist state" does not lie in the state's domination by capital but is in fact constituted

in the very “separation between state and civil society” (83). This legitimacy of this separation is thus both founded on and represents a seemingly natural result of “the characteristic of universality assumed by a particular set of values” (83). What are these values? They are “the ‘universal’ values of formal abstract liberty and equality”:

In societies based on expanded reproduction and generalized commodity exchange [i.e., capitalist societies], we observe a process of privatization and autonomization of men as producers. Natural human relations, founded on a hierarchy involving the socio-economic subordination of producers (witness slave and feudal states), are replaced by “social” relations between “autonomized” individuals, located in the exchange process. *Marx and Lenin underscore this evolution of natural relations into social relations . . . that underlies the constitution of commodity-value and labor-value and exploitation in capitalist, exchange-based society. . . . This appearance of social relations in the capitalist system of production in fact presupposes, as a necessary precondition, the characteristic atomization of civil society and goes hand in hand with the advent of specifically political relations.* (Poulantzas [1965] 2008, 83)⁸

Any politics assumes and asserts a historical and geographical terrain to which it lays claim. As the “specifically political character” of the capitalist nation-state is constituted in the separation of the state and civil society, these are the grounds on which the legitimacy of the nation-state rests. Its hegemony in the contemporary political imagination underwrites our assertion that if climate Leviathan is to emerge, it will do so as a transformation of the existing form of sovereignty, enabling the world’s most powerful states to engage in planetary management. Yet we now recognize this claim sidesteps a crucial and difficult question that Leviathan must answer: How could we get from the present Westphalian world to planetary management? And might we get there in a way that preserves the territorial nation-state?

Any materialist approach to these questions must reflect on the manifest inequalities of power in a mode of global political-economic regulation currently constituted to a significant extent by liberal capitalism (United Nations conventions, Bretton Woods institutions, free trade agreements, the European Union, etc.). This matrix thus far has failed to produce a coordinated response to climate change; to generalize, climate change is framed as a scientific-technical problem, best addressed by fuel-efficient cars, tradable permits, and flexible adaptation “governance” (IPCC

2014).⁹ Although planetary warming accelerates ecological transformation and human suffering apace, for capitalist states it nevertheless does not yet signify a fundamental transformation of the grounds of the political. In the wealthy world, climate change still does not matter—or, alternatively, its “mattering” is refused. Instead, the buildup of anthropogenic greenhouse gases is confronted as mere market failure, for which various market-mending policies are proposed: cap-and-trade, carbon offsets, catastrophe bonds, mandatory risk disclosure, flood and hurricane insurance, and so on (Johnson 2013).

Consider the debacle that is the international United National Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations on climate change, a process slowed by both affluent sabotage and developing-world resistance. As justifiable as the latter might be, it shares with the former a futility rooted in fidelity to the conventional economic thinking by which the nation-state-centered liberal capitalist matrix operates, as it relies just as heavily on the essentially technical distribution of costs and benefits. Negotiators seek to solve an optimization problem whose terms must include coefficients for colonialism, underdevelopment, massive historical displacement, and impoverishment. This is to say nothing of inequalities internal to developing nation-states. Climate change cannot be addressed by liberal economic reason, which, denying itself a conscious politics—indeed, denouncing all “politics” as a distortion of economic rationality—cannot think about history and hysteresis (i.e., the irrepressible ways that history continues to matter). On orthodox economic terms, a global solution is not merely politically unlikely but logically impossible. There is no market-based solution to a massive problem whose causes took place before it was possible to price their repercussions. In short, there is no Coasian solution to climate change (Coase 1960; cf. Gilbertson and Reyes 2009; Lohmann 2009), no way for self-interested actors to address the problem of social cost when the very ground on which the problem must be addressed—the political—is disavowed.

This is emphatically not to deny the global environmental debt. That the luxurious life of the capitalist Global North is desertifying West Africa and inundating rural Pakistan is impossible to deny—but it is just as impossible to price. If, as we are often told, the market is by definition apolitical, then it is ridiculous to suggest it as a solution to what is in many ways today’s defining political issue: Whose lives will pay the cost of adaptation to a warming planet?

This failure endlessly frustrates all market-based efforts to allocate a global pool of emittable greenhouse gases (and even the powers that be know it cannot be anything less than global [Stiglitz 2013]). The constant intrusion of the pesky politics of the unpriceable history of the present—inequality, colonialism, and underdevelopment—simultaneously legitimates southern resistance and explains affluent nations' shirking of historical and moral accountability. For the south, it justifies the rejection of petty payments to forget the crimes of history. For elites of the north, for whom the ways and means of liberal capitalism are presumed, the way forward is via the erasure of the record of past wealth-producing emissions, and the declaration of an atmospheric blank slate. "Save our global village," "we're all in this together": This is the political adaptation proclaimed by the Global North. No mention is made of assisted mitigation. It is adaptation *qua* consolidation.

This program suppresses—as it must—the fact that adaptation to climate change will not be cheap and many will suffer. To broach the question in a manner that recognizes this truth is categorically impossible in the liberal capitalist nation-state framework. This is where political struggles over the form and character of planetary management come clearly into view. For if Mitchell (2009, 401) is right that "the political machinery that emerged to govern the age of fossil fuels may be incapable of addressing the events that will end it," what will follow?¹⁰

Any climate Leviathan will be predicated on the assumption that the future requires the consolidation of present forms of juridical subjectivity so as to reproduce a classical liberal world, at least in the logic of rule. In the contemporary capitalist state, this means that climate change is addressed by merely tweaking citizen-subjects' juridico-scientific status to include a role as emission source. In other words, this form of adaptation necessarily invokes the nation-state, or subnational units (states, provinces, municipalities) under its direction, taking the nation as the obvious mode through which rule is exercised. Isn't every citizen, however global or local, ultimately subject to some nation-state? The effectiveness of this program is thus premised on the simultaneous adaptation of the political *qua* separation of state and civil society and the refusal to adjust existing juridical and legal territoriality and power. It is a performative project to create a world in which orthodox liberal concepts—concerning the liberty of markets, property rights, and the state—actually work.

With the growing awareness that the mitigation window has closed, this project is becoming tightly linked to plans to "geoengineer" our way to safety, via massive technosocial mitigation-by-planetary-manipulation (Keith 2000; Robock 2008; Hamilton 2013). These efforts are of a qualitatively different order than projects to create resilient infrastructures or produce drought-resistant agricultural seed stock. We refer, rather, to more or less well-advanced plans for what might be called geomodification. Take, for example, the 2006 NASA-sponsored workshop on "solar radiation management"; that is, artificially increasing atmospheric albedo (Lane et al. 2007). Other commonly proposed strategies include artificially generating cold-water upwelling to lower surface temperatures, or altering ocean chemistry to absorb more carbon (Keller, Feng and Oschlies 2014).¹¹ As the IPCC (2013, 29) itself acknowledges, carbon capture and storage belongs here, too, as depositing gigatons of carbon in the Earth's crust for thousands of years, as imagined by the IEA (2012), will involve considerable geological engineering.

Geoengineering alone will not bring Leviathan into being, of course. But large-scale projects will involve a relatively small group of actors experimenting with global systems, in what is hard not to see as the most improbable of missions: to materially reconfigure planet Earth so as to avoid having to rework human political economies. The recognition that any means of evaluating geoengineering projects will be intensely political explains the logical appeal for a legitimate planetary authority to adjudicate the merits of experimentation and the cloaking of such authority in the white coat of technoscientific confidence: "Either we are smart enough to craft that feedback mechanism ourselves, or the Earth system will ultimately provide it" (Parson and Keith 2013, 1279). It is reason versus the state of nature. Between them stands the planetary sovereign: the one that declares the (experimental) exception in the name of life itself. Planetary sovereignty thus emerges in what might be called *Weltrecht*; that is, the arrogation of the authority and duty to remake the world to save it.

A Natural History of Our Conjuncture

It might be useful, at this juncture, to return to the concept of natural history. In a preface to *Capital*, Marx ([1867] 1976, xx) writes: "My standpoint, from which the development of the economic

formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.” For the contemporary climate justice movement, this is a far more radical insight than it might first appear. It is to say that an adequate account of the current transformation—the onset of the Anthropocene, we might say—must reject the subjectivist moralism of modern environmentalism. If “the development of the economic formation of society” is “a process of natural history” in which the individual is not “responsible for relations whose creature [s]he remains,” then what is to be done? We are moments in natural history, nodes inextricably enmeshed in a more-than-human world. This is perhaps most readily evident in the fact that to live in and work on the world is to be a carbon being; carbon is, after all, the second most abundant element in our bodies, one that we metabolize to power every act of living labor and exhale with every breath.

The problem is how to avoid taking this as an argument for paralysis, structural overdetermination, or helplessness. Instead, if it is true—and what useful account of climate change can rely on apportioning blame to this or that individual?—then the challenge resides not only in questioning the adaptation of the political but in pursuing it. The present chapter in Earth’s natural history is structured to a significant extent by capitalism as a social formation and, at least for those with the largest carbon budgets, it is on this basis that our existential relation with carbon is currently constituted. What is to be governed is the very stuff we are made of.

This helps explain why Leviathan’s planetary sovereignty—and the adaptation of the political—is being shaped by struggles over the relation between carbon agency and carbon subjectivity. For if “to emit, or not to emit” is not a question, or at least not one of mere subjective choice, then the hegemony of environmental individualism in liberal climate politics is leading us into a political cul-de-sac. Indeed, it seems that we are already there. The utter failure of these efforts, and the end of any hope for meaningful mitigation, is not only evidence of their futility but stands as the most powerful argument to justify a consolidating climate Leviathan: If people will not make the right carbon choices on their own, then they must be made to do so.

The more complicated—and politically urgent—question is the emerging forms of carbon subjectivity

these dynamics produce, both in the heart of the carbon-spewing north and the more varied carbon geographies of the south and the status of agency therein. Examining the manifold incipient forms of subjectivity, and their relation to the forces that produce multi-scalar political–economic inertia and change, is surely one of the most important tasks facing human geography today. It demands a willingness to follow the carbon, materially and theoretically, an endeavor to which many geographers are already committed (e.g., Yusoff 2009; Johnson 2010, 2013; Rice 2010; Swyngedouw 2010; Osborne 2011; Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2012; Lansing 2012; Saldanha 2012, 2013; Huber 2013; Labban 2013); more will surely follow.

It is here, in the relation between what we might call a biopolitical subjectivity and a transformational agency, that we are bound to find our questions leading, the terrain on which the adaptation of the political must inevitably unfold. This is, of course, a very old problem. Indeed, it is the puzzle at the core of all revolutionary thought, the problem to which all revolutionary action must offer a response. The question of revolution thus always haunts the adaptation of the political, which is an attempt to forestall radical material transformation. The specter of such transformation is but one more fund on which climate Leviathan might draw.

In his wonderful book on revolution and European philosophy, Kouvelakis (2003) remarks that what Kant “finds alarming” in the prospect of revolution is “the moment of vacuum thus created, insofar as it implies the threat of regression to a state of nature” (21). Many current efforts on the left, from the liberal to the radical, are emerging from this fear of the ecological-resource scarcity precipice we perceive on the horizon. It seems clear, as we suggested earlier (Wainwright and Mann 2013), that this fear is a significant part of the reason something like climate Leviathan—like other Leviathans—can come to make so much sense.

A refusal of this position is essential. There is no state of nature to which we inevitably regress in the absence of civilization. First, because the concept of civilization emerged with the birth of liberal modernity, so any concept of its lack, at least in the Hobbesian nasty-brutish-short sense it has today, is just as modern. Second, history puts the lie to it wherever we look. The critical assertion that there is no essentialist way we all are (or must be) is not merely a political preference, but a truth. If what makes climate change

terrifying is the expectation that people will “revert” to the war of all against all that is the state of nature, it is essential to recognize that this reversion would be neither a product of climate-induced scarcity, nor of nature, human or otherwise. The *bellum omnia* might very well loom on some horizons, along with a Leviathan (or a Mao) to subdue it, but in all cases they will be products of historical social relations, and are only inevitable if how we live now (and that might not be a very inclusive “we”) expresses the truth of how we “really are”—some base condition to which we will forever revert in the absence of counteracting forces. There is no reason to believe this. If we are Hobbesian, it is because we make ourselves so: there is nothing inevitable or irrefutable about it.

To see this is to recognize the persistence of the political in natural history, and vice versa; it is to say that climate change is an event in our natural history. As Marx argued and many geographers have reiterated, the relations between humans and nature always reflect the prevailing relations between humans.¹² Indeed, this point remains fundamental to any political ecology worth the name. It should be paired with a second analytical point concerning the temporality of the political, one more closely associated with Gramsci. To grasp the adaptation of the political we would need to read as *conjunctural* our strange present-conditional politics, in which what might happen in the future seems to determine the present. The concept of conjuncture defines a moment, emphasizing its existence as a complex of pasts and futures. Our hypothesis is that the adaptation of the political that we might anticipate with climate Leviathan is defined by the furtive way the future bends back into the now. Just as money guarantees its social power in the present through a never-yet-realized futural promise to be worth something—to be more than a dirty scrap of paper or useless lump of metal—so will climate Leviathan secure its existence by structuring a present that realizes a certain future, one worth living. The result is a politics of emergency, one where politics is deferred. This deferral arrives from, or is premised on, a future that, increasingly, many await only with fear. This peculiarity might explain why the era in which we live, saturated in struggle, could nonetheless appear to some as postpolitical, a world in which we seek institutional and industrial technologies through which we might avoid a future necessarily presupposed by the world in which, however reluctantly or unjustly, we are all condemned to live. In sum, what we are experiencing is less after politics than other politics;

that is, the adaptation of the political. This other would, of course, be the first victim of the emergency whose looming threat legitimates it—precisely because it is constructed for a disappearing world.

Notes

1. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development founded the IEA in 1974 (at U.S. behest) to coordinate wealthy countries’ response to dependence on Middle Eastern oil.
2. Hence the new geography of energy demands increasing amounts of energy in the process of extraction relative to the energy of that extracted. During the last century, the global average fell from 1:100 to 1:30 and as low as 1:5 in some unconventional operations. In other words, whereas an average extraction project once produced one hundred times the amount of energy invested, it now produces only thirty times, and often less (Bridge and LeBillon 2013, 9).
3. The data supporting this realization—familiar to many geographers—include the following: In 2011 global CO₂ emissions reached a record high of 31.6 gigatons (Gt), a 1.0 Gt (3.2 percent) increase over 2010 (IEA 2012). The world is on track to emit ~58 Gt in 2020, the year the Durban agreement commitments are supposed to begin, ~14 Gt more than can be emitted if we are to limit warming to 2°C (United Nations Environment Program 2012). From 2004 to 2013, atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations measured at Mauna Loa increased 2.14 percent, the fastest decadal increase yet (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2013). The rate of increase continues to accelerate. Between February 2012 and February 2013, Mauna Loa recorded a 3.26 ppm rise in CO₂, registering 400 ppm for the first time in May 2013, relative to preindustrial levels of approximately 280 ppm (Zickfeld et al. 2009; Vidal 2013). Moreover, there has been no green energy boom: “[t]he drive to clean up the world’s energy system has stalled,” and “the average unit of energy produced today is basically as dirty as it was 20 years ago” (IEA 2013). Finally, there is no substantive progress in international climate change negotiations, to say nothing of actual carbon mitigation. In the ruins of Kyoto, the UNFCCC lacks a coherent roadmap. The July 2013 U.S.–China agreements are narrow in scope and nonbinding.
4. Braun (2014, 50) argues we treat capitalism and sovereignty as functions of a binary “on/off” switch” (his term).
5. We endorse McCarthy’s (2013) critique of Swyngedouw (2010) and his argument that “there are . . . very substantial, significant, and ongoing struggles around the politics and politicization of climate change that are directly at odds with some of the ‘post-political’ dynamics that Swyngedouw sees” (McCarthy 2013, 23).
6. Žižek’s translation (“better to take the risk and engage in fidelity to a Truth-Event, even if it ends in catastrophe, than to vegetate in the eventless utilitarian-hedonist survival of what Nietzsche called the ‘last men’”)

- is improbably loose (Žižek 2010, xv). *Désêtre* is a Lacanian word game, a derivative of misreading *désire* as “not going” (*ir* is a participle of “to go” in French); hence *désêtre* is “not being” or “disbeing.”
7. See, for example, Lawson and Elwood’s (2014) excellent work on “relational poverty.”
 8. By our reading, Poulantzas places the word *social* in “social’ relations” in scare quotes to emphasize that they are also natural relations. This passage, with its emphasis on the natural history of the formation of the political in capitalist society, lends support to Bob Jessop’s assertion that “were he alive today, Poulantzas would be a political ecologist” (personal communication 2013). We urgently need a study that draws on Poulantzas’s thought to study climate change and the capitalist state.
 9. For example, “Existing and emerging economic instruments can foster adaptation by providing incentives for anticipating and reducing impacts (medium confidence). Instruments include public–private finance partnerships, loans, payments for environmental services, improved resource pricing, charges and subsidies, norms and regulations, and risk sharing and transfer mechanisms” (IPCC 2014, 24).
 10. Mitchell’s analysis of the natural history of capitalist democracy shares important similarities with our project, and we have learned much from his work. Unfortunately, as Labban (2013) notes, “Mitchell eliminates capitalism altogether from the natural history of carbon democracy and replaces social relations between persons with the relations of things to persons such that, to borrow from Marx (1864), the ‘definite social connections appear as social characteristics belonging naturally to things.’”
 11. For a broad view of the scientific discussion of geo-engineering, see the contributions to a special issue of the journal *Climate Change*, Vol. 77, No. 3–4 (2006).
 12. See Karatani (2008, 571). As Labban (2012) shows, Karatani’s Kantian “associationism” provides the basis for our conception of “climate X,” a kind of ideal path. Labban insightfully points out that in failing to articulate a properly materialist alternative, climate X remains an essentially theological concept (in reply, see Wainwright and Mann 2012).

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