



Photographie : Noémie Goudal

BACK TO EARTH

A play written by Bruno Latour

Directed by Frédérique Aït-Touati

Text: Bruno Latour

Conception and staging: Frédérique Aït-Touati

Set Design: Patrick Laffont-DeLojo, Frédérique Aït-Touati

Video and Light Designer: Patrick Laffont-DeLojo

Maps and Data Viz : SOC (Alexandra Arènes, Axelle Grégoire, Soheil Hajmirbaba)

Assistant: Sean Hardy

Produced by Zone Critique

Co-Produced by (in development): ZKM (Karlsruhe), Centre Pompidou, Nanterre-Amandiers, Kaaitheater (Bruxelles)

Residencies (in development): Studio-théâtre de Vitry-sur-Seine, TJP-CDN de Strasbourg, Théâtre de l'Echangeur, Les Bernardins

Tour (in development): Centre Pompidou, Varsovie, Cairo, Nanterre Amandiers, ZKM, Serpentine Gallery (London), Kammerspiele (Munich)

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“Galileo and Lovelock are the twin brothers of the quaking Earth.”

California, 1965. It is the age of the Whole Earth Catalogue and the conquest of space. Buckminster Fuller compares the Earth to a spaceship. And while America deploys its space program, James Lovelock, an eccentric English scientist, claims to have proven that only the Earth can accommodate life. It is the birth of the Gaia hypothesis, which contradicts the Galilean vision of a universe filled with other 'Earths' that resemble our own. The science of the 60s has some of the Baroque aesthetic of Galileo's age. There is the copious usage of special effects, a far-away dream of conquest, and an imagination of unlimited space. We now live in the ruins of these large ambitions. The cardboard clouds that were once painted and animated with spectacular machinery have been grounded, the space vessels of the first Star Wars have rusted - we wander in the jumble of the old Space.

Galileo taught us that the Earth is in motion. Twentieth century scientists James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis discover a “moving” Earth, in another sense: they describe an Earth where space and time are the products of the actions of the living. They force us to change our world view and our understanding of the cosmos. Why is it that the importance of this second revolution is not perceived in society? By making the parallel between Galileo and Lovelock, between the astronomical revolution of the 17th century and the Anthropocene, the play tells the story of a discovery that changes everything, and yet about which we remain indifferent. The connection between a new cosmological order and the social order is the subject of *The Life of Galileo* by Brecht. It is also our concern. The performance tests this hypothesis by Bruno Latour: we are currently experiencing a world transformation that is as radical and profound as that of Galileo's time.

THE PROJECT

Where to land? On what planet do we live? These are the questions that philosopher Bruno Latour asks in his most recent book (Down to Earth, 2018) and in this new conference-play.

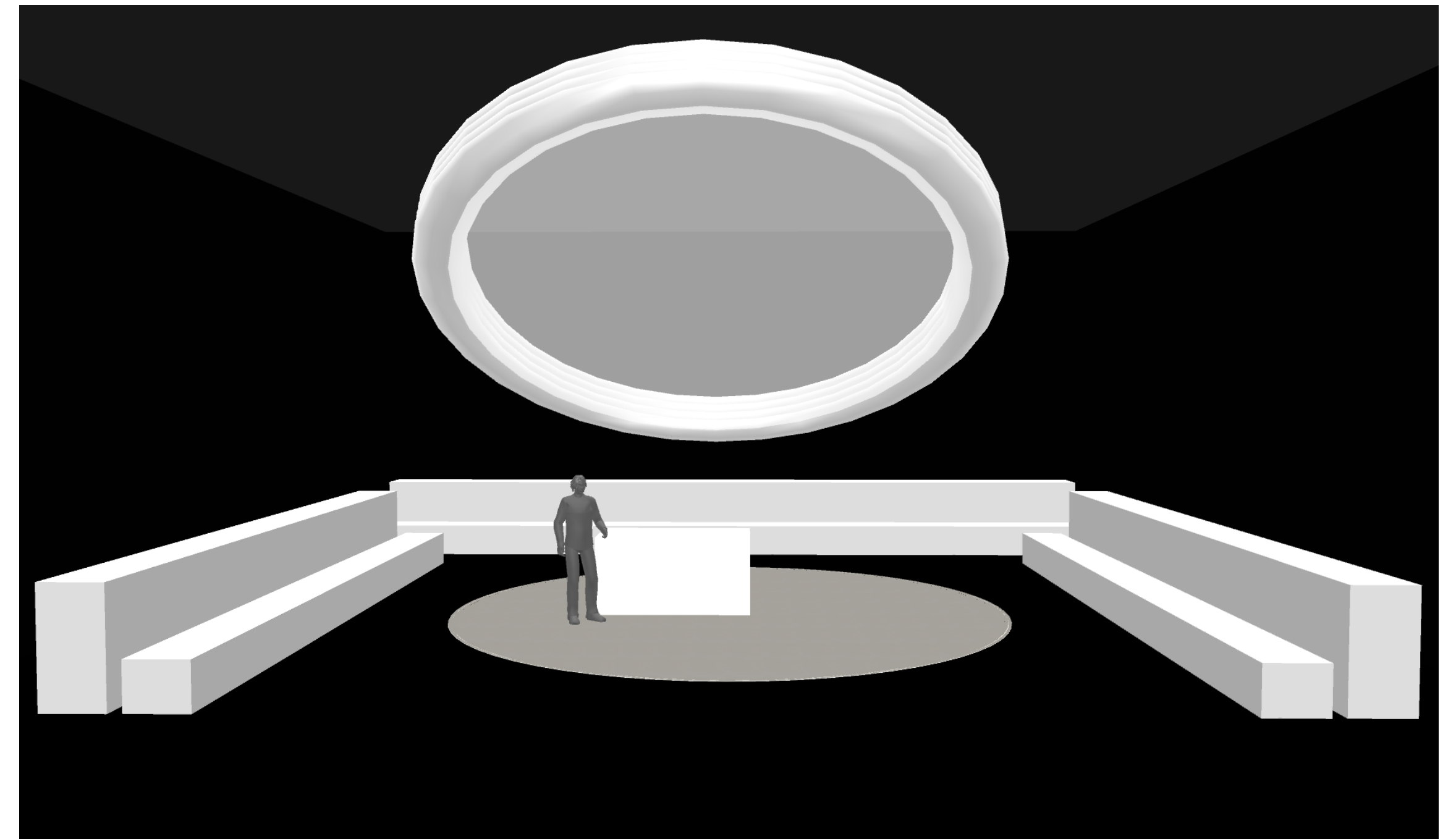
The set design is inspired by Renaissance “anatomical theatres”: the audience surrounds and overlooks the stage, on which a video mapped planetarium of the “seven planets” defined by Latour as the seven concepts of the world is projected. Within this scenic apparatus – a laboratory of representations – the performers make a series of experiments. In front of them, a long table on which multiple objects and instruments that they will use. The conference is a starting point for a collective exercise that brings the viewer into an intellectual and delicate thought experiment that investigates our manners of living in this world. It is an exercise in being shaken into action.

The scenic space merges two spatial devices: the Renaissance anatomical theatre (a circular space in the centre of which dissections were carried out), and the planetarium. The aim here is to create a tool for dissecting the Earth... or, rather, modes of representation of the Earth. Each representation involves political choices: these are the seven "planets" of which Latour speaks, seven planets which are as many possible futures. Through a reflection and mirroring device, the planets are projected onto the ground like a planetarium brought back to Earth: a political, terrestrial planetarium.

On the table of experiment, various instruments help to question our visions of the world with new tools of analysis: 360° camera, thermal camera, microscope camera allow

indeed an exploratory field in perpetual expansion. We choose to work with a circular projection on the ground and, to create a reversal, a circular mirror surface is suspended above so as to show the projection on the ground and at the same time give a reverse reading.

This scenic device, including video projections, live images from the different types of cameras, images worked on upstream, lights and text, will be the common space for the various forms that will inhabit it. What image do we have of the world? What image do we give to the world?





THE COMPANY

Created in 2004 in England by Frédérique Ait-Touati, the company Zone Critique (previously AccentT) explores different genres of theatrical writing and interrogates the scientific and ecological imaginations. After several years of exploration of the franco- and Anglophone repertory (Phèdre by Racine, A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams, Landscape by Harold Pinter, Elle est là by Nathalie Sarraute, En attendant Godot by Samuel Beckett), the company now focuses on research-performance, in collaboration with the CNRS and the Observatoire de Paris. Since 2010, Frédérique Ait-Touati has developed her work on science, ecology and theatre at the Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lez-Avignon and at the Comédie de Reims in 2011 and 2012. Invited by Philippe Quesne, she has been working at the Nanterre-Amandiers Theatre since 2014 with SPEAP, the experimental academic research program she directs.

For the past ten years, philosopher Bruno Latour and director Frédérique Ait-Touati have worked together on projects at the intersection of research and theatre. They work with other artists of the company Zone Critique on different forms of theatrical and performative writing: from conference-performances (“Tarde/Durkheim”, Cerisy and Cambridge 2007; “Bergson/Einstein”, Centre Pompidou 2010; “Anthropocène Conférence”, Musée des Confluences and Quai Branly, 2015), the performance Gaïa Global Circus (2013-2016, on tour in France, England, Switzerland, Germany, the USA, and Canada), the performance of “Théâtre des Négociations / Make it Work” (Nanterre-Amandiers, with Philippe Quesne 2015), the conference-performance INSIDE (premiered at Nanterre-Amandiers Theatre in 2016, tour in 2017-2019 in Berlin, Frankfurt, New York, the TJP-CDN of Strasbourg, the Kaaitheatre of Brussels, and the Théâtre national de La Criée, Marseille). At the crossroad of history of sciences, theatre, and scientific research, their next production investigates the aesthetic and political consequences of the new vision of our planet as proposed by the Earth System Sciences.

Conference-Performance by B. Latour – (excerpts)



I would like for you to feel what it means to find yourself facing a revolution regarding the conception of the Earth. What it does to the stomach, to the guts, the wallet, the soul, the mind, the morals: to the taste and distaste for life, to the hope to escape.

My history lesson should touch you. Except that it is not taught. And yet, we are living it! Nothing is done. Nothing is set in motion. It's as if I find myself in the year 1610: anxious, fascinated, surprised, and shaken by what I hear on new emotions that the Earth would suffer. I hesitate and I tremble.

Violent short-circuit. If you would like to understand the emotions of the planet Earth, then you must interest yourself in cow flatulence, and about the inside of their rumen, and in the chemical reactions of bacteria. The largest is held by the smallest. The Gaia hypothesis is the convergence of Jim and Lynn. One asks where these gases come from, the other searches for where gases emitted by microbes go. One takes the things very high and very far—the Earth seen from Space; the other starts off with the very small and the very old—the action of microbes over three billion years. The two converge on a hypothesis that shatters all relations of scale. No living being is in an environment. What your environment is composed of, is in fact the action of all living things, including you. Including you! It's there that the problems begin.

Conference-Performance by B. Latour

Imagine for a moment that we just told you that the world in which you thought you lived actually resembles nothing that you originally thought. There you were, peacefully surrounded by objects with well defined proper shapes, a basin, a table, a chair, a napkin, every single one well separated from the others, each one keeping apart, and yet like they were all inscribed in a painting, which it itself has its own space independent of them. And you, you are there, before this show of comfortable and well designed, decoupled objects, which only move if they are pushed or pulled. You have in mind a whole collection of deep or superficial thoughts, and you feel quite distinct from this assemblage of things, with a good distance, and once again as if in front of a canvas. Perhaps you see outside: tree leaves, clouds that the wind is making move in the sky, a dog that wags his tail, the contour of a mountain, but they as well are at the correct distance; objects amongst objects, all inserted in the infinite space, all distinctly painted, as if they were in a painting by Vermeer.

And it is here that little by little things begin to complicate. The clouds of rain that cover the horizon, it is in fact the bacteria that sewed their genesis. The sky in which the clouds float stays there because for billions of years the waste of microbes has accumulated. Without them, water vapor would have disappeared long ago, rendering this Earth as sterile as Venus. The average temperature that you enjoy, it is again thanks to an immense multitude of living beings. Even the air that you breathe; it is thanks to the trees that you see outside, that you believe to be outside, that you can breathe. Regarding the mountain, it suffices to look at the fossils engraved in the marble slabs to understand that it comes, as well, from the immense activity collected of these creatures.

Do you realize what is happening? Living beings no longer stay next to each other, but instead begin to superimpose on each other, to slobber over each other, to combine with each other, to become interlaced. These beautiful and deep thoughts that you are currently having, you are capable of having them due to billions of bacteria and diverse phages in your different intestines. The landscape thus undoes itself; the canvas is wiped. And even this table, this chair, this basin, this napkin, here a thousand foreign connections are added; these

objects too are chased from their shells. The wood from which the chair is made because a far-off forest; the iron of the basin contains the bacteria that had accumulated in rocks; within the cotton of the napkin you may add as well the Indian peasants and the results of their labors. You are carried away by the superimposition of the setting in motion of all of these beings. You no longer have a home. There is no longer an "outside". You no longer see anything as theatre.

Look at this wasp's nest, light as a paper, crumbly like a biscuit, it is inert of course, it is not living. But if you forget the wasps, you would understand nothing about its form; its presence in the world would become incomprehensible. Jim and Lynn simply state that the same is true for the atmosphere; for the mountains of limestone; for the maintenance of ocean water; for the average temperature of the Earth; perhaps even for the setting in motion of the tectonic plates (which is much more speculative). They do not say that the Earth is "living", that it is an "organism" nor even a "super-organism". They state that you have never felt anything that was not dependent on living organisms; modified, transformed, and exhaled by living organisms. You included.

Bruno Latour

Born in Beaune in 1947, Bruno Latour is a sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher. Latour's work won him the highest distinction in social sciences, the Holberg Prize, in 2013. Professor at Sciences Po, he is interested in the sociology of sciences and the study of the process of scientific research (La Vie de laboratoire), the dynamics of innovation and the philosophies of its resultant techniques (Aramis ou l'amour des techniques), and also the philosophy of anthropology (Nous n'avons jamais été modernes) which puts into question the distinctions between nature, society and political ecology. He also curated many exhibitions including: "Iconoclash", "Making Things Public" and "Reset Modernity!". Latour taught for many years on the engineering school circuit: first the CNAM, followed by l'École des Mines, where he joined the Centre de sociologie de l'innovation in 1982. Since September 2006, he is a Professor at Sciences Po, where he directs the Médialab.

Frédérique Aït-Touati

Born in 1977, Frédérique Aït-Touati lives and works in Paris. As a stage director and scholar, she explores the relationships between science, literature and politics. In 2004, she created her company in England where she directed plays by Harold Pinter, Tennessee Williams, Nathalie Sarraute, Racine, and Samuel Beckett. She was invited as resident at the Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon and at the Comédie de Reims from 2011 to 2013 for the project Gaïa Global Circus, which toured until 2016 (France, United States, Switzerland, Germany, Great Britain, Canada), and has worked at the Nanterre-Amandiers Theatre since 2014, creating with Bruno Latour and Philippe Quesne, Le Théâtre des Négociations – Make it work (2015). The following year at Nanterre, she directed the conference-performance of Bruno Latour, INSIDE (2016), which is on tour since (in Berlin, Bruxelles, Marseille, Strasbourg, Francfort, New York). As a historian of science at the CNRS, Aït-Touati has published Fictions of the Cosmos (Chicago, 2011) and teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales; she also runs the program SPEAP (Experimental Program in Political Arts).

Patrick Laffont-DeLojo

Born in 1976, Patrick Laffont-DeLojo lives and works in Paris. Artist, videographer, and set designer, Patrick Laffont-DeLojo develops his work "on stage" in close collaboration with performers. He collaborates since 2004 with Cyril Teste and the theatre collective MxM. He has also collaborated with the dance company Skalen, Hubert Colas for close to 15 years, Emilie Loizeau, Alain Françon, Robert Cantarella, Yves-Noel Genod, Jean-Louis Benoît, Thierry Thieu Niang, Benjamin Bertrand... In 2016, he presented a series of installations on Beirut at the Mucem; created Ctrl-X at the théâtre de Poche in Geneva; and created Mona with Émilie Loizeau. He also designed the set for 4X11 by Gildas Milin. At the end of 2017, he presented his first own exposition – Bleu – at Lux, national theatre of Valence. Since 2017, he has collaborated with Frédérique Aït-Touati and Bruno Latour and teaches at the Faculté des arts d'Amiens and recently at L'École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs.