

A platform of knowledge to leave the Anthropocene

Victor Chaix (translated by Elvira Højberg)

**Despite of the awareness generated by the latest climate movements, the dynamics causing the current climate catastrophe remain unchanged and GHG emissions continue to rise. Facing this dead-end, we must work together – researchers and young generations fighting for the climate – in the search of alternatives to counter the tragedy of the Anthropocene.**

‘War is on its way to last ten thousand years, to last longer than the history of man.’ (« *La guerre est en route pour durer dix mille ans, pour durer plus longtemps que l’histoire des hommes.* »)<sup>1</sup>

Created under the impulsion of the philosopher Bernard Stiegler and the writer Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, the Association of the Friends of the Thunberg Generation (AFTG) finds its *raison d’être* in a conclusion shared between the academic world at large and recent environmental movements: we are at war. This war is shaping up to be just as devastating and cruel as it is already omnipresent and apparently interminable. The only responses fit for the challenges at stake are, as in all wars, to be found in audacious coalitions – founded on novel and shared representations.

Engagement and knowledge should find spaces in which to unite. Researchers need to conduct their research with youth movements in order to disseminate their findings in society. Youth movements need to become researchers to propose alternatives to the dynamics they denounce. This is what the [Internation collective](#) calls *contributory research*. These two worlds, which evidently hold differing viewpoints, are motivated by the same imperative of transition, and respond to the same state of urgency. Moreover, while raising the supranational question – in reference to the concept of ‘Internation’ developed by Marcel Mauss<sup>2</sup> – the Thunberg generation and its friends emphasise first and foremost the value of locality and decentralisation (both of which have been destroyed by economic globalisation and sterilising bureaucratization).

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (Gallimard, 1970)

<sup>2</sup> In *La Nation* (1920), Marcel Mauss created the concept of Internation to designate a dynamic calling upon nations to cooperate without compromising their local dimensions.

Taking note of these shared elements, the AFTG will organise everywhere it is possible in the world regular exchanges between the young generations mobilised in face of the environmental catastrophe and researchers and key actors from the domains of science, economics, law, the arts, philosophy, and technology who consider the Thunberg generation's struggle indispensable. The aim will be to work together to elaborate propositions that can be appropriated by local, regional and supranational institutions, and by citizens themselves, in conjunction with already existing territorial experiments.

As Bernard Stiegler put it the 23<sup>th</sup> of November to members of Youth for Climate and Extinction Rebellion, during a discussion that prefigured the association at the *Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation*, 'activism today passes by the sciences and knowledge'. In turn, these must 'serve to renew society'. This discussion was pursued on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December during a [round-table discussion](#) at the New Industrial World Forum at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and again in the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 in Geneva, at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League of Nations, during which the collective Internation made [its proposition to the UN public](#)

Revisiting the question of intergenerational relationships (between generations that are alive) and transgenerational relationship (with prior generations and those to come), this association also aims to reinforce a dialogue between young generations that hold their forbears accountable for the state of the climate and environment ever since Greta Thunberg started striking [every Friday](#) in front the Swedish parliament and the movement Extinction Rebellion made its declaration of uprising to the British government [in her presence](#). The AFTG is, indeed, created in response to the [comments made by the former president of the \*Amis du Palais de Tokyo\*](#), who urged to "shoot down" [*abattre*] Greta Thunberg, following her speech given to the United Nations the 23 September 2019. The association is, in this sense, about redefining friendship and treating the intergenerational rift as illustrated in the expression '*Ok Boomer*'.

Our regular meetings will aim to address the 'weakness of a society that has become structurally incapable of educating its children, in being incapable of distinguishing minority from majority'. Such undermining of 'the difference between minors and adults [is] at the very heart of contemporary consumer culture, which systematically defines consumers – minors and adults alike – as

being fundamentally, structurally irresponsible.<sup>3</sup> This enterprise starts by questioning such relationship – minors having a lot to teach to the adults today: this is a *major* fact.

‘In the cranial boxes, more soft images, more stories, more analyses [...] sounds, amongst many others, sounds of the big vibrating machine.’ (« *Dans les boîtes des crânes, plus d’images douces, plus de récits, plus d’analyses [...] des bruits, parmi tant d’autres, des bruits de la grande machine à vibrer.* »)<sup>4</sup>

The flourishing environmental movements of these past months such as Youth for Climate and Extinction Rebellion, globally driven by the youth, can take the credit for sounding the alarm of an ecological state of emergency and for making it resound in different forums, from the UN, to IPCC to IPBES. They have brought these urgencies to the forefront of the political debate through a continuous and considerable mobilisation, using methods that have been more or less radical. These movements, however, now seem to reach their limits, [failing to produce significant effects](#) in view of the scale of the ecological challenge. Following these last months of contestation and actions responding to a disastrous political and ecological reality, it seems imperative for us to move to the next step. We must, from now on, work collectively, and as fast as possible, to think about emergency exists opening onto new long-term perspectives.

To affirm the incalculable – the living – against the hegemony of the calculable in the everyday, we have to fundamentally rethink our macroeconomic models of accounting, to redirect them towards criteria that are qualitative. We will have to grant ourselves sufficient time to think and propose bifurcations to our socio-economic models, despite of the urgency of the situation, and even if it is already too late to avoid certain major ecological and human catastrophes. We will have to ‘prepare an alternative, as one has to in face of any catastrophe,’ as Bernard Stiegler wrote (specifying that catastrophe in ancient Greek means *denouement*) – and to cultivate from our apparently hopeless situation ‘the faculty to dream the most improbable such that it is also the most rational, which is to say the most feasible.’<sup>5</sup> Facing the vertiginous situation of the planet and of our societies presupposes to

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Stiegler [trans: Stephen Baker], *Taking Care of Youth and the Generation* (Stanford University Press, 2010), which was written in response to the suspension of the mitigating circumstances of minority for young delinquents in the initiative Rachida Dati, François Fillon and Nicolas Sarkozy: it aimed to show that in doing so these politicians exempted themselves from their own responsibilities, by mimicking the calamitous politics of repression that could be observed in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (Gallimard, 1970)

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *Qu’appelle-t-on Panser? 1. L’immense régression* (Les liens qui libèrent, 2018).

think and act with clarity, and, as paramedics, take the time to *care*, in response to the ultra-rapid acceleration that characterises the Anthropocene.

‘The young girl of whom I speak does not only have one body and one soul. She has thousands of them.’ (« *La jeune fille dont je vous parle n’a pas un seul corps et une seule âme. Elle en a des milliers.* »)<sup>6</sup>

As evoked during the discussion on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, the challenge of the AFGT will be to create a convergence between research, which often appears opaque, and activism, which must be accessible in order to be widely disseminated and eventually create a mass movement promoting a new understanding of the world. The bet behind the creation of this blog and what will accompany it (meetings, publications, work groups, summer schools) is to share and make understandable these different ideas, in the form of research or concepts – without distorting their significance or reducing their intellectual and political wealth. It follows from the need of a new form of a popular, challenging and emancipatory education, one that is online and free, tied to the approach of contributory research.

In face of a media machine that tends to vulgarise ideas to the point of emptying them of all substance, which addresses supposedly passive, proletarianized consumers, who indeed become proletarianized by such an address, this blog will on the contrary attempt to empower its readers, not by procuring them ready-to-consume content, but by convincing them of enhancing their thoughts by bringing their attention to the nuances of reality – and, by doing this, making them active in their own political reflections. Science is based on controversy and plurality, and these contributory publications valorise as such *the sciences*, and, more generally, theoretical knowledge developed through debate, without the fear of arousing contradictions.

This platform would like to become at once the virtual instrument accounting for the physical meetings between researchers, with differing and sometimes conflicting opinions, and the environmentally engaged youth, itself everything but monolithic, and a space that brings together the exchanges that these encounters should generate. These regular meetings – consisting in the first place of half-day work sessions every second month – will be transcribed and broadcasted here, as will those held in the context of multiple-day symposiums, the first of which will take place the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of May at the Sorbonne in the amphitheatre Bachelard.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (Gallimard, 1970)

The first edition of a summer academy will also be organised in Arles in mid-July. An itinerant school, physical as well as digital, the AFGT will constitute itself around experimental territories, which the collective Internation has asked the UN to support on [the 10<sup>th</sup> of January in Geneva](#).

We, the young activists of the association, will not simply listen to the scientists – as Greta Thunberg calls upon the policymakers to do – we are going to work with them, in the belief that this will give others the desire to work as well. It is a question of responsibility and a way for us to rebuild our democracies. In the view of the catastrophic becomings and post-truth of the Anthropocene, we have to reconstitute future imaginaries that are desirable by creating feasible local and macro-economic alternatives, and, through this, recompose and *care-fully think* the relation between the individual and the collective, currently in full disintegration. For this, we must not fear handing the young generations the keys to their future – so that they find within themselves the capacity to dream feasible dreams, which is to say rational dreams. To hand them over, these keys of reasons, we must forge them in between generations.