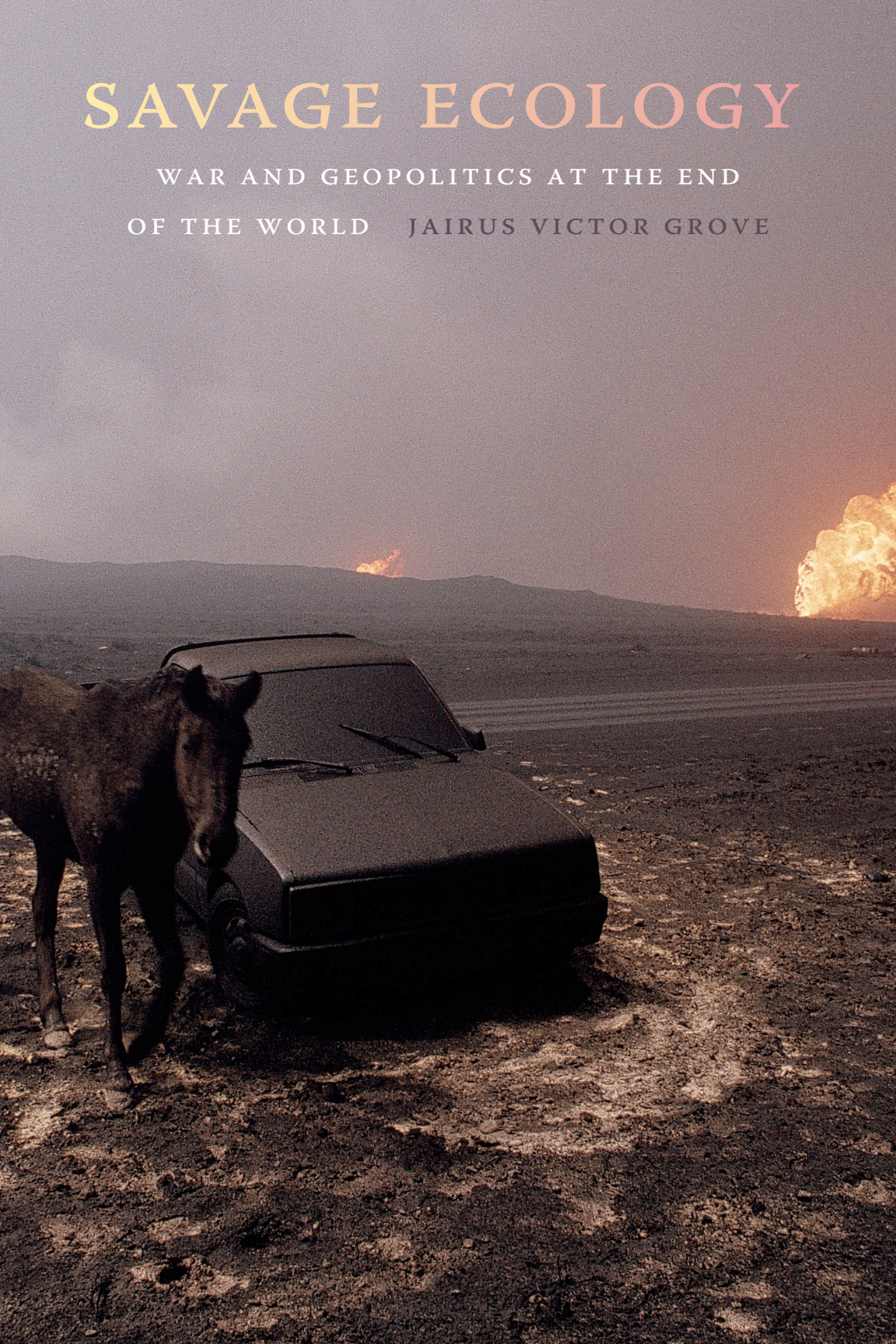
SAVAGE ECOLOGY

WAR AND GEOPOLITICS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

JAIRUS VICTOR GROVE



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Cover art: Kuwait, 1991. © Bruno Barbey/Magnum Photos.

O I see now, flashing, that this America is only you and me,

Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,

Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, slavery, are you and me,

Its Congress is you and me—
the officers, capitols, armies, ships, are you and me,

Its endless gestations of new States are you and me,

The war—that war so bloody and grim—
the war I will henceforth forget—was you and me,

Natural and artificial are you and me,

Freedom, language, poems, employments, are you and me,
Past, present, future, are you and me.

WALT WHITMAN, "As I Sat Alone by Blue Ontario's Shores"

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This book wasn't supposed to be written. That it was written means I ran up an incredible debt with mentors, friends, and family. Only now as a professor and advisor do I understand how much the labor given was beyond anything like professional responsibility and just how scarce the time was that many gave. I was a hard student, I struggled, and any aptitude I had for this kind of work was not obvious. I benefited because early on a few people took an interest when most thought I was an annoyance and a waste of time. Beyond all the citations these folks get throughout the rest of the book, I want to say something about the debt I can never pay back, beginning with my mom.

My mom watched me finish most school days in tears and then start most days physically sick with dread. Homework was impossible. Trying to recopy things from books felt like peeling the skin off my own face. Writing felt like punishment. My mom got me through every assignment, wrote notes to rarely understanding teachers explaining why my homework was in her handwriting, and waited out the most hostile of the teachers who felt inspired to convince me and my mom that I had no business being in school at all. Some insisted I would not finish high school. Others just wanted to make sure I understood how truly lazy they thought I was. Before there was an Americans with Disabilities Act, my mom fought for me to have access to a computer, adequate time to finish assignments, and the basic respect necessary to survive in the classroom. Before most teachers knew what a learning disability was, long before we could say something affirmative like neurodiverse or my favorite, neuroqueer, my mom found someone who could teach me to physically write, almost spell, and at least learn to use some rudimentary grammar. When the prevailing wisdom was to put me on medication, she talked me through the side effects and let me choose not to pursue medication. She was a single mother who by her nature hated confrontation and yet she was a fierce advocate and a limitless emotional support so that I could survive a school system designed for me to fail.

In addition to the hard stuff, my mom also cultivated in me a love for 1940s screwball comedies and a devotion to Alfred Hitchcock, which proved, serendipitously, to be an invaluable background for the pursuit of philosophy. There were a few teachers along the way who made school worth showing up for: Mark Webber, my debate coach; Dorothy Blodgett, who inspired my love of history; and Jim Herman, who encouraged my curiosity for the biological sciences: all helped get me through high school.

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INTRODUCTION

> The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves. It isn't absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are.
>
> —LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture and Value*

In 1992 the Union of Concerned Scientists issued a warning to humanity. According to the union, the current trajectory of development promised "vast human misery . . . and a planet . . . irretrievably mutilated."[1] At this time, the critical areas of concern were the atmosphere, water resources, oceans, soil, forests, living species, and the size of the human population. Each of these areas was identified as a necessary precondition for human survival, with 1,575 scientists joining the public statement. The warning was followed by a set of recommendations said to be within the grasp of all populations of the world: a significant reduction in the destruction of natural resources, sustainable resource management, population stabilization through voluntary family planning, reduction and then elimination of poverty, and sexual equality such that women could determine their own reproductive decisions. To accomplish these goals, the union insisted that investment in and occurrence of violence and war needed to be reduced in order to free up the necessary resources for saving the species. The report estimated that US$1 trillion annually was being directed to the preparation and prosecution of warfare. The starkness of the choice is itself interesting. For the union, in a world of finite resources the species had to choose between war and survival, but it could not choose both.

Twenty-five years later, the warning was issued again, and 15,364 scientists joined the "second notice" to humanity.[2] The group, now renamed Alliance of World Scientists (unions and concerns having fallen out of political favor),

found unequivocally that the state of the world is worse than we thought in 1992, and that little if any progress has been made in the intervening years. While no official answer to the 1992 warning was issued, a decision was made. Those in a position to make a decision chose war.

It is not unusual that more than fifteen thousand scientists would agree on something. I imagine millions of scientists agree on other questions, like the basic nature of gravity and the atomic weight of cobalt. Yet it is difficult to imagine the need or interest to issue a public statement about these mere descriptions of fact. What makes this concern worthy of a public address is that the statements issued in 1992 and 2017 are attempts to make a claim on a public, in fact *the* public: the global whole of the human species. The tone of both letters invests the full force of collective scientific expertise, argument making, and powers of persuasion on the case to be made for a threat to the planet. The letters simply assume that if the case is successfully made that humanity faces impending doom, the case for saving humanity will automatically follow as if by some mechanism of logical necessity. Unfortunately, this assumption is not merely off the mark. Global politics for the past five hundred years is proof of the opposite of common sense. There is a centuries-long investment in research, development, and deployment of techniques to ensure that survival is only ever a right for some. This right for some, more often than not, is ensured at the expense of the self-determination and continuation of living for the overwhelming majority of the planet's human population.

Against the banal appeal to a universal humanity or the equally commonplace and catastrophic insistence on an inevitable clash of civilizations, I prefer the idea of "form of life." Not quite race and more than culture or style, this phrase refers to those ways of being in the world—always lived collectively—without which one would no longer be who or what one is. I want to go further than Ludwig Wittgenstein's invocation of form of life as one's particular game of language and gesture—the physiognomy that for him makes one human—into the ways that not just humans but all things creatively striving toward complexity come to make worlds out of their intractable dependence on and contribution to an environment.[3] And beyond Wittgenstein's events of communicative failure, interruptions of these relations and habits threaten existence itself. When efforts are made to wipe out the American bison and buffalo or to militarize borders to interrupt the flow of migrants who follow seasons and crops, it is not just a habit or practice that changes. The interruption of a form of life kills people and frequently cascades into genocides and extinctions. In the case of the buffalo, it was not just the bands and nations of the Great Plains whose precarity was leveraged for the strategic goal of

genocide and settlement. The entire prairie ecosystem was targeted, moving on from human inhabitants to predators such as wolves and big cats to make way for leisure hunting and grazing practices that created the dust bowl and the subsequent collapse of riparian habitats throughout the United States.[4]

I take inspiration from Giorgio Agamben's more radical reading of Wittgenstein's form of life in my desire to describe lives that cannot survive being separated from the way they are lived, but like Wittgenstein's linguistic provincialism, I do not accept Agamben's species provincialism that form of life either is what defines the human or is exclusively a human attribute.[5] Quite the opposite, when form of life is seen ecologically, what becomes apparent is how many different species, practices, histories, cosmologies, habitats, and relations come to constitute what we might call a form of life. Form of life is a particular origami in the "fabric of immanent relations" that defines the torsion between the singularity and the interpenetrated relationality of each and every human and nonhuman person.[6] This question will be taken up more substantially in chapter 1, but suffice it to say that form of life, for me, is the current or flow against which we can even identify a change or intervention as violent rather than merely as a change. And geopolitics, the focus of all the following chapters and that which the concerned scientists want to avoid, is the collectively practiced art and science of that violence against other forms of life.

In fact, it is this very geopolitics—nation-states making decisions and wielding power at a global scale—that the scientists want to steer away from war toward saving the planet, which is not premised at some foundational level on a general principle of order or the good. Geopolitics is, at its most fundamental level, a husbandry of global life in which thriving is intimately connected to the particular form of life and the particular lifeworld through which one becomes who one is. Geopolitics is structured to be selective, and to ensure that selectivity by lethal force.

Therefore, to oppose survival to the pursuit of war as a global question for a global audience (as if that audience were empowered or even capable of issuing a global answer) displays a persistent and willful naïveté of how the global was made in the first place. The geopolitical project of planet Earth is a violent pursuit of a form of life at the cost of others—full stop. However, at the same time, with an often zero-sum game over form of life at its center, global war—the presumed opposite of human survival—is not primarily about direct killing. Instead, the violence of geopolitics is an ecological principle of world making that renders some forms of life principle and other forms of life useful or inconsequential. Emmanuel Levinas is quite helpful on this point. In his investigation of the antinomy between philosophy and

war, Levinas came to understand the violence of geopolitics and its pursuit of global war to be less a direct material force and more an organizational principle of coercive steering and depriving: "Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out action that will destroy every possibility for action."[7]

The attack on the conditions of life and its formation as a form of life establishes more than a trade-off between the material costs of warfare and the pursuit of the Union of Scientists for planetwide and environmentally sustainable economic and sexual equality. Geopolitics, enacted through global war, is itself a form of life that pursues a *savage ecology*, radically antagonistic to survival as a collective rather than discriminatory goal. Geopolitics, as the organizational matrix of global war, has as its enemy the very pursuit of what the scientists see as a commonsense, pragmatically just planet. Therefore, the line between extreme human misery and just transformation is not practically or impractically out of reach because of a lack of will or misuse of resources. For the majority of the planet, the failure to ensure survival is not about an oversight or bad financial management. Instead, the line between misery and something else is heavily policed and enforced with everything, from odious international debt to hellfire missiles.

Alfred North Whitehead says every science belies a metaphysics, or something we could call more broadly a cosmology.[8] The science in question for *Savage Ecology* is the Euro-American science of geopolitics. I want to understand the cosmology of geopolitics. Thus, this book is an effort to understand how a particular formation of global war, as the slow accretion of a form of life, came to be a dominant form of life cosmologically at odds with the idea of collective thriving. This geopolitical form of life is so caustic, it calls into question if there has ever been anything as universal as a human species to be threatened, much less saved.[9]

Geopolitics or Savage Ecology

The Anthropocene, the reframing of the Earth in the image of industrial modernity, will be short-lived, a geopolitical instant more than a slow geological era.
—BENJAMIN H. BRATTON, *Dispute Plan to Prevent Future Luxury Constitution*

Of the various "cenes" of late trying to name what has caused catastrophes at a global scale, no one diagnosis can quite win out. Racism, sexism, settler colonialism, ableism, heteronormativity, speciesism, classism, and technolo-

gism are all real forces in the world, and a compelling case for all of them has been made to diagnose the crisis we face. However, each case falters as it tries to close the last loop of its argument such that each of the other forces is somehow subordinate to *this* explanation. Rather than pick a side or stake out new ground on the intersectional axes of destruction, I have opted to contribute to how we understand the state of affairs and the historical conditions that made this state of affairs possible—that is, the means and the ends of our destruction. The motivations behind the state of affairs or master logic in the basement of all things is beyond the scope of this book. I remain interested but agnostic as to what inspires the will to catastrophe. I am less ambivalent about the how of the situation. Geopolitics as a European-led global project of rendering, in the way that fat is rendered into soap, or students are rendered pliable and obedient subjects, is the driver of our epoch and the obstacle to any other version of our world, whether plural or differently unified.

This book is an attempt to make a certain kind of ecological sense out of five hundred years of geopolitics and its warlike means. Here I develop a martial genealogy for what I am calling the *Eurocene*. In this story of development and expansion, geopolitics is not a cause per se, but it is a means that has been elevated and refined into a virtue. It is a means that has become its own ends. Because geopolitics is now a virtue, it succeeds and fails without much consideration for whether it should be abandoned. Those who benefit most from geopolitics shift slightly from time to time—a little more internationalism or a little more unilateralism and back again. The consequences of a geopolitical form of life vary from settler colonial genocide to environmental massacre to strategic interventions into the very rhythms and synaptic terrains of individual human bodies. Yet at each interval of deformation, destruction, failure, renewal, reentry, and invasion, geopolitics persists as the primary operating system of planetary life.

In chapter 1, "The Anthropocene as a Geopolitical Fact," I follow the strange path of Paul Crutzen from his interest in the ozone layer to nuclear winter to climate change to becoming the foremost advocate of the Anthropocene. While Crutzen's early work on the ozone layer and nuclear winter put geopolitics front and center in his scientific analysis, he takes a postpolitical turn after the Cold War by framing climate change as a problem for humanity. In addition to the ways Crutzen's universalist appeal erases the very uneven responsibility for climate damage, the newly depoliticized category of humanity quickly became a justification for great powers to take the lead in geoengineering the planet despite the significant risks for subtropical and tropical inhabitants. In some sense, geopolitics was only a problem for

Crutzen when it threatened the metropoles of the Northern Hemisphere. Now relieved of the possibility of nuclear war between the U.S. and the USSR, power politics is seen as benign, and even transformative. In chapter 7, I return to how this elision of geopolitics informs renewed hope for the future-oriented industrial ecology advocated by Stewart Brand and other ecomodernists.

Moving from the global scale of geopolitics to the hard, martial labor of implementing the geopolitical order, chapter 2, "War as a Form of Life," zeros in on the making of geopolitical bodies and the kinds of corporeal rhythms that inhabit the zones of war and peace in the Eurocene. I ask the question of what it would mean to consider warfare as a form of life, that is, an ordinary practice for many people rather than the ways we often characterize war as an anomalous or rare event that suddenly breaks out. Turning to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of the body, and Erin Manning's work on dance, I try to theorize what kind of body a human body must be if the extremity of war can *become* normal. Considering warfare as an embodied becoming rather than an abnormal break, I hope, draws our attention to how geopolitical orders are written into the very musculature of our bodies, practices, and communities.

In chapter 3, "From Exhaustion to Annihilation: A Martial Ecology of the Eurocene," I historicize the martial practices of bodies in the ways war speciates into wars of exhaustion, which are primarily reserved for European "peers," and wars of annihilation, which are practiced in settler colonies. Pursuing an ecological approach that looks for relations, heterogeneous actors, things, technics, racializations, territorializations, and practices, the chapter explores how the environment itself—an ecological approach to "New World" ecologies—informed practices of annihilation beginning with the earliest settlement practices in New Spain through to the American war in the Philippines and contemporary practices of counterinsurgency.

In the second part of the book, "Operational Spaces," I take up three different ways that homogenization and war have been operationalized in different ecological orders. Chapter 4, "Bombs: An Insurgency of Things," is a case study on the relationality of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the decisive role IEDs played in the U.S. post–September 11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I explore how these variable failures and reinventions played out in the nonhuman character of war through an exploration of the undead war trash of improvised explosive devices. In chapter 5, "Blood: Vital Logistics," the difficult and often contradictory tug-of-war between the metaphors and materialities of blood and race takes center stage through a circuitous his-

tory of blood transfusions and their regulation during World War II in the United States, UK, France, and Germany and the ways those policies inform the complexity of enmity and blood use for the U.S. in the global war on terrorism. In chapter 6, "Brains: We Are Not Who We Are," the brain itself becomes a political terrain. The Eurocene, as a neuro-geopolitics, is obsessed with hacking the brain as a new frontier of ecological and martial control. The chapter concludes with a series of questions about whether attempts to weaponize the brain undermine the condition of possibility for agency and freedom. The drive for security and control in the Eurocene comes to devalue the very foundations of autonomy and self-possessed rationality that enlivened the geopolitical drive for homogenization. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, *Savage Ecology* is a story about the aspiration for total control, not control's total victory.

In chapter 7, "Three Images of Transformation as Homogenization," the book moves from the historical making of the Eurocene to its imagined futures. Here I focus on three particularly popular futures espoused as alternatives to the current global catastrophe. Specifically, ecomodernist, Marxist, and U.S. militarist futures all bear the marks of the Eurocene's taste for incorporation and violence. While hoping for transformation, each future remains committed to a project of homogenization at the expense of human animal and nonhuman animal forms of life that are aversive to the smooth transformations each project envisions.

Despite the global scope of homogenization as a geopolitical project, the habitats and ecosystems of the planet still vary by species, by climate, by terrain, and by form of life. I do not want to overstate the success of geopolitics in achieving its dream of a flat planet. However, I also do not want to obscure the increasing intensity and danger, that is, the difference of the contemporary moment of geopolitics. The point of the first two parts is not to, in some sense, declare the kind of "end of history" of the Eurocene or the inevitability that homogenization will prevail. Instead, I want to make as apparent as possible that on every continent—and even the outer reaches of the planet's atmosphere—the technics and waste of geopolitics connect every space to every other space, whether by satellite feed, radioactive isotope, aircraft carrier, unexploded ordinance, sexual trauma, or tragic absence of forced removal. The global network of open wounds, bruises, and scar tissue that runs over the surface of the planet, through its water table and abandoned mine shafts that sprawl out on the vast ocean floor, exceeds the migratory and circulation patterns of any other species or even family of species. Five hundred years of geopolitics has built a global savage ecology.

At the half-millennium of the geopolitical epoch, terms like *biopolitics* seem almost quaint. Life, much less human life, is at best a small sliver of the vast infrastructure of geopolitics. Coastlines, rivers, gravitational fields, and the atmosphere are elements that have been altered in addition to whole populations and individual bodies. The scale of these alterations is not recent. The decimations of continent-wide populations and global temperatures have been in the fabric of geopolitics since its beginnings.

If there is a difference that the contemporary makes, it is that the substance and means of action for change are converging into one substrate for life. Félix Guattari described the world after the cybernetic drive to become the final and total science of all things as a postmedia age.[10] More than the convergence of audio, visual, and data communication described by Friedrich Kittler, Guattari saw Earth itself, along with human consciousness and desire, as converging media. A proliferation of what can be altered is simultaneously paralleled in a flattening of those differences in communication and substance into informatics such that everything becomes at some level plastic in the same way. The sciences of brain plasticity, species plasticity, the plasticity of matter, and the plasticity of the atmosphere are all native to the same historical moment, and understand measurement and change in the same way ontologically. Catherine Malabou's question, "What should we do with our brain?," is now extended to "What should we do with the planet?"[11] The focus on the brain and plasticity as a more general way of thinking about matter as plastic connects the recounting of the past as it is engaged in the first two parts of the book to the vision of the fully plastic future. This future, I argue in chapter 7, is envisioned by forces of industrial liberalism, left and right accelerationism, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

The twentieth century will be remembered as the moment cybernetics truly made humans conscious of themselves and their environment. However, the twenty-first century will be the moment that humans became capable of acting on the processes of that consciousness. The likelihood that this consciousness or these capabilities will serve the new ethic aspired to by the Alliance of Global Scientists seems slim. The postmedia era diagnosed by Guattari looks to be every bit as geopolitical as the eras that preceded it. The benefactors of the world's greatest minds searching for breakthroughs in neuroscience, artificial intelligence (AI), space exploration, and even climate engineering are primarily the martial divisions of the world's governments.

The point of saturation has taken on the feel of an end of history; however, it is not an end. It is something else. The *something else* is the theme of

the last part of the book. In this final part, "Must We Persist to Continue?," I describe what I see as the possibility for forms of life other than war and homogenization. Chapter 8, "Apocalypse as a Theory of Change," details an affirmative theory of catastrophe and turbulence. The question of apocalypse *for whom* is thought in parallel with the disruptive and often violent history of geological change. The hope here is not to romanticize Earth's history of mass extinctions but rather to displace the sociocentrism that, in equal parts, ignores the destructive geological power of the planet and the annihilations unleashed on human timescales by very particular humans. Geological and human history are punctuated and mutated by these events. Rather than seeing apocalypses as inevitable, I read them as transformations or bifurcation points where other ways of life become possible.

As a kind of warning against those who would respond to the terror of apocalypses and change with a conservative humanism, the main target of chapter 9, "Freaks, or the Incipience of Other Forms of Life," is Jürgen Habermas and others who fall into a tendency of somatic fundamentalism. I argue that instead of trying to preserve a romantic view of what the human was, we need an agonistic respect and attentiveness for the emergence of freaks, or what we and other lifeforms could become. Rather than fear AI, posthumans, or other emergent forms of life, we should embrace the differentiation of life as preferable to the goals of a recalcitrant humanism or homogenous singularity.

In the book's conclusion, "*Ratio feritas*: From Critical Responsiveness to Making New Forms of Life," I take the idea of speciation and change further into something like a virtue, or what I call feral reason. It offers the possibility of other futures oriented toward creativity and adventure rather than conservation and technological homogenization. In this part, I take apocalypse as a fact but the future as unwritten. To temper the temptation that the future is open to free play, or that any particular grouping of humans truly possesses the determinative agency to make a future, I put forward my best effort to sketch the probable world if it continues along the same sadistic lines of Eurocene geopolitics. In the postvision, which I am calling "The End," I try to imagine the United States of America in the year 2061 if the "great homogenization" continues unabated. The landscape of the story combines the ecological concerns of the book with an emphasis on militarization and the security politics of our contemporary moment.

Savage Ecology is a speculative theory for an ecological approach to global politics. By ecological, I mean a form of analysis characterized by inhuman encounters and deep relational processes across geographical scales rather than a form of political thinking that relies on discreteness, causality, and an exceptional notion of human agency. Hence an ecological approach does not center principally on the environment, what in international relations is called environmental security; nor does it limit global politics to states, international organizations, social movements, or even humans. Instead, I take ecology to mean that all things that make a difference in the vast landscape of geopolitics ought to be included in the geopolitical considerations of contemporary life. The book is populated with Neanderthals, improvised explosive devices, revolutions, brains, dead soldiers, beavers, ideologies, mutants, artificial intelligences, drones, states, and the occasional zombie. The research ranges from sixteenth-century counterinsurgency training manuals to leaked internal Department of Defense reports to the speculative futures of mad scientists like José Delgado. There is no one archive or object of inquiry. For me, all these things and more take part in the catastrophe that many have termed the Anthropocene.

Savage Ecology is also a martial theory of the Anthropocene. Throughout the book I take the idea that we are in a planetary epoch in which the Anthropos is capable of making a "cene" quite seriously. The Anthropocene as a philosophical and political crisis has been too quick to forget the geopolitical arrangements of power and violence that have brought us to this point. Not all of "us" have played an equal part in the making of either the Anthropos or the Anthropocene. In part, the often narrow focus on climate change and the fever pitch of crisis abets the erasure of the U.S.'s role in building and maintaining the current world order. This argument amounts to: "now that everything is broken it is everyone's problem so pointing fingers just gets in the way of a solution." Even critical and posthumanist approaches often lose sight of the role of hegemony and power. This is, in part, because of the efforts of those lines of thought to decenter the human as the sole locus of thinking and action. I am committed to relaxing the focus on human actors in processes of global change; however, I think we can decenter the human without letting go of the very specifically human and often national assemblages that broke this planet.

While there is no global history of industrialized war, capitalism, and ecological destruction, the politics of homogenization as an elite-driven Euro-

American geopolitics of industrialized war and capitalism made ecocide that is now a global historical fact. To put it simply, our shared experience of planetary life has a definitively parochial beginning and present. No anthropogenic, planetary-scale threat faced today—be it nuclear weapons, plastic, climate change, or global war—originated outside the Euro-American circuit of expansion, extractivism, and settlement. As Sylvia Wynter has stated, "we must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it . . . because the West did change the world, totally."[12] To do this means exiting the Anthropocene as an idea, and collectively—even if not equally—exiting the Eurocene as a failed epoch. I think we should relish Wynter's invitation to consider other "genres of the human."[13] She explains she will not miss the Anthropos because, among so many others, she was never considered human to begin with. We should affirm her lack of nostalgia for the human. To invent a new species is the task that must be undertaken before there can be a "we," an "our," or a "cene" that is more than a requiem for the end.

Unfortunately, for those who want definitive answers, there is no theory provided in this book that puts everything in its right place, predicts the outcome of the next presidential election, or can save us from the now inevitable collapse and reorganization of planetary life. Instead, *Savage Ecology* is a speculative reflection on the depths, nay, fathoms of shit we are in as a community of species. I am certainly not alone in wanting to open up to the sheer magnitude of what confronts the planet. And yet I want to do so without losing sight of the real differences in politics, geography, history, meaning, and cosmology that modulate how each one of us will confront the end of this epoch. In so doing, I hope to emphasize a refrain throughout the book that the end of the world is never the end of everything. An apocalypse is always more and less than an extinction, and whatever makes a life out of the mess we are currently in will depend in some ways on how we come to understand the contemporary condition. Ideas matter even if they cannot save us. Stories, explanations, and philosophical adventures are, in my estimation, the best of what the human estate has to offer. No matter how desperate things get, someone will still ask why this is happening, and we will share in that question the possibility of thinking together. As Bill Connolly often says, "we are not unique; we are merely distinctive," and that distinctiveness is connected to a sense of wonder—even when it is a dark wonder.[14] I want to connect this sense of wonder to a plea for a feral reason. This is a renewed sense of adventure and creativity in pursuit only of itself. Feral is not a way out of all this but rather a way through.

To specify what I mean by nonknowledge: that which results from every proposition when we are looking to go to the fundamental depths of its content, and which makes us uneasy.—GEORGES BATAILLE, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*

We need less by way of context and more by way of concept.
—EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO

Something in the world makes us think. How could it be any other way? If thought was its own cause, consciousness that is consonant with the world would be impossible. We live in a world of persistent provocations, and our thinking is at its best when it is along for the ride without trying to steer the course of events. Following Steven Shaviro:

> Things encounter one another aesthetically and not just cognitively or practically. I always feel more of a thing than I actually know of it, and I feel it otherwise than I know it. To the extent that I do know an object, I am able to put it to use, to enumerate its qualities, to break it down into its constituent parts, and to trace the causes that have determined it. But feeling an object involves something else as well. I feel a thing when it affects me or changes me, and what affects me is not just certain qualities of the thing but its total and irreducible existence.[15]

This is another way of saying that all the things of the world should set the agenda for research, as opposed to our anthropocentric image of the world.

If a research agenda is driven by one's presumption of that which is to be studied, then we already find ourselves lost in our imposed telos of the research rather than the object of that research. Take, for instance, the major studies of nuclear weapons. The presumed purpose of a nuclear weapon is to function, to deter, to launch on command, or even to launch on warning. We have many fine studies of how the nuclear arsenal is supposed to work, or more specifically, how we desire it to work. We have theories of nuclear decision-making, game theories of nuclear war fighting, psychological theories, and organizational theories. These studies, from John Steinbruner's *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision* to *Managing Nuclear Operations*, are excellent analyses of hypothetical arsenals in coordination with either definitive human events such as the Cuban missile crisis or equally hypothetical scenarios of nuclear war fighting that "double-click" entirely over the actual process by which six thousand or so weapons get deployed, targeted, launched, and detonated.[16]

The virtue of encounter as the driving force of thought is that it compels us to understand how little we actually describe, much less comprehend,

what nuclear weapons, as an assemblage, actually do—that is, not what we would like to do with them but what they are. Delivery vehicles leak coolant, operators lose their minds, code command systems malfunction, and early warning systems misread solar flares, weather balloons, and even geese. Warheads get left armed and flown over "friendly territory."[17] Parts work, break down, and produce algorithmic anomalies. Yet how many great works of security studies or international relations are there on the history of accidents, near misses, organizational confusion, and failed tests? The field has not yet produced a Graham Allison for the arsenal, only a Graham Allison for the presidential decision.

The practical impediment of anthropocentrism—organizing thinking around our projection of the world rather than encountering the world as it is—for good research is how little of the world of geopolitics we spend time thinking about. The vast reality of nuclear weapons finds almost no place in research about nuclear weapons. Despite the occasional consideration of a nuclear accident or an accidental nuclear war, real scholarship on the continent and even planetary-sized assemblages of computers, soldiers, technicians, enriched heavy metals, virtual monitoring and testing, trucks, railways, engineers, underground villages, hollowed mountains, theories of nuclear physics, chain of command, fear, regret, and guilt find almost no place in the theories of international relations. Yet all of it is waiting for us on road trips, with every network dependent on daily ritual, in uranium tailings in Native American reservations and in the cancerous growths of loved ones.[18]

To start with the encounter rather than the application of human-determined purpose directs the researcher to be attentive to how the whole world can be studied rather than picking and choosing the processes that conform to a desired research agenda. I explore what this might look like as a general approach to warfare in chapters 2 and 3, and then in the second part of the book I take on improvised explosive devices, blood, and brains as three specific knots in the filaments of martial ecologies.

Relational Thinking (An Ecology of Things)

The discreteness of objects and actors is a useful but often distracting fiction. If what we want to think through is the problem of geopolitics, then to atomize sectors, objects, and agents of geopolitics will defeat the systemic character of change, behavior, and the emergence of both. By systemic I do not mean structural in the sense of being mechanistic. An ecological approach to security expects a world of highly distributed and complex agencies. Coalitions

of agents maintain consistency and contribute to the upheavals that defy the order from which an upheaval emerged. Thus I do not think that ecology is a metaphor for analyzing the world. Instead, relational thinking accretes from empirical scrutiny. Unfortunately, relational thinking is messy because, as John Law says, reality is a mess.[19] The distributed and connective character of change can make things like case selection and variable choice seem arbitrary.

Those who are compelled to pursue positivist analyses of politics via quantitative methods are not likely to find this insight about the world helpful. However, much will be lost to the possibility of analysis if we continue to isolate causally significant variables, or indivisible clusters of variables, from our work. One can, for instance, see how much time has been lost in investigating the relationship between climate change and instability. Thomas Homer-Dixon's *Environmental Scarcity and Global Security* was largely ignored by mainstream international relations theory because of the methodological problems of studying ecological systems in the context of national security crises. Yet who would argue now, more than twenty years later, that we should not have prioritized climate change as a major factor in geopolitics?

So how does one study complex systems rigorously if they, by definition, exceed the mathematical processing powers of our best computer-based tools or the accepted methodologies of the field? I think the answer lies in the rigor and insightfulness of so-called softer approaches. Concept creation when combined with historical analysis and field research can produce scholarship that is insightful beyond our ability to "prove" that it is insightful. Here, I seek to follow Eduardo Viveiros de Castro when he says that "we need a new theory of theory: a generalized theory of theory, one enabling us to think of theoretical activity in radical continuity with practice, that is, as an immanent or constitutive (as opposed to purely regulative) dimension of the intellect embodied in action."[20] This does not mean that quantitative analytic tools or computer-assisted modeling cannot be a vital part of critical work—quite the contrary. Climate modeling, for instance, allows researchers to experience scales of time and space that individual embodied humans cannot. Oral traditions similarly compress and extend time across lifetimes but are too often dismissed because of their nonmodern means of informatic storage and retrieval.[21] Computers, like archives and books, are vital prosthetics in research. They allow us to encounter things in ways that extend our experience beyond ourselves and our native sensory capabilities.

The pack of critical approaches I enjoy traveling with takes issue with the idea that data or modeled outcomes somehow speak for themselves. Rather, data in all forms—from ideas to calculations—are objects of encounter. Data

compel us to think but cannot compel us to know. Georges Bataille aptly calls this category of research nonknowledge, "an understanding . . . that borders on knowledge."[22] Data do not transmit information; rather, data provokes further thinking and therefore are not determinative. What modeling, field research, reading, and watching films can do is create the conditions of possibility for encounters not of our own making.

The relational nature of change and emergence means that we must cultivate an attentiveness that might find the most interesting research agenda during a routine check at the airport, or in the repeated failure of your car's GPS near military facilities. The value or rigor of a relational approach that emphasizes the fecundity of encounters is that it marginalizes the capacity of the investigator in favor of the world she investigates. In this sense, undermining anthropocentrism is not just an ethical practice. It also provides a necessary check on observation bias that imposes a telos on the people, things, and systems we encounter, which is a way to pursue the terrifying success and failures of technological interventions into global order. All technical apparatuses from the muskets in chapter 3 to geoengineering discussed in chapter 7 make a difference, but they rarely make the difference that was promised before they were deployed.

Speculation (Scholarship Requires Intervention, Not Proof)

Despite the baggage of international relations, an encounter or empirically driven ecological approach should not need a more sophisticated name than realism. However, to say that things are real does not mean that things are self-evident or easily accessible. It is unfortunate that, for many scholars, things have been reduced to an inert category of rump matter. Things are material *and* they are creative. Things of all kinds possess a quality of plasticity in that they have the capacity to form and be formed. Such formative attributes are variable among different things but importantly are not restricted to language, meaning, or the brain. The constructivist insight about the variability and formative character of the social world should be affirmed but without the unnecessary modifier "social." Rather, we can pursue a speculative description of the construction or process of everything. I do not think such an approach is per se foreign to international relations. For instance, discourse analysis is a process philosophy of sorts, but it is too restricted in what it will consider as the constitutive material of meaning. Some will argue this is because the discursive world is already complex enough. Some will argue that we privilege the discursive because we have privileged access to

the world of "our" making. The problem is that such a position often reifies the belief that the world is of our making.

Rather than dismiss attempts at bridging the gap between our world and the world at large as scientism, we can speculate about the creative conjunction of different and differing things, human and otherwise. It is unfortunate that the word *speculation* is much derided in the social sciences. Often to speculate is synonymous with guessing. Following Alfred North Whitehead, I think we should recuperate speculation as the process by which we rigorously intervene in a world that is neither law-driven nor fully accessible to our senses but does resemble what Whitehead called a "doctrine of necessity."[23] In chapter 2, I try to develop an ecological approach to war that can bridge the gap between speculative investigation of the systems of war and the material practices of the body that make those abstractions concrete. Chapter 2 is an intervention into the problem of what war is but it is not a hypothesis about war. Hypothesis testing of various sorts might make sense in a steady-state world where the capacity to test could be up to the task of capturing the system being tested. And discourse analysis alone would make sense if the world were fully withdrawn, or if it were present but meaninglessly inert. However, there are good reasons to believe that neither is the case. Meaningfulness is a construction, but we are not the purveyors of its constructions. Without the blueprints, we have to creatively speculate about the conjunction of heterogeneous actors.

Can Realism Be Critical?

The question often posed, particularly by Marxists, is, What is critical about all of this? Well, it is a plea for a realism whose enemy is common sense. I think we actually have to work quite hard not to be critical. The world insists on its complexity and defies the parsimonious theories we impose on it with such regularity that I do not think the problem is actually how to be critical. The problem is the habits and routines that inure us to the provocations all around to think differently or otherwise than we do.

Such a view of criticism is likely unsatisfactory for those who hope that being critical is synonymous with being normative. For that, I can only offer my condolences, as I do not believe any argument or sufficiently elegant critical theory will deliver to us the ontology we want or think we deserve. Unfortunately, God is very dead, and so if you had hopes that the inner truth of the universe was going to be coincidental with the good, you are out of luck. Ta-Nehisi Coates's letter to his son captures this better than I can: "Struggle

is all we have because the god of history is an atheist, and nothing about his world is meant to be. So you must wake up every morning knowing that no promise is unbreakable, least of all the promise of waking up at all. This is not despair. These are the preferences of the universe itself: verbs over nouns, actions over states, struggle over hope. . . . You have to make your peace with the chaos, but you cannot lie."[24]

Thus the continual theological superstition that imbues criticality with redemption or progress is, for me, a dead end. If the horrors of geopolitics are not sufficient to persuade you that there is no providential future for humanity, then no argument or evidence can. Instead, what we have is everything around us, and it is sufficiently creative and weird all by itself. It is also necessary to the task of undermining the petty provincialism that animates geopolitics and a narrow view of humanity. Certainly we can struggle to intervene in those arrangements that are disgusting to our sense of good. Any intervention that is not allied with the world, which is the condition of possibility of sensation and intervention in the first place, will likely fail all the more catastrophically. We can, I think, have a bias for struggle over nihilism, but ultimately realism, or the world, is the greatest enemy against the violence of common sense.

We Need Genre to Be Realists Because Reality Lacks Verisimilitude

Please do not mistake my love of ideas for an escapist retreat into idealism. Quite the contrary: I think the task of theorizing is to invent modes of experiencing the world, even if the route is a circuitous journey that does not lead from fiction to nonfiction but instead from truth to falsity. Fiction in our age of continuous-real-time-captured-by-iPhone news updates is so much more frequently true. The world is real but not easily apparent. There is a world as such but no way of encountering it that is not, as Stanley Cavell says, an interpretation. All encounters are a sensuous process of labor *with* the world and not before the world or after it. Therefore, the fight to see, think, and feel things as they are requires an affirmative sense of genre; CNN is a genre, security reports are a genre, terror alert levels are a genre, and Chomsky-esque truth-telling is a genre, although all of these we are inured to or primed for as a common *sense* of reality.[25] Sometimes we need wilder genres like horror or sci-fi or speculation so that we have the capability to see past what Rudy Rucker calls "consensus reality" into the weird worlds of brain implant experiments, detailed in chapter 6, that have been going on since the 1960s or

the emerging freaks of science—explored in chapter 9—that could, if we pay attention, challenge our restrictive normative boundaries of the human.[26]

I take inspiration in Sayak Valencia's work on *gore* or *splatter cinema* as an analytic category for contemporary capitalism to expand the attention of empiricism to include the gore of the real world.[27] Like Valencia finds in the genre of gore, the practices of torture, disappearing, and spectacular violence that suture together the political economy of bodies in the border region between Mexico and the United States are no longer exceptional events but increasingly global practices. The choice of genre is not haphazard. Valencia further distinguishes the sadistic erotics of *snuff* from the specific necro-practices of gore, which produce spectacular forms of extra-state narco violence, the smooth flow of goods and labor necessary for globalization, and the persistence of state sovereign violence all in one stroke.[28] For Valencia, the genre of gore as opposed to other genres of horror and snuff captures these "processes of doubling" and invisibility that characterize the narco-state-capital-death-body machine.[29] Like horror and science fiction more generally, Valencia, like Rucker, describes the "irreal" character of social relations and their reproduction correspondingly requiring a contrarealist genre to make visible what is meant to be ignored or normalized.

Rucker and Valencia practice a kind of transrealism as an *art* form that "deal[s] with the world the way it actually is"[30] because mere description is insufficient to pierce the veil of consensus reality. The endurance of consensus reality as a genre of naïve realism is indebted to an aesthetic but also a corresponding anesthetic that foregrounds a "common sense" in place of an openness to experience of what has not previously been experienced.[31] Consensus or commonsense reality shields us from a world that would otherwise be too real, creating a feeling of the *irreal.* According to Rucker, as long as the evening news feels real, the consensus can continue despite unbelievable contradictions. This is a fact tested well beyond what I thought was darkly possible by the first year of the Donald Trump presidency. As a collective—what Félix Guattari called a machinic unconscious—we tune in and tune out simultaneously.[32] Valencia similarly highlights the degree to which gore capitalism can engage in labor practices and new forms of violence markedly dystopian by any public consensus of a moral life without somehow calling into question the state or globalization.[33] Even catastrophic material contradictions fail to create a legitimacy crisis, and frequently outright fictions mobilize whole nations. There is no better proof of this than the public consensus aided and abetted by thousands of scholars that the greatest threat to humanity is a handful of people called terrorists. Without these new genre-

inspired tools for investigation, how else do you make sense of autonomous killer robots and the savage biopolitics of conquistadors, and equally find inspiration in Go-playing AI platforms and nearly annihilated cosmologies resurging against any "realistic" odds?

How do we get from horror to critique? Rucker recommends that we can "turn off the TV (or now ubiquitous internet), eat something, and go for a walk, with infinitely many thoughts and perceptions mingling with infinitely many inputs."[34] Furthermore, artists of all sorts, scholars included, can refuse to allow this "severely limited and reactionary mode condition all of our writing."[35] We can instead employ the tricks of other aesthetic genres and conceptual speculation to expand the sensory capabilities to see the world beyond consensus reality. In this sense, theory can be a kind of dark magic, a destroyer of worlds, an art of sensual experience. We can craft concepts like spells. We can conjure ideas from the virtual in hopes of altering the experience of reality. What comes after that is beyond our control.

To this end, what if the primary goal of studying global politics was not to explain things like laws, rules, and predictions but was rather to broaden how much of the world we could experience and be part of? What if international relations was an empiricism infused with what Cavell calls imagination, such that we can "take the facts in, realize the significance of what is going on, make the behavior real for [ourselves], make a connection"?[36] Cavell says this process of imagination is what Wittgenstein called "interpretation" or "seeing something as something."[37] The failure to see so many things and others as "something" is a plague of much greater significance than any research problem that can be saved by the next methodological breakthrough. And the "seeing something as something" problem is as equally unlikely to be solved by any scientific breakthrough, in the narrow sense. Instead we have to find tactics for making sense of "what is fantastic in our ordinary lives."[38]

Of Mood and Method: Pessimism, Failure, and International Relations

Of course it is hard for us to think that we are becoming completely wretched! And yet . . .—GEORGES BATAILLE

We're doomed.—EUGENE THACKER

Because I wanted this book to inspire curiosity beyond the boundaries of international relations (IR), I considered ignoring the field altogether, removing all mentions of IR or IR theory. However, upon closer reflection, I have

decided to keep these references as I think they are relevant for those outside the discipline and for those who, like myself, often feel alienated within its disciplinary boundaries. In the former case, it is important to know that, unlike some more humble fields, IR has always held itself to be a kind of royal science. Scholarship in IR, particularly in the United States, is half research, and half biding time until you have the prince's ear. The hallowed names in the mainstream of the field are still known because they somehow changed the behavior of their intended clients—those being states, militaries, and international organizations. Therefore, some attention to IR is necessary because it has an all-too-casual relationship with institutional power that directly impacts the lives of real people, and IR is all too often lethal theory.[39] As an American discipline, the political economy of the field is impossible without Department of Defense money, and its semiotic economy would be equally dwarfed without contributory figures like Woodrow Wilson, Henry Kissinger, and Samuel Huntington. The ubiquity of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis and Kissinger's particular brand of *realpolitik* are undeniable throughout the field, as well as the world.[40] Each, in their own way, has saturated the watchwords and nomenclature of geopolitics from an American perspective so thoroughly that both political parties in the United States fight over who gets to claim the heritage of each. Although many other fields such as anthropology and even comparative literature have found themselves in the gravitational pull of geopolitics, international relations is *meant* to be scholarship as statecraft by other means.[41] That is, IR was meant to improve the global order and ensure the place of its guarantor, the United States of America.[42] Having spent the better part of a decade listening to national security analysts and diplomats from the United States, South Korea, Japan, Europe, China, Brazil, and Russia, as well as military strategists around the planet, I found their vocabulary and worldview strikingly homogeneous.

If this seems too general a claim, one should take a peek at John Mearsheimer's essay "Benign Hegemony," which defends the Americanness of the IR field.[43] What is most telling in this essay is not a defense of the U.S. as a benign hegemonic power, which Mearsheimer has done at length elsewhere. Rather, it is his vigorous defense that as a field, IR theory has done well by the world in setting the intellectual agenda for global challenges, and for creating useful theoretical approaches to addressing those problems. For Mearsheimer, the proof that American scholarly hegemony has been benign is that there is nothing important that has been left out. A quick scan of the last ten or twenty International Studies Association conferences would suggest otherwise.

That issues like rape as a weapon of war, postcolonial violence, global racism, and climate change are not squarely in the main of IR demonstrates just how benign American scholarly hegemony is not. As one prominent anthropologist said to me at dinner after touring the ISA conference in 2014, "it was surreal, like a tour through the Cold War. People were giving papers and arguing as if nothing had ever changed." These same provincial scholars aspire and succeed at filling the advisory roles of each successive American presidency. One cannot help but see a connection between the history of the IR field, and the catastrophes of U.S. foreign policy during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One could repeat the words of the anthropologist I mentioned to describe the 2016 presidential campaign debates over the future of U.S. foreign policy: it is as if "nothing had ever changed." And yet these old white men still strut around the halls of America's "best" institutions as if they saved us from the Cold War, even as the planet crumbles under the weight of their failed imperial dreams.

If international relations was meant to be the science of making the world something other than what it would be if we were all left to our own worst devices, then it has failed monumentally. The United States is once again in fierce nuclear competition with Russia. We are no closer to any significant action on climate change. We have not met any of the Millennium Development Goals determined by the United Nations on eradicating poverty. War and security are the most significant financial, creative, social, cultural, technological, and political investments of almost every nation-state on Earth. The general intellect is a martial intellect.

Despite all this failure, pessimism does not exist in international relations, at least not on paper. The seething doom of our current predicament thrives at the conference bar and in hushed office conversations but not in our research. In public, the darkness disavowed possesses and inflames the petty cynicisms and hatreds that are often turned outward at tired and predictable scapegoats.

After the fury of three decades of critique, most IR scholars still camp out either on the hill of liberal internationalism or in the dark woods of political realism. Neither offers much that is new by way of answers or even explanations, and each dominant school has failed to account for our current apocalyptic condition. One is left wondering what it is exactly that they think they do. Despite the seeming opposition between the two, one idealistic about the future of international order (liberals) and the other self-satisfied with the tragedy of cycles of war and dominance (realists), both positions are optimists of the positivist variety.

For both warring parties, IR optimism is expressed through a romantic empiricism. For all those who toil away looking for the next theory of international politics, order is out there somewhere, and dutifully recording reality will find it—or at least bring us closer to its discovery. For liberal internationalism, this will bring the long-heralded maturity of Immanuel Kant's perpetual peace. For second-order sociopaths known as offensive realists, crumbs of "useful strategic insight" and the endless details that amplify their epistemophilia for force projection and violence capability represent a potential "advantage," that is, the possibility to move one step forward on the global political board game of snakes and ladders. Still, the cynicism of IR always creeps back in because the world never quite lives up to the empirical findings it is commanded to obey. Disappointment here is not without reason, but we cynically continue to make the same policy recommendations, catastrophe after catastrophe.

I have an idea about where IR's recent malaise comes from. I think it is a moment, just before the awareness of the Anthropocene, after the Cold War and before September 11, when the end of everything was only a hypothetical problem for those of a certain coddled and privileged modern form of life. The catastrophe of the human predicament was that there was no catastrophe, no reason, no generation-defining challenge or war. Now the fate of this form of life is actually imperiled, and it is too much to bear. The weird denial of sexism, racism, climate change, the sixth extinction, and loose nukes, all by a field of scholars tasked with studying geopolitics, is more than irrationalism or ignorance.[44] This animosity toward reality is a deep and corrosive nihilism, a denial of the world. Thus IR as a strategic field is demonstrative of a civilization with nothing left to do, nothing left to destroy. All that is left is to make meaning out of being incapable of undoing the world that Euro-American geopolitics created. Emo geopolitics is not pretty, but it is real. The letdown, the failure, the apocalypse-that-was-not finally arrived, and we are too late.

Still, the United States of America continues to follow the advice of "the best and the brightest," testing the imperial waters, not quite ready to commit out loud to empire but completely unwilling to abandon it. Stuck in between, contemporary geopolitics—as curated by the United States—is in a permanent beta phase. Neuro-torture, algorithmic warfare, drone strikes, and cybernetic nation-building are not means or ends but rather are tests. Can a polis be engineered? Can the human operating system be reformatted? Can violence be modulated until legally invisible while all the more lethal? Each incursion, each new actor or actant, and new terrains from brains to

transatlantic cables—all find themselves part of a grand experiment to see if a benign or at least sustainable empire is possible. There is no seeming regard for the fact that each experiment directly competes with Thomas Jefferson's democratic experiment. One wonders if freedom can even exist anywhere other than temporarily on the fringe of some neglected order. Is this some metaphysical condition of freedom, or is the world so supersaturated with martial orders that the ragged edges between imperial orders are all that we have left? It feels like freedom's remains persist only in the ruins of everything else. No space is left that can be truly indifferent to the law, security, or economy. Such is the new life of a human in debt. The social contract has been refinanced as what is owed and nothing more: politics without equity. Inequity without equality.

What about the impending collapse of the post–World War II order, the self-destruction of the United States, the rise of China and a new world order? If humanity lasts long enough for China to put its stamp on the human apocalypse, I will write a new introduction. Until then, we live in the death rattle of *Pax Americana.* While I think the totality of this claim is true, I do not want to rule out that many of us throughout the world still make lives otherwise. Many of us even thrive in spite of it all. And yet, no form of life can be made that escapes the fact that everything can come to a sudden and arbitrary end thanks to the whim of an American drone operator, nuclear catastrophe, or macroeconomic manipulation like sanctions. There are other ways to die and other organized forms of killing outside the control of the United States; however, no other single apparatus can make everyone or anyone die irrespective of citizenship or geographic location. For me, this is the most inescapable philosophical provocation of our moment in time.

The haphazard and seemingly limitless nature of U.S. violence means that even the core principles of the great political realist concepts like order and national interest are being displaced by subterranean violence entrepreneurs that populate transversal battlefields, security corridors, and border zones.[45] Mercenaries, drug lords, chief executive officers, presidents, and sports commissioners are more alike than ever.[46] Doomsayers like Paul Virilio, Lewis Mumford, and Martin Heidegger foretold a kind of terminal and self-annihilating velocity for geopolitics' technological saturation, but even their lack of imagination appears optimistic. American geopolitics does not know totality or finality; it bleeds, mutates, and reforms. Furthermore, the peril of biopolitics seems now almost romantic. To make life live? Perchance to dream. The care and concern for life's productivity is increasingly subsumed

by plasticity—forming and reforming without regard to the telos of productivity, division, or normative order.

There are, of course, still orders in our geoplastic age, but they are almost unrecognizable as such. When so many citizens and states are directly invested in sabotaging publicly stated strategic ends, then concepts like national interest seem equally quaint. We are witnessing creative and horrifying experiments in the affirmative production of dying, which also deprive those targeted and in some cases whole populations from the relief of death. To follow Rucker, I want to try to see the world for what it is. We can only say that tragedy is no longer a genre of geopolitics. Tragedy redeems. The occluded character of contemporary geopolitics shoehorned into experience produces the feeling that there is no relief, no reason, no victory, no defeats, and no exit within the confines of national security's constricted world. This is not tragedy: it is horror. We live in an age of horror that, like the victims of gore movies who never quite die so that they can be tortured more, furthers our practice of collective violence and goes on for decades as a kind of sustainable warfare.

A Different Pitch of Failure

Why would I bother with the "night side" of IR theory?[47] In part, I wish to move away from the rationalist fallacy among both defenders and critics of empire. There is a shared belief in the strategic competence of nations like the United States. Even those most vocally critical often see in the covert operations and vast military occupations a kind of purpose or conspiracy. The debate about empire then becomes about its moral virtue rather than the factual question of the strategic competence of imperial states. However, the lives of millions annihilated in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and now increasingly throughout the continent of Africa do not reflect an amoral strategic competence. The mass murder in pursuit of the war on terrorism and its vision of nation-building is the result of lethal stupidity.[48] In some sense, the investigative journalism of Jeremy Scahill and Glen Greenwald attributes too much reason and order to the catastrophic floundering of the American empire.[49] To see even a dark vision of order in the last thirty years of U.S. policy is itself a form of optimism. No one is in control, there is no conspiracy, and yet the killing continues. A pessimistic reading of U.S. empire and the geopolitical history that precedes it is neither tragedy nor farce. It is a catastrophic banality lacking in any and all history, a pile of nonevents so suffocating that we often hope for a conspiracy, punctuating event, or villain worthy of the

scale of violence.[50] For those of us who continually rewatch the reruns of *The Walking Dead* and *Jericho* on our laptops in bed, we are waiting for relief in our privileged but increasingly fragile bubble. I know I am not the only one who finds respite from the weight of politics' "cruel optimism" by watching fantasies of cruel pessimism. A pessimistic understanding of global politics helps explain how we could come to a place where there is a sense of relief in watching everything come to an end.[51]

Failed IR affirms the power of this kind of negative thinking as an alternative to the endless rehearsing of moralizing insights and strategic foresight. The negative is not "against" or reacting to something. Rather, it is the affirmation of a freedom beyond the limits of life and death. That is, it is making a life by continuing to think about the world, even if that thinking is not recuperative, and even if nothing we think can save us. In the face of it all, one celebrates useless thinking, useless scholarship, and useless forms of life at the very moment we are told to throw them all under the bus in the name of survival at all costs. This is a logic referred to lately as hope and it is as cruel as it is anxiety inducing. Hope is a form of extortion. We are told that it is our obligation to bear the weight of making things better while being chided that the failure of our efforts is the result of not believing in the possibility of real change. In such an environment, pessimism is often treated as a form of treason, as if only neoliberals and moral degenerates give up—or so goes the op-ed's insisting upon the renewed possibility of redemption.

In response to these exhortations, pessimism offers a historical atheism, both methodologically and morally. The universe does not bend toward justice. Sometimes the universe bends toward the indifference of gravity wells and black holes. Affirming negativity, inspired by Achille Mbembe, is grounds for freedom, even if that freedom or relief is only fleeting and always insecure. I am not arrogant enough to think a book can attain freedom of this sort, but this book is inspired by refusals of critique as redemption in favor of useless critique and critique for its own sake.

That the pursuit of knowledge without immediate application is so thoroughly useless, even profane, is a diagnosis of our current moment. The neoliberal assault on the university is evidence of this condition, as is the current pitch of American politics. Our indifference as intellectuals to maximizing value has not gone unnoticed. We are still dangerous, worthy of vilification, of attack, sabotage, and derision because we fail so decadently. We are parasites according to Scott Walker, Donald Trump, and the rest. So be it. We are and shall remain irascible irritants to a worldwide assault on thinking that is well underway and facing few obstacles in other jurisdictions.

What would failed scholarship do? Learn to die, learn to live, learn to listen, learn to be together, and learn to be generous. These virtues are useless in that they do not prevent or manage things. They do not translate into learning objectives or metrics. Virtues of this order are selfsame, nontransferable experiences. They are meaningful but not useful. These are luxurious virtues. Like grieving or joy, they are ends unto themselves. But how will these ideas seek extramural grants, contribute to an outcomes-based education system, or become a policy recommendation? They will not, and that is part of their virtue.

Even if there is no straight line to where we are and where we ought to be, I think we should get over the idea that somehow the U.S. project of liberal empire is conflicted, or "more right than it is wrong," or pragmatically preferable to the alternatives. I hope this book can contribute to the urgent necessity to get out of the way by reveling in the catastrophic failure that should inspire humility but instead seems to embolden too many to seek global control yet again. Demolition may be an affirmative act if it means insurgents and others can be better heard. And yet this may fail too. If we can accomplish nothing at all, we can at least, as Ta-Nehisi Coates and other pessimists have said, refuse to suborn the lie of America any longer. Telling the truth, even if it cannot change the outcome of history, is a certain kind of solace. In Coates's words, there is a kind of rapture "when you can no longer be lied to, when you have rejected the dream."[52] Saying the truth out loud brings with it the relief that we are not crazy. Things really are as bad as we think.

If there are those of us who want to break from this one-hundred-year-old race to be the next Henry Kissinger, then why do we continue to seek respect in the form of recognizable standards of excellence? I am not sure where the answer finally lies, but I do know that professionalization will not save us. To appear as normal and recognizably rigorous will not be enough to stave off the neoliberal drive to monetize scholarship, or to demand of us strategically useful insights. The least we can do in the face of such a battle is to find comfort in meaningful ideas and the friendships they build rather than try to perform for those we know are the problem. Some will ask, who is this "we" or is that "they"—where is your evidence? More will know exactly what I am talking about.

The virtues I seek are oriented toward an academy of refuge, a place we can still live, no matter how dire the conditions of the university and the classroom. It is not the think tank, boardroom, or command center. We are, those of us who wish to be included, the last of the philosophers, the last of

the lovers of knowledge, the deviants who should revel in what Harney and Moten have called *the undercommons*.[53]

In one of his final lectures, Bataille speaks of the remnants of a different human species, something not quite so doomed, something that wasted its newly discovered consciousness and tool-being on the art that still marks the walls of prehistoric caves.[54] This lingering minor or vestigial heritage is philosophy's beginning. Philosophy survives war, atrocity, famine, and crusades. Thinking matters in a very unusual way. Thinking is not power or emancipation. Thinking matters for a sense of belonging to the world, and for believing in the fecundity of the world despite evidence to the contrary.

How do you get all this from pessimism, from failure? Because willing failure is a temptation, a lure to think otherwise, to think dangerous thoughts. Pessimism is a threat to indifferentism and nihilism in the sense of the phenomenon of Donald Trump. Pessimism is a provocation and an enemy of skepticism, particularly of the metaphysical variety. It is not redemption from these afflictions, but in pessimism there is solace in the real. To put it another way, to study the world as it is means to care for it.

The exhortation that our care or interest should be contingent on how useful the world is and how much of it conforms to our designs is as much opposed to care as it is to empiricism. We can study airports, poetry, endurance races, borders, bombs, plastic, and warfare, and find them all in the world. To consider the depth of their existence can be an invitation to the world rather than a prelude to another policy report. One cannot make a successful political career out of such pursuits, but you might be able to make a life out of it, a life worth repeating even if nothing else happens.

At the end of Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, we are presented with the Fantastic Mr. Fox's toast as an exemple of something meaningful in these dark times of ours.

> They say all foxes are slightly allergic to linoleum, but it's cool to the paw—try it. They say my tail needs to be dry cleaned twice a month, but now it's fully detachable—see? They say our tree may never grow back, but one day, something will. Yes, these crackles are made of synthetic goose and these giblets come from artificial squab and even these apples look fake—but at least they've got stars on them. I guess my point is, we'll eat tonight, and we'll eat together. And even in this not particularly flattering light, you are without a doubt the five and a half most wonderful wild animals I've ever met in my life. So let's raise our boxes—to our survival.

Halberstam says of this queer moment:

> Not quite a credo, something short of a toast, a little less than a speech, but Mr. Fox gives here one of the best and most moving—both emotionally and in stop-motion terms—addresses in the history of cinema. Unlike *Coraline*, where survival is predicated upon a rejection of the theatrical, the queer, and the improvised, and like *Where the Wild Things Are*, where the disappointment of deliverance must be leavened with the pragmatism of possibility, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is a queerly animated classic in that it teaches us, as *Finding Nemo*, *Chicken Run*, and so many other revolting animations before it, to believe in detachable tails, fake apples, eating together, adapting to the lighting, risk, sissy sons, and the sheer importance of survival for all those wild souls that the farmers, the teachers, the preachers, and the politicians would like to bury alive.[55]

Although not as much fun as Halberstam's monument to low theory, *Savage Ecology* is for all the other wild animals out there studying global politics. May we be buried alive together.

INTRODUCTION

1 Union of Concerned Scientists, "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity."
2 Ripple et al., "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity."
3 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 19, 23.
4 R. Manning, *Rewilding the West*, 3–10.
5 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 208.
6 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 358.
7 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.
8 Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 207.
9 Elsewhere I have described this cosmology as a martial cosmopolitanism. See Grove, *Target Practice*.
10 Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, 11.
11 Malabou, C., *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 2–3.
12 McKittrick, *Sylvia Winter*, 18.
13 McKittrick, *Sylvia Winter*, 31.
14 Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*, 49.
15 Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*, 55.
16 According to Latour, "the error is not that we trust Double Click—it's our whole life—but that we slip unwittingly from omission to forgetting." See Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 275.
17 Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 245–47.
18 Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert*.
19 Law, *After Method*, 2–3.
20 Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native*, 51.
21 Muecke, "Wolfe Creek Meteorite Crater—Indigenous Science Queers Western Science."
22 Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 115.
23 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 6.
24 Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 71.
25 Shapiro, *The Time of the City*, 21–23.
26 Rucker, "A Transrealist Manifesto," 2.
27 Valencia, *Capitalismo gore*, 30.
28 Valencia, *Capitalismo gore*, 33.
29 Valencia, *Capitalismo gore*, 31.

30 Rucker, "A Transrealist Manifesto," 1.
31 Rucker, "A Transrealist Manifesto," 1.
32 Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious*, 36.
33 Valencia, *Capitalismo gore*, 67.
34 Rucker, "A Transrealist Manifesto," 3.
35 Rucker, "A Transrealist Manifesto," 3.
36 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 354.
37 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 354.
38 Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 184.
39 Weizman, "Lethal Theory."
40 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, 2011.
41 Network of Concerned Anthropologists, *The Counter-counterinsurgency Manual*; Chow, *The Age of the World Target*.
42 Hoffmann, "An American Social Science."
43 Mearsheimer, "Benign Hegemony."
44 International relations scholars do love nuclear weapons, but they spend most of their time studying the deterrence strategies and game theory of "great powers" rather than thinking about the long-term consequences of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons decaying around the planet.
45 I recently discovered a corresponding term to describe the kind of violence I am thinking through in the work of Sayak Valencia. In *Capitalismo gore*, Valencia describes these creative violence actors as "especialistas de la violencia," or violence specialists. Among those specialists for whom violence is the primary skill and technique of action, there are those she refers to as "empredador/as," or entrepreneurs of violence. Like Valencia, I am interested in how these violence specialists are characterized by a "creative orientation" to "innovation, flexibility, and dynamism" (55–57). For Valencia, the drug cartel Los Zetas is emblematic of what she sees as the doubling of entrepreneurship from economics and politics into crime and spectacular violence. If there is any difference in our use of the term at all, it may be Valencia's emphasis on capitalism in the formulation of violence entrepreneurs. I see a much longer historical reach for the concept and describe at length how violence entrepreneurs played a key role in precapitalist settler colonialism. In a provisional kind of way, I would add that violence entrepreneurs play a significant role in the transitions between every "episteme of violence" rather than being idiosyncratic to the period of late globalization Valencia engages. Furthermore, although the term *episteme* is adapted from Foucault, I think Valencia would agree that epistemes of violence do not graph neatly onto the periods identified by Foucault, particularly as we dilate the geographic scope of the genealogy of violence beyond the provincialism of Europe. This history is detailed in chapter 3.
46 Anabel Hernández and her coauthors provide juicy details about how easily elites move between licit and illicit economies in the twenty-first century. See Hernández, Bruce, and Fox, *Narcoland*.
47 This idea of the "night sight" of thinking is borrowed from Eugene Thacker's work on pessimism. See Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism*.

48 Physicians for Social Responsibility has made a compelling case that the U.S. global war on terrorism has killed some 1 million people. I say "for no reason" because the vast numbers of these deaths were the result of a fictional premise. There were no weapons of mass destruction. It is instructive of our moment in history that one has to make a "case" for murder and not the normal sort where the guilt or innocence of the perpetrator is being contested. Instead the scale of murder is such that groups have to make a "case" that murder has taken place. The numbers are too large to verify even when dealing with something as determinative as dead or alive, with estimates of dead equaling as many as forty or fifty thousand, a margin of error larger than many cities and far in excess of the total number of every person you have ever known. See Physicians for Social Responsibility, *Body Count: Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the "War on Terror" Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan*, 2015.

49 See Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, and Greenwald, *No Place to Hide.*

50 I am quite taken with Povinelli's characterization of the violence of late modernity as cruddy or eventless. See Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*.

51 Lauren Berlant writes about the left's obsession with the "cool facts" of suffering and how they become the "hot weapons" in the debates about agency that so often derail political change. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 101–2.

52 Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 116. Coates's lie is that of slavery and democracy but for me this is just the rotten core of the empire project of U.S. history. W. E. B. Du Bois referred to the vision of the U.S.-dominated UN Security Council as the "global color line." For Du Bois, U.S. foreign policy and empire were the Middle Passage inside out. See Du Bois, *Color and Democracy*.

53 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.

54 Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity*.

55 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 183–84.

1. THE ANTHROPOCENE AS A GEOPOLITICAL FACT

1 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:85.

2 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37–41.

3 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:25. See also Pickering, "Cyborg History and the World War II Regime."

4 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:65–72.

5 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:99.

6 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:101.

7 Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3:99.

8 Crutzen, "Estimates of Possible Variations."

9 Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies*, 14–16.

10 Hamilton, *Earthmasters*, 182.

11 The Annales school is the most developed of the attempts to understand the deeply ecological character of history. Fernand Braudel in particular added the distinctively geographic and climatic character of the rise of European hegemony and the system of capitalism that developed with it. Unlike other Marxist historians, for Braudel,