

**ON THE EXISTENCE OF BRUNO LATOUR'S MODES:  
FROM PLURALIST ONTOLOGY TO ONTOLOGICAL PLURALISM**

by **Terence Blake**

**Abstract:** In this article I take a critical look at the origins and sources of Bruno Latour's pluralism as it is expressed in his book *AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE*, and compare it to other similar projects (Wittgenstein, Feyerabend, Badiou). I consider the accusations of reductionism and of relativism, and demonstrate that Latour's «empirical metaphysics» is not an ontological reductionism but a pluralist ontology recognising the existence of a plurality of entities and of types of entities. Nor is it an epistemological relativism but an ontological pluralism affirming the existence of a plurality of types of existence. These two strands, pluralist ontology and ontological pluralism, mutually reinforce each other to produce at least the outlines of a robust pluralist realism.

## FOREWORD: CRITIQUE AND DIPLOMACY, STRATEGY AND ALLUSION

"Where do you criticize from? Don't you see that criticizing is still knowing, knowing better? That the critical relation still falls within the sphere of knowledge. of "realization" and thus of the assumption of power? Critique must be drifted out of. Better still: Drifting is in itself the end of all critique. The desire underlying and informing institutions composes set-ups which are energetic investments in the body, in language." (Lyotard, 1972, cited from DRIFTWORKS, Semiotext(e), 1984).

"Lawrence criticised French literature for being incurably intellectual, ideological and idealist, essentially critical, critical of life rather than creative of life... We can only assemble among assemblages" (Deleuze and Parnet, DIALOGUES, 49-50 & 53, published in French in 1977).

I read Latour with many French texts resonating in my mind, texts from the period just before and just after May '68. There are many such texts dating from this epoch and later that seem to have formed the pre-individual conceptual soup from which Latour draws to elaborate his own process of intellectual individuation. One line of argument in those texts was the critique of "critique" as the triumph of negativity and conformism disguised as lucidity, of intellectual laziness disguised as sophistication, of meta-discourse and abstraction disguised as perspicuity. Critique was said to be the new avatar of transcendence, a way to avoid engaging with life and concrete experience. Critical thought, though necessary, was seen as insufficient, and potentially destructive of thought and life if given primacy. What was needed was creative life, seen as an empirical concrete art of composition and assemblage.

It is interesting to note that Paul Feyerabend was talking in much the same vein at roughly the same time, criticizing Popper's critical rationalism for the primacy it gave to critique. An important difference was that Feyerabend did not limit his discussion to the shortcomings of various academic accounts of the practice of science. He was willing to pose the general question of the nature and value of science. Latour affirms that properly understood his analyses do not undermine science but explain why it is as reliable as it is. What he undermines, or so he says, is a persistent deformation, a phantasm concerning the nature and function of science. This is only half true. His idea is that critique has become so democratized that anyone can apply its techniques to cast doubt on solid science, such as evolutionary biology or the study of climate change, in favour of positions that have no real research behind them (creationism, climate denialism) and whose defence reposes on just these critical techniques and nothing else. While I globally agree, I think questioning of the critical attitude goes too far and brands more general critical examination of the sciences as irrational.

Latour's thesis is not new, Feyerabend (who Latour never seems to refer to, preferring to imply that he was not influenced by the illustrious epistemological predecessors of science studies) declared that his aim was not to make critique easier but a lot more difficult. Yet he also maintained that more general questions on the cognitive status and on the value of scientific results are a necessary part of a democratic education and of an enlightened participation in society.

Latour's works emerge from this creative context of ideas, that we may group together under the rubric of "post-structuralism", or more generally of epistemological and ontological pluralism. Yet he does not easily acknowledge this source, except in the vaguest terms. Words, concepts, images that he seems to present as his own derive from this background. The question one can pose is why does he not fully acknowledge his immediate predecessors. On his own theory of mediation this influence is both inevitable and desirable, for to "multiply the mediators" is supposed to strengthen a position rather than weaken it. Sometimes I think that Latour is a Machiavellic master manipulator, a cunning diplomat deploying a rhetorical strategy to become the stereotype of the Great French Philosopher; sometimes I think that he is a master of the allusiveness that is necessary to enrich one's style with enough transindividual vibrancy to really be able to say something both contentful and new.

I do not know how to resolve my dilemma, which comes from having read many texts that he has surely read and hearing their resonances in his own words. This impression of "déjà vu" combines with other worries about the explicit content of his views that I find I both approve and feel dissatisfied with, that I summarise by saying "he's on the right track, but he doesn't go far enough". In many ways I find Bruno Latour's system is an advance on Alain Badiou's philosophy with its four truth procedures, where Latour discerns fifteen modes of veridiction, which are also modes of existence. Yet behind the talk of an open plurality of truth-régimes and their specific mediations and institutions there are signs of conceptual and institutional conservatism and of authoritarian legitimation of the status quo.

I share Latour's desire for philosophers to indulge in more "empirical research", conceived broadly. My concern is that sometimes he slides between this more general sense of empiricism, where a philosopher like Deleuze can be considered to do (conceptual, affective, perceptual, political, and even religious) empirical fieldwork and a more limited sense in which Latour has done fieldwork but not Deleuze, nor Badiou, Lyotard and Serres. My quarrel is with the diplomatic caricature of himself that Latour secretes, consciously or not, and that interferes with the part of his message that I like and wish to help publicise.

**ON ACADEMIC REGRESSION IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

We are living through a period of intellectual regression in the realm of Continental Philosophy, a regression that proclaims itself to be a decisive progress beyond the merely negative and critical philosophies of the recent past. Yet the philosophies of Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard cannot be summed up in the image of pure critique. Their critical dissolution of the dogmatic residues contained in even the most innovative philosophies they had encountered did not leave us in a powerless void of negativity and paralysis. Their "deconstruction" went all the way down, deconstructing even the notion of critique and liberating the possibility of new assemblages and new processes of subjectivation.

Despite his insinuations to the contrary, Bruno Latour's compositionism is the direct application of post-structuralist thought, that he is very familiar with. His talk, containing overtones of scientific bravado, about his "empirical" research is very misleading, as his system is parasitic on these philosophical predecessors. He is however a good populariser of difficult ideas, and his work should be encouraged as long as we do not accept his own contextualisation of his research. Latour is very much an inheritor of Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida and Serres and the intellectual contemporary of Laruelle and Stiegler. It is his continuation of this pluralist lineage that gives his work its superiority over Badiou's system, not any primacy of the empirical over the philosophical.

Beyond the critique of the new figures of transcendence and ontotheology these thinkers gave concrete sketches of how to see the world in terms of a very different sort of ontology based on immanence - a pluralist diachronic ontology. The recent promotion of philosophical successors to this constellation of thinkers of immanence, such as Badiou and Zizek, has not led to any real progress but to a labour of travesty of the past (one has only to look at Badiou's DELEUZE and Zizek's ORGANS WITHOUT BODIES) and to a return to such intellectual deadends as Lacanian psychoanalysis (especially understood synchronically, as Badiou understands everything, as a speculative system). But even these regressive philosophers remain in dialogue, however one-sided and unjust, with their illustrious predecessors, and strive to confront them at the level of conceptual richness that characterised their work.

The next step was to keep up the general aura of having "gone beyond" the older supposedly negative thinkers but to radically simplify the conceptual level, presenting easy summary presentations of the new thought while conveniently forgetting the conceptual paths followed. This step was taken by the epigoni: Meillassoux, who still retains an elevated style and at least an intention of conceptual rigour; and its pop variant in Graham Harman's adaptation for the masses. For example, in THE THIRD TABLE Graham Harman gives a popularised version his theoretical position in the form of a flawed reading of, and an unsatisfying

response to, Sir Arthur Eddington's famous paradox of the two tables. Unfortunately, Harman shows himself incapable of grasping the anti-reductionistic import of Eddington's argument and proposes an abstract philosophical dualism to replace Eddington's pluralist vision of scientific research. Harman claims that his account escapes the reductionism that he mistakenly attributes to Eddington's view, despite reducing the objects of common sense, science, and the humanities to the status of "utter shams". It is implied that the theoretical justification for this unsatisfying presentation is to be found elsewhere in Harman's works, but this is not the case.

However, it is Badiou's philosophy that expresses in its purest and most general form the new paradigm that articulates explicitly what is elsewhere just blithely presupposed as a form of thought too evident to even be aware of. The next step in consolidating the regression that Badiou's philosophy, however innovative, represents (a regression that Badiou's thought does not initiate but rather registers and legitimates) corresponds to the far less ambitious productions of the object-oriented ontologists. I say far less "ambitious" in the sense of conceptual ambition, because their ambition is if possible even greater than that of Badiou, but it is of a different order than the conceptual. They are the marketised version of the Badiou-Zizek constellation, and so the extremely politicised tone has been discreetly dissolved to leave a more demagogic packaging to the stale ideas that OOO trumpets ambitiously as the new construction after so much critique. The attempts by this new generation of philosophers to elaborate a thought capable of guiding us in the new historical conjuncture that we are entering without being able to produce the concepts necessary to describe it are far from original. Faced with the inadequacy of these variants of Badiou's ontological hypothesis Mehdi Belhaj Kacem describes the need for a "new conjecture". He examines various attempts to go beyond the metaphysical problematic secreted unconsciously by the trend towards speculative capitalism, of which Badiou's metaphysics is the explicitation and the most accomplished form. MBK envisions such movements as Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology as containing nothing new capable of leading us out of the Badiouian predicament.

It is normal that in this context François Laruelle's philosophy is at last coming into its own. It could not attain full visibility and be understood on its own terms while the work of Deleuze and Derrida were in progress, as his critiques of that work were only half-true, based on giving it an ultimately uncharitable reading as remaining within the norms of sufficient philosophy, but other readings are possible. This was not the appropriate background to show up the singularity and the penetration of his ideas. Laruelle pursued over the decades his unwavering commitment to immanence, and this project shines forth now against the background of the regression that Badiou-Zizek-Meillassoux and the OOOxians represent.

Paul Feyerabend gives us a sketch of a different sort of ontology than that of the Badiou-Zizek-epigoni carousel, an ontology that is itself subject to the process of research instead of lording it over the sciences, the arts, love, and political struggle. Bruno Latour goes in this direction, that of a diachronic ontology, and expresses the fairly obvious demand that religion be included among the various "truth-procedures" or modes of existence that are also, as Mehdi Belhaj Kacem points out, modes of "prehension" (using Whitehead's term). François Laruelle made use of science to rid philosophy of its synchronic pretensions, and has now opened philosophy onto the whole field of prehensions, including religion (gnosticism and mysticism), art (photography), literature (science-fiction), politics (democracy), psychoanalysis (non-analysis). Bernard Stiegler underlines the catastrophe visible inside Plato's own works of the replacement of the preceding traditional diachronic cosmology by a new tyranny of thought and action based on the establishment of a synchronic ontology.

I make use of the Feyerabendian concept of abundance to resume the features of a diachronic ontology that makes a place for realism AND historicity, for speculation AND revisability. "Withdrawal" is an artefact, the pessimistic consequence of employing a simplified set of abstractions to describe the different modes of existence, spatialising them and so producing and promoting a synchronic ontology which can neither account for change nor even do justice to the many elements and aspects of the world. Feyerabend distinguished the way of the scientist, or more generally the way of research, from the way of the philosopher. Consequently he was very wary of academic philosophy, its abstractions, its jargon, and its dualisms. This led him to be very attentive to the life of the ordinary person and to defend common sense reality from academic philosophers who would teach us that the abundance of the concrete world is an illusion, a "sham", and that only their philosophical abstractions are real.

All this talk about diachronic ontology and processes of individuation raises the question of non-academic prehensions of the world, that we may summarize following Feyerabend and Laruelle under the term "gnosis". How much gnosis does one actually see in academic talk about gnosticism? Paul Feyerabend praised the gnostics for being able to put into question not just aspects of the world but also criticise in their globality both our understanding of the world and also the world itself. Feyerabend's whole thought from his anarchism, his defence of counter-induction, to his sketches of an ontology capable of underwriting his pluralist methodology and politics of democratic relativism, bears the mark of his affinities with Gnosticism. If Gnosticism is the opposite of an external doctrine to be administered by a hierarchical institution based on ontological stupidity and blindness (as much of the academy has become) then it is to be put more in relation with processes of psychic and collective individuation (as Jung has argued). Feyerabend's style embodies

"gnosis" in this sense, and one would wish to see , for example, talk of the hermetic Deleuze be itself more hermetic (gnostic, diachronic, individuating) and less academic (dogmatic, synchronic, alienating).

The question then is not to be in the academy or not. There is no right place to be, as Lyotard remarked, just a right way of being: a good conductor of intensities whether inside or outside the academy. We cannot say that artists exemplify a creativity that is lacking in academic philosophy. Even philosophy professors can be non-philosophers, or better non-standard philosophers, innovating outside the conceptual hegemonies imposed by tradition. Even artists can be careerist pimps. There is no absolute criterion, and even our vocabulary can betray our thought. I would like to talk in terms of non-academics and ask "Does your path of energies take you closer to the sources of immanence?" I would like to talk, as Laruelle does, of "thought-power" on the analogy with labour-power, but all that is academic jargon if it is not tied to the lived experience it tries to convey. Feyerabend, a university professor, condemned the academy, its language and its cliques. He did not talk or teach or think like the vast majority of his colleagues. Yet he claimed to have always had "complete freedom" to do things his way. Being in the academy or not administratively speaking is not the criterion. But being inside the collective phantasm that it secretes and sustains, and voluntarily perpetuating that phantasm or doing something else is a criterion

### **HOW TO READ LATOUR (1): Polytheism of Values**

One cannot help noticing a certain vagueness and conceptual tension in Latour's use of the term "Moderns", and of what role his appeal to a notion of "values" plays in his project: preliminary survey to open up the field of inquiry or rhetorical reduction to serve the purposes of his own agenda. The question is thus posed of how we may best read this book, and Latour's work in general.

Style and vocabulary are important to Latour's message, as are argumentative and rhetorical strategy. This implies that we do not read Latour through the literalism and the narrow rationalism of "double-click" spectacles. Double-click is the name for a mode (of discourse and of existence) that reduces existence to information treated as unmediated and transparent access to reality. In opposition to the claim of double-click rationality to be the only trustworthy access to reality, since it takes itself to be the only mode of existence, Latour argues that there are in fact many modes of existence. Each of these modes generates its own information and subjects it to multiple transformations, and each embodies different values. The rise to hegemony of double-click rationality corresponds to what Max Weber called the process of rationalization, which brought with it the reduction of the many modes of existence to one, and thus the "disenchantment" of the world.

(Note: Latour lays out fifteen modes of existence and of "veridiction", but unlike Badiou and his magic number of four "truth-procedures" Latour is open to the possibility of adding others. In this regard we can see Badiou as still practicing a priori philosophy, where Latour true to his word is intent on practicing an empirical metaphysics).

One can note that Latour's choice of theoretical vocabulary is voluntarily simple, and one motive for this choice is the desire to avoid the misleading associations and connotations that adhere to the more technical words of the philosophical tradition. However, I agree with Deleuze that it is often the books that make the choice of a non-technical vocabulary that are the most difficult. We have seen in the last post that Latour's use of the word "modern" conceals many problems, as does his choice of the word "values", and I have argued that his text on his own account must not be taken at face-value ("face-value) is another name for double-click, the omnipresent enemy of the recognition of the plurality of modes).

I think that this creates a situation that is a challenge for any consequent pluralism. Latour's book is written not as just a monist double-click treatise about a pluralism of modes of existence but as itself an enactment of such pluralism, and is to be read accordingly. Its aim is, after the double-click disenchantment of the world, to reenchant the world by investing it with a polytheism of values. It requires that we read it with polytheistic awareness. Certainly we can and must read it for information, but we must also be awake to its strategies and conjunctural alliances. We must appreciate its fictioning of beings and of conceptual personae, and we must approach it with religious care to respond to the living spirit underlying its potentially dead letter. We must relate to it in terms of the psychic construction, or individuation, that it exemplifies and renders possible.

This polytheism of reading is in line with my own approach to understanding and interpretation. I personally don't believe in direct access to a text (or to anything else), nor does Latour. I read a text with everything I've got. Certainly it is important to take note of the vocabulary and of the distinctions foregrounded by the author, but I argue that they must be read against this polytheistic background.

## **HOW TO READ LATOUR (2): Against Straight Reading**

We are often confronted with the demand that we read a writer "first" in their own terms, and then in a later phase propose hypotheses for interpreting the text. This is a naïve empiricist methodological principle based on the idea that we must first seek direct unmediated "raw" data, and then elaborate hypotheses to



explain that data. This principle is based on an impossibility, the myth of information untransformed by theoretical interpretation, and is in no way applicable to the process of research. Latour himself condemns it under the name of "Double Click", the myth of transport of information without transformation. This is a basic principle of Latour's research from the very beginning - we have only to recall that Latour started out in Biblical exegesis.

There is no "blank-slate" reading, just registering what Latour says in his own terms. Can we then read Latour with constant reference to the known facts concerning the domains he discusses? This would be yet another positivist reduction of his text, as Latour does not claim to be giving a report on the results of empirical research: "it is not in the mode of knowledge that I claim to be working" (AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, 481). Latour's text is not an exercise in "speaking straight" (Double-Click), but in "speaking well" (plurimodal diplomacy). As such it requires something other than "reading straight": a plurimodal or polytheist reading.

Latour calls the approach employed in his text "plurimodal", "diplomatic", or "relationist". His text is constructed on the fable of an anthropologist who wishes to reconstitute the value system of modern Western societies. She is careful to avoid the naïve error of "believing what the West says about itself" (28), taking a truly anthropological approach, understanding that "modernism's accounts of itself may have no relation to what has actually happened to it" (28). Her investigation involves living among her informants and participating in their daily activities without being credulous. She understands that this is the only way to discover the value system of her informants, "who account for this system in terms to which she must avoid giving too much weight".

The "surprising" discovery of this fictitious investigator is that not only do the accounts given by the moderns of each mode of existence that she isolates not correspond to their actual practice, but that they are very often shocked by the more adequate accounts that she comes up with based on her investigations. They tend to deny that her accounts are accurate, preferring to believe quite naïvely in their own utterly unrealistic accounts, and she must exercise much diplomacy to get her findings accepted. The pervasiveness of this denegation and naïveté are in large part responsible for the difficulty of the investigation.

I think this fable of the anthropological investigator is a good model of the sort of reading that is appropriate to AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE. The reader of Latour's work must live with it without giving too much weight to its own self-account, and be alert to possible instances of denegation and of naïveté (whether authentic or feigned) in the very construction of the

project within the text. Bernard Stiegler gives us (in "Bernard Stiegler's Pharmacy: A Conversation", Configurations Volume 18, Number 3, Fall 2010) very useful advice in reading Latour's texts:

"Right now I have a stylistic difficulty with Latour. If you will, for me, Latour -- who I think is a very interesting person -- is in a bad relation with philosophy ... he is in a state of philosophical denial ... I always have the impression, because of this denial, that there is a certain blindness, a certain naïveté even, in Latour's reasoning process, a certain cynicism".

This gives us a fruitful set of criteria for reading Latour: be on the lookout for occurrences of philosophical denial, of blindness, of naïveté, and of cynicism. It is clear that Stiegler thinks that because of his philosophical denegation Latour is still stuck to some extent in naïve empiricism. In effect, Latour's work embodies a double empiricism: an empiricism of networks, that one has just to trace and follow, and also one of modes of existence that one has to describe and prevent from imposing their felicity conditions on another mode.

We can observe the conjoined presence of blindness, naïveté and cynicism in the beginning chapters of Latour's new book:

1) Blindness: Latour conflates a philosophical definition of the Moderns (those who believe in Science's radical separation from Politics and in the dynamic of progress brought about by that separation) with an empirical socio-economic definition (the technologically advanced societies of Europe and the United States). He passes from one sense to the other without seeming to notice, creating a certain degree of vagueness and of conceptual confusion in his declarations;

2) Naïveté: Latour's analyses taken as real-life political prescriptions are naïve in that they ignore important socio-economic realities of class, power, institutions, and cultural .

3) Cynical: Latour is not very reliable in enunciating all the stakes of his analyses, and is often pursuing several agendas at once. His style is an intervention in a field of forces, allies and enemies, not all of which are made explicit, and whose characterization often depends more on strategic convenience and rhetorical positioning than on straight-talking referential prose.

Does all this invalidate what Latour has to say? Not at all, Latour's "blindness" is counterbalanced by a new insight into materiality. Stiegler praises Latour for posing important questions and for bringing a concern with "things" into philosophy:

"I find that he is extremely intelligent and he often raises pertinent questions, but, moreover, he is interested in objects

and things and this interests me ... I think that the thing, the banal "thingness" of the thing, is something extremely important that philosophy has a tendency to reject. I therefore regret that in Derrida's work, the critique of logocentrism does not lead in the end to a reconsideration of things. Here, Latour is very interesting".

This reaction of Stiegler's highlights an impression that one may have in reading Latour of real novelty embedded in disingenuous narration. The avoidance of traditional philosophical jargon is no doubt a useful heuristic procedure for extracting us from sedimented presuppositions. But it has the disadvantage of exaggerating the novelty of the analyses and of cloaking important conceptual affinities and precedents. It cannot be put forward as an obligatory methodic principle, but may be of use when considered as just one heuristic amongst many. The conclusion for reading Latour is that we should both go with the actual network of concepts elaborated by Latour and at the same time interpret that network in terms of a plurality of perspectives or modes insofar as they are pertinent to the matters at hand. Exegesis is not straight reading nor free association, but pragmatic pertinence.

#### **SITUATING LATOUR'S ENUNCIATIONS: META-LANGUAGE OR NEWSPEAK**

Bruno Latour's book AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE purports to describe the felicity conditions of a plurality of modes of existence and of their corresponding modes of veridiction. So it is reasonable to raise the question of the situation of enunciation instituted in the book, and of the status of Latour's own speech acts. In the passage from certainty to trust the enunciative modality changes:

"But when one has to appeal to trust, the interlocutory situation is entirely different: one has to share the concern for a fragile and delicate institution, encumbered with terribly material and mundane elements-- oil lobbies, peer evaluation, the constraints of model-making, typos in thousand-page-long reports, research contracts, computer bugs, and so on" (3).

Latour's own discourse seems to allude to a possible scientific status, by the constant evocation of an "anthropology of the Moderns", yet much of what he says is philosophical in form and content, containing idiosyncratic speculation whose evidential support is not readily apparent. The lack of clarity over the object of the inquiry (the "Moderns" and their "values") and over the potential audience for its results adds to the puzzlement over the status of his discourse. In the conclusion Latour states:

"Thus while I have spoken all along of an inquiry and even of a questionnaire, it is not in the mode of knowledge that I claim to be working. The term "inquiry" has to be taken in a plurimodal sense whose object is to preserve the diversity of modes. Can we

call this approach "empirical philosophy"? I am not sure, given how indifferent philosophy has become to the tasks of description. Experimental metaphysics? Cosmopolitics? Comparative anthropology? Practical ontology? ... To situate this reprise of the rationalist adventure, but to mark clearly that it will not take place under the auspices of Double Click, I have entrusted it to the term "diplomacy".

So it is not in the mode of knowledge, yet empirical. In the beginning of the book Latour appeals to his status as a practitioner of science studies, and we know he has published books on a case study of technology and of law. His book on religious enunciation REJOICING is not based on a case study but on his own (experiential? philosophical?) impressions of what such utterance is all about. "Plurimodal", including the mode of knowledge but not limited to it, seems an apt description, but so does "meta-modal", if we want to capture the idea that it is not political diplomacy that is at play, but ontological diplomacy. The scene of this diplomacy is vague too: the investigator must show diplomacy with her informers and strive to obtain their assent for her redescriptions of their practices and institutions, diplomacy again in the negotiations between the different modes of existence, and yet again in the negotiations between the Moderns and the "others".

Despite an effort to locate and free us from category mistakes when one mode of existence is confused with or impinges on another, Latour himself mixes philosophical considerations and empirical claims in a confusing way. The result is a vagueness or "muddiness" that complicates his argument and gives an illusion of concreteness. There emerges from all this an impression of authority, yet the bibliography to support his claims is lacking. There is an attempt to exploit the trust the reader may have in Latour's previous work on revisioning of science and have it accorded to claims about other domains, institutions, and modes of existence where no such work is cited. The objections that the text envisions come from naive straw men who are trapped in the snares of subject-object, the bifurcation nature-society, the impossible quest for unmediated certainty, or of double-click literalism. There is so much renaming that one has trouble formulating objections that have not been rendered impossible by the new terminology. An interesting case is the fate of the word "transcendence", which becomes split in two: there is a "bad" transcendence and a "good" transcendence, which is defined so as to be synonymous with immanence ("immanence, for AIME, is synonymous with good transcendence"). This is in line with a return to a more consensual ("diplomatic") posture and an attempt to avoid "provocation", at least at the level of terminology. Already Latour had renamed his position from "social constructivism" to "constructivism". Now we have him renouncing constructivism in favour of compositionism, and the return of values, institutions, and even ("good") transcendence. There are no boundaries between domains, but one may not mix different modes

of existence, under penalty of "category mistake". Yet one may ask: are all such crossings sterile errors? If this ontology is diachronic, with modes of existence evolving, mutating, coming into being and disappearing, can such crossings sometimes be productive? The terminology of category mistakes, though necessary for eliminating "bad" mixtures, may eliminate too much (what about the possibility of "good" mixtures and tend towards stasis. Once we have our map of values and modes that characterise us are we just going to agree to be different from our others, or are we going to swap and mix with them? It is strange to police the proliferation of hybrids at the object level with the stern warnings against categorial confusion at the meta-level.

On the question of "Values", I think that Latour effectuates an illegitimate transition at the beginning of the book from experience to value in his presentation of his project. Then he gives the value thus located a new content ("new account"). So the defence of the values of the moderns is a strange tension of conservative and revisionary moves.

Latour's "felicity conditions" are to be distinguished from the values he posits, being rather the criteria determining that some value has been respected or attained, or not. Reducing science to the value of "objectivity" as Latour does in the introduction, or religion to conversion, is a dubious move. The idea that each mode of existence embodies a "value" that can be isolated out is a rhetorical reduction. It is rhetorical because it consists in persuasively re-defining the experience underlying a mode of existence while giving the appearance of simply re-stating that experience; it is a reduction in that something of the complexity of that experience is lost. Wanting us to give up the "belief in beliefs" in favour of a belief in values seems little gain, but tends towards denying any cognitive dimension to values. There is also the inter-textual aspect. Latour relies heavily on a fuzzy set of allusions to previous French philosophers. In particular much of his pluralism has a Deleuzian ring, just as his declaration of the end of the modernist master narrative of Emancipation is a Lyotardian concept. In Deleuze's terms value is always a term for the conformist codification of practices and of modes of existence, and it is rather singular evaluations that allow us to construct our modes of existence without succumbing to transcendence in the sense of a higher objective court of appeal. Latour seems to be trying to revamp the terminology to produce more conservative conclusions than such thinkers worked towards; There is a whole strand of re-defining the terms of his predecessors rather than confronting them that goes in the same direction; His re-defining of "deconstruction" into purely negative critical thought is an important example. His wiping out of two generations of predecessors is of a piece with his considering only straw man objectors. Noone wants to be a dualist still believing in subject-object or the bifurcation of Nature and Society, noone wants to believe in the unmediated access to the real or in the unitary autonomous subject. But the victory over

(i.e. the deconstruction of) these concepts in favour of (it was not just negative) multiplicities of heterogeneous elements arranged in immanent networks - this was not Latour's contribution but that of his immediate predecessors. So I think that looking very warily at a seemingly innocent word such as "value" is important to understand Latour's project in a wider intellectual context than that which he himself indicates explicitly. An unreliable narrator of the necessity of trust is not to be taken at face value.

### **THE DEMOCRACY OF TRUST AND THE VALUE OF "PROT-"**

At the beginning of AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE Bruno Latour recounts an anecdote to illustrate the new situation we find ourselves in today, at the end of the "modernist parenthesis":

"They're sitting around a table, some fifteen French industrialists responsible for sustainable development in various companies, facing a professor of climatology, a researcher from the Collège de France. It's the fall of 2010; a battle is raging about whether the current climate disturbances are of human origin or not. One of the industrialists asks the professor a question I find a little cavalier: "But why should we believe you, any more than the others?" I'm astonished. Why does he put them on the same footing, as if it were a simple difference of opinion between this climate specialist and those who are called climate skeptics...?" Latour wonders if the scientist will respond with a summary of the indisputable data leading to certain knowledge, but the response is a summary of "the large number of researchers involved in climate analysis, the complex system for verifying data, the articles and reports, the principle of peer evaluation, the vast network of weather stations, floating weather buoys, satellites, and computers that ensure the flow of information... the pitfalls of the models that are needed to correct the data as well as the series of doubts that have had to be addressed on each of these points".

No appeal to indubitable data or to certain knowledge, but to trust in the institution of science: "He sees no higher court of appeals".

Latour recounts being shocked by the sceptical question of the industrialist, surprised at the lack of appeal to the certainty of expert knowledge, and favorably impressed by the scientist's account of the research process and by his recourse to trust in the institution. He sees a shift in philosophy of science, in epistemology, in ontology, in this appeal to trust instead of to certainty and to the institution instead of to unmediated access. There is some complacency here as Latour finds that scientists have shifted from their Cartesian dogmatism and certainty to a Jamesian (and by implication Latourian) pragmatism. By implication it is really Latour who won the "Science Wars".

Yet Latour does not really explain why this change in behaviour has taken place. "The modernist parenthesis is at an end" is a rather vague explanatory hypothesis, itself in need of explanation. One problem is that the notion of modernism is defined in a variety of ways, such that its extension is quite vague. One definition of the moderns is: those for whom others have beliefs whereas they have knowledge. On this definition the modernist parenthesis goes back to Plato, or even to Moses. More often it is limited to Europe ASR (After the Scientific Revolution).

Latour's explanation for the change in metaphysics that characterises the change of epoch is the gravity of the ecological crises that beset us. The value of Certainty leads to inflexibility, whereas the times require flexibility and fluidity under the value of Trust. But this notion of the epoch is ambiguous between an internal and an external version. Have the scientists themselves due to new research findings discovered that they must abandon their dogmatic rigidity and authoritarian tendencies? Or has the rise of a less credulous and less deferential attitude in all domains led scientists to revise their epistemology and their rhetorical strategies?

In the anecdote recounted by Latour we have a scientist being subjected to a cavalier question by an industrialist who has chosen to relay, according to Latour, the sort of objections that the climate sceptics use. The scientist replies philosophically, but why? One industrialist is easily snobbed and dismissed (unless he represents Big Money needed by the scientists or his colleagues). But many objections made in all sorts of venues from the TV to the classroom, from philosophical journals to SF novels may have played their part in tempering the expert's attitude. This is the development of what Steve Fuller calls "protscience", the urge towards a democratisation of science impelled by a sort of protestant revolution conducted by the users of science. This movement has had negative effects, such as making room for the naive or cynical climate sceptics and for the intelligent designers. But it has also had the positive effect of demanding more concrete explanations, of the type the climate expert gives in the anecdote, than just the assertion "Science says it is so". What I am arguing is that where Latour sees the sign of a new epoch in the scientist's response, we can also see its sign in the industrialist's question. No contradiction with Latour's project, but a slight shift of emphasis. We may follow the lead provided Steve Fuller, who describes the rise of an attitude that is sceptical of the certainty of science without falling into the opposition between trust and denialism. This is what he calls protscience, and he hypothesises that it may be responsible for the contemporary passage from the appeal to the absolute authority of the expert to the call for reasoned and provisional trust in the scientific community. Perhaps he should integrate into each mode its own "PROT-", so that we would have not just protscience but also protlaw, protanalysis, proteconomy and even protreligion

(gnostics, hermeticists, alchemists included). Protanalysis is covered already by the integration of Tobie Nathan's ethnopsychiatry. Protreligion would lead to combining MET and REL as submodes under a more embracing supermode, that one could call IND (or process of individuation).

## **LATOUR AND BADIOU**

The parallel between Latour's and Badiou's ontologies is important to keep in mind as I think that it fruitfully illuminates both projects. One of the tasks with reading Latour is to re-establish a philosophical context without dragging his work back into a set of presuppositions that he is trying to escape. An examination of Latour's conceptual debts to post-structuralist thinkers demonstrates that Latour's book is both more speculative and less empirical than advertised, but the comparison with Badiou shows that there is a fundamental difference in their approaches. Badiou is still doing a priori philosophy and has shown himself incapable of expanding the number of truth procedures that he posits (for example, to include religion), while there is no real reason inside his system not to envisage other such procedures. We can conclude that Latour's way of taking up the notions of ontology and of truth, and of pluralising them in terms of an open list of modes of veridiction and of existence, is empirical in spirit. Further, Latour's system proposes much more of a diachronic ontology (Latour's "being-as-other", including both alterity and alteration) from the very beginning, whereas Badiou's ontology is synchronic at the level of Being, with a diachronic supplement in the notion of the event.

Contrary to Badiou, Latour does not reactivate a foundational style, rather he does everything to avoid such a thing. Badiou's philosophy is foundational in a very classical sense, and I think his idea that "mathematics is ontology" is a regressive move. Despite his explicit claims, Badiou's difference with the later Wittgenstein is not so much that of his rejection of the "linguistic turn" as that of his failure to effectuate the diachronic turn or the abandon of the idea of foundations. For Wittgenstein mathematics is a constantly evolving patchwork, and set theory is not at all the foundational instance that it is for Badiou. Wittgenstein was also quite intent on separating religious experience from the type of existence investigated by the sciences, and on separating psychological experience from psychoanalysis, which he regarded as an invasive mythology. So Latour is far closer to Wittgenstein than he is to Badiou.

For Badiou mathematics is ontology, and there is no other: there is only one mode of existence. His is a pluralism of content, everything is multiplicity of multiplicities. Latour proposes a pluralism of modes of existence and not just of content, and so for him ontology is itself multiple. The modes are a little like



regional ontologies, only they do not exist as regions inside some totalising space, but are qualitatively incommensurable. In that respect he is closer to Wittgenstein than to Badiou.

### **LATOUR AND STIEGLER: Ideology and Modes of Existence**

Reading Bruno Latour and Geof Bowker's discussion of the different approaches to science in France and in the English-speaking world, one can begin to situate the contribution of Latour's new book to discussions that are traversed by the Anglophone/Continental divide. Each side sees the other as ignoring crucial problems, so rather than choose sides Bowker and Latour attempt a symmetric account of the difference. Their observations correspond to my own experience of the differences of approach, which sometimes has produced difficulties of communication with French philosophers over the 30 years I have been living here in France, and also some frustration at the differing but equally limiting presuppositions on both sides.

This set of differences is something I noticed from the beginning when I arrived in France in 1980. One element is that the notions of theory-ladenness and incommensurability, which had led to intense discussions in Anglophone philosophy of science in the 60s and 70s, had been accepted as evident since the beginning of the 20th Century. However, this strong anti-empiricist orientation did not lead to any questioning of the epistemological status of science, nor to its relativisation in terms of outside, psychological and social, influences. This also explains why Popper, Kuhn, and Feyerabend are typically treated as more or less the same, separated only by minor theoretical nuances. For the French epistemologists, science is essentially a theoretical rather than empirical enterprise. However, this does not relativise science, which is simply posited as rational par excellence.

This rejoins my own observation that French philosophical formulations often sound radical when read in an Anglophone context, but have their scope limited in France by shared implicit presuppositions. Similarly, many radical Anglophone pronouncements seem obvious to the French, as they subtract out any deep questioning of scientific rationality.

Bernard Stiegler, who is not cited in Latour and Bowker's text, falls into the asymmetry imposed by this dichotomy. He does not tackle critically the notion of science, yet his restoration of the centrality of the concept of ideology in his recent book PHARMACOLOGIE DU FRONT NATIONAL leaves him in an ambiguous situation with respect to science. Sometimes Stiegler praises science for its critical rationality, for its ability to question and revise even its most basic assumptions and most entrenched interpretations. Sometimes he finds ideological assumptions embedded in proposed scientific paradigms e.g. neo-liberal

economics (but never in the hard sciences), embodying a dogmatic process of rationalisation. His recent references to a "Darwinian" notion of controversy (where rival interpretations compete until the best interpretation survives) tend towards enshrining a monist principle where the plurality of interpretations in a domain are provisionally entertained in view of ultimate convergence on a single winner.

Bruno Latour does not make use of the notion of "ideology" in his theoretical meta-language, no doubt considering it to be too molar or macro-conceptual, covering too many different sorts of cases to be a useful theoretical term. Latour uses instead the notion of illegitimate crossings between different forms of enunciation/modes of existence. These are closely equivalent to the long chains of transindividuation that Bernard Stiegler evokes. One could transform Stiegler's theoretical vocabulary slightly and talk in terms of modes of transindividuation. This would have the advantage of emphasising that the modes of existence are not synchronic universals, but contingent, diachronic contingent formations. This diachronicity is allowed for but is not very well articulated in Latour's system.

When one mode of existence imposes its own felicity conditions on another, the resulting category mistake produces illegitimate translations that travesty the meaning of the utterances, and give an inadequate account of the existence corresponding entities. So the past and present of a mode is deformed, and its capacity for fruitful innovation is wiped out. In Oldspeak we could say that this imposition or infringement produces "ideological" deformations of the different modes of existence, where the difference between the experience of a mode on the one hand and the accounts given by its practitioners and adherents. Such monological translation creates problems and at the same time removes any possibility of resolving them.

In each case of "crossing" or of encounter between different modes, one has to discern the different modes present in the situation and analyse their functioning. It is important to see if there are hegemonic crossings, where one mode imposes its conditions on the others, or rather compositional crossings, where each mode functions according to its own conditions in a diplomatically satisfying common assemblage. Yet even Latour does not allow for the possibility of heuristically positive interferences between modes e.g. the role of Newton's religious beliefs in his scientific constructions. Stiegler in his recent seminars emphasises the need for "transgression", and so the question becomes are all transgressive crossings necessarily steric?

### **EMPIRICISM VS HERMENEUTICS (1): READING LATOUR RELIGIOUSLY**

Does Bruno Latour have two philosophies, as he claims recently, or just one? Is this an empirical or "double-click" question? Or is it

a hermeneutical question? does it depend on our interpretation, which may be different than the one Latour gives of his own work? Perhaps it is even religious? Latour himself declares

"Groping, contradictory exegesis: this is religion itself. Etymology attests to this: religion is the relationship among or, better still, the relativism of interpretations; the certainty that one obtains truth only through a new path of alterations, inventions, deviations that make it possible to obtain, or not, against rote reiteration and wear and tear, the faithful renewal of what has been said" (AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, 313).

This is good advice on how to read his book: avoid the weak reproductive reading of "rote reiteration", and read critically and creatively to engage in the "faithful renewal" of what Latour has written. Reading is interpretation and not repetition, and such interpretation is necessarily plurimodal. Hermeneutics is thus essential to Latour's thought, and to reading his books. In the list of authors that constitute his hermeneutic horizon, I would not include in pride of place such official hermeneutic authors as Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Rather precedence should be given to Spinoza, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze.

Bad advice would begin by telling people not to read in terms of their preferred modes of existence, but rather according to one's own favoured mode. This is the monist or monotheist mode of reading that judges everything in terms of its one supreme value. Reading, I have argued, is interpretation, it cannot be contained within the borders of one domain. Reading is tied to pluralism and intensity, it "takes into account the fact that a border indicates less a dividing line between two homogeneous sets than an intensification of crossborder traffic between foreign elements" (AIME, 30).

Some good work of exegesis has been done on Latour's work in view of the intensification of our reading experience. I do not see critical discussion as condemned to remain at the level of mere generalities, expressing emotional reactions of rejection or appropriation. A good hermeneutic reading certainly involves not just linear rote summary but global framing, wandering trajectories, and plurimodal intensities, including critical intensity (something that Latour is full of, despite his inveighing against "critique").

One possible conclusion that one could draw from the book is that of the need for "religious studies", on the model of science studies, to complete or transform the perspectives of this preliminary report. Unfortunately, there is nothing in AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, or any other of Latour's texts, to show that he has done any field work on the subject of religion, of anything approaching the tenor and rigour of the work he has done for Science and Law and Technology. That is a very serious shortcoming of AIME. Doing religious studies is not the same thing

as speaking religiously, nor is speaking religiously necessarily speaking about God. The "religious" is a mode of veridiction, not a special content or an obligatory name. It directs our attention (to the nearest and the neighbour). If I read Latour's book with attention, as neighbour, with all I've got, then I am reading it religiously whether I speak of God or not.

This raises the question of the cognitive dimension of religion as Latour's professed view seems to favour a form of reductionist demarcationism which is in contradiction with the pluralism he espouses. There are serious problems with Latour's use of the information/transformation dichotomy, his demarcation of science from religion, and the resulting referential neutralisation of religion. His views on religion are worrisome because they are utterly unempirical, ie they are not based on any concrete research with the diverse populations of believers, but on his own experiences, readings, and reflexions. Yet in REJOICING, and even more so in AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE he relies on the authority given him by his studies on science, technology and law to insinuate that his views on religion are part of an empirical "anthropological" investigation.

A comparison with the ideas of Paul Feyerabend is illuminating. Feyerabend recognises an apparent qualitative difference between religious traditions and straight referential traditions such as science, in that religion explicitly includes a performative (or transformative) aspect, but not in such a way as to replace or exclude the referential cognitive aspect. So the difference in kind is that religious traditions are more complete than (most) secular traditions, in that they include both a performative and a cognitive dimension. A second difference is that in fact, but unbeknownst to them and so only in repressed and truncated form, secular traditions have this performative aspect too.

Latour's account of religion seems open to the the accusation of formalism, of establishing a preserve for a merely "generic" religion with no creedal content. It is also protectionist, where Feyerabend's views are transversalist and non-demarcationist, favorising a symmetrical account arguing that both religion and science have a cognitive dimension, and that both of them are performative, i.e. that the cognitive/performative distinction is not pertinent for demarcating science and religion. Not only is there no absolute conceptual distinction, there is also historically a constant practice of interference and of heuristic interaction. Religion has "interfered" positively with science throughout its history, and not just negatively as a popular positivist myth would have us believe.

The distinction in terms of different "felicity conditions" is not at all new, and was advanced by post-Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion over 40 years ago. It is a protectionist, territorialising, conservative move, unworthy of the rest of Latour's pluralist ontology. It is too sharp a distinction, and

its normative force has a potentially negative effect on the conduct of science. Such a demarcationist approach is methodologically illegitimate (it is normative and not "agnostic", as Latour's method requires). It is also both purificatory (an approach that Latour condemns in his critique of modernity) and unrealistic, and so would have had disastrous consequences for scientific progress if it had been applied by the actors whose intuitions and comportment are supposed to be described in Latour's account.

The most that Latour can do is to create a protected reserve with its own felicity conditions for some sort of "generic" religion. There is something very diluted about a shared régime of religiosity that does not foreground the actual beliefs and objections, the creeds and the controversies that matter to actual religious observance, which are not mere differences of opinion but incommensurable rifts within the religious "truth régime". Either the particular identity of his religious obedience is dissolved, or Latour is committing the fallacy of homogeneity by his generic partitioning of the truth régimes. He is thus condemned by his non-cognitivist approach to religion both to embrace the empirical transversality and diversity of religious experience (pluralism) and to turn it against the established creedal boundaries, and so to invalidate actual religious affiliation and institutional identity by voiding them of all cognitive content (formalism).

### **EMPIRICISM vs HERMENEUTICS (2): Latour's "two philosophies"**

AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE purports to be the sequel to WE HAVE NEVER BEEN MODERN, published 20 years earlier. Where that book's emphasis was mainly negative, as the title shows, deconstructing the false identity that was mistakenly supposed to characterise us, this new book is positive in its aim to present what we have been and still are. In the last post we saw that the book is a hermeneutic treatise, both exemplifying a reinterpretation of the Moderns, purporting to replace the erroneous interpretation that has been coextensive with the modern epoch, and calling for interpretation in its turn. This hermeneutic dimension is confirmed by the "origin story" that Latour recounts about the beginnings of his project in his Roman Catholic youth and in his apprenticeship in Biblical exegesis:

"the systematic destruction by exegesis of all dogmatic certitudes, far from weakening the truth value that the successive glosses played out over and over, made it possible at last to raise the question of religious truth. But only on condition of acknowledging that there was an itinerary of veridiction with its own felicity conditions" (BIOGRAPHY OF AN INVESTIGATION, 3).

So in Latour's intellectual biography religion and hermeneutics come first, and the study of science comes later to confirm this idea of a non-empirical itinerary of veridiction, incommensurable

with the ideal of pure unmediated contact with the real:

"Imagine my amazement when I discovered, in Guillemin's laboratory in 1975, located in a splendid Louis Kahn building overlooking the Pacific Ocean, that scientific work bore a strange resemblance to the exegesis I had left behind in Burgundy" (BIOGRAPHY OF AN INVESTIGATION, 5).

Yet the book whose genesis is thus related proceeds in a different order, no longer biographical but pedagogical. Strangely it foregrounds a claim to be a treatise of "empirical philosophy", purporting to give a more adequate account of our experience:

"Only experience will tell us whether this hybrid apparatus using new techniques of reading, writing, and collective inquiry facilitates or complicates the work of empirical philosophy that it seeks to launch" (AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, xx-xxi).

In the first two chapters Latour begins with science and the discovery of its dependance on equipment and networks, proceeds to Law as an example of another type of veridiction and then introduces religion as a confirming instance, comporting yet another itinerary of veridiction. This sequence of science-law-religion occurs twice, first in Chapter One and then again in Chapter Two. Far from being a simple empirical account of Latour's intellectual evolution, it is a rational reconstruction designed to establish the idea that Latour's work has passed from one philosophy (actor-network theory) to another (modes of existence project), and that the reasons for the passage are empirical.

The book itself abounds in "empirical" vocabulary, distinguishing the experience and values of the Moderns from the accounts given of their experience. Latour proposes to remain "faithful" to the experience but to give more adequate accounts. He enshrines this empirical commitment as a methodological principle giving rise to a set of "specific tests" of the adequacy of his account: "The first is factual and empirical: have we been faithful to the field by supplying proofs of our claims?" (65). The passage from Chapter One with its networks to Chapter Two with its prepositions corresponding to different modes seems to correspond to this passage from one philosophy to another.

This discrepancy between biography and rational reconstruction is reinforced if we take into account the Deleuzian background and resonances of Latour's vocabulary. In his analyses of Spinoza and the construction of a plane of immanence Deleuze associates inextricably a quantitative pluralism of heterogeneous elements with a qualitative pluralism of their composition in modes of existence. For example here in a seminar from December 9th 1980: "Les deux critères de l'éthique, en d'autres termes, la distinction quantitative des existants, et l'opposition qualitative des modes d'existence, la polarisation qualitative des

modes d'existence, vont être les deux manières dont les existants sont dans l'être. Ca va être les liens de l'Éthique avec l'Ontologie". ("The two criteria of ethics, in other words, the quantitative distinction of existents, and the qualitative opposition of modes of existence, the qualitative polarisation of modes of existence, are going to be the two manners in which existents are in being. That will be the relation between the Ethics and Ontology", my translation).

So from the point of view of the philosophical background to Latour's thought there seems to be no reason to conceive of his evolution as containing two distinct philosophies. The heterogeneous networks and the differing modes of existence are inseparable for Deleuze, and Latour traces his involvement with Deleuze's thought back to his doctoral thesis:

"In a thesis defended in 1985 ... I had developed that argument in an analysis of Mark's gospel and of "Saint" Péguy.... A bit of Derrida and Lévi-Strauss plus a large dose of Deleuze helped give the argument the contemporary sheen that neither Péguy nor Bultmann, of course, could have provided" (BIOGRAPHY, 3).

### **LATOUR, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE PRIMACY OF THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT**

Bruno Latour's religious outlook is central to AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, and his discovery of different modes of enunciation (and thus of existence) goes back to his apprenticeship in Biblical exegesis. Indeed religious enunciation appears as a model for the rest: "there are few institutions more obsessed with the distinction between truth and falsity than the religious institution. And yet we also understand that it would be erroneous to claim to judge religious veridiction according to the entirely distinct modes of law or science" (45). Religion needs to be judged by its own specific interpretative key.

In religion we see most clearly and most intensely the concern with being "faithful" to a message that requires constant "innovation" in order to be preserved and transmitted anew:

"It is entirely possible, our anthropologist tells herself, that the relation found here between value and institution is a unique case. Only in the religious domain--and perhaps only in the history of the Christian churches--would we find such a series of betrayals, inventions, reforms, new starts, elaborations, all concentrated and judged on the basis of the principal question of whether one is remaining faithful or not to the initial message. But her own idea (the origin of her eureka moment) is that the situation is perhaps the same for all the Moderns' institutions" (55).

There is a substantial overlap here with Ludwig Wittgenstein's views on different "forms of life" in relation to the question of

the status of the religious as mode of enunciation and of existence. Wittgenstein began his PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS with an appeal to the "spirit" in which he wished it to be read: "This book is written for such men as are in sympathy with its spirit. This spirit is different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. That spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures; the other in striving after clarity and perspicuity in no matter what structure" (Foreword, 1930). This spirit is not at all "Modern", in that it is not exclusively devoted to following the "onwards movement" of modernization, yet it is not against that movement either: it is not anti-modern, but rather what Bruno Latour calls "amodern":

"How will we call this retrospective discovery that we have never been modern? Post-modern? No since this would imply a belief that we have been what we have never been. I propose to call it amodern" (Postmodern? No Simply Amodern. Steps Towards an Anthropology of Science. An essay Review).

Wittgenstein then proceeds to an invocation of God ("I would like to say 'This book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means the book is written in good will, and in so far as it is not so written, but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned. He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them"). Wittgenstein's views on religion are complex, but he did not see religion as a matter of fact, or a question of belief. He saw it as dealing with matters of concern, a deepened attitude to life involving the whole person, embodying the conversion from the bad will of vanity or egoism to the good will of "doing the will of God".

Bruno Latour begins his book AN ENQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE with an epigraph: "Si scires donum dei" ("If thou didst know the gift of God"). This is from The Gospel according to John, Chapter 4, verse 10, where Jesus asks for water from a Samaritan woman and promises the water of everlasting life. The whole incident is relevant to Latour's system of modes existence. Jesus asks for literal water (mode of existence DC, double click) and declares that he can give "living water" (mode of existence REL, religious). He convinces her he is a prophet by showing that he knows intimate details of her life (DC), but he proposes a different sort of knowledge, adoration of the Father "in spirit and in truth". In Latourian terms Jesus's words must be understood in a different "interpretative key", what Wittgenstein calls a different "spirit", than the dead letter of double-click's mode of veridiction.

Indeed, Latour does not hesitate to conceive his whole ontological project, his pluralism of modes of existence, in religious terms,



as a Pentecostal pluralism, a form of speaking in tongues. His conceptual persona, an anthropological investigatress studying the modes of existence of the Moderns

"purports to be speaking while obeying all the felicity conditions of each mode, while expressing herself in as many languages as there are modes. In other words, she is hoping for another Pentecost miracle: everyone would understand in his or her own tongue and would judge truth and falsity according to his or her own felicity conditions. Fidelity to the field comes at this price" (58).

The repeated references to the idea of an "empirical philosophy" must themselves be understood in the right interpretative key. Latour seems to be appealing to the same sort of authority as that of the empirical sciences, but this is just a convenient rhetorical mask. He defines such reference to uninterpreted facts as "first wave empiricism" and makes clear that such a philosophy is not even adequate to the sciences that it takes as the model to impose on all enunciation. In the expression "empirical philosophy" he can only mean "second wave empiricism" keyed to the plurality of modes of existence and respectful of the multiple interpretative keys. There is something strangely circular about this idea of "fidelity to the field", and so it is not surprising that Latour makes no real discoveries of unsuspected régimes of enunciation, but lifts each readily recognizable domain to the régime of enunciation that characterises it most essentially. The procedure amounts to a form of what Willard Van Orman Quine called "semantic ascent", and the régimes of enunciation thus "found" (and their corresponding modes of existence) are the empirical correlates of a prior hermeneutic decision.

### **RYLE AND LATOUR: ON CATEGORY MISTAKES**

At the beginning of Chapter Two of AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE Bruno Latour recounts an anecdote based on Gilbert Ryle's introduction of the notion of category mistake in THE CONCEPT OF MIND (1949): "The canonical example involves a foreign visitor going through the buildings of the Sorbonne, one after another; at the end of the day, he complains that he "hasn't seen the University of the Sorbonne." His request had been misunderstood: he wanted to see an institution, but he had been shown buildings . . . For he had sought in one entity an entirely different entity from what the first could show him" (AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE, 48-49).

Latour's initial comment on this story is a little surprising, as he supposes that the visitor's request would have been satisfied if he had been introduced to the rector, to the faculty assembly, or to the university's attorney, but this supposition is itself based on a category mistake, since Latour is here confusing the University as an institution with particular members or representatives of that institution. Latour then proceeds to

explain: "His interlocutors had misheard the key in which what he was requesting could be judged true or false, satisfactory or unsatisfactory" (49). Ryle's name is not cited, but this remark is faithful to Ryle's analysis of category mistakes as based on a misapplication of concepts consisting in allocating them to the wrong logical type.

Latour's explanation follows from the introduction, in Chapter One, of his thesis concerning "the pluralism of modes and thus the plurality of keys by means of which their truth or falsity is judged" (18). The context he gives is that of Austin's theory of speech acts:

"But the difficulty is not so great, after all, if we turn to the work done by J. L. Austin and his successors on "speech acts." The notions of felicity and infelicity conditions, now solidly established in our intellectual traditions, make it possible to contrast very different types of veridiction without reducing them to a single model" (18).

If we look up the expression "category mistake" on the site associated with the book, we find this entry:

"The expression is valuable in beginning to separate the different modes: it supposes that we question a situation in a key which we soon realize is not the right one and in which it will be pointless to persist. Better simply to change key. The phrase is attributed to (Ryle, 1949 [200]), who wanted to counter the Bifurcation of soul and body; his example is of a visitor wishing to visit the University of Oxford, who complains after seeing a large number of buildings that he has still not seen the University".

It is interesting to compare Latour's account with the original version, which is a little clearer:

"A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asks 'But where is the University? I have seen where the members of the Colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.'

It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized. When they are seen and when their co-ordination is understood, the University has been seen. His mistake lay in his innocent assumption that it was correct to speak of Christ Church, the Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean Museum and the University, to speak, that is, as if 'the University' stood for an extra member of the class of which these other units are members. He was

mistakenly allocating the University to the same category as that to which the other institutions belong" (THE CONCEPT OF MIND, 6).

This mistake of allocating a term to the wrong category is an error in logical grammar. Latour seems to want to echo this analysis when he chooses the term "preposition" to designate the interpretive key necessary to situate a set of utterances in their appropriate category, to understand them according to the correct régime of enunciation, and to follow their particular trajectory of veridiction:

"To designate these different trajectories, I have chosen the term preposition, using it in its most literal, grammatical sense, to mark a position-taking that comes before a proposition is stated, determining how the proposition is to be grasped and thus constituting its interpretive key".

This use of "preposition" is in fact metaphorical, and not at all "literal" (word added by the translator) nor "grammatical" (the grammatical category of preposition is not at all engaged), but etymological and morphological: "preposition" is analysed into pre-position. Here again Latour is guilty of a category mistake. A further example of this non-literal use of the term "preposition" comes in Chapter Six when Latour discusses the difference between his project and critical thought as exemplified in Derrida's deconstruction: "And it is finally Derrida, the Zeno of "differance," who was right always to preface the notion of construction with the preposition "de": constructivism is always in fact de-construction" (156). This is a grammatical error, we are not properly talking about a preposition but about the prefix "de-". Thus the author finds himself once more enmeshed in the very error that his manual is warning against.

### **LATOUR'S PLURALISM 2.0: CAN WE PLURALISE THE PLURALISTS?**

Pluralism becomes interesting when it is not just an acknowledgement of a plurality of closed and finished totalities but when it sees each totality as open and porous, whose unification is an ongoing process, and constituted as well of open and porous subpluralities. One of the consequences of this way of thinking is that totalities are not constituted by one sole synthesis, but by several different and conflicting operations of synthesis that may draw the boundaries in different ways. Another is that the subpluralities are in interaction inside a totality and between totalities. So I would distinguish a "structuralist" pluralism emphasising macroscopic wholes and closure, and a "poststructuralist" pluralism that completes this picture with a swarm of underlying interferences and interactions and hybridisations.

This means that pluralists in this sense are ready to analyse innovations in terms of transformation, transfer, translation,

transport, transversality, etc and to break down all identities into multiplicitous components. The problem is that they only rarely incorporate these insights into their style of work. Deleuze and Guattari, with their idea of the rhizome and with their slogan "pluralism is not just something you talk about it's something you do" (my words), made important gestures in this direction. But more can and should be done.

When these pluralists explain that closed totalities are hallucinatory or fantasmatic pseudo-entities (ie the opposite of Luhmann's notion of "operational closure", which characterises what I am calling structuralist pluralism)) with quantum tunnels and relativistic wormholes underlying and undermining their macro-structure, then they should not act like they were the only pluralists in the world. No, Latour's system is not born from some philosophical tabula rasa and he is wrong not to engage with past and present pluralists, and when he talks about Souriau and modes of existence he is doing misdirection in my eyes. He is wrong to talk about pluralism without discussing people like Laruelle and Stiegler and Deleuze and Feyerabend and Badiou, who sometimes confirm sometimes contradict his analyses, and sometimes just plain go further along that path than he does. etc etc.

Latour wishes to avoid "fundamentalism" in questions of religion and also of science and politics. He defines this fundamentalism as "the refusal of controversies" (i.e. the refusal of discussions where there is no pre-given arbiter) and "the attempted exercise of hegemony of one mode of existence over the others" (interview "L'universel, il faut le faire" in CRITIQUE, Nov. 2012, p 953). This dogmatic domination is what many pluralists have fought under the name of reductionism. Reduction lies in treating religion as a matter of belief, and as submitted to the same truth-régime as referential domains like science. Latour is quite explicit that for him, and I think for many other religious people, religion is not a question of belief at all, not a question of reference to the physical world, but one of performative invocation and transformative message. One can find examples of this non-cognitivist approach to religion in the movement of demythologisation, but also in Dreyfus and Kelly's ALL THINGS SHINING, and in post-Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. Slavoj Zizek propounds this sort of approach as the premise of a possible emancipatory use of religion. It may be a minority position compared to the number of fundamentalists, but it is not negligible, and Latour is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness.

From this point of view fundamentalism as the insistence on defining religion as a matter of belief in factual propositions about the world is a deformation of religion. This "transformative" or "performative" understanding of religion has something good and something bad to it. The bad part is that it looks suspiciously like trying to have your cake and eat it too, making seeming claims about the world and then dancing back and

saying that you are in fact doing something else entirely, making your propositions immune to criticism. But the good part is that it preserves an important use for religious language, defending it against its positivistic elimination as mere superstition. I must admit that I am not indifferent to this language if it is used "poetically", that is to say to express deep or transformative experiences. But I would argue here that the religious person would have to accept that this poetic and transformative language is becoming in itself more pluralist. The brute fact of finding that one is moved by certain words and images and rituals that are closely tied to profound experiences and insights becomes a little suspicious when it conveniently conforms to a pre-constituted faith, let us say Catholicism in Latour's case. Given the empirical diversity of the "varieties of religious experience", to use William James' expression, this is too convenient by far!

Many people make use of "religious" language, widely interpreted, outside all instituted religious denominations. Such language occurs in the context of the practice of yoga or meditation, of analysis or of the martial arts, in songs and films and comic books. It is employed even by those who consider themselves to be total atheists. This is why one can consider that there is more to religion than the making of referential claims about the physical universe, and that fundamentalism is a reductionist approach to religion. This heuristic (or "gnostic") use of religious language and images is more common than one might think. It corresponds to what Bernard Stiegler (and Gilbert Simondon, and Carl Jung) calls individuation.

In the discussion of the cognitive status of religion it is difficult to maintain a balanced perspective. An interesting attempt is made in Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly's Heideggerian treatment of both polytheism and monotheism as useful contemporary ways of understanding the world and ourselves in ALL THINGS SHINING. Their account of religious language is "existential" and so situates religion as having a certain sort of cognitive function, but still maintains it as incommensurable with the type of referential cognition which characterises natural science. Religion is seen as incarnating a type of understanding of the world that is radically different from, and so unable to contradict or be contradicted by, or even enter into conflict with, the natural sciences. It is at this price of the referential neutralisation of religion that they can employ it positively to fulfil their program: to lure back the shining things, to lure back the gods, "to find meaning in a secular age".

Similarly, both Bruno Latour and Paul Feyerabend give accounts of religion that, in related but different ways, remove it from its customary opposition with secularism. For Latour religion is one "régime of enunciation" or "mode of existence" among others, with its own "conditions of felicity", aimed at transformation rather than information. Feyerabend extends Latour's view of religious traditions as different in kind from secular traditions, by

nevertheless insisting that as raw materials they can be of use in secular traditions such as the sciences or may even be employed to correct (or at least to relativise) the one-sidedness of these traditions. This is where Feyerabend goes further than Latour. Latour "protects" religion from the accusation of, for example, scientific insufficiency or political violence. These sorts of accusations amount to criteria of the demarcation of religion from, and its subordination to, some other instance (very often science) supposed to be free from violence and cognitively more reliable. Latour makes this sort of move impossible by claiming that religion is so different that it is "not even incommensurable" with referential régimes such as science:  
<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/86-FREEZE-RELIGION-GB.pdf>.

Feyerabend recognises a possible qualitative difference between religion and straight referential traditions in that it includes a performative aspect, but not, he argues to the detriment of a referential cognitive aspect. So the apparent difference in kind is due to the greater completeness of religious traditions as compared to (most) secular traditions. He is willing to add that in fact, but unbeknownst to them and so in truncated form, secular traditions have this performative aspect too.

Feyerabend is classically deconstructive here, accepting initially a binary demarcation (science/religion) to go on to re-valorise the weaker term (in rationalist discussions this is often religion), to then efface the demarcation and leave a more complex and more ambiguous situation (complexity and ambiguity being terms that Feyerabend uses to describe his own "deconstructive" strategy - Feyerabend explicitly compares his arguments to deconstruction, though he declares that he prefers "Nestroy, who was a great, popular and funny deconstructeur, while Derrida, for all his good intentions, can't even tell a good story"). Latour is certainly funnier and more popular in style than Derrida, but I find that there is something protectionist about his humour.

## **LATOUR, FEYERABEND, DELEUZE: CORRECTING A REVISIONIST HISTORY**

Bruno Latour is complicit in the effacing or the downplaying of the ideas and influence of the previous generation of Continental philosophers (and I include Feyerabend in this category, alongside Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault) and their role in inspiring, or even often anticipating, his own ideas. He gives the same biased view of philosophical history as Meillassoux and OOO in which correlationism and the flight from realism continued through most of the last half of the 20th Century, and in which the "new" realists bring us what was lacking in deconstruction and poststructuralism, and so take a decisive step forward. Rather than acknowledging a very real, and in fact massive, debt to Feyerabend, Deleuze, et al., he misrepresents and denigrates their contributions, and prefers to reach even further back to Tarde, James, Whitehead, and Souriau to mystify those who are too young

or too credulous to detect the Orwellian rewriting of the recent past that he often engages in.

In a recent interview (2012), discussing his own methodology, Latour affirms "this a thing that I learned from the "scientists" I studied, i.e. that: "Anything goes as long as it leads to what you want to find". Just as in a laboratory you have instruments of all sorts, including the most archaic and the most contemporary, because that is what is necessary in production, I myself have learnt a lot from "true" scientists, hard scientists, i.e. total indifference to questions of method" (page 123, my translation). This is very exactly what Feyerabend proposes in AGAINST METHOD (already in the essay version published in 1971), and Latour seems to be guilty of a little "creative forgetting" here. He continues for two and a half pages (!) on the same theme, applying this notion it to his own work, and concludes, once again echoing Feyerabend without deigning to cite him: "So, how do you produce objects that resist what is said of them?, well, anything goes" (126).

Contrary to the repeated attempts (with which Latour himself is complicit) to associate Feyerabend with a naive espousal of chaos and anarchy, Feyerabend emphasised that we need both tenacity and proliferation, rules and their heuristic suspension, order and chaos, speculation and testability. He condemned the "naive anarchism" of no rules, he disliked chaos but claimed to have made creative use of it in certain contexts, and he rejected the dogmatism of the traditional anarchists along with their scientism. Feyerabend wanted more responsibility, not less, and proposed that all those concerned, in citizen assemblies, should decide on what ontologies, theories, methods to apply - and not just the experts.

Feyerabend's anarchism is "epistemological" precisely because he wants to get away from the need to posit a dogmatic "anarchist" method. Feyerabend explains that he did propose such a dogmatic anarchism for science in the early 60s, but then the encounter with the needs of the practicing scientist, and later the encounter with the needs of the more diverse population of students that were enrolled after more democratic education policies were adopted in the US (at the end of the 60s), led him to reject even the most open set of rules as long as they were meant to be applied universally instead of as rules of thumb. This is similar to Latour's evolution from the methodological anarchism that he espouses above to his later concerns with democratic assemblages.

Aside from the need to diffuse a smokescreen around certain key but disturbing influences, such as Feyerabend and Deleuze, whose explicit acknowledgement could get him into trouble in his search for a consensual surface, we cannot ignore Latour's rhetorical, or "diplomatic", strategy of adapting his presentation to the auditory. To the English-speaking world familiar with Feyerabend's

epistemology he makes a political critique, accusing him of "anarchism" (ignoring that Feyerabend's later name for his position was "democratic relativism"). To a French politician interviewer he comes out with a defence of exactly the sort of epistemological anarchism ("anything goes") that Feyerabend defended decades before Latour. Feyerabend himself does not take credit for this idea, stating that he heard Popper defending it in the 1940s. Latour does not mention this point, preferring in the interview to affirm that Popper makes no real contribution to the study of science, but is a political thinker hiding behind an epistemological mask.

On the whole question of methodological anarchism versus epistemological anarchism Feyerabend is quite clear that Popper was advocating methodological anarchism, the idea that there was no fixed method for science other than what worked or was appropriate in a specific case, in the 40s. Already Feyerabend agreed, but thought it was a banality, as his friends in the Kraft Circle took this methodological anarchism for granted. The problem, as Feyerabend later came to realise, was that this methodological anarchism is basically incompatible with taking science as a preconstituted object, and so he argued that Popper's more specific methodological suggestions were a case of circular reasoning. Popper, he claimed, presupposes the very instances of good science (eg Newton, Maxwell, Einstein) that his criteria are supposed to neutrally select out. In fact the criteria are generalisations made from a partisan set of pre-decided instances, and not the other way around. This is the difference, at least in Feyerabend's work, between methodological anarchism applied inside the pre-constituted and pre-demarcated sciences, and Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism (circa 1966) which puts that demarcation totally up for grabs and argues for all sorts of transversal composites as necessary for what we commonly think of as scientific progress.

Contrary to Latour's attempts to depict Feyerabend, and the whole of the post-'68 generation, as caught in negativity and critique, it must be emphasised that Latour's starting point was in religious exegesis, and it is he who has expressed sadness at the disappearance of this mode of existence. Feyerabend's starting point was aesthetic (opera and theatre) and scientific, and at the end of his life he expressed the satisfaction that he "was never hindered in anything", and that he had finally come to the maturity of being capable of loving another person (Grazia). In his autobiography Feyerabend describes in a concrete and personal way his progressive steps towards such love, whereas Latour talks about an abstract phenomenon of "conversion" as an all-or-none point-like experience in his book on religion, REJOICING. So I think that Latour is the more abstract thinker, and the true disappointed nostalgic. He is caught in the contradiction of pretending to be a descriptive anthropologist of the modern and yet including in his empirical description, out of nostalgia, a mode of existence that he claims has disappeared.



On the technical side of his epistemology, Latour is often guilty of making naïve empiricist statements and moves despite his seeming sophistication in other passages. His attempted universalising of so-called "empirical" observations, are far more theory-laden and value-laden than he is often willing to take into account. This is one of my major criticisms of AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE: the whole project is formulated in naïve empiricist terms, despite his meta-theoretical reflections on a "second empiricism". This gets him caught in a set of pragmatic contradictions that Feyerabend never fell into.

Another disturbing feature of Latour's proclamations is his emphasis of the key advance his system makes in overcoming the subject/object dichotomy. This claim to radical progress over the recent past is ludicrous to anyone who knows the even slightest bit about the philosophies of Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault. However, it may be of use to consider the absurdity of this claim in relation to the development of post-positivist epistemology. Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism does not presuppose subjects facing objects. From the very beginning in the early 50s Feyerabend was influenced by Wittgenstein, and considered scientific statements as part of non-subjective language-games. He was also influenced by Popper, who later summarised his position in 1967 in a paper called "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject". The whole Popperian tradition elaborated such an epistemology outside the subject-object face-off, as did the Quinean and the Wittgensteinian traditions in their own ways.

The subject-object face-off just has nothing to do with this whole decades long evolution of Anglophone epistemology, and Latour shows either his ignorance or his incomprehension of the treatment of these questions in the English-speaking world. Whatever his other faults, Popper broke decisively with this epistemology of the knowing subject and Latour cannot wish it away to create a void between himself and Whitehead. Feyerabend in the essay version of AGAINST METHOD (1971) was already presenting the subject as a collective assemblage entangled with other assemblages, a relay station for the passage of various forces, influences, processes and events. This analysis is blindingly obvious in his treatment of the Homeric cosmology in the book AGAINST METHOD of 1975, where he declares that a more contemporary version of this type of cosmology, that he endorses, can be traced back to Ernst Mach.

Wittgenstein was a reader of William James and was influenced by him for his philosophy of psychology and his philosophy of religion, and there are strong pragmatic aspects to his general perspective. One of his big ideas was the folly of trying to think "outside language games". Another was a deepening of the notion of philosophical grammar. (Feyerabend mentions how he derived his idea of incommensurability and theory change from the reading of

the PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS and he first expounded it in 1952 to a group of Wittgensteinians, who were unmoved, finding it rather obvious). I think that Latour is indebted to this positive legacy of Wittgenstein's, and that talking about Ryle and Austin is yet another piece of misdirection. Also Wittgenstein is a key reference for David Bloor and the strong programme of the sociology of knowledge, and so Latour is playing down his debt to the guiding figure of a programme that he learnt from and then rivalised with.

Why did Deleuze famously condemn Wittgenstein's "legacy"? We must remember that in LOGIC OF SENSE Deleuze is quite eulogious of Wittgenstein for the idea of meaning as use, that he cited Wittgenstein's critique of Freud's mythology as a precursor of the ideas developed in ANTI-OEDIPUS, and that in A THOUSAND PLATEAUS the important idea of "incorporeal transformations" is discussed in relation to the tradition of "linguistic" philosophy initiated by Wittgenstein. So Deleuze, as usual when evaluating a movement of thought, approved of the creation of concepts in this tradition but disapproved of the conservatism of meaning and the policing of language. Feyerabend, who admits to having been decisively influenced by Wittgenstein, has exactly the same attitude to the conformism of some of his successors. Latour, despite his conceptual innovations, is in danger of elaborating a new police of meaning in his will to establish the "felicity conditions" of the various modes of existence and to forbid illegitimate crossings.

Latour cannot claim to be establishing empirically what previous philosophers such as Feyerabend were only able to advance as speculation. He cannot affirm that Feyerabend does not examine the specific ways in which science produces knowledge. This is false, the whole point of the historical case study of Galileo and of his detailed studies of Bohr, are to indicate what procedures did in fact work to advance physics. True Feyerabend does not do laboratory studies, but no one ever said that laboratory studies are all there is to studying science; Latour's philosophy of science is woefully derivative: his historico-semiotic study of Pasteur contributes no new epistemological ideas, and confirms Feyerabend's ideas derived from the study of Galileo. And it is woefully incomplete: he is doing intra-paradigmatic analyses of networks in LABORATORY LIFE, and is unable to deal with the actual content of scientific theories except by taking a Feyerabendian turn (see preceding remark on the Pasteur studies). So the looking-at-specific-ways-science-produces-knowledge criterion does not distinguish Feyerabend from Latour either. The only criterion that does is the "laboratory studies" criterion, but it is of limited value, and is not rich enough to deal with paradigm change; Latour does talk about paradigm-change in relation to Pasteur, but this is precisely NOT a laboratory study, but a historical case study of the same type that Feyerabend conducted on Galileo.

It would be erroneous to maintain that Feyerabend's case study of Galileo just leads him to conclude that "anything goes". This is not at all true, and he proposes specific methods that Galileo used. His conclusions are by no means purely negative. Latour does not engage with Feyerabend's actual views and arguments but with an empty cliché far removed from his actual texts.

The criticism of Feyerabend as an amusing Dadaist is a case in point. It is no acute remark of Latour's, but is a crucial point advanced by Feyerabend himself. He describes himself as closer to the Dadaists. This is part of Feyerabend's critique of political anarchism as being scientific, dogmatic, indifferent to concrete human lives, based on resentment, and it is Feyerabend who accuses anarchism of dogmatic flattening. He declares that the problem with naive anarchism is that it leaves the hegemonic reality in place (including the subject-object bifurcation) and so is part of the same problem rather than the solution. Latour is merely parasiting Feyerabend's own ideas here, relabeling them, and turning them against a fictitious Feyerabend who never existed.

Does Feyerabend leave all forms of knowledge undifferentiated from each other? No, this is Latour's problem in his actor-network phase, which many have recognised to be one of the most reductionist ontologies of science, and Latour says as much in his new book. He says that the actor-network analysis always reduced everything to the same sort of explanation in terms of networks, and needs to be supplemented and pluralised by his new theory of modes of existence. Feyerabend too fell into that sort of undifferentiated theorising in the early 60s, expounding a sort of radicalised Popperian universal pluralist methodology covering art, science, religion, myth etc. But he broke with that at the end of the 60s, thanks to his Machian and Wittgensteinian inheritance.

Feyerabend spent much time analysing the typological distinctions between different sorts of cosmologies. He distinguished between cosmology A type traditions (e.g. Homer and Mach) and cosmology B type (Xenophanes and Popper). In CONQUEST OF ABUNDANCE he distinguishes between Homeric, Judaic, and Rationalist traditions and inside science itself Einsteinian and Bohrian traditions. His typology is different from Latour's but he is emphatic that we do need a typology. Latour does not differentiate inside science, as he assigns it all to the one mode, that of reference. But reference for Feyerabend is too abstract and globalising a category, and he considers it a retrospective product of science in the making. Latour talks about studying science in the making, but this notion of reference does not distinguish between intraparadigmatic science where reference makes sense, and inter-paradigmatic science where reference is constructed post hoc.

Curiously, Deleuze and Guattari, who elaborate their own typology of modes of existence in WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?, share with Latour this characterisation of science as reducible to the mode of

reference. In this they seem to gloss over the difference that they made in A THOUSAND PLATEAUS between royal science and nomad science. The later forgetting of this distinction and the sharp demarcation that they make between science and philosophy, on the basis of the criterion of belonging to the mode of existence of reference, is excessive. If reference is constituted post hoc then it cannot serve to identify science in the making (i.e. pro hoc) but only science made.

On this point it is Latour who makes a better move in an article in French on Pasteur (<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/232>). He refers to the actors in the history of fermentation (Pasteur, yeasts, lactic acid etc.) as "conceptual personas". He is clearly making use of the Deleuzoguattarianian concept without respecting the demarcation that they set up between philosophy and science. Curiously this reference is omitted in the English translation, thus rendering it once again more difficult to locate the Deleuzian influences on Latour's ideas.

### **LATOUR AND WHITEHEAD: A PRAGMATIC ALLIANCE**

Is Whitehead a key influence on the formation of Latour's thought? The question can be posed because, despite Latour's increasing number of references to Whitehead's work and and to his importance as a philosopher, the essential ideas of his project seem to predate his engagement with Whitehead's work and concepts. In a seminar (at approximately 31 mins) devoted to IRREDUCTIONS Latour tells us that he had no real knowledge of Whitehead at the time of writing this treatise, but that he became a Whiteheadian only later, through his discussions with Isabelle Stengers.

I am not at all hostile to drawing a connection Latour and Whitehead. When I was very young (15-17) I read Whitehead with much pleasure, although I probably didn't understand very much. Later I read Feyerabend, who became for a while my favorite philosopher. I am convinced that there are important similarities between Feyerabend's ideas and Whitehead's, but I don't think that there was any influence, more's the pity. So while I am willing to acknowledge a resemblance between Latour and Whitehead, I am dubious about the post hoc stories of influence that he recounts. I am willing to go so far as to admit that Latour is best understood against a Whiteheadian backdrop, but I find that he is rewriting his past on the basis of his present, and thus falsifying a little.

More generally I don't think one should confuse the order of rational reconstruction (rhetorical order) with the order of discovery (heuristic order). Similarity (e.g. between Latour and Whitehead), or even eulogistic referencing, is not the same as influence. At the beginning of this blog, I discuss ALL THINGS SHINING, which I maintain is a pluralist treatise on modes of existence. Under the influence of Shaviro's book on Whitehead, which contrasts very sharply the problematic of Heidegger and that

of Whitehead, I undertook to rewrite the ontological basis of ATS. I did so because I thought that such a pluralist endeavour is best understood in Whiteheadian terms, rather than, as they themselves understand it, in Heideggerian terms. I wrote several posts in this line, but I eventually abandoned it because I realised that Dreyfus and Kelly had managed to "bend" Heidegger in a pluralist pragmatist direction, compatible with Whitehead. I realised that thanks to their real innovations the differences between Heidegger and Whitehead on a classical reading of the two philosophers was no longer an interesting question.

I bought into this sort of dichotomy over 3 years ago (in my case the dichotomy between Heidegger and Whitehead as ontological precursors to ALL THINGS SHINING), but I abandoned it very quickly as being too simplistic and ultimately futile. Latour is French and came to intellectual maturity without having read the great classics of the pragmatist tradition. During the 60s many important thinkers (Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, Foucault, Edgar Morin, Kostas Axelos and many others) had abandoned the subject-object bifurcation and epistemologies of demarcation, and came to espouse various forms of semiotics and of enunciative linguistics. The origins of Latour's ideas are best understood in the light of this milieu. Every page of Latour is redolent of Greimas and Serres and Deleuze and Foucault and Lyotard.

I do not think that Latour's "public statements" of influence are to be taken at face value, but are more to be seen in the perspective of provisional alliance than in terms of filiation. Conceptual resemblance does not constitute proof of filiation (my example of Feyerabend illustrates that). The most substantial textual convergence between Latour and Whitehead is in an article where he reformulates the findings of THE PASTEURIZATION OF FRANCE post hoc in Whiteheadian terms. Latour's philosophy of science at the time of THE PASTEURIZATION OF FRANCE and IRREDUCTIONS (1984) is a transcription of the Deleuzian and Foucauldian Nietzsche reworked by Greimasian semiotics. Even on this point the idea of applying semiotics not just to texts but to things is a Nietzschean inspired one. since for Nietzsche all things as will to power interpret and evaluate the world. Latour has declared that at the time he was not acquainted with Tarde, Whitehead, or William James, and so was obliged to make do with the conceptual resources available to him.

In a paper drawing the philosophical conclusions from his study of Pasteur, and intent on overcoming the opposition between realism and constructivism, he declares that it is the reading of Whitehead that permitted him to overcome this opposition: "Before reading Whitehead, I could not extricate myself from this dilemma" (13). Here Latour is referring to an event in his personal intellectual history, reading Whitehead, which was necessary for him to arrive at a solution.

However, the original French version does not contain this

sentence, but a slightly different one: "Avant Whitehead, nous ne pouvions nous sortir de ce dilemme" (10) . "Before Whitehead, we couldn't get out of this dilemma." Here there is no reference to Latour's reading but to intellectual history. Whitehead is said to have created the conditions for leaving the dichotomy behind. Latour may have found the solution directly in Whitehead or in a later thinker, the biographical question is left open.

Strangely, an earlier account of the same work does not mention Whitehead at all, but attributes the role of guide to exiting the dichotomy to the semiotician Greimas: "This freedom in selecting actors and redistributing properties among them is crucial to understanding scientific practice, and, to my knowledge, no other discipline possesses that freedom. All the others have to start from a "natural" division between human and nonhuman properties" (3).

My conclusion is not however that the "real" debt is to Greimas and that the more recent references to Whitehead are a mere pedagogical or diplomatic device. Nor do I conclude that Greimas allowed him to get close to an insight that only the decisive influence of Whitehead crystallised into a "real" solution. That would be a pre-Latourian naïveté. Latour himself provides the more appropriate conclusion:

There are mediators all the way down, and adding sources will only add more mediations, none of them being reducible to mere "document" or "information."

Deleuze, Greimas, Derrida, Whitehead, William James, etc. are all "mediators" permitting Latour to express his ideas now from one angle now from another, first to one public and then to another.

There is a deep resemblance between the systems of Latour and Whitehead but I think that the terminological borrowings do not reflect a major debt . Latour's more recent discussions of the need to overcome the bifurcation of Nature are a weak point in his argumentation. They critique a straw man, a naïve empiricism, while not managing to hide Latour's own the naïve empiricist presuppositions. If this is a major influence of Whitehead on Latour it's a bad one, but I think it's mainly window dressing and anxiety of influence.

Latour read Deleuze long before he read Whitehead, and the critique of the bifurcation of Nature is everywhere in Deleuze, e.g. the first few pages of ANTI-OEDIPUS, which Latour read before undertaking the work leading to the writing of LABORATORY LIFE. IRREDUCTIONS is a direct transposition of Deleuze's NIETZSCHE, "network" is the "rhizome", everything is "assemblages", "constructivism" is from A THOUSAND PLATEAUX, "modes of existence" from Deleuze's writings on Spinoza and Nietzsche. The terminological and conceptual resemblances are massive, and very prior to Latour's encounter with Whitehead. I don't think one

should downplay the convergence with Whitehead, but I don't think the reading of Whitehead was a more important formative influence than the study of Deleuze.

### **FROM SEMIOTICS TO ONTOLOGY**

1) RELIGION AND THE ENUNCIATIVE TURN: The origins of Latour's hypothesis of multiple régimes of truth go back to his work on Biblical exegesis, as he declares repeatedly. The principle theoretical influences there seem to be Bultmann and Péguy. This is where Latour came to a "positive and constructive" reading of Bultmann's chains of translation ("Coming out as a Philosopher"). Far from coming to a sceptical conclusion about religion, Latour concludes that the long chain of mediations is the condition of the truth of religious enunciation. This is a singular bifurcation point: Latour conceives of religion as a specific régime of enunciation, a move which many have made. He argues that "belief" is not a pertinent category for this régime, nor is reference, which he will assign to factual knowledge. Yet despite abandoning belief, knowledge, reference and facts as non-pertinent, he retains the notion of "truth", and regards religious expressions as belonging not just to a specific régime of enunciation, but to a régime of truth or of "veridiction". This may be where Latour became interested in Greimas's semiotics. I think that this separation of truth and reference created a gap in Latour's system that Greimasian semiotics did not really fill, and that this is a big part of the reason for the later move to Whitehead. Seeing things as themselves enunciations in the mode of reproduction allowed Latour to semiotise everything without reducing everything to language.

2) SCIENCE AND THE SEMIOTIC TURN: Latour's beginning engagement with science, including LABORATORY LIFE and right up to IRREDUCTIONS, is best understood against a background composed of Deleuze-Serres-Lyotard-Foucault-Derrida and a sort of generalised Nietzscheanism and anti-Hegelianism. The engagement with networks of reference was facilitated by the Greimasian paradigm of semiotics that allowed Latour to treat human's and non-humans on the same plane. This permitted him to view the historicity of knowledge as at the same time a historicity of facts. This is the phase that Latour calls "historico-semiotic" and "socio-semiotic" ("Biography of an Investigation").

3) MATERIAL ENTITIES AND THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN: Latour's discussions with Isabelle Stengers led to an "epiphany" in 1987. Constantly in danger of falling into a form of semiotic reductionism, Latour seized on Whitehead's descriptions of the "risk" of involved in persisting in being, even by rocks. This is where Latour's semiotic pluralism becomes veritably an ontological pluralism, and the contribution of Whitehead's thought was decisive. In one sense the contribution is minor, the addition of a fifth mode (the mode of reproduction) after the four first modes that Latour had already isolated (religion, reference, technology,

and double-click). At the same time this Whiteheadian encounter led to a real bifurcation on Latour's intellectual path, that has grown wider ever since. His first reaction was to write up the modes he had discovered in a little text called "Petite philosophie de l'énonciation" ("Little philosophy of enunciation", written according to Latour in 1988 but published in 1998). It is interesting to note that the title still gives key place to the semiotic register of régimes of enunciation, but that this is the seed of the project that will give rise to AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE which features in the title the ontological register.

### **METHOD: ONTOLOGICAL ASCENT AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCENT**

Latour's movement is initially phenomenological. He attempts to get away from the abstraction of the subject-object division and to come back to both historical and individual experience. Only then can he rise to more "cosmological" concerns. In the case of the beings of metamorphosis (Chapter 7) he begins with a historical survey of the West's treatment of superstition, the "irrational" belief in magical forces, occult powers, and invisible beings. Noting the rampant psychologization of our society, its massive use of psychotropic drugs, and its fascination with the fantastic in books, films, and tv series, he sees a contradiction between our anxious avoidance and persistent denial of the literal existence of these metamorphic beings on the one hand, and our readiness to expose ourselves to them in situations that treat them as mere "subjective" phenomena on the other.

To come to grips with their ontological status outside this protective framing in terms of subjectivization, Latour turns to a description of the "original experience" that permits us to define their mode of existence, which he takes to be the phenomenon of emotion and moods. Rejecting the premise of this subjectivization, that treats emotions as mere "inner" phenomena, he remarks that our experience is of something from outside us. Rather than being confined to our interiority, emotions, on Latour's hypothesis, are key elements in the networks that produce this interiority. These "psychogenic" networks include many sorts of material elements such as drugs and the pharmaceutical industry, books, shows, films and the entertainment industry, family arrangements, and therapeutic arrangements.

We may note that Latour's description of the "original experience" of emotion presents it as always embedded in an imaginative or fantasy context. He uses a language of energies, forces, powers, metamorphoses and transmutations. He invokes the experience of dreams, the "subtle atmosphere of...moods", the depictions of mythology and the manifestations of ritual. This whole chapter is a defence of psyche against the reductions of psychologization. Rational psychology, including Freudian psychoanalysis, is presented as a compendium of self-misunderstandings.



Latour argues towards the end of this chapter that we may consider that psychogenic metamorphosis is only one part of the metamorphic mode of existence, to which he attributes universal extension: "Everything can, everything must, become something else" (203). In doing so, he elevates it to a cosmogenic principle on a par with [rep], the persistence in being. However this universality is only a speculative "hypothesis" inspired by the cosmological status that other collectives give to these beings. At the end he descends once again to modern subjectivity, our experience of emotions, and our interaction with invisible existents.

Latour calls his project "empirical metaphysics" and I see this same movement of descent, elevation, and redescent everywhere in the book. Starting off from some historical and social generalities he descends to the "original experience" (empiricism), the privileged or paradigmatic example. Doing the phenomenology of this lets him extract the form of veridiction (with its felicity conditions) appropriate to the beings involved and lets him rise to the determination of their mode of existence. This ontological determination lets him descend again to experience, but this time finding the beings in question all through experience, and not just confined to the paradigm case he began with.

In theory, the phenomenology of the original experience has primacy, yet the book as philosophy is a speculative reconceptualisation of experience. So the tidy methodological sequence from experience to speculation and back to experience seems, at least some of the time, to be a fable hiding a quite different sequence where the speculation, guided by prior commitments, selects and characterises the experience that it will later, in the fable, claim merely to describe and to generalise. Latour's talk of "empiricism" serves to blur or to cover over these methodological problems rather than resolving them.

### **COMPARISON WITH FEYERABEND**

In an interview (2012), discussing his own methodology, Latour affirms:

"this a thing that I learned from the "scientists" I studied, i.e. that: "Anything goes as long as it leads to what you want to find". Just as in a laboratory you have instruments of all sorts, including the most archaic and the most contemporary, because that is what is necessary in production, I myself have learnt a lot from "true" scientists, hard scientists, i.e. total indifference to questions of method" (page 123, my translation).

This is very exactly what Feyerabend proposes in AGAINST METHOD (already in the essay version published in 1971). Latour continues in the same vein for two and a half pages, applying this notion of epistemological anarchism to his own work, and concludes: "So, how do you produce objects that resist what is said of them?, well,

anything goes" (126).

As in the case of Feyerabend's philosophy, epistemological anarchism is explicitly tied to a thesis of realism: the goal is to produce objects that "resist what is said of them". This anarchism is "epistemological" precisely because Feyerabend wants to get away from the need to posit a dogmatic "anarchist" method that has to be applied in every case. He explains that he did propose such a dogmatic anarchism for science in the early 60s, but then the encounter with the needs of the practicing scientist, and later the encounter with the needs of the more diverse population of students that were enrolled after more democratic education policies were adopted in the US (at the end of the 60s), led him to reject even the most open set of rules as long as they were supposed to be applied dogmatically as fixed, universal, and binding principles, instead of heuristically as variable, local, suggestions or rules of thumb. This is similar to Latour's intellectual evolution from the methodological anarchism that he espouses above to his later concerns with composing democratic assemblages.

This evolution from methodological anarchism to democratic pluralism parallels the progression in Feyerabend's work from his Popperian methodological anarchism applied inside the pre-constituted and pre-demarcated sciences to his epistemological anarchism (circa 1966) which puts that demarcation totally up for grabs and argues for all sorts of transversal composites as necessary for what we commonly think of as scientific progress, and on to his democratic relativism as diplomatic guard rail for a pluralist free society.

Latour tells us that this epistemological anarchist phase of his work, that can be seen in his actor-network phase were in danger of entrenching a hyper-reductionist approach. He argues that the actor-network analysis always reduces everything to the same sort of explanation in terms of networks, and needs to be supplemented and pluralised by his new theory of modes of existence. Feyerabend too fell into that sort of undifferentiated theorising in the early 60s, expounding a sort of radicalised Popperian universal pluralist methodology covering art, science, religion, myth etc. But he broke with that at the end of the 60s, thanks to his Machian, Hegelian, and Wittgensteinian inheritance.

Feyerabend spent much time analysing the typological distinctions between different sorts of traditions and cosmologies. For example, in his last (unfinished) book CONQUEST OF ABUNDANCE he distinguishes between Homeric, Judaic, and Rationalist traditions, and inside science itself between Einsteinian and Bohrian traditions. His typology is different from Latour's but he is emphatic that we do need a typology to distinguish between different modes of existence, and between different forms of knowledge.

## THE SPECTRE OF RELATIVISM

"We are witnessing today the struggle for intellectual hegemony -- for who will occupy the universal place of the "public intellectual" -- between postmodern-deconstructionist cultural studies and the cognitivist popularizers of "hard" sciences" (Zizek, "Lacan Between Cultural Studies And Cognitivism").

Zizek proposes his own regressive solution to escape from this dichotomy: an imaginary Lacanism (that could be called "Lacan-Z") put together retrospectively to outflank both constructivism and cognitivism. The position elaborated in Zizek's texts amounts to the combination of a poststructuralist approach (there is no meta-language, the big Other does not exist) and of a regressive Freudian-Lacanian recoding of such ideas. Zizek takes deconstructive and pluralist arguments and then retranscribes them backwards into what he calls "Lacanese". But this Lacan never existed, it is the necessary mask for Zizek's own ideas, a heuristic fantasy.

Zizek wavers between poststructuralist pluralism and a monist reductionism founded on his idiosyncratic reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Despite the grand declarations, Zizek does not accomplish any break with and going beyond poststructuralism, rather his work represents its continuation. Unless one accepts his caricature of poststructuralism as an accurate description, in which case it is no big thing to go beyond it.

This strategy of unavowed parasitic feeding on and misrepresentation of pluralist thought (when Zizek talks about postmodern, deconstructionist, or poststructuralist thought he is targeting the pluralist thought of Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida) is no invention of Zizek's. Deleuze and Guattari argue convincingly that Lacan's thought is a compromise formation between the monism of his predecessor Freud and various pluralist insights that he integrated to correct or to pluralise the system partially. So, like Freud, Lacan feeds on, without giving proper recognition to, the "other image of thought" that Deleuze explicitly links with the names of Nietzsche, William James, and Whitehead.

Discussing "pluralism" or the "pluralist" in general can be in itself a conceptually regressive gesture, creating the danger of conflating the pluralist with the relativist, or confusing pluralism with social constructionism. As these latter positions are relatively easy to refute, such connotations and confusions have a strategic rhetorical advantage: one can seem by hard-hitting arguments to refute a whole gamut of positions and to be in the theoretical avant-garde, without giving oneself the trouble to work through any really existing specific pluralist elaborations in detail. One may bray loudly about our fallibility and the need and importance of empirical tests to ensure our agreement with the real, without ever having confronted a real pluralist position to test one's arguments. As one has talked

about noone in particular specific quotations contradicting the stereotyped analysis can be ignored, declared irrelevant, interpreted as saying the opposite of what they do indeed say, etc.

Thus to distinguish pluralism from its relativist shadow, we need to elaborate the concept of a realist pluralism both in abstract terms and also in relation to a concrete example of a pluralist thinker. The concrete example that we have been examining in this article is the pluralist metaphysics of Bruno Latour as it is expounded AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE. To conclude I wish to examine Latour's contribution to an ontological (or realist) pluralism.

# # #

#### LATOUR ON INVISIBLE ENTITIES: Relativist Tolerance or Ontological Pluralism?

Let us examine how Latour deals with the problem of superstition in his ontological treatise AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE. The general framework of the book is materialist in the sense that the various modes of existence are embedded in material networks, and that Latour regards the various relations that define and constitute these modes of existence as themselves material, existing with the same degree of material reality as the elements that are related. Latour poses a basic ontological principle that what is generated within and transits along these networks is not reducible to them. To take an epistemological example, knowledge is produced inside the material networks of reference but cannot be identified with them. To identify knowledge and its networks (i.e., in the case of science, laboratories, instruments, inscriptions, scientists themselves, and computer simulations, etc.) would be to commit a category mistake (naive reductionism). To separate off knowledge as existing in some other non-material realm would be another category mistake (Platonist idealism). The same can be said for the other "modes of existence" that Latour describes, on the principle that if all is material networks, what is produced and transits in these networks can be qualitatively very different.

It is important to note that these distinctions have nothing to do with "belief", but with an empirical and conceptual analysis of the various material networks. For Latour the people occupying a certain domain of practices may be totally mistaken not only in particular beliefs, but also globally in the type of existence that they attribute to the entities they deal with. For Latour there is no question of ontological tolerance being extended to every worldview, some are just plain wrong. This is the realist principle underlying his ontology. For example, fundamentalist Christians, in Latour's terms, are mistaken, they get the world wrong. The same can be said (and Latour says it often) about climate change denialists (they are wrong about science, they are wrong about climate change, the politics that they advocate would have disastrous consequences). Latour's pluralism is no wishy-washy tolerant relativism, but a doctrine of combat.

Over and over again Latour emphasizes the fallibility of our beliefs and the need for objective tests. When he talks about "interpretive keys" characterising each mode of existence, this is not beautiful soul relativism proclaiming "to each his belief". The key is a criterion that ensures that the claims and the practices can be put to the test, to be validated or rejected as compatible with the ongoing engagement with reality that each mode embodies. The keys and the networks are the criteria that ensure that we are not infallible, each in his or her own world, and that we are not reducible to our system of beliefs.

In Chapter 7 Latour applies this ontological pluralism to the "irrational superstitions" that are thought to characterise traditional societies. Enlightened modernity and its view of reason has been self-consciously constituted in terms of a battle against the superstitious belief in invisible beings and occult powers. The previous chapters of AN ENQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE have shown that the Moderns are mistaken about the nature and composition of the visible world. For Latour there is no single "visible world", the very idea is the result of a category mistake. Visibility is constructed and maintained in diverse material networks, and means different things in different contexts, mobilising different equipment and standards.

According to Latour, we are not as homogeneously reasonable as we suppose. A suspicious symptom from our history is the overwhelming violence that has accompanied the spread of Reason in the world, a sign that we are anxious and frightened about the entities that we nonetheless assert to be devoid of existence. The accusation made by the moderns against other cultures is that of their "irrationality" in their attribution of real existence to invisible beings. Not existing in the objective world, these beings in the eyes of the moderns can only be projections of the human psyche, the true locus of their existence. The only mode of existence that they can have is that of illusions and phantasms. These beings can only be explained in terms of the psychology of the inner world of subjectivity.

Applying his method Latour must search for material networks that are psychogenic, i.e. engaged in the production and maintenance of psyches and subjectivities. The moderns that we are may have no positive institution for welcoming invisible beings, but we have an abundance of psycho-techniques and psycho-entertainment to stimulate, care for, or amuse ourselves. Our naïve, folk-psychology, belief is that we do not produce our psyches but rather that we possess them. The self is supposed to be autonomous, independent of networks for its existence. There is no meaning in the external world that is not projected by means of our internal representations.

In this ontological investigation into spirits, subjectivities and psychic entities, traditional psychoanalysis cannot help us:

according to Latour what is "repressed" is not just a part of the inner psyche that we project onto the outside world, confusing inner representations with outer entities. More fundamentally, what defines us is the ontological repression of the psychogenic networks that endow us with a psyche.

Our error is to attempt to think outside networks, to pay attention only to the "visible" products and to forget the invisible infrastructures. In consequence, we no longer know how (or where) to situate the subject and its "contents". Certainly not inside, as interiority is not a given, it is manufactured. Our problem is one of attention, we do not notice the networks that engender the psyche. So we must return to the "original experience" of this mode of existence: emotion. Emotion is a form of crisis and transit, where our interiority is in the grip of what feels like an outside force. It invades us, takes possession of us for a certain time and carries us away, transforming our reactions, and then leaves us changed for better or worse.

The modern self is a contradictory relation between the belief in an autonomous authentic individual subject alone in an objective world devoid of meaning, and the swarm of entities that are actually necessary to its fabrication and continual modifications. Caught in the repressive process of avoidance of these outside forces and of denial of their existence, the moderns have produced a vast array of therapeutic arrangements authorising their acknowledgement as inner facts susceptible to various forms of manipulation.

Latour affirms that an ethnopsychiatric approach to therapeutic situations gives us the best insight into the existence of these invisible beings and into the skill needed in dealing with them. We already have such a skill constructed over our many contacts with these invisible beings. We know how to deviate and deflect their forces to other targets and gain their energy for going on in life. These beings can transform us, alienating or inspiring us in uncanny ways. They metamorphose themselves too, so this is why they are "invisible", they do not have the persistence of the beings of reproduction, they do not belong to their régime of visibility and of stability. They do not inhabit the same networks. But they are real nonetheless.

Thus in Latour's system and in Tobie Nathan's practice these invisible beings are quite real, although perhaps not in the way that those who consciously believe in their existence may suppose. Their scope is not just therapeutic but ontological, foregrounding by means of their own properties of metamorphosis and invisibility the alteration that characterises the form of ontological pluralism that Latour advocates, which he calls "being-as-other".

Latour acknowledges the existence of invisible beings, of forces, powers, divinities and demons that do not take us as unified persons; he emphasises the importance of psychic processes, of

incorporeal metamorphoses, transformations, transmutations and becomings that oblige us to take being as alteration and repetition as difference. This is the language of affects and intensities that was developed by both Deleuze and Lyotard, but Latour does not give them ontological primacy, as Deleuze and Lyotard did at a certain moment. They constitute one mode of existence amongs many, and the pluriverse does not repose on this mode alone. Latour also breaks away the jargon-filled Freud-Marxist conceptual field that complicated this ontology and burdened it with a heavy-handed academic style. By renewing our theoretical vocabulary and references Latour has freed us from antiquated connotations and other dogmatic residues of the last century's philosophical combats.

### **AGAINST THE OBJECTAL REDUCTION: LATOUR'S PLURALIST ONTOLOGY**

Bruno Latour's AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE provides us with a host of categories other than object for describing what exists. In particular, the dynamic aspect of matter is described in Chapter 7 under the category MET or "the beings of metamorphosis". Most of the chapter is focused on psychic entities, but at the end he remarks that these beings "precede the human, infinitely" (203). It is clear that calling all existents "objects" is already a reduction, and we need a more plural vocabulary.

On the question of the stability of objects, Latour has revealed that he found this problem particularly difficult. It was only after a conversation with Isabelle Stengers about Whitehead that he had an illumination that this stability was not universal, nor was it necessarily tied to humans. He conceived that it belonged to a specific mode of existence REP or reproduction, that ensures the persistence of beings.

Latour's movement is to get away from the abstraction of the subject-object division and to come back to both historical and individual experience. On the basis of an ontological analysis of the phenomenology, he can then widen the import to more "cosmological" concerns. He makes it clear towards the end of the chapter we may consider that psychogenic metamorphosis is only one part of the metamorphic mode of existence: "Everything can, everything must, become something else" (203). In doing so, he elevates it to a cosmogenic principle on a par with reproduction.

On this model the beings of reproduction are prior to the bifurcation of subject and object, and so prior to, but at the basis of, the constitution of objects stricto sensu by means of human categorisation. The interplay between persistence and alteration, or reproduction and metamorphosis, is the "musical" substrate for all other modes of existence which modulate this rhythmic composition of process and stability: "they form the basso continuo without which no music would be audible" (204).

However this universality is only a speculative "hypothesis"

inspired by the cosmological status that other collectives give to these beings. At the end he descends once again to modern subjectivity, our experience of emotions, and our interaction with invisible existents.

Latour calls his project "empirical metaphysics" and I see this same movement of descent, elevation, and redescend everywhere in the book. Starting off from some historical and social generalities he descends to the "original experience" (empiricism), the privileged or paradigmatic example. Doing the phenomenology of this lets him extract the form of veridiction (with its felicity conditions) appropriate to the beings involved and lets him rise to the determination of their mode of existence. This ontological determination lets him descend again to experience, but this time finding the beings in question present all through experience, and not just confined to the paradigm case he began with.

### **ONTOLOGICAL PLURALISM IS NOT RELATIVISM: THREE THESES**

1) Against tolerance: Latour's pluralism argues against climate change denialism

On this very interesting question one should read the numerous discussions of climate change denialism by Latour, who very intelligently outflanks the deniers, and shows that they have no research to back up their claims, that they are not credible "others" whose point of view is to be respected. Latour's pluralist ontology is not a universal relativism, as this very example proves. The Gifford lectures (Facing Gaia: Six lectures on the political theology of nature) were very clear on this point. Also AN INQUIRY INTO MODES OF EXISTENCE opens on this question and establishes Latour's rejection of such sceptical and relativist ploys as based on a totally inadequate view of science. There is no equivalence of value between the scientific view and pseudo-scientific propaganda.

2) Against "belief": Latour's pluralism rejects fundamentalism as erroneous

It is important to note that the distinctions that Latour makes between the different modes of existence have nothing to do with "belief", but are based on an empirical and conceptual analysis of the various material networks that sustain them. For Latour the people occupying a certain domain of practices may be totally mistaken not only in particular beliefs, but also globally in the type of existence that they attribute to the entities they deal with. Such is the case of the Christian fundamentalist. There is no question of ontological tolerance being extended to every worldview and to every belief, some are just plain wrong. This is the realist principle underlying Latour's pluralist ontology.

Fundamentalist Christians, in Latour's terms, are mistaken over



many things, not just about their own religion: their preoccupation with belief as the defining feature of religion is wrong, their actual beliefs are false, their idea of reference to the world is wrong, and so Latour concludes that they get the world wrong. As we have seen, the same can be said (and Latour says it often) about climate change denialists (they are wrong about science, they are wrong about climate change, they are wrong in the politics that they advocate, which would lead to disaster Latour's pluralism is no wishy-washy tolerant relativism, but a doctrine of combat.

3) AGAINST EPISTEMIC IMMUNITY: Latour's pluralism argues for the fallibilism of our knowledge claims

Latour's pluralist ontology emphasises the fallibility of our beliefs and the need for objective tests. When he talks about "interpretive keys" characterising each mode of existence, this is not beautiful soul relativism proclaiming "to each his belief". Applying the wrong interpretive key is a category mistake, i.e. an ontological error that results in false claims about the world. The key is a criterion that ensures that the claims and the practices can be put to the test of experience, and so to be validated or rejected as compatible or not with the ongoing engagement with reality that each mode embodies. Our ontological error is to attempt to think outside material networks and to ignore the need for the appropriate interpretative key. We tend to pay attention only to certain detached propositions and to reified products, and to forget the modes of existence and the material infrastructures. The keys and the networks are the criteria that ensure that it makes sense to try to get the world right, taking into account that our beliefs are not infallible, each in his or her own world, and that we ourselves are not reducible to our system of beliefs.