

BOOK REVIEWS

LATOUR, BRUNO. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 520 p. ISBN: 9780674724990 (hardcover). Translated by Catherine Porter.

Latour's latest book, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* continues and sums up (to date) the project started with his groundbreaking book, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993 [1991]), in which he pointed out how the Moderns have been trapped in the processes of purification and hybridization, constantly separating Society and Nature. The inherent dualism leads us, the Moderns, those who expect Science to keep a radical distance from Politics by separating facts and values, to choose between a modernist project of Economizing, calculable rationalization producing singularities, and a hybrid project of Ecologizing that is the world of constantly proliferating attachments. However, according to Latour, current processes in the world, for example climate change, require new scientific approaches, even for the Moderns.

The Internet site (<http://www.modesofexistence.org/>) emphasizes networking and interaction into which Latour's project, AIME (an abbreviation of the name of the project and the book), inquires. On the digital webpage it is possible to access the digital version of the book, the notes, bibliography, index, glossary and supplementary documentation. Through comments and discussion on the webpage Latour seeks to develop 'digital humanities', challenging the more conventional style of social sciences and philosophy. (p. xix.)

The book is a guide to a methodology that aims for a more diplomatic way of data collecting and production of knowledge. The Inquiry goes on with an invented 'she', the ethnographer, whose task is to write an ethnography of the Moderns. Fifteen different modes of existence—ontologies of the Moderns that are identified by four canonical questions asked of each mode—are summed up at the end of the report. Since there is no index in the book, the content pages at the beginning of the book and every chapter assist navigation.

The book is divided into three parts: the first part sets out the methodology, tools and scope of the inquiry; the second approaches invisible beings and quasiobjects—a term borrowed from Serres (1982)—that are not quite subjects nor objects but draw together different actors, human and nonhuman; the third part is about redefining the collectivities.

In the first part, the object of an inquiry, the first mode of existence, is a network [NET]: a series of associations and small discontinuities that can be defined through a particular pass [PASS], a new attachment, operating on the principle of free association. A pass is a surprise, unexpected in the continuity of networking (p. 34). This starting point resembles Sahlins' (1985, 2004) investigation of an event, taking place in the structure of conjuncture that is, in contrast to Latour, analyzed in cultural terms. For Latour, on the other hand, a network is always flat and does not qualify values. According to Latour, the researcher must concentrate on prepositions [PRE], the crucial differences in the network that make possible the comparison between different networks. After unfolding network associations, it is possible to qualify the type of connections that allow network extension (p. 62). However, in every pass there is a process of translation. According to Latour, is

a modern trap since the Moderns have approached the world as if it were accessible through a Double Click [DC], referring to a click of a mouse that obtains information as if it were pure objective fact (pp. 93–4).

The second part is about how to benefit from the pluralism of modes of existence by approaching certain invisible beings that Latour calls beings of metamorphosis, for example, devils and demons. They have a transforming influence on the Moderns (p. 188). For Latour's subjects, autonomy comes to them from the 'outside', not from inside as stated in Western psychoanalysis. This is Latour's call for symmetric relativism in which internal-external dualism is not the ground for the analysis. Modes of existence, Technology [TEC], Fiction [FIC] and Reference [REF], are quasiobjects that hinge on the materials each puts forward—technologies, figures and chains of reference—when attracting subjects. However, in constant processes of transformations, the mode of habit [HAB] is necessary since it presents continuity without interruptions, like an animated film that is made up of a sequence of fixed images, smoothing over the effect of the immanence (p. 266).

The third part is about how to redefine the collectivities, the use of the term emphasizing the operation of gathering or composing, while simultaneously stressing the heterogeneity of beings thus assembled (p. 293). Quasisubjects, like Law [LAW], Politics [POL] and Religion [REL] offer opportunities of subjectivity through expression. For example, certain manners of speaking define the tone of the group or event through felicitous and infelicitous conditions (see Austin 1962) that always depend on the situation and moment and ability to 'come back to the conditions of enunciation that give consistency to subjects' (p. 371).

Quasisubjects and objects come together in the Economy, a modernist master narrative, and a naturalized condition of life authorized by calculating Reason (p. 383) that separates modern humans from nature. In order to get rid of the Economy and continue towards amalgamation, three different modes of existence are required for the analysis: Attachment [ATT], characterized by valorization, interest and multiplying goods and bads; Organization [ORG], in order to change the frame and disorganize; and Morality [MOR], exploration of the links between ends and means and in order to calculate, in Latour's words, impossible optimum.

Ultimately, Latour's work clearly invites social scientists to pay careful attention to their categories and methods. However, I find that this book is more understandable if one is familiar with Latour's other productions. In addition, I would have appreciated solid ethnographical examples in this book. These would have helped to estimate whether his method is useful in leading the Moderns into diplomatic research processes that have been criticized by several authors (see. e.g. HAU 2014).

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