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## **Review of »An Inquiry into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns« by Bruno Latour**

### **Summary**

LATOUR's latest study of the moderns is a continuation of a life-long project. Just like *We Have Never Been Modern*, it's mainly a theoretical work in which sociology, anthropology and philosophy are coming together<sup>1</sup>. The starting point is the same: "The moderns have never been modern, but they have believed they are modern"<sup>2</sup>. There are many similarities with his previous works, although his modes of existence are a huge step in the network ontology. For many years he attacked the ontological foundations of traditional sociology. Now, LATOUR finally gives an example of how his idea of an ontological pluralism, the network metaphor and empiricism come together. The result is a multiplicity of various modes of existence, each with their own characteristics and epistemology. In this critical review, we will focus on a few recurring topics. We will start by setting the stage for LATOUR's modes of existence and their keys, anti-fundamentalism and the network metaphor. As a result, we come across a confusing alternation between a descriptive and a normative style. Next, there will be a critical examination of his "moderns" and the new concept Double

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<sup>1</sup> LATOUR, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

Click. Finally, we discuss an unusual use of the age-old idea of transcendence.

Before we go further into the listed topics, it seems only fair to refer to the official website of the book.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, it stands out among other websites dedicated to philosophy books for the quality of its design and its knowledge of the subject.

### 1. Empirical metaphysics and ontological pluralism

At the last two pages of the book, the reader finds a list of the fifteen modes of existence LATOUR detected in the world of the moderns: fiction, religion, law, politics, etc. They all have their own way of being. Their goal, inner workings and epistemology are all unique.<sup>4</sup> Repeating these modes and LATOUR's findings would be redundant. Yet, it is interesting how he came up with these fifteen modes. To understand his, what we might call, empirical metaphysics, we are forced to make a small detour through the starting point of metaphysics as a pre-empirical speculation on reality.

Metaphysics as the study of the ultimate structure of reality has traditionally been a rationalist enterprise. DESCARTES' first meditation in *Méditations Métaphysiques*<sup>5</sup> is an analytical way of turning into oneself. Central in his legendary work is his epistemological doubt, enforced by both God and an evil demon. KANT on the other hand asks the question: how is reality organized in such a way that it makes itself understandable to us? HEIDEGGER starts a phenomenological research of being in which he clearly denounces the so-called vulgar phenomena.<sup>6</sup> All of these traditional ways of approaching metaphysics are pre-empirical or try to constantly overcome the everyday life empiricism.

<sup>3</sup> LATOUR, *Immanence*.

<sup>4</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> DESCARTES, *Méditations métaphysiques*.

<sup>6</sup> HEIDEGGER, *Zijn en Tijd*, p. 58-63.

In LATOUR's work, everything starts with empirical data. Epistemological skepticism can't be a reason to make metaphysics a pre-empirical enterprise, since there is already a metaphysical assumption in this epistemological skepticism. Not going into any details, we might bluntly summarize epistemological skepticism as a gap between the looking-subject and the playing-for-dead-object. The same subject/object distinction is implicitly present in the metaphysical search for how reality has to be in order to make it perceivable to us. LATOUR elsewhere mocks KANT:

One should add the comical role of being-there-just-to-prove-that-one-is-not-an-idealist role invented by Kant [...] things are there but play no role except that of mute guardians holding the sign. We deny that we deny the existence of an outside reality. Quite a function well worth hapless "things in themselves".<sup>7</sup>

We can't translate LATOUR's works in one sentence, but his attack on the subject/object dualism is definitely the key throughout his thinking. This dualism is the weak point towards which LATOUR sent wave after wave of attacks. DESCARTES produces the subject by meditating. LATOUR prefers to produce a different metaphysics, not based on meditation, but on experience in everyday life. Unlike HEIDEGGER, we shouldn't start by studying the questioners of the ontological question in order to obtain the metaphysical questions.<sup>8</sup> It's the anthropological study of reality that will automatically include humans. In this way, a kind of naive-looking empiricism is far less problematic as a starting point than juggling with heavy metaphysical concepts without any eyes and hands.

What is left is a vague idea of following whatever we encounter. The metaphysician becomes an anthropologist, a switch LATOUR cleverly made as well while jumping from the title *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* to the subtitle *An Anthropology of the Moderns*. The net-

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<sup>7</sup> LATOUR, *The promises of constructivism*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> KOCKELMANS, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 23.

work metaphor is a way to describe the result of the act of *following*.<sup>9</sup> Riding piggyback on an actor is like tracking down the paths it takes. It's up to the researcher to detect clusters of actors.<sup>10</sup>

This leaves us at a post-humanist position in the sense that humans aren't the starting-point, goal or a necessary intermediate. From here, others in the ANT family like A. MOL<sup>11</sup> and J. LAW<sup>12</sup> have put forward the idea of chaotic performative realities. Besides the similarities, LATOUR has taken a slightly different path. In this new book, the modes of existences aren't to be understood as clusters of actors, but rather interpretative keys.

To understand this network metaphor as the anthropological/empirical work that needs to be done in order to come up with the metaphysical structure; we need to stop once again. Remember, there is no reason to accept any assumptions at this point. This includes the distinction between real and unreal, truth and falsity. Before we delve into the network metaphor, there are two simple, yet, massively important rules: (1) Everything we encounter is a part of reality<sup>13</sup>, and, (2) existence is an action and every action implies a relation.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Categories/modes: Not just networks with knots

With all of this in mind, we can finally see why LATOUR considers himself an anthropologist and at the same time writes about modes

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<sup>9</sup> Network is not merely used as a way to make the work of the researcher plastic. In a second meaning, LATOUR sees existence as such to be based on relations. In this way, an existant, actor and network are all synonyms.

<sup>10</sup> LATOUR's popular term „actant” is often used in his previous book as a part of his object/subject independent vocabulary. The actant was a replacement for the anthropomorphic actor. For some reason it has, after many years of good service, left LATOUR's last book.

<sup>11</sup> MOL, *The Body Multiple*, pp. 54, 96 and 115.

<sup>12</sup> LAW, *ANT and politics: working in and on the world*.

<sup>13</sup> LATOUR, *When things strike back*, p. 109. In various sources we can find LATOUR's criticism of so-called fetishes.

<sup>14</sup> “This point is not relativist: all statements are not equal. It is relationist: showing the relationships between the points of view held by mobilized and by mobilizing actors gives judgements as fine a degree of precision as one could wish for” (LATOUR, *Technology is Society Made Durable*, p. 128).

of existence in a serious, metaphysical way. One should keep in mind that the metaphysical project of LATOUR was from the very start a necessary detour in the creation of a proper sociological methodology. With Ian HACKING's terminology, we might distinguish the historical epistemology of SHAPIN and SCHAFFER<sup>15</sup>, the historical ontology of HACKING<sup>16</sup> and lastly ontology as a philosophical discipline, necessary to reach a methodology that includes a historical epistemology and ontology. In this book, he follows the moderns (a problematic term, as we will see later) and uncovers their implicit metaphysics. Reality is always in-the-making. Because of this, LATOUR isn't forced to search absolute and universal structures of reality, although the modes of existence are structures of reality nevertheless. There might be differences in the structures of reality between for example Aborigines and the moderns. Acknowledging his limits, he follows the moderns and finds a network. New to this book is the view that linkages between the different entities aren't enough. One entity can be read in a completely different way through the glasses of the mode.

The major problem with the reading and glasses metaphor we've only just used is its anthropocentric character. Crucial in this story is that we can't speak of subjects reading an object-out-there in a religious or political way. Interpretation is key, yet, there are no subjects to interpret. Taking this to the metaphysical level we might come up with Graham HARMAN's work in which every entity comes across another one, interprets it, but never really grasp it in its totality. HARMAN doesn't have an empirical metaphysics like LATOUR and the latter would disagree with the *subterranean creatures*.<sup>17</sup> For LATOUR, entities are only their relations. What the two do have in common is their search to write about interpreting entities in a broad, post-humanist, way.

All the modes of existence (or "categories") have their own actors, goals, epistemology, etc. Here LATOUR sees the moderns stumbling over their own feet. They often don't respect their own categories.

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<sup>15</sup> SHAPIN & SCHAFFER, *The Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

<sup>16</sup> HACKING, *Historical ontology*.

<sup>17</sup> HARMAN, *Tool-Being*, p. 133.

Namely, he sees how science has upgraded itself to be the supreme category. In debunking certain facts belonging to other categories, they used the wrong tools to interpret the fact and verify its validity. He sees this as an unacceptable evolution. None of the modes can dominate all the others.<sup>18</sup> Every category has its own key. Knowing in what category you're working in is essential in choosing the right key. This choosing is itself a category, named preposition.<sup>19</sup>

The new idea of modes with their own key for interpretation makes LATOUR vulnerable for problems he managed to avoid while he only had networks to worry about. Firstly, LATOUR had to fight a lot of accusations of relativism in the past.<sup>20</sup> Within his theory he was able to avoid these. Differences in conceptions of truth were simply the result of a different composition of links between actors. There were no transcendent categories with their own specific rules, only entangled links that created knots and unique situations out of which rules sprang.

Networks could have knots with their own inner workings, but there was nothing platonic or transcendent about them. Modes on the other hand seem much harder to uphold on a plain metaphysical level. The mode is an interpretative key, but doesn't originate from an anthropological study of the links and knots of the network. It's unclear where the modes come from and they show a remarkable resemblance with our ordinary conceptions of spheres in reality. By making them distinct metaphysical categories and warning against so-called categorical mistakes, it's hard to see how this pluralistic social ontology isn't relativism. Distinct modes with their seemingly transcendental state own their own sense of truth and are protected against other modes.

Secondly, we seem to be able to categorize different modes of existence, something that LATOUR doesn't do. Connected to this, the often used network has taken up new functions. For many years, LATOUR was active as an Actor-Network Theory scholar next to aca-

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<sup>18</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, p. 316.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> LATOUR, *Pandora's Hope*.

demics like Michel CALLON and John LAW. The addition of a key for every category is considered by LATOUR a (little) break with ANT. The network metaphor has become a mode of existence next to all the other ones.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the different modes of existence have very different functions. For example, preposition and double click are (possibly) present in modes like religion, law and economics, while these latter modes cannot operate within preposition and double click. In our opinion, the latter modes; religion, law and economics, should be considered knots in the network. Unfortunately, LATOUR doesn't spend much attention in categorizing his different modes. The preposition is knowing in what knot you're working at that moment. In this way, the network itself, in my view, can't be a mode of existence like any of these two. The network is merely a visualization of the whole of reality.

When we return to LATOUR's criticism of ANT, we acknowledge its relevance even without the network as a mode of existence. Without a key, ANTERS followed the actors successfully, but they couldn't really understand them. The homogeneity of networks can be broken, not by adding categories like LATOUR seems to have done now, but by bumping into knots in the network. It would certainly be ridiculous to approach a church sermon similarly to the technical aspects of the microphone through which the sermon finds its way to the ears of the interested. But isn't LATOUR one of the ANT scholars who, referring to Gabriel TARDE, draws the focus to connections? You don't need a theologian to understand the technical aspects of the microphone. The latter is more connected with the electricity company, Chinese factories and a long list of innovative engineers. A single connection with the Holy Word won't be enough to make a complex knot in which both highly define each other and a common epistemology would spring. Therefore, the physical presence of a microphone in a church doesn't make them part of the same knot. Networks in ANT have never been solely based on either space or time. It's through the anthropological study that we come across these modes of exist-

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<sup>21</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, p. 64.

tence, each with their own interpretative key. We should beware of the seemingly transcendental move LATOUR makes.

Making room for other categories/modes is LATOUR's main incentive for writing this book.<sup>22</sup> As a Catholic theologian, it's not surprising to see his efforts in the creation of a space within reality for religion. By demanding respect for the ways of being of every mode of existence, he in fact rejects any scientific objection towards religious claims, although we should add that he equally condemns religious claims about scientific objects. The ghost of relativism has returned together with the addition of the categories.

### 3. Confusion: Descriptive or normative?

The main issue we have in reading LATOUR's anthropology of the moderns is a tension between the descriptive and normative aspect. In his view, all the described modes are part of reality in the modern world. At the same time, there is always something normative in there as well. If reality is something *done*, it seems contradictory for LATOUR to make remarks on how the moderns are *doing* it wrong. When every mode of existence has its own epistemology and ethics, who is LATOUR to decide in all of this? Isn't he making a so-called Category Mistake or granting himself a meta-mode? The answer might lie within his own theory. The upside of a *reality in the making* is its possibility to change, no matter how difficult it is at the moment. Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways, now LATOUR's interpretation is itself an action for change. Academics as creative actors in a political-ethical project.

LATOUR's goal is to explain how reality is today in the modern world and what changes he deems fit. The most remarkable example here is religion. For many years, LATOUR studied laboratories and the workings of scientists in general. In this book, he finally recognizes the time to be ripe to exploit the space he created himself during the past thirty years. The details of religion as a mode of existence can be read in the book. What is difficult to find, is the reason why we

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<sup>22</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, pp. 72, 141.



should accept the boundaries between the categories. Whenever scientists are debunking a religious claim, LATOUR denounces this debunking because they don't understand what religion is for. Simply put, the key of science is different from the religious key. He calls this a "category mistake". In opposition to a mistake of the senses, it's not a matter of improving your equipment, moving a bit closer or working harder. An application of a key from one mode of existence would be to read and judge beings in another mode of existence.<sup>23</sup> This position itself is defensible. The main issue for us is how LATOUR describes the modes of existence and later disagrees with how the creators, ie. the moderns, function within this reality. The category mistakes are a value judgment based on a meta-epistemological rule. Namely, don't mix the modes and keys.

With Ian HACKING's terminology we might call LATOUR's anthropology of the moderns a contemporary historical ontology. LATOUR writes about the contemporary social ontologies and becomes an actor in the creation of his own topic of research. The book becomes a political-ethical project. Limiting oneself to the description would be an academic fortification of the existing ontological categories. Andrzej W. NOWAK pleads in this respect through his *imagined ontologies* for a progressive program.<sup>24</sup> It's the acknowledgment of the agency of the researcher and an awareness of the political-ethical position taken. At the same time, both LATOUR and NOWAK, are constructive and positive in their study. Seeing the ontological categories as socially constructed doesn't make them unreal and definitely doesn't destroy them. Only through creation (by imagination) the ruling categories can be replaced.<sup>25</sup>

InLATOUR's metaphysical views, reality is constantly in the making. More than ever before, this book tries to become a serious actor in this creative process. His descriptive anthropology of the moderns is accompanied by his own agenda. In effect, he pleads for the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> NOWAK, *Ontological Imagination*.

<sup>25</sup> "Slechts door te scheppen kunnen wij vernietigen!" – "Only through creation, we can destroy!" (NIETZSCHE, *De vrolijke wetenschap*, p. 81-82).

re-institutionalization of the different categories. The combination of both the descriptive and the normative aspects make this book a bit sneaky.

#### 4. The moderns

Notwithstanding the meticulous attention for ontological assumptions in sociology, there is a remarkable naivety in the use of “*the moderns*” by LATOUR. The problem with the moderns, according to LATOUR, is the gap between their definitions or theory and their practices. There seems to be a similar problem in LATOUR’s use of “*moderns*”. But while LATOUR applauds the moderns in their practices and denounces their metaphysical theories, we will do the opposite with LATOUR.

Referring to *We Have Never Been Modern*, LATOUR writes:

The “we” of the somewhat grandiloquent title did not designate a specific people or a particular geography, but rather all those who expect Science to keep a radical distance from politics. All those people, no matter where they were born, who feel themselves pushed by time’s arrow in such a way that behind them lies an archaic past unhappily combining Facts and Values, and before them lies a more or less radiant future in which the distinction between Facts and Values will finally be sharp and clear.<sup>26</sup>

LATOUR explicitly defines the moderns not in terms of geography. Instead, it’s the function of Science as a supreme judge and mode of existence that is under attack. It’s Science with a capital “S” because it is an all-encompassing, absolute and a fixed category with strong beliefs about Truth and progress. Science as studied by LATOUR and many others in the Studies of Science and Technology is, according to LATOUR, different in that it’s one mode of existence. Here science loses its capital “s” because its existence and content are constantly in the making and don’t automatically encompass the whole of reality.

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<sup>26</sup> LATOUR, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 8.

Unfortunately, when we accept this definition, LATOUR himself often miss-uses “moderns”. Already in the introduction he jumps from “moderns” to “the West” and “Europe”<sup>27</sup> as if they were synonyms. Yet, no one can accept the complete absence of geography in “Europe”. Therefore, LATOUR violates in his use of the word “modern” his own definition of it. The problem rises whenever LATOUR moves from an abstract to a political argument.<sup>28</sup> Even when we accept for a moment the equalization of modern and European and ignore the geographical aspect, the political views on Europe are quite improvident. Is there any political scientist who considers Europeans as one group with a single set of beliefs? Differences in religion, politics, and social and economic status are all neglected. A bizarre move for someone who claims to be more empirical than empiricists and more materialist than materialists.<sup>29</sup> We might assume that a thorough study of politics will come up with a knot of Europe, similar to the studies made of science by LATOUR, but LATOUR himself so far hasn’t begun such a study and writes about politics in a rough and idealistic way.

In multiple reviews of *We Have Never Been Modern*, many already problematized the vagueness of “the moderns”.<sup>30</sup> Reading this book, it doesn’t look like LATOUR has listened to those critics. The importance of the moderns plays less in the metaphysical argument explained at the start of this article. But LATOUR does claim a political project as well. In this context, the conflicting usage of “moderns” is problematic. The moderns are functioning like the bourgeoisie in Roland BARTHES’ oeuvre. They are the ill-defined and overtly stupid straw men. Like the Walkers, they are destructive in their behavior, yet, we almost feel sorry for them because of their brainless behavior. Hopefully political scientists will work in a more LATOURIAN manner than LATOUR.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Although even in his metaphysical argument he has used the phrase “European ontology” (LATOUR, *Reflections on Etienne Souriau*’s).

<sup>29</sup> LATOUR, *Can We Get Our Materialism*. Materialism in the sense of actors we encounter (whether it are humans, microscopes or bacteria), without the postulation of a transcendent entity “matter”.

<sup>30</sup> ELAM, *Living Dangerously*, p. 4.

## 5. Double Click: The moderns' cheating trick

Double Click (DC) is one of the modes of existence. Unlike the previously mentioned modes, we can't think of DC as a knot in the network of reality. DC is a way of operating within the categories. It reduces existence into information as an unmediated and thus untransformed being on its own, moving around freely. Criticism of such shortcuts has been present in LATOUR's works from day one. The idea of irreducibility is already a key element in the second part of *The Pasteurization of France*<sup>31</sup> and has been repeated in more understandable words later on.<sup>32</sup> This is a philosophical stance connected to other contemporary thinkers like the flat ontology of L.R. BRYANT.<sup>33</sup> In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* he shows how DC is used in a range of different modes of existence. The concept is new, but the idea has been in LATOUR's work for a while. It's the highway the moderns use without ever having to build and maintain the road and vehicles on it.

Referring to DESCARTES, LATOUR writes about DC as the Evil Genius. It's a way to jump from the searching subject to the object-out-there. In DESCARTES' case, the means to get information (the senses) have already been cut off by the axe of skepticism. For LATOUR on the other hand, DC is a means to get information, while ignoring all the necessary mediators.<sup>34</sup> Using DC has the upside of moving very fast. The downside is that moderns consider information and facts as independent pieces of the universal Truth. The result is an absolutist or fundamentalist view on reality in which there is no room for the multiplicity of modes. In order to gain access to this Truth, the moderns must find means to transport the world-out-there into their books of knowledge without any transformation. In particular, academics within the Studies of Science and Technology (SST) have been vehemently attacked by scientists and other philosophers for degrading scientific facts to merely social constructions. Yet, all they did

<sup>31</sup> LATOUR, *The Pasteurization*, p. 151-236.

<sup>32</sup> LATOUR, Comments on »The Sociology of Knowledge about Child Abuse«, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> BRYANT, *The Democracy of Objects*, p. 67.

<sup>34</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, p. 93.

was describe what is happening inside and around laboratories, an act unrightfully interpreted as an attack on objectivity<sup>35</sup> In LATOUR's words, they showed the mediators the path from the Amazon forest to the academic paper.<sup>36</sup> Nobody can claim the Amazon forest and an academic paper are the same, only a series of transformations can take you from one to the other.

Generally, LATOUR prefers attacking straw men. By postulating DC as a vile tool of the moderns, he ignores some of the relevant comments made during the science wars. The straw man mister Modern is as a dummy always an easy target. LATOUR seems to avoid a direct encounter by neglecting footnotes, a bad habit he has for years. Maybe he sees them as an unnecessary rhetoric devise, building impenetrable walls around the text.<sup>37</sup> To us, the opposite is the case. For example, when we take a look at the criticism of Jean BRICMONT and Alan SOKAL<sup>38</sup>, they don't always disagree with the correctness of the descriptive studies made in the SST. They simply don't understand why we should observe what scientists are doing in such a banal fashion. What LATOUR has called DC here isn't accepted by anybody. SOKAL, BRICMONT and everybody else knows we don't jump from the Amazon forest straight to an academic paper. It isn't the work of the scientists that is denied, but it is the interpretation and metaphysical consequences of this work that were at stake in the *science wars*.

The question is whether knowledge is the result of an archaeological inquiry in which the eternal Truth underneath was discovered or the transformation of and by different actors into a new one? The same goes for the DC LATOUR finds in economics. The shop clerk and his costumer are probably (vaguely) aware of all the institutions needed in order to keep transactions running smoothly. Just like studying science, the economist might ask: why should we study these mundane things? Maybe, at least in this specific case, we truly

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 154.

<sup>36</sup> LATOUR, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 24-79.

<sup>37</sup> LATOUR, *Science in Action*, p. 56-61.

<sup>38</sup> SOKAL & BRICMONT, *Intellectueel bedrog*, p. 112.

have never been modern! In our view, the fundamentalism of Truth maligned by LATOUR doesn't have DC as a necessary consequence.

## 6. Continuity/immanence and discontinuity/transcendence

The classical distinction between immanence and transcendence is largely thrown overboard in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*. This classical transcendence is called “*the bad transcendence*” by LATOUR.<sup>39</sup> These are the absolutes and universals that he has been fighting for ever, as noted before. The immanence and transcendence used by LATOUR is different from the classical views and isn't necessary religious. The question is not whether God is in or beyond our world, let alone a KANTIAN search for the conditions to make experiences possible. LATOUR highjacks the words to address the problem of existence.<sup>40</sup> Continuity and immanence are synonyms, idem ditto for discontinuity and (small) transcendence.

It's unclear to us why LATOUR uses such an important concept in the history of philosophy like transcendence, especially as the meaning of transcendence doesn't show any correspondence with previous meanings. Even LATOUR himself acknowledges that small transcendence is merely a part of immanence. On the website we read:

Immanence, for AIME [*An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*], is synonymous with good [or little] transcendence, that which identifies hiatuses and the passages necessary for the prolongation of courses of action.<sup>41</sup>

The often used network metaphor and the idea of reality in the making seem a far better fit in explaining the same idea. The meaning is so different from the traditional use of transcendence that we can't even see it as a kind of monster DELEUZE claimed to make.<sup>42</sup> The incredibly interesting changes LATOUR made in the meaning of social

<sup>39</sup> LATOUR, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> We would add „through time”, but this would imply a simplistic view of time as a straight arrow forward.

<sup>41</sup> LATOUR, *Immanence*.

<sup>42</sup> DELEUZE, Letter to a Harsh Critic, p. 6.

constructivism (a concept he, unfortunately, has dropped a while ago) during the past decades, while keeping the original social constructivism (at least for a while) makes sense. To summarize, “social” isn’t a kind of *stuff*, instead it indicates a set of relations between actors. “Constructivism” shows how every actor is *made* out of many different actors.<sup>43</sup> For example, a building is constructed in a collaboration (social) of many different actors: architect, bricks, pencils, masons... But the small leaps an actor has to take in order to subsist aren’t transcending anything. Within the network metaphor there simply isn’t any transcendental position possible, a fact LATOUR happily agrees with, while he confusingly uses the word anyway.

## 7. Conclusion

LATOUR’s latest book fits well within the long list of works he published since *Laboratory Life* in 1979.<sup>44</sup> As a philosophical system builder he has been working on a pluralistic and empirical metaphysics for a while. New concepts like Double Click fit well within his already developed thought. Unfortunately, together with “*the moderns*”, the same DC served in this review as an example of a defect in all of LATOUR’s works. It’s a shame he uses far too often weak straw men instead of actual opponents. It’s hard to predict what the result would be in a direct confrontation. In our opinion, LATOUR will be able to keep his metaphysical project. But he might be surprised in how similar the outcome will be once the metaphysical foundation of the humanities is changed.

*An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* gives us a description of the modes of the moderns and hints at how LATOUR would like them to function. Researchers can use the various works of ANT scholars like Michel CALLON, John LAW and Bruno LATOUR with all their methodological tools in order to study certain topics. The normative aspect LATOUR adds in this work is quite new compared to his previous works and those of other ANT’ers. Nevertheless, we do think that the recog-

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<sup>43</sup> LATOUR, A Relativistic Account.

<sup>44</sup> LATOUR & WOOLGAR, *Laboratory Life*.

inition of a political-ethical project will grow importance in the future through the work of LATOUR, NOWAK and others.

Ultimately, this book does present something new. It's the application of a theory LATOUR has been working on for decades. The addition of modes has changed quite a lot. But it's hard to see what the role of his denigrated networks will be, how he will remain an empirical anthropologist and whether he can hold off relativism.

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