

Placing Humans and Nonhumans in a Trinitarian and Geographical Dynamic:
Colin Gunton and Bruno Latour on Nature, Society, and Modernity

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Declaration

I, Bret Daniel Stephenson, declare that I have composed this thesis entirely through my own efforts. I further certify that none of the work contained in this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed _

Abstract

This thesis is centrally concerned to provide a detailed theological and interdisciplinary account of how the dynamic relationality between humans and nonhumans may be registered and accounted for in a Trinitarian and geographical framework. The method of this study is to establish a mutually critical and enlightening conversation between the fields of Trinitarian theology, science studies, and human geography. The thesis then takes as its primary interlocutors Trinitarian theologian Colin E. Gunton, and science studies theoretician Bruno Latour. A detailed discussion of each author's respective diagnoses of the Enlightenment's cultural, philosophical and theological fallout is offered. The study lends particular focus to the way in which each interlocutor has detailed the modern movement to fragment or distance the realms of God, humans, and nonhumans. Further in this vein, the study then moves to consider a critical comparison of each author's respective positive programs – 'Trinitarianism' and 'nonmodernism' respectively – for navigating our way out of the many pitfalls of modern thought.

The study concludes with an attempt to bring the insights of Gunton's Trinitarian thought and Latour's 'nonmodern' project into conversation with the human geographical concept of place/placing. Here it is argued that a theological adoption of the geographical concept of place/placing would allow for a more detailed account of nonhuman participation in sociality, nonhuman agency/actancy, and nonhuman participation in human personhood. The culmination of these efforts is to be found in the construction of a specifically Trinitarian theo-geographical concept of place/placing that would allow for a theology capable of more fully registering the dynamic relationality that exists between persons and things, humans and nonhumans, culture and nature. By engaging Trinitarian theology in a mutually critical conversation with the fields of science studies and human geography, it is argued that we are better able to construct a distinctly theological means of registering the deep relationality that exists between humans and the multiplicity of nonhumans with whom we share a common world.

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Introduction

They sat and looked at it and burned it into their memories. How'll it be not to know what land's outside the door? How if you wake up in the night and know - *and know* the willow tree's not there? Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't. The willow tree is you. The pain on that mattress there – that dreadful pain – that's you.¹

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

The *Grapes of Wrath* is a story which elegantly reveals and unravels the relational fabric which embeds and connects humans to the many geographical contexts of which they are a part. To say '*geographical*' in this instance is to suggest several things, each playing off of geography's traditional triad of space-place-nature. First, these relationships are most certainly of a spatial character and thereby implicate time(ing) as well. Secondly, and perhaps more important for our purposes, these relationships exist in the vibrating and dynamic movement between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature. That is to say, that within the dynamism of human interaction with the material world, as Steinbeck powerfully illustrates, boundaries between people and things seem to become porous and at times altogether uncertain. Third, to say that these relationships are geographical is to suggest that they acquire the locus of their dynamism in a particular *place* or *placing*. In fact, we are reminded that one of geography's central mantras is to declare that '*place is powerful*', or that '*geography matters*'!² And certainly, as Steinbeck illustrates, place is a powerful force in the constitution of human personhood and identity. To be clear, we are here saying that the multiplicity of nonhumans that are distributed throughout the fabric of space-time are inextricably linked to our own personal being – we might say that we participate in one another so as to be co-constitutive. Indeed, we could adopt another mantra from the growing field of science studies: '*there is no humanity without inhumanity!*'

This thesis has grown out of a deep desire to speak theologically of the relational dynamism that exists between human persons and the constellations of nonhuman things – 'natural' things, 'technical' things, and 'artificial' things included – which populate and intimately participate in our lives. To be certain, Christian theology has not always taken the varieties of relationship between humans and the nonhuman world as its central locus of concern. Therefore, I take it as granted that theology must look outside of itself in an effort to engage other disciplines which seek to account for the complex relationality that exists between humans and nonhumans. As Daniel Hardy has argued, if theologians 'are to remain in touch with the factors which are formative of modern life and understanding, we cannot so

¹ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking, 1939; Arrow Books Ltd., 1998), p. 101.

² The slogan belongs to geographer Doreen Massey.

easily distance ourselves from the empirical and theoretical considerations of other disciplines...we must probe and test them.³ This thesis may be understood to as an effort to take this charge very seriously. In light of Hardy's observation, the method which this thesis has adopted is deeply interdisciplinary in its overall trajectory. Therefore, in addition to a specifically theological inquiry, this study will also draw heavily from the fields of science studies and human geography. Of all the academic fields which touch on the relationship between humans and their material emplacements, few have added more detail to our understanding of this dynamism than the practitioners of these two overlapping fields. As a field of inquiry ultimately concerned with understanding how the practice of the sciences works to bring nonhuman entities into partnership with human endeavors, the field of science studies has offered a growing and rich account of the co-participation of human and nonhuman worlds. Human geographers, for their part, have been eager to adopt many of the insights of science studies while adding to these emerging theories a distinctly spatial or geographical content. All of this works to suggest that both of these fields would easily lend themselves as partners to a fruitful interdisciplinary conversation with Christian theology, but in such a way as to be mutually enlightening.

The form of this detailed analysis of human/nonhuman relationality takes its shape around two primary interlocutors. The theological content of this thesis will largely draw on Colin Gunton's Trinitarian theology of creation and culture. The work of Colin Gunton is very well suited to this study for several reasons. First, Gunton's body of work is certainly extensive enough to warrant a detailed study. That is to say, there is no lack of source material from which to construct a detailed critical evaluation. Moreover, Gunton has clearly been one of the more significant theologians of the late 20th century, especially in his native England. Secondly, Gunton has been one of the few theologians to have dedicated several studies to the investigation of human and nonhuman relationality. Throughout his wide body of work one may easily identify an unceasing concern to reflect on the relationship between the doctrine of creation, theological anthropology, and the trinitarian doctrine of God. Thinking through these three main areas of theological inquiry has clearly been the mark of Gunton's overall theology of creation and culture. Whether Gunton was entirely successful in these efforts will be a major topic which this thesis is ultimately concerned to review in some detail. Thirdly, it is surprising that there have been rather few critical assessments of Gunton's work that are of any sustained length. Therefore, Gunton's work is rather well suited to this theological inquiry into human and nonhuman relationality.

The second primary interlocutor for this study is representative of the growing field of science studies. French theoretician Bruno Latour has also dedicated a career to

³ Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 70.

understanding the varieties of relationship which exist between human and nonhuman realms. I have chosen Latour as a primary interlocutor for this study for three main reasons. First, I am aware of only one or two truly theological studies that have given Latour's work more than a brief mention.⁴ I find this oversight to be rather striking for several reasons. Primary amongst these would be the fact that Latour has become one of the most widely known, and widely read, thinkers of our time. He is, in fact, a truly international figure that has had, and continues to have, a very deep impact on a vast spectrum of disciplines throughout the university. His neglect by theologians is particularly striking on the account that he is himself a product of philosophical and theological training, as it was through these disciplines that Latour made his entry into academic life. One may also easily identify numerous theological undercurrents throughout his work, and these distinctly theological lines of thought most certainly deserve comment, refinement, and critique from the theological community. The second reason for selecting Latour as a suitable conversation partner for the Trinitarian theology of Colin Gunton is to be found in what I take to be their remarkable compatibility. For instance, they both share a concern to adequately understand the philosophical and cultural evolution which resulted in the modern period. Further along these lines each of our thinkers share a deep uneasiness with what we might call the alienating and fragmenting tendencies of modern and late-modern thought and culture. Moreover, both of our interlocutors have proposed detailed responses to the pitfalls of modernity and its postmodern offspring. As I hope to make clear throughout this thesis, there are several points where these often parallel projects might be employed in such a way as to be mutually illuminating. Finally, I have chosen to focus on the work of Latour on account of his unwavering desire to take *things* into account. By this I mean to indicate that Latour is untiring in his mission to create a philosophy – we may also say a 'politics of nature' or a 'cosmopolitics' – that seeks to strictly detail the dynamic relationship that exists between what he refers to as 'humans and nonhumans'. This is something I fear theologians have yet to fully grasp. That is, the importance of giving a thorough going account of the deep, and ontologically constitutive, relationship that exists amongst persons and things. By theologically engaging with the work of Latour, we are forced to take what Gunton has called 'horizontal relationality' very seriously.

There is, perhaps, a third interlocutor to be found in the final part of this thesis. In the last two chapters we bring the insights of Gunton's trinitarian and Latour's nonmodern

⁴ Simon Oliver, "The Eucharist Before Nature and Culture," *Modern Theology* 15, 3 (July 1999); Lambert Van Poolen, "Towards a Christian Theology of Technological Things," *Christain Scholar's Review* 33, 3 (2004). Oliver's article gives only brief mention to Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* and then focuses more directly on the work of Donna Haraway. Van Poolen's article is rather interesting but it also clearly lacks theological content as he is a professor of engineering rather than a theologian.

projects into conversation with the human geographical concept of place/placing. In doing this we bring the two projects into a particularly geographical, that is spatio-temporal, focus. The culmination of these efforts is to be found in the construction of a specifically trinitarian theo-geographical concept of place/placing that will allow us to fully register and account for the dynamic relationality that exists between persons and things, humans and nonhumans.

This thesis may then be divided into three distinct parts and five chapters in total. Part 1 consists of two chapters which are dedicated to reviewing the overall projects of Gunton and Latour respectively. In chapter 1, we review Gunton's detailed diagnosis of the ills of modernity, with particular emphasis on the ways in which modernity may be seen to be an outgrowth of a poorly conceived doctrine of creation. We also trace Gunton's diagnosis of the Enlightenment project as one which served to fragment the realms of God, humans and nonhumans in such a way as to engender alienation. In the second half of the first chapter we review Gunton's constructive trinitarian suggestions towards the construction of a theological amendment to the pitfalls of the modern project. In chapter 2 we largely follow the outline of chapter 1 by introducing the sweeping project of Bruno Latour and his diagnosis of the 'modern Constitution'. In the second half of the chapter we turn our attention to outlining Latour's constructive proposals for navigating our way out of modernity's failures by way of his 'nonmodern constitution'.

Part 2 of this thesis consists of one rather large chapter which is fully dedicated to the construction of a critical dialogue between the often parallel projects of Gunton and Latour. The chapter could have been split into two separate chapters, but not without significantly reducing the clarity and overall unity which the single chapter provides. Therefore, I have left this chapter rather long but I believe with good cause. Chapter 3 sets out to compare the trinitarian and nonmodern projects on three specific points of contact, each of which revolves around the three-fold relationship of God, humans, and nonhumans. Here we compare Gunton and Latour's respective approaches to the related concepts of *ontology and otherness*, *mediation and relation*, as well as *unity and multiplicity*. The chapter concludes with a mutual critique of the two projects, using each to correct the shortcomings or blindspots of the other.

Part 3 consists of two chapters each of which is dedicated to the development of what I have called a theo-geographical concept of placing. In chapter 4 we trace out the geographical adoption of Latour's nonmodern thought with particular reference to the emerging nonmodern concept of placing. Here the concept of placing serves to counteract the alienating currents of modernity and helps us to reconsider human embodiment in a world saturated with socio-material content. Finally in chapter 5 we move to consider recent theological adoptions of the human geographical concept of place. Our concern here is to illustrate the profound shortcomings of these recent adoptions, illustrating that they have done little to overcome specifically modern forms of alienation. The chapter concludes with

suggestions towards the construction of a theo-geographical concept of the *placing* which adopts a particularly trinitarian logic. In proposing a trinitarian concept of geographical *placing* it is hoped that we may be better equipped to register the intimate relational dynamism that exists between humans and nonhumans as they find their shape in relation to the Triune God of creation.

In sum, the overall trajectory of this thesis may be summarized in the following terms. First, this thesis presents a critical review of Colin Gunton's trinitarian theology of creation and culture, and Bruno Latour's nonmodern thought. Secondly, the thesis attempts to use both of these projects in such a way as to be mutually enlightening and corrective of their respective blindspots or pitfalls. Third, by reviewing both of our interlocutor's diagnosis of the fragmentation and alienation attendant to the Enlightenment, and then pairing the projects in mutual critique, this thesis seeks to add depth to each of our interlocutors accounts of modernity, and the Church's culpability in instigating the currents of modernity. Fourth, we are here deeply committed to understanding how a trinitarian theology may be able to register and account for the participation of nonhumans in sociality and non-anthropomorphic agency. Fifth, this thesis seeks to critically adopt the human geographical concept of place in an effort to construct a trinitarian theology of *placing* that may fully account for the intimate relationality that exists between God, humans, and nonhumans.

Part I – Trinitarian Theology and Nonmodern Thought

Chapter 1

Colin Gunton's Trinitarian Theology of Creation and Culture

'In the light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different.'

- Colin E. Gunton

Introduction

Until his sudden death on May 6, 2003, Colin E. Gunton was Professor of Christian Doctrine at King's College, University of London, and associate pastor at his beloved Brentwood United Reformed church. It was here that Gunton built an extremely successful theological career that spanned more than 30 years and in the process gave renewed life to the practice of classical academic theology in his native England. This was not at all a minor achievement considering that at the time when Gunton's theological project was truly beginning to find its feet – the early nineteen eighties – theology in the English university was largely on the retreat, as it slowly fell victim to the cultural and academic fashions of the day. As Douglas Knight has observed, Colin Gunton began his theological project in the English university at a time when Christian truth claims were being evaluated in order to reveal which Doctrines 'insulted the dignity of "modern man" and ought to be expunged. Tradition, imagination and the indeterminability of the relationship of language and world had to be laboriously defended'.¹

The faithful community was consequently working within a framework which it found to be altogether foreign, but as Gunton would strongly illustrate, it was a framework in which the Church itself had a hand in building. Due to the onslaught of modernity and its postmodern fallout, faith and reason were now understood to exist at opposite ends of a dichotomy that was bought wholesale by many theologians within the academy of the time. In response to the hyper-rationalism of these modern philosophical currents, theology grew to become overly occupied with the rapid deconstruction and sanitization of its own central doctrines.² As all knowledge was reported to be passing away, and the Christian tradition was being increasingly left behind, fears of a full-blown crisis began to ripple through the academy, while voices of calm were altogether rare.

Colin Gunton was one theologian who proved to be unalarmed by the 'newness' of the times. In *Yesterday and Today* (1983), Gunton outlines his analysis of the 'crisis' that currently exercised a stranglehold on theology in the English university. In this book he

¹ Douglas Knight, "From Metaphor to Mediation: Colin Gunton and the concept of mediation," *Neu Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001), pp. 118.

² For instance, John Hick ed. *The Myth of God Incarnate*, (London: SCM, 1977).

outlined his proposition that the contemporary crisis facing the confessing community was by no means a new phenomenon in the wide scope of church history. Instead, Gunton was to propose that it was closely akin to the cultural and philosophical climate that surrounded the early church fathers at the very beginnings of the Christian Church. Not unlike our contemporary situation, the Fathers ‘lived at a time when old orders were crumbling, and found themselves not only thinking the foundations of the Christian tradition but also rethinking the nature and reality of human knowledge’.³ After all, the cultural collapse that was now challenging the Church was the collapse of the same culture that had been largely constructed upon the foundation laid by the Western Fathers. Gunton’s great insight was to further highlight the continuities and discontinuities between ancient and modern thought, claiming centrally that our familiar ‘post-Kantian dualism and the dualistic thinking of the Greeks that provided the background of much ancient Christology – as well as the foreground of ancient heresy – are one and the same intellectual phenomena.’⁴ Although being cut from the same philosophical cloth, ancient and modern philosophies still embody elements of discontinuity. As Gunton would repeatedly rehearse in *Yesterday and Today*, and in much of his later work, the early Fathers were largely concerned with illustrating Jesus of Nazareth’s participation in *eternity*, whereas modern theologians have been equally concerned with illustrating his participation in *temporality*. Western culture has thus been continually locked in two competing sides of a dualism, and theology has ever since fallen into two competing methodologies: theologies ‘from above’ and theologies ‘from below’.

Throughout his career, Gunton repeatedly returned to this question of how Christian theology should conceptualize God’s continuing relation with this created realm. After detailing the pitfalls of the equally problematic extremes of theology from ‘above’ and ‘below’, Gunton grew to become increasingly convinced that the answer to the God/world relationship was to be found in the doctrine of the Trinity. As his now classic study *The One, the Three, and the Many* has masterfully detailed, the Trinity became for Gunton the key to navigating our way out of our particularly Western dualisms in an effort to reveal the dynamic relationship between eternity and time, Creator and creation, unity and particularity. In this book the Trinity emerges – more fully than it did in *Yesterday and Today* – as the key to understanding the proper continuity of the Church’s response to its cultural milieu, whether it is that of the ancients, moderns, or even postmoderns. Gunton finds that it is when the Church tradition has been unable to maintain the properly trinitarian shape of its confession that it has soon lost the ability to maintain the proper tension between theologies from ‘above’ and ‘below’.

³ Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology*, 2nd (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1983; SPCK, 1997), p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Thus the task of constructing a ‘fully Trinitarian theology’, to use the subtitle to one of his last books, would be the hallmark of nearly all of Gunton’s work following the publication of *Yesterday and Today*. For him it was absolutely clear that the Church tradition, since the time of the early Fathers, had slowly begun to lose its distinctly trinitarian character. And it is for this reason that Gunton would often single out the work of Augustine as being particularly detrimental for theology in the West due to his culpability in the diminishing of the Trinity. One can detect throughout Gunton’s many works a rather pronounced element of displeasure with Augustine’s inability to fully grasp, appreciate, and ultimately express the Trinitarian being of the Godhead.

In *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Gunton highlights three points upon which Augustine’s theology fails in this important regard. First, by seeking to find trinitarian analogies in the threefold pattern of human mental experience and the human soul, completely outside of God’s ‘economy of salvation – what actually happens in Christ and with the Spirit—Augustine introduces a tendency to draw apart the being of God—what he is eternally—and his act—what he does in time’.⁵ Therefore, we find in Augustine a fundamental failure to understand God’s historical action towards the creation as being mediated through both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere Gunton argues that following Augustine this task of mediation was to be more deeply Platonized as it was ‘increasingly, to be performed by the universals, which were traditionally conceived to be a timeless conceptual structure informing otherwise shapeless matter’.⁶ Secondly, and closely related to the first objection, Gunton argues that Augustine goes too far in emphasizing the notion that the economic actions of the Trinity are essentially undivided. Here again we find the role of Son and Spirit being diminished as the Trinitarian being of the Godhead is pushed into a unified, and monistic, whole. The result is that the Trinitarian character of the economic Trinity is almost entirely lost. Finally, Gunton highlights the failure of Augustine to treat the concept of the *person* in a sufficiently Trinitarian manner. On the whole Augustine seems to lean towards a more unitarian vision of God’s *personae* as he tends to locate God’s personhood in his unified oneness, rather than his unified threeness.

The ‘cultural collapse’ with which Gunton paints modernity and its symptoms – the various species of postmodernity and its attendant fragmentation – are in no small measure the outgrowth of this insufficiently trinitarian theology we find in Augustine and his medieval and modern offspring. To the three theological pitfalls we have outlined above, we may add another two that weigh heavily in Gunton’s more recent critique. First, the paradoxes of modernity and post-modernity have had much to do with a theological failure to properly relate creation to redemption. Augustine’s insufficiently trinitarian theology is once again

⁵ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, 1997), p. 3-4.

⁶ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 55.

instructive, for it was he who strongly emphasized the doctrine of predestination, stressing, as he did, the election and salvation of a select few people from the overall mass of humanity. The result was a view of the salvation of a few human beings *from* the created order, rather than an understanding of the redemption of ‘man in and with the whole created order’.⁷ Secondly, and perhaps one of the most important harbingers of modernity, we find in Augustine an account of creation that emphasizes the arbitrary *will* of the creator. As the role of the Son and Spirit are downplayed in the act of creation, and the overwhelming will of the One God is stressed, we find that the theology which emerges sets the stage for modern forms of deism and atheism, as Hans Blumenberg and Michael Buckley have argued.⁸

It is, however, important at this early stage that we recognize the fact that Gunton has come under some important criticism concerning his often sweeping historical analysis of what he considers to be the loss of the trinitarian shape of theology in the West. As we will discuss more fully at the end of the next section, Gunton’s critics have been particularly concerned to illustrate that he has, perhaps, deeply misunderstood and misrepresented the trinitarian shape of Augustine and Aquinas’s respective theological programs. Gunton’s critics have sometimes accused him of erecting something of a straw-man portrait of Augustine and Aquinas only for the purpose of more easily offering his ‘fully trinitarian’ remedy to the many ills of modernity. To be certain, many of these criticisms appear to have some teeth, but again, we will return to these points after detailing Gunton’s own account of the theological and philosophical pedigree of our modern predicament.

For now we may conclude by summarizing the overall problem which Gunton finds in Augustine and his medieval successors by reiterating his claim that their theologies are all too ‘other-worldly’ and ultimately marked by an inability to fully affirm this world of created space and time. The antidote to such ‘other-worldly’ theologies will find its shape firmly rooted, according to Gunton, in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and by once again seeking to understand the roles of both Son and Spirit in the mediation between God and world, and similarly between personal creatures (humans in the image of God) and the non-personal. Seeking to describe these relationships is, for Gunton, at the very heart of the theological project. Moreover, because the

theology of the Trinity has so much to teach about the nature of our world and life within it, it is or could be the centre of Christianity’s appeal to the unbeliever, as the good news of God who enters into free relations of creation and redemption with his world. In the light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different.⁹

⁷ Gunton, "The Doctrine of Creation," chap. in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 150.

⁸ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, translated by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1983); Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 7.

In an effort to add depth to this claim we will now turn our attention to the elucidation of Gunton's Trinitarian theology of creation and culture. Here we will seek to find the specific ways in which Gunton defines and relates the realms of human and nonhuman creation, society and nature, as well as God and world. Our overall purpose is to discover the particular form and shape of human and nonhuman relationality within the Trinitarian matrix which Gunton has outlined. Furthermore, we are interested in discovering the shape which these relationships take within space and time specifically.¹⁰ We begin by outlining what has been lost in modernity's account of these important relations. Here Gunton's overriding thesis may be characterized thusly: there is, he argues, a fundamental relation between the 'way the doctrine of creation was formulated in the West and the shape modern culture has taken'.¹¹

I. Our Modern Inheritance

As we have already alluded, Gunton finds very little that is distinctively new in this current era known as modernity, or, perhaps, *post*-modernity or *late*-modernity. In fact, what we have found in the modern period is nothing more than the ancient but familiar Gnostic worldview, reformulated and re-presented in new clothes. Posing as a new intellectual alternative to the failed theologies 'from above', modernity turned its attention to the distinctly human sphere, and thereby lost touch with the essence of what makes Christian theology particularly *Christian* — that is, the gospel of the incarnate Christ.¹² It can be said without exaggeration that the bulk of Gunton's theological program has been directed towards offsetting the theological and cultural fallout of modernity, but particularly its tendency towards 'fragmentation', 'homogenization', 'disengagement', 'subjectivism', and 'relativism' all of which have been so characteristic of this age.

Importantly, Gunton understands that modernity is the logical outgrowth of a flawed doctrine of creation, but particularly the modern inability to understand creation in fully trinitarian terms. This is a shortcoming we have already seen to be most clearly expressed, according to Gunton, in the theology of Augustine. Again the continuity between the church of today and the early church can be found in the fact that each has been forced to develop and defend a trinitarian account of relationality. This is because each of these eras has sought to 'play the one against the many, or the many against the one, in such a way that the rights of

¹⁰ Although there are very pronounced consistencies within the wide breadth of Gunton's many publications, his unexpected death abruptly ended his plans to publish a full systematic theology. What we do have in his staggering amount of published work remains, to a large degree, in the 'occasional' English style. Thus in our attempt to fully embody and give structure to Gunton's theological program, which clearly evolved over the course of his career, we will necessarily be required to draw from a wide variety of his published works in an attempt to reveal some the finer points and continuities within his trinitarian theology of creation and culture.

¹¹ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 3.

¹² This argument of Gunton's is most clearly and directly addressed in *Yesterday and Today*.

both are often lost'.¹³ And just as the early fathers were forced to confront the Greek and Arian onslaught, such as the view of Protagoras that all truth is relative to the particular perceiver, so too must the church of today stand in opposition to the cultural currents of subjectivism and relativism. Moreover, as the problems of this era are the outgrowth of a flawed theology, then it follows that the Church's response – its witness – should also consist of the presentation and elucidation of the orthodox and Trinitarian creed. 'Modernity', Gunton writes, 'is like all cultures, in being in need of the healing light of the gospel of the Son of God, made incarnate by the Holy Spirit for the perfecting of creation.'¹⁴

It is perhaps rather difficult to pin down the date to which Gunton attributes the genesis of the Enlightenment, maintaining as he did that modernity was really little different to much of ancient Greek thought. Recognizing the rather ambiguous historical origins of modernity, Gunton argues that it had certainly found its fulcrum by the middle of the eighteenth century in thinkers like Immanuel Kant. Its earliest genesis, however, can be traced further back to the thought of those early philosophers of science, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene Descartes (1596-1650). The task of dating modernity's genesis is further complicated by the fact that modernity itself consists of many ideas, movements, philosophies, and theologies. This is why Gunton will argue that modernity is much more a 'family of dogmas and practices' than a single entity. Among these diverse dogmas and practices Gunton includes postmodernity, which he prefers to call late modernity, as he sees it as no more than a symptom of modernity proper.¹⁵ For Gunton it is beyond question that modernity represents no less a threat to the church than did the Arian controversies which originally spawned the Trinitarian defense of Christian truth claims. The sum weight of these various modern dogmas and practices has created, in Gunton's estimation, four particular detrimental movements or tendencies: disengagement and the fragmentation of culture, the severing of belief from truth, the displacement of God, and an impoverished notion of personhood. It is to a brief elucidation of these four pitfalls that we now turn, while holding over until the second half of the chapter Gunton's specifically Trinitarian and theological response to these modern cultural and intellectual currents.

Modern Ontology: the Un-Substantiality of the Many

The first aspect of the modern paradox consists of its loss of any sense of true *substantiality* in the created world – the world of reality. As is well known, Gunton appeals, as heuristic device, to the contrasting ancient Greek philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides who seem to have held opposing ontological positions on the 'nature' of matter

¹³ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

itself. These interlocutors are useful in that they clearly express the ancient question concerning the relationship of the one and the many. To begin with, Heraclitus has long been associated with the view of reality as flux, plurality, multiplicity, and motion. He is then, the original philosopher of the many overcoming the unifying movement of the one. Parmenides stands at the opposite pole of this ancient dichotomy, positing instead that reality is unchanging, timeless, and on an ontologically basic level, unified. Ultimately, for Parmenides, the ‘many do not really exist, except it be as functions of the One’.¹⁶

The problem of the one and the many is an ancient one, and is of no less a concern today than it was for the ancient Greek philosophers. In fact, Gunton maintains that every age since the genesis of this ancient Greek debate has continued to trade upon privileging either the one or the many. The Greeks appear to have allied more closely with the Parmenidian philosophy, tending towards monism. For our age, Gunton finds that the two philosophies continue to compete for prominence, and often collapse into indistinguishability – thus the ‘modern paradox’. He also points out that the question of the one and the many is not limited to cosmology alone – the question of whether the universe is ultimately plural or singular – but is implicated to an equal degree in our social ordering. Moreover, it is in the modern period that we have seen a wavering between collectivist (communist totalitarianism) and individualist (Western capitalism) social orderings. Going against the main thrust of the modern paradox, Gunton proposes that we must once again seek to find ways of relating these realms to one another – the cosmological and the social.

As we have already mentioned, for Gunton, the Enlightenment sought to sever our cosmological ontology – the being of the universe – from the way in which we understand our personal particularity, and our social ordering. We will recall that the Modern desired to be free from any natural determination, and thus denied any perceived bondage to God or the material world. Therefore, the ontological fallout within the social realm (the personal) closely followed the modern metaphysics of material or worldly reality (the nonhuman) within which personal life is lived. If the ‘*inscape*’ within which modern life took place was thought to be ultimately unsubstantial, like the impermanence of Heraclitus, then personal reality within this world would also ultimately reflect this cosmological ontology. As is so often the case, epistemology closely follows our accepted ontology. Being ‘uneasy with those people and things which make up the manyness of reality’, Gunton argues, modernity has ultimately proven incapable of affirming the status of either the one or the many.¹⁷

Plato is, for Gunton, highly instructive on this point, as it was he who was first to offer a sustained account of the one and the many, and has subsequently had a lasting impact on our Christian understandings of the doctrine of creation. In Plato’s philosophy we find an

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

account of material reality that reflects the flux and insubstantiality that so consumed Heraclitus. In the *Timeaus* Plato teaches of a two stage creation. First, we learn that there was a perfectly timeless circular mass of matter ‘constructed from fire, water, air and earth’.¹⁸ Therefore, the first stage is one of pure formless matter that is filled with the divine soul and is eternal. The second stage consisted of the introduction of time to the formless material. This ‘realm of the forms’ added shape and pattern to all of the particulars within the creation, however imperfectly. The material world then becomes much like a flawed facsimile of the divine and eternal world of the forms. The outcome, as Gunton explains, is that ‘material things are only half real, existing as they do mid-way between being and non-being’.¹⁹ Within this dualistic ontology we come to find that to be material is to partake in a lesser form of being.

In order to counter-act the unsubstantiality of the material particulars, we also find a Parmenidean element in Plato’s philosophy. Here we learn that it is the rational mind which raises the material human being into the realm of the universal forms. Therefore, it is the human mind, through the exercise of reason, which brings unity to the fleeting multiplicity found in the material realm. As Gunton explains, it is not the ‘otherness-in-relation’ of the material particular that is ‘constitutive of their real being, which is seen to lie in a universal whose tendency is to render them homogeneous’.²⁰ As the Platonizing of the Western mind has been passed down, especially through the Platonized Christian theologies of Origen and Augustine, the result has been what Gunton refers to as the ‘double mind’ of the West.

The ‘double minding’ of the West is, as Gunton argues, largely the result of a Platonizing of the Christian God and the Christian doctrine of creation. For it is in Plato and his medieval Christian offspring that we find a movement towards celebrating particularity and variety but in a way that ultimately subverts that very particularity. What is lost is something like Irenaeus’ conception of God’s *particularizing will* that is mediated through both the Son and the Spirit. Instead, what the Platonizing tradition accomplished was a diminishing of this particularizing will, replacing it instead with the ‘general conceptual forms’ of Plato.²¹ This has been clearly expressed in the medieval and modern ‘substantializing of the divine image’ – a movement which envisions a shared ‘God stuff’, or singular internal characteristic such as rationality or soul, that precludes relationality.²² It is this element of modernity, according to Gunton, that would ultimately be taken up and

¹⁸ Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁰ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 51.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²² *Ibid.*, We will return to these points on the image of God in the sections on personhood below.

expanded upon by the nominalist theologies of the late medieval and early modern periods. We will return to this extremely important point on modern nominalism later in this chapter.

For now we may conclude this section by commenting on the modern notion of *substance, or substantiality*, as it is expressed in modern aesthetics and artistic representation. Gunton's work is widely concerned with aesthetic matters, arguing as he has, that the 'realm of arts also provides an excellent illustration of the way in which the modern world does not seem to know where it stands in reality'.²³ And it is here that we find the work of the Impressionists – modern as they were – to be instructive. Gunton, commenting on the thought of G.K. Chesterton, argues that the works of the Impressionists depict a world which 'appears to have no backbone, and some analyses of late modernity appear to confirm the judgment that a loss of substantiality is at the heart of the matter'.²⁴ The confused and fragmented images of the impressionists ultimately posit a world devoid of particularity or *substantiality*.

In an interesting meditation – interesting in anticipation of our later discussion of *place* – Gunton relates these observations concerning the modern aesthetic to its fuller expression in modern architecture. The problem of particularity reveals itself in what has become a common anti-modern complaint. That is, that places are becoming homogeneous under the crushing force of 'one size fits all' attitude of global capitalism. Everywhere we go it is the same thing, the same aesthetic – Starbucks and golden arches. Yet anti-modern, or perhaps non-modern, architects such as the celebrated Frank Lloyd Wright sought to build architectural structures that were suited for their particular environments. Anti-modern architects, like Wright, sought to establish an aesthetic which found importance in particularity, seeking the 'way a building fits into its setting'.²⁵ One of Wright's most famous homes, *Falling Water*, clearly counters the modern forces of homogenization. Built to perch perilously atop a rocky outcrop with a small 'natural' stream running through it, Wright's masterpiece is celebrated for its attention to particularity – it was made to fit into that *particular* place. But like the modern metaphysical scheme as a whole, the modern aesthetic is largely allergic to particularity of this kind. It is for this reason that the words 'modern architecture' are so quick to conjure thoughts of bland and soulless structures that look as if they were made for another world, or in fact, *any place*. The charge being that the underlying modern ontology is essentially *place-less*, tending as it does towards homogeneity.

Modern Epistemology: The Problem of Perception

We may now address the problem concerning how we are to rely on our embodied senses to communicate the marginally-real material realm to our universalizing capacity to

²³ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

reason. Here we encounter the issue concerning what Gunton calls the ‘commerce’ between the human person and the world that is perceived through the senses. As noted above, we find here an ontological argument concerning the ‘nature’ of material reality closely implicating an attendant epistemology. For if our metaphysical scheme informs us that the material realm is somehow less-than-real, and the human senses are themselves material, it then follows that our sense perceptions of that material realm will be similarly flawed. On this account there is little faith to be instilled in the human senses. What subsequently develops in Greek philosophy is an understanding that ‘perception is necessarily inferior to reason and is accordingly strongly contrasted to it’.²⁶ The result is, as Gunton argues, a radical human alienation from a material realm (the world) due to the absence of a mediating third factor. In this section we will seek to trace some of the major movements concerning the problem of perception in the modern tradition.

In his coming to understand the modern characterization of the ‘commerce’ between humans and the nonhuman creation (reality), Gunton highlights the peculiar modern tendency to distinguish between passive sensation and active reason. Again, Plato is instructive on these points, as he was an early harbinger of what was to come in the Enlightenment. The perception of the material world by the senses was for Plato, not to be trusted. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, as we have noted above, Plato saw in materiality only impermanence and flux. Therefore, that which partook of the material realm was thought to be only marginally real. This is the ontological argument. Secondly, Gunton argues, that for Plato, perception ‘is what happens when there is an interrelation taking place in time between that which acts (the world) and that which is acted upon (the person)’.²⁷ It is here that we meet for the first time what will become an important theme throughout this thesis. That is, the ability or inability of the nonhuman realm to exercise some form of agency – the ability to act upon – in regard to the human person.²⁸

Plato understood the perception of a particular happening in the material world to be just that, *particular*; having no share in what is general or universal. In perception it is the material particular which *acts* upon the human senses whether it is willed or unwilled by the human person. Perception is then additionally understood to be a *passive* faculty. The human mind, however, was understood to exercise reason (*actively*) which brought unity to the imperfect particulars which populated reality. It was towards this end of the dualism that Plato attributed human agency to the commerce between humans and the world. ‘Thus’, as Gunton

²⁶ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 14-15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ As will be made clear in subsequent chapters, Bruno Latour’s project and that of many geographers, is greatly concerned with giving some account of nonhuman agency or ‘*actancy*’.

writes, ‘the contrast between the two mental functions centers on the fact that perception is at least partly bodily and passive while reason, in its abstracting and evening role, is active’.²⁹

Here again we see something of the ‘double minding’ that would become so characteristic of Western philosophy all the way up to the Enlightenment’s natural philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries. The world is partially made up of marginally-real material particulars that force themselves upon the human mind through the faulty ‘windows’ of perception.³⁰ In this manner the human mind is passive as material particulars ‘impress’ or ‘impinge’ themselves upon the mind. Secondly, the active function of the rational human mind added the universalizing layers of form and unity – again, *actively* – to the multiplicity of particulars. The result, as Gunton argues, was that there ‘developed a distinction between passive sensation and active reason, and this gave another reason for the disparagement of the material and the sensed by contrast with the intelligible and that which was conceived rationally’.³¹

Contained within this line of thought is a Greek philosophical pedigree which Gunton, perhaps too easily, traces to early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Hume.³² Briefly, Gunton characterizes each of these thinkers as sharing in the Greek distrust of sense perception due to the unsubstantiality of the material particular and the faultiness of the material sense organs. All that presents itself to the mind, through the senses, was thought to be questionable as it could be mere illusion or perhaps the result of intentional deceit ‘by a malign and super-human spirit’.³³ Descartes’ infamous response was to retreat to the interiority of the human mind, positing as he did that it was the human mind disembodied from the flawed senses that gave firm ground for the rational adoption of knowledge. Moreover, Gunton points out the rather common assumption that Descartes held to a rather dualistic understanding of *matter* and *mind*. Matter was to be understood as ‘extension’, or that which fills space. This conception of matter was to be strictly distinguished from mind which was seen to be that which was not ‘extended’ in space.³⁴ Again, the effect was very much one of distancing the rational human mind from its *mechanistically* conceived world.

John Locke did much to perpetuate the dualistic philosophy of Descartes by drawing a radical distinction between *primary* and *secondary qualities*. The difference between Locke

²⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁰ The word ‘windows’ is, perhaps, rather appropriate in this instance as many Enlightenment thinkers portrayed the sense organs as the windows to the mind. Windows much like that of the contemporary technological triumph of perception known as the *camera obscura* or the doors to a ‘cabinet’ (Locke) containing the individual mind.

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² There are, of course, important intermediaries in the figures of Augustine, Aquinas (the *rationes aeternae*), Scotus, and Ockham amongst several others. We will speak particularly to Ockham and Scotus in more detail below.

³³ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁴ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 126.

and Descartes, according to Gunton, is found in that ‘the latter held that the mind was at birth furnished with a number of ideas by the elucidation of which it was able to understand the world’. Locke, on the other hand, ‘held that the mind obtained its contents from without’.³⁵ What both men held to was a notion that materiality, mechanistically conceived, *acted* upon passive human senses at the divine behest. On this point, Gunton further highlights Locke’s conception of the mind as *tabula rasa*, as it vividly depicts the passivity of perception through the senses. The material world actively presents itself to the senses, yet it is the rational human will which *works* to give form to these impressions. Again, perception is here reduced to mere sensing, while the active human reason or will is given the place of privilege. The positive side of this is to be found in the fact that both Descartes and Locke have attempted to account for the ‘commerce’ between human and nonhuman worlds. Yet they have also engendered alienation by way of positing that the material particular is not truly sensed, but rather, it is the innate *ideas* – which appear unbidden upon the *tabula rasa* of the mind due to the mechanistic action of the material world – that are ultimately perceived. ‘But because perception and reality are entirely separate, only agnosticism is possible about whether we perceive what is there’.³⁶ The additions brought in by the most radical of empiricists, David Hume, were in a similar vein. Phenomena happen in the world ‘out there’ and are rendered by the senses, whilst human reason supplies the concepts and ideas to those events. In the end, we now have a world populated with particulars that have no true relationality between them. As Gunton glosses; in Hume we find that ‘perception and reality are further apart than ever before’.³⁷

In the interest of space we will limit the remainder of our review of Gunton’s understanding of the currents of modern epistemology to one of modernity’s leading spokesman, Immanuel Kant. The philosophy of Kant is instructive also for its obvious descent from the ancient Greek thinkers. As Gunton has argued, Kant was most certainly modernity’s ‘leading Sophist and its Plato’.³⁸ Gunton justifies this view by way of appeal to Kant’s adherence to a two-tiered world consisting of what he termed *noumena* and *phenomena*. The noumena were the actual *objects of thought*, while the phenomena are understood to be the *things which appear* to the senses. The debt to Plato is clear, for the former tier – the ‘higher’ noumenal realm, containing the metaphysical divine ‘ideas’ – was the cause of the latter, the mere phenomena of our personal experience.³⁹ This, however, returns us to our ontological question concerning what it is that is actually being sensed. We will remember Locke’s response, to which Kant is partially indebted, when he stated that our sensations are indeed

³⁵ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 141.

³⁹ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 131.

caused by some *thing*, but ‘we know not what’. The two traditional answers to this problem have been either God or substance. But for Kant and Locke this simply cannot be known, ‘because there is no way in which the mind can penetrate beyond the appearances’ – the phenomena – ‘into what is really there’ – the noumena.⁴⁰ For Gunton this indicates that we may now see modern ontology and modern epistemology coming to full fruition in the philosophy of Kant. Adopting as he did the two-tiered world of Plato, Kant goes even further to then posit that there is no way in which we may come to know what the underlying reality actually is.

This is not to say that absolutely nothing can be known within the Kantian philosophical framework, but rather, that what is known of the ‘outside’ world is only the product of the structured impressions of the human mind. As the manifold of material particulars present themselves to the human senses it is, once again, the role of the *active* human mind to *impose* upon this plurality a framework which can be understood. This is especially true of that which cannot be directly sensed, such as the now famous examples of space, time, and cause. In what is perhaps an ingenious amalgamation of Hume’s doubt, and Newton’s mechanistic physics, Kant turned to the mechanical structuring activity of the mind to supply the categories by which the world ‘outside’ is known. In the often rehearsed example of space and time, Newton found that these were *absolute* features of the world. Kant on the other hand, expressing some of the empirical doubt of Hume, found these to be absolute in another sense – that is, ‘as conditions for any experience of the phenomenal world – the world given to our senses’.⁴¹ Space and time are then subjective conditions supplied by the human mind in order to make sense of the world. Even if space and time were to truly exist in the world ‘outside’ of the mind, we could not but be agnostic concerning their ultimate reality. The same is again true of causality which cannot be established through empirical observation as Hume maintained. Instead, causality, like space and time, was to be relegated by Kant to the mechanistic patterning of the rational mind.

We may conclude with a brief summary evaluation of what these movements in Enlightenment epistemology represent for Gunton’s diagnosis of modernity. First, Gunton points out that the overall effect was to encourage skepticism and idealism concerning human commerce with the ‘outside’ world:

skepticism because, as in Newton, it appears that the underlying real world cannot be known at all, only the world appearing to our senses; and idealism because the weight is placed not on knowledge of the world, but on the contribution the mind makes to the ordering of knowledge.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 132.

Moreover, Kant's framework is, for Gunton, far too rigid in its closing out of alternative conceptions of knowledge making. Part of this rigidity is found in Kant's argument that all minds contain within them unchanging and universal concepts that are strictly obedient to mechanistic Newtonianism. It is within this vein that Kant has limited 'articulation of human knowledge of the truth of being' to the justifications of science alone – ethics and aesthetics are then cast aside in the search for truth.⁴³ Secondly, Gunton finds in Kant's (qualified) idealism a pronounced drive to force God out of the phenomenal realm – *the world* – all together. For Kant, God belonged fully to the noumenal realm, 'the real but intellectually shadowy world underlying this one'.⁴⁴ The outgrowth of this banishing of God from the immanent sphere is clearly found in the modern movement of deism. It is to a deeper accounting of this element of Kant's philosophy, and the wider modern project as a whole, that we will now turn.

Theology of Modernity: The Displaced God

It can be expected that the ontological and epistemological currents of the modern era, as powerful as they were, would dramatically impact the theology of the time as well. This is a point which is certainly not lost to the projects of both Gunton and, as we shall see, Latour. Both of our interlocutors are concerned to highlight the modern demand for ultimate autonomy from authoritarian structures, whether this heteronomy be found in the monarchy, the church, or even nature and society. The thought of Kant is again instructive, for his work embodied a radical distrust of the heteronomy which God was seen to have held over the premodern. As Gunton has illustrated, Kant was not altogether anti-religious, yet he did protest 'against any view that sees our behaviour as being imposed upon us by God' or by a mechanistically conceived world.⁴⁵ Yet, according to Gunton, this is certainly not a movement peculiar to Kant alone, as its genesis may be traced to the middle ages, but particularly to the thought of John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1285-1347). In light of this, we will now attempt to trace the shape of this modern move to distance God from the realm of creation as Gunton has described it.

One finds throughout Gunton's work a sustained involvement with what he has termed the 'rootless will of modernity'.⁴⁶ The beginnings of this rootless will can, in Gunton's estimation, be traced all the way back to Irenaeus who stressed the absolute freedom with which God initiated the creation. Irenaeus made this claim in light of his understanding that God had created all things out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo*. For him there could be *nothing*

⁴³ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 133.

⁴⁵ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ This is the title to chapter 4 in *The One, the Three, and the Many*.

coeternal with God, for this *thing*, as it held to infinitude, would then ‘impose necessity on the creator’.⁴⁷ This was, however, a very different understanding of the absolute willing of creation by the Creator than would develop in the early modern era. This is because Irenaeus matched this stress on the will of the Creator with a mediating measure of relationality conceived as love. On this account, creation is the outcome of the omnipotent Creator’s will brought into effect by the Trinitarian community of love. This, as Gunton highlights, maintains ‘the centrality of the trinitarian mediators of creation to ensure the purposiveness of the creation, its non-arbitrary character.’⁴⁸

In the introduction to this chapter we reviewed some of the theological pitfalls which Gunton has traced to Augustine’s inadequate treatment of the doctrine of creation. There we learned that Gunton found his theology inadequate in not being fully trinitarian. Once again, Gunton finds this to be true again in Augustine’s construal of God’s omnipotent willing of the creation. Where as Irenaeus carefully maintained a relationship between creation and redemption, Augustine, according to Gunton, fails to fully appreciate God’s continuing relation – through his Son and Spirit – to the creation he had originally willed. Gunton also points out that in Augustine’s stress on the omnipotent will of the creator, he subordinates the role of love to that of God’s all-powerful will. On this account, Augustine represents a watershed, as all Western philosophical and theological treatments of this issue would rarely be adequate following him. In those who followed Augustine ‘creation becomes very much the product of pure, unmotivated and therefore arbitrary will’.⁴⁹ For Gunton, this clearly signaled what would become the ‘Babylonian captivity’ of the doctrine of creation.

It is a strange notion that a rigid theology of creation as willed by an omnipotent creator could eventually result in atheism, but as we have seen time and again, modernity is full of paradox. Beginning with Irenaeus, Gunton draws a line – although not without controversy – connecting the theology of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, concerning their emphasis on God as the ultimate cause and *will* of creation. ‘Modernity happens’, Gunton insists, ‘when the will moves into the driving seat’.⁵⁰ The thought of John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham are also classed by Gunton as representing a watershed in the tradition’s understanding of God’s relationship to the creation. Although very different thinkers, Scotus and Ockham represent a late medieval revival of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and a new reinforcement of a voluntarist understanding of creation.

In the *Triune Creator*, Gunton presents his most sustained account of the theologies of Scotus and Ockham. In this book he shapes three main developments which Scotus brought

⁴⁷ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 117.

to the doctrine of creation. First, he argues that Scotus represents a movement away from the Platonized notion of God as 'supreme reason'. It is in this vein that Scotus represents a return to the Patristic emphasis (Irenaeus) on creation as the free and personal willing of the creator God.

The shift to an emphasis on the divine will means that for Scotus God is the creator both of things and of their forms. Forms are not so much in the divine mind, so partaking of a form of eternity, as more clearly a part of the created order. This, in turn, leads to a new stress on particularity, with all its long-term epistemological implications.⁵¹

On this account Scotus reins in a very promising ontology of the created world as being truly real in itself. His doctrine of *haecceitas*, translated as 'this-ness', according to Gunton, grants a renewed particularity to the multiplicity of material particulars which populate reality. Secondly, Scotus introduces a renewed emphasis on the ontological homogeneity of all created beings. According to Gunton, this stands in stark contrast to the Neoplatonic theologies of the mediaeval period which, like that of Aquinas, stressed a hierarchy, or 'great chain of being'. In true Platonic style, these chains of being were thought to have stretched between 'pure mind' at the top, all the way down to 'pure matter' on the bottom. It is for this reason that some have taken Scotus' development to constitute the second overcoming of Gnosticism.⁵² Equally importantly, Gunton finds in this a 'radical rejection of the pantheist undertow of Aquinas' thought'.⁵³ Thirdly, and perhaps most promising for a trinitarian theology of creation, Scotus develops a concept of mediation between God and world that is not based on Platonic forms, but rather, on christology. As Gunton states, Scotus' 'view that Christ is definitive for the relation of God to the whole world at least opens up the possibility of a return to a Christological mediation of creation'.⁵⁴

For Gunton, the influence of Scotus was very promising in regard to its attempt at freeing the doctrine of creation from its 'Babylonian captivity'. However, Scotus' closest philosophical heir, William of Ockham, would not maintain these gains toward a more Trinitarian concept of mediation. Although there is little evidence to intimately link Scotus with Ockham, as they often are, there is some affinity to be found between the two scholars. According to Gunton Ockham embodies some of the pitfalls associated with holding to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* without attending to the ontology of the created world. The first of these involves Ockham's position that creation, as the product of the omnipotent will of the creator, is ultimately arbitrary and tending towards irrationality. Moreover, in contrast to Scotus who taught that particulars were linked together by universals, Ockham held that

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gunton is thinking primarily of Hans Blumenberg and his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

universals were merely the products of the mind. This is not to say that nothing can be known of the material world, for the universals exist for Ockham, 'as proper human attempts to generalize about the world'.⁵⁵ It is for this reason, and his stressing of the contingency of creation, that Ockham is so celebrated amongst historians of science for his part in making scientific inquiry a legitimate pursuit.

Although both Scotus and Ockham emphasized God's personal divine willing of creation, and thereby the contingency of creation, Ockham differs in his unsatisfactory conception of the world's continuing relation to the omnipotent creator. It is for this reason that Gunton feels justified in characterizing Ockham's discussion of creation as being 'entirely non-trinitarian', even to the point that he can miss the Christological significance of creation in the opening to the Gospel of John.⁵⁶ The problem, as Gunton describes it, is one of a monistically conceived – and largely in terms of will – relation between the Creator and the contingent world. Moreover, lacking the 'communal love' that was characteristic of the Irenaean account, Ockham tends towards a 'radical theological voluntarism.' The result, as Gunton argues,

is that for Ockham, human reason has the power to perceive neither the logical nor the mediated, but only the contingent structuring of reality. The effect in theology is, as Torrance says, that 'man is thrown back upon revealed truths which God provides by his absolute power.' In other words a total disengagement of faith from reason is threatened.⁵⁷

The results of this are, according to Gunton, two-fold. First, a nominalist theology such as this creates a radical separation of scientific and theological pursuits, since God becomes essentially unknown, and the contingent world essentially knowable. As God becomes irrelevant, due to His unknowability, a vacuum is created whereby the 'responsibility for ordering the world – personal and non-personal alike – is transferred to the human from the divine will.'⁵⁸ This proved to eventually result in the much lamented severing of belief from knowledge in the modern world. Secondly, Ockham served to undermine the doctrine of creation by relocating the centre of meaning from God and placing it firmly within the arbitrary will of the human agent. In the end we are left with a particularity without relationality, a God relegated to the theological sidelines, and a rationalist reductionism that would continue to shape modernity.

Like Ockham, Kant, according to Gunton, effectively relegated 'the concept of God, which formerly had provided a basis for meaning and truth, to a realm of which there could be no knowledge'.⁵⁹ We will remember that Kant's Platonizing was to be found in his mediation

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁸ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

between noumenal and phenomenal realms by way of the transcendental structures of the human mind, attributes which were once reserved for the deity. This represents Kant's response to the threatened heteronomy so feared by the moderns. Moreover, Kant is given greater credit than Ockham in his being the greater force towards extending this evacuation of God, not from the phenomenal sphere alone, but also from the wider realm of ethics. Although we cannot exhaust the topic here, we may point out that Kant is not a subjectivist when speaking of ethics. There is a sense in Kant's philosophy in which morals are transcendently 'imposed' upon the human agent by our 'rational nature'. But this is not the re-imposition of heteronomy upon the human agent. The reason for this, Gunton explains, is because the 'radicality of Kant's programme is that not only is ethics autonomous; the *will* is also. The transcendent source of ethics is not really transcendent at all, for the source is the *will* itself.'⁶⁰ Here Kant clearly represents the modern movement to dislocate or distance God from the realm of lawmaking and instead firmly locating this function within human reason alone.

The trend would persist as modern philosophy and theology continued to develop following Kant. To be brief, we may highlight Gunton's reference to the existential philosophy of Sartre, who shared with Kant a 'virtual identification of the self with the will'.⁶¹ Moreover, Sartre would go even further than Kant in his positing that values were *entirely* the creation of the autonomous individual. We may continue with a litany of examples leading to the conclusion that the Enlightenment was a program of displacing the role of God in the universe with the completely autonomous human will. But let us conclude with Gunton's extremely important point that all of this modern fallout, and striving for autonomy, is the direct result of a flawed Christian theology of creation in the West.

As Gunton makes clear in his many works, the theological pedigree of the 'rootless will' of modernity can be traced directly to theologies which based their program upon the idea that God is the omnipotent cause – or arbitrary *will* – of all things. Like Aquinas, who began his theology with the understanding that God is ultimate power, thereby setting the overall tone for the remainder of his theological work. But as Gunton insists, if we are to define God as 'that upon which we are absolutely dependant' (Schleiermacher), or as the first cause and omnipotent power (Aquinas), then 'God does appear to be an authoritarian power against which revolt may seem an appropriate reaction.'⁶² It is ironic, if not tragic, that what began as a theological attempt to ascribe absolute power to the God of creation has resulted in modern atheism. On this point Gunton enlists the examples of Fichte, Feuerbach and Nietzsche, all of whom rejected humanity's dependence on an omnipotent God on the

⁶⁰ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 61, (emphasis added).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

grounds that it was ultimately dehumanizing. It is then clear, as Gunton maintains, that the Enlightenment had legitimate complaint with its received theology of creation, but the response it conjured was tragically misguided. What is needed, as we shall see in the next section, is a Trinitarian conception of mediation. But before we turn to outline this central proposal of Gunton's we will summarize this section by bringing each of these marks of the modern condition to bear on the uniquely modern understanding of the human person or *self*.

The Modern Self and Society: Disengagement and Fragmentation

There is no exaggeration in describing Colin Gunton as a theologian of *personhood*, as it is a theme which saturates nearly all of his works. On this point, one can often hear a constant lamentation for the impoverished modern understanding of personhood, perhaps better described simply as the 'modern self', lacking as it does any appreciation of true personhood. In fact, as Knight has recently pointed out, Gunton was one of the first to insist that the term 'person' or 'personhood', properly understood, is truly a theological term.⁶³ In the first chapter of *The One the Three, and the Many*, Gunton adopts the term 'disengagement', a term he attributes to Charles Taylor, to describe the modern movement towards severing human embodiedness from its worldly home. Again, in the interest of tying together the points made above, we will seek to briefly trace modernity's philosophical and theological movements which instigated this disengagement from the material realm. Central to this will be an elucidation of the modern theological understanding of the *imago dei*, as it has also participated in this impoverished sense of self. Secondly, we will move up in scale from modern selves to modern society. Here we will be interested in highlighting what Gunton has described as the 'fragmentation' of modern culture, especially in the realms of knowledge, ethics and aesthetics.

We have already reviewed the ontological and epistemological currents which Gunton understands to have fueled this modern drive towards personal – or *individual* – disengagement, built as it was on a pronounced distrust of substantiality and human sense perception. As we now attempt to outline Gunton's understanding of the modern concept of the human person, it will become clear that the ontological status of particular persons will closely resemble that of the cosmos as a whole. For just as the modern movement was one of homogenizing the material particulars of all being – the cosmos – so too is the human person subsumed by the overwhelming force of homogeneity. Yet we can also find within the modern milieu a pronounced sense of fragmentation between these homogenized *individuals*. This is, of course, somewhat of a paradox considering the forces of modern consumer culture, as Gunton indicates:

⁶³ Knight, "From Metaphor to Mediation". We will return to Gunton's Trinitarian understanding of personhood below.

For all its apparent pluralism, the world of the market that so dominates our lives is actually making us all identical: all to drink coca cola and to eat at McDonald's, those symbols of the homogenizing forces of modernity, all to wear the same only superficially different designer clothes.⁶⁴

We can now attempt to make explicit the anthropological tendencies of modernity which have to this point been implicit. Following Gunton, we will trace the disengagement and fragmentation of modern personhood in each of its primary manifestations, understanding that each of these has at its heart a lack of relationality. These manifestations include the severing of mind from body, the diminishment of relationality between particular persons, and finally, a diminishment of the relations between persons and the material – Gunton, as we shall see, uses the term ‘non-personal’ – world.

We have already seen that the modern period was very much concerned with establishing certainty in the face of our flawed sense perception. That this would result in a severing of human beings from a world understood as external to the viewer is, according to Gunton, most clearly found in the philosophy of Descartes. As is well known, Descartes reintroduced many of the ancient Greek dualisms which can be blamed for this distancing of humans from the material – mind over body, rationality over mechanism. We also find in Descartes that the ontology of the human constitution closely reflects this dualistic vision of the universe. The world consists of both brute matter and divine idea, and this is similarly reflected in the godlike mind of the human, and the material body. As the godlike part of the human, the mind ‘is able by virtue of its equipment with innate ideas to comprehend by the use of pure reason the rational structure of the machine’.⁶⁵ Here we are, as Gunton says, very close to the traditional interpretation of the *imago dei* as consisting in human rationality or reason. The problems associated with such a conception of the doctrine of the image of God are legion. But here we will review two primary pitfalls. First, by locating the image of God in human reason we initiate a problematic comparative ontology. If humans are like God because of this single internal quality, as the argument goes, then a radical discontinuity with the rest of the nonhuman creation is initiated. Secondly, by stressing this single internal characteristic of humanity we have discounted and preempted other equally important characteristics of what it is that constitutes human being. Moreover, ‘it encourages the belief that we are more minds than we are bodies, with all the consequences that that has: for example, in creating a non-relational ontology, so that we are cut off from each other and from the world by a tendency to see ourselves as imprisoned in matter’.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 15.

⁶⁵ Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*," in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p. 47.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

It then becomes clear that the modern era, by first postulating a separation of mind from body, embraced a homogenous view of the person as *individual*. This is to say, that modern understanding of personhood is ultimately severed from its relationality with other people, and is thereby supposed to be a heralding of individual freedom. In seeking to outline what are Gunton's observations concerning the being of the modern self, we must follow him in drawing a distinction between the affirmation of *personal particularity* and its modern cousin *personal individualism*. For Gunton, personal particularity consists of

the locus of distinctiveness and variety – where the many truly are many, for everything is what it is and not another thing – and that of the individualism which only appears to do justice to particularity.... The paradox of individualism is that it often reveals a genuine and powerful concern for the particular which in practice achieves the opposite....⁶⁷

We may then understand the modern characterization of personal particularity as tending towards an individualism that ultimately fails to do justice to the very particularity which it seeks preserve. By lacking a thorough account of the relationality – how we are each distinctively who we are – *individual* particularity, according to Gunton, collapses into undifferentiated homogeneity. Stated differently, the modern privileging of personal independence *from* relationality has led to an understanding of the person only in terms of their universal *rational* characteristics. What we are left with is a type of personhood which totally lacks a particular human face, as only the universal and interior aspects of personhood are stressed. 'What is lost', Gunton maintains, 'is a recognition of the otherness-in-relation in which alone can particularity be truly preserved'.⁶⁸

Gunton comes to see the modern understanding of self as essentially 'standing apart from each other and the world and treating the other as external, as mere object'.⁶⁹ It is in this sense that disengagement and alienation begin with a basic offense against the being of the other. Moreover, it is our 'technocratic attitude' which gives expression to this important symptom of the modern condition, since it expresses our overriding will to employ the other in exploitative ways. Exploitative because the other becomes purely an instrument of our own will without understanding or appreciating the other as something that is bound up in our own being – our own personhood. The differences on these points between modernity and postmodernity are rather subtle. Where modernity sought to exclude the other entirely, postmodernity has sought to simply erase the *otherness* of the other. For Gunton, modernity and postmodernity betray their shared philosophical pedigree in that they are both unable to comfortably relate particulars to other particulars. Once again, late modernity has done nothing more than trade upon the ancient dichotomy of Heraclitus and Parmenides.

⁶⁷ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

We can now identify two particular streams of modern disengagement that have been implicit in the previous sections. The first has to do with *epistemological* commitments and the drawing of a radical distinction between the mind ‘inside’ and the world ‘outside’, as well as an attendant distinction between belief and knowledge. The second is a kind of *ontological* alienation, characterized by the radical separation of humans from one another. Yet the ontological separation is not limited to human social relations alone. This is because we find an equally alienating distance being opened up between modern selves and their nonhuman environments. Again, by locating the *imago dei* in the single internal human quality of rationality, an ontological gap was further opened between human minds and bodies, as well as humans and the multiplicity of nonhumans who apparently do not share in this imaging of God, or its attendant rationality. We may then recognize that the modern period suffered from an impoverished understanding of the place of humans in a world composed of individual and homogenized persons, completely lacking any appreciation of their internal relations with the nonhuman creation. Here again we encounter one of the many relational blindspots of the modern era.

The negative impact of disengagement and fragmentation has certainly not been limited to the realm of persons (individuals) alone, but extends, rather, to society as a whole. One can locate this societal or cultural fragmentation in what Gunton describes as ‘our failure to integrate or combine the different objects of human thought and activity: in brief, science, morals and art’.⁷⁰ The reasons for this fragmentation are manifold, but here we will mention just a few. Firstly, fragmentation can be traced to the sealing off of scientific experimentation, ethics, and artistic expressions as activities with little or no relation to one another. In the modern milieu they are, in fact, realms in and of themselves – fragmented into distinct categories with little, if any, cross-over. Immanuel Kant is again instructive, for it was he who, according to Gunton, most clearly affirmed the distinction of the realms, setting the pace for the long line of modernizers who were to follow him.

Gunton further explains that Kant understood science as the action of the rational mind working to create concepts which make sense of the world and ordered it into negotiable reality. As we have seen, for the premodern this role was always the work of God (or gods). Secondly, in the search for ethical principles, human reason again takes up what was once the role of God by finding *within* itself the source of moral wisdom.⁷¹ Finally, in the realm of aesthetic judgment we find that human subjectivity has almost fully taken over. Aesthetic judgments here become nothing more than personal judgments of taste which fail to teach us anything of true meaning.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 114-15.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 115. We have already seen something of Kant’s association of the human will with moral principles.

We then find in the modern era, not only a disengagement of humans from God, one another, and the nonhuman creation, but also a fragmentation of the three realms of culture as well – science, ethics, and art. These two movements are, for Gunton, clearly related. We may point out with confidence that the disengagement of persons from one another as found in Kant, and others, is directly implicated in the fragmentation of the cultural realms as well. Perhaps most obviously in the philosophy of Kant we find the impoverished notion of personhood coexisting with an attendant fragmentation of culture. What is at stake in the Church's response to this fragmentation and disengagement is clearly summed up in Gunton's belief that

it is important for the health of our culture...that we should be able to hold in some positive relation, yet without reducing one to another, the three central dimensions of human being: its formation by truth, goodness, and beauty. Without a measure of integration of our knowledge, ethics and experience of beauty we are not fully what we might be.⁷²

Criticisms of Gunton's Historical Analysis

In the introduction to this chapter we indicated that Gunton's diagnosis of modernity – but particularly his historical analysis of the patristic and medieval theologians whom he considered to be the theological harbingers of modern thought – has now been subjected to a number of important criticisms. Therefore, we will now pause to consider two of the more important critiques which have been lodged against Gunton and his sweeping historical analysis. On these points, it has been Gunton's treatment of Augustine and Aquinas which have attracted the most critical attention from scholars who specialize in Augustinian and Thomist studies. Of these critics, Augustine scholar Lewis Ayres, and Aquinas scholar Fergus Kerr, have been some of the more vocal in their taking exception to Gunton's characterization of these two giants of the theological tradition.

We may begin by cataloguing the protests of Ayres who has found what he takes to be worrying misconceptions in Gunton's examination of Augustine, and his further claim that the Augustinian tradition has been culpable in the instigation of our modern predicament. His criticisms have been logged in the form of two book reviews of Gunton's *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* and *The One the Three and the Many*. The primary points of critique may be summarized in two main arguments. First, Ayres points out that Gunton's examination of Augustine is far too reliant on the single analysis of Adolph Von Harnack whose work dates from the end of the 19th century. Here Ayres argues that Gunton would have found a very different portrayal of Augustine if he were to have consulted some of the

⁷² Ibid., p. 117.

more recent scholarship on Augustine and his theological legacy, but particularly his understanding of the ‘self’ which Gunton finds to be overtly internalized and individualized.⁷³

Secondly, and perhaps most critically, Ayres is unequivocal in his claim that Gunton has fundamentally misunderstood Augustine’s understanding of the Triune being of God. This misunderstanding – or even worse, this misrepresentation – has been most clearly expressed in Gunton’s consistent claim that Augustine held to a simple modalistic view of God’s relation to the world in creation and redemption. Singled out for particular criticism is what he takes to be Gunton’s overly simplified understanding of Augustine’s use of the terms ‘divine substance’ or ‘divine essence’. As Ayres argues: ‘Gunton assumes that Augustine taught the existence of a “divine essence” as the unity of the three persons, and that the individual persons of the Trinity have little place in Augustine’s understanding of redemption.’⁷⁴ This, according to Ayres, represents a gross simplification of Augustine’s true understanding of the Trinity. With little attempt to mask his frustration, Ayres proceeds to argue that ‘it really is time that ascribing such a simplistic style of doctrine to Augustine ceased.’⁷⁵ Contrary to Gunton’s diagnosis, Ayres briefly makes the point that Augustine’s use of the terms ‘*essence*’ and ‘*substantia*’ are far more complicated and nuanced than Gunton’s brief treatment is willing to allow, and therefore does not suggest the strict monism which he has attempted to identify with Augustine. Ayres further argues that Gunton would have found substantial counter-evidence if he were to have consulted Augustine’s *Iohannis euangelium tractatus* for an account of his understanding of ‘Christ’s coming into the world created through him, or of the centrality of Christ as mediator in *trin.* IV or XIII.’⁷⁶

For Ayres the point of getting Augustine’s theology correct is a critical one, especially if we are to follow Gunton in his criticism of western Christianity as it developed in the wake of Augustine. As we have seen, Gunton has freely correlated Augustine’s theological heritage to the long-running western tendency to place an ‘emphasis on the individual above community and the unity of God above his relationality.’⁷⁷ The point has also been made in Gunton’s consistent claim that Augustine represented a watershed in the western understanding of self-hood as individualization, in the sense that Gunton finds in Augustine a ‘turning-inwards’ of the self. Moreover, as we have seen, this is a movement of ‘individualization’ which Gunton then traces from Augustine all the way through to Kant. For Ayres, ‘the leap from Augustine to Kant occurs remarkably easily’ and with little supporting

⁷³ Lewis Ayres, Review of Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 43:2 (1992), p. 780.

⁷⁴ Lewis Ayres, “Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity”, review of Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, in *Augustinian Studies*, 26:2 (1995), p. 130.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

evidence or argumentation.⁷⁸ Again, on this point concerning Augustine's understanding of the 'self', Ayres argues that Gunton would have found a more sympathetic reading – and altogether less 'modern' understanding – if he were to have consulted some of the more recent scholarship in Augustinian studies.

Fergus Kerr has issued similar criticisms concerning Gunton's rather hasty dispatching of the Thomist doctrines of God and creation as fundamentally monist and even at times borderline pantheist in their conception. To be certain, Gunton has offered a consistent and strongly worded critique of the Thomist understanding of God's relationship to the creation, beginning first with his *Becoming and Being*, continuing all the way up into his final published works. In his recent book *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Kerr challenges many of the points of critique which Gunton has brought against the thought of Aquinas. Kerr is, however, particularly concerned to correct what he takes to be Gunton's critical misunderstanding of Thomas's ideas concerning the doctrine of creation in terms of divine causality. According to Kerr, Gunton has oversimplified and too quickly dispatched Thomas's understanding of God as a 'monistically' or 'omnicausally' ('meaning that there is no other cause of anything that happens in the world but God alone'⁷⁹) conceived First Cause. In Gunton's understanding, Thomas's emphasis on God as the First Cause of creation actually threatens the value and substantiality of creatures due to its seeming tendency to tie the creator too closely to the creature in a non-personal and non-trinitarian manner. Kerr answers Gunton's reading with two primary counter claims.

First, Kerr disputes Gunton's consistent claim that creation is for Thomas a unitary or monistically conceived act, altogether lacking in trinitarian content. As Kerr points out, in his book *Becoming and Being*, Gunton bases this claim on the observation that Thomas's consideration of creation in ST 1.27-44 speaks of the procession of creatures from God in such a way as to suggest a 'monotheistic' (in its pejorative form) understanding of God as First Cause. Kerr summarizes Gunton's apparent point: 'In short, even after expounding his doctrine of God as Trinity, Thomas goes back to God as First Cause, as if nothing significant had happened in between.'⁸⁰ Kerr's explanation for this gap in Thomas's thought – where specifically trinitarian language seems, for a time, to fade into a distinctly omnicausal discourse – is that we should just assume that Thomas had in mind the triune God, 'the God whom Thomas worshiped everyday', even though he did not find it necessary to fully spell this out for the reader.⁸¹ In short, Kerr argues that a reader more familiar with Thomas on the

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

⁷⁹ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, (London: Blackwell, 2002), p. 43.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸¹ Ibid.

whole would simply know that he still holds to the triunity of God even when he is not explicitly speaking to the particular actions of the triune persons.

The second argument, which appears to be on more firm ground than the first, concerns a more general misconception which is not at all unique to Gunton. Here Kerr makes the point that many commentators, but Gunton in particular, have failed to register the true intention behind Thomas's understanding of God as First Cause. Far from indicating pantheism, monism, or an erasure of proper creaturely substantiality, the concept of First Cause was actually intended to preserve creation in its own creaturely reality or substantiality. In response to Gunton's reading of Thomas's 'First Cause', Kerr explains that:

This is all very provocative for old-fashioned Thomists. For them, it is important, even wildly exciting, that Thomas's concept of God as First Cause, far from annulling created agents as secondary causes, actually preserves and respects them... Thomas sees no conflict between God's working in everything and every being's doing its own thing, so to speak.⁸²

Following the similar criticism we found in Ayres earlier, Kerr suggests that Gunton may be drawing too heavily on the work of Adolf Harnack who came to similarly misguided conclusions concerning Thomas's use of the idea of God as First Cause. The problem with both Harnack and Gunton, according to Kerr, is that they find in Thomas the precise opposite of what he is in fact trying to argue. 'What Thomas wants to maintain here', Kerr explains, 'is a distinction between God's doing everything, omnicausality as we might say, and God's doing everything on his own: monocausality. This latter position, which Gunton [like Harnack] finds in Thomas, is exactly the position Thomas consistently excludes.'⁸³

To be certain, this brief review does not represent the totality of the criticisms which have been lodged against Gunton's overall theological project. In the next section we will consider what I take to be some of the more important challenges to Gunton's constructive trinitarian project which have to do with the efficacy of a trinitarian ontology. Presently, however, we may now consider whether or not these criticisms of Gunton's deconstructive task are indeed terminal to his overall theological project. Upon my reading there appear to be at least two points worth noting. The first has to do with the clear fact that Gunton has made a practice of being somewhat hasty in his tendency to link thinkers and times with little supporting evidence. I believe this is most apparent in his *Alienation and Enlightenment* and *The One, the Three and the Many*, where historical lines of thought, as Ayres has argued, appear to be traced a bit too easily from the ancient Greeks all the way up to the most 'modern' of thinkers. In my view this is remedied, to some degree, in *The Triune Creator*, where the depth of argumentation which Gunton provides appears to be no less shallow than any number systematic studies by other theologians. The fact remains, however, that there

⁸² Ibid., p. 43.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

persists in this work what many commentators have taken to be a misrepresentation of these important theological figures. But to suggest that Gunton's thesis is totally negated upon the reasoning that it is too sweeping or brief in its form, I believe, is a misguided suggestion. All things considered, I believe there is an important place for theological studies which attempt to trace out meta-narratives within the great traditions of thought, even if for no other reason than to encourage further discussion and interrogation of ideas.⁸⁴ If judged on this merit alone, Gunton's work may be taken to be a resounding success.

The second point to be made has more directly to do with Gunton's reading (or misreading) of Augustine and Aquinas in particular. Ayres, for instance, has raised the important question as to whether or not it matters for Gunton's overall project that he may have been wrong in his interpretation of Augustine, and for that matter, Aquinas as well. As Ayres asks: 'does proving that Augustine did not hold these views actually affect the argument that latter tradition's interpretation of Augustine in the terms that Gunton outlines led to some of the theological problems of modernity?' In answer to his own question, Ayres suggest that this is indeed true but in a limited sense. He argues that '[b]y its very nature constructing such a meta-narrative must iron out and ignore the subtlety of historical development, and the subtleties of interaction and influence.'⁸⁵ In other words, it may well be true that even if Augustine (and we may add Aquinas) did not hold to a 'monistic' understanding of God, they may well have been interpreted in such a way in the subsequent tradition. The problem with Gunton, according to both of these critics, is that he simply ignores the finer points of this complex historical development and offers little of any evidence to support such a view. Criticism such as these must be taken seriously. But what I believe is most regrettable in all of this is the fact that Gunton never directly addressed these particular criticisms in any published work of which I am aware. Similarly, Ayres, to my knowledge, has never dedicated more than two brief book reviews to his criticisms of Gunton. It appears to me that Ayres criticisms are on the whole well founded, but if they are truly as important as he suggests, then they should be more fully registered so as to be made more convincing.⁸⁶ Also lacking in these critical accounts of Gunton's work is any alternative

⁸⁴ This appears to be one of the primary conclusions drawn by Craig Bartholomew in his rather lengthy review of Gunton's *The One, the Three and the Many: "The Healing of Modernity: A Trinitarian Remedy?"*, *European Journal of Theology* 6, 2 (1997). For instance his conclusion that 'Gunton's [book] is an exciting and important example of the type of work Christians must engage in if we are to contribute to the healing of modernity/postmodernity' (p. 128). In this paper Bartholomew further suggests that Gunton's work would be a very fruitful conversation partner for neo-Calvinist theologians.

⁸⁵ Ayres, "Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity", p. 31

⁸⁶ In the first footnote of his "Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity", Ayres indicates that he had written a more full-scale critique of Gunton to be published under the title "Is a 'Trinitarian Ontology' Possible?" which was to be accompanied by a direct response from Gunton himself. In the footnote Ayres claims that the papers were 'forthcoming' in *Modern Theology* 11 (1995), but unfortunately no such papers were subsequently published.

suggestions or historical analysis for diagnosing the theological tradition's culpability or innocence in the emergence of modern thought.

II. Trinitarian Theology of Creation and Culture: the Human and Nonhuman

Gunton's Place within the Trinitarian Renaissance

Theologians critical or uncertain of Augustine's trinitarian legacy have usually tended to take one of two theological directions in order to correct or amend his legacy. The first of these may be found in the work of those Western theologians who have come to develop a deeper conversation with Eastern trinitarian theologies. We may comfortably locate Gunton within this first group which has sought to reach further back into the Christian tradition in order to discover pre-Augustinian trinitarian concepts that are better equipped to register the distinct *outward* or *economic* actions of the Son and the Spirit amongst the creation. Of utmost importance to this group of patristic era theologians would be the significant contributions made by the Cappadocian fathers, and in the case of Gunton, we may also add the trinitarian theology of Irenaeus of Lyon who has also re-emerged as another pivotal patristic theologian. The second group, as we have seen evidenced in the criticisms of Denis Ayres, has instead sought to recover 'those aspects of Augustine's reflections that had seemed to play a subordinate role in Augustinian trinitarianism'.⁸⁷ But now in the interest of better understanding Gunton's place within the wider 'Trinitarian Renaissance' we might do well to briefly review the other major figures and movements responsible for returning trinitarian thought to the center of theological practice in the late-modern era.

The first murmurings of the Western church's return to the doctrine of the Trinity may be found in the early 19th century theological and philosophical programs of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Georg W.F. Hegel. Although both of these important thinkers have been subjected to rather scathing critiques by the more recent 'fathers' of trinitarian thought – Barth and Rahner in particular – their works clearly contain the beginnings of a return to trinitarian orthodoxy. In his major theological work *The Christian Faith*⁸⁸ – originally published in 1821-1822 and then revised in 1830-1831 – Schleiermacher argued for a return to Trinitarian reflection in the interest of properly conceiving the nature of God's revelation. And whilst Schleiermacher's work signaled a definite return to a serious thinking-through of the trinitarian shape of Christian theology, he is often criticized for placing his treatment of

⁸⁷ Christoph Schwöbel, "The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 5.

⁸⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.).

the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of his systematic presentation. This was a methodological move which Barth would later criticize as a regrettable relegation of the doctrine.⁸⁹ Although Stanley Grenz has recently tried to mitigate some of the more common charges against Schleiermacher's treatment of the Trinity,⁹⁰ important reservations continue to taint contemporary evaluations of his work. For instance, one weakness inherent to the late treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity has been found in the fact that other doctrines, Christology and pneumatology in particular, necessarily end up lacking in trinitarian content.

It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that the task of bringing trinitarian thought back to the center of Christian thought would be more successfully carried out by a philosopher rather than a theologian. But as a contemporary to Schleiermacher, Hegel did much to revive scholarly interest in trinitarian thought – although admittedly through a program that was more philosophical than it was theological. Of central importance for Hegel was the idea that 'the content of the doctrine of the Trinity was not merely a religious teaching but also lay at the heart of the philosophical understanding of all reality.'⁹¹ This central tenant of Hegel's philosophy would be most clearly expressed in his use of a trinitarian language which sought to capture what he understood to be the inherent dynamism of God conceived philosophically as 'Spirit' or '*Geist*'. According to Hegel, the term 'Spirit' is, in fact, rendered meaningless if we do not first understand God's own being by way of a clearly trinitarian logic. Although Hegel's additions to the trinitarian conversation are numerous and rather complex, it is his reflections on the relationship between what we now call the 'immanent' and 'economic' trinities that has most clearly left its mark upon modern trinitarian thought. Briefly, what is notable in Hegel's often abstract formulation of the relation between immanent and economic trinities is his pronounced resistance to their conceptual separation. In this sense, Hegel has done much to frame one of the more important debates which continues to occupy trinitarian theologians who, like Gunton, have continued to negotiate the relationship between immanent and economic trinities. We return to this important discussion of Hegel's, and Gunton's response to it, later in the chapter. But to conclude, we may simply indicate that Hegel's influence in the Trinitarian Renaissance can be scarcely overestimated. As Samuel M. Powell has indicated, 'it is clear that the fact that there is any contemporary interest in the doctrine of the Trinity at all owes a great deal to Hegel.'⁹²

⁸⁹ Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 192.

⁹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), p. 21.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹² Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 140.

Although the work of Schleiermacher and Hegel would prove to be essential to the modern resurgence in trinitarian interest, few would challenge the commonly held claim that it is to the work of the ‘two Karls’ – Karl Barth and Karl Rahner – that the bulk of credit is due. While it now appears that Barth’s legacy is, perhaps, the brighter burning of the two stars, each of these thinkers has done much to encourage a return to serious trinitarian thought amongst both the church and the academy. But in the interest of space we will here focus on the work of Barth who was clearly the more influential of the ‘two Karls’ in relation to Gunton’s own theological development.

Unlike his liberal predecessors, Barth would strongly reject the anthropologically centered ‘theology from below’ which so occupied Schleiermacher and Hegel, as well as those who would come in their wake, but Feurbach in particular. Taking God’s self-revelation through his Word as the foundation of the theological task, Barth forcefully argued that revelation – and therefore theology as a whole – always arises through the prior act of God and not through human initiation. Said otherwise, the act of revelation is for Barth a trinitarian ‘event’ or ‘happening’ that always comes from ‘above’ rather than ‘below’. Today it is commonly held that Barth, through his development of a rigorous theology ‘from above’, was better able than his liberal predecessors to maintain the required ‘otherness’ between God and world so as not to risk a confusion of the two. Furthermore, this particular methodology led Barth into a detailed discussion concerning the trinitarian character of the Word of God which, as he consistently maintained, was indeed God’s revelation of *himself*. In what would become an often repeated dictum within the wider Trinitarian Renaissance – one which, as we shall see, was also a favorite of Gunton’s – Barth summarized his position thusly: ‘*God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals Himself.*’⁹³ But in the interest of avoiding a total identification of the eternal God with the historical act of revelation, Barth was careful to add the point that while ‘God is identical with the act of revelation, God is not reducible to that act.’⁹⁴ This is a point which, as we shall see, Gunton has appropriated from Barth’s trinitarian theology – namely, that in order to avoid the collapse of immanent and economic trinities the theologian must equally stress God’s *freedom* to act in a revelatory manner. In sum, we may say that for Barth a trinitarian theology necessarily arises out of a theological consideration of revelation. Moreover, it is through God’s free revelation of his Word that we are made a part of the intertrinitarian act, which is itself, the outward expression of the divine life.⁹⁵

There is little doubt that Gunton’s own theological project was deeply influenced by, and indebted to, the rigorously trinitarian thought of Karl Barth. And as we have already

⁹³ Cited in Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, p. 39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

indicated, Gunton's early doctoral work, later published as *Becoming and Being*, was at least partially dedicated to the critical evaluation of Barth's trinitarian legacy. But even in these early engagements with Barth's trinitarian thought we may detect in Gunton an overall uneasiness. As John Webster has observed, Gunton's anxiety had to do with what he took to be Barth's 'Augustinian' tendencies. Just as Augustine diminished the particular economic acts of the divine persons by overemphasizing their underlying divine unity, the same criticism, according to Gunton, may be lodged against Barth's overall diminishment of the Holy Spirit's role within the trinitarian dynamic. The outgrowth of this 'thin pneumatology' may be identified in Barth's inability to attribute 'agency to the Holy Spirit in sustaining Jesus' genuine humanity. The result is that Jesus can sometimes seem to function as a Platonic form'.⁹⁶

We are, then, reasonably justified in describing Gunton's own trinitarian theology as being distinctly 'post-Barthian' as he clearly strove to appropriate, criticize, and build upon Barth's detailed trinitarian thought. But after having painted Barth with the unenviable title of being the last great 'Augustinian' of the Western tradition, Gunton then set about to detail his own trinitarian project which – although still deeply indebted to Barth – would draw heavily from those theologians which he saw as presenting an alternative trinitarian vision to that of the Augustinian mainstream of the Western tradition. To fulfill this role, Gunton would most frequently seek inspiration from Irenaeus, the Cappadocians (by way of John Zizioulas), Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and to a lesser extent the puritan theologian John Owen. While still recognizing Gunton's strong relation to Barth's theological legacy, we may now equally identify Gunton with at least three of the other important trends which have come to surface within the more recent Trinitarian Renaissance of the past thirty years or so.

Gunton's unique place within the trinitarian renaissance may be traced, in the first instance, to his distinct interest in delineating the ontological implications associated with a thoroughly trinitarian approach to the systematic task. As he indicated in the preface to the first edition of his early assessment of trinitarian theology, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Gunton claimed that the central concern of his own trinitarian approach 'is to be found in a quest for ontology'. He further explains that 'it is only through an understanding of the kind of being that God is that we can come to learn what kind of beings we are and what kind of world we inhabit.' In even stronger terms he would here make the bold proposal that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to ontology', but more precisely, 'to any ontology that would hold together creation and redemption.'⁹⁷ There are, however, at least two further

⁹⁶ John Webster, "Systematic Theology After Barth: Jüngel, Jenson, and Gunton," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, 3rd (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 259.

⁹⁷ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. xi.

related movements within the wider Trinitarian Renaissance that help to further place Gunton's own unique and ontological approach within the wider trinitarian movement.

The first major trend with which Gunton may be identified has to do with the recent upsurge in trinitarian theologies concerned to illustrate the implications attendant to the realization that God is, in his very own being, fundamentally *relational*. The 'relational turn' within the recent Trinitarian Renaissance may once again be traced back to the work of the Barth and Rahner.⁹⁸ Yet this turn to a concerted focus on relationality would not gain full speed until the end of the twentieth century, largely due to the influence of Jürgen Moltmann,⁹⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg,¹⁰⁰ and Gunton's early PhD supervisor Robert W. Jenson.¹⁰¹ Often considered to be the primary movers in the theological movement which sought to take up the 'theme of God as the fullness of (divine) history',¹⁰² this trio of theologians may be equally credited with bringing about a more concentrated focus on the implications of divine relationality for contemporary trinitarian thought. As Stanley Grenz has indicated, the methodological principle variously proposed by these three thinkers, has centrally to do with the understanding that 'the doctrine of God cannot be constructed from the givenness of the one divine substance but should move from the three persons to the divine unity.' Moreover, as Grenz adds, this 'methodological commitment has been largely responsible for elevating relationality to the lofty place it has attained in trinitarian theology.'¹⁰³

Working in the shadow of Moltmann, Pannenburg, and Jenson, a number of new movers within the trinitarian renaissance began to develop their own theological programs which would take seriously the dynamic relationality of the trinitarian persons. Of the more influential theologians in this relational vein of trinitarian thought, we may here single out the work of Leonardo Boff,¹⁰⁴ John D. Zizioulas,¹⁰⁵ and Catherine Mowry LaCugna,¹⁰⁶ each of

⁹⁸ For a thorough evaluation of the philosophical and theological precursors to the 'relational turn' see; F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ Wolfhardt Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-1998); *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

¹⁰¹ Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997-1999).

¹⁰² Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, p. 73.

¹⁰³ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000); *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988).

¹⁰⁵ John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

whom may be said to have developed a ‘social’ or ‘communal’ trinitarian theology. And although Gunton’s own relational theology appears to draw most heavily from Zizioulas – but particularly, as we shall see, his use of the Cappadocians to develop a distinctly trinitarian theology of personhood, communion, and otherness – Gunton also holds much in common with liberation theologian Leonardo Boff. There are, I believe, two important correlations to be made between these seemingly divergent thinkers. We may first highlight the fact that both Gunton and Boff have dedicated much of their trinitarian theology of relationality to an exposition of its implications for the doctrine of creation.¹⁰⁷ But closely related to this mutual interest in applying trinitarian relationality to the nonhuman creation is their equally shared interest in its further application to human sociality. Take, for example, Boff’s explanation that ‘[h]uman society is a pointer on the road to the mystery of the Trinity, while the mystery of the Trinity, as we know it from revelation, is a pointer toward social life and its archetype.’¹⁰⁸ While Gunton would later distance himself from ‘social trinitarians’ such as Leonardo Boff and Miroslav Volf¹⁰⁹ – especially following some important criticisms he received in regard to his own propositions concerning trinitarian thought and human social structure in *The One, The Three, and the Many* – much of his work has also focused on delineating the social outworkings of relational and trinitarian theology of creation and culture.¹¹⁰

The final major trinitarian movement with which Gunton may be identified has much to do with our earlier points concerning his decidedly ontological focus. Here we may place Gunton’s work amongst a number of other recent trinitarian theologies which have sought to make a return to theorizing the ‘immanent’ or ‘ontological’ Trinity. Although we will return to Gunton’s treatment of the immanent and economic Trinities more fully later in the chapter, we may now simply indicate that there have been several recent calls for a near total moratorium on theological consideration of the divine nature *ad intra*.¹¹¹ But in spite of these

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Mowery LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

¹⁰⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Cry for the Earth, Cry for the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997); *Ecology and Liberation*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995).

¹⁰⁸ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likemness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); "'The Trinity Is Our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14, 3 (1998).

¹¹⁰ In the preface to the second edition of his *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* – written in 1996, four years after the publication of *The One, the Three and the Many* – Gunton clearly begins to distance himself from his own earlier, and less tempered, use of the ‘social analogy’ between the immanent trinitarian relations and human social relations. As Gunton here concedes; ‘It may be true that the Trinity encourages neither an individualist nor collectivist form of social order, as I can scarcely deny in view of my use of them in various papers in this book (PTT), and in a successor (TOTM)’ (p. xx).

¹¹¹ LaCugna, *God for Us*; Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Philip Clayton, "Pluralism, Idealism, Romanticism: Untapped Resources for a Trinity in Process," in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki (New York: Continuum, 1997).

calls for a ban on theologizing the immanent Trinity, Gunton is among a small group of theologians who have grown convinced that such theories are theologically legitimate and altogether necessary. Of this group Hans Urs von Balthasar,¹¹² Thomas F. Torrance,¹¹³ and Elizabeth A. Johnson¹¹⁴ deserve particular mention, for it was these theologians, along with Gunton, who ‘sparked a renewed sense of the theological (and ethical) importance of explicating the concept of God *in se*.’¹¹⁵ To be certain, this small cadre of trinitarian theologians embody a rather diverse, and at times disparate, breadth of theological language and methodology. Thus we may further specify that of these three theologians, Gunton’s own trinitarian thought is most closely approximate to that of T.F. Torrance, who shared with Gunton a distinct willingness to ‘devote serious thought to theological description of the created order’, yet in such a way as to remain ‘undergirded by trinitarian teaching.’¹¹⁶ Differences aside, what all of these thinkers share in common, as Grenz points out, is a distinct desire to uncover new ways of speaking of ‘God *ad intra* without losing completely the focus on divine relationality that had become such a widely held axiom of trinitarian theology.’¹¹⁷

The Need for a Trinitarian Theology

Now that we have placed Gunton’s trinitarian theology in its wider context within the Trinitarian Renaissance, we may now look more closely at Gunton’s own justifications for adopting a specifically trinitarian approach to his theology. In this regard we may first point out that if Gunton is correct in his estimation that modernity is essentially the outgrowth of a poorly devised doctrine of creation – and again, I do not believe his critics have adequately proven this to not be the case – then it follows that our response as the Church must be equally theological in nature. ‘The Christian gospel’, he insists, ‘is that alienation is not a necessity’.¹¹⁸ But before moving to outline the shape of his theological response to modernity we must first elucidate what it is that Gunton sees as the task of theology. In other words, we must ask: what is the basis and goal of theology today?

¹¹² As he was an overwhelmingly prolific writer, I will here offer just a small sample of Balthasar’s work concerned with the immanent Trinity: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, 7 vols (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982-1989); *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992).

¹¹³ Again, I here offer just a sample of Torrance’s work concerned with the exploration of the immanent Trinity: Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985); *Divine and Contingent Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

¹¹⁵ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, p. 164.

¹¹⁶ Webster, "Systematic Theology After Barth," p. 261.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹¹⁸ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 150.

The answer to this question can be found in three distinct marks of Gunton's theological project, each of which lends itself to a trinitarian approach. First, Gunton maintains that any theological program must be firmly rooted in the life of the worshipping Christian community. That is to say, that the very basis of theology is to be found in the act of worship itself. And as Gunton insists, worship expresses something of the characteristics of the Triune God because, like God, worship is inherently relational – it is a 'happening'. 'And the happening between persons is worship in the Son and through the Spirit' – the second and third *persons* of the Triune God.¹¹⁹ This leads closely into the second mark of the theological task which takes instruction from the Christian understanding that we as human persons are related to the Father through both Son and Spirit. Moreover, it is the task of theology, and Christian life as a whole, to realize this distinctive relationality. Here again we find that Gunton's theology finds its basis not only in the doctrine of the Trinity alone, but rather, in a triune understanding of creation as a whole. 'The point', Gunton argues, 'is that because we are established in our being in the Trinity, we are enabled to think *from*, and, with careful qualification, *about* the triune being of God'.¹²⁰ The outgrowth of this fundamental touch-point of Gunton's theology is that theology itself becomes a part of the Trinitarian dynamic. From the Trinitarian being of God – through whom and in whom we are created – comes this human articulation of the multiplicity of relationships in which we find our own being. Theology is then the process of attempting to articulate and discover the universal shape of this dynamism.

Finally, the theological task will have two primary functions or goals. The first of these is again directed towards the worshipping community of the Church, and seeks to articulate the faith of the community for its own benefit and enrichment. Gunton calls this the 'internal orientation of theology,' due to its rather inward looking goal of making Christian truth claims obedient to and dependent upon Jesus 'who is the truth'.¹²¹ The second focus of the theological task is directed towards bringing the truth claims of the Christian community to those outside of the worshipping community. In this vein, theology takes on, as Gunton explains, an 'apologetic or missionary function'. In the fulfillment of such an outward theological project, the Church should also be bold in its presentation of the trinitarian shape of the Gospel rather than present a watered-down monistic 'natural theology'.¹²² Therefore, according to Gunton, the theologian should not see the sometimes difficult doctrine of the Trinity as a stumbling block to faith, but rather, as a true testimony to the way the world is

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7. We will discuss these 'careful qualifications' in more detail in the section concerning *Trinitarian Ontology* below.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

related to its Creator. Without an account of the trinitarian shape of all things – divine, human, and nonhuman – Christian theology remains empty.

Trinitarian Ontology: Personal Being

Along with many of his fellow colleagues within the Trinitarian Renaissance, Gunton has argued for a deeper appreciation of the radical terminological revolution which the Cappadocian fathers brought about. We have already reviewed what Gunton considers a deficiently trinitarian theology in Augustine, whom, as Gunton cites, failed to fully understand and appreciate the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians – Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. The result was that the Cappadocian achievement would be lost to theology in the West, largely due to the overall brilliance of Augustine's theology, aside from this major drawback. But what was this Cappadocian achievement which Gunton and his colleagues are so fond of?

Following the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) the terms *hypostasis* (person) and *ousia* (essence/substance) were commonly used as cognates, both used to signify being in general. The Nicene Creed, directed as it was towards the Arian heresy, famously adopted the term *homoousion* to assert the divinity of Jesus Christ, whom they maintained is of 'one being with the Father'. As Robert Jenson has explained, the Nicene use of *homoousion* (one being) has two possible meanings. First, that 'two things are *homoousios* could mean that they are exactly the same one', thereby abolishing any distinction. This is, of course, unacceptable for it would ultimately lead to a monistic end – unity without personal particularity. Secondly, it could mean that the Father and the Son 'perfectly instantiate the same essence' thereby resulting in two different Gods.¹²³ Clearly, both options are unacceptable in their tendencies towards monism and tritheism respectively. The confusion which came out of the Council of Nicea would set the stage for what would become the Cappadocian terminological achievement in the decade following 370.

We may begin an exposition of this theological achievement by following Gunton in focusing on the concepts of *person* and *relation*. First, we must sight the underlying problem with the Nicene usage of *homoousion*, and its subsequent interpretation in Western theology following Augustine. The problem is found in the interpretation of *ousia* by *substantia*, which as Gunton points out is a literal interpretation of *hypostasis*. This interpretation served to ultimately 'deprive the concept of the person of due weight because it introduced a stress on the *underlying* reality of God.'¹²⁴ By closely approximating *ousia* (being) and *hypostasis* (person) the Nicene Creed, along with subsequent Western theology in general, has reduced *personal being*, whether it be divine or human, to the underlying *substance* which makes up

¹²³ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God*, p. 103.

¹²⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 191.

the persons – ‘God-stuff’ or ‘soul-stuff’. Importantly, Gunton finds in this ancient theological debate concerning the being of persons to be closely parallel to our modern struggle of the one against the many. For what this Nicean confusion of *ousia* and *hypostasis* represents is a fundamental privileging of the one over the many. That is to say, it privileges the *one* substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, over against the distinct personhood of each.

The Cappadocian achievement, then, consisted of the brilliant ‘desynonymizing of *ousia* and *hypostasis*: of making what were synonymous terms into words of distinct meaning.’¹²⁵ The term *hypostasis* would now be used to signify the concrete particular known as a *person*, and the term *ousia* (being in general) would now become a *relational* achievement – the communion of persons. This is to say that the *hypostasis* are no longer to be construed as individuals, but as persons whose being (*ousia*) consists in their relation to one another. In a real sense then, being is now found in a relational *becoming*, as Barth and Jüngel would make popular in the last century. This is not to say that persons are simply relations, ‘but concrete particulars in relation to one another.’¹²⁶

We can now see that the profound achievement of the Cappadocians was to completely redefine the ontology of persons, both divine and human, by carefully clarifying the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia*. From this terminological revolution came two primary achievements. First, true trinitarian ‘threeness in the oneness’ could now be conceived without reducing the particularity of each person (*hypostasis*) to an underlying *ousia* or substance. Secondly, the Cappadocians have introduced an entirely new ontology of communion. And here we must introduce a third term into the equation. The reason for this is plain; for there to be true threeness in oneness, there needs to be some deeper account of this relationality in which particular being finds itself in otherness.

The term *perichoresis* has often been summoned to add depth to this claim. Perichoresis is, as Gunton highlights, essentially a ‘metaphor of spatial motion which introduces a dynamism into the eternity in which the [divine] persons are what they are in and through one another.’¹²⁷ The relationality which perichoresis represents is often characterized as reciprocal. That is, perichoretic relations give to and receive from particular hypostases without sacrificing their own particularity. It is relationality without the confusion, sublimation, or indistinguishability that is so characteristic of modern and postmodern relationality. In the divine perichoretic relations we find that the three hypostases ‘dynamically constitute one another’s being in what Coleridge called “an ineffable cycle of Being, Intelligence and communicative Life, Love and Action.”’¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

¹²⁶ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 39.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

¹²⁸ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 164.

For Gunton, the divine movement of perichoresis – for the term should always be understood dynamically – also serves to characterize the divine involvement in space and time. It is on this point that he has maintained the idea that perichoresis can be developed as an analogical concept concerning the world as well, but only on a qualified and partially apophatic basis. In fact, Gunton would like to elevate perichoresis to the level of what he has called the ‘trinitarian transcendentals’, noting that perichoretic relations are a mark of created being in general. The world is then understood to be an ordering of things that is ultimately perichoretic in that ‘everything in it contributes to the being of everything else, enabling everything to be what it distinctively is.’¹²⁹

Yet the question remains: can we truly move from making a number of general statements concerning the being of God – *hypostasis, ousia, perichoresis, personhood* – to applying this ontology of God’s being to the creation in general? Gunton seems to think that we can: ‘because the Trinitarian concepts reflect the being of God, we should be prepared to find them echoed in some way in human thought and in structures of the created world.’¹³⁰ Conservative as this may be – insisting as he does that the application is both analogical and tempered with a measure of apophaticism – this assertion has probably drawn the greatest weight of attack upon Gunton’s theology, and that of his colleagues, in what has been dubbed the ‘Trinitarian renaissance’. In the next section we highlight some of the complaints by Gunton’s objectors, and detail his response to these important questions.

The Immanent and Economic Trinity

It is in Gunton’s more recent work that we find him giving full attention to several serious challenges that have arisen in the face of the ‘Trinitarian renaissance’ of contemporary theology. These questions primarily concern the theological legitimacy of ‘reading into’ the *immanent* or ontological Trinity from our essentially creaturely and contingent perspective. In other words these critics have asked the question: Are we misguided in our efforts to project our creaturely understanding of the economic Trinity ‘up into’ the immanent Trinitarian being? First, we need to account for the terminology. Borrowing the words of T.F. Torrance, we may understand the divine economy, or economic trinity, as ‘the orderly movement in which God actively makes himself known to us in his incarnate condescension and his redemptive activity within the structures of space and time’.¹³¹ Or as Gunton says of the economy by way of Irenaeus; the divine economy protects against the ‘gnostic divorce of creation from redemption’, by accounting for God’s agency and unity through time and

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 166.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

¹³¹ Here Gunton is quoting T.F. Torrance from his *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 92. Cited in Colin E. Gunton, "Eastern and Western Trinities," p. 36.

space.¹³² On the other hand, as we have already alluded, the immanent Trinity refers to ‘what kind of being God is in himself, in the eternal *taxis* or order of persons in relation.’¹³³

In the recent book *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, Gunton’s last published work following his untimely death, he answers two recent protests to any theology of the Trinity which seeks to move conceptually from economic to immanent Trinities. Both Ted Peters in his *God as Trinity*, and Catherine Mowery LaCugna, in her *God for Us*, have advocated a position that bars theological inquiry into the immanent Trinity and effectively limits theological enquiry to the economic Trinity alone.¹³⁴ For these writers it is a mistake to try and read an ontology of God’s immanent being off of his economic actions in time and space. ‘All talk of the Trinity must therefore be in some way a function of the economy of salvation, so that we cannot, for example, develop a concept of *perichoresis* and use it to throw light from God’s reality to ours.’¹³⁵ The main thrust of Peters and LaCugna’s critique appears to be directed towards the commendable goal of preserving God’s freedom. On this account, all that we may be justified in asserting is that God is in the process of relating to creation. Anything more than this would infringe upon God’s ultimate freedom and otherness.

Gunton finds two major flaws in the arguments of Peters and LaCugna concerning the limitation of theology to the economic Trinity for the sole purpose of preserving God’s freedom. For as Gunton argues, there is much more at stake than both of these authors seem to claim. The first pitfall concerns Barth’s argument that God’s being has truly been given to us – revealed – in the person of Jesus Christ. He is in Jesus as He is in eternity. It then follows, according to Gunton, that the doctrine of the ontological Trinity may serve to establish the relative independence of the Creator from the creation. ‘It is because God is a communion of love prior to and in independence of the creation that he can enable the creation to be itself.’¹³⁶ In light of this, Gunton asks whether Peters and LaCugna’s approaches are able to avoid the threat of pantheism which may result from their apparent attempts to bring God into too close a proximity with the creation. Such as LaCugna’s claim that there ‘is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia*’.¹³⁷ The threat is a real one, since each of their formulations ultimately posits only *one* reality, whereas Gunton’s ontological vision, I believe correctly, emphasizes the otherness-in-relation between Creator and creation, heaven and earth.

¹³² Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 158.

¹³³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, from the "Preface to the Second Edition," p. xvii.

¹³⁴ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity. Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); LaCugna, *God for Us*.

¹³⁵ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³⁷ *God for Us*, p. 223. Quoted in Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Preface to the Second Edition, p. xviii-xix.

Secondly, there is the important and often cited concern having to do with the uncritical drawing of analogy from the immanent to the economic Trinity, or visa versa. On this account the Trinity is used 'as a kind of principle of explanation and ethics.'¹³⁸ This has been carried out, as Gunton highlights, in the recent theologies concerned with a 'social Trinity' that is both immanent and economic, posited through a complex of intermediate argumentation. The problem of course, is that moving from the immanent Trinity to the created and contingent world is deeply problematic. As Gunton writes: 'Their chief defect is that they turn Christ into a world principle at the expense of Jesus of Nazareth, and often construe his cross as a focus for the suffering of God rather than as the centre of that history in which God overcomes sin and evil.'¹³⁹

Although Gunton has been clearly aware of this second potential pitfall to any theological comparison between economic and immanent Trinities, he and his colleagues have fallen victim to some measure of criticism on this point. For instance, Richard Fermer has charged that 'in identifying God's *ousia* or being with the communion of the *hypostaseis*', Gunton has essentially impaired the 'the mystery of God's being'.¹⁴⁰ Fermer's concerns are much like those of LaCugna in that they both want to stress the mystery of God's internal being on apophatic grounds. How then, Fermer asks, can we move from a hazy understanding of God's being as communion and then establish this finding as a methodological principle for theology in general? We must then inquire of Gunton; has he himself turned 'Christ into a world principle' in a way that is ultimately offensive to the mystery of God's being?

Gunton's defense on these points concerning the relationship between immanent and economic Trinities has stretched back to his earliest work concerning the theology of Karl Barth. This is because Barth, according to Gunton's reading, stood out amongst nearly all of his predecessors in beginning his treatment of the doctrine of God with an exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. In his doctoral thesis, later published as *Becoming and Being*, Gunton highlights Barth's logic behind his cautious movement from the economic *activity* of God to the immanent Trinity.¹⁴¹ As Gunton reminds us, for Barth, all theological thought begins with a single theological understanding: '*God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals Himself.*'¹⁴² Because God has revealed himself in his economic actions,

¹³⁸ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 24.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Richard M. Fermer, "The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm," *Neu Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 41 (1999), p. 174.

¹⁴¹ Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth* (London:1978; SCM Press, 2001), particularly chapter 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 128. Quoted from Karl Barth, *CD*, I/I, p. 296.

theological inquiry ‘will lead us inexorably from what happens in Jesus Christ to the description of God in his triune reality’.¹⁴³

This argument of Gunton’s, indebted as it is to Barth, can now be seen as a major theme in his overall theological project from beginning to end. It is perhaps both sad and appropriate that he began his career with a defense of Barth’s Trinitarian theology, and his careful exposition of God’s being and revelatory action, and ended with another strong defense of his own theology of revelation in his final work *Act and Being*. Like bookends, these two works define the basic character of Gunton’s life work. Both draw heavily on Barth’s understanding that revelation is ‘something that *happens*; not to subjective experiences but to events that are God, and specifically the events that come to expression in the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ’.¹⁴⁴

If we are to understand Gunton’s reply to his critics – Fermer, LaCugna, and Peters – then we must look further to Gunton’s Christology and Pneumatology. The key to successfully relating the immanent and economic Trinities lies in the fact that ‘the doctrine of the Trinity must not be abstracted from the doctrine of the atonement.’¹⁴⁵ Therefore, it is the *work* of the Son and the Spirit which establishes the otherness of God and creation, yet maintains the revelation of God’s being economically. This is, of course, a theology of mediation.¹⁴⁶ Here Gunton draws heavily on the points made by Irenaeus, who characterized the Son and Spirit as the ‘right’ and ‘left’ hands of God. What this characterization of God’s economic activity suggests is not an ‘ontological subordination’ of Son and Spirit to the Father, but rather, it emphasizes ‘that the Son and the Spirit are the ways by which God himself is *personally* involved in the created order’.¹⁴⁷ Important for Gunton is the freedom which this Irenaean conception maintains for God. By the twin movements of understanding God’s economic relation to the creation as the work of Son and Spirit, and also by maintaining the otherness of Creator and creation, the freedom of God is then successfully defended. Gunton sees in this an implicit ‘doctrine of the immanent Trinity, in that it distinguishes the being of God from that of the world he creates’ – a point which Peters and LaCugna, according to Gunton, threaten to overstep.¹⁴⁸

In Gunton’s final book, *Act and Being*, he offers a sustained account of this ‘implicit’ doctrine of the immanent Trinity. This work focuses primarily on the elucidation of the divine attributes in light of God’s action in the world. As we have seen Gunton comes to understand revelation, following Irenaeus and Barth, as something that *happens*, revelation is found in

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 128. Gunton would later argue that Barth failed in not giving an adequate account of the distinction of each person of the Trinity.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁴⁵ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ We will give a more full account of Gunton’s theology of mediation in chapters 3 and 5.

¹⁴⁷ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. xxv.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. xxvi.

the action of God *in* the world. Moreover, 'it is impossible to distinguish between God's word and himself, between what God *does* and what he *is*'.¹⁴⁹ Again, this is most clearly demonstrated in the incarnation of Christ. For it is here that we are given God Himself as he is fully revealed in this act, and we should therefore seek this particular source above any other in our effort to understand who God is eternally. 'That is the order of knowing: we know God (by his ostensive self-definition) from and in his acts. We know *who* God is from what he does.'¹⁵⁰

Against Fermer's charge that Gunton oversteps the cautious parameters of the apophatic tradition on these points, we may remember Gunton's own notes of caution which stop far short of declaring that nothing can be known of God's eternal being. As Gunton writes: 'This does not mean that we have a private view into the being of God, but that the general characteristics of God's eternal being, as persons in relation, communion, may be known from what he has *done* and *does* in the *actions* that we call the economy of creation and salvation.'¹⁵¹ The value of a rigorously trinitarian theology is to be found, not so much in its privileged account of the internal being of God, but rather, in its enabling theology to gain a renewed understanding of God's action in this world – that is, his commerce with creation and culture alike. This is why the atonement took on a renewed emphasis in Gunton's second edition of the *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. This doctrine, being at the center of the particular life of Jesus, offers up a kind of criterion for trinitarian theology. If we see the atonement – in trinitarian terms – as the act 'of the one God and its many-sidedness as a work of God achieved by both Son and Spirit', we may go some way towards preventing the Trinity from becoming a 'kind of problem solving device rather than theology bound up with repentance and worship'.¹⁵²

Trinitarian Freedom: the Space and Time to be

Preserving some distinction between economic and immanent Trinities is, for Gunton, extremely important in preserving the otherness-in-relation which preserves the integrity – the freedom – of persons, both divine and human. There is little exaggeration in claiming that this is one of the defining marks of Gunton's overall theology.¹⁵³ What is needed, Gunton explains, is adequate 'space' between persons. 'Freedom is to be found in the space in which persons can be themselves in relation with other persons'.¹⁵⁴ We find then, that freedom is

¹⁴⁹ Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, p. 129.

¹⁵⁰ Gunton, *Act & Being*, p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 230. (emphasis added)

¹⁵² Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. xxx-xxxi.

¹⁵³ One might go so far as to characterize it as a constant anxiety in Gunton's theology.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

concerned with finding the room of ones own so as not to be subsumed into the other, or as modernity so often tended, losing the one amongst the homogenization of the many.

At the beginning of this chapter we reviewed what Gunton took to be Augustine's pronounced inability to maintain the differentiation of the Triune persons. But as is well known, Gunton also took issue with his former PhD supervisor, Robert Jenson, on this very same point. Therefore, let us use this gentlemanly disagreement to further elucidate the spatial and temporal dimensions of Gunton's trinitarian formulation.

Although to a lesser degree than Augustine, Robert Jenson's trinitarian theology has often been brought into question by Gunton who charges; 'that there can be discerned in Jenson's theology survivals of Western conceptions which at once deprive the Spirit of particularity – especially in relation to the Son – and at the same time run the risk of abolishing the space between God and the world'.¹⁵⁵ The problem is found in Jenson's supposed 'Western' subordination of the Spirit to Jesus in his use of the expression; 'the Spirit of Jesus'. According to Gunton, the subordination is located in a failure on Jenson's part to give full *personal* distinctness to the Holy Spirit – the Spirit is then seen to be subordinate to the Son. The effect of this formulation is to diminish the *space* between the persons of the Trinity, reducing them in the economic Trinity to a point where the persons become 'functionally indistinguishable'. Gunton will alternatively assert that we must 'speak of the Spirit's Jesus as much as of Jesus' Spirit'.¹⁵⁶ In this, Gunton recognizes that we need a doctrine of the Holy Spirit which maintains his personal space in distinction from that of the Father and the Son. To fail on this theological point would invite deterministic outworkings, and ultimately, an erasure of personal being.

We will return to Gunton's important focus on pneumatology later in the chapter, but for now we will consider Gunton's second objection to Jenson's theology of the Trinity. This is an objection concerning Jenson's apparent movement to draw the immanent Trinity into too close of a spatial and temporal proximity to the world. These important points come to a head as we consider the implications for a doctrine of creation, and thereby, for a theological anthropology. First we must highlight that Christian theology has long struggled to properly understand two seemingly, or potentially, contradictory claims. Gunton clearly summarizes the conflicting claims in stating

that, first, God is the sole creator, and indeed, sole lord of what happens within that creation's history subsequent to its creation; and that, second, as creator and redeemer he is at the same time the one who gives that creation its proper *Selbständigkeit* or

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 133.

relative independence, a subsistence that it receives from its relation to God. That is apparently to want one's cake and eat it too.¹⁵⁷

We will recall that this is exactly what the modern world rejected on the account that it introduced an intolerable hegemony of God's agency. For the modern it is an offense to reason to consider that God would omnipotently will and create all things, yet still allow human agency to flourish. For the modern, this was an apparently irreconcilable dichotomy. The only option was to then deny God and revert to one of the many modern forms of atheism. According to Gunton, however, a sufficiently Trinitarian theology of creation can hold these two claims in tension. In fact, as he will repeatedly argue, a rigorously trinitarian theology is the *only* way to reconcile the two claims.

Gunton often appeals to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's arguments concerning the properly trinitarian formulation of God's relation to the created world. For Coleridge there were only two theological models to choose from: otherness-absorbing pantheism, or otherness-affirming trinitarian theism. Only trinitarian theism could assure that sufficient 'space' between the creator and the creation was maintained so as to secure the distinction of each, while still affirming the created order's 'continuing dependence upon God for everything that is and takes place'.¹⁵⁸ Certainly, as Gunton concedes, Jenson would agree to this Coleridgian proposition. This notwithstanding, there developed between Gunton and Jenson a theological debate concerning the way in which the relation of God to the world should be described. What is at stake for Gunton is the fundamental otherness of each, both God and world, with the only choices being between an otherness affirming transcendence or an otherness denying immanence.

Like Gunton's first objection to Jenson's trinitarian formulization of the relations between the divine persons, here again his objections are largely Christological. In the former case Jenson was found to subordinate the Spirit to the Son, thereby reducing the distinction of each hypostases. And here the objection concerns Jenson's distinctively Lutheran formulization of the Christological mediation of creation. Gunton locates the problem in Jenson's stress on the single hypostasis of Christ's 'two natures' – both divine and creaturely. Jenson's intention is to avoid any notion of the Christologically dangerous separation of the two 'natures' in a dualistic manner. As Jenson explains; 'The incarnation given, what we call the humanity of Christ and the deity of Christ are only actual as the one sole person, so that where the deity of the Son is, there must be Jesus' humanity, unabridged as soul and body.'¹⁵⁹ Gunton finds in this Christology a definite risk of losing the 'distinct reality of Jesus'

¹⁵⁷ Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert W. Jenson: An Encounter and a Convergence," in *Trinity, Time and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 82.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

humanity' to the overwhelming oneness of the two natures. The 'tendency is to downplay the necessary otherness of Jesus and the Father by over stressing their identity'.¹⁶⁰

The problem can be further located in Jenson's suggested 'communion of attributes' amongst the three persons of the Trinity. Gunton finds in this a pronounced risk of losing the actions – the attributes – of Jesus that were distinctly human. Thus, Gunton concludes:

If Christology is to provide a matrix for an understanding of the relation between creator and creature, must not more be done to ensure the distinct reality of Jesus' humanity as the eternal Son become incarnate?... may it not be objected that more effort should be devoted to demonstrating that the logos speaks *as human*?¹⁶¹

Once again, what is threatened, Gunton maintains, is the distinct "space" of the humanity of Jesus. Moreover, Gunton finds that the distinct otherness of the created world, as a distinct entity that is other than the Creator, is similarly threatened. For if Christology is going to be our basis for understanding the God-world relationship – as Jenson indicates in stating that the 'Father's love of the Son is...the possibility of creation'¹⁶² – without falling into the Coleridgian dichotomy of pantheism or radical deism, we must work to preserve sufficient "space" for the humanity of Jesus. The question is now whether or not Jenson's Christology is successful on this point. Or as Gunton would ask: is his Christology sufficiently trinitarian?

The answer to this question is, for Gunton, a qualified no. We have already reviewed some of the reasons for this conclusion above, but Gunton also finds reason in Jenson's metaphorical characterization of the spatiality of God and creation.¹⁶³ Jenson is very careful to make clear that the doctrine of creation is not concerned with a 'timeless' relation between God and the world. The act of creation is rather a making of space and time for which creation can be itself. As Jenson explains; 'God is roomy; he can make room in himself if he chooses; if he so chooses the room he makes we call time; and that he creates means that he chooses.'¹⁶⁴ But as Gunton has famously objected, it is, perhaps, problematic to construe the act of creation as the making of space and time '*within*' the being of God rather than as pure '*externalization*'. Yet Gunton will also concede that there is a strong element of creation understood as externalization in Jenson's theology. But the question remains as to whether the '*within*' which Jenson employs is the same as Barth's description of a 'temporal analogy' between God's spatiality and the world he has created.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Works of God*, p. 48.

¹⁶³ The use of 'metaphor' is not meant here to deny that reality is being spoken of in these matters. Gunton is continually insistent that metaphors are 'a necessary means of our interaction with the world' (p. 87). Therefore, metaphor should be taken, at least, somewhat literally.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert," p. 87. From Robert W. Jenson, "Aspects of a Doctrine of Creation," in Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁵ Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert," p. 89.

We will remember in all of this that what is at stake is the true otherness-in-relation that maintains both God and world as distinctively themselves, and without succumbing to the modern drive to expel God from the created realm entirely. But similarly, we must protect against the opposite side of the modern paradox which sought to bring God and world into an indistinguishable immanence to one another (pantheism). Interestingly for our overall project, we find that Jenson adopts the place-language of John of Damascus to highlight the God-world relationship which he wishes to illustrate. As Jenson explains;

We must inquire into the relation between God himself and the space he makes for us. *God is his own place*. What then is the relation of God, as his own place, to the space he makes in time for creatures? If he is not to be an absent, deist God, he must be present to creatures in their space. How is that? ¹⁶⁶

For Jenson, the answer to this question is to be found in Thomas Aquinas' proposition that God is present where he is at work, or where his power and agency can be exercised. The creation is then 'a place open to God'.¹⁶⁷

We may find in this a sense of creation as the externalization which Gunton is looking for. Yet Gunton remains suspicious as to whether this conception of the God-world relationship is sufficient to maintain the otherness that is required for personal beings to truly be themselves. Gunton is led to ask; 'How can what is within God...fail to be a part of God?'¹⁶⁸ Indeed the problem is not just Christological, but equally pneumatological, as Gunton finds Jenson's account to be somewhat lacking in both regards. It is in this way that we may find the Trinitarian balance that is needed. As Gunton insist, the humanity of Jesus 'is most satisfactorily articulated where attention is given to his relation to his Father as it is mediated by the Spirit'.¹⁶⁹

How then, in Gunton's estimation, are we to construe the 'spatiality' of both God and world, immanence and transcendence? In what proved to be his final response to Jenson, Gunton states that his 'preference would be to say that the creation takes place within *Christ*, rather than within God *simpliciter*'.¹⁷⁰ Gunton bases his argument concerning this confinement of the spatial metaphor to Christ on Colossians 1:16, which suggests again that all things in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible, have been created through Christ himself. It is then, Christ alone who is 'the place where the relation between God and the world is both realized and understood'.¹⁷¹ But this cannot be maintained without a supporting account of the Holy Spirit's role in this act of mediation between God and world. We must then speak equally of the 'one by whose mediation the Son became incarnate and is made the

¹⁶⁶ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 48. (emphasis added)

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁸ Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert," p. 91.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91-92.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

means of the relating of the creation to God the Father'.¹⁷² As the one who relates the world to the Father through the Son, the Holy Spirit is the omnipresence of God in the world which enables the world to be what it is. The Spirit, as Gunton consistently highlights, is the one who perfects creation, by mediating the multiplicity of material particulars to the Father through the Son.

In summary, we can now say that trinitarian freedom involves the 'roominess' to be oneself, but also the relationality, through Son and Spirit, to be an other-in-relation. Applied to the immanent Trinity, we find that Gunton is very much concerned with attributing God's work to one of the three particular hypostasies, rather than ascribing God's economic activities to the Trinity in a homogeneous or undifferentiated fashion. As Gunton writes; 'We should say, then, that the essence of the being in relation that is the Trinity is the personal space that is received and conferred.'¹⁷³ And because God is intimately involved – economically – in the structures of space and time, he cannot be understood by negative abstraction as solely timeless and spaceless.

Perichoresis implies an ordered but free interrelational self-formation: God is not simply shapeless, a negatively conceived monad, but eternal interpersonal life. There is thus a richness and space in the divine life, in itself and as turning outwards in the creation of the dynamic universe that is relational order in space and time.¹⁷⁴

Certainly we cannot equate space and time with God's being – God is not continuous with space and time – they are instead part of the creation itself. It is in this way that a Trinitarian construal of mediation is so crucial to a doctrine of creation. For without it we have little choice other than what we have seen as the modern dichotomy of pantheism or radical deism.

III. The Creation: Personal and Non-Personal

Now that we have some understanding of what a properly Trinitarian notion of relationality looks like, we must now consider in some detail the shape of what Gunton terms the personal and non-personal creation. Moreover, we must ask the basic ontological question: what kind of being is the *human* person? We have already seen that the modern era had difficulty in fully understanding the significance of personhood, which, according to Gunton, is essentially a theological term. We will also recall that the problem of the 'one' and the 'many' is by no means particular to the modern period, as Greek philosophers equally struggled to navigate between the affirmation of multiplicity or unity, the universal or the particular, in a fashion very similar to the moderns and their postmodern offspring. This split-personality has also made its way into the modern struggle to understand the nature of

¹⁷² Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 142.

¹⁷³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 164.

persons, as it trades upon varying views of alienating individualism (too much space) or homogenizing collectivism (too little space).

But as we have already seen, we have at the very heart of the doctrine of the Trinity an extremely useful and important concept of the person. Useful because it is through this concept that we are able to formulate a Trinitarian understanding of how it is that others participate in our very being. As persons we are empowered by others to be distinctively ourselves; we are in fact, *enabled* by others through relationality. We have already spoken of the three *persona* of the Trinity where we learned that being (Trinitarian ontology) is a relational achievement found even at the very heart of the Godhead. The achievement of the Cappadocians, however, extends beyond the inner-being of the Trinitarian *persona* alone – extending in a limited and carefully qualified sense – to those creatures made in the image of God. We will now seek to elucidate Gunton’s theological understanding of the creation, taking in turn the human/personal sphere and then the non-human/non-personal realm of the remainder of creation. Again, our overall concern is to begin to uncover the way in which Gunton relates these realms to one another in and through space and time, only to continue this project in chapter 3.

The Personal: Humanity in the Imago Dei

Theologians have long struggled to understand human ‘exceptionalism’ but particularly as it has been applied to the doctrine of the image of God. As we reviewed earlier in the chapter, the traditional response – if any single tradition can be identified – has been to locate the image in the human capacity to reason, and we have reviewed some of the pitfalls to such a position. It is important, however, that we follow Gunton in seeking to locate what is at the heart of this line of inquiry. For him there are two central concerns or lines of questioning that are at work here. First, by questioning the role of the *imago dei* we are seeking to understand our special relationship, as humans, with God the Creator. And secondly – second, both ontologically and methodologically – we find that questioning the *imago dei* is also an attempt to give expression to what it is that differentiates humans from the multiplicity of nonhuman creatures, both organic and inorganic, natural and artificial.¹⁷⁵

We see then, for Gunton the question concerning the relationship of human persons to God is ontologically determinative and prior to the secondary human relationship with both human and nonhuman creation. This is because, as Gunton explains, in the image of God we are not dealing with a single characteristic or an internal quality of the human being, but rather with an overriding ontology. Moreover, it is God’s Trinitarian being – as outlined above – that is the determining factor of this creaturely ontology. As Gunton argues:

¹⁷⁵ Gunton gives very little, if any, attention to what we might describe as ‘artificial’ or technological entities. We will return to this omission in chapter three.

To be made in the image of God is to be endowed with a particular kind of personal reality. To be a person is to be created in the image of God: that is the heart of the matter. If God is a communion of persons inseparably related, then surely...it is in our relatedness to others that our human being consists.¹⁷⁶

Gunton makes it clear that the relationality that results in human personhood finds its shape in a 'double orientation'. We are persons first because of our relationship to God, and secondly, because of our relationship with the remainder of creation – what he calls the 'horizontal' relations. But as we will discover, Gunton will also insist that among 'horizontal' relationships, human to human relationality is ontologically and methodologically prior to human relationships with the nonhuman creation. We may now identify something of a hierarchy of relationships develop in Gunton's theological anthropology. The first and privileged relationship belongs to the 'vertical' human-God relationship, secondly the 'horizontal' human-human relationship (the social), and finally the human-nonhuman relationship. We now take each of these relationships in turn.

Christology of Personhood

As we have already seen, for Gunton the metaphor of *space* sits at the very heart of his understanding of the God-world relationship. There must, he insists, be sufficient space amongst all relationships, both vertical and horizontal, if human personhood is to flourish freely. We have already reviewed something of the relational space that exists between God and the world in Gunton's trinitarian theology. But now we must ask how this space develops in relation to the human person specifically. As we will recall, the Moderns lamented the absolute willing of the human person by an omnipotent Creator, for this appeared to be an offence to human freedom – it collapsed the *space* between Creator and creature into an immanence which denied personal particularity. Yet as Gunton will continually insist, the space between humans and God should be understood as distinct but always in dynamic relation. Once again, this spatially mediated relationality takes place through God's 'two hands', the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, 'to be in the image of God', Gunton argues, 'is to be created through the Son, who is the archetypal bearer of the image'.¹⁷⁷ The image of God is instilled not through an approximate sharing of space that erases otherness, but rather through being conformed to the person of Christ through the Spirit – 'the creator of community'. We are then sustained in our unique humanity by the 'creating and redeeming agency of the Triune God'.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, personhood is always to be understood as a distinctly Triune achievement.

¹⁷⁶ Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology" p. 58.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

What is certain is that this does not exhaust all that must be said of the ‘vertical’ relations which constitute human persons in our unique particularity. The Christian confession concerning the freedom of particular human persons from the determinism of God is constantly problematic. Therefore, it is not enough to rely simply on spatial metaphors to allay modern fears concerning the freedom of persons. If we are to continue to confess, as we must, that it is our relationship with God which sustains us in our particular being, then something more must be said concerning human sin and human freedom.

The doctrine of sin teaches that each and every person who bears the image of God is entrapped in a ‘network of disrupted relations’ with God and the world ‘so that as a matter of fact apart from redemption, they are able to replicate only the patterns of disorder’.¹⁷⁹ And as Gunton argues, it is by way of this disrupted relationship with God from whom our being is given, that we are directed to consider the past, present, and future of our sinful nature.

In *Christ and Creation*, Gunton highlights the importance of understanding the ‘three tenses’ of God’s preservation and conservation of our personal being. That is to say, we are preserved and conserved in our freedom in spite of our sinful leanings towards what Barth famously described as ‘nothingness’. The doctrine of original sin teaches that there is a past to human rebellion against the Creator through which we have been graciously preserved – the past tense. Similarly, we know that we are presently in rebellion yet sustained in our being through a graceful and personal relationship with God – the present tense. And finally, we understand that our personal being, and the world as a whole, is destined for perfection and completeness in Christ – the future or eschatological tense. Thus to be a creature created in the image of God, is to be directed towards a future perfection in Christ through the power of the Spirit.¹⁸⁰

In light of this we find that the person of Christ is determinative of our creaturely being, and that our particular personhood is directed towards a future perfection *in* Christ. In this sense, personhood is something of an eschatological category. We will truly be persons only when God becomes all in all. Importantly, this highlights the idea that the image of God is not a static quality, but rather, a dynamic happening that takes place through time. Upon this understanding our final realization as persons is always before us.

Gunton will also place Christ at the very center of a theological anthropology, because Christ is the one in whom we see a profound intersection of the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ relations. ‘He is indeed part of the created order, and although his humanity is that of the Son, it is no less than ours part of the general network of relationality of created being.’¹⁸¹ What must be made explicit on these points is that Gunton clearly argues that

¹⁷⁹ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

¹⁸¹ Gunton, *Ibid.*, p. 52.

human freedom, even the freedom found in Christ's human nature, is always a relational achievement empowered by the Holy Spirit. The imaging of God is then an inherently Triune act: 'the Son images the Father as through the Spirit'.¹⁸²

We are then deeply misguided in seeking to locate human (personal) freedom in some kind of pre-given internal human quality. This is grounded in the realization that as the true image of God, Christ accepts and takes on his freedom as a gift of the Spirit. Therefore, Gunton understands that

Freedom is not an absolute, but something exercised in relation to other persons, and that means in the first instance that it is the gift of the Spirit who is God over against us, God in personal otherness enabling us to be free. It is in our relatedness that we are free or not....¹⁸³

We find in this a strong argument against the many forms of modern determinism that have proven so alienating. Yet human freedom is not to be found in the 'vertical' relation alone, but also in the 'horizontal' relations which make up human community – that is, the *social* sphere.

From Persons to Sociality

As we have already indicated, 'social' relationality is the first of the two types of 'horizontal' relations which Gunton takes into consideration. Once again, we see that for Gunton human community takes its ontological shape – as a communion of persons created in the image of God – analogically from the being of the Triune God. Here Gunton makes clear that he is not interested in a 'social theory' of the Trinity, for these tend to suggest 'three almost independent deities'.¹⁸⁴ Rather, Gunton finds continuity between the Trinitarian ontology of relationally achieved being and the constitution of human sociality. As Gunton writes:

The chief affirmation to be made here is that if persons are, like the persons of the Trinity and by virtue of their creation in the image of God, *hypostases*, concrete and particular, then their particularity too is central to their being. It is not an unfortunate accident but our glory that we are other: each unique and different. The destruction of forces making for homogeneity can be achieved by finding ways of allowing persons to be particular, particular in relation indeed, but made by that very relationality unique and free.¹⁸⁵

In light of our creaturely constitution as beings created in the image of God, human persons are inherently and ontologically social beings. Like Adam, we are unable to be fully ourselves without a social communion with like others. 'It is only when he can rejoice in the fellowship

¹⁸² Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 101.

¹⁸³ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 55.

¹⁸⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 214.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

of one who is a true other-in-relation that he is able to transcend the merely *individual* state that is a denial of human fullness.¹⁸⁶

Gunton criticizes all of the many historical concepts of a sociality that consist of an artificial contract that floats above the ontologically prior individual. Thinkers such as Kant, Hobbes, Lock, and Nietzsche, all held to a view of sociality as something artificially contracted amongst individuals in the interest of maintaining peace and order. Hegel represents something of a watershed in his holding to a view of sociality as an intrinsic part of being human. However, Hegel's concept of the social tends to follow the same path as the later Marxist conception of the social, both tending to collapse into a homogenization of the individual.¹⁸⁷

Again, Gunton turns briefly to the work of Coleridge in his effort to construct a concept of sociality that sees relationality as intrinsic to human being and freedom, yet maintains the space that is necessary if persons are to remain other. Coleridge categorized the social, or sociality, as partaking in his notion of *idea* – a category which he invoked to capture the commerce which exists between the human mind and reality. However, we should not mistake the *idea* for static structures of the mind like the Kantian transcendental. The Coleridgian *idea* is far more dynamic as it seeks to embrace the ontological interaction of both the One and the many. Moreover, as is well known, for Coleridge the Trinity was the 'idea of ideas' from which all other ideas were to emanate.¹⁸⁸ For Gunton's part, this notion of *idea* is a far superior way of understanding sociality than is the Enlightenment's *a priori* social contract. If we understand sociality to be something like the Coleridgian *idea*, then we are close to seeing sociality, not as a contract, but as a 'historic reality' which favors the understanding that ecclesiology is the basis of human being. This observation will lead Gunton into the bold claim that 'social being, of the kind embodied in *ecclesia*, is the deepest expression of human reality'.¹⁸⁹

It is now clear that for Gunton sociality takes its distinct form, not from some legalistic notion of social contract that is *added* to human personhood, but from an ontology that is most fully realized in ecclesial community – the body of Christ – that is formed through covenant. For Gunton, the Biblical concept of 'covenant' encapsulates 'the calling of the human race into free and joyful partnership with God, and so with each other.'¹⁹⁰

Importantly for our overall purpose in this study, we may now assess Gunton's theological understanding of sociality as one which almost entirely excludes nonhuman participation. We will have much more to say on this in chapter 3, but let us conclude for now

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 221-222.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

with a brief review of Gunton's disagreement with Daniel Hardy. In responding to Hardy's article "Created and Redeemed Sociality" he further illustrates this distaste for theologies which consider nonhuman or *natural* participation in sociality. For Hardy, sociality is more than a Coleridgian *idea*, but is rather, a 'trinitarian transcendental' that must be 'traced to the Logos of God operative in creation. This divine ordering', according to Hardy, 'is what ultimately implants in the human condition the "being-with" which is natural to it.' What is unique in Hardy's theological understanding of sociality is his insistence that sociality not be limited to the Church community alone. Unlike Bonhoeffer and Forsyth before him, Hardy argues that sociality as a transcendental 'should be traced to the truth of God *present in creation*.'¹⁹¹ On this view, sociality is understood to be a universal and *natural* mark of all humanity. This further suggests that sociality 'pertains not just to redeemed being – being in the church – but to created being as a whole.'¹⁹² For Gunton this simply will not do, for it threatens to collapse or submerge the realm of the personal (society) into the realm of the nonpersonal (nature) in such a way as to risk ontological continuity between the two realms. Gunton will further argue that Hardy's doctrine of transcendental sociality would be better applied to the realm of the *personal* – human and divine – alone. Thus we may summarize Gunton's understanding of the cosmos as consisting of the human realm that is personal and social, but most fully when realized within the church community. But secondly, the cosmos also consists of the 'natural order' which is to be understood as ontologically distinct from the personal and social spheres.

The Non-Personal: Nature

We now take up the task of outlining Gunton's characterization of the nonhuman creation, but particularly in terms of four specific categories: non-personal, non-social, contingent, and relational (or perichoretic). By unraveling these four categories we will also be interested in determining Gunton's understanding of the dynamic commerce which exists between human and the nonhuman creation.¹⁹³ Although the two realms of personal (humanity) and non-personal (non-humanity) are to be ontologically distinguished, for Gunton, there must be something said of the important relations which exist between humans and their 'environments'. Indeed, he will often insist that 'we are not human apart from our relation with the non-personal world'.¹⁹⁴ Along these lines we may further see that the

¹⁹¹ Hardy, "Created and Redeemed Sociality," in *On Being The Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 42. (emphasis added)

¹⁹² Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 222.

¹⁹³ In chapter 3 we give this topic a more full treatment in our comparison between Gunton and Latour's approach to the issue.

¹⁹⁴ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 115.

pronounced distinction which Gunton seeks to preserve between God and world, immanence and transcendence, can similarly be found in his radical distinction between *personal* humanity and *non-personal* nature. For him there is much at stake as we attempt to draw ontological lines between persons and non-persons. The modern era, as we have already seen, radically alienated persons from the 'natural world' by seeing the human as a *mind* or *will* that had to jump an epistemological void in order to access the world 'out there'. Later modern thinkers began to propose a radical identification with the 'natural' which essentially destroyed personal particularity – as in some breeds of Deep Ecology and naturalism. Thus we must now ask the question; where and how do we draw the ontological lines between personal and non-personal being?

For Gunton, the criterion which must be met for membership in the realm of persons is rather clear-cut. We will remember that he was one of the first to make the radical claim that the term 'person' is at its most basic level a distinctly theological category. Moreover, it is a primitive concept derived from the Trinitarian being of God, and is closely associated with the terms; relation, otherness, and freedom. Now we must ask to what degree Gunton is willing to extend these properties or characteristics to nonhuman entities. We begin by detailing what makes persons different from nonhumans, and we will conclude with some of their important continuities.

First, we may indicate that humans and the Trinitarian hypostasis (or persons) express personhood in 'their ability to transcend themselves, to think and act beyond the present and the place in which they are set.'¹⁹⁵ In Gunton's estimation, this simply cannot be said of the nonhuman realm. In chapter three, we will see that this is why Gunton will limit the possession of the Spirit to the personal realm alone. But for now we may compound these thoughts by saying something of the passivity of the nonhuman creation which legitimizes human 'dominion' over the nonhuman creation. Gunton's discussion of dominion in relation to the nonhuman realm has more to do with eschatological dependence than it does the stronger forms of human anthropocentrism of which thinkers like Lynn White have been so critical. Instead, Gunton argues that the non-personal realm is ontologically dependant upon the realm of persons – 'the world is what it is by virtue of its relation to those who bear the image of God.'¹⁹⁶ The non-personal realm is then found by Gunton to be fully subordinate to the realm of persons. This does not, however, mean that the non-personal realm is completely passive in the face of human intentionality and agency. But Gunton is far from clear as to what kind – if any – agency he is willing to extend to (non-personal) nonhumans. We shall have more to say on this topic in chapter three.

¹⁹⁵ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Secondly, we may say for Gunton that the nonhuman, and thereby non-personal realm, does not participate in what he has deemed *sociality*. This is to say that personal entities 'are social beings, so that of both God and man it must be said that they have their being in their personal relatedness: their free relation-in-otherness.'¹⁹⁷ But this cannot be said of the non-personal being of nonhuman entities. To be social, is for Gunton, to be capable of expressing the characteristics of love and freedom. Read otherwise, to be social is to carry the marks of human and divine agency. Therefore, we may only say of the universe as a whole that it is characterized by *relationality*, but not by *sociality*.

What then might we be able to say of non-personal – nonhuman – relationality? First, Gunton is clear that we should be able to speak, by analogy, of a universal *perichoresis* at work in and through the non-personal creation as well as the personal. 'Everything in the universe', Gunton insists, 'is what it is by virtue of its relatedness to everything else.'¹⁹⁸ Although he does not detail the finer points of the argument – like many philosophers are more concerned to do – Gunton argues that all things, both personal and non-personal, are perichoretically bound up in the being of all other things. As Gunton writes; 'The human is like the non-human in being spatio-temporally particular, while it is also continuous with it in being bound up perichoretically with all being.'¹⁹⁹ But the kind of relationality which perichoresis implies is one which works to constitute entities in their own particular being. Once again, this is what Gunton has determined analogically – and imperfectly – from the Trinitarian being of God who is himself constituted through the internal *taxis* of the divine hypostasis.

If we are to preserve relationality from deteriorating into a kind of particularity-destroying homogeneity or pantheism, we must speak equally of ontological *otherness*. As we reviewed earlier; all created being enjoys some measure of ontological distinction from the Creator. Gunton explains that the 'world's otherness from God is part of its space to be itself, to be finite and not divine'.²⁰⁰ In the realm of personal beings Gunton refers to this quality as freedom – *personal freedom* or *personal space*. And to be sure, non-personal beings enjoy a space or otherness of their own, but this is of a subtly different quality than that of personal beings. Along these lines Gunton argues that the

concept of freedom is transmuted into contingency when we move from the personal to the non-personal sphere...It means that the world does not *have* to be what or as it is. It is not the same as freedom, but is rather the way of speaking of the distinctive form of being of the non-personal created world.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁰⁰ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 111.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 148-149.

The point to be drawn from this is that we are to find a qualitative difference between personal freedom and non-personal contingency. While human persons are created in the image of God – and thereby are enabled to praise the creator – non-persons are not made in this image, and are therefore characterized as contingent.

Non-personal entities are, like personal beings, perichoretically enabled to relate to other beings and still retain their own particularity. But as Gunton argues, this relationality should not be conceived as *personal freedom* because the non-personal being is unable to realize its own destiny apart from those human persons created in the image of God.²⁰² Moreover, by describing non-personal otherness as contingency rather than freedom, he intends to indicate that the nonhuman creation – the world – could have been created differently. In other words there is nothing which bound the creator to create all of reality in the manner which the sciences now struggle to understand. This effectively avoids any hints of necessity in the created order. But the contingency of the non-personal realm goes even further for Gunton, who also finds ‘inherent contingencies’ within the nonhuman creation to this very day. Drawing on the concepts germane to chaos theory, Gunton argues that the world is essentially chaotic yet altogether stable. The chaos which is inherent to the created order, is for Gunton, further proof that the ‘universe is not only contingent – free in its own way; but the contingency operates so as to be creative’.²⁰³ In sum, non-personal – particular – entities enjoy a kind of freedom that allows them to remain uniquely themselves, but this is of a distinctly different quality than the freedom enjoyed by persons. Non-personal beings are dependent upon human persons, created in the image of God, to become fully what they were intended to be. As Gunton indicates, this is why the creation ‘awaits with eager longing the revealing of the children of God (Romans 8.19)’.²⁰⁴

To conclude this section we would do well to indicate some of the continuities between persons and the non-personal realm. It is important that we notice that both persons and non-persons, humans and nonhumans, are particulars constituted and preserved through the many and various relationships in which they find their own particular being. In fact, it is on this account that Gunton will propose *relationality* as a kind of transcendental – a universal mark of all being – since we are now free to maintain that ‘all created people and things are marked by their coming and returning to the God who is himself...a being in relation’.²⁰⁵

Both persons and things are hypostatic in the sense of being substantial particulars, and rendered such by the patterns of relations that constitute them what they distinctively are: with God in the first instance and with other temporally and spatially related particulars in the second. It is thus that hypostasis, meaning

²⁰² Ibid., p. 111.

²⁰³ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 153.

²⁰⁴ Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology" p. 56.

²⁰⁵ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 229.

substantial particular, variously taking shape as person and thing and constituted relationally, acquires the status of a kind of transcendental.²⁰⁶

And as we will review in greater detail in chapter 3, Gunton finds that it is the particularizing work of the Spirit that maintains persons and non-persons in their ontological difference.

Difference, is for Gunton, always to be conceived in a relational trinitarian fashion.

Difference is a dynamic act of the Creator, who himself embodies both otherness and relation as three distinct hypostasis, who find their own personal being *within* their dynamic loving relationality.

Conclusion

As a theologian very much concerned with bringing the Christian Gospel to bear on our contemporary Western cultural climate, Colin Gunton has done much to re-establish the significance of theology throughout the modern university. Although his historical analysis has come under some important criticisms, his ability to draw attention to the possibility of a causal relationship between insufficiently Trinitarian theologies of creation and the alienating and homogenizing thrust of modernity, has greatly strengthened the call for a reengagement of the Church with its cultural context. Moreover, it has also served to refocus attention on the Christian doctrine of creation in such a way as to remain faithful to the orthodox shape of the tradition, while avoiding the ultimately flawed late-modern philosophies of immanence. These are, after all, merely symptoms (or reactions to) a doctrine of creation that had lost its Trinitarian shape. From Gunton we have also learned to revisit the wisdom of the early Fathers with a renewed understanding that they were vexed by the same problems that now occupy the contemporary Church. And if we are to find a balance between eternity and time, God and world, persons and things, as well as theologies from above and below, then we might do well to follow the Fathers and seek out the Trinitarian and relational shape of all things.

We will return to Gunton's trinitarian theology of creation and culture in chapter 3. There we will be concerned to compare his overall diagnosis of modern disengagement and fragmentation with that of Bruno Latour, as well as compare their respective responses or prescriptions for these modern failures. But more importantly, we will seek to evaluate whether Gunton has been able to fulfill what he declared to be one of the most pressing needs of our culture today – namely, the need to understand how we humans are 'internally related to the rest of the world'.²⁰⁷ Further, we will ask whether Gunton has been able to effectively

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 203.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

relate the realms of nature, society, and God in the fully Trinitarian fashion which he was so keen to achieve.

Chapter 2

Bruno Latour's Nonmodernism: Science Studies and the Socialized Nonhuman

We ain't sure where you stand, you ain't machines and you ain't land. And the plants and the animals they are land. And the plants and the animals eat each other.¹

Modest Mouse, *Building Something Out of Nothing*

Introduction

How is it that *things* have become so difficult to define in relation to *people*? Why must we always define humanity in strict opposition to non-humanity? How is it that there has now developed such a wide rift between the human sciences and natural sciences? And how could we ever have reached a point where one can ask, in all seriousness: 'How are we to access, and speak truthfully, of the world *out there*'? I believe the epigraph to this chapter accurately captures our current climate of hesitation in deciding where to draw the boundaries between the human and non-human realms, or more importantly, whether boundaries should be drawn at all. This overall uneasiness has now saturated (post)modern art, and has also become the center of focus for one little known discipline within the academy. 'Science studies', as the field has come to be known, incorporates all of these questions, and more, into its small but growing corpus of 'hybridized' studies. Standing in the middle of an intellectual storm dubbed the 'science wars,' science studies has sought to retrace our steps in order to discover the point where humans attempted to step 'outside' of the world, severing themselves from it, in order to obtain absolute and unmediated certainty of what it contained. More importantly, science studies seeks to describe exactly what it is that has been lost as we endeavored to make what now appears to have been an impossible leap.

Born in 1947 in Beaune, France, Bruno Latour has grown to become a global leader in the field of science studies. His career has also closely reflected the interdisciplinary shape of the field he now calls his own. Interestingly for our present study, Latour began his academic career with university studies at Dijon in the fields of philosophy and theology. Here and into his postgraduate studies, Latour would focus on Biblical hermeneutics, but particularly the theology and writings of the often polemical (and socialist) Catholic theologian Charles Péguy (1873-1914). Latour published his first professional article on Péguy in 1973 and would later receive his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Tours with a thesis titled *Exégèse et Ontology: une analyse des textes de resurrection*, in 1975. Although he began his career with something of an interest in philosophical theology,

¹ Modest Mouse, *Building Something Out of Nothing*, (Up Records, 1999).

he has since largely left this area of inquiry behind opting instead to focus his philosophical training on the many fields which have fed into the transdisciplinary field of science studies; sociology, anthropology of science, and history to name just a few.²

This change of direction was likely instigated by a stint of military service in the mid 1970's which sent Latour to the Ivory Coast. It was here that he was submerged in ethnographic studies for the French government, who had charged him with the task of critically analyzing French methods of industrial education in the former colony. This study would serve as Latour's introduction into the overlapping constellations of social scientific methodology, field studies, international politics, and the technological practice of science. For Latour, and the field of science studies as a whole, these early studies would result in an altogether new and exciting 'ethnographic' or 'anthropological' style of studying scientists and engineers going about their work. Moreover, it would be this new 'style' of studying scientists and engineers 'in action' that would initially bring Latour into international recognition. In the mid-1970's, Latour spent nearly two years visiting the Salk Institute, a molecular biology laboratory in San Diego's growing biotech sector. It was there that Latour, with very little scientific training of his own, set out to simply observe and meticulously record the activities of scientists steeped in the process of 'discovery', or as Latour would come to argue, the 'production' of facts. Through an interesting stroke of luck, Latour happened to be studying at the Salk Institute at the same time as fellow Dijon-born scientist, Roger Guillemin, who was there conducting his research into peptide hormones of the brain. Guillemin's research, along with Andrew Schally, would subsequently receive a Nobel Prize in 1977 for their ground breaking work at the Salk Institute. In 1979 Latour and Steve Woolgar published their observations of the workings of the Salk laboratory in their groundbreaking book *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*.³ The intention for this project, as Latour explains, was to 'become part of a laboratory, to follow closely the intimate processes of scientific work, while at the same time to remain an 'inside' outside observer, a kind of anthropological probe to study a scientific 'culture' — to follow in

² In a recent lecture at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Latour publicly explained that he had been raised Catholic but now considered himself to be 'not particularly pious'. It is clear that he remains interested in religious matters, but I do not believe, judging from this lecture and other writings, that he would consider himself a practicing Christian or a 'believer' in the generic sense. Lecture titled: *Another Take on the Science and Religion Debate*, Templeton Series on Science, Religion and Human Experience, UCSB, (May, 2002).

³ In its original French publication in 1979 the book carried the words 'social construction' in its subtitle. Subsequent criticism and debate pressed Latour to drop the term 'social' from the subtitle for its first English translation in 1986. This proved to be the last time that Latour would use the term 'social construction' in any of his work, and he maintains to this day that his usage of the term was completely misunderstood. To be certain, Latour is, on the whole, completely opposed to the notion of 'social construction' in its common (and seemingly ubiquitous) usage.

every detail what the scientists do and how and what they think.’⁴ At the time, this type of methodology was far outside the norm of traditional social scientific study, as it seemed to many observers of the time that the natural sciences were fundamentally immune to *sociological* interrogation or study. Yet the new methodological formula proved quite successful as the book initiated a new direction for the field of science studies, or the ‘sociology of science’ as the field was more commonly known at the time. Moreover, as many observers have commented with varying degrees of joy or dismay, ‘Latour also inspired a different *style* in sociology of science, a style that might be described as elusive, self-conscious, and literary.’⁵

The 1980’s signaled yet another turn in Latour’s career as he began to focus more intently on the technological practices of scientific research as well as its important historical and philosophical dimensions. This was also the decade of Latour’s widespread introduction to English readers as the revised version of *Laboratory Life* was translated and republished in 1986 to a wide readership in the UK and North America. One year later Latour would publish his first major interaction with distinctly philosophical issues concerning the sciences with his book *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (1987). Then in 1988 Latour introduced his first major historical study of scientific practice with the publication of *The Pasteurization of France*, which was originally published in France in 1984. It was these three books in their English translation which would begin to cement Latour’s influence amongst the Anglo-American academy. But these books also signaled an even more pronounced deviation of the ‘French School’⁶ from the standing field of the sociology of science which had been established by the ‘Edinburgh School’ in the mid 1970’s. This new deviation, however, was not without its controversy as we will review in more detail later in the chapter.

In the 1990’s Latour’s project took an even greater turn towards the investigation of philosophical concerns germane to the study of nature and society as a whole. With the publication of *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour began to apply the discoveries of his small field of science studies to a more sweeping historical and philosophical interpretation of modern and postmodern thought. As we will illustrate throughout this chapter, it was this book which began Latour’s project of evaluating the new relationship between nature and society which he and his colleagues ‘stumbled upon’ through their detailed ethnographic studies of scientists and engineers at work. In 1996 Latour published

⁴ Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, 2nd (New York: Sage, 1979; Princeton, 1986), p. 12.

⁵ Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 133.

⁶ Latour’s ‘school’ is sometimes referred to as the ‘French,’ ‘Paris,’ or ‘Continental’ school and often includes the work of several others including, but not exclusive to Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, Michel Callon and Michel Serres.

Aramis, or the Love of Technology, which presented – in an unorthodox and perhaps experimental style – a detailed study of a failed Parisian attempt to build a highly computerized public transportation system. This book may be read as a case study for the philosophical ideas which Latour had outlined in *We Have Never Been Modern* by seeking to unravel the often tangled webs of relations between human societies and their nonhuman technological creations. In *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (1999), Latour presents what is to this date his most systematized attempt to make explicit his own philosophical and methodological commitments within the field of science studies. This study is also full of interesting case studies and philosophical discussion directed towards correcting many of the important, and widespread, misconceptions concerning the position of the French School. In a more recent major work, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (2004), Latour illustrates his understanding of how nature and society – and therefore science and politics – may be reconfigured in the wake of modernity and postmodernity's demise. As will soon become clear, the balance of this and later chapters will focus primarily on Latour's more recent work from 1990 onwards, due in large part to their more philosophical and historical trajectory than his earlier work.⁷ In this thesis we are primarily concerned to review and critically appropriate Latour's fascinating vision of the relationship between nature and culture, humans and nonhumans, which has been the central mark of these more recent works.

Outside of his prolific publishing career it is worth noting that in 1982 Latour took up the position of professor of sociology at the Centre de sociologie de l'Innovation at the Ecole nationale supérieure des mines in Paris, where he remains to this day. He has also taken several visiting professorships at institutions such as the University of California at San Diego, the London School of Economics, as well as Harvard University's history of science department. Included in his many awards and recognitions is an honorary doctorate awarded by the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1996. Most recently he has also begun to delve into the philosophical aspects of artistic and architectural representation. In this vein he has served as the co-curator for two recent art/architectural exhibits, and has been the contributing editor for one of the exhibit's companion volume titled *Iconoclash*.⁸ Today Latour enjoys a world-wide readership with several of his books having now been translated into more than 20 languages.

⁷ It is also worth noting that Latour's work in the 1990's was directed towards reworking his studies from the 70's and 80's so as to be made more philosophically rigorous and less susceptible to misunderstanding by his critics.

⁸ *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image-Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, was an international exhibit opened for three months starting in May of 2002, in Karlsruhe, Germany, and was hosted by ZKM (Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe) under the direction of Peter Weibel. Latour served as contributing editor for the companion volume of the same name which contained both pictures and accompanying essays from the exhibit. More recently he has been co-curator with Peter Weibel for an exhibition titled *Making Things Public – Atmospheres of Democracy*, which was also hosted by ZKM Karlsruhe, on the 19th of March, 2005. The companion volume to this exhibition is currently in-press.

Although his writings have received world-wide recognition, it is a strange twist of fortune that Latour's work has found a greater welcoming in English speaking countries rather than his native France. His eager acceptance in the United Kingdom and North America has led Latour to translate all of his major works, and many of his shorter articles into English, and has now begun to publish many of his more recent works exclusively in English.

We will now attempt to outline the major currents of argumentation which may be found running through Latour's wide-ranging body of work.⁹ The outline of this chapter will closely reflect that of the preceding chapter on Colin Gunton with but one exception; here we will begin with an illustration of Latour's place within the sometimes difficult to grasp field of science studies and its overall history. Secondly, and rejoining the template of the last chapter, we will first review Latour's critical assessment of modernity and its failed 'Constitution'. In the second half of the chapter we will outline Latour's constructive response to modernity and its radical shortcomings. As we will see, Latour has given the name of 'nonmodernism' to his constructive program.

I. Latour and the Field of Science Studies

The Shape of Recent Eco-Political Thought in France

In the interest of more fully understanding Latour's overall project, we may now take a moment to consider the unique national context of which his work is representative. Long sidelined amongst Anglo-Saxon 'green' theorists for its supposedly Cartesian character, French eco-political thought has carried a much deeper and far more unique trajectory than the English-speaking academy has often been willing to recognize. In a recent volume titled *Divided Natures: French Contributions to Political Ecology*, Kerry H. Whiteside has made an altogether compelling evaluation of French 'ecologisms', as he calls them, and has done much to outline the genuinely unique characteristics shared amongst French eco-political theorists. Thus, in our effort to better understand the French context of Latour's work, we may now follow Whiteside by delineating three of the commonly shared characteristics of French ecologism which serve to clearly differentiate it from that of the mainstream of Anglo-Saxon ecologism.

The first and perhaps most striking difference between French-speaking and English-speaking ecologisms may be located in the distinctly French affinity for 'decentered' eco-

⁹ The task of attempting to systematize Latour's work is rather difficult considering his own characterization of his rather 'Continental' writing style: 'I produce books, not a philosophy. Every book I am involved with is a work of writing that has its own categories and its own makeup. I cannot transform all of these books into a unified field of thought that would remain stable over time and of which one book would simply be coherent manifestations.' Robert Crease, et. al., "Interview with Bruno Latour," in *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality*, Don Ihde and Evan Selinger (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 19.

political thought. For at the very heart of the more recent French contributions to political ecology is a distinct problematization of our received notions of ‘nature’ and ‘society’ or ‘nature’ and ‘humanity’. Where Anglo-Saxon theorists have tended to begin their theorization with a ‘centered’, ‘reified’, or even ‘dualistic’ understanding of what constitutes ‘humanity’ and ‘nature’, the French approach has often been to understand these two realms as ‘noncentered’ and more thoroughly intertwined or hybridized. To be certain, Latour’s own brand of science studies is very much within this ‘decentered’ French tradition.

The reason for this divergence in approach, according to Whiteside, has centrally to do with what we might call the differing ‘environmental histories’ of the two cultures. In the Anglo-Saxon world, but particularly in the United States, Canada, and Australia, ‘green theory’ began with a rise in public alarm at the rapidly disappearing ‘wilderness’ and was soon followed by a bifurcation of the eco-debate into the two competing philosophical camps of ‘preservationism’ and ‘conservationism’. Unique to the Anglo-Saxon experience was this encounter with a seemingly un-humanized landscape which compelled preservationist sentiments to keep these areas free of human impact. Thus, as Whiteside illustrates, English-speaking ecologisms developed in such a way that ‘humanity’ and ‘nature’ were more fully ‘centered’ as two distinct ontological realms. The outgrowth of this early ontological commitment, or ‘centering’, may be clearly seen in the Anglo-Saxon affinity for focusing eco-political discussion on the question of *value* and *inherent worth*. Having left the categories of humanity and nature ‘centered’ and unproblematized, Anglo-Saxon ecologisms have been consumed with drawing the distinction between anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric ecologisms, and have therefore been ultimately consumed with the location value or worth – either in the ‘human’ or ‘natural’ realm. ‘Centered theories’, as Whiteside explains, ‘ground environmental values in an entity – the human subject or nature – with a distinct and stable identity.’¹⁰ The problematic outgrowth of this centered approach to ecologism, common in the English-speaking academy, is that ‘many green thinkers regard the locus of value, not the *identity* of humanity or nature, as what is most problematic for environmental ethics.’¹¹ Moreover, ‘neither side makes reflection on the conceptual interdependency of humanity and nature the focus of its philosophical project. We humans are one thing; nature is another.’¹²

In modern France the encounter with ‘nature’ has been of a very different sort than that of the English-speaking ‘New World’. Where in the Anglo-Saxon experience

¹⁰ Kerry H. Whiteside, *Divided Natures: French Contributions to Political Ecology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002) p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71. (emphasis added)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

'wilderness' – or landscapes which have not yet seen high levels human domination¹³ – were the central controlling factor in the development of a 'centered' ecologism, the French ecological mindset developed in an already anciently humanized landscape. Thus, as Whiteside points out, 'green thinkers' in France have never been occupied with the preservation of 'wilderness' idea popular amongst the Anglo-Saxon, and have instead taken 'great pride in the beauty of their much-reworked countryside.'¹⁴ For Whiteside, this difference in the human/nature relationship becomes the central point of explanation for the differing directions of French and Anglo-Saxon ecologies – *decentered* and *centered* respectively. In the French 'culture where few hold up wilderness as quintessence of nature...there is less temptation to dichotomize the human and the natural' in the fashion of the Anglo-Saxon world.¹⁵ Instead of focusing the discussion on the 'centers' of anthropocentrism or nonanthropocentrism, the French have turned their attention towards understanding the complex of processes which serve to link a *decentered* 'humanity' and 'nature'.

In addition to the French affinity for a decentered epistemology and ontology, Whiteside has also illustrated that there is a shared 'anthropological moment' amongst the French ecologies of Edgar Morin, Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, Jean-Paul Deléage, Denis Duclos, and that of Serge Moscovici. As Whiteside explains, this anthropological moment takes place as the 'theorist temporarily suspends belief in the truth of scientifically established information in order to consider our knowledge of nature as a *human* phenomenon'.¹⁶ The point, however, is not to merely debunk scientific claims to have harnessed reality in the name of 'social construction' or 'anti-realism'. Instead, the anthropological moment inherent to these decentered views of scientific practice serves to further reinforce the understanding that 'nature' is a highly contested product of knowledge-building. Thus the anthropological moment allows for the rather mundane (and human) routine of the actual scientific research process to become part of the overall scientific story. We will find this distinctly French 'anthropological moment' clearly expressed throughout Latour's own science studies, but particularly in his 'generalized principle of symmetry' and his 'parliament of things' which we review more fully in section VI of this chapter.

Whiteside has also illustrated the strong genetic lineage which is claimed amongst the majority of these French ecologies with the wider currents of *humanism*. Concerned that English-speaking (centered) theorists will too quickly confound 'humanism' with stronger

¹³ I am aware that the concept or idea of 'wilderness', as it has captivated the Anglo-Saxon world, is itself highly problematic and thoroughly contested. See for instance William Cronon's fascinating study "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," chap. in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

¹⁴ Whiteside, *Divided Natures*, p. 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

forms of anthropocentrism – like the ‘humanisms’ of Descartes, Bacon and Kant – Whiteside is at pains to make clear that the two should be clearly distinguished, as there are important distinctions to be drawn between the differing varieties of humanism. In the context of French ecologisms, the term ‘humanism’ – along with its functional application in the term ‘humanizing nature’ – is more clearly grasped when it is interpreted from within the wider French context of *decentered* ecologism. Here the French ecologists are not in allegiance with what we might call ‘classic humanism’, but rather, with what Whiteside calls ‘skeptical humanism’. Where classical humanists ‘regard the essential, law-giving power of reason’ to be ‘constitutive of our humanity’, the skeptical humanist tradition, drawing more heavily on the work of Montaigne and Pascal, is far more willing to recognize the corruptibility of human reason.¹⁷ Thus, unconvinced by the ‘law-giving power of human reason’ the skeptical humanist will ‘criticize what dehumanizes our existence: vain pretensions to social superiority; fanaticism; disregard of spiritual consequences of technical innovations; philistine outlooks that flatten the moral terrain in the name of equality.’¹⁸ But once again the difference between English and French approaches to ecologism is rather stark. ‘In French ecologism’, as Whiteside observes, ‘debates take place not *between* nonanthropocentrists and anthropocentrists but rather *through* various notions of humanism.’¹⁹

Indeed, Latour appears to fit rather well into all three of Whiteside’s generalizations concerning the defining marks of French ecologism; a decentering of nature and humanity, the shared anthropological moment, as well as the shared tradition of skeptical humanism. But what remains rather peculiar is the relatively low-impact Latour’s work has had in his native France. As he approaches soaring levels of recognition, appreciation, and criticism in the Anglo-Saxon academy, Latour continues to fly below radar particularly, as Whiteside points out, amongst French liberals. This is clearly evidenced in the fact that Luc Ferry, a liberal political philosopher and one of the most outspoken critics of Anglo-Saxon political ecology, has yet to take much of any notice of Latour’s science studies. Best known for his scathing critique of Anglo-Saxon ecocentrism in his book *The New Ecological Order*, Ferry and other French liberals have yet to apply their critical pen to the political ecologies of their own countrymen.²⁰ The silence on the part of French liberals is, in Whiteside’s opinion, rather regrettable. ‘By concentrating their criticisms on “Anglo-Saxon” variants of green theory,’ he explains, ‘they fail to perform what would be a signal service in their own linguistic community.’²¹ Yet of the several decentered ecologisms currently populating the French

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁰ Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, tran. Carol Volk (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²¹ Whiteside, *Divided Natures*, p. 256.

academy, Latour's has clearly been the most eagerly accepted in the English-speaking world. Again, the reason for this may be credited to his compelling style of writing. But perhaps more important is his ability to make clear what it is that undergirds the Anglo-Saxon affinity for centered ecologisms and to then illustrate the many pitfalls attendant to such theoretical centering. Similarly, Latour's success may also be traced to his distinctly non-Marxist and non-socialist political ecology. It is for this reason that Latour may appear to the Anglo-Saxon reader to be a true alternative to the 'radical ecologies' already well known to the English-speaking theoretician.

A Short History of the Field

Having now reviewed the unique qualities of the French eco-political context we may now turn to consider the often misunderstood academic field in which Latour has established his international reputation. The field which is today commonly known as 'science studies' began its conception nearly 30 years ago in Britain and soon began to spread amongst social scientists throughout the Anglo-Saxon academy. Although methodologically and philosophically distinct from the 'old' 'sociology of science', which was firmly established in the 1950's through the work of the eminent American sociologist Robert K. Merton, the modern-day field of science studies owes much to Merton's earlier sociological studies of scientific practice. However, a distinct change was initiated in the 'old' field during 1970's as the 'Edinburgh School' – as it is now known – introduced a new methodological trajectory to the 'old' Meritonian sociology of science. This new method of study was dubbed the 'strong program' by its creators – Henry Barnes²² and David Bloor²³ in particular – and effectively moved the sociology of science into greater interaction with the often parallel field commonly known as the 'philosophy of science'. Peter Godfrey-Smith describes the general understanding of the change from 'old' to 'new' as such:

The older work wanted to describe the social structure and social placement of science as a *whole* but did not try to explain *particular scientific beliefs* in sociological terms. The newer approach has tried to use sociological methods to explain why scientists believe what they do, why they behave as they do, and how scientific thinking and practice change over time.²⁴

Unlike the Mertonian sociology of science before them, whose methodology often assumed a logical empiricism in his interpretation of scientific theories; the new Edinburgh School – which adopted the name 'sociology of scientific knowledge' (SSK) – took a markedly 'anti-positivist' turn. With a more philosophical trajectory owing much to the influence of

²² Barry Barnes, *Scientific Knowledge and Sociological Theory* (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1974).

²³ David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, 2nd (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976 [1991]).

²⁴ Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, p. 125. (emphasis in the original)

Wittgenstein, '[t]he newer sociology embraced [Thomas] Kuhn, holism about testing, incommensurability, new ideas about observation, and various speculative views about scientific language.'²⁵ Perhaps most famously, the 'strong program' of the Edinburgh School gave the overall 'impression that sociological explanation could account wholly for the content of science. So scientific knowledge-claims about nature were represented as 'constructs' of the social processes whose outcome they were.'²⁶ The overall effect of this 'strong' stance was to firmly affix the Edinburgh School, perhaps unfairly, with the often unenviable label of being firmly *relativist* in its view of scientific knowledge. As Godfrey-Smith has explained, the strong program 'holds that science has no special authority that extends beyond local norms. Instead, the norms and standards that govern scientific belief can be justified only *from the inside*, and that is true of other, nonscientific norms as well.'²⁷

But just as the strong program had pushed the 'old' Meritonian sociology of science out of the picture in the 1970's, it would itself suffer the same fate by the hands of Latour and the French School in the 1980's. As will become clear throughout this chapter, much of Latour's early work within science studies was taken up in direct opposition to the Edinburgh School's strong program, but particularly its 'principle of symmetry'. We review the Edinburgh School's 'principle of symmetry' and the French School's corrective 'generalized principle of symmetry' later in the chapter, but for now we may simply emphasize the rift between these two competing schools within the general field of science studies.

This simmering rivalry which spans the English Channel began with Latour's introduction to English readers in the 1980's, and has recently peaked with a highly visible skirmish taking place in one of the field's most popular journals, *Studies in History, Philosophy and Science*, which is published by the Edinburgh School. This recent spat of argumentation began with the publication of Bloor's now famous (or infamous) paper 'Anti-Latour' (1999) in which he strongly claims that his work has been misunderstood and misrepresented by Latour and the French School as a whole.²⁸ Published in the same volume is Latour's rebuttal which admits to some of Bloor's criticisms but is, in my opinion, an altogether successful defense of his own position.²⁹ In the wake of this highly charged outbreak were a number of attempts by others within the field to bring about some measure of peace between the two schools. For instance Eve Seguin, a British historian, argued that the debate was not based on fundamental differences, but rather on fundamental

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 62.

²⁷ Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, p. 128. (emphasis in the original)

²⁸ Bloor, "Anti-Latour," *Studies in History, Philosophy and Science* 30, 1 (1999).

²⁹ Latour, "For David Bloor and Beyond: A Reply to David Bloor's 'Anti-Latour'," *Studies in History, Philosophy and Science* 30, 1 (1999).

misunderstandings.³⁰ In the final estimation it appears that the Edinburgh School has lost much ground since the 1970's and there is little doubt that the French School enjoys a much more wide-ranging influence to this day.

What is rather certain, however, is that the field has come a long way since Merton's sociology of science in the 1950's. Today the field of science studies has been influenced and absorbed by a variety of other fields and sub-fields – Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK), Science and Technology Studies (STS), Social Studies in Science (SSS), Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), Anthropology of Science, Philosophy of Science – each of which seems to have filtered some measure of influence into what today falls under the umbrella term of 'science studies'.³¹ This comparatively young field has also cast a rather wide net in its incorporation of interdisciplinary theorists. As we have already seen, the field originally drew from disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology and sociobiology, but the findings of the practitioners of science studies have now found their way into numerous other fields such as geography, literary criticism, economics and environmental studies to name just a few. For such a small field, it has certainly enjoyed a rather wide transdisciplinary reception. Theologians, however, have yet to take much notice of the field and its theoretical and empirical findings. But now that we have briefly traced the historical development of science studies as a field, we may now address the more difficult question concerning what it is that science studies seeks to achieve.

The Latourian Approach to Science Studies

Proposing a singular definition for an academic discipline as diverse as science studies would be a difficult if not impossible task. Certainly, the undertaking would be simplified if we were to limit our definition to the obvious notion that science studies is about the study of the sciences. But a definition such as this would not go far enough in explaining the actual practice and methodology of science studies which make it such an exciting and innovative field.

Mario Biagioli points out that science studies differs from other fields in that it 'does not have to define its subject matter in relation to its neighboring disciplines', for as he illustrates, 'over the years, the scientists have done much of that work.'³² Yet this unified object of study has not, as we might have expected, produced a unified field in terms of disciplinary identity. Science studies is, then, a truly *interdisciplinary-discipline*. As Biagioli explains; 'The fact that science is a well-delineated and established enterprise seems to have

³⁰ Eve Seguin, "Bloor, Latour, and the Field," *Studies in History, Philosophy and Science* 31, 3 (2000).

³¹ In fact, the Edinburgh School, as a university department, has now changed its name to the 'Science Studies Unit' of the University of Edinburgh.

³² Mario Biagioli, "Introduction: Science Studies and Its Disciplinary Predicament," in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. XI.

two opposite effects on science studies: it allows the field to be simultaneously unified (in terms of its object of study) and strongly disunified (in terms of its methodologies, research questions, and institutional locations).³³ It is, however, safe to say that science studies is, at its very core, interested in discovering how science *works* rather than what it *is*. In opposition to what has become a common misrepresentation and over generalization of the work of science studies practitioners, science studies begins from a general agreement that science does indeed work. Too often it has been accused of the most extreme forms of iconoclasm, as if it were seeking to debunk all scientific claims to truth and reality. While this has been true of some thinkers within the field, the vast majority within science studies agree that the reality of science and its accomplishments are plain for all to see – indeed, *science works*. Yet the question remains: how does science work, and why has it been so successful as a methodology?

For Latour, the field of science studies should center on the curious lives of what he calls ‘hybrids’ or ‘quasi-objects’, for it is they who tie together heaven and earth, the global and local, and the human and nonhuman realms. The geographical (spatio-temporal) undercurrents to this language should, however, not be missed and will be made more explicit in chapter four. Yet for now we will limit our inquiry to Latour’s central programmatic concern for the field of science studies itself. Latour opens *We Have Never Been Modern*, by describing the proliferation of hybrids and quasi-objects through the *socio-technical mediation* of the modern sciences, but as we shall see, it is a mediation that is ultimately obscured. His primary example is that of the ozone hole – a hybrid marked by its distinctly global scope. The ozone hole can be considered a hybrid in so far as it draws together a number of actors/*actants*³⁴, both human and nonhuman, into its web of relations with the end result being a single hybridized entity. Atmospheric chemists, CEO’s of international chemical companies, refrigerators, aerosols, journalists, and international treaties are all drawn into this single network of activity. Chemical reactions are translated into political reactions, yet the ‘horizons, the stakes, the time frames, the actors—none of these is commensurable, yet they are caught up in the same story.’³⁵

This is just one example among many of the modern hybrid as Latour describes it. But our distinctly modern difficulty begins to reveal itself as the compartmentalization and fragmentation of these hybrids is allowed to obscure their true nature. As we will see, theirs is

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The term ‘actant’ will be more fully addressed throughout this chapter and more directly in chapter three, yet it is now worth pointing out how the term is used in science studies. It is a term borrowed from semiotics in order to make clear that we do not always need to make an absolute distinction between ‘things’ (objects) and ‘human actors’ (subjects) in terms of their ability to *act* on other entities. As Latour insists, Natural forces are no more immediately given than are human agents.

³⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (New York and London: Pearson Education Ltd, 1993), p. 1.

a nature or ontology that is best understood, according to Latour, as being ultimately *variable*. This is because hybrids consist of delicate ‘threads’, ‘rhizomes’, or ‘networks’ that are long and rich if left intact, but die without a trace once severed from their life blood – their heterogeneous and mediated relations. However, these fragile threads of human and nonhuman networks, Latour argues, will not survive in our modern [post-Enlightenment] world. Here they ‘will be broken into as many segments as there are pure disciplines. By all means, they [the moderns] seem to say, let us not mix up, knowledge, interest, justice and power.’³⁶ Throughout his widely read book *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour argues that it is the ‘modern Constitution’ – a failed constitution as we will see – that compels us to break the ‘Gordian knot’ that weaves the world into a unified whole. Yet, for the practitioners of science studies, it is the study of these hybrids which will ultimately serve to reveal the fact that knowledge of things has been purified and held as far from power and politics as possible – for it is the one that guarantees the other. Therefore, Latour argues that science studies must follow these ‘imbroglios’ wherever they may lead, refusing to respect the modern Constitution’s demand that things (objects, Nature) and politics (Society, subjects, culture) be held at arms length.

We can then see that for Latour the role of science studies is to ultimately find ways of shuttling back and forth between that which modernity could only register as a falsely dichotomous Nature or Culture. Hence, in order to renegotiate this metaphysical impasse, Latour’s methodological brand of science studies relies on a number of terminological inventions unique to the discipline such as ‘translation,’ ‘networks,’ ‘collectives,’ ‘generalized symmetry,’ and a ‘parliament of things’ to name just a few. In this and later chapters we will take a closer look at how each of these terms functions in practice. But for now let us continue to simply emphasize the general core of Latour’s project. At its heart it is a movement which seeks to utilize all of these terms and methodologies in order to restore some form of unity in our approach to understanding scientific facts and hybrids. But as Latour argues, this is a task that has been made more difficult by the recent vogue of critical theory. The problem with critical theory is that it has produced a rather regrettable further fragmentation of thought into three distinct approaches to speaking about the world: *naturalization*, *socialization* and *deconstruction*.³⁷ Once these critical methods are applied to the hybrid or quasi-object – for instance, the ozone hole – our accounts are forced into a deepening fragmentation, thus one account is always unable to be reconciled with the other two. ‘Can anyone imagine a study that would treat the ozone hole as simultaneously naturalized, sociologized and deconstructed?’³⁸ Certainly such an attempt to distill the hybrid

³⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

into three purified forms would be folly. But according to Latour, this is precisely what our current intellectual climate forces upon us. Epistemologists, sociologists, and deconstructionists are all forced to fend off the assaults of one another.

Science studies, particularly that of the French school, claims to offer a developing alternative to the intellectual culture of late-modern fragmentation. The ‘networks’, ‘collectives’, ‘hybrids’, and ‘translations’ of science studies are intended to illuminate a new understanding of reality that is freed from the demands of the ‘modern Constitution’ and its ‘critical’ outgrowths. Through the sociological (or ethnographic/anthropological) study of scientific practice – as expressed in *Laboratory Life* – science studies has stumbled upon a way of understanding networks as ‘simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society’.³⁹

French and Edinburgh Schools

It is important that we make this methodological point explicit; for it is scientific *practice*, or what is often called ‘science in the making’, that has taken center stage within the French School of science studies. The impetus for this, however, was initiated from across the English Channel by David Bloor’s work in the University of Edinburgh’s sociology of scientific knowledge department (SSK) in the 1970’s. As we have already seen, theorists within the field of SSK – Bloor and Barnes in particular – were concerned with applying the analytical devices of the social sciences to the *practice* of the natural or hard sciences. Therefore, we may now take a moment to make clearer the distinction between the Edinburgh and French Schools.

As we have seen, at the very heart of science studies (on both sides of the Channel) there exists a fundamental questioning of the modern separation between the natural sciences and the human sciences, or rather, between science and society as a whole. From this perspective, we can see the birth of science studies having been firmly grounded in the human sciences, and in sociology in particular. Moreover, Latour has argued that a major advance took place within science studies once ‘it was realized’ – by the Edinburgh School – ‘that, contrary to what traditional sociology of knowledge and Meritonian sociology told us, the *content* of science is fully capable of study, and the implementation of this research program is *a single task* for historians, sociologists, philosophers, and economists.’⁴⁰ Thus the ‘strong program’ of the Edinburgh School enjoyed steady advance until it began to become clear that the macro-perspective of sociology was poorly equipped to deal with the micro world of the natural scientist and the engineer. Therefore, only the most over-arching of phenomena were

³⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Latour, "One More Turn After the Social Turn," in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 277.

able to be explained through the use of the ‘strong program’, such as the construction of scientific worldviews and cultures. Alternatively, research programs which sought to approach the micro aspects of scientific practice – such as Latour and Woolger’s *Laboratory Life* – were beginning to appear very successful.

For Latour the deficient element in the SSK approach of the Edinburgh School was clear. What it lacked was a rigorous account of what it is that holds societies together – that is, what it is that makes them durable through the fabric of space and time. According to Latour, it appears ‘that either the social science is subtle enough to explain the content of science but the making of global society is left in the dark, or that macrosociology is back in but the details of science disappear from view.’⁴¹ Latour further diagnoses the problem as one of lending too much focus to the ‘internalist’ dimension of the sociology of science. Philosophers of science, particularly those in the English-speaking world, were myopic in their attention to internalist accounts, which according to the Continental view, had already been exhausted by philosophers of the history of scientific practice – Duhem, Bachelard, Mach. The goal, then, was to present a coherent link between sociological concerns and politics to the microsociological studies of science. But the goal proved elusive due to the polemical stance of those schools which claimed that the study of scientific practice was completely unattainable as a matter of principle.⁴² The warring between the two camps, according to Latour, served only to obscure the goal of a research program that was effective on both macro and technical levels. Therefore, the delicate balance that was needed for science studies to be effective continued to elude its theorists.

Science studies, at least in France, took as one of its departing points the bracketing of the word ‘social’ within quotation marks. For it had found social constructivist accounts of scientific content to be lacking on several levels. First, it was suddenly realized that sociology was itself a science, and therefore open to the same critical scrutiny as the sciences it sought to explain. Some argued that sociological accounts should be abandoned all together opting instead for the utilization of the ‘local technical content’ which the practitioners themselves employed. Said differently, many argued that there should be no appeal made to an overarching metalanguage. It was thought instead that practitioners of science studies should focus on the localized language of a particular scientific practice. Latour points out that science studies began to adopt this diagnosis in full, and he sites the early forms of actor-network theory (ANT) in particular. This ‘theory’, as we will discuss in more detail later in this and subsequent chapters, proposes that networks of heterogeneous associations of humans and nonhumans should replace the actual content of the dichotomous poles of science on the one hand, and society on the other. Yet as several voices began to protest, the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 277.

⁴² Ibid., p. 278.

‘seamless webs’ of actor-network theory began to confuse things even more.⁴³ With all things now possible, ‘nothing is clear and distinct anymore. Everything being a network, nothing is’.⁴⁴

The breakthrough for science studies came about once theorists ‘first began to talk about scientific *practice* and thus offered a more realistic account of science-in-the-making, grounding it firmly in laboratory sites, experiments, and groups of colleagues’.⁴⁵ It is crucial at this early stage that we make it perfectly clear that the science studies of the French School does not wish to extend *merely* social explanations to the hard sciences – emphatically, this is not its emphasis. One of the central methodological stances of French School is rather, to turn attention to the local site, the material and mundane location of scientific practice. Therefore, *practice* for Latour takes on a slightly altered connotation than that of traditional sociology. What science studies has sought to reveal through the study of scientific practice, and with great success, is the multiplicity of mediators that form relational networks which results in the sciences themselves. Although there has been much confusion about its central purpose – especially by natural scientists anxious that their fields of study are being reduced to mere ‘social construction’ – science studies, as Latour sees it, has never had as its goal the debunking of scientific claims. Nor has it sought to portray scientific findings as pure ‘social constructions’.

What has taken up a place of central importance within the field is a concerted push towards what Latour call a more ‘realistic realism.’ As he states so clearly in the opening of his most recent summation of his vision of science studies, *Pandora’s Hope*: ‘That we are studying a subject matter does not mean that we are attacking it. Are biologists anti-life, astronomers anti-stars, immunologists anti-anti-bodies?’⁴⁶ It is important that we make this point clear at the very outset as there has been rampant misrepresentation of the basic philosophical trajectory which science studies seeks to follow.⁴⁷ It was also this deep misunderstanding by natural scientists of Latour’s work that drove him to write *Pandora’s Hope* in an effort to make clearer the overall project of science studies as a field. Much of the confusion appears to stem from the fact that the two camps are speaking an entirely different language. How is it, Latour asks, that he could dedicate his career to the examination of scientific practice in the hope of *adding* realism to the endeavor, yet be seen by so many as

⁴³ Steven Shapin, "Following Scientists Around," *Social Studies of Science* 18 (1988); Harry Collins and Steven Yearly, "Epistemological Chicken," in *Science as Practice and Culture*, Andy Pickering (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁴⁴ Latour, "One More Turn After the Social Turn," p. 278.

⁴⁵ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ This deep-seated mistrust of the field of science studies was most infamously displayed in the now infamous Alan Sokal ‘hoax’ and its continuing fallout through the 1990’s.

the worst kind of relativist, with the total destruction of the natural sciences as his ultimate goal?

The Elusiveness of Science Studies

In *Pandora's Hope* Latour outlines a number of reasons why science studies is so difficult to pin-down and define. First, he cites that science studies occupies the void which has been created between two separate cultures. These cultures can be traced to a division of labor which is familiar to university campuses the world over.

One camp deems the sciences accurate only when they have been purged of any contamination by subjectivity, politics, or passion; the other camp, spread out much more widely, deems humanity, morality, subjectivity, or rights worthwhile only when they have been protected from any contact with science, technology, and objectivity. We in science studies fight against these two purges, against both purifications at once, and this is what makes us traitors to both camps.⁴⁸

Thus it is the interdisciplinary, or non-disciplinary, character of science studies which has made it a difficult concept for the rest of the academe to grasp. But its intent comes through clearly; it seeks to connect scientists and their work with the wider collective of humans and nonhumans that support them. To accomplish this goal, Latour retorts, would only enhance the work of science – it would allow it a more ‘realistic realism,’ as Latour is fond of saying.

The force of French School’s general argument is not targeted solely in the direction of the natural or ‘hard’ sciences. The second camp, the humanists, must also realize that ‘the more nonhumans share existence with humans, the more humane a collective will become.’⁴⁹ For it is just as inaccurate for natural scientists to claim that their work is entirely purged of all social/subjective characteristics, as it is for the social scientist to invent a world purified of nonhumans – i.e. a world that is entirely ‘socially constructed’. Latour admits that the more difficult fight is with the social scientists rather than the natural scientists. While scientists are little bothered with the work of philosophers of science, the sociologists are heavily invested in ‘freeing human subjects from the dangers of objectification and reification’.⁵⁰ While science studies tries to bridge the gap between these two polemical giants, its foundational intentions continue to be lost or obscured by the warring parties, or what has unfortunately come to be called the ‘science wars’.

The final force working against science studies becoming an easily understood movement is the perpetual conflict between what may be loosely termed ‘postmodernism’ and Latour’s brand of ‘nonmodernism’. This dichotomy is mirrored by a similar drama being played out in the natural sciences between ‘the model of Science’ and ‘the model of

⁴⁸ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

Research.’ These rival models have now established themselves within the social sciences and the humanities, and continue to battle for privilege of place. As Latour explains: ‘Everything the first takes to be justification for more absence, more debunking, more negation, more destruction, the second takes as a proof of presence, deployment, affirmation, and construction.’⁵¹ It is then a gross distortion to place science studies – but the French School in particular – in with the relativistic, critical, and social constructivist postmodern philosophies, as is too easily done by some of its critics.

Certainly, one would find no support for postmodern thought within Latour’s work, but rather a constitutional distaste. In fact, science studies could be defined in some opposition to the ‘postmodern’ intellectual movement. For what science studies seeks to achieve is a theoretical and practical movement which Latour has described as *nonmodern*. This is a movement which rejects the postmodern will to privilege iconoclasm. As Latour suggests; ‘The program of debunking, exposing, avoiding being taken in, steals energy from the task that has always seemed much more important to the collective of people, things and gods, namely, the task of sorting out the “cosmos” from an “unruly shambles.”’⁵² We might say that nonmodern thinkers do not carry critical hammers. Instead, theirs is a project which has set its aim towards a ‘politics of things,’ as they ‘insist and insist again that there is a social history of things and a “thingy” history of humans’.⁵³ Therefore, it has become one of Latour’s central assertions that modernity, as it was devised, was never implemented in full and reality and morality have never truly been severed.

In order to unpack what I see as the remarkable body of work produced by those within the field of science studies, but particularly the work of Bruno Latour and the French School, we will first have to examine his account of the ‘modernist settlement,’ or the ‘modern Constitution.’ For it is this concept, and Latour’s now famous claim that ‘we have never been modern,’ that serves as the bedrock for his program of ‘adding realism to science.’ Second, we will turn our attention to Latour’s claim that this modern project was never actually implemented according to its impossible Constitution. Following upon this, in the third section we will outline the ‘first principle of symmetry’ of the Edinburgh School which presented the first sizable challenge to the traditional sociology of knowledge and its concerns regarding the examination of scientific practice. We then contrast the ‘first principle’ of the Edinburgh School with Latour’s move towards a ‘generalized principle of symmetry.’ One of the central motivations behind Latour’s wide body of work is his desire to intervene in what has come to be known as the ‘science wars.’ As we shall see, Latour understands the ongoing combat between realists, idealists, scientists, social scientists, postmoderns, and

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 18

epistemologists as so much catastrophic fallout from a modern settlement that never truly was. He comes equipped with an intricate diagnosis of the deteriorating modern settlement which has produced nothing but intellectual impasse amongst the various interests involved in these science wars. In the fourth section we will seek to gain an understanding of what Latour describes as the developing ‘nonmodern’ constitution. In this new constitution Latour proposes a new metaphysical understanding of both humans and nonhumans, and their variable, yet deeply relational, ontological status.

II. Latour and The Modern Constitution

As we have seen in our review of Colin Gunton, there is certainly no shortage of theories which seek to account for what constitutes the essence of modernity. In fact there are probably as many theories as there are philosophers and journalist alike. Through this morass of opinions, Latour extracts one central element common to all of the theories concerning modernity – namely, the passage of time. Invariably, ‘modernity’ has been used to denote a peculiar quickening or acceleration in the flow of time. If the premodern times were stilted, cumbersome and archaic, the modern stood for a radical break where history was now defined on a continuum of progress. More than just an adjective used to explain a revolution in time, ‘modern’ as Latour sees it, is often employed in the midst of an argument. In this sense, it is used to distinguish between ‘winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns’.⁵⁴ In recent years this once clear distinction between winners and losers has become less and less clear, as the Ancients seem to be coming out on top just as often as the Moderns. This questioning of the modern concept of progress, or this ‘symptom’ of the modern settlement as Latour terms it, has come to be known by the label ‘postmodernity’. We have already seen that science studies is often unjustly grouped with the postmodern movement, probably because they both seek to challenge the modern Constitution, yet the two schools harbor deeply divergent interests and methodologies.⁵⁵ Science studies’ interest in defining the modern settlement stems from its desire to find a place for the networks and collectives it has unveiled within scientific and technological practice. Therefore, if science studies is to fully embrace its mantra of ‘follow the networks,’ it must come to understand this ‘settlement’ or ‘Constitution’ which obscures the reality of networks, collectives, and hybrids.

In his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, his most detailed exemplification of the modern settlement, Latour clearly argues that the word ‘modern’ designates the odd cultural

⁵⁴ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Latour finds it important to use a capital ‘C’ when referring to the modern ‘Constitution’, as it serves to distinguish it from political constitutions. Yet Latour will maintain that the modern ‘settlement’ is certainly a constitution like any other, as it delineates the rights and duties of both humans and nonhumans.

practice of radically separating nature and culture into a dualistic paring, all the while continuously ‘translating’ these dualistically conceived realms into a litany of hybrids. Moreover, the word ‘postmodern’ designates the contemporary disenchantment which has followed upon the realization that these two purified zones are in reality, totally confused and increasingly hybridized. Often we find that modernity is defined in humanist terms as the ‘turn to the subject,’ or the ‘birth of man.’ But Latour warns that this habit is itself a modern characteristic as it reinforces a radical asymmetry which modernity has forced upon us. What this habit obscures is ‘the simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’—things, or objects, or beasts—and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines’.⁵⁶ Here we begin to see the two sets of uniquely modern practices, and their dualistic purification, come to light. First, the modern settlement is engaged in the practice of creating hybrids through ‘translation’ – a term used to describe movement across the modern settlement – thus creating novel entities which mix together the realms of nature and culture. On the other hand, a determined purification is taking place, effectively creating a demarcation between two ontological zones: one zone for humans and another for nonhumans.

We may now identify two distinct dichotomies or dualisms which Latour will identify within the modern settlement. First, the realms of nature and culture, subject and object, human and nonhuman are cut off from one another and purified into distinct ontological realms. Secondly, these dual practices of *purification* on the one hand and *translation* on the other are completely separated – dichotomized – by the modern settlement. On one level the work of purification continues to separate nature and culture, while translation (hybridization) continues at pace, but is completely obscured and hidden by the forced dichotomization. In a very real sense, the right hand knows not what the left hand is doing. In light of this diagnosis, Latour argues that we must direct our attention ‘simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization.’ For once we have carried this out ‘we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change.’⁵⁷

Again, the goal for Latour has never been to fall in line with the postmodern critique, but rather to become ‘nonmodern.’ In order to achieve this, science studies seeks to erode the double dichotomization of the modern settlement. There is no doubt amongst science studies’ practitioners that the modern settlement was entirely effective in the execution of this radical and dualistic separation. The nearly total success of creating two distinct ontological zones between human and nonhuman is testimony to this accomplishment. But it is a success that has been won at a great cost, and through a rather simple movement of asymmetry. Equally important is Latour’s argument that the modern Constitution has never truly happened, as we

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

will explore more fully in a later section of the chapter. Moreover, this asymmetry can be overcome because as ‘soon as one outlines the symmetrical space and thereby reestablishes the common understanding that organizes the separation of natural and political powers, one ceases to be modern’,⁵⁸

Hobbes, Boyle and the Vacuum

We may come to a deeper understanding of the modern Constitution by reviewing one of Latour’s central case studies. This is the well known 17th century debate between political philosopher Thomas Hobbes and natural philosopher Robert Boyle. Their gentlemanly disagreement is of great importance because it is exemplary of the early-modern debates concerning the distribution of power; scientific, political, and even theological. What makes this argument interesting is that the human actors in this debate are both involved in creating the modern Constitution, yet they can be set up symmetrically rather than asymmetrically in order to produce a critical assessment of their arguments. Latour makes heavy use of a fascinating study by Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer titled *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*,⁵⁹ a study which seeks to provide a truly comparative anthropology of these two characters. Latour finds their study to be entirely unique in comparative anthropological studies in that it takes science very seriously. This is because Shapin and Shaffer’s work moves in two important, and new, directions. First, they displace the historical beginning of the divide between epistemology and sociology. And secondly, they ignore the traditional privileging of sociological explanation over the scientific.⁶⁰ Hobbes and Boyle can then be compared through the devices of a new ‘nonmodern’ and comparative anthropology. ‘Boyle has a science and a political theory; Hobbes has a political theory and a science.’⁶¹ Shapin and Shaffer manage to bring this insight out of its dichotomized obscurity by clearly illustrating that epistemological concerns are also the concern of the social order. In opposition to the studies that preceded theirs, Shapin and Shaffer ‘are not prepared to explain the content by the context’.⁶²

Hobbes and Boyle present themselves as ideal candidates for the exercise of the new comparative anthropology because they share very similar perspectives. They both want the same things – Church, King and Parliament – yet they disagree on how scientific experimentation and reasoning may be interpreted and allowed to inform political discourse. While there are two obvious human actors in this drama, common to them both is a third

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁹ Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁶⁰ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 16.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

party or *actant* – the air pump. And here is where the debate begins as Boyle claims to have created, through the mediation of his laboratory, a vacuum. He had undertaken several experiments in order to prove the existence of this vacuum, ranging from the suffocation of small animals to the employment of chicken feathers which he used to detect the absence (or presence) of the ether his adversaries postulated. The crux of the debate hinges upon the divergent methods of argumentation the two human actors preferred. Boyle made no hesitation in adopting the method of argumentation known as democratic opinion. Said otherwise, his approach is to rely upon *doxa* rather than apodeictic reasoning. A method which, as Latour points out, was held in the deepest contempt by the older scholastic tradition, but is now firmly established as the empirical style which we moderns so readily employ today. ‘Instead of seeking to ground his work in logic, mathematics or rhetoric, Boyle relied on a parajudicial metaphor: credible, trustworthy, well-to-do witnesses gathered at the scene of the action can attest to the existence of a fact, the matter of fact, even if they do not know its true nature.’⁶³ Within the artificial environment of his laboratory, Boyle produces a phenomenon – the chicken feather does not move – and then turns to his witnesses to extract their objective observations of the event, not their opinions.

For Boyle, it is the objects – the air-pump and chicken feather – that have constructed the factual and objective existence of the vacuum. Importantly, the word ‘constructed’ is not out of place in this instance. As Latour explains, Boyle answered the central question that constructivists are asking today – ‘are the facts constructed?’ The answer for Boyle, according to Latour, is simple: ‘Yes, the facts are indeed constructed in the new installation of the laboratory and through the artificial intermediary of the air pump.’⁶⁴ Critical in this is Boyle’s abstinence concerning any desire to explain the ‘why’ of phenomena, that is, he is careful not to offer an interpretation of the causes. However, we may come to understand the ‘nature of facts’ because we have enabled them to ‘speak’ through the mediation of the laboratory environment. We have developed the facts in an environment that is under our control and within our understanding. What is a locally constructed fact, with only local value, can now be turned into an advantage: ‘these facts will never be modified, whatever may happen elsewhere in theory, metaphysics, religion, politics or logic’.⁶⁵ The scientific fact then becomes a ‘natural’ fact, made untouchable by the many tides and seasons of human culture.

In spite of their many differences, Boyle and Hobbes shared an equal desire to preserve the Bible from free interpretation by the masses, and preserve the monarch from the

⁶³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 18. We will continue to observe that for Latour this is the true meaning of the concept of the *construction* of facts or reality. As Latour makes clear in all of his recent works, he does not want to talk of the *social* construction of reality, but rather of the technical and material construction of ‘facts’, ‘factiches’, or ‘matters of concern’, as they form within the hybrid collective. Both humans and nonhumans, rather than social subjects and natural objects, together *construct* or *compose* reality.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

threat of civil war. Hobbes, however, sought to accomplish these ends through the unification of the Body Politic – the Leviathan. It was through this contract of the Body Politic that the Sovereign could be understood and preserved as ‘that *Mortal God*, to which we owe, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense’.⁶⁶ Hobbes wished to suppress transcendence by emphasizing the unity of the one Monarch who is the single ‘Representer’ of the ‘Represented.’ His interest was in suppressing the masses of this, the lower world, by reserving any access to transcendence for the authorities alone – God and king. Civil wars would be unavoidable as long as the rabble of commoners were free to appeal and petition to God directly, usurping both Church and King. In line with this is the idea that inert objects, mechanical matter, are an important component in keeping the civil peace. Just as important, that is, as keeping the Bible out of the hands of the common folk who feel free to interpret it as they please. For Hobbes, ‘it behooves us to avoid at all costs the possibility that the factions may invoke a higher Entity—Nature or God—which the Sovereign does not fully control’.⁶⁷ In this framework, Knowledge clearly equals Power as Latour is keen to point out.

Here we can see where Boyle and Hobbes diverge in terms of argumentation. Whereas Boyle relied upon the opinion of observers, Hobbes instead relies upon mathematical demonstration. For Hobbes it is only through the appeal to *human* reason that we will be able to effectively silence the rabble of the multitudes. As Latour explains, Hobbes’s mathematical methodology is ‘the only method of argument capable of compelling everyone’s assent; and he accomplishes this demonstration not by making transcendental calculations, like Plato’s King, but by using a purely computational instrument, the Mechanical Brain, a computer before its time’.⁶⁸ But in his clash with Boyle, Hobbes is confronted with his greatest anxiety. That is, a rogue group of gentlemen who have come to an agreement of *opinion* that there exists in their air-pump a real vacuum, free of any trace of ether. What is more, they have dared to challenge the authorities by invoking an appeal to *nonhuman* Nature, and phenomena they have observed with wholly fallible human senses. The Royal Society must now be stopped, for if ‘you allow experiments to produce their own matters of fact, and if these allow the vacuum to be infiltrated into the air pump and, from there into natural philosophy, then you will divide authority again... Knowledge and Power will be separated once more’.⁶⁹ Such are the anxieties of Thomas Hobbes.

A Truly Comparative Anthropology

⁶⁶ The quote is from Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), quoted in Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

We should take a moment to review what Shapin and Schaffer, and now Latour, have accomplished in this study of Boyle and Hobbes. Their unique accomplishment is to have produced a truly comparative anthropology. As Latour writes:

For the first time in science studies, all ideas pertaining to God, the King, Matter, Miracles and Morality are translated, transcribed, and forced to pass through the practice of making an instrument work. Before Shapin and Schaffer, other historians of science had studied scientific practice; other historians had studied the religious, political and cultural context of science. No one, before Shapin and Schaffer, had been capable of doing both at once.⁷⁰

Here the old school of contextualist explanation has been left far behind. No longer are we limited to starting from a pre-conceived idea that a macro-social explanation exists, and can therefore explain why Hobbes and Boyle believed what they respectively believed concerning the outcome of the air pump experiments. Shapin and Schaffer were instead concerned with explaining how a suffocating bird and an air pump – both nonhumans – could somehow ‘translate, displace, transport, distort all the other controversies, in such a way that those who master the pump also master the King, God, and the entire context’?⁷¹ Theirs is a study that traces the birth of a new entity, a new quasi-object, born in an English laboratory in the middle of the seventeenth century. And in so doing, they reveal the very *real* foundations of scientific practice. They reject talk of a reality that is somehow ‘outside’ while human subjectivity is ‘inside’, but rather firmly ground scientific *reality* in the networks and practices that *create* it. And this is what, according to Latour, makes Shapin and Schaffer true comparative anthropologists. They are able to account for the insertion of nonhumans – air pumps, feathers and dead birds – into the human collective, into human society. This is one of the central insights of science studies which we will develop more thoroughly throughout the remainder of this study. That is, we live in *collectives* not Societies.⁷² The social bond we experience ‘comes from objects fabricated in laboratories; ideas have been replaced by practices, apodeitic reasoning by a controlled doxa, and universal agreement by groups of colleagues’.⁷³

What this serves to reveal, in part, is Boyle’s insistence that things (nonhumans) should be allowed to testify in social affairs through the mediation of the laboratory. What is new about this is that previously ‘the witness had always been human or divine—never nonhuman. The texts had been written by men or inspired by God—never inspired or written

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷² The capital ‘S’ serves to emphasize that the word is part of the modernist settlement and is really just an artifact imposed by this settlement. This is an idea made clear throughout Latour’s work and is also expressed in the capitalization of the word ‘Nature,’ which is similarly another purified artifact of the modern settlement.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 21.

by nonhumans.’⁷⁴ But now the ‘courts of justice’ were opened up to the nonhuman as well. The entirety of the collective is now opened up to a new actor/actant that was created in the midst of this new burgeoning Constitution. The effect of this is made plain by Latour who explains that ‘nonhumans, lacking souls but endowed with meaning, are even more reliable than ordinary mortals, to whom will is attributed but who lack the capacity to indicate phenomena in a reliable way’.⁷⁵ There is no doubt that the nonhumans are entirely inert, and therefore do not possess the ability to consciously will an action. They are, however, entirely capable of ‘speaking,’ ‘signaling,’ and ‘showing’ through the mediation of laboratory technology. The rational gentlemen (in this era, anyway) huddled into the laboratory are allowed to witness events and then speak on the behalf of the nonvocal-nonhuman. As their behavior has now become meaningful, the nonhumans are genuinely allowed to testify, and the scientist is genuinely enabled to *represent* their ‘voice’.

The Contested Role of the Sciences

Now we may briefly make clear the differences between Boyle and Hobbes in terms of their understanding of scientific interpretation. As we have already said, they both wanted the same things preserved – Church, King, and Parliament – yet they end up rivals. The core of the discrepancy resides in Hobbes’s opposition to allowing any appeal to an entity deemed to be higher than the king’s civil authority. In light of this, we can see that Hobbes wanted to box-out God by casting the divine into an utterly distant and closed-off transcendence. The Sovereign, for Hobbes, must be the sole processor of access to both Nature and the transcendent God. But the Sovereign is never more than the sum of the people, the Republic itself. Therefore, totalitarianism is avoided due to the king’s inability to dismantle this Leviathan which is the very base of power within the Republic. But what can threaten this order is the dangerous division of authority. If Boyle and his gentlemen observers are allowed to carry on allowing ‘experiments to produce their own matters of fact’ – in this case the existence of the vacuum – then we open up a court of appeal that is above the civil authority. Knowledge and Power are separated and we begin to ‘see double.’⁷⁶ Even once Boyle has suffocated a number of birds and severely challenged the ‘ether hypothesis’ with a chicken feather, Hobbes continues with a new argument. Hobbes ‘refuses to admit that the phenomenon he is talking about can be produced on a scale other than that of the Republic as a whole’.⁷⁷ For Hobbes, the constructed facts of the laboratory cannot be allowed to speak with authority. Whereas for Boyle, the laboratory-created fact should carry the highest

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

authority, as it is an authority which ultimately rests on the highest court of appeal – nonhuman, universal, Nature.

It is here that we find the source of Hobbes's anger. If the destiny of humans is now opened to the testimony of nonhumans, thereby allowing countless voices to rush into the law courts, the entirety of the old system of power will collapse into anarchy. Why? Because for Hobbes, ours is a monist society, Knowledge and Power must be held together as one and the same. However, as we now know this doomsday preached by Hobbes has not materialized. Societies have not (all) plummeted into disarray. But what is it that holds back the anarchy?

What is perhaps one of Latour's more profound insights can now be identified in his response to this question. Here Latour argues that a relative peace has been maintained throughout the revolution by cutting off, or making opaque, all the networks (relationships, mediations) between humans and nonhumans. We are then left with a politics, a God, and a society left untouched and unpolluted by a seemingly overwhelming Nature. The modern Constitution that both Boyle and Hobbes were participants in creating has produced what Latour calls the 'double artifact of the laboratory and the Leviathan' – 'a division of power between the two protagonists, to Hobbes, the politics and to Boyle, the sciences'.⁷⁸ And here I believe Latour's diagnosis is particularly insightful. For what he distinguishes in this milieu is the odd development of parallel projects that are at the same time totally divergent. As Latour so lucidly explains:

Boyle is not simply creating a scientific discourse while Hobbes is doing the same thing for politics; Boyle is creating a political discourse from which politics is to be excluded, while Hobbes is imagining a scientific politics from which experimental science has to be excluded. In other words, they are inventing our modern world, a world in which the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract.⁷⁹

The modern Constitution is the reification of these two points of view, or rather more accurately, points of blindness. It is, in fact, a double blindness that is created due to the bracketing of political (human) representation and scientific (nonhuman) representation, and making them entirely opaque to one another. The term 'representation' is the same in both usages, yet the controversy between Boyle and Hobbes has rendered the two meanings of 'representation' irreconcilable. Scientists represent the nonhumans, but science cannot be political; politicians represent the people, but politicians are not allowed to appeal to the nonhumans spoken for by the scientists and their technology.⁸⁰ What we are left with is a science purified of politics and a politics purified of science. The debate has now boiled down to its elements.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

Here the components reveal themselves as two poles of a continuum, social forces on one side, and mechanized natural forces on the other. Scientists speak for the multitude of nonhumans, politicians speak on the behalf of the multitude of humans. In the end, both are representatives of the many. To hold to this view of representation, is to hold to a ‘symmetrical’ understanding of both human and nonhuman representation – that is, political and scientific representation. Importantly, this symmetrical understanding was still intact in the middle of the seventeenth century. It was clearly held that scientists (humans) had to speak for the ‘facts’ of the nonhumans. The facts of scientists were not yet purified into a transcendent realm where the nonhuman or natural facts were thought to ‘speak for themselves’ with no mediation of laboratory or human spokesperson. But according to Latour, this is exactly what has happened with the success of the modern Constitution. The common origin of these two forms of the same type of representation has been totally lost. Scientists are no-longer spokespersons for the nonhumans as their networks of mediation have become entirely eclipsed. Under the modern Constitution there are only believed to be spokespersons on the side of humans, that is, the politicians are the only ones still ‘representing’ in the old understanding of the word. Soon after Boyle and Hobbes, ‘the word ‘representation’ will take on two different meanings, according to whether elected agents or things are at stake. Epistemology and political science will go their opposite ways.’⁸¹

III. The Guarantees of the Modern Constitution

For Latour, modernity is a paradoxical settlement. It is paradoxical because of its hybridizing and mixing of elements on the one hand, and then a radical purification of elements on the other. It is precisely this profound paradox that has been revealed in Shapin and Shaffer’s comparative study of Boyle and Hobbes. On the one hand they are redefining the hermeneutics of facts, scientific politics, scientific discourse and even theology. Together they describe how God, King, spirits and angels should act, how nature should be represented and how the people can be kept in check. While on the other hand, they make no strict demarcation ‘between a pure social force and pure natural mechanism’.⁸² But as the project of modernization moves on from Boyle and Hobbes, this demarcation becomes more and more pronounced and reified. One of Latour’s most useful accomplishments is to be found in his elucidation of this effort to reify the new movement of modernity into an actual Constitution that, like any other constitution, offers a number of specific guarantees. We will now take a

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸² Ibid., p. 29-30.

brief look at each of these guarantees, which have been to this point implicit, in an effort to now make them explicit.

The first guarantee of the modern Constitution is found in its ontological purification of Nature. For the modern thinker, society does not make Nature; rather, Nature is seen as preexistent – transcendent in a sense – and universally present in untainted form waiting for humans to discover its secrets.⁸³ This is the political Nature which Hobbes sought to preserve through the singular representation of the Sovereign God and King. If we limit the representation of Nature to one single representative (God, and King) who speaks on the behalf of the whole Leviathan, then this purified and untainted Natural realm remains transcendent and free of politics.

The second guarantee follows closely in line with the first. If the first guarantee successfully maintains a transcendent and purified Nature, then the same will be true of society; that is, only humans will be seen to ‘construct society and freely determine their own destiny’.⁸⁴ Again, it is only nonhumans who may be implicated in the construction of Nature, while Society is strictly limited to human participants. We can now see that the two realms have been effectively dichotomized (polemicized) through the first two guarantees of the modern Constitution.

Yet, as Latour warns, these two guarantees cannot be taken in isolation for the one supports the other. If we were to conceive of a Nature made solely by nonhumans and leave it at that, then Nature’s very transcendence would overwhelm us, we the humble and ultimately immanent humans. Nature would also be forever outside of our sphere of existence, foreign and remote. Similarly, a Society constructed purely upon the backs of humans would be only the most artificial of entities. As Latour remarks; ‘Its very immanence destroys it at once in the war of every man against every man.’⁸⁵ These scenarios are only logical when we take each of the guarantees on their own rather than as a coherent whole. As the entire corpus of Latour’s work and the work of many others within science studies has shown, these two guarantees were created together rather than in isolation. They are, in fact, polemical, yet they were created to be just that. Therefore, Latour will argue in *Pandora’s Hope* that all attempts to overcome this dichotomy between subject and object are doomed to failure. Furthermore, ‘all attempts to reuse it positively, negatively, or dialectically have failed’. And the reasons for this failure are clear: the dichotomy ‘is made *not* to be overcome, and only this impossibility provides objects and subjects with their cutting edges’.⁸⁶ As the two guarantees were set up in a polemical symbiosis, rather than as two ‘innocent metaphysical inhabitants of

⁸³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁶ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, p. 294.

the world,' there is no hope in creating peace between the two. Latour summarizes; 'The object is there to protect the subject from falling into inhumanity; the subject is there to protect the object from drifting into inhumanity.'⁸⁷ Due to the ultimately polemical nature of this dualism, Latour's project is not one that seeks to heal the modern Constitution's dichotomization of subject and object, Society and Nature, but rather to by-pass the dichotomy all together – basically, to ignore it.

The first two guarantees are ultimately contradictory. In one breath Boyle is admittedly *constructing* facts in the lab, and in the other he is *discovering* Nature, pure and untainted. At the same time, Hobbes is busy building a social Leviathan through the purified force of Sociality, but all the time looking for Natural facts (nonhumans) to support and sustain the project. Latour then points out, that in order to prevent a destructive spiral into schizophrenia, the modern Constitution must offer a third guarantee. This stipulates that 'there shall exist a complete separation between the natural world (constructed, nevertheless, by man) and the social world (sustained, nevertheless, by things); secondly, there shall exist a total separation between the work of hybrids and the work of purification'.⁸⁸ This is the second dichotomy of the modern Constitution. On the surface of things, Society and Nature are kept at arms length, but underneath there continues the proliferation (translation) of hybrids and quasi-objects. This is a proliferation that is, however, totally obscured by the second dichotomy – the work of purification is kept completely separate from the work of mediation (hybrid making).

The Fourth Guarantee: God Crossed-Out

The first three guarantees revolve around a perceived need to keep Nature and Society at opposite and purified poles of modern forms of thought. There is, however, a fourth guarantee within the modern Constitution which seeks to disarm the 'God question' in its theorization of the origins of both Nature and Society. Latour argues, in close proximity to Gunton, that for the Constitution to work properly God had to be evacuated, 'as if by an air pump', from the duality of social and natural construction. The idea was not to challenge belief in a creator God as a whole, but rather to purify Nature and Society from divine interference all the while preserving God as an actual Being. The followers of Hobbes would take on the task of extracting God's presence from Nature, while the followers of Boyle would endeavor to rid Society of any divine origin.⁸⁹ Here God is withdrawn to a distant heaven and boxed-in as the mere origin of Natural Law while the Laws of the Republic are left to form their own origins and destiny. In Latour's words, 'God becomes the crossed-out

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 294.

⁸⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

God of metaphysics, as different from the premodern God of the Christians as the Nature constructed in the laboratory is the ancient *phusis* or the Society invented by sociologists from the old anthropological collective and its crowds of nonhumans.⁹⁰

The modern God, as Latour sees it, is the infinitely distant and transcendent God who would only be called back to earth in order to settle conflicts between Natural Laws and the laws of the Republic. In this sense God can be held at arms-length allowing modern persons to be atheists yet still religious as God is held in reserve to settle matters of dispute. Here, humanity has privileged itself to a point where it is humans alone who may re-invite God into an immanence He once fully controlled. ‘Spirituality was re-invented: the all-powerful God could descend into men’s heart of hearts without intervening in any way in their external affairs.’⁹¹ Here we witness the birth of a Christian demiurge God who was proposed and sustained by the Deistic thought of the European Enlightenment. Scriptures were now interpreted only figuratively by the Sovereign, and belief in miracles was largely abandoned. Probably one of the greatest examples of this was the Jeffersonian Bible of the early nineteenth century, which omitted all that could be considered miraculous intervention into the realm of Nature. The outcome was belief in a God who was expelled into pure transcendence, waiting to be invited into this world through the wholly individual and spiritual religion of modern men. God was now an absent God who was unable to meddle in science or society, but could be appealed to by the individual heart of the pious believer. Modern man was therefore able to be both atheist and pious Christian simultaneously.

The four guarantees of the modern Constitution conjoin to create a threefold transcendence and a threefold immanence which brackets in all possibilities. Latour cleverly explains the useful paradox the moderns have created: ‘They have not made Nature; they make Society; they make Nature; they have not made Society; they have not made either, God has made everything; God has made nothing, they have made everything.’⁹² Here the modern Constitution reveals itself as being closely akin to certain political constitutions which require the separation of governmental duties and powers. The modern Constitution is itself a series of checks and balances and final veto power rests in the fourth guarantee – the crossed-out God. For the Modern, God is the totally remote divinity who is paradoxically impotent in affairs of immanence, yet can be appealed to as sovereign judge in matters of contradiction between the first two guarantees.

The Strength of the Modern Constitution

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 34.

It is these four Constitutional guarantees that make up the unique power and quality of the modern era. What stands out as a central element in all of this is the idea that the modern Constitution makes it impossible to witness the proliferation of hybrids or quasi-objects. For Latour it is the work of mediation which makes for this fertile environment where hybrids are allowed to multiply, yet the various dichotomizations of the Constitutional guarantees have obscured the hybrids to the point where they are no longer *representable*. This does not mean that hybridization is not happening, but on the contrary

the modern Constitution allows the expanded proliferation of the hybrids whose existence, whose very possibility, it denies. By playing three times in a row on the same alteration between transcendence and immanence, the moderns can mobilize Nature, objectify the social, and feel the spiritual presence of God, even while firmly maintaining that Nature escapes us, that Society is our own work, and that God no longer intervenes.⁹³

Today we tend to think of postmoderns as philosophers with hammers, the most brutal of iconoclasts ready to smash all belief into shards. However, the moderns, armed with their sharp Constitution, were (are) similarly able to smash the old powers into mere superstition by employing the material causality which those powers obscured. Throughout its development, modernity would mature into a movement which sought to quash all ideological pollution through a strict delineation of what constitutes Nature, with the help of the natural sciences, and later by doing the same for Society, through the advent of the sociological sciences. In between the two movements the hybrid was lost. The second group of Enlightenment thinkers, Latour writes, ‘too often saw an unacceptable blend that needed to be purified by carefully separating the part that belonged to things themselves and the part that could be attributed to the functioning of the economy, the unconscious, language, or symbols.’⁹⁴ With the new and exciting present of purified realms in hand, the old, backwards, and confusing yesterday could be seen as a completely separate history. Modernity could now understand itself as a radical break, a revolution in time, by which all other times were to be judged and differentiated. Once modernity had arisen from the confused and superstitious past, all that came before it was simply classified as the epithetical ‘premodern.’

Indeed, the moderns were an invincible force. They could critique and debunk all ideological claims to power through the appeal to Natural Law, unveiled by natural science, and at the very same time, they could employ the human sciences to debunk any naturalization, or false power, which the natural sciences sought to claim. Whereas the ‘Old Regime’ of the premoderns was hopelessly bogged down in its utter confusion of natural phenomena and human passions, the enlightened Moderns would not be so duped. Armed with their new Constitution they would be able to sharply delineate the old ‘illegitimate

⁹³ Ibid. (emphasis in the original)

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

mixtures' and submit them to purification 'by separating natural mechanisms from passions, interests or ignorance.'⁹⁵ This was the unprecedented advantage of the moderns and their Constitution. They could easily switch principles as they saw fit, without the slightest accusation of contradiction. The hybridity and collectivity of human and nonhuman realms could be papered-over until the two were made entirely opaque to one another. As Latour puts it, everything is mixed up in the middle, 'everything passes between the two, translation networks, but this space does not exist, it has no place. It is unthinkable, the unconscious of the moderns'.⁹⁶ With the delicate and detailed links between nonhumans and humans made invisible and unimportant, the moderns were free to evangelize the world with the new faith! Colonialism gained a new moral thrust to liberate the premoderns from their superstitious confusing of Nature and Culture, nonhumans and humans.

IV. A Revolution That Never Happened

Latour is probably best known for his provocative and seemingly paradoxical claim that the modern world is one which has never truly been. His book *We Have Never Been Modern* makes this claim quite lucid. His point, however, is not to argue that the modern Constitution has done nothing to change the world in which we live, but rather to stress that modernity has never actually functioned according to its own rules of conduct. In practice, modernity 'has never separated the three regions of Being' which it tried so hard to purify into discreet regions. This is due to the clever fact it could always rely upon its Constitutional ability to shift between immanence and transcendence in regards to all three 'regions of Being' – human, nonhuman, and God. For the moderns, the 'practice of translation has always been different from the practices of purification'.⁹⁷ But this is a maneuver which has prevented the moderns from seeing themselves as existing in any continuity with those they now deemed 'premodern'. Not until recently have the inheritors of modernity been able to see themselves in comparative fashion with the premoderns, or 'nonmoderns' as Latour prefers.

In making the claim that the moderns have never truly been modern, Latour is not pretending that they are so confused as to be blind to what they are doing. He does not wish to be iconoclastic or in anyway debunking of the modern project, but rather to simply state what it is that they actually fulfill in practice. Latour claims that there is no 'false consciousness involved' on the parts of the moderns, as they are explicit about their dichotomization of Nature and Society, and their unwillingness to consider the work of purification and

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

mediation together.⁹⁸ What is different about Latour's exposition of the modern Constitution is his willingness to make explicit the connections between these two sets of practices.

It is one of the most perplexing paradoxes of the modern Constitution that it worked to obscure mediation and hybridity, yet created a fertile ground for the proliferation of these hybridizing practices. Scientific mediation and laboratory practices allowed for a mobilization of nonhumans that had never before been seen. Humans and nonhumans could be mobilized on a far wider scale than history had ever witnessed. With laboratory techniques such as the air pump, there could now be a vacuum created (artificially) in every laboratory across the world. The vacuum, in Boyle's mind, could now permit the universal definition of Natural Laws, the causality of God (or lack thereof), and could settle disputes among revolutionary movements and monarchies. The contracts between humans and nonhumans would enjoy an unprecedented multiplication. Although human and nonhuman were separated and purified and held apart, their networks (hybridizing contracts) could be multiplied and extended across vast distances. Latour makes it clear that

the moderns think they have succeeded in such an expansion only because they have carefully separated Nature and Society (and bracketed God), whereas they have succeeded only because they have mixed together much greater masses of humans and nonhumans, without bracketing anything and without ruling out any combination!⁹⁹

Purification was never the sole seat of success for the modern project as they would wish to see it. But rather, it was the obscured proliferation of mediation, mobilization, hybridization and the expansion of scale that granted them this great success. The one practice could not have lived without the other. But it took a nonmodern vision to see what was going on beneath the surface and thereby add the two halves to one another.

When Latour insists that 'we have never been modern,' he is proposing that the first two guarantees of the Constitution have never been truly and fully employed. We have never been able to completely separate the natural realm from the social. In reality, it is the contrary that has occurred; the Constitution has actually 'accelerated the socialization of nonhumans, because it never allows them to appear as elements of "real society."' ¹⁰⁰ We have a choice, says Latour, we can either defend the modern work of purification or we can choose to study the twinned work of purification and mediation together. Once we begin to follow this route of adding the two halves of modernity together, we then cease to be fully modern – we in fact become nonmodern. The goal for Latour has never been to become an effective postmodern. On the contrary, Latour, like Gunton, sees this project as a mere 'symptom' rather than a desirable solution. Postmodernity is still all too dependent upon the modern Constitution, or

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

rather, parasitic upon it. The postmodern has simply lost faith in the ability of the modern's Constitutional guarantees, yet continues to work within its foundations. Postmodern thought has failed to retrace 'the path of modernity all the way back to the various bifurcations that started this impossible project in the first place. It feels the same nostalgia as modernism, except it tries to take on, as positive features, the overwhelming failures of the rationalist project.'¹⁰¹

Kant and the Entrenchment of a One-Dimensional Science

The skirmishes between Boyle and Hobbes are just one early example of the many debates that would contribute to the solidification of the modern Constitution. Doubtless, these arguments can be seen to stretch further back than our seventeenth century combatants. In fact, in *Pandora's Hope*, Latour outlines a similar debate between Socrates and Callicles concerning their differing ideas about political representation in the Agora of Athens. But as could be expected, the other central figure in the solidification of the modern Constitution's guarantees has been Immanuel Kant. It is worth taking some time now to illustrate Latour's understanding of Kant's contribution to the modern settlement. This exercise will aid in our comparison with Gunton who found Kant also to be deeply responsible for our modern state of alienation and fragmentation. Like Gunton in the last chapter, Latour finds Kant to be culpable in his formulation of the 'Copernican Revolution.' But as Latour sees it, this was not so much a scientific revolution as it was a 'scientific nightmare'.

For Latour, what Kant's *Critique* established was nothing less than the 'yardstick' by which all subsequent debate concerning the nature of human knowing would be measured. For it is from him that we have found ourselves in the midst of a one-dimensional science. The continuum of this one-dimensional science is flanked by the two dichotomous poles of Nature and Society. The repercussions of the establishment of these two extremes have had a detrimental effect on the current debates which have been described popularly, and regrettably so, as the 'science wars.' Latour argues that all scientific debate is now plotted along this yardstick which Kant had cemented into the modern sciences and has since revealed itself in our current impasse between the 'two cultures'. Again, the yardstick is one which stretches between the diametrically opposed poles of Nature and Society, natural sciences and social sciences. Nature occupies the right hand side while Society has entrenched itself on the left. 'If one goes from left to right then one has to be a social constructivist; if on the contrary, one goes from right to left, then one has to be a closet realist.'¹⁰² Along this continuum there exists no opportunity for true communion between the two poles, only differing mixtures between the two purified realms is possible.

¹⁰¹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 22.

¹⁰² Latour, "One More Turn After the Social Turn," p. 279.

Kant's reasoning for establishing this dichotomous yardstick was essentially polemical in trajectory. For what Kant sought to accomplish was the complete separation of objects and subjects. As Latour explains

Kant rejected at the two poles—Things-in-themselves on the one hand, the Transcendental Ego on the other—the resources that, when put together, would account for knowledge. This was the foundation of the *Critique* that made us modern, more modern. To be sure, empirical scientific knowledge appeared in the middle, but this middle, the phenomenon, was understood only as the meeting point of the two purified sets of resources coming from the subject pole or from the object pole.¹⁰³

The middle of the yardstick, where empirical scientific knowledge would appear, consisted only of a single point of contact between these two purified extremes. It is at this meeting point where the clash between object (Nature) and the subject (Society) produced that strangest of entities known to Kant as the 'phenomena.' Ever since Kant's polemical separation of the two dichotomous poles, both philosophers and sociologists have fought to seize control over the subject end of the yardstick, since it was the ultimate focus-point of Kant's Copernican revolution. In their haste, Latour points out, both sides of the yardstick missed the fact that it makes little difference 'whether the elected ruler was Kant's Ego, Durkheim's macro-Society, Foucault's *epistemes*, Dewey's praxis, Wittgenstein's language games, collectives of scientists, brains and neurons, minds, or cognitive structures—as long as this one ruler capitalized all the explanatory resources and had the object turning around it'.¹⁰⁴ It is in this sense that Kant's dichotomizing of the two poles necessitated a push towards reductionism that overwhelmed the many rival scientific schools. The effect was to obscure the basic framework of the *Critique* that forced the polemical stance in the first place.

Latour points to a second reason why Kant's yardstick of uni-dimensional science carried such a wide influence into the modern Constitution. This may be found in the fact that Kant's framework was heavily *asymmetrical* in its construction. For it was the subject – as Latour says, the 'Sun' of the Copernican revolution – that took up the place of privilege amongst the many lifeless and a-historical objects which revolved around its singular and objective gaze. There was little concern for creating any new understandings of the object itself. 'It really seemed that if one could occupy the right-hand side of the yardstick, much of the left-hand side would be explained.'¹⁰⁵ So while the philosophers and sociologist clamored to occupy the focus of Kant's 'Sun' – the subject – the Things-in-themselves were left untouched and unquestioned. They were there simply to be formed and molded by the many categories which Kant outlined in his *Critique*. Idealism was the constant threat that could possibly undermine the validity of the subject, thus to qualify Kant's idealistic leaning, the

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 280.

nonhuman was left to be external, a-historical, and entirely purged of the social. This further served to effectively preserve the transcendentalism of human reason thereby avoiding any slippage into an unchecked idealism. As long as Nature was pure and objectified, and thereby containing no pollution of the social, human knowledge was safeguarded.

It is this asymmetry which has become one of the primary points of debate within the small field of science studies today. It was in the mid 1970's that science studies, or more specifically the SSK approach of the Edinburgh school, began to question this asymmetrical and dichotomous opposition between the poles of Nature and Society. In the next section we will take a close look at the genesis of this important question. Furthermore, we will review how the initial challenges have been critiqued and amended by Latour and the French school of science studies. The principle of symmetry and its recent offspring have sparked a heated debate within science studies that should not be ignored. By reviewing this debate, we will come closer to grasping the central concerns of science studies and its potential application to a theological accounting of persons and things.

V. The Principle of Symmetry

As we have seen, the modern Constitution forced us into making the sometimes violent distinction between subjects and objects, or as science studies has re-labeled them, humans and nonhumans. Here we are given purification with one hand while mediation is forced with the other. As Latour and others have so clearly shown, this state of affairs makes it nearly impossible for any anthropological study of modern man/woman. The modern Constitution was always becoming entangled in its own inability to deal with the sciences and the technologies they produced. Therefore anthropologists did not know how to handle these strange beings that inhabited a world purified into a dichotomous Nature and Society, thus they were forced to set sail for those who still inhabited the 'premodern' world. The problem, according to Latour, is due to an inherent asymmetry within the social sciences themselves. They had now settled on an impossibility that 'rules out studying objects of nature, limiting the extent of its inquiries exclusively to cultures.'¹⁰⁶ Herein lies the crippling asymmetry, the social sciences – and anthropology in particular – have been unable to cope with the modern's secret hybridization of nature and society. Whereas the 'premoderns' of the world were perpetually stuck in a pattern of completely confusing nature and society in all of their practices. How could anthropology then stand a chance of becoming truly comparative within this modernist atmosphere? How can you compare purification with total confusion? For anthropology to become truly comparative, that is, able to move from moderns to premoderns

¹⁰⁶ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 92.

and back again, it would have to adopt a methodological model that could overcome the asymmetry of the older model. Thus was born the ‘first principle of symmetry.’

The First Principle of Symmetry

With the publication of *Knowledge and Social Imagery* in 1976, David Bloor of the Edinburgh School, deeply disturbed traditionalists within the field of sociology of scientific knowledge by insisting that both error *and* truth must be given equal footing in the field’s methodology. At the outset of the book, Bloor questioned traditional SSK’s pessimism concerning its ability to coherently investigate and explain the very content of scientific knowledge. Bloor’s stance was clear, all ‘knowledge, whether it be in the empirical sciences or even in mathematics, should be treated, through and through, as material for investigation’.¹⁰⁷ In doing this the sociologist should adopt a symmetrical view of *all* claims to a truthful state of affairs within the natural sciences. That is to say, we should not limit our investigations to truth claims that have withstood historical scrutiny alone. We should, instead, give equal consideration to scientific claims that have since been proven to be false conclusions. The reason for this is relatively simple, for what we are left with today is a world where only the victors in scientific debate still remain. The victors have effectively silenced the losers to the effect that error is seen as having always been socially explainable, while truth appears to be self-explanatory and a-historical – truth has become ‘black-boxed’ to the effect that it has lost its historical pedigree. Isabelle Stengers explains that ‘we are the heirs of the winners, we re-create, with regard to the past, a narrative in which arguments internal to a scientific community would be sufficient to designate these winners; it is because these arguments convince us as heirs that we retrospectively attribute to them the power to have made the difference.’¹⁰⁸

Before the radical break of Bloor’s symmetry, only ‘naïve beliefs,’ for instance a belief in angels, could be explained through sociological investigation, whereas rigid truths, like Newton’s gravity, were off-limits to sociological scrutiny. All of scientific history was split into two groups, illusion on the one hand, and absolute truth on the other. Counter to this, a symmetrical account of the sociology of scientific knowledge would compel us to also weigh the accounts of the losers by seeking identical causes for both true and false, ‘fabricated’ and ‘real,’ claims to truth. Sociological scrutiny would now be required to give a parallel or symmetrical accounting of both winners and losers. Latour explains that it is in the

¹⁰⁷ Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, 2nd (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976 [1991]), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 8-9.

revealing of ‘this double standard’ that ‘we recognize the split in anthropology between the sciences, which were not open to study, and ethnosciences, which were’.¹⁰⁹

The blame for this ‘double standard,’ as Latour sees it, can be firmly placed at the feet of the epistemologists who long ago created this foundational model of asymmetry between true and false sciences. Latour will forcefully argue that it is the ‘towering epistemologists’ – especially those of the French tradition – that are the real villains in this drama. It is they who have rejected a symmetrical anthropology, and have thereby forced an epistemological break between ‘true’ and ‘false’ beliefs. The epistemologists have insisted that ideology and scientific truth must be held apart at all costs if we are to have any hope of accessing absolute truth. But how are we to understand scientific practice if the quasi-objects that it produces are forever ripped from the networks that give them their actual meaning? Once this epistemological break is made, the quasi-object dies leaving only a mute and opaque object – an object with no history, no blood ties, and no ideological ‘pollution’. Here again the principle of symmetry breaks in to reestablish some semblance of continuity and history for the ‘object’ of scientific scrutiny. Yet Latour’s protest rings clear, for what this insistence – this Modern insistence – obscures, is the path taken by the proliferation of quasi-objects which the Modern settlement is so skilled at producing. Therefore, it is the epistemologists who have made opaque the actual practice of science along with technological and political practice as we will see later in this chapter. Michel Serres has made these points about epistemology clear in his summation; ‘The only pure myth is the idea of a science devoid of all myth.’¹¹⁰ For the historian of science, explanations of scientific failure must be equally applicable to scientific successes. If we are to account for science’s successes, we must be able to use the same criteria for explaining its failures.

As we have seen, Bloor’s principle of symmetry radically revised the SSK field. All that came before it now appeared as so much anathema, with its convenient employment of epistemological breaks. Without a legitimate recourse to *a priori* distinctions between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sciences, SSK could now begin to bring some form of peace between sociologists who study belief systems and those who studied the sciences.¹¹¹ We can imagine the profound impact this would have on anthropological studies. Remembering that under the asymmetrical account of the epistemologists, only falsehood could be explained sociologically while truths were purified and elevated into the realm of a-historical Nature. Anthropologists, the so-called ‘soft’ scientists, were forced to seek out the premoderns of the world in order to go and separate out their tangled web of false beliefs concerning Nature. This is because they were

¹⁰⁹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 92.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 93. The original statement can be found in Michelle Serres, *La Traduction (Hermès III)*, (Paris: Minuit, 1974).

¹¹¹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 94.

thought to be the only ones worthy of study since it was they, the premoderns, who were not living in accordance with the epistemological break. Theirs was still a world of fetishized natural 'objects' waiting to be shattered by the indelible hammers of the modern anthropologist. But what the principle of symmetry served to accomplish was a reawakening of anthropologists. Now that Nature could no longer be used to explain truth or falsehood, and this task had been handed over to sociological explanations alone, the anthropologist was now free to study the sciences and technologies of his or her own kind – the modern. As Latour explains, the anthropologist 'is no longer required to limit himself to cultures, since Nature – or, rather, natures – have become similarly accessible to study.'¹¹²

The first principle of symmetry was indeed a breakthrough for its time, but voices of dissent began to grow in the 1980's, particularly in France, due in large part to the influence of Latour and Michel Callon's work. Latour's point of issue is rather simple, the first principle of symmetry is *not* symmetrical, in fact, it is distinctly asymmetrical! In the old settlement of the epistemologists, truth correlated to Natural reality, while falsehood could be explained through sociological explanation of varying interests and epistemes. This was obviously an asymmetrical account. The first principle of symmetry, on the other hand, sought to bring both truth and falsehood under a *single* program of scrutiny and explanation – sociology, interests, epistemes. Latour explains that the principle of symmetry 'is asymmetrical not because it separates ideology and science, as epistemologists do, but because it brackets off Nature and makes the 'Society' pole carry the full weight of explanation. Constructivist where Nature is concerned, it is realistic about society.'¹¹³

Latour argued that the Society which Bloor now adopted as the rule of all explanation was just as constructed as the Nature it would seek to explain. It follows that if we demand to be realists about Society, then we must extend the same courtesy, so to speak, to Nature. If we are to maintain a constructivist view of one pole, the Natural, while proclaiming to be realists when speaking of the other, Society, we then cease to give a truly *symmetrical* account. Latour ties these observations back into his diagnosis of the failed modern Constitution. He insists that we 'must be able to understand simultaneously how Nature and Society are immanent—in the work of mediation—and transcendent—after the work of purification'.¹¹⁴ The dual poles of Nature and Society should not be the sure foundations from which we are obliged to initiate our attempts to understand the quasi-object, for it is these separate poles which we are trying to explain in the first place. The purified realms of the epistemologists have served only to obscure the solution. For Latour, Nature and Society are the late comers

¹¹² Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 94. But see also Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Don't Throw the Baby out with the Bath School! A Reply to Collins and Yearley," in *Science as Practice and Culture*, Andy Pickering (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

in this drama. They appear as sources of explanation, for the epistemologists, only after the quasi-object has stabilized into an object that may be purified into the realm of Nature, an object of external reality, or as subject within Society. The goal is to situate ourselves before we can ‘clearly delineate subjects and objects, goals and functions, form and matter...Fully fledged human subjects and respectable objects out there in the world’ cannot be our starting point, but rather, our point of arrival.¹¹⁵

The Generalized Principle of Symmetry

If we are to come to a better understanding of the quasi-object – the hybrid of the modern constitution that was always hidden in practice – we must seek a symmetry that begins with the quasi-object itself. Said differently, what we need is an anthropology that is itself truly symmetrical in its focus. This is what Michel Callon has deemed the ‘principle of generalized symmetry: the anthropologist has to position himself at the median point where he can follow the attribution of both nonhuman and human properties’.¹¹⁶ Latour describes this same movement towards the center of Kant’s one-dimensional science (his yardstick) as the ‘counter-Copernican revolution.’ Now that we have defined the two polemically opposed ends of Kant’s continuum, the subject pole and the object pole, we can now move on to investigate how Latour and others within science studies have sought to modify Kant’s settlement as well as Bloor’s symmetry, without leaving the *terra firma* of scientific practice.

The first move of the counter-Copernican revolution, or the generalized principle of symmetry, is essentially ontological. Latour asks us to ‘make one more turn after the social’ by modifying Bloor’s principle of symmetry. We will recall that Bloor’s principle stipulated that truth and error should both be subjected and explained through sociological methodology. His was an approach which crowded the subject end of Kant’s spectrum. This principle effectively abandoned the Natural pole, allowing it to fall exclusively under sociological interpretation. As Latour argues, it was hardly symmetrical, but rather, entirely asymmetrical. Therefore, the first move for a generalized principle of symmetry must be to ‘force the two poles, Nature and Society, to shift into the center and to fuse into one another.’¹¹⁷ The fusing of these two poles, however, is no simple operation considering they have been polemically dichotomized for several centuries. As we will recall, the object pole (Nature) was purified in order to guarantee the transcendent form of human knowledge. That which is Natural, could never be tainted with the pollution of human (subjective) passions. Knowledge could never be

¹¹⁵ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 182.

¹¹⁶ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 96. See also Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieux Bay," in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, John Law (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1986).

¹¹⁷ Latour, "One More Turn After the Social Turn," p. 282.

seen as human-made or socially constructed if we had a pure object pole to which we could appeal for transcendence. Again, the subject pole was preserved in a vacuum for similar reasons. For it was the subject which guaranteed that all knowledge was human-made, whether the subject is defined as transcendental Ego, society, subject, mind, or any of the other legion of pretenders to the throne. 'In addition, the very distinction between the two poles—the distinction which Kant made so sharp—warranted that those two contradictory guarantees would *not* be confused, because the two transcendences—that of the object “out there” and that of the subject/society “up there”—are sources of authority *only if they are as far apart as possible*,¹¹⁸ These are, as we reviewed earlier, the failed guarantees of the Modern Constitution. Therefore, if we are to force these two poles together in a new generalized principle of symmetry, we must seek to understand this overwhelmingly important 'middle-ground' between the two poles.

As we take up this 'median point,' the point between humans and nonhumans, the reality of the quasi-object once again comes into view. This once 'non-place' of the modern Constitution now becomes the central player in our movement towards understanding what the modern Constitution has always sought to make invisible. This new and notably un-polemic methodology may now take up this middle-ground as its fulcrum. This 'no-man's-land' between modernity's subjects and objects will now become the natural home for the 'nonmodern' inhabitant, as Latour describes it. Thus it is from where the mediation of quasi-objects was once obfuscated, now arises a means for coming to grips with the mysterious two-sidedness of the modern Constitution.

Returning to the case of a comparative anthropology, we may now pause to consider what this may look like in the nonmodern context of generalized symmetry. The anthropologist, or ethnologist, of the past would head out to analyze the cultural intricacies of a particular people. The researcher would then employ a rather singularized analytical tool to carryout these studies, spanning, for instance, from a culture's farming practices to their ancestral mythology. Latour points out that the ethnologist is bold enough to use this monochromatic web of interpretation because she is convinced that her job is to interpret the mere representations with which these people have created their society. The Natural world – that is, a natural and purified world – in which these people inhabit, is the same universal Nature that the modern ethnologist will find in any and every culture around the globe. This is because Nature, for the ethnologist, 'remains unique, external and universal. But if we suppose the two positions—the one that the ethnologist occupies effortlessly in order to study cultures and the one that we have made a great effort to define in order to study our own

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 282. (emphasis in the original)

nature—then comparative anthropology becomes possible, if not easy.’¹¹⁹ The ethnologist may no-longer occupy a privileged vacuum that is somehow outside of culture and inside the purified Nature from which truth may be extracted. Instead, the ethnologist may now employ a truly comparative anthropology by contrasting what Latour has called ‘natures-cultures.’ Important to this, is the promise it holds for unraveling the ever-present pitfall of relativism.

VI. Towards a Nonmodern Constitution

In Colin Gunton we have seen that the late-modern world is deeply in need of a renewed theology of creation and culture that is fully Trinitarian. For him, the answer to alienation and fragmentation is to be found in a thoroughgoing relating of God and world, persons and nonpersons, in such a way as to maintain the integrity of the one and the many. For Latour the answer to the modern Constitution’s many pitfalls is to be found in a concerted effort to become nonmodern. We must come to realize that modernity was little more than a clever smokescreen which sought to play a polemical Nature against a polemical Society, all the while keeping God in a distant judge’s chair. Now that we have come to see through the smokescreen and realize that translation has never ceased we will begin to become distinctly nonmodern. Thus we may now begin to outline what Latour has called a nonmodern constitution. But as he so often has emphasized, we are not seeking to be more clever or more critical than the modern and postmodern critiques. In other words, we certainly do not need another form of iconoclasm or a debunking ‘era of suspicion.’ What nonmodernism entails, for Latour, is a ‘retrospective attitude, which deploys instead of unveiling, adds instead of subtracting, fraternizes instead of denouncing, sorts out instead of debunking.’¹²⁰ Unlike the postmoderns, nonmoderns do not carry hammers – they are not iconoclasts. But as Latour insists; ‘A nonmodern is anyone who takes simultaneously into account the moderns’ Constitution and the populations of hybrids that that Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate.’¹²¹ This is the positive definition of the nonmodern project. If the reality is that we have never been modern, and for that matter have never been critical, then why start now? If we have never truly left the old anthropological mix of the ‘premodern,’ then why spend our days being wholly critical of the modern?

Quasi-Objects and Quasi-Subjects

The first step towards recognizing the nonmodern milieu would consist in the recognition of the hybrids and quasi-objects which the modern Constitution so eagerly

¹¹⁹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

obscured. Here we should pause in the interest of making clear what is meant by the term ‘quasi-object’ in Latour’s usage. Remembering our earliest example of the ozone hole, we can now try to see how this quasi-object would fit into the Constitution of the moderns. Following the regulations of their first three guarantees, the modern would be forced to see all the elements (networks) which compose this strange being in purified realms. So-called ‘human elements’ would go to the social scientists, while the ‘natural elements’ would be preserved for the natural scientists. But is the ozone hole, global warming, or mad cow disease purely the outcome of human deeds? Or are these hybrids purely the outcome of purely natural processes? Can we classify them as purely local phenomena or purely global phenomena? What the modern Constitution had to categorize through ‘seeing double’ can now be seen as a continuous (networked) whole by the nonmodern milieu. The quasi-object is all of these things – natural, social, human, nonhuman, local and global. It was after all, the moderns who created this fertile soil for the proliferation of the hybrid that has now saturated the modern framework. But now the nonmodern task is to offer these hybrids a new ontology that resists the forced pigeon-holing of the moderns.

The quasi-object and the quasi-subject, therefore, resist the specified and polarized interests of the natural scientist and the social scientist who are stuck within the modern disease of ‘seeing double.’ Interested in debunking the beliefs of the common people, social scientists have been too concerned with portraying the object as the mere receptacle of ‘false’ human projections. They could only see the object as the mere *tabula rasa* for human projections, desires, and passions. Yet there is also a second movement within the social scientist camp which seeks to debunk the human *belief* that we are free subjects. Here the social scientist, who once saw the object as the passive recipient of human categories, now steps in to declare the object’s ultimate power over the subject. The subject ‘has become powerless, shaped in turn by the powerful objective forces that completely determine its action’.¹²² The double sightedness of the modern Constitution leaves society in either too strong a position over the object or in too weak a position – the middle ground is lost. This has left us with the undesirable solution of dualism, where thinkers offer us alternating options between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ notions of Nature and Society. Nonmodernism, through the quasi-object/subject, seeks to upset this dualist paradigm by insisting that we ‘are not forever trapped in a boring alternation between objects or matter and subjects and symbols. We are not limited to “not only...but also” explanations’.¹²³

Certainly, there have been countless attempts at overcoming the dualist paradigm. We have reviewed the Edinburgh School’s attempts and have concluded that they were noble indeed, but have ultimately fallen short on several fronts. Latour has also systematically

¹²² Ibid., p. 53.

¹²³ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 212.

rejected other projects such as phenomenology, the incommensurability of Habermas, and the project of dialectics. Although we will not dig into each of these in turn, we will make short mention of Latour's response to the latter for it has held some sway in recent theological formulations of the nature/culture relationship.¹²⁴ Dialectical reasoning, for Latour, has attempted to link the dual poles of the modern Constitution simply by filling the middle ground with 'as many arrows and feedback loops as one wishes' but it does not 'relocate the quasi-object or quasi-subject' that Latour sees as the heart of the nonmodern Constitution.¹²⁵ Essentially, dialectics circles around the quasi-object/subject with its numerous loops and spirals, without ever really touching on the hybrid itself. Dialectics entirely misses the middle ground by circling the peripheries which the modern constitution has solidified. In the final estimation, dialectics remains all too modern for Latour.

The quasi-object and quasi-subject exist between the two poles of the modern Constitution, but also 'below' it. They are far more socialized than the hard extreme of the natural sciences, which is to say that they exist in the 'collective' of the middle ground. Nor are these quasi-objects the blank *tabula rasa* upon which society might project its desires, anxieties, and constructions. As Latour points out, the quasi-object is 'much more real, nonhuman and objective than those shapeless screens on which society—for unknown reasons—needed to be "projected."'¹²⁶ Coming to terms with the quasi-object/subject has put science studies in a position where we might now be able to reconsider the place of the nonhumans in our hybridized collectives.

The Nonmodern Guarantees

As we have seen, the quasi-object or hybrid is the lifeblood of nonmodern thought. Therefore, Latour's first stipulation in regard to a nonmodern Constitution is that it would commit to the full representation of the quasi-object. This stands in heavy opposition to the modern Constitution's third guarantee. Remembering that this guarantee demanded the complete separation between Natural and Social worlds, and secondly between the work of hybrids and the work of purification. It was this third guarantee of the modern Constitution that allowed for the black-boxing of the quasi-object. But here in the nonmodern constitution the first guarantee will act to reinforce the inseparability of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. As Latour explains

Every concept, every institution, every practice that interferes with the continuous deployment of collectives and their experimentation with hybrids will be deemed dangerous, harmful, and—we may as well say it—immoral. The work of mediation

¹²⁴ Here I am referring primarily to Peter Scott's application of Marxist dialectics in the nature/culture relationship in his recent study titled *A Political Theology of Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹²⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 55.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

becomes the very centre of the double power, natural and social. The networks come out of hiding.¹²⁷

As the networks of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects are brought out of obscurity, the middle ground – the non-place of the modern Constitution – takes on a new importance. Yet we must also be careful, Latour warns, as we do not wish to once again become premoderns. In the premodern understanding, all things both natural and social had to correspond directly, to the effect of making large scale experimentation utterly impossible. In this sense we want to preserve one of the modern Constitution's major precepts: 'the separability of a nature that no one has constructed—transcendence—and the freedom of manoeuvre of a society that is of our own making—immanence'.¹²⁸ This is, however, only to be understood in a qualified sense as we wish to maintain this distinction without the clandestine duplicity of the modern Constitution's third guarantee.

What is desired, according to Latour, is the maintenance of the modern Constitution's first two guarantees, but without the obfuscating action of the third guarantee. This seemingly undesirable movement can be achieved once we have made it explicit that the transcendence of Nature and the immanence of Society is the sole product of the work of mediation. This is, of course, contrary to what the moderns claimed. But as the nonmodern sees it, both nature and society are the 'products' (loosely interpreted) of the durable and irreversible work of translation and mediation. This allows for a nature (now with a lower-case 'n') that we have not 'made,' and a society that we can change; 'there are indeed indisputable scientific facts, and free citizens, but once they are viewed in a nonmodern light they become the double consequence of a practice that is now visible in its continuity'.¹²⁹

This moves us into a position where we might begin to define the second guarantee of Latour's nonmodern Constitution. This guarantee seeks to hold the first two guarantees of the modern Constitution in an inseparable tandem, whereas the moderns sought to purify them into distinct realms. As the first guarantee of the nonmodern Constitution sought to free all the networks and quasi-objects from the black-boxing of the modern, this second guarantee seeks to preserve their 'freedom of manoeuvre.' Therefore, Latour does not argue that the moderns were completely off the mark as they sought to objectify nonhumans and preserve free societies. 'They were mistaken only in their certainty that that double production required an absolute distinction between the two terms and the continual repression of the work of mediation.'¹³⁰ The life-blood of the modern project was precisely the action which they denied – the work of mediation.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The third nonmodern guarantee revolves around a new understanding of history and time. As we have seen, the modern Constitution was locked into recognizing only three specific entities within its cosmos: subjects, objects, and the ‘crossed-out God’. Within this constellation it was only human history that could be understood as being in anyway contingent. As we have already seen, all of history was understood in relation to the modern ‘revolution’, and all that came before it was deemed to be merely ‘premodern.’ The modern understanding of time was thus strictly linear, flat and predictable. In the nonmodern view, this simply is not the case. Time is not, nor has it ever been the steady, predictable flow of homogenous associations. As Latour explains; ‘If time depends on associations, associations do not depend on time.’¹³¹ In other words, if associations are heterogeneous rather than homogenous, then so too will time be something other than a coherent and smooth flow. We return to this interesting nonmodern concept of time in chapter four, where it is given a more complete treatment along with spacing and placing.

But for now, and in light of this revised understanding of the time and place of objects, we may now seek to give a brief definition of the third guarantee of the nonmodern constitution. This guarantee maintains that ‘freedom is redefined as a capacity of hybrids that no longer depend on a homogenous temporal flow.’¹³² We are now free to combine heterogeneous associations of humans and nonhumans without having to pigeonhole them into the Old Regime’s choices of ‘archaism and modernization, the local and the global, the cultural and the universal, the natural and the social’.¹³³ We should take notice that this is a move away from reserving freedom for the social pole of the continuum alone. Again, we will return to this aspect of nonmodernity for a more complete treatment in chapter four.

The fourth guarantee of the new nonmodern Constitution is the one Latour esteems as possibly being the most important of them all. We will remember that the fourth guarantee of the modern Constitution revolved around the ‘crossing-out’ of God, as he was seen to be banished to a wholly distant transcendence so as to be incapable of meddling in immanent affairs, save for the most extreme of conflicts. Here the fourth guarantee of the nonmodern would seek to liberate God from his distant imprisonment. As Latour explains: ‘The question of God is reopened, and the nonmoderns no longer have to try to generalize the improbable metaphysics of the moderns that forced them to believe in belief.’¹³⁴ The intention is that this will open up a space where the once hidden proliferation of hybrids will now be officially recognized and regulated. Moreover, Latour insists that this may be a time and place where

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 141.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

we might extend the practice of democracy to things themselves, rather than to the human subject alone.¹³⁵ This is, as he has termed it, a ‘parliament of things.’

The Parliament of Things: A Nonmodern Anthropology

Now that the quasi-objects have been brought into the light of day, no-longer resigned to living beneath the modern Constitution’s opaque shadow, we may begin to imagine what Latour has termed the ‘Parliament of Things.’ These discoveries of science studies have been forced to patiently await the development of an anthropology capable of absorbing these new imbroglios – the obscured hybrids. As the modern settlement depended on a strict division of human and nonhuman worlds, the nonmodern constitution of science studies has done much to move closer towards a nonmodern anthropology that is truly comparative. Again, this is not a movement towards a debunking of science, as many of the opponents of science studies have charged. But rather, as Latour insists:

When we amend the Constitution, we continue to believe in the sciences, but instead of taking their objectivity, their truth, their coldness, their extraterritoriality—qualities they have never had, except after the arbitrary withdrawal of epistemology—we retain what has always been most interesting about them: their daring, their experimentation, their uncertainty, their warmth, their incongruous blend of hybrids, their crazy ability to reconstitute their social bond.¹³⁶

Therefore, science will maintain a place within the new parliament of things, but it will be a science with a new and immanent history. It will not be the God-like or transcendent practice of years past.¹³⁷ In Boyle’s parliament, things (nonhumans) required human representation to intermeditate on their behalf. As we have seen, these passive, gentlemanly, witnesses simply reported what the things would have said if they could speak for themselves. Hobbes, on the other hand, invested his interests in the singular representation of the masses of human subjects who could not all speak at once; therefore the Sovereign was essential to the parliament of people. Again, the Sovereign was thought to be a gentleman who would speak only that which the people would speak if all could be heard at once.

The breakdown crept in, as Latour points out, once we began to question whether the scientists and the Sovereign were translating or betraying their masses of humans and nonhumans. If the scientists were wrong, we would lose the nonhumans and fall into human argumentation alone. If the Sovereign was dishonest, we would lose societal representation and be forced back into a state of Nature – man against man.¹³⁸ But if we could keep to the

¹³⁵ Latour has recently attempted a full elucidation of what this might look like in his book titled *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences Into Democracy*.

¹³⁶ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 142.

¹³⁷ Scattered throughout Latour’s work a distinction is made between two types of science; science one and science two. Science one is the science of the Enlightenment, while science two is the more realistic and modest science he has described in the preceding quotation.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

two spheres of representation – human and nonhuman – as far apart as possible, then there would be no harm in carrying on with a ‘double sightedness.’ This left the moderns with no way of knowing who was honest and who was betraying the parliaments they represented.

A Parliament of Things, which depends upon a nonmodern anthropology, will reject this division of duties. Representation will not be separated into two purified realms. Instead, the Parliament of Things will adopt a singular mode of representing both humans and nonhumans, reuniting that which was forced to opposite poles by the modern Constitution. Undoubtedly, the nonmodern constitution will encourage the sidelining of traditional concerns of the epistemologists. In their anxiety ridden grasping for an immediate world ‘out there,’ the epistemologists have tried to evacuate all mediation and translation from scientific practice, both natural and political. But in the Parliament of Things intermediaries, translators, and hybrids will no longer be seen as the polluting entities they were once considered by the epistemologists. We must recognize that suspicions regarding scientific representation had grown out of the modern belief that Nature could only become immediately accessible if all traces of the social were evacuated from its forms of mediation. The scientists wanted the social at arms length, while the sociologists wanted objects set in their properly distant place. A nonmodern Parliament of Things will instead seek to register both forms of representation as a *single* entity. As Latour exclaims; ‘Let us again take up the two representatives and the double doubt about the faithfulness of the representatives, and we shall have defined the Parliament of things.’¹³⁹

Within this new nonmodern parliament the mediator will reign as king. Naked, transcendent, unmediated truths will be forever banished, but so too will the bare-boned subject-citizen who has been purified of all inhumanity. ‘Natures are present, but with their representatives, scientists who speak in their name. Societies are present, but with the objects that have been serving as their ballast from time immemorial.’¹⁴⁰ All that was formerly obscured by the modern constitution is now brought into the light of day. The networks of hybridized quasi-objects/subjects now have the parliament to themselves as it is they who need to be represented as they defy and transgress the fictional ‘purified realms’ of the modern Constitution. As Latour is keen to point out, this is not a revolution. It is rather, simply ratifying what we have always done in practice but could not recognize due to the official Constitutional guarantees. The Parliament of Things simply rejoins the two-halves of the constitution which Boyle and Hobbes sought to dichotomize.

Common Criticisms of Latour’s Project

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

It is to be expected that a writer as prolific, flamboyant, and altogether ubiquitous as Latour has become, would inevitably be subjected to a number of criticisms. To be certain, one of the central tasks of this thesis is to subject Latour to a specifically theological critique which we pursue in the next chapter. But for now we may do well to simply highlight a number of the more common criticisms which have been lodged against Latour and his ‘French’ brand of science studies. Here we will focus on just three of the more common criticisms.

We have already alluded to the first and most common criticism which, upon my own reading, is based upon a common misunderstanding, or in some cases, an intentional misrepresentation of Latour’s work. This has to do with the widely held notion – primarily amongst scientific realists – that Latour’s work represents a kind of radical ‘social constructivism’ or merely a faddish antirealism in the vein of mainstream postmodern thought. This is, however, a gross distortion of Latour’s project. As Steven C. Ward has argued, Latour’s approach is more clearly understood as an ‘attempt to offer a view of science that is void of both modern realist optimism and postmodern relativist pessimism. As such, it is neither a realist vindication of the progress of science or an antirealist denigration of all foundations.’¹⁴¹ As Ward makes clear, Latour’s project is not centrally concerned with iconoclasm, but rather with explaining the success of the sciences by appealing neither to realism nor relativism. The continuing problem, or point of confusion, for many scientific realists, however, has to do with Latour’s consistent denial that science is the *only* means of capturing reality. ‘Science is not’, for Latour, ‘the supreme modern way of knowing simply because of its philosophical, ideational, or theoretical supremacy, but because it is a powerful associational network containing a strong and expansive web of heterogeneous actants.’¹⁴² Upon my reading of these criticisms, it appears quite clear that those who continue to accuse Latour of being a radical ‘social constructivist’ or anti-rationalist continue to address only his earlier work, but particularly his *Laboratory Life*, which in its first publication carried the words ‘social construction’ in its subtitle. Latour has since recanted his early usage of the term and I believe his critics would do well to give his more recent work a fair reading as he clearly rejects the mainstream understanding of ‘social’ constructivism.

Benton and Craib have lodged a second criticism concerning Latour’s nonmodern terminological inventions such as ‘hybridity’, ‘quasi-object’, and ‘quasi-subject’. According to these authors ‘[t]hese terms get such meaning as they have only in terms of their *prior* understanding of what “subjects”, “objects” and the “pure” elements of the “hybrid” are.’ Moreover, they add that ‘Latour contravenes his own methodology in the very act of defining

¹⁴¹ Steven C. Ward, *Reconfiguring Truth: Postmodernism, Science Studies, and the Search for a New Model of Knowledge* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), p. 133.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

his most basic ideas.’¹⁴³ In other words, it is argued that Latour subverts his own nonmodern program by continuing to rely on modernity’s ‘purified’ concepts to explain his own position. Again, I do not take this criticism to be a terminal blow to the nonmodern project as a whole. To be certain, Latour has identified this very issue within his own work, as he has frequently lamented the fact that the terminology which modernity has given us is wholly inadequate to the task. Hence Latour and others within the French School have engaged in long etymologies of candidate words for incorporation into the nonmodern project such as ‘fact’, ‘factish’, ‘translation’, ‘enrollment’, etc. These etymological considerations clearly saturate Latour’s more recent work, thus it is a point of criticism of which Latour is fully aware and continuously re-addresses in nearly every new book he publishes. In fact, Latour has now taken to adding a glossary of terms to his books in order to help the reader navigate the re-invented language of the nonmodern theorist.

Finally, Latour’s account of nonhuman agency/actancy has been widely misunderstood and misrepresented as being overly anthropomorphic. We return to this point in the remaining chapters, but for now we may briefly rehearse the common complaint. Again we may turn to Benton and Craib, who have argued this point by returning to Latour’s work from the 1980’s – but particularly his *Science in Action* – where they accuse him of reducing nonhuman things, such as wind acting on a windmill, ‘to a conscious quasi-human interlocutor, with its own interests and capacity for compromise.’¹⁴⁴ The point has been made frequently enough that Latour has, in his more recent work – *Pandora’s Hope* in particular – addressed many of these concerns. Again, I find it rather surprising, and altogether unfair, that Latour’s critics continue to return to his earliest works in order to construct a portrayal of his work that is much easier to critique than his more philosophically rigorous recent work. We return to Latour’s concept of nonhuman agency/actancy in the remaining chapters. To be certain, Latour has been careful to avoid the anthropomorphism which Benton and Craib have located in his earliest work.

Conclusion

In the end, Latour offers us a new politics and a new understanding of the sciences, both social and natural, where the construction of reality (the collective) is the product of a multiplicity of mediations, both human and nonhuman, social and material. We will recall that one of Latour’s central propositions revolves around the adoption of a new type of anthropology – that is, an anthropology which employs the generalized principle of symmetry – which claims the middle ground between the proliferations of the modern Constitution’s dualisms. Within this new mode of thinking ‘the anthropologist has a position to himself at

¹⁴³ Benton and Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

the median point where he can follow the attribution of both nonhuman and human properties'.¹⁴⁵ The modern Constitution has served to obscure this 'median point' or 'middle ground' between the opposite poles of a purified Nature and Society. Latour refers to this point as the 'no-man's-land' or the 'non-place' of the modern project. It is this place which was black-boxed and made opaque, thereby shrouding the mediations and hybridizations which made the modern project so successful. This newfound place of mediation 'is far from empty: quasi-objects, quasi-subjects, proliferate in it. No longer unthinkable, it becomes the terrain of all the empirical studies carried out on the networks'.¹⁴⁶

Newly re-claimed for and by the nonmodern constitution, this onetime 'non-place' has been transformed into the central point of concern for science studies and a number of other disciplines and sub-disciplines. Human geographers have for many years been concerned with this median point – which as science studies has shown, is less a point and more a plane – and has worked with varying degrees of success to bring it out of its modern obscurity. Many human geographers have now begun to turn their focus upon this median point or plane, in order to establish theoretical and practical links between geography's traditional 'physical' trajectory and the challenges of the social sciences. Therefore, we may envision human geographers as ones who have built their project of inquiry within this mediating plane, this 'non-place,' between the polemicized Nature and Society of the modern Constitution. Many theorists within the field of human geography have answered the modernist depiction of the mediating point/plane as a 'no-man's-land' or 'non-place' with their own geographically informed antidote. The geographical concept of *place* or *placing* has a long pedigree within geographical thought, yet it has been only recently that geographers have begun to incorporate the ideas flourishing within science studies with their own. We turn to the elucidation of this nonmodern spatiality in chapter 4, but first we must take time to critically compare the projects of Latour and Gunton in a sustained fashion.

¹⁴⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Part II – A Mutual Critique

Chapter 3

Trinitarian Theology and the Nonmodern Collective: Comparing the two Projects

Introduction

Gunton's theological trinitarianism and Latour's nonmodern collective share several commonalities in their desire to understand the dynamism which exists between humans and the multiplicity of nonhumans with whom they share a collective existence. Moreover, each of our interlocutors are invested in understanding the theological possibilities, or requirements, that accompany these theories – yet as a theologian, Gunton is clearly the more dedicated in this regard. A detailed comparison of the two projects would, I believe, provide an extremely fertile climate for better refining our theological concepts concerning human-nonhuman relationality, but it would also help to correct and deepen some of the theological concerns germane to science studies. It is surprising that there have been few, if any, detailed theological evaluations of Latour's work, especially in light of the fact that it so frequently ventures into theological concerns. This is testament both to the post-disciplinary nature of Latour's vision, but also to the broad scope which concerns recent philosophical and constructive theologies. Such a detailed comparison is also called for on the account that Latour began his scholarly vocation as a theologian and has continued to see important parallels between religious and scientific discourse. One may characterize Latour as a 'student of science' who is continually bumping up against theological issues, whereas Gunton is a theologian consistently trying to interact with the field of science studies.¹ In this chapter I propose a constructive comparison of these parallel projects, all the while working to elucidate some possible areas of crossover and mutual illumination. Of particular concern will be an interest in using Latour to reveal some of the important blindspots in Gunton's theology, yet we are also interested in correcting much of Latour's theological suggestions by way of Gunton's important trinitarian insights.²

In order to give some structure to our comparison of the trinitarian and nonmodern projects I have selected a number of points for discussion, each of which will better enable us

¹ One can find throughout Gunton's work scattered references and approving allusions to the field of philosophy of science, but particularly the work of fellow Englishmen, Michael Polanyi, whom he often quoted and engaged with great approval.

² It is perhaps worth mentioning that Prof. Gunton kindly took the time to meet with me for a discussion of this thesis topic concerning Latour and a theology of 'placing' on 28th of February, 2002, at the University of Edinburgh, New College. During this meeting I asked if he was familiar with the work of Bruno Latour and he indicated that he had not heard of him. After more than an hour of discussion, Prof. Gunton appeared very interested in reading Latour's work, often comparing him to Michael Polanyi, and left with a list of Latour's book titles. I do not know if he subsequently read anything of Latour's. But I might also mention that he was very interested in the geographical concept of place, but was again unfamiliar with the literature.

to understand the deep relationality that exists between humans, nonhumans, and God. First, we briefly review some of the commonalities to be found in our author's diagnosis of our modern inheritance. This section is rather brief since the points of convergence and divergence will continue to be illustrated throughout the chapter. Secondly, understanding that both Gunton and Latour are deeply invested in constructing ways of climbing out of the many pitfalls of modernity I have chosen to arrange a comparison of the two projects around three closely related themes – ontology and otherness, mediations and relations, and the location of unity. Finally, in the last section of this chapter we offer a mutual critique of both projects as we attempt to illustrate a number of blindspots or pitfalls inherent to both the nonmodern and trinitarian projects.

I. Diagnosing the Modern

Ontological and Epistemological Alienation

We may begin with a brief comparison of both Gunton and Latour's respective estimations of modernity and its cultural and theological fallout. In an effort to avoid simply restating that which we covered in-depth in the first two chapters, we are here concerned with beginning to make explicit the strengths and weakness to be found in each of our interlocutors. In this it will become clear that our authors share very similar concerns regarding the cultural fragmentation which modernity has produced. Yet there are also a number of important differences between our authors which, I believe, serve only to betray their disciplinary backgrounds and respective agendas. Gunton is clearly more interested in uncovering the role which poor theologies of creation have played in creating our modern state of alienation and fragmentation. For Gunton, our response to modernity and its bankrupt theologies should be both theological and trinitarian in nature. Latour, on the other hand, takes a more holistic vision in his construction of a full-blown modern Constitution and its antidote in the shape of his nonmodern constitution – although it is, admittedly, a constitution with something of a theological component. Coming to understand the modern predicament from the perspective of a 'student of science', Latour is clearly less concerned with theological movements and has instead opted to focus on the establishment and continuing role of the 'two' sciences – 'natural' and 'human'.

What is clear from the first two chapters is that our authors agree on the basic origins of the modern predicament, and hold equal disdain for all its postmodern symptoms, but especially those concerned with critique and radical relativism. Similarly, both of our authors are concerned to address the dualisms, or the 'double-minding', which the Enlightenment has engendered in Western culture. The modern opposition between belief and truth has been one of these shared targets for correction. As Gunton writes in his *Enlightenment and Alienation*,

it was the early moderns who turned Augustine's injunction; 'unless you believe you will not understand', into the epistemologist's mantra; 'If you believe you will not understand'.³ Signaling the rise of hyper-rationalism and its attendant forms of scientism, modernity has now spawned something of a paradox: 'there emerges both a Hericlitean flux and its alter ego, the totalitarian state that rushes in to fill the social and political vacuum'. And as Gunton glosses; 'The modern Protagoras is not the friend of freedom and plurality that he appears to be.'⁴ Latour would certainly agree with the diagnosis adding that; 'Reality is an object of belief only for those who have started down this impossible cascade of (modern) settlements, always tumbling into a worse and more radical solution.'⁵ Thus both of our interlocutors have based the modern predicament – to varying degrees – in the realms of ontology, epistemology, theology, and a flawed politics of nature.

Finally, both of our thinkers lament, in their own ways, the modern push towards the fragmentation of culture. Gunton, for instance, indicates that Kant's great legacy can be found in his forcing the realms of science, ethics and art into such radically separated fields of experience that the study, or even the possibility, of a meaningful universe falls deeply into question. 'Without a measure of integration of our knowledge, ethics and experience of beauty', Gunton writes, 'we are not fully what we might be.'⁶ Latour certainly shares this concern, but adds depth to the claim that it is to Kant that we owe our now warring cultures of 'natural' and 'social' sciences. Our authors are also deeply consumed with what they see as the perverse modern notion that there is a 'world out there' which is somehow cutoff from humans. Both authors trace this to the rise of an epistemology of doubt, but while Gunton is more concerned to find its theological pedigree, Latour is much more concerned to find philosophical and political ways out of our modern predicament. As seems to be so often the case, Latour is much more rigorous in his search for finding the very practical and specific ways in which we might reunite the human and nonhuman worlds that were rudely severed by the modern's Constitution. Whereas Gunton's great contribution has been to outline the beginnings of a trinitarian theology capable of embracing that which the moderns could not – namely, both the one *and* the many simultaneously. The respective strengths and weakness of each approach are made even more explicit as we turn to consider each author's appreciation of the theological currents which would aid in the shaping of modernity.

The Displaced and Crossed-Out God

³ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, p. 3-4.

⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 112.

⁵ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 14.

⁶ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 115-116.

We have seen in the preceding chapters that both projects, Gunton and Latour's, have sought to identify the Enlightenment's tendency to distance God from the immanent affairs of the created realm. Both of our authors are concerned to elucidate the damaging effect which a 'distanced' or 'crossed-out' God has had on modern culture and piety. So let us begin with one point of agreement. Both Gunton and Latour understand that the distancing of God from the immanent sphere has resulted in the individualization and internalization of faith. The genesis of this distancing, as we have reviewed, was to be found in the modern movement to 'free' humanity from the overwhelming determination of an omnipotent God. For Latour, this initiated the reinvention of spirituality: 'the all powerful God could descend into men's hearts without intervening in any way in their external affairs.'⁷ Gunton would certainly agree with Latour's evaluation, where in his discussion of the problem of the one and the many he related theologies which posited an omnipotent, monistic, and hegemonic deity with human longings to be free of totalitarian rule. Thus Gunton will insist that 'much modern social and political thought can be understood as the revolt of the many against the one, and at the same time that of humanity against divinity.'⁸ Ultimately, Latour will go as far as to say that this modern drive for human freedom would constitute a 'ban on theology' altogether.⁹

Although it is less pronounced in Gunton than in Latour, there is also an indication made by both authors concerning the modern tendency to trade on the immanence and transcendence of God in regard to nature. As modernity expelled God from the immanent sphere, thereby losing its source of unity, a new unity of a very different and impersonal kind 'returns insidiously and unnoticed through the backdoor.'¹⁰ For Latour, these 'surrogate divinities' present themselves in the guise of movements such as evolutionism, sociobiology, and psychological behaviorism.¹¹ As we reviewed in the first chapter, Gunton will also relate this movement to a spatial metaphor of God's relation to the world. Here modernity's habit was to first spatially cast God to an unreachable transcendence only to return Him to a pantheistic immanence in late-modernity – from deism to pantheism.

I would like to employ these points of general agreement to highlight two important points of contrast between our two authors. Moreover, these two points will serve to illustrate one strength and one weakness in each of our author's diagnosis, and subsequent mitigating proposals for remedying our modern state of alienation and fragmentation. By pausing now to review these points of mutual critique, as they apply to our author's understandings of the modern's God, we will then be able to trace these strengths and weaknesses throughout the chapter.

⁷ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 33.

⁸ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 27.

⁹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 298.

¹⁰ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

We begin with what I find to be Gunton's great strength and Latour's great weakness. As an academic theologian of creation and culture, Gunton has clearly done more to illustrate the theological roots of our modern alienation. We have seen him trace the impetus for modernity to inadequate theologies of God and creation, which ultimately obscured the trinitarian shape of God's relationship to the world. This is the result of what he has called the 'Babylonian captivity' of the Christian doctrine of creation, where God's mediated relation to the world through his 'two hands' was largely diminished in Western theology. The contrast to Latour is rather subtle upon first glance, but reveals itself quite starkly in Latour's neglect of a counter-theology in his proposed nonmodern constitution. Where both authors are concerned to highlight the bankruptcy of modern theologies, Gunton will go on to develop a deeply detailed counter-theology built upon a Patristic-inspired 'fully trinitarian' doctrine of God and creation. Latour, on the other hand, after highlighting the effect the Enlightenment would have on theology, offers little of any direction on how theology may be reconceived in a nonmodern fashion. His suggestions concerning theology after modernity, in his *We Have Never Been Modern*, amount to little more than the claim that the question of God is now 're-opened'. We will return to address Latour's neglect of theology in the section concerned with unity and the God-world relationship later in this chapter. There we will begin to see that Latour's more recent theological musings have begun to take on a rather pantheistic leaning.

Secondly, I intend to illustrate throughout this chapter that Latour's great strength tends to be Gunton's great weakness. Whereas Latour falls short in terms of positive theological proposals as we emerge from modernity, his great strength has been to illustrate how the 'crossed-out God' of modernity served to obscure the work of mediation, translation, and hybridization. Said differently, Latour has provided a much deeper account of how the role of the quasi-object has been overshadowed by modernity's theological maneuvering. While he may be weak in terms of offering a theological framework for becoming nonmodern, Latour's great strength has been to achieve something which Gunton was ultimately, in my estimation, unable to fully achieve. That is, a thoroughgoing account of 'horizontal' relationally between humans and nonhumans. Gunton, for his part, is not at all unaware of the problem, but here I will begin to submit the argument that his is a theology which is still all too captivated by the 'social' pole of the modern dichotomy and thereby neglects the extremely important role of the nonhuman/nonpersonal. His continued emphasis on the social and political outworkings (here almost entirely limited to human persons) of modernity and the ancient problem of 'the one and the many' is, I believe, representative of his work overall.

It is, therefore, clear that Latour's work represents a much greater willingness and ability to take nonhuman action into full consideration. However, we shall also illustrate how Latour's theological proposals tend to overcompensate for the modern displacement of the

divine. Gunton's trinitarian understanding of the God-world relationship is, in my view, highly amenable to Latour's nonmodern vision and will serve to correct his pantheistic tendencies. But before attempting something of a detailed mutual critique, we will continue to elucidate a number of points of convergence and divergence between the two projects. In order to do this we will now focus on each of our authors constructive projects as they relate to a number of unifying themes organized around human/nonhuman relationality: ontology and otherness, mediation and relation, as well as unity and multiplicity. Treating these questions of *ontology*, *relationality* and *unity* in some abstraction from one another is admittedly somewhat artificial, as they inherently grow out of one another. But for the sake of clarity we will here address each of these themes in turn.

II. Ontology and Otherness

As we begin to elucidate some of the important differences between trinitarian and nonmodern approaches, it will be helpful if we begin with the basic question concerning the ontological distinctions each makes concerning the human and nonhuman realms. The importance of such a distinction has been made clear in much of the recent philosophical and theological reflections on human embeddedness in the nonhuman realm. Most often we find that it is the Deep Ecology of Arne Naess and his philosophical offspring, and their developing notion of an 'ecological self', that is at the center of the critique. Ecofeminist philosopher, Val Plumwood, has argued convincingly that the deep ecological notion of 'cosmological identification' goes much too far in eroding the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman entities – a position many feminist thinkers are unwilling to accept.¹² The risks associated with this 'indistinguishability account', as Plumwood has termed it, have recently been made clear in the work of several theologians concerned with human embeddedness. As Peter Scott indicates, a self such as this 'never meets resistance for it operates with no genuine account of otherness or difference'.¹³ Ultimately what is risked is a fall into the totalitarianism which Gunton was so concerned to avoid. If we are too willing to find a total identification between human selves (persons) and their nonhuman contexts, we come to adopt a relationality that ultimately offends the otherness – the *space* – which maintains the particularity of both. In the end, many of the recent 'spiritual ecologies', 'deep ecologies', and 'new age ecologies' that populate the discussion ultimately fail to escape this modern predicament. As Gunton might argue, they serve only to represent the modern process of self-assertion into places where God once resided, and in doing so fall prey to the modern

¹² Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹³ Peter Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003), p. 80.

‘temptation to seek unity and stability above all’.¹⁴ Moreover, as Scott points out, the movement is not just one towards totalitarianism, but also toward the anthropocentrism which Deep Ecologists first sought to avoid.¹⁵ We must then ask how it is, if at all, that Latour and Gunton seek to maintain this distinction (*otherness*) between human and nonhuman *being*.

We will begin by evaluating Gunton’s stance on this important issue since so much of his position has already been formulated. In fact, Gunton’s entire body of work contains the continuous occupation of maintaining the otherness and particularity which constitutes ‘beings and realms’ as distinctively themselves. This is the issue which the problem of the One and the many sought to highlight in ancient, modern, and now late-modern cultures. We have seen that modern thought, through its cascades of philosophical and theological fragmentation, has found much difficulty in navigating between particularity and homogeneity – the One and the many. Lacking a sound philosophy of the substantiality of the material particular (the ontological question) and the human ability to register that substantiality (the epistemological question), modernity has failed to fully appreciate the otherness-in-relation which is so characteristic of a trinitarian theology. Moreover, we have seen that for Gunton, otherness – the distinct being of things – is only to be found in the midst of a relationality analogically derived from a trinitarian ontology.

I would like to return to this important concept of relationality for a more thorough treatment in the next section, but in the interest of clarity and comparison we will briefly review the differences which Gunton finds amongst ‘beings and realms’, but particularly God, humans, and nonhumans. The first differentiation is, of course, the important distinction between God and *world* – a term Gunton uses to signify all that which is not God. The differentiation between God and world is, as we have seen, absolutely critical for a doctrine of creation. This is why the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* remains such an important element of the Christian confession, for it establishes the otherness and non-necessity of the creation. Or as Gunton would say, recalling his dispute with Robert Jenson, it maintains the *space* in which God and world can be distinctively themselves. Moreover, this guards us against that other modern tendency towards a pantheism which ultimately erodes particularity into undifferentiated unity. ‘If the world is creation, then it has its own particular being, even if that being is not separable from its relation to its maker and redeemer.’¹⁶

Now we may consider the ontological distinctions which Gunton draws amongst the created order. We have just reviewed that its first trait is to be found in that is *other* than the Creator. This implies that to ‘be created involves spatial and temporal limitation, so that living autonomously within the bounds of the created order – living according to the law of

¹⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 85.

¹⁶ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 166.

spatial and temporal being – involves the acceptance of limitation'.¹⁷ But we have also seen that Gunton makes another differentiation within the created realm between personal/social beings, namely humans, and the non-personal/non-social realm of nonhumans. This is a distinction which is critical for Gunton: 'The danger here, so widely apparent, is of a failure to coordinate the two, to recognize the differences between person and world, while respecting the proper being and status of the natural world.'¹⁸

Before considering the nonhuman creation, let us recall the differentiation which exists amongst personal (human) beings. First, we will remember that to be a person is certainly not to be a radical individual. Personal individualism, as Gunton argues, was merely a myth of modern culture. Moreover, it is a myth born out of the modern severing of individual minds from the 'outside world'. If we are to be free, the moderns insisted, then we must be free *from* one another. Against this modern view of individuality which engenders nothing but alienation, Gunton has argued for a renewed appreciation of the theological and trinitarian basis of personhood ushered in by the Cappadocian fathers. Like the divine hypostasis found in the trinity, we acquire our personhood – or distinct personal being – only in relation to like others. Again, we will say more about this relationality in the next section.

Now concerning the differentiation – the otherness – between human and nonhuman realms, we will recall four categories of differentiation we identified at the end of chapter one. First, Gunton argues that nonhumans do not participate in the marks of personhood. What this means is that nonhumans are unable to 'transcend themselves', 'act', or 'think' beyond their immediate circumstance. This means that nonhumans do not participate in the *imago dei* as do human persons. This lack of the *imago dei* implicates three further points of differentiation. Thus secondly, we may say that persons find their distinct being (otherness) in *social* forms of relationality. This cannot be said of the nonhuman/nonpersonal realm. We will remember that for Gunton, sociality consists of the personal capacity to express love and freedom, and this simply cannot be said of nonhumans. Thirdly, whereas it can be said that human persons are free in their relations with one another, it can only be said that nonhumans are *contingent*. This means that nonhumans enjoy their own particular otherness, but they ultimately rely on human persons for their ontological and eschatological destiny. It is through these stringent lines of demarcation that the otherness of 'beings and realms' is maintained.

In consideration of the sweeping review of Latour's diagnosis of the modern Constitution and its nonmodern antidote offered in the previous chapter, it is – perhaps – by now clear that Latour's interest in otherness will be much different than that of Gunton. Rather than demarcate the differentiation that exists between nature (nonhumans), subjects (humans), and God, Latour is far more interested in going back to the moment when all of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

these realms were fractured and purified into distinct ontological realms. And more importantly Latour is interested in determining the motivations behind this violent purification. We have already reviewed the contribution of one of modernity's primary statesman, Immanuel Kant. His 'yardstick' which posited a Subject purified to the *left* and a Nature purified to the *right*, leaving only the phenomenon in the middle, is perhaps one of the primary moments in this fracturing of the realms. It was at this, and other important moments, that the two sciences were inaugurated and the 'transcendental Ego' – the 'Sun' of the Copernican revolution – would give shape to a nature that ultimately escapes us. Later the transcendental Ego would be replaced by a cascade of new pretenders that were supposed to shape our perception of Nature: 'Society', 'Self', 'Mind', '*epistemes*', etc. Now it was not only 'the mind disconnected from the world, but each culture was disconnected from the others'.¹⁹ Yet the task of identifying the pressures which led to this epistemological crisis remain to be identified. Why were we seemingly forced to take a fork in the road which led to the birth of Subjects and Objects and an unsurpassable gap between the two?

In *Pandora's Hope*, Latour offers a more detailed account of how this modern obsession with epistemological certainty came about. For him it comes down to the ancient political problem concerning how to silence the non-expert masses – what Socrates called the 'ten thousand fools' – who threatened the rule of reason with their brute strength. In an effort to avoid mob rule, Latour argues that politics required something which allowed – or forcefully required – *universal* assent, for it was only in this way that reason could rule over brute force. For politics to work we must 'depend on something that has no human origin, no trace of humanity, something that is purely, blindly, and coldly outside of the City'.²⁰ What was needed was a universal and entirely inhuman Nature which could serve as the highest court of appeal. As Latour explains:

The idea of a completely *outside* world dreamed up by the epistemologists is the only way, in the eyes of the moralists, to avoid falling prey to mob rule. *Only inhumanity will quash inhumanity*. But how is it possible to imagine an outside world? Has any one ever heard of such a bizarre oddity? No problem. We will make the world a spectacle seen *from* the inside.²¹

The 'mind in a vat' of the epistemologists serves this function of preserving a Nature that is totally outside of us (Society), yet remains connected to it through a single 'artificial conduit'.

Thus as we saw in the last chapter, Latour defines modernity as the era which sought to artificially purify subjects, objects, and even God, into ontological realms totally alien to one another. In fact, we might say that whereas for Gunton the preservation of otherness is the highest of virtues, for Latour it is the 'blackbox' to be illuminated and then ultimately ignored

¹⁹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13. (Emphasis in the original)

in the interest of finding the ‘networks’ of hybridity which transgress this otherness. This is the ultimate goal for a science studies which does not lack reality because it never dreamed of ‘dominating the people’.²² A politics such as this will also no longer participate in the ‘science wars’ since it will no longer engage in the dispute between the natural sciences and the social sciences for ultimate control of the unruly mob. For Latour, neither one of the sciences can win a war of subjects and objects which were established in polemic opposition in the first place – their definitions are only to be found in their opposition to one another. As the nonmodern settlement and the parliament of things suggest:

Humans and nonhumans are enough for us (the practitioners of nonmodern science studies). We do not need a social world to break the back of objective reality, nor an objective reality to silence the mob. It is quite simple, even though it may sound incredible in these times of the science wars: we are not *at war*.²³

What is clear in all of this is Latour’s initiation of an ontological movement – that will be closely followed by an anti-epistemological movement reviewed later in the chapter – of refusing to recognize the politicized Subject and Object, and instead seeking to recognize only humans, nonhumans, networks and quasi-objects.

We can now attempt to identify a number of points of conflict and convergence in Gunton and Latour’s respective formulations of otherness. First, we have seen that whereas Gunton takes as one of his primary concerns the maintenance of otherness amongst beings and realms, Latour identifies the purification of subject and object as the heart of the confused modern condition. For Latour otherness – in regard to subject and object – has been our primary problem, for Gunton it is the goal. But secondly, we must be careful to understand the terminology used by each of our interlocutors. In this we must ask: Are Gunton’s *persons* and *non-persons* the same as Latour’s *humans* and *nonhumans*? Are they intended to serve the same function of upsetting the subject-object dichotomy? On the surface Gunton’s change of terminology does not appear as deliberate as Latour’s well considered refusal to recognize subjects and objects. But we will continue to return to this important issue throughout the chapter. Third, we will have to return to the theological propositions found interspersed in the work of Latour. We have seen that Gunton’s eagerness to preserve the transcendence of God is maintained in the interest of preserving His otherness from the creation. In doing this, as Gunton argues, the reality of both creaturely and divine realms is preserved. At the end of this chapter we will challenge Latour’s under-developed theology on this precise point. Finally, at the end of this chapter we will return to the objections made by Val Plumwood in her criticism of deep ecology’s ‘indistinguishability account’, and ask of both Latour and Gunton

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³ *Ibid.*

if they are able to preserve the ‘space of ones own’ that is need for particularity – personal or otherwise – to be preserved amongst unity.

As we have already indicated, this is a somewhat artificial discussion concerning otherness or differentiation in Gunton and Latour. For each of our thinkers it is in many senses an impossibility to speak of stable and particular ontologies without at the same time speaking of relationality or mediation between the multiplicity of particulars which populate reality. We will therefore move quickly to consider the differing accounts of mediation and relation in Gunton’s trinitarian and Latour’s nonmodern projects.

III. Mediation and Relation

We can say of both Latour and Gunton that they locate much of modernity’s problems in a chronic inability to fully appreciate relationality or the mediation which exists between beings, entities, or realms. Latour places the emphasis on transecting the many mediations which exist between humans and nonhumans. Moreover, Latour is primarily interested, but not exclusively, in tracing the multiplicity of mediations which take place in the practice of the sciences. Gunton on the other hand takes interest in defining the mediation between God and the world in the first instance, human and other humans in the second, and finally in human and nonhuman relations. In this section we seek a deeper understanding of the critical issue of relationality in the trinitarian and nonmodern approaches. But due to the deep complexity of each project’s account of mediation, and in the interest of clarity, this time we will need to consider each in its own distinct section.

III.A. Gunton’s Theology of Mediation: The Son and Holy Spirit

We have already seen that modernity is strikingly paradoxical in its trading on favoring either the one or the many. Often its tide would turn to towards a homogenization or forced unity of all things in an effort to cast off distinctly modern forms of alienation. The particularity of things, as Gunton has argued, was often seen as an abhorrent element of reality, and has thus been attacked on many fronts: philosophical, theological, political, social, and even commercial.²⁴ But as Gunton highlights, it is an appreciation of the particularity and multiplicity of reality that needs to be thoughtfully formulated in our contemporary theology of creation and culture. In fact, he will argue that ‘a theology giving central place to particularity is precisely what the modern age needs’.²⁵

Yet a theology which seeks to regain an appreciation of particularity must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of that medieval theologian who championed particularity: John Duns

²⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, ch. 2. Gunton highlights the homogenizing forces at work in modern advertising campaigns that have sought to globalize brand names.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

Scotus. As we reviewed in chapter one, Scotus worked to relocate the *form* of things from the ‘mind’ of God back into the created order itself. By emphasizing creation as the outgrowth of God’s omnipotent will, Scotus was able to re-emphasize the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and give a renewed solidity to things-in-themselves – material particularity once again came to populate reality. But the pitfall of all this is to be found in Scotus’ successor, William of Ockham, who was less able to maintain the world’s continuing relation to this omnipotent Creator. Ockham’s negative achievement was to effectively relocate unity in the arbitrary will of the human agent, thereby eliminating the role of God as the unifying factor in the cosmos. The effect of this nominalist theology was to introduce an appreciation of the material particular, but this was bought at the expense of the crucial *relationality* between particulars. Therefore, as Gunton insists, if we are going to re-affirm particularity it must be tempered with an equal amount of relationality. This exercise will necessarily entail a rigorous theology of *mediation* which, for Gunton, is to be found in the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit – as Irenaeus would say, God’s ‘two hands’.

Throughout Gunton’s theological program one finds repeated reference to the mediating work of the Son and the Holy Spirit towards and amongst the creation. In the first chapter of this thesis we reviewed in some detail the shape of trinitarian relationality and the ‘space’ required to maintain the distinct being of the three divine hypostases. Similarly, we reviewed the mediated relationality that exists to maintain the distinct otherness of God and world. There we learned of Gunton’s deep commitment to understanding pneumatology and christology from a strictly trinitarian perspective. In this section we take up the important task of elucidating Gunton’s understanding of the work of the Son and Spirit within the creation itself. In the interest of clarity we will consider the mediating action of the Son and the Spirit in separate sections. This is, of course, a purely practical matter and should not be taken as a general severing of divine action. Gunton is surely correct to insist that ‘all divine action, whether in creation, salvation or final redemption is the action of God the Father; but it is all *equally* brought about by his two hands, the Son and the Spirit.’²⁶

Mediation of the Spirit

Gunton has identified what he understands to be the two central elements of a theology of the Holy Spirit. First, the Spirit’s work has largely to do with the *transgressing of boundaries*. Here we find the Spirit drawing into relation ‘beings and realms’ which are usually seen to be polarized and separated. In ‘scripture’, Gunton writes, ‘God’s being spirit appears to refer to the capacity of the creator to cross ontological boundaries’.²⁷ While the God/world relationship is probably the first among these boundaries that are being

²⁶ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 80.

²⁷ Gunton, *Act & Being*, p. 115.

transgressed, we must also notice the boundaries between creaturely realms – the ‘horizontal’ relations of the creation – are similarly being transgressed. As we have seen in chapter one, for Gunton the Spirit is the divine hypostasis responsible for animating the relation-in-otherness that is the Triune being, both immanently and economically – in Godself and in his actions in the creaturely realm. As Gunton explains, ‘by perfecting the communion of the Trinity, the Spirit is the Spirit of holiness, first in God himself *and then in the world.*’²⁸ As we will see more clearly later in the chapter, what Gunton means by his use of the term ‘world’ is here not altogether clear. It could be that he is speaking to both personal and non-personal beings, but the more likely intent is that he is speaking of the personal in the first instance, and to the non-personal only by means of the personal.

Gunton will go on to add another layer of depth, or qualification, to this first characteristic of the Spirit by describing the specific action which takes place in the work of the Spirit. As Gunton explains, the Spirit of God is that which

relates to one another beings and realms that are opposed or separate. That which is or has spirit is able to be open to that which is other than itself, to move into relation with the other...The result of this movement is that by his Spirit God enables the creation to be open to him.²⁹

Here we see that it is the third person of the Trinity which brings God into relation with the creation, and similarly brings spirit-filled humanity into relation with its Creator. The Old Testament frequently speaks of humans being given the Spirit, the divine *ruach*, which ‘opens’ humanity up to relationship with the Creator. Again it is the Spirit who ‘makes room’ for the other within its midst. Although we should take the words ‘makes room’ as largely metaphorical, there is present in this understanding of Spirit an underlying spatial realization. That is, the Spirit does seem to act as the transgressor of spatial (geographical) boundaries. Gunton points out that Paul’s insistence that he is ‘absent in body but present in spirit’ suggests that the Spirit enables created beings to transgress spatial boundaries, however in a limited sense.³⁰ But central to all of this, we see the Spirit as that which ‘opens out’ persons to one another and to their Creator. This is the heart of Gunton’s theology of mediation where the Spirit works as ‘the power of God in action over against that which is not God’, as is characteristic of many of the New Testament accounts of the Spirit’s work.³¹ We will have more to say of the ‘opening out’ which the Spirit enables later in the chapter as it is altogether unclear if the non-human/non-personal realm can be said to participate in the ‘opening out’ of the Spirit.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 120. (emphasis added)

²⁹ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 181-182.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 182.

³¹ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and the Created Order," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, 2 (2002): p.191.

The second characteristic of the Spirit is to be found in its maintenance and preservation of *particularity*. Importantly, we do not find that the Spirit works to bring ‘beings and realms’ into such a close proximity that the end result is ontological indistinguishability. Instead we see the Spirit working to perfect the multiplicity of ‘beings and realms’ into their own concrete, and *real*, particularity. Within Gunton’s theology the Spirit is that which both maintains the integrity of the multiplicity of particulars while simultaneously transgressing alienating forms of particularity which lack relationality. As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit resists the homogenization of particulars into an oppressive and overarching unity. This particularizing, yet relational action of the Spirit can, according to Gunton, be found throughout the scriptures. First, it is to be found working in the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. The Spirit, Gunton writes, ‘is the one, the personal other, by whom Jesus is related to his Father and to those with whom he had to do’.³² Importantly, we can also find the Spirit at work in creaturely relationships as well, but here again the emphasis is placed by Gunton on the *human* creation. The Spirit works within the Christian community freeing each of us to be inducted into a ‘new—particular—network of relationships: first with God through faith in Christ, and then with others in the community of Christ’.³³

Closely related to this particularizing action is Gunton’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as the *perfecting cause* of creation. This is an insight which he has taken from the theologies of Basil of Caesarea and to a lesser extent John Calvin. ‘The Spirit as the perfecting cause of the creation is the one who enables things to become what they are created to be; to fulfil their created purpose of giving glory to God in their perfecting.’³⁴ In this sense the Spirit is the ‘eschatological person of the Trinity’ working to bring creatures into their fulfillment in the Creator.³⁵ It is through the Spirit that creatures are enabled to become what they were truly intended to be. We may now see that this third characteristic is intimately tied to the first two; without relationality and particularity *nothing* would have its own being, its own reality that could find its ultimate and particular purpose of giving praise and glory to its Creator. This action of the Spirit is not, however, carried out in abstraction from the Son. Indeed, as is true of all acts belonging to the Triune persons, we may distinguish their economic functions, but we may not *separate* them – ultimately they are all actions of the One God. Thus Gunton, referencing Ephesians 1.10, will argue that ‘[i]t is the function of the

³² Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 182.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁴ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and the Created Order," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, 2 (2002), p. 203.

³⁵ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 81. The situation of this quote in its wider context seems to suggest that Gunton is again speaking of human creatures rather than creatures both human and non-human.

Spirit as the perfecting cause “to unite things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth”³⁶

The Spirit’s perfecting action is also closely related to the *freedom* which particularity suggests. In this regard Gunton appeals to 2 Cor. 3.17 for scriptural support: ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’.³⁷ This is the freedom of being liberated as a distinct other, fully enabled to find ones divinely intended and particular being. Here it is important that we note, once again, the continuity Gunton finds between the immanent and economic Trinities in regard to the Spirit as perfecting cause. The Spirit is first understood to be the perfecting cause within the ‘eternal’ or immanent Trinity itself. In the dynamism of the three persons of the Trinity, it is the role of the Spirit to maintain – to *perfect*, to *free* – the ‘divine communion by being the dynamic of the Father’s and Son’s being who they distinctly are.’³⁸ But secondly, the perfecting character of the Spirit is turned outwards towards ‘the world to create, to redeem, and to perfect.’³⁹ As the perfecting cause *within* creation – the ‘outward’ movement of the Spirit – we find that the freedom which perfection implies is, according to Gunton, to be limited to the realm of persons. As we have already seen in chapter one, Gunton has made freedom the sole preserve of persons – human and divine – insisting that we qualify non-personal freedom with the term ‘contingent’. This distinction, once again, is made in order to maintain his claim that as the bearers of the *imago dei*, human persons are uniquely enabled to offer up the creation in praise of the Creator. It necessarily follows that non-personal beings are, for Gunton, unable to realize their own destiny apart from human persons. We will see this understanding of the relationship between human persons and non-personal creation expressed once again in Gunton’s understanding of the ‘cultural mandate’ we review below.

For now, let us emphasize the point that Gunton does not go so far as to propose spirit as a transcendental mark of all being. Here he recognizes the pitfall of Hegel’s scheme which represents the opposite of the modern tendency which we have found in the nominalist theologians. For them the problem was located in a particularity without relationality, but in Hegel we begin to find relationality without particularity. The problem begins with Hegel’s desire to find spirit at work in all things cultural and historical, thereby making all things in effect spirit. The pitfall associated with this is clear: all matter becomes eternalized leading to the absorption of all materiality into the being of God.⁴⁰ What is risked is a sudden and radical expansion of God’s being into the creation itself. Again, we see the pantheistic outworkings of the modernizing project which sees particularity as an intolerable element of reality. As Gunton points out, the totalizing movement of the spirit results in the abolition of time, space,

³⁶ Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 121.

³⁷ Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, p. 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁰ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 186.

and materiality in the Hegelian framework. This is, in fact, a modalism of the spirit, and thereby betrays the heart of the problem – namely an insufficient doctrine of the Trinity. Without a sufficient understanding of God as three and One in perfect loving perichoretic relations, as the orthodox understanding of the Trinity maintains, Hegel’s framework falls into a faulty modalistic understanding of God and world as pure spirit, and the Father and Son become merely ‘temporary’ manifestations. Once again, the problem encompasses the overall modern – or late-modern – tendency to collapse God and world into an undifferentiated whole.

Finally, if we are to speak of mediation we must, as Gunton insists, maintain two important currents of thought – *substantiality* and *relationality*. This is because if we are to avoid the modern tendency to affirm a ‘particularity without relation and a relationality without particularity’⁴¹, we must affirm that all things find their substantiality – their particular existence – *in relation* rather than in spite of it. It is ‘in dependence upon a God understood substantially and not abstractly’ that we are to find the substantiality, or the concreteness, of all things.⁴² Gunton proposes this understanding of substantiality and relation in opposition to those theologies and philosophies which privilege notions of relationality over and above substantiality, or ontology. Here Gunton is taking aim at theologies of relation like that of Sallie McFague who appears to adopt an ‘idealizing’ notion of relationality. Hers is a notion of relationality in ‘which things can be known only in terms of their relation to us, or rather as they appear to us’.⁴³ Relationality of this sort only serves to undermine substantiality in its tendency towards idealism. We must have both relationality *and* substantiality. So important is the notion of substance that Gunton will go so far as to propose it as ‘a kind of transcendental’ – that is, a universal mark of all being.⁴⁴

The Spirit and the Non-human / Non-personal

In consideration of the goal of this chapter which is to focus on the ‘horizontal’ relations within creation, it is appropriate that we now focus on Gunton’s understanding of the role of the Spirit amongst the non-personal/non-human creation. Here we discover the important claim that spirit, or perhaps the work of the Spirit,⁴⁵ is to be limited to *personal* entities alone. For Gunton, spirit ‘has to do with that unique feature of persons,’ – divine and human – namely ‘their ability to transcend themselves, to think and act beyond the present

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 193.

⁴² Ibid., p. 194.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 194, f. 18. Here Gunton is referring to McFague’s *Metaphorical Theology. Models of God in Religious Language*, (London: SCM Press, 1983).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 207.

⁴⁵ Part of the problem in understanding Gunton’s pneumatology has do with his frequent shifting between speaking of *the* Spirit (the person of the Trinity) and a more generalized spirit (lowercase ‘s’) without being totally forthcoming in his reasoning or intentions for making the sudden change.

and the place in which they are set'.⁴⁶ It is in this context that we must speak once again of the ability of the Spirit to enact the 'opening out' of particular beings which we mentioned earlier. As persons who *have* spirit we are enabled to be dynamically 'open' to that which is other. In us, Gunton states, the Spirit 'enables a form of perichoresis to take place, between mind and world, world and God'.⁴⁷ In this instance it appears to be the work of the Spirit to enable *human* persons to become 'open' to the non-human/non-personal creation. Here the distinct line of agency or causality (the force, perhaps, of initiating the relationship) is from the human to the non-human. But later Gunton will refer to 'the world's openness to human knowledge, action and art' – suggesting that perhaps there may be something of an 'opening' effect of spirit (or the Spirit) within the non-personal realm.⁴⁸ Yet when Gunton speaks of the non-human world being 'open' to human persons it is altogether unclear as to whether we may attribute this to the Spirit directly, recalling that he has already said that spirit is the unique feature of persons.⁴⁹ Therefore the term 'open', as Gunton applies it to the non-human/non-personal realm, seems to imply a kind of preparation for human initiated relation.

Here we must highlight the fact that concerning the work of the Spirit, Gunton clearly delimits the *agency* which 'openness' through the Spirit implies, to the narrowly defined realm of the 'personal'. We are then left with an understanding of spirit-enabled relationality that is largely one-way or uni-directional in character. The reasoning behind such a limitation is plain. Aware of the Hegelian pitfall we reviewed earlier, Gunton is at pains to make the point that 'God *is* spirit, while finite persons *have* spirit—and things [nonhumans] neither are nor have spirit'.⁵⁰ For while humans are free to love and relate to the other in ways that can be both enslaving and redeeming, the nonhuman creation cannot exercise any such agency in relationship towards *another*. We find then, a distinct routing of nonhuman agency in Gunton's pneumatology. The perichoresis-like action which the Spirit bestows upon persons – human and divine – merely 'opens' the nonhuman to receiving the person-initiated relationality. The movement of relationality is distinctly one-way, originating either with God or human persons. As Gunton insists, the Spirit is not a universal mark of being, but rather works to qualify the realm of persons alone. Again, in maintaining this otherness between Spirit and world, Gunton is here heading off what he sees to be the certain threat of pantheism. This is why he has often argued that the 'Spirit is better identified in terms of

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁹ The full quote reads: 'But spirit is a word for the most part limited to the personal world, to God and human beings. It has to do with that unique feature of persons, their ability to transcend themselves, to think and act beyond the present place in which they are set.' *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 184.

⁵⁰ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 188. (The brackets are my own addition)

transcendence than of immanence. The Spirit may be active *within* the world, but he does not become identical with any part of the world.⁵¹

But one may ask whether Gunton has offended his own rule when in *The One the Three and the Many* he appears to say the precise opposite: 'If both *persons* and *things*, for all their crucial ontological differences, alike receive the shape of their being from the particularizing Spirit, we can no longer, in the tradition beginning with Descartes, treat matter as merely the intrinsically meaningless object of our instrumentality, as tends to be the way of both modernism and late modernism.'⁵² What are we to make of these clearly contradictory statements concerning the work of the Spirit? I would suggest that these statements betray an internal conflict within Gunton's overall pneumatology as it pertains to the creation. As we have seen, he is greatly concerned to avoid identifying *the* Spirit or spirit, with the creation in general. On the other hand, he is also concerned to make the claim that all of created particulars – personal and non-personal – participate in a universal relationality or perichoresis. Where Gunton seems to lose his way is in giving some account of what it is that embodies, maintains, or mediates this universal relationality. Anxious to avoid identifying the Spirit with non-personal creation universally or as a general field of force, Gunton has left us only with something of a grey area within his pneumatology. Yet if we are to speak on the balance of Gunton's claims in this matter, we must conclude that on the whole Gunton understands the Spirit to be most closely associated with human persons who are 'opened out' by the Spirit to God, other humans, and to the nonhuman creation.

In sum, there is little indication in Gunton's theology of the Spirit that we may be justified in speaking of the Spirit's work as that of bringing nonhuman/nonpersonal creation into relation with human persons. The line of agency is always from the human/social sphere *out to* the nonhuman/nonsocial sphere. What can be found of the Spirit's work in nonpersonal creation is more generally attributed to a bringing into relation nonhuman creation and Godself so as to sustain, perfect, and particularize the creation in direct relation to God. Hence, the Spirit's mediating role is not found to move from nonpersons to human persons, but only from nonpersons to the divine persons. Moreover, at the points in Gunton's theology where one may detect some hint of nonhuman agency being expressed or exercised *towards* the human/social realm, we find that this hint of agency is not attributed to the Spirit directly. Instead, Gunton will attribute this extremely mild form of nonhuman agency to a generally conceived perichoretic nature amongst all created things. Thus the *personal* action of the Spirit is sidelined, and a generally conceived field of perichoretic relations is introduced in those very few instances where the nonhuman realm is understood to exert some force upon human persons.

⁵¹ Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, p. 108. (emphasis in the original)

⁵² Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 207. (emphasis in the original)

There is, perhaps, one hint within Gunton's theology which may suggest this to be a general rule rather than a universal claim. Or alternatively, it may be that this final example serves only to further indicate Gunton's own confusion on the topic. This argument aside, in one further study of the Holy Spirit Gunton argues that 'we must say that whenever the created order, in any of its levels or aspects, is able to praise its maker, there is the agency of the Spirit'.⁵³ He does not, however, explain in any deeper sense what is meant by this. One commentator has taken this to mean that Gunton does see room for non-personal creation's agency in worshipping the creator.⁵⁴ Yet judging from Gunton's more directed comments on the issue I do not take this to be his meaning in this instance. At best this seems to be a momentary lapse from Gunton's overall understanding of the Spirit's role in worship. As we will discover in the next and subsequent sections of his chapter, he goes to great lengths to maintain agency, of any sort, as the sole preserve of those he considers persons – even the agency expressed in worship.

Spirit, Creation, and the Cultural Mandate

Since we are here concerned primarily with 'horizontal' relations – relations amongst created beings – we must also address the work of the Spirit within human culture. For Gunton, human culture consists in 'all the things that human beings do to, with, and in that created world'.⁵⁵ Culture is not, for Gunton, merely the symbolic worlds particular to human beings which many social sciences seek to understand, but rather the intimate interaction of human beings in and with the non-personal world. Therefore, in speaking of human culture, Gunton is concerned to highlight the ways in which relationality or mediation exists between humans and the creation, through the Spirit. Yet once again, we will see that it is a relationality that is distinctly one-way in character.

In what was perhaps his final reflection on the role of the Spirit within human commerce with creation, Gunton first makes clear that the effect of sin has not served to route the Spirit's power within creation. The Spirit, he explains, 'may be affected but is by no means constrained or constricted by the Fall'.⁵⁶ Secondly, Gunton seeks to draw-out the many forms of worship, which as he argues, represent a communal and cultural interaction with the material in ways that reenact God's historic acts of creating and redeeming. Worship is then a form of human culture in which specific forms 'of symbolic actions place human life in

⁵³ Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 120.

⁵⁴ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 209. Commenting on Gunton's statements, Scott writes 'Praise is, to be sure, a category of agency and action....Therefore I remain unsure what it can mean to say that, for example, inorganic nature praises God.'

⁵⁵ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters," p. 200.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

relation to God, human social order and the material world'.⁵⁷ Certainly we may say that the Lord's Supper is a paradigmatic example of this spirit-filled worship relating – in a redemptive way – humans and materiality through the cultural products of the bread and the wine.

In an attempt to widen our understanding of the Spirit's mediating role in human creative or cultural activity, Gunton references Paul's account of the role which humans and human culture plays within the created order as a whole. Gunton sites Romans 8:21, which sets 'churchly culture' in relation to the material: 'in the hope that the whole creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God'. Furthermore, in an interesting passage Gunton questions whether we might be justified in speaking more generally of the work of human hands being empowered by the Spirit. Here he draws on other scriptural evidence such as that found in Exodus 31:3-9 where the chief craftsman of the tabernacle is seen to have been enabled with 'skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...' (Ex. 31:3) by the Spirit of God.⁵⁸ Passages such as these encourage Gunton to ask whether we are justified in seeking a more general account of human cultural action – that is, human interaction with the non-personal – being enabled and enlivened by the Spirit of God. Furthermore, he will argue that this step can be made through the lens of the 'cultural mandate' which is 'the divine command' God has placed on humanity 'to make something of the world'. For Gunton this represents a 'command so to engage with the created order as to enable it to join the human species in praise of its creator'.⁵⁹ To be sure, this 'cultural mandate' is at the heart of his understanding of that often troublesome passage from Genesis concerning human dominion over creation – our *dominium terrae*.

We return to Gunton's understanding of the proper human exercise of dominion as it is granted to the bearers of the image of God later in the chapter. For now we must further pursue the issues this raises concerning the Spirit's mediation between persons and non-persons. For instance, does this mean that we are now free to speak of the Spirit as deeply involved in human artifice amongst the material? Can we speak of the Spirit in terms of human cultural practices such as the arts, technology, scientific practice, architecture, or even city planning? It appears that for Gunton the answer is a qualified yes, if we speak of the action of the Spirit in the more general terms of creaturely perichoresis. We will recall from the first chapter that Gunton finds perichoresis – a term we know only from reflecting on the Trinitarian being of God – to be a transcendental mark of all being. We will also remember 'that perichoresis, properly understood, is the foe, not the agent, of homogeneity. Both things and relations are various, just as the Father, Son and Spirit are personally distinct and

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 201-202.

constituted so by the form of their relatedness.’⁶⁰ And when applying the concept of perichoresis to the created world, we must do so in the carefully qualified and analogical style we reviewed in Gunton’s discussions of the immanent and economic trinities in the first chapter.

In an interesting example of this taken from *The One the Three and the Many*, Gunton actually speaks of perichoretic relations taking place within our culture’s deep attachment to one of the 20th century’s most widely embraced technologies – the motor car. Our car-enthralled culture has evolved to such a degree that we now find the ‘motor car shapes our relations with each other and the world for good and ill and in all dimensions of our being’.⁶¹ The relationships which have developed around this technology have grown into a many-sided social, cultural, and environmental matrix that is reciprocating in nature. The car has radically reshaped city planning, social habits and conventions, and even personal being. Therefore we can find within this socio-material dynamic a mutual constitution of people, society, technology, and even environmental change in something approaching reciprocal fashion. Gunton concludes with the interesting comment that the automobile is then ‘a symbol of our perichoresis for both good and ill with each other and the world: with the way in which all things are what they are in relations of mutual constitutiveness with all other things.’⁶²

This general concept of a perichoresis of all things, will be very important once we turn to consider the mediations and translations which Latour traces through the practice of the sciences. But for now we may conclude this section on the mediation of the Spirit by reiterating that it is through the Spirit that all things are perfected – that is, related back to God through Christ. Yet we must also remember that for Gunton, non-personal entities do not *have* spirit but they may be shaped by human hands, offered in worship, and further perfected, through the hands of Spirit-enlivened persons. This for Gunton is the ‘cultural mandate’ which all humans share in. It is through human activity in the arts, sciences, and other cultural endeavors that the non-personal creation may be brought up into the broader process of human life and ‘be offered to the Father in Christ and through the Spirit’.⁶³ We have also seen in this single, and largely uncharacteristic, example of the motor-car, that Gunton attributes any reciprocation in relation which would suggest a diminished form of agency on behalf of a nonhuman entity (the motor-car) to our mutual submersion in perichoretic relationality. What is to be highlighted in this is the fact that this relationality – a seemingly multidirectional relationality – is not attributed to the Spirit, but rather, to a generally conceived relational and perichoretic fabric.

⁶⁰ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 172.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Incarnation and Mediation

We have seen that in Gunton's theology of the Spirit there is no nature which holds its own being and *telos* outside of its relation to the Creator. And whereas it is the Spirit who is seen to be the agent of the perfecting of creation, it is *through* Christ that the creation is held together: 'he is its principle of immanence, the person through whom all things came to be, in whom they hold together and to whom they are directed'.⁶⁴ Therefore, we must also seek out the incarnational dimension of mediation if we are to avoid the pitfall of Hegel. A truly trinitarian account will follow Irenaeus by seeking to establish mediation through both 'hands' of God, the Son *and* the Spirit. Thus we must now follow Gunton's recognition that a theology of the Spirit can only be explored 'through the lens provided by Jesus Christ'.⁶⁵ The reason for this is to be found in the fact that it was the incarnation of Christ which initiated the redemption and reconciliation of 'all things'. Yet Gunton is at pains to make clear that the 'Word who became man' did so 'first for human salvation and only after that for the reconciliation of all things' – that is, the non-personal creation.⁶⁶ In this section we are concerned with elucidating something of Jesus' horizontal relationality within the created order. This is not to neglect the 'vertical' relations of Christ since neither the 'vertical' nor the 'horizontal' can be taken in abstraction from one another.⁶⁷ Moreover, we have already, in chapter 1, reviewed Gunton's understanding of Christ's 'vertical' relationality as expressed in his debate with Robert Jenson. And now in our effort to elucidate these 'horizontal' relations we will draw primarily from Gunton's *Christ and Creation*, a book which is hailed by many as perhaps his best effort.

In this book Gunton argues that Christology, properly conceived, must be buttressed more fully by the place of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' humanity than theologians such as Karl Barth were able to maintain. Thus we will come to see once again that it is somewhat artificial to speak of Christ and Spirit in abstraction from one another – although we have tried, to some degree, to do that here in the interest of clarity. The relation between Holy Spirit and Christ is to be found in this: 'The distinctive work of the Spirit is, through Christ, to perfect the creation. The function of the Spirit in relation to Jesus is, accordingly, as the perfecter of his humanity.'⁶⁸ According to Gunton, a conception such as this helps to prevent the Western tendency to diminish both the Spirit and the humanity of Jesus, by making particular

⁶⁴ Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, pp. 120-121.

⁶⁵ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters," p. 195.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ It is important that we be reminded that Gunton uses the terms 'vertical' and 'horizontal' as largely metaphorical, and should therefore not be taken in a strictly spatial sense. This is to say that by using the term 'vertical', for instance, he is not saying that God's being is somewhere literally 'above' us, but rather, that he is ontologically 'above' his creation.

⁶⁸ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 50.

reference to their mutual trinitarian being. If we are able to maintain the humanity of Christ through reference to the perfecting action of the Spirit we are much better able to avoid this Western pitfall. Moreover, it encourages the view that Christ's saving action, while still fully divine, is carried out within created time and space as a truly *human* being, thus avoiding the Arian heresy.

Incarnation and the Human Directedness of Creation

The humanity of Christ, perfected and particularized through the Spirit, is very instructive for our task of outlining the horizontal relationality which the incarnation affected amongst the creation. By maintaining the humanity of Jesus, along side his divinity, we are enabled to find continuity between our own human relationality and that of the second Adam: he is, as Gunton says, 'indeed part of the created order, and although his humanity is that of the Son, it is no less than ours part of the general network of relationality of created being—and that means being on the way to dissolution in meaninglessness'.⁶⁹ That creation has been impacted by human sin is central to the incarnation and subsequent atonement and redemption. As Gunton argues, the creation is in need of redemption due to the loss of integrity which the fall initiated amongst all creation. He uses the metaphor of 'pollution' to capture the breakdown in vertical and horizontal relations which has engendered disorientation within the networks of created relationality. And since the fall was the result of human sin, it is 'appropriate that the first fruits of redemption should be the free, obedient and loving self-offering of this true human life to God the Father'.⁷⁰ Thus to understand the Son's work amongst the fallen networks of created relationality we must first establish his continuity with the creation, as well as his obedience to the Father through the Spirit.

But are we justified in claiming that the work of Christ is truly cosmic in its reach, or are we to limit its redemptive impact to the personal-human sphere alone? It is on this note that Gunton highlights the hidden virtues of the anthropocentric outlook we found earlier in his understanding of the 'cultural mandate'. By understanding Christ's work of redemption as directed towards personal-humanity in the first instance, and towards non-personal creation in the second, we remind ourselves that it is we humans who are at the center of the creation's 'pollution' problem. Moreover, as the Word became incarnate, he did so as a distinctly *human* being for the reconstitution of all created being. What is to be avoided, Gunton insists, 'is not all anthropocentrism, but the tearing apart of creation and redemption, so that redemption comes to appear to consist in salvation out of and apart from the rest of the world'.⁷¹ We then find that it is the personal-human creation that is at the center of God's redemptive action

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 33.

within the world. Gunton will argue further that 'Creation is represented before God first by Christ and then, in dependence upon him, by us'.⁷² We are then justified in understanding something of a 'cosmic Christ', but this is meaningless if not tempered with the centrality of human persons – as Gunton says, the non-personal is 'peripheral' to God's overall action in the world.⁷³

We will find in this a clear continuity with Gunton's theology of the Spirit where it was learned that only human-persons *have* the perfecting and particularizing spirit, whilst non-persons participate in the work of the spirit *through* human-initiated action. Therefore, Gunton will write: 'God the Father through his Spirit shapes this representative sample of the natural world [humanity] for the sake of the remainder of it.'⁷⁴ The point is one which embraces the christological and eschatological dimensions of the Spirit's work. It is christological because it is here that we find the incarnation as representative of the Father's use of the creation through the Spirit to form the flesh of the Redeemer. This is a point which, for Gunton, affirms the special status of the human creation as we reflect the image of God throughout all of creation. And it is eschatological on the basis that wherever the Spirit is found, there the true *telos* of creation is present. Gunton might summarize thusly: 'It is Christ to whom all creation moves, and therefore to Christ that the Spirit directs his eschatological work...The action of the Spirit is distinct but not separate from that of the Son, for he brings the creation to the Father through the Son.'⁷⁵

Horizontal Relations and Resurrection

What is clear for Gunton is that the man Jesus was both fully divine and fully human, and being human, he took upon himself the materiality of a creature. To be a human creature also implicates a number of 'horizontal' relations which maintain us in our particularly human personhood. 'To be a creature', Gunton argues, 'is to be constituted by, and to constitute, other finite beings existing in time and space.'⁷⁶ Christology must therefore take materiality very seriously. And to his great credit, this is a point which Gunton is rather occupied with giving its full justice. He highlights the fact that as a human person, Jesus would be constituted through relations of a social (personal) kind as well as through a web of relations with the non-personal world.

For Gunton there is no other event which more dramatically belonged to Jesus' horizontal relationality than his resurrection, whereas the ascension belongs most fully to his

⁷² Ibid., p. 34.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters," p. 197.

⁷⁵ Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, p. 122.

⁷⁶ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 36.

‘vertical’ relations.⁷⁷ To be clear, we see here that Gunton finds the resurrection to entail the immanence of Christ, whilst the ascension should move us towards his transcendence. It was, in fact, the horizontal (immanent) relations which were to bring about his death. Furthermore, we may understand that his relations with certain groups of people, individuals, and the material world as a whole, were what made him who he was and directed the events of his life and ultimate death. ‘In that respect’, Gunton explains, ‘Jesus was as we are, a creature in relations of ‘horizontal’ reciprocal constitution with other people and the world.’⁷⁸

For all of our similarities and continuities with the man Jesus, there remain some important differences. To begin with, Gunton makes it clear that the quality of Jesus’ relationality, both vertical and horizontal, is very different to our own. As we are now speaking to the horizontal relationality of Jesus’, we may certainly conclude that his relationship to the world is different in the sense of being ultimately *redemptive*. ‘As bound up with the world as any other human being, he is yet its Lord and redeemer, recalling it from its bondage to decay so that it may participate in its true directedness.’⁷⁹ And closely related to this is the fact that in the resurrection of Jesus, we find his relationality to be both redemptive and *universal*. We do not mean to suggest something of a ‘cosmic Christ’ by using the term ‘universal’ in this instance. Rather, it is a term used to indicate that through his resurrection, the ‘horizontal’ relations of the risen Jesus are ‘brought into some kind of a *constitutive* relation with all creation.’⁸⁰ Through his resurrection there is also pronounced and ‘eschatological judgment on all things’ which carries distinctly ontological repercussions. What follows, Gunton claims, is a transformation of the flesh of Jesus ‘into the conditions of the age to come’, thereby bringing about the restoration of the cosmos.⁸¹ It is after the resurrection that creation achieves its destiny in its being ‘gathered to him’ through the Spirit.

This is in the first instance the redemption of the human creation, but involves other things in its relationality. As we have seen, we humans are the centre of the world’s problems, and only by our redirection will the whole creation be set free.⁸²

It is then through the resurrection of Christ’s material body that he is made the ‘first fruits’ or ‘the first born among many’ (Rom 8:29), through which the remainder of creation may be brought into a perfected redemption. But according to Gunton, it is those who were created in the image of God who are the first to be moved by the Spirit into a new ontological perfection within the risen Jesus.

In this we find that it is not only the resurrection we must speak of but also of the ascension. For it is in this event that the resurrection is completed through the taking up of

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁸ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 60. (emphasis added)

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸² Ibid., p. 64.

Christ and the opening of a new relation between heaven and earth. It is in this way that Christ – through whom the world was created – comes into relation with the world in space and time to redeem the complex networks of relationality that had been so impacted by the fall. By taking up spatial and temporal form through the Son and Spirit, creation has been reordered towards God. In the telling words of Gunton: ‘It is not therefore *something* which holds things together, but *someone*: the one through whom, in the unity of the Father and the Spirit, all things have their being.’⁸³

As a concluding point on this section concerning Gunton’s vision of mediation, we may now try to summarize the meaning, or the significance, of the Son and the Spirit in terms of our creaturely space and time. The important points to be made here have been implicit in all that we have now reviewed in Gunton’s trinitarian theology of creation and culture. What the incarnation of Christ, and his subsequent death, resurrection and ascension – all particularized, perfected, and empowered through the Spirit – has accomplished is nothing less than the complete reordering of all creaturely reality. Moreover, by approaching the incarnation within a trinitarian frame of understanding – as the patristic Fathers did so long ago – we come to see that the mediating and redeeming work of Son and Spirit will have both a ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ impact on space-time. In the ‘vertical’ trajectory a trinitarian understanding of the incarnation will reveal that space and time are not containers, as the ancients believed, where God is banished to an unreachable transcendence. But as Thomas Torrance has illustrated, a trinitarian understanding of the incarnation allows us, as it did the Fathers, to envision a relational dynamic between God and world where the distinct being of each is in no way threatened.⁸⁴

Secondly we may consider the ‘horizontal’ space-time implications of the incarnation. As Gunton explains; ‘What is realized in the incarnate involvement of the Son in time and space is the redirection of the creation to its original destiny, a destiny that was from the beginning *in Christ*, for all creation is through and to the Son.’⁸⁵ Thus it is through God’s ‘two hands’ that space and time are affirmed and set on the path of ultimate redemption and reconciliation to the One from whom it originated. As the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ relations most clearly intersect in the Son we may conclude with the realization that it is through the incarnation, again conceived in trinitarian fashion, that we may understand the world as ultimately *real*. Without a trinitarian understanding of creation, as revealed in the incarnation, we would ultimately collapse either into an idealism, where the world amounts to little more than a collective projection, or into a world-denying pantheism. ‘It is because God the Father

⁸³ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 179.

⁸⁴ Here I am referring to Torrance’s *Space, Time and Incarnation*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1969), which Gunton approvingly refers to in his *Christ and Creation*, pp. 78-79.

⁸⁵ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 94.

creates through the Son and the Spirit, his two hands...that we can conceive a world that is both real in itself, and yet only itself in relation to its creator.⁸⁶

III.B Latour on Mediation, Actancy, and Networking

We will remember from the previous chapter that Latour locates the power of the moderns in their constitutional guarantees, the first two of which rendered the towering Subjects and Objects into polemic opposition. The third guarantee of the modern Constitution served to render the work of mediation and hybridization between the two dichotomized poles completely opaque. The outcome for modernity was that quasi-objects, hybrids, and the networks which exist amongst the collective were rendered invisible and unrepresentable. Yet we also learned that this lack of representation did not limit the continuance of mediation and hybridization. In fact, modernity served to dramatically increase the work of mediation and hybridization amongst the collective, all the while denying that such a mediation was taking place. This is, as we have seen, why Latour can make the claim that ‘we have never been modern’ – we have never ceased to multiply more and more hybrid networks of quasi-objects. Therefore, it is by way of a nonmodern constitution that Latour intends to shine light into the abandoned ‘middle kingdom’ which the modern Constitution fought so hard to keep black-boxed. By replacing Subjects and Objects with the nonmodern pairing of humans and nonhumans, Latour intends to show how they can now ‘exchange properties, in order to compose in common the raw material of the collective’. By seeking out the heterogeneous networks of humans and nonhumans we will again ‘make it possible to fill up the collective with beings endowed with will, freedom, speech, and *real* existence’.⁸⁷ In this section we take up the task of elucidating the ways in which Latour finds a dynamic mediation taking place between humans and their nonhuman counterparts. In this we will certainly find points of convergence and divergence with the account of mediation we found in Gunton. But as we might expect, Latour’s accounting is much less concerned with matters theological.

We may begin this exercise by asking of Latour what is meant in his discourse by the term ‘*mediation*’, as there are some important differences to be found between his usage and that of Gunton who is more apt to use the term ‘*relation*’ when considering what he calls ‘horizontal’ relations. It is perhaps best to begin by locating the work of mediation – the term *work* here serves to communicate the dynamism of mediation, rather than static qualities. First, we can locate the work of mediation in the practice of the sciences, both ‘natural’ and ‘social’. As Latour explains;

The active locus of science, portrayed in the past by stressing its two extremities, the Mind and the World, has shifted to the middle ground, to the humble instruments,

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

⁸⁷ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 61. (emphasis added)

tools, visualizations skills, writing practices, focusing techniques, and what has been called “re-presentation”. Through all these efforts, the mediation has eaten up two extremities: the representing Mind and the represented World.⁸⁸

Immediately we find that, for Latour, mediations sit at the very heart of what the modern Constitution strived to obscure. Moreover, we find that mediations are often material, technical, or inscriptive, but never are they merely cold objects or purified subjects. Mediations as we will see, are what ‘vascularize’ the nonmodern collective. Here the sciences will no longer seek to obscure the mediations which are their lifeblood, but rather, seek the multiplication of mediators.

Secondly, mediators are never to be understood as simple *intermediaries* that transmit pure forms of Nature or Society. Therefore, in the interest of highlighting the meaning of mediation, Latour will often contrast it to the work of an intermediary. Blind to true mediations, moderns saw only intermediaries that were always fully defined by what caused them, in a fashion similar to the dialectics of Marx or Hegel. In these systems of thought there is much said of mediations between Nature and Society, or Nature and Spirit, ‘yet the countless mediations with which it peoples its grandiose history are only intermediaries that transmit pure ontological qualities’.⁸⁹ In the end, intermediaries simply transfer the modern Constitutional guarantee of a purified Nature and Society – that is, they simply transport energy from one of the two purified poles. Thus intermediaries in the modern mode leave us with a hybridity that is no more than the mixture of two ontologically purified forms. Or as Latour explains, when confronted with a hybrid the modern thinker would first determine the intermediaries, then beginning from the poles of the modern ‘yardstick’, would then work their way towards the middle – ‘the place of the phenomena in Kant’s great narrative’.⁹⁰ It was in this way that the moderns would deny true mediation by then seeking out which parts were Social/subjective and which were Natural/objective. The end result is much less mediation than it is *fragmentation*. Mediation, as we will see, is far more ontologically radical than the mere intermediaries of the modern Constitution.

Whereas intermediaries are fully defined by their causes, mediations always exceed their conditions, their inputs and outputs.⁹¹ They will instead carry what Latour will call ‘variable ontologies’, not merely social nor merely natural, they cannot be understood asymmetrically. Following Latour we shall turn to the example of Boyle’s air pump once again. A common historical evaluation of the Boyle-Hobbes controversy would have little interest in the pump itself ‘except to make it emerge miraculously from the Heaven of Ideas to

⁸⁸ Latour, “How to be Iconophilic in Art, Science and Religion,” in *Picturing Science-Producing Art*, Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 422.

⁸⁹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 57.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹¹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 307.

establish their chronology'.⁹² In the modern settlement there is little of any 'historicity of things', only humans were seen to populate the realm of history. Therefore, scientist and epistemologists who study the controversy 'will describe the physics of the vacuum without paying the slightest attention to England, or even to Boyle'.⁹³ The first evaluation will ultimately produce English society (the left pole) as the determining factor; the latter will offer the indelible 'Laws of Nature' (the right pole) as the determining factor. Only by tracing the *intermediaries* of pump, Royal Society, witnesses, feathers, and leaky seals, are we to reconnect the two poles which the moderns dichotomized. Here in the modern mode we will notice that there is no variable ontology. 'To explain our air pump, we simply plunged a hand alternately either into the urn that contains for all eternity the beings of Nature, or into the one that contains the sempiternal mainsprings of the social world.'⁹⁴ The intermediaries of this story simply transport energy from one of the two ontological categories that carry any weight in the modern schema.

A nonmodern evaluation, as we have seen, must act *symmetrically* and begin in the middle with the mediations and mediators themselves. This will necessarily involve an abandonment of the two powers at the dichotomized poles. Nature and Society are no longer the basis of explanation that never required explanation or justification in themselves. Instead;

Nature will emerge altered from Boyle's laboratory, and so will English society; but Boyle and Hobbes will also change in the same degree. Such metamorphoses are incomprehensible if only two beings, Nature and Society have existed since time immemorial, or if the first remains eternal while the second is stirred up by history. These metamorphoses become explicable, on the contrary, if we redistribute essence to all the entities that make up history.⁹⁵

Yet in doing this, as Latour insists, we will discover that the intermediaries are much more than that – they are in fact *mediators*. They are 'actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it'.⁹⁶ In doing this we add history to once Natural things, thereby making them truly *contingent*.

Actancy and Technological Mediation

It would be very difficult to fully understand the Latourian concept of mediation without speaking equally to the issue of nonhuman agency (or actancy) as well. And if we are to do this effectively we must now seek to outline one of Latour's most successful methodological offspring. At the beginning of chapter two we eluded to the important 'academic style' which Latour and Michel Callon are credited with inspiring through their

⁹² Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 79.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

nonmodern thinking. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as it was originally termed, grew out the desire to capture a nonmodern notion of mediation and generalized symmetry within – to begin with – sociological theory.⁹⁷ The ANT approach(s) has now grown to colonize sub-fields in many disciplines including anthropology, economics, history, technology studies, feminist studies, and human geography to name just a few. In the next chapter we will look more deeply at the spatial and temporal aspects of the actor-network by studying the adoption of ANT amongst human geographers. But here we are concerned to offer only a general outline of the ANT ‘style’ and its appreciation of heterogeneity, networks, performance/practice and the material mediations which exist amongst the collective (parliament of things).

Actor-network theory is very closely akin to Latour’s nonmodern project as whole. As John Law has explained, ANT ‘is a ruthless application of semiotics. It tells that entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities.’⁹⁸ Essentially all *a priori* ontological distinctions are done away with – subjects/objects, structure/agency, knowledge/belief. In ANT, as it is with Latour’s work as whole, essences, ontologies, divisions, distinctions, and even *agency* are always the *result* of work, practice, relations and actions that are mediated along heterogeneous associations. Never are ontologies and divisions to be found given in a ‘state of nature’, or ‘in the order of things’. Instead, ontologies within the ANT framework can only be outlined once the materially heterogeneous networks of relationality have been traced through the space-time which they produce – the focus of chapter four. This is what Law and others have called the ‘relational materiality’ or the ‘semiotics of materiality’ of the ANT approach(s). Again, according to Law; ‘[ANT] takes the semiotic insight, that of the relationality of entities, the notion that they are produced in relations, and applies this ruthlessly to all the materials—and not simply to those that are *linguistic*.’⁹⁹ This is, in sum, the generalized principle of symmetry realized in methodological practice. The outcome allows ANT theorists ‘not to alternate between natural realism and social realism but to obtain nature and society as twin results of another activity, one that is more interesting’ – namely the building of heterogeneous networks of mediators.¹⁰⁰

Once we have thrown away the Kantian ‘yardstick’ new possibilities of action are unlocked from the Subject sphere and redistributed throughout the heterogeneous networks of

⁹⁷ Latour has recently suggested that the name Actor-Network Theory is misleading on many levels and would be better off with ‘actant-rhizome ontology’ for its namesake. Bruno Latour, "On Recalling ANT," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 19.

⁹⁸ Law, "After ANT: Complexity, Naming and Topology," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 3.

⁹⁹ Law, "After ANT," p. 4. (emphasis added)

¹⁰⁰ Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bath School!: A Reply to Collins and Yearly," chap. in *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 348.

mediators who are always more-than human. By following the practices of the sciences – ‘science in action’ – the ANT theorist is no longer limited to assigning agency to ‘humans-amongst-themselves’ alone, but also to the nonhumans who mediate and actually ‘exchange properties’ with humans within the tangle of networks. As Latour argues; ‘Once we enter the realm of engineers and craftsmen, no unmediated action is possible.’¹⁰¹ Yet this requires a very different understanding of techniques than has been allowed in the modern Constitution which was far too concerned with sorting techniques and artifacts into the object pole of the dichotomy. Therefore, Latour suggests four ways in which techniques should be understood within the ANT or nonmodern perspectives.

First, Latour will insist that we define ‘technical action as the form of delegation that allows us to mobilize in an interaction movements which have been executed earlier, farther away, and by other *actants*’ – a term we will describe in more detail below – ‘as though they are still present and available to us now’.¹⁰² There are, perhaps, two further points that we may draw from this. We see here that technical action makes present other actants who are now absent. The actions of another have been made durable through time and space. Again, the space-times which ANT draws from this understanding of ‘sociotechnical’ networks will be the focus of the next chapter. But secondly, this suggests that without technical action and its artifacts – its things – human society would be on its own. Without all of these nonhumans populating our collective and mediating relations and actions from far away in space and time, we would be limited to pure social interaction. This point is a critical one and will be the focus of the next section, where we briefly discuss Latour’s ‘missing masses’ and simian societies.

Secondly, Latour’s understanding of technical action will require the rejection of the traditional *Homo faber* view of human technical practice. The traditional view understood technical action ‘as the imposition of a form consciously planned in advance onto some shapeless matter’. But as Latour argues, this ‘should be replaced by a much more oblique, although more accurate, definition’ of technical action ‘as the socialization of non-humans’.¹⁰³ Therefore, it is not the case that humans have, through techniques, some kind of unmediated access to a nature that is ‘outside’ of us and is wholly passive to our action. Holding to such a fictional notion would only serve to reproduce the ‘great divide’ which the Enlightenment had cemented into the modern Constitution.

Third, Latour is interested in challenging the traditional *Homo faber* myth which understood humans to be in complete control of the objects of their design. Instead, he argues

¹⁰¹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 175.

¹⁰² Latour, "Pragmatogonies: a mythical account of how humans and nonhumans swap properties," *American Behavioural Scientist* 37 (1994), p. 792. (emphasis added)

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

that we must seek out the ways in which *an exchange of human and nonhuman properties* takes place in the midst of technical action. If this is fully accomplished we will be much closer to achieving the comparative anthropology which was sought in the last chapter. This claim is based on the realization that once we highlight and trace the heterogeneous networks which proliferated under the modern Constitution's radar, we may then begin to compare modern collectives and traditional (nonmodern or premodern) collectives. This is impossible as long as we continue to posit a 'great divide' between humans-among-themselves (Society) and things-among-themselves (Nature).

The fourth dimension of re-conceiving technical action in nonmodern terms has to do with a redefinition of what it is that constitutes sociality altogether. But this is a much larger topic which deserves its own section below. For now, let us seek only to gain a deeper understanding of two of Latour's major arguments on this topic of technical mediation. First we will seek to better grasp his proposition that it is through technological action that humans and nonhumans exchange properties. Secondly, we will seek to better outline his understanding of what constitutes nonhuman *actancy*.

Exchanging Properties amongst Humans and Nonhumans

If we are to witness the 'swapping' or the 'folding' of properties between humans and nonhumans, as Latour maintains, we must abandon our *a priori* definitions of subjects and objects. Again, this is the generalized principle of symmetry in action, where we begin in the middle and 'under' the Kantian 'yardstick', seeking instead to begin with the mediations and networks themselves. Thus we must abandon the 'civil war' of the modern's Subjects and Objects and instead seek out the exchange of properties amongst humans and nonhumans. In *Pandora's Hope*, Latour uses the American 'gun rights' debate to form his case study concerning the exchange of human and nonhuman properties.

The argument takes its form in the opposing views of gun ownership advocates the NRA (National Rifle Association) and those of the gun control advocates who want strict laws limiting gun ownership. As the advocates of gun control cry; 'Guns kill people', the NRA cries in return; 'Guns don't kill people; *people* kill people'.¹⁰⁴ Latour breaks this impasse down into materialist and sociological positions. The advocates of gun control are offering a *materialist* account; good citizens can be *transformed* into something else by simply carrying this material artifact – the gun. But the NRA advocate is offering a *sociological* account; the gun does nothing in itself, it is simply a tool which neutrally mediates the will of its human carrier.¹⁰⁵ In the materialist account both human and nonhuman are seen to be actors/actants within the drama. The material artifact actually *adds* something

¹⁰⁴ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 176. (emphasis in the original)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

into the interaction – an innocent citizen can become, or is transformed into, a criminal. ‘Materialists thus make the intriguing suggestion that our qualities as subjects, our competences, our personalities, depend on what we hold in our hands.’¹⁰⁶ However, the NRA advocate cannot be so bold as to claim that the gun plays no part within this drama. Instead they will offer a moralist account. The gun does not change the moral state of the person holding the gun, but rather makes an already corrupt or decent person more efficient at carrying out the task of killing or incapacitating. ‘Thus the NRA sociologists make the troubling suggestion that we can master techniques, that techniques are nothing more than pliable and diligent slaves.’¹⁰⁷

Who then is responsible for the act of killing? Does the gun add anything more to the act of killing other than pure efficiency? Is the gun a pure technological mediator of an always human agency? Once again, Latour will seek to answer these questions symmetrically. In doing this we must not seek out *a priori* agencies in human and nonhuman participants. Instead we must treat both the human and the gun as potential actors within the drama. In this way we are able to speak of the way in which a *program of action* comes up against some form of interference (an *anti-program*). As Latour cites in the glossary to *Pandora’s Hope*, these are:

Terms from the sociology of technology which have been used to give technical artifacts their active and often polemical character. Each device anticipates what other actors, humans or nonhumans, may do (programs of action), but these anticipated actions may not occur because those other actors have different programs—anti-programs from the point of view of the first actor. Hence the artifact becomes the frontline of a controversy between programs and anti-programs.¹⁰⁸

We then have Agent 1 (our human) who has its own goal – perhaps to survive a potentially violent altercation lawfully, or to make an unlawful killing more efficient. To do this Agent 1 falls back on Agent 2 ‘and enlists the gun or is enlisted by it—it does not matter which—and a third agent emerges from the fusion of the other two’.¹⁰⁹

What do we call this third agent? Is it a ‘gun-man’, a ‘man-gun’? And how might the materialist and sociological accounts hold? Here Latour argues that for the NRA’s sociological account to succeed Agent 1’s program of action (its goal to be a good citizen) would have to meet Agent 2’s program of action (the gun’s goal to be fired) thereby creating a third agent (Agent 3, the gun-man) and survive this interference without straying from the original goal to be a good citizen. Here the gun is merely an intermediary, a tool dominated by human action.¹¹⁰ But if Agent 3 (the gun-man) were to drift from its original goal (to be a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 177-178.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 178.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

good citizen) and adopts a new goal by the persuasion of Agent 2 (the ‘gun’s intent, the gun’s will, the gun’s script’) then the materialist account holds. Here it ‘is human action that is no more than an intermediary’ of the gun’s program of action.¹¹¹

A symmetrical account will allow us a third possibility which Latour argues is the more commonly realized of the options. This is the creation of a new third goal (program of action) which does not belong to either Agent 1 or Agent 2 alone. Whereas the materialist would have us believe in the force of the gun’s agency, the sociologist would have us believe in the predominance of human agency. But what if the agency we are dealing with is a composite: ‘a citizen-gun, a gun-citizen’? Here we are left with a very different picture where essences are not yet determined. As Latour argues:

If we try to comprehend techniques while assuming that the psychological capacity of humans is forever fixed, we will not succeed in understanding how techniques are created nor even how they are used. You are a different person with the gun in your hand.¹¹²

What we are here witnessing is a truly symmetrical and relational ontology. Both human and nonhuman agents are modified by the encounter. The human is different with the gun in hand just as the gun is different by means of being embraced by the human. Moreover, what is true of the human is similarly true of the nonhuman. Whereas materialists and sociologists approached this interaction with *a priori* essences with which the world must comply, ANT will seek out the technical mediations, articulations, and hybridizations which the encounter of multiple programs of action produces. The goals of both humans and nonhumans are never fixed. In sum: ‘We must learn to attribute—redistribute—actions to many more agents...Agents can be human or (like the gun) nonhuman, and each can have goals (or functions, as engineers prefer to say)’.¹¹³ In the end we find that for Latour, agency can be shared. Neither guns nor people kill on their own, but rather it is the ‘citizen-gun’ that kills.¹¹⁴

Latour has offered us a rather different philosophy of technology than the tradition has allowed. Techniques, artifacts, and objects are no longer to be located in a purified realm of ‘object objects’. Nor are these nonhumans to be considered the mere blank screens for human projections and ‘social constructions’. It is for this reason that Latour will suggest that we leave behind the nouns ‘technique’ and ‘technology’ and instead employ the more dynamic adjective ‘technical’.¹¹⁵ The intention here is to lift us out of the ‘legendary kingdom’ where subjects stare across a deep divide at objects of their own making. Instead we

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 179.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 180. (brackets in the original)

¹¹⁴ It is perhaps worth pointing out that this is just one of the many ‘stories’ Latour tells in his effort to elucidate human and nonhuman ‘foldings’. In the next chapter we will review a few more of his interesting examples, and seek to draw out the implications in greater detail.

¹¹⁵ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, p. 191.

now have a situation where there is ‘no sense in which humans may be said to exist as humans without entering into commerce with what authorizes and enables them to exist (that is, to act)’.¹¹⁶ But we also find in this a concerted refusal to distinguish between ancient techniques (Heidegger’s beloved *poiesis* of the artisans) and the more modern (broad-scale, inhuman, domineering) technologies. As Latour insists; ‘The distinction was never more than a prejudice.’¹¹⁷

Nonhuman Actancy

We have just seen how Latour seeks to diminish the polemically opposed subject and object by redistributing agential characteristics through witnessing the dynamics of practice. It was in this way that subjects and objects cease to fight their ‘civil war’ and become the far less polemical humans and nonhumans. Yet there remains the tricky question concerning what appears to be a common sense objection. Returning to our gun example above, one might protest that it is still a distinctly *human* agency which is the predominant force. Humans fabricate guns, pick them up, pull the trigger, and lock them away. Humans make computers, phones, cars, and staplers, but none of these nonhumans has been known to make a human. Therefore, it is argued that our analysis should be, according to common sense, strictly *asymmetrical* rather than *symmetrical*.

But this, Latour argues, misses the point entirely. Certainly we have in the above story begun with a human actor, but this prime mover encounters a second actor and the combination of the two together produce a new ‘distributed, and nested series of practices whose sum may be possible to add up but only if we respect the mediating role of all the actants mobilized in the series’.¹¹⁸ We might ask ourselves if it would have been possible for the human actor to kill without the intervention of the gun. Perhaps, but this would have been a very different action all together. Instead we must ask who are the actors here composing this new program of action? The answer comes: ‘Action is a property of associated entities.’¹¹⁹ Even if we are to identify the human as the prime mover in this series of nested sub-programs, in no way does this weaken the claim that it is a composition of entities whose *actancy* enabled this final program of action. Rarely, if ever, do we find humans acting on their own. It is only through and association of actants that agency is realized.¹²⁰

Finally, we have now been using the term *actant* for some time now, and I would like to conclude this section by briefly speaking to its evolution within science studies. Early in its academic life ANT began to speak of nonhumans possessing a form of ‘agency’ which

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.192. (brackets in the original)

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p 194.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 181.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the modern Constitution was so incapable of recognizing. But concern would later grow amongst ANT theorists that the term 'agency' was too loaded a term to be useful when speaking of nonhumans. Thus it has been widely suggested, by Latour and others, that the terms 'actant' and 'actancy' should be preferred since these lack the anthropomorphic undertones of the term 'agency'. Moreover, the term also avoids the traditional underpinnings of the always human interpretation of 'agency' which included qualities like consciousness, self-awareness, rationality, language, etc. It is certainly not the goal of ANT theorists to extend characteristics such as these to the nonhuman actant. Instead, the term actant refers to performances that are simply not the sole preserve of humans.

The Material Mediation of Society

Finally, we must outline the impact that this nonmodern understanding of mediation between humans and nonhumans will have on social theory as a whole. In the traditional Durkheimian interpretation, Latour argues that society was understood to be something which preceded individual action and lasted much longer than any single interaction. Society was then thought to be the external corporate body which dominated and defined us as subjects. In fact, society proves to be so transcendent that it becomes 'more real than ourselves'.¹²¹ Here society is built upon the back of countless interactions which continuously work to repair and maintain the social fabric. But as Latour will argue, Durkheim has offered only a tautology – society is the primitive *sui generis* order that has only itself to maintain it, to 'socially construct' itself over and over.¹²² Yet we must ask, once again, what shape does 'society' take in a symmetrical, hybrid, nonmodern, or collective world? What is it that lends stability to social interactions if it is not a *sui generis* social transcendence?

On this point Latour instructs us to seek out the 'missing masses' – the dark-matter of our social fabric. These are the countless constellations of nonhumans which mediate and stabilize social interactions amongst the collective. To further elucidate something of the shape of human and nonhuman sociality within collectives, Latour will often take his readers into the world of simian societies. These 'almost human' societies, as sociobiologist Shirley Strum will sometimes call them, are surprisingly rich and complicated. And now that some of the controversy surrounding the field of sociobiology is beginning to simmer down, Latour has argued that there is an enormous amount that can be gleaned for social theory by seeking to better understand these fascinating simian societies.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of simian societies – at least for social theorists – is their almost total lack of technical action and language. This opens the door for a fascinating study of 'pure' social interaction – a 'paradise of interactionism'. As Latour has

¹²¹ Latour, "Pragmatogonies," p. 801.

¹²² 'Social construction' is, of course, a terribly misleading term, but here it seems appropriate.

suggested, for social interactions to take place the sociological literature has always presupposed a few constitutive elements. First, there must be at least two actors co-present to one another. Second, they must be linked by some kind of communicative behavior. And finally, the behavior of each agent must react, evolve, and be modified by the behavior of the other in a way that is in some ways unpredictable. In other words, the emergent behaviors must be 'more than the sum of the competencies in use by the actors before this interaction'.¹²³

Now, what makes simian societies a 'paradise of interactionism' is the fact that the social order is a continuous project of immediate interactions that produces no 'totalizing or structuring effects'.¹²⁴ Social cohesion in a simian society has nothing to make it relatively permanent or durable through time and space other than 'pure' social interaction. As Latour explains:

For all behavior patterns that presuppose some totalization, primates other than humans have to conduct a series of trials, that need to be ever again begun anew in order to ensure the duration of collective effects. Deciding the direction to be followed by the troop, for example, presupposes an evaluation of the movements of all by all, whence emerges, at the beginning of the day, an order that no one member has given, and that none can claim as their own.¹²⁵

We then see that simian society exists on the pure and repeated face-to-face interactions amongst members. But is there any form of mediation taking place? Yes, but it is a mediation that is carried out by partners. And more importantly, each actor within the society must on a continuous basis compose for *themselves* the overall social totality of which they are a part. Unlike humans, simians 'only have their bodies with which to compose the social, only their vigilance and the active engagement of their memory to "hold" relationships together'.¹²⁶

What this tends to suggest concerning 'human societies' – as this is still a problematic term – is that there is something which adds durability, through time and space, to our human sociality that is not present in simian societies. Moreover, human sociality is far more dislocated, 'globalized', than the always *local* immediacy of simian societies. But what is it that makes our 'societies' durable over space and through time? Or asked in the old dualistic framework of sociology; how is *structure* maintained in the face of all these individual *agents*? The social structuralist will argue that it is some kind of *sui generis* society which is then 'manifested' through human interactions.¹²⁷ But as we have already seen, human social life must depend on something other than the social world itself, otherwise we are left only with the Durkheimian tautology. Others have argued that durability is to be found in the

¹²³ Latour, "On Interobjectivity," Geoffrey Bowker trans., *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 3, 4 (1996), p. 229.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

human capacity for symbolism. These mental projections, it is thought, span the void and take the place of something which is absent. Thus it is through the allusion to a symbolic presence of structure that society is made durable. Simians, it is supposed, are unable to grasp the symbolic and thus rely on pure social immediacy. Yet Latour will ask; 'How could a brain alone stabilize that which bodies cannot?'¹²⁸

Social durability will instead require something which enables complicated sociality to extend, shift time frames, shift spacings, and effectively go beyond the here and now. Thus as Latour will repeatedly suggest, social theory must seek out the 'missing masses' which hold our more-than-human sociality together – that is, it must seek out the *nonhuman actants* which populate our collectives.¹²⁹ That sociology has been blind to the proliferation of nonhuman or material participation in human sociality is in no way surprising. Sociological theory has built itself on the very foundation that it is a science without an object.

Indeed, for the human sciences, things have become untouchable since, with the exact sciences, they became "objective." After this split, operated in the modern period, between an objective world and a political world, things could not serve as comrades, colleagues, partners, accomplices or associates in the weaving of social life.¹³⁰

As we have seen, the 'Great Divide' of the modern Constitution disallowed the mixing of natural things and social things. Politics and nature were to be held at opposing poles in order to make political discussion obsolete. It was in this way that the great unwashed masses could never overcome the 'matters of fact' which the sciences produced and coaxed out of a transcendent Nature. Society was never to be allowed to corrupt Nature, and Nature could never be allowed to corrupt Society. And in the abyss between the two fell the socialized nonhumans which spanned the gap between actor and system. 'Forgetting artifacts (in the sense of things) has meant the creation of that other artifact (in the sense of illusion): a society that has to be held in place with just the social.'¹³¹

ANT seeks to capture this new understanding that objects actually participate in sociality as full-fledged *social actants*. But as we reviewed above, nonhumans are not to be understood as passive tools in the hands of an always-human agency. We are not, as Latour is fond of saying, *ex nihilo* creators of our own actions, potentialities, and worlds. Nonhuman actants, through multiple associations and the 'nesting of sub-programs', make human action possible. Primates rarely, if ever, engage objects to carryout their social interactions. Humans, on the other hand, can rarely avoid interaction with techniques in their interactions. 'By dislocating interaction so as to associate ourselves with non-humans, we can endure beyond

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

¹²⁹ Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).

¹³⁰ Latour, "On Interobjectivity," p. 235.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 236. (brackets in the original)

the present, in a matter other than our body, and we can interact at a distance – which it is difficult for a baboon or chimpanzee to do.’¹³² Even the clothes we wear come from distant places and distant times, just as the buildings we inhabit were made by hands that are no longer present but continue to exert the influence of past actions. There are many *others* who are now absent yet materially present in space and time – that is to say mediated – due to the nearly ubiquitous artifacts which saturate our socio-material constellations. It is for this reason that Latour can insist that ‘technology is society made durable.’¹³³

IV. Locating Trinitarian and Nonmodern Unity

Now that we have looked into the trinitarian and nonmodern accounts of ontological differentiation and ‘horizontal’ mediation, we may now take up the final point of comparison – the locating of unity. A comparison on this point will make our task of comparing these two very different approaches to our modern and late-modern predicament much clearer by reducing the problem of modernity to the basic components which Gunton identified time and again. The problem with modernity, he insists, is nothing new. In fact, it is an ancient problem which consumed even the earliest philosophers. What is the nature of reality? Is there a unity to the cosmos as Parmenides postulated? Or are all things merely chaotic and in some kind of Heraclitian flux? May the God of creation perform a unifying role? Or is unity a mere fairytale with no purchase on reality? I think much would be made clearer if we were to pose the question of ‘the One and the many’ to our two interlocutors. Here we are concerned to locate each of our author’s account concerning the possibility for unity amongst multiplicity.

It is by now clear that we have already reviewed much of Gunton’s response to this ancient question. Modernity and late-modernity are, for Gunton, characterized by a pendulum swinging from overly homogeneous concepts of sociality which oppress personal particularity to the individualist societies which emphasize personal particularity over relationality. To disrupt this modern pendulum of extremes we require a distinctly theological antidote. While modernity can be seen as a protest against the overwhelming omnipotence of a unitarily conceived deity, the Church must now embrace the Triune creator. For it is only through the One God who contains within himself ‘a form of plurality in relation and creates a world which reflects the richness of his being,’ that we are able to embrace both plurality and unity simultaneously.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., p. 239.

¹³³ Latour, “Technology is Society Made Durable,” in *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, Sociological Review Monograph 38, John Law (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹³⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 177.

As we witnessed in chapter one, the Cappadocian fathers were responsible for the brilliant formulation of the trinitarian ontology which Gunton and others would like to see the Western church now embrace more fully. By affirming the relational being of the Trinity, the Cappadocians have given us the theological tools necessary to deal with the cultural crisis that now faces the Western, or modern, world. Moreover, the Cappadocian achievement was also to introduce the term *perichoresis* which serves to indicate something of the Triune God's work, action, or relationality, through space and time. Indeed, *perichoresis* can be identified as a universal mark of all being as it works to relate all things on a cosmic scale. Thus it is through this understanding of God as Triune, and through the work of his 'two hands' that we are to find plurality and unity within the created order. Only in this way are we able to hold personal, material and cultural realms in relational distinction. As Gunton insists; 'if the triune God is the source of all being, meaning and truth, we should be able to develop a theology of the unity of culture without depriving each of its dimensions of its distinctive approach to validity'.¹³⁵

But as we have also seen, this does not require a strictly immanent God. Instead, Gunton has argued that God must be understood as ultimately transcendent – meaning *other-than* – the world which is his creation. Yet the transcendence of God does not limit his activity within the 'world'. Through the mediating action of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God continues to uphold, perfect and sustain the created realm. In sum, we can say that Gunton finds unity and multiplicity in the Creator's triune being. And it is appropriate that we will find the marks of this relational ontology within the created order itself, as we have seen in Gunton's understanding of the economic Trinity.

Latour's approach to the ancient problem of 'the one and the many', as is now clear, differs greatly to that of Gunton. For Latour, the loss of ancient unity in the form of modern fragmentation is directly related to the modern's constitutional guarantees which polarized subjects and objects, politics and nature, and God and world. Unlike Gunton, Latour will not appeal to a 'Creator God' in the hope that this transcendent being may be able to push the world back into a forced unity. Nor will he appeal to some other kind of ready-made unity to which we can all appeal in an effort to reach political univocality. This was the failed practice of the moderns who traded on a transcendent Nature or a transcendent Society in order to find this ready-made univocality whenever it was desired.

Unity, for Latour, never comes to us ready-made or descending from the heavens. Instead we are to find that it is always the outgrowth of work, or *constructivism*, as Latour has termed it.¹³⁶ Therefore, he will argue that we must stop looking for a *master* who can bring

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ The term 'constructivism' could demand another full section of its own, but much of what Latour seeks to encompass in this term has already been reviewed. Constructivism has nothing to do with the

unity to our experience. This was the preoccupation of modernity which continuously searched for a master who could bring unity out of multiplicity. We have gone, he explains, from a 'God of Creation to Godless Nature, from there to *Homo Faber*, then to structures that make us act, fields of discourse that make us speak, anonymous fields of force in which everything is dissolved—but we have not yet tried *to have no master at all*.'¹³⁷ Here we see the beginnings of Latour's theological deviation from Gunton's trinitarian project. We will return to this issue again in the next section. But for now let us identify the moments of unity within Latour's nonmodern project. And here I believe there are two ways in which unity can be found – or perhaps, 'achieved' would be a better term – within Latour's framework.

First, we have found that Latour will locate a kind of unity, what we might call a singular unity, in the hybrid networks themselves. Populated by the heterogeneous associations and mediations of both humans and nonhumans, each network, or web of networks, creates a unity that can span from the local to the global as long as the network associations remain stable. I refer to this as a 'singular' unity primarily because this is not the totalizing unity amongst all things that we are looking for. The unity found in networks is better understood as momentary unities (plural) that could easily dissolve or rematerialize at another time. This form of Latourian unity, as we will see, has recently been subjected to something approaching Val Plumwood's 'indistinguishability' critique, but we will return to this important point in the next section.

Secondly, unity is to be achieved as the outgrowth of a *political process* that is symmetrical in its representations. Where Gunton sees both unity and multiplicity in the Triune creator himself, Latour will not seek to find unity in any kind of *a priori* whether it be the Creator God (like the pre-moderns), a transcendent Nature (like the moderns), or the human mind (also like the moderns). Instead he will insist that 'unity and multiplicity cannot be achieved unless they are progressively pieced together by delicate negotiations'.¹³⁸ This political feature of Latour's philosophy has been at the center of much of his latest work. In his recent *Politics of Nature* and *Pandora's Hope*, Latour argues that nature is not an already constituted unity from which political discussion can be quashed, like the transcendent Nature posited by the Moderns. Latour energetically explains:

If there is something unattainable, it is the dream of treating nature as a homogeneous unity in order to unify the different views the sciences have of it! This would require

'social construction' of the critical sociologists. Alternatively, the term carries a very positive connotation which seeks to capture the sense that 'reality', 'unity', or the 'world', is the result of the sharing between many agencies/actancies that do not have full mastery of their constructions. We return to this concept later in the section. But see Latour, "The Promises of Constructivism," in *Chasing Technoscience*, Don Ihde and Evan Selinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

¹³⁷ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 298.

¹³⁸ Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?*, trans. Charlotte Bigg, ed. John Tresch (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), p. 30.

us to ignore too many controversies, too much history, too much unfinished business, too many loose ends.¹³⁹

Whereas the moderns sought unity through a purified Nature and Society, the nonmodern must give up this 'dream' scenario which will unite the peoples of the world.¹⁴⁰ This speaks to a Science (with a capital 'S') that has exercised political power by forcing its 'matters of fact' upon the masses who were allowed no voice in the face of the overwhelming weight of a Nature 'out there' which was thought to be transcendent to mere sociality and political discussion. Once again, for Latour this transcendent Nature was made possible only through the 'crossing-out' of the Creator God who provided cosmological unity up until the early modern period. But just as a personal interpretation of the Bible was ushered in by the Reformation, any single reader could now 'come to reverse the established order in the name of his own interpretation' thereby threatening the end of social order – the fear of Hobbes.¹⁴¹ Nature and its representatives in lab coats have merely filled the vacuum left as God was thrown into an unreachable transcendence and replaced by the 'spiritual' God who spoke in the silence of the individual heart. Unity was at this point privatized within the individual 'king-self', whereas it was once located in God, Church, and King – Boyle's success.

Latour does not ask us to return to the unity of a Creator God but rather to a unity that is built, *constructed*, and comprised out of a political process which seeks to locate the work of both politicians and scientists under a single parliamentary house. Although modernity has bestowed us with a 'two house' parliament – political discussion in one house and scientific discussion in the other house – the nonmodern must now seek to unify the two houses into a single 'parliament of things'. Thus the practice of the sciences can no longer be kept apart from the practice of politics. This is a process which he has described as 'bringing the sciences into democracy'.¹⁴² In sum, we can say that Latour locates our hope for a unity in a nonmodern political and scientific process which requires the work of democracy to be distributed symmetrically – to both humans and nonhumans. As Latour insists; 'the common world is not behind us and ready made, like nature, but ahead of us, an immense task which we will need to accomplish one step at a time.'¹⁴³

This building of a 'common world' implicates the process of *constructivism* to which we have already alluded. We can no longer appeal to any of the failed masters which the moderns proposed, nor can we return to the failed mastery of the Creator God of the pre-moderns. Instead we must piece by piece, build a common collective together with all of the

¹³⁹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ According to Latour this misguided belief is what spawned the universalizing project of European colonialism.

¹⁴¹ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 222.

¹⁴² This is the subtitle to his *Politics of Nature*.

¹⁴³ Latour, *War of the Worlds*, p. 29.

nonhuman actants who are equally responsible for the construction of our common world. This understanding that unity must be worked towards upsets the opposition of contingency and necessity because it by-passes this impasse altogether. Humans and nonhumans are not separated by words and World, but are instead bound up in a single history that makes their separation impossible. Therefore, Latour argues that ‘constructivism is deeply misread if it is seen as a debate between realism and nominalism’.¹⁴⁴ Thus the construction or composition of unity will require two primary questions to be asked of *any* entity (divinities, viruses, technologies, etc.) which seek entry into the unified parliament (the collective, or common world):

The relevant question for the diplomats would no longer be, “Is it or isn’t it constructed?” but rather: “how do you manufacture them?” And, above all, “How do you verify that they are well constructed?” Here is where negotiations could begin: with the question of the right ways to build.¹⁴⁵

Latour’s concept of constructivism is admittedly rather complex and difficult to fully grasp, and it would perhaps require an entire chapter to even begin to describe. What is clear thus far is that *constructivism* is antithetical to postmodernity’s ‘deconstruction’ or ‘social construction’. Constructivism is nothing more than a process by which humans and nonhuman actants are found to mutually build our collectives. And here we find the very important roles for the sciences (now with a lowercase ‘s’) and politics (now open to the sciences), to construct our collective ‘piece by piece’, all the while moving towards unity. ‘We are’, as Latour says, ‘aiming at a *politics of things*, not at the bygone dispute about whether or not words refer to the world’.¹⁴⁶

V. Revealing the Blindspots: a Mutual Critique

Now that we have reviewed the differing accounts of *otherness*, *mediation*, and *unity* in both the trinitarian and nonmodern projects, we are now able to construct a critical dialogue between the two. We will recall that at the beginning of the chapter I proposed the argument that Latour’s nonmodern thought was in need of a deeper theological vision, and that Gunton’s trinitarian theology would benefit from the insights of Latour’s particular brand of science studies. It is the burden of this final section of the chapter to begin this critical dialogue which will be continued into part three of this thesis. Our overall goal is to now evaluate each of our author’s treatment of our three areas of comparison in an effort to better understand the primary concern of this thesis – the deep relationality that exists between humans, nonhumans, and God, through space and time.

¹⁴⁴ Latour, "The Promises of Constructivism," p. 39.

¹⁴⁵ Latour, *War of the Worlds*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 22.

V.A Why the Nonmodern Needs a Trinitarian Theology

In this section we will outline two critically important pitfalls of Latour's diagnosis of modernity and his subsequent nonmodern proposals. The first of these pitfalls may be characterized as one pertaining to 'vertical' relations, whilst the second is more concerned with 'horizontal' matters. We begin with where we left off in the previous section, with his understanding of nonmodern unity as the outgrowth of a symmetrical political process best described as 'constructivism' or a 'parliament of things'. Secondly, we will subject Latour's account of nonmodern or actor/actant-network mediation to Plumwood's critique of 'indistinguishability'. On this account we are interested in asking whether Latour is able to maintain the ontological otherness we discussed in the first section of this chapter.

A Purely Immanent Unity?

We have just seen that there can be found in Latour's nonmodern thought, two potential types of unity. There are what we have called 'singular unities', as found in the heterogeneous networks, and there is also the unity of constructivism. For the moment we will leave these 'singular unities' to the side and turn our attention towards Latour's rejection of the 'God of Creation' in favor of his proposed political process known as the 'parliament of things'. We have seen that Latour strongly rejects any notion of a transcendent or ready-made unity from which we might establish universal assent amongst the human and nonhuman multitudes. Yet it is important that we now unravel the distinctly theological notions that accompany his position.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw that Latour and Gunton share similar understandings of the theological movements which accompanied modernity. Each of our authors has identified a distinct movement to distance God from immanent affairs, although Gunton is also aware of the equally modern theological movement to bring God out of transcendence and into a sometimes stifling immanence, as is found in the late-modern liberal theologies from 'below'.¹⁴⁷ There is, however, a notable difference in how each of them has come to understand the motivating forces behind the banishing of God in early modernity.

For his part, Latour has portrayed the modern move to 'cross-out' God as solely the result of early developments in Enlightenment philosophy itself, namely the development of deep-seated epistemological doubt. It was this anxious grasping at a 'world out there' which would necessitate the purification of subjects and objects and the eventual evacuation of God from the natural realm. Alternatively, Gunton looks to identify a much earlier theological shift – the rise of a monistically conceived God expressed solely as arbitrary will, and the theology

¹⁴⁷ Gunton has most directly addressed this modern trading on theologies from 'above' and 'below' in his books *Yesterday and Today*, as well as *Becoming and Being*.

of the nominalists – and then finds that the Enlightenment is itself an outgrowth of this poorly conceived and wholly non-trinitarian theology. Indeed, the Enlightenment is for Gunton an act of protest against this freedom-stifling theology whose roots go much further back than Descartes, Kant, Boyle, or Hobbes. Therefore, I find Gunton to be far more convincing in terms of his ability to trace the genesis of the Enlightenment to a deficient doctrine of creation, thereby leading him to the conclusion that our response to the problems of modernity should be equally theological in nature. We may include in this all of the careful theological movements which Gunton has made in order to reinforce the understanding that God remains transcendent (other-than) to the world, yet in continual relation through the mediation of the Son and Holy Spirit. Latour, on the other hand, sees the theological move to ‘cross-out’ God only as the outgrowth of an earlier epistemological shift accompanied by the rise of the sciences. By understanding the theology of modernity simply as an outgrowth or a surrendering to the philosophical tides of the time serves only to diminish or completely pass-over the role which Christian theology played in actually causing the Enlightenment protest. In spite of this undervaluation of the early role theology played, we may still find in Latour’s full body of work, but especially in his work following *We Have Never Been Modern*, a number of suggestions for the construction of a distinctly nonmodern theology.

Latour’s theological suggestions concerning the reformation of theological discourse in the wake of his nonmodern project are rather sparse. Yet we might begin by recalling Latour’s claim that the power of the moderns was to be found in their purification of the realms of Nature, Society, and the ‘crossed-out’ God. ‘Those agencies’, Latour explains, ‘had a constitutional role to play only as long as they remained distinct.’¹⁴⁸ Aware of the stifling effect of an imposed and rigid unity that has not been ‘constructed’, ‘composed’, or arrived at by ‘due political process’, Latour rejects the transcendent God of the pre-moderns and early-moderns. This outright rejection is also based on an interesting theological claim which he has made quite clear in his more recent *Pandora’s Hope*. There he explains that God is an unsuitable candidate for the provision of unity simply because God is himself incapable of ‘mastering’ the creation which he has created *ex nihilo*. The passage from *Pandora’s Hope* is rather lengthy, but deserves quotation in full.

To be in command, to master, is a property of neither humans nor nonhumans, nor even God. It was thought to be a property of objects and subjects, except that it never worked: actions always overflow themselves, and gnarled entanglements always ensued. The ban on theology, so important in the staging of the modernist predicament, will not be lifted by a return to the God of Creation but, on the contrary, by the realization that there is no master at all. That religion too was seized by modernists as oil for their political war machine, that theology debased itself by agreeing to play a role in the modernist settlement and betrayed itself even to the

¹⁴⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 128.

point of talking about nature “out there,” the soul “in there,” and society “down there,” will, I hope, serve as a source of bewilderment for the next generation.¹⁴⁹

At this point one might want to use one of Latour’s often used colloquialisms in asking: is this not to throw the baby out with the bath water? Must we do away with the ‘God of Creation’ simply because the theology of the past was seen to be oppressive? To be sure, Latour is not hostile towards theology as a whole. Although he will sometimes make provocative quips such as: ‘if there is anything worse than dabbling with non-humans, it is to take theology seriously’.¹⁵⁰ Yet this does not reveal a general distaste for theological endeavors. We will remember that Latour began his academic career as a student of Biblical exegesis, and he has recently reported that his next book will be specifically concerned with the topic of religious enunciation.¹⁵¹ However, Latour is surely wrong to simply do away with the unifying capacity of a Creator God with such ease and to now try ‘*to have no master at all*’.¹⁵²

It is worth noting in all of this that Latour’s theological leanings seem to be along the order of the process theologians and philosophers. Although I am unable to find in any of his writings any direct reference to the works of the more recent process theologians, one can often find theological pronouncements closely followed by a reference to Alfred North Whitehead himself. The above quote concerning the non-mastery God has over his work of creation, for instance, can be traced directly to a ‘Whiteheadian’ influence. As Latour indicated earlier in the same chapter, this concept was inspired by his reading of *Process and Reality*: ‘As Whitehead so beautifully proposed, God too, is slightly overtaken by His Creation, that is, by all that is changed and modified and altered in encountering Him...Yes, we are made in the image of God, that is *we* do not know what we are doing either.’¹⁵³ Thus the small glimpses which Latour has allowed us to see in his theological stance would indicate that he is sympathetic to the theological trajectory of Whitehead.

In keeping with the theological influence of Whitehead there can also be found in Latour’s work suggestions of a pantheist notion of God’s immanence. Yet here we must tread carefully since like all dualisms, Latour is seeking to collapse or bypass the transcendence/immanence divide all together. We will recall that the moderns constantly traded on the transcendence and immanence of all three realms – Nature, Society, and God – according to the needs of the moment. As we have also seen, it was from this slight-of-hand that the moderns wielded such power. However, in the nonmodern settlement transcendence does not necessarily require a contrary. Thus the question for Latour becomes: ‘How can we

¹⁴⁹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 298.

¹⁵⁰ Latour, "On Recalling ANT," p. 24.

¹⁵¹ This is a project which he has recently initiated with a public lecture at the University of California at Santa Barbara (May, 2002).

¹⁵² Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 298.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

go from the transcendent/immanent crossed-out God to the God of origins who should perhaps be called the God of below?’¹⁵⁴ Although it is not all together clear what is meant by the ‘God of origins’, it is not so difficult to discern the meaning of a ‘God of below’, with its likely pantheistic understanding of the God-world relationship.

Although Latour is not as clear on these points as a theologically minded reader might wish, it becomes apparent that all three realms must be redistributed amongst the collective. No longer are we to speak of transcendence and immanence all the while trading on the two at our convenience. Instead we will have three transcendent mediations without their opposite in immanence. We thus have, according to Latour, a new understanding of transcendence that is no longer a polemical term used to counter immanence. The ‘word has to change meaning if it is no longer an opposite term... I call this transcendence that lacks a contrary “delegation”’.¹⁵⁵

Yet we must ask whether or not this leaves us with an understanding of God’s immediacy of the type which Gunton was so concerned to avoid – namely a pantheistic or panentheistic immediacy. We will recall from the first chapter that one of Gunton’s primary concerns throughout his theological project was to preserve the relation-in-otherness between God and world. Just as we must preserve the particular hypostasis (Father, Son, and Spirit) within God’s being as others in perfect loving relation, so too must we understand the trinitarian shape of God’s relation to the creation in terms of otherness-in-relation. As Gunton explains; ‘If the creation is to be truly creaturely, it requires its own time and space which are given by God but not coterminous with his reality.’¹⁵⁶ Even though Latour has attempted to make all realms ‘transcendent without opposite’ it is difficult to see any appreciation for the theological – and according to Gunton, cultural – pitfalls which this would incur. By reducing all realms, including God, to a homogenized immanence – or as he craftily terms it, ‘a transcendence without opposite’ – Latour has in effect offered only a ‘God from below’ approach which, I will maintain, is simply an over-reaction to the theological concessions made to modernity during its genesis. Certainly, Latour is not a theologian and cannot be expected to know the intricacies of trinitarian theology. However, I will argue that his nonmodern project would be greatly enhanced through a directed conversation with the trinitarian theology which Gunton’s work represents. In the final estimation it appears that Latour simply does not know what to do with the ‘God question’ after criticizing the theology of the moderns.¹⁵⁷ Thus he has simply offered the opposite of a distant and ‘crossed-out’ God without consideration of the very positive and useful trinitarian notions of mediation between God and world. By completely dissolving the perceived dualism between God and world, and

¹⁵⁴ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 77.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁵⁶ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁷ In Latour’s *Politics of Nature* the role of God almost goes without mention. In fact, Latour seems at times to be entertaining the concept of Gaia as a wholesale replacement (p. 199).

then envisioning a kind of watered-down conception of God (who turns out to be a lot like us), Latour has only offered what Gunton has identified time and again as an equally modern God. We are left with a unity that is purely of our own (immanent) making thereby leaving open the question of ethics.¹⁵⁸

The Threat of 'Horizontal' Indistinguishability

Now that we have investigated the pitfalls associated with the 'vertical' trajectory of Latour's nonmodernism we may now critically consider its distinct 'horizontal' aspects. We will recall from our discussion of ontology and otherness earlier in the chapter, as well as from our review of Gunton's project in chapter one, that wherever we find relations and mediations there exists the attendant risk of the dissolution of difference and the loss of particularity. If things are to be distinctly themselves – particular essences, substances, or ontologies – there must be a space of one's own where particular being might be allowed to flourish. In the field of environmental philosophy this point has been very clearly outlined by Plumwood in her argument against the 'ecoself', or the 'expanded' and 'mature' self, most clearly found in the philosophy of Arnie Naess. The ecoself of the deep ecologists, Plumwood argues, ultimately falls into a kind of 'indistinguishability' or radical homogenization of human and nonhuman ontologies, bringing with it a cascade of ethical and ontological pitfalls. The self without boundaries is for Plumwood an essentially 'colonizing' or 'devouring' self which, through its seemingly benign dissolution of boundaries, ends up doing great violence to otherness.¹⁵⁹ It is now our task to apply the same question to Latour's account of mediation, networking and the exchange of human and nonhuman properties. In this we are seeking to determine whether the Latourian actor/actant-networks are finally capable of maintaining the otherness-in-relation which both Plumwood and Gunton are so concerned to maintain.

We have seen that within the nonmodern or ANT understanding of reality there is a deep commitment to demonstrating that all entities, beings, or things – both human and nonhuman – are the *result* of network effects. Thus the particular ontology of *anything* is here always to be seen as the outgrowth of an ontologically prior relationship. We have also witnessed that this understanding of relational ontology requires an appreciation for what Latour and others have called nonhuman *actancy*. This brings us back to the question of those 'singular unities' which we introduced earlier in the chapter. There we saw that by extending

¹⁵⁸ A discussion of Latour's difficult to grasp comments on what we might call a nonmodern ethics would be well beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover, it would again deserve a chapter in itself, or perhaps more, to fully discuss.

¹⁵⁹ 'The failure to affirm difference is characteristic of the colonizing self which denies the other through the attempt to incorporate it into the empire of the self, and which is unable to experience sameness without erasing difference.' Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 174.

network (relational) mediations through both humans and nonhumans, Latour has posited a deeply relational ontological vision capable of achieving these singular unities which extend through space.¹⁶⁰ Yet by now inviting the *Other* of traditional sociology (the nonhuman) into the social fold as fully-fledged ‘socialized nonhumans’, has nonmodernism risked the same homogenization we found in its ‘vertical’ account, but now in the ‘horizontal’ trajectory? Or to use Gunton’s language, can the actor/actant-network maintain the one amongst the many?

There have been a few voices of warning on this very matter from within the fields of science studies and SSK concerning this point of Latour’s nonmodern constitution and ANT as a whole. Nick Lee and Steve Brown have suggested that ANT may be so radically liberal and democratic that it actually loses a sense of the *Other* altogether.¹⁶¹ In a later paper Lee and Paul Stenner point out that “‘belonging” on the ANT account seems to have no necessary limit’.¹⁶² They conclude with a warning to all of their fellow ANT theorists: ‘as we break ontological boundaries and render everything ‘networky’, we will become insensitive to complexity and heterogeneity if we forget that there is an heterogeneity between Other and others.’¹⁶³ Now that all has been assimilated into the collective, including God, it is worried that there is truly no Other of which we may speak. Leading theorists in the SSK camp have suggested that the radical symmetry of the network relations also runs the risk of turning all reality into an oscillating exchange of properties up and down the heterogeneous networks. In this scenario, as Latour understands his critics to be suggesting, everything being in a sense unified through network relations, nothing truly is.¹⁶⁴

We may now briefly outline how we might expect Latour to respond to such criticisms. Certainly, Latour has insisted that his nonmodern program is not interested in a wholesale erasure of difference/otherness amongst human and nonhuman realms. This was the point of his adoption of the term ‘Counter Copernican Revolution’ to explain his nonmodern realization that ontology must now start in the middle of the modern ‘yardstick’, or dichotomy, between a purified Nature and Society. The first move for the nonmodern is to relocate the polemically opposed Nature and Society into the middle and to fuse them together – that is to recognize the obscured hybridity which proliferated under the modern’s Constitution. Latour has warned us that this is a rather difficult task since it was their polemic

¹⁶⁰ The space-times and the ‘space-time compression’ which these networks create will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁶¹ Nick Lee and Steve Brown, “Otherness and the Actor Network: the Undiscovered Continent,” *American Behavioural Scientist* 37 (1994). They conclude that there is a way for ANT to avoid this charge by making an incredibly complex appeal to the philosophy of Giles Deleuze.

¹⁶² Lee and Paul Stenner, “Who Pays? Can we Pay Them Back?,” in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 91.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁴ This is the meaning which Latour has taken from Collins and Yearly’s critique of ANT, “Epistemological Chicken”, as well as Shapin’s, “Following Scientists Around”. Latour mentions these critical commentaries on his work in his “One More Turn After the Social”, p. 278.

opposition that defined them in the first place. Yet once we have redistributed the modern's Objects (created to guarantee that human knowledge was not constructed) and Subjects (created to guarantee that our knowledge be human-made) throughout the collective we are then able to follow the networks and mediations from the *center outwards*. This is the critical ontological point for Latour, that stable humans and nonhumans are, in a sense, latecomers to the scene. In other words, we must refuse to begin with pre-existent and ontologically purified poles of Nature and Society and instead look to the mediations and relations in the 'Middle Kingdom'. Only once we have traced the heterogeneous networks are we able to then shift entities into a kind of ontological and substantial stability – either human, nonhuman, or even divine. As Latour explains, the moderns were correct in seeking to find 'objective nonhumans and free societies. They were mistaken only in their certainty that that double production required an absolute distinction between the two terms and the continual repression of the work of mediation.'¹⁶⁵ In sum, Latour is certainly willing to locate stable ontologies or substances, but only *after* we have offered them an historical and political space in which these entities may emerge and be further 'substantiated'.¹⁶⁶ In Latour's own words: 'Full-fledged human subjects and respectable objects out there in the world cannot be my starting point; they may be my point of arrival.'¹⁶⁷

We may at this point begin to see a potential point of conversation between Latour and Gunton's respective accounts of 'horizontal' relations. Here I would like to emphasize, once again, that I do not believe that the nonmodern and trinitarian programs should be forced into a kind of synthesis. The two approaches are radically different, and I am anxious to avoid the appearance of making theological claims and commitments in any way subordinate to a largely un-theological philosophy. With this important point now clear, we may move towards what I believe will be a mutually enlightening conversation where moments of congruency may be identified. As we have seen, both of our authors see 'horizontal' relationality as an important component to understanding the world – or our common realm – and the place of both humans and nonhumans within it. Both of our authors have shown their understanding of ontology to be deeply relational in character. Moreover, each has committed to a program which recognizes that both humans and nonhumans are mutually constituted through their various relations. There are however, two dramatic differences to be found in our author's relational ontologies.

First, as we have seen, Gunton begins his relational program with what we might call an *a priori* ontological categorization of persons, nonpersons, and God. These are the three most fundamental ontological realms which Gunton is willing to identify. For him

¹⁶⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 140.

¹⁶⁶ See Latour's brief definition of 'substance', *Pandora's Hope*, p. 311.

¹⁶⁷ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 182.

relationality is to be found between concrete particulars whose essences are fully known and guaranteed – perhaps ‘maintained’ is a better term – by the perfecting and redeeming actions of the Son and the Spirit. Moreover, we have characterized Gunton’s overriding ontological concern to be that of maintaining ontological otherness without sacrificing relationality. Latour, on other hand, and beginning with the modern Constitution, has identified *a priori* ontological purity as the primary target for critique. From his perspective it was the cementing of an all too precious Nature and an all too precious Society into the ontological bedrock of modernity that is the problem. Thus Latour has taken the opposite rout and declared ontological substantiality to be an historical outgrowth of the *ontologically prior* relationality.

Secondly, as is by now clear, Latour does not base his ontological understanding in the ‘God of Creation’ or any other divine source. His is not a theologically conceived relational ontology as Gunton’s clearly is. This is obvious enough. But now, rather than pronounce a winner and a loser in this ontological conversation, I would like to simply highlight a strength and weakness of each approach.

It appears that Latour’s account of ‘variable ontologies’ is much more successful than Gunton’s in accounting for the particularities of human and nonhuman relationality. This is to be expected since he takes as his methodological starting point the ‘Middle Kingdom’ of hybrids and quasi-objects which the moderns obscured. Yet this has opened the way for one considerable weakness concerning the threat of ‘indistinguishability’. To my mind, it remains deeply questionable whether the purely immanent political process of the ‘parliament of things’ is capable of maintaining the otherness necessary to avoid the ‘colonization’ of the Other which Plumwood has warned us of. Gunton is surely the more successful in his very meticulous preservation of otherness, basing it as he has on a trinitarian understanding of both God and world. Said otherwise, unlike Latour, Gunton has analogically derived his understanding of otherness-in-relation from a distinctly transcendent source – namely the trinitarian being of the Godhead. Moreover, if we are to remain trinitarian in our vision, as this thesis is ultimately dedicated to preserving, we must not accept a mere reversal of the modern’s ‘crossed-out’ God and deeply polarized humans and nonhumans. A trinitarian theology must resist the temptation to merely reunite the polarized realms of modernity and instead seek out the various forms and moments of relationality (mediation) that exist between God, humans, and nonhumans. Latour threatens to overstep this basic insight of trinitarian theology. There are, however, deep insights to be found within Latour’s nonmodern project which may be used to challenge Gunton’s theology of creation and culture. Before moving on to the final two chapters of this thesis, we may now employ Latour’s nonmodern account of mediation to correct some of Gunton’s own blind-spots concerning human/nonhuman relationality.

V.B Geographical Blindspots in Gunton's Trinitarian Theology

We may now begin to outline some of the important 'geographical blindspots' which may be identified within Gunton's overall trinitarian theology of creation and culture.¹⁶⁸ By using the term 'geographical' in this instance, it is my intention to begin to highlight the often misunderstood scope of geographical thinking as it has developed into a distinct academic field over the last century. This will be the primary focus of part three of this thesis, but for now we may simply remind ourselves of what I began to outline in the introduction to this thesis. By qualifying these blindspots as 'geographical' we are highlighting the fact that they pertain to what Gunton has called 'horizontal' relations. Moreover, the term 'geographical' serves to emphasize a number of specific points concerning 'horizontal' relationality. First, to say that relations are geographical is to indicate that they are of a distinctly spatial nature and thereby implicate time as well. Secondly, the term 'geographical' serves to implicate the traditional geographical triad of space-place-nature, and to this we may add a fourth category of human/culture – thanks to the more recent work of human and cultural geographers. On this point, to say that Gunton expresses a 'geographical' blindspot is to suggest that he is missing something in the dynamic and spatial relations that exist between humans and nonhumans, nature and culture. In the final two chapters of this thesis we will also see that 'geographical' relations between humans and nonhumans tend to find their locus in particular places/placings. But before moving into our construction of a 'theology of placing', we must illustrate these geographical blindspots within Gunton's theological program.

In fairness to Gunton's work we should begin by making it clear that he has done much to emphasize the deep relationality that exists between humans and nonhumans. We have seen this aspect of his theological program expressed most clearly in his account of horizontal relationality. To be certain, many theologians have given little or no attention to this important aspect of the doctrine of creation. Therefore, Gunton should be applauded for these efforts. In *Christ and Creation*, for instance, he has himself identified some of the blindspots inherent to the Western Christian tradition. He begins with the important recognition that the Western theologians have been all too occupied with uncovering the particularities of individual, as well as societal and political, redemption. Here Gunton outlines the important insight that we, the Christians of the West, have put all of our efforts into understanding God's relation to the social pole of the modern dichotomy, whilst greatly neglecting 'the wider material context' in which individual persons and larger societies take their shape.¹⁶⁹ He goes on to explain that we have been particularly weak in trying to develop

¹⁶⁸ It may be somewhat disingenuous to call each of these 'blindspots', considering that Gunton was quite aware of his theological maneuvering which, I will argue, served to diminish the role of nonhuman relationality.

¹⁶⁹ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 102.

a theology concerned with human action within the material realm. Yet there remain points where Gunton's own program of detailing 'how we are internally related to the world', fails to do justice to the trinitarian model of relationality which he has employed. What I would like to suggest is that Gunton's overall theology tends to remain all too modern in his inability to fully appreciate the intimate relations that exist between humans and nonhumans, nature and society. The purpose of this section will be to look at several of the main points, or 'blindspots', where Gunton's ability to register and account for human/nonhuman relations – the 'commerce' between people and things – breaks down. Moreover, we will employ the insights of Latour's account of socio-material or socio-technical mediation as a point of challenge for Gunton's trinitarian theology.

In an interesting and recent article, Edward Russell has outlined a number of important blindspots inherent to many of the contemporary relational theological anthropologies that now populate the field. His paper is directed primarily towards a critical engagement with the anthropology of John Zizioulas, but he has also tied in a few general comments concerning Gunton's anthropology which is similar in many respects. The overall thrust of the argument has to do with the inability of these recent relational anthropologies, based as they are on the trinitarian being of God, to fully register three main points; the doctrine of sin, the discontinuity between human and divine persons, and to fully appreciate human embodiment in the world.¹⁷⁰ I would like to now focus on the last of these claims as it applies to Gunton's anthropology. Although his comments are rather brief, Russell recognizes what we have slowly been illustrating throughout this thesis. We have already seen that Gunton understands human persons to be relational beings. Moreover, we have seen that this has something to do with our imaging of God. That God is a community of persons in himself is the basis for our claim that human persons (by analogy) are also composed and maintained through multiple networks of relations. We have also seen that something of a hierarchy develops in Gunton's thinking concerning the doctrine of creation and his theological anthropology. We are first persons as we are related to the Father through the Son and the Spirit. We said that for Gunton this relationship is both methodologically and ontologically prior to all other relationships. Secondly, our personhood is to be found through our relationships with other human persons. This type of relationality Gunton has (exclusively) termed *sociality*. We are persons only as we are found to interact with true others-in-relation, other human persons. Finally, our unique and particular being as persons is to be found 'in our continuity with the remainder of creation and our necessary embodiment.'¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Edward Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas's Theological Anthropology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, 2 (July 2003).

¹⁷¹ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 208.

What Russell points out, and what I would like to add depth to presently, is the fact that even after dedicating at least two whole books to the task of illustrating ‘the way human beings subsist in creation’, Gunton has paradoxically managed only to describe ‘the continuity between human beings and creation at the most general level.’¹⁷² Although Russell’s paper is dedicated largely to the work of Zizioulas, he argues that both theologians have been unable to truly account for human/non-human relationality because of their combined focus on detailing the continuity between divine and human persons. Thus the hierarchy of relations has produced something of a blindspot or the pitfall of what we might call an *exaggerated emphasis*. By giving such great weight to the first two relationships – the God/human and the human/human – Gunton has been unable to offer up an account of the human ‘commerce’ with the nonhuman anywhere beyond the most general of statements.

The Non-Sociality of Nature

While I strongly agree with Russell’s contention that the theological anthropologies of Gunton and Zizioulas are too heavily weighted towards detailing continuities between divine and human persons, I believe there are a number of other contributing factors at work in Gunton’s case that are of equal or even greater importance. Here I would like to offer one general argument with three important supporting factors. The general point has to do with Gunton’s refusal to register non-human/non-personal participation in what he has called *sociality*. We will recall from chapter one of this thesis that he has deemed sociality to consist in the uniquely human and personal capacity to express the characteristics of love and freedom. I believe Peter Scott has clearly identified one of the sticking points for Gunton in this instance. The problem is to be found in Gunton’s inability to see sociality as consisting in anything other than I-Thou relationality.¹⁷³ For Gunton, only persons are capable of the intimate and reciprocating I-Thou relationality which requires the ability to exercise self-consciousness – ‘thinking and acting beyond the present’. Thus we saw that Gunton has taken issue with Daniel Hardy in his claim that we may speak of a ‘social transcendental’ – that is, a *universal* mark of all being. To speak of *all things* as participative in sociality, as the term ‘transcendental’ would suggest, is for Gunton to threaten the true and distinct being of persons and non-persons alike. It is, in fact, to invite the indistinguishability which Plumwood and many others have warned us of. Yet as Scott has pointed out, this is only true if I-Thou relationality is the only way of conceiving true sociality. To be sure, Latour and many others have shown us multiple ways in which the ‘social’ may be, and indeed *must* be, extended beyond the narrow confines of I-Thou reciprocity. It is here that we may identify the general basis of Gunton’s inability to fully register the intimacy of personal/non-personal

¹⁷² Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology", p. 185.

¹⁷³ Scott has made this point in his, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 53.

relationality. It is, then, my contention that the looming factor in many of Gunton's geographical blindspots is to be located in his conception of an all too precious sociality. By jealously policing the boundaries of what may be considered social interaction or social relationality, Gunton has closed the curtains on what could be a much fuller account of human/non-human relationality. Moreover, a narrow understanding of sociality, such as this one, will greatly hinder Gunton's declared goal of detailing how human persons are 'internally related to the rest of the world'.¹⁷⁴ This general point carries three further supporting points, or 'blindspots', within Gunton's project: an inability to register any form of non-human agency/actancy, an overemphasis on the anthropocentric aspects of the 'cultural mandate', and an impoverished understanding of the covenantal model of sociality. We now take each of these in turn.

The Inability to Recognize Non-Human Agency/Actancy

As I argued earlier in this chapter, Gunton appears to be quite equivocal when speaking of the Spirit's action within the non-personal realm. At times he appears to strictly limit the reach of the Spirit to the personal sphere alone; 'God *is* spirit, while finite persons *have* spirit—and things [nonhumans] neither are nor have spirit'.¹⁷⁵ Yet in at least one other point in his work he seems to say the precise opposite: 'If both *persons* and *things*, for all their crucial ontological differences, alike receive the shape of their being from the particularizing Spirit' then we should not treat things as purely instrumental.¹⁷⁶ We have also reviewed Gunton's understanding that the Spirit is that which 'opens out' human persons. Yet here again he appears to equivocate on whether the Spirit can be said to 'open out' the non-personal realm in like manner – that is, in such a way as to understand nonhumans as exercising agency/actancy in the initiation of relationality. It seems that Gunton is concerned to maintain that non-personal creation is indeed 'open' to personal humans – the Spirit 'enables a form of perichoresis to take place, between mind and world, world and God'¹⁷⁷ – but in such a way as to see the relationality as being unidirectional. In other words, he wants to be able to say that all things are perichoretically bound up in one another (without identifying the Spirit with the non-personal), but in such a way as to jealously protect all relational agency for human persons alone.

This is closely tied to our earlier point concerning Gunton's inability to register non-personal participation in sociality. For him, sociality and the action of the Spirit apply to persons capable of the forms of address which I-Thou relationality would suggest. Thus the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 188. (brackets are my own addition)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 207. (emphasis in the original)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

two movements are of a piece. Human persons are capable of forms of address that can be described as I-Thou (intentional and reciprocal), and thus can be said to possess 'spirit' which bestows the agency that is the 'opening out' of the person. Non-persons, on the other hand, are not capable of the forms of address associated with I-Thou relationality. Therefore they are not capable of exercising agency towards persons, nor can they be said to possess 'spirit'. For Gunton, agency, spirit, sociality and personhood are all of a piece. To extend any one of these characteristics to the non-personal sphere would be to invite the *ontological continuity* – homogeneity, indistinguishability – that so worries him, and has been the mark of modernity as a whole.

It is my contention that Gunton is unable to go beyond the most basic of generalities when describing human/non-human relationality for this very reason. By refusing to understand sociality in anyway other than I-Thou relationality – that is, relationality marked by consciousness, intentionality, and ultimately anthropocentric agency – Gunton has been unable to register the deeply intimate participation of the nonhuman/nonpersonal realm in humanity and sociality as whole. To be clear this is due to his almost total inability to see any kind of agency/actancy coming from the non-human/non-personal side of the relationship. One could now imagine Latour's diagnosis: Gunton's trinitarian theology remains all too modern! Indeed, Gunton has constructed an opaque blackbox around the 'middle kingdom', that yawning gap between the modern's polemical Nature and Society, so as to make opaque the intimate relationality between humans and non-humans. That is to say, that nothing of all that great of an interest happens on the non-personal side of the person/non-person relationship. We have then a picture of warm spirit-enlivened persons meeting the cold and completely passive, non-personal objects that populate reality. The non-persons are 'open' to relationality due to the generally conceived perichoretic nature of all of creation, but the only thing of interest would be the always *human* agency of persons. This point leads us into the second contributing factor concerning Gunton's primary geographical blindspot.

Anthropocentric Emphasis and the Cultural Mandate

Closely related to the two earlier blindspots we have reviewed is what I take to be the heavily anthropocentric emphasis in Gunton's theology. This is closely related to his inability to recognize non-personal participation in sociality, as well as his routing of non-personal agency. Both of these movements have served to diminish the non-personal creation's ability to participate in relationality to such a degree that the human realm of creation takes up what I consider to be a firmly anthropocentric place within the creation. This was clearly seen in

Gunton's comments from *Christ and Creation*, where he argued that the non-personal is best understood as being 'peripheral' to the human drama of redemption.¹⁷⁸

We have also seen this expressed in Gunton's understanding of the Genesis passage (1. 28) which assigns humanity with the task of exercising 'dominion' over the creation – *dominium terrae*. There we learned that he takes this sometimes troublesome passage to be God's 'divine command' or 'cultural mandate' for the human creation to go out and 'make something of the world'.¹⁷⁹ Drawing further on Romans 8:21, Gunton has argued that the exercise of human dominion represents a 'command so to engage with the created order as to enable it to join the human species in praise of its creator'.¹⁸⁰ Thus it is the personal/human creation – by virtue of our imaging the second Adam – that by interacting with the non-personal realm fulfils the 'cultural mandate' to redeem the creation from its bondage. It is in this way that Gunton envisions a heavily asymmetrical relation between personal and non-personal creation, even to the point that non-personal creation is understood to be ontologically dependent on the personal realm – 'the world is what it is by virtue of its relation to those who bear the image of God.'¹⁸¹

Although this is certainly not the anthropocentrism which Lynn White sought to find within Christian thought, it remains a heavily asymmetrical theological understanding of creation. I find two primary points of contention with Gunton's strong anthropocentric emphasis. First, it appears that Gunton has overstated the case of non-personal creation's dependence on the human persons to such a degree that creation no longer enjoys its own true reality outside of human cultural interaction. As counterpoint, there is also a wealth of Biblical evidence to suggest that the non-personal creation enjoys a relationship with its creator quite outside of its relationship with human persons. Bill McKibben has offered an intriguing reading of the book of Job which offers a strong response to Gunton's over-emphasized anthropocentrism. Speaking specifically of God's speech to Job, McKibben draws out a number of lessons concerning the non-personal creation. He points out that God appears to be entirely 'untroubled by the notion of a place where no man lives', citing the references to God's sending rain to the uninhabited regions of the earth.¹⁸² More importantly, he argues that we can take from God's speech a strong sense that humans are just one of many parts of an incredibly diverse and awesome creation. In other words, it is not humans who are to be seen as the center of creation, but God – it is a theocentric vision. Gunton, I believe,

¹⁷⁸ Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁹ Gunton, "The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters," p. 201-202.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 216.

¹⁸² Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 37.

oversteps this theological truth by placing far too much importance on the personal creation. To be clear, the problem is not one of substance of Gunton's argument, but one of emphasis.

The second objection is closely related to the first and returns us to the issue of nonhuman agency/actancy. In his depiction of the 'cultural mandate', Gunton seems to envision human agency being exercised in such a way as to assimilate the always passive non-personal entities into the redemptive realm of the personal. By this I mean to say that Gunton seems to find in the redemptive human cultural activities of art, worship, and science, an always human agency at work, so that the non-personal creation adds nothing but bulk and passive matter to the always human cultural and artistic enterprise. Latour, as we have seen, armed with an ability to register nonhuman actancy, has painted a very different picture of human engagement with the nonhuman. His is an understanding of technical action or artifice which understands a kind of human and nonhuman being in becoming. Humans do not merely impose their artistic or technical vision onto a fully passive matter. Said otherwise, humans do not mentally 'build' or 'project' worlds before they are lived.¹⁸³ To use the Latourian language we encountered earlier in the chapter, human 'programs of action' always encounter nonhuman programs of actancy. The products we call 'cultural' are then to be understood as emergent properties produced in the tangle of practice. Thus the 'cultural mandate' which Gunton supposes, appears to rely on a totally purified human agency with no appreciation of the non-personal additions to the final product. Artists, architects and scientists alike can readily attest to the nonhuman additions which often complicate and redirect their respective engagements with the material realm. Moreover, one need not ascribe anthropomorphic agency to the non-personal in order to account for nonhuman participation in 'cultural' creativity. In closing we may summarize all of these comments on Gunton's over-emphasis on the 'cultural mandate' by stressing that he appears to have made humanity transcendent to nonhuman nature in such a way as to threaten losing sight of the continuity between human and nonhuman creation.

Loss of the Nonhuman Dimension of Biblical Covenants

We may conclude this line of argumentation concerning Gunton's geographical blindspots by referencing one clear and paradigmatic example of his consistent ability to overlook nonhuman participation in sociality. In *The One the Three and the Many*, before dispatching Hardy's claim that sociality may be understood to be a transcendental category,

¹⁸³ Anthropologist Tim Ingold has made this point wonderfully clear with his contrast between the 'building perspective' and the 'dwelling perspective'. His comments on this topic are also highly amenable to Latour's nonmodern vision. See especially chapter 10 of his book *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). We return to this point in chapters 4 and 5.

Gunton claims that sociality is best understood in light of the Biblical concept of *covenant*.

Gunton explains:

It is significant here that the Bible has given us a word for social relations which allows neither a purely individualist nor a merely legal construal. It is that of covenant. *Covenant* expresses above all the calling of the human race into free and joyful partnership with God, and so with each other.¹⁸⁴

One may locate in this summation of the social character of covenant a rather blaring omission of the non-human/non-personal realm's participation. To be sure, not all of the Biblical covenants are of the same type. Some are more clearly established with individual humans (Abraham), while others are established with whole people groups (Israel). But what is missed by Gunton is what several theologians and biblical scholars have understood as the distinctly socio-natural content of many of the biblical covenants. Where Gunton has found only a 'calling of the human race' into 'partnership with God', Bernhard W. Anderson has found a deeply non-human or 'ecological' component. Speaking to the Noachic covenant of Gen. 8-9, Anderson finds that 'when one reads the creation story in its scriptural context it becomes clear that God's covenant embraces the whole of creation.' Moreover, the covenant with Noah 'is universal in the widest sense imaginable. It is fundamentally an ecological covenant that includes not only human beings everywhere but all animals...and the earth itself'.¹⁸⁵

A final example may be drawn from the covenant embodied in the land Sabbath described in Leviticus 25. 2-5. Here we learn that as the Israelites enter the land promised to them they are instructed to allow their fields to lay fallow every seventh year. Now the strictly ecological benefit of allowing fields to lay fallow every seventh year is unmistakable, especially on the type of land the Hebrew's were farming which was fragile and susceptible to erosion, soil exhaustion and eventual desertification. Yet the benefit of the land Sabbath and year of Jubilee runs much deeper than simply good ecological practice. In Leviticus we learn that every fiftieth year is to be a jubilee where the land is to enjoy a special type of Sabbath, the fields will again lay fallow, all pasture land will be returned to its original owner, and servants or slaves will be set free. At its heart, we find the land Sabbath to consist of a *cosmic covenant*, made between Yahweh, Israel, and the land itself. Moreover, it makes inescapable the fact that the land is the Lord's, given in trust to Israel.

The impact the jubilee will have in terms of social justice is also difficult to miss. Here we find that there is a very definite *social intent* to Israel's interaction with the land – with this place they call home. Like the land itself, every fifty years the slave will be set free and debts forgiven. Moreover, the stranger in the land, the widow, and the poor, will all be

¹⁸⁴ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 222. (emphasis in original)

¹⁸⁵ Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 156.

allowed to eat what the land produces. Essentially, these are stipulations on what constitutes neighborliness in a cosmic order that sees both *nature* and *culture*, the land and the people, bound together in covenant and practice. Proper agricultural practice – human interaction with the nonhuman – is inextricable from neighborliness. Or as Michael Northcott has clearly framed the matter: ‘In (this) cosmic covenant, the land is not just the context on which Israel works out her covenant with Yahweh, but a part, a vital part, of the covenant community itself.’¹⁸⁶ Thus the Sabbath is not unlike the Noahic covenant before it, where Yahweh was found to enter into covenant, not with *human* creation alone, but with the whole of *nonhuman* creation as well – promising to never again threaten creation with destruction.

We are here very close to what has become one of several ways of speaking of nature as *inherently social*. It is often argued that ‘natures’ and ‘cultures’ are inextricable from one another when seen from within the tangled practice of everyday life. Moreover, these covenants indicate a socio-natural vision that is highly compatible with Latour’s understanding of our ‘collective’ existence. It appears now that Gunton is perhaps correct in indicating that the Bible has given us, in the form of covenant language, an appropriate model for conceiving of social relations, yet – as Latour might say – he has altogether failed to see the covenantal model of sociality in an appropriately ‘*symmetrical*’ fashion. We may conclude with the observation that all of these geographical blindspots add up to a rather pronounced risk of committing to a kind of ‘social narcissism’ where only humans are seen to contribute to the dynamics of horizontal relationality.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

In what has been a necessarily lengthy chapter we have now seen that Gunton and Latour’s respective projects are capable of engaging in a mutually critical yet constructive dialogue. As he have compared the two projects through the unifying themes of *otherness*, *mediation*, and *unity*, we have come to see that Latour’s nonmodernism is in need of a theology and Gunton’s trinitarian theology lacks an understanding of the socialization of non-human/non-persons. Thus we leave this chapter at the level of mutual critique with an eye to the final two chapters of this thesis where we will attempt to constructively organize a mediating solution around the geographical concept of place/placing. Here it will be my intention to highlight the ways in which trinitarian theology may benefit from a largely nonmodern concept of human and nonhuman relationality that finds its locus in the relational and geographical concept of placing. By bringing trinitarian theology into conversation with the dynamics of placing we may be better able to register the importance of the ‘middle

¹⁸⁶ Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 187.

¹⁸⁷ The term belongs to Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, p. 84.

kingdom' which Gunton's theology is altogether incapable of describing in any detail. The shape of part three of his thesis will then begin with a full chapter dedicated to the development of a nonmodern-inspired concept of placing. In the final chapter of this thesis we will take up the task of appropriating the language of nonmodern placing and applying it to a distinctly theological and trinitarian framework.

Part III - Placing Humans and Nonhumans

Chapter 4

Geography, Time, and the Collective: *placing* the nonmodern

[W]e do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.¹

- Michel Foucault

Introduction

Through chapters 2 and 3 we have surveyed the increasingly important contributions made by the fledgling field of science studies by focusing on the work of one of its most prolific spokesmen, Bruno Latour. We have also reviewed some of the motivations for, and methods of, describing a *relational ontology* which makes no *a priori* distinction between humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects. In this effort we have also begun to see that agency/actancy in the nonmodern constitution is understood to be a relational achievement amongst a ‘parliament of things’, or a ‘collective’ that is constituted through networks and associations of both humans and nonhumans. Interestingly, this work has now begun to make a distinct impact on theorists within the various spatial sciences of geography, as well as architecture, philosophy, environmental studies, and even museum studies. What has been of particular interest to ‘human’ geographers² is the well-known species of science studies called actor-network theory (ANT). Most closely associated with the Latourian brand of science studies many geographers have sought to critically adopt ANT-based insights into their specifically spatial/placial theorizations. In this chapter we will review the interaction between the Latourian nonmodern project (ANT) and the emerging ‘hybrid’ geographies which are now beginning to populate the geographical field. We begin by focusing on the reworking of the concepts of space and time within the nonmodern mode. We then move to consider the wonderfully rich geographical concept of *place/placing*. Place, as we shall learn, is a concept which emphasizes so much of what has been missed in recent Christian doctrines of creation and relational anthropologies such as that of Gunton. The concept of place/placing is an active and dynamic means of registering the hybridity or the deep relationality that proliferates amongst humans and nonhumans, and thereby enables us to more fully register these critical relations which modernity served to obscure.

¹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," p. 23.

² The use of inverted commas is intended to indicate that the term ‘human’ is being subjected to increasing scrutiny within the field known as ‘human geography’. Thus questioning the ‘human’ in human geography will be a reigning factor throughout this chapter.

I. Network Geographies

Geography Under the Modern Settlement

In the century just passed, the disciplinary field of geography has been polarized along the lines of what we have seen Bruno Latour describe as the modern Constitution – that is, the dichotomization of natural sciences and social sciences. Early in its movement towards solidification as a legitimate university department the field of geography was greatly influenced by the reigning school of logical positivism and attendant scientific methodology. In its effort to achieve scientific legitimacy as a stand-alone discipline, geographers began to focus their analysis upon ‘physical’ or ‘empirical’ phenomena, thereby leaving the ‘social’ aspects of spatial differentiation in the background. It was, therefore, the field of ‘physical geography’ which served to firmly establish the discipline within the permanent university structure in the first half of the 20th century.

An early revolt against the physical and quantitative school of geography was led by the new practitioners of ‘behavioral geography’. This approach took human cognition as its central point of interest and regarded the ‘knowledge and perceptions of decision-makers as equally or more important than the physical and economic conditions of the environment.’³ These behavioral approaches to geography can trace a lineage back to the early 1920’s when quantitative approaches held the most ground, yet it was not until the 1950’s – largely through the work of Gilbert White at the University of Chicago – that behavioral geography began to be widely accepted throughout the discipline. Yet as Steve Pile has recently pointed out, this brand of geography ‘consistently operated through what is actually a radically unstable set of dichotomies, such as those between external and internal worlds...and between Mind and Nature.’⁴

In the 1970’s geographers disillusioned with the failures of behaviorist approaches to human/geographical relationships began to investigate new epistemological traditions in order to reinvigorate the struggling geographical project. Borrowing heavily from phenomenology, the new school of ‘human geography’ began to develop its own particularly humanistic concept of the geographical triad of space-place-nature. Human geographers, such as the preeminent Yi-Fu Tuan, began to grapple with the idea that humans can experience a ‘sense of place,’ or conversely a ‘sense of placelessness,’ which suggested that place(s) could somehow bear meaning and even participate in human identity. This new approach presented

³ Arild Holt-Jenson, *Geography History and Concepts: A Students Guide, Third Edition* (London: Sage, 1999), p. 216.

⁴ Steve Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 43.

a strong challenge to the standing schools of positivist geography which took only observable phenomena as a valid form of knowledge.

As early as 1953, Glenn Trewartha, a physical geographer, noted in his presidential address to the AAG (American Association of Geographers) that there had begun to develop a rather unfortunate bifurcation of the discipline into physical and cultural camps.⁵ This lamentable rift within the discipline has continued into the present with 'physical' and 'human' geographers setting up offices on separate ends of geography faculties the world over. Furthering the internal rift, each end of this dichotomized field has now established its own journals for its own style of professional publication. In spite of this radical severing of the field, much has been done in the last ten years to establish geography as a distinctly 'synthesizing' discipline. In fact, several geographical thinkers have argued that geography is uniquely situated to effectively carry out a synthesis of the 'major branches of knowledge in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities.'⁶ Human geographer Patricia Grober, in her own recent presidential address to the AAG has insisted that human geographers 'can no longer afford to characterize geography as exclusively or mainly a social science discipline. We are today a hybrid', she argues, 'of science, technology, social science, and the humanities.'⁷ Clearly, the tide within this once polarized discipline has now begun to shift back towards a greater synthesis and hybridization of concern.

Towards Nonmodern Space-Times

As part of this movement towards a deeper synthesis between the two sides of the corridor, physical and human geographers have recently begun to seek out new philosophical frameworks which might aid in this movement towards greater synthesis. Therefore, the relationship between human and nonhuman entities has begun to attract increasing concentration from human geographers eager to dissolve the old dichotomy. In fact, the more progressive forms of this reassessment of the geographical task have led towards a desire to question and transgress the discipline's namesake – that is its designation as being 'human'.⁸ For several geographical theorists, particularly in Britain, the recent developments within the field of science studies have been of increasing interest. Human/cultural geographers such as Nigel Thrift, Sarah Whatmore, Jonathan Murdoch, and Nick Bingham along with science studies writers (most of whom belong to sociology departments) like John Law, Annmarie Mol and Kevin Hetherington are just a few of those who have been most directly dedicated to

⁵ Glenn Trewartha, "A Case for Population Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 43 (1953).

⁶ Patricia Grober, "In Search of Synthesis," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, 1 (2000): p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ This task has been taken up by Sarah Whatmore, "Hybrid Geographies: Rethinking the 'Human' in Human Geography," chap. in *Human Geography Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

bringing spatial thinking to bear on the work of Bruno Latour and others within the fold of ANT.

As we have already indicated, much of this geographical reflection upon the insights of ANT has revolved around its dissolution of a dualistically conceived human subjectivity and nonhuman objectivity. As will become clear, the primary goal of this chapter is to further elucidate this task of challenging the traditional geographical mode of binary thinking. There has, however, been a more generalized realization that nonmodern thinking may greatly aid in reinvigorating the geographer's concept of space and time altogether. In a recent geographical exegesis of various contemporary philosophies, several geographers have come together to investigate the multiple 'species of space' that now populate their field and the academe as a whole. In their edited volume *Thinking Space*, Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift have sought to compile a body of essays that seek to develop '*space as process and in process* (that is space and time combined in becoming).'⁹ The essay contribution by Bingham and Thrift in this volume seeks to specifically assess the impact of the work of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres as it continues to be adopted into the geographer's realm of spatial theorization.¹⁰ In this interesting chapter the authors point out that the great contribution of these two thinkers is to be found in that

they have sought to repopulate space and time with all the figures that have been stripped away by an idea of abstract division, by concentrating instead on movement, on process, on the constant hum of the world as the different elements of it are brought into relation with one another, often in new styles and unconsidered combinations. In other words they are attempting to rediscover the *richness* of the world...'¹¹

Certainly, for the ANT theorist, space is far more complex than the Euclidian system of fixed points of proximity and distance which the moderns so eagerly embraced. This is the same Euclideanism which posits that objects of three dimensions are thought to exist within a similar three dimensional space. Objects such as these may then move through this space without deformation as long as they do not occupy the same point/place as another object. But for an ANT inspired approach, space is always more than the grid-like surface of the Enlightenment thinker whose distinction between local and global relations could comfortably remain unquestioned.

⁹ Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, "Introduction," in *Thinking Space*, Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3. (emphasis and brackets are in the original)

¹⁰ Latour has often cited the work of his colleague Michel Serres as being particularly influential in his own spatio-temporal thinking. Thus the two authors are often mentioned in the same breath by human geographers interacting with ANT and nonmodern thinking. Latour's extremely interesting interview of Serres has been published as Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, Trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995 [1990]).

¹¹ Nick Bingham and Nigel Thrift, "Some New Instructions for Travelers: The Geography of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres," in *Thinking Space*, p. 281. (emphasis in the original)

What Latour and Serres have sought to achieve is a radical interrogation of our received understanding of space and time as 'primitive terms'. This requires that we understand that 'space and time are no longer conceived of as existing "independently as an unshakable frame of reference *inside which* events and places would occur," but, conversely, as the result of inter-action, "*consequences* of the ways in which bodies relate to one another"'.¹² Immediately we should notice that space is here the result of relationships (networks) established between a multiplicity of heterogeneous objects or quasi-objects/subjects. This merits two important preliminary observations. First, this nonmodern approach precludes any alliance between actor/actant-network theory and 'social constructivist' approaches to space and place which geographers as a whole have too often been tempted towards. Secondly, this approach should be strictly distinguished from similar phenomenological and psychological descriptions of 'lived' space-time – that is, 'subjective' space-time proposed in polemic distinction to the 'objective' space-time of scientific reason and its cold 'timeless and spaceless apparatus.'¹³ The pitfall of this approach, according to Latour, is that the phenomenologist and psychologist are still operating within the dualistic mode of the modern settlement. They have simply and uncritically adopted the opposite of the 'objective' Enlightenment ideal, opting instead to focus on the alternate pole of the purified dichotomy – namely, the subjective.

Phenomenology deals only with the world-for-a-human-consciousness... phenomenology leaves us with the most dramatic split in this whole sad story: a world of science left entirely to itself, entirely cold, absolutely inhuman; and a rich lived world of intentional stances entirely limited to humans, absolutely divorced from what things are in and for themselves.¹⁴

In describing the world of a wind-surfer, Latour further reveals his distaste for phenomenological accounts of 'lived worlds': Latour protests that 'he is not in a human, subjective, psychological, mental time-space. I want no part in this painting job, where [the] "lived" world adds false but warm colors to a real but bleak reality made of measurement.'¹⁵ Clearly for Latour, the 'lived world' of the phenomenologist and psychologist does far too little to upset the reign of the human subject.

Due to the influence of ANT and nonmodern thinking, geographers are now very interested in unraveling the 'material relationality' through which space and time are thought to be 'produced'. Building upon the insights of ANT, theorists within the spatial sciences are now beginning to take notice of the once ignored ubiquity of things, objects, human and nonhuman, which combine into variably stable and unstable networks of heterogeneous

¹² Ibid., p. 289. (emphasis in the original)

¹³ Latour, "Trains of Thought: Piaget, Formalism and the Fifth Dimension," *Common Knowledge* 6, 3 (1997): p. 170.

¹⁴ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Latour, "Trains of Thought" p. 171.

associations. But what this relational ontology does to our received notions of space is a more complex matter altogether. John Law and Kevin Hetherington have sought to outline a few of the spatial implications of what they describe as a 'relational materiality'. They argue, with the assistance of Latour's nonmodern project, that 'spatial phenomena', such as globalization, are 'made by materials which are in space—but which also have spatial effects'.¹⁶ Upon this thinking, networks of material relations create variable spaces of their own. That is, spatial phenomena, such as global flows (economic or cultural), are produced through material relations that are sustained on a global scale. Law and Hetherington illustrate the point with what is now a well-known historical example within ANT circles of a heterogeneous network in practice; that is the Portuguese spice trade with India.¹⁷ Here they trace all the socio-material mediations (networks), the Portuguese Man of War ships, trading companies, maps, compasses, trained soldiers, etc., which served to establish Portuguese power (agency) at a distance. Yet we might equally well look at the distances, or spaces, created through technologies and various material arrangements which produce information in our contemporary computer-assisted networks. In both cases multiple technologies move information with great speed thereby resulting in variable spatio-temporal outcomes. For instance, Law and Hetherington will argue that 'the City of London is closer to Wall Street than it is to inner-city Salford.'¹⁸ The technological – that is socio-material – relationships between these two places have served to bring them closer in space and time. In fact, through multiple networks these two places have created a variety of space-times particular to their own networking.

The Immutable Mobile

In order to fully understand nonmodern space-times we must return to a concept which received only a brief mention in chapter 2. One of Latour's most enduring contributions to the field of science studies has been his description of the 'immutable mobile'. Sometimes referred to simply as 'inscription,' the immutable mobile serves to denote the work of transforming any kind of entity into a material sign. Most commonly, Latour will describe how a scientist will enroll, mobilize, enlist, translate, inscribe, and circulate these immutable mobiles which are nothing less than the 'life blood' of the sciences. Importantly, this life blood consists of countless representations that are both durable and capable of mobilization such as maps, charts, graphs, emails, academic journals, books, etc. Immutable

¹⁶ John Law and Kevin Hetherington, "Materialities, Spatialities, Globalities," in *The Spaces of Postmodernity*, Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 393.

¹⁷ See for instance, Law, "On the Methods of Long-Distance Control: Vessels, Navigation, and the Portuguese Rout to India," in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, John Law ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

¹⁸ Law and Hetherington, "Materialities," p. 393.

mobiles such as these will often be of such a nature that they will be easily presentable, legible, and capable of recombination. For science to work, that is for local knowledge (truth claims about a nonhuman or human entity that is often produced in a lone laboratory) to be made universal, information must be translated and inscribed into some form of nonhuman entity or media – the knowledge must be ‘re-represented’. Furthermore, this inscription must be made able to travel the world (mobility) without losing its shape or changing the information being mobilized (immutability). Local truth claims can now be mobilized and made available for argumentation at a distance. The ‘world’ – nonhumans in natural science and humans in social science – is now understood to be effectively loaded into scientific discourse by way of translating local knowledge into various immutable mobiles.

We can now see that the immutable mobile sits near the heart of nonmodern thinking, as it is a further means of transgressing the modern divide between epistemological and ontological questions. Similarly, as ANT practitioners trace the immutable mobile through and across networks, it serves to transgress the modern belief in a gap between words and world. For instance, the philosopher of science will often demand that epistemological and ontological questions never be confused, but as we have seen, a nonmodern account demands that this modern dichotomy be transgressed. As Latour insists, ‘if we were to follow the philosophers’ advice we would not understand any scientific activity, since confusing those two supposedly separate domains is precisely what scientists spend much of their time doing.’¹⁹ The scientists are directly implicated in the proliferation of hybrids. Therefore, the nonmodern thinker is interested in unpacking how it is that scientists load or *translate* nonhumans into human discourse in order to be ultimately persuasive. In sum, we may think of the study of immutable mobiles as the study of the socialization of nonhumans.

The *circulation* or *networking* of these immutable mobiles effectively constitutes the ‘vascularization of scientific facts’. Or as Latour puts it otherwise; ‘Disciplining men and mobilizing things, mobilizing things by disciplining men; this is a new way of convincing, sometimes called scientific research.’²⁰ But singular and independent immutable mobiles do very little for the ‘propping up’ of scientific truth claims on their own. Therefore, the very essence of *networking* is directly implicated in the idea of what Latour will call ‘circulating reference’ or scientific ‘vascularization’. As we have already seen, and will describe in more detail later in this chapter, this concept of the immutable mobile and circulating reference is responsible for the ‘network’ portion of the ANT style. In fact, the immutable mobiles may be understood as networks in themselves, that is, they hold together because they are networked and supported through multiple relations. As John Law makes clear,

¹⁹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

immutable mobiles are *themselves* a network, an array. They *are* objects. But they also pass down or through a network, held in an array of secure and stable surroundings. If the circuit is broken then the [immutable mobile] starts to degrade, loses its form, and turns into something else.²¹

This is a point we will take up again as we look further into the spatiality of networks and network-objects (the two can hardly be separated). Moreover, it is the immutable mobile that is capable of traveling these networks without deformation due to their ability to make heterogeneous relations of people and things hold stable at a distance.

This leads us to what has become one of the more important points of nonmodern spatiality; that is, space is not a *natural* category, it has not been established in 'the order of things.' For the actor-network thinker, spaces and distances are created through the 'immutable mobile' and the materially-mediated relations between places. 'The argument is that distance demands communication and interaction. Its very possibility depends on communication or interaction. It depends on joining things up within – and thereby making – a single space.'²² What is clear in all of this is that for the nonmodern thinker geographical space is *performed* through constellations of socio-material relationality – space is the outgrowth of materially heterogeneous effects. Or as Latour himself argues, spaces and times are the result of 'reversible and irreversible displacements of many types of mobiles. They are generated by the movements of mobiles, they do not frame these movements.'²³ Space-times are then numerous and diverse co-existing networks that are never pre-given in the 'order of things'. In fact, there may be as many space-times as there are types of relations or networks. Moreover, being heterogeneous, networks cut through the full spectrum of the collective – the 'parliament of things' – drawing together elements which we often describe as *purely* social, natural, spiritual, political and technical. Interestingly, Nigel Thrift has referred to this radical refashioning of space and time as the 're-timing of space and the re-spacing of time.'²⁴

II. Repopulating Time

Topology and the Local / Global

The nonmodern understanding of space-times further encourages us to rethink our received modern notions of the local and the global. As we have already seen, heterogeneous and material relationships, or networks, serve to wrinkle and fold space-times. For instance, a single office in London's business district is certainly located in the global geographical space which we have all experienced and are part of. Yet it is also the material *things* like emails,

²¹ Law, "Objects and Spaces," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 19, 5/6 (2002), p. 93.

²² Law and Hetherington, "Materialities," p. 396.

²³ Latour, "Visualization and Reproduction," in *Picturing Power: Visual Depiction and Social Relations*, Gordon Fyfe and John Law (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), p. 25.

²⁴ Thrift, "Afterwords," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): p. 221.

faxes, postal services, telephones, and all the other performances of these 'materially heterogeneous links which maintain the mobilities between places, and define the distances.'²⁵ For Serres and Latour, networked space-times are most easily understood as the folding of a simple handkerchief. As Serres explains;

If you take a handkerchief and spread it out in order to iron it, you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities. If you sketch a circle in one area, you can mark out nearby points and measure far-off distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by putting it in your pocket. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. If further, you tear it in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant. This science of nearness and rifts is called topology, while the science of stable and well-defined distances is called metrical geometry.²⁶

This 'topology' or 'topography' which Serres speaks of is now radically changing due to our proliferation of hybrid collectives. The term 'topology' is itself taken from a branch of mathematics which seeks to explore 'possible' spaces. As Law has elaborated, these spaces would include 'what we tend to think of as 'space' in Euro-American common-sense, which is geographical or Euclidean in character.'²⁷ But he adds that this Euclidean space is just one spatial possibility among many. There are, in fact, many topologies or spatial circumstances in which objects may find their relational being. Topology is the science which then seeks to describe these spatial, and thereby temporal, possibilities.

The enlistment or socialization of numerous nonhumans into our human collectives, according to Latour, is now also having a dramatic impact on our understanding of scale and distance. Relations are now being sifted into varying degrees of localization or globalization. But as Latour points out, this is a misguided outlook as networks resist strict purification into local/global, micro/macro categories of scale. We may take Latour's example of one rather visible network of both human and nonhuman entities – a railroad – in order to flesh-out these interesting points of topological thinking. Latour asks:

Is a railroad local or global? Neither. It is local at all points, since you always find sleepers and railroad workers, and you have stations and automatic ticket machines scattered along the way. Yet it is global, since it takes you from Madrid to Berlin or from Brest to Vladivostock. However, it is not universal enough to be able to take you just anywhere...The railroad model can be extended to all the technological networks that we encounter daily.²⁸

Within the nonmodern milieu we are no longer forced to choose between local and global perspectives since the very notion of the network affords us the ability to think of particular things as related globally while remaining continuously local. No longer must we oppose the micro and the macro, local or global, but may instead follow the relational networks which

²⁵ Law and Hetherington, "Materialities," p. 397.

²⁶ Serres with Latour, *Conversations on Science*, p. 60.

²⁷ Law, "Objects and Spaces," p. 94.

²⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 117.

perform an entity as strategic or less-than strategic. Strategic entities will be composed of many strong and stable networks, while those with few associations or weak associations will be less-strategic. This recognizes, as Latour has illustrated, that the 'prevalence of geography' or the 'tyranny of distance' has been one of the greatest barriers to seeing all 'associations in terms of networks'.²⁹

We can now see that for the nonmodern thinker distinctions between local and global are largely unhelpful and without merit. They are, in fact, a fossil of the modern settlement. The moderns saw themselves as truly revolutionary in their privileging the universality of sciences that were taken in abstraction from their local situation. 'They thought there really were such things as people, ideas, situations that were local and organizations, laws, rules that were global.'³⁰ But like the railroad, networks are made up of a series of local interactions that are either rather long, or rather short. Therefore, spatial scale is redirected towards the topological. Or as Latour summarizes; 'The two extremes, local and global, are much less interesting than the intermediary arrangements that we are calling networks.'³¹ Here, space and time have been liberated from their modern position as 'Newtonian sensoria' or internal (*a priori*) frames of the mind's perception. This is to say, they are no longer primitive terms, but rather, the results of the ways in which *things* – bodies, people, rocks, buildings, rabbits – relate to one another, networking and associating.

Nonmodern Timing

Space and time are extremely difficult to differentiate or speak of in abstraction from one another. Certainly, this is a point which has not been lost to Latour and Serres. Both of these thinkers have done much to formulate what we will continue to call a nonmodern view of time. As we have already seen, space-time is for Serres akin to the folds of a handkerchief – a view which closely parallels the 'origami' approach to space-times belonging to Deleuze and Guattari.³² Thinkers such as these insist that time cannot be easily simplified and formalized. In fact, time, and thereby space, is produced in multiplicity. Serres helpfully elaborates on these points in his 'conversations' with Latour, here he explains that

As we experience time...it resembles this crumpled version much more than the flat, overly simplified one... Admittedly, we need the latter [metrical time] for measurements, but why extrapolate from it a general theory of time? *People usually*

²⁹ Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: a Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, 4 (1996), p. 371.

³⁰ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 120.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³² See for instance, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988); or Marcus Doel, *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

confuse time and the measurement of time, which is a metrical reading on a straight line... No, time does not flow as people think it does.³³

Here we are cautioned to never confuse ‘classical’ or ‘geometrical’ time with what is often described as ‘real’ time. Serres will often highlight the insight which the French word for time can provide in this instance. He explains that it is ‘by chance or wisdom’ that the ‘French language uses a single word, *temps*, for the time that passes and for the weather outside’.³⁴ This serves to highlight the way in which our experience of time – using ‘modern’ language we would say both internally (*subjectively*) and externally (*objectively*) in the natural world – better resembles unsettled and ever-changing weather systems than it does the predictable and incremental passage of classical time. Indeed, time can be tempestuous or rather fair.

There is also an important element of materiality which will aid the nonmodern thinker in repopulating time with the whole of the collective. As Latour points out a nonmodern understanding of time will find its fulcrum in the ‘relation between transportation and transformation.’³⁵ These processes of transformation and transportation are deeply entwined in the materiality which we have seen is so important to nonmodern (or ANT) understandings of space. In his 1996 seminar paper on the topic of space-times, Latour argues that “‘time’ is not something that is in the ‘mind’ or that is in ‘thought’ by a mind, but something rooted in a long material and technical practice of record-keeping, itself merged into institutions and local histories.”³⁶ Therefore, a nonmodern sense of *timing*, according to Latour, will seek to once again bypass the dichotomized notions of subjective and objective time all together. To do this, Latour calls for the recognition of a second dimension. That is, a dimension that will prioritize the recognition of the amount of *labor* or *work* which goes into the act of moving through the web of space-time. At base, Latour sees this effort as his attempt to bring spacing up to the same philosophical prestige as timing.

As we have seen, traditional philosophical debates concerning time were broken into the two realms of subjective ‘lived’ time and objective ‘real’ time. But in the interest of breaking out of this dichotomy, Latour proceeds to employ a thought experiment by telling two parallel stories of traveling fraternal twins. One of the twins is comfortably seated on a European bullet train and easily travels along a network which others have constructed to express great efficiency of movement. The other twin, however, is said to be traveling on foot along the same route but through the thick forest adjacent to the rail line. The second twin must then use a hatchet to cut a path through the forest. For her, ‘each centimeter has been won over through a complicated “negotiation” with other entities, branches, snakes, sticks,

³³ Serres with Latour, *Conversations on Science*, pp. 60-61. (emphasis in the original)

³⁴ Serres, *The Natural Contract*, Trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 27.

³⁵ Latour, "Trains of Thought," p. 172.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

that were all going in other directions and had other ends and goals.³⁷ The argument then revolves around the different productions of space-time which each traveler will now experience. Here timing depends upon an *ontological* difference rather than an ‘internal’ quality of apperception, or an ‘external’ metric or measured time. The difference is to be found in the divergent number and nature of heterogeneous others which each traveler encounters along their path. To clarify the point Latour invokes the language of ‘intermediary’ and ‘mediation’ which we have just described in chapter three. Latour explains that the timing which each traveler experiences depends on the nature of these heterogeneous others which they encounter along the way. Latour asks:

Are they well-aligned *intermediaries*, making no fuss and no history and lending themselves to a smooth passage [Like the smooth running rail network], or full *mediators* defining paths and fates on their own terms? Are they more of the same—that is intermediaries—or are they really others—that is mediators?³⁸

The well-aligned intermediaries will gently transport the traveler relatively unchanged from one location to the next, whereas ‘full mediators’ will have ‘counter programs’ of their own – to use the language of the last chapter – and severely tax the body for each meter of travel. It is here that we are to find the ontological difference between the two timings. Latour can situate each of the twins within a second dimension – a dimension outside ‘classical’ and ‘lived’ times – where we are able to take ‘into account the ratio of transformation over transportation or else the number of mediators compared to the number of intermediaries.’³⁹ The train traveler experiences very little transformation in relation to the distance traveled. Moreover, this twin will experience very little physical or ‘lived’ aging. The space traversed is then relatively timeless. Alternatively, the forest traveler will experience a much higher degree of transformation in relation to transportation – time and ageing will have been exacted upon the body as it encounters a number of mediators rather than networked intermediaries. Any gain in spatial transportation is then taxed with a rather hefty amount of transformation.

We now begin to see this second dimension, the dimension of *labor* or *work*, beginning to reveal itself in the folds of timing and spacing. The forest traveler produces a series of mediations as she works to cut a path and experiences the labor and transformation involved in transportation. For him space and time are indistinguishable. Any gains of spatial transportation bring upon a more pronounced awareness of time – this is what is often, unhelpfully, called ‘real’ time. On the other hand, the train traveler literally rides upon the work of others – engineers, conductors, technicians. His transportation is taxed with very little transformation thereby dissolving the role of the multiple intermediaries which make his

³⁷ Ibid.,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 174. (the brackets and the emphasis are my own addition)

³⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

travel possible. Moreover, his sense of time will be far different to that of the forest traveler, as for him ‘time is like nothing,’ it is merely ‘lived’ time. But thinking in terms of purely ‘real’ and ‘lived’ time only takes account of the autonomous train traveler in a world where only he exists. All of the other entities involved in *making* time have faded into the background. If the train were to break down short of its destination, cranky passengers would quickly be made aware of the masses of silent others – human and nonhuman – who had been responsible for their comfortable transportation without transformation. Certainly, we can say that ‘time passes or not depending on the alignment of other entities.’⁴⁰ What all of this serves to suggest is this: if other entities are necessary to our very existence, as Latour argues, then there will exist a multiplicity of timings and spacings. We are never simply alone in our subjective ‘lived’ time, but are instead wrapped up in our necessary associations with many other persons and things, all of which contribute to the times and spaces we experience. Now we may come to understand why Latour and Serres’s philosophy of space and time is often called the ‘repopulating of space and time’, for they have brought the full collective to bear on these once absolute or internal categories. Moreover, it is for this reason that we are advised to speak of time in terms of the dynamism which the French word *le temps* captures. In light of this we will proceed by speaking of the verb *timing*.

III. In-Human Geographies

Nonmodern Agency/Actancy and Geography

We have now covered the spatial significance of the ‘network’ portion of the ANT ‘style’, which carries the most overtly spatial outworkings of the approach. But there remains the extremely important, and radical, application of Latour and Callon’s ‘generalized symmetry’ to the geographical project. The ‘actor’ portion of the theory is critical, for it is responsible for policing the boundaries of what is allowed to constitute and *perform* agency. Although we have already introduced the basic shape of the nonmodern understanding of agency/actancy in chapters 2 and 3, we must now give further depth to the account in order to understand its uniquely spatial outworkings. As we have seen, the nonmodern will consistently stress that agency is never an internal quality possessed by an individual subject. Instead, agents are always to be understood as relational effects. Now that we have slowly introduced the topic of agency in the last two chapters we may now definitively outline a number of observations concerning the attribute of agency as it is conceived within actor-network or nonmodern thinking.

First, as we have seen above, in nonmodern thought networks are composed of a multiplicity of *things* rather than always purified ‘social’ networks where only humans may

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 174.

be seen to express agency. We may then conclude that humans are never able to act on their own.⁴¹ A common-place and highly visible network, such as a railroad, will consist of engineers, tracks, stations, manuals, passengers, money, and numerous complex machines. Thus, the network is composed of both humans and nonhumans. It is what we might call 'materially heterogeneous'. This takes us back to Latour's understanding of societies as 'collectives' or 'parliament's of things' that are always much more than purified social actions and negotiations. We have also seen that *society*, for the actor network theorist, is composed of all the material *things* of the network just as it is composed of people. John Law, reflecting Latour's 'missing masses', puts it this way: 'If human beings form a social network it is not because they interact with other human beings. It is because they interact with human beings and endless other materials too.'⁴² Indeed, ANT consists of a ruthlessly symmetrical approach, which applies relationality to all materials and not just those who happen to possess the capacity for language. 'Thus an agent is a spokesperson, a figurehead, or a more or less opaque 'black box' which stands for, conceals, defines, holds in place, mobilizes and draws on, a set of juxtaposed bits and pieces.'⁴³

Secondly, the actor-network approach turns our attention towards *performativity*. By focusing on the materially heterogeneous networks within which entities achieve their form, ANT is similarly obliged to describe how these entities are '*performed* in, by and through those relations.'⁴⁴ This carries with it a similar effect to what we have witnessed for networked space above. That is, entities are not seen to be given in 'the order of things' – indeed, they are nonessential. Instead, entities, of any stripe, are understood to be radically contingent and ultimately uncertain and reversible. In an interesting study, Annemarie Mol has argued that *anaemia* is actually performed in many different ways and each performance is often seen to be closely associated with particular places.⁴⁵ For instance, anaemia is not performed in the same way in a laboratory as it is in a health clinic. For the lab technician anaemia is performed as a low hemoglobin count, where as the doctor would see anaemia performed through descriptions of dizziness, the appearance of the skin, and other generally visible symptoms. This has led Mol to suggest that things – entities, agents, quasi-objects – are '*done* and *enacted* rather than observed.'⁴⁶

⁴¹ We will recall that this is one of the main oversights we identified in Gunton's account of the 'cultural mandate' and his strong anthropological emphasis.

⁴² Law, "Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity," <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc054jl.html>: Center for Science Studies and the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, 16 June, 2001.

⁴³ Law, *Organizing Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 101. (emphasis in the original)

⁴⁴ Law, "After ANT: Complexity, Naming and Topology," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 4.

⁴⁵ Annemarie Mol, "Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77. (emphasis in the original)

Thirdly, and as we have already seen, ANT does not limit agency to the human realm alone. Again, this accounts for ANT's recently developed regret for their early adoption of the word 'agency' itself. The problem is that the terms 'agency' and 'actor' are too often limited to humans alone. Latour and others have sought to rectify the regrettable adoption of these exclusive words by replacing them with the more widely functional terms of 'actant' and 'actancy'.⁴⁷ Here it may be helpful to bring the discussion back to the work of 'translation' as ANT theorists use the term. For it is largely through translation that agency/actancy can be extended to all sorts of *things*. In its essence the term acts to ferry between the purifications of the modernist settlement. It does this by embodying all the 'transformations so typical of the sciences; like "inscription" or "articulation".... In its linguistic and material connotations, it refers to all the displacements through other actors whose mediation is indispensable for any action to occur.'⁴⁸ For instance, in scientific practice charts, graphs, samples, notes, photographs, and texts are allowed (if correctly gathered) to stand as equivalent to the original *thing* being evaluated. A translation has taken place in order for one actor to carry out a further action. This is what we have seen clearly expressed in the 'immutable mobiles' we reviewed earlier. By virtue of their ability to travel and circulate without deformation these hybrids or socialized nonhumans are able to extend action at a distance. They are part of a network where actancy is fully distributed amongst the heterogeneous human and nonhuman members.

This point on translation and nonhuman actancy is critical to the overall project of science studies, and by extension, that of human geography. Therefore, we would do well to review just one example (or story) which Latour has offered which seeks to embody the spatial effect of 'translation' and 'immutable mobility'. Here we will focus on his well-known description of that uniquely frustrating artifact called the 'sleeping policeman' or 'speed bump'. As we have seen, techniques, artifacts, and all of the material fabrications of *homo faber* are, for Latour, translations of human expressions and intentions. Yet they are much more than the 'simple denizens' upon which we load up a world of discourse. Techniques modify the matter of expression and not simply the form.⁴⁹ Such is the case when campus engineers endeavor to translate their goal of getting cars to slow down by sticking a lump of cement in the middle of the road. As Latour explains, the engineer's goal to get cars to slow down is translated into a technical mediator, which in turn translates into the driver's goal of not damaging the car's suspension. The expression of 'slow down' has been changed from a verbal command, or visible road sign, to a lump of cement in the middle of the road. What has

⁴⁷ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 303.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

taken place is 'a change in the very matter of expression'.⁵⁰ Latour goes on to insist that much of our language is incapable of expressing what has taken place in this technological mediation of the engineer's wishes. Words like 'objectified,' 'reified,' or 'materialized' are all too biased towards expressing the sole agency of the human, whilst the contribution of the nonhuman is made opaque.

Here we must briefly return to Latour's account of the 'technical mediator' for this is crucial to our point concerning distributive actancy and its geographical outworkings. We may recall that through his multiple examples of technical mediation – we have already reviewed the handgun example – Latour is not suggesting that technology is nothing more than human discourse made solid in a way that can be easily re-fabricated in any number of differing media.⁵¹ If this were indeed the case, then the transition from 'hey slow down' to the lump of concrete would count for nothing, the technological mediator would be meaningless. Moreover, this would simply take us back to the modern settlement where the 'material world confronts us only to serve as a mirror for social relations and a source of entertainment for sociologists.'⁵² Instead, Latour argues that technological mediation should be understood to encompass the action of the mediators themselves. In this we may now see that the artifact is no longer the silent and obedient *intermediary* between society (meaning) and nature (material). The meaning of this translation is now, in part, 'constituted, moved, recreated, modified, in short expressed and betrayed' by the technological mediator (the hybrid). The 'sleeping policeman' has gone from abject object to assuming 'all the dignity of a mediator, a social actor, an agent, and active being.'⁵³

What the moderns saw as an abject object, the nonmodern sees as a socialized nonhuman, hybrid or actant. Michel Callon summarizes these points in stating that it 'is precisely because human action is not only human but also unfolds, is delegated and is formatted in networks with multiple configurations, that the diversity of the action and of the actors is possible.'⁵⁴ Or we may again witness Latour who states: 'Action is simply not a property of humans *but of an association of actants*....Provisional "actorial" roles may be attributed to actants only because actants are in the process of changing competences, offering

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ It is on this particular point that Lambert Van Poolen appears to have totally misread Latour's understanding of technological action by speaking of Latour's vision of the artifact as encompassing a 'textual' reading of the artifact. For Latour, artifacts are much more than mere 'hermeneutical texts', but it appears that Van Poolen's attempt to theologially apply Latour's philosophy of technology has taken this to be his main point. "Towards a Christian Theology of Technological Things," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, 3 (2004)

⁵² Latour, "The Berlin Key or How To Do Words With Things," in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, P.M. Graves-Brown (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 18-19.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁴ Michel Callon, "Actor-Network Theory--The Market Test," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 194.

one another new possibilities, new goals, new functions.’⁵⁵ Indeed, things are full of people and people are full of things.

Topology of Distributed Actancy

Latour and other ANT thinkers have been keen to highlight the spatio-temporal outworkings of this nonmodern view of technological mediation or actancy. For instance, Latour points out that in the case of the ‘sleeping policeman’ a triple *shifting* is being played out. First, in this example there is an ‘actorial’ shift from engineers to a mass of concrete. Secondly, this shift is also manifest spatially as there is now a new actant in the middle of the road. Finally, there has taken place a temporal shift as the engineers are no longer present but something reliable holds the enunciation of the engineers in place as they are now represented by an artifact.⁵⁶ This is what Latour calls ‘shifting down’. The engineer’s program of action has been shifted down allowing a complex combination of both absence and presence to take place. The engineers are not there, but their actions, their shifting down or delegation of action is still present through the mediation of this new actant. This hybrid enacts – performs – a new topology as it ‘carries past acts’, or far away acts, ‘into the present and permits its many investors to disappear while also remaining present.’⁵⁷ Time and space are being reordered through this ‘distributive’ or shared actancy of the heterogeneous materials which compose the network.

There is another important element to this topology of networked spaces which concerns the *durability* or *stability* of the network-actant. Earlier we noted that ANT thinking implies a radical contingency in regard to spatialities and objectivity. We argued that these are constituted through a material relationality that is not present in the ‘order of things,’ but is rather performed through contingent heterogeneous associations. This leaves open the question of the durability of certain networks and object/actants. For what radical contingency suggests is that object/actants can be adopted into other networks or multiple networks depending on the relative stability or instability of the network. When networks are strong the objects enrolled into that network, and their relationally achieved actancy, are held in place. Conversely, networks that are relatively unstable have a greater difficulty in maintaining the objectivity/actancy of its heterogeneous components. Similarly, these unstable networks are unable to consistently perform a network space. We may then say that a network-object/actant implies a stable shape within a network space. As network actancy becomes distributed and made durable, spatiality then becomes an aspect of network stability. Law and Mol have made

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 182. (emphasis in the original)

⁵⁶ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 188.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

the point rather concisely in stating; '*Spatiality is an aspect of network stability*'.⁵⁸ This is to say that the distributed actancy of a network, if stable, produces its own topology. If the network fails – the train jumps the tracks, or the sleeping policeman disintegrates – so to the topology, the spacing, fails.

Finally, it should be made clear that Actor-Network Theory has done much to destabilize Euclideanism by emphasizing the performative character of the heterogeneous relations which serve to compose network-objects/actants. It is also important that we notice that ANT does not seek to completely subvert Euclidean space – that is, space of constantly held three-dimensional coordinates. We might make this point more clearly by returning to Latour's concept of the *immutable mobile*. For what the immutable mobile achieves is a simultaneous codependency on both Euclidean and network space. According to Latour, the immutable mobile exists in two spaces, or two topologies. The 'immutability' represents its belonging to network-space in which it *does not move* (mutate or transform) or else it would cease to be itself. For instance, if the network of software, hardware, people, and electricity – the network – which moves an email across the Atlantic were to fail, producing a jumble of words on the other end, the network would have failed to maintain the network-object in network space. Similarly, if the author of a scientific paper does not conform to the practices of scientific convention in writing her article it may prove unreadable or otherwise useless once it reaches its destination. Again, the network would fail to hold the object/actant stable in network space. The 'mobile' portion of the term refers to the object's ability, say the journal article, to move through Euclidean space. Certainly, the two 'species of space' are closely linked. As Law and Mol make clear, 'it is that immutability in network space which affords the immutability and the mobility in Euclidean space...it is the *interference between the spatial systems that affords the [network-object] its special properties*'.⁵⁹

Nonmodern thinking approaches space as a performance between the humans and nonhumans which inhabit the network topos. In doing this, it seeks to undermine the reifications associated with Euclidean topologies, and reveals this spatiality and its objects as relational performances that are caught up in a process of becoming. Latour neatly summarizes these points in writing; 'The notion of network helps us to lift the tyranny of geographers (in the modern constitution) in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor 'real' space, but associations.'⁶⁰

⁵⁸ John Law and Annemarie Mol, "Situating Technoscience: an Inquiry into Spatialities," <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Mol-Situating-Technoscience.pdf>: Center for Science Studies and the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, 8, December, 2003, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Law and Mol, "Situating Technoscience," p. 3. (emphasis and brackets in the original)

⁶⁰ Latour, "On Actor Network Theory", p. 371. (the bracketed words are my own addition)

IV. The Human Geographical Concept of Place

At the beginning of this chapter it was indicated that human geography has traditionally taken the triad of *space*, *place* and *nature* as its central area of analytical concern. We have also highlighted the new movement towards achieving greater synthesis between physical and human geographical approaches. Integral to this shift has been an upsurge in theoretical debate within the social sciences and humanities concerning spatial thinking. Furthermore, it has become altogether clear that Actor-Network Theory has been one of the more rigorous and exciting new exchanges to have been initiated between the social sciences and the spatial science of geography. Now that we have reviewed the spatial and temporal outworkings of an actor/actant-network approach, it is time we gave some attention to the other third of human geography's triad – that is, the concept of *place*.

Place in the Modern Settlement

It has been deeply inscribed within the geographical tradition that the fundamental difference between space and place resides in the idea that place is something subjective, human, meaningful and altogether warm. We might think, for instance, of warm places saturated with projections or 'social constructions' of human desire and emotion: grandmother's house, the church of your baptism, or childhood home. Space on the other hand, especially Euclidean space, is thought to be something objective, meaningless, inhuman and generally cold. Thinking of space we tend to conjure thoughts of largely meaningless grids on a map: latitude and longitude, arbitrary political boundaries with ninety degree angles and straight lines, or a featureless expanse of ocean. Within this dichotomy we may easily identify what Latour has diagnosed as the fallout of the modern Constitution. Space is seen to be populated by sheer materiality, abject objects, and meaningless nonhumans. Whilst place is understood to be distinctly human, subjective, thoroughly social, and ultimately meaningful.

It then comes as little surprise to find that geographical interest in the concept of place has largely fallen under the domain of human geographers. As it began to borrow heavily from the field of phenomenology, early in the 1970's the new school of 'human geography' began to grapple with the idea that humans can experience a 'sense of place,' or conversely a 'sense of placelessness.' What this suggested was that place(s) could somehow bear meaning and even participate in human identity. As it gained ground the new humanistic movement presented a strong challenge to the standing school of positivist physical geography which, as we have already highlighted, took only observable phenomena as a valid form of knowledge. Today it is clear that the concept of place has now been firmly

established as a central conceptual term within the field of human geography and has henceforth spawned a legion of theoretical approaches and philosophical definitions.

Today the concept of place remains a hotly contested concept within human and cultural geography. Yet even in this midst of this diversity, there remains a wide-spread assumption that turning space into place – that is, investing space with meaning, or ordering space – is purely and exclusively the expression of *human* intervention or subjectivity. This has led a large proportion of human geographers to assume that place is always something which is ‘socially constructed,’ whereas space alone is thought to be ‘real’ or present ‘in the order of things’. As Kevin Hetherington has put the matter: ‘Contemporary geographical discourse only sees the difference between spaces and places and, in doing so, it has tended to make the material world disappear and to replace it instead with culture with all its symbolism and meaning.’⁶¹ By way of example we may mention one of the most celebrated of the early founders of the field of human geography, Yi-Fu Tuan. In his widely read early addition to the place conversation, *Space and Place*, Tuan provides a wonderfully rich account of the human construction and experience of various places, but in true modern fashion it seldom leaves the confines of human ‘lived worlds’, in order to seek out the moments of material participation in the act of placing.⁶² More recently, Marxist geographer David Harvey has argued that places ‘are social constructs and have to be read and understood as such’.⁶³ In even stronger words, he insists that if we are to ‘write of “the power of place,” as if places...possess causal powers is to engage in the grossest of fetishisms; unless, that is, we confine ourselves rigorously to the definition of place as a social process’.⁶⁴ Place is here defined in the first instance as a human projection of meaning, and secondly by a dialectical movement between material and ideal. Nicholas Entrikin’s *The Betweenness of Place*, stands as a good example of a geographical concept of place which seeks to balance positivist and phenomenological approaches. On this view, place is a concept that ‘incorporates both the existential qualities of our experience of place and also our sense of place as a natural “object” in the world’.⁶⁵ Yet even here there is little of any account of nonhuman participation, or actancy, within the dynamism of place.

What is clear is that human geographical theories of place have been fundamentally defined by humanist discourses. Moreover, what this approach reveals is an unquestioned

⁶¹ Kevin Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry: the materiality of place," in *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*, Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers/ The Sociological Review, 1997), p. 184.

⁶² Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1977).

⁶³ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 324.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 320.

⁶⁵ J. Nicholas Entrikin, *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 6.

assumption that place is concerned with an agency that is all but exclusively the domain of humans. This has been the case ‘even when places are seen to be contested and open to multiple interpretations—the current position advocated by many cultural geographers,’ such as Gillian Rose and Rob Shields.⁶⁶ All of this works to suggest that the geographical concept of place has suffered much of the same problems which have plagued the traditional understanding of space in the modern vein of thought. This is to say that ‘place’ has been purified into the realm of the subjective and humanist discourse, while space has been deemed the sole preserve of the physical and positivist inspired approaches. Thus it was understood that the physical geographer would find interest in the space between things, towns, mountains, or chairs in a room – she was interested in the cold and largely meaningless materials found within formally defined geometrical space. The human geographer was alternatively seen to find interest in the meaning invested or ‘projected’ upon places by individual human subjects or their larger collective societies. The human geographer would then investigate a space/place for its underlying revelations of social convention or construction. The physical geographer’s tools consisted of measuring devices, remote sensing, and satellite imagery all employed to interrogate non-vocal nonhumans. Whereas the human geographer circulated numerous surveys in order to extract impressions and feelings from the exclusively agential humans.

Placing in the Nonmodern

Human/cultural geographers have been rather quick to embrace nonmodern thinking in their effort to reinvigorate their working concepts of place. Interestingly, several geographers have highlighted the general lack of attention paid by ANT theorists – within the parent field of science studies – to the particularly geographical category of place. In fact, several geographers have indicated that there exists a ‘place-blindness’ within many ANT-based studies. One of the leading ANT-informed geographers, Nigel Thrift, has noted that thinkers such as Latour are quite skilled at describing how *things* ‘dwell’ with us and ‘haunt’ us, yet they miss how this haunting quality relates to the geographical concept of place in particular. It is certainly true that ANT theorists have done much to unravel the peculiarities of *particular* places such as laboratories, offices and even hospitals, but they have generally failed to grasp the importance of place as a working concept that is, in a sense, portable. The problem, as Thrift sees it, is that ‘Latour and other actor network theorists often fail to see the importance of place because they are reluctant to ascribe different competences to different aspects of a network or to understand the role of common ground in how networks echo back

⁶⁶ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 184.

and forth, often unwittingly.⁶⁷ Hence much of the ANT-based theorization of place has been left to geographers to work out on their own. There is now, however, a growing realization that place studies are a potentially important part of actor/actant-network thinking. This has led theorists such as Hetherington, who is himself a sociologist by training, to lend sustained attention to the importance of place as a general concept rather than simply approaching specific places such as museums for study and interrogation. It is in this spirit that there is now a developing account of what a specifically nonmodern concept of place/placing might entail. Once again, we are not concerned here with this or that place in particular – that is to say we are less concerned with specific places such as home, church, laboratory, nation – but rather with the concept of place/placing that may be used to describe our collective being of humans and nonhumans wrapped up in a dynamic common world. Equally important is the point that we are not here concerned with ‘reviving a sense of place’ so as to ‘reactivate the care of the environment’ as some theological commentaries on place have attempted.⁶⁸ Instead we are now seeking to develop a working concept of place/placing that is capable of registering the intimate relations between people and things. Thus our concept of place/placing should always be understood as a dynamic and performative and dynamic happening between humans and nonhumans. Thus in the final estimation places/placings, like spaces/spacings, are always multiple and wrapped up in a kind of relational becoming.

Further in this vein of thought, actor-network theory and nonmodern thinking have offered a rather well articulated critique of some of the more recent, yet still modern, concepts of place which we have just reviewed. For instance, we have seen that ANT wholly rejects any attempt to resolve the modern dichotomization of Nature and Society through an appeal to dialectics. As Latour will often argue, dialectical reasoning is just as faulty as the old dualist notions which plagued the moderns. At its base, dialectical thinking tries to overcome the dualism of the modern project not by subverting its basic constitution, but by accepting the dichotomy of pure ontological realms and imagining a series of mediations between the two modern poles. True dialectics, according to Latour, speaks of nothing but mediations, but in truth they are merely ‘intermediaries that transmit pure ontological qualities’ – the hybrid or the quasi-objectivity of the collective is then buried even deeper.⁶⁹ We may equally cite Gilles Deleuze who insists that any ‘combination of opposites tells us nothing; it forms a net so slack that everything slips through’.⁷⁰ Therefore, Latour brands the dialecticians with the honor of being ‘incontestably our greatest modernizers, all the more powerful in that they

⁶⁷ Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place," chap. in *Human Geography Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 313.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 30. We focus on recent theologies of place in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1991), p. 44–45.

seemed in fact to have gathered up the totality of knowledge and the past and brought to bear all the resources of the modern critique.⁷¹ Drawing on this, we will surmise that a nonmodern concept of place will necessarily be drastically different than that of the early human geographers or that of Harvey and Entrikin. According to the nonmodern geographers we will review below, these approaches have relied too heavily upon the modern, or postmodern, symptom of dialectical thinking.⁷² What we need is a nonmodern concept of place/placing that is informed by the ANT principles of material relationality that may serve to better register the intimate ways in which persons and places/placings ‘take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities.’⁷³ Indeed, this will ultimately be a concept of place that is ‘constructed’ or ‘composed’, but as Latour is fond of saying, it is certainly *not* ‘socially constructed’!

V. Placing and the Heterogeneous Network

How then are we to bring the nonhuman back into *place*? Or posed differently, how might we bring heterogeneous materiality back into the concept of place so as to disrupt the reign of human subjectivity and agency? Here we will draw on the work of ANT-inspired spatial theorists such as Hetherington and Thrift, but also their important philosophical forerunners Michel Foucault and the intellectual team of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Each of these writers is interested in re-envisioning the actual composition of space and place as heterogeneous and relational. For instance, Hetherington appeals to Foucault’s example of a ship floating upon shifting seas, which he used as an illustration in his well-known paper titled *Of Other Spaces*.⁷⁴ Hetherington asks us to imagine the ship to be functioning much like *place* itself: ‘It is something that stays in one location but moves about within networks of agents, human and nonhuman.’⁷⁵ This should sound quite similar to what we have already reviewed of nonmodern spacing. Earlier we said that for the nonmodern theorist space-times are the relational outcome of heterogeneous materials bound up and ordered by the actants which compose the network itself. What the ship floating upon the sea begins to illustrate is the critical point that place/placing is a process of relationships which emerge, fold, dissipate, rise and fall. In fact, place, for the nonmodern thinker, is less about stasis and more about the dynamics of *placing* – a socio-material happening in space-time. It is for this reason that we

⁷¹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 57.

⁷² It is clear that ANT or nonmodern spatial theorists have little affection for dialecticians. Moreover, it is my sense that David Harvey is indeed the target of much of their scorn. For a full critique of Harvey’s use of Marxist dialectics see Noel Castree, “Birds, Mice and Geography: Marxism and Dialectics,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, 2 (1996).

⁷³ Law, “After ANT,” p. 3.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, Trans. by Jay Miskowicz, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, 1 (Spring 1986).

⁷⁵ Hetherington, “In Place of Geometry,” p. 185.

have tried to avoid the exclusive use of the more static term 'place' and instead opted for the more dynamic verb form of the word – 'placing'.

It is helpful here to recall that network-space works in tandem with Euclidean, Cartesian and regional understandings of space. The two are not mutually exclusive topologies. Place itself is the outcome of these two topologies intersecting and sustaining one another. Like the ship floating upon the water, *place* moves, bobs, and shifts upon the ever rearranging networks of heterogeneous materials and actants. This is to say that place/placing is actively sustained upon network-space, and once again place/placing is itself an ordering effect of those networked actants. Euclidean space is also at work here, since places are ultimately reliant upon some measure of stasis within geometrical/geographical space.⁷⁶ For instance, it almost goes without saying that you can always go back to the location of Edinburgh castle, Yosemite Valley, or your favorite café, that is, as long as they are not somehow destroyed. Such would be the case if our mythical boat were to run aground, its network relations would fail and the ship would be dispersed across Euclidean space – thus it is no longer immutable. Therefore, *immutability* belongs most intimately to network-space, while *mobility* and speed belong to geographical or Euclidean space. In sum, to speak of place is to speak of multiple topologies creatively and dynamically intersecting.

Placing and Similitude

Hetherington considers further the necessity of understanding *similitude* as a fundamental concept within our nonmodern concept of placing. This is a point which he has drawn largely from Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' or 'other place.'⁷⁷ Foucault described places that were non-discursive sites or places that were defined by tension or contrast and whose existence established an odd socio-spatial juxtaposition. Heterotopias, such as prisons, madhouses, and even honeymoon suites, were thought to bring together an unlikely amalgam of unusual things and bestow upon them a singular meaning by creating a space that allows the performance of an alternative social ordering. 'Heterotopic relationships unsettle because they are out of place, their juxtaposition to a settled representation makes them appear anomalous and uncertain.' Moreover, as Hetherington highlights, the 'meaning attached to these uncertain sites is one derived from similitude rather than resemblance.'⁷⁸ Like network-space, heterotopias do not exist in the order of things. Instead, they become sites where an alternate ordering is allowed to take form. Today we might think of the Glastonbury Festival

⁷⁶ It is my understanding that this temporary 'stasis' of place/placings which nonmodern geographers sometimes appeal to is not unlike what Harvey has called relative 'permanences', at least as it applies to his own understanding of place. See his *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 294.

⁷⁷ Each of these concepts is most clearly addressed in Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Travistock/Routledge, 1989); and "Of Other Spaces".

⁷⁸ Hetherington, "Identity Formation, Space and Social Centrality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, 4 (1996): p. 38.

site or the many English new age traveler sites of which Hetherington has produced detailed studies as being contemporary forms of heterotopia.

Heterotopias are, however, more than just sites of difference; they are equally sites of otherness. Like the ship floating upon the ocean, places exist in a process of boundary work. They are not established on either side of a boundary, but rather as Hetherington insists, they are constituted through *work* itself. And this is where similitude and otherness really come to the surface in the nonmodern understanding of placing. For what similitude involves is 'the juxtaposition of things not usually found together, or which have no ordered meaning together and the ambiguity that they create in terms of representation. Similitude sets up a heterotopic space.'⁷⁹ Hetherington further suggests that it is this focus on representing similitude that is critical to our understanding of a nonmodern concept of place. This is because 'place is the effect of similitude, a non-representation that is mobilized through the placing of things in complex relation to one another and the agency/power effects that are performed by those arrangements.'⁸⁰ We will have more to say on 'non-representation', a concept Hetherington has borrowed from Thrift, in the next section.

It is here that subjectivity becomes the product of *placing* rather than the always already formed addition to the cold and meaningless materiality of space, which modern understandings of place have eagerly held to. If we are to follow Foucault and Hetherington in thinking of places as the effects of similitude, we are then one step closer to conceiving of place outside of the traditional terms of human subjectivity. Here places are seen to be dynamic movements 'through material placings, through the folding together of spaces and things and the relations of difference established by those folds.'⁸¹ Subjectivity is not the detached and purified entity which stands in abstraction from this process of folding relations together, but rather, it is *the outcome* of this folding. This also suggests that places are never finished products, but rather, they are always lacking and unfinished. Hetherington further suggests that because of this, places are always odd and without structure in themselves. Instead of producing an ordered structure, places, on the contrary, establish a system of differences that requires an order. It is this ordering which the concept seeks to embody. That is to say, *place/placing is this process* of ordering, which works to make sense of the similitude. What is critical in all of this is the realization that the process of ordering/placing is not somehow present in the 'mind in there,' or the 'world out there.' The ordering process is to be understood as being established *within* the actor/actant-network, not by subjects alone, but by the 'labour of division associated with the difference of placing.'⁸²

⁷⁹ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 186.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

It is now clear that the concept of place within actor-network thinking is better understood in its verb-form rather than its noun-form. Place/placing is a dynamic happening from moment to moment that is always unsettled in both network-space and Euclidean space. Thus the term place/placing should always conjure thoughts of relational dynamism and incompleteness rather than sheer permanence or stasis. Moreover, place/placing should not be defined by equal parts of geometric space and human mental projections or social constructions. In fact, places should not be understood as completely fixed upon geometrical space 'but free to move across the boundaries of geometry into some elsewhere which lies beyond the limitations of subjective ways of representing objects and their spatial distribution.'⁸³ Place is not, therefore, something that stands for something else simply because of its stasis in geometric space. Instead, place is now a relational existence of similitude, that is a '*being in the process of being placed in relation to* rather than being there.'⁸⁴ What is by now clear is that the performance of place, or place as process, has become a central idea in the nonmodern concept of place. Witness, for instance, poststructuralist geographer Marcus Doel who has indicated that: 'Were being to be "emplaced" or "contextualized," then it would simply be unbecoming'⁸⁵ – place would, in effect, be rest or stasis. Doel's concept of place centers entirely on the idea that 'place is an event: it is verbal rather than nounal, a becoming rather than a being'.⁸⁶

It is worth noting here the divergence between the views of Hetherington and Doel as compared to those of Law. Recalling Law's well-known example of the Portuguese Man O' War ships extending a network of power and control across vast distances, Hetherington questions his view that networks simply allow one pre-established place (Lisbon) to effect power in another pre-established place (Calicut). Hetherington makes the charge that this would invoke a static view of place rather than the more dynamic understanding which ANT strives to describe. Law argues that the Portuguese were able to control trade and authority in India because they were better at enrolling extended heterogeneous networks to produce that control (agency) at a distance. Yet if we are to stay true to the idea that place is constituted in the process of *placing*, then we will see that Portugal and India are the places that they distinctly are because of the mobile effects of the agency found within the heterogeneous networks between them. It is the labor of folding networks together that establishes the places as themselves. In other words, these places do not pre-exist their actual *placing*, they *are* their placings.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

⁸⁵ Doel, *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 10.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

Placing and Representation

There is another important concept which has populated several of the actor/actant-network based approaches to geographical understandings of place. This concerns the issue of representation and place. In the preceding section we highlighted that places are constituted through the dynamic act of *placing*. That is to say, they arrange and order various heterogeneous networks and actants into systems of similitude and difference. But if places are always in a state of becoming and incompleteness, then what is it that they might be able to represent? Asked differently, what is it that signifies a place? Thrift has made this issue a central component to his largely ANT inspired notion of place/placing. In an attempt to address these questions, Thrift's project seeks to construct an understanding of place utilizing a theoretical style which he calls *non-representational 'theory'*.⁸⁷ This has led him to develop a concept of place that, like Hetherington's, is deeply relational, dynamic and ultimately mobile. What non-representation serves to embody is 'a sense of place in which "nothing signifies" and which is able to "shove off to whatever's next".'⁸⁸ Therefore, in this section we will take a moment to further investigate these issues of (non-)representation and place/placing.

Like most ideas which find their roots in ANT thinking, the question of representation necessarily draws us back into discussions concerning Latour's immutable mobile. We will recall that the idea of the immutable mobile was born out of the attempt to understand how scientific knowledge could travel over long distances. Latour observed the seemingly obvious fact that scientific data of all kinds, or knowledge, was collected, graphed, charted, and otherwise inscribed as immutable mobiles – representations that could travel over distances without deformation. These are knowledges which were once local, but may now travel and be reproduced in a multiplicity of places. Hetherington and Thrift have made the point that if these immutable mobiles are able to do this for scientific knowledge then they should apply equally to other types of knowledge as well: 'in this instance knowledge of space, and what we call place.'⁸⁹

Indeed, places are heterogeneously assembled with the aid of these immutable mobiles, but this has not always been a welcomed or celebrated phenomena. For decades, if not centuries, writers have lamented a general and now global 'loss of place'. We are, if these

⁸⁷ The term 'theory' belongs in inverted commas because the intention for Thrift is to question what is meant by 'theory' as a whole. See Thrift's *Spatial Formations* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), which is largely dedicated to exploring the specifics of this approach.

⁸⁸ Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place," chap. in *Human Geography Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 296.

⁸⁹ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 189.

thinkers are to be believed, in a crisis of place, and closely tied to this is a crisis of identity.⁹⁰ To be certain, many theologians have picked up on this idea of a diminishing sense of place as well.⁹¹ The argument has often centered on the growth of those immutable mobiles which we often class as 'media'. With the advent of printing, books, newspapers, radio, television and most recently the World Wide Web, we now have unprecedented access to distant places and their meanings. This has spawned a vigorous debate concerned with assessing the impact of 'modernization,' 'globalization,' 'homogenization,' and technologically based 'space-time compression'.⁹² Each of these often-discussed villains has shouldered some of the blame for what many have considered our modern condition of 'placelessness' and the subsequent loss of identity – personal, national, etc.. Places and their representations, as the argument goes, are so common and widely circulated that places are becoming too similar. The world is becoming a homogeneous wash of commercially motivated and wholly inaccurate or disingenuous representations of place.

Interestingly, many recent geographical studies have largely rejected this general thesis of modern 'placelessness' due to globally circulating representations. In fact, many geographers have reasserted the importance of place despite our current climate of technologically driven 'space-time compression' and the homogenizing effect of globalization. Geographers Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard in their recent book entitled *People and Place*, have flatly rejected the general thesis that places are now becoming all the same.⁹³ For geographers such as these the concept of a 'non-place' or of a wholesale homogenization of places is out of the question. Indeed places are changing, but to suggest that they are being wiped-out and rendered 'meaningless' is a step too far. After all, people are fundamentally and constitutionally unable to exist in a 'placeless' and meaningless world. Similarly, David Harvey – who coined the term 'space-time compression' – has suggested that our technological breakthroughs have diminished geographical resistance to the flow of people, things, and information. Yet he goes on to make the surprising claim that this 'does not mean that the meaning of place has changed in social life and in certain respects the effect has been to make place more than less important'.⁹⁴ Many of these points are adopted and added upon by Thrift in an interesting chapter titled *A Hyperactive World*. Here he argues that

⁹⁰ As we will see in the next chapter concerning theological adoptions of place-language, discussions of 'placelessness' and the 'loss of place' have unquestionably been the focus of much of the recent investigations into place. See for example, Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*; Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁹¹ We will return to these theological accounts of the 'loss of place thesis' in the next chapter.

⁹² The term 'space-time compression' belongs to David Harvey but it has been picked up on by Gunton who mentions this modern phenomenon in his *The One, the Three and the Many*, p. 77.

⁹³ Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (London/New York: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 66.

⁹⁴ Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 297.

the supporters of the 'loss of place' thesis are enthralled with an unhealthy, and ultimately unoriginal, measure of nostalgia. In fact, Thrift concludes that such predictions of homogenizing doom should be taken with 'a large pinch of déjà vu'.⁹⁵

There is now a growing case to be made for the ultimate inextricability of place and representation. As Hetherington argues, these 'representations assemble and transform the similitude of the materiality of space into the ordered arrangement of a place.'⁹⁶ The immutable mobiles – the representations – make a place knowable at a distance by creating an order to a place. Each media representation, an advertisement, a film, a poem, makes a truth claim about a particular place just as a scientific article might make a truth claim about a plot of forest in Borneo. Moreover, it is through these networked and material representations that we are able to establish the difference between one place and another. Here again it is not the subjective world of memory, meaning, and image alone that assembles a place. But rather, it is through the materially mediated and heterogeneous representations that this difference can be recognized, and subsequently re-organized. This is because place, as Hetherington insists, is about an ordering/similitude which is produced within the 'hum' of multiple heterogeneous networks and associations of human and nonhuman actants.

Yet ordering or making sense of things, as Thrift is so concerned to illustrate, is always relational, practical and based in performance. This is what his brand of 'non-representational theory' strives to make plain. His is an ontology 'which works through things rather than imposes itself upon them from outside or above.'⁹⁷ By using the terms 'non-representation theory,' Thrift is not supposing that the immutable mobile carries no representation – or re-representation – within itself. Instead, what Thrift is highlighting is the realization that humans are unable to extract a representation of a purified non-human world 'because we are slap bang in the middle of it, co-constructing it with numerous human and non-human others'.⁹⁸ Therefore, non-representational theory insists that place is ordered, produced, or practiced through a materially relational encounter with the world rather than consisting of a purified mental extraction or projection from outside of it. Place is created through 'disclosive *skills*' that are performative, embodied, mimetic and contingent. Clearly, this is an approach owing much to the philosophical giants of the last century: Heidegger, Foucault and Wittgenstein.

⁹⁵ Thrift, "A Hyperactive World," in *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World in the Late Twentieth Century*, R.J. Johnston et.al (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 21.

⁹⁶ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 189.

⁹⁷ Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place," p. 302. Thrift is quoting T. Brennan, *History after Lacan*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 86. Thrift's non-representational theory is very much like the 'dwelling perspective' of Heidegger which has recently been re-worked by Tim Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, ch. 10.

⁹⁸ Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place," p. 297.

Another leading thinker in ANT-based geographical theorization is Sarah Whatmore who has helpfully described this process as the ‘representational moment.’ By using these terms, she is indicating that ANT does not posit a reality on the one hand and a representation of that reality on the other. Instead, ‘ANT recognizes chains of translation of varying kinds and lengths which weave sound, vision, gesture and scent through all manner of bodies, elements, instruments and artifacts – so that the distinctions being present and being represented no longer exhausts, or makes sense of, the compass and possibility of social conduct.’⁹⁹ Here Whatmore makes the important observation that the representational moment is far more than simply a visual phenomenon belonging only to the eyes, but rather that it encompasses a more holistic sensual embodiment.

To summarize these points on placing and representation we may draw out a number of important observations. First, nonmodern/ANT thinking in regard to the representation of place is diametrically opposed to traditional models of representation. It rejects these on the grounds that our re-presentations are not purely ‘internal’ phenomena which impress us with some ‘naturally’ present reality. ANT thinkers will instead argue that it is always our *embodied practices* that constitute our sense of the real.¹⁰⁰ As we have just highlighted by way of Whatmore, place representations – or we should by now say *presentations* – incorporate all of the senses and not merely the visual faculty alone.

Secondly, we can say that within an ANT-inspired view of placing, (re)presentations – whether they are in the form of print art, film, music, poetry, literature, etc. – are not to be understood as merely passive descriptions of those places. Instead, they have insisted that representations themselves act upon the world or the specific place which they are (re)presenting. It is for this reason that we may claim that representations are never ontologically innocent. In fact, place itself constitutes what we might call a ‘representational labour of division that generates the subjects, objects, their relations, and the worlds in which these exist.’¹⁰¹ Simply put, both subjects and objects are produced, ordered, practiced, and coordinated through the process (work, labor) of *placing*. This element of ANT-based notions of (re)presentation is clearly implicated in a process which Mol has called an *ontological politics*.¹⁰² Law and Benschop explain that an ‘ontological politics asks how it is that the representational practices that make up worlds—and so the worlds made up in those practices—co-ordinate themselves. How it is that worlds go together, or don’t.’¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Whatmore, "Hybrid Geographies", p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Thrift, *Spatial Formations*, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ John Law and Ruth Benschop, "Resisting Pictures: Representation, Distribution and Ontological Politics," in *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*, Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers/ The Sociological Review, 1997), p. 175.

¹⁰² Although it seems that John Law was the true originator of the term. See Annemarie Mol, "Ontological Politics: A word and some questions," p. 87 n.1.

¹⁰³ Law and Benschop, "Resisting Pictures," p. 175.

Finally, it must be stressed that the (re)presentation of place, be it through media, memory, dream or fantasy, is always much more than a product of the subjective/human world alone. This is because the subjective world 'operates by assembling materials into representations and using those representations to establish the difference between one place and the next.'¹⁰⁴ (Re)presentations, like immutable mobiles, make some kind of truth claim about the place in which they are (re)presenting – they aid in the performative ordering of the place. We should also notice that the (re)presentation of place is itself tied up in the process of *placing*. That is to say that is caught up in the creation of similitude which we reviewed above. These two parts of the placing process are inextricable from one another. Placing necessarily involves a labor of ordering and assembling places into 'knowable and reproducible representations and the location of the representations in relation to others.'¹⁰⁵ It is through materially heterogeneous (re)presentation that places work to produce similitude and otherness, identity and non-identity.

(Re)Placing Subjectivity: Memory, Materiality, and Event

Remember through sounds...remember through smells...remember through colors...remember through *towns* with fear and fascination, of what was here and what's replacing them now.¹⁰⁶

Modest Mouse (Song Lyrics)

We have observed throughout this chapter that we are ill advised to speak of time, space, and actors/actants as static entities given in the established order of the world. We have instead noticed how each of these categories is better understood as a relational processes which is 'verbal' rather than 'nounal', an observation which has compelled us to instead speak of *spacing*, *timing*, *acting*, and now *placing*. These words serve to capture more fully the way in which each of these processes are populated with a multiplicity of heterogeneous quasi-objects/subjects, hybrids, and networks. Moreover, each of these terms serves to highlight the fact that the whole of the collective is relationally implicated in each of these processes. Thus rather than being jealously guarded exclusively for humans (modern place) or nonhumans (modern space), the nonmodern concept of placing takes the whole of the collective into account.¹⁰⁷ This nonmodern concept of placing has now afforded us an extremely useful language for speaking of the dynamic 'commerce' which exists between humans and nonhumans. Furthermore, our nonmodern concept of placing has given us a way

¹⁰⁴ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 189.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ Modest Mouse, "Building Something Out of Nothing," (Up Records, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ The theologically minded reader might ask where God might be found within this account, but that will be the focus of chapter 5.

of conceiving of this geographical dynamic in way that escapes the modern tendency to see place as static and fully 'fixed' by an always human agency/subjectivity.

Although we have done much to upset the 'reign of the human subject' in this nonmodern concept of placing, there remains the difficult question concerning the role of human memory in our experience of what we may call the 'placing event'. Earlier in the chapter we made the important nonmodern observation that human subjectivity is itself a product of the dynamic encounter between human and nonhuman. This is to say that human subjectivity is not what meets a 'cold', passive, and altogether meaningless nonhuman world in the placing event, it is, rather, the *outcome* or *result* of this relational event. But what are we to make of the fact that places/placings such as homes, towns, churches, fields and forests – and all of the human and nonhuman networks which find their dynamism within these placings – can be left behind and, perhaps, returned to at a later time? But more importantly, what are we to make of the fact that multiple placings remain with us in our memories of them? Does the unique quality of human memory – setting aside for the moment the clear possibility that many nonhuman animals share in this capacity – necessarily return us to a heavily humanist discourse in relation to the placing event?

In order to address this concern, we will end this chapter by returning to Steinbeck's place(ing)-narrative which we used to open the discussion in the introductory chapter of this thesis. By returning to a concrete example of what Latour has called an 'event-producing topos', or alternatively, a 'topos-producing event'¹⁰⁸, I believe we may be better able to illustrate a nonmodern or symmetrical account of placing, as well as further delineate the role which human memory may take within this dynamic. What we are now seeking is an account of human memory which is able to avoid adopting the overbearingly 'modern' or 'humanist' discourses which have served to diminish the role of nonhuman materiality in the 'event-producing topos'. Moreover, through the employment of this single example of a placing event – understanding that a single narrative will not necessarily capture the variety of nonmodern argument – we may summarize and further elucidate our nonmodern concepts of spacing, timing, placing, and acting. To be certain, placing is not a term which is easier to grasp than time or space alone. This is because the placing event, as we have seen, actually combines spacing, timing, and acting within the 'event-producing topos'.

We return, then, to Steinbeck's captivating narrative of the Joad family farm and its multiple foldings and networks of human and nonhuman actants. As Steinbeck writes;

They sat and looked at it and burned it into their memories. How'll it be not to know what land's outside the door? How if you wake up in the night and know - *and know* the willow tree's not there? Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't.

¹⁰⁸ Latour, "Trains of Thought," p. 175.

The willow tree is you. The pain on that mattress there – that dreadful pain – that's you.¹⁰⁹

How might we now come to understand the willow tree, Tom Joad, the family farm, and their multiple foldings and networkings in such a way as to capture our new found nonmodern terms? Moreover, who or what is it that is making – *performing* – this place(ing); is it the willow tree, Tom Joad, Steinbeck or all three? And once again, with all of this emphasis on materiality and inhumanity, we will further seek to find out whether there is any 'space' for human memory within this nonmodern account of placing.

Spacing

To begin with, we may now seek to illustrate the way in which we may speak of this narrative in relation to our nonmodern concept of *spacing*. Our first task is to highlight the fact that all of the elements or actants – human and nonhuman alike – are folded into a topology of networked space. Here we may include the willow tree, Tom, dust, sun, and we could even go so far as to add Steinbeck's book into the rather lengthy list of associated actants. To be sure *The Grapes of Wrath* is a fictional narrative, but this hardly matters for our purposes of illustration. Thinking of this space as topological in the first instance will liberate us from the traditional 'tyranny of the geographer' by allowing us to define this space in terms of heterogeneous associations rather than as a simplified and dichotomized space that forced to conform to the polarized categories of either 'social' or 'real'. Therefore, the *spacing* that is being performed through these associations is here defined as topological, heterogeneous, and multiple.

Timing

Yet as we have made clear throughout the chapter, topological spacing always implicates various *timing(s)* as well. But when we speak of both timing and placing – that is, from a human perspective – we must also consider the important dynamic of human memory and its relation to the placing event, as it must be recognized that places are often seen as things which we return to again and again. For instance, we may leave a place for some period of time and upon returning things may have changed materially but our memory of the place will continue to endure through time. It is this type of dynamism between various placings, timings, and human memory which Steinbeck is so adept at illustrating. Therefore, we may now set out to describe the timings and memories (topos-producing events) which this place narrative – the Joad family farm – evokes for its human inhabitants. Witness Steinbeck's character 'Muley':

¹⁰⁹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 101.

I been goin' aroun' the places where stuff happened... there's the place down by the barn where Pa got gored to death by a bull. An' his blood is right in that groun', right now...I put my han' right on the groun' where that blood is still. An' I seen my pa with a hole in his ches', an' I felt him shiver up against me like he done...An' all them things is true, an' they're right in the place they happened...Place where folks live is them folks.¹¹⁰

Admittedly, we are told by Steinbeck that 'Muley' is beginning to lose his sanity at this point, 'he's touched' as they say in the story. But this is an experience, a *topos-producing event*, to which we can all relate. This further illustrates the worry which confronts the Joad family as they are forced to leave behind their beloved farm and willow tree. They worry that all the memories of joy, bitterness, and sorrow will be left as a fading memory in the rearview mirror as they are forced to move westward. They are, in fact, anxious that all that *time will be lost* along with the loss of place. For this farm had been a place/placing, a *home*, where the Joad family could always return to again and again. But now their family's footprints will fade, and tractors will gradually erase the material elements (actants) which populate this particular place – the blood soaked ground and the willow tree which serve to *perform* this specific place(ing) – will ultimately lose their immutable character and the place(ing) will itself take up new spacings and timings and will become part of new networks.

But even if the family farm is plowed-under and made into an industrial farming operation, the place will remain an element of the Joad family identity as it is remembered by each family member throughout their lives. This is a point which is, of course, obvious enough as it has been widely recognized that places and our memory of places are intimately associated with our sense of personal identity and history.¹¹¹ Therefore, we are once again confronted with the extreme difficulty of separating spacing and timing into neat and purified zones. A picture, a smell, a sound, could easily transport Tom back to this placing that is distant in both time and space, but close at hand in his memory of this place(ing).

It is also clear that we only know of placing because we are able to return to the same place over and over. Indeed, places (often) stay the same as we are free to come and go at leisure. As Muley returns to the spot where his father was killed by a bull, the place – and all of its heterogeneous networks, material or otherwise – itself becomes a fold in time, it has actually become a part of time. The material elements of the barn and blood-soaked ground are made as much a part of time as are the days, weeks, and years it may have been since the incident (topos-producing event) actually happened. As Latour points out, it is only by walking away from the place once again that the wanderer may 'conclude that this is a place

¹¹⁰ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 57-58.

¹¹¹ None have made this specific point clearer than Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Although as Hetherington has argued, Bachelard's commentary seldom escapes the humanist subject: "In Place of Geometry", p. 197.

and not only a date.¹¹² Thus we are reminded once more of the immutable mobile – or in this case immutable *immobile* – or rather, an object or artifact that remains relatively immutable in a particular place. We, like Tom Joad, can compare the irreversibility of our aging bodies to the reversibility of the willow tree's size. But here we must once again take special notice of the nonmodern emphasis on the labor or work that is involved in the production of these spacings and timings. For it is by returning to that place – the tree, the blood-soaked ground – that it is worked into space rather than time alone. The event, the place, has been *spaced*.¹¹³ If these nonhuman materials were not immutable to some degree, if they aged at the same tempo as our bodies, we would be unable to measure the reversibility of shape. We would, in fact, be unable to register the coming and going from a place – trees and barns would simply deteriorate at the same rate as our bodies. Therefore, without memory *and material immutability* the world would be a complete non-place of purified, perhaps static, space and time for the human observer.

We must, however, exercise extreme caution on these points concerned with elucidating the role of human memory in the dynamic of placing, as it may appear that we are here arguing that placing is somehow wholly *dependant* upon the *human subject*. To be certain, this is not the suggestion that I am here trying make. While I have clearly made the opposite claim – namely, that human subjectivity *is relationally dependant* on the multiplicity of nonhumans with whom we share our being – I am not here suggesting that the dynamism of placing is in anyway dependant upon human subjects. There have, of course, been a number of human geographers – largely in the ‘modern’ mold we reviewed above – who have strongly made this claim. Take for instance the words of geographer David Sack who in his widely read book, *Homo Geographicus*, has developed a rather complex ‘geographical framework’ of which place is a major component. Concerning his concept of ‘place’ Sack clearly argues that ‘[t]he effects and even the existence of place (but not space) rely on human agency or the self’.¹¹⁴

There are, I believe, two things worth noting in regard to Sack's claim. First, we will notice here the clear vestiges of the modern dichotomy between space and place we reviewed earlier in the chapter. Take for instance Sack's insistence that *place* is an impossibility without the participation of a distinctly human subject, whereas *space* is still considered to be the ‘cold’ and brute materiality which populates the Euclidean dimensions. Secondly, by insisting that place is dependant upon human subjects, Sack along with the many other ‘modern’ geographers who hold equally to this dualistic vision, must then address the

¹¹² Latour, "Trains of Thought," p. 7.

¹¹³ Adopting a rather interesting term, Marcus Doel has called this process ‘*splacing*’. See his *Poststructuralist Geographies*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Robert David Sack, *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 30.

question of whether or not 'place' can be said to exist where there is no human subject present. Aware of this objection, Sack is compelled to offer what I take to be a thoroughly 'modern' distinction between what he calls 'primary' and 'secondary' places. 'Primary places', Sack explains, 'involve human actions and intentions and have the capacity to change things.' These 'primary places' are 'more artifactual or culturally constructed than secondary place' and are thus 'virtually ubiquitous in human experience'. 'Secondary places' are those few remaining corners of the globe which – if any such region may be truly said to exist – have not yet felt the presence or impact of humans. As might be expected, Sack's main example of a secondary place is the thoroughly modern notion of 'wilderness'. 'Secondary places', as Sack argues, 'simply exist, but if they become a part of our culture, they soon will most likely become primary by acquiring meaning and social rules.'¹¹⁵ Sack's dualistic distinction between primary and secondary place is closely married to his related concepts of 'first' and 'second' nature. 'First' nature most closely approximates the wilderness-like 'secondary place' as it has to do with a 'nature' that is not yet 'infiltrated by additional sets of human elements'. But since 'place contains social relations and meaning. Place transforms nature into a "second" nature, and subjects it to the structure and dynamics of place... Somewhere along the continuum the meaning of nature is altered as it becomes a part of place. Place turns it into a "second" nature.'¹¹⁶

A nonmodern account of placing avoids having to make this distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' place, as well as 'first' and 'second' nature, by refusing to marry the concept of placing to a modern humanistic, and ultimately dualistic, discourse such as that of David Sack. This return to a humanist-dominated discourse can be avoided by holding to two important nonmodern precepts, each of which falls short of denying the human capacity for place memory. These include the nonmodern commitment to a symmetrical epistemology and ontology as well as a symmetrical account of nonhuman actancy. What is needed is a symmetrical account which begins in the 'middle kingdom' and not with the dichotomized poles of 'warm' human subjects encountering 'cold' nonhuman objects. Thus if we are to affirm a nonmodern and symmetrical account of placing that resists the dominance of a humanistic discourse, yet is still capable of recognizing the (relatively) unique role which human memory will often play in this process, we must return to the issue of nonhuman actancy.

Acting

Returning again to Steinbeck's narrative of a topos-producing event, we may now address more closely the role which nonhuman materials play within this dynamic. 'In this

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 180.

too we have to consider not just the thinking, remembering subject but a heterogeneous materiality that is the fabric of such a memory.¹¹⁷ Thus we must rejoin Hetherington by posing an important question concerning a nonmodern understanding of this place-memory relationship. That is: ‘To what extent, therefore, can this be seen as an effect of materials?’¹¹⁸ A question closely paralleling this would ask ‘who are the actants in this placing?’

Certainly, we would not say that the willow tree, the barn, or the blood-soaked ground are capable of remembering their genesis or their history through metrical time. But what we must insist upon is the understanding that the placing event would be unthinkable, indeed impossible, without these heterogeneous materials exercising their own form of ‘actancy’. We will once again elaborate these points by way of Muley’s barn and blood-soaked ground. The barn was probably built decades ago, and we know that his father tragically died in this very spot when Muley was just a boy. But who or what has provided the labor of the placing event – who or what are the actants in this placing? Or posed differently, what is it that makes this a ‘topos-producing event’ for Muley? According to Latour the answer is rather simple. Place is created through ‘the [connection] of actions taking place in different sites and times by various actants’ – both human and nonhuman.¹¹⁹ The wood for the barn probably came from another state, since Oklahoma had few trees. The planks were likely cut in an Eastern sawmill by immigrant workers using coal-fired machines. The nails may have been crafted in a neighboring town with steel from Pennsylvania. All of these materials ‘reach out’ and connect in the folds of the spacings and timings they each serve to network and mediate. Moreover, they encompass and enclose the labor of numerous actants who are now distant in metrical time and space, but close at hand in network space-time. Or as Hetherington has put the matter, ‘the construction of place is impossible to conceive without taking into account the translating effects of the material actants involved.’¹²⁰ Thus while the actual event of the tragic death of Muley’s father has ‘produced the topos’, it is the materiality of this placing and the immutability of these nonhumans that has prompted a kind of ‘return’ to the space-time place-event. In order to avoid a return to a humanist-dominated discourse of place we must then remember the ‘importance of the materiality of place in the process of remembering... Materials are the texture of our memories and it is through *their effects* that places come to be.’¹²¹ In this nonmodern scenario of place-memory we lose the distinctly human agency upon which modern notions of place depend. Furthermore, what this nonmodern vision of an ‘event-producing topos’ embodies is the universally held notion – whether we think it superstitious, silly, or profound – that places, things, materials mediate

¹¹⁷ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 193.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Latour, "Trains of Thought," p. 8.

¹²⁰ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry", p. 194.

¹²¹ Ibid., 197. (emphasis added)

and make present others who may be distant or even deceased. From this seemingly universal realization, Thrift has spoken of places and things as carrying a 'haunting' quality.¹²²

Finally, we may simply reiterate the importance of three things in this placing-event dynamic; material immutability, the mutability of the human body, and subsequent returning. As Latour has illustrated, placings such as Muley's become a relational matrix of networks dispersed in time, space and action that are maintained through returning. For it is by coming back to a site that an event-producing topos is finally instituted. The barn and blood-soaked ground maintains its ordering, it 'occupies space, creates a landscape...not because it is a spot "in" space, but because it is itself the event connecting interactions on a large spread of space-time-actants. Here history was locally made and traditions continuously kept it in place. Thus there is a place.'¹²³ Stemming from this point is a near total negation of 'internal', and thoroughly human, mental qualities. The event of placing is heterogeneous in character, thereby involving the whole spectrum of nonmodern actants, both human and nonhuman. All of these entities are here performing and carrying out the work of the space-time event of placing. This is why we will never 'encounter time and space, but a multiplicity of interactions with actants having their own timing, spacing, goals, means and ends.'¹²⁴ Or as Hetherington summarizes; 'There is human agency but there are other forms of agency too, without which places cannot be.'¹²⁵

Conclusion

Unlike the modern vision of space, time and place, nonmodern understandings seek to transgress and bypass the traditional dichotomization of subject and object, or lived and real. Within the distinctly nonmodern approach each of these terms has been reformulated to incorporate a 'fifth dimension' of *process, performance, work, or labor*. Therefore, we now speak of space, time and place in their verb form: spacing, timing and placing. Yet these are terms which are rendered meaningless without considering an extremely important fourth term – *acting*. That is, acting which is not the sole possession of the human world, but is rather extended to the whole of the collective. This is what the nonmodern theorists have termed *actancy*. These shifts have led us to further examine the labor involved in the acts of spacing, timing, placing. We have concluded that in the nonmodern framework, places are socio-materially constituted through a process of ordering and similitude. The act of placing will then incorporate three processes. First, placing is constituted or performed by the folding of heterogeneous materials into a network of actants. Secondly, it is marked by a process of

¹²² See especially his article "Afterwords", where he speaks to the 'haunting' qualities of his recently deceased father's personal effects.

¹²³ Latour, "Trains of Thought," p. 180.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

¹²⁵ Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry," p. 193.

ordering – placing – these heterogeneous networks so that ‘they can be known and represented through immutable mobiles’.¹²⁶ Finally, it is through returning to places remembered that they are firmly established in both space and time, drawing the once dichotomized entities into something approaching a peaceful communion. It is then, the work between memory and materiality that orders and *places* the networks of quasi-subjects and quasi-objects. In the final estimation, we now have the beginnings of a workable concept of place/placing which is general enough – in the sense that we are not talking about specific places – to intimately account for our multifaceted and deeply relational commerce with the world. Worth stressing is the point that our account of placing emphasizes that the commerce between humans and nonhumans is always much more than one-way in character. Within a nonmodern concept of placing, materials, artifacts, techniques, in fact, all manner of nonhuman is understood to *actively* participate in the event of placing. Our very being in the world, is bound up with a host of others who are always much more than merely human. In the final chapter we turn our attention towards applying a nonmodern concept of placing to a trinitarian framework in the interest of healing some of the geographical blindspots which we have identified in Gunton’s theology of creation and culture

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

Chapter 5

Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Placing

Finding the intellectual conditions for truth-telling about God's presence in our interweaving will give us a means of combating the illegitimate division of human thoughts, of human beings and cultures, as well as the illegitimate separation of human beings from nature, by discovering the way in which God is present through the interweaving of human beings, cultures and nature.¹

- Daniel W. Hardy

Introduction

In the preceding chapters we have traced Gunton and Latour's respective accounts of our Western culture's modern or late-modern condition. We have also described their respective positive programs for mitigating the Enlightenment's cultural fallout which each of our interlocutors has identified as a movement towards greater cultural fragmentation, alienation, and homogenization. In chapter 3 we used the concepts of *otherness*, *mediation* and *unity*, to elucidate the main strengths and weaknesses of each approach, trinitarian and nonmodern respectively. In the final analysis it was concluded that Latour's nonmodern project struggles to maintain otherness in both the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' trajectories. On this point we noted that Latour's nonmodern theological proposals amounted to little more than the polar opposite of modernity's 'crossed-out' God of the margins. By rejecting the distant 'creator God' of the modern Constitution, Latour has offered only a generalized 'God of below' approach which appears to be little more than an otherness-denying pantheism. In the same vein we found that Latour's account of unity is to be found in the purely immanent political movement towards the piece by piece 'composition' of a 'common world'. We further concluded that it was Latour's great strength to offer a detailed account of how we may understand human and nonhuman entities to be intimately bound up and mutually constituted through a truly symmetrical and networked account of actancy. Yet once again, it was argued that Latour's nonmodern vision lacked an adequate account of how otherness might be maintained amongst these 'horizontal' relations. We further concluded that Latour's 'horizontal' account ultimately threatened to submerge humans and nonhumans into a kind of ontological indistinguishability. In Gunton's trinitarian theology of creation and culture, we found his great strength to be Latour's weakness. The maintenance of otherness amongst beings and realms is for Gunton, an absolute priority. We have also identified in Gunton's project a much deeper appreciation for the Enlightenment's theological pedigree than Latour's diagnosis of the modern Constitution was able to account for. To be certain, Gunton

¹ Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, p. 70.

– through his trinitarian vision of creation and culture – has provided a far superior account of how we may conceive of God’s differentiation from the world, whilst still maintaining an intimate account of his continued relation to creation as it is mediated through his ‘two hands’. In both the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ trajectories, Gunton’s trinitarian account deeply stresses the otherness of beings and realms. However, we have also argued that Gunton’s account of ‘horizontal’ otherness appears to be stressed to a point where, despite his stated intentions, he is only able to offer the most general account of human and nonhuman relationality. In the final estimation, Gunton has very little to say concerning the details of human and nonhuman relationality. We attributed this ‘geographical blindspot’ to Gunton’s refusal to identify the terms *sociality*, *agency*, *spirit*, and *personhood* with anything other than what he has strictly defined as the *personal realm*.

Our task in the fifth and final chapter of this thesis is to now bring these concerns together into what I am calling a trinitarian theology of *placing*. In chapter 4 we reviewed the truly unique concept of placing that is now coming out of ANT or nonmodern inspired reformulations of the geographical concept of place. It was also in chapter 4 that we began to formulate a detailed account of how we may begin to register and understand the deep relationality that exists between humans and their nonhuman, yet socialized, partners. But most importantly, the nonmodern understanding of placing does not shroud the important contributions which nonhumans add to the dynamic and relational *becoming* which a concept of placing seeks to capture. In other words, our nonmodern concept of placing clearly preserves a role for nonhuman actancy. Hence, our overall purpose in this chapter is to elucidate how a theological and trinitarian appropriation of the concept of placing may help us to navigate the pitfalls attendant to both Latour’s nonmodernism and Gunton’s trinitarian theology. This will necessarily involve something of a divergence from the great majority of the theologies of place that have recently begun to populate the theological literature. Thus, we will begin with a review of the shape of recent theological engagement with the geographical concept of place. We will then move to consider a number of important but lingering issues concerning a trinitarian (and largely orthodox) theology’s compatibility with the ‘nature as social’ thesis and the recognition of nonhuman sociality and actancy. We then move on to outline what a specifically trinitarian theology of placing might entail.

I. Recent Theologies of Place

The geographical concept of place has recently enjoyed a rather wide-ranging adoption into the broad spectrum of theological study. Of the several recent theological studies which have sought to incorporate a concept of place within a distinctly Christian framework, the work of Phillip Sheldrake and John Inge stand out for being the more

substantial of the group.² Although each of these studies has been published in the new millennium, there have been a few earlier theological engagements with the concept of place, or a ‘sense of place’, which I understand to be paradigmatic of the overall direction of the discussion thus far. This rather brief discussion is certainly not intended to be an exhaustive overview of the interdisciplinary exchange up to this point. Here my intention is to merely highlight the ways in which I see my own proposals in this chapter to be a constructive and unique addition to the emerging theo-geographical conversation.

The Loss of Place Thesis

The overriding concern common to nearly all of the recent theological interactions with the concept of place is to be found in their combined focus on what they considered to be the modern erosion of a unique ‘sense of place’. This widespread concern that the particularities of place(s) are being eroded on a global scale – or that place has simply become uninteresting to modern Westerners – has been eagerly adopted by a litany of Christian theologians and writers. In fact, there is little doubt that this ‘loss of place thesis’ has been the primary point of contact between the place-literature and Christian thought up until this point. In one of the earliest formulations of this view by a Christian scholar, Walter Bruggemann’s widely celebrated book *The Land*, began with these words:

The sense of being lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary culture. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place, is a deep and moving pursuit. Loss of place and yearning for place are dominant images. They may be understood in terms of sociological displacement, as Americans have become a “nation of strangers,” highly mobile and rootless, as our entire social fabric becomes an artifact designed for obsolescence...³

Bruggemann then sets out to illustrate that a ‘sense of place’ is indeed an important aspect of faith. Moreover, he applies this idea to Old Testament studies by way of emphasizing that the ‘[I]and is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith.’⁴ Bruggemann does not, however, draw very heavily upon the work of human or cultural geographers for this study, and therefore this work does not represent a major engagement with the place-literature.

In what was another early effort to appropriate this type of place-language for an expressly theological purpose, Oliver O’Donovan set about to develop a Christian response to what he identified as our Western culture’s fading ‘sense of place’. In a paper appropriately titled *The Loss of a Sense of Place*, O’Donovan identifies three major theological and philosophical contributing factors to this overall movement towards the homogenization of

² Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (London: SCM Press, 2001); John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003);

³ Walter Bruggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978/2002), p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

space/place. First, he identifies Western philosophy's unwillingness to identify 'spirit', either human or divine, with spatio-temporal constraint. He further explains that 'the spiritual realm', after Plotinus, 'is indivisible: it is *wholly* present wherever it is present. It is not *somewhere*, but it is *everywhere*; and that not being present *in space*, but by space being present *in it*.'⁵ Thus it has come to pass that 'spirit', 'Mind', and 'soul' were understood to be without spatial extension, thereby initiating a cascade effect which served to diminish the importance of embodiment and local relations. Secondly, he highlights the theological concern of Christianity, as a universal belief, to avoid being bound to particular holy places. We may then see these first two points come into a kind of convergence in Western Christianity. Not only has spirit, Mind and soul been made 'spaceless', but so to has the Christian West become 'placeless' as it promotes a vision of universal encounter with the divine. The final contributing factor has to do with our Western capitalist notions of land as economic resource which has resulted in a severing of community ties with their local place. Here it is thought that as land became a commodity in the West, along with it was lost a particular commitment to any single place on the map.

Following O'Donovan we find the loss of place thesis clearly expressed in Geoffrey Lilburne's theological engagement with the concept of place in his *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land*. For Lilburne, a 'sense of place' develops into three distinct yet related concerns. First, like Bruggemann and O'Donovan before him, Lilburne finds our modern culture to be moving towards placelessness: 'In the transition to our mobile, urban life style, we have moved away from a sense of place...we have sought the freedom of space at the expense of the places of roots, commitment, and community.'⁶ Drawing on this loss of place thesis, Lilburne moves to consider the idea that what is lacking in our modern culture is a sense of place as *sacred space*. He argues that 'the recovery of a sense of place may be the means whereby the functions of sacred space can be regained in our secular culture.'⁷ We will again see this connection between the loss of place thesis, and a counter movement towards what we might call a re-sacralization of place, expressed in the later projects of Sheldrake and Inge. The third concern of Lilburne is, however, unique to his project alone. Here he uses the loss of a sense of place thesis to argue that the 'Christification of holy space' – the title to chapter five of his book – may be employed in an effort to heal our global environmental crisis. More than any of the other authors we will review, Lilburne will deeply tie a sense of

⁵ Oliver O'Donovan, "The Loss of a Sense of Place," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 55 (1989), p. 43. This paper was originally presented as the Church of Ireland lecture at Queen's University, Belfast, in 1986. I would also like to thank Dr. David Livingstone for making me aware of this article.

⁶ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

place or placelessness to our environmental consciousness.⁸ ‘It is something of this quality of a life “in place”’, Lilburne explains, ‘that we see at the root of the solution to our environmental crisis and that we seek to recover for contemporary consciousness.’⁹

Phillip Sheldrake’s *Spaces for the Sacred* may also be located under the ‘loss of place’ category. He begins his study by lightly detailing what he calls the Western crisis of place, as he finds it clearly expressed in our culture’s rootlessness. Moreover, Sheldrake identifies our crisis of place as being particularly ‘social’ in character. We are a culture, he writes, where ‘mobility is now understood to be a freedom bought by money and education. Remaining in the same place has come to symbolize a lack of choice, an entrapment, which is the lot of the poor, the elderly and people with handicaps.’¹⁰ He goes on to highlight the equally commonly held belief that our modern information technologies have added to our growing sense of placelessness. ‘Rather than a “global village” with its strong communitarian imagery and locality, media and information technology are just as likely to create communities with no sense of place.’¹¹

John Inge’s addition to the theological engagement with the place-literature represents what is perhaps the most sustained attempt yet published. Drawing heavily on Edward Casey’s two lengthy volumes on the philosophical history of the concept of place,¹² the great bulk of Inge’s work takes up the loss of place thesis as its primary concern. In fact, he opens his study with these words: ‘This book argues that place is very much more significant than is generally recognized.’¹³ Continuing in this vein, Inge observes that ‘there has been what might be termed a “loss of place” in human experience for very many people in the recent past.’¹⁴ In order to counter act this loss of place, Inge turns to the Old Testament scriptures in order to illustrate that particular places – or what he considers to be the concept of place as a whole – is a critical component to understanding the Old Testament narrative. In what is perhaps the overriding contribution which Inge is attempting to add to the Christian understanding of place, he proposes that we adopt a ‘relational view of place’. Although the terminology here used by Inge to describe place as ‘relational’ may initially sound very much like the nonmodern view of placing we reviewed in the last chapter, the differences between the two types of relationality are, in fact, quite vast. For Inge, a relational view of place is intended to embody the idea that ‘there is a threefold relationship between God, his people,

⁸ Theologian Steven Bouma-Prediger has recently made similar connections between a sense of place and a deepened environmental consciousness in chapter 1 of his book *For the Beauty of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁹ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place*, p. 97.

¹⁰ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² Casey, *Getting Back Into Place* and *The Fate of Place*

¹³ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. IX.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

and place.¹⁵ The relationality which Inge seeks to encompass in this ‘relational view of place’ has much less to do with human/nonhuman relations, but more to do with God’s practice of revealing himself or becoming particularly present in specific places. Thus, Inge argues that it is due to the universalizing currents of modernity that the particular places where we once experienced God have come to lose their overall importance amongst modern Western culture.

There is, then, a rather stark contrast between the ‘relational view of place’ which Inge has proposed and what we have reviewed as a nonmodern understanding of placing. In the final estimation ‘relational’ is, for Inge, a term which applies to place only in the sense that God relates to humans through the mediation of particular places. This leads into Inge’s second primary proposal for combating our modern culture’s loss of a ‘sense of place’. Here he argues for a ‘sacramental’ concept of place which will allow us to speak of places as ‘the seat of relations’, not between humans and the nonhuman creation, but ‘between God and world’.¹⁶ Therefore, I find Inge’s contribution to the place conversation to be far too concerned with what we have called ‘vertical’ relations to specific places – churches, shrines, pilgrimage routes – and not at all concerned with speaking to the ‘horizontal’ relations with which this thesis is primarily concerned. In Inge’s study the only interesting questions concerning place have centrally to do with seeking out where we may truthfully speak of God’s presence becoming manifest to his people. In fact, Inge criticizes the work of Geoffery Lilburne for suggesting that we might consider more than just human activity as the ‘qualifying’ event which establishes space as place.¹⁷ Once again, it appears that Inge is working with a very narrow concept of place where the only actors of any real interest are God and humans – a wholly ‘modern’ vision indeed.

It is perhaps by now clear that I have found these studies which adopt the ‘loss of place thesis’ as their starting point to have, in several important respects, stunted the theological conversation with the geographic concept of place. As we have already seen, geographers of a more nonmodern mind-set argue that these proclamations of the modern ‘loss of place’ are really nothing new and may well ‘have reached their historical sell-by date’, to use Thrift’s telling phrase.¹⁸ Moreover, it often appears that these worries of growing placelessness and homogenization are marked by a sometimes unhealthy measure of nostalgia. Although there is certainly something of importance to be found within the loss of place thesis there are at least three important counterpoints to be made.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁸ Thrift, "A Hyperactive World," p. 22.

The first point is clearly anecdotal, but I have now taught an undergraduate university course on the geographical concept of place for more than three years and I am consistently surprised to witness my students' reactions, which are often quite angry, to this loss of place thesis. Many of these students grew up in what could easily be classified as 'cookie-cutter' suburban sprawl which is often singled out in the 'loss of place' literature for being a paradigmatic example of this modern homogenization of place. Yet, many people who grew up in these places insist that they are anything but 'placeless' (in the modern understanding), as even a MacDonald's or a cement storm drain can become a deeply meaningful 'event producing topos' – to use Latour's terminology.¹⁹ Therefore, I do not entirely share in this anxious sense of a looming or continuing loss of place. There remains, even in the United States – considered by many to be the epitome of modernization and homogenization – a diverse spectrum of human experience, culture, landscape, accents, political philosophies, culinary traditions, and a multiplicity of 'senses of place'. It may also be that individual understandings of the issue are largely generational in nature.²⁰ But what is all together certain is that our varying 'senses of place' or 'placelessness' will differ greatly amongst cultures at various levels of socio-economic or cultural shift. But to push the diversity of place language into the either/or conversation of the loss of place thesis, will ultimately serve only to diminish the concept's wonderfully diverse utility to a Christian theology.

Secondly, by speaking of the concept of place in the language of a 'sense of place' we risk turning the entirety of the concept's utility into a purely quantitative and subjective category. Either you have a 'strong sense of place' or you have 'no sense of place'. In this formulation, emplacement is not only an exclusively *human* category but also a category set on a sliding scale of *quantity*. What this tends to suggest, as we have seen geographers Hubbard and Holloway argue in the last chapter, is that humans could actually exist in a

¹⁹ For my course titled *People, Place and Nature*, I took to showing a recent documentary on the socio-historical development of skateboarding in the Southern Californian suburb of Venice Beach. The documentary *Dog Town and Z-Boys*, traces a small group of misfit teens who were growing up amongst the decaying dregs of modern architecture and city planning in 1970's Venice Beach. The film's makers, almost unwittingly, slowly reveal how a group of 'down and out' kids was ultimately able to develop a deep 'sense of place' and belonging even amongst the rotting decay of urban planning gone terribly awry. To use the nonmodern language of ANT-inspired geographers, this group of kids learned to 'perform' this seemingly 'non-place' into a rich landscape of movement and beauty through the art of skateboarding. They in fact 'performed' their concrete environment in such a way that it became, for them, a sea of concrete waves which were no less meaningful (or soulfully felt) than the real ocean waves just a block away. Human geographer Ian Borden has recorded many of these similar observations in his book *Skateboarding and the City: Architecture and the Body* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001).

²⁰ This was one of the many conclusions arrived at by the Calvin College Christian Scholar's Seminar group "Christian Environmentalism with/out Boundaries", a seminar of which I was a participant in the summer of 2003. After three weeks of lively debate amongst Christian theologians, geographers, and ecologists, many of us concluded that there tends to be a generational gap between those who fear a steady loss of place (the older generations) and those who do not share in this anxiety (largely the younger generations). In fact, many of the younger scholars in attendance felt strongly that a degree of 'placelessness' was an important element to the development of an individual's ethical consciousness.

'placeless' world. But certainly this is not the case, as we tend to act upon our placings just as they act upon us, no matter where we are or how strongly we feel attached to a particular place. We are *placed* simply by virtue of our being embodied entities in the midst of a material existence with others – human, nonhuman, and divine.

Thirdly, I have grown rather allergic to the theological adoption of this loss of place thesis simply because it serves to cement into our minds a singular understanding of how the concept of place/placing may be employed. For instance, the projects of Lilburne, Sheldrake and Inge begin with the general idea that a 'sense of place' is being lost in our culture, thus each of these projects moves into a program which may be described as a general push towards the re-sacralization or re-enchantment of place. In fact, a large portion of each of these author's books is dedicated to questioning how we may speak of God's presence in various yet specific places, with particular attention paid to the universal and particular outworkings of such a concern. Here the main points of inquiry are expressed as such; Are we justified in speaking of a ubiquitous presence? And may we understand God to be more potently present in particular places at particular times rather than others? What is the cause of this presence? And is God present in the material place or in the people gathered in the place? In sum, these studies find the re-sacralization or re-enchantment of place to be the only in-road for a theology of place. Whilst this project may be noble in its own right, I believe it deeply limits our understanding of place, and more importantly, it does not do justice to the wider body of geographical literature.

All of the major theological engagements with the geographical concept of place which we have reviewed thus far have begun with what I have called the 'loss of place thesis'. Moreover, the majority of these projects – Lilburne's and Sheldrake's may be exceptions, in a very limited sense – has moved in a direction where place is portrayed as a category most appropriately applied to humans and God, whereas the material world's role is largely secondary, as it fades into a kind of scenery upon which human categories may be painted. Even the term itself, a '*sense of place*', carries idealizing and ephemeral undertones which do not give credit to material or nonhuman participation in the dynamism of placing. Thus, by concentrating on the loss of place thesis as its main entry into the place literature, these recent theologies of place have, on the whole, remained well within the modern mode we outlined in chapter 4. However, I do not wish to overstate the case, as we will see there are some indications that this is true generally rather than exclusively. We may further elucidate the point by briefly looking more closely at some of these author's basic definitions of space and place.

Defining Space and Place in the Theo-Geographical Literature

We may first look to O'Donovan, who after lamenting our Western culture's lack of relationship with specific places goes on to offer his definition of what constitutes the difference between space and place. It is my sense that he has remained clearly within what we have called the 'modern' understanding of space and place when he writes:

"Place" differs from "space", in that space is prior to culture or inhabitation, whereas place is the way we come to experience space when we have made our home in it. A "place", therefore, is the fruit of civilization, an area of space that has been distinguished from other areas by the inhabitation of a community...To think of a place is at once to think of a natural space on the one hand and of the community that is defined in relation to it in the other...Human existence evokes place out of space by virtue of the distinctive combination of mobility and rootedness which characterises our species.²¹

The overriding point to be made here is that place is, for O'Donovan, a phenomenon almost wholly attributed to human intentionality. 'Places' are full of cultural or communal meaning, whereas 'space' is that which exists where human communities have not yet stored up a cultural narrative. Moreover, it is an always human agency which serves to evoke 'place out of space'. In what appears to be true modern style, place is merely space that has been 'filled up' with warm layers of human meaning. In part two of the paper O'Donovan draws on the Good Samaritan parable to continue his largely humanist understanding of place. Here he correlates place to a space where inter-human encounters of 'neighborliness' are found.

Where the Samaritan meets the Jew, a once non-place in a sea of undifferentiated space, there place is created. All we need to point out in this place-making scenario is that for O'Donovan the actors involved are clearly human and exclusively so.

Although he remains deeply within a discourse limited to the 'sense of place' or 'loss of place' trajectory, Lilburne has initiated within theology the beginnings of what we may identify as a nonmodern understanding of place. For instance, he will argue that 'a sense of place is as much a function of the nature of the places themselves as it is of human activity.'²² The only problem is that he offers very little to support the statement with any detailed account of nonhuman participation in place making. Moreover, he appears to blend Christian theology with Aboriginal spirituality without giving much of any explanation as to how the two might be compatible. It is, however, a commendable first step towards bringing theological engagement with the concept of place out of a purely humanist discourse.

In the case of Sheldrake, one is rather hard-pressed to locate a consistent or well defined definition of either space or place. It then appears that he has done more to simply elucidate the troublesome nature of the terms by drawing on several contrasting views without ever suggesting a specific direction out of the confusion. But we may identify a few clarifying remarks within his work. To begin with, Sheldrake defines place as such: 'The concept of

²¹ O'Donovan, "The Loss of a Sense of Place", p. 46-47.

²² Lilburne, *A Sense of Place*, p. 28.

place refers not simply to geographical location but to a dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. Place is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious.²³ Judging solely from this definition it would appear that Sheldrake does indeed tend to lean towards a rather ‘modern’ notion of place and space. I base this claim on the fact that here Sheldrake does not seem to be challenging the modern notions of nature ‘out there’ and human narrative or subjectivity ‘in there’. Although the appeal to dialectics is initially forgivable, Sheldrake will go on to suppose place to be more clearly a product of social construction. Later he writes that ‘[p]hysical places are vital sources of metaphors for our social constructions of reality.’²⁴

In what appears to be a complete turnaround from these earlier definitions, Sheldrake later moves to consider a definition of place that is much closer to the nonmodern understanding. For instance, he will explain that ‘[a]lthough place is a human construct, it is equally vital not to lose sight of the fact that natural features are a part of the interrelationships that go to make up place.’ Then in a comment that is even more deserving of celebration, Sheldrake states that the ‘physical landscape is a partner, and an active rather than purely passive partner, in the conversation that creates the nature of a place.’²⁵ While the allusions to nonhuman agency are encouraging, what is lacking in his work is the same thing we found lacking in Lilburne’s, that is, a thorough account of the details involved in this mutual participation (human and nonhuman) in the dynamic of place-making. In fact, through the very next pages following this revelation, Sheldrake appears to fall back into a human dominated discourse as he explains the relationship of memory to place. Although memory plays a large part in the nonmodern concept of placing, Sheldrake’s account appears to fall back into the distinctly modern understanding of a human subjectivity that ‘projects’ and paints the nonhuman materiality of a place with warm layers of human semiotic ‘text’.²⁶ The agency involved in what we are now calling *placing* returns, for Sheldrake, to the purely human sphere. In the final estimation, however, Sheldrake offers surprisingly little help in sorting out what the concept of place actually entails.

John Inge’s understanding of place adds very little to what O’Donovan observed more than thirteen years earlier. He begins his book by offering his basic definitions of the two categories of space and place. Here he explains that

“space” is more abstract than “place”. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...What is undifferentiated space becomes for us significant place by virtue of our familiarity with it. The two terms might be thought of as tending towards opposite ends of the spectrum which

²³ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

has the local at one end and the infinite at the other. Spaces are what are filled with places.²⁷

We find in this very little, if any, deviation from what we have called the ‘modern’ understandings of space and place. Once again, place is like a container to be filled with human significance alone. Moreover, as we have already highlighted, Inge’s program is marked almost exclusively by an effort to understand God’s relationship to humans in specific places – a re-sacralization or re-enchantment of place. In the final analysis, there is in Inge’s work, little of any attempt to voice the relationality between humans and nonhumans which a nonmodern understanding of placing seeks to embody as a matter of priority.

Shortcomings of the Recent Theologies of Place

We may now ask whether or not any of these theological appropriations of the geographical concept of place have brought us any closer to determining, with any measure of detail, how we as human creatures are ‘internally related to the world’ as Gunton was so concerned, but ultimately unable, to account for. It is my view that these theo-geographical concepts of place have done very little in this regard and I will propose five central reasons for this overall failure. The first two have already been made rather explicit. First, by focusing on the loss of place thesis as their starting point, we have seen these theological appropriations of place take a very narrow view of how the concept may be employed to enlighten theological concepts and concerns.

Secondly, we have seen that these recent theologies of place have done very little to challenge the modern notions of space and place which we reviewed in chapter 4. For nearly all of these studies, place is little more than space invested with *unidirectional* human significance, meaning, and agency. This strongly suggests that these theologies of place have employed what Tim Ingold has dubbed the ‘building perspective’.²⁸ The ‘building perspective’ is very similar to the modern understanding of place which we have already reviewed. Moreover, nonmodern geographers such as Thrift, have eagerly embraced Ingold’s description of the ‘building perspective’ as a useful illustration of what they are trying to get away from in their own geographical theories. Thrift has summarized Ingold’s characterization of the modern ‘building perspective’ quite succinctly.

This is the view that human beings are engaged in building discursive worlds by actively constructing webs of significance which are laid out over a physical substrate. In other words, human beings are located in a terrain which appears as a set of phenomena to which representations must be affixed prior to any attempt at engagement...in the building perspective, space and time are neutral grids, or perhaps containers, over which and in which meaning is ‘placed’.²⁹

²⁷ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 1-2.

²⁸ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, ch. 10.

²⁹ Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place", p. 301.

What this distinctly modern view of place (the ‘building perspective’) serves to accomplish is the complete obfuscation of the relationality which populates the ‘middle kingdom’ which Latour has described. In other words, it simply further dichotomizes nature and culture. This leads us directly into my final three points.

The third point of contention we may lodge against these recent theological appropriations of place-language, is the critical realization that these studies are actually speaking more to the geographical concept of ‘*locale*’ or ‘*location*’ than they are to a truly geographical concept of ‘*place*’. The confusion or conflation of ‘place’ and ‘locale’ is, as Holt-Jenson has recently claimed, strikingly common amongst many geographers, but more so amongst many social theorists, such as Anthony Giddens, who have been concerned to incorporate elements of spatiality into their sociological theories.³⁰ The substitution of the term ‘place’ for what more closely approximates ‘locale’ is, perhaps, most clearly expressed in Inge’s effort to theologically appropriate geographical language. As we have seen, Inge’s project is primarily occupied with the purpose of stressing that *particular ‘places’* are indeed significant to the human encounter with God. This leads Inge to the conclusion that we should then seek out a re-enchantment or re-sacralization of these particular places. This particular use of the term ‘place’ is in fact very close to the much criticized ‘locale’ which Giddens has frequently employed. Here ‘*locale*’, or ‘place’ for Inge, is a spatial concept which refers merely to ‘space as providing the physical setting for interaction’.³¹ In this scenario, and that of the majority of these theologies of place, what is being stressed is not an inherently relational becoming between the whole of the collective (place/placing), but rather, *a singular locale/location which is thought to carry particular significance.*

Fourth, these theo-geographical projects have entirely missed the opportunity to use the concept of place as a means for challenging our received ‘modern’ notions of nature and society, objects and subjects, humans and nonhumans. It is here, in contrast to Inge, that we are to find the true utility of the ‘relationality’ which the concept of place/placing seeks to register.³² This further serves to illustrate that these studies are still enthralled to the modern and humanist notion of place which we have already described. But there is in fact, a ‘new geography’, as the editors of *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture*, have recently explained. This is a geography which seeks to register and appreciate that the ‘world

³⁰ Arild Holt-Jenson, *Geography History and Concepts*, p. 127.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³² I find it somewhat perplexing that Inge has proposed a ‘relational concept of place’ in such a way as to suggest that place could be conceived otherwise. For the geographers of today, the term ‘*place*’ cannot be conceived without first thinking of relationality. In fact, ‘place’ is geographical shorthand for relational dynamism. This point only adds weight to my earlier claim that Inge is actually working with the more simplified concept of ‘locale’ or ‘locality’ than he is with the incredibly rich geographical concept of ‘place’.

is now patterned by both human and nonhuman processes' which are bound up in a kind of mutual becoming.³³ Moreover, the 'new' geographical studies which this volume embodies try to 'take seriously the entanglements – the invisible hyphens – between nature and culture, human and nonhuman.'³⁴ It is this kind of relationality that is at the heart of what I have called the nonmodern concept of placing. What the nonmodern concept of placing strives for is a total re-thinking of the dynamic relationality between people and things, not necessarily in an effort to reignite an 'environmental awakening' in the manner of Lilburne, or to re-enchant spaces in the manner Sheldrake and Inge, but rather, to help us to better understand what Gunton was ultimately unable to formulate – namely, how we are 'internally related to the world'.

The final major reason why I believe these recent theologies of place ultimately fail to bring us any closer to an understanding of our internal relations to the world is due to their near total lack of a trinitarian vision. Out of all of these recent theological works on the topic of place only Sheldrake gives any mention to specifically trinitarian concepts. Yet, even on the occasion that he does mention trinitarian concepts it is only to indicate that God is present to the creation or to highlight, as Gunton has, how the trinitarian shape of creation redirects our understanding of universals and particulars. To be certain Lilburne, Sheldrake and Inge have all described the significance of the incarnation for their theological adoptions of place-language. Each of them has, in their own way, indicated that the incarnation is our basis for understanding 'the divine indwelling in all material reality'.³⁵ For his part, Inge uses the incarnation as the basis for considering our personal embodiment, which necessarily entails that we will always be located in a specific place.³⁶ Moreover, I understand each of these authors to be using the incarnation as a means of arguing that God's love, or presence, is indeed particular rather than homogeneously universal. But what is missing in all of these accounts is any mention of the Holy Spirit beyond the most general of comments. Indeed, the Spirit has not even been listed in the index of any of these books. Nor is there any systematic attempt, in any of these works, to bring the relational dynamism of trinitarian ontology to bear on the process of placing. I find this omission to be somewhat perplexing considering the fact that trinitarian theology, such as that of Gunton, offers a wonderfully rich theological vocabulary for envisioning the deep relationality which the concept of place/placing embodies – or should embody. With the one exception where Sheldrake has briefly employed trinitarian language to describe the 'vertical' relationship to particular places, the Trinity goes without mention in the vast majority of these works.

³³ Stephen Harrison, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift eds., *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 9-10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁵ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p. 66.

³⁶ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 53.

At least one important exception may be found to this overall trajectory of recent theological adoptions of place-language. In his recent *A Political Theology of Nature*, Peter Scott has adopted place language in order to flesh-out his concept of relations within the ‘common realm’ of God, humans and nature. While Scott’s utilization of place is not in my view entirely ‘modern’, I have left his account of place out of this general critique of recent theologies of place for several reasons. First, the concept of place as it emerges in his vision of the common realm does not, in my view, account for a major engagement with the geographical concept of place. Although place emerges as a definite theme in his book, Scott has only committed a few sub-chapters to the topic which culminate in a proposal for a ‘eucharistic place’ in the final chapter. My second point is that Scott has drawn almost exclusively from David Harvey’s Marxist and dialectical understanding of place in order to develop his own theological account of place. As we have seen in previous chapters, for this reason alone, ANT inspired geographers would likely classify Scott’s approach as distinctly modern. Thirdly, due to his altogether brief encounter with the concept of place as it is used in the geographical literature, and his total reliance on just one geographical commentator, I remain ambivalent about the overall merit of his commentary on place. That is to say, I find his concept of place to be rather limited in its overall application. I believe the root of this ambivalence is to be found in the realization that Scott, more often than not, employs place-talk to speak to people’s attachments to specific places, and whether these places may be considered politically liberatory or economically equitable. In this vein of thought the significance of place is once again to be found largely in people’s ‘sense’ or ‘attachment’ to specific places – it is perhaps in this sense that we may consider Scott’s theological account of place to remain in the distinctly modern mode. Thus, place is seen by Scott to be ‘a privileged location where people seek to connect with the environment as a *locus* of community’.³⁷

This might very well be a noble project in itself, but the concept of *placing* which I am attempting to outline in part 3 of this thesis takes a rather different direction. My concern is not with an account of place as a ‘privileged location’ – Scott will later privilege the locations of church and Eucharist – but rather, with an account of the dynamic interaction between people and things no matter what the specific ‘location’ or circumstances in which they may find themselves. Therefore, my account will admittedly have little to do with specific ‘locations’ or ‘privileged places’ that are either liberatory or oppressive. My concern is to describe, in trinitarian terms, the unavoidable process of *placing* which all embodied being is engaged in producing by virtue of the inherently relational nature of all things. Finally, I have left Scott’s account out of this main section of recent theologies of place since it is my

³⁷ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 159.

intention to engage with his theology of ‘the common realm’ more fully in what remains of this chapter. In what follows I am particularly concerned to draw on Scott’s theological account of *sociality* as a transcendental as well as his insistence on a theological appreciation of nonhuman agency which is clearly counter to Gunton’s theological understanding.

To conclude this section we may summarize that these recent theologies of place – barring Scott’s account in a limited sense – suffer many of the same ‘geographical blindspots’ we have outlined in relation to Gunton’s theology as a whole. In what remains of this chapter I will attempt to give a more full account of how trinitarian concepts may be used to invigorate the ‘horizontal’ relationality which the concept of placing seeks to embody. By bringing a nonmodern concept of placing into conversation with trinitarian theology it is my hope that we may be able to use these two accounts – trinitarian and nonmodern – to speak more deeply about the relationality that exists between humans and nonhumans, as well as the role of God’s two hands within this dynamic. But before detailing a specifically trinitarian theology of placing, we must further consider the compatibility between theology and the nonmodern notions of the socialization of nonhumans and of nonhuman actancy.

II. Theology and Nonmodern Sociality/Actancy: Nature and Culture Re-Mixed

If we are to propose a truly nonmodern theology of placing that resists what we have identified as the modern ‘building perspective’ of place, we must reconsider the important issues of nonhuman sociality and nonhuman agency/actancy. For at the heart of a nonmodern account of placing, we find a fundamental questioning of our received understandings of a purified Nature and Society, and purified Objects and Subjects. And as we have now seen, recent theologies of place have done little of anything to question these jealously protected (and purified) ontological realms, and are thus unable to provide a detailed account of the *multidirectional* relationality which nonmodern placing seeks to register. Moreover, we have also seen that Gunton was ultimately unable to affirm nonhuman actancy, nor could he affirm nonhuman participation in sociality, and was thereby unable to deeply challenge our received modern notions of nature and society. Thus before moving on to construct a specifically trinitarian account of placing, we must return to these important and closely related questions which Latour’s project has raised for a theology which seeks to speak of both creation and culture without polarization. This section is, therefore, dedicated to making the case that a trinitarian theology of creation and culture must indeed embrace some account of nonhuman participation in sociality and nonhuman actancy.

As we have already seen, Gunton has denied nonhuman/nonpersonal entry into what he has termed *sociality, agency, spirit and personhood*. We have also directly tied this position of Gunton’s into his altogether unwavering understanding of sociality in a strict ‘I-

Thou' form. But we may now ask whether or not this is a position which a Christian theology must affirm. Therefore, we now ask the question: Does a Christian theology *require* that sociality be understood in the strict and limiting terms of I-Thou relationality, thereby preserving social interaction solely for divine and human persons?

As indicated above, I would now like to draw on Scott's theological accounting of nonhuman participation in sociality, as he has presented a rather strong case in his recent *A Political Theology of Nature*. Moreover, I find three primary reasons why a deeper engagement with Scott's work would prove fruitful for our current project. First, Scott's book is one of the very few theological attempts to take seriously the fact that our received notions of nature and culture are deeply problematic. Secondly, he has attempted to address this problem from a distinctly trinitarian perspective. Finally, Scott appears to have drawn deeply from the work of Gunton, yet he has been able to construct a much more detailed account of 'horizontal' relationality than Gunton was able to provide.

Scott's addition to the nature/society debate within Christian theology is an extremely insightful and much needed addition to the conversation. What is notable in this study is that Scott, not unlike Gunton before him, closely ties together the fragmentation of nature and humanity with the displacement of the Triune God which medieval nominalism and the Enlightenment both served to instigate. The movements of fragmentation are, for Scott, all of a piece. As God was distanced from the world in the Enlightenment, so too was humanity separated from nature. Thus Scott will describe his project 'as a theological attempt to overcome this double alienation of God from the world and humanity from nature.'³⁸ In a very similar fashion to the overall trajectory of this thesis, he further proposes to focus on 'the interaction between humanity and non-human nature', that is to say, 'nature as it enters or impinges upon the social sphere, in political and social description.'³⁹ A major component to this re-relating of God and world, humans and nature, is directed towards achieving what we have seen Gunton reject – namely the recognition of nature as possessing the marks of agency and sociality. A close review of his book, however, soon reveals that he is much stronger on making a case for nonhuman participation in sociality than he is in making a case for nonhuman agency. We will first consider Scott's theological justifications for claiming that nature does indeed participate in sociality.

Trinitarian Justification for Nonhuman Sociality

³⁸ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

To begin with, Scott picks up on Gunton's earlier project of outlining what he called 'open transcendentals' or 'trinitarian transcendentals'.⁴⁰ We will recall from his disagreement with Daniel Hardy that Gunton has rejected sociality as a transcendental concept – for him it is not appropriately classed as a universal mark of all being, but is rather, a characteristic unique to the realm of persons. For Gunton, only *relationality* as a transcendental category may be attributed to the nonhuman sphere of nature.⁴¹ Scott challenges Gunton on this point and will instead propose four transcendentals of his own: *becoming*, *unity*, *sociality*, and *openness*. While the transcendental of becoming appears to be applied to the Godhead as a whole, Scott will more specifically apply 'unity to the creator, sociality to the Word/Logos and openness to the Spirit.'⁴² 'Such transcendentals', Scott explains, 'are general terms which, "before" knowledge and ontology, specify the general characteristics of reality.'⁴³ Thus, for Scott the transcendental of sociality may be applied generally to God, humans *and* nonhuman nature. We may now ask what justifies the inclusion of nonhuman nature in the realm of sociality.

For Scott, the 'foundation and rationale' of the whole transcendental project is to be located firmly within the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From this understanding we find that the universal mark of sociality is to find its distinct focus in Christology. This is because

the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's promise to the covenantal character of social humanity *in nature*; humanity and nature share the important feature of the transcendental of sociality. Thus the promise of the continuation of solidarity even through death pertains also to nature. The promise of God the Father in Jesus Christ grants a future to that which is social. For nature also is social. Hence, if the act of election by God the Father in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the election of *social* humanity, then that same act of God is the election of *social* nature.⁴⁴

By basing the sociality of nonhuman nature on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Scott has argued that nonhuman nature is itself incorporated into the resurrection by virtue of its common sociality with humanity. 'Nature is redeemed in the vicarious action of Christ not on the grounds that it forms the natural conditions of human life but because it is *social*.'⁴⁵ Here Scott is consciously trying to move beyond the more common assumption, like that of Jürgen

⁴⁰ Gunton outlines his transcendental project most clearly in his *The One the Three and the Many*, Ch. 5. It is also worth noting that Gunton appears to have largely dropped the project of developing 'open' or 'Trinitarian transcendentals' subsequent to the publication of *The One the Three and the Many*. In a personal conversation he indicated that there was no specific reason behind this and he further indicated that he remained convinced of the utility and wisdom of such a project.

⁴¹ Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 229.

⁴² Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 44. It is worth noting that Latour's nonmodern project – although perhaps weary of transcendental projects – would largely agree with each of these proposed transcendentals, except, perhaps, for *unity*. As we have seen in chapter 3, unity is for Latour an immanent political project of negotiation and representation – it is a project that is always before us and slowly negotiated.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Moltmann, that the nonhuman creation is brought into transforming relation to the resurrection by way of Christ's material embodiment rather than through the shared sociality of humans and nonhumans. But this also raises the question of whether it may also be said of God – as the notion of transcendental would suggest – that he too is marked by sociality. On this point, Scott argues that sociality does indeed apply to the Triune God, but that it is a different type of sociality than that found in human and nonhuman nature. For Scott, the difference is located in the realization that when attributed to the Triune God sociality is expressed *perfectly*. 'God is unitive, social, open and becoming perfectly but creatures participate in the transcendentals asymmetrically, for the cause of these transcendentals in creatures is God.'⁴⁶ As Scott argues, the human and nonhuman creation are thereby 'invited to imitate' (rather than participate *in*) the perfect sociality of the Triune God. But we may not claim to fully understand the sociality of God as it is 'ambiguous and opaque', yet 'on account of Jesus Christ, we may attribute creaturely sociality to the Godhead *metaphorically*.'⁴⁷ Thus, it is through Christ, and not through an imagined participation in the immanent Trinity, that we may come to understand that all of creation is asymmetrically marked by the transcendental of sociality.⁴⁸

After making the claim that all creaturely being participates in sociality via Christological considerations, Scott then moves into a number of further qualifying remarks on what he has called an 'ontology of the ecosocial'. The term 'ecosocial' is used by Scott to indicate that he is speaking to 'the interaction that occurs between humanity and nature' – the 'horizontal' relations in Gunton's terms.⁴⁹ We then find that these qualifying points to the ecosocial ontology fall under the categories of *sociality*, *spatiality*, and *temporality*. What these concepts serve to reinforce is the ultimate 'reality, otherness and proximity of nature in relation to un/natural humanity.' Moreover, Scott argues that he has drawn these concepts from their Christological source in the 'life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.'⁵⁰ It is at this point that we begin to see what Scott intends to communicate in his claim that both human and nonhuman nature share in the transcendental mark of sociality. Unlike the I-Thou relationality which Gunton strongly adhered to as the litmus test for sociality, Scott will instead see social relations taking shape in the process of *work*. 'A social ontology thereby

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 51. Scott emphasizes the point that our attribution of sociality to the Godhead is 'metaphorical' simply because we cannot fully understand what we mean when we say that the immanent Trinity is marked by sociality.

⁴⁸ I take this point to be one of the main differences between the account of Samuel M. Powell and that of Peter Scott. Powell has framed his argument of creation's reflection of the trinitarian notions of otherness-in-relation with the concept of 'participating in God' rather than Scott's 'imitation' language. Powell does, however, qualify the point of 'participation' with the same 'asymmetrical' language which Scott employs. See Powell's *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

specifies exchanges, transactions, interdependencies and interactions.⁵¹ We find in this a very similar ‘ecosocial ontology’ to that of Latour and the ANT theorists who have put a point of emphasis on the various processes of performance, labor, work, translation, and the heterogeneous networking of associations of humans and nonhumans. In fact, Scott closely echoes the proclamations of the nonmodern constitution in declaring; ‘Nature is *in nobis*; we are in nature.’⁵²

Yet before offering a deeper comparison between Scott’s ecosocial ontology and the nonmodern understanding of the socialization of nonhumans, we must review the other two qualifying characteristics which Scott will apply to his vision of creaturely sociality. The first of these qualifying characteristics is *spatiality*. Here the term ‘spatiality’ is used to suggest the ultimate reality of both human and nonhuman nature – they have their own *real* and distinct being – as well as their non-necessity or contingency in relation to God. By emphasizing the spatiality of nature as its contingency, Scott asserts that ‘[n]o claims can be made that God validates, at the social or political level, certain configurations of humanity or nature as “natural”.’⁵³ Furthermore, spatiality will also suggest that God continues to bless and preserve the creation so as to maintain its ‘stability and continuity’ – that is, its unity. ‘Hence, humanity is placed by God into a real, natural context; the natural conditions of human life are real (however much they may be ignored in practice). The stability of nature is *extra nos*.’⁵⁴

The second qualifying characteristic of the ecosocial ontology which Scott has proposed is *temporality*. The qualifying addition of temporality is primarily intended to protect against the privileging of space over time. Thus by stressing the temporality of the ecosocial ontology, Scott ‘insists on the historicity of nature at all levels: cosmological, biological, social.’⁵⁵ Temporality further suggests that ‘specific differentiations and determinations can emerge and disappear within God’s ordering of the world.’⁵⁶ Thus we find in these two qualifications of sociality – spatiality and temporality – that human and nonhuman nature are secured in both otherness and temporal becoming. Scott will later indicate that this represents his ‘attempt to present afresh the material commitments of Colossians 1.16-17: “ – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (NRSV).’⁵⁷

Finally, we may highlight the important point which Scott delineates concerning *unity* (a transcendental) and differentiation within the creaturely realm. Here Scott argues that all

⁵¹ Ibid.
⁵² Ibid., p. 54.
⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵ Ibid.
⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 55.
⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

creatures are created through Christ, and therefore find their unity in Him. But as creatures they are also marked by sociality, spatiality, and temporality, and therefore must be understood to exist within a 'differentiated whole'. Hence, Scott will argue that 'all parts and wholes participate, as social, in a unity which disassembles and recomposes into wholes and parts through the temporal and spatial dynamics of creatureliness.'⁵⁸ We may then find within the creaturely realm both dynamism and orderliness which are capable of transformation in their process of becoming. Moreover, according to Scott, the agency behind this dynamism and transformational ordering is to be traced to Jesus Christ.

There are at least three points which I find of particular value in Scott's understanding of sociality as a transcendental mark of all being. First, through his careful theological account of sociality we come to see that 'humanity is "in" nature. If we must think in spatial images', Scott explains, 'we have not a humanity alongside nature but rather a humanity placed, in its societies, in the societies of nature.'⁵⁹ Although I do not find in Scott's work a specific concern with dispatching what we have seen Tim Ingold call 'the building perspective', or with adopting what Thrift has termed a 'non-representational theory', it appears that Scott's theologically based vision of a common sociality between humans and nonhumans might be able to significantly aid in the creation of a trinitarian concept of *placing* which is deeply suspicious of the building perspective. Secondly, I also believe that Scott's vision of a transcendental sociality qualified by spatiality and temporality – as well as his judgment that this is based on the sociality of Jesus Christ and the resurrection – is highly amenable to Gunton's own trinitarian theology of the 'spatiality' of God and world, which he eventually developed through his dialogue with Robert Jenson. Even though he was unwilling to identify nature with sociality, Gunton did ultimately affirm the idea that we may be able to conceive of creation taking place 'in' Christ.⁶⁰ In fact, both Scott and Gunton have based their similar claims concerning the spatiality of Christ on Colossians 1:16. Therefore, it seems quite clear that Scott has gleaned much from Gunton's trinitarian theology, and that of Jenson. Thirdly, although I find Scott to be rather opaque concerning his basic idea of what sociality actually consists of, we have seen that it has something to do with *work* – it takes shape in 'exchanges, transactions, interdependencies and interactions.'⁶¹ By understanding sociality – again, qualified by spatiality and temporality – as a process of exchange and transaction between human and nonhuman societies, we now have a point of conversation between trinitarian theology and Latour's nonmodern collective.

Trinitarian and Nonmodern Understandings of Nonhuman Sociality

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

⁶⁰ Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert," p. 91-92.

⁶¹ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 52.

Rather than abandon our primary interlocutors to fully investigate the particularities of Scott's political theology of nature – which is clearly not our primary concern – we must now return to the nonmodern notion of the 'socialization of nature' in order to identify points of compatibility with Scott's theological understanding of sociality. It is worth noting at this point that Scott has not engaged with the work of Latour, or the wider scope of ANT theorists, in any of his work that I am aware of. Latour does, however, receive one brief mention in *A Political Theology of Nature*, but on the whole Scott has chosen to engage with a number of other political ecologies – deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, Marxist/socialist ecology – rather than that of actor/actant-network theory.⁶² Therefore, we may now seek to briefly outline points of convergence and divergence between Scott's theological vision of transcendental sociality and Latour's 'networky' nonmodern vision.

Although the accounts of nonhuman sociality in Scott and Latour are rather different in methodology – one theological and one philosophical or ethnographic – it is important that we are aware of the commonalities and discontinuities of these two programs. What is particularly notable is the specific way in which Latour's science studies came to the conclusion that nonhuman nature does indeed participate in sociality. Without diving into too much redundancy, we may recall that science studies came to recognize nonhuman sociality in its effort to by-pass the dichotomous modern poles from which scientific explanation was obliged to start – either the 'natural' pole of objects (natural realism) or the 'social' pole of subjects (social realism). Through his historical illustration of Boyle and Hobbes, Latour has claimed that modernity's 'natural realists' and 'social constructivists' have something rather profound in common – they are both unable to imagine nature and culture in a non-dichotomous way. Hence, in order to by-pass modernity's polemical Subjects and Objects, the practice of the nonmodern constitution is to first shift the modern's Nature and Society back into the obfuscated 'Middle Kingdom'. By shifting modernity's Nature and Society into the middle ground and reducing them both to the non-polemical 'humans' and 'nonhumans', nonmodern thought has robbed 'natural realists' and 'social constructivists' of their polemical powers. This leveling of humans and nonhumans to a single transcendence is what we have described as Latour's 'generalized principle of symmetry'. Within the single nonmodern transcendence of humans and nonhumans, all ontological activity has been redistributed to all the actants within a network or collective. No longer must we always begin at one of the two capitalized poles of the modern 'yardstick'. Instead, we may now begin in the middle, the once 'non-place' of the modern Constitution. Here we are no longer forced to choose between

⁶² The reference to Latour comes on p. 224 where Scott discusses his vision of a 'democracy of the commons'. Upon my reading it appears that Scott may well have drawn heavily from Latour's vision of a 'Parliament of things' where he argues for the admission of nonhumans to a collective democracy, but Scott does not seem to indicate any direct affiliation with Latour's wider nonmodern theory.

‘things-in-themselves’ or ‘humans-in-themselves’, as we now have a collective of networked humans and nonhumans that truly *mediate* action rather than serve as mere *intermediaries*. The main point in all of this, as it applies to Scott’s vision of the sociality of nonhuman nature, is that within the nonmodern vision, things, materials, artifacts, become socialized nonhumans who then *mediate* action – they are true hybrids or quasi-subject/objects composed of both human and nonhuman qualities.

This highlights a point where Latour’s project may be seen to be more radical than that of Scott, but it also indicates a parallel point where nonmodernism may be considered to be more conservative than Scott’s ‘common realm’. We will begin by detailing the more modest point of Latour’s project. This has to do with the question of whether ‘nature’ – again, Latour rarely uses the word, while Scott and Gunton appear to use it almost exclusively – may be considered to be social *prior to* human interaction. For Scott, Christological considerations have led him to the conclusion that nature is indeed social in such a way as to be independent of humanity, but not independent of God. To be clear, Scott understands nature to be ‘social’ even when it is seen to be relatively untouched by humanity.⁶³ On the other hand, for Latour, there is little sense in speaking of ‘nature’ as social in and of itself. The first problem has to do with terminology; ‘nature’ and ‘society’, as we have seen, are not *a priori* ontological categories within nonmodern thought. ANT will instead reduce all beings down to ‘mere’ humans and nonhumans and then talk about their exchanging of properties, their hybridization, and their networking. Only once we have followed the networks to their termination may we identify something called ‘nature’ and something called ‘society’. Moreover, it becomes nonsensical for the nonmodern to speak of stable ontological realms prior to relationship. We then find that ‘nature’ is not in itself ‘social’ nor are ‘humans’ to be understood as ‘social’ in themselves. Only within the networked dynamism of the ‘middle kingdom’ may we begin to sort out the socialization of humans and nonhumans. For the nonmodern, we do not have two *a priori* quantities – nature and society – these are only the outcomes of a tangled networking of humans and nonhumans.

It is for this reason that we may argue that Scott’s project is in one important sense more radical than Latour’s. For Scott, nature is social in and of itself through its participation (election) in the redeeming action of Christ. Whereas for Latour, this claim would make little sense since it retains a kind of binary conception. For Latour, there is no hope for ‘sociality’ – as the moderns understood it – to exist outside of the interaction (translations, associations, mediations) between humans and nonhumans. To be sure, however, ‘nature’ for the ANT theorists, has a kind of ‘sociality’ all of its own. Latour, for instance, has studied the pure ‘interactionism’ of simian societies. Moreover, there is no doubt that ‘nature’ contains within

⁶³ Even this presents something of a difficulty since Scott, I think correctly, would argue that we would be hard-pressed to find any ‘natural’ area that is free of human impact or interference.

itself systems of exchange and regulation all of its own, wholly outside of any reliance on humans. But again, it makes little sense to speak of this in abstraction from humanity. We too are part of that ‘natural’ dynamism. Thus, sociality is only to be understood as the outgrowth of human/nonhuman engagement. Nature and society are not giants sitting at opposite poles from one another; but rather, they together grow outwards from the ‘middle kingdom’ where being is always dynamic, practiced, performed, and altogether tangled.

This also serves to highlight the greater radicalism of the nonmodern ontology to that of Scott’s common realm. For Latour, the point of ANT thinking is to begin our thinking from the middle ground where humans and nonhumans – not ‘nature’ and ‘society’ – meet in the tangle of practice. Within this meeting point we may begin to witness the hybridization, or the ‘socialization’, of humans and nonhumans into a collective and networked existence. Within this dynamism we may begin to recognize the ‘swapping of properties’ between humans and nonhumans, where nonhumans are slowly brought (translated, enlisted) into the social fabric, thereby lending their immutability, mobility, and stability to social forms. It is clear that Scott has little of anything to say about this middle ground. Hence, the question we may pose to Scott and his vision of sociality as transcendental: Is this transcendental vision capable of registering the continuously multiplying hybrids which now populate the ‘common realm’?

At issue between Scott’s vision of an ‘ecosocial ontology’ and Latour’s heterogeneous networks of human and nonhuman actants is the basic shape of how each of them envisions the dynamic of human/nonhuman sociality to take place. The mode of interaction depicted by Scott often looks very much like two independent types of sociality (human societies and nonhuman societies) that are then superimposed upon one another, but only for a time, and then retreat back to their appropriate (modern) corners thereby preserving otherness. Upon a nonmodern reading this may be traced back to Scott’s heavy reliance on describing human/nonhuman relationality in terms of Marxian dialectical relations. Take for instance Scott’s portrayal of ‘humanity and nature as interacting in a series of overlapping “societies”’.⁶⁴ We may also witness his language of ‘interlocking societies’: ‘it is vitally necessary’, Scott explains, ‘to see humanity as placed in the middle of nature through a series of interlocking societies which relate to other – natural – societies’.⁶⁵ I find Scott’s language in this regard to be rather confusing. On the one hand he has portrayed two types of society, one ‘human’ and one ‘ecological’, which then meet as they tend to overlap one another. But the actual mode of this interaction remains, according to nonmodern thinking, all too modern in its commitment to dialectical ‘intermediaries’. We will recall that the nonmodern scorn for dialectical thinking had to do with its inability to register true hybridity as it instead opted for

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 181

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 183-184.

mere 'intermediaries that transmit pure ontological qualities' of subjectivity or objectivity.⁶⁶ The true dialectical and 'intermediary' shape of Scott's account comes to the surface of his argument as he attempts to account for the co-participation of nature's societies in human sociality. The argument begins with great promise:

To speak of society from the perspective of the social transcendental is thereby always to maintain nature as co-participant: through all projects, non-human nature is active. ...however society is organized, every transformative activity has nature as co-participant; all practices are co-constituted by nature. We should therefore speak of the mutual, shaping and irreducible interrelationality of all things in sociality.⁶⁷

Here we may applaud Scott as he stresses the important point that nonhuman nature is co-participant (actively) in sociality, thereby reinforcing the inseparability of human sociality with nonhuman sociality. It appears, however, that Scott's argument begins to lose ground in his follow-up statements.

Indeed, we might say: *nature lies between people*. On this view, ecological nature is the 'in-between', the middle of life. In the interstices, the joints of human living, nature is always already present. Nature is not then in the middle of life but is that middle...In theological theorizing we need to understand nature as that which is in-between. Nature, we may affirm, is a dialectical concept: it demands an account of humanity in nature, yet as differentiated from nature.⁶⁸

Manifest here is the great strength and weakness of a dialectical understanding of human/nature dynamism. The strength is to be found in the dialectician's ability to affirm a type of relationality between humans and 'nature', but to then always retreat back into purified ontological zones – people here, nature there, and otherness is preserved. It is little wonder that dialectical thinking has been of such great interest to theologians anxious to affirm relationality-in-otherness amongst human and nonhuman creatures without risking mixing the two. However, what is lost in this dialectical reasoning is a deeper account of what is happening in the 'in-between' which Scott speaks of. Moreover, it is of particular interest that it is always 'nature' or 'ecological nature' (ontologically distinct or 'pure') that is 'in-between'. Here there is no provision made for an account of hybridity, quasi-objectivity, or the socio-materiality which we see the practitioners of science studies so deeply concerned to detail. For Scott, there seems only to be human sociality grafted over natural sociality, never a mixing or 'swapping of properties', but rather, only an ontologically untouched nature 'in-between' humans. Upon my reading, Scott seems to play it safe by keeping at arms-length the truly tangled practices of human-being-in-the-world. As humans meet the material world – as they continuously do by virtue of their necessary embodiment – the boundary work attendant to their relational dynamism is not as ontologically hygienic as his account of 'ecological

⁶⁶ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 57.

⁶⁷ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 188.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188-189. (emphasis added)

nature' 'in-between' humanity would suggest. This gets at the heart of where Scott's project may be seen to be much more conservative than that of the Latour.

This further serves to indicate a second observation having to do with Scott's rather sparse account of nonhuman agency. It may well be that his commitment to conceiving 'horizontal' relationality in dialectical (intermediary) terms, accounts for his lack of any in-depth comment on nonhuman actancy. Scott begins his project with declarations that the 'account of Trinitarian totality' which he is proposing – the 'common realm' – 'is deeply indebted to ecofeminism's account of nature as active subject in the dynamic of encounter.'⁶⁹ In light of this he will often appeal to a general 'natural agency' present in the nonhuman realm. Hence, Scott maintains the theologically bold stance that 'there is no society without natural agency', yet in practice he has surprisingly little to say about the particularities of how this 'natural agency' is actually expressed.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in what I take to be a baffling contradiction, Scott has seemingly 'mythologized' some of the primary biblical evidence for making the claim that nonhuman nature is indeed agential. As we have seen in chapter 3, Scott criticizes Gunton's (uncharacteristic) claim that we may, on occasion, understand nonhuman creation as being capable of praising God – however, for Gunton, this is by way of the Spirit's agency and not that of the nonhuman creation. Although the agency of nonhuman creation is a theme carried throughout the Old Testament, as illustrated in the passages which describe nonhuman creation praising the Creator in the Psalms, or witnessing to covenants, Scott will respond that he is 'unsure what it can mean to say that...inorganic nature praises God.'⁷¹ It is surprising that Scott would so strongly claim that his 'political theology of nature' rests on a concept of nature as agential, but then goes on to provide little, if any, account of how this is to be specifically understood.

We have already seen that Latour's nonmodern thought and ANT both offer a much deeper account of nonhuman agency/actancy than Scott is ultimately able to provide. Moreover, unlike Scott's dialectics, Latour's ontology is capable of registering the quasi-natural and quasi-social entities which populate the middle ground which has been obscured in both modernist and dialectical understandings of relationality. In fact, what the nonmodern or ANT forms of relational ontology encourage is what we have found to be the mark of trinitarian ontology as a whole – that is, a trinitarian theology cured of the geographical blindspots we have found in Gunton – namely that beings are always the *outcome* of a prior relationality. That is to say that entities are always composed through a multitude of prior relations, to such an extent, that we cannot speak of particular ontologies without equally speaking of relationality – indeed, *relationality* is a transcendental. The focus in nonmodern

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 209.

thought, as it is in trinitarian dynamics, is then placed on heterogeneous *associations* rather than the *separations* which may still be found latent in the Marxian dialectics which Scott readily employs.

Therefore, in what remains of this thesis I will attempt to bring what may be considered to be a 'low-flying' or 'weak' form of ANT's account of networked relationality and actancy to bear on a specifically trinitarian account of *placing*. Fully aware of the risk of homogenization or ontological continuity attendant to any consideration of socio-material hybridity, I believe a trinitarian account of networked relationality may be able to go a step further in detailing the dynamics of human/nonhuman relationality than Scott and Gunton's projects are ultimately able to attain. By placing a 'weak' ANT account within a trinitarian framework, we may be able to maintain the desirable measure of otherness-in-relation between humans and things, yet still account for the ontological 'messiness' that is involved in such intimate relationality. But what is perhaps even more needed, is an account of human/nonhuman relationality that takes into account the socio-material mediations and space-times which technical actions and the production of immutable mobiles necessarily create. In both Scott and Gunton's understandings of human/nonhuman relationality, little is said of the 'imbroglios' and 'hybrids' which inhabit the middle-ground. For Scott, as we have seen, it is only 'nature' or 'ecological nature' which is 'in-between' humans. For the ANT theorist, on the other hand, the space 'in-between' is populated with a multitude of hybrid mediators who are always in the process of swapping 'social' and 'natural' qualities.

Before moving on, however, we must make more clear the meaning of the terms 'low-flying' or 'weak' versions of ANT or nonmodern thought. To begin, we have already seen that nonmodern thinking starts with the assumption that actors in a network of relations will always be more than human. Yet, as we have argued in chapter 3, attendant to the stronger forms of ANT – those which tend to find anthropomorphic characteristics in nonhuman actants – there is the distinct threat of losing any sense of ontological otherness or stability. These 'strong' forms of ANT then incur the 'problem of instilling a great *indifference* between the countless things of the world...which arises when they end up being portrayed as *potentially all the same*.'⁷² What a 'weak' or 'modest' version of ANT will affirm is that imbroglios, rhizomes, and hybrids do indeed proliferate, but we may still be able to locate a unique place for human subjectivity and agency, such as uniquely human forms of praise and worship, as well as modes of relationality marked by Gunton's emphasis on love and freedom. What is strongly denied is that these anthropomorphic qualities bar nonhuman participation within the dynamic of sociality or agency/actancy. Moreover, we here reject a purified notion of human subjectivity which does not understand the human capacity for

⁷² Eric Laurier and Chris Philo, "X-Morphising: A Review Essay of Aramis," *Environment and Planning A* 31 (1999): p. 1061.

memory, action, or subjectivity as being the direct *result* of our heterogeneous networking. Also rejected is Gunton's equivocation on the role of the Spirit within the nonhuman realm – a point we return to below. Moreover, a 'weak' form of ANT or nonmodern thought will be willing to recognize that some processes or networks are more human than nonhuman, more 'social' than 'natural', or *visa versa*.

It is in this sense that I believe Scott is correct in stating that '[t]here is no denying that the incarnation of the Logos in human form privileges the human in a certain way: for the human person is the greatest concentration of the capacity to be social.'⁷³ But again, even 'weak' forms of ANT will deny a purified human sociality, or a human agency that is not conceived as a distributive effect of many actants that are both human and nonhuman. In light of this, we thereby reject Gunton's strong anthropocentric understanding of the 'cultural mandate', as well as the moderate dialectics of Scott, which are unable to account for this distributed actancy. We have also already witnessed something of a 'weak' version of ANT in the previous chapter as we sought the preservation of human subjectivity in the process of placing by appealing to *human memory*. Although we will also recall that this was a form of subjectivity which could not be separated from nonhuman actancy – that is to say that human memory is often, if not always, materially-based within the nonhuman actants themselves. Thus, there remain vestiges of asymmetry in the following account, but we have certainly come a long way from the modern vision of transcendent binaries and dualisms which both Gunton and Latour have reviewed in detail.

We may now seek to outline how a nonmodern account of socio-material networking may be applied to Gunton's trinitarian vision. In this effort it will be necessary at several points to gently amended Gunton's trinitarian account in order to make up for what we have identified as his primary 'geographical blindspots'. Moreover, I believe that this will principally require that we address Gunton's rather limited pneumatology more than any other aspect of his trinitarian vision. But to be clear, our purpose, again, is not to uncritically force trinitarian theology into the mold of ANT, but rather to position the two approaches in a mutually enlightening conversation.

III. Placing Humans and Nonhumans in a Trinitarian and Geographical Dynamic

In what follows we take up the task of applying the trinitarian and transcendental projects of Gunton, Hardy and Scott to the 'weak' actor/actant-network ontology we have seen expressed in Latour's nonmodern thought. In doing so, however, we reject three specific

⁷³ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 186.

currents in Latour's thought. The first is Latour's denial of a transcendent (other-than) God of creation from whom unity finds its locus. Attendant to this, we secondly reject Latour's understanding of unity as a purely immanent political process of negotiating a 'common world'. Within the trinitarian framework we are here proposing, and in line with Gunton and Scott's commitments to Colossians 1.16, unity is to be attributed to the Triune God and the unifying locus of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To be certain, the trinitarian theology of *placing* which we are now proposing will insist that human and nonhuman relations cannot be fully conceived without seeing both in their proper relation to the Triune God of creation. Third, we will attempt to protect against the threat of ontological homogeneity present in the 'stronger' forms of ANT by placing horizontal 'networked' relationality in a specifically trinitarian framework which works to respect and preserve relationality-in-otherness, yet without losing the capacity to register the depths (and 'messiness') of this 'horizontal' relationality. In other words, a theology of *placing* will not privilege the detailing of *otherness* over and above an account of true *relationality*. Therefore, we equally reject Gunton's inability to register nonhuman/nonpersonal actancy and participation in sociality, and his attendant emphasis on a strongly conceived 'cultural mandate'. Moreover, we have also seen that Gunton was unable to understand agency as consisting in anything other than 'personal agency'. This served to set in motion a cascade of qualifications which ultimately served to further sever humanity from its nonhuman social partners. In the end, as we have seen, Gunton has only been able to affirm human/nonhuman relationality in the most general of terms.

Once again drawing on the account of *placing* we have outlined in chapter 4, our task is to now speak of the *placing* of humans and nonhumans in a trinitarian and geographical dynamic. Here relations between humans and nonhumans are to be seen as much more than the uni-directionality of the earlier theologies of place which we reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. Rejecting the very modern 'building perspective' of these earlier studies, here both humans and nonhumans will be found to share a distributed actancy amongst a collective of heterogeneous associations enlivened, and made possible, by the mediating and sustaining work of Son and Spirit.

Trinity, Spacing, and Timing

Our first concern is to simply illustrate the compatibility of the nonmodern understanding of spacing and timing which we outlined in chapter 4, with a trinitarian understanding of space-time which we may discern in the discussion between Gunton, Jenson, and now Scott. To be sure, the two approaches – trinitarian and nonmodern – to describing the dynamics of space-times have much in common. Take for instance, Gunton's rejection of the modern Newtonian understandings of space and time as absolute. 'The effect

of the spatialising of time', Gunton argues, 'is to treat it as reversible, like a machine.'⁷⁴ The outgrowth of this modern mechanistic understanding of space-time was a certain portrayal of the universe as ultimately static and thereby reversible. The effect in theology was to be found in the development of an understanding that the end of time would simply be a return to the beginning – in the end space and time are merely wound backwards to the garden paradise. The problem with these modern notions of absolute space and time, according to Gunton, is to be found in their inability to register 'indeterminacy or contingency, relativity and true dynamism.'⁷⁵ Thus we see that Gunton, much like the nonmodern spatial theorists in chapter 4, is concerned to understand space-time as a deeply relational and dynamic category. Later, Gunton will reinforce the relational character of time in such a way as to echo the movement to 'repopulate' space and time we have found in nonmodern thought. Here Gunton explains that '[t]ime, as the concept in terms of which we focus one central aspect of what is real, has...both a reality – albeit a relational reality that takes its being from those things that have their being in it – and a determinate end.'⁷⁶ Here Gunton adds the one amendment concerning the Christian understanding that time and space are ultimately finite – they will indeed come to an end. But the core of his argument is very much like that of the nonmoderns. Time and space must not be viewed as mechanisms or containers, but rather, as a relational dynamic amongst all of the created particulars which populate reality. As Gunton says: 'Space, like time, is a function of the created world.'⁷⁷

We have also seen that space and time come to a rather tricky crossroads as we seek to inquire into the relationship of God to the world. In chapter 1 we reviewed Gunton's dispute with Robert Jenson on this very point. There it was revealed that Gunton places a definite emphasis on maintaining the otherness of God to the world which he has created. To lose the otherness of the Creator to the creation is to lose the firm and distinct reality of space and time as belonging to a reality which is truly their own. Therefore, in Gunton's trinitarian theology of God and creation, the preservation of 'space' between the persons of the Trinity, as well as between God and the world, are closely tied together. If relations between God and world are to be free from the threat of pantheism, Gunton has argued God must be understood as fully Triune. This has led him to the conclusion that creation should *not* be understood to exist 'in God *simpliciter*', but rather, that it would be preferential 'to say that creation takes place within *Christ*'.⁷⁸ The effect this would have on Gunton's understanding of space and time as a whole is to be found in his claim the God is intimately involved in the structures of space and time, and therefore we cannot think of God as merely the negative abstraction of

⁷⁴ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 140.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁸ Gunton, "Creation and Mediation in the Theology of Robert Jenson," p. 91-92.

space and time. Instead, God is to be understood as intimately involved in the structures of creaturely space and time, yet differentiated through the mediation of his ‘two hands, the Son and the Spirit. As Gunton explains

Space and time are not continuous with God, which means that they are, as created realities, in some way functions of there being a created order. They are real – created – yet relative, relative to there being things which are what they are by virtue of their relation to God and to one another in space and time. It follows, second, that this universe of related things, taking shape in time and space, is constituted in relation to God through his creating Son and perfecting Spirit, and so also remains open to more things than reductionist science imagines to be possible...⁷⁹

Although Gunton does not take the relational dimensions of space-times to the same lengths which the nonmodern theorists have – as seen in their accounts of socio-material networks and immutable mobiles – we find in his understanding an important parallel of the relational dynamism which goes into the fabric of space-time production. Moreover, we find in Gunton the important theological claim that space and time are themselves constituted in the dynamic relationality of ‘God through his creating Son and the perfecting Spirit’. Created space and time may only be themselves – distinctly *real* and other-than God – by way of their continuing relation to the creator. ‘The conclusion to be drawn is that if we see the world outside its relation to God, we do not see it properly.’⁸⁰

The trinitarian vision of space and time presented here, by way of Gunton, carries with it an important point of convergence with ANT thinking, but also an important critique of Latour’s nonmodern vision. We will begin with the latter, by recalling Latour’s nonmodern theological antidote to the ‘crossed-out’ God of the moderns. We will remember that Latour has offered only the polar opposite of the ‘crossed-out’ modern God of ‘above’ by instead posing a purely immanent God of ‘below’ who is no longer master of his own creation. It is here that a trinitarian understanding of the God/world relationship would greatly aid in the construction of a nonmodern theology that seeks to do more than simply propose the opposite of the modern’s distanced God. Therefore, the trinitarian theology of *placing* that we are now outlining will hold firmly to Gunton’s account of the spatio-temporal outworkings of a fully trinitarian theology of creation. To be sure, God is no longer the ‘displaced’ and radically deistic God of modernity, nor is God collapsed into the creation itself, as Latour’s attempt to construct a nonmodern theology would suggest. A trinitarian vision will instead emphasize the otherness-in-relation between God and world which ultimately does full justice to the dynamic relationship which the Triune God maintains with the creation through the Son and the Spirit. Gunton is surely correct in his insistence that creation must be other-than the

⁷⁹ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 144.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

creator, but he is also correct in his insistence that creation be understood to remain in relation to God through the trinitarian mediation of Son and Spirit.

Not to be missed in all of this is the final important point of convergence between nonmodern and trinitarian understandings of space-time. Here we may highlight that both projects affirm the preservation of space as it inheres within *things themselves*. For both trinitarian and nonmodern understandings, space is not purely understood as an ‘internal’ transcendental quality of the mind, as in Kant, but rather, as a necessary *a priori* for the existence and maintenance of otherness. But as we have just seen, Latour has failed to understand the important theological point made by Gunton that for space-time to be truly *real* there must be an account of the distinct otherness between God and world. As Gunton has argued, pantheistic understandings of the God/world relationship erase the reality of space and time as distinctly their own. The result being that both ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ spatiality (otherness) is sacrificed. What is needed is a space of one’s own; for God, for the world, and all of the many human and nonhuman particulars which populate space-times. Or as Scott has put the matter: ‘As independent, space – the way that things are ordered for agents – may be understood as the condition of otherness and of the relations that pertain between others.’⁸¹

Trinity and Socio-Material Mediation

Now that we have illustrated the points of compatibility between trinitarian and nonmodern space-times, we may now attempt to apply the trinitarian vision of Gunton and others to the socio-material networks and nonmodern ontologies which we have reviewed throughout this thesis. Here we are particularly concerned to illustrate how the socio-material mediations we reviewed in chapters 3 and 4 may be reconceived in true trinitarian fashion. For this to be effective we must be able to affirm nonhuman participation in sociality as we have argued with the help of Scott in the previous section. Similarly, we must also be able to affirm some form of nonhuman actancy, here conceived through a ‘weak’ version of ANT. Our task is then to outline how Gunton’s account of horizontal mediation through Son and Spirit may be carefully married to Latour’s account of socio-material relationality. If successful, this effort would go a long way towards constructing a trinitarian concept of placing that may be used to heal the geographical blindspots inherent to Gunton’s trinitarian theology of creation and culture. Equally so, this project will also greatly aid in protecting against Latour’s primary difficulty of maintaining otherness amongst God, humans and nonhumans within his ‘common world’, ‘collective’, or ‘parliament of things’.

⁸¹ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 197.

At the beginning of this chapter we learned that recent theologies of place have generally lacked a specifically trinitarian account of relationality. And as a direct outgrowth of this oversight, we have also seen that these theologies have lacked any detailed account of how the Spirit may be seen to work within the dynamic relationality which constitutes our emplacement or *placing*. These recent theo-geographical accounts of place have instead been heavily focused on detailing the geographical significance of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ with little of any reference given to the Spirit's particularizing and mediating work within the nonhuman realm. It is then my understanding that pneumatological concerns are at the heart of Gunton's many geographical blindspots. It is for this reason that in what remains of the chapter we will focus primarily on how the Spirit may be understood to take part in the work of placing.

In chapters 1 and 3, we learned of two main features of Gunton's pneumatology. First, as the third person of the Trinity, the work of the Holy Spirit has largely to do with the transgressing of ontological boundaries. Secondly, we have seen that the Spirit should be understood as the 'perfecting cause' of creation. Upon this first understanding, part of the Spirit's dynamism is to be found in his/her ability to bring into relation 'beings and realms' which are often thought to be ontologically distinct. Gunton applies this first to the immanent trinitarian relations where he maintains that it is the Spirit who perfects the communion of the Triune persons. Secondly, the work of the Spirit may be found in bringing God and world into dynamic relationship economically. And thirdly, the work of the Spirit may be understood as an 'opening out' of persons to one another and to God. It is on this point that we noticed that Gunton is altogether unclear concerning the way in which the Spirit may be found to work within the nonhuman/nonpersonal realm. This is due to the fact that Gunton has, at times, strictly limited the work of the Spirit to the realm of persons alone – 'God *is* spirit, while finite persons *have* spirit—and things [nonhumans] neither are nor have spirit'.⁸² As we have seen in chapter 3, this opens up a seeming contradiction in Gunton's theology. On the one hand he is concerned to make the claim that all of creation participates in relationality [a transcendental], and he will at times speak of the 'openness' of the creation 'to the human mind', but this is never clearly attributed to the work of the Spirit.⁸³ We have also seen that Gunton's pneumatological concern is to be found in his understanding that any attribution of the Spirit to the nonhuman/nonpersonal sphere will result in a cascade of negative effects, all of which revolve around the threat of pantheism.

In order to avoid the threat of pantheism which he finds attendant to any attempt to relate the Spirit to the nonhuman realm, Gunton will instead attribute nonhuman relationality to a more general account of an analogical application of *perichoresis* to the whole of

⁸² Gunton, *The One the Three and the Many*, p. 188. (The brackets are my own addition)

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

creation.⁸⁴ Upon my reading, this appears to be a clever sleight of hand on Gunton's part, as he appears to be equivocating on whether or not the Spirit may be seen to be at work in the 'opening out' of the creation, or whether this preparedness for human initiated relationality is merely the outgrowth of a cosmic – and nonpersonal – movement of perichoresis. To be clear, it appears that Gunton wants to achieve two things: to affirm the relational character of all creation, but to also avoid identifying the Spirit with this relationality as it applies to the nonhuman realm. It then appears that Gunton has passed on the job of animating nonhuman relationality, or the 'opening out' of the nonhuman, to a more generalized background movement of cosmic perichoresis.

We then see that Gunton's understanding of nonhuman relationality is ultimately based on a generalized account of perichoresis which he appears to use as a kind of 'stand-in' animus for his notion of nonhuman participation in, or 'openness' to, relationality. But as many critics of Gunton's work have illustrated, the whole concept of applying the ancient Greek usage of the term *perichoresis* – sometimes translated as mutual indwelling without confusion – to relations outside of the internal taxis of the Triune persons, is at best, a risky stretch of the Cappadocian concept.⁸⁵ In fact, most commentators would scarcely agree with Gunton's more modest application of perichoresis to the *internal* taxis of the Triune persons. While Ayres has argued that Gunton has simply misappropriated the Cappadocian concept as a whole, Karen Kilby has gone further in arguing that nearly all theological attempts to utilize the concept of perichoresis amount to little more than a 'projection' of human conceived categories onto God. Although I am not quite as prepared to totally do away with the concept of perichoresis as some of Gunton's critics, I do believe that this delegation of nonhuman relationality to an impersonal and generalized background of perichoresis, rather than to the personal work of the Spirit, puts Gunton's project on a rather unstable footing.

Taking Gunton's concerns of pantheism as well-founded yet altogether overemphasized, we may now ask whether it is possible to find a way of speaking of the Spirit's interaction with the nonhuman/nonpersonal realm in such a way that will allow for a 'weak' form of nonhuman actancy and socialization, but still protect against the Spirit becoming completely identified with the material realm. As we have seen, Gunton is able to find the Spirit at work in human cultural interaction with the material. But now we may ask whether we might go further and affirm – without equivocation – that the Spirit 'opens out' the nonhuman in a way which allows for nonhuman actancy to be registered. This raises two

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 163-179.

⁸⁵ Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity", *New Blackfriars*, 81/956 (2000), 412-445; Lewis Ayres, Review of Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 781; Randall E. Otto, "The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54:3 (2001), 366-384; Craig Bartholomew, "The Healing of Modernity", p. 128.

important follow-up questions. First, what does the role of the Spirit look like once we have come to the conclusion that agency need not be understood in the strictly anthropomorphic terms of intentionality, consciousness, and language? And secondly, how might we conceive of the Spirit's dynamism taking place within human/nonhuman relations now that participation in *social* relationality is no longer the sole preserve of persons?

Towards A Pneumatology of Placing

In an attempt to move beyond Gunton's limited pneumatology, we may now critically draw on the pneumatologies of Daniel Hardy and Peter Scott, among others, who have been much more willing to find the Spirit at work in the nonhuman realm. We have already seen that Gunton and Hardy came to disagreement on the point of whether or not sociality may be construed as a universal mark of all being. We have since come to the conclusion that Hardy was on much firmer ground in his understanding that sociality is indeed a transcendental mark of all things. In like fashion, I believe Hardy is again in better standing on pneumatological concerns as well. In a fascinating paper titled '*The Spirit of God in Creation and Reconciliation*', Hardy sets out to investigate 'the relation of the Trinitarian God to the dynamics of humanity and nature' with a specific emphasis placed on the role of the Spirit within this dynamism.⁸⁶ In order to initiate this task, Hardy begins by setting out what may be taken to be nothing less than a prolegomena to a theology of *placing*. Although he does not use the geographical language we have employed in this thesis, Hardy begins with a description of what he calls our 'contextuality'. Clarifying the point, he explains that "context" does not indicate that which surrounds us, as if that were distinct from us, as if it were an envelope in which we are contained.' It is instead intended to indicate 'the interweaving of human subjects with their cultures and the natural world'.⁸⁷ Here we find that Hardy, from the very outset, has seemingly rejected the modern 'building perspective'. We find, then, that humans are not to be understood as aliens dropped amongst a world of nonhuman things which simply rotate around human subjects. Instead, 'contextuality' serves to indicate that humans are always interwoven into a single multi-textured fabric with a spectrum of nonhuman partners. But Hardy also appears to lose some ground with his qualifying statement concerning our 'contextuality' as he argues that it is '*a mental, if not also a cultural, construct*, one which serves to tidy up the often confusing mixture of situations in which we find ourselves.'⁸⁸ Hardy is, however, clearly aware that there are pitfalls attendant to any appeal to theories of 'social construction', admitting that there 'is

⁸⁶ Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, p. 68.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. (emphasis added)

some danger' that we may in fact 'lose the vibrancy of the very mixture which we seek to clarify' by making such an appeal.⁸⁹

We may now pursue the question concerning how Hardy understands the Triune God to be participative in the dynamism which he describes as the 'interweaving' of humans, nonhumans and God. He begins by seeking out what he calls a 'true poesis' which understands the Triune God to be *performative* of the truth, for it is within the Trinitarian dynamism that we are to find the 'intellectual conditions' appropriate to registering our 'interweaving'.⁹⁰ And in light of the realization that our poesis – our 'song of reality' – is indeed dynamic and performed through God's own dynamism, we must also abandon the supposition that reality is composed of 'fixed orders of being'. 'It is a strange irony', Hardy explains, 'that theology has been only half-purged of the notions of fixed orders of being which arise from God's creation.'⁹¹ Upon my reading, this begins to reveal a close proximity to the nonmodern understanding of the radical contingency of all things. The world is not composed of strict orders of being but is rather a network of dynamics, which 'opens up the possibility that God, human beings and nature interact *dynamically* in ways to which our habits of thought blind us.'⁹² Like the nonmodern theorist, Hardy has committed theology to a program interested in registering the 'rhythms' of relational dynamism, rather than simply seeking out static forms of ontology which populate a fixed reality composed of various orders of being.

Following from this dynamic and performative vision of contextuality, Hardy – in agreement with Gunton – argues that we must not posit a strict severing of the immanent and economic Trinity. This is to say that the dynamic life of God immanently, must not be severed from God's outward movement economically. What this further suggests, for Hardy, is that God's economic involvement in our contextuality is never to be understood as fragmented amongst the three persons of the Trinity. As Hardy argues:

The activity of God on the contextuality of the world is not to be confined to the presence of Christ, but it is not simply to be identified with the Holy Spirit either. The activity of God in the contextuality of the world requires recognition that the operation of the Holy Spirit achieves its consistency by following the initial conditions which we conventionally identify as the 'Father' and the congruence with the world which we identify the 'Son'.⁹³

God's dynamic and triune being is then understood to be the source from which the many possibilities for life find their beginning. Yet Hardy also makes clear that when we speak of God's economic dynamism within our own contextualization, we must speak of both the Son

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁹² Ibid., p. 72, (emphasis in the original).

⁹³ Ibid., p. 81.

and the Spirit. 'Thus, from the implicit relationality of "the Father", the Spirit can be seen to generate the fullness of the Father through the Son and through the Son's work in the world.'⁹⁴ For Hardy, it is the triune God who is the dynamic source of our contextualization and our interweaving of humans, nonhumans, and God. Hence, it is also through the Son and the Spirit that we are to find *unity*. Not a unity that is forced upon us from the outside – the hegemonic unity which modernity was right to protest – but rather, a unity that is performed actively through the dynamism of our immanent contextualization and interweaving. This gives us a vision of particularities that are always interwoven – we might say *networked* – so as to remain particular, yet also woven into the wider tapestry of 'contextual weaving'. 'So it can be said that the conditions for the full contextual interweaving of human beings and other animate creatures, as well as nature itself, are already actively present in the contextuality of human life, and that we are here only uncovering what already is by God's grace, so that it may be performed more fully.'⁹⁵ We find here that Hardy has begun to move towards expanding the action of the Spirit towards the networking of humans and nonhumans, both animate and inanimate. But I do not, however, detect in this work of Hardy's a concern for making a full case for nonhuman agency/actancy. In his vision of contextual interweaving, enlivened by Son and Spirit, the 'engine' of the dynamism seems to be most fully placed in the Son and the Spirit themselves. In other words, the work of the Spirit does not appear to be responsible for an 'opening out' of inanimate nature in such a way as to allow for the type of nonhuman actancy which the nonmodern thinker might be concerned to locate.

Peter Scott appears to take a step closer in his detailing of an 'ecological pneumatology' based on a 'pneumatology of fellowship'. For Scott, like Gunton and Hardy before him, the actions of the Spirit should not be separated from the work of the Son. This is because the 'actions of the Spirit, co-working with the Word, relate the movements of encounter through the spatio-temporal field of sociality.' The particular action of the Spirit, which Scott singles out, is the work of bringing different beings into a kind of relationship which he has called 'fellowship'. 'Through the practices towards fellowship, which are the gift of the Spirit, and the enjoyment of fellowship, which is the life of the Spirit, the presence of the Spirit is to be understood.'⁹⁶ We will take particular notice that this is quite close to Gunton's understanding that the Spirit's work is to bring into relation 'beings and realms' which are often thought to be ontologically distinct or even opposite. But unlike Gunton, and even Hardy, Scott is much more willing to find the Spirit at work amongst the nonhuman realm – both animate and inanimate – dynamically bringing into fellowship all manner of

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

⁹⁶ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 202.

being through the Word. As Scott writes; ‘By the Word yet in the Spirit, creatures are placed in a material order which is premised upon fellowship and oriented towards fellowship.’⁹⁷

What is perhaps most intriguing in Scott’s ‘ecological pneumatology’ is his insistence that the fellowship which the Spirit bestows is not to be found exclusively in human agents, but also in nonhuman agents. We find within this two points of particular note when compared to the pneumatology of Gunton. The first point has to do with what we have consistently seen as Gunton’s inability to recognize nonhuman agency, whereas Scott has declared it to be one of the distinguishing marks of his political theology of nature – yet we have also seen that Scott has given very little direction on how this nonhuman agency is to be specifically understood. Secondly, here Scott has clearly extended the work of the Spirit into the nonhuman realm, and without the equivocations or the dubious appeals to the Cappadocian concept of *perichoresis* which we have identified in Gunton. As Scott argues:

To speak of fellowship in the Spirit across the common realm is, of course, to speak of communion between creator and creatures: difference indeed! Which means, of course, that, if the fellowship is granted by the gift of the Spirit between God’s Trinity and *human* creatures, the difference between creatures and creator cannot be used to exclude the non-human from participation in fellowship. The fellowship bestowed by *Creator Spiritus* knows no such arbitrary restriction.⁹⁸

Drawing on the pneumatology of Jürgen Moltmann, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Michael Welker, Scott further argues that the Spirit works to bring into fellowship all of God’s creation, both human and nonhuman. And as the giver of fellowship, the Spirit is also to be understood as the source of the vast diversity of life. ‘Diversity is thereby not alien to the project of creation. Instead, diversity is to be sourced to the giving of the Spirit.’⁹⁹ Scott further argues that it would be illogical to then limit the Spirit’s work of differentiation to the human sphere alone. We may then, following Wainwright, understand the third person of the Trinity as *Creator Spiritus*. And following Welker, we are also justified in understanding that the ‘benefits of the Spirit are not for humans only but are also for “spatial and temporal, proximate and distant environments”.’¹⁰⁰ To be certain, we have here the beginnings of a pneumatology much better suited to registering the dynamics of human and nonhuman placing than Gunton was ultimately able to offer.

Scott has also picked up on the transcendental concept of ‘openness’ or the ‘opening out’ which we have reviewed in Gunton. We will recall that it was here that we identified one of Gunton’s primary equivocations, or points where his argument becomes rather opaque, as it was unclear as to whether or not he affirmed that the Spirit enacted an ‘opening out’ of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 203; quoting Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 338.

nonhuman entities. We concluded, however, that it was clear in Gunton's case that the nonhuman particulars were not to be understood as 'open' in such a way as to allow for nonhuman agency/actancy. For Gunton, agency or the ability to exert an effect on *another*, is the sole preserve of persons divine and human. But Scott has offered a bit more clarity on this point through a twofold movement. First, by insisting upon the combined sociality of humans and nonhumans, and then by coupling 'openness' with the social forms of relationality found in human and nonhuman sociality, Scott is able to affirm that the work of the Holy Spirit is to 'open out' both human and nonhuman entities. In other words, by expanding sociality to the nonhuman realm, Scott has been able to apply the transcendental of 'openness' to both human and nonhuman sociality. To be social is, then, to be empowered towards an 'openness' to that which is other-than. To say that 'openness' is a transcendental mark of all being, is to insist that the Spirit works to 'open out' particulars in order to be socially available to another, whether that *other* is human, nonhuman, or divine. In sum, all things participate in relations which may be deemed social, and this sociality is empowered through an openness which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is also of particular note in this formulation is that Scott has not, in any sense, delegated the work of nonhuman 'opening' to a generalized account of cosmic perichoresis, as we have seen in Gunton's account. In Scott's pneumatological vision, we may understand nonhuman 'openness' and sociality to be the outcome of the *personal* activity of the Spirit. Borrowing the words of Elizabeth Johnson, Scott argues that 'the Spirit may therefore be understood as eschatological movement in and towards the openness of creaturely reality: "the Spirit characteristically sets up bonds of kinship among all creatures, human and non-human alike, all of whom are energized by this one Source".'¹⁰¹

We may now ask how this expanded role of the Spirit's action in the nonhuman realm, which we have gleaned from Hardy and Scott, may now be re-envisioned through a nonmodern account of socio-material or socio-technical mediation – that is to say, through a network ontology. This further step beyond both Hardy and Scott is necessary due to the fact that each of them has failed to account for the multiplicity of hybrids which the practitioners of science studies have made the central focus of their field. Although Hardy has done much to redirect our attention towards understanding our intimate 'contextuality', his account lacks two important points. Missing in Hardy's pneumatology is an account of nonhuman actancy, as well as a detailed account of the multiplicity of socio-technical hybrids which populate our collective existence. We found the same to be true of Scott's account of the 'common realm'. Although Scott was able to improve upon Hardy's pneumatology by insisting upon nonhuman agency, Scott has done little of anything to add any depth to this important claim, as he has remained altogether mute on how nonhuman agency is to be understood. We have also traced

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 205, quoted from Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*, (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 44.

this persistent inability to register the ‘hybridity’ of humans and nonhumans in Scott’s project to his consistent reliance on Marxian dialectics. Thus, by seeking to build upon the expanded pneumatological understanding of these two theologians, we may now attempt to speak of the Spirit’s work within the obfuscated ‘middle kingdom’ which has been the focus of the nonmodern thinker. If successful, we will be much closer to our goal of constructing a trinitarian and nonmodern concept of placing.

A Pneumatology for the Middle Kingdom

A start can be made by seeking to build upon the trinitarian theologies of Hardy and Scott, by beginning to consider the work of the Spirit to be more directly involved in the socio-material mediation between people and things, humans and nonhumans, agents and actants. What is required is a very definite account of the Spirit’s ‘opening out’ of nonhuman entities in such a way as to allow for the recognition of nonhuman actancy within this dynamism. We have already seen that for both Hardy and Scott, the Spirit is more directly associated with the ‘opening out’ of nonhuman nature than Gunton – anxious to avoid any hints of pantheism – was able to affirm. But are we now justified in applying this transcendental principle of *openness* to hybrid (socio-technical) entities as well? To be clear, we have seen that both Hardy and Scott have identified ‘openness’ as a Spirit-bestowed transcendental mark of all being – human, nonhuman, and divine. The problem, however, is that we have only seen this applied to ‘ecological nature’ or ‘nonhuman nature’ – that is, to a seemingly ‘purified’ nature. But what happens when we apply the principle of Spirit-bestowed ‘openness’ to the socio-material (or hybrid) networks of the nonmodern thinker? It is my position that in doing this we are given a much deeper account of Hardy’s ‘contextuality’, Scott’s ‘ecosocial ontology’, and Gunton’s wish to understand our ‘internal’ relatedness to the world. In a very real sense, we begin to find a way of speaking theologically of the socio-material ‘humming’ or ‘vibrations’ of a world which suddenly becomes much more rich and textured than the modern’s polarized world of warm Subjects and cold Objects. Through a theo-geographical concept of placing which seeks to locate the work of the Spirit’s ‘opening out’ more directly in the nonhuman sphere, we begin to understand that we do not live in societies which stare out at a distant nature, or up at a distant God. Instead, we begin to see that we are not human without the socio-material and trinitarian relational networks of which we are a part.

It is for this reason that I believe the recent theologies of place, which we have reviewed above, have been rather impoverished in their near total lack of trinitarian concern. As we have seen, these recent theologies of place have almost totally neglected pneumatological concerns, opting instead to focus exclusively on the geographic outworkings of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As important as this may be, a theology of

placing must also seek to register the ‘opening out’ of nonhuman particulars – be they ‘natural’, ‘ecological’, ‘technical’, or ‘artificial’ – so as to allow for nonhuman actancy, and full nonhuman participation in sociality. To be clear, this means that it is the work of the Spirit to prepare (‘open’) all things – human, nonhuman, and divine – in such a way that relational agency/actancy is no longer the sole preserve of persons alone. As long as a theology of placing lacks an account of the Spirit’s work in ‘opening out’ nonhuman particulars it will remain an impoverished, and distinctly *modern*, account of our ‘interweaving’ of humans, nonhumans and God. This is the very problem we have continued to trace in Gunton’s geographical blindspots throughout this thesis. In his haste to avoid all notes of pantheism, Gunton has been far too jealous in his policing of ontological boundaries, to such an extent, that he has little to say about the intimate relationality between people and things which he so often claimed to be seeking out. This has become distinctly manifest in his over-pronounced concern to limit sociality, agency, and spirit to the realm of persons alone.

When coupled with a nonmodern understanding of human/nonhuman placing, the pneumatological expansion I am here proposing is, in fact, rather modest. Surprisingly, this would require only a small correction, or addition, to the projects of the three theologians we have drawn from in the present section. Gunton, as we have seen, came very close to painting a similar picture in his description of the constellations of perichoretic relations which enmesh our culture through its love affair with that ubiquitous modern hybrid – the motor car. It was here that Gunton made the very nonmodern argument that the ‘motor car shapes our relations with each other and the world for good and ill and in all dimensions of our being’. Continuing, Gunton writes: ‘It is thus a symbol of our perichoresis for both good and for ill with each other and the world: with the way in which all things are what they are in relations of mutual constitutiveness with all other beings.’¹⁰² Similarly, drawing on Exodus 31:3-9, Gunton has indicated that there is some truth to speaking of the Spirit’s involvement in human creative interaction with nonhuman materiality. We have also seen that Gunton has appropriated this understanding of Spirit-enlivened interaction with the nonhuman for his concept of the ‘cultural mandate’. On this point Gunton argued that it is through the Spirit that human persons are able ‘to engage with the created order as to enable it to join the human species in praise of its creator’.¹⁰³ But a nonmodern and trinitarian concept of placing will further insist, along with Hardy and Scott, that we understand the work of the Spirit to also consist in the ‘opening out’ of the nonhuman materiality in such a way as to allow for nonhuman actancy to be expressed in the process of technological or artistic action. We need not, and must not, jealously limit the Spirit’s work of ‘opening out’ to personal entities alone. In a theology of placing we must be equally able to speak of the nonhuman’s agential

¹⁰² Gunton, *The One the Three*, p. 178.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

openness to the personal realm as well. In conclusion I will offer two summary points on how a symmetrical and trinitarian pneumatology may be positively employed so as to allow the agential ‘openness’ of nonhuman entities to be more fully registered.

The first suggestion will take us back to our earlier discussion concerning *social-technical mediation* and *nonhuman actancy* which we addressed in chapter 3 (III. B). We will first recall that ‘mediators’ are, for the nonmodern, to be strictly contrasted with what Latour has identified as modern ‘intermediaries’. Whereas the moderns recognized only intermediaries – relations which ferried between pure ontological forms of either Nature or Society – the nonmodern is equipped to now seek out truly *hybrid* or *asymmetrical* mediations which carry a ‘variable ontology’. Mediators, unlike modern intermediaries, are variable in that they are capable of actually exchanging properties between humans and nonhumans through the dynamism of their heterogeneous networking. For Latour this realization requires a new language for expressing the process of human engagement with nonhuman materiality – what he calls ‘technical action’. In chapter four we catalogued four specific ways in which Latour has reconceived technical action in nonmodern and symmetrical terms which, as we argued in chapter 4, avoid Gunton’s habit of pitting exclusively agential humans against merely passive nonhumans. For the nonmodern thinker we must be able to speak equally of the nonhuman’s contribution to the act of technical engagement or formation. As we have already seen Latour forcefully argue, we must find a new nonmodern language which will allow us to speak symmetrically of both human and nonhuman additions – exchanges, foldings, actancies, and translations – to the production of the technical hybrid.

But how might we be able to speak, specifically, of the Spirit’s work within the production of this ‘middle kingdom’ where essences are ultimately variable, hybridized, and altogether ‘messy’. As we have seen in the handgun example in chapter 3, the socio-technical hybrid – the handgun – is understood symmetrically as being itself an imbroglio of human and nonhuman characteristics or properties. The handgun is composed through the technical ‘folding’ of human and nonhuman qualities, with the result being that this socio-technical mediator actually carries its own ‘program of action’, its own ‘script’, the agency/actancy of which cannot be traced back to a purely human or nonhuman source. Without the nonhuman materiality of the immutable gun metal, human action – or human sociality for that matter – would fade into ‘pure interactionism’ or pure immediacy. Importantly, it is the gun’s metal, plastic, springs, powder, hinges, and firing pin which all combine to make a new ‘program of action’ that is both mobile and immutable. Now populating the once obfuscated ‘middle kingdom’, technical hybrids are no longer to be understood as merely ‘abject objects’, but rather, as full mediators who are ontologically variable and hybrid. These observations have led us to speak of agency/actancy as ‘a property of associated entities’ that are always both

human and nonhuman.¹⁰⁴ Humans, as we have repeated many times now, simply do not act on their own as if in a vacuum. Humans, along with our social fabric as a whole, rely heavily on our multitudes of socialized nonhuman partners who enable us to act and extend the social fabric in space and time, duration and distance. It is here, within this ‘rhizome-like’ ontology, that we must be able to speak confidently of the Spirit’s ability to transgress ontological boundaries and ‘open-out’ both humans and nonhumans in a *symmetrical* fashion so as to make true hybridity ultimately conceivable. To ‘open-out’, as we are here applying the term to both humans and nonhumans, is to prepare or enable two or more unlike others to participate *multidirectionally* in each others being. To be absolutely clear we must stress that here the work of ‘opening-out’ instigates a shared or relationally achieved actancy. Thus, unlike the pneumatologies of Gunton, Hardy, and Scott, a nonmodern ‘eco-social pneumatology’ will locate the ‘opening-out’ which is the work of the Spirit at the very heart of the ‘folding’ or ‘networking’ of humans and nonhumans, rather than in a still purified ‘human society’ which happens to overlap with an equally pure ‘ecological society’.

Secondly, we are now able to state more clearly the role of the Spirit within the dynamic and relational process which we have called placing. For the purpose of illustration we may here, once again, return to our example of the Joad family farm which we have taken from Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Leaving this place/placing which had been a home to the Joad family for generations is not only sad, it becomes for them an ontological crisis: ‘Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can’t. The willow tree is you. The pain on that mattress there – that dreadful pain – that’s you.’¹⁰⁵ For the humanist geographer, cast in the modern mold we have already described, a place-narrative such as this would easily lend itself to a heavily humanist analysis – place is merely space filled with human emotional attachment – human passions, social constructions, warm layers of humanity painted over an indifferent and totally passive willow tree. Under the modern paradigm the nonhumans of the story are reduced to mere scenery, standing ready to passively accept human ‘social’ projections. But the nonmodern and trinitarian concept of placing that we have detailed in this thesis will tell a very different story. As we begin to look upon the same family farm, but now with nonmodern eyes, we begin to see both the humans and the nonhumans in a symmetrical fashion. No longer reduced to the role of a wholly passive *tabula rasa* waiting to be painted with human projections, we may now see the Joad family, the willow tree, the barn, and the blood-soaked ground as actants who are sharing in a vibrant relational becoming which we have named *placing*. Through the relational dynamic of placing, we may now understand each of the entities involved, human and nonhuman alike, as being uniquely and mutually constituted through their heterogeneous networking. Once again, we may now highlight that it

¹⁰⁴ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁵ p. 101.

is to the work of the Spirit that we may attribute the relational and agential ‘openness’ of all the actants in this placing, both human and nonhuman. Due to the openness which the Spirit affords we may now, through the trinitarian and nonmodern language of placing, speak of the mutual and multidirectional relationality of these heterogeneous and ontologically constitutive relationships. Without this openness which is shared amongst both human and the nonhuman entities we would be locked into a wholly modern and distinctly asymmetrical discourse which is unable to account for the fullness of our internal relations with the whole of creation.

Spacing, Placing, and Person-Making

In seeking to find the Spirit at work in the ‘opening out’ of both human and nonhuman entities, we equally affirm Gunton’s insistence that; ‘[b]oth persons and things are hypostatic in the sense of being substantial particulars, and rendered such by the patterns of relations that constitute them what they distinctively are: with God in the first instance and with other temporally and spatially related particulars in the second.’¹⁰⁶ Yet, by marrying a nonmodern concept of placing with Gunton’s trinitarian anthropology and doctrine of creation, we are now able to heal many of the geographical blindspots which we have identified in his program. This is particularly true of his account of a relational anthropology. As we have seen, in Gunton’s anthropology there developed a hierarchy of relationships of which human/nonhuman relationships were of the least importance, and thereby received the least detail. Here Gunton focused primarily on detailing the continuity between divine and human persons, and only secondarily on interpersonal ‘social relations’. But when we couple Gunton’s trinitarian vision with a vibrant concept of placing, human/nonhuman relationality begins to come out of the shadows. By lending detailed attention to a theo-geographical concept of placing that is both trinitarian and nonmodern, we are no longer obliged to approach nonhumanity as the mere ‘object objects’ of traditional sociology which saw them as little more than projection screens for human meanings, human texts, and human social constructions. Instead, we begin to find that human personhood is itself an absolute impossibility – indeed, without its ‘vertical’ relationship – but also without the multiplicity of nonhuman partners with whom we share our collective existence. We find, in fact, that human sociality is impossible without the constellations of socialized nonhumans who lend their immutability and stability to our numerous social forms, and in the process share with us a collective existence.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁶ Gunton, *The One the Three*, p. 202.

We began this thesis with the singular concern of developing a theological language suitable to the task of registering the deep relational dynamism which is believed to exist between human persons and the constellations of nonhuman things – ‘natural’ things, ‘technical’ things, and ‘artificial’ things – which not only populate our lives but also intimately participate in them as well. In the interest of fulfilling this task we adopted in Part I of this thesis a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach which sought to draw from the fields of trinitarian theology, science studies, as well as the geographical sciences. We further adopted as our primary interlocutors the trinitarian theology of Colin Gunton and the science studies of Bruno Latour. Both theorists, as we have seen, are deeply critical of modernity and its ill effects – social, religious, and philosophical. Thus we began this study by detailing how each of these thinkers has diagnosed the many pitfalls which followed in the wake of the development of modern thought. Central to them both we found a pronounced distaste for the distance which the Enlightenment had created between humans, nonhumans, and God. This movement towards a greater and greater fragmentation of these realms motivated each of our interlocutors to construct their own positive programs for healing the many ills which modern fragmentation had ushered in.

In part II of this thesis we offered a critical comparison of these constructive programs, Gunton’s trinitarian theology of creation and culture and Latour’s nonmodern constitution. As we have now seen, lacking the logic of trinitarian relationality, nonmodern thinking strove to develop an ontology based on material relationality that ultimately ended up threatening its ability to affirm the particular reality of the many. We have also seen that Latour’s nonmodern thought was equally unable to handle the ‘God question’ in his nonmodern counter program to modernity. Rather than seek to affirm the otherness-in-relation of God and world, Latour has instead only been able to propose the polar opposite of modernity’s ‘crossed-out’ God. In the end we are given a God who is ultimately not unlike humans, as he is portrayed as one who is unable to fully master his own creation. As we have seen, orthodox trinitarian theology rejects the notion of a collapse between God and world, as well as the notion that God has lost control of creation as a whole. Therefore, Gunton is certainly correct to identify modernity’s inability to properly balance between the God of deism and the God of pantheism. What our late-modern world now requires is a vision of God which is able to affirm both otherness *and* relation, unity *and* multiplicity. By following Gunton in his trinitarian understanding of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ relations we have been able to heal Latour’s inability to affirm the otherness of relations in both of the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ trajectories.

Yet we have also identified a number of shortcomings in Gunton’s trinitarian theology of creation and culture. We have seen that Gunton has retained a number of dualistic currents which Latour has been able to accurately identify in modernity as a whole. Primary

amongst these is Gunton's wholesale inability to affirm nonhuman participation in sociality due to his strict adherence to an I-Thou form of sociality. As we have seen, this geographical blindspot is closely followed by two more shortcomings. First, Gunton has largely limited relational agency to human and divine persons alone, and is therefore unable to offer much of any detail concerning human/nonhuman relationality. And secondly, this has led Gunton to affirm a strongly anthropocentric emphasis in his understanding of the 'cultural mandate'. What we have been able to illustrate with the help of Latour, is that it is terribly misguided to speak of sociality without equally speaking of nonhuman participation. In fact, as Latour has argued, without material participation in sociality human inter-personal relations would be reduced to pure interactionism. It is for this reason that the practitioners of science studies can boldly claim that '*there is no humanity without inhumanity!*' That is to say that we humans simply could not maintain our wonderfully complex and persistent forms of sociality without the constellations of socio-material mediators which circulate throughout our collectives.

Part III sought to bring both of our interlocutors into a deep conversation with the dynamic field of 'human' geographical thought, but particularly the concept of place/placing. It was here that we began to elucidate the fascinating crossover which is taking place between nonmodern theorists from science studies and the growing contingent of geographical theorists who are now seeking to question the human-dominated discourses of their field. We concluded in this that the concept of place as it has operated in the shadow of the modern constitution is altogether inadequate to the task of expressing the intimate relationality we seek amongst humans, nonhumans, and the triune God. We thus proposed in its stead the developing nonmodern concept of placing which seeks to apply the nonmodern principles of symmetry, nonhuman actancy, and relational ontology.

In this chapter we have now briefly reviewed several of the recent theological attempts to appropriate the geographical concept of place in order to reinvigorate theological concepts in need of a spatial theory. Here we concluded that these recent geo-theologies which claimed to adopt the human geographical concept of place were, in fact, working more closely to the geographical concept of *locale* than they were *place*.

Moving into the truly positive conclusions of this thesis we then moved to consider the theological and trinitarian justifications for speaking of nonhumans as participating in the marks of sociality. It was in this vein that we concluded that the trinitarian theologian need not follow Gunton's limitation of social interaction to the strict confines I-Thou relationality. Again with the help of Scott, we argued on trinitarian and Christological grounds for the admittance of nonhumans into the realm of the social, but came to a disagreement with Scott on the specifics of this nonhuman sociality. It was on this point that it was argued that the trinitarian vision of nonhuman sociality in both Scott and Hardy did not do enough to account for nonhuman actancy and the hybridity that is achieved in the 'middle kingdom' where

humans and nonhumans may be found to exchange properties. In an effort to remedy this lack of a trinitarian account of the ontological ‘messiness’ which exists in this middle kingdom, we then sought to emphasize – in distinction to Gunton, Hardy and Scott – the role of the Spirit in the ‘opening-out’ of *both* humans and nonhumans. Here the argument focused on the relational actancy which the Spirit enlivens in both humans and nonhumans as it works to also preserve these beings in a relationally achieved otherness.

It is then a fundamental theological truth that in light of the Trinity everything, indeed, begins to look very different. This is particularly true of our renewed concept of placing. By understanding nonhuman actancy as the outgrowth of perichoretic and Spirit-enlivened socio-material mediations, we are now able to envision a deeper account of human dwelling in the world than Gunton was able to fully realize on his own. No longer may we divide the creation into a dualistic pairing of agential persons on one side, and purely passive nonpersons on the other. Instead we are left with the understanding that humans are rarely, if ever, able to act on their own. To be human is always to be wrapped up in overlapping constellations of networked relationships of humans and nonhumans, people and things, each acting on one another in the dynamic and mediated foldings of multiple spacings, timings, and most of all, particular *placings* that mutually constitute us in our own particular being. This is, however, always to be understood as the outcome of the work of Son and Spirit, dynamically holding all things in mutually constitutive relation without sacrificing the substantiality of the one *or* the many.

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