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Experimental Procedures for New Ontologies

Tom Kayzel & Sigmund Bruno Schilpzand

Review essay of: Bruno Latour (ed.) (2016) *Reset Modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 560 pp.

In 2013, French philosopher Bruno Latour baffled his growing audience with the publication of *An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence* (henceforth AIME), a 500-page tome containing Latour's attempt at a systematic philosophy with the ambition and scale of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, claiming that our modern world is best understood by delineating the fifteen "modes of existence" that make it up (Latour 2013a). Although this 500-page monster caused confusion even amongst his most seasoned readers, for Latour himself it was only the start. Simultaneously, Latour launched an interactive website through which fellow scholars could contribute to his study of those that give themselves the attribute of "modern". While studying "the moderns", as Latour would call these people, contributors to the website detracted or added from the "modes of existence" that made up the ontology of the moderns.¹

The whole AIME-project (that is, the book, multiple workshops, lectures and online discussions) came to an end with an exhibition in the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe called *Reset Modernity*. In the past, Latour had already,

together with Peter Weibel, director of ZKM, utilised exhibitions for exploring and investigating specific topics in his work, inviting many prominent scholars, curators and artists to reflect with him on these topics. This resulted in two large catalogues that also function as reference work for scholars interested in Latour's work (Latour and Weibel 2002, 2005). And now his latest exhibition has produced again a sizable tome, simply named *Reset Modernity* (henceforth RM). Even if this catalogue is a bit shorter than his previous two, the volume is still full to the brim with articles of prominent scholars across many disciplines, such as anthropologist Philippe Descola, art historian Joseph Leo Koerner, philosopher Isabelle Stengers and intercut with essays and artworks by artists such as Armin Linke, Friedrich Casper David and Tomás Saraceno, to name but a few.

In RM Latour asks his readers to reset their sensing devices in order to render sensible to us the things that make us modern. Long-time readers notice that he is continuing his research into modernity as set out in his 1993 book *We Have Never Been Modern*, in which Latour argued that our conception of modernity came down to a rigid and unbridgeable distinction between subjects and objects, culture and nature. More shockingly, Latour argued that this great watershed between subject and object had never taken place as our practices showed that we constantly relied on entities that defied that categorisation, so-called quasi-objects (Latour 1993, 51–55). Only our thinking had been modern, our practices had never been. AIME was the answer to a question posed to Latour after finishing *We Have Never Been Modern*, namely "if we never were modern, what are we then?" (Latour 2013b). The somewhat paradoxical answer was that we are modern, albeit not in the sense that philosophers usually understood this condition. The problem for Latour was that since we understand the world through the Modern Constitution that divided subject and object we are not well equipped to understand quasi-objects, while a proliferation of quasi-objects is precisely what makes our society, or rather our collective, as Latour would say, modern (Latour 1993, 13–15; 88–90).²

RM promises procedures through which we can rid ourselves of our ontological preconceptions and truly start to understand ourselves as modern. A task which is, according to Latour, very urgent in the age of large-scale environmental problems,

smartly captured in the notion of “the Anthropocene”. But what is precisely the danger if we modern people cannot conceive of ourselves as modern? According to Latour’s opening essay *Let’s touch base*, the problems revolve around nihilism: a politico-theological aspect of modernity. The introduction sees Latour at his most ferocious, producing lines like “the modernizing frontier seems ready to swallow humans and nonhumans alike, plunging all of them into the midst of a general destruction of the conditions fit for life”, and “transcendence [has] been transformed into the abandonment and condemnation of this world” (11).³ Here, the modernizing frontier and transcendence are used interchangeably. Latour points out religious and economic wars as the source of the “general destruction” and these events are cast as processes attracted by transcendent goals. Both are attracted towards some beyond: “religious wars for the colonization of a nonexistent after-world; [...] economic wars for territories that are equally insubstantial” (11). Latour’s warnings of nihilism recall Nietzsche’s (anti-Christian) crusade against nihilism. Nietzsche wrote against life-denying longings, and the acts of self-flagellation and practices of punishment associated with it (See: Nietzsche 1998). Latour does something similar: in the Anthropocene the viability of the planet is at stake, and the belief in some transcendent beyond is causing the trouble.

But what is Latour’s alternative? He contrasts nihilism with the *earthly* (which we interpret as a term for the immanence of actants), the *secular* and the *material* as better dwellings for thought and practice. Latour’s goal this time around seems to be: offering procedures for discovering our Earth anew, not as a place to realise a transcendent beyond that calls upon us, but as a place in which we need to learn how to survive or prevent the looming environmental catastrophes by moving “neither up nor down, but within and along the world” (20). Ridding ourselves of the old “modernizing frontier” by resetting our modern sensibilities would thus help us to find the Earth again.

Resetting however, Latour is quick to stress, should not be understood as the act of rebooting our electronic devices (e.g. resetting my mobile phone), a simple push on a button. Instead Latour alludes to how technical instruments are reset, by recalibration. For example, recalibrating measuring instruments in such a way that

they are able to detect the modern entities and value them appropriately; but also the recalibration of navigation instruments, seeking for new points that can help to orient the moderns. An urgent issue since the older horizons that we used to navigate modernity (e.g. secularization, liberal democracy, civilisation, rationalisation, etc.) are either under pressure all over the world, or have proven to be problematic.

The reset procedures are invitations for the reader to develop new ontologies that escape the Modern Constitution. Their outcome is uncertain: although Latour has his ontologies already mapped out, it is clear that his collaborators are not convinced yet and want to find their own ways; what’s more, whether these procedures render new ontologies at all is questioned by some contributors. This gives the procedures offered an experimental character. Thus for the remainder of this essay, we take this experimental route and see what the possible outcome of following Latour’s procedures can be, reviewing the volume in the process.

Procedures 1 & 2: Relocalizing the Global; Without the World or Within

For those who are familiar with Latour’s output before AIME, procedures 1 & 2 are familiar territory. Just as in *Science in Action* (Latour 1988a) or *The Pasteurization of France* (Latour 1988b) Latour asks us to look beyond ready-made knowledge and see the messy practices that purify scientific results bringing the quasi-objects that underpin the workings of modern science into view. The novelty is that Latour does not concentrate on knowledge but on our practices of making pictures of the world (cf. Heidegger 1977a). Following Peter Sloterdijk, Latour considers that the predominant modern way of picturing the world is globular (see: Sloterdijk 2014). Globes are not only a representation of all earth’s land and seas as an interconnected whole; in the modern perception it is also that *in* which or *on* which we reside. Slogans as “think globally, act locally” seem to suggest that the image of the globe is essential to understand the impact humans have on the earth in the Anthropocene. Yet, as Latour remarks in his book *Facing Gaia*: “the danger is always the

same: the figure of the Globe authorizes a premature leap to a higher level by confusing the figures of connection with those of totality” (Latour 2017, 130). As Latour explains, the globe is an abstraction but is confused for the totality; the result, all the practices and materials involved into making this abstraction disappear from the totality.

In RM Latour explains this mistake of the image of the globe by discussing Charles and Ray Eames’ 1977 short film *Powers of Ten* (53). What seems at first an educational film about what science can tell us about the largest and smallest possible scales, turns out to be riddled with “globes”; their integration provides a perfect antithesis to what Latour tries to achieve in his first procedure in particular, and RM in general. Effortlessly, the film’s camera travels from the sphere of the galaxy to the sphere of our DNA-structure. But that one camera does not exist. Multiple recording devices were needed to produce the pictures we see. All the pictures are stylized in order to let us grasp the information in them more easily. Others, such as those of a carbon nucleus, could more accurately be described as an artist’s impression. The smooth transition the film gives us would have taken, in reality, complicated travels among laboratories and artist’s studios around the world.

Not only does Latour invite us to imagine the travels between the laboratories but also to take a look inside them. If we would, for example, visit NASA’s research division, we would learn that the famous Blue Marble picture from 1972, which features in the *Powers of Ten*, is actually made up of large datasets of photos stitched together, removing a lot of cloud formations in the process. Not only are the jumps between the spheres not smooth, closer scrutiny proves that the spheres do not even hold together.

By thinking through such examples Latour helps to rid us of those totalising world pictures, which were according to Martin Heidegger so fundamental to our modern way of thinking. Without the globe, Latour asserts, we are “able to follow connections without jumping [...] to the ‘big picture’” (54). Ridding ourselves of the “big pictures”, the second procedure neatly connects by ridding ourselves of another major framework that guides our understanding, the already mentioned subject-

object scheme, more specifically, the positioning of object and subject as always face-to-face. Knowledge must be understood to never rely “on such a face-to-face of object and subject and a subject-with-nothing-else-to-do-but-gazing-on-an-object” (93). Latour proposes that instead of imagining the production of knowledge to be this vertical relation, we should “shift direction sideways by ninety degrees” (93): knower and known are now on the same plane (“within” the world; a plane of immanence).⁴ Latour’s final word on the matter is that we must move away from the vertical scenography, and should replace our faulty self-understanding with “[registrations of] the experience of dealing with the world” (93).

Giving this procedure more colour than the usual Latourian fare is the addition of essays by critical Latour interlocutors Pablo Jensen, Philippe Descola and Graham Harman, amongst others, who shed new light on what it means to go beyond the subject-object scheme. For example, in his essay *How We Became Modern: a View from Afar* Descola equally sets out the procedure(s) Latour prescribes, where he understands them as “considering the conditions that made them [the moderns] modern” (122). Remarkably enough, Descola arrives at different results than those of Latour. Noteworthy of Descola’s identification of the moderns is that it helps to fulfil two tasks in the procedure. Firstly, a historical investigation and corroboration of the production of hybrids veiled by the moderns’ cosmological dichotomy; secondly, more importantly, Descola’s anthropological work allows us to see the modern’s cosmology/ontology *alongside* (rather than above) “premodern” cosmologies, persuading us that throwing out subject and object does not make for an inhospitable world, and encourages one to experiment with nonmodern thought. As such, Descola adds to the procedure and helps us in considering our place on earth together with other collectives.

Procedure 3: Sharing Responsibilities: Farewell to the Sublime

Procedures 1 and 2 brought our own modern *collective* of quasi-objects in view, in contrast with the exclusive human “society”, and made us aware that there are other collectives on the earth who may not share our “cosmology”. But how is it possible

to direct our attention and action with regard to environmental problems without a globe? And with multiple collectives inhabiting the Earth, what is responsible for these problems if not “humanity”? The third procedure asks us to conceive of new ways of how to share responsibilities, while being wary of the temptation of another big Western concept, *the sublime*.

Traditionally, the moderns considered responsibility as reserved for their individual actions. In extension, responsibility was also something that was felt towards a community, and later on towards society. In the seemingly modern times a new responsibility was added: that for humanity as a whole. In short, the limits of their feeling of responsibility are always formed by the limits of their (collective) subjectivity: from the individual to the community, to a universal idea of humanity. In contrast, one seldom feels responsibility for nature, nor was nature ever a moral agent. But in the Anthropocene, it seems that nature’s catastrophes are at least partly co-produced by humans. Thus one can ask if we are to blame when another hurricane hits the coast.

Our first response may be to morally perfect ourselves and include nature in the moral realm. But then we run into trouble since the Anthropocene not only questions our responsibilities, it also asks “who is this humanity?” Is the whole of humanity responsible for climate change, including residents of Indian slums, and the Amerindians of the Amazon forest? Surely not. For this reason some critics of the term Anthropocene have proposed the alternative Capitalocene, identifying Capitalism and capitalist powers as those who are (or should be held) responsible. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s contribution to RM lists all new proposals for new “-cenes”, including their pros and cons (189-99; cf. Moore 2017). Still, with no common human responsibility, how can we account for the fact that the very existence of humanity is potentially threatened by climate change, a fate the moderns share with the Indian Slums, and Amazon Amerindians?

Latour’s answer to these questions (what is humanity in the Anthropocene? and what is its responsibility?) uses an idea developed by the inventor James Lovelock and biologist Lynn Margulis, known as the Gaia-hypothesis. In an interview with

Hans Ulrich Obrist, reprinted in RM (200-4), Lovelock explains the following about the origins of this hypothesis:

[I]n marches another astronomer [...] who announces that a complete analysis had been made of the Martian and Venusian atmospheres, and that they are nearly all carbon-dioxide with just traces of other things. I knew instantly that there was almost certain no life on either planet, and that suddenly made me think, well, what about Earth? Why does it have an atmosphere so different [...]? And then, it came to my mind as a flash of enlightenment: we must be regulating the atmosphere. And then I thought, again almost instantly, where do the gases come from? We know oxygen comes from plants, and methane, which it reacts with, comes from bacteria. Those are both living things. Carl Sagan’s first remark was “O Jim, it’s nonsense to think that the Earth can regulate itself. [...]” But then he said, “Hold on a minute, there is one thing that has puzzled us astronomers, and that is the “cool sun problem.” At the Earth’s birth, the sun was 30% cooler than it is now, so why aren’t we boiling?” [...] I thought, if that’s true, then all the biota have to do is regulate the CO₂ and they control the temperature. (203-4).

The Gaia-hypothesis states that life on Earth is not simply the result of the right conditions, but that living beings play an active role in stabilizing these conditions. As such, all the organisms of Earth cooperate in order to regulate the temperatures on Earth. This cooperation, as one ecosystem as it were, is what Lovelock and Margulis called Gaia. When adapting this hypothesis for his own philosophy Latour is wary of its holistic overtones. Gaia, in Latour’s interpretation, is not simply a large self-regulating thermostat-system in which all life on Earth has to participate. Nor is it a super-organism, of which all other organisms are merely a part. Such thinking invokes Gaia as an ancient Goddess, whose divine providence rules over all mortals, such as us humans.

Latour robs Gaia of her divine providence in order not to go back to the Romantic idea of the sublime, a terrifying nature in which man’s existence is insignificant.

But he keeps some of her godly features. She announces herself to the people, undertakes action by raising the temperature on Earth, and it's the people who invoke her when they take action for the well-being of all the Earth. Since not all collectives are called upon by Gaia in the same manner, nor invoke her in the same way, not all peoples share the same responsibility. And indeed the call of Gaia may sound the loudest for those capitalist powers. Mediated by Gaia, the peoples of the Earth no longer have a need for an overreaching humanity to understand their actions as bearing responsibility for all life on the planet. Going through procedure 3 gives us the first contours of the new horizon for us moderns, a non-totalizing entity in which we share our existence with nonhumans.

Procedures 4 & 5: From Lands to Disputed Territories; Innovation not Hype

The unfortunate reality of modern political discourse is that the interests of Gaia are measured against the interest of "the economy". In AIME, Latour has called the economy a meta-dispatcher, a container in which all social relations are reduced to one particular set of forces: in the economic case, social relations are expressed by monetary values and individual preferences (Latour 2013a, 401–2). The problem of the economic reduction is twofold: first, caring for Gaia most likely involves a reduction of consumption and emission, and thus a restraint on the growth of the economy as such. Secondly, economic values and relations are given excessive attention, while those values which are not easily transformed into monetary value and individual preferences remain out of sight. This puts heavy constraints on what us moderns can value, especially now we obviously share our life-world with nonhumans.

The fourth procedure thus turns attention to how we could improve on the way we do economics and how we can account for what we hold dear. In RM the attempts to undertake such endeavours are somewhat disappointing. Martin Girardeau, Antoine Hennion, Vincent-Antonin Lépinay, Cormac O'Keeffe and Consuelo Vásques make preliminary sketches of how to improve economics. Their

motto seems to be: localise as much as possible (260-271). In other words: economics should engage in real-world experiments wherever it can, and refrain from making law-like claims on the functioning of an overall system. Sometimes they cite the writings of the neoliberal Friedrich Hayek, and one is tempted to think that we're dealing with a free-market proposal in disguise. But the authors defend themselves, saying they are not the "aggressive Darwinist" Hayek was (266), and they propose circumstances under which market-forces could be commanded to halt. If the economy is not an overreaching system, but a collection of local sites, then there is more space for social democracy to exist outside of economic needs, and truly provide a protection against the excesses of market forces. A social democracy outside of the economy is a tempting vision but does not yet connect to any real-world situation. Moreover, all essays, Latour's included, in this procedure give no clue whatsoever on what kind of institutions could guarantee the limits of market forces.

Procedure 5 zooms in further on the relation between us moderns and the entities making up their collective. The classic tale we find in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Heidegger, or Carolyn Merchant, is that with the advent of modernity our relationship with nature becomes mediated by technology and becomes one of instrumental rationality, being enframed or undergoing violent domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Heidegger 1977b; Merchant 1980). These descriptions are neither adequate to describe our relation to technology and nature, nor desirable, but the hype has us in its grip when a seemingly major technological step has been taken (a computer defeating a Go master, for example) which shows we have not yet rid ourselves of thinking in these modern constellations. Latour suggests that we should conceive of our relationship with technological entities not in terms of instrumentality, but in terms of care. Even the most freighting technology, such as, for example, military drones who are able to kill people on the other side of the world, should not be seen as the inevitable new stage of warfare due to technological change, but as problem children. In not caring for these technologies, we would miss how drones being piloted from great distances completely rewrite sovereign law.⁵

This is what Latour takes from Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1831) in his play *Gaia: Global Climate Tragi-Comedy* (328-36). Here it becomes clear that Frankenstein's fault is not that he created his creature, but that he abandons it because it isn't as beautiful as he had hoped. *Frankenstein's* author asks her own creature Viktor why he has imitated the vengeful God that drowned the Earth to rid himself of his sinful creations. "No Mary. I didn't imitate him since I ran away. It's not creating that is a crime, it's abandoning one's Creation" Viktor replies (335).

Procedure 6: Secular at Last

The most puzzling is the sixth procedure. Harking back to his opening statement against nihilism and restating the immanence of being, Latour has to find a different place for religion than the one usually given it in Western philosophy. Moreover, in reference to the works of Eric Voegelin, Latour is keen to stress that, even in a secular age, transcendence has not left politics (Voegelin 1987). Therefore Latour asks: what are we to do to make politics and religion earthly? In asking this question Latour gives a new twist to the notions of secular and secularization. With these terms Latour means disentangling the political and the religious from transcendence (364); from attractors that do not take into account what tethers these practices to "the collective," downgrading religion and politics to the driving forces behind wars.

Latour's line of thought seems to be that to make politics or religion earthly, one has to discern what specifically political or religious skills and actions amount to. Once we discern these, we might be "freed from the strange idea that there is an activity whereby a human could master mastery so thoroughly that it no longer depends on any other source of power" (365), that the political or the religious could make an entire future happen. But, as Latour is keen to stress, they cannot: they share this earth with other beings. Denying that is nihilistic.

Picking one essay to demonstrate how to view politics in an earthly fashion, we will read Gerard de Vries's answer to the question: *What are Politicians for?* He

argues that the political should be a practice in which one bears a responsibility to one's constituency. Politicians are preoccupied with "the defense of the decisions the assembly will make"; whether the outcome of the political process is "good enough [...]" knowing that "[t]here will never be general approval. [The politicians] are preparing for what comes next" (391). By contrast, sometimes the political and the religious, especially in conjunction, amount to perversions of these practices. The game of responsibility (a specifically *political* skill) that De Vries describes is not wrong in itself, and the positive result of this "procedure" is that one might engage with politics without feeling as if one is subjecting oneself to mere power-games – "A good site to open up the possibility of *diplomacy*" (365) indeed, because if we are to engage with other collectives in a diplomatic way we need to trade our supposed mastery of the world for a particular kind of weakness.

Procedure 7: In Search of a Diplomatic Middle Ground

As has become clear in the previous procedures, Latour is looking for a reorientation of the project of modernity, but it is essential that this new front of modernisation cannot become the measuring rod by which we judge the non-moderns, as for example happened when Canada's governments falsely blamed the First-nation hunters for the declining Caribou population, applying the new rules of the Anthropocene to all people equally (Parlee, Sandlos, and Natcher 2018). Moreover, in so far as we are modern, we cannot expect the non-modern to follow the same path of modernisation. Still, given the redistribution of responsibilities in the Anthropocene, all the collectives of the earth are forced to interact and to coordinate their actions. These actions cannot be given shape by a similar horizon of modernity, and thus we should instead have recourse to the act of diplomacy for our coordination with other collectives.

Enter diplomacy. Diplomacy must take place in an encounter between different collectives, between which lies a "middle ground" (405). Rather than a fierce showdown between cultures (Latour mentions the colonization of the Americas), "middle ground" designates the possibility of genuine epistemo-cultural recalibration.

The Other then is no longer a mere premodern, or a nonhuman that cannot speak the modern as no longer superior.⁶ Rather, again annulling the binary, “we are all beginning to be equally amodern”, which means that the affairs of us moderns, too, (including the scientific - think of particular methods or distinctions) “are open to ridicule in the face of the others who, themselves in their turn, don’t know how to address them” (407-8). Discovering of the practices hidden by modern definitions already changes “the very idea of what a science is” (405), but this idea is on the diplomatic middle ground up for more scrutiny: comparing, for example, our value of objectivity with the values within other collectives. In a bilateral exchange there are chances of epistemological and existential transformation: “what you encounter can jeopardize the solidity of the epistemological framework that sent you into the field. [...] You are never sure to survive the encounter” (405).

Latour makes a remark specifically meant for philosophers: “diplomatic encounters have a strange capacity to modify the way philosophers define their task” (407). Engaging in diplomacy should prompt us to pay closer attention to what we actually do, because we will have to explain it to others. The task of non-modern thinkers will come to include careful acts of description, as Jamie Allen, Claudia Mareis and Johannes Bruder write: “[t]he “reset” [...] cracks our modern imaginaries, all the while attempting to log the enunciations of our archival world, dragging along with it an earthly historical ballast, never naively trying to escape [modernity]” (505), and it certainly seems to us that the prospect of diplomacy, an *immanent* goal for thought to work towards, and keeping on this earthly path with its historical ballast, would certainly make for interesting philosophy, as the essays in this volume demonstrate.

Conclusion

In an interview with *Les Temps Modernes* Latour was critically asked about the apparent systematic nature of his AIME project: “[Why] counter a metaphysical machine with a bigger metaphysical machine?” (Marinda 2015). This question is raised again in the last procedure of RM: is the systematic nature of the AIME

project not too closed off in order to be truly diplomatic? Many of the philosophers who contributed to the book are willing to engage with the modes of existence that Latour has proposed, yet few of them accept the systematic ontological classification of these modes, and which is reprinted again at the end of RM (543-6). If even the AIME contributors reject the systematic classification, what then is the upshot of the whole project? Reading through RM provides an answer.

The issues posed by the advent of the Anthropocene ask for a new way of thinking about our relation to the world and a new form of collective action, actions for which our current institutions fall hopelessly short. In lectures given surrounding the Reset Modernity exhibition and thereafter, Latour has sketched a new framework for understanding our current political affairs with regard to what he calls The New Climate Regime.⁷ Here, Latour presents the Earth as the new horizon that could be used to coordinate political action. But what is this Earth, what does it mean to be a horizon for actions? The resetting procedures of RM help us to conceive what this new horizon can look like.

From procedures 1 and 2 it is clear that Earth cannot be a totalising picture, or a frontier that divides the people into modern and premodern. As with Gaia in procedure 3, Earth shows us the kind of responsibilities we have together with other collectives for the place we inhabit (the Earth itself). Consequently, it does not presuppose a shared humanity (identity for the Earth dweller) just the simple fact that we (who/whatever) are all in this together. Furthermore, the Earth has no transcendence, no meaning in the depths of her cave: we cannot die in the name of the Earth in the hope of gaining a better Earth (procedure 6).

Similarly, the Earth is no utopia guiding our politics, and it is a far cry from the techno-inflated visions of the future that Silicon Valley provides us with: technology is not here to save us, but we have to learn to live with technology (procedure 5). Lastly, the Earth is rich in resources, but ultimately limited. And given that there is not one collective that inhabits the Earth, this means we have to reconsider how much of Earth’s resources we have to use, in order to leave enough for other collectives. What do we value in our modern lifestyles and what do we need to

sustain them (procedure 4)? If we gain that knowledge, we can negotiate with the other collectives how to make use of Earth's resources. This negotiation should be an act of diplomacy (procedure 7), in which the only common ground between the parties is the one beneath their feet, the Earth. The Earth is in a sense a political fiction, *a way of imagining politics*, perhaps just as the Leviathan pictured on the front piece of Hobbes' famous book was a fiction. On the other hand, the Earth is very mundane, very concrete, very tangible.

RM perhaps does not reach a complete doctrine of how Earth should feature in politics, nor of how politics oriented towards the Earth should concretely take place. But RM gives us something other which is important, namely a set of terms (Earth, Gaia, Diplomacy, Collectives) that can replace our previously held dear "grand narratives" of the globe, humanity, the free market, etc., which used to navigate our moral and political action, without becoming totalizing. Concluding, RM does not yet yield concrete answers or lasting ontologies, but as the procedures for calibrating our scientific measuring instruments have become more refined over the centuries, so too, we hope, may the procedures that help us to understand our modernity become better over time.

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Notes

1] The site is still online, see: www.modesofexistence.org

2] It would go too far to explain Latour's problem with the notion of society in this short essay, but see: Latour 2005, 4-5.

3] Page numbers within brackets without further reference throughout this text refer to RM.

4] We can point out a Deleuzian slant in Latour here: it is interesting to note – when trying to place Latour in philosophy – that Deleuze's thought is called *transversal* and that in Deleuze's case, too, thinking along a plane of immanence is the key to his (in)famous philosophy of multiplicities, simulacra and assemblages (See: Williams 2005). Where Graham Harman interprets Latour as a secular occasionalist we adumbrate that there are also links to be made between his thought and Deleuze's, whose rhizomes, disguises and fluxes don't quite fit Harman's understanding of objects in Latour (Harman 2009; see also Harman's essay in RM, 129-138).

5] *Krisis* 2017 (1) was completely dedicated to drone technology; on the relation between drones and sovereign law see Chamayou 2015.

6] In Latour's *Politics of Nature*, nonhuman entities, too, lose their "speech impedimenta". Rivers and animals, for example, may gain political mouthpieces/representatives to which these politicians would bear a particular kind of responsibility: of representing them such that these entities "agree" with the policies that follow (e.g. respectively not-drying-up after the placement of a dam or reproducing freely after a particular geographic zone has become a reservation). (Latour 2004, 62-64).

7] During the writing of the review essay, this framework had yet to appear in an official publication. This very recently happened in the booklet *Down to Earth* (Latour 2018), but too late to incorporate in this essay. Instead the following draws on a Lecture given at the Humboldt University in Berlin on 12 May 2016 called "On a possible difference between earth and the globe", visible in its entirety on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVCsUMxzWNg>

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