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Unifying the Modes of Existence

By

Erin Ward

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Philosophy  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2017

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Unifying the Modes of Existence

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will argue that Axel Honneth's formulation of the theory of recognition can add something valuable to Bruno Latour's metaphysics of heterogeneous modes of existence in that it provides an account of what motivates individuals to continually participate in established patterns of interaction thereby encouraging the stability of the collective. I claim that heterogeneous modes of existence, or patterns of interaction are, in a sense, unified in the individual in that not only do they, at least in part, constitute reality for generations that are socialized into them, but participation in these instituted behaviours is also what constitutes an individual's sense of self. I will argue that the co-constitution of society and sense of self that results from patterns of recognition can provide the explanation of stability, in terms of the perpetuation of instituted practices, and unity, in terms of the sense that those practices form a meaningful, unified whole, that is missing from Latour's account. It is my claim that this can be done in a way that is compatible with Latour's overall metaphysics. Given that part of the project in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* involves accounting for the actual experience of moderns while simultaneously tracing the disconnect with theory, it is important for the experience of stability and unity as described above to be located within his metaphysics.

I will begin with some background on Latour's project so as to understand the issues with modern theory that he seeks to address as well as the solution offered by the modes of existence before going on to frame what is missing from this account. I will then consider the sense of self that arises out of processes of recognition based on Axel Honneth's account. I will then make a case for the usefulness of master narratives if they are understood in terms of symbolic universes as explained by Berger and Luckmann or symbol systems as explained by Clifford Geertz and will consider their role in processes of recognition. Finally, I will explain how the process of the co-constitution of self and society and the mechanism of recognition are consistent with Latour's overall project.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Rose, for his support and guidance with this project. Thanks are also due to Dr. Neculau and Dr. Datta for taking the time to review and comment on the paper.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*,<sup>1</sup> Bruno Latour outlines a new metaphysics intended to properly capture the actual practices in which moderns regularly engage. He argues that a chasm has opened up between modern theory and practice that has some important repercussions. First, this chasm prevents moderns from meaningfully confronting the ecological crisis with which they are currently faced. Second, the conflation of truth with scientific knowledge has resulted in an inability to account for other values that do not provide what Latour will call ‘equipped and rectified knowledge’ and as a result has threatened their very existence. Finally, the way in which moderns conceive of themselves in theory renders comparison with other collectives<sup>2</sup> impossible given that other collectives are considered to be merely ‘premodern’ in the sense that they have simply not yet discovered unmediated access to objective knowledge. This mindset has the unfortunate result of encouraging undiplomatic relations with other collectives.

Latour identifies a bifurcation between nature and culture at the core of the fracture between modern theory and knowledge. For Latour, modern theory depends on a total separation

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter shortened to *AIME*.

<sup>2</sup> Latour rejects the notion of ‘society’ as a kind of substance that can be appealed to in order to explain the various practices that a given group of humans regularly engage in and how those practices are organized. Instead, he argues that a constant process of organization and reorganization is at work in any given community and thus their practices are not unified at the outset but have to be constantly reprised and altered in order to prevent incompatibility between them (*Reassembling* 8). As a way of avoiding the impression of society as a unified substance, Latour uses the term ‘collective.’ This is meant to capture that what characterizes a given community of humans is the collection of practices in which they regularly engage. Practice is understood very broadly here. Since Latour is avoiding explanations in terms of a social context that lies behind the various activities in which humans engage opting instead to focus on tracing the various associations between humans and the other beings (see footnote below for a brief explanation of this term) of the world, he doesn’t distinguish practices as being ‘social’ or otherwise. The qualifier ‘social’ no longer distinguishes anything meaningful on his account. Practice can thus be understood as the various activities in which human beings regularly engage. These can be distinguished and what is specific to a legal practice versus a scientific practice, for example, can be understood according to the specifications of their respective modes of existence. This will be explored further in the body of the paper.

of humans and nonhumans that has never actually existed (*We Have* 10-11). Instead, he argues that the actual practice of moderns is characterized by a mixing—everything exists as a result of the interaction between what he will call ‘beings.’ What the moderns have done, he suggests, is to allow the mixing to bring new entities<sup>3</sup> into existence, and then ignore that mixing by separating out these new entities and categorizing them according to distinct domains, which are then further categorized as belonging either to ‘nature’ or to ‘culture’ (*We Have* 3-5). This results in an inability to account for the actual practices that allow these entities to come into being in the first place as well as ignoring their continued dependence upon these setups (*An Inquiry* 32-33). The repercussion of this is that the understanding of which courses of action must be followed in order for such entities to continue to exist is threatened.

Latour offers the modes of existence as an alternative to distinct domains that is able to represent these courses of action as well as what they supply to the collective. Latour was heavily influenced by Whitehead, and espouses a similar kind of process<sup>4</sup> metaphysics that sees the

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<sup>3</sup> I am opting to use the term entity instead of ‘being’ for now. The term ‘being’ is key to understanding Latour’s metaphysics but has a very unusual and technical meaning, so until I have explained this, I will avoid using it. Essentially, ‘being’ is meant to refer broadly to anything that exists. The existence of beings is understood in a particular way though, as immanence from various processes (in the sense of habitualized activities or movements of many sorts). So there can be legal beings (verdicts etc. that exist as the result of the regularized processes of law) just as there are beings of reproduction (animals, humans etc. that exist as the result of bodily processes as well as reproductive processes). This term allows for a kind of ontological flattening so that the conditions that allow for various beings to exist can be compared side by side, without according some more reality than others (as has been the case in the conflation of material existence with reality properly speaking). These processes that result in the existence of various beings are not self-contained, however. Instead they involve interaction with many other beings of various kinds. ‘Being’ seems to carry with it the impression of an animate, living, breathing organism, but this is not the sense in which Latour uses it. As a result, to avoid creating that impression, until more has been said about ‘being’ I will use entity, but not in its first sense as a discrete, independent thing, but rather in its second sense, which is simply something that exists.

<sup>4</sup> I have used ‘practice’ and ‘process’ somewhat interchangeably here. ‘Practice’ seems to have the connotation of a directed, intentional activity and so is well suited to refer to practices in which humans engage, whereas ‘process’ seems well equipped to capture regular movements that aren’t directed by any self-consciousness, like the gradual disintegration of mountains exposed to rain and wind and the gravitational pull of the earth, or the regular pumping of the heart and circulation of blood in mammals. Part of what Latour suggests, however, is that there isn’t a one way direction of action in terms of a conscious being constructing something in whatever way they so choose, but rather bringing something into existence requires a kind of communication between the human and what is being brought into existence and the various elements involved in that construction (this will be explained in more detail in

existence of any entity as the result of continual processes, rather than positing the existence of discreet, completed objects. Furthermore, for Latour, the processes out of which the existence of a given entity arises are dependent upon the interaction with other entities, and so nothing ever exists in itself but instead as the result of a continual passage through other entities (*An Inquiry* 42).

What results from the project in *AIME* is a kind of framework for understanding courses of action and for being able to speak of the value of a given entity in its own terms. Each mode of existence that is identified has its own interpretative key, its own specifications for how the courses of action proper to it are to proceed, and how to determine truth or falsity according to these specifications. As a result, Latour offers a kind of language according to which the value of a given practice can be expressed in its own terms, rather than having to appeal to specifications that are not proper to it, as has been the case in the conflation of truth with material existence and objective knowledge as supplied by scientific facts. This is arguably the most important contribution of *AIME*, this understanding of a plurality of ways in which something can be true or false. This is not a form of truth pluralism, however, in the sense of there being one way of existing and many ways of speaking about it—it is not a linguistic claim. Instead, his metaphysics of heterogeneous modes of existence allows for a plurality of ways in which something can *be* true or false, ontologically speaking (*An Inquiry* 20) and the truth or falsity of what exists as the immanence of some process is determined based upon the purpose or function of that process—the value that it is intended to supply to the community—and whether the processes actually continue to supply value for which they were intended. In this way, Latour seems to offer a very pragmatic conception of truth. Whether a given entity is true or false is essentially determined by whether it does well what was meant to do. What is so useful about this concept of different ways of being true or false is that it offers a way of justifying practices by expressing their value in their own terms. It seems to be the

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the section on instauration). As a result, practice may be best suited to refer to habitualized activities in which humans regularly engage so long as it is understood that this habitualized activity becomes instituted in the first place as the result of processes of interaction with various beings.

case that in modernity the options for justifying what is valuable about a given practice have been largely narrowed down to just two: it can be argued that the practice is justified in that it supplies objective knowledge or is itself objectively true (science), or its value can be expressed in terms of participation in markets—through appeal to the income that is generated or its contribution to the economic success of the collective (economics). The framework that Latour provides offers other ways of expressing value, and as a result, practices can be justified in terms of the value they actually supply.

What seems to be missing, however, from Latour's account of heterogeneous modes of existence is a way of accounting for the remarkable stability and sense of unity that is experienced, at least in Western collectives. By stability I mean the regular unfolding of various practices in a collective. For example, I wake up in the morning with the expectation that if I drive to a nearby coffee shop I will be able to give the person behind the counter some coins and they will hand me a hot cup of coffee in return. If for some reason my car doesn't start, I feel justified in the assumption that I can have a tow truck deliver the vehicle to a mechanic who will be able to restore its function. If I walk out to find that my car has been stolen, I feel justified in my assumption that police officers will come and investigate. But I also feel justified in my assumption that if I smile at someone in line they will not be offended, or that if I offer my hand to a business colleague they will shake it. In short, there are a variety of practices and processes of interaction that occur with such regularity that I am justified in my assumption that they will continue to be in existence when I awake on subsequent mornings—coffee shops will continue to operate, ownership of private property will continue to be enforced, smiling will continue to be seen as a friendly gesture.<sup>5</sup> The stability I am referring to here is the continuation of habitualized practices of all sorts. This is an ontological stability in that the practices do continue to exist in the world but it is also a stability in

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<sup>5</sup> I'm not sure that Latour would distinguish normative stability from ontological stability given the kind of ontological pluralism he espouses.

the expectations of individuals. These are essentially two sides of the same coin, since the expectation of the continuation of habitualized practices is necessary for individuals to continue to come and fill the roles defined by them, and this continual filling of the roles is also what allows for these practices to continue to exist. What accounts for individual motivation to continue to fill these roles remains unclear in Latour's theory.

It is my claim that this stability and sense of unity can be explained by providing an account of the kind of co-constitution of self and society<sup>6</sup> that can be seen in the work of Honneth on recognition and Berger and Luckman on the forging of society. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann outline how habitualized activities come to be instituted in the first place as well as providing an explanation of how these practices seem to confront individuals in subsequent generations as forming a unified, meaningful whole. Berger and Luckmann claim that humans are characterized by what they refer to as a 'world openness' that is the result of a low degree of biologically necessitated specialization of patterns of behavior and while exact patterns of behavior may not be biologically determined, what is determined is that such patterns be established in order to guide expectations and keep chaos at bay (51, 52). This process of limiting world openness results in typified roles for actors that exist, in a sense, independently of any particular actor, and are available to anyone to come and fill (54). These habitualized practices and the typified roles they give rise to are then crystalized in the transmission to a new generation (61). It is these institutions established through these processes that come to constitute reality for the next generation given that in the process of socialization, those patterns confront the individual as objective reality<sup>7</sup>. It is here, in the transmission of instituted patterns of interaction that this

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<sup>6</sup> These terms will initially seem as if they would be problematic for Latour, but I intend to explain them in a way that is compatible with his theory.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to consider, in light of this process, whether this is a form of necessary reification in the sense that these instituted behaviours take on the character of a thing for those socialized into them (they appear as objective reality rather than as the result of a process of patterning behavior in response to meeting needs and solving issues).

collection of heterogeneous practices becomes unified in the sense of reality of the individuals socialized into them.

Berger and Luckmann also suggest that these various practices can be understood as a meaningful whole when individuals reflect upon them and their own role within them. They argue that symbolic universes are formed out of the various meanings that are ascribed to institutionalized conduct and they then confront individuals as the totality of reality. All events are then situated within this symbolic universe (96). Nothing unifies these various institutions at the outset, but a symbolic universe can be abstracted out of them that unifies them essentially in the conception of individuals. The process of socialization in which the various instituted patterns of interaction<sup>8</sup> confront an individual as objective reality and the subsequent placement of all events within a symbolic universe that captures all instituted meaning, can explain this sense of the various heterogeneous practices being part of a unified whole. In this case, the unity that I am referring to lies in the conception of humans, but, as I will argue, this has an important function and so long as it is understood for what it is and its origin is located *after* the habitualization of various practices, this notion of symbolic universes can be compatible with Latour's metaphysics.

A more specific account of the mechanism responsible for this co-constitution can be found in the work of Axel Honneth on recognition. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth outlines three patterns of recognition and describes the process by which a person becomes individuated from an initial experience of symbiosis and, through socialization, develops layers of positive relation to self.<sup>9</sup> The understanding of oneself as an individual and furthermore as a unique individual with particular attributes results from this process. Given this, an individual's sense of

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<sup>8</sup> I will use this term throughout to refer to the ways of interacting with the various elements of one's environment that have been instituted. I have chosen this term so as to avoid specifying particular interaction partners. The term is not limited to interactions with other humans or with physical entities, but is open to interaction with any and all existents.

<sup>9</sup> In *Reification*, Honneth also identifies an elementary stance of recognition wherein the position of interconnection with the surrounding elements of one's environment is identified and this will also provide an important point of connection with Latour's theory.

self is entirely bound up with their participation in the various instituted practices. It is through gaining recognition for participation in these practices that an individual *has* a sense of self in the first place, and how it is furthermore maintained. The resulting sense of self is thus as dependent upon the continued existence of these institutions as those institutions are on the continued participation of individuals. This co-constitution, as a result, supplies the motivation for individuals to continue to partake in habitualized practices as their sense of self is, at least in part, dependent upon them. This, as I will argue, goes a long way towards explaining the stability experienced in western collectives, while still remaining open to change.

Recognition, according to Honneth, is granted with respect to a shared value horizon (*Struggle* 121). Particularly in terms of the pattern of recognition that he calls esteem, what one gains recognition for are abilities and traits that are deemed valuable to the collective.<sup>10</sup> Essentially individuals are recognized based upon engaging in patterns of behaviour, or patterns of interaction with both other humans and the various elements of one's environment that have already been instituted.<sup>11</sup> I claim that this value horizon can be seen to be abstracted from instituted practices and expressed in symbolic terms so that general guidelines for patterning behaviour and for granting and receiving recognition can be determined and are objectively available to members of the collective. I will appeal to Clifford Geertz's explanation of symbol systems in *An Interpretation of Cultures* as a way of explaining how a shared value horizon is expressed. Geertz argues that symbols function by expressing relations between things and are thus capable of providing guidelines for subsuming unfamiliar experiences under those already expressed in symbolic terms (215). Symbol systems, or symbolic universes offer a way of expressing particular relations such that one is able to pattern their interactions (both with other humans and with various other beings) accordingly.

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<sup>10</sup> I am choosing to use Latour's term here, although Honneth does not use this term.

<sup>11</sup> I will spend some time on this in the body of the paper, considering what a shared value horizon can mean in terms of Latour's metaphysics.



An individual gains a sense of themselves as a person, on Honneth's account, through receiving recognition for their contribution to the collective. This entails an agreement about what counts as valuable, which is established in the first place through a process of recognition in that individuals agree to recognize other beings (of various sorts) as indicating particular obligations in terms of one's interaction with them. These beings then symbolize particular relations—that is they specify certain expectations and obligations for interaction. As a result, symbol systems are able to inform the processes of recognition that allow for individuals to have a sense of themselves as unique, individuated persons as well as allowing for stabilized patterns of interaction—they express general guidelines for patterning interaction based upon relations that are abstracted from the practices currently instituted.

Latour provides a new metaphysics capable of capturing the practices in which moderns regularly engage and as a result what they actually value, but what he does not offer is an account of *why* we value as we do; how and why patterns of interaction come to be instituted in the first place; and what motivates individuals to continue to habitually engage in the practices they do. In order to avoid appeal to some meta-dispatcher that would unduly unify all the practices of a collective and cause a shift to an understanding of society as a kind of substance, a thing-in-itself, Latour avoids any kind of unification, opting instead to see society as an aggregation of what he calls individual 'scripts' and human motivations as individual attachments to various projects. It seems to me that this highlights a weak point in the theory. Latour runs the risk of doing what he criticizes the moderns for, failing to account for actual experience.

The explanation of the sense of self that arises out of the process of recognition can account for the stability of practices in terms of their perpetuation as well as the experience that these various practices form a unified, meaningful whole. Furthermore, it can do so in a way that is compatible with Latour's metaphysics. First, it too is the result of a process that also depends upon continual maintenance and is not considered to be a native, autonomous self. Honneth is also

rejecting the subject/object bifurcation, locating its origins in a reification, which he defines as a forgetting of the elementary stance of recognition as presented in *Reification*, opting instead to focus on processes of interaction with the concepts of subject and object existing as abstractions that can only come after (38-39). Finally, particularly in terms of the esteem pattern of recognition, the resulting sense of self as a unique individual can be understood as a kind of being-as-other, which as we will see, is an important part of Latour's metaphysics. There also seems to be a rudimentary acknowledgment of the importance of recognition in Latour's explication of the mode of existence of religion [REL], although it remains underdeveloped.

The purpose of this paper can be explained succinctly as follows: while Latour's project in *AIME* is useful in that it offers a plurality of ways in which things can *be* true or false in the world and thus provides a way of understanding and expressing the value of entities in their own terms, it is difficult to see what, in a theory of heterogeneous modes of existence, can account for the stability and unity that is experienced in Western collectives. It is my claim that this stability can be explained in terms of the co-constitution of society and sense of self that results from patterns of recognition, and that, furthermore, this can be done in a way that is compatible with Latour's overall project.

To this end, I will begin by providing background on Latour's metaphysics so as to understand the purpose of the project in *AIME*, the issues with modern theory that he identifies, and how the modes of existence provide an alternative. I will then consider what is missing from this account, namely an explanation of the stability and unity experienced in Western collectives followed by a consideration, guided by the work of Berger and Luckmann, of how the modes might come to be instituted in the first place. I will then consider how the mechanism of recognition as explained by Honneth factors into institutionalization, and how the co-constitution of society and sense of self that seems to be implied in his theory of recognition can supply the missing account of individual motivation and can explain the remarkable stability of the collective. I will then spend

some time on what is meant by a shared value horizon on Honneth's account and argue that metanarratives or meta-dispatchers, if understood in terms of symbol systems or symbolic universes, serve a useful function. In the final section I will turn to a discussion of how the understanding of the sense of self that arises in Honneth's formulation of the theory of recognition can be understood as being compatible with Latour's metaphysics. I am aware that the issues raised by Latour's work, and thus this thesis too, pertain to broader debates in the philosophy of social science, the philosophy of science, and metaphysics.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MODES OF EXISTENCE

Latour's project has been occasioned by what he refers to as the coming of Gaia; the realization of how inextricably connected human affairs are to the rest of the processes of the earth. They are so connected as to form a sort of giant organism, hence the reference to James Lovelock's Gaia character. The coming of the ecological crisis, says Latour, has highlighted the importance of addressing the cracks that have begun to show in the theories moderns have devised in order to explain who they are and what they value (*An Inquiry* 10). It has become clear that this crisis cannot be accounted for with appeal to theories that depend upon the total separation between humans and nonhumans. In modern theory, social affairs have only to do with humans interacting with one another, with how they organize and pattern their social and political interactions, how they live together, the context in which they engage with nature, which itself forms its own separate realm, and thus it came as a surprise to find that those human affairs were having a destructive effect on the environment, one that was as threatening to them as it was to it. It is this realization that nature and culture cannot remain separate in the understanding of modern practices precisely because they have actually never been separate that gives rise to the necessity to revisit modern practice and theory in order to understand what is actually happening in modernity.

Latour locates the origin of this bifurcation in the modern notion of 'matter,' a concept which he ultimately claims is an amalgamation of two different modes of existence, reference and reproduction [REF –REP], and which relies on an errant formalist conception of form (*An Inquiry* 106-110). This understanding of matter has led to a conflation of what is true or 'real' properly speaking with what has material existence and has resulted in relegating all else to an existence 'in the mind.' Latour presents his notion of modes of existence as an alternative that is capable of accounting for the existence of beings, material and immaterial, side by side, as it were, rather than reducing reality to the 3+1 dimensions of space as he claims the moderns have done (*An Inquiry*

104). Latour is rejecting the reductionist principle of Occam's razor. For him, sometimes the simplest explanation is not the best, in this case the reductionist urge has led to an inability to properly capture the diversity of existence (*An Inquiry* 19).

This plurality of ways of existing also results in a plurality of ways in which a given being can be true or false, each relative to the mode of existence proper to the entity in question. It is important to understand, however, that Latour is not a relativist. His position is best understood as a kind of *relationism* (*We Have* 114)—it is in the interaction between humans and nonhumans<sup>12</sup> that truth or falsity is determined. It is not that truth is constructed between humans and then simply projected onto the world of nonhumans. Instead, because Latour claims that these nonhuman entities also articulate themselves, are also actors in their own right, this interaction is always a kind of communicative process. As a way of capturing the nature of this interaction, Latour introduces the term 'instauration.' The notion of constructivism has gone awry, according to Latour, precisely because it excludes this communicative nature of interaction (*An Inquiry* 160-161). But construction has also been undermined by the notion of unmediated access to things as they exist in themselves, which, as we shall see, arises from this errant notion of matter. If such access is possible, then anything that relies on mediations, by comparison, is immediately suspect.

In order to arrive at these insights, Latour takes up the challenge of returning to experience in order to understand not only the actual practices of the moderns, but also the disconnect between those practices and the theories intended to explain them. In order to do so he dispatches his anthropologist of the moderns into the fray of modernity in order to follow the threads of experience

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<sup>12</sup> This distinction is just used as a way of avoiding the culture/nature distinction and to focus instead on the myriad interactions between human beings and the many other existents of the world that comprise the reality of the moderns. This is not a meaningful distinction other than to highlight that everything actually happens in the space between. There is no human world, and no world of nonhumans, there is only this myriad of interactions between the beings of the world.

and see where they go. The first insight that this fictional anthropologist provides is that these threads of experience, these courses of action, weave themselves into vast networks.

### *Networks [NET] and Beings*

The notion of networks runs counter to the clearly delineated domains within which the moderns categorize their various activities, but as Latour points out in *We Have Never Been Modern*, it suffices to pick up a newspaper to see that the domains do not operate in insolation from another (1). As he says, “The same article mixes together chemical reactions and political reactions. A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and the most sordid politics, the most distant sky and some factory in the Lyon suburbs, dangers on a global scale and the impending local elections, or the next board meeting” (*We Have* 1). Instead of operating linearly within a particular, independently operating domain, any given course of action regularly crosses domain boundaries, forming instead a kind of network that connects a number of heterogeneous elements. Latour illustrates this point by imagining this anthropologist of the moderns attempting to explain the activities of a given domain<sup>13</sup> by remaining within it:

. . . She goes into a laboratory: there she finds white lab coats, glass test tubes, microbe cultures, articles with footnotes—everything indicates that she is really “in Science.” But then, with a certain obstinacy, she begins to note the origins of the successive ingredients that her informants need in order to carry out their work . . . In a single day, she may have noted visits by a lawyer who has come to deal with patents, a pastor who has come to discuss ethical issues, a technician who has come to repair a new microscope, an elected official who has come to talk about voting on a subsidy, a “business angel” who wants to discuss the launching of a new start up, an industrialist concerned about perfecting a new fermenting agent and so on (*An Inquiry* 30).

What the moderns have done, according to Latour, is to allow this mixing in the establishment of networks, but once the network is in place, they bracket off the products—or what Latour will call the ‘beings’ that circulate therein—and categorize them according to distinct domains. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour refers to the mixing necessary for the establishment of networks as the

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<sup>13</sup> In Latour’s metaphysics, the modes of existence will come to take the place of this notion of discrete heterogeneous domains operating independently from one another, but until we have this concept, I will continue to use the term ‘domain.’

translation phase and the bracketing of the entities that subsequently come into being as the purification stage (10-11). He claims that each process is dependent upon the other and yet must remain separated. According to Latour, participation in these two paradoxical practices is essentially what constitutes modernity (*We Have* 10).

In *AIME*, Latour moves away from this notion of translation—of what he refers to in *We Have Never Been Modern* as a mixing of nature and culture that produces hybrids—because he rejects the implication that these form two separate spheres. Instead, he focuses on following courses of action, and accounting for the ways in which things come into being, and persist, through interaction with other beings. Still, the essential point that he is making is that there is a stage at which networks of heterogeneous associations are formed that allow for beings to come into existence in the first place and then a stage at which these beings are separated out of the process, separated from one another, and neatly categorized. The issue with this categorization is that it ignores the dependence of beings on the interaction with others in order to exist in the first place, and then ignores the continued dependence on these setups in order for the being to continue to exist.

Before we go any further, it is important to understand what Latour means by ‘being.’ In the first place, this term is introduced as a way avoiding the perspective that given entities are discrete, or that there are finalized products that result from a given process which then have an independent, autonomous existence. Latour is heavily influenced by Whitehead’s process metaphysics, and this notion encourages a focus on *process*. But, for Latour, these beings that come into circulation are something different from the process itself, or from the setup of a network (*An Inquiry* 32). They exist as a sort of immanence, something that results from the regular perpetuation of processes (Latour, *An Inquiry* 162). When we consider, in the example above, the networks that courses of action in science (which Latour will redefine as reference) form, beings of science, scientific facts (or what Latour will come to refer to as access to remote entities) are the result of

the continuous following of processes. They do not exist prior to the establishment of these networks and the institution of these regular practices, and they only continue to exist so long as those practices continue. The existence of scientific things in the world is a form of immanence from established practices, and are thus both dependent upon the setup of those practices and as well as existing as something different from them. As Latour says:

So under the word “network” we must be careful not to confuse what circulates *once everything is in place* with the *setups* involving the heterogeneous set of elements that allow circulation to occur. The natural gas that lets the Russians keep their empire going does circulate continuously from gas fields in the Caucasus to gas stoves in France, but it would be a mistake to confuse the continuity of this circulation with what makes the circulation possible in the first place. In other words, gas pipelines are not made of “gas” but rather steel tubing, pumping stations, international treaties, Russian Mafiosi, pylons anchored in the permafrost, frostbitten technicians, Ukrainian politicians. The first is a product; the second a real John Le-Carré-style novel (*An Inquiry* 32).

According to Latour, the establishment of the network and the being (in this case the gas) that circulates once it has been established are not the same thing and yet they cannot be separated in the way that the moderns have done. This tendency to ignore the heterogeneous elements that had to be brought into association in the establishment of a network after it has been established and something is circulating continuously within it obscures the continued dependence of what is circulating on this network. The gas delivery is a being, in Latour’s sense, and it exists (the delivery that is) only as a result of this network that joins together many discontinuous elements (steel tubing, international treaties, frostbitten technicians etc.). While it may circulate continuously once the network is established, to consider it to be a distinct product that can then be separated out and be categorized under a given domain is to ignore its continued dependence on the maintenance of the network of heterogeneous elements. That this dependence still exists despite the seemingly continuous circulation of, in this case, the gas, is clear anytime there is a disruption in the network.

As he says,

Everyone notices this, moreover [the continued dependence], when some geopolitical crisis interrupts gas deliveries. In the case of crisis, or, more generally, in the case of “network interruption” (we have all come to know this expression with the spread of cell phones), the two senses of the word “network” (what is in place and what puts it in place) converge.



Everyone then sets out to explore *all over again* the set of elements that have to be knitted together if there is to be a “resumption of deliveries.” Had you anticipated the link between the Ukraine and cooking your risotto? No, but you are discovering it now. If this happens to you, you will perhaps notice with some surprise that for gas to get into your stove it had to *pass through* the moods of the Ukrainian president . . . Behind the concept of network, there is always that movement, and that surprise (*An Inquiry* 32-33).

It is clear in this example that human and nonhuman do not remain separated any more than technology and politics do. If we shift focus to the process, the interconnected nature of all the things that tend to be subsequently delineated becomes clear. This highlights the fact that there is never a final, completed product but rather the gas circulation and delivery, in this case, depends upon a continued passage through discontinuous elements—the term ‘being’ is meant to capture this existence by means of passage through discontinuous elements. Furthermore, the association between discontinuous elements must be constantly maintained in order for gas delivery to continue to exist. This requirement of continuous maintenance also indicates the error in categorizing things according to distinct domains. The separation of the various elements required for gas to continue to reach the stoves of France is only possible if the influence of one upon the other for the setup and maintenance of the network are ignored.

Latour introduces a technical distinction between what he refers to as ‘being-as-being,’ and ‘being-as-other’ as a way of highlighting that beings exist as the result of a passage through other beings (*An Inquiry* 162). Being-as-other focuses on existence as immanence, as a particular passage or *movement*. For Latour, the dependence of beings on networks of heterogeneous elements means that things only come to be as the result of passing through other beings (the gas circulates into the stoves of France only after passing through the moods of the Ukrainian president among other things). This means that the thing does not exist in itself as it were and thus cannot be defined in terms of a particular substance that underlies and assures its existence (being-as-being). This notion of substance, or being-as-being arises, as we shall see, out of the moderns’ errant notion of matter and a kind of ‘formalist formalism’ that is used as justification. Being-as-other is introduced as a way of capturing that the continued existence of a being is better understood as a kind of

subsistence, since rather than being guaranteed, it relies on a continuous process whereby continuity is forged by continuously leaping over discontinuous elements in order to connect them through a particular passage (Latour, *An Inquiry* 162). The continuity is essentially in the *movement*. Stop the movement and there is no being. This notion of being-as-other is key to understanding Latour's metaphysics because it changes the way we can understand and talk about the nature of existence. Instead of what exists being discrete, self-contained entities, what exists is process and immanence from those processes.

There is another way in which the term 'being' is important to Latour's metaphysics, which I will consider in more detail when I address the issues he identifies with constructivism, and the subsequent introduction of the term 'instauration.' Essentially, this is the understanding that beings *articulate* themselves.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the importance of this notion is that the process between humans and nonhumans is essentially a communicative, interactive process. This means that humans are not, in a sense, totally free to establish whatever they want, but are instead guided or constrained by the other elements that they enter into interaction with and the ways in which those elements articulate themselves in their own particular way of subsisting. This will be explored in more detail in the chapters to come.

While Latour claims that beings circulate in networks, he does not consider the notion of networks to be sufficient to explain the practices of the moderns because it essentially says the same thing about all courses of action—that they connect a series of heterogeneous elements together and forge continuity across discontinuous stages (*An Inquiry* 35). But this notion can say nothing of how a political course of action, for example, differs from a scientific one, or how a being in science differs from a being in politics. As Latour says, "as she [the anthropologist] studies

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<sup>14</sup>More on what Latour means by 'articulation' can be found in the entry on this term on the website that accompanies the book:  
[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#15&b\[subheading\]=#255&a=SET+VOC+LEAD+ER&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-17&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=articulate](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#15&b[subheading]=#255&a=SET+VOC+LEAD+ER&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-17&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=articulate)

segments from Law, Science, The Economy, or Religion she begins to feel that she is saying almost *the same thing* about all of them: namely, that they are ‘composed in a heterogeneous fashion of unexpected elements revealed by the investigation’” (*An Inquiry* 35). This is where, in *AIME*, Latour moves beyond the insights of actor-network theory. While the notion of network [NET], which is the first mode of existence that Latour presents, allows for the actual courses of action of the moderns to be followed, there is a loss in specificity. For modes of existence to come in and take the place of domains, they need to be able to account for the contrasts that were expressed therein. Latour locates this specificity in the particular way in which continuity is formed. He argues that each mode defines a particular way of passing through the beings of other modes, or, to use Latour’s term, it specifies a particular trajectory (*An Inquiry* 41). Essentially, each mode of existence indicates the direction in which courses of action will proceed. The result of this movement is the supply of something specific. As Latour says:

Law is no more made “of” law than a gas pipeline is made “of” gas, but still, the legal network, once it is in place (established through a multitude of nonlegal elements, she understands this now), really does ensure the supply “of law” as it were. Just as gas, electricity, influence, or telephone service can be qualified as networks, without being confused with one another (even if they often share the same subterranean conduits— influence in particular!), why not use the same term to qualify “regular supplies” in science, law, religion, economics and so on? These are networks that can be defined as a series of associations of the [NET] type, and yet what circulates in them in a continuous and reliable fashion (provided that they are maintained with regularity, at great cost) does indeed supply values, services, distinct products (*An Inquiry* 36).

These values and services, these distinct products,<sup>15</sup> are not so easily explained as the gas in the gas pipeline, so while something may be legal in nature, or have something scientific about it, explaining what makes it so is not so clear. In following a course of action, however, the anthropologist notices that what is particular in the circulation of each value is the way in which it passes from one discontinuous element to the next. For example, in law continuity is paved between

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<sup>15</sup> Distinct in the sense of having something specific about them, not in that they exist autonomously as things-in-themselves.

discontinuities using the passage of *means*, in science it is *proofs* that allow this passage through discontinuities (Latour, *An Inquiry* 42).

***Preposition [PRE]***

According to Latour, the process of identifying the interpretive key of a particular mode of existence begins with the identification of a category mistake wherein something is taken for something else (*An Inquiry* 48). Latour offers the example of a visitor to the campus of the University of Sorbonne:

The canonical example involves a foreign visitor going through the buildings of the Sorbonne, one after another; at the end of the day, he complains that he “hasn’t seen the University of Sorbonne.” His request has been misunderstood: he wanted to see an institution, but he had been shown buildings . . . for he had sought in one entity an entirely different entity from what the first could have shown him. He should have been introduced to the rector, or the faculty assembly, or the institution’s attorney. His interlocutors had misheard the key in which what he was requesting could be judged true or false, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. It is in this sense that I propose to take up the term “mistake” again—before specifying later on how “category” is to be understood (*An Inquiry* 48-49).

It is here, in this contrast between two modes that what is specific to one and not the other can be determined. It is not mistakes within a given mode that is of concern here (for example, if the man thought he had been shown the buildings of some other institution than the university) but rather an uncertainty about the mode itself; about how to determine truth and falsity in a given situation (Latour, *An Inquiry* 51). It is not perceptual errors, or problems with the apparatus used to judge truth or falsity in a given situation that is at issue here, but rather mistakes about what constitutes or allows for a determination of truth or falsity in the first place in a given situation. Latour refers to these as second-degree mistakes (*An Inquiry* 50-51); they are mistakes about the interpretive key itself (*An Inquiry* 53). Latour introduces another mode, what he calls preposition [PRE] as a way of determining the direction in which a course of action should proceed. In a sense this is the point at which a position is taken that will guide the subsequent course of action.

There are a number of ways in which Latour's metaphysics seems to be a very pragmatic account of truth. I begin to see this here in his introduction of the mode of existence of preposition [PRE]. It seems to me that this 'position-taking' often refers to deciding, according to one's intended purpose, which mode of existence ought to supply the specifications for how to proceed. It seems to me that this decision could only be based upon the intended outcome. For example, if my intention is to understand how yeast ferments grapes, then it makes sense to proceed according to the specifications of the mode of existence of reference (what the moderns call science)<sup>16</sup> given that the intended purpose of my activity is to gain access to remote entities.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, it may be that one must take a position in terms of identifying by which interpretive key they ought to understand a given being that they have come into contact with in some way. But at least in terms of guiding one's own behavior in the production of something, the determination of which interpretive key to follow is a pragmatic one.

[PRE] does not itself provide any information as to what will follow, it only indicates the direction in which to proceed. Like picking up a novel that is designated as 'fiction,' this designation says nothing about what is to follow, but colours the way in which one will engage with, and understand what happens thereafter (Latour, *An Inquiry* 57-58). After taking this preposition, or determining the mode of existence according to which one ought to proceed, the trajectory, or the direction in which subsequent courses of action should take can be determined (Latour, *An Inquiry* 52). So in the example above, understanding what the visitor had been interested in seeing, an institution in this case, defines what direction the following course of action should take. In this case, the tour should not go from building to building, but rather from rector to attorney or the like. Again, this seems to be determined according to the intended purpose of the

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<sup>16</sup> This mode will be explained in due time.

<sup>17</sup> Again, this term will be explained, but essentially I take this term to refer to entities that are not directly accessible to the senses. This will become clear in the explanation of access to Mont Aiguille in the section on reference [REF].

activity, and so seems like a pragmatic account. If, for example, the position is taken that one's safety has been threatened and needs to be restored, then the direction in which the action should proceed ought to be specified by the mode of [LAW], and an attempt will be made to attach the case at hand to the established documents and protocols (legal means) that allow legal actions to be taken and the safety of the individual to be preserved.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Interpretive Key of the Modes***

In addition to specifying a trajectory that indicates the direction according to which a course of action should proceed, each mode of existence specifies its own veridiction conditions (*An Inquiry* 53). Determining, then, whether a given being is true or false (or, in other words, whether a given process does allow for the immanence of what it is intended to supply) depends upon the specification of the mode to which it belongs. It is not enough, says Latour, to simply identify a moment in which there is confusion about how to determine the truth or falsity of something, but we must furthermore “identify the principles of judgement to which each mode is going to appeal explicitly and consciously to decide what is true and what is false” (*An Inquiry* 53). Essentially this means that each mode specifies what it means to *be* true, and this is again an appeal to process. The point is really that each mode has its own way of determining what it means for something to exist in that mode. We can understand more clearly what this means by considering the example of [LAW]. Legal networks, for example, are established as a way of protecting citizens by attaching people to what they say and do across time, thus establishing the means to hold them accountable (Latour refers to the beings of law as safety-bearers) (*An Inquiry* 369). So legal proceedings are judged to be true or false based upon whether they actually do what they were intended to do, that is, whether they have succeeded in holding the individuals involved accountable for their actions using specifically legal means thus supplying safety (or ‘saftey-bearers’ to use

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<sup>18</sup> The mode of [LAW] allows for the existence of ‘safety-bearers’ in that legal means are a way of connecting individuals to their actions and utterances across time and place and thus can hold them accountable for what they say and do (*An Inquiry* 368-371).

Latour's term). So for a being of law to exist, there must be this movement of connection, and it must furthermore conform to the specifications of that mode in order for the processes to actually supply safety to the collective. Truth or falsity in any particular case of this movement will be judged on that basis.

This highlights what it means also for things to *be* true in different ways. For something to be true or false in a legal sense is different from whether there is proof in the scientific sense. This is because what allows for law to exist—for there to be practices that give rise to the existence of law and legal things—is different from what allows science to be, there are different specifications in each case. Therefore to ask at the end of a legal case whether the verdict represents the objective facts of the matter is to confuse law with science. In law, whether something is found to be true or false is dependent upon whether there are legal means that connect certain facts to documents, procedures, protocols, and whether the particular movement actually connects them.

This understanding of the particular interpretative key according to which courses of action can be assessed is reflected in language in that in understanding the interpretative key, one knows how to speak well in a given mode. This means, for example, that one knows not to ask of a legal verdict whether it represents the objective facts of the matter. Latour uses Austin's terms, felicity and infelicity conditions, in order to capture this requirement (*An Inquiry* 56). As Latour says, "On each path of veridiction, we will be able to ask that the conditions that must be met for someone to speak truths or untruths be specified according to its mode" (*An Inquiry* 56). This is what will allow us to avoid the mistake of assuming that the existence of objective knowledge is the only way to determine truth and falsity (Latour, *An Inquiry* 58). While Latour does introduce the understanding of how to speak well in a given mode as an indication of one's ability to assess the truth and falsity of beings of that mode, the requirements for truth go beyond linguistic concerns. Latour's account differs here from theories of truth pluralism in that his claim is ontological. There are many ways of *being* true, many ways in which what emanates from a given process can be true to the proper

function of its mode of existence or not. For truth pluralists, on the other hand, the claim is essentially that there are a plurality of ways for statements about the world to be true or false. For them there is one way to exist and many ways to speak about existence. For Latour, there are many ways to exist, as well as many ways to speak well of existence (*An Inquiry* 20).

Latour summarizes the requirements of the interpretive key that allow for the diversity of the modes as well as what is specific to them to be captured as follows:

The investigator now knows the three criteria by which one can recognize a mode of existence. First, thanks to a category mistake: she feels vaguely, in the beginning, and then more and more precisely, that she is missing something, that she isn't getting what is said in the right tonality, that she hasn't preceded it with the right **PREPOSITION**. Alerted by this feeling that she has blundered, she understands that she must look, second, to see if there is some particular type of discontinuity, some **HIATUS** that would account for a particular type of continuity and that would thereby trace a **TRAJECTORY**, its own particular **PASS**. Finally, she knows that she has to find out whether there are **FELICITY AND INFELICITY CONDITIONS** that would make it possible to say of a mode of existence in its own idiom under what conditions it is truthful or deceitful (*An Inquiry* 132).

Latour presents the modes of existence as a kind of ontological flattening. By allowing that each mode has its own veridiction conditions, he is denying that any can be subsumed under any others. No modes of existence are more fundamental in Latour's metaphysics, although some may exist prior to others in time, and so there is no hierarchal categorization. He also denies appeals to foundations, arguing instead for the notion of subsistence which sees a continuous movement that has its own particular ways of paving over discontinuities as what makes a given being what it is. It is a particular *way* of existing that defines a given being, not some underlying substance.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned, Latour is rejecting the reductionist urge here, opting to set Occam's razor aside for a more robust toolbelt, one he sees as being capable of maintaining an understanding of the actual practices that allow for the regular supply of beings deemed valuable to the collective (*An Inquiry* 19). As a result, there is no final arbiter of truth, not science, not culture, not language.

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<sup>19</sup> Latour's justification for this will become clear when we consider what he identifies as being errant in the modern notion of matter.



Truth is defined by each mode of existence. Latour is not saying, however, that truth is relative, but rather, given this focus on the purpose, the supply of useful values by way of continuous processes from which they emanate, truth is instead *relational* (*An Inquiry* 481). As a consequence of rejecting the separation of culture and nature, he is also rejecting the notion of a reality that is socially constructed and then simply projected onto the natural world. Instead, truth and falsity are established in a process of interaction between beings. This is an ontological claim, things can *be* either true or false, and this is determined by a given mode of existence. This seems to be a determination of whether something works or not; whether a course of action is in keeping with the trajectory of the mode; whether the movement actually supplies what the processes of the mode have been established in order to supply; whether the interaction with other beings is successful.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that not all modes refer to networks established in the interaction between humans and other beings. This will become clearer when I consider the groupings of modes that revolve around quasi-objects, modes that revolve around quasi-subjects, and modes that revolve around neither. Not all beings are instaurated in a process of interaction with humans.

## CHAPTER 3

### MODERN THEORY—WHAT WENT WRONG

In order to understand what has gone wrong with modern theory and thus properly justify the need for his alternative, Latour identifies the origin of the fracture between modern theory and practice in an errant notion of matter and the bifurcation that results from it. Latour claims that the modern notion of matter actually conflates two modes of existence, reference and reproduction [REF-REP] (*An Inquiry* 98). This notion of matter is what produces the conviction that moderns have objective knowledge in the sense of unmediated access to things-in-themselves, and that this is what separates them from pre-modern cultures. It is this conviction (in conjunction with relativism in the sense of reality being socially constructed and then projected onto the world) that in turn explains what has gone wrong with the notion of constructivism and has resulted in a form of critique that undermines institutions by revealing their mediations. This has paved the way for post-modernism, which Latour sees as being a symptom that we have never been modern, rather than a legitimate response to modernity (*We Have* 46). In order to understand this amalgamation involved in the notion of matter, I will begin by considering what Latour says about each mode of existence involved therein.

#### ***Reference [REF] and Reproduction [REP]***

This is the mode that Latour uses in order to explain the practices that are really at the core of what the Moderns have referred to as the domain of science. Latour argues that there is a strange double notion of correspondence that is at the heart of the modern understanding of science (*An Inquiry* 71). Statements in science are said to correspond to the world and yet at the same time to be in a sense identical to the world (this hinges on the modern notion of matter as we shall see). As he says, “On the one hand, we are told that they are one and the same thing; on the other, that they have nothing to do with each other and that they relate as a thing relates to a mind” (*An Inquiry* 71).

This results in kind of conflation of science and truth wherein scientific statements are true statements in that they directly relay the happening of the world without any mediation. Furthermore, since these statements relay things that have a physical, material existence, truth, or what is 'real' properly speaking, becomes conflated with what has a material existence.<sup>21</sup>

Latour rejects this notion of science having unmediated access to things as they exist in themselves, and argues instead that what is actually happening in the practices of science is the establishment of chains of reference that allow access to remote entities, but that in this access the entity and those gaining access are both altered (*An Inquiry* 89). While Latour does not define remote entities, it seems that this could mean remote in the sense that they are not visible to the senses (as in the case of atoms and forces for example) or entities whose subsistence and myriad of relations to the other beings of the world one is not directly experienced by the individuals seeking access (in the case of a mountain, or a cat for example). In order to understand something about how such things exist and to grasp some of their relations to other beings, a series of interactions must take place and be inscribed. To illustrate this, Latour uses the example of the study of beer yeasts in the laboratory. In the interaction between scientists (or 'yeastists' as Latour refers to them) and these yeasts, both are altered. Never before has yeast yielded "facts" and never before has fermentation been a concept usable and expressible by the humans (Latour, *An Inquiry* 89). Of course, Latour is not denying that the yeast has relations that remain stable over time and are not merely incidental, but the point is that access to these relations requires a process of interaction between human and yeast that is something new for both (at least initially). The facts regarding how yeast ferments grapes result from a series of interactions, from placing yeasts in petri dishes, from inscribing each stage of the process and establishing a chain of such stages that can be followed back and forth between the yeast and the human (*An Inquiry* 89). Furthermore, this only

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<sup>21</sup> Material existence is also an expression that Latour claims is ill equipped to capture the particular passage of beings in the mode of reproduction [REP] (*An Inquiry* 98).

establishes some of the yeast's relations to other beings of the world. It describes how it interacts with the sugars of the grape, for example, but not how it reacts with the sensory receptors of the human tongue or of a squirrel (how it tastes). The object (in this case the yeast in terms of which of its relations have been witnessed and inscribed) and the subject (the human who has the concept of yeast that can be used to understand and express some of the relations of this entity) arise out of the interaction and do not exist on opposite sides prior to it waiting to be brought into correspondence. These are thus emergent properties. Once the chain is established and so long as it is maintained, there is regular access, and thus there is objectivity in that this access is available to anyone (Latour, *An Inquiry* 90). Latour refers to this form of objectivity as equipped and rectified knowledge in that it is equipped with chains of reference and allows for the circulation of constants. Latour refers to these constants as immutable mobiles, and explains the term as follows:

The expression, introduced in (Latour, 2006), was intended to designate, via an oxymoron, two apparently contradictory operations visible in any scientific inscription: firstly the lack of similarity between two stages (this is the mobility) and, on the other hand, the maintenance of a constant through this dissimilarity (this is the immutability). The result is information (in the meaning of what is put "in" a "form"): the statement does not rely on resemblance but it does contain something that authorizes a location to speak truthfully of a remote location, provided that a cascade of transformations - a chain of reference - is maintained throughout and for as long as that chain is maintained (*An Inquiry* web).<sup>22</sup>

This passage that allows access and establishes a continuity across the discontinuous stages of the chain is what characterizes the mode of existence of [REF], but it is not the same as the passage the yeast must undergo in order to continue to subsist.

In order to begin to dis-amalgamate the modes of existence of reference [REF] and reproduction [REP] that Latour claims have been conflated in the modern notion of matter, he describes hiking on Mont Aiguille armed with a map. The map allows him to not be lost on the mountain despite his unfamiliarity with the location, and it is able to do so as a result of a continuity

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<sup>22</sup>The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:  
[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#9&b\[subheading\]=#127&a=SET+VOC+LEADE R&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-327&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=immutable+mobiles](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#9&b[subheading]=#127&a=SET+VOC+LEADE R&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-327&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=immutable+mobiles)

that has been established between the inscriptions on the map, the markers on the trail and the layout of the path (Latour, *An Inquiry* 74-75). Here a network has been formed by aligning these discontinuous elements. This allows for a kind of back and forth movement while on the mountain where the hiker can use the markers on the mountain to refer to the map and the map to refer back to the markers. It is through this back and forth motion of reference that allows the hiker to follow the path, to not be lost. But the map itself does not resemble the mountain. Instead, in conjunction with the signposts and the landmarks that are set up and indicated on the map, it establishes certain constants. The hiker can check that the angle inscribed on the map is the same as the one reflected on his compass, but this is only as the result of the placement of a marker, as the result of putting into place something there that aligns with the inscriptions on the map and only after such a geometry has been established in the first place. In this way, what allows the hiker access to the mountain is dissimilar from the mountain itself, instead it is established through this back and forth, through markers and inscriptions that are put into place and aligned. Were the map to be identical to the mountain, this would afford no more access than the mountain itself does. As Latour says,

. . . it is possible to establish an itinerary (I am not forgetting that this has required three centuries of geographers, explorations, typographical inventions, local development of tourism, and assorted equipment) thanks to which one can maximize both the total dissimilarity—nothing looks less like Mont Aiguille than the map of Mont Aiguille—and the total resemblance—the angle that I am targeting with my compass is indeed the same as the one printed on the map. I can refer to the map to locate Mont Aiguille; I can refer to Mont Aiguille to understand what the map means; if everything is in place—if there is no fog, if some goofball hasn't turned around the signposts over the cairns, if my senses do not deceive me—I can move along the path with complete safety, because at the same time I can go back and forth along a continuous road paved with documents, even though none of these has any mimetic resemblance to the one that proceeds or follows (*An Inquiry* 76).

Latour uses the expression 'chains of reference' to describe the trajectory (*An Inquiry* 77). It is the back and forth of reference that produces both the object (in this case the geometry of the mountain, or a geometrical version of Mont Aiguille) as well as the subject that knows it (the hiker armed with the map). Latour is careful to stress that neither of these existed prior to the establishment of a chain of reference but instead they both arise out of it, and are dependent upon being able to continually refer back to the links (the signposts, the inscriptions on the map, the path) that establish

the chain (*An Inquiry* 80). This is why, says Latour, we cannot ignore that process in favour of the endpoints: Mont Aiguille and the map (*An Inquiry* 79). This seems to me to again reveal this modern habit of separating a final, completed product out of the process, so that the process may be ignored. In this case, the map is considered to be the final product and it is said to represent the mountain, or correspond to the mountain in the strange double sense explained at the beginning of this section. To call it instead a being of reference [REF] brings us back to the movement specific to reference, and what needs to be continually maintained in order that this being of reference continue to grant access to the mountain.

It is perhaps most clear in considering reference what Latour means by saying that there is no separate realm of nature. This is because the facts in reference are not something that exist independently of human interaction with the beings of reproduction. In the interaction, access is established, but the establishment of access is the result of changes to the remote entity as well to the human seeking access. This access is then not a simple transfer of facts that already exist in that form in the world into the understanding of humans, but rather just that, access. It is again a movement, a process, a being, a happening.

While beings of reference pass through immutable mobiles (those constants that are established and the inscriptions that grant access), Latour points out that it is clear that beings of reproduction need not do so in order to subsist (*An Inquiry* 82). Mont Aiguille does not require that these be established in order to continue to exist. The establishment of immutable mobiles is all about the interaction between humans and nonhumans. It's about access. This interaction between humans and nonhumans as the basis for the production of new beings is a theme that runs throughout *We Have Never Been Modern*, as well as the project in *AIME*. Moderns have separated them, human and nature, but according to Latour everything happens in the space between. These empty categories are posited after the fact and can be maintained only by ignoring the processes by which each are established as the result of this interaction. Of course, not all beings depend upon

an interaction with humans in order to subsist, although all beings rely on the interaction with other beings in order to subsist. Even the beings of [REP] subsist as a result of being-as-other (Latour, *An Inquiry* 87-88). In order for such a being to continue to exist from one moment to the next, a cat for example, there are also a number of discontinuous elements that must be passed through (Latour, *An Inquiry* 88). Latour seems to focus on how a species, for example, continues to exist across time (the pivot table he introduces to keep track of the specifications of the modes lists the beings to institute for reproduction as lines of force, lineages, and societies), but part of what allows for this is the passage that individual beings must also go through in order to continue to exist from moment to moment. The cat, for example, must encounter and accommodate, or alter oxygen molecules, and so is dependent upon the existence of trees, and it must encounter and accommodate a number of nutrients and vitamins produced by plants and other beings of reproduction, it is dependent upon the various processes of the body, the heart continuously circulating blood, the lungs continuously converting oxygen, cells continuously dividing and regenerating. The processes are dependent upon the existence and the encounter of a variety of other beings and thus exist through a process of being-as-other. It is clear that the beings of [REP] are not brought into existence as the result of interaction with humans in the way that beings of [REF] are. Mont Aiguille also must pass through discontinuities in order to subsist says Latour, but this is a different kind of pass with its own particular trajectory (*An Inquiry* 83).

### ***Forms***

We can now turn to the modern notion of matter, which Latour argues is an amalgamation of [REF – REP]. Latour argues that the modern notion of matter hinges upon a formalist conception of formalism that turns the objects of the world into a kind of knowable substance (*An Inquiry* 112). This conception arises out of a particular understanding of form.

Latour identifies three senses of ‘form.’ The first one is informal, and refers to what is maintained through a series of transformations. This sense relies on movement, on the continuation

of the series. Stop the movement and the form disappears (Latour, *An Inquiry* 107). The second one, also informal but more concrete, refers to objects that allow something to be put into form. He gives the example of a specimen from an archeological dig being placed in a labelled drawer. This is a part of a long series of transformations and only has meaning in conjunction with the stages that come before and after it (Latour, *An Inquiry* 107-108). This still refers to a particular stage of a process, and so is in a sense isolating a part of it, but it maintains an awareness of the form as a part of a larger process. Latour claims that it is a third, parasitical sense of form that the moderns grasp onto in order to justify their notion of matter (*An Inquiry* 109). This form arises out of the second, it takes that notion of a concrete form, and instead of focusing on the movement, on its position as one stage in a larger chain that is dependent upon the other stages to have meaning itself, it focuses only on the concrete form at the end of the chain. This allows for a formalist conception of form to be defined that refers to a suspended notation as if it were the conclusion, the final product, as if it did not depend upon this continuous movement (*An Inquiry* 110). This is again a return to the modern tendency to separate a product from the process at the expense of losing sight of the courses of action that enable it to exist in the first place. But while this may obscure the very practices that are necessary to bring a given value into being, and to maintain it, what is of more consequence here is what the moderns use that form to do. Latour argues that moderns posit that this kind of form is the stable essence that underlies the objects of world—the remote entities to which the practice of science seeks access (*An Inquiry* 111). They provide the stable essence that defines the object as well as ensuring its continued existence. By claiming that what is truly essential to the object in question is the same thing captured in this final form, the moderns invent a notion of the material world as consisting of a kind of knowable substance (Latour, *An Inquiry* 112). This seems to fly in the face of common sense, however, given that, to go back to the example of Mont Aiguille, as Latour says, nothing looks less like Mont Aiguille than the map of Mont Aiguille (*An Inquiry* 76). The moderns account for this obvious dissimilarity by claiming that the fogs, the solidity of the rock underfoot, the colour of the cliffs are not essential to Mont Aiguille



itself. Instead, they have to do with the interaction between human and non-human, between the hiker and the mountain. These elements are ascribed a subjective existence and are not considered what is essential to the mountain. As Latour says, “All I have to do is act as though Mont Aiguille itself, basically, in its deepest nature, were also made of geometric forms” (*An Inquiry* 113). This is only possible if the discontinuous elements that are paved over with the chain of reference are ignored, as well as the separate passage that the mountain itself must navigate in order to continue to subsist. What is posited is that there is something solid and stable underneath and that that something is identical to the form to which science affords access by stripping away everything that is not essential, that is, everything that is part of human interaction with the object. This assumes that this final form presents what the thing is in itself independent of how it is perceived by human senses. This results in the notion of a knowing subject and a thing known that have the same content. World and knowledge become one and the same thing. This is where the conflation is. This has important repercussions as this is the origin of the famous modern bifurcation, as well as being emblematic of a reductionist drive. By splitting the qualities of a given entity into primary qualities (those essential to it) and secondary qualities (those having to do with its interactions with other beings), two separate regions are defined, that of the object itself, and that of the subject confronting it. This is what leads in turn to the bifurcation of nature and culture. Nature is about what exists, while culture is about interactions, which, since they have been separated from the world, can now only properly be said to reside in the mind. This is what allows for positing of an absolute separation between humans and nonhumans—the objective world that exists in nature and the subjective world that exists in culture. This bifurcation takes many forms in modernity, the table below provides some examples.

Table 1

## The Many Forms of the Modern Bifurcation

<i>NATURE</i>	<i>CULTURE</i>
object	subject
primary qualities	secondary qualities
literal	figurative
nonhumans	humans
external, material world	internal, knowing mind
science	politics, economics, religion, law, fiction etc.

This is a strange notion since, as Latour has explained, there is no access without this human interaction, and the successive mediations that the remote entity and the human undergo in the process of gaining access would seem to belie that the resulting knowledge is not of a thing-in-itself, or of an underlying stable substance that defines it. This primary/secondary quality distinction, by positing the existence of an essential underlying form, ignores the entity's relational existence, and discards those relations as not being something proper to it. Science (or chains of reference out of which objectivity arises), can only capture certain of the relations of a given entity, for example, it can say something about how photons bounce off a particular surface and interact with the rods and cones of the human eye, but it has nothing to say about what yellow *looks* like. This is nevertheless one of the relations of that entity being perceived. This really is a strange notion because it is the way in which photons bounce off the surface of the rock and interact with the rods and cones of the human eye, and the way in which it resists the pressure of human fingertips, and the myriad of other relations between human and mountain that allow humans to develop a geometry of the mountain in the first place. Without these interactions, no knowledge of the entity is possible, so it seems rather bizarre to discard those as inessential. The moderns seem to want to say that while these relations allow access to the underlying form, the mountain is, in essence, identical to that form. Latour's point is that the relations in which the mountain stands to other beings *is* part of its existence. Furthermore, we never have a full understanding of the remote entity

because we are able to determine only some of its relations (for example, we have access to the relations we can establish through our senses and through chains of reference, the yeast's relation to grapes for example). This is a point that Whitehead makes in *Modes of Thought*. As he says:

Each fully realized fact had an infinitude of relations in the historic world and in the realm of form; namely, its perspective of the universe. We can only conceive it with respect to a minute selection of these relations. These relations, thus abstracted, require for their full understanding the infinitude from which we abstract. We experience more than we can analyze. For we experience the universe, and we analyse in our consciousness a minute selection of its details (89).

There is no thing-in-itself to be accessed, but rather the thing exists in its multitude of relations only some of which will be accessible to humans. Furthermore, we also never have knowledge of something without the thing undergoing an alteration in the process. The geometry of Mont Aiguille did not exist until it was put into that form by moderns interacting with it, taking measurements, creating this dissimilar map. This particular relation between the mountain and humans is new. The mountain does not exist as a geometric constant, but this is now one of its relations to humans. The purely geometrical Mont Aiguille did not exist prior to this process, instead, as a result of this back and forth interaction, this is now something that can be known about the mountain, but it is not the mountain itself, it is specifically the result of human interaction with it, it is a particular consequence of how the human encounters the mountain, the angles that are perceived by the human that affect the way the human can travel over the rock and how a human can locate themselves on its surface. This understanding of the mountain is inconsequential to the passage that the mountain must undergo in order to continue to exist. This is not, as the moderns have supposed, essential to the mountain, it is not what explains its existence, it does not supply the essence of the being.

This bifurcation of primary and secondary qualities that allows for the formalist conception of form (as a final product separated from the process) and the notion of "matter" as a kind of knowable substance has an important consequence. The resulting notion of direct access, of a value, objective knowledge, that does not depend on mediations but rather allows for the transfer of the

essence of the object (for example, Mont Aiguille as a geometric constant) to the understanding of the human without anything changing—as Latour puts it, transfer without transformation—is the origin of critique that undermines institutions on the basis of revealing their mediations (*An Inquiry* 94). This, as mentioned, makes values that depend on mediations suspect. This is part of what Latour claims has gone wrong with constructivism in modern theory (*An Inquiry* 157). This also contributes, according to Latour, to undiplomatic relations with other collectives because moderns see themselves as having knowledge, while the other collectives, given that they do not have direct access, merely believe (*An Inquiry* 173).

### ***Construction***

Latour replaces the term ‘construction’ with ‘instauration’ as a way of correcting the errant impression that construction is a kind of one-way activity—that the constructor is active while the thing being constructed is passive (*An Inquiry* 157-161). Instead, Latour once again explains the production of new beings as a process that happens in the space in between human and non-human and arises from their interaction. There is, furthermore, a kind of communication happening in the process, so that the human is never entirely free to do whatever they choose, but is instead always at least in part guided by the being (Latour, *An Inquiry* 161).

Latour argues that something has gone wrong with the notion of construction, that has led to the opposition in moderns’ accounts between what is fabricated and what is real (*An Inquiry* 153). The moderns have not properly understood the process of mediation. Their notion of matter as a knowable substance and the transfer of the underlying form without any transformation taking place has led to the suspicion that if there are mediations involved, if something is altered, or constructed, then it cannot be true as compared with this pure form of transfer without transformation. This is the origin of a kind of critique that operates by revealing the mediations involved in institutions as a challenge to their validity (*An Inquiry* 155). This form of critique has

undermined many institutions and threatened their existence,<sup>23</sup> something which has important consequences. According to Latour, it is not just those seeking to discredit a given value or institution that believe this, instead both those seeking to criticize and those seeking to defend buy into this concept. This leads to a kind of fundamentalism on the part of the defenders, because the impetus becomes finding something fundamental to a given practice, something that is essential, or that doesn't require any mediations in order to exist for those investigating (Latour, *An Inquiry* 156). The issue here is that by de-constructing, or trying to get down to some fundamental essence, what gets cast aside is the actual process by which objectivity<sup>24</sup> is able to exist, and that values can be continually supplied. This de-construction actually seems to hinder an understanding of the values that moderns hold to because it actually threatens to halt the processes that allow them to exist. The issue is a kind of reification,<sup>25</sup> value comes to mean some fundamental substance, a *thing* rather than being something that is seen as emanating from particular practices. This form of critique actually undermines the very practices that allow values to exist (in the sense of the beings that arise out of the process of establishing networks and circulate in them thereafter). This is part of why modern theory and practice have had to remain separate, because they are incompatible, they have to be separated if those values have a chance of continued existence. If we were to focus on critique, on finding foundations in order to have objective knowledge, all the objectivity being generated by these processes that require mediations would grind to a halt. As Latour says,

If it has become impossible to say in a single breath “This is well constructed, it is therefore true, even really true,” it is because the negative view of mediations (even though they alone are capable of establishing the continuity of networks) is shared both by those who want to defend values and by those who want to undermine them. Or rather, the thought that is always trying to reveal behind the institutions of the True, the Beautiful, the Good, the All, the presence of a multiplicity of dubious manipulations, defective translations,

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<sup>23</sup> In the sense that individuals feel less compelled to perpetuate their practices.

<sup>24</sup> Latour claims that objectivity is possible in all the modes, not just in reference. Objectivity results from the continuous circulation of beings such that they are in a sense available to anyone and furthermore that they are expressed in particular ways such that it is not possible to do just anything with them, or say just anything about them.

<sup>25</sup> In the way that Lucacs means it, which is simply that a relation has taken on the character of a thing. Honneth will provide another formulation of this with the help of his notion of an elementary stance of recognition.

worn-out metaphors, projections, in short transformations that cancel out their value—this thought has become “CRITIQUE.” The position that in effect justifies, a contrario, in the eyes of their adversaries, the invocation of a substance that would maintain itself, for its part, without any transformation at all (*An Inquiry* 155)

Part of the solution has been to identify the error in the notion of there being any value to which moderns have unmediated access, which Latour has done by dis-amalgamating the two modes he sees as being conflated in the modern notion of matter. The next step is to restore the role of mediations, and to properly understand them. In order to do so, Latour considers what has gone wrong in constructivism, by identifying three features in construction that tend to be overlooked. The first is that the action is doubled, it is unclear where the source of action is because action is carried out because of others, and still others pass into action as a result of the request of another (Latour, *An Inquiry* 157-158). Latour provides the example of a child doing their homework at the request of a parent, “If you make your children do their vacation homework assignments, you do not do them yourselves, and the children won’t do them without you...” (*An Inquiry* 158). So who is acting, or is responsible for the action is unclear.

The second uncertainty regards the direction of the action. Whether it is the constructor who is determining the direction of the action, or the thing being constructed which has occasioned the action is uncertain (*An Inquiry* 158). This is clear in the case of [REF], for example, where there is this back and forth between the investigator and what is being investigated such that the thing being investigated influences the way in which the investigator proceeds. The way in which the yeast in the petri dish actually responds to the sugars introduced will influence the next step that is taken, the inscription that is made, the next substance to be introduced into the petri dish. As Latour says, “A new oscillation: to receive the Nobel Prize, it is indeed the scientist herself who has acted; but for her to deserve the prize, facts had to have been what made her act, and not just the personal initiative of an individual scientist whose private opinions don’t interest anyone. How can we not oscillate between these two positions?” (*An Inquiry* 158-159). In other words, it is the interaction

with other beings, where both are active and influence one another in particular ways, where a form of communication occurs that allows for something new to come into being.

Finally, to say that something is constructed requires a judgment of the quality of the construction (*An Inquiry* 159). But, says Latour, nothing in constructivism allows for this judgement about whether something is well or poorly constructed to be made. This is because to be constructed is itself a determination that it is not true (*An Inquiry* 159).

In order to be able to determine whether something is well or poorly constructed, and to be able to capture the three elements uncovered above, then, Latour introduces a new concept, that of instauration. The process of instauration involves this communication with beings, it involves paying attention to way in which beings *articulate* themselves. He says, “. . . the act of instauration has to provide the opportunity to encounter beings capable of worrying you . . . Articulate beings to which instauration can add something essential to their autonomous existence” (*An Inquiry* 161). This notion of beings that articulate themselves is necessary because, as seen in the three features presented above, there is no clear constructor who acts so as to construct something which then, and only then, exists as a result of their action. This notion is meant to capture this sense of communication, of back and forth, that happens between a constructor and the thing that they are constructing. For example, in law a verdict or legal judgment, is a being that is instaured (a safety-bearer to use Latour’s term) as the result of this back and forth process between the facts of a given situation and the documents and procedures that have been put in place in order to allow a judgement to be made based on the connection between the two. It is clear that this being, while it is constructed, does not exist solely in the mind of the judge who decides. Rather it comes into being as a result of these connections being presented are argued for by lawyers, and as a result of the judge deliberating over these things. It is in the interaction between these things and the verdict that either the process is successful in doing what it is intended to do (promoting the safety of citizen by connecting them to their actions and promises across time and space), or is not. It is in

the interaction between these things that that being of law is instaurated either satisfying the conditions of the mode and therefore true, or not, and therefore false.

The point may become clearer in another example, one in which we might tend to think of what is being constructed as being something inert and passive. Consider the process of building a house. Building the structure will involve assembling a variety of other beings that ‘express’ themselves in particular ways, but furthermore the process is, in a sense, an interaction with the house that is coming into being, which again seems relative to the purpose of the structure. If, in the process of framing, the wood is damp and uncured and begins to rot, then what is communicated is that the wood is unsuitable and this is in a sense communicated by the being (in this case the house) being instaurated relative to its function or intended purpose. Given that it is intended to shelter and protect the inhabitants, a framework that is not solid due to rotting wood threatens the existence of a protective shelter and thus, in order to properly instaurate this being, new wood must be selected for the framing. So it is in this process of interaction—in this case is the process of building in which there is a back and forth communication between the builder and the thing being built as it is being built—that a being is either successfully or unsuccessfully instaurated.

### ***The Issues with Modernity***

Now it is a little easier to say what has gone wrong with modern theory, and to understand what has occasioned this project. There are arguably three main issues that Latour identifies:

1. Modern theory cannot account for the ecological crisis and so is unable to effectively confront it.
2. Truth has been ascribed to only one mode of existence and thus threatens the existence of other values.
3. Modern theory does not allow for comparison with other cultures (collectives), which contributes to undiplomatic relations with them.



I will consider each of these in turn, as well as the solutions that are offered by way of Latour's new metaphysics of modes of existence.

### *The Ecological Crisis*

The inability to confront the ecological crisis from within the confines of modern theory stems from the absolute separation of humans and nonhumans upon which that theory depends (*Modern* 11). It came as a surprise, then, to discover in the era of the anthropocene that humans are a force something akin to a natural disaster on the earth. As Latour says, "If geologists themselves, rather stolid and serious types, see humanity as a force of the same amplitude as volcanoes or even of plate tectonics, one thing is now certain: we have no hope whatsoever—no more hope in the future than we had in the past—of seeing a definitive distinction between Science and Politics" (*An Inquiry* 9). In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour explains this separation and why it has been necessary in terms of two separate and paradoxical practices: the process of translation, and the process of purification (10-11). While, in *AIME*, Latour will develop this notion of the process of translation into the understanding of the necessity of networks composed of heterogeneous elements in order for beings (in the sense of being-as-other) to exist, in *We Have Never Been Modern*, he provides an explanation of the reason for their separation, as well as the historical origins. First, in the phase of translation, there is the production of what he calls hybrids in *We have Never Been Modern*, but will change to beings in *AIME* in order to avoid implying the existence of two, distinct ontological domains of nature and culture. Then, as we have seen, there is the work of purification that allows for distinct products to be separated out of the process and categorized according to domains that are further categorized as belonging either to culture or nature. Latour suggests that it is this work of separation that paradoxically allows for the proliferation of hybrids, or beings circulating in networks (*We Have* 11). Latour argues that the first is not possible without the second, and that the second would be unnecessary without the first, as there would not be this proliferation of hybrids (beings) to categorize (*We Have* 11). These two paradoxical practices is

what it means to be modern on Latour's account, and this is essentially where moderns differ from other collectives, or premodern collectives as they have tended to view them. If the focus were on the hybrid nature of what is being produced, he argues, then the proliferation of hybrids would cease because to accommodate these new beings would require an understanding of their effect on all the other beings with which they are connected so as to integrate them properly (*We Have* 41-42). As he says:

While the moderns insure themselves by not thinking at all about the consequences of their innovations for the social order, the premoderns – if we are to believe the anthropologists – dwell endlessly and obsessively on those connections between nature and culture. To put it crudely: those who think the most about hybrids circumscribe them as much as possible, whereas those who choose to ignore them by insulating them from any dangerous consequences develop them to the utmost. The premoderns are all monists in the constitution of their nature-cultures (*We Have* 41-42).

What gets the moderns off the hook for doing this, is essentially to deny that these things have any association with humans. This is why we have never truly been modern according to Latour, because there has never been an actual separation between the nature and culture. (*We Have* 11). Paradoxically, it is these practices that have increased the proliferation of hybrids (beings) (Latour, *We Have* 41).

Latour appeals to the work of Hobbes and Boyle in order to understand how the separation of humans and nonhumans into the realms of politics and science occurred in the first place. He then argues that these separations mutually reinforce one another (*We Have* 31). They each provide certain guarantees, the first is that nature exists independently of humans and has always done so and with the help of science we are merely discovering what has always already been there. The second is that society is a fully human construction, determined by humans for humans, with no part of it being a naturally occurring phenomenon (Latour, *We Have* 30). Each guarantee, Latour says, is nonsensical without the other. If nature is entirely independent from humans, it remains inaccessible and hopelessly remote, if society is a purely human construction, just about humans, then it has no substance and cannot get off the ground (Latour, *We Have* 30-31). The separation of

nature only works, however, with a parallel separation of culture. If nature is to exist independently of humans, then human constructions must exist independently of nature. Each guarantee is also internally inconsistent because, as he says:

If we now consider them together, not separately, we note that the guarantees are reversed. Boyle and his descendants are not simply saying that the Laws of Nature escape our grasp; they are also fabricating these laws in the laboratory. Despite their artificial construction inside the vacuum pump (such is the phase of mediation or translation), the facts completely escape all fabrication (such is the phase of purification). Hobbes and his descendants are not declaring simply that men make their own society by sheer force, but that the Leviathan is durable and solid, massive and powerful; that it mobilizes commerce, inventions, and the arts; and that the Sovereign holds the well-tempered steel sword and the golden sceptre in his hand. Despite its human construction, the Leviathan infinitely surpasses the humans who created it, for in its pores, its vessels, its tissues, it mobilizes the countless goods and objects that give it consistency and durability. Yet despite the solidity procured by the mobilization of things (as revealed by the work of mediation), we alone are the ones who constitute it freely by the sheer force of our reasoning – we poor, naked, unarmed citizens (as demonstrated by the work of purification) (*We Have* 31).

This leads to a couple of constitutional guarantees, the first is that nature is as if it were not constructed, even whilst it is constructed, and the second is that although society is our construction, it is as though we did not construct it (Latour, *We Have* 32). This is a powerful constitution as it allows for enormous freedom in the actions of the moderns. As Latour says,

They are going to be able to make nature intervene at every point in the fabrication of their societies while they go right on attributing Nature its radical transcendence; they are going to be able to become the only actors in their own political destiny, while they go right on making their society hold together by mobilizing nature. On the one hand, the transcendence of Nature will not prevent its social immanence; on the other, the immanence of the social will not prevent the Leviathan from remaining transcendent (*We Have* 32).

Since modern theory depends upon a complete separation between human and nonhumans, between culture and nature, it is a struggle to account for the realization that human, cultural practices are in fact having a detrimental impact on nature, on nonhumans. The practical urgency of understanding and confronting the ecological crisis reveals this discrepancy between practice and theory. It is this practical urgency of the ecological crises that has in many ways opened up a space for the project that Latour undertakes.

The modes of existence offer a new framework that allows the network nature of beings (the mixing, the translation) to be accounted for, while still being able to account for what is specific to the beings of each mode. As a result, it is possible to understand the relationship between beings and the impact they have on one another by considering the networks in which they circulate. This re-establishes the connection between beings. At no point in this framework is it necessary to appeal to ‘culture’ or ‘nature’ to explain the processes at hand since each mode supplies its own interpretive key and thus these become empty categories. Instead, one need only specify the mode of existence to understand the particular way in which the practices proceed and the way in which they pass through other beings. In terms of confronting the ecological crisis, then, it is possible to go back to the networks, understand what they supply, and consider the ways in which they can be reworked, so that the supply can be continued, while not infringing upon the continued existence of other values.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Ascription of Truth to Only One Mode of Existence*

The ascription of truth to only one mode of existence (or what the moderns refer to as the domain of science) is an important repercussion of the bifurcation of nature and culture. For moderns, according to Latour, culture is seen as something constructed by humans for humans while nature describes the realm of things that exist in themselves in the world. This has a number of important consequences as we have seen. First, owing to an errant notion of matter, and a formalist conception of form, the natural world is seen as being populated by ‘knowable substances’ as it were, which allows for the notion of objective knowledge in the sense of unmediated access to things as they exist in themselves. The idea here is that the underlying form (in the formalist sense that isolates the form at the end of a chain of reference ignoring its dependence upon the

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<sup>26</sup> I’m thinking, by way of example, of the establishment of new forms of energy delivery (solar, wind) and new regulations that are put in place for energy consumption etc.

entire sequence) is transferred from the object existing in the world, into the understanding of a fact without any transformation. The form in the mind is the same as the form in the world.

What happens next, as a result, is that the notion that science provides objective knowledge in the sense of direct, unmediated access to the essential underlying form of things as they exist in themselves (substance metaphysics), makes anything that relies on mediation immediately suspect.<sup>27</sup> This has the repercussion of equating that which is constructed with that which is fabricated, or unreal, in comparison with the possibility of direct access. This cannot account for the true purpose and importance of mediations in the process of instauration that is at the core of the modes of existence that would previously be ascribed to 'culture.'<sup>28</sup> It also ignores the mediations that are actually responsible for allowing access in the mode of reference.

The result of this disavowal of mediations is a form of critique that operates by revealing the mediations at work in given institutions as a way of undermining the value that they supply. This loss of the interpretative keys by which a value can be understood in its own terms in relation to the purpose or function of the practices out of which it emanates has led to the post-modernist notion that there is no objectivity. Latour sees this as a symptom of the misunderstandings inherent in the bifurcation. For him, there is objectivity in every mode. This seems to be supplied by the interpretive key according to which the truth or falsity of a given being can be determined.

This reduction of truth to that which provides objective knowledge in the modern sense also has the unfortunate consequence of leading to a kind of conflict of values, wherein practitioners in a given mode feel compelled to justify their practices according to the truth conditions of another mode. It seems that there are two recourses in modernity for the justification of practices. One can argue that they provide objective knowledge, or one can frame the importance of the practices in

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<sup>27</sup> This, as we shall see, also contributes to the undiplomatic relations with other collectives.

<sup>28</sup> Those that center around quasi-objects, and quasi-subjects as we will see, rather than those that center around neither.

terms of participation in markets. I have, on occasion, listened with fascination as the host on a Christian radio station attempted to use the fossil record, and the gaps therein, as evidence of God's existence. For Latour, this would be an instance of a category mistake. The purpose of religion is not to supply objective knowledge in the sense that the moderns have meant this, but instead seems to have a kind of addressing function on his account. This also hints at the strained relationship between values and the institutions that are intended to harbor them. These institutions can, says Latour, and have in many cases, lost sight of their true purpose (*An Inquiry* web)<sup>29</sup>. However, the ascription of truth to only that which supplies objective knowledge leads to such attempts to justify practices in those terms.

I also distinctly recall my disappointment when upon attending a talk given at the University of Michigan about the value of studying arts and humanities, rather than hearing an account of what it is about the arts and humanities themselves that are valuable, the importance of the practices, understandings, and insights gained therein, I listened instead to an explanation of how such studies translate into lucrative careers, how they affect one's earning potential and employment opportunities. It seems to me that this was a case in which the interpretative key that would allow the value to be expressed in its own terms was lost. Of course, I understand that the reality of requiring an income is an important factor for potential students, and as a result I see the importance for the speaker to address that, but still, it seems to me that a few words about what is valuable about the practices themselves should also have had their place in that presentation. This seems like another avenue that is regularly taken to justify practices: participation in markets.

The modes of existence offer a way of understanding and assessing values in the terms proper to them, and so offer a way of avoiding recourse to only a couple forms of justification for practices. It also offers a way to avoid positions of post-modernism, since, as seen with the notion

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<sup>29</sup> The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears: [http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#3&b\[subheading\]=#41&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=VOC&i\[id\]=#vocab-577&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#3&b[subheading]=#41&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=VOC&i[id]=#vocab-577&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions)

of instauration, it is not case that anything goes. As Latour argues, the process of instauration requires a kind of communication with what is coming into being as well as an appeal to the specifications of the mode of existence according to which the process is taking place (*An Inquiry* 161). He uses Austin's concept of felicity/infelicity conditions as a way of capturing this. In order to be able to judge the truth or falsity of a being in a given mode, one must know how to speak well of a being in that mode, one needs to, in a sense, be able to speak of that being in the particular language of the mode in question. Of course, Latour argues whether something can be said to be true or false goes beyond assessing the sentences with which one speaks about it and instead has to do with the actual existence of the thing in question, but identifying what it takes to speak well or poorly about a being in a given mode is a good place to start (*An Inquiry* 20).

This is where Latour diverges with pluralist theories of truth. While he does maintain that there are different ways in which something can be true or false, he doesn't want to restrict this to sentences, or truth and falsity to be ascribed in different ways to what can be said about existents. Instead, for him, it is the *beings* themselves—what emanates or emerges from the processes—that are true or false, and this is directly linked to understanding what the beings of a given mode are intended to do, what their purpose or function is, or what value they supply the collective with. Being able to speak well about a being in a given mode of existence then means that this function has been understood, and the particular way, or process by which a being is instaured such that it serves its purpose is understood and that the being can then be judged according to these specifications. So speaking well is thus intimately connected to respecting the practices of a particular value, and speaking of what is instaured in those terms, and not in terms of other modes of existence. For Latour the processes are a kind of articulation, and the reason we are able to speak about beings at all is because they articulate themselves (*An Inquiry* 285-287). For truth pluralists, statements about the world can be true in different ways, but existence itself is singular. This is

something that Latour rejects, singular existence with a plurality of ways of speaking about it. Instead, in his formulation, existence is plural.

Given this focus on the process, and the determination of truth and falsity based upon whether or not a given being actually supplies the value it is meant to, Latour seems to offer a pragmatic account of truth, something akin to James. In “Bruno Latour’s pragmatic realism: an ontological inquiry,” Francisco J. Salinas makes the case that Latour’s metaphysics can be understood as being pragmatic realism. This hinges on his understanding of pragmatism as including particular ontological suppositions. As he says, “My proposition about pragmatism is that *inside* the tradition, there reside key elements about reality’s constitution: therefore, its relevance is *not only* practical but also ontological (10).” The form of pragmatism that he sees Latour’s work as being an example of is one that is concerned with the relationship between objects and experience (10). So truth will be determined by that relationship. For Salinas, knowledge is what happens in between the human and the object, and it is the different experiences that happen in this ‘in between’ that comprise reality (11). As a result, according to this view there is no inconsistency in saying that one is both a realist and a conceptual relativist, since the experiences, while perhaps relative, also constitute reality (Salinas 11). So to Salinas, for a pragmatic realist, knowledge and reality are not separate but instead both result from this interaction of human and object; both arise from experience (12). He claims that the notion of circulating reference is key to understanding Latour’s position as being a kind of pragmatic realism given that it does not separate subject and object, and instead sees them on the same continuum of reality, both arising out of the same processes (12).

### ***Modern Theory Does Not Allow for Comparison with Other Collectives***

As long as moderns have insisted upon seeing other collectives as premodern, there was no reason to consider their practices as anything other than errant, they were still confused, and had not attained the level of rationality that would allow them to put an end to belief, to cease using images and idols and appeal instead to the direct, unmediated truth of things as they exist in the



world. Latour argues, however, that this insistence on the possibility of unmediated access is, in itself, a belief on the part of moderns. As Latour says, “We believe that we know. We know that others believe” (*An Inquiry* 173). Once it is accepted that the moderns too rely on mediations in order to produce objective knowledge, then the possibility of understanding the true purposes of the practices of other collectives is reopened, and rather than attempting to spread this rationalism to other collectives in the name of progress, the stage is set to explore the alternatives, and to respect the differences in practices for what they are (alternative methods for supplying important values).

Since moderns’ entertain a belief in materialism, which we have seen is really an amalgamation of [REF-REP] on Latour’s account, what they are doing is actually quite similar to what they are condemning in other cultures. Also, since moderns have left themselves with only two options between which to choose, either raw materiality or representations in the mind, they have to see the practices of other collectives as representations in their minds only. As Latour says, they are encountered as cultures, which he defines in the following way:

The danger of the concept of culture stems, of course, from the fact that Europeans absorbed the diversity of "other" collectives under its auspices. Like the notion of cosmology, these terms suppose that questions of reality and truth be put in parentheses in order to account for differences. AIME's project, however, is to open a negotiation in which the distinction between that which amounts to reality and that which amounts to representation cannot be immediately established. If it were possible, there would be some final arbiter - which would generally be nature - and diplomacy would be pointless. Culture is the appearance that a collective assumes when it is broached via the sole schematic of Object and Subject (*An Inquiry* web).<sup>30</sup>

The idea here is that moderns see other cultures as having mixed up object and subject, while they ought, according to modern theory, to be separated. The sense of themselves that the Moderns have thus does not allow them to respect what other collectives value, and leads instead to the drive to modernize other cultures by spreading this rationalism that depends upon the separation of nature

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<sup>30</sup> The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:  
[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-13&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=culture](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-13&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=culture)

and culture and their particular notions of matter and objective knowledge. They cannot see the ways in which they too depend upon mediations and the interaction between various beings.

What *AIME* does is allow for those interactions and the processes of mediation and instauration to be properly understood, which in turn allows for their values (the practices of the various modes and what they supply the collective with) to be laid out, side by side as it were, next to those of other collectives. This reopens the possibility of communication and respects the values of other collectives as not just being representations residing in minds but as having an ontological existence with their own networks and their own interactions with various beings that populate the world.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE MODES

While Latour's account in many ways provides a convincing description of modern practices and has the benefit of re-opening a way of accounting for values in their own terms—one that respects what those values are truly delivering and doesn't require that they be justified in terms of other values—what this account seems unequipped to explain is *why* we value as we do; how and why patterns of interaction come to be instituted in the first place and what provides the motivation for individuals to continually maintain these practices. I will argue that it is in the mechanisms that shape the sense of self of individuals that this motivation can be accounted for and the unity and stability that is experienced in western collectives can be understood.

#### *'Persons' on Latour's Account*

I will take a moment here to look at what Latour says about 'persons' in order to allow a comparison in the subsequent sections with the sense of self that arises out of Honneth's theory of recognition. For Latour, 'person' is essentially a multimodal term, but, since it is in the mode of religion [REL] that individuals are addressed, it is arguably here that a human gains a sense of oneself as being an individual with value and worth and a valuable member of the community. This mode accounts for only one layer of subjectivity that an individual can develop, although it arguably plays a role in how an individual is able to relate to the other layers of their subjectivity. It is in the mode of [REL] that individuals are addressed as unified 'persons,' and thus it seems to be here that they first get a *sense* of self. As he says, "Words of love have the particular feature of endowing the person to whom they are addressed with the existence and unity that person has lacked" (*An Inquiry* 302). He also seems to suggest that this mode is responsible for making individuals feel connected to one another in that it places them within a community as a valuable individual among other valuable individuals, and so it may have a unifying function not just in the

individual but across individuals as well. He says “. . . we don’t draw the certainty of existing and being close, of being unified and complete, from our own resources but from elsewhere: we receive it as an always unmerited gift that circulates through the narrow channel of these salutary words” (*An Inquiry* 302-303).

This mode is distinguished from organized religions, which have fallen prey to transcendence in an attempt to give them a definite substance and to allow them to serve as a repository for threatened values. Instead Latour considers the *function* of religion, and finds it to be responsible for giving individuals a sense of being unified persons (*An Inquiry* 301). The beings of religion, what he refers to as presence-bearers, address individuals directly, as opposed to those of metamorphosis that wash over an individual not in any way because of who they are personally (*An Inquiry* 301-302). The idea seems to be that the words of religion are (or at least initially were) intended to address individuals, making them feel as though they are connected. Again, he is explaining these as beings in their own right, beings that have the ability to ‘save’ characters on the brink of dissolution by unifying them and making them feel whole again. It is in the mode of religion, perhaps, where what it means for each mode to have its own veridiction conditions becomes most clear.

There is a tendency in modernity to say that of course gods and angels are not real, properly speaking, although perhaps we can concede a function to religion, but for Latour, to say that these ‘presence-bearers’ are not real is to confuse the veridiction conditions of reference with those of religion. The beings of religion do not provide us with equipped and rectified knowledge, but that is beside the point. Instead, a being of religion is true if it has its intended effect, if it results in making persons feel unified and whole. The messages of the words of religion have this function according to Latour, and to know what words to say, to address, to unify, to save, requires a delicate interaction with these beings, a back and forth between the message and its formulation in words such that it will have the intended effect (*An Inquiry* 310). Again this is a particular type of

movement, in this case there is no information being conveyed, instead this process is undergone specifically to evoke a particular response on the part of the listener.

It seems that what Latour has in mind here is that the function of religion, of the words of religion, to address an individual as a person is essentially to acknowledge them as a member of the community, thus giving them a sense of identity as an individual, but also a sense of unity with fellow community members who have been similarly addressed. This seems clear in what Latour says about a 'malign inversion' that has occurred in modernity:

Quite to the contrary, it is when we speak of Science that we should raise our eyes to toward the heavens and when we speak of Religion that we should lower them toward the Earth. For it is quite obviously objective knowledge that gains access to remote entities, and that goes everywhere with no limits whatsoever as long as it is given the means, while it is religion that had some chance of allowing access to what is nearby, to our neighbours (*An Inquiry* 322-323).

In this mode, Latour seems to be acknowledging the importance of experiencing a sense of being a valuable member of the human community for individuals, although how this sense can also translate into the stability and sense of unity of the collective overall is not considered. Regardless, given the malign inversion that he identifies, it seems that this potential function of religion has been a casualty of modernity, and so seems unable to account for the unity that continues to be experienced. There must be something else that has this effect, and it seems to me that this function of 'addressing' can be better re-formulated in terms of the mechanism of recognition, which will be the subject of the following chapter.

While [REL] may have a role in allowing individuals to have a sense of themselves as valuable individuals and thus sets the stage for positively relating to their various layers of subjectivity, this is one layer among many. For Latour, it is through participation in the modes, through interaction with various beings that one develops subjectivities unique to themselves. As he says:

Although the term is obviously multimodal, it is used in this inquiry to designate one of the many layers of subjectivation, obtained when [REL] beings are met. This allows us to isolate, in the ensemble of encounters, the form of subjectivity which, in the tradition

explored by the Moderns, enables quasi-subjects - who feel themselves to be directly addressed, redressed and saved - to exist. This is the type of address that we have learned to associate with love but also with religious discourse; there are words, expressions and tonalities which, when addressed to us, make us exist as persons. But this mode of address, of course, is in no way sufficient to define subjectivities as there are as many forms of subjectivity as there are modes (*An Inquiry* web).<sup>31</sup>

Latour is denying the existence of a native, autonomous self here, instead it is the particular subjectivities that are developed as a result of their interactions that are specific to an individual, and so this individuality does not exist, in any sense, prior to them. One becomes skillful, for example, by interacting with the beings of technology, and it is only *after* these interactions that having certain skills becomes a part of one's individuality. Even the experience of emotions is not something that is internally generated by a native autonomous self on his account but are rather seen as beings<sup>32</sup> in their own right [MET] that take up residence in an individual and that require an alteration in the individual in order to be dislodged (*An Inquiry*, 195).<sup>33</sup> Latour is denying the

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<sup>31</sup>The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:

<http://modesofexistence.org/crossings/#/en/met-rel>

<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to find a good term for what Latour means here that doesn't carry certain impressions with it. Being seems to me to give the impression of a living entity in the sense of an animal, or human. I find it somewhat distracting as it requires a constant return to the notion of a being as emanating from some process. It does have a real, meaningful existence, which can be understood now that existence isn't conflated with the 3+1 dimensions of space, and now that there is no separation between objective and subjective reality. I cannot seem to come up with any better alternative however. I think this captures something really important. I remember, years ago, a moment of confusion over the claim that 'dreams aren't real.' It struck me as baffling and I wondered what could 'real' mean other than that something exists? It is clear that dreams do exist, and as an actual phenomenon of the world, not simply as ghostly happenings in the mind. Latour's formulation explains why this claim made sense for so many years before this insight and was accepted by me without question. It was because reality has become conflated with material existence in modernity. In *AIME*, Latour opens the door to accepting many other dimensions of existence, all of which are real in different ways.

<sup>33</sup> I find this to be an interesting claim. To me, it seems somewhat analogous to extrinsic theories of thought. Not, perhaps, in the exact way in which Latour explains it but I think they share a similar insight or are at least both compatible. While thought, in extrinsic theories, takes place in interactions with various things in the world, and so is essentially given by these interactions, so too can emotions be seen to result from interactions with the world. It is difficult to see how an emotion could be generated that cannot be linked to particular experiences of the individual. Extrinsic theories of thought seem to be in keeping with Latour's metaphysics also in that there is no content of thought that is not supplied, at least initially, in interactions experienced in the world. This seems very intuitive to me in that I cannot fathom what entirely independently, internally generated thought could consist of. It seems clear to me that the content of thought comes initially from experiences in the world, which can then undergo processes of abstraction and comparison and categorization and the like. Thought can then proceed by combining and recombining and making abstractions, but not first without some experiential interaction with the world (see Geertz 214 for more on theories of extrinsic thought).

divide between interiority (a native, autonomous self), and exteriority here (*An Inquiry* 188). Instead, everything, including the development and maintenance of the psyche, happens in the space between. So there is no native, autonomous self that is present in the individual from the moment they arrive on the scene, but rather it is precisely by engaging in the various modes of existence that a human becomes this multi-modal ‘person.’ In order to understand this properly, we need now to consider the four groups that Latour presents in order to categorize the modes, and what is meant by the terms ‘quasi-object’ and ‘quasi-subject.’

### ***Quasi-objects, Quasi-subjects and the Four Groups***

Latour introduces four groups as a sort of conceptual tool for organizing the modes in accordance with their relation to humans. The first group contains modes that involve neither objects nor subjects ([REP], [MET], habit [HAB]), although the beings of these modes are still dependent on a passage through discontinuous elements and the interaction with many other beings in order to subsist (*An Inquiry* 285-286). The beings of these modes, while they precede humans, still articulate themselves. For Latour, each leap that occurs at a branching point, each instance of continuity being forged through discontinuity is a kind of enunciation (*An Inquiry* 285). The being announces itself, as it were, by this leap into continued existence.

Latour offers the next two groups, those that center around quasi-objects and those that center around quasi-subjects as a way of respecting the contrast that led to the modern bifurcation of subject/object (*An Inquiry* 288). While Latour vehemently rejects the object/subject bifurcation of the moderns, he does concede that they have identified a real contrast, the mistake has been in separating the two concepts and positing that they exist independently of one another (*An Inquiry* 290). For Latour, there are no subjects facing a world of objects, these are not things that exist prior to the many practices that are instituted in modern life, and they do not stand in opposition, facing each other from across a grand abyss. Instead, both arise out of the same practices and cannot properly be separated from those practices or from one another. Latour uses the terms quasi-object

and quasi-subject in order to capture this contrast, but also this interdependence. This is again a shift away from substance. The subject is not a thing that exists in itself—there is no underlying substance that defines it—rather the subject arises as a result of interaction with other beings and is better understood as subsisting through the continuation of these interactions.

Some modes ([TEC], [REF], [FIC]), says Latour, revolve around *things*. However, in doing so, they create positions for subjects to fill (*An Inquiry* 290). In the case of the instauration of a being of technology [TEC], for example a cell phone, while at the outset there is neither an object (the cellphone) nor a subject (the technician), in the process both arise. In the process of the development of a cell phone, the possibility of being a subject capable of building, or servicing, or using a cellphone also arises. Neither exists prior to the interaction, and neither can be entirely separated as becomes clear when the cellphone requires servicing. However, while for modes that center around quasi-objects positions for subjects to fill also arise, it is true that process is really not occasioned for them, rather they are a necessary repercussion. The focus is on the instauration of these quasi-objects. As Latour says, “It is because these three modes turn around quasi-objects that they produce, by a sort of centrifugal movement, original forms of subjectification: skills, creations, objectivities” (*An Inquiry* 290). So in [TEC], the focus is on the production of these quasi-objects, although in the process the possibility of a quasi-subject being technological, or being a technician, also arises.

Other modes ([LAW], politics [POL], [REL]) revolve around subjects. By this he seems to mean that they are occasioned by humans living in community. They are processes intended to produce ‘subjects,’ as it were, in terms of endowing individuals with certain rights, expectations and connections. As he says:

To sum up the originality of the **THIRD GROUP** in an overhasty sentence, let us say that, while following along the political Circle, humans become capable of opining and of articulating positions in a collective—they become free and autonomous *citizens*; by being attached to the forms of law, they become capable of continuity in time and space—they become *assured*, attributable selves responsible for their acts; by receiving the religious



Word, they become capable of salvation and perdition—they are now **PERSONS**, recognized, loved, and sometimes saved (*An Inquiry* 372).

These modes are not entirely separable from quasi-objects either, it would seem, since each involves the interactions with quasi-objects. Law, for example, does not have merely human interaction as its subject, but also the ways in which quasi-subjects can enter into interaction with other beings (Latour, *An Inquiry* 362). For example, in order to conduct certain experiments [REF], approval is required, in order to protect creations in [FIC] and [TEC] there are copyright and patent laws. [LAW] holds people accountable for what they say and do by attaching them to their utterances and actions across time (Latour, *An Inquiry* 368), this is intended as a way to protect individuals living together in community and so it revolves around providing that safety, but this peripherally involves the interaction with quasi-objects as well. These modes, in a sense, revolve around the production of ‘subjects’ in the same way that the former modes above revolve around the production of ‘objects,’ but it is just a slight contrast, everything still happens in the interactions in between. All the modes that center around quasi-objects involve quasi-subjects, and all the modes that center around quasi-subjects involve quasi-objects, what these terms really designate is just a difference in *focus*, a difference in what has occasioned them in the first place.

Where moderns have gone wrong is in allowing subject and object to define distinct ontological regions (Latour, *An Inquiry* 290) when they are really just a way of explaining this difference in focus. As Latour says:

For want of an appropriate metaphysics, perhaps the Moderns merely exaggerated, to the point of making an incontrovertible foundation out of something that should always have remained just a *convenience of organization*: some modes are more centripetal with respect to objects, others revolve more around subjects. Nothing to make a scene about; nothing that would make Nature begin to bifurcate! (*An Inquiry* 291).

So, for Latour, it is in the positions for quasi-subjects to come and fill in the modes that center around quasi-objects that individuals can acquire layers of their subjectivity. In addition, in modes that center around quasi-subjects, individuals also arguably acquire a sense of themselves as subjects, or citizens, by adhering to particular ways in which to enter into interaction with the beings

of other modes, and with the quasi-objects, and those form layers of an individual's subjectivity as well. This will provide an important point of connection with Honneth's theory of recognition as we shall see.

Finally, Latour introduces a third group (organization [ORG], attachment [ATT], morality [MOR]) that includes modes that connect quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. Latour locates what he considers to be an errant notion of the economy here in the amalgamation of these three separate modes (*An Inquiry* 379). In [ORG], he rejects the notion of 'society' as a kind of thing in itself, claiming instead that the organization of a variety of disparate scripts<sup>34</sup> occurs through a particular movement of aggregation that occurs by piling them up rather than by switching levels (*An Inquiry* 399). He is denying here any kind of transcendence, or shift to a second level of organization that would explain how these scripts all fit together (*An Inquiry* 398).<sup>35</sup> This is where he is denying the existence of a meta-dispatcher that is responsible for organizing the various activities in a collective into a cohesive whole (*An Inquiry* 421). Instead, this organization is something that gets puzzled out, as it were, in the actual practices as they unfold.

Latour also explains the motivation for inserting oneself into various scripts in the mode of [ATT] (*An Inquiry* 422). But again, since he is avoiding any shift in level, the passionate interests that characterize [ATT] just wash over individuals in much the same way as beings of [MET] do, and there is nothing that explains what gives rise to attachments (*An Inquiry* 428). As he says:

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<sup>34</sup> The following is Latour's explanation of scripts on the website: "We give the venerable term 'script' a more specialized meaning, keeping the sense of an inscription but giving it also the cinematic connotation of a prefiguration of a whole series of embedded behaviors. It is a technical term to follow the beings of [ORG]. The concept must be given a broad extension, however, in order to grasp at once the mute gestures of someone following a recipe or the collaboration between two skilled craftsmen, as well as the 'derivatives' invented by financiers for gambling on maturities and the allocation of contracts. What counts in the concept is a strange existence at once below and above injunctions that also have due dates and which therefore acquire frameworks and limits despite - or rather because of - their continual reprise" (*An Inquiry* web).

[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#3&b\[subheading\]=#45&a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-519&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=script](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#3&b[subheading]=#45&a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-519&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=script)

<sup>35</sup> I will argue that symbol-systems, or symbolic universes are different from second level explanations in key ways, and that their function is what justifies their production.

If there is a question we no longer have to raise, it is whether interest stems from the individual, the object, or the influence of the milieu. We shall simply say that Peter and Paul, along with their friends and enemies, find themselves linked, attached, bound, interested, in long chains of quasi objects and quasi subjects whose surprising unfolding gives their experience all its piquancy. Interest arises impromptu. (*An Inquiry* 428).

This is the extent to which Latour can account for motivation. However, what prompts the institution of particular patterns of interaction, how they come to be instituted, and what motivates individuals to continue to engage in them is not addressed. Even in the mode of habit [HAB], how things become habitualized in the first place is not the focus, but rather the focus is on the immanence of essences that result from the continuation of particular activities that have already been put into place and regularized (*An Inquiry* 259-281). Of course, Latour has provided the framework for how these things come into being with the notion of a network [NET]; the series of discontinuous elements that must be netted together in order to allow for the circulation of given values, but beyond the simple confrontation of practical problems or the meeting of survival needs, what guides or motivates the development and the maintenance of these networks is not explored.

### ***Institutions***

Given that recognition, particularly in terms of esteem, as we shall see, is granted on the basis of an individual's participation in instituted patterns of interaction (which I will link back to Latour's notions of quasi-object and quasi-subject), it will be useful to consider how practices (or modes of existence) become instituted in the first place.

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann provide an account of how patterns of behaviour become habitualized and instituted that seems useful for clarifying what an institution actually is. Latour does not provide an exact definition of institutions, but there are some clues in what he does say that would seem to suggest that the notion presented by Berger and Luckmann is compatible with what he has in mind.

Berger and Luckman claim that the human species is characterized by a kind of world openness, by which they mean that there are a vast array of possibilities for how human beings can enter into interaction with one another and the elements of the world around them in order to meet their needs (47). While they suggest that the behaviors of other species are largely biologically constrained, human biology supplies only vague guidelines in the form of instinctual drives. These drives are inadequate to provide any definitive direction as to how to limit this world openness and limit the possibilities to particular patterns of behavior (Berger and Luckmann 48). While the exact method of closing this world-openness is not biologically determined, Berger and Luckmann claim that the necessity that it be closed *is* biologically determined, given that human beings are reliant on stability in order to survive (51, 52). Failure to close this world openness would result in chaos, as no one would know what to expect of others at any moment, and to meet each need, humans would have to pause before the vast array of possibilities and choose anew each time (Berger and Luckmann 54).<sup>36</sup> As a result, behaviours and activities must be habitualized so that various needs can be met and activities carried out with an economy of effort (Berger and Luckmann 53). As they say:

While in theory there may be a hundred ways of building a canoe out of matchsticks, habituation narrows these down to one. This frees the individual from the burden of “all those decisions,” . . . habituation provides the direction and the specialization of activity that is lacking in man’s biological equipment . . . And by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, it frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasions. In other words, the background of habitualized activity opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation (53)

This is very much in keeping with the mode of existence of habit [HAB] that Latour introduces in that by ignoring or ‘veiling over’ what initially prompted the activity, the determination of the

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<sup>36</sup> I listened to an episode of the radiolab podcast in which it was suggested in an interview with USC psychology professor, Antoine Bechara, that emotions help us to make decisions, and without emotions, rather being able to make spock-like rational decisions, we would instead be paralyzed in the face of calculating between all the choices available to us. This hints at this world openness and the necessity of closing it also. That podcast can be accessed here: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/91642-overcome-by-emotion/>

preposition and the determination of which courses of action to follow, individuals can continually carry out those activities as needed without a lengthy process of deliberation (*An Inquiry* 259-281). Of course, Latour claims that that the preposition must not be forgotten, or the mode in which the course of action is being carried out—this seems to be so as not to forget the purpose of the activity so that if something goes wrong in the course of habitualized actions they can be adjusted according to purpose they are meant to achieve. This does not yet explain how social<sup>37</sup> order arises, however, since Berger and Luckmann claim that a human in isolation will habitualize his or her own activities (54). Social order, they claim, is the result of habitualizing activities in ways that typify roles for actors (33). The origins of institutions lie in this process of habitualization in that stable roles are defined that determine the patterns of interaction that each individual involved will follow, and this is furthermore recognized and adhered to by others involved as well. As they say, “Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized action by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions” (54).

The notion of typifications arising out of habitualized activity is also in keeping with Latour’s notion of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. It is in this process of interaction between human and other beings, or in other words, it is in participating in patterns of interaction instituted in the modes of existence, that allows for the possibility of developing certain subjectivities. For

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<sup>37</sup> Quick note on how Latour would react to this term: in *Reassembling the Social*, Latour claims that he has no issue with the use of the term ‘society’ so long as it is used to designate a stabilized set of affairs after it has been stabilized. The problem for him arises when the term is used to designate the nature of something, to say that it is comprised of a particular material, that it is made of ‘social stuff’ as it were (*Reassembling* 1). In this case, it is unclear whether this use of the term ‘social’ is designating a particular kind of material or whether it is simply meant to indicate that the order pertains to the patterning of specifically human interactions (with one another and the elements of their environment). It would be possible to drop ‘social’ altogether and just use order so as to avoid incompatibility with Latour’s terms, but I think it is useful in order to indicate that it is referring to the patterning of human interactions. I will continue to use it when explaining Berger and Luckmann’s insights.

Berger and Luckmann, institutions arise when courses of action are habitualized such that they give rise to roles that are independent of any particular individual that fills them (54). To tie this back to Latour, the role of a cell-phone technician, for example, arises after the network has been established and this being is continuously circulating within it. The role of cell-phone technician is then a regular position that is defined by particular patterns of interaction that is potentially available to anyone to come and fill. These roles, for Berger and Luckmann, are—similar to the positions taken by quasi-subjects for Latour—at least in part constitutive of an individual’s identity as a ‘person.’

While the encounter of new problems or issues may prompt the formation of new habitualizations and resulting institutions, most of the habitualized patterns of interaction that an individual experiences have already been instituted prior to their participation in them. These institutionalized roles, patterns of interaction, and the expectations they authorize are largely transmitted in the process of early socialization. Berger and Luckmann seem to suggest that the limiting of the world-opening must necessarily take place in an infant and child’s early socialization in order for the individual to develop a stable reality construct that guides their activities and their expectations. As they say,

The human organism is thus still developing biologically while already standing in a relationship to its environment. In other words, the process of becoming man takes place in an interrelationship with an environment. This statement gains significance if one reflects that this environment is both a natural and a human one. That is, the developing human being not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order,<sup>38</sup> which is mediated to him by the significant others that have

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<sup>38</sup> They seem to mean this in the sense of an order that determines the activities of the human being in relationship to its environment, and so they are not separating the social/cultural order as something separate from the environment. This does not seem to be an instance of the dreaded bifurcation of modernity as they are clearly appealing to this relationship. We could rephrase this in Latour’s terms, however, and say that the developing human being interrelates with modes that revolve around quasi-subjects and quasi-objects, as well as those that revolve around neither. What they are suggesting is that part of what constitutes an individual’s reality are the patterns of interaction that are established between humans in response to their needs and their environment and that, given that these patterns are not biologically determined, it is useful to understand the human activities that establish them. ‘Social’ seems to designate that these patterns are established as the result of this human activity, although this does not occur in isolation from nonhumans but instead in response to interactions with them.

charge of him. Not only is the survival of the human infant dependent upon certain social arrangements, the direction of his organismic development is socially determined (48).

Berger and Luckmann suggest that this passing on of institutionalized activities to subsequent generations is what cements them (61). This seems to be owing to the fact that, since the origins of that activity or what prompted or necessitated it in the first place are not available to the child being socialized into them, the patterns of interaction that have been instituted and the roles typified therein appear to the child as facts of reality, or, as Berger and Luckman put it, they confront the child as objective reality (60). As they say,

An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection, it was there well before he was born, and it will be there after his death. This history itself, as the tradition of the existing institutions, has the character of objectivity, the individual's biography is apprehended as an episode located within the objective history of the society. These institutions, as historical and objective facticities, confront the individual as undeniable facts (60).

They go on to stress, however, that despite the way in which these institutions confront individuals as a kind of objective reality, this social world "does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it" (60-61). Latour says something similar by claiming that it is the scale of what he calls 'scripts' that make them seem independent of the human activity that occasioned them and gives the illusion of an organized society, or the impression that there is some underlying principle, a meta-dispatcher, that is responsible for organizing society into one cohesive whole (*An Inquiry* 420-421).

Institutions, for Latour, are meant to harbor values, although in modernity, given the fracture between theory and practice, this is not always the case. From this position it seems that what Latour means by 'institutions' and 'values' can be clarified. Latour says the following about values:

The banal term "value" is reused in this investigation to designate the primary means by which a mode of existence is known, before analysis has clarified the best ways of grasping its felicity conditions, its ontological status and the institution that accommodates it. Value is thus meant in the simple sense of "that which we hold dear". Also, since the word has

been made banal by criticism, "that which is disputed"; "that to which we aren't sure if we are in fact attached" (*An Inquiry* web)<sup>39</sup>

So values are the result of the processes of the modes of existence and institutions (or institutionalized practices) are meant to preserve them. Institutions can become detached from these values by failing to respect that the value actually lies in the particular practices and the immanence that results from them. If the value then becomes something detached from those practices, a substance, or thing-in-itself, then the practices can shift away from that which actually produces the value. It is only by respecting the true nature of values, in terms of their modes of existence, that what is necessary in order to ensure the continual supply of these values can be understood.

It seems, then, that Latour would agree with Berger and Luckmann that institutions result from habitualized practices (although whether those practices actually supply the values they are meant to or not is a separate question). What the modes of existence are meant to express is the relationship between institutions and values. Latour's focus is thus different in that it shifts from understanding how patterns of interaction are instituted, to understanding how to ensure that institutions remain connected to values. The modes, with their various interpretive keys, seem to be a way of capturing what is valued, and specifying how the practices of an institution in a given mode ought to proceed if they are to actually continue to supply the collective with the value proper to that mode. The focus seems to be on what the *function* of given practices really is. As Latour says,

With the Moderns, it is difficult to respect institutions because there is no direct relationship between the values that need to be protected and institutions as they were drawn up. What is at stake in this inquiry is a reshaping of institutions, after a diplomatic process, so that there might be a better correspondence between values and institutions (*An Inquiry* web).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:

[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#3&b\[subheading\]=#41&a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-577&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#3&b[subheading]=#41&a=SET+VOC+LEADER&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-577&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions)

<sup>40</sup>The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:

[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#3&b\[subheading\]=#41&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=VOC&i\[id\]=#vocab-577&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#3&b[subheading]=#41&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=VOC&i[id]=#vocab-577&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=institutions)



Latour's account seems to offer a way of understanding how values are connected to practices that supply them. Understanding the actual practices that are necessary will allow for those to be what is actually instituted. Still, it is clear that institutions, for Latour, are the habitualized practices of a collective, and so he would seem to be in agreement with Berger and Luckmann on this point.

What is deemed valuable in the first place seems to be a matter of historical accident. Berger and Luckmann stress that reciprocal typifications of actions arise out of an historical process (54), and this, coupled with the claim that human biology is characterized by a world-openness, seems to suggest that the establishment of institutions is a somewhat accidental process whereby humans institute habitualized patterns of interaction in order to deal with whatever particular needs and issues are encountered. Furthermore, given that nothing necessitates that these patterns be as they are, the possibility for change remains open.

What Honneth seems to supply in his formulation of patterns of recognition, as I will argue subsequently, is a way of understanding how these somewhat accidentally instituted practices can be valuable to individuals such that they are motivated to continue to participate in them. But it also supplies a mechanism that allows for changes to this order to be made in a way that does not threaten its stability. Berger and Luckmann claim that while the process of externalization and the transmission to subsequent generations solidifies institutions, it also gives rise to the possibility of deviance, since individuals no longer have access to the initial interactions that necessitated the institutions. As they say:

Deviance from the institutionally "programmes" courses of action becomes likely once the institutions have become realities divorced from their original relevance in the concrete social processes from which they arose. To put this more simply, it is more likely that one will deviate from programs set up for one by others than from programs that one has helped establish oneself (62).

As a result of this potential for deviance, controls need to be introduced. It seems to me that what Honneth offers in his formulation of the positive relations to self that are acquired through processes of intersubjective recognition is a way of understanding the motivation to continue to partake in

institutionalized patterns of interaction that one did not institute oneself. It also seems to offer a more detailed explanation of the mechanism by which an individual becomes a 'person'<sup>41</sup> through interacting with a social order. Furthermore, this understanding of the 'self' can account for the process of historical change that has been witnessed while still accounting for stability.

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<sup>41</sup> Berger and Luckmann use the term 'man' to designate a person as something separate from a human being (50).

## CHAPTER 5

### BACKGROUND ON RECOGNITION

Every being depends upon interactional processes in order to exist. Humans depend upon oxygen, so they depend upon trees photosynthesizing, trees depend upon sunlight for this process, but they also depend upon foresting regulations, and methods of energy consumption in order to ensure their continued existence. This seems to be what Latour is getting at with the concept of Gaia, nothing can be entirely separated from anything else (despite the urge to do so for conceptual ease) given this complex system of mutual dependence and interaction, and he uses the term ‘ecology’ to refer to this kind of system. This entirely interconnected web of existence means that everything has an effect on the rest, and that it is not possible to change something without it having at least a minute, trickle-down effect on the rest. The modes are able to capture this interdependence in that the networks formed in each are entirely intertwined with all the others.

As Berger and Luckmann claim, the ‘self’ is something distinguished from the human (50), for while the human is dependent upon oxygen and the like to exist, it is at least conceivable for the human to exist independently of other humans (depending upon when the isolation occurs of course), whereas the notion of the self that arises out of processes of recognition is entirely dependent upon other humans. This dependence is something different from that of an infant on caregivers for their survival. Instead, it is the notion of oneself as an individual among others, a differentiated person, and furthermore one with certain rights and corresponding expectations that is dependent upon the patterns of interaction instituted in a community of humans.

Honneth, like Latour, also denies the prospect of a native, autonomous self, although he does maintain that individuals establish a form of autonomy. This autonomous self does not,

however, exist prior to an intersubjective<sup>42</sup> process of recognition, and it remains dependent upon this process for continual maintenance. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth explains that recognition results, in the first place, from the possibility of taking on the perspective of others (73). This notion arises from the work of George Herbert Mead, who describes a kind of initial relation-to-self that is the precondition for all communication (Honneth, *The Struggle* 73). He distinguishes the notion of an 'I,' which seems to be the spontaneous experiences and responses of an individual, from a 'me,'<sup>43</sup> which can only be arrived at by taking on a de-centered perspective whereby one views oneself from the perspective of a partner of interaction (*The Struggle* 74-75). It is from this de-centered perspective that one has a sense of being to another what they are to oneself. This is a kind of initial recognition of oneself as an autonomous individual among others and gives rise to the possibility of subsequently recognizing certain obligations towards others.

This sets the stage for the three patterns of recognition that Honneth identifies in the work of Hegel and Mead. The first two place the individual within the same human community, with the same claims to respect and rights, while the third individuates them as distinct from others in particular ways. Despite their differences, the same mechanism of reciprocal recognition underlies each, and that is why Honneth considers all three to be different patterns of what is essentially the same phenomenon (*The Struggle* 108). These patterns of recognition, Honneth argues, allow for the individuation of a sense of self in the first place, and then allow for the development of corresponding positive relations to self. These positive relations to self are what constitute the identity of the individual, and the requirement for continual maintenance provides the motivation to continue to partake in established patterns of interaction. Furthermore, as mentioned, each

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<sup>42</sup> This term may be problematic for Latour, as it seems to suggest that this is a 'social' process, as distinguished from the processes of 'nature', and thus is situated in the dreaded bifurcation. This could perhaps be expressed in a way that is compatible with Latour's theory by calling it an 'inter-quasi-subjective' process.

<sup>43</sup> This seems very similar to the difference between 'man' and 'human being' that Berger and Luckmann identify.

pattern of recognition on Honneth's account provides an occasion for struggle that can result in modifications to instituted patterns of interaction, and so can account for the process of change. It is in the importance of recognition to the individual's positive relation to self that Honneth locates the normative motivation for struggle. I will begin with some background on the three patterns of recognition that Honneth identifies so as to allow for an explanation of how the sense of self that arises as a result of them can be considered to be compatible with Latour's metaphysics and what the mechanism of recognition could contribute to the project in *AIME*.

### ***Three Patterns of Recognition and Corresponding Relations to Self***

#### ***Emotional Support and Self-confidence***

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, the first dimension of recognition that Honneth identifies is emotional support. Recognition in this dimension is what allows the individual to develop self-confidence. Here Honneth outlines a process of maturation that, in contrast to Freud's theory, does not progress as a result of the unfolding of predetermined innate instincts, but instead results from the mutual recognition of one another as needy creatures that occurs between primary caregiver and infant (*The Struggle* 95, 97). In order to provide empirical support for this dimension of recognition, which was initially posited by Hegel who referred to it as 'love,' Honneth turns to object-relations-theory with a particular focus on the work of psychoanalyst, Donald W. Winnicott. Because the infant is completely dependent upon their primary caregiver's response to their needs in order to survive, and because there is also no experiential differentiation between the two, Winnicott posits an initial stage of symbiosis in which it does not make sense to consider the infant in isolation (Honneth, *The Struggle* 98). Other theories of maturation make the mistake of abstracting the infant from this relation of dependence, then attempting to explain the maturation process as something specific to them without an appeal to this relationship and dependence upon another (Honneth, *The Struggle* 99). Initially, according to Winnicott, the experience of needs and the satisfaction of them are part of the same undifferentiated field of experience for the infant. The

needs are not identified as something belonging to the infant, and the satisfaction of those needs are not identified as being the response of an independent entity that is not controlled by the infant and their needs (Honneth, *The Struggle* 99). At this stage, the infant does not possess a sense of independence but is instead entirely intertwined with their primary caregiver.

This initial symbiosis and dependence runs counter to the notion of a native, autonomous self as individuation occurs as part of a process of extrication from symbiosis and does not exist prior to it. According to Winnicott, it is as the dependence of the infant upon the caregiver begins to lessen that this process of extrication begins (Honneth, *The Struggle* 100). The child begins to individuate themselves from the primary caregiver when the response to needs is no longer immediate as the caregiver has begun to turn attention back to other interests. At this point, the child develops a sense of their dependence, since the response to their needs for survival are not within their immediate control, but instead must come from an external source (Honneth, *The Struggle* 100). Honneth refers to this initial relation of attachment as “being oneself in another” (*The Struggle* 100). As Honneth explains, “Corresponding to the ‘mother’s’ ‘graduated de-adaptation,’ there is an intellectual development, on the part of the infant, in which the expansion of conditioned reflexes is accompanied by the capacity for cognitive differentiation between self and environment” (*The Struggle* 100). This is the point at which an infant begins to differentiate a ‘self’ in their interactions with the environment, and begins to determine what the relationship is between this self and the objects encountered therein. With the use of transitional objects, the infant begins to locate the caregiver as a separate individual that exists outside of its omnipotent control and begins to form an understanding of being merged and being separated (Honneth, *The Struggle* 103). This separation, and the awareness of one’s dependence upon another when coupled with the stable care of a primary caregiver allows the infant to gradually develop an awareness of themselves as a needy creature, and furthermore as a creature whose needs are worthy of being met. The resulting positive relation to self is one of self-confidence, confidence in one’s worthiness to

express needs and have them met, and this sets the stage for all positive relations to self<sup>44</sup> (Honneth, *The Struggle* 107).

What is essentially recognized in relationships of love is the individual existence and independence of the other (Honneth, *The Struggle* 107). But this independence can only be recognized in light of affectionate bonds that assure the continued care of the individuated person (Honneth, *The Struggle* 107). Honneth explains that this is a double process in which the other is acknowledged as independent and yet also attached to oneself through emotional bonds and, as a result, this recognition only occurs between certain individuals and is not extended to all. Nonetheless it remains crucial for patterns of interaction with other individuals in general. As Honneth says,

Although this means that love will always have an element of moral particularism to it, Hegel was nonetheless right to discern within it the structural core of all ethical life. For it is only this symbiotically nourished bond, which emerges through mutually desired demarcation, that produces the degree of basic individual self-confidence indispensable for autonomous participation in public life (*The Struggle* 107).

The idea here is essentially that one has a sense of oneself as individuated only in the experience of identifying another creature that one is connected to who is similarly needy and whose response to one's own needs is not under direct control. The recognition here is of a kind of similarity, and it is this similarity, but also a kind of independence that allows the individual to be capable of placing themselves in a community of similar, equal individuals (Honneth, *Struggle* 107).

### ***Cognitive Respect and Self-respect***

The second pattern of recognition that Honneth identifies is the recognition of an individual as having particular rights, as being a member of the moral community. Basically, it is the recognition of a person as being capable of participation in the law, both in terms of being bound by it and participating in its formation. While this pattern of socialization is entirely different from

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<sup>44</sup> Love here refers to close, personal relationships and so is not restricted to intimate relationships, but also friendships and familial relationships.

the one outlined in the section above, Honneth argues that they both share the same underlying mechanism of reciprocal recognition (*The Struggle* 108).

In this case, the individual only becomes capable of understanding themselves as having rights when they acknowledge the ways in which they must constrain their behaviors when it comes to others (Honneth, *The Struggle* 108). It is only when they recognize the rights of others that the individual gains this understanding of having certain rights themselves that must be respected. This is again a reciprocal, intersubjective process out of which this form of autonomy arises. An individual does not *have* such rights because they do not actually exist until they recognize that others have those rights and that they are similarly recognized by those others. As Honneth says,

In the case of law, Hegel and Mead drew this connection on the basis of the fact that we can only come to understand ourselves as bearers of rights when we know, in turn, what various normative obligations we must keep vis-à-vis others: only once we have taken the perspective of the ‘generalized other,’ which teaches us to recognize the other members of the community as the bearers of rights, can we also understand ourselves to be legal persons, in the sense that we can be sure that certain of our claims will be met (*The Struggle* 108).

As Honneth points out, however, what counts as a morally responsible person has been subject to historical change and it is only with appeal to a more universalistic conception of morality that this form of recognition could be based upon equality and not simply one’s social status (*The Struggle* 109). Conventional morality assigned rights based on the social class into which one was born so while individuals did have certain sanctioned rights that could be enforced, this amounted to nothing more than a mirroring of the norms of the conventional division of labour. It did not assign rights that would protect an individual on the basis of being considered the equal of other individuals. As he says,

Here, the individual is recognized solely for its legitimate membership in a social collective organized on the basis of the division of labour. As we have already seen, even this traditional form of legal recognition grants one society’s protection for one’s human ‘dignity’. But this is still completely fused with the social role accorded to one within the context of a generally unequal distribution of rights and burdens (*The Struggle* 109).



The notion of the legal person presented by Hegel becomes interesting for Honneth and capable of providing the occasion for struggles for recognition that can lead to an expansion in who counts as a morally responsible person and what rights they therefore possess as a result of that recognition when it is connected with more universalistic principles of justification (*The Struggle* 110). Honneth argues that defining the trait of being morally responsible—for which individuals reciprocally recognize one another—is an open-ended process and it is this process that allows the law to adapt to the changing demands as to who ought to be included as morally responsible and what rights they ought to therefore be accorded. As he puts it,

This trait [being morally responsible], which is supposed to be shared by all subjects, cannot be taken to refer to human abilities whose scope of content is determined once and for all. It will rather turn out to be the case that the essential indeterminacy as to what constitutes the status of a responsible person leads to a structural openness on the part of modern law to gradual increase in inclusivity and precision (*The Struggle* 110).

This formulation of legal organization seems reminiscent of Whitehead's notion of forms process being open ended, as well as being in keeping with Latour's focus on the continual movement necessary in the modes, in that this is essentially a process that is never completed. In fact, what makes this mechanism of recognition useful in the organization of human activities is exactly that indeterminacy, that flexibility. There is no end point that is being aimed at, or the expectation of reaching a completed state in this formulation. Instead, it is in fact because of this focus on process that the mechanism of recognition of rights can be a tool for accommodating change, and a very useful one for maintaining stability. Whitehead acknowledges the principle of perpetual change in forms of process in the following way:

In so far as identities are preserved, there are orderly laws of nature. In so far as identities decay, these laws are subject to modification. But the modification itself may be lawful...And yet such laws of change are themselves liable to change. For example, species flourish and decay; civilizations rise and fall; heavenly bodies gradually form, and pass through sequences of stages. In any of these examples, as the changes occur, new types of existence are rendered possible, subject to new laws of nature dependent upon that new environment. In other words, the data, the forms of process, and the issues into new data, are all dependent upon their epoch and upon the forms of process dominant in that epoch (95).

What seems assured is merely process, merely patterns of change, themselves subject to change. What Honneth seems to be identifying here is a pattern of change by which there is an expansion of the notion of a morally responsible person and a corresponding expansion of the assignment of rights. This is something that can be attributed to the mechanism of recognition itself, this ability to incorporate changes in patterns of interaction in the various dimensions of recognition. Of course, Honneth is focusing on processes of organization of human community, while Whitehead's claim is more of a metaphysical claim about the nature of existence, but this is still arguably a form of process among others.

This notion of perpetual change seems to be part of what justifies Latour's project of describing practices, rather than seeking foundations, or trying to find underlying principles. The modes describe the forms of process that exist right now, but nothing necessitates that these particular forms of process exist, or persist for that matter, and so what is important to understand is which practices allow for the perpetuation of values, or beings currently deemed valuable to the collective, so that those practices can be properly instituted and the circulation of the values ensured.

Honneth claims that the dimension of recognition in terms of legal rights identified in the work of Hegel can, with the introduction of post-conventional morality, be further delineated into respect in terms of the equality of persons and esteem accorded based upon recognition for one's contribution to society. In Hegel's work, these two remain conflated given that legal rights were distributed accorded to social status, and the level of esteem granted based upon contribution to society was determined by one's role as distributed along class lines (Honneth, *The Struggle* 111). Honneth considers Rudolph von Ihering's explanation of the de-coupling of attitudes of respect and esteem saying, ". . . in the case of what Ihering himself calls 'legal recognition,' the idea is expressed that every human subject must be considered to be an 'end in itself,' whereas 'social

regard' emphasizes the 'worth' of an individual, insofar as it can be measured according to the criteria of social relevance" (*The Struggle* 111).

For Honneth, respect is a normative concept. That is, it goes beyond a conceptual acknowledgement of an individual as having the characteristics that make them a person, and instead only becomes moral respect if it also has the effect of compelling the individual who acknowledges this status of personhood to act according to the obligations that this status demands (Honneth, *The Struggle* 112). This involves two processes: knowledge of what the obligations towards persons once recognized as such are, as well as an understanding of whether, in a given situation, one is actually dealing with an individual in possession of the characteristics that qualify them as such a person (Honneth, *The Struggle* 112-113). This is where struggles for inclusion can arise. Individuals can make claims that they ought to be included as autonomous persons worthy of respect based on matching the characteristics that define such persons, or can make claims on what sorts of behavioral obligations the recognition of themselves as an autonomous person entails (Honneth, *The Struggle* 113). The acknowledgment of humans as being ends in themselves has the effect that for them to be subject to the law, they must be capable of willingly submitting to it, it must be freely chosen. As Honneth says,

If a legal order can be considered to be valid and, moreover, can count on the willingness of individuals to follow laws only to the extent to which it can appeal in principle, to the free approval of all the individuals it includes, then one must be able to suppose that these legal subjects have at least the capacity to make reasonable, autonomous decisions regarding moral questions. In the absence of such an ascription, it would be utterly inconceivable how subjects could ever have come to agree on a legal order. In this sense, because its legitimacy is dependent on a rational agreement between individuals with equal rights, every community based on modern law is founded on the assumption of the moral accountability of all its members (*Struggle* 114).

What it takes for a person to be capable of rational agreement is open to discussion, and has resulted in an expansion of rights. What is important here is that new classes of rights are instantiated on the basis of arguments that they are necessary for being morally accountable (being able to agree to be held by laws and to be able to participate in their formation), or, in other words, qualifying as

a person (*The Struggle* 116). For example, social welfare rights were established on the argument that without, for example, a certain level of education, an individual could not be seen as being capable of rational agreement as an autonomous person because of the lack of requisite understanding of what they are agreeing to. As Honneth explains,

The institutionalization of bourgeois liberties initiated, as it were, a permanent process of innovation that gave rise to at least two new classes of individual rights, because what was demonstrated again and again in subsequent history, under pressure from disadvantaged groups, was that not all of the appropriate preconditions were present for equal participation in a rational agreement: in order to be involved as morally responsible persons, individuals need not only legal protection from interference in their sphere of liberty, but also the legally assured opportunity for participation in the public process of will-formation, an opportunity that they can only actually take advantage of, however, if they also have a certain social standard of living (*The Struggle* 117).

According to Honneth, self-respect is the positive relation to self that arises from the experience of being recognized by others as a morally responsible person gives. The idea is that an individual only has a sense of themselves as a person worthy of respect when they are able to understand themselves as having the characteristics of a morally responsible person, which in turn only happens through this intersubjective process where individuals recognize these characteristics in others along with the corresponding normative obligations they carry, and are themselves recognized by others in a similar manner. As Honneth says, “Since possessing rights means being able to raise socially accepted claims, they provide one with a legitimate way of making clear to oneself that one is respected by everyone else” (*The Struggle* 120).

### ***Solidarity and Self-esteem***

This final pattern of recognition is the one which is perhaps most relevant to the point I wish to make. Honneth points out that the first two patterns of recognition and corresponding positive relations to self do not actually individuate a person, but instead function by inclusion, that is, it is in virtue of being the same as, or equal to all others in terms of certain key characteristics that one is accorded recognition (*The Struggle* 122). It is in the pattern of recognition of social

esteem that Honneth provides his most significant advancement from the insights of Hegel and Mead that form the core of his normative social theory.

Both Hegel and Mead identified the necessity for individuals to gain recognition for the value of their particular traits and abilities in order for them to relate positively to them (Honneth, *The Struggle* 121). In order to understand this pattern of recognition, Honneth says, the attribution of esteem for traits and abilities must suppose the existence of a shared value-horizon (*The Struggle* 121). It is with respect to an understanding of the collective's overall goals that traits and abilities can be recognized for their contribution. Honneth identifies issues with the placement of this form of recognition in each theory. For Hegel, given that his theory is historically rooted in corporative forms of organization, he is only able to account for this form of recognition in his notion of 'honour.' One is able to esteem their own abilities as a result of receiving recognition for how well they fulfill the duties ascribed to them by the social class into which they are born (Honneth, *The Struggle*, 123). However, as Max Weber pointed out, this does not accord recognition to individuals, but rather, to entire social classes. As Honneth explains, "The personality traits towards which the social evaluation of a person is oriented, under these presuppositions, are thus not those of a biologically individuated subject but rather those of a culturally typified status group" (*The Struggle* 123). This leads to an asymmetrical form of recognition wherein more or less esteem is granted to individuals outside one's own social class on the basis of the value attributed to the traits and abilities that one is permitted and expected to develop based on their class (Honneth, *The Struggle* 123). Thus it is only with the flattening of the social hierarchy that began with the universalization of morality and a new distribution of rights to participation that this form of recognition is capable of being directed at individuals. As Honneth says,

The bourgeoisie's struggle against the compulsion to conduct oneself in a manner suitable to one's 'estate', to which they had been yoked by the old system of recognition relations, led to an individualization of the notion of who contributed to the realization of societal goals. Because it is no longer to be determined in advance which ways of leading one's life are considered ethically admissible, social esteem begins to be oriented not towards

collective traits but towards the capacities developed by the individual in the course of his or her life (*The Struggle* 125).

Honneth identifies a similar issue in Mead's formulation of this third pattern. Mead attempts to connect this sense of the value of one's abilities to the contribution they make via employment to the reproduction of society (*The Struggle* 88). Of course, as Honneth points out, the degree to which a given job is considered to contribute to the collective's overall goals is not independent of a value system, and is therefore not a neutral determination (*The Struggle* 89). As a result, linking this form of recognition to the functional division of labour does not provide any kind of neutral basis from which esteem is granted to individuals.

Where Mead's formulation has been useful according to Honneth, is in bringing to light the role of a shared value-horizon. As he says, "For self and other can mutually esteem each other as individuated persons only on the condition that they share an orientation to those values and goals that indicate to each other the significance or contribution of their qualities for the life of the other" (*The Struggle* 121). This, says Honneth, is historically contingent as well. He argues that a kind of value-pluralism arises as the result of changes to concepts of morality and the resulting changes in the hierarchal social structure. Uncoupling rights from social status in the move towards the universalization of morality opens the door to recognizing a plurality of ways of life, and thus value shifts from being attributed to the predetermined contribution of status groups, to being attributed to individuals, who may now each contribute to the collective in a myriad of ways (Honneth, *The Struggle*, 125). It is only at this point that individuals can actually become individuated in this sense because it is only at this point that it is possible to esteem an individual for something that is particular to them rather than for something that is ascribed to an entire status-group. Of course, says Honneth, this relies on the existence of a shared orientation to values wherein individuals are esteemed on the basis of contributing to the satisfaction of the collective's goals (*The Struggle* 126). It is this shared value-horizon that allows individuals to esteem one another for their particular contributions to these mutually acknowledged goals. The concept of 'honour'

introduced by Hegel is now replaced by a less determined, more fluid concept of 'prestige.' (Honneth, *The Struggle* 125).

This is also the point at which this dimension of esteem is capable of supplying the motivation for struggles. This is owing to the fact that whether, and the degree to which one's traits and abilities are considered to contribute to the abstract goals of the collective is a matter of interpretation. A struggle to make the case that particular traits and abilities that have been hitherto overlooked or disregarded ought to be recognized as contributing to those goals can now occur. Similarly, struggles to have new values recognized as contributing something meaningful to the collective can also emerge at this point. Recognition is the mechanism by which shared value horizons are developed, maintained and changed.

For Hegel, solidarity could only be explained in terms of an external threat to the group whereby the group members can esteem one another symmetrically in light of the new common goals that arise in the face of this common enemy (Honneth, *The Struggle* 128). This is because in corporative organizations, individuals are esteemed as individuals but according to their social group, and thus the esteem they receive for their activities is predetermined by the rank of the overall group. However, the individualization that occurred in the wake of the dissolution of conventional social order provides this motivation since, for the first time, individuals can expect to be esteemed for their own achievements (rather than having to confer these back to the collective) and can esteem the individual achievements of others as well (Honneth, *The Struggle* 128). Symmetrical in this case means that each individual has the opportunity to have their own, individual achievements esteemed in terms of their contribution to society as determined by shared overall values or goals (Honneth, *The Struggle* 129). Of course, esteem will still be unevenly distributed according to the value-judgments based upon this shared value-horizon. The degree to which one's accomplishments contribute to the collective in light of this shared value horizon is also open to interpretation, and thus the shared value horizon does not provide absolute measures

of the contribution of individual activity (Honneth, *The Struggle* 130) This constitutes solidarity, however, in that the particularities of each individual are of concern, and worthy of consideration (*The Struggle* 129). As Honneth says, “. . . ‘symmetrical’ must mean instead that every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, so that one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognized, in light of one’s own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable for society” (*The Struggle* 130). In this dimension, individuals develop the positive relation to self of self-esteem in light of the recognition they receive from others for the contribution their traits and abilities make to the shared goals of the collective.

It seems that value-horizons may arise initially as the product of historical accident, if we think of the way in which institutions, in the sense defined by Berger and Luckmann, come to be established as a way of patterning interactions necessitated by meeting needs and solving problems that are encountered. The exact form of organizational patterns, like the corporative organization of Hegel’s time, given world-openness, are not necessitated, and seem to just arise in the process of the typification of roles in habitualized activities. As a result they arise in a process that could have been otherwise were other issues encountered, or other patterns of interaction habitualized. Berger and Luckmann do not address exactly how those typified roles, once instituted, can be changed, but arguably they can be changed through struggles for recognition in the way that Honneth has described.

### ***Value Systems***

I want to take a moment to consider what a shared value horizon could refer to in a theory of heterogeneous modes of existence. It seems that, for Latour, this could really only refer to the modes themselves; to the collection of values supplied by the various modes. Latour wants to avoid appeal to a meta-dispatcher, or some overarching societal narrative that is responsible for organizing everything in order that the various modes are able to provide their own explanation rather than being subsumed under some other explanation. As result, for him, recognition for



contribution to the collective could only be based upon whether the traits, abilities, behaviours in question contribute to the perpetuation of the values supplied by a particular mode of existence. Latour has produced a pivot table that allows for the specifications of each mode to be compared side by side and the value of each expressed in its own terms (*An Inquiry* 487-488). This is a way of keeping track of the various modes without conflating them or subsuming them under other explanations. Arguably, the pivot table Latour has drawn up to keep track of the specifications of the modes is a symbolic expression of the shared value horizon of the moderns.

This is not necessarily incompatible with what Honneth seems to be saying. Honneth has claimed that social esteem can be afforded only in light of appeal to a shared value-horizon from which the general goals of a collective can be ascertained.<sup>45</sup> The general goals would seem to be a kind of abstraction from the practices currently instituted. If we consider the mode of existence of [LAW], for example, if it supplies the value of safety (in the sense of connecting individuals to their actions and utterances across time and thus instituting what Latour calls ‘safety-bearers’), then from that we could generalize and say that one of the goals of the collective is to provide more safety for more individuals. An individual who is then a good lawyer, for example, could be recognized for contributing to that goal. Essentially recognition would be granted for participation in the modes. An individual could also argue for a new form of protection through accountability on the basis that it would provide more safety for the individuals involved given that more safety for citizens is considered a goal of the collective.

A description of a value-horizon simply in terms of the modes that have been instituted, however, does not account for *how* these modes come to be in the first place, it does not account for *why* we value as we do. It would seem that the modes arise out of historical accident in the way explained above with reference to the habitualization of activities on Berger and Luckmann’s

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<sup>45</sup> I am choosing to use Latour’s term so as to avoid the problematic term ‘society.’

account—that they first arise as ways of dealing with practical issues and ways of meeting needs and limiting the world openness that characterizes human life. What the mechanism of recognition allows for, is a way of shifting these values, by claiming that other ways patterning interactions are still, and often more so, consistent with the goals abstracted from the current practices. But it also explains how these practices, first accidentally instituted, become valuable to individuals in that they are constitutive of their sense of self in various ways. They preserve a sense of oneself as an equal citizen deserving of rights for example, or they validate one as valuable in the ways in which they contribute with their regular activities to the abstracted goals of the collective.

In *Reification*, Honneth also introduces what he refers to as a form of elementary recognition, which seems to describe an awareness of one's interconnection with the various elements of the world. For him, as we shall see in the section on the co-constitution of society and self, value is something that is *felt* in the interaction with the world, and so value is disclosed in each experience (*Reification* 38). This also seems to suggest that value can be located in the patterns of interaction that are established themselves, that it is not something separate from the process of establishing and instituting such interactions.

Recognition, in terms of esteem, also provides an important understanding of why we value as we do in that each individual's sense of self is in large part dependent upon gaining recognition for traits and abilities deemed valuable to the collective. As a result, those instituted practices become valuable to individuals precisely because they reinforce that sense of self. The possibilities for recognition can then be seen as a major source of motivation for individuals to continue to participate in them.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> An important consequence of this is that what is meaningful about the practices individuals engage in can then become detached from their original purpose, or the values they were initially intended to supply, and can become meaningful simply because they grant those involved recognition, or esteem. As a result, esteem can become divorced from contributions to the collective in certain cases and can take on a pathological form.

### *Can a Case be made for the Importance of Meta-narratives or Meta-dispatchers?*

What I consider to be an interesting implication of Latour's metaphysics is that given the plurality of ways in which things can be true or false in the world, it seems to be the case that truth is linked to function. Whether something is considered to be true or not seems to depend, in large part, on whether or not it fulfills the purpose for which it was brought into being (or whether it fulfills the conditions for its subsistence in the case of the beings of modes that revolve around neither quasi-objects nor quasi-subjects). It is this implication that opens up the possibility for justifying the importance of metanarratives.

In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour rejects the existence of a social context that defines interactions, or the concept that the assemblage of connections is itself a thing (1, 14). Instead, he argues that there is nothing beyond series of connections that can be traced. 'Social' can only refer to a movement of assemblage and association that is continually reprised (*Reassembling* 7). In order to illustrate the error in appealing to a metanarrative, Latour references Tarde's reversal of micro and macro:

In a multitude of forms, though on a smaller scale, the same error always comes to light, namely, the error of believing that, in order to see a gradual dawn of regularity, order, and logic in social phenomena, we must go outside of the details, which are essentially irregular, and rise high enough to obtain a panoramic view of the general effect; that the source and foundations of every social coordination is some general fact from which it descends gradually to particular facts, though always diminishing in strength; in short, that man acts but a law of evolution guides him, I hold the contrary, in a certain sense (*qtd. in Reassembling* 14).

But could the case not be made that this process of abstraction from the details serves a useful purpose? Perhaps it allows for the development of a kind of framework that offers guidelines for actions and ways of ascribing meaning to the events of one's life? The fact that such abstractions, or macro explanations do not reflect the way in which processes are actually assembled, and do not necessarily provide the means for tracing them, may not matter so much if the purpose of such a practice is not to provide equipped and rectified knowledge.

To understand what the purpose of such practices might be, I will turn briefly to the notion of cultural symbol systems as explained by Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. In “Ideology as a Cultural System,” Geertz provides a positive formulation of ideology by comparing its function for the political organization of life with symbolic templates, or symbol-systems according to which patterns of behavior can be organized. In a way reminiscent of Berger and Luckmann, Geertz claims that these templates, or symbol-systems are necessitated by the lack of biological specification for behavior. As he says,

The reason such symbolic templates are necessary is that, as has been often remarked, human behavior is inherently extremely plastic, Not strictly but only broadly controlled by genetic programs or models—intrinsic sources of information—such behavior must, if it is to have any effective form at all, be controlled to a significant extent by extrinsic ones (217).

These templates—which are arguably the particular relations of interactions experienced and patterned in the world expressed in symbolic form—then offer a way of accommodating unfamiliar experiences by subsuming them under more familiar ones (Geertz 215). The idea seems to be that new meaning is produced by the expansion that occurs when two experiences that were previously unrelated (at least symbolically in human understanding) are subsumed under the same concept.

Geertz seems to use extrinsic theories of thought to express that symbol-systems are ultimately ways of representing relations between things, or establishing new ones as a way of providing extrinsic information that individuals can appeal to in order to pattern their behavior and responses in the face of encountering something unfamiliar (216-217). Geertz provides a quote from W. Percy in order to express the kind of ‘matching’ that takes places in extrinsic theories of thought. In the quote he describes a process in which, when approaching an unfamiliar something in a field, an individual goes through a series of casts for what this thing may be. At first it is seen as a rabbit, and then paper bag and so forth (Geertz 215). What is particularly interesting is that the final one, while correct, is no less mediated. As Percy says,

But most significant of all, even the last, the “correct” recognition is quite as mediate an apprehension as the incorrect ones; it is also a cast, a pairing, an approximation. And let us

note in passing that even though it is correct, even though it is borne out by all indices, it may operate quite as effectively to conceal as to discover. When I recognize a strange bird as a sparrow, I tend to dispose of the bird under its appropriate formulation: it is only a sparrow (*qtd in Geertz 215*).

The suggestion here seems to be that the entity that is experienced in this interaction is matched to a concept by picking out some of its relevant features, for example, long ears, a short tail, a particular leaping movement allows me to identify it as rabbit, but that too is a relational concept that provides a kind of guideline for expectations. Matching this unfamiliar something to the concept of 'rabbit' allows me to pattern my behavior accordingly. But this concept has at its core expectations that have been generated by many previous interactions with these things that have these relevant features in common that allow for the matching with 'rabbit.' In this case, the match allows me to not run off in fear of being attacked, for example. I have a sense of what I can expect in my interaction with this entity. The danger, however, lies in losing sight of the origins of these concepts in the interaction with the world. When that happens, the sparrow is just a sparrow, and the true nature of the concept is lost. This seems to be in keeping with Latour's rejection of a 'substance' metaphysics in favour of 'subsistence.' 'Sparrow' thus abstracted begins to define something that exists in itself, some discrete, independent concept existing as such in the world, it becomes the definition of a particular, assured substance rather than being understood as a symbol that captures the relation between humans and this entity as experienced in interaction between the two. By appealing to extrinsic theories of thought, Geertz also seems to be in agreement with Latour in that he denies any ghostly happenings of the mind, everything, including thought and the development of concepts, happens in processes of interaction with the world (216) and thus cannot be considered to exist independently of that. There is no interiority that is opposed to exteriority on this account.

Symbol-systems also operate in this manner, that is, they allow for the patterning of behavior, and are most important when institutional guides are not available (Geertz 218). As Geertz says, "It is in country unfamiliar emotionally or topographically that one needs poems and

road maps” (218). Symbol-systems, framed in this way as expressing relations under concepts that act as a sort of short form for what can be expected in a given situation, seem to be compatible with Latour’s metaphysics. They arise out of these interactions in order to express the experienced relations between things, and to symbolize them and make them expressible.

Not all of them are necessitated, however, and that is the point really. Given world openness, some of these will operate not by expressing relations experienced in the world, but by providing a template for patterning the behaviours that are open in this way. These templates are sort of along the lines of the meta-dispatcher that Latour denies, only they arise out of the actual formation of typifications of interactions in the world. The point at which metanarratives, or justifications for these patterns, for these symbol systems arises is when those patterns have not been established by the individuals who are currently expected to participate in them. Berger calls these second order legitimations. This is where theoretical formulations develop, as ways of justifying these practices to new initiates (Berger and Luckmann 93). It seems like this could work on Latour’s account, so long as it is not forgotten that this happens *after* the actual processes. Honneth identifies the importance of this as well in *Reification*, since his reformulation of Lucaks’ concept explains reification as essentially what loses sight of the movement by forgetting, after acts of cognitive abstraction, what occasioned them in the first place. These abstractions then become pure ‘objects’ and their origins are forgotten (Honneth, *Reification* 56).

Berger and Luckmann locate the origin of what they call ‘symbolic universes’ in a process of legitimation. As they say, “Legitimation produces new meanings that serve to integrate the meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes. The function of legitimation is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the ‘first-order’ objectivations that have been institutionalized” (Berger and Luckmann 92). This process, they claim, is motivated by a desire for integration (92) and ultimately leads to the establishment of theoretical concepts that achieve a form of autonomy from the practices out of which they arose. At this point, say Berger and

Luckmann, a symbolic universe is established which integrates the various institutionalized practices (95). It is appeal to this symbolic universe that now guides subsequent patterns of interaction and is called upon to legitimate them (Berger and Luckmann 95). So, at the outset, these practices are not integrated in any way and it is only through this process of abstraction and the development of theory, or objectively available symbol systems, that they become unified in a symbolic universe that represents them. As we shall see, this also has in common with the notion of elementary recognition that Honneth presents the importance of remaining aware that cognition follows the experience of interactions and that it is important to not lose sight of those origins.

What Latour would object to is the notion of reality being constructed and then simply projected onto a passive world, as if those patterns could be established in any way whatsoever. Instead, he argues that beings articulate themselves, that they are actors in their own right, and so, there is no passive construction, but rather it is always a process of interaction. This is also how he denies that language can be the final arbiter of truth. It is only possible to speak about beings, he says, because they are themselves articulated. Language is then only developed as a means of facilitating this interaction or expressing it symbolically and is not projected onto a world that is itself mute. Latour says the following about articulation:

The term has a wonderful pedigree, including links to "arms", and "ars" (Lat.), and multiple meanings in law, commerce, physiology, rhetoric, linguistics, even theology - an article of faith. It is the ontological foundation of AIME; a being is articulated (rather than being a silent presence, made immediate, persistent, given duration without existence). This articulation precedes by some distance that of spoken language. It explains the principle "in the beginning was the Word" ("In principio erat Verbum") - we might say, rather, "in the beginning was articulation." Entities are not dumb, rather they are articulated; we do not speak because we have language but because we conspire with, and participate in, this generalized articulation. It is the articulation of beings that enables us to talk about them and to judge, that is to say, to monitor the risks they take in being "permitted by" and "promised to" (*An Inquiry* web).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>The following is a link to the exact section of the website where this statement appears:  
[http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#11&b\[subheading\]=#155&a=SET+VOC+LEAD ER&c\[leading\]=VOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#vocab-17&i\[column\]=VOC&s=0&q=articulation](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#11&b[subheading]=#155&a=SET+VOC+LEAD ER&c[leading]=VOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#vocab-17&i[column]=VOC&s=0&q=articulation)

While language is possible as an expression of the articulations already present in the world, symbol-systems, or symbolic universes are arguably able to express the patterns of interactions with these articulated beings that have been established. This is not necessarily inconsistent with Latour's metaphysics so long as the interactional nature of these patterns is not forgotten.

Latour also rejects the transcendence to a second level of explanation given that this level attempts to explain what is established as a 'thing' itself, or a substance, and what is lost in this transcendence are the actual movements that assemble a collective. This notion of a symbolic universe, or symbol system as providing guidelines for patterning behavior in the face of unfamiliar somethings is different from a shift to a second level of explanation, or the 'bad' transcendence that Latour rejects. This is because symbol systems act as tool with a particular function, and not as an entity that explains the assemblage of a collective. It seems that this is only problematic if that function, and the understanding that these are developed after the actual assembling, is forgotten.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE ‘SELF’ THAT ARISES OUT OF RECOGNITION

#### *Co-constitution of Sense-of-self and Society*

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth explains that an individual develops a sense of self by first of all individuating themselves by recognizing the independence of others thus being able to take on a de-centered perspective from which they can view themselves from the perspective of another (74-75). This takes place in a process of early socialization. In *The I in We*, Honneth explains how the other two dimensions of respect and esteem also are first experienced in the process of early socialization (205). A child first develops a sense of self-respect in the experience of being at play with others whose judgements are deemed reliable or valuable to them and self-esteem develops alongside self-respect in the experience of gaining recognition for the value of one’s traits and abilities (Honneth, *The I in We* 205).<sup>48</sup> It is not the case, however, that after this initial process of socialization the individual’s sense of self is formed and finalized and provides some kind of stable core of the individual, instead, according to Honneth, these positive relations-to-self require continual maintenance in the form of regular recognition from others (*The I in We* 205-206). Honneth locates this need for continual recognition as the motivation for subsequent group formation. As he says, “The experience that one’s own needs, judgment and, above all, skills are regarded as valuable is one that subjects must constantly renew and re-concretize so that they do not lose their strength and vitality in the anonymity of a generalized other” (*The I in We* 205). As a result, individuals have a vested interest in continuing to engage in institutionalized behaviours for which they can gain recognition in that their sense of self is dependent upon it. Individuals have formed their sense of self initially against the backdrop of a shared value horizon into which they

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<sup>48</sup> Of course, it is not guaranteed that these layers of positive relation to self will be successfully developed in the process of socialization. Honneth links issues in this process to the potential for group pathologies (*The I in We* 212-214).

are socialized, and so those values are not just constitutive of their sense of reality, but are also constitutive of themselves as individuals. As Honneth says, “The process of autonomization is tied to the process of socialization, because the only subjects who will be able to fulfil socially expected norms are those who have made those norms the practical core of their own understanding-of-self (*The I in We* 205). This is what I mean by the co-constitution of self and society, the typification of roles in habitualized action results, in a sense, from a process of recognition, whereby individuals agree to recognize their respective roles and their subsequent contributions. So the formation of these patterns of interaction is, in the first place, a process of intersubjective recognition. But, furthermore, in order for these patterns to continue, individuals must continue to come and fill those roles. Given that the process of socialization autonomizes the individual on the basis of filling such roles, the individual’s sense of self is as reliant on the perpetuation of these patterns and on their continuing to fill certain roles as the perpetuation of those patterns is dependent upon individuals continuing to come and fill them. Since, as Berger and Luckmann suggest, given the world openness of human beings, nothing necessitates the implementation of any particular forms of institutionalization, what *is* necessitated is only that there ultimately be some, this mechanism of recognition explains how it is that these patterns can become so enormously stable despite not being necessary.

Berger and Luckmann suggest something similar saying that institutions are in a sense integrated in the reflection of the individual on their biography (64-65). They claim that nothing unifies these institutions from the outset, but that this is a process undertaken by each individual who sees their world as a consistent whole. As they say:

*De facto*, then, institutions *are* integrated. But their integration is not a functional imperative for the social processes that produce them; it is rather brought about in a derivative fashion. Individuals perform discrete institutionalized actions within the context of their biography. This biography is a reflected-upon whole in which the discrete actions are not thought of as isolated events, but as related parts in a subjectively meaningful universe whose meanings are not specific to the individual, but socially articulated and shared. Only by way of this detour of socially shared universes of meaning do we arrive at the need for institutional integration (65).

So it is by way of acknowledging the shared nature of the instituted patterns that an individual, upon reflection, can come to view their world of interactions as a meaningful, consistent whole, and can understand themselves as an individual differentiated by their particular engagements in institutionalized actions, themselves only meaningful as a result of the fact that they are shared between individuals. This allows the practices of a collective to be in a sense unified in the sense of self that individuals develop. Again, while this notion of a society as a consistent whole may not reflect the way in which associations are formed and perpetuated and changed, and may not allow for the tracing of those associations, it may have an important function nonetheless in that it allows for the stabilization of institutionalized practices. The individual gets their sense of the many heterogeneously operating practices as forming a consistent whole, or 'society,' as well as their sense of themselves as a biographical subject individuated by specific contributions to this meaningful whole. I think the importance of this process should not be discounted.

What Honneth provides is a specific and plausible mechanism by which an individual can come to have this sense of themselves as a biographical subject individuated by their specific contributions. The first two dimensions: love and respect, give an individual a sense of being an equal member of the community with the same needs and rights as everyone else, while the third, esteem, allows the individual to have a sense of themselves as being unique in their contributions.

None of these dimensions of recognition are independent of interactions with the other elements of the world. While it may seem, in Honneth's formulation, that these are purely social interactions, it seems to me that this concept of recognition can be compatible with Latour's account if it is understood in terms of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. While the dimensions of recognition of love and respect seem to center around quasi-subjects, the dimension of self-esteem arguably centers around quasi-objects. Esteem can be seen to be granted on the basis of participation in the modes of existence that center around the instauration of quasi-objects. As Latour has claimed, 'persons' gain layers of subjectivity through their participation with the modes of existence. For

example, one becomes technological by engaging with the beings of technology (*An Inquiry* 372). So in this case, esteem would be granted based upon one's ability to provide the collective with technological objects or beings, which is something that has been deemed valuable to the collective in that it has been instituted. So again, one gains esteem for participation in patterns of interaction that have already been instituted and thus already deemed valuable. This provides significant motivation for individuals to perpetuate those institutions thus securing the stability of the collective. The mechanism of recognition explains how individuals can relate to those subjectivities such that they can develop a sense of themselves as a unique individual. Having this sense of self, as I have argued, is crucially important to maintaining stability in that this sense of self is dependent upon continued participation in instituted activities, which are themselves, in turn dependent on individuals' continued participation. This seems to be a rather delicate balance and may help to explain why, when stability is upset in times of crisis, it can be so difficult to re-establish.

In order to preserve such a delicate balance, then, there needs to be a way of accommodating change that does not threaten the overall stability of the collective. The mechanism of recognition again seems particularly well-suited for explaining how this can occur, given that each dimension of recognition provides an occasion for struggle whereby individuals can make claims for the inclusion of either a greater number of people, or the inclusion of particular patterns of interaction. These claims, however, are made on the basis of the preexisting value-horizon, or, in other words, instituted patterns of interaction. For example, we can think of the struggles to allow same-sex marriage. Gay rights activists argue for this against a pre-existing backdrop of the rights of subjects to have certain liberties and argue that this form of relationship ought to be recognized as another version of the same form already instituted in the practices of marriage. Rather than attempting to form some new version of the instituted practices surrounding human pair bonds, attempts were instead aimed at inclusion in those that already exist, thus creating a change in the scope of what is included in the institution of marriage. In this way, the mechanism of recognition

allows for the accommodation of change in a way that allows the overall stability to be ultimately maintained.<sup>49</sup>

In “Recognition as Ideology,” Honneth expresses the necessity to appeal to existing value-horizons in attempts to introduce change by expanding them (*The I in We* 87-88). He claims that for what he refers to as ideological recognition to occur, it must be credible not only in the sense that the recognition is received from someone qualified to give it (someone who has the relevant skills to acknowledge the value of what one is doing), but also in that it is recognition for something that goes beyond what is actually considered valuable at that point in history. He says:

. . . there is a second, more important element to the criterion of ‘credibility’, one that is related to the expansion of the realm of evaluative reasons: people will only accept value statements that go beyond the value they have already achieved in the process of overcoming one-sided or inappropriate interpretations. In other words, ideological forms of recognition can only employ value statements that live up to the evaluative vocabulary of the present . . . Therefore, the criterion of credibility also contains a component of rationality with a clear historical or temporal index (*The I in We* 87).

Change, on this account, proceeds by the expansion of existing values and this change must be reflected in a corresponding change in the interactions and behaviors in the world. As he says,

An altered form of social recognition will only be ‘credible’ if, in addition to being rational from an evaluative point of view, it does justice to a new value quality in material terms. Something in the physical world – be it modes of conduct or institutional circumstances – must change if the addressees are to be convinced that they have been recognized in a new manner (*The I in We* 93).

So, to use the example above, same-sex couples can only accept recognition for the validity of their relationships if there are corresponding changes, for example the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The point is really that this is a process that appeals to values currently instituted and makes claims as to how they ought to be amended or expanded. As a result, this kind of change

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<sup>49</sup> This refers, of course, to conflict that is internal to a collective. When the threat is from an outside collective the struggle will obviously take another form. If there are a number of groups who have formed very different value-horizons in terms of instituted patterns of interaction struggling to have control over the same area, the mechanism of recognition will not be effective in the same way.

is not so radical as to upset other established patterns of interaction—it is a way of affecting change that does not threaten to tip the collective into chaos.

Honneth also offers a notion of recognition that can account for interaction with the beings of those modes that do not center around either quasi-objects or quasi-subjects. In *Reification*, Honneth identifies an elementary form of recognition in the work of Dewey, in which an individual recognizes their dependence not just upon other humans but on the world as a whole (37). This is similar to Heidegger's notion of 'care,' of an empathetic engagement with the world and is what Honneth considers to be lost when interactions become reified in the sense meant by Lucaks—when they take on the character of a thing (*Reification* 38). As Honneth says,

According to Dewey, it is in this underlying quality of all our experience that the existential immediacy and practical involvement of our dealings with the world are brought to bear. He employed the term “interaction” to indicate that our everyday activity is not characterized by a self-centered, egocentric stance, but by the effort to involve ourselves with given circumstances in the most frictionless, harmonious way possible. Just as is true of the mode of care, in interaction the world is not centered around us; instead, we experience situations in such a way that we “take care” to maintain a fluent interaction with our surroundings. In what follows, I will refer to this primordial form of relating to the world as “recognition” in its most elementary form (*Reification* 37).

For Honneth, this position of engagement with the world, or this 'care,' is what allows us to experience the value and significance of things encountered therein and this precedes acts of “detached cognition” (*Reification* 38). This seems to be an acknowledgment that nature and culture do not define two distinct ontological regions and instead that these are abstractions from an initial experience of one's unity with the rest of the beings of the world and a felt understanding of their value.<sup>50</sup> It is only after this experience of 'qualitative unity' as Honneth puts it that a process of abstraction can take place in which the elements of the situation are broken down into analytic concepts (*Reification* 38). This is the point at which an object/subject division can arise, but Honneth rejects the notion that these are anything more than abstractions, and warns against

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<sup>50</sup> This seems in keeping with Latour's notion of Gaia.

forgetting that it was a qualitative experience of unity that prompted the reflection in the first place (*Reification* 38-39). As he says:

If we take an arbitrary statement possessing a subject-object form, this linguistic form itself suggests that hereby a characteristic has merely been attributed to a given entity. If we remain at this level of predication, it ultimately remains ontologically impossible to determine the relationship in which the characteristic actually stands with the apparently independent entity. This riddle can't be solved until we subsequently realize that the predicative statement results from the attempt to abstract from an original qualitative experience. For it then becomes clear that subject and object "correlatively" complement one another by virtue of having originally indicated the direction of movement contained in a qualitatively expressed engagement with the world (*Reification* 39).

So Honneth also rejects that the bifurcation of subject and object designates a difference in kind, but it is rather a way of expressing the particular movement of an interaction. This again sheds some light on how symbol systems, or metanarratives might be considered useful templates providing general guidelines for patterning interactions. The issue arises when it is forgotten that these are essentially abstracted concepts, developed *after* the initial engagement in interactions in the world.<sup>51</sup> However, there is room for the importance and usefulness of such templates to be accepted so long as their actual function is understood.

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<sup>51</sup> It is important that the movement of abstraction is not reversed as it is in the concept of 'society' a thing that explains what is assembled.

## CHAPTER 7

### HOW THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION IS COMPATIBLE WITH LATOUR'S METAPHYSICS

It is my intention to supplement Latour's theory with the understanding of the self that emerges in theories of recognition. Essentially it has been my claim that the practices of a given collective are unified and stabilized in the individual in the sense that participation in these practices forms the core of an individual's sense of self and thus not only do the patterns of interaction into which they have been socialized constitute, in large part, reality for them, but it is also participation in these practices that allows for a sense of oneself as an individuated person to be maintained. As a result, this provides individuals with the motivation to continue to engage in institutionalized practices that allow for stability in a collective.

There are several important parallels between this notion of the self and Latour's metaphysics that will allow for them to be compatible. First, this forging of the self is also a process that is never completed, and the self that emerges requires continual maintenance. Second, this sense of self arises also in the space between objectivity and subjectivity, with both notions arising out of this process. Finally, given the dependence of sense of self on other beings (both quasi-objects and quasi-subjects), this is consistent with the notion of being-as-other, or subsistence, rather than depending on the notion of being-as-being, or substance that has dominated the modern perspective. I will consider each of these in turn.

#### *The 'Self' as an Immanence from Process*

As I have explained above, in Honneth's theory of recognition, the sense of self that emerges is dependent upon a process of individuation and socialization. In this way, this notion is compatible with Latour's overall process metaphysics, as well as how he explains 'persons,' or 'citizens' or 'individuals.' Latour has claimed that these terms are multi-modal, since it is



participation in the various modes that allows for various layers of subjectivity to be acquired. Recognition is similarly multi-dimensional in that different relations to self are developed through participation in different instituted practices.

Furthermore, since the dimensions of recognition are subject to change in that they provide occasions for struggle, these patterns of recognition, and thus the engendering of the 'self' that occurs through them, is characterized by continual reprisal. This, as we have seen is also not something that is limited to interactions between humans, but it also affects the patterns of interaction with the other beings of the world. As Honneth has said, a new form of recognition cannot be accepted by individuals unless there is a corresponding change to practices occurring in the world (*The I in We* 93).

So within this notion of recognition is an appeal to a kind of *movement* wherein the patterns of recognition are expanded and changed, as are the corresponding interactions with the world. This is in keeping with what Latour has said about what 'social' is. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour argues that what is meant by 'social' has been shrinking to the point that it is now meant to designate only interactions between humans in 'societies' with the repercussion that we have no way of talking about all the ties that seem to bind us (6). Instead, he argues, the social ought to designate a particular movement, so that it is capable of capturing the many different kinds of connections. As he says, ". . . I am going to define the social not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (*Reassembling* 7).

I have argued in the previous chapter that both the 'self' and 'society' (understood as the collection of currently instituted practices) arise out of this process of recognition, and so, in this understanding, I am not claiming that there is an individual and a social order at the outset. Instead, analogous to the way Latour sees the concepts of 'subject' and 'object' as arising out of the lengthening and strengthening of chains of reference, self and society can be seen as arising out of

processes of habitualization of activities that give rise to typifications that individuals can then recognize one another for filling. This process of recognition allows individuals to develop a sense of themselves as an individuated person as well as stabilizing the practices that have been instituted in that in the subsequent processes of individuation and socialization of the next generation, these practices become constitutive not just of their sense of reality but also their sense of self within it. So processes of recognition can be seen as a kind of mechanism that allows for the stability and unity of the sense-of-self of individuals as well the patterns of interaction that have been instituted. This process seems to supply a missing link between individuals and the patterns of interaction that have been instituted in that it provides significant motivation for the perpetuation of particular practices. These patterns of recognition are never finalized, however, and undergo continual reformulation, reprisal and reassembling just as Latour has suggested is what characterizes the ‘social’ (*Reassembling* 7). The mechanism of recognition seems to be a way of explaining this connection as a process—as a method for connecting humans to the practices that have been instituted.

### ***The Continual Maintenance of the ‘Self’--No Native, Autonomous Self***

What Hegel was rejecting in his initial formulation of recognition and what Honneth also rejects are atomistic theories—like that of Hobbes and Machiavelli—of independent, self-interested subjects that are constantly engaged in calculations as to how to maximize their own gains. They both reject the supposition that community is something added after the fact in order to unite these individuals (Honneth, *The Struggle* 12-13). Instead, they each focus on the interdependence of humans both in terms of reliance on other humans as well as a reliance on interactions with their environment, as can be seen in the notion of elemental recognition that Honneth presents. As a result, the focus is shifted to process and is thus in keeping with Latour’s metaphysics.

As we have seen, Honneth also denies that subject and object exist as separate entities, and instead sees them as abstractions that result from a kind of reification in the sense of forgetting the interdependence disclosed in this initial form of recognition (*Reification* 38-39). Latour and Honneth would seem to agree on this point, subject and object are never separated, but are always dependent upon one another.

In his appeal to object-relations theorists like Winnicott to explain the process of early socialization, Honneth is also rejecting the concept of innate, inborn instinctual drives that are posited in theories like Freud's. This is a similar kind of conception of atomistic human individuals that can only arise in the abstractions that follow engagement with the world. Honneth agrees with Winnicott's claim that given the utter dependence of the infant on its primary caregiver in early life and the experiential lack of differentiation between the infant and the caregiver, it does not make sense to view the infant as an isolated individual (*The I in We* 208). It is clear from this claim that Honneth is in agreement with Latour in that there is no native, autonomous self. Instead, initially the infant experiences a kind of symbiosis wherein the different elements of experience are in no way differentiated, and so there is no sense of self. Furthermore, autonomy and sense of self both arise out of processes of interaction in early socialization rather than resulting from the procession of internal drives, and so there is nothing native to the individual on this account but rather individuality is developed in a process of interaction with one's environment.

Positive relations to self also require continual maintenance on Honneth's account, as we have seen, and so sense of self is dependent upon the continual engagement in various practices for which one's positive relations to self are reinforced (*The I in We* 205). So this is again an account of the self that is not independent from various processes, or we could say, participation in various modes of existence, and so, is compatible with Latour's notion of 'persons' being a multi-modal term. What this concept of recognition adds is an understanding of specifically *how* that sense of self is developed and it furthermore supplies an account of what motivates individuals to

continually engage in instituted practices. Berger and Luckmann explain the necessity of engaging in such practices as a need to limit the world openness of human beings so as to allow for stability and prevent chaos. But it seems like a stretch to suggest that it is knowledge of this necessity that motivates individuals, particularly since for most individuals this world openness has already been closed in particular ways that they are then socialized into. Instead, since an individual's sense of self is dependent upon continued recognition for engaging in instituted practices, or practices deemed valuable to the collective, they are motivated to continue to participate in these practices because their sense of self is dependent upon it.

In the mode of [ATT], Latour describes society as being just the pile up of scripts and denies that there is any meta-dispatcher behind this that designates roles, or organizes and unifies everything (*An Inquiry* 426). He argues that the tendency to posit a meta-dispatcher loses sight of the actual process of organizing, which relies on a kind of constant juggling and reformulating of scripts so as to make them compatible. This is again a movement that relies on a continual process of re-organizing in the face of constant dis-organization. What motivates this continual movement on Latour's account is simply the experience of attachments, as we have seen, which are not themselves explained by anything (*An Inquiry* 428).

Berger and Luckmann have arguably formulated the process of institutionalization in a similar manner. There is no meta-dispatcher there either, instead, the typifications of roles are developed in processes of interaction with other humans and beings in the environment in order to solve practical issues as to how to satisfy needs and solve problems. These patterns become habitualized as a way of economizing activity and avoiding having to decide all over again each time how to confront the meeting of various needs. While the particular form these patterns take is not necessitated—there is no meta-dispatcher that specifies the roles or how patterning ought to proceed—Berger and Luckmann do suggest that they become somewhat solidified when they are passed to subsequent generations, as at that point they constitute, in part, the reality that the next

generation are socialized into. This is also itself a process in that there will be changes in the patterns instituted by that generation (we can think of the struggles for recognition as the mechanism for incorporating these changes), which will then in turn be solidified in the transfer to the next generation and so on through the ages.

There does seem to be some value in developing symbolic universes (arguably meta-dispatchers in that they provide general guidelines for patterning behavior) in that they allow for an economy of effort, similar to that in habitualization, for encountering unfamiliar somethings. They are, in a sense, general guidelines for subsuming those unfamiliar somethings under other concepts, thereby allowing behavior to be patterned and justified with an economy of effort. These general guidelines, or symbolic universes, or meta-dispatchers come after initial patterning and thus do not explain their formation, but are useful abstractions nonetheless. If it is necessary to limit the world openness, then guidelines for subsuming unfamiliar somethings under already established patterns of interaction rather than having to face the myriad of possibilities are useful not just for economizing effort, but also for maintaining stability.

### ***The 'Self' as Being-as-other***

Given that the sense of self that arises in the process of individuation and socialization and that is maintained by continual participation in given practices is dependent upon processes of interaction, it can arguably be seen as an example of being-as-other.

This is particularly evident in the case of the dimension of esteem, which individuates a person based on recognition for traits and abilities that are particular to them. Respect and emotional support and the corresponding positive relations to self have a kind of uniting function in that they allow an individual to see themselves as an equal member of a community with particular needs and rights, as we have seen, and these relations to self can be understood as being established by gaining recognition for participation in modes that center around quasi-subjects. Esteem allows for

a sense of what differentiates one from others, and this can be seen as being established via recognition for participation in modes that center around quasi-objects. So this relation to self in particular relies on the interaction with beings of other modes, for example technology and fiction, in order to arise. As Latour says,

This [the rebound effect that gives rise to positions for subjects] is what allowed us never to begin our analysis with acting, thinking, speaking human beings, humans capable of “creating technologies,” “imagining works,” or “producing objective knowledge.” To put it in the shorthand terms of anthropogenesis: humanoids *became* humans—thinking speaking humans—*by dint of association* with the beings of technology, fiction, and reference. They became skillful, imaginative, capable of objective knowledge, by dint of grappling with these modes of existence (*An Inquiry* 372).

Whether one is considered skillful, or imaginative and so on is in itself a kind of judgment of the contribution of what they do, and in order for an individual to relate to themselves in this way they require some recognition for that value. An individuals’ sense of self is thus dependent upon interacting with the beings of other modes, and gaining recognition for the value of those interactions.

### ***How Does Recognition Fit into the Modes?***

If the concept of recognition can be useful for Latour’s metaphysics, its place in the modes of existence will need to be explained. It seems to me that there are a couple of options. Recognition could first of all be seen as something that is at work in all the modes. We can get a sense of how this might work by considering what Latour says about morality [MOR] and how it is at work in all the modes. Given that the notion of instauration carries with it a value judgement about the quality of what has been instaurated, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are judgments, says Latour, that occur in every mode (*An Inquiry* 452). Again he avoids any shift to a second level of explanation, and instead claims that morality exists in the world. As he says, “If the bearings up to this point have been well understood, morality can only be a *property* of the world itself. To seek to found it on the human or on substance or on a tautological law appears senseless when every mode of existence manages excellently to express one of the differences between good and bad” (*An Inquiry* 455). So

recognition is afforded basically according to one's role in the instauration of beings deemed valuable in the mode. One is recognized as being skillful, for example, if they are involved in processes of successful instauration of beings of technology. This would be at work in all the modes in which humans participate.

The other possibility, which I tend to favour, is that recognition could itself be seen as a mode of existence. In much the same way that Latour claims that [MOR] is both at work in all the modes and is itself a mode in that it is concerned with the "*reprise of scruples about the optimal distribution of ends and means*" (*An Inquiry* 455), recognition could be seen to be at work in the various modes and also be a mode itself given that it is concerned with the co-constitution of 'self' and 'society,' or the collective, in order to forge stability.

It seems to me that recognition does a lot of what has been attributed to the mode of [REL] and that mode may be better reformulated as recognition or, at least, a new mode of recognition could be distinguished and attributed some of the functions currently attributed to [REL]. As mentioned in the section on [REL], this mode essentially operates by addressing individuals and making them feel valued and connected to others. This seems to be part of the function of recognition. First of all, as explained by Mead, in order for one to get a sense of oneself as an individuated person among others, it is necessary to take a de-centered position, that of a partner of interaction, in order to view oneself from their perspective (*The Struggle* 74). This initial relation-to-self is arguably the first instance in which one feels like a 'whole' person. This then allows for communication and the possibility of recognition. In being recognized, one is, to use Latour's term, addressed as an individual (dimension of esteem), but they are also recognized as being an equal member of the community (respect, emotional support). Thus recognition has a uniting function as well as an individuating function. The possibility of developing this sense of self results from the kind of co-constitution of self and society as explained above.

Recognition, as has been explained, is in keeping with Latour’s metaphysics in that it is a process that defines a particular type of movement and the sense of self that arises in the process is dependent upon interaction with other beings, with a passage through them, and is thus compatible with the concept of being-as-other.

The table below provides a possible entry for recognition in Latour’s pivot table for the modes of existence that includes the specifications of recognition that are discussed in the previous sections.

Table 2  
Potential Pivot Table Entry for Recognition [REC]

NAME	HIATUS	TRAJECTORY	FELICITY/INFELICITY CONDITIONS	BEINGS TO INSTITUTE	ALTERATION
RECOGNITION [REC]	Disconnect between individuals and institutions	Engender persons	Expand inclusion/contract inclusion	Stability- bearers	Co-constitute persons and collective

As mentioned, Latour has drawn up a pivot table in which the specifications that allow for a mode of existence to be identified and contrasted with others are recorded (*An Inquiry* 488-489). These entries indicate the gaps between discontinuous stages that need to be passed over in order for the immanence of a continuity (hiatus); they specify the direction in which courses of action, once their purpose is identified, ought to proceed (trajectory); they capture what it means to speak well of a being in a given mode—or in other words—what it means for something that exists to be true or false relative to the purpose or function of the process from which it emanates (felicity/infelicity conditions); they express the value of what emanates from those courses of action (beings to



institute); and they indicate the general contribution of the mode—the way in which it alters existence (alteration).

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that Honneth's formulation of the theory of recognition can add something valuable to Latour's metaphysics of heterogeneous modes of existence in that it provides an account of what motivates individuals to continually participate in established patterns of interaction, thereby encouraging the stability of the collective. It has been my claim that heterogeneous modes of existence, or patterns of interaction are, in a sense, unified in the individual in that not only do they, at least in part, constitute reality for generations that are socialized into them, but participation in these instituted behaviours is also what constitutes an individual's sense of self.

As I have explained, this sense of self is not something that exists independently of processes of interaction, both with other humans and with the various beings of the world, given that it arises out of recognition for participating in the patterns of interaction with those very beings that have been instituted. For this to be compatible with Latour's metaphysics, it will have to be accepted that this patterning is not entirely open, it is not something that can be established in any way whatsoever as decided upon between humans. Instead it must be accepted that the other beings in the interaction also articulate themselves, and thus guide or constrain the patterns that can be developed in various ways. As a result, this process of patterning interactions must be understood as a kind of communication, a back-and-forth between humans and the other beings involved. Given that his focus is on normative processes rather than metaphysics, Honneth does not discuss this, nor do Berger and Luckmann make any such claim when explaining the origins of institutions, but these accounts are not incompatible with this insight of Latour's either. So long as this caveat of the nature of 'beings' is included, these accounts provide useful insights in terms of the motivation of individuals within the collective.

As a mechanism, or a kind of continuous process, recognition is able to account for the experience of unity in Western collectives without positing a shift to a second level of explanation and without appeal to the collection of practices as a unified ‘thing,’ or a kind of social substance. Instead, recognition can explain individual ‘selves’ as well as the stabilization of instituted practices as emerging from the same process. As a result, neither are separable from this continued process and thus the existence of both is better understood as a kind of subsistence rather than explainable by appeal to some underlying substance. In this way, the sense of self that arises from Honneth’s formulation of the theory of recognition is compatible with Latour’s general metaphysics.

While this mechanism can explain the stability and unity of western collectives without appeal to a meta-dispatcher or metanarrative, I have argued that if these concepts are understood in terms of symbol-systems, or symbolic universes, they may still have a useful function. In these cases, general guidelines for subsuming new experiences and arriving at solutions to new problems are abstracted out of currently instituted patterns of interaction and are available to the members of a collective. Understood in this way, while they do provide a basis for patterning interaction and can be appealed to as a way of dispatching actions, as it were, they do not unify the practices of a collective at the outset, nor can they explain how such practices have come to be instituted in the first place. It is only *after* practices have been instituted out of the necessity to limit the world openness of human beings in order to establish sets of expectations that allow for an economy of effort in routinely meeting needs that such general guidelines can be developed. As long as such meta-narratives or meta-dispatchers are understood to be abstractions that serve a useful function, it seems we can redeem this urge to develop them.

Finally, I have suggested that this mechanism could fit into Latour’s modes of existence either by being at work in all of them—or at least those that center around quasi-objects, quasi-subjects and those that connect the two—or as a mode of existence in its own right. In terms of the former, individuals gain recognition for participation in the modes, that is, by coming to take the

positions for quasi-subjects that they give rise to. Just as a value judgement is inherent in the instauration of beings in the various modes, so too can an individual be recognized for their role in such instaurations. In the case of the latter, recognition could potentially provide a formulation that better explains the addressing function that Latour has ascribed to the mode of existence of religion [REL].

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