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Late Latour: Politics as a Mode

With the public emergence of Latour's work on the different modes of existence, we have undeniably reached a new phase in his thinking, even though he had secretly been hard at work on the project since the late 1980s. Latour recounts the long history of these labors in his pleasant overview "Biography of an Investigation: On a Book About Modes of Existence," an intriguing essay that nonetheless tells us little about the specifically *political* ramifications of the AIME project. Whereas the first part of Latour's career employed a deliberately flat ontology in which all natural, human, artificial, simple, composite, and imaginary entities were equally linked together in networks, the new project reverses this flatness and tries to account for the incommensurability of various modes of being, each with its own criteria of truth. Law [LAW], religion [REL], and politics [POL] are three of the most recognizable modes, each of them governed by standards that cannot be applied to the others. Alongside these familiar modes from human life are the seemingly full-blown metaphysical modes such as reproduction [REP], reference [REF], and habit [HAB]. We also find the three modes entitled organization [ORG], attachment [ATT], and morality [MOR], the particles left behind when economics is smashed in the accelerator of Latour's mind.

Despite his now definitive shift to the modes-of-existence project, Latour sometimes writes and speaks in the idiom of his older system, much as when Coca-Cola continued to offer Coke Classic on the shelf alongside New Coke. The distinct old and new voices of Latour may co-exist for some time to come. Yet this presents no problem, since they are perfectly compatible: after all, networks remain in Latour's new system as a mode called networks [NET]. It is also rather easy to tell the early/middle philosophy from the late one. Whenever Latour emphasizes that we must dissolve the modernist opposition between nature and culture and throw all entities into a single witches' cauldron, we can be sure that we are drinking Latour Classic. But if instead we hear him distinguishing carefully

between science with its referential mode and various other modes such as religion, law, and politics, we can be sure that we are drinking a bottle of New Latour.

TALKING POLITICS

Accepting the Siegfried Unseld Prize in Frankfurt in September 2008, Latour recalls that "beginning [at] Easter 1987, I started in earnest the first project about comparing regimes of enunciation (what I now call *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*), even though I have not published a line about it ever since—until today that is" (COP 603). While this claim is mostly true, Latour in Frankfurt seems to be forgetting his fascinating earlier publications on the modes project, one of them perfectly suited to our topic: the neglected 2003 article "What if we *Talked* Politics a Little?"

Even the abstract of this piece gets straight to the point: "The political circle is reconstituted [in this article] and thus also the reasons why a 'transparent' or 'rational' political speech act destroys the very conditions of group formation" (TPL 143). Latour goes on to speculate that the widespread disillusionment with politics today is based on a misunderstanding, "as if, in recent years, we had begun to expect it to provide a form of fidelity, exactitude, or truth that is totally impossible" (TPL 143). The implication is that rationalism has tried to apply globally a model of truth-as-correspondence that is simply inapplicable to the political sphere. As a result, politics looks to the Moderns like nothing worth celebrating:

> Political expression is always *disappointing*; that is where we must start. In terms of the transfer of exact undistorted information on the social or natural world, we could say that it always seems to be totally inadequate: truisms, clichés, handshakes, half-truths, half-lies, windy words, repetitions mostly, *ad nauseam*. That is the ordinary, banal, daily, limp tautological character of this form of discourse that shocks the brilliant, the upright, the fast, the organized, the lively, the informed, the great, the decided. When one says that someone or something is "political," one signals above all this fundamental disappointment … The expression "that's political" means first and foremost "it doesn't move straight," "it doesn't move fast"; it always implies that "if only we didn't have this load, we'd achieve our goal more *directly*." (TPL 145)

There is now a genuine danger that our contempt for the political mode of existence will lead us to forget its true nature: "Could it be possible to *forget* politics? Far from being a universal competency of the 'political animal,' might it not be a form of life so fragile that we could document its progressive appearance and disappearance?" (TPL 143). The disappearance of the political mode would not even be unprecedented: "Perhaps, we are going to get to the point where talking in this [political] way will seem as incomprehensible as uttering religious statements" (TPL 152).

By politics, Latour is not referring merely to "conversations on explicitly political topics, such as parliamentary elections, corruption among elected representatives or laws that need to be passed … nor to all the ingredients of politics as an institution, as defined in the corridors of political science departments, that is, international relations, constitutional law, power struggles, etc" (TPL 144). The reason is that politics is *everywhere*. This does not mean that politics is once again ontologized to the point that "everything is political," the permanent risk run by the early and middle Latour. Instead, Latour wants to treat politics not as an explicit type of content, but as a specific *manner* of dealing with things. This political manner can be found in any place, though not necessarily at every time: "One can be a member of Parliament and not talk in a political way. Conversely, one can be at home with one's family, in an office, at work, and start talking *politically* about some issue or other even if none of one's words have any apparent link with the political sphere" (TPL 145). Politics can appear anywhere, but at any given moment might exist nowhere.

Everyone seems to dream of a rational politics that would consist "of information, transparency, exactitude, rectitude, and *faithful* representation. That is the dream of honest thinking, of non-deformation, of immediacy, of the absence of any mediator" (TPL 145–146). It is the dream of what Latour sarcastically terms "double-click" communication. Yet such transparency is merely a dream even for science, let alone for politics: "Demanding that scientists tell the truth *directly*, with no laboratory, no instruments, no equipment, no processing of data, no writing of articles, no conferences or debates, at once, extemporaneously, naked, for all to see, without stammering [or] babbling, would be senseless" (TPL 147). If any theme is typically Latourian, it is the idea that there is only mediation, never mere intermediaries through which entities could communicate without translation or distortion. Here Latour turns toward the major theme of his system of modes of existence:

> Each enunciation regime [i.e., each mode of existence] elaborates its own criteria of truth and lies, its own definitions of felicity and infelicity. Saying that political discourse is "twisted" has a very different meaning, depending on whether one has chosen the curve or the straight line as an ideal for all utterances. Straight lines are useful for drawing a square, but they are hardly so when we wish to outline an ellipse. (TPL 146)

Why, we might ask, does politics fail to provide us with direct access to truth? Latour would respond with impatience: "A stupid question deserves a stupid answer. One could just as well complain about the poor quality of a modem that was incapable of percolating coffee ordered on the internet" (TPL 147). But there is really no problem between politics and truth: "Political discourse appears to be untruthful only in contrast with other forms of truth. In and for itself it discriminates truth from falsehood with stupefying precision. It is not indifferent to truth, as it is so unjustly accused of being; it simply differs from all the other regimes in its judgment of truth" (TPL 147).

This leads us to ask how politics can claim to judge truth, if it is not a matter of transparent access to a reality that could straighten out the crookedness of mediocre politicians. Latour's answer is clear enough. Politics "aims to *allow to exist* that which would not exist without it: the public as a temporarily defined totality. Either some means has been provided to trace a group into existence, and the talk has been truthful; or no group has been traced, and it is in vain that people have talked" (TPL 148). Philosophers usually tell us that a statement is true if it corresponds to a true state of affairs outside the mind in the world. But this criterion could not possibly work for political statements such as the following: "'I understand you,' 'We're one big family,' 'We won't tolerate this any more,' or 'Our firm must conquer a bigger market share'… 'All together, all together, all!'" (TPL 148). Such statements do not succeed or fail through some reference to an external state of affairs, but to "an entirely new phenomenon: the *resumption* or *suspension* of the continuous work of definition and materialization of the group that this talk intends to trace" (TPL 148). And now comes the final lesson: "Anything that extends [the group] is true; anything that interrupts it is false" (TPL 148). This explains Latour's frustration with the repeated failure-without-consequence of the unfalsifiable radicals of the Left. As Latour puts it in an interview with a Turkish periodical:

> the will of total subversion is still there in some circles, but has now become even more immensely satisfying because it is also connected with the certainty of failure while maintaining the absolute comfort of being morally superior … And this goes a long way toward explaining why the minority parties of the ultra-left are still able to intimidate all of the other movements: you are the best and the brightest, you will fail; failure will never be counted against you, only against those who failed to be as radical as you. (DBD)

Failure in politics signals untruth, not a superior truth that is simply too good for our corrupt world. Here we have Latour's definitive rejection of the "beautiful soul" in politics, which links him with Foucault's refreshing demand that activism must have genuine practical effects. Alienation is nothing but a failure on the part of the alienated.

As we have seen, Latour holds that politics can and should arise just about anywhere:

> For *any aggregate*, a process of redefinition is needed, one that requires curved talk to trace, or temporarily to retrace, its outline. There is no group without (re)grouping, no regrouping without mobilizing talk. A family, an individual, a firm, a laboratory, a workshop, a planet, an organization, an institution: none have less need for this [political] regime than a state or a nation, a rotary club, a jazz band or a gang of hooligans. For each aggregate to be shaped and reshaped, a particular, appropriate dose of politics is needed. (TPL 149)

If we limited politics to discussions of voting, governance, and revolution, this would ignore the need of even the apparently "non-political" aggregates mentioned above to retrace themselves in existence. This brings us to the key idea of Latour's article: his *topological* definition of the political already touched upon in *Politics of Nature*. Unlike science and the law, which Latour normally describes as consisting of *chains* of mediators, politics is envisioned as a *circle*: "What exactly is [the political circle] about? About transforming the *several into one*, initially through a process of representation … and subsequently through a process of retransformation of the *one into several*, [which] is often called the wielding of power but that I more bluntly call obedience" (TPL 149). The purpose of viewing politics this way is "to consider simultaneously the two parts of political science, too often disjoint: (a) how to obtain a representation? and (b) how to wield power? In fact it amounts to the same question asked twice but at different points in

the same circular movement" (TPL 149). The reader may find it helpful to replace the word "representation" (too laden with everyday governmental associations) with "mediation." The ruling power *cannot* faithfully represent the ruled, since the latter does not always know what it wants in the first place. Latour is fond of Steve Jobs's offhand remark that Apple used no focus groups or market research for its products, since "a lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."[1] Reciprocally and by the same token the ruled *cannot* faithfully obey the ruling power, since all orders must be locally translated and can rarely be followed to the letter, as Latour made clear in *The Pasteurization of France* when expressing admiration for Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. This is the political circle, in which the ruler inevitably betrays the ruled and the ruled betrays the ruler in turn, through a series of translations or remixes of what one seems to tell the other.

The political circle is presented in a diagram (TPL 150), one that is not necessarily easier to understand than the prose of the text itself. The dream of political philosophy has always been *autonomy*, in which "there is no order received … that is not also produced by those who receive it" (TPL 150). In other words,

> from the classical point of view I am *auto*-nomous (as opposed to *hetero*-nomous) when the law (*nomos*) is both what I produce through the expression of my will and what I conform to through the manifestation of my docility. As soon as this coincidence is broken, I leave the state of freedom and enter into that of dissidence, revolt, dissastisfaction or domination. (TPL 150)

Latour now interjects a doubt into this classical picture, since the remarkable thing is that this movement "should be totally impracticable. The movement of autonomy is impossible by construction since in it the multitude becomes a unit—representation—before the unit becomes a multitude again—obedience. This transmutation is at first sight even more improbable than that of the dogma of the transubstantiation of the host" (TPL 150). The problem Latour sees with the circle of autonomy is that if it were able to work as transparently as advertised, it would be useless:

> [Assume] we demanded that politicians … "talk truthfully" by "repeating exactly" what their electors say "without betraying [or] manipulating them." What would happen? The several would remain the several and the multitude the multitude, so that the same thing would

> simply be said twice (faithfully for information and therefore *falsely* for politics)… By demanding transparency, rectitude, and fidelity, we are asking for the circle no longer to be a circle but a straight line so that the same can remain precisely the same in the most perfect (and mortal) similitude. In practice, this amounts to calling for the end of politics and consequently the end of autonomy, despite it being so highly valued, for if the multitude never knows how to become one, there will never be a *gain* of representation … A choice must be made between authenticity, pursued in its most extreme consequences, and the difficult work of freedom which demands a particular form of "lie," or at least of curve. (TPL 151–152)

Nor is straight talk possible when it comes to obedience. For, "imagine politicians making the claim of being 'faithfully obeyed.' This time it is the passage from the one to the several that would be impracticable. The order given would be required to be exactly, directly and faithfully transported with no betrayal, deformation, bias or translation!" (TPL 152). Anyone generally familiar with Latour's writings will see why this is impossible. There is no transport without transformation, no way to move facts, goods, wishes, or commands from one place to another without coming to grips with the constraints of the new situation.

A critic from the camp of Truth Politics might now object that Latour is admitting that politics is nothing but lies and deception, a glittering or brutal form of sophistry. Latour responds that "we have to be careful here so as not to draw the hasty conclusion that it is enough to be devious in order to utter political talk accurately" (TPL 153). The point is not to lie or deviate, but to succeed in closing the political circle: forming a new and temporary collective, translating its wishes into unforeseen form, then awaiting the possibly surprising results of its unforeseen manner of obedience. If we were to say simply that "politicians must lie,"

> that would be too easy. The Prince of Twisted Words would simply have replaced the White Knight of Transparency. Dissimulation, opportunism, populism, corruption, wrangling, and the art of compromise and *combinazioni* are not enough in themselves to guarantee the continuation of the circle. One can walk skew, think curved, cut across, be sly, without necessarily drawing the political circle … "Curved minds" are clearly distinct from one another, even if they are all an object of ridicule for "straight minds." (TPL 153)

But not only would political straight talk lead to a situation of motionless tautology. More than that, the road to this dismal outcome would be lined with a multitude of crimes:

> [W]ith the best intentions in the world, those who have wanted to rationalize politics (and God knows that history has not been stingy in that respect!) have managed to do nothing more than generate monstrosities infinitely more serious than those they wanted to eliminate. The Sophists may have been expelled, but they were replaced by various types of "commissars"—to put it bluntly. (TPL 156)

Another way of viewing the problem is that neither Truth Politics nor Power Politics is able to acknowledge any form of transcendence that lies beyond its range of mastery. We would be left with either knowable political truth or knowable political force, both of them simple tyrannies of whoever purports to have either right or might. Latour claims that his political circle provides us with a "mini-transcendence of political talk" (TPL 156). It is not hard to interpret the sense of the prefix "mini-." Latour cannot recognize any transcendence of independent things-in-themselves. Not only would this turn his ontology of relations and translations into a series of simple lies: it would also open the door to the epistemology police and others who claim to have *access* to those things-in-themselves. Instead, transcendence for Latour can only be obtained *politically*, meaning that it must be confronted by a collective engaged with the challenge of actants not yet incorporated into the collective. Transcendence can only be "mini-" because it refers to no otherworldly plane of realities, but only to actants already concretely in the world and simply not yet assimilated by the polity.

Truth Politics of the Left tends to view politics in terms of domination, and treats political talk as mere ideology designed to obscure the ugly realities of oppressive power. Needless to say, Latour does not adhere to such an outlook. If we were to begin our political philosophy with a well-defined map of classes or interest groups, "we would find ourselves with agents with set shapes who would be the exclusive owners of their words; they would be totally identical to their interests, wills, identities, and opinions" (TPL 159). And if this were the case, then "any work of composition [would appear] only as an intolerable compromise, even a dishonest one, [that] would break, shatter or annihilate wills, opinions, interests, and identities" (TPL 159). Furthermore, if we took as our principle that we must listen transparently to all interests, opinions, and wills, "we would never manage to close the circle—neither one way

nor the other—since multiplicities would triumph, doggedly stubborn in their irreducible difference" (TPL 159). In short, "the only way of making the circle advance, of 'cooking' or 'knitting' politics, of producing (re)groupings, consists in never ever starting with *established* opinions, wills, identities and interests. It is up to political talk alone to introduce, re-establish, and adjust them" (TPL 159).

Public life, Latour holds, is always being rebrewed and never consists of the same fixed ingredients. Collectives are temporarily composed, and shift their identity as one issue after another arises. "It would be extremely dangerous to count on the natural inertia of politics, for if we suspend the 'forced' movement of the circle, even just for one day, the interests, identities, affiliations and wills each resume their own course and scatter like a flight of sparrows" (TPL 161). The present collective is fragile, not a scene of impregnable domination. As Latour sees it, "critical" politics too often lacks the patience to carefully reassemble, transform, and delegate the work of collectives: "It is so much more comfortable to stop at the stage of unarticulated complaints, of hatred for the elite, or … to stay in one's office draped in a legitimacy that no longer needs to be put to the test" (TPL 161). Nonetheless, "neither the grumble, nor the complaint, nor the hatred, nor the legitimacy, nor the law, nor the order have any meaning unless we set out again to square the circle" (TPL 161). We need to preserve the key, tone, or "spin" of political statements: "By talking of 'relations of domination' we think we are talking politics, but since these power relations move *in a straight line*, like double-click information, and not in a curved line, by translation, we are not talking about them politically" (TPL 161–162). Indignation is not yet politics, and too often the indignant "have lost the tone that would enable them to sound political, the audacity to go around the circle again by representing the totality differently" (TPL 162). We must now consider how the political circle fits with the other modes of existence identified by Latour.

POLITICS AMONG THE MODES OF EXISTENCE

The publication of *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2012 in French, 2013 in English) was the culmination of a quarter-century of mostly clandestine work by Latour on his new system. Hereafter, we shall refer to the book simply as *Modes*. I have often joked that while many philosophers have early and late phases, Latour is surely the first to have passed through both phases simultaneously. As we have seen, the signature intellectual maneuver

of Bruno Latour up till now has been to flatten all entities onto a single plane. No longer did we have separate taxonomical domains of Nature and Culture, but only a unified plane of *actors* or *actants*, where everything's claim to reality hinged on whether or not it had an *effect* on something else. For this reason just about anything had to be counted as an actor: quarks, asteroids, horses, unicorns, square circles, Popeye, and present-day bald kings of France. For Latour all of these entities were equally real, but not equally *strong*: quarks simply had more or stronger allies testifying to their existence than did Popeye or unicorns. Reality was granted freely and equally to anything that had an effect, but strength came in various magnitudes ranging from feeble to mighty.

The new gesture of Latour's *Modes* is to deny that this flattening picture of the world can be maintained in unmodified form. A few dozen pages into the book, he indulges in a charming bit of self-satire, telling the imaginary story of an ethnologist who first discovers actor-network theory and later encounters its limits. Though at first she applies the methods of ANT (actor-network theory) with great fruitfulness, "to her great confusion, as she studies 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'" (AIME 35). And again: "To be sure, she is indeed moving, like her informants, from one surprise to another, but, somewhat to her surprise, this stops being surprising, in a way, as each element becomes surprising in the same way" (AIME 35). Though Latour criticizes the seeming monotony of his earlier method, there is still a freshness to actor-network theory that belies any weary claim that it has become boring. What Latour really faces here is not the trouble of a boring old social science method, but the same problem that confronts every ontology. Namely, once we have identified the most skeletal features belonging to everything that exists, how do we then account for the differences between the various *zones* of reality, or between all the numerous kinds of beings? If philosophy begins as a theory of ultimate reality, it must aspire to say something about non-ultimate reality as well. Latour has always renounced any pre-cooked divisions or commonsensical taxonomies, such as the emblematic modern rift between humans and world. For Latour as for all philosophers, this creates pressure to provide a new theory of how the world is cut apart into partially autonomous segments. The *Modes* project is his effort to rise to this perennial challenge of philosophy.

Latour's early unified field theory of actants has considerable virtues that must be retained. And in fact, actor-network theory *is* retained in the new project as a mode of existence called networks [NET]. It remains true that everything is equally an actant, and as Latour sees it, we must continue to focus on the actions of actants rather than rushing to stamp them with prejudiced words such as "natural," "artificial," "human," or "inanimate." None of this changes in *Modes*, and in that sense Latour no more passes through a radical *Kehre* or "turn" than does Martin Heidegger himself. Yet Latour is also aware that different types of reality require different standards of truth. The sciences apparently aim at an *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, a correspondence in which the mind makes accurate copies of things in the real world. But we have seen that Latour does not even recognize adequation as a valid model for science, let alone for politics [POL], which is clearly no straightforward exercise of revealing the truth and demanding that society bow down slavishly before it. Perhaps even more obvious is the case of law [LAW], in which judge's decisions often bring no closure even for victorious appellants, and in which facts are "taken to be true" rather than established directly as the definitive truth. There is also religion [REL], the object of modern scorn in a way not true of law or even politics. Religion admittedly cannot prove the existence of God outside the mind along the same paths that science uses to establish the existence or non-existence of the Higgs boson. For many rationalists, this means that religion has simply become a laughingstock; for Latour, it means instead that the type of veridiction belonging to science has wrongly acquired a monopoly on standards of truth. *Modes* aims to draw up a table of categories and to show how "category mistakes" (in Gilbert Ryle's sense) result whenever we mistake one mode of existence for another. All of these categories are different modes of existence. They resemble the parallel but disconnected networks found in today's urban infrastructure: gas, water, sewage, electric, fiber optic, telephone, cable television, ATMs, and underground trains. No one would expect to have flowers literally delivered over the telephone line, or gas through the tunnels of the Metro. Likewise, we should not expect to have "correspondence with the outside world" delivered via the networks of politics, religion, or law. This does not make these spheres of activity useless or inferior, any more than the Metro or telephone lines are "useless" or "inferior" for not providing us with drinking water. The modes can also be thought of as musical keys: if a statement is heard in the wrong key, a category mistake occurs. Latour gives these modes the name of prepositions [PRE], since they literally

pre-position actors in a specific *kind* of network, not just in a global flat ontology where all actors are equally real.

The published version of *Modes* claims to identify fifteen modes in all, and suggests that they are not *a priori* categories of the understanding but pertain solely to the Moderns. The project is admirable in its ambition, and often breathtaking in its insights. But at the outset, three critical remarks are in order:

1. One of the modes, double click [DC], is not really a mode, and seems to be added to the table to create an artificial symmetry. A metaphor drawn from our recent world of computer mouse and track pad, double click refers to the belief that information can be obtained directly, without mediation. As such, it has more in common with category mistakes than with the other modes, and is the obvious black sheep on Latour's ultimate fifteen-fold list (AIME 488–489). The problem with the forced symmetry of five groups of three is that it obscures the overarching role of two of the fourteen modes that are more global than the others: network [NET] and preposition [PRE]. In fact, it is more helpful to think of Latour's new system as twelve modes grouped into four triads that result from prepositions cutting up the global network of the early/middle Latour into distinct regions, so that the addition of preposition and network brings the total number of modes to fourteen.
2. The subtitle of *Modes* is *An Anthropology of the Moderns*. There is no contradiction here for Latour, author of *We Have Never Been Modern*, since he is speaking of those who *think* themselves to have been modern. Modernity is a Western invention, and hence the modes in his book make no claim to speak of human history as a whole. Yet the book never delimits its precise geographical or temporal scope. Do Russia and Turkey belong to the Moderns? Did Japan join the list at some point? Do the United States and Canada deploy the same modes of existence as Europe? None of these questions are addressed. Nor do I recall even a single calendar date in the book, though the reader might have wished to know when and how some of the modes began in historical time. While these omissions can easily be excused as not belonging to the intended scope of the book, they do leave room for wondering whether some of the modes are not *a priori* ontological categories, despite Latour's claim to be doing nothing more than developing an anthropology of the moderns.

3. At least one of the modes, reproduction [REP], is undeniably a full-blown ontological category. What Latour means by [REP] is that entities do not automatically remain in existence, but must do the work of reproducing themselves from one instant to the next. This is a rather pointed ontological claim, one that unites Latour with Whitehead, the occasionalist philosophers of the seventeenth century, and ultimately the Ash'arite theologians of early Islamic Iraq, for all of whom there was a continuous re-creation of the universe from one moment to the next. But this notion would be an utter absurdity for Bergson, who thought it ridiculous that time could be composed of isolated instants. It would be rejected by Deleuze, the recent master thinker of becoming. It would even be refused by Aristotle, who in the *Physics* argued that time is a continuum that is not actually but only *potentially* divisible into instants. In short, [REP] is in no way a universal anthropological category of the moderns, but rather a point of lively metaphysical dispute among ancient, medieval, and modern philosophers alike. It represents not a basic structure of modern or Western civilization, but a blunt metaphysical decision by Bruno Latour against an alternative theory in which continuous becoming is prior to individual states. This is why Latour and Whitehead have nothing to do with Bergson and Deleuze, despite the misguided attempts of many gifted commentators (Stengers and Steven Shaviro come to mind) to unify the Deleuzian and Whiteheadian schools under the failed general rubric of "process philosophy."

We now return to our main topic, politics. We have seen that both the early and middle Latour run the constant risk of *ontologizing* the political. This is true both in the jaunty Machiavellian asides of the pre-1991 writings and in the more fragile liberal "parliament of things" that culminates in *Politics of Nature*. In both cases "politics" tends to become a name for reality as a whole, with all the accompanying virtues and vices that belong to any such ontologizing method. In *Modes* this is no longer the case. Now, for the first time in Latour's career, politics becomes a limited and specific zone of reality. Politics [POL] is discussed in Chapters 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 of *Modes*, all of which we briefly consider here. Chapter 5 undertakes a renewed discussion of the major themes of *Politics of Nature*: the disaster that results from mixing politics with any adequating reference [REF] to nature, and the "circular" or loop-like structure of politics covered most precisely in "What if We *Talked* Politics A Little?" Chapter 12 is devoted to politics in its own right. Chapter 13 distinguishes politics from law,

while Chapter 14 draws a distinction between politics and organization [ORG], a mode that covers roughly the same terrain as sociology, but in Tarde's rather than Durkheim's sense: a sociology of associations between all things, not a sociology of human Society with a capital S. In Chapter 15 Latour warns us not to confuse politics and organization, and in Chapter 16 he hints surprisingly at moral foundations for politics and each of the other modes.

We proceed in order, beginning with Chapter 5. Here Latour continues his campaign against straight talk and double click. Chains of inference do not proceed in the supposed geometrical manner, as if free of cost and devoid of mediation: "What is striking, rather, in the establishment of chains of reference, is the continual invention of modes of writing, types of visualizations, convocations of experts, setups of instruments, new notations that permit the cascades of transformations we have noted above" (AIME 127). Straight talk too easily makes "poets, rhetoricians, common people, tradesmen, soothsayers, priests, doctors, wise men, in short, everyone" seem guilty of "*crooked talk*; they become double-dealers, liars, manipulators." More generally, "if the range of what [rationalists] call the 'irrational' is so vast, it is because the rationalists adopt a definition of 'rational' that is far too unreasonable and too polemical" (AIME 128). Here once again, we see Latour's preference for the Sophists over a rationalized version of Socrates:

> But who speaks better? Who is more sensitive to the requirements of this veridiction? The one who learns to speak "crooked" in an angry crowd, looking for what it wants, or the one who claims to speak straight, perhaps, but leaves the crowd to its disorderly agitation? In the agora, at least, the answer is clear. And yet isn't it strange that we continue to abhor the Sophists and heap praise on the hemlock drinker? (AIME 135–136)

Against Socrates, who disastrously insisted on straight talk while being tried in Athens, Latour warns us in a marginal note against any "dangerous amalgam between knowledge and politics" (AIME 128).

The next appearance in the book of the political mode [POL] is in Chapter 12, which is devoted entirely to the theme. The moderns want to rationalize politics: "They want it to be straightforward, flat, clean; they want it to tell the truth according to the type of veridiction that they think they can ask of the Evil Genius, Double Click … This began with Socrates and has never stopped, through Hobbes and Rousseau, Marx and Hayek,

to Habermas" (AIME 333). This long movement develops a political epistemology, which "was a rival of religion before it took religion's place, through a sort of moral rationalism, by claiming to reign over all metalanguage in the name of the 'scientific view of the world'" (AIME 329). As a result, "it is acknowledged that the political world is not, cannot be, cannot ever become, must not become the kingdom of any veridiction whatsoever. The case is closed: to go into politics, to take courses in political communication, to participate in an electoral campaign would be to *suspend* all requirements of truth" (AIME 331). It is not surprising when Latour objects that this is an exaggeration. He now pivots from his critique of epistemological Truth Politics to a critique of the opposite vice: Power Politics as represented by Machiavelli, one of the heroes of his early period. In doing so, he draws a fascinating analogy with the way people also exaggerate the unreality of another mode of existence, *fiction*. As Latour puts it:

> We find the same problem [with politics] as with fiction [FIC], which people have sought to reduce too quickly to the suspension of all requirements of objectivity and truth. No longer able to see by what thread one could follow the reason of the political, they began to overestimate unreason, and to brandish lies, skill, power struggles, violence, no longer as defects but as qualities, the only ones that would remain to that form of life. Such is the temptation of Machiavellianism. Now, if people misunderstand the political mode by requiring transparency and information from it, they misunderstand it just as much by propagating the belief that it has to abandon *all* rationality. (AIME 335–336)

For Latour, the middle course between Truth Politics and Power Politics might be called Object Politics, which he names instead both *Dingpolitik* (politics of things) and object-oriented politics.[2] As he puts it in the initial headings before Chapter 12: "An object-oriented politics allows us to discern the squaring of the political Circle, provided that we distinguish between speaking about politics and speaking politically" (AIME 327). Only the Circle is able to bring mediation into politics, and hence only the Circle can be displaced by the "mini-transcendent" issues it encounters along the way. Latour makes his case in several fine passages. For example: "If politics has to be 'crooked,' this is first of all because it encounters stakes that oblige it to turn away, to bend, to shift positions. Its path is curved because on each occasion it turns around questions, issues, stakes, things—in the sense

of *res publica*, the public *thing*—whose surprising consequences leave those who would rather hear nothing about them all mixed up" (AIME 337). And furthermore: "in the forceful slogan proposed by Noortje Marres: 'No issue, no politics!' It is thus above all because politics is always object-oriented—to borrow a term from information science—that it always seems to elude us" (AIME 337). The reference to Marres indicates that we are now moving in the orbit of the American journalist and political thinker Walter Lippmann, since it was Marres who first acquainted Latour with Lippmann and his notion of the phantom public. As Latour puts it: "It is for just this reason—Walter Lippmann may be the only person who really got it—that one can respect the ontological dignity of the political mode only by grasping it in the form of a phantom public to be invoked and convoked" (AIME 352). We meet Lippmann again in Chapter 7, but it should already be clear that Latour takes Lippmann and Dewey to be the exemplary mentors of an object-oriented politics.

Latour now speaks more poignantly of the political circle than ever before:

> it is a Circle; it is impossible to trace; it must be traced, however, and once it has been traced it disappears; and we have to start all over again at once … it is so contrary to our rigidities, our other certainties, our other values—it *hurts* so much, it so threatens to do bad things we don't want rather than the good things we would like to do. (AIME 338)

Moreover, the repetitive character of politics is unavoidable: "Like religion [REL] and law [LAW], political discourse [POL] engages the entire collective, but in an even more particular way: one has to pass from one situation to another and then come back and start everything, *everything*, all over again in a different form" (AIME 338). Or stated differently: "What is most magnificent in the political, what makes those who discover its movement shed tears of admiration, is that one has to *constantly start over*" (AIME 341). This also provides us the clue as to how politics can go wrong:

> the principal infelicity condition of the political is to have its course *interrupted*, the relay broken off. "That's not going anywhere." "That's pointless." "That won't do any good." "They're forgetting about us." "They don't give a damn about us." "Nobody's doing a thing about it." Or, in a more scholarly fashion, "We are not represented." "We are not obeyed." In other words, something rings false in each example taken separately precisely because it is *taken separately*. (AIME 341)

But even when it remains uninterrupted, there is always something perilous about the political circle, since

> nothing in this movement ensures its duration; here is the source of all its hardness, all its terrible exigency, since it can at any moment grow larger by multiplying inclusions, or shrink by multiplying exclusions. Everything depends on its renewal, on the courage of those who, all along the chain, agree to behave in such a way that their behavior *leads* to the next part of the curve. (AIME 342)

Latour notes that "when this happens, a *political culture* begins to take shape and gradually makes the maintenance, renewal, and expansion of the Circle less and less painful" (AIME 343). And yet, "things can also turn in the other direction: they can literally 'take a turn for the worse,' 'turn out badly'" (AIME 343).

Before leaving Chapter 12, we should also note an important appearance by Carl Schmitt, to whom we will turn our attention soon enough. One of Schmitt's central themes is the "state of exception," a sheer struggle with the enemy for survival that cannot be arbitrated by any transcendent standard. Far from seeing this as a lamentable lapse into irrational power struggle, Schmitt views this state of exception as the very essence of the political. Despite Latour's admiration for Schmitt (shared by many on the political Left), he rejects the notion of a state of exception that would appear only in monumental historic crises resolved by dictatorial figures. Latour opposes this notion by spreading out the "exceptional" moments over the whole of political life. As he puts it:

> It will have become clear by now that everywhere there are only *little* transcendences. This definition of the curve also has the advantage of keeping the state of exception from needing an "exceptional man" who would "be decisive" because he would be "above the law." Schmitt's error lay in his belief that it is only on high, among the powerful and on rare occasions, that the political mode has to look for exceptions. Look at the Circle: it is *exceptional at all points*, above and below, on the right and on the left, since it *never goes straight* and, in addition, it must always *start over* especially if it is to spread. (AIME 347–348)

In fact, Latour had already aired a similar claim in a footnote buried in his 2003 article on the political mode. There we read as follows:

> It is interesting to notice that those who talk of sovereignty so much like Schmitt are unable to see that political talk requires a curve in every single [one] of its points, so they concentrate in one single point the oddity of political transubstantiation. In effect they confuse the curvature of the political circle with the "state of exception," as if putting in Zeus's hands the full power of thunder and lightning. (TPL 163, note 10)

Though Chapter 13 is devoted to law [LAW] as a mode of existence, politics makes several key appearances here as well. Indeed, politics and law are both assigned to the triad of modes called "quasi-subjects." As Latour puts it:

> At the end of Part Two, we proposed to regroup the beings of technology [TEC], fiction [FIC], and reference [REF] under a single heading, that of quasi objects … This is why it would be quite useful to continue to nurture our little classification scheme by putting politics [POL], law [LAW], and religion [REL] together in a single group, that of quasi subjects. (AIME 371–372; sentence order reversed)

Incidentally, the other modes of existence are grouped according to precisely the same criteria. There are three modes that *ignore* the distinction between quasi-subjects and quasi-objects, acting everywhere with impunity, and these are the most blatantly metaphysical in flavor: reproduction [REP], metamorphosis [MET], and habit [HAB]. There are three other modes said to link quasi-subjects with quasi-objects: attachment [ATT], organization [ORG], and morality [MOR]. That would appear to leave three other modes thrown into a miscellaneous basket, though we have seen that double click [DC] is really a category mistake rather than a genuine mode. Meanwhile network [NET] and preposition [PRE] have a higher status than the other twelve modes, since it is their very intersection that produces the others (AIME 488–489). For a full account of the various modes of existence, the reader is referred to my forthcoming book *Prince of Modes: Bruno Latour's Later Philosophy*.

In passing, we should note at least two potential problems with how the modes are organized. First, the highly symmetrical structure of triads grouped with respect to the quasi-subject/quasi-object distinction casts grave doubt on any claim that *Modes* is merely an empirical history or anthropology of the West. This is not to say that overarching structures have no place in anthropology: the contrary is proven not only by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his classic *Structural Anthropology*, but more recently by

Latour's friend Philippe Descola in *Beyond Nature and Culture*, with its intriguing fourfold classification of animist, naturalist, totemist, and analogist societies. But these are the exceptions that prove the rule, since Lévi-Strauss is widely interpreted in philosophical terms, Latour increasingly so, and Descola has an ardent readership among French philosophy students that could eventually make him the Lévi-Strauss of some unknown future Derrida. The case of Descola is especially instructive, since even though it took him years of painstaking fieldwork to develop his anthropology, the underlying mechanism of his fourfold structure cannot have been generated by historical contingency. For Descola holds that there are only four *possible* ontologies, all of them resulting from binary decisions on two central questions: (1) Do other beings have the same interiors as we do? and (2) Do other beings have the same physicalities that we do? Naturalism, the ontological standpoint of the West and most urban civilization, holds that other beings have the same sorts of bodies that we do but different inner lives. Animism flips these decisions by saying that we have similar interiorities to other beings but dissimilar physicalities. Totemism claims that we are similar to other beings both within and without, while analogism holds the reverse: we are dissimilar to other beings in both respects.[3] Though the philosopher Latour carefully subtitles his book *An Anthropology of the Moderns*, the anthropologist Descola might well have used the subtitle *An Ontology of All Cultures*, since he shows no philosophical modesty about his own central dualism:

> As we shall see, this distinction between a level of interiority and one of physicality is not simply an ethnocentric projection of the Western opposition drawn between the mind and the body. Rather, it is a distinction that all the civilizations about which we have learned something from ethnography and history have, in their own fashions, objectivized. (p.116)

As concerns Latour, the point is as follows. Given that his modes are grouped symmetrically according to the duality of quasi-subjects and quasi-objects, it is hard to see how any more could be added (or even subtracted, if not for the specter of "forgetting" that haunts religion and politics). If Latour's list of modes really holds good only for the modern West, it would need to be explained how other cultures could orbit different stars than Latour's chosen pair.

The second problem with the list of modes is precisely its use of "quasi-subject" and "quasi-object" as the central operators. When Latour's

ontology of actants effaced the difference between nature and culture, it also seemed to eliminate the modern notion that human beings must comprise a full half of any situation. Latour's ontology holds that actants are defined by their relations with other actants, not that they exist only in correlation with a human observer, as in the "correlationism" attacked by Quentin Meillassoux. Given Latour's global relationism between all actants of every kind, there is no obvious reason why *people* should be entitled to meddle in half of the modes of existence. At times Latour seems to use the phrase "humans and nonhumans" merely as a catch-all term to ensure that nothing is left out, but at other times (as in the present case) the distinction continues to linger in Latour's philosophy as a primary dualism, as if the legacy of Descartes had not fully been shaken off.

Elsewhere in Chapter 13, Latour repeats his prior discussions of the political Circle, now rechristened as the mode of politics [POL]. But he adds something more, the notion that [POL] joins all modes except law [LAW] in not preserving its own traces:

> In fact, all the modes identified up to now have this distinctive feature: they *pass*, they move forward, they launch into the search for their means of subsistence. Each one does it differently, to be sure, but they have in common the fact that they never *go back* to the conditions under which they started. Even the political Circle [POL], while it always has to start over, disappears, as we have seen, as soon as it is interrupted, without leaving any traces but the slight crease of habit … In other words, the other modes [besides law] *do not archive* their successive shiftings or translations. They leave wakes behind, of course; they begin again, each making use of the preceding ones, but they do not *go back* to *preserve* the traces of their movements. The predecessors disappear once the successors have taken over. This is what they do: they pass; they are passes. (AIME 368–369)

Earlier in the book, Latour had explained that his key term "passes" is meant in the sense of football or basketball passes. One political state always passes to another, and since the collective is constantly transformed from one to the next, no return to an earlier time is possible. We now skip ahead four pages: "This is why politics can never be based on a preexisting society, and still less on a 'state of nature' in which bands of half-naked humans end up coming together. The exploration of successive alterations takes us in the opposite direction from this implausible scenography" (AIME 373).

Chapter 14 proceeds in remarkable fashion, identifying three new modes by pointing to three distinct failings of economics, which claims to be the master discourse of our time. Economics, rather, is "a contrast drawn together by *three modes of existence* that the history of the Moderns has blended for reasons [that the ethnologist] is going to have to untangle. It is this interweaving that explains why she has to resist the temptation of believing either in The Economy or its critique" (AIME 385). Given Latour's claim that the Left too often misreads political questions as economic ones, we should give a brief summary of how Latour decomposes economics into three distinct modes. He does this by trying to demonstrate three gaps between economics and reality.

The first gap is between hot reality and cold calculation. Latour's beautiful passage on this gap deserves to be quoted at length:

> A first gap. You observe goods that are starting to move around all over the planet: poor devils who drown while crossing oceans to earn their bread; giant enterprises that appear from one day to the next or that disappear into red ink; entire nations that become rich or poor; markets that close or open; monstrous demonstrations that disperse over improvised barricades in clouds of teargas; radical innovations that suddenly make whole sectors of industry obsolete, or that spread like a dust cloud; sudden fashions that draw millions of passionate clients or that, just as suddenly, pile up shopworn stocks that nobody wants any longer … and the immense *mobilization* of things and people; they say it is driven only by the simple transfer of *indisputable necessities*.
>
> Everything here is hot, violent, active, rhythmic, contradictory, rapid, discontinuous, pounded out—but these immense boiling cauldrons are described to you as the ice-cold, rational, coherent, and continuous manifestations of the calculation of interests alone. (AIME 386)

The philosophy of mind often speaks of hypothetical "zombies," beings that would show all outward signs of an inner life while actually having no conscious experience whatsoever.[4] By analogy we might imagine "economic zombies" who would move about the earth making decisions based on rational self-interest, while taking not the least pleasure or pain in any of their actions. What Latour seems to suggest in the passage above is that economics is effectively describing economic zombies rather than humans. Economics misses our passionate attachments to various people, enterprises, and things even as these are successively buffeted by market forces. In a word, economics misses the mode of attachment [ATT].

A second gap is found between the apparently high stakes of economics and the air of silent determinism that surrounds it. In Latour's own words:

> A second gap. In The Economy, the question, [the ethnologist] is told quite gravely, consists in dividing up rare goods, in parceling out scarce materials, benefits, or goods, or, on the contrary, in making the largest number profit from a horn of plenty debited from one resource or another. As everyone repeats, with imperturbable seriousness, these are the most important questions we can address in common, because they concern the whole world, all humans and all things, henceforth engaged in the same flows of mobilization, in the same history, and in the same common destiny … And in recent times, they tell her even more energetically, these questions have become all the more constraining since a scarcity more unexpected and more fundamental than all the others has been discovered: we don't have enough planets! We would need two, three, four, five, six, to satisfy all the humans, and we only have one, our own, the Earth, Gaia.
>
> [The ethnologist] wonders what procedures they will adopt to bring off such feats of decision, division, and distribution, and what instruments, what protocols, what assurances, what verifications, what scruples they will deploy. She is already directing her gaze toward the noisy assemblies where such common matters are going to be violently debated. And there, what is she told? *Nothing* and *no one* decides: "It suffices to calculate." The very place where everything must be decided and discussed, since these are matters of life and death for everyone and everything, appears to be a public square *emptied* of all its protagonists. (AIME 386–387)

Here a new sort of economic zombie appears: a deterministic stoic who identifies the economy with fate itself, as if it were a divine power beyond all human intervention. What this new zombie fails to register is the vast number of scruples that limit the economy from the outset. We might easily force children into slave labor, gouge resalable kidneys from the homeless, sweet-talk the elderly into ludicrous swindles, exploit the market for ivory and tiger skins, and auction off Gaia on eBay, if not for the mode of morality [MOR].

The third and final gap lies between the apparently mammoth organizational infrastructure needed to maintain the economy, and the fact that we can never really pin this infrastructure down. As Latour puts it:

> A third gap … [The ethnologist] sets out to approach enterprises, organizations qualified under the law as "corporate bodies." She extends her hand and what does she find? Almost nothing solid or durable. A sequence, an accumulation, endless layers of successive disorganizations: people come and go, they transport all sorts of documents, complain, meet, separate, grumble, protest, meet again, organize again, disperse, reconnect, all this in constant disorder; there is no way she could ever define the borders of these entities that keep on expanding or contracting like accordions. The investigator was hoping to get away from stories of invisible phantoms; she finds only new phantoms, just as invisible.
>
> And if she complains to her informants that they have taken her for a ride, they reply with the same unfathomable confidence: "Ah, it's because *behind* all that agitation you haven't yet detected the assured presence of the real sources of organization: Society, the State, the Market, Capitalism, the only great beings that actually hold up all this jumble …" And, of course, when she begins to investigate such assemblages, the gap reappears, but this time multiplied: more corridors, more offices, more flowcharts, other meetings, other documents, other inconsistencies, other arrangements, but still not the slightest transcendence. No great being has taken charge of this ordinary confusion. Nothing stands out. Nothing provides cover. Nothing decides. Nothing reassures. It is immanent everywhere, and everywhere illogical, incoherent, caught up at the last minute, started over on the fly. (AIME 387–388)

The third economic zombie revealed here might be described as a "Lacanian zombie," since it tacitly assumes that some hyper-competent Big Other is keeping the world organized from behind the scenes.[5] In reifying the market as an independent and hyper-alert super-entity, economics misses the on-the-fly character of the mode of existence called organization [ORG], in which humans jump daily between multiple different scripts, sometimes feeling above them and other times beneath them.

It is interesting to note that of the three post-economic modes, [ATT], [MOR], and [ORG], it is [ORG] that will be least surprising to readers of the early and middle Latour. After all, one of the long-time staples of actor-network theory is the notion that whether we analyze a Cabinet meeting of the government, a corporate boardroom, a middle-class household, a religious summit, or a waterfront drug deal, we generally encounter the same number of people and hear the same sorts of conversations. There is no master level of macroscopic authority where

everything is magically held together. By contrast, [ATT] and certainly [MOR] feel like newer additions to Latour's philosophy. The best previous example of passionate attachment in Latour's prior career was probably in the technological detective thriller *Aramis* (subtitle: *The Love of Technology*) in which the proposed Aramis automated Metro system for Paris died unloved, as if by an army of economic zombies. As for morality, it was subjected to a great deal of scorn in Latour's dashing early Machiavellian days. It was then given a major role in *Politics of Nature*, but in a way that had the feel of a concession about it, and only after a belittling reference to its formerly weak state: "In the old framework, the moralists cut rather a sorry figure, since the world was full of amoral nature and society was full of immoral violence" (PN 160).

[ORG] turns out to be just as precarious as [POL] itself. Latour describes the risk as follows:

> Organization *can never* work: the scripts always define dispersed beings; they always achieve their outcomes in staggered fashion: one can only try to *take them up again* through other scripts that add to the ambient dis/reorganization … From this standpoint, the organizing act is just as constantly interrupted as the movement of the political Circle [POL], or the attachment of law [LAW], or the renewal of religious presence [REL], or the mere survival of a body [REP]. Sameness can never nourish these strange beasts. They require otherness. (AIME 394)

Despite this similar fragility of numerous modes, in Chapter 15 we are urged not to confuse [ORG] (or the matter of sociology) with [POL] (or the matter of politics). Latour gently critiques the Moderns for succumbing to this "temptation to mix [ORG] with politics" (AIME 415). While it is certainly true that both [ORG] and [POL] give us the sense of being in a group larger than ourselves, Latour glosses their difference in the following rather subtle manner:

> [I]t was a mistake to define the social tautologically, and an even greater mistake to seek to extend it to all the modes. Scripts do not present themselves as tautologies … unless we forget the slight temporal *gap* thanks to which we never find ourselves "above" or "below" a given scenario at exactly the same time or with exactly the same capacities. Unfortunately, the notion of tautology completely misses this sinuosity, which is so particular to scripts. And even if it managed to follow that mode of extension, it would still not be able to serve as a yardstick for

> politics, religion, law, or psyches … Once again, we observe the tendency of each mode to propose a hegemonic metalanguage for speaking about all the others; a quite innocent tendency, but one from which this inquiry aims to protect us. (AIME 416)

If this distinction between [POL] and [ORG] seems somewhat elusive, there may be an easier way to crack the nut. We need only recall the different position of these two modes in Latour's fifteen-fold chart. Whereas [POL] belongs to the mode of quasi-subjects, [ORG] belongs to those which link quasi-subjects with quasi-objects. This immediately suggests that for all the concern [POL] shows for the "mini-transcendence" lying beyond it, [POL] still has a more solipsistic tendency than [ORG]. As far back as Chapter 5, Latour wrote as follows: "In this mode of existence [POL] there is something sui generis, in the literal sense of 'self-engendering,' something the Greeks called *autophuos*, and that we are going to have to learn to treat with as much respect and skill as we grant to chains of reference" (AIME 135). Now, Latour's use of the term *autophuos* immediately suggests another technical term of Greek origin: I speak of *autopoiesis*, a notion promoted by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and further developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann.[6] The idea, first born from considerations of immunology, is that the cell is a homeostatic system with the sole aim of keeping its internal parameters stable. For this reason it has no direct access to its environment, but only understands that environment in its own terms. So far Latour has not entered into dialogue with this parallel school of *autopoiesis*, and to my knowledge he has had nothing but harsh words for Luhmann and his influence on German sociology, viewing Luhmann's theory as too biologistic in character.[7] It is easy to understand why Latour would reject any biological model of society, since this would amount to interpreting organization as a unified organism rather than as the scattered and haphazard assemblage that it is. This in turn would run the risk of returning to Durkheim's model of a pre-given organic Society with a capital S: "The sociology of 'the social' (as opposed to the sociology of associations) may have been right to see the social as one of the major phenomena of the human sciences." Two things in this brief passage are telling: (1) the hesitant concession that sociology *may* have been right to grant importance to the social; and (2) the invocation of the "sociology of associations," which refers in large part to Durkheim's failed rival Tarde. For Latour, society cannot be treated as an organism because it is always an improvised collage built of numerous human and nonhuman elements.

Cut off from nothing, [ORG] barely maintains its identity as actors come and go and many scripts fail badly. By contrast, we have seen that [POL] is *autophuos* or self-engendering. This suggests that even if Latour must categorically reject Luhmann's use of a biological model for *society*, he might well accept it for *politics*. In Latour's own words: "the political body is a phantom, yes, but it is not an ectoplasm like the phantom of Society. Greek and Latin must not be confused here: autophuos is a mode of existence; Society sui generis is not" (AIME 416–417).

We now arrive at the closing chapter of *Modes*, Chapter 16, where Latour touches briefly on the relation of politics to morality. The early Latour would probably have scoffed at any such relation, given his initial view of moralists as beautiful souls who cannot get the political job done as well as Hannibal, with his powerful mixture of strategy and cruelty. The middle Latour then shifted views, placing moralists side-by-side with scientists as important detectors of entities previously excluded from the collective. But the late Latour of *Modes* goes even further, claiming (whether whimsically or not) that morality lies at the basis of his entire project. First, there is a stirring mention of the relation between [POL] and [MOR], beyond all Machiavellianism: "How could we deny that, in the renewal and abandonment of the Political Circle, there is one of the most important sources of what is called morality [POL]? It is hard to overlook the difference between political courage and political cowardice" (AIME 453). Yet Latour's morality is not that of the beautiful soul, who forever remains above it all. It is the morality of those who take sides and who also act:

> It does not suffice to be simply troubled, vaguely uneasy: we have to *commit* to a new movement of exploration in order to verify the *overall quality* of all the links … Some even find in the religious mode's requirement of salvation and in its end times a pretext for ending all exploration, even for denying the very necessity of any compromise … "What's the point in being moral, since I'm saved?" In taking this position, one is betraying religion as much as morality. (AIME 460)

We now come to Latour's claim that morality underlies the whole of the *Modes* project: a surprise ending indeed from an author who began his career visibly more sympathetic to the power players of success than to the beautiful moralizers of failure. Latour imagines a sarcastic reader wondering if morality is being served at the end of the book in the manner of a gratuitous helping of dessert. He responds as follows:

> Before ironizing about our inquiry, the reader will perhaps acknowledge that I have been "moralizing" from the outset, in the sense that I have brought out the felicity and infelicity conditions for *each mode*. Every instauration implies a "value judgment," the most discriminating judgment possible. Consequently, the "moral question" is not being brought into this inquiry *after* all the questions "of fact" have been dealt with. It has been addressed from the start. There is not a single mode that is not capable of distinguishing truth from falsity, good from evil *in its own way*. (AIME 452)

Although morality and values are mentioned here in the same breath, we should note that they actually occupy opposite sides of the spectrum for Latour. This was most clear in *Politics of Nature*, where Max Weber's fact/value distinction (transmuted rather than discarded in Latour's book) assigned "fact" to the outside of the collective and "value" to the inside. But while we might have expected Latour to line up moralists in the "values" camp, he actually performs the opposite maneuver, pairing moralists with scientists on a mission to look outside for excluded entities. If values are commonly associated with relativism, Latour links morality with a kind of *realism*. For morality with its scruples is what prevents the self-engendering collective from mistaking itself for the universe as a whole. If the politics of the early Latour left no room for any sort of transcendence, his increasing interest over the years in "mini-transcendence" culminates in what he now claims is a moral foundation for the cosmos. It is morality alone that provides the basis for felicity or infelicity in how the various modes are deployed.