Living Dangerously with Bruno Latour in a Hybrid World

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A Book of Non-Modern Revelations

AT THE BEGINNING OF *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour complains that he lives in an intellectual culture that does not know how to categorize. He tells us that following the smallest AIDS virus takes us across continents and through tissue culture, DNA, sex and the unconscious, and yet established expertise insists on cutting up such extended networks so as to accommodate them within a rigid disciplinary order (Latour, 1993: 2). Behind this disciplinary order, Latour identifies a partition of 17th-century origin which scrupulously isolates those who study the natural world from those who study the social world. For Latour, this partition, or Great Divide, is, at the end of the 20th century, looking decidedly shaky, and as its arbitrariness becomes ever more apparent so the realization should grow and, indeed, must grow, that we have never been modern.

To help us get a better grip on the condition we like to call modernity, Latour draws our attention to two very different sets of practices which until recently it has been possible to keep apart. The first set is those of translation or mediation, and Latour ties these to the generation of the networks of science and technology in a way reminiscent to that in which Schumpeter tied innovation to the 'carrying out of new combinations' (Schumpeter, 1968). The second set of practices are those of purification. For Latour, these are the practices that have put a specifically modern face on the world. They have done so by re-creating and maintaining the two

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distinct ontological zones of human culture and non-human nature. According to Latour, it is in seeing the connection between translation and purification that the key to unlocking the secret of the modern condition lies. Once we are able to see the connection we will literally lose our modern minds. We will see how purification has facilitated translation by rendering it invisible; how it has accelerated the production of hybrids by successfully denying their very existence:

> The moderns think they have succeeded ... only because they have carefully separated Nature and Society (and bracketed God), whereas they have succeeded only because they have mixed together much greater masses of humans and nonhumans, without bracketing anything and without ruling out any combination! (Latour, 1993: 41)

According to Latour, the less impure modern-minded people have believed themselves to be, the more impurity they have indulged. The more adept we have become at envisioning a transcendent Nature and a transcendent Society, the harder it has become to face up to an increasingly bizarre hybrid reality down below. The bottom line in *We Have Never Been Modern* is that we can no longer afford to be modern in the old-fashioned way. We must change our ways of changing and open our eyes to the reality of hybrid lives. We must free our minds of categories of thought originating from the 17th century and stretch our political imaginations far enough to see that 'Half of our politics is constructed in science and technology. The other half of Nature is constructed in societies' (Latour, 1993: 144).

Latour is a great story-teller and *We Have Never Been Modern* is irresistible reading. With wit and verve, our modern world is turned upside down in less than 150 pages. The primary experience for the reader is one of dizzy pleasure in the intellectual hoops we are pulled through. However, the very agility of mind Latour displays, and the strong opposition to Grand Narrative, also brings some of his readers to ask if the story of our non-modernity could not be told otherwise. After a second reading, it can appear important to ask how Latour himself is implicated in the non-modern world of which he speaks. And, if we choose to enter non-modernity with him, where will we end up?

Taking into account his earlier writings, we find that Latour likes to portray himself as occupying a 'breathing space' independent of the networks of power/knowledge he charts (Latour, 1987: 257). He claims to be able to map these networks in every detail without them ever touching or creating an impression on him. The source of his intellectual security is presented in terms of 'style' and the ability to write stories that transcend the science/fiction divide. When successful, these alternative 'scientifiction stories' work like the best of religious texts by captivating an audience and directing attention 'to the reader himself, to his own life and fate' (Latour, 1988: 167; 1996). The ambition is to be:

> ... at once more scientific than the sciences – since we try to escape their struggles – and much less scientific – since we do not wish to fight with their weapons. Our quandary is similar to that of a non-violent pacifist who still wishes to be 'stronger' than a violent militarist. We are looking for weaker, rather than stronger, explanations, but we still would like these weak accounts to defeat the strong ones. (Latour, 1988: 165)

So Latour constructs himself as the master story-teller cultivating the power to captivate, while always escaping captivation himself. The question that follows is: can we believe in such an untouchable subject of knowledge? In more than partial resistance to the spell Latour has cast over me as one of his readers, the argument of this article is that while non-modernity might not be such a bad idea, other accounts of the condition are definitely needed. Because Latour sees himself as detached from, and not seriously embroiled in, the different worlds he charts, he proceeds to address the problem of our non-modernity from the outside and, first, in terms of one big global misunderstanding: a global-sized misunderstanding which only a privileged few outsiders are in the position to see or do anything about. Putting himself forward as belonging to this privileged few, Latour offers his readers a Book of Non-Modern Revelations. As he expresses it:

> As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change. At the same time we stop having been modern, because we become retrospectively aware that the two sets of practices have always already been at work in the historical period that is ending. (Latour, 1993: 11)

Again, because Latour constructs himself as a privileged observer but not a serious player in the non-modern world, he is able to wield such notions as 'purification' and 'hybridization' as if they can never be anything but benign conceptual tools in his hands. Apparently, he is just offering us the non-modern world and writing (cf. Latour, 1988: 170). However, despite the projected innocence of his intellectual actions, when we re-examine the central pillars of the non-modern story Latour constructs, we can in fact find a very particular and decidedly partial perspective being articulated and developed.

Which Are the Greatest Divides of Them All?

In Latour's eyes there are two Great Divides that really count when summing up modernity and, by implication, when introducing our true state of non-modernity. First, we have the greatest divide of them all between humans and non-humans which can also be equated with the nature–society divide. Second, we have the divide between 'Us' and 'Them' which for Latour means the divide between Us – the Westerners – and Them – all the other cultures remaining in a state of 'pre-modernity'. The first is the Internal Great Divide

and the second, the External Great Divide, and the relationship between the two is expressed as follows:

> In order to understand the Great Divide between Us and Them, we must go back to the other Great Divide between humans and non-humans.... In effect, the first is the exportation of the second. We Westerners cannot be one culture among others, since we also mobilize Nature.... Thus at the heart of the question of relativism we find the question of science. If Westerners had been content with trading and conquering, looting and dominating, they would not distinguish themselves radically from other tradespeople and conquerors. But no, they invented science, an activity totally distinct from conquest and trade, politics and morality. (Latour, 1993: 97)

For Latour, science, or rather, a false image of science, is what has kept Us apart from Them. Smash this image and you will have abolished the big difference between people living in the West and those living everywhere else – a new symmetry will reign between the Occident and the Orient. Structuring his story in this way, Latour is clearly making it harder to refuse. Refusing to view humans and non-humans symmetrically becomes something only bigoted and conceited people will want to do, those who are still determined to turn a blind eye to the fate of their fellow man. In other words, to sell his story Latour is not afraid to play on our moral sensibilities (cf. Lee and Brown, 1994: 778). However, when we look beyond this initial morality play and deeper into the book, we find that all is not as it at first appears, and that behind new symmetries lie also new asymmetries. As it turns out, these new asymmetries are already evident in the way in which Latour addresses his audience; in the position he puts them in. The 'We' on the dust-cover of his book who have never been modern is Us in the West, who despite the reign of a new symmetry are still *not Them*. As the reader progresses through the book, s/he finds that for Latour the non-Western world remains not only non-modern, but also *pre-modern*, and, as we shall see below, this still makes a very big difference – one which in the last analysis remains indistinguishable from a Great Divide.

What Latour succeeds in providing for his chosen audience is in fact a very limited overview of the non-modern world. Everything hinges on two Great Divides, the one supposedly providing the key to the other. Instead of attempting to open up and unpack the Great Divide between humans and non-humans, Latour prefers to keep the lid on it so as to be able first to account for, and then re-identify a second division between Us and Them. In this way, Latour holds the complexity of non-modernity at bay and avoids engaging with the issue of human and non-human difference in any depth or detail. As Donna Haraway has pointed out, the key actants in Latour's hybrid networks of science and technology are all too often men and machines, with other humans and other non-humans remaining largely invisible (Haraway, 1992: 331). Consequently, there remain many sides and many interfaces to the non-modern world that Latour is distinctly

unwilling to either recognize or address. Following Haraway, we can say that he largely ignores the interfaces between machines and *other* non-humans and between humans and *non-machine* non-humans (1992: 332). However, of even greater significance than these omissions is his refusal to acknowledge profound differences among humans which bear at best only a tenuous relation to an imagined Great Divide between Westerners and non-Westerners.

One of the most blaring of silences in Latour's text is the one that reigns over the issue of sexual difference. Even if the slogan 'We have never been modern' cannot help speaking very differently to women and men (regardless of whether they are Western or not), for Latour, the sex of the non-modern subject appears to remain as singular as that of its modern counterpart. While Latour-style non-modernity makes room for Us to rethink a Western identity, it still leaves our sexual identity beyond contention. In this way Latour shows no appreciation for the work of prominent feminist scholars who have shown equal dedication to the task of rereading and rewriting the history of modern ontology. The case of Luce Irigaray is particularly pertinent as she not only identifies but also staunchly defends the existence of a Great Divide separating the worlds of masculine and feminine experience. She insists that this division of human being ranks alongside mortality as an inescapable fact of our existence. Making this an ontological claim for sexual difference, she elaborates in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) her own version of the we-have-never-been-modern story by specifying the historical complicity between masculinity and rationality. Entering into an engagement with the problem of our non-modernity in this way leads her to articulate a political agenda very much at odds with the one Latour defines. Rather than the need for closer regulation of proliferating hybrid networks, the first priority for Irigaray is that widespread appreciation of our non-modernity be sustained through a positive vision of sexual difference and the continued elaboration of new forms of woman-defined female subjectivity, sexuality and experience. This can be understood as corresponding to the first step towards empowering women in the networks of science and technology Latour describes, and in the long term this would obviously not leave the development of these networks unchanged. By continuing to leave women's otherness unrepresentable in his representations of our non-modernity, Latour is guilty from a feminist point of view of breaking a complicity between masculinity and rationality, only to affirm his support for a new and potentially more powerful connivance between masculinity and the construction and regulation of hybrid networks.

If sexual difference remains unacknowledged in Latour's account of our non-modernity, so too does national difference. It is as if his 'we' who have never been modern are not only all of the same sexless sex, but also all members of the same Western nation. We are robbed of both our sexed bodies and our passports. By seeing Us and Them only in terms of an opposition between those living in the West and those living everywhere

else, Latour avoids dealing with the fact that moderns have traditionally viewed their membership in the West as being contingent upon their membership in a particular sovereign state. That the West has never been one in Western eyes, but has remained divided into separate sovereign territories is in itself another major chapter in the we-have-never-been-modern story. Again, however, like the one on sexual difference, this is a chapter that Latour has chosen to ignore. When it is realized that Latour is skipping large sections in the story of non-modernity and only focusing on the parts he prefers, we soon come to understand that he himself is performing purifications. He is not simply interested in mapping relations of similarity and difference, but in orchestrating them as well. He is for some ways of non-modern life and against others: aligned with some communities and placed in opposition to others. In this article, the aim is to concentrate on Latour's international relations, and how he is not as alone as he makes out in writing about non-modernity. Just as proclaiming 'we have never been modern' rallies women, so it also assembles, for different reasons, the Euro-American discipline of international relations. Although Latour may choose to turn his back on the very different things women and the strategic studies community say about non-modernity, he cannot help interacting with them. While he joins with those who wish to put the sex of the non-modern subject beyond contention, he also speaks to those who wish to imagine a non-modern West as One today. In short, he speaks to any Western power currently harbouring imperial ambitions.

In the next section the side of the non-modern story articulated by those in and around the discipline of international relations will be introduced through a brief engagement with the principle of sovereignty. It will be argued that Latour connects sovereignty with a concentration of power and authority but neglects its association with the fragmentation of the political space of modernity. This results in Latour approaching the spatial organization of non-modernity very differently from those within international relations. Thereafter, the new asymmetries that lie behind Latour's initial deployment of the symmetry principle will be explored in detail. In particular, attention will be focused on the use Latour makes of a notion of hybridity to re-specify the difference between Us and Them and reaffirm the superiority of a Western scientific culture. Following this, attention will shift to how the transition from realism to neo-realism within international relations favours Latour's vision of non-modernity and the similarities between his concern for a contemporary proliferation of hybrids and the action plans of leading defence intellectuals in the USA as they set about securing America's position as *hegemon* of the West. In conclusion, further efforts will be made to take measure of Bruno Latour by identifying him as a remote sensor/censor of power/knowledge.

Why the West Has Never Been One

Although Thomas Hobbes is an important figure in Latour's account of non-modernity, the principle of sovereignty is not discussed at length.

Sovereignty is important because it concerns the spatial organization of (non-) modernity and the place of the territorial state within this (Onuf, 1991: 425; Walker, 1993: 154). It provides the basis for an understanding of why Westerners have never been able to consider themselves purely modern but always French modern, Swedish modern, Japanese modern and so on, depending upon citizenship. As it emerged in early modern Europe, the principle of sovereignty represented a response to the breakdown of medieval culture and society which supported the alternative principle of hierarchical subordination. Whereas the latter principle judged a person's worth with reference to a universal hierarchy reaching up as far as God, the principle of sovereignty ties individual identities to territorial boundaries in a horizontal, bordered world (Shapiro, 1994: 488; Walker, 1990: 10).

As Walker (1990, 1993) describes it, the principle of sovereignty can be viewed from either the outside or the inside. Viewed from the outside, sovereignty refers to the fragmentation of global space into autonomous political units. Such a vision of divided space has clearly always remained indebted to Hobbes's talent for transferring an imagery of individuals in a state of nature to the realm of relations between states as collectivities. As Hobbes put it: 'every Soveraign hath the same Right, in procuring the safety of his People, that any particular man can have, in procuring the safety of his own body' (1651/1985: 394). In *Leviathan*, as every student of political science will know, states are presented as generally existing under the same conditions as the savage peoples in America and as men in the middle of civil wars: all are forced to survive without a common Power to hold in awe. In the absence of a common authority to fear, states are left in the position where they have no choice but to fear each other; they will always be 'in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another' (Hobbes, 1651/1985: 187). According to Hobbes, it is fear and a sense of danger, rather than greed or glory, that is the key for unlocking the logic of international relations and the occurrence of war between states. As Hedley Bull elucidates, it is not fear in the sense of an unreasoning emotion that Hobbes is referring to, but in the sense of a 'rational apprehension of future insecurity'. For Hobbes:

> It is a concern to secure what we already have, rather than any ambition to acquire what we do not have, that inclines all mankind toward 'a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death'. (Bull, 1981: 722)

Viewed from the inside, sovereignty no longer refers to the fragmentation of power and authority but to its necessary concentration. It means situating final and absolute political authority in the political community and accepting that it cannot exist anywhere else (Onuf, 1991: 429; Walker, 1990: 9). According to Carl Schmitt's famous definition, the Sovereign is 'he who decides on the exception' (1934/1988: 5). Although continually present, sovereign authority is usually invisible. It is only during a state of

emergency that it reveals its essence. As Schmitt puts it, sovereignty is a concept pertaining to 'the outermost sphere'; associated with the 'borderline case' and not with routine (1934/1988: 5). However, by deciding on the exception that breaks the rule, sovereign authority also underwrites the normal situation:

> The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition. (Schmitt, 1934/1988: 15)

Because sovereign authority decides on the exception and where to draw the line, it cannot afford to be of two minds. To be truly sovereign, sovereign authority must be undivided. Thus, turning back to *Leviathan*, we find that Hobbes treats the idea of a mixed government as implying something monstrous; like 'a man, that had another man growing out of his side, with a head, armes, breast, and stomach, of his own' (1651/1985: 373). Any worries concerning the concentration of power and authority are, the concept of sovereignty suggests, continually deprived of any grounds thanks to the complete fusion of interests and identities the concept succeeds in effecting:

> The [sovereign] state is the land, the people, the organization of coercion and a majestic idea, each supporting and even defining the other, so that they become indivisible. (Onuf, 1991: 437)

Considered together, the two sides of the principle of sovereignty immediately complexify Latour's vision of our non-modernity. As he only sees sovereignty from the inside he fails to acknowledge the broader politics of exclusion associated with it. Although Hobbes appears in Latour's story he is only there because of his dispute with Robert Boyle. This dispute concerned the right of gentlemen scientists belonging to the Royal Society to have independent opinions on matters of fact beyond state control. Therefore, Latour is only interested in sovereignty to the extent that natural scientists have been able to win over some of the absolute power and authority connected with it from politicians. He is interested in how sovereign power *has* proved divisible, and how scientists have been granted the authority to represent facts (Nature) like heads of state have been granted the authority to represent citizens (Society):

> Does the Sovereign speak in his own name, or in the name of those who empower him? This is an insoluble question with which modern political philosophy will grapple endlessly. It is indeed the Sovereign who speaks, but it is the citizens who are speaking through him. He becomes their spokesperson, their persona, their personification.... Scientists are scrupulous representatives of the facts. Who is speaking when they speak? The facts themselves, beyond all question, but also their authorized spokespersons.

> Who is speaking, then, nature or human beings? This is another insoluble question with which the modern philosophy of science will wrestle over the course of three centuries. (Latour, 1993: 28)

For Latour, the nature of the controversy between Hobbes and Boyle makes them into something like a pair of Founding Fathers drawing up the first draft of the Modern Constitution (1993: 28). They are the two who, in opposition to each other, introduced the Greatest Divide of them all, between human society and non-human nature. Everything, in effect, boils down to them and their quarrel. Latour now wants to start reversing the process by deconstructing the quarrel and settling the two men's differences. By undoing the labours of division of Boyle and Hobbes, Latour believes that he can initiate some ontological adjustments of his own, capable of cancelling the Modern Constitution and radically redistributing the accepted powers of representation of scientists and politicians. He even believes that, by removing the partition that Boyle and Hobbes first erected, he will have done enough to bring the other Great Divide between Us and Them into serious question as well. At this point, however, Latour is taking far too much for granted and ignoring the existence of other sides to the story of our non-modernity. While the divide between Us and Them was indeed forged by Hobbes, he worked on this without the active intervention of Boyle. While again it is true that a divide between Us and Them is often *juxtaposed* with a divide between humans and non-humans, it has never been so simple a case, as Latour suggests, of the first constituting a straightforward 'exportation' of the second (1993: 97).

Viewing sovereignty from the outside and not just from the inside forces us to acknowledge the fragmentation of the political space of modernity into a system of states. That this system of states has not yet been superseded is in itself a large chapter in the we-have-never-been-modern story. It is a chapter, however, of which many authoritative versions already exist, penned most recently by those following in the 'Hobbesian tradition' within the Euro-American discipline of international relations, including strategic studies. Latour completely ignores the work of these well-established and highly accredited experts on non-modernity, although, as shall be argued below, some of them may yet come to greatly appreciate his work. At this point, however, what is important to note is that what will bring many scholars within international relations to dismiss Latour's account of non-modernity out of hand is his use of the principle of symmetry. Sweeping assertions that the differences between Us and Them have been greatly exaggerated and that humanity has always been a single brotherhood (Latour, 1993: 114) can only sound dangerous and irresponsible to them. As self-identifying 'realists' who bear no illusions about the world, they know that subscribing to symmetry can only cost lives. Defences will be lowered and the perpetually precarious character of our modernity flouted. Instead of a principle of symmetry, the realists within international relations know that the 'anarchy problematique' still remains the only reliable guide to the

limits of our modernity (Ashley, 1988). This problematique teaches us to accept the fact that modern values have never developed beyond the boundaries of the sovereign state. Secure inside of states, we have been able to engage in authentic forms of politics, but outside of them, we have never been able to engage in anything except mere relations with war remaining a regular occurrence (Walker, 1990: 11). For the realist, modernity comes in patches, and in the non-modern spaces in between, chaos has always prevailed.

Taking into account what realists within international relations and strategic studies say about non-modernity, we find that the lines of difference out of which our modern identities have been constructed are more diverse than Latour implies. The anarchy problematique supports another form of global inscription where difference is taken to spell Danger with a capital D. Its dominance has meant that in the drawing of boundaries between Us and Them, *fear* has always been a vital factor interspersed with any concern over the imagined presence or absence of a Scientific Mind. The problem with Them has not only been taken to reside in their primitive minds but also in the unpredictable fits of violence they are always thought liable to fall into, and the mayhem they are always believed capable of generating. This in turn has meant that the maintenance of a divide between Us and Them has not only been treated as a philosophical problem but also as very much a practical problem calling for a decidedly 'hands-on' approach. Preserving our patch of modernity has meant remaining vigilant and understanding Them as objects of foreign policy quite apart from the subjects of domestic politics.

Hybridity and the Writing of Difference

> The principle of symmetry aims not only at establishing equality – which is only the way to set the scale at zero – but at registering differences – that is, in the final analysis, asymmetries – and at understanding the practical means that allow some collectives to dominate others. (Latour, 1993: 107–8)

> We have to steer a course that can lead us out of a simple relativism and by positing a few, simple, empirically verifiable causes, can account for *the enormous differences in effects that everyone knows are real.* We need to keep the scale of the effects but seek more mundane explanations than that of a great divide in human consciousness. (Latour, 1990: 21, emphasis added)

Why does Latour choose to tell the story of non-modernity in the way he does? Why do the two particular divides he focuses on qualify as the two Greatest Divides in his eyes? To get a satisfactory answer to these questions we must first recognize that Latour does not see himself as a deconstructionist addressing modernity, but as a constructivist addressing non-modernity (1993: 134). He may see it as his task to deconstruct Great Divides supposedly given in the nature of things, but underlying this is an even

stronger desire to re-specify and bring to light the real stuff of which these, for him still extremely important, divides are made. At the end of *We Have Never Been Modern*, despite the reign of a new generalized symmetry, *or rather because of this reign*, Latour is still telling his Western audience that there are enormous differences separating humans from non-humans, and Us from Them. The big difference about these big differences, however, is that they are now conceived as contingent rather than necessary, and as manufactured rather than given. Therefore, the two Great Divides Latour focuses on are the greatest in his eyes simply because they remain the two he cares about most of all. Rather than wanting to erase these two divides he wants to define them differently, more realistically, in order to help us defend them more effectively.

For Latour, even in a non-modern world it is still science and technology that accounts for the biggest difference between Us and Them. According to him, during the modern era, we have misread the nature of our scientific culture and as a consequence we have wrongly specified the difference between the West and the rest. Because our scientific culture has been thought so special, the difference between Western culture and all other cultures has been greatly exaggerated and stated in far too grandiose terms. It has, for example, been stated in terms of a radical break in human consciousness and the opposition of a rational and a savage mind. For Latour, specifying our scientific culture in this fashion is 'hagiographic in most cases and plainly racist in more than a few others' (1990: 19). His ambition in *We Have Never Been Modern*, and in other texts as well, is to re-specify the superiority of a Western scientific culture, and to do so in terms which can be considered simple, economical, parsimonious and empirically verifiable (cf. Latour, 1990: 21). Latour wants to bring us down to earth and focus attention on the nitty-gritty details which have kept the West ahead of the rest. With a dedicated eye for such detail, he wants to preserve the difference between Occidentals and Orientals by putting it on a firmer micro-sociotechnical footing. The difference between Us and Them has never been science in theory, but always science in action.

The principle of symmetry Latour defends is in fact a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is first and foremost a way of sparing us from a dangerous illusion, and of forcing us to pull our heads out of the clouds. It is a piece of shock treatment to be performed on a conceited West. Listen, says Latour: 'They are like us, they have never stopped being our brethren' (1993: 127). Some among his chosen audience applaud the democratizing move, others recoil in fear – but he has the undivided attention of us all. The next moment, the master story-teller announces that, while we may not be entirely modern, 'we are not premodern either' (1993: 127). The applause wavers and the fears start to subside. As Marilyn Strathern (1994, 1995) has pointed out, although Latour refigures the difference between Us and Them as a matter of contingent scale effects, this difference still retains a necessary edge. This necessary edge has to do with the way in which Latour grants exclusive property rights over inventiveness and serious science in action to

the West alone (cf. Strathern, 1994: 9). For Latour, the true greatness of the non-moderns stems from:

> Their daring, their research, their innovativeness, their tinkering, their youthful excesses, the ever-increasing scale of their action, the creation of stabilized objects independent of society, the freedom of society liberated from objects. (Latour, 1993: 133)

The ignobleness of the pre-moderns, on the other hand, stems from their possession of negative characteristics in direct opposition to those of the non-moderns – their excessive caution; their collective restraint; the limits they impose on all forms of experimentation with hybrids; the restrictions on freedom of manoeuvre they enforce. According to Latour, such characteristics defining a collective are, even in the non-modern world, to be deemed 'harmful, dangerous and, quite simply, immoral' (1993: 140). Therefore, Latour clearly believes that even as non-moderns we still cannot survive without figures of abjection to tell us who we really are. Figures of abjection who at one moment are akin to us (brethren) but at the next are deprived (by no one else but themselves!) of a crucial capacity for serious inventiveness – a serious inventiveness which ends up guaranteeing for Us alone 'a much greater degree of subjectivity' achieved alongside 'a much greater degree of objectivity' (Latour, 1993: 108).

According to Latour, symmetry is an initial move we have to make if we want to assert that differences between Us and Them are only a matter of size, not of kind (1993: 108). The question of difference, Latour claims, has been dominated by a multitude of grandiose schemes all of which he hopes to sweep aside with the force of symmetry. Having cleared the stage, Latour then wants to take us back to the level of simple craftsmanship and address difference as nothing more than a strictly empirical question. This he sees as allowing us to sort between collectives 'more freely' (1993: 114) treating difference as something capable of fine calibration and graphical representation. With the application of sufficient craft and precision, Latour is certain that we shall conclude that the only reason why non-moderns are bigger and better than pre-moderns is because we have 'invented longer networks by enlisting a certain type of non-humans' (1993: 117). Our superiority is purely a product of the mediation of non-humans and nothing else. Interestingly, Latour attributes a decisive role to the mediation of non-humans in both the successful production and successful measurement of human difference. We are bigger than them only because we enlist a larger number of non-humans in longer networks. How do we know this? Because through empirical research and the use of scientific instruments and inscription devices we have the capability to measure and document every branching, every alignment and every connection in the different networks (cf. Latour, 1993: 118). In effect, only we can have anything meaningful to say about the differences between Us and Them because only we are capable of mobilizing the non-humans necessary to accurately gauge these

differences. Pre-moderns are not worth listening to on the matter of human difference because they resemble perfectly scientists deprived of their inscription devices: scientists who are reduced to stuttering, hesitating, talking nonsense and displaying every kind of political or cultural bias (Latour, 1990: 22). For Latour, the principle of symmetry is not only a way of establishing equality but also a means of setting the scale of difference at zero (1993: 107). It is therefore, in effect, Latour's own personal inscription device for holding the pre-moderns down at ground zero with precious little chance of escape.

But why should Latour want to hold the pre-moderns down? The short answer would seem to be because he sees the building of longer and longer heterogeneous networks as getting out of hand. The moderns are on the verge of becoming the victims of their own inventiveness and submerging themselves in their own mixtures (Latour, 1993: 49). Because we have continued to assume that our scientific culture is protected and guaranteed by the supposedly rational quality of our minds we have remained blind to the increasingly precarious and fragile nature of our position. Our Western scientific culture is not universal but only relatively universal and even this position of strength must be 'purchased, day after day, by branchings and calibrations, instruments and alignments' (Latour, 1993: 123). These are the practices that sustain us, but they are also the practices that lead us into ever more intimate connection with an ever greater collection of human and non-human materials. Our scientific culture hangs on a thread of practices and instruments that 'inadequately embrace a world on the basis of points that become centres of profit and calculation' (Latour, 1993: 121; see also Barry, 1996). It is just because the precise location of these original points of profit and calculation has been increasingly brought into question today that Latour wants to help us take a new fix on them.

It is at this juncture that it becomes important to take a second look at Latour's reliance on the notion of hybrids to characterize non-modern combinations of humans and non-humans. Although there is no reference to the fact in Latour's account of our non-modernity, hybrids have been a perennial concern of imperialists and colonialists. Like Donna Haraway's alternative cyborg figure, the hybrid can be said to have a bad history. While Haraway (1991: 151, 1995) makes clear her reasons for adopting the 'offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism', Latour never attempts to account for his attraction to a concept closely connected with colonial science projects. In relation to this silence, Latour fails to adequately address the way in which hybridity encourages us to essentialize difference and thereby cancel out the new symmetries he introduces in favour of new asymmetries.

As both Robert Young (1995: 6) and Marilyn Strathern (1994: 9) have recently discussed, the English term 'hybrid' is taken from the Latin *hybrida*, meaning the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. While it appeared sporadically during the 17th century, notably in Ben Jonson's *The New Inn* (1630): 'She's wild Irish born, sir, and a hybride' (quoted in Young,

1995: 184), it was not in widespread use before the 19th century. As Young (1995: 6) remarks, 'hybrid' is a word that came of age in the 19th century. It came to signify some of the worst anxieties plaguing British imperial power and embodied some of the colonizer's most secret fears and desires. It reflected then, as it continues to reflect today according to the *OED*, a broad-ranging concern with the interbreeding of species as well as an engagement with anything derived from heterogeneous or incongruous sources. Therefore, the history of hybridity is the history of combinations conceived in a particular fashion; combinations conceived, first, during the course of colonial expansion; combinations often thought absurd, unnatural and dangerous, but still potentially profitable; combinations associated with the forcing together of unlike living things, the grafting of one species on to another, and the wilful manipulation of difference into sameness; the construction of a sameness which if not properly tended will soon revert back into difference.

Identifying the fertility and productivity of hybrids was an emergent 19th century concern. From a preoccupation with the productivity of plant and animal hybrids, discussion developed to include a serious engagement with the issue of the fertility of racial mixes. As Young explores in great detail, the hybrid became one of the most important and contested figures within Victorian racialism. Although significantly different positions on hybridity were adopted by different authorities, it remained common for the term to be used in opposition to that of 'amalgamation'. While those who spoke of amalgamation tended to argue that all humans can interbreed prolifically and create new mixed races, those who spoke of hybridity often asserted that the different races are in fact different species guaranteeing the infertility of any product resulting from their union (Young, 1995: 18). Although those who spoke of hybridity accepted that in some cases infertility might not arise for several generations, this was still presented as an inevitable outcome. This meant that even when races had been observed to physically intermingle, those defending hybridity could still argue that the different races continued to live separate lives within the bodies of the hybrid individuals concerned. The body of the hybrid, therefore, was imagined as a body with something like its own internal policy of apartheid (Young, 1995: 17).

Young accounts for his detailed exposition of the idea of hybridity in 19th-century racial science with reference to the recent revival of the term in the context of late 20th-century post-colonial theory and in the work of Homi Bhabha in particular. He contends that:

> There is an historical stemma between the cultural concepts of our own day and those of the past from which we tend to assume that we have distanced ourselves.... Hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same

> conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure. There is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes. It shows that we are still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed. (Young, 1995: 27)

While Young appears unaware of Latour's deployment of the concept of hybridity, his line of argument, it can be argued, is even more telling when aimed at the latter's work than when at that of Bhabha and other post-colonial theorists. To fix human difference Latour makes indirect use of a notion of hybridity. For him, hybridity is most appropriate for articulating human/non-human relations as we are then dealing with relations across what remains a genuine species divide. In this context, Latour plays on all the classic tropes of hybrid connection: how the productivity of hybrids is never guaranteed; how prior differences remain as differences within; how wilful manipulation is always needed to draw the heterogeneous elements together; how hybrids remain artificial not natural mixes; how things may always fall apart at any time. For articulating the difference between Us and Them, however, hybridity does not apply in the first instance according to Latour. As we have already mentioned, he explicitly distances himself from physiological, species-like distinctions between a rational and a savage mind (1990: 19). By enforcing the principle of symmetry, Latour insists that the difference between Us and Them is always everywhere purely cultural. But how does this purely cultural difference manifest itself? First, says Latour, in relation to a willingness to violate a species divide and enter into the construction of large-scale hybrid networks. According to Latour, while we non-moderns have been willing to hybridize ourselves and enter into ever more intimate liaisons with non-humans, they the pre-moderns have forbidden themselves from making such close connections. Therefore, what starts off as a purely cultural difference separating Us and Them turns with the introduction of a notion of hybridity into an approximate species difference. Although in theory (the symmetry principle) they are our brothers, taking into account hybrid practice (science in action) we soon come to realize that we have developed into a totally different breed from them. According to Latour, non-humans are now integral to our physiology; for Them, such impurity remains inconceivable.

So is hybridity the non-modern revelation Latour makes it out to be? Or, alternatively, is hybridity a recurrent theme during the modern era which re-emerges every time the identity of empire and World Order is put into serious question? It would appear as though hybridity has always been a key concern for empire-builders, providing them with much food for thought. In particular, it seems to have provided them with a basic recipe for claiming sovereignty over what are in reality extremely complex and heterogeneous entities. Hybridity implies the possibility of being able to successfully merge with others while still remaining essentially the same. It suggests the possibility for asserting ownership and control over the

embodiments of our foreign affairs. Addressing Latour's vision of our contemporary situation, Strathern's view is that:

> On the horizon are a whole new set of claims to proprietorship. They arise out of the very perception of hybrids, out of mixes of techniques and persons, out of combinations of the human and non-human, out of the interdigitation of different cultural practices. And because they are not socially innocent, not without their own likely effects in the world, they presage a new modernity of sorts. (Strathern, 1994: 3)

For Latour there is no doubt: the hybrids are our babies – our creations. Although currently we might not be prepared to offer them sufficient love and attention, they are still our property – they belong to the West. They are the products of our inventiveness; they are our responsibility; they are common nature with *our* culture added (cf. Strathern, 1994: 11). According to Latour, while the pre-moderns still remain unversed in the facts of hybrid life, we the non-moderns must now learn to become better parents and start thinking very seriously about the need for hybrid family planning. For the love of science and technology we must learn to curb our hybrid passions in future and 'reorient and regulate the proliferation of monsters' (Latour, 1993: 12).

Empire and Networks

Taking into account that Latour's chosen audience – the West – has never been One, and that this in itself is an important chapter in the we-have-never-been-modern story, who is left to identify with his text? To which sections of the West will Latour's alternative approach to Western superiority continue to appeal? Who is likely to credit the fact that it is, first, science and technology in action which sets Us and Them apart today? Who at present is likely to condone a defence of the West in terms of the careful monitoring and management of hybrid networks, as opposed to uncompromising acts of purification?

In many ways, Latour's narrative coincides with the contemporary shift from realism to neo-realism within the Euro-American discipline of international relations and the modification of the classic anarchy problematique in favour of a notion of mature anarchy (Buzan, 1991; Smith, 1991). In particular, the way in which Latour redefines the true strength and greatness of communities in terms of the length of their hybrid networks complies very well with what American security experts are saying in the mid- 1990s about the strategic importance of an 'information edge' (Nye and Owens, 1996).

As the Cold War ended, there was a very real concern among key members of the American defence establishment that the USA, as the hegemonic Western power, was submerging in its own mixtures. Containment as the key organizing concept of American Cold War foreign policy was recognized as having given rise to some worrying side effects. While it

had successfully focused attention on the purification of the West against the Soviet threat, it had also sanctioned an increasingly disturbing hybridization of the US defence industrial base. As long as the Soviet threat remained large and palpable, this process of hybridization remained largely hidden from view, but as soon as that threat vanished a new type of security crisis immediately revealed itself.

If anyone has seriously imagined and projected an idea of the West as One during the lifetime of Bruno Latour it is the American architects of the Cold War policy of containment. During the period 1946–89, the most obvious Great Divide between Us and Them was undoubtedly that between Western Capitalism and Soviet Communism. This was constructed and defended by both sides as an unbridgeable species-related divide. According to the man who introduced the term 'containment' into American foreign policy discourse, the Soviet threat was to be understood as more non-human than human and as 'a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, towards a given goal [until] it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power' ('X' Kennan, 1947: 575). In the face of such an alien and amorphous threat, the defence of the West that America orchestrated after 1946 aimed to be global in scale and completely airtight. In the newly independent, formerly colonial states, communism was diagnosed as a common 'disease of transition' calling for large doses of preventative medicine. In this context, Bradley Klein (1990: 315) points to the importance of that 'self-consciously proclaimed handbook of Westernization', Walter Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960). Here was laid out a natural path of progression for 'developing' countries to follow, culminating in the glorious 'age of mass high consumption' as the high-point of Western-style civilization. This foreign policy commitment to the effective sealing of the West against the East survived until the mid-1980s, when the extent of the Soviet threat increasingly fell into doubt. Encouraged by the perception of Japan as an emergent Great Power, a fresh concern for the American defence establishment became the alarmingly high proportion of 'foreign parts' appearing in the nation's most advanced weapons systems. A string of official reports from the Department of Defense, the Defense Science Board, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Office of Technology Assessment pointed to an acute crisis of the US defence industrial base. America's defence industries were apparently 'globalizing' and a threat of 'foreign dependence' in need of careful management had suddenly emerged (Crawford, 1994; Moran, 1990; Vernon and Kapstein, 1992).

In response to what was interpreted as something very similar to a hybridization of the ultimate symbols of American prowess and the world's most potent weapons systems, the key text setting out the path for reform became the book-length report of the Harvard Dual-Use Technologies Project, *Beyond Spinoff* (1992). This report recognized and acknowledged the relative decline of the USA as a weapons producer as:

> ... the result (even if not fully intended) of the resounding success of U.S. postwar military and economic policies, which sought the recovery of both allies and enemies as successful free-market democracies while containing Soviet expansion within its 1946 sphere of influence. (Alic et al., 1992: 13)

As a by-product of this success, the report insisted that it be accepted that the trading partners the USA had fostered were now the nation's 'technology competitors' (Alic et al., 1992: 13). Therefore, in a changed world, what the Harvard group sought to provide was 'a fundamental reassessment of the wellsprings of American military and economic power'. According to them, the Cold War had entrenched a civil–military divide splitting the domestic technology base in two. This internal division of technological powers reflected the external Soviet threat and amounted to a divide between opposing realms of free and necessary innovation. At the end of the Cold War, however, such a separation of technological powers could no longer be interpreted as working in the national interest. On the contrary, such a separation now handicapped the USA in relation to its new technology competitors. According to the Harvard group, the two halves of the nation's technology base were in need of rapid reintegration. The vehicle for such reintegration was constructed in terms of the development of new 'dual-use' technologies: new unambiguously American technologies combining both military and commercial applications; technologies capable of enhancing US commercial competitiveness as they preserve US military security (Alic et al., 1992: 3).

A world of international technology competition is a world significantly different to the one traditionally faced by those in and around the Euro-American discipline of international relations. Technology competitors are envisioned as communities made to some extent in the image of a single leading Western power – they remain different from each other and yet they all bear a striking family resemblance. Therefore, a much greater degree of symmetry is thought to be observable on the international scene today. Of course, outside of this new symmetry rogue powers are still to be identified: non-Western powers with whom we can only relate through plays of force. However, the presence of these rogue powers cannot alter the fact that a new realism is called for; a new realism that accepts that the grip of the old anarchy problematique on the international imagination must be loosened.

As a leading neo-realist within the discipline of international relations, Barry Buzan has successfully advanced the notion of 'mature anarchy' to characterize the contemporary international scene (Buzan, 1991). When anarchy is mature, sovereign states are prepared to be more reasonable towards each other. They are prepared to draw closer, to interact more and exchange positive qualities. However, because they remain competitors with a will to dominate each other, interactions must continue to remain guarded and defensible from a strategic point of view. Under conditions of mature anarchy, maintaining or achieving a power advantage is about

carefully managing your interactions with others, not immuring yourself away from them. The superior powers are those with the ability to grow more intimate with others without ever losing sight of where the advantage lies.

By the mid-1990s, the initial post-Cold War crisis of the American defence industrial base appears to have been overcome, and a clear understanding of the contemporary wellsprings of American military and economic power seems to be at hand. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Joseph Nye, former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council and Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, who is also Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, together with Admiral William Owens, former Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Clinton administration, identify America as the most superior power in the world today thanks to her possession of an 'information edge'. This edge is composed, first, of dual-use technologies in the critical areas of ISR (intelligence collection, surveillance and reconnaissance) and C4I (command, control, communications and computer processing). Linked together in an emerging global 'system of systems', these technologies allow America to collect, process, act upon and disseminate more information more speedily than anyone else (Nye and Owens, 1996: 20).

According to Nye and Owens, in the same way that the USA provided a coalition of Western powers with a nuclear umbrella against the threat of Soviet aggression, it can now provide the West with an information umbrella against the new threat which is the 'deeper ambiguity' of actors and events in the world today:

> With the organizing framework of the Cold War gone, the implications are harder to categorize, and all nations want to know more about what is happening and why to help them decide how much it matters and what they should do about it. (Nye and Owens, 1996: 26)

Through its unique space-based observation and positioning systems, for example, America can pinpoint any trouble spot in the world and provide a Western coalition with real-time, continuous surveillance of events as they unfold. Thus, it can enable a Western coalition to take precise measurement of world events and guarantee them superior 'situational awareness' (Nye and Owens, 1996: 27). While, during the Cold War, leadership of the West proceeded from a straightforward capacity to obliterate and purify the world of a known enemy, today it proceeds from the ability to cut quickly through the ambiguity of situations, to respond flexibly and to use deadly force, where necessary, with extreme accuracy and precision.

For Nye and Owens, if America is to maintain its information edge and its leading position among Western nations, it will have to be prepared to selectively share its superior technological capabilities with others. While at the end of the Cold War the hybridization of strategically important technologies was seen by US defence intellectuals as a threat, today it is

identified as a means of consolidating and safeguarding the economic and military might of America. The extended networks of advanced information and communication technologies which currently give the USA the edge could be matched by any nation, or collection of nations, with the money and the will to set about the task. Such an endeavour, however, would be extremely expensive, and therefore the USA can continue to reduce the incentives by enlarging access to its networks (Nye and Owens, 1996: 28). During the Cold War, American security experts were blind to the hybridization processes that were affecting the identity of the nation's defence industrial base. Today, however, they are prepared to actively encourage hybridization, confident in their ability to manipulate the outcomes in a way that serves the nation's best global interests.

Remote Sensors/Censors and Calls to Order

> 'Soft power' is the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. (Nye and Owens, 1996: 21, see also Nye, 1990)

> We are looking for weaker, rather than stronger, explanations, but we still would like these weak accounts to defeat the strong ones.... (Latour, 1988: 165)

Latour's ambition is to transcend the networks of power/knowledge he charts – to rise above their struggles – and yet avoid constructing himself as another great power. He is the 'non-violent pacifist who still wishes to be stronger than a violent militarist' (Latour, 1988: 165). Latour finds the solution to his predicament in story-telling and disarming 'scientifiction' stories with the soft power to captivate and direct attention 'to the reader himself, to his own life and fate' (Latour, 1988: 167). For Donna Haraway, however, rather than escaping the struggles of the sciences he maps, Latour only succeeds in intensifying these struggles 'both in the narrative of science and in the discourse of the science-studies scholar' (Haraway, 1996: 436). Similarly, as has been argued in this article, a close affinity can be established between Latour's concern with 'the Leviathan as a skein of hybrid networks' (1993: 120) and the stories emerging from the Euro-American discipline of international relations as new and less conventional wars are imagined against technology competitors, the environment and 'Muslims from North Africa to Indonesia' (Nye and Owens, 1996: 25). The revised realism Latour supports, which concentrates on 'a few, simple, empirically verifiable causes' (1990: 21) that explain the big differences between Us and Them, fits snugly with the turn to neo-realism within international relations and the new preoccupation with the practical details of technology competition. Both realisms are interested in smashing our illusions about guaranteed superiority today and sensitizing us to the new craft and delicacy required in the pursuit of foreign affairs.

Latour presents himself as someone who wants to recast the relationship between historical detail and the grand picture to the extent that his readers will always crave more detail of him without ever asking for the general trend (1988: 174). In effect, what Latour wants to be taken for is a remote sensor of science and technology with an extra high resolution eye for detail. Like the superior American satellite systems Nye and Owens describe, Latour also promises his readers more precise and accurate 'battlespace knowledge' of science in action, and unique levels of 'situational awareness' (Nye and Owens, 1996: 27). However, what Latour and his American counterparts both tend to gloss over is the nature and importance of the colour they add. In itself, remotely sensed data from whosever satellite it comes has few attractions. To be transformed into arresting images or captivating stories it must be first carefully processed and thoughtfully packaged. In short, additional colour is needed to bring out thematic features and to suppress unwanted backgrounds (see Lynch and Edgerton, 1988). Therefore, compelling representations from afar always rely on *both* keen sensors *and* deft censorship in the course of their production, and while the former may be truly remote, the latter invariably takes place close to home.

While Latour modestly claims that he is just offering us the lived world and writing, it is the colour he stirs in that produces the real difference. It is his ability to make some details spectacular while suppressing others that wins him an audience and holds them spellbound. Without this talent for editing detail he would never be able to perform his stories as serious revelations. Revelations are plays of darkness and light. They render the invisible visible and thereby attract our attention, but they distract as well. They are made to both startle and entice: to first stun us and then draw us in. Putting it in the language of semiotics, revelations are tales tailor-made to *interpellate* their readers; not only forcing them to think again about their lives, but also to surrender their own powers of judgement. Latour's ambition in designing and producing revelations is not to advance a dialogue with his readers, but, literally, to take hold of their imaginations. Like the information umbrella Nye and Owens wish the West to avail itself of, so Latour's revelations are similarly designed to position us as subjects subjected to a higher authority, a Subject with a capital 'S' (on interpellation, see Law, 1996: 49). While Latour reports on the existence of sizeable differences out there in the non-modern world, he is also interested in manufacturing one on his own account, between himself and his small biddable readers. Therefore, Latour assumes a position outside of the action, only to reappear as science in action personified.

Despite his own conscious efforts to the contrary, Latour cannot help re-enacting the imperial ambitions that infuse the networks he charts. Even for him, the production of knowledge becomes synonymous with colonization. It becomes an occasion for the exercise of soft power and calls to order through attraction rather than coercion. Like his counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic, Latour has a whole New World Order on offer and for

those of us who have yet to fall completely under his spell, the only option available is respect for his talents followed by a dedication to the production of noise and interference.

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