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Latourian Mannerism.

From Modes of Existence to Situated Cosmopolitics

Introduction

The new climatic regime and the proliferation of ontological conflicts have rendered modern political categories increasingly untenable. Still grounded in the presupposition of a single, unified world, these categories prove incapable of accounting for the heterogeneity of beings and practices that now openly resist political unification. It is within this impasse that Bruno Latour's modal ontology demands to be reconsidered. Read through what we propose to call an *ontological mannerism*, Latour's thought offers a way of following heterogeneous modes of existence without subsuming them under a single interpretive framework, thereby challenging the universalist legacy of European metaphysics.

This shift, we argue, becomes fully intelligible only through a renewed engagement with Etienne Souriau's aesthetic-metaphysical thought. Such a re-engagement makes it possible to radicalise the plurality of modes of existence and to reconceive politics as a practice of composition among different worlds – what Latour names the *pluriverse*. However, despite this ontological breakthrough, Latour's cosmopolitical project remains marked by a residual universalism that limits its political consequences. We aim to clarify the radical scope and the internal limits of Latour's modal ontology with the help of Souriau. We argue that the work of contemporary anthropologists such as Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser offers a possible way to address these limits by situating and concretising Latour's cosmopolitical aspirations. Taking up Latour's legacy today requires accepting the challenge of composing plural worlds without reinscribing the universalism of Modernity.

Yet it is precisely at this point that the internal tension of Latour's project becomes unavoidable. This residual universalism is not a secondary or merely political problem. It touches the internal coherence of Latour's modal ontology itself. If ontological plurality is affirmed at the level of modes of existence, but political composition continues to rely on universalisable forms, then plurality risks being silently reabsorbed into a

modern regime of governance. In such a case, modal ontology would fail to produce genuinely plural political practices and would instead become a renewed European metaphysics of difference, capable of recognising heterogeneity only insofar as it remains governable. The risk is therefore not only theoretical but also colonial: without a situated cosmopolitics, the pluriverse may once again be composed from a single world's political grammar. It is this tension – internal to Latour's project – that this essay seeks to make explicit and to address.

Mannerist Pluralism

To fully grasp the metaphysical scope of Latour's pluralism, we need to retrace the development of the notion of "mode of existence", through which Latour takes up and radicalises the ancient question of modality – the *modus* of being. As is well known, this inquiry goes back to the famous pages of Aristotle's *Categories*, where the Greek philosopher distinguishes what is said (*ta legomena*) into ten fundamental genera (*Cat.* 1b25-2a4). One of these, substance, immediately assumes a privileged status, becoming the substratum of being, the support to which all the other *genera* ultimately refer. Consequently, the plurality of categories does not put into question the unity of being: being is one; it is simply said in many ways (Aristotle, *Met.* 1003a33-34).

Understood in this way, modality cannot lead to any genuine ontological differentiation, since all modes are ultimately drawn back to the same substantial "keystone". From this point on, philosophy appears largely unable to free itself from the presupposition of a single being, allowing at most for different ways of expressing or accessing it. Any pluralism grounded on this framework thus remains structurally limited, insofar as it leaves the unity of being intact. As long as modality remains confined within the horizon of the unity of being, it cannot adequately account for the multiplicity of beings that populate the cosmos. Latour seeks to overcome this limitation by developing a genuinely pluralist ontology – one capable of conceiving distinct modes of being as irreducible to a common ontological ground. This entails rejecting a "pluralisme selon *un seul* mode, dans une seule clef"¹ in favour of a *multimodal* pluralism, in which plurality concerns not merely entities but the very ways of being themselves. This, in short, is the metaphysical demand that underlies *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.

This achievement is gradual, the result of years of reflection. As early as 1998, in *Piccola filosofia dell'enunciazione*, Latour offers an embry-

¹ B. Latour, *À métaphysique, métaphysique et demie. L'Enquête sur les modes d'existence forme-t-elle un système?*, in "Les Temps Modernes", vol. LXVIII, n. 682, 2015, p. 80.

onic formulation that foreshadows several aspects of the modes of existence later developed in the *Inquiry*. There, he speaks of “regimes of enunciation”². The parallel with the 2012 book is striking, since these regimes largely reappear – albeit in a partially transformed form – as modes of existence. If the articulation is similar, what distinguishes the two? The answer lies in their *ontological scope*.

Latour introduces the modes of existence to move beyond the strictly linguistic domain and to grant these regimes full ontological consistency. The importance of this shift becomes increasingly clear through his engagement with Étienne Souriau’s work³. In this sense, Souriau plays a decisive role in inspiring the very elaboration of the modes of existence⁴. A 2009 article, *On a book by Étienne Souriau: The Different Modes of Existence*, bears clear witness to the conceptual hesitation and ferment that precede the *Inquiry*. Here, Latour suggests that “mode of existence” may be understood as a synonym for the earlier “regime of enunciation”, while simultaneously acknowledging the risk involved: “by utilising terms drawn from semiotics or linguistics as synonyms for modes of existence [...] I run the risk of derailing the project before it ever gets on track”⁵. It is not merely a semantic difficulty but a genuinely ontological one. For this reason, it becomes necessary to adopt the expression “mode of existence”, which deliberately brings together two domains traditionally held apart: that of words and that of things⁶. The modes of existence thus transcend any “bifurcation of nature”⁷; they function as conceptual operators for investigating the integrity of experience without subordinating practice to theory or language to reality. To avoid any re-

² B. Latour, *Piccola filosofia dell'enunciazione*, in *Eloqui de senso. Dialoghi semiotici per Paolo Fabbri. Orizzonti, compiti e dialoghi della semiotica. Saggi per Paolo Fabbri*, Costa & Nolan, Milano 1998, pp. 71-94. For an analysis of this article, see R. Ronchi, *Cioè. L'ontologia di Bruno Latour*, in “aut aut”, n. 402, 2024, pp. 127-140.

³ An author whom, like many others, Latour discovered thanks to his friend Isabelle Stengers. Cf. B. Latour, *La religion à l'épreuve de l'écologie*, La Découverte, Paris 2024, p. 57.

⁴ One may also recall Simondon, who, according to Latour, does not go far enough in articulating a genuine plurality of modes of existence, since his analysis remains largely centered on the technical object. G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Aubier, Paris 1958; tr. en. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2017.

⁵ B. Latour, *Sur un livre d'Étienne Souriau: Les différents modes d'existence*, in F. Courtois-l'Heureux, A. Wiame (a cura di), *Étienne Souriau. Une ontologie de l'instauration*, Vrin, Paris 2015; tr. en. *On a Book by Étienne Souriau: The Different Modes of Existence*, in L.R. Bryant, N. Srnicek, G. Harman (ed.), *The Speculative Turn. Continental Materialism and Realism*, re.press, Melbourne 2011, p. 309. (hereafter OBES).

⁶ B. Latour, *Enquête sur les modes d'existence. Une anthropologie des Modernes*, La Découverte, Paris 2012; tr. en. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2013, pp.20-21. (Thereafter I).

⁷ A.N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1920.

maining ambiguity, the expression “regimes of enunciation” is ultimately abandoned in the *Inquiry*. As often happens, this terminological decision signals a major speculative leap, one that we propose to understand as Latour’s entry into the multirealism sought by Souriau⁸.

We therefore propose to read *The Different Modes of Existence* as a systematic inquiry into multirealism⁹: a radically pluralist cosmos that can be conceived only by moving beyond the limits of classical ontic pluralism and embracing a deeper, *experiential pluralism*¹⁰. The difference between these two forms of pluralism hinges on the concept of modality itself. In the first case, plurality concerns the very modes through which beings exist, yielding genuinely distinct modes of existence¹¹. For Latour, Souriau’s decisive contribution lies in having taken “ways of being” seriously, granting equal weight to both terms: *being* and *ways*¹². This is a point that Souriau emphasizes from the outset of *Istauration philosophique*: “Il y a plus d’une façon d’exister [...]. Car exister c’est toujours exister de quelque manière”¹³. To exist, Souriau suggests, is always to exist in a particular manner, in one specific mode. Consequently, the mode becomes primary, insofar as being itself depends on it. Latour follows this line of reasoning and radicalises it to the point that we may speak of a *Latourian mannerism*¹⁴: a philosophy that does justice to the intrinsic dynamism of the real while nonetheless preserving ontological differentiation. The etymology of *mannerism* traces back to the Italian word “maniera”, which denotes the adoption of a certain style or man-

⁸ B. Latour, *OBES*, p. 308. Multirealism rightly marks the failure of Aristotelian metaphysics: “Now multi-realism, to speak like William James, would like to explore many other modes of existence than simply this single action of saying many things about the same being. In fact, it would like for there to be many ways of being”. B. Latour, I. Stengers, *Le sphinx de l’œuvre*, in É. Souriau, *Les différents modes d’existence*, PUF, Paris 2009; tr. en. *The Sphinx of the Work*, in É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2015, p. 34.

⁹ B. Latour, *OBES*, p. 312.

¹⁰ Cf. §§ 1 and 6 in É. Souriau, *Les différents modes d’existence*, PUF, Paris 2009; tr. en. *The Different Modes of Existence*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2015. The present contribution situates itself within the line of inquiry opened by C. Frigerio, *Existential Ontology: Towards a First Philosophy of Modes of Existence*, in “Cosmos and History”, vol. XX, n. 1, 2024, pp. 96-132.

¹¹ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 99.

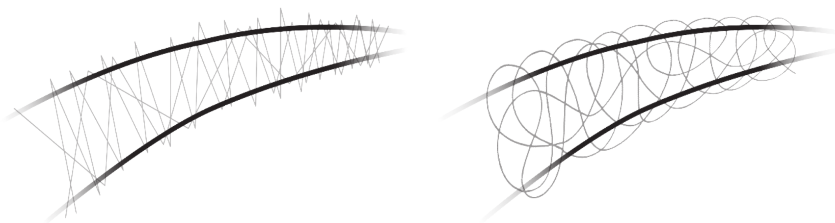
¹² B. Latour, *OBES*, p. 308.

¹³ É. Souriau, *L’instauration philosophique*, Félix Alcan, Paris 1939, p. 366. *Italics added*.

¹⁴ Close to the “universal mannerism” through which Debaise characterizes Whitehead’s philosophy. D. Debaise, *L’appât des possibles. Reprise de Whitehead*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon 2015; tr. en. *Nature as Event: The Lure of the Possible*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2017. For an in-depth analysis of mannerism and for an understanding of its significance within the contemporary philosophical landscape, see also S. van Tuinen, *The Philosophy of Mannerism. From Aesthetics to Modal Metaphysics*, Routledge, London-New York 2023.

ner of comportment. *Comportment*, in turn, derives from the Latin verb *comportare*, meaning “to carry together” or “to transport.” A manner of being thus designates a specific mode of conveyance – one that necessarily involves alterity (*cum*).

The *Inquiry* lays out an ontological landscape that has been thoroughly reconfigured. The primacy of *being-as-being* – monolithic, singular, and grounded in self-identity – is displaced in favour of being-as-other: a becoming, intrinsically relational form of being that subsists only by ceaselessly passing through alterity. *Being-as-other* is the only form of being compatible with a mannerist philosophy, since it alone can account for incessant change without reducing it to accidental variation. Latour is not speaking of the alteration of something already given; rather, alteration *is* that something itself: “If no alteration, then no being. This is what I designate as *being qua another*”¹⁵. This formulation provides the radical definition of modality made possible by experiential pluralism. If alteration is being, then the different ways in which alteration occurs correspond to distinct modes of existence. To say that the modes of existence express a Latourian mannerism is therefore to affirm that each constitutes a singular modality through which being-as-other takes place: a distinctive “ontological variety”¹⁶.



MODES OF EXISTENCE

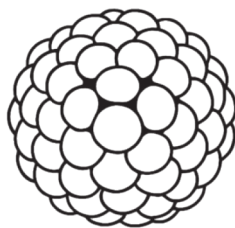
¹⁵ B. Latour, *OBES*, p. 319.

¹⁶ Latour defines his modes as “ontological varieties,” thereby distinguishing them from Spinoza’s modes, which he understands rather as “ontological variabilities”. B. Latour, *lecture on Spinoza*, available online, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv4OSq7fRDc> (last accessed 12 Dec. 2025). On the distinction between variety and variability, we also recommend considering Deleuze’s discussion of this issue: G. Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, PUF, Paris 1968; tr. en. *Difference and Repetition*, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 173.

The Pluriversal Turn

The adoption of radical pluralism necessitates a new conception of the cosmos. Until now, we have spoken of multirealism; we can now introduce the term used by Latour: *pluriverse*¹⁷. Borrowed from William James¹⁸, this term is employed in the *Inquiry* to mark the qualitative transformation the universe undergoes once we acknowledge that being is not unitary. If being is not one, then there are distinct modes of existence, each contributing to the constitution of a genuinely distinct world. The pluriverse thus refers to a cosmos composed of multiple worlds, among which the “modern” world is merely one.

This shift inevitably leads to the articulation of a “regional ontology”: a first philosophy attentive to the illusory nature of universalist claims, and committed to diversifying ontological inquiry in accordance with the worlds that come into view. As the subtitle of the *Inquiry* indicates – *An Anthropology of the Moderns* – Latour’s investigation is explicitly situated within the world of “the Moderns”. It would therefore be a mistake to assume that the entire pluriverse could be exhausted by the fifteen modes of existence elaborated in the book¹⁹. This marks a major speculative shift, one that renders any form of ontological universalism untenable. Latour’s modal pluralism can thus be understood as a tool for dismantling ontological universalism – indeed, as a demanding therapeutic path²⁰ for the Moderns and, ultimately, as an antidote to the poison of modern philosophical imperialism. It amounts to recognising that the cosmos is far more populous than the Moderns are prepared to acknowledge²¹.



PLURIVERSE

¹⁷ B. Latour, *I*, p. 291.

¹⁸ W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, Longmans, Green and Co., London 1909.

¹⁹ Ivi, pp. 488-489.

²⁰ Latour speaks of a “pharmacopeia of modes of existence”. Ivi, p. 261.

²¹ This corresponds to the *thinning of being* discussed in D. Debaise, I. Stengers, *Au risque des effets. Une lutte à main armée contre la Raison ?*, Les Liens qui Libèrent, Paris 2023.

Becoming aware of such complexity entails a change in the very nature of philosophy. If philosophy were to persist in conceiving itself as a general study of being, it would have to acknowledge its own impotence: faced with the sheer multiplicity of worlds, any claim to exhaustive comprehension would prove untenable. It is futile to delude ourselves. A comprehensive study of the real is not merely impractical; it is conceptually misguided. The *Inquiry* does not point in this direction. Once the limits of the traditional philosophical posture are recognised, Latour invites us to adopt a different one: no longer a meticulous study of the real, but an attentive recognition of the heterogeneity of worlds and an inquiry into their possible composition. Philosophy thus becomes a practice of *taking-into-account* and *assembling*: taking worlds into account by recognising the modes of existence through which they subsist, and assembling a pluriverse without presupposing a unified order. Understood in this way, philosophy immediately acquires an ethical and political dimension. Rather than contemplating a presumed order of the real from above, it intervenes in the concrete composition of a common world – one capable of welcoming the plurality of worlds without hierarchy or exclusion.

The figure of the philosopher consequently shifts. The protagonist of the *Inquiry* is a young anthropologist who takes “Western society” as her field site. This choice is not self-evident, given that the conceptual language employed throughout is unmistakably philosophical²². It would not have been incoherent, in other words, to assign a philosopher this role. Yet the articulation between anthropology and philosophy proves decisive. While acknowledging that philosophical vocabulary remains unavoidable – since “the Moderns are the people of Ideas”²³ – the *Inquiry* nonetheless adopts an anthropological stance. Only by grounding itself in field experience can it claim to conduct an “empirical investigation”²⁴. Narrative guidance is therefore entrusted to an anthropologist, since the task is to study the Moderns in their own habitat – and, as is well known, philosophers tend not to move far from their desks, unless it is to consult an ancient volume in a historic library, the furthest extent of exoticism they generally attain. In *becoming anthropology*, philosophy regains a concrete field of inquiry and remains anchored in the real, without relinquishing its conceptual ambition. All of this bears on the way in which modes of existence are taken into account and elaborated. Since ontology is regional, we cannot expect the modes of existence of all worlds to be

²² Cf. D. Debaise, *Le peuple de l'Idée. Ce que Latour fait à la philosophie*, in “Esprit”, n. 489, 2022, pp. 109-114.

²³ B. Latour, *I*, p. 22.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 37.

articulated in the same manner. What follows, therefore, takes up Latour's own reasoning and concerns itself exclusively with the distinctive ontology of the Moderns.

To this point, we have clarified what modes are; we have not yet addressed the question of their emergence. Where does a mode of existence come from? Is it a theoretical construct? Do we create a mode, or do we discover it? This is a delicate issue, which Latour navigates with particular care, much like a slackliner suspended over a ravine: it requires outlining a philosophical method that does not betray the empirical anchoring of his thought. Modes cannot be arbitrarily invented, yet neither can they be said to exist entirely independently of the philosopher's intervention. To escape this impasse, Latour once again takes up a term borrowed from Souriau²⁵ and refers to the "instauration"²⁶ of modes of existence.

We must therefore clarify what is at stake in this notion of "instauration", without presupposing a strict identity with Souriau's own usage²⁷. Let us begin with *On the Mode of Existence of the Work to-Be-Made*, one of Souriau's best-known texts, due in part to its citation by Deleuze and Guattari²⁸. Here, the exemplary case through which Souriau explores the theme of instauration is that of the work of art. We maintain, however, that the concept can be extended to first philosophy. We do not consider this an unwarranted move; indeed, we can put forward two arguments in support of it. First, Souriau explains that he devoted himself to aesthetics "for others", while maintaining a deep passion for "general philosophy"²⁹. This suggests that his aesthetics cannot be reduced to its strictly academic sense. Second, Latour explicitly regards Souriau as a metaphysician – precisely because of his instauration of modes of existence³⁰. These considerations suffice to establish the legitimacy of this hermeneutic extension.

To understand what instauration entails, let us consider Souriau's formulation: "To instaure is to follow a path. We determine the being to come by exploring its path. In blooming, the being demands its own ex-

²⁵ A term fully developed in É. Souriau, *L'ombre de Dieu*, PUF, Paris 1955, pp. 235-288.

²⁶ Cf. B. Latour, *Efficacité ou instauration ?*, in "Vie et Lumière", n. 270, 2006, pp. 47-56.

²⁷ Cf. F. Fruteau de Laclos, *Les voies de l'instauration: Souriau chez les contemporains*, in "Critique", n. 775, 2011, pp. 931-948. In the already cited 2009 article, Latour states that he uses Souriau in order to develop his own philosophical project. In doing so, he effectively carries out the kind of reading-as-betrayal to which Stengers also refers: I. Stengers, *Que vais-tu faire de moi ?*, in Étienne Souriau, *Une ontologie de l'instauration*, cit., p. 67.

²⁸ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Minuit, Paris 1999; tr. en. *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 220.

²⁹ É. Souriau, *Étienne Souriau*, in G. Deledalle, D. Huisman (ed.), *Les philosophes français d'aujourd'hui par eux-mêmes. Autobiographie de la philosophie française contemporaine*, C.D.U., Paris 1963, p. 97.

³⁰ B. Latour, I. Stengers, *The Sphinx of the Work*, cit., p. 31. Cf. B. Latour, *OBES*, cit., p. 309.

istence. In all of this, the agent must *yield* before the work's own will"³¹. Instauration cannot be equated with either creation or fabrication. Unlike creation, it does not involve a production *ex nihilo*, since it always presupposes an environment that precedes and guides the operation. And unlike fabrication, it does not treat being as a passive substrate at the disposal of a sovereign subject³². What characterises instauration is the quasi-agentive status of what comes into being: the being to be instaurated solicits, constrains, and orients the process. Souriau further insists that instauration begins with a "questioning situation"³³ – a situation that demands a response and calls for intervention. Neither creation nor fabrication, instauration occupies an intermediate position: it yields something new, but only by responding to an agentive reality that requires participation. In this respect, it can be compared to Lévi-Strauss's figure of the bricoleur³⁴.

The relevance of this concept for Latour now becomes clear. The idea of a questioning situation aptly describes the ethnographic setting of the *Inquiry*, fulfilling the demand for experiential grounding that runs throughout his work. The anthropologist of Modernity follows experience, allows herself to be guided by the trajectories of modes of existence, attends to them, and is thereby led to their instauration. Modes of existence depend on both the anthropologist's work and the concrete practices of the Moderns. No mode is ever elaborated at a distance from experience: from Law [LAW] to Habit [HAB], each aims to map concrete practices as faithfully as possible.

The Cosmopolitical Construction Site

At this point in the argument, a final question comes to the fore: what does it mean to practice philosophy as an assembling of the pluriverse –

³¹ É. Souriau, *Du mode d'existence de l'œuvre à faire*, in *Les différents modes d'existence*; tr. en. *On the Mode of Existence of the Work to Be Made*, in *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 231. *Italics added*.

³² The use of the term *instauration* was also intended to avoid the possible confusion associated with the notions of "construction" or "fabrication". See B. Latour, *OBES*, pp. 310-311. Despite the precautions taken by Latour to dissociate the term *construction* from accusations of extreme subjectivism, its use has nevertheless had a deleterious and often depreciative effect on the reception of Latourian critical theory – an issue of which the author has been aware at least since his influential 2004 article: Id., *Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern*, in "Critical Inquiry", vol. 30, n. 2, 2004, pp. 225-248.

³³ Cf. É. Souriau, *On the Mode of Existence of the Work to Be Made*, cit., p. 232.

³⁴ C. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Plon, Paris 1962; tr. en. *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966, p. 16.

the patient art of composing a cosmos inhabited by multiple worlds? The analysis of regional ontology leads directly to this issue. As Latour himself insists, “we shall have to concentrate first of all on their curious regional ontology if we want to have the slightest chance of confronting the “others” – the former others – and Gaïa – the truly other Other”³⁵. This demand is unavoidable. To recognise “other” forms of existence, human and nonhuman alike, we must first learn to regard our own as only one among many. Through a critique of our own modes of existence, we may begin to relate to “others” without implicit hierarchies, becoming attentive to our own limits and contradictions – often no less significant, and at times more damaging, than those we ascribe to other worlds.

Once this awareness is achieved, Latour’s aim comes into focus: the search for a political order adequate to the pluriverse – that is, a properly *cosmopolitical order*³⁶. *Cosmopolitical* here should not be understood as a general normative framework or a theory of coexistence, but as a practical problem: how to compose a common world without neutralizing the heterogeneity of the modes of existence involved – not only Modern ones, and not only human ones. What is at stake, then, is a form of politics capable of accounting for different human and nonhuman worlds and of initiating “diplomatic negotiations”³⁷ through which new ways of inhabiting the cosmos might emerge. Diplomacy, in this sense, does not consist in the search for mutual understanding through translation into a shared language or common political grammar. It names, rather, a situated practice of negotiation that proceeds without guarantees, remaining attentive to asymmetries, incommensurabilities, and the risk of failure. Latour explicitly recognizes this diplomatic requirement as the horizon and point of arrival of the *Inquiry*: the anthropological work on the modes of existence is meant to prepare the Moderns for such encoun-

³⁵ B. Latour, I, p. 22.

³⁶ An expression taken from I. Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, La Découverte, Paris 2022; tr. en. *Cosmopolitics I – II*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2010-2011. See also Ead., *La proposition cosmopolitique*, in J. Lolive, O. Soubeyran (a cura di), *L'émergence des cosmopolitiques*, La Découverte, Paris 2007, pp. 45-68.

³⁷ B. Latour, I, p. 9. See also: Id., *A Dialog About a New Meaning of Symmetric Anthropology*, in Charbonnier P., Salmon G., Skafish P. (ed.), *Comparative Metaphysics. Ontology after Anthropology*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham 2016, pp. 325-341; I. Stengers, *Réactiver le sens commun. Lecture de Whitehead en temps de débâcle*, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris 2020; tr. en. *Reactivating Common Sense: Reading Whitehead in Times of Collapse*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2023. The theme of diplomacy has been widely revisited and further developed in recent anthropology, including intra-specific approaches, as exemplified by: B. Morizot, *Diplomatie animale. Co-habiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant*, Actes Sud, Arles 2016; tr. en. *Wild Diplomacy: Coexisting with Wolves on a New Map of Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2022. For a critical analysis, see: I. Janicka, *Reinventing the Diplomat: Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour and Baptiste Morizot*, in “Theory, Culture & Society”, vol. 40, n. 3, 2023, pp. 23-40.

ters³⁸. Yet acknowledging diplomacy as an endpoint does not suffice to bring it into being as a situated practice. In this context, the urgency of this task has only intensified with the intrusion of Gaia³⁹, a concern to which Latour devoted the final years of his life. Yet despite the importance of the problem, we contend that Latour ultimately fails to bring the cosmopolitical construction site to completion. The impasse arises from a return to the very metaphysical error he sought to overcome: having exposed the illusion of philosophical universalism, Latour reintroduces it at the political level by seeking universal solutions to problems rooted in regional ontologies⁴⁰.

This universalist residue is also discernible in *Facing Gaia*: from the proposal to convene the various peoples (of nature), each equipped with its own translation table⁴¹, to the relatively traditional project of a *Parliament of Things*⁴², Latour remains entangled in precisely the Western framework from which he aimed to emancipate himself. The same tension is evident in the *Inquiry*, where metaphysical pluralism is presented as the condition for a cosmopolitical regime, yet that regime is ultimately associated with a return to the *agora*⁴³. We recognise that, by this term, Latour intends the recovery of politics itself – the capacity to deliberate and to choose. Nevertheless, a certain unease remains. As Ailton Krenak observes: “language is highly determinative in interactions, and everything that comes from the polis carries the mark of an assemblage of equals, where political experience is presumed to be convergent”⁴⁴. It thus becomes necessary to abandon any terms that presuppose a levelling equality, for they ultimately entail the imposition of one world upon others and the denial of the legitimacy of other modes of existence. Universalism, in this sense, resembles a weed: if left untouched in even a small corner of the garden, it eventually overtakes the whole. When the framework remains universalist, cosmopolitics risks becoming another form of colonialism.

³⁸ B. Latour, *I*, p. 480.

³⁹ I. Stengers, *Au temps des catastrophes. Résister à la barbarie qui vient*, La Découverte, Paris 2013; tr. en. *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Open Humanities Press, London 2015.

⁴⁰ Cf. I. Janicka, *The Janus Face of Cosmopolitics. The Concept of Universality in Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour*, in “Philosophy Today”, vol. LXVIII, n. 1, 2024, pp. 129-145.

⁴¹ B. Latour, *Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*, La Découverte, Paris 2015; tr. en. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2017, p.154.

⁴² Ivi, p. 262. See also: B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris 2006; tr. en. *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1993; Id., *Esquisse d'un Parlement des choses*, in “Écologie & Politique”, vol. LVI, n. 1, 2018, pp. 47-64.

⁴³ B. Latour, *I*, p. 59.

⁴⁴ A. Krenak, *Futuro ancestral*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo 2022.

Our aim, however, is not to reject Latour's work, but rather to fully embrace its radicality. Through modal ontology, he succeeded in elaborating an immanent and mannerist philosophy, capable of following the ongoing unfolding of experience. This orientation also reveals the pragmatist character of this thought, allowing it to be understood less as a system than as a method⁴⁵. It is therefore no accident that Latour described the *Inquiry* as a permanently open construction site: rather than offering a completed doctrine, it gestures toward a new philosophical praxis. Remaining faithful to empirical experience requires this method to engage anthropology, establishing a reciprocal relation in which the two disciplines correct and protect one another: "L'altérité ne peut être enregistrée et maintenue que par un détour par l'ontologie. Mais à condition de protéger l'ontologie contre toute mainmise d'un mode sur les autres. [...] Disons que la philosophie et l'anthropologie se corrigent et se protègent l'une l'autre"⁴⁶.

This insight is decisive, yet it is precisely here that Latour appears to hesitate. At the moment when cosmopolitical practice should be tested, he retreats toward a largely theoretical horizon, relinquishing, in a certain sense, the concreteness of worlds in favour of a generalised institutional pluralism. Cosmopolitical diplomacy thus appears a compelling but deeply utopian project, one whose condition of realisation remains unclear. Whether Latour might have corrected this universalist drift over time is an open question. What seems clear to us is that honouring his legacy requires precisely such a correction: *situating cosmopolitics* and anchoring it in concrete practices. Once again, anthropology proves decisive. Some of the most fruitful heirs of Latour's thought emerge not from within European philosophy, but from anthropological work situated outside Modernity – a detail that is far from incidental. While anthropology's contribution to philosophy has been widely acknowledged even within the European context⁴⁷, it is equally evident that overcoming universalism appears possible only from perspectives that do not take Modernity as their implicit horizon.

Among these perspectives, the work of Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, editors of the volume *A World of Many Worlds*. Their collaborative work defines the pluriverse that is particularly suited

⁴⁵ W. James, *Pragmatism. A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, Ravenbrook, USA 2009.

⁴⁶ B. Latour, *À métaphysique, métaphysique et demie*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ F. Keck, *L'anthropologie intensifiée par la métaphysique*, in "Critique", n. 774, 2011, pp. 909-926.

to bringing our inquiry to a close. Rather than treating the pluriverse as an ideal to be achieved, they emphasise its processual character: the pluriverse names the concrete negotiations through which worlds come into being⁴⁸. It is this incessant compromise that we must learn to recognise and to inhabit. This follows from our thesis: *the pluriverse is already here*, immanent to the real. What remains undecided is whether we will acknowledge it and grant it importance or continue to deny it by sustaining the fiction of a single world that subsumes all others. The pluriverse is nothing other than the practice of “taking seriously” modes of existence – the recognition that coexistence demands sustained engagement with heterogeneous ways of being in everyday life.

Blaser and de la Cadena propose to use the pluriverse as an ethnographic “analytic tool”⁴⁹, insisting that ethnography is not the mere accumulation of data, but an instrument for constructing an *ontological politics*⁵⁰. The two anthropologists employ the pluriverse as a compass to orient their ethnographic analyses, thereby avoiding the simplification or reduction of intrinsically complex situations to a single epistemological perspective. Whether in the case of disputes over Caribou hunting in Labrador⁵¹ or in the conflict triggered by mining concessions in Sinkara⁵², Peru – to cite only two concrete examples –, Blaser and de la Cadena demonstrate how anthropology can illuminate cosmopolitical processes already underway. In the Andean case, for example, the mountain exists simultaneously within multiple worlds: those of Quechua communities (Nazario, Mariano), the modern state, mining corporations, environmentalists and NGOs, tourism and rural economies, and even Catholic ritual practice. Each brings the mountain into being in a different way. What is at stake is, therefore, not a mere conflict of interests, but an ontological conflict⁵³.

⁴⁸ “A pluriverse: heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices, negotiating their difficult being together in heterogeneity”. M. Blaser, M. de la Cadena, *Pluriverse. Proposals for a World of Many Worlds*, in *A World of Many Worlds*, a cura di M. de la Cadena, M. Blaser, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2018, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 6. See also I. Stengers, *The Challenge of Ontological Politics*, in M. de la Cadena, M. Blaser (a cura di), *A World of Many Worlds*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2018, pp. 83-111.

⁵¹ M. Blaser, *Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?*, in “Cultural Anthropology”, vol. 31, n. 4, 2016, pp. 545-570.

⁵² M. de la Cadena, *Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond “Politics”*, in “Cultural Anthropology”, vol. 25, n. 2, 2010, pp. 334-370.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 358.

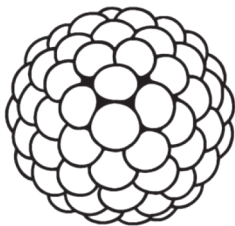
A traditional epistemological politics is unable to respond adequately to such heterogeneity, as it subsumes divergent worlds into a single framework. Only an ontological politics can move beyond the limits of Modernity, recognising the reality of a pluriverse and regulating coexistence among heterogeneous worlds. This is not a matter of pacification, but of accepting an atavistic state of conflict arising from the impossibility of total agreement among worlds – what de la Cadena, drawing on Viveiros de Castro⁵⁴, describes as learning to *inhabit equivocation*⁵⁵.

These ethnographies matter because they do not speculate about a universal cosmopolitics yet to come, but rather document concrete cosmopolitical construction sites that are already in progress. Their situated and partial character is not a weakness, any more than the regional character of ontology itself – after all, the Andean mountain pluriverse is not interchangeable with that of the icy Canadian lands. Treating the pluriverse as an ethnographic analytic tool thus makes it possible – locally and provisionally – to actualise Latour's cosmopolitical project. Far from being a paradox or a betrayal, this move remains fully faithful to the intuition of modal ontology: attention to the ways of existing that inhabit conflict frees the pluriverse from the veil of abstraction in which it risked becoming trapped.

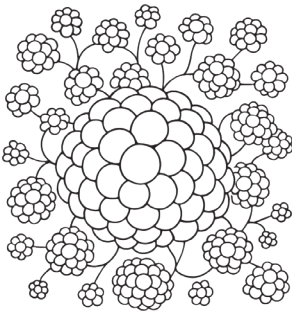
More importantly, these ethnographies allow us to formulate a philosophical criterion. Cosmopolitics names a situated practice whose legitimacy depends on its capacity to remain bound to the worlds it seeks to compose. A cosmopolitical practice exists only insofar as it is locally instantiated, attentive to ontological conflict, and resistant to any form of universal equivalence. Where plurality is translated into commensurability, cosmopolitics risk collapsing into a renewed form of colonialism. Conversely, only when political negotiation remains exposed to the incommensurability of modes of existence can the pluriverse be said to take shape. From this perspective, ethnography functions as a necessary condition for any non-universalist cosmopolitical practice. This is where philosophical mannerism leads when taken in its full radicality. Attention to the heterogeneity of modes is not a conceptual ornament, but the condition for realising situated cosmopolitics and, with it, the de-modernisation of Modernity.

⁵⁴ E. Viveiros de Castro, *Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation*, in "Tipiti: Journal for the Society of Anthropology of Lowland South America", vol. 2, n. 1, 2004, pp. 3-22.

⁵⁵ M. de la Cadena, *Uncommoning Nature: Stories from the Anthro-Not-Seen*, in *Anthropological Theory*, 2018.



IDEAL PLURIVERSE



ACTUAL PLURIVERSE

Il manierismo latouriano. Dai modi dell'esistenza alla cosmopolitica situata

L'articolo propone una lettura dell'ontologia modale di Bruno Latour a partire dalla nozione di manierismo ontologico, inteso come una radicale affermazione della pluralità metafisica al livello stesso dell'esistenza. Letti attraverso Souriau e il suo pensiero estetico-metafisico, i modi d'esistenza di Latour non designano variazioni interne a un unico essere, ma forme ontologiche autonome e irriducibili. Pur mettendo in questione l'eredità universalista della metafisica europea, questa ontologia manierista lascia tuttavia emergere una tensione tra pluralità metafisica e pratica cosmopolitica. Se alla radicalità ontologica non corrisponde una forma altrettanto situata di composizione politica, l'ontologia modale rischia di perdere la propria forza critica e di trasformarsi in un pluralismo addomesticato, puramente formale. Per affrontare questa tensione interna, il saggio si rivolge all'antropologia contemporanea e sostiene che solo pratiche etnografiche situate possono rendere effettiva la cosmopolitica senza neutralizzare la posta metafisica del pluralismo. L'antropologia appare così come una condizione necessaria della coerenza filosofica dell'ontologia modale.

PAROLE CHIAVE: ontologia modale; manierismo ontologico; pluriverso; cosmopolitiche; antropologia situata.

Latourian Mannerism. From Modes of Existence to Situated Cosmopolitics

This article develops an interpretation of Bruno Latour's modal ontology through the notion of *ontological mannerism*, understood as a radical commitment to metaphysical plurality at the level of existence itself. Read in dialogue with Étienne Souriau's aesthetic-metaphysical thought, Latour's modes of existence are approached as irreducible ontological forms rather than variations of a single being. While this mannerist ontology displaces the universalist legacy of European metaphysics, the article argues that a tension persists between metaphysical plurality and cosmopolitical practice. When ontological radicality is not matched by an equally situated form of political composition, modal ontology risks losing its critical force and reverting to a domesticated, formalised pluralism. To address this internal tension, the essay turns to contemporary anthropology, arguing that only situated ethnographic practices can actualise cosmopolitics without undermining the metaphysical stakes of pluralism. Anthropology thus emerges as a necessary condition for the philosophical consistency of modal ontology.

KEYWORDS: Modal Ontology; Ontological Mannerism; Pluriverse; Cosmopolitics; Situated Anthropology.