

# Cosmopolitics and the Subaltern

## Problematizing Latour's Idea of the Commons

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### **Abstract**

This essay traces the ontological and political limits of Bruno Latour's conceptualization of the 'common world'. Latour formulates this concept in explicating how modernist scientific and political institutions require a meta-physical foundation that is anti-democratic in rigidly partitioning nature from society. In the stead of nature/society, Latour proposes a 'cosmopolitics' in which we recognize our embroilment in systems comprised of heterogeneous human and nonhuman actors, and seek to innovate appropriate procedures for governing such systems and composing a more peaceful common world. However, feminist and postcolonialist science studies scholars have argued that Latour's project fails to apprehend the experiences of subjects marginalized by scientific and political structures of representation. Thus, science studies scholars seem to be faced with a problem; to avoid ontological dissonance and contradiction in integrating Latour's program with feminist and postcolonialist critiques we must defer his claims that the cosmopolitical program entirely supersedes contemporary social movements and oppositional politics. I offer an alternative. Namely, I argue that Latour's formulations of cosmopolitics' procedures and the common world's boundaries actually require an incipient model of the limits of democratic representation. I modify Latour's proposed system of representation by reading it against Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of 'subaltern pasts', which are unassimilable to academic historical narratives (in their attribution of agency to nonhuman gods, for example). This reading emphasizes how Latour does not adequately theorize and politicize the partially autonomous reality of those excluded from the common world and thus fails to attend to how this externalization replicates the violence of modernist representational institutions.

### **Key words**

coexistence ■ historical narratives ■ Bruno Latour ■ science studies ■ subaltern

[W]e are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories. (Haraway, 2008: 42)

Subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric. (Chakrabarty, 2000: 106)

OVER THE past three decades, Bruno Latour has emerged as a theorist well known for challenging readers to better apprehend the multiplicity of roles played by nonhumans in the production of scientific and social scientific knowledges (see esp. Latour, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1999a, 2004a, 2005). Latour embraces an ethnographic ethic in his insistence that attending to the specific, located material practices of the sciences will lead scholars to see that humans are not the only lively actors in this world. Achieving this observation entails scholars' willingness to work outside the conventional academic stance that humans are the purview of the humanities and social sciences, nonhumans the purview of the natural sciences, and *never the twain shall meet*.<sup>1</sup> This position leads Latour to argue that a 'separation of powers' (Latour, 2004a) between the social sciences and politics (or the institutions for representing humans) and the natural sciences (or the institutions for representing nonhumans) is anti-democratic, failing to account for how matters of concern in the contemporary world weave together hybrid networks of humans and nonhumans. Such matters of concern, which he also calls 'things' and 'issues', include any scientific, environmental, health, or political problem wherein the participating actors are emergent or not yet fully defined.<sup>2</sup>

Many of Latour's peers in science studies and countless scholars working in allied fields have effectively employed his nonhumanist ontology as a productive analytical repertoire. Yet, there remain questions surrounding whether Latour's framework sufficiently addresses concerns with how specific sociopolitical categories such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, and religion emerge, intersect, and produce subjects (e.g. Haraway, 1997; Harding, 2008). In this essay I locate how such critiques apply to the politico-scientific program that Latour formulates most clearly in his 2004 book *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. I proceed to address such critiques by supplementing Latour's formulation of 'cosmopolitics', or 'the progressive composition of the common world' (Latour, 2004a: 8), with a key argument that subaltern historiographer Dipesh Chakrabarty articulates in his 2000 book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*.<sup>3</sup> Namely, Chakrabarty claims that the historical narratives of subaltern subjects remain partially unrepresentable within the institutionalized academic discipline of history.

My argument is twofold. First, I submit that Latour's cosmopolitical program produces and requires actors that are unassimilable to its defined representational procedures. These actors, partially constituted by their

externalization from the ‘common world’, mark the limits of Latour’s ideal for the democratization of political and scientific representation. Second, I argue that Chakrabarty has effectively positioned such externalization as the ontological limit of democratic representation through his concept of ‘subaltern pasts’, or narratives that ‘cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian’s own position’ (2000: 105). The compatibility of these two positions issues from a shared commitment to elevate actors’ narratives to the level of serious, sincere, and consequential explanations of how the world works. Indeed, the two authors have elaborated nonhumanist ontologies that overlap in their refusal to explain (away) actors’ narratives as expressions of the purely ‘social’.

Thus, I maintain that we can expand the range of actors represented by contemporary political and scientific institutions without assuming that established critiques of inequality no longer have any salience. Latour’s cosmopolitics multiplies the kinds of inequalities that become valuable and visible sites for critical and careful analyses as well as political action. He usefully provokes readers to imagine a representational institution that does not delimit its constituencies on the basis of an ascribed ontological status (particularly the human/nonhuman distinction). But his program is definitively strengthened by sympathetic accounts that better thematize the problem of living and partially connecting with forms of difference that remain unintelligible to both actual and imagined institutions of politico-scientific representation. Such positions reveal ontological and epistemological inadequacies of representative democracy that Latour’s (2004a) proposal does not currently address.

This argument helps give empirical and political teeth to Latour’s very abstract alternative to the nature/society opposition. It aids readers of Latour to see the procedures of externalization necessary to the effective operation of cosmopolitics as tangible material-semiotic practices through which sciences and politics deprive actors of both representation and material resources. By refusing to take some actors into account the common world constructs a new class of subaltern, a concept now applicable to more than purified humans. My reading thus emerges as a further politicization of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern’s (1996) assertion that Latour’s tendency to emphasize the capacity of relational networks of actors to diffuse or expand must be counterbalanced by demonstrations of how these networks also enact ‘cuts’ that enable objects to be perceivably bounded (and, for example, owned). Scientific and political practices definitely cut actors, refusing to represent them, constituting them as subaltern (see also Watson, 2010).

Ultimately, locating this act of deferral, or cutting, as an insufficiently theorized and politicized yet actually existing component of cosmopolitics helps further clarify the existing tension between Latour’s program and postcolonialist arguments (e.g. Mallavarapu and Prasad, 2006; Ray and Selinger, 2008). Moreover, it begins to establish a coherent epistemological basis for the growing number of studies integrating Latour’s methodology

and metaphysics with postcolonial and empire studies (e.g. Anderson, 2002; Anderson and Adams, 2008; Harding, 1998, 2008; Hayden, 2003, 2005; Langwick, 2007; Redfield, 2000, 2002; Verran, 2002). Indeed, by further politicizing the limits of representation charted within the cosmopolitical program and reconsidering their compatibility with contemporary oppositional politics, it may become possible to salvage Latour's program from relegation to 'little more . . . than a fascinating fantasy' (Castree, 2006: 169).

### **The Limits of Cosmopolitics**

In *Politics of Nature*, Latour (2004a) elaborates his earlier claim (Latour, 1993) that the distinction between nature and society is a political problem fundamentally paralyzing the possibility of democracy. He traces this problem to Greek philosophical thought, particularly Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In Latour's reading, the allegory creates an absolute distinction between the Cave's noisy captives, 'society', and the world outside the Cave's walls, 'nature'. Only a handful of people can relay between the inside and the outside. While formerly philosophers, these people are now scientists who take on roles as spokespersons for the 'external' world. Latour's alternative to this ostensibly anti-democratic structure of representation involves a politico-scientific model in which we set aside preformed concepts of nature and society and reapportion capacities for speech and action to both humans and nonhumans. Reforming our scientific and governing institutions in these terms presumably allows us to better apprehend contemporary political problems, which entail imbroglios of humans and nonhumans, without relying exclusively on politicians to represent humans and scientists to represent nonhumans. We – already cooperating humans and nonhumans – all become provisional spokespersons, and we decide how well emergent actors, or entities, facilitate peaceful cohabitation, the progressive composition of a common world, or cosmopolitics.

In Latour's (2004a) model, participants in the collective collaboratively determine whether emergent propositions and entities should be admitted to the common world and, thus, represented. He develops the process of admitting new entities in relatively formal procedural terms. Proposed actors in the common world (a.k.a. the collective, assembly, parliament, or Republic), including humans as well as nonhumans such as scientific interpretations and technological innovations, pass through successive stages of evaluation and delegation of powers termed perplexity, consultation, hierarchy, and institution. The stages require the enrolled actors in the collective to determine whether and how emergent entities help enact more peaceful cohabitation in a common world.<sup>4</sup> The already enrolled participants can either admit proposed actors as consequential contributors to the composition of a common world and entrust them with certain competencies and representational roles, or they can banish them to the outside of the common world (a substitute for the concept of nature, now composed of actors that cannot associate peacefully with those already enrolled in the collective).

Thus, Latour (2004a: 121–7, ch. 5) begins to conceptualize the problem of ‘externality’ (or ‘exteriority’) in *Politics of Nature*. As entities pass through the sequence of procedures that define their roles as co-participants in the collective and alter their properties, some are clearly excluded. Despite the rather allegorical formulation of this procedural metaphysics, Latour maintains that political and scientific processes of externalization already exist.<sup>5</sup> He poses the problem in these terms:

Of these excluded entities we cannot yet say anything except that they are exteriorized or externalized: an explicit collective decision has been made *not* to take them into account; they are to be viewed as insignificant. This is the case, in the example given earlier, of the eight thousand people who die each year from automobile accidents in France: no way was found to keep them as full-fledged – and thus living! – members of the collective. In the hierarchy that was set up, the speed of automobiles and the flood of alcohol was preferred to highway deaths. (2004a: 124, emphasis in original)

[A] gradient is going to be established between the interior of the collective and its exterior, which will gradually fill up with excluded entities, beings that the collectivity has decided to do without, for which it has refused to take responsibility – let us remember that these entities can be humans, but also animal species, research programs, concepts, any of the rejected propositions that at one moment are consigned to the *dumping ground* of a given collective. We no longer have a society surrounded by a nature, but a collective producing a clear distinction between what it has internalized and what it has externalized. (2004a: 124, emphasis in original)

Latour has assembled a political house with an inside composed of procedurally authorized actors surrounded by a multitude of entities that these authorized participants have refused to enroll. While the boundary is ‘gradient’, Latour’s program in *Politics of Nature* clearly begins to grapple with the ontological differences that mark internal and external actors.

In beginning to conceptualize the difference between actors inside and outside the common world, Latour implicitly addresses Strathern’s (1996) claim that his ontology fails to sufficiently consider how networks enact negative exclusions, or ‘cuts’. Yet he does not frame the problem as a response to such critiques and I maintain that, while cosmopolitics overcomes the modernist distinction between a nonhuman nature ‘out there’ and a human society ‘in here’, it nevertheless rests on structures of inequality. The reunification of science and politics is a profoundly democratizing intervention. But, the common world materializes as a kind of citadel from which we insiders gaze out at the unrepresented masses of excluded entities. Thus, it remains somewhat undemocratic, or hints at the necessary limits of democracy. Science as citadel (Downey and Dumit, 1998; Martin, 1998) becomes the common world as citadel.

Further exploring the boundary separating those enrolled in and cut from the common world provides an improved basis for reconciling Latour’s ontology with those formulated by postcolonialist and feminist

science studies scholars. The common world's exteriority is thus the central analytical object of my intervention into Latour's program. Externalizing actors from the common world constitutes them as subordinate and deprives them of representation and material resources. This externalization reduplicates the marginalization requisite to the effective operation of existing political and scientific institutions, as identified by feminist and postcolonialist scholars (Chakrabarty, 2000; Harding, 2008; Spivak, 1988).

Though Latour does not seem to envision externalization from the collective in terms congruent with the arguments of feminists and postcolonialists, he nevertheless adopts a vocabulary that overlaps with some of their critiques. Specifically, he states that actors externalized from the common world will 'put the collective in danger', coming back 'to haunt' it (Latour, 2004a: 124–5). In other words, Latour seems to attribute a negative reality to the actors not enrolled in the composition of a common world. The entities externalized from the collective become an ontological successor to nature. The external actors are necessary to the common world, but remain 'enemies' (2004a: 207) or 'aliens' (2004a: 209) that have not yet made successful bids to become co-participants in the collective. In a rather modernist vein (see also Castree, 2006; Elam, 1999; Harding, 2008), Latour seems to envision 'us' – humans and nonhumans working peacefully together – as actors already participating in the collective, capable of looking outside to see the range of humans and nonhumans that we have excluded, those spectral 'appellants' returning to the gates of our Republic (2004a: 126–7).

Latour (2004a: 125, 144, 160, 186, 193) repeatedly invokes the notion of 'haunting' to designate the subsequent actions of those externalized from the collective. What Latour means by this ghostly term can be illustrated by considering his example of a modernist innovation *par excellence*, the invention and stabilization of asbestos as a matter of fact, 'at once inert, effective, and profitable' (2004a: 23). In this case, asbestos, an actor originally externalized on the basis of its presumed lack of effects on those in its spatial proximity, actually obscured an imbroglio of health risks immanent in its articulation with humans. While scientists and politicians considered it a stably known matter of fact, asbestos returned to haunt the collective with its unanticipated qualities. Rather than following the moderns in mistakenly relegating such objects to the 'dumping ground' of an inert exteriority, Latour (2004a: 125) redefines the collective's outside, demanding that we consider those actors explicitly externalized by the procedures of the collective as 'the small transcendence of external realities' (2004a: 196) participating in a 'feedback loop' (2004a: 125, 200–9) that perpetually reintroduces them to the collective.

My position that Latour's metaphysics is ultimately commensurable with Chakrabarty's subaltern historiography finds a premise in the existence of this inexplicitly formulated negative ontology in *Politics of Nature*. While Latour conceptualizes a permeable boundary between the inside and outside of the collective, those externalized nevertheless have a spectral

quality, lacking the relational properties acquired by enrolled participants. The ambition of cosmopolitics is not simply to enroll all existing actors into the collective, but to enroll and harmoniously integrate as many actors as possible while guaranteeing those excluded a right to appeal (Latour, 2004a: 199). In effect, Latour reduces entities external to the common world to empty bearers of this single right.

Thus, I contend that Latour formulates but does not explicitly thematize the external or negative component of his ontology and that this conceptualization is insufficient in its failure to attend to the epistemic violence of representation. This reading has significant implications for those within postcolonial science studies who agree with anthropologist Cori Hayden's (2005: 188) position on the inverted epistemological stances on representation held by subaltern studies scholars and Latour (whose position is sometimes termed actor-network theory, or ANT):

We might say . . . that actor-network theory shades towards the positivities if not the positivist dimensions of knowledge production as an act of representation, while much postcolonial studies in South Asia and Latin America (specifically, the work of subaltern studies scholars) asks us to attend to its negativities – its violences and elisions.

While Latour's program certainly foregrounds the positivities of representation, his political ontology in *Politics of Nature* also contains a germinal formulation of negativities, though their potential violences remain problematically unspecified.<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, thus, I agree with claims that Latour's (1993: 5–6) attenuated treatment of Jacques Derrida's program is too dismissive (e.g. Mitchell, 2002: 309). I read feminist science studies scholar Karen Barad's (1998: 104) valorization of critical techniques as a necessary corrective, and one usefully emphasizing that no straightforward opposition exists between critique and construction:

the political potential of deconstructive analysis lies not in the simple recognition of the inevitability of exclusions, but in insisting upon accountability for the particular exclusions that are enacted and in taking up responsibility to perpetually contest and rework the boundaries.

The space external to Latour's common world certainly bears resemblance to the terrain that Derrida (1994: 10, 51) designates with the (unfortunately ridiculous) term 'hauntology', ghosts and all. Hayden is correct that the ostensible difference between the onto-epistemologies of Latour and those who adopt more Derridean positions within subaltern studies (e.g. Chakrabarty, 2000; Moreiras, 2001; Spivak, 1988) turns on whether they lend primacy to the positive or negative ontological processes of representation and subject-formation. I argue that an ontological basis for such cross-readings at the heart of research in postcolonialist and feminist

science studies already exists in the interplay between the positive and the negative in Latour's metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> Yet, an asymmetry remains. The Latourian program could become more explicitly accountable for the exclusionary work entailed in composing common worlds.

This is the basis for my claim that Latour's program is (perhaps unexpectedly) compatible with Chakrabarty's notion of 'subaltern pasts', and that the latter concept serves as one tool (among many) to help render the democratic project of cosmopolitics more broadly comprehensible. Before I further elaborate this point, it is crucial to position it as a response to some of the already existing postcolonialist and feminist critiques of Latour's program, to which I turn in the following section.

### **Reconciling Cosmopolitics and Oppositional Politics**

Latour's ontology seems to have little in common with contemporary narratives of radical political action, some of which are based in the 'critical sociology' (including both structuralist and Marxist approaches) that he most explicitly works to overturn in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Latour, 2005). Indeed, Latour indicates that his ontology of the social cannot be reconciled with current social scientific concepts of political action:

If it has been difficult to pinpoint exactly where ANT's political project resides – and thus where it errs and should be redressed – it's because the definition of what it is for a social science to have political relevance has also to be modified. (2005: 253)

[T]he opposition between a detached, disinterested, objective science and an engaged, militant, passionate action becomes meaningless as soon as one considers the formidable *collecting* power of any scientific discipline – and it makes no difference if it's 'natural' or 'social'. (2005: 253, emphasis in original)

Such statements convey Latour's position that the current yardsticks for measuring the political significance of social scientific metaphysics and methodologies plainly do not apply to his approach. Only a complete overhaul and unification of politics and science could overcome the 'great divide' of the old constitution, the anti-democratic separation of institutions that represent nature and society (Latour, 1993, 2004a).

Latour's program is far from apolitical. His apparent refusal to accept the positions advocated under the rubrics of 'identity politics', 'alliance politics', or 'new social movements' (Harding, 2008) does not derive from a desire to detach his research from its political implications. To the contrary, Latour's philosophical vision of the reunification of the sciences and politics is too radical to smoothly 'associate' with oppositional politics. The quasi-utopian, sometimes allegorical qualities of his philosophical writing effectively

seem to render his constructive program incommensurable with more common political positions.

The radical originality of Latour's vision for how we might together construct a common world thus renders the actualization of his philosophical program all the more difficult. As readily as academic outsiders to science studies might assume that Latour's work 'deconstructs' science, they might also assume that his work would be sympathetic to critical sociologists and others involved in anti-racism, gender equality, environmentalism, gay rights, and labor struggles. Instead, he has constructed scientists as his allies – seemingly in reaction to 'science wars' rhetoric (Latour, 1999a) – and he has constructed these social movements as part of the problem that his politico-scientific program aims to overcome (Latour, 2005). Yet, as Donna Haraway (1997), Sandra Harding (2008), and other contributors to feminist and postcolonialist science studies have pointed out, Latour's critique does not address how 'oppositional' critical theorists and activists understand the forms of violence and oppression that they expose and oppose as contingent material and semiotic processes through which categories of social experience are dynamically performed, often enacting bodily and epistemic violence.

This critique seems almost as poignant today as it did when Haraway initially formulated it in the mid-1990s. Indeed, in a recent book Harding (2008) interchangeably describes Latour as a 'mainstream' science studies scholar and a practitioner of 'Northern science studies' (as in the 'Global North'). In Harding's (2008) view, Latour's (1993, 2004a) position shares the status of Northern science studies with the prominent programs of Ulrich Beck (1992 [1986], 1997, 1999) and the team of Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott, and Michael Gibbons (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny et al., 2001).<sup>8</sup> While Harding (2008: 24–6) presents these three projects as the products of somewhat different intellectual legacies, she emphasizes how they have developed common arguments concerning modernity and science as objects of analysis. All three criticize totalizing narratives of modernity, yet none resorts to the fragmenting techniques of postmodernism. Instead, they seek to craft alternative modes of contemporary sociality and governance. They all raise concerns with the current separation of powers between science and politics, making claims that scientific arguments are not merely technical and actually have inbuilt social and political dimensions. Finally, none of these authors has given up on science as a potentially positive, politically accountable set of projects for transforming the contemporary world in progressive ways. Latour has peers in his ambitious project of crafting an alternative to both modernist and nonmodernist distinctions between science and politics (Harding, 2008).

Harding (2008: 26–7) additionally claims that they all share blindness to the problematics of gender and colonialism. What unifies the projects of these scholars as 'Northern', in Harding's description, is their failure to attend to the – now well-established – feminist critiques of the sciences as a set of exclusionary and constitutively sexing and gendering practices

(e.g. Barad, 1999, 2007; Haraway, 1988, 1997; Harding, 1986, 2008; Keller and Longino, 1996; Schiebinger, 1993), as well as postcolonial critiques that illustrate the sciences' complicities with often violent extensions of European governance and culture (e.g. Anderson, 2002; Anderson and Adams, 2008; Harding, 1993, 1998, 2008; Hayden, 2005; Lowe, 2004; Prakash, 1999). Harding (2008: 26) summarizes her critique of Latour's work in these terms:

Latour's accounts are at least perched on the near side of the border between Western and postcolonial histories, ethnographies, and philosophies of science, without fully appreciating the content or power of the postcolonial criticisms of the West, its imperial sciences, and its modernities, let alone what other cultures can offer Western sciences. With respect to gender, he very occasionally does mention one or two feminist science theorists; Donna Haraway gets perhaps three or four mentions in the two books to be discussed here [Latour, 1993, 2004a]. Valuable as her work is, such a tiny citation record is not sufficient to count as engagement with feminist science studies. His work is uninformed by Haraway's arguments or those of any other feminist science theorist. He specifically discounts the value of what he refers to as 'identity politics', including many of the new social movements which have produced feminist and postcolonial science studies.

Harding (2008) places Latour's conceptualization of identity-based political groups at the root of his failure to engage feminist and postcolonialist critiques of science. According to Harding, Latour does not present the new social movements (including feminist and anti-racist collectives) as groups working 'for themselves', self-aware of their contingency and emergent qualities. Instead, contrary to the general inclination of his metaphysics, Latour misrepresents their practices as grounded in unselfconscious concepts of essential identities. In other words, Harding has reiterated Haraway's (1997: 35) objection to Latour's apparent assumption that the social movements inspired by oppositional critical theories inevitably invoke 'preformed categories of the social' as their political grounds. Importantly, Harding appears not to see any significant shift in Latour's thought in the decade separating the 1993 publication of *We Have Never Been Modern* and the 2004 publication of *Politics of Nature*. Indeed, such a position seems most explicitly articulated in his dismissal of critical sociology in *Reassembling the Social* (2005).

It is clear that Latour's shifting philosophical program does not fully accommodate critiques of science based in the systematic or structural experiences of marginalized subjects. In effect, he externalizes their positions as a priori anti-democratic. Latour's apparent reluctance to apply what he calls 'due process' (2004a) in taking social movements into account seems to issue from a sense that they fundamentally differ from the sciences (or the institutions of cosmopolitics), treated in turn as highly dynamic systems, characterized by a proliferation of innovations, objects, and inscriptions. Science-in-action is protean, dynamic, and messy. Whether he is

following them around the Salk Institute (Latour and Woolgar, 1986 [1979]) or the Amazon rainforest (Latour, 1999a), Latour figures scientists as creative progenitors deeply engaged in specific material systems. Thus, Latour seems to resist what he sees as an inclination among radical, critical scholars to ascribe ostensibly static categories to large collectives of subjects. Radical political movements are to remain externalized appellants indefinitely.

That scientific knowledge practices emerge in Latour's literary inscriptions as a creative set of translational engagements with nonhumans acting in their own form- and matter-specific ways does not necessarily entail that all participants in cosmopolitics possess comparable degrees of existential freedom. Yet, in expanding the social beyond the human, and effectively revealing the errors of the social constructivism that characterized earlier approaches to the sociology of scientific knowledge (Callon and Latour, 1992; Latour, 1999b), Latour has adopted a radical relationism that refuses the stability of any actor's experience, apparently including experiences of structural violence and societal marginalization. As metaphysician Graham Harman (2009) points out in his compelling reading of Latour as a philosopher, one of ANT's basic metaphysical premises holds that all actors fundamentally lack essences and achieve qualities through their constantly shifting material, relational contiguities, or 'associations'. In the absence of a more politicized account of externalization, such a premise fails to accommodate the possibility of producing inscriptions that effectively, if partially, translate the *communal experiences* of marginalized actors. It is my position that we can save the commensurability of Latour's program with oppositional approaches by reading (or misreading?) his concept of externalization (Latour, 2004a) as the ontological basis of subalternity, or the collective position of marginality to representational institutions.

Before elaborating this critique of Latour's metaphysics, it is useful to further substantiate the claim that he elides oppositional politics through a direct analysis of his writing. I maintain that Latour, for example, clearly indulges this elision in his offhanded rejection of the 'standpoint' trope in *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (1999a; see also Latour, 2005: 145–6). Latour invokes the term 'standpoint', prominently employed by feminist theorists including feminist science studies scholars (see Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 2004), in an argument against what has more recently been termed 'correlationism' (Meillassoux, 2008; see also Harman, 2009). Following philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2008), correlationism is a phenomenological insistence on the primacy of the perceptual human–world interface. Harman (2009) holds that correlationism dodges the metaphysical problem of whether objects exist independently of human perception. Latour (1999a: 9, 66) rejects the term 'standpoint' in his similar position, insisting that phenomenological analyses fail to apprehend that the practice definitive of scientists' experiences is the shift from one positionality to another: "To say that a scientist 'occupies a standpoint' is never very useful, since she will immediately move to another through the

application of an instrument. Scientists never *stand* in their standpoint' (1999a: 66). While he is not directly addressing feminist standpoint theory, the polemical final sentence in this quoted passage seems to suggest that feminist critiques of the sciences that mobilize the 'standpoint' trope remain stuck in a phenomenological idiom that cannot accommodate scientists' dynamic relations with the world's multiplicity of flourishing nonhuman actors.

Standpoint theory, however, should not be reduced to the phenomenological insistence that all points of view issue from subjects' specific worldly experiences. It does not merely hold that perceptions of reality are idiosyncratic reflections of subjects' positionalities. Rather, it maintains an epistemological and ethical stance that 'good' science should respond to and address problems articulated by subjects in subordinated social positions (Harding, 2004, 2008).<sup>9</sup> In turn, it becomes an ethical imperative for critics – or, to use Latour's (1999a) terminology, 'students' – of science to speak 'from below' or 'from the margins.' Thus, to be good cosmopolitical citizens and oppositional science studies scholars we must innovate a 'power' additional to those of 'taking into account', 'arranging in rank order', and 'following up' (Latour, 2004a). We must continuously attempt to engage with those externalized from the common world while acknowledging the possibility that they may not continuously return to the gates of the citadel. Without relegating the externalized 'small transcendences' (Latour, 2004a: 196) to a space of absolute alterity, we must reserve the possibility that they remain at least partially unassimilable to the given procedures of representation.

In other words, I think that the democratization of science entails more than a reunification of the 'two houses', science and politics. Projects for democratization should consider the problematic ways in which scientific knowledges, technological innovations, and political decisions render consequences that further entrench social and economic inequalities. Democratization requires something beyond breaking down the walls of Plato's Cave to allow more than a handful of experts to relay between the former inside and the outside, society and nature (Latour, 2004a). It entails innovating practices of situated representation that speak to, with, and of scientists from the standpoints of externalized, marginalized actors (human and nonhuman). Standpoint epistemology thus provides a necessary additional sense of democracy as the struggle to recognize and combat the forms of subordination enacted by our political and scientific institutions.

The feminist and postcolonialist projects have maintained that the externality of subjects to the institutions of representation – their status as necessary exceptions to the system – can be read as a critique of the system itself (Harding, 2008; Spivak, 1988). This is where Latour errs through omission, and seemingly renders his cosmopolitics incompatible with oppositional social movements. He assumes that those externalized from the common world, those specters that take the place of nature, share

an intrinsic proclivity to appeal their cases. I counter that some actors occupying the haunts of the common world necessarily remain partially unassimilable to its procedures of representation. They are not all committed appellants, and some are not appellants at all (as I discuss in the following section). Therefore, the users of cosmopolitics are not excused from explicitly conceptualizing the program's potential complicity with the sociomaterial marginalization of the subaltern, despite this metaphysics' primary emphasis on the positive construction of a common world.

For feminist, postcolonialist science studies scholars such as myself, and I think for Latour as well, these marginalized outsiders are not just rhetorical placeholders in a politico-scientific allegory. They are self-immolating Hindu widows (Spivak, 1988), endangered snails cared for in Michael Hadfield's laboratory at the University of Hawaii (Haraway, 2008: 91–2), Santals who cite a god as the instigator of rebellion (Chakrabarty, 2000: 102–6), indigenous subjects cut from the networks of pharmaceutical production that they enable (Hayden, 2005), and mosquitoes that go unacknowledged in histories of a malaria epidemic (Mitchell, 2002: ch. 1), among countless others.<sup>10</sup>

In foregrounding the subordination of these actors, I ask: how might we place Latour's program into fruitful coexistence with oppositional politics that forward critiques of inequality? What happens once we begin to emphasize how Latour's collective emerges as a political system depending on constitutive exclusions? What happens if not every externalized actor eternally returns to the gates of the cosmopolitical citadel? How might the unassimilable differences of some entities reveal the limits of Latour's current formulation of cosmopolitics' representational apparatus? Good science and good politics should both entail commitments to living together more peacefully, as the cosmopolitical program maintains. But such a successor project to the science/politics and nature/society distinctions will only achieve a greater degree of politico-scientific utility if it can address these questions, and acknowledge its limits and the equally 'modernist' forms of material and epistemic violence that they enact.

We may no longer need expert philosophers or scientists to relay back and forth between the dark, noisy hollows of Plato's Cave and the sunlit external world, but we still need social activists, scientists, and politicians to relay between the cosmopolitical citadel and the worlds of normatively marginalized actors, learning to listen to the oppressed.

### **Subaltern Pasts and Latourian Nonhumanism**

Distinguishing Chakrabarty's and Latour's patterns of thought is a concern for the enduring legacy of empire and the imbalances of human history. To take both authors seriously poses a riddle: we may never have been modern, or at least not in some of the ways we like to think. But some of us have certainly been more colonized than others, marked by race,

language and other artifacts of historical difference. What are we to make of these combined insights? (Redfield, 2002: 795)

Subaltern studies scholars have long held that history reads differently when written from the margins (e.g. Chakrabarty, 2000, 2002; Guha, 1988 [1982], 1989, 2002; Prakash, 1995; Spivak, 1999). Of profound interest to a Latourian methodology, one way in which history reads differently entails the attribution of agency to nonhumans in subaltern historical narratives. Subalternist historiographers have sometimes treated nonhumans as relatively passive material symbols mobilized by active humans, as in Ranajit Guha's (1983) discussions of clothing, residences, and foods as markers of group identity in contexts of Indian peasant insurgency. Yet, they have also acknowledged certain categories of nonhumans as active social participants. Such a position is most clearly thematized and theorized in Chakrabarty's (2000) *Provincializing Europe*, an extended critique of historicism and the political as the major organizing themes of modernity. *Provincializing Europe* can be read as a capstone of the subaltern studies group's methodology for attributing historical agency to conventionally marginalized subjects, and has much to offer the Latourian program. Namely, while Chakrabarty shares a desire to redefine historicism and the political with Latour, he nevertheless defends the intractable necessity of 'Western' social scientific thought.<sup>11</sup>

Within this framework, Chakrabarty's argument proceeds through two parts: 'Historicism and the Narration of Modernity' and 'Histories of Belonging'. 'Historicism and the Narration of Modernity' emerges as a sustained conversation with Marx on the topic of historicism, questioning how the histories of the Indian subaltern supplement and define the limits of Western history. Combating the tendency to envisage the emergence of the modern citizen and state in India as indicative of the 'end of history', Chakrabarty articulates a fundamental reformulation of history and the historical subject: "History" is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate, on behalf of the modern (my hyperreal Europe), these other collocations of memory' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 37). Likewise, in 'Histories of Belonging', Chakrabarty turns to the ambivalent role of the Bengali literati in enabling, and simultaneously deferring, types of modern subjectivity. While Bengali authors incorporated some of the principal themes and genres of modern literature, such as the autonomous rights-bearing individual and the realist novel, they simultaneously supplemented these adoptions with specific Bengali cultural forms, such as extended kinship and the non-individualist practice of *darshan*, a form of ritual seeing and imagining.

In attending to the translation between 'European' and 'non-European' cultural and epistemic practices, Chakrabarty (2000) continuously pays heed to how our ontological categories delimit which actors are represented as consequential in social scientific narratives. Thus, like Latour, he seeks to outline failures of the social scientific ethos that has emerged out of

modern philosophical thought and he rejects ‘the social’ as a preexisting matrix or analytical resource:

We need to move away from two of the ontological assumptions entailed in secular conceptions of the political and the social. The first is that the human exists in a frame of a single and secular historical time that envelops other kinds of time. I argue that the task of conceptualizing practices of social and political modernity in South Asia often requires us to make the opposite assumption: that historical time is not integral, that it is out of joint with itself. The second assumption running through modern European political thought and the social sciences is that the human is ontologically singular, that gods and spirits are in the end ‘social facts’, that the social somehow exists prior to them. I try, on the other hand, to think without the assumption of even a logical priority of the social. One empirically knows of no society in which humans have existed without gods and spirits accompanying them. (Chakrabarty, 2000: 15–16).

Not unlike Latour, Chakrabarty links the marginalization of divergent philosophies of time and history with the Durkheimian theme of the priority of the social. In other words, escaping the tyranny of an autopoietic ‘European’ historical philosophy that centers the great deeds of rational and morally irreproachable actors leads us to challenge the corresponding ontology that assumes the a priori reality of something called ‘the social’. From this point of view, social scientists cannot simply cast the gods and spirits that subaltern subjects deem participants in historical processes as superstructural beliefs that function only as ‘social facts’ or, in more recent parlance, ‘social constructions’. Gods and spirits effect social *practices*, not just social *beliefs*; thus they have material presence, render worldly consequences, and should be considered legitimate actors in historical (and social scientific) narratives, though existing academic conventions may prevent historians from sufficiently acknowledging such nonhumans. On this fundamental ontological point, Latour and Chakrabarty converge.

Yet, they take their respective nonhumanisms in different directions. Chakrabarty (2000: ch. 4) vividly explicates his position in response to Guha’s (1988) analysis of the supernatural in narratives of an 1855 rebellion against nonlocal Indians and British enacted by the Santal, a tribal group in Bengal and Bihar. As Chakrabarty points out, Guha’s essay grapples with how to treat the Santal leaders’ account of the rebellion, in which they claim their actions to have been motivated by the Santal god Thakur. Chakrabarty makes clear that this invocation of Thakur entailed a deferral of agency on the part of the subaltern subjects. They would not consider themselves the subjects of their own history. Such a perspective comes into tension with Guha’s subalternist historiography, in which he desires to attribute historical agency to the consciousness of subaltern subjects who, in turn, identify their actions as determined by a nonhuman god.

In Chakrabarty’s reading, Guha fails in listening to the rebel voice and accepting that Thakur was responsible for the rebellion. While Guha is

sympathetic to the account, he ultimately ‘anthropologizes’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: 105) the narrative as Santal belief rather than historical cause.<sup>12</sup> For Chakrabarty, such distancing academic narrative practice fails to apprehend ‘subaltern pasts’, or narratives which ‘cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian’s own position’ (2000: 105). In this case, the identification of religious beings as historical actors comes into a seemingly irresolvable contradiction with the historian’s responsibility, narrating the past within the ostensibly secular public sphere. Subaltern pasts, thus, cannot be assimilated to liberal and Marxist historiographical forms, which – as Latour (e.g. 2009) would undoubtedly agree – *reduce* the consequential actions of nonhuman gods to social beliefs.

Responding to this inadequacy in the identification of consequential historical actors, Chakrabarty emphasizes how the plural existing pasts cannot be assimilated to a single overarching narrative. Presenting his project as an expression of ‘minority history’, he further insists that we must think outside of a reductive opposition between historical fact and falsehood, with the objective of opening up democracy to multiple expressions of being and historicity:

The task of producing ‘minority’ histories has, under the pressure precisely of a deepening demand for democracy, become a double task. I may put it thus: ‘good’ minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy, but talk about the ‘limits of history’, on the other hand, is about struggling, or even groping, for nonstatist forms of democracy that we cannot not [sic] yet either understand or envisage completely. This is so because in the mode of being attentive to the ‘minority’ of subaltern pasts, we stay with heterogeneities without seeking to reduce them to any overarching principle that speaks for an already given whole. There is no third voice that can assimilate the two different voices of Guha and the Santal leader; we have to stay with both, and with the gap between them that signals an irreducible plurality in our own experiences of historicity. (Chakrabarty, 2000: 107–8)

The voices of Guha and the Santal leader may address each other in situated, partial ways but cannot be assimilated to a unifying ‘third voice’. This is precisely the kind of problem that Harding (2008) positions as wholly outside the scope of Latour’s program. I diverge from Harding’s position in proposing that Latour’s (2004a) expansion of representative democracy beyond the purified, modernist human subject is already equipped with a conceptualization of externality that implies the limits of cosmopolitics’ democratic practice. The necessary tool that my reading of Chakrabarty (2000) offers to Latour’s program is a practice of explicitly acknowledging these limits and permitting the haunts of the common world an independent existence that exceeds their status as appellants.

Unlike Latour, Chakrabarty presents his project as congruent with the politics of radical social movements. Indeed, acknowledging Santal religious practice as a model for our own ways of being – acknowledging the

epistemological legitimacy of Santal narratives – emerges in Chakrabarty's account as a prerequisite for understanding the Santal as an object of historical study. Thus, subaltern pasts are necessary supplements that define the boundaries of the historian's narratives. That subaltern pasts are unassimilable to institutionalized historical narratives should not imply an inability on the part of spokespersons such as historians and anthropologists to relay into the common world's exteriority in order to enact 'partial connections' (Haraway, 1985; Strathern, 1991) with those constitutively marginalized by the politico-scientific system. Indeed, this is a central task for feminist and postcolonialist science studies scholars. If we wish cosmopolitics to achieve broader comprehensible political relevance today, it is not sufficient merely to ascribe a certain ontological indeterminacy to the positions of those enrolled in the common world, as Latour (2004a: 211) does: 'Neither ecumenism nor catholicity nor social democracy nor political economy nor *Naturpolitik* can define for the others and in their place the position that is appropriate for them.' We must extend this guarantee to actors in the exteriority, the margins, while recognizing that they may not hear our proposal or care.

My vision of cosmopolitics would accommodate the possibility that not all actors need to be – or can be – fully represented by any proposed politico-scientific institution. If cosmopolitics is to be saved, we must construct its externality as inhabited by more than actors banging on the doors of the citadel, appealing for the existing forms of representation. Living together more peacefully entails living with difference, with the impossibility of completely understanding the other and the ethical imperatives for response and respect that this alterity demands. Like Latour, Chakrabarty wishes to open up the social sciences to nonhuman actors. This is a crucial ontological, ethical, epistemological, and political task. Reading Latour's stance against Chakrabarty's program for reforming historiography introduces a productive skepticism towards the possibility that any proposed politico-scientific institution could represent subaltern pasts in sincere and nonviolent ways. This position thus emerges as an imperative to acknowledge and share the suffering of our cosmic companions (Haraway, 2008), rather than as a total prohibition on positive representation.

As I have suggested throughout this essay, Latour's cosmopolitical program offers an ambitious, if rudimentary and incomplete, framework for imagining a more democratic commons. It would certainly be a mistake to put Latour's cosmopolitics out to pasture. Indeed, Latour has much to offer in return to the programs of postcolonialists such as Chakrabarty. While the two authors share skepticism towards the utility or priority of the social as an explanatory resource, Chakrabarty does not fully address how his vision for 'expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy' (2000: 107) impacts nonhumans beyond gods and spirits. Religious nonhumans are not the only matters of concern in rendering historical knowledge practices more thoroughly cosmopolitical. Cosmopolitics is certainly a postsecular project; gods and spirits have their places. But, in

the end, Latour's project may be more radically open to the given multiplicity of nonhumans. While I maintain that Latour has not adequately politicized the limits of cosmopolitical representation, Chakrabarty and other postcolonialists producing minority histories might also reinvigorate the category of the 'subaltern' within a nonhumanist frame inclusive of the unrepresentable worldly actors conventionally objectified by the natural sciences. Like (or as) 'good' science, 'good' minority history might benefit through methods that resist any a priori designation of which actors matter.

Ultimately, bringing Latour's (2004a) argument into dialogue with Chakrabarty's (2000) nonhumanist ontology helps to reveal how Latourian cosmopolitics could benefit by a more explicitly politicized concept of externalization. Such a concept would render cosmopolitics more commensurable with 'critical' approaches that emphasize the constitutive violence entailed in the limits of representation. At the same time, this juxtaposition evinces the strength of Latour's formulation of the common world itself, a strength that issues from the radical openness of its relational ontology.

### Conclusions

Every scientific and political problem draws together a heterogeneous mélange of humans and nonhumans. In *Politics of Nature*, Latour (2004a) assembles some strong empirical, philosophical, and political tools to address these problems today. Recognizing the intrinsic inadequacy of our given 'separation of powers' is a primary step for conceptualizing such problems more effectively. It is absolutely fundamental for social theorists to innovate forms of representation, material connection, and care that help enact more peaceful worlds, worlds characterized by greater attention to the consequences effected by our actions. However, the functionality of this assemblage of tools wavers when users begin to imagine it as an absolute substitute for the preceding inventory. Latour exaggerates the degree to which his politico-scientific project nullifies the existing standpoints of feminist and postcolonialist authors as well as activists who represent subordinated collectives. He does not adequately address how existing social collectives apprehend their identities as strategically deployed, contingent, and dynamic monikers. Thus, his disinclination to consider existing cosmopolitics compatible with radical politics and social movements relegates such positions to a perpetual exteriority.

Haraway (2008: 42), in contrast, considers cosmopolitics a question of 'learning to be "polite" in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing? Being polite, in this sense, supersedes both liberal tolerance and the mimetic extension of humanist representations and political institutions to ostensibly nonhuman actors. Being polite or – for that matter – political in the common world will require an amendment to the new constitution's procedures. This amendment is an imperative to continuously acknowledge and redress how our worldly being, our being-together-peacefully, requires the discomforting,

asymmetrical existence of non-beings, the new subaltern. While Latour conceptualizes the rudiments of this asymmetry and the existence of the common world's non-beings, he does not go as far as Chakrabarty and his feminist peers in crafting tools to partially connect with those outsiders. Indeed, he seems to consider them haunting enemies instead of companions with whom we might venture to share suffering at constant risk of failure.

Here, I have aimed to transform Latour's notion of exteriority into a central analytical resource for reconciling his metaphysics with the political stances of postcolonialist and feminist science studies scholars. Thus, the specific value of this reconciliation issues from its basis in Latour's already existing conceptualization of the limits of the common world, diverging from treatments of Latour's program as a positive ontology that does not provide any tools to understand representational elisions. I have further argued that while these limits differ ontologically from those of the modernist constitution that segregated society from nature, they institute an equally non-democratic distinction between those actors that peacefully co-inhabit a common world and those actors that appear to haunt and endanger this collective. Subalternist positions such as Chakrabarty's that thematize the violence intrinsic to representation offer important supplementary tools to refract Latour's metaphysics and circumvent cosmopolitics' reincarnation of the modernist divide re-dressed in nonhumanist clothes.

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### *Notes*

1. Though I follow Latour in using the human–nonhuman distinction in this manner, it is important to acknowledge up front that the multitude of actors deemed 'nonhuman' do not fit comfortably in any existing institutional or disciplinary structure. Indeed, material or 'natural' nonhumans have been the analytical objects of the sciences, while gods, spirits and human artifacts have traditionally fallen within the purview of the social sciences and humanities.
2. For a series of analyses of such contemporary matters of concern, see Latour and Peter Weibel's (2005) edited volume *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*.
3. Latour adopts the sense of cosmopolitics as the progressive composition of a common world from philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers (1996–7). In its emphasis of the ongoing, processual dynamic of composing a cosmos, a universal totality that is always aspired to and never achieved, her formulation of this concept differs notably from other uses of the term (e.g. Kant, 1970 [1795]; see Stengers, 2005).
4. At least in his more allegorical formulations, Latour does not seem to address whether all participants in the collective have equal power in determining which

actors should be taken into account and how they should be ranked into order. The existence of the hierarchy certainly implies an uneven distribution of power, but the degree to which different actors can control the governing procedures remains somewhat indeterminate. While the common world constantly increases in complexity and intricacy as it enrolls and orders greater numbers of actors, Latour clearly requires that its actors participate in coordinated, collective procedures.

5. I maintain that the degree to which Latour's project is normative or descriptive remains an open question, despite his attempt to address this issue in the conclusion of *Politics of Nature* (Latour, 2004a: 224–5). Latour considers the normative/descriptive distinction inapplicable because it depends on the fact/value distinction that his metaphysics fundamentally opposes. I agree that description is never 'mere' and necessarily entails normative practices. Yet I think that Latour is overly dismissive of a useful question concerning his frequent alternation between describing his experimental metaphysics as an already existing process, which he occasionally substantiates with empirical examples, and describing it in the future tense as a 'successor' to the Allegory of the Cave and its modernist actualizations (e.g. Latour, 2004a: 49–57), even if it ultimately '*disinvents* modernism' (Latour, 2004a: 193, emphasis in original). If experimental metaphysics itself is not a successor project, then inspiring the pervasive recognition that our cosmos is already ordered in the manner that he claims remains – reading charitably – somewhat utopian.

6. While he does not foreground the violences entailed in representation, actor-network theorist John Law (1999) has emphasized how the notion of translation central to the Latourian program ultimately entails the epistemological impossibility of one actor simply representing another through proxy, or direct metaphorical substitution. As Law (1999: 1) says, 'to translate is to betray'. If there is no translation without deformation, there is no cosmopolitics without cacospolitics. (Though, I would prefer to do without this last word, an extension of Latour's [2004a: 240] quip that 'cacosmos' could serve as the antonym of 'cosmos'.) That we have never been democratic is a perpetual problem that cannot be resolved absolutely.

7. Derrida provides one point of entry into conceptualizing the limits of representation, and is relevant here in his influence on subaltern studies. But there are also emerging accounts of the limits of representation within science and technology studies. For example, Mark B. Brown (2009) identifies how Latour follows in the tradition of liberal theorists in constructing a juridical model that overemphasizes the centrality of electoral politics or choosing representatives to the process of governance. While highly sympathetic to Latour's project, Brown (2009) points out how Latour fails to consider the inability of elected representatives to adequately speak for constituencies, who may have contradictory interests, oppose their representatives, or lack enfranchisement in the electoral system. Thus, as Brown (2009: 179) puts it, 'representatives inevitably "betray" some constituents even as they remain "faithful" to others'.

8. While Harding effectively teases out their shared assumptions and objectives, Latour and Beck have also detailed how their respective projects of 'cosmopolitics' and 'cosmopolitan realism' diverge (Beck, 2004, 2005; Latour, 2004b).

9. Of course, the treatment of positionality by some feminist epistemologists remains less clearly commensurable with a modified Latourian metaphysics.

Namely, the assertion that actors external to structures of power have privileged insight, or a shared ‘epistemic advantage’, into how those structures function (Narayan, 2004; Rolin, 2009; Wylie, 2004) remains a problem to be addressed in this defense of standpoint epistemologies. Is the claim that the subaltern are (at least partially) ontologically constituted through marginalization from structures of representation fully incommensurable with the assertion that externalized actors wield privileged insight into the operation of politics and science?

10. Despite my encompassing use of the term ‘subaltern’, accounts of these collectives’ experiences of externality to political and scientific representational institutions have no simplifying recourse to analogy (Schueller, 2005). In other words, there is no unifying model of marginalization that can serve as a generalizable foundation for comparing the violence of disparate identitarian and ontological positions.

11. While Chakrabarty (2002: xx) dismisses Latour’s (1993) earlier parliamentary allegory somewhat hastily, he cites Latour’s (2004a) *Politics of Nature* more sympathetically in his recent discussion of history and climate change (Chakrabarty, 2009: 207, 211).

12. Here Chakrabarty also resembles Latour somewhat in invoking a straw man of modernist anthropology upholding firm fact/value and outsider/insider distinctions. Latour’s (2004a: 210–1) straw man is particularly sardonic: ‘anthropology can no longer allow itself to meet those who surround it by asking the traditional question of modernism: “Thanks to nature, I know in advance, without needing to hear what you have to say, who you are; but tell me anyway what representations you have made of the world and of yourselves – it would be so interesting to compare your visions to the equally factitious ones of your neighbors?”’ In adopting nonhumanist positions, both authors reject the utility of modernist anthropologists’ methodological distinction between subjects’ culturally specific, internal ‘emic’ beliefs and scientists’ generalizable, external ‘etic’ knowledge. See Clifford Geertz’s (1983) essay “From the Native’s Point of View”: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding’ for an earlier anthropological critique of this opposition.

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