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Quasi-Subjectivity and Ethics in Non-Modernity

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Quasi-subjectivity and Ethics in Non-modernity

by

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ABSTRACT

The inspiration behind this philosophical endeavor is an ethical one: interested in what it means to flourish as a human being – how to live well and authentically. Similar to medicine and how the ability to prescribe the appropriate treatment depends on first making a diagnosis, the focus of this work will be to understand the human condition and the ways in which subjectivity, one's sense of self, is constituted. Given the general dissatisfaction with the modern metaphysical picture of the world, which analyzes the world in terms of the mutually exclusive and completely separate categories of nature/objects and society/subjects, I proceed from an alternative conceptual perspective, that of non-modernity, offered by Bruno Latour. By focusing on the actual practice of the sciences Latour develops one of his central concepts: mediation. From this understanding of the practices of mediation the world is revealed as an ontological continuum of hybrids – mixtures of human and nonhuman elements – that ranges from quasi-object to quasi-subject. Rather than being separate, nature and society are intimately interwoven and co-constituted, forming a nature-culture collective that is connected and defined by the network of relations between existing hybrids. Given this philosophical landscape of mediation, hybrids and networks, the question that I seek to address is how does this effect what it means to be human? What does it mean to human living in a hybrid world? I answer this question by articulating and developing Latour's concept of quasi-subject. This will ultimately amount to saying that as humans, our sense of self and agency is co-constituted through our networks of relations with both humans and nonhumans. I conclude the paper by exploring some of the ethical implications that naturally emerge from such an understanding.

Chapter 1: Modernity

Before jumping into the details it is worthwhile to briefly survey the different parts of this paper and the way in which they fit together to present a coherent picture of what it means to be human living in non-modernity and the ethical implications such an understanding has. This paper focuses on the work of anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour and develops on his non-modern perspective of the world. From his study of the actual practices of so called moderns, Latour claims that we have really never been modern. In order to understand this claim, chapter one addresses Latour's depiction of the central features of modernity such as its dualistic foundation which holds that everything in the world can be sorted into one of two mutually exclusive and self-constituting categories: Nature or society. Ultimately, Latour contends that the actual practices of modernity not only involve the officially sanctified work of purification but also mediation. Such practices of mediation gives rise to hybrid entities that defy the modern constitution in that they bring together human and nonhuman elements, subject and object properties, in a unified phenomenon. The chapter concludes with the unraveling of modernity and how despite modern attempts to dismiss hybrids as mere intermediaries, the very success of modernity leads to its own downfall as this success is accompanied by an uncontrollable proliferation of recalcitrant hybrids that it unable sort. Chapter two then looks at Latour's non-modern response to the problems of modernity. Non-modernity can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the practices of purification which differentiate nature from culture with the practices of mediation from which hybrids arise. There are three main concepts on which non-modernity is founded: mediation, hybrids and nature-culture collectives. Rather than being composed of subjects of society and objects of Nature, the

non-modern world is an ontological spectrum of hybrids such that everything is said to be a hybrid. Around these practices and the resulting hybrids emerges a nature-culture collective. This other main concept of non-modernity conveys the way in which nature and culture are conceptually defined in relation to one another and causally linked.

Chapter three goes on to further articulate the non-modern perspective by considering the way in which Latour sorts the world according to the concepts of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects, which refer to the opposite ends of the continuum of hybrids. Unlike their modern counterparts, quasi-objects have an existential and historical character, lack clearly defined boundaries, and have productive capacities. In order to elucidate these dimensions we turn to Latour's experimental metaphysics and insights from actor-network theory. With the Latourian stage set, the question for chapter four becomes how does this understanding of non-modernity redefine human existence? What does it mean to be human in relation to quasi-objects? While Latour's concept of quasi-subject seems to be the answer to these questions there is an apparent lack in discussion about it. By connecting together disparate ideas throughout the works of Latour I attempt to sketch what it means to human qua quasi-subject. Ultimately, what this amounts to is that humans are relationally defined by others in a more expansive sense than previously acknowledged. The most basic and distinguishing features of human existence – from agency to identity to subjectivity – are not only constituted by our relationships with other humans but also quasi-objects and nonhumans. Given this shift in understanding of the human self, the final chapter seeks to take the first steps in charting out what a non-modern ethic would look like.

In order to understand Bruno Latour's provocative and seemingly very contentious assertion that we have never been modern we must first understand what modernity means. In doing so, the unsatisfactory nature of modernity will come to surface that prompts the need for something more which Latour is ultimately responding to. Such an understanding will also help introduce and accentuate Latour's non-modern understanding of the world. To begin with, modernity is based on a dualistic constitution¹ that holds the world can be organized into two entirely distinct and completely separate categories: Nature and society. Everything is reducible to these ontological domains as every being is either an object of Science or a subject of law and every phenomenon is the result of either natural processes or social relations. Modernity, then, essentially divides the world in two with an absolute cleavage that separates the assembly of nonhumans from the assembly of humans.

Latour traces the advent of modernity to the dispute between Boyle and Hobbes and the rise of the separate fields of science and politics which they each respectively led. The two fields are held to be about two completely different matters that have nothing to do with each other. Nor should they, as each sought to factor out and eliminate variables from the other field; e.g. how science seeks to systematically weed out human perspectives to achieve an objective account of nature. This split was representative of a much deeper metaphysical view that natural and social things, as well as nature and society as wholes, were two entirely different, closed spheres of existence operating with different principles on different things. As such, Latour depicts Boyle and Hobbes as the founding fathers of modernity, "...inventing our modern world, a world in which the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated

¹ Similar to the constitution of nation-states, the modern constitution represents its core founding principles.

from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 27).² Modernity’s metaphysical either-or lens produces a double vision of the world such that things are to be seen either entirely in terms of the domain of Nature or the domain of society, severing any direct relations between them. It is because of this, and not mere oversight, Latour contends that political philosophers have ignored Hobbes’s science while historians of science have ignored Boyle’s position on the politics of science. The same holds true for Modernity’s understanding of itself, which is explained only through social categories. Latour elucidates how “Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of ‘man’ or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit itself is modern, because it remains asymmetrical. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’ – things, or objects, or beast...” (13).

Nature and society, nonhumans and humans, become forever dissociated due to the dualistic constitution on which modernity is founded. This constitution holds these conceptual categories to be entirely distinct and completely separate as self-evident truths. They are completely separate in the sense that they are independent, autonomous worlds that are self-constituting with no impact on each other. On the one hand with Boyle, we get the first constitutional guarantee of modernity that “...it is not men who make Nature; Nature has always existed and has always already been there; we are only discovering its secrets” (30). With it comes the modern conception of Nature, with a capital N, as a singular, autonomous, and totalizing whole that refers to the preexisting, one true order of Nature. Nature operates via a fixed and stable set of unified and

² This dissociation is also seen in the works of some of the most prominent thinkers of modern philosophy; for instance Rene Descartes division between mind and body, and Immanuel Kant’s schism between nature and morality.

universal laws that remain the same regardless of what humans think of them. The laws of nature causally determine the movement of all natural beings through brute mechanism. On the other hand, with Hobbes' conception of the Leviathan we get the social category of the republic that is defined purely by humans via the social contract. As Latour puts it, "The Leviathan is made up only of citizens, calculations, agreements, or disputes. In short, it is made up of nothing but social relations" (28). In this way society is also self-constituting, being defined by only the respective like-minded members of its party and the relations between them; which is the second guarantee of modernity: "...human beings, and only human beings, are the ones who construct society and freely determine their own destiny" (30). Thus, together, the first and second guarantees effectively maintain the separation between state and Nature.

Next, the two categories are held to be entirely distinct in that they are mutually exclusive, referring to things with opposite characteristics. Along with Boyle, science, and Nature comes the intervention of a new actor, matters of fact – objects. According to Latour, a natural object, as a matter of fact, is recognizable by having "...*clear boundaries*, a well-defined essence, well-recognizable properties. It belonged without any possible question to the world of things, a world made up of persistent, stubborn, non-mental entities defined by the strict laws of causality, efficacy..." (*Politics of Nature* 22). Since the modern conception of Nature is ultimately a matter of necessity, in which phenomena are given to causal laws and the immediacy of the conditions of their natural environment, this gives rise to perception of its inhabitants as thoroughly passive. Not only does the modern object lack speech, will, preference, intention or bias as arbitrary shapeless matter, but as an inert body it always lacks the ability to act, to effect change; and

so it is something that is always acted on. In addition, due to the cleavage that separates the world of Nature and worlds of society, an object is only defined with respect to natural categories since the incommensurability of the two worlds prevents its effects on the social world from being registered and impacting its initial definition. Coupling this with immutability and necessity of the laws of nature, an object has a well-defined, atemporal, ahistorical essence. Furthermore, the essence of an object, its substance, is defined by the inherent properties that the object in itself possesses as a discrete entity. The discreteness, self-constituting essence, and fixity give objects clear boundaries.

Contrary to Nature, with eternal laws which determine the course of passive objects in advance, society is a contingent realm of existence. Its historical unfolding depends not only on the preceding labor and passion of humans but also on the current social movements at large as well the interests, thoughts, actions, and aspirations of its constituent individuals. Although there are still forces that exist between its members, social forces such as cultural values and beliefs, economics, social structure, bureaucracy, government are not conceived as absolutes that deterministically dictate the everyday life of individuals or human history, rather they are influences that shape, but do not control, and are themselves subject to change. Along with this looser and more open relation comes a shift in attention. When it came to understanding the domain of Nature the universal laws alone are of central importance as they govern how all the particular objects play out, with regards to society however the emphasis is also on the individual. While humans are also substantively conceived as discrete beings, they have opposite characteristics. To begin with humans are independent, autonomous, free, being forever irreducible to the constraints of nature. Consciousness allows for intentionality, choice,

reflexivity, and will which makes humans into subjects, granting them the ability to act on others, including nature, themselves, and society as a whole, and effect change. As such the human self is thought to be an independent and autonomous individual.³ Overall, this ability to change over time gives individual humans and society the quality of becoming while Nature is reduced to merely the quantities of being.⁴

Due to modernity's metaphysics, in which Nature and society are fundamentally separate spheres of existence from the start, the involvement and mixing together of things and humans was perceived as mere confusion on the part of ignorant, primitive, and unrefined humans. As such, modern progress is marked by the continual sorting of the world into its proper category. Through the reductionist method of purification the moderns gained an ever greater understanding of what truly is nature and what truly is society as well as the separation between them. In the words of Latour, "Modernization consists in continually exiting from an obscure age that mingled the needs of society with scientific truth, in order to enter into an age that will finally distinguish clearly what belongs to atemporal nature and what comes from humans, what depends on things and what belongs to signs" (*We Have Never Been Modern* 71). One such leap forward that modernity really comes into full effect is with the age of Enlightenment. With the burgeoning of the natural sciences that reached farther expanses of the world with unprecedented precision came a definitive demarcation of Nature that discredited many

³ Such a conception of the self leads to empathizing caring for people as discrete individuals and protecting their freedom from being infringed on by other people, government, and the private sector of the economy.

⁴ This modern conception of the world, specifically of Nature and oppositional object and subject, is supported by Martin Heidegger's discussion on modern understanding of technology. In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger argues that the essence of modern technology is a particular understanding of the natural world that reveals it in terms of human use value as a stockpile of energy, a resource; and reveals nature as a whole as a coherent, quantifiable, discrete, and calculable system of forces. This point of view in turn reveals humans as the users and places us in a mentality of max and min and directs us to use and manipulate nature according to individual human ends.

previous ill-founded human prejudices, fantasy, religious import, superstitions, and cultural beliefs. Such advances in Science have come to define an irreversible arrow of time for modernity, one that moves towards an ever greater separation between Nature and society.

While modernity is built upon this purified surface of separation between society and Nature, Latour claims that its very success, e.g. its scientific discoveries, technological inventions, and social movements, comes from the process of mediation that exists unofficially below the surface of modern reality. These processes, including those found in very practice of science itself, give rise to hybrid entities in which nature and culture are fused in a type of synergetic phenomenon. While moderns utilize and mobilize these mediating hybrids in everyday activities, such as in laboratory experiments, their existence is not officially recognized by the modern constitution.⁵ This is because, as Latour stresses, “The essential point of this modern constitution is that it renders the work of mediation that assembles hybrids invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable” (34). The point is apparent from the above discussion since modernity’s dualistic depiction of Nature and society is unable to grasp and represent such hybrids as these would involve a mixing of mutually exclusive categories that are supposed to be absolutely separate as self-contained, closed sets. In order to avoid the hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another, modernity tries to explain hybrids away by relegating them to mere intermediaries, reducible mixtures of nature and culture.

⁵ The inability of the modern constitution to be able to register hybrids is not seen as a weakness but a strength. There is just too much at stake, both politically and ideologically, to come to terms with hybrids. In particular, politically, if science was seen as a hybrid practice that was contaminated by humans and social interest then it would have to forfeit its claim to being absolutely objective; for more on this see *Politics of Nature*. Ideologically, or with respect to how humans view themselves, this recognition of humans and society as hybrids would challenge the cherished view that humans are completely unique creatures that occupy a separate, special, sphere of existence that is detached from the rest of nature.

Modernity manages to simultaneously specify and cancel out the work of mediation that gives rise to hybrids, to so to speak have their cake and eat it too, “By conceiving every hybrid as a mixture of two pure forms” (78). The existence of hybrids is emptied of any relevance, or significance by conceiving them merely as mixtures that can be split apart and reduced to their constituent natural and cultural parts, that is what comes from the subject or the social and what comes from the object or Nature. In and of themselves hybrids lack substance, their only claim to reality is through the pure essences they are composed of. For instance, in the case of Boyle and the air-pump, the ontological originality of the vacuum is rendered null and void by conceiving it as merely representing part laws of nature and part 17th century English society; in particular, the “...laboratory pump ‘reveals’ or ‘represents’ or ‘materializes’ or ‘allows us to grasp’ the Laws of Nature...similarly, that the wealthy English gentlemen’s ‘representations’ made it possible to ‘interpret’ air pressure and to ‘accept’ the existence of the vacuum” (80). As such, hybrids do not need to be reckoned with as they can just be explained away in terms of the given metaphysical picture of modernity; thus, leaving the modern metaphysics intact.

Modernity is able to maintain that hybrids are just mixtures of the two *pure* forms because it conceptually cancels out and historically conceals the work of mediation. The work of mediation is canceled out by conceiving of such things as air pump, experimental procedure, and the scientific theory as merely intermediaries between humans and nonhumans. As an intermediary “...their role is precisely to establish the link between the two but they establish links only because they themselves lack any ontological status. They merely transport, convey, transfer the power of the only two beings that are real,

Nature and Society” (80). The air pump, experiment, theory, and scientist are merely neutral, unbiased conduits or vessels that allow for the manifestation of natural phenomenon without imparting any of their own nature, so as to mediate, alter, or structure the presentation of Nature. They simply reveal Nature as is, unadulterated by human factors. Or in the case Hobbes and the Leviathan, the republic is just a reflection of the will of the people, which is merely an amalgamation of social interest that contains no traces of nature. Consequently, the purity of the two forms of Nature and society is conserved as nothing is lost or added through an intermediary.

The key to pulling off this cancellation via intermediaries is to conceal, make invisible, the actual processes that go into them, such as those involved in the practice of Science and the unfolding of society. This time by writing off the process itself as a mere intermediary, modernity manages to present mediating hybrids, themselves the product of the work of mediation as hybrids of nature and culture, as mere intermediaries. As such, the sole focus is on the givens and the results. Take for instance the story of the Leviathan, the republic that results via the social contract represents only the interest of fully formed humans and social factors as these are the initial given conditions. However, this is because the story behind them is bracketed off, like how an individual’s interest is shaped in part by their physical need and vulnerability which naturally arise as a result of being material bodies or how the natural environment and its resources impact social factors. With regards to science, by overlooking the actual practice of science and focusing on just the end results, including already constructed scientific equipment and established scientific discoveries and theory, it is able to mask the ways in which the equipment, the experimental method and design, and the scientist are themselves

mediated hybrids, that in turn mediate the proceedings of the experiment, the data, and the ultimate findings and conclusions. Latour develops this saying,

If you suppress Boyle and Hobbes and their disputes, if you eliminate the work of constructing the pump, the domestication of colleagues, the invention of a crossed-out God, the restoration of English Royalty, how are you going to account for Boyle's discovery? The air's spring comes from nowhere. It emerges fully armed. In order to explain what becomes a great mystery, you are going to have to construct an image of time that is adapted to this miraculous emergence of new things that have always been there, and to human fabrications that no human has ever made. The idea of radical revolution is the only solution the moderns have imagined to explain the emergence of the hybrids that their Constitution simultaneously forbids and allows, and in order to avoid another monster: the notion that things themselves have a history (70).

In order to try and account for the emergence of fully formed hybrids out of thin air modernity conceives of its history as one punctuated by radical revolutions, whether they be scientific, intellectual, or social. Such revolutions are the dawning of a new age that is completely detached from the previous ones. "The moderns have a peculiar propensity for understanding time," Latour says, "that passes as if it were really abolishing the past. They all take themselves for Attila, in whose footsteps no grass grows back. They do not feel that they are removed from the Middle Ages by a certain number of centuries, but that they are separated by Copernican revolutions, epistemological breaks, epistemic ruptures so radical that nothing of that past survives in them" (68-69). With these revolutions, breaks, and ruptures come new and different actors and a new sense of reality, e.g. the exact composition and structure of Nature and society – the things that are said to exist, the theories that are true. While these were formed over time through mental and physical exertion, this was in a past infinitely removed from the present by revolutions that sever these historical origins. These new fully formed actors are taken as the starting ingredients, the givens, which have always

been like that since after all they reflect what reality really is. Consequently, their history no longer becomes a problem, or for that matter, a question.

The historical perspective of irreversible revolutions and ruptures relies on a bread-slice model of temporality. Temporality is defined by the particular operative conceptual scheme used to organize the world.⁶ “*It is the sorting that makes the time,*” Latour asserts “*not the times that make the sorting*” (76). As such, one age seems to be infinitely removed from the preceding age, even though it is only years, decades, or centuries apart, because of the drastically different composition and organization of the world before and after the revolution. The ruptures between times is due to the Attila-like conception of time in which the present is like a slice of bread - everything that defines the present is contained to only this time and has no connection to the ones preceding it. In other words, the present day world represents a complete, ordered cohort of elements that belong to same contemporary time period or calendar date. According to Latour’s analysis, the systematic cohesion of this temporal front that is achieved by replacing some of the elements of the preceding period with new ones and their rearrangement gives rise to the impression of time passing irreversibly.⁷ However, it is not as if this coherent and ordered front already naturally existed somewhere out there in the world and we just had to discover it. Rather there is a bunch of tinkering that must be done to arrive as this point where things fit neatly into place, which modernity fails to officially acknowledge. In his words, “Modern temporality is the result of a retraining imposed on

⁶ For instance, before the age of Enlightenment the world was still understood from a religious perspective, which is very different from the way the world was view afterwards through the lens of science, new actors come on to scene such as scientific facts associated with a multitude of new natural objects and the happenings of the world come to be explained through natural processes via laws of nature and scientific theories.

⁷ Since it seems like all of a sudden there is this entirely new conceptual understanding – a new world - due to the new elements and the changing places of the former ones, which is completely different as the past one was proven to be wrong and this one is now the right one.

entities which would pertain to all sorts of times and possess all sorts of ontological statuses without this harsh disciplining” (72). This process of cleaning up, shaving off, and severing the tangle of associations things have with the past and both ontological domains, as well as the act of sweeping it under the rug, is crucial for modernity to remain credible.

While the reductionism of modernity’s process of purification, and its dualistic constitutional basis, proved to be an extremely effective analytic tool of understanding, which led to numerous scientific and technological advances, Latour contends these very advancements led to its unraveling. In his words, “...the moderns have been victims of their own success...the scope of mobilization of collectives ended up multiplying hybrids to such an extent that the constitutional framework which both denies and permits their existence could no longer keep them in place...The third estate ends up being too numerous to feel that it is faithfully represented either by the order of objects or by the order of subjects” (49). The growing scientific fields and overall the ever-expanding scientific front introduced a plethora of hybrids such as inertial guidance systems of intercontinental nuclear missiles, fuel cell electrodes, anthrax bacterium, brain peptides, asbestos, and global warming. These hybrids are not either wholly human or natural creations, nor are they simply reducible to pure constituent essences. They are not things-in-themselves, but are tied to the social collective. Latour brings this to light in asking, “But where are we to classify the ozone hole story, or global warming, or deforestation? Where are we to put these hybrids? Are they human? Human because they are our work. Are they natural? Natural because they are not our doing. Are they local or global? Both.” (50). However, modernity is unable to provide such an explanation due to its

dualistic constitution. Unable to adequately account for such hybrids the age of modernity essentially falls into shambles due to the ineptness of its sorting schema to provide a coherent and complete understanding of the world; after all, it is the sorting that makes the times, and so if the sorting schema falls into disarray so does the age itself.

The modern façade could have gone on a little while longer Latour says, "... if its very development had not established a short circuit between Nature on the one hand and human masses on the other" (50). The façade was able to hold water because Nature seemed forever remote, transcendent, inexhaustible, and under control. However, this is punctured with and like the increasing prevalence of such hybrid phenomena as the hole in the ozone that it helped produce. The increasing pervasiveness, complexity, and riskiness of these hybrids are linked to the constitutional basis behind their development. The same constitutional guarantees that forbid their conception and deny the full-blown existence of hybrids, he contends, paradoxically spur their proliferation as, "...the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes..." (12). Taking the absolute separation held between humans and nonhumans for granted modernity carelessly carried on with scientific research and social practices without concern about the impact that these two spheres of existence have on one another. Consequently, modernity unwittingly mixed together, and linked, the two worlds in ever greater ways, giving rise to such hybrids as the hole in the ozone and global warming. These hybrid phenomena testify to the causal interdependency between nature and society, which modernity guaranteed did not exist. Thus, similar to the failing assessment of any other constitutional organization, modernity's is due to its guarantees not holding up.

Chapter 2: Becoming What We Never Ceased to Be: Non-modern

Given the conceptual problems of Modernity's dualistic constitution to adequately account for the world, as well as the dangers its way of thinking cultivates, Latour advocates the adoption of a non-modern perspective.⁸ "A nonmodern," he describes, "is anyone who takes simultaneously into account the moderns' Constitution and the population of hybrids that that Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate" (47). While non-modernity is substantially different from modernity, jettisoning its dualistic essence-based categories of Nature and culture, it is not a complete rejection of modernity. Rather it seeks to reconcile the modern Constitution with modern practices. Indeed in actuality, Latour's main contention in *We Have Never Been Modern* is that we have never really ceased to be non-modern since in practice even the supposedly most purified disciplines of science and politics regularly involve the mobilization and production of hybrids, despite the modern Constitution claiming otherwise. In order to induce this change in times and become non-modern,⁹ Latour introduces a hybrid ontology that is based on the processes and practices that hybrids play a role in and from which they initially arise. In doing so he adds depth to modern picture. While retaining the work of purification as an analytical tool of understanding, Latour wants to elucidate the original nature of mediation that is also going on in practice. Out of the work of mediation emerge hybrids and nature-culture collectives, which respectively replace modernity's dualisms of subject/object and Nature/culture. Ultimately, Latour is just revealing the same world, as

⁸ However, he is not advocating a reactionary romantic movement that adopts anti-modern ideals or ways. Nor should this be taken in the revolutionary sense as this would just buy back into the modern regime's conception of time with its ruptures and breaks from the past that allowed for the seemingly emergence of new entities.

⁹ Recall it is the sorting that makes the time, so in changing the organizational categories used to sort world, via a new ontology, Latour is essentially ushering in a new age.

it has always been: an ontological continuum of hybrids, which vary in degree in their particular mixture of nature and culture.

The moderns neglected to pay attention and due diligence to hybrids because of their dismissal of hybrids and the practices which mobilize them and from which they emerge as unimportant, unsubstantial intermediaries. By studying the real-life practices of the so called moderns Latour seeks to reveal and bring to the fore the existence of a plethora of hybrids and the process of mediation *taking place/happening* that gives rise to them. Both of which have existed in the practices of the moderns the whole time but behind the officially recognized scenes of modernity. In order to accommodate and conceptually ground hybrids, the exceptions that prove to be the rule, Latour asserts, “To the practice of purification – the horizontal line – we need to add the practices of mediation – the vertical line...By deploying both dimensions at once, we may be able to accommodate the hybrids, and give them a place, a name, a home, a philosophy, an ontology, and I hope, a new constitution” (50-51). Hence, Latour is not rejecting modernity and its analytical method of purification but rather is contending that there has always been more going on in the practices of modernity, i.e. the work of mediation, which he wants to come to terms with. In doing so, he reveals the way in which moderns have actively engaged in the production and use of hybrids.

The central practice of non-modernity, mediation, in turn calls attention to the existence of things as mediators. While intermediaries merely serve a transitory role between Nature and Culture, “A mediator, however, is an original event that creates what it translates as well as the entities between which it plays the mediating role” (78). Unlike an intermediary, which gives direct access to some thing already there, as is, mediation is

an “*original event* that creates what it translates” in that the translation depends on the method and actual process involved in the practice of a discipline as well as the members participating on both sides and relationship between them. The translation process does something: it creates something new by shaping, no matter how subtle or seemingly inconsequential, the thing being translated. More specifically, translation can be seen as the “...the process of constructing hybrid networks of relations, that is, bringing, together supposed natural and social elements in a single phenomenon or practice (Bannon 21). Translation creates a link that did not exist before between natural networks pertaining to the physical system and cultural networks of humans. The resulting hybrid is a manifestation of the overlap between these networks of relations. As such one of the defining characteristics of hybrids is that they consist of a particular mixture of cultural and natural parts.¹⁰ Again, the resulting hybrid is an original event – a synergetic phenomenon – a sum which is more than its parts, and so is not reducible to either just purely nature or culture, nor for that matter a combination of the two.

Ultimately, all phenomenon are mediated and so instead of being surrounded by subjects and objects in natural and cultural environments, we find ourselves living in a thoroughly hybrid world.¹¹ Even paragon practices of modernity turn out to involve processes of translation such that they too result in hybrid varieties.¹² Take for example the very modern practices of science and engineers which seem to be instances that fit

¹⁰ While Latour in the works mentioned in this paper conceives of hybrids mainly a being part nature, part culture, i.e. part nonhuman part human, the concept of hybrid seems to be extendable to any overlap of solely natural networks of relations, e.g. between an animal and its environment which would be an overlap of internal relations constitutive of that animal and external relations constitutive of its surrounding physical environment.

¹¹ Simply put everything is a hybrid. Even the relata, i.e. humans and nature, of the hybrid relation are hybrids.

¹² Even the work of purification Latour contends is just a particular case of mediation (*We Have Never Been Modern* 78-79). That is, the analytic method of modernity mediates reality by breaking it into simpler parts.

neatly into the pure, polar categorical urns of modernity – the scientific discoveries of objective facts represents external objects of nature, while constructions of engineers reflects the free self-assertion, creativity, and intentionality of agency associated with subjects of society. However, examining the actual practice of these disciplines reveals the work of mediation involved in each such that both scientific facts and constructions of engineers are hybrids. These examples are also insightful because they show how mediation occurs from both ends of the ontological spectrum; that is, the way in which humans are mediated by nonhumans, e.g. in the case of the engineer, and nonhumans are mediated by humans, e.g. in the case of scientific facts. Hence, not all hybrids are the same but consist of different mixtures of nature and culture.

In making the practice of science, involving humans, experimental equipment, and theory, of central importance Latour reveals the way scientific facts are mediated and are themselves hybrids too. Rather than being merely an intermediary, experimental research turns out to be a multi-layered process of mediation. From the collection of data in field work in which an experimental procedure and scientific equipment translate a living, breathing, changing, dynamic nature into the form of raw data.¹³ To the way the data produced in a laboratory is an artificial representation of nature that was created by isolating phenomena in a controlled setting through human stimulation via laboratory equipment; and so, is only a simulation, albeit a very precise and reliable one. Then there is the salient role theory plays in the practice. Observation, measurement, and experimentation are simply not possible in a meaningful sense without a relevant theoretical framework from which to interpret them. Data is interpreted and analyzed in

¹³ For more information on this process, specifically in the case of scientific field work, see chapter one of Latour's *Pandora's Hope*.

terms of the conceptual framework of scientific theory, which imports mental constructs such as quantum mechanic operators, ideal conditions, and self-identity principles that lack any correspondence to nature. All of which reflect the varying ways in which “nature” is not conveyed in its totality but rather is the outcome of a series of translation processes via experimental and theoretical practice through which some aspects are lost while others emphasized. These translations reflect the structure of the networks involved and what they are able to transmit; in the case of science, specifically a quantifiable representation of the nature.¹⁴ Moreover, this also goes to show the active role humans play throughout the process of science and the formative impact they have on “nature.” Nobel winning chemist Ilya Priogogine and Isabelle Stengers nicely capture this turn in science’s understanding of itself: “Whatever we call reality, it is revealed to us only through the active construction in which we participate” (293).¹⁵ Therefore, even “nature” is a hybrid as our most basic conception of it is entangled with humans via scientific theory and practice.

While scientific facts illustrate how human artifices and practices have a formative impact on “nature”, on the other side of the ontological spectrum there exist hybrids that bear witness to the ways nonhumans/nature mediate human projects and

¹⁴ There is also the larger social/culture context that scientific research is taking place in, which itself translates the practice and the development of science as a whole, and ultimately our representation of nature. From the training and indoctrination of scientist, which directs them towards “questions of interest,” accepting axiomatic beliefs and how to interpret nature, how to conduct experiments selecting some factors as relevant and others not. Then there is the way facts are the end result of the consensus formed by the respective scientific community on how to interpret the data, how the discoverer is engaged in his field and in the particular experiments they are engaged in because of personal motivations (political, moral, social, etc.) and how both the scientific community and the scientist is situated in a politically and culturally charged atmosphere that direct scientific research towards various ends, which in turn reveals a particular aspects of nature in a particular light.

¹⁵ The active role humans play in experiments has been most pronounced by quantum mechanics, e.g. the double slit experiment, which has revealed the inescapability of perspective; challenging, the classical scientific ideal of objectivity which is suppose to give a complete description of nature independent of how it is observed.

actions. Take for example the work of artist and engineers. Their work is often envisioned as exemplars of modernity's social category as they supposedly involve a free, self-determined assertion of human will in which ideas are expressed through useless, malleable, shapeless, and passive material. However, closer examination of the actual process and practice of these disciplines again reveals there to be more going on than meets the eye. Engineers and artist must work within the demands and confines of natural materials. As such these natural networks mediate the projects, directing them to a certain extent, opening some possibilities while closing off others, and ultimately are incorporated in the final product. Great artist and engineers possess a familiarity and intimacy with the character of materials, e.g. their physical properties, and how they work such that they can know which is best suited and the best way to use them in order to carry out their intentional design. The end product is not purely a human creation, the culmination of some great act of domination of the will over the materials. Rather their work represents a resonance between human intention and the materials, in which each is expressed. While these constructions are mainly reflective of humans, the point is that natural, physical materials play a part, have some say in it, and so they also have nonhuman elements. In other words, they too are a hybrid network of relations.

Not only is a mediator an original event in that it "creates what it translates," giving rise to hybrids, but as Latour's definition goes on to specify it also creates the "the entities between which it plays the mediating role". Out from this second aspect of mediation derives his replacement for modernity's dualism of Nature and culture. Ultimately, Latour contends that the mediators, such as the air-pump as well as the practices they are caught up in, existing between nature and humans/society come to

redefine these very categories. Nature and culture are no longer either conceptually or casually separate, rather they are co-constituted and connected via practices and networks of hybrids as a nature-culture collective. The two form together out from and around the practices of mediation such that they are relationally defined with respect to each other.

However, as a preliminary it should be noted that he is not completely jettisoning the modern explanatory model. Rather he is saying that there is more to the story. While modernity assumed that Nature and culture were givens, Latour's emphasis on practice seeks to elucidate the mediators, definitive events, and history that are behind and constitutive of these categories. For modernity the pure forms of Nature and Culture serve as the solid hooks of reality since what they are is more or less already given from the beginning and remains relatively the same. As such they served as the foundation for explanation in that phenomena are explained in terms of them by being reduced to either the laws of Nature or principles of culture. However, by taking into account the subterranean practices of mediation happening below the official scenes of modernity all this changes: the explanatory model becomes inverted. Nature and culture have not always existed, as is, from the outset and throughout. Rather Latour contends that they change and are redefined over time with respect to the practices of mediation and the resulting production of hybrids. It is only after the fact, after the original mediation process and after the subsequent work of purification that the categories of Nature and society take on more stabilized and distinct transcendent essences with the explanatory power modernity granted them from the start. As Latour puts it, "The appearance of explanation that Nature and Society provide come only late in the phase, when stabilized

quasi-objects have become, after cleavage, objects of external reality on the one hand, subjects of Society on the other.” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 94-95).

Thus, the submerged middle ground of mediating hybrids and translating practices becomes the foundation of explanation for understanding the states of nature and culture, as well as the changes therein. According to Latour, “The great masses of Nature and Society can be compared to the cooled-down continents of plate tectonics. If we want to understand their movement, we have to go down into those searing rifts where the magma erupts and on the basis of this eruption are produced... Like the geophysicians, we too have to go down and approach the places where the mixtures are made that will become – but only much later – aspects of Nature or of Society” (87). He refers to this shift from extremes to the downward center as a sort of Copernican counter-revolution, in that Nature/objects and Society/subjects are seen co-revolving around, being mutually defined in relation to, the practices of mediation and the mobilized collective of assembled hybrids. This rather abstract coproduction of Nature and Society out from practice is insightfully illustrated by Latour in the case of the Boyle and the air-pump:

All these questions are no longer caught between Nature and Society, since they all redefine what Nature may be and what Society is...Around the work of the air pump we witness the formation of a new Boyle, a new Nature, a new theology of miracle, a new scholarly sociability, a new Society that will henceforth include the vacuum, scholars, and the laboratory. History does something. Each entity is an event. We shall no longer explain the innovation of the air pump by reaching alternatively in the two urns of Nature and Society. On the contrary, we will refill these, or at least modify their contents. (81).

Another move Latour makes away from modernity is his dismissal of the separation of nature and culture – nature existing independently, as is and as it always has been, on the one hand, while on the other we have cultures, which differ, change, as well

as come and go. Instead a nature and a culture grow together, out of the practices of mediation and in relation to the particular hybrids these practices give rise to, into what Latour calls a nature-culture collective. A nature-culture collective is one in which the two are causally connected and relationally defined with respect to each other. To begin with, the collective itself represents a network of hybrids that connects the two states of each. Natural processes and social practices have a way, via the networks of interdependency between the two, of impacting each other. Nature and culture are not only linked through causal networks, but much more fundamentally as the two are conceptually defined in relation to each other. Latour maintains, “For each state of Society there exists a corresponding state of Nature” (88). Put the other way around, a particular understanding of nature gives rise to a particular type of culture in that the society and its subjects think of themselves in certain light and engage with nature in particular way. The specific way beings are divided up and the properties they are attributed come to define the particular nature-culture collective.¹⁶ Latour elaborates this and the way in which, “All natures-cultures are similar in that they simultaneously construct humans, divinities and nonhumans...In constituting their collectives, some mobilize ancestors, lions, fixed stars, and the coagulated blood of sacrifice; in constructing ours, we mobilize genetics, zoology, cosmology, and haematology” (106).

One such example of this co-production is given by modernity itself. With the invention of scientific matters of fact comes not only a particular stance with respect to the realm of nature, e.g. what is nature and how it operates as well as through what and to

¹⁶ This connection is also brought to light by Heidegger elucidation of the Western world’s metaphysical conception of Being and the way it gives rise to its particular worldview and understanding of humanity. Also, Heidegger’s analysis of the understanding of modern technology points out how nature is revealed as a stockpile resource which in turn positions man as the user and manipulator.

who is it conveyed, but this stance in turn defines Western culture. The way in which nature and culture change with respect to the practices of mediation and newly emerging hybrids, e.g. new scientific facts, as well as how the two are also relationally co-defined, is nicely illustrated by Latour in his portrayal of Boyle's work and the new emerging hybrid that is the scientific fact itself:

Boyle wondered how to put an end to civil wars. By compelling matter to be inert, by asking God to not be directly present, by constructing a new closed space in a container where the existence of the vacuum would become manifest, by renouncing the condemnation of witnesses for their opinions. No ad hominem accusation will prevail any longer, Boyle said; no human witness will be believed; only nonhuman indicators and instruments observed by gentlemen will be considered trustworthy. The stubborn accumulation of matter of fact will establish the foundations of the pacified collective. This invention of facts is not, however, a discovery of the things that are out there; it is an anthropological creation that redistributes God, will, love, hatred and justice (83-84).

While it is worthwhile noting the way this quote places Boyle's anthropological creation and science as a whole in a larger social context, of particular interest here is the way Boyle's and science's representation of nature via matters of fact redefines society, giving rise to "modernity." Specifically, it gives rise to the two world view in which through their oppositional definitions the two reinforce each other such that science has authority over the world of passive, inert matter that interacts via mechanistic forces and necessity, while politics governs a world of intentional, passionate, free moral subjects. Modernity, then, is just another nature-culture collective albeit one in which the relation between society/humans and the scientific conception of nature is one of stark contrast, the two having an oppositional definition.

Chapter 3: Experimental Metaphysics and Quasi-objects

With his basic philosophical landscape surveyed we are now in the position to delve deeper into Latour's experimental metaphysics that presents hybrids as actants¹⁷ in, and of, networks. Such a metaphysics is essentially an expansion of existentialism in the sense that all hybrids, humans and nonhumans, are defined in relation to their effective actions over the course of time. By their very definition, actants bring with them the existence of other actants that register these effects and together form networks – another main concept of Latour's metaphysics. From this existential understanding of all hybrids we come to terms with his organizational category of quasi-objects that refer to the more natural, nonhuman side of the hybrid ontological spectrum. Quasi-objects are more elevated things than the traditional objects of modernity in that they share properties typically associated with humans such as an existential character, agency, and productive power, although not to the same degree or form.

To begin with, the metaphysics Latour espouses is one of common sense. In order for a thing to exist it must do something, have some effect, otherwise how would we know it exists. The basic constituents of reality, anything real, are things that act – hybrid actors. A hybrid actor is "...an association of humans and nonhumans, an association [though] whose exact composition is not yet known to anyone, but about which a series of trials makes it possible to say that its members act..." (*Politics of Nature* 75). The trials come to define actors, as Latour lucidly explains, "Because there is no other way to

¹⁷Note that actant and actor are pretty much used interchangeably. While actor is the much more common term, it typically is used in reference to the human subject, but here on out should be thought of as applying to both humans and nonhumans, which is what an actant does; hence its appeal and my use of it. Another advantage of the term actant is that it can apply to a set of things or a subgroup, and so is not as restrictive nor ideologically loaded as the terms like agent, which being embedded in the subject-object dichotomy of modernity by default implicate individual things, objects and subjects, as the players on the scene as if this was the way the world is naturally parsed, or so to speak carved at the joints.

define an actor but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the focus of attention” (*Pandora’s Hope* 122). Hence, the existence of a thing is posited on, and defined with respect to, its effects on others.

This ultimately gets at the experimental nature of Latour’s metaphysics, which extends an existential perspective to all things such that the existence of humans as well as nonhumans is defined by their actions. He explicates, “What Sartre said of humans – that their existence precedes their essence – has to be said of all the actants: of the air’s spring as well as society, of matter as well as consciousness” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 86). Again in making this move Latour is attempting to uncover the story, the practices and processes, behind modernity’s concept of substance and essence.¹⁸ Specifically he is contesting the idea that the essence or substance of thing, taking the form of inherent properties of the thing in itself, is atemporal: something that always has existed and does not change. Rather what a thing is emerges through events, through the trials it undergoes in the world or laboratory during which it demonstrates its mettle, the resiliency of its action and effects on others. Originally, Latour contends, “The actor does not yet have an essence. It is defined only as a list of effects – or performances – in a laboratory. Only later does one deduce from these performances a competence, that is, a substance that explains why the actor behaves as it does.” (*Pandora’s Hope* 308). That is, an actor begins as just a name of action, a label corresponding to a set of effects. Based on this set, the existence of an actor is then conjectured and eventually articulated a substantive existence as a thing with such and such properties/powers that make it

¹⁸ In this regard, what Latour is doing is very similar to Nietzsche’s aim to reveal the origins, or at least give a retelling, of the concepts of good and truth.

capable of producing the respective set of effects.¹⁹ All things have this existential definition such that what a thing is is defined by its effects in so much as it is instantiated with various properties that correspond to those effects. This definition is then subsequently read into the events themselves and used to explain the occurrence of such effects as being caused by this actant. Existentially put, “A series of performances *precedes* the definition of the competence that will later be made the sole cause of these very performances” (119). His experimental metaphysics is thus epitomized by: essence is existence and existence is action.

Pivotal to this move is the understanding of a scientific experiment as an *event*.²⁰ Such an understanding dances between the traditional accounts of science given by materialists and social constructivists, as either a discovery of nature out there or as invention of scientific facts; both of which fail to capture the gravity of situation.²¹ Latour brings this to our attention in his case study of Pasteur and the *evention*²² of yeast. Latour elucidates this understanding, saying,

...an experiment is an event. No event can be accounted for by a list of the elements that entered the situation *before* conclusion, *before* Pasteur launched his experiment, *before* the yeast started to trigger the fermentation, *before* the meeting of the Academy. If such a list were made, the actors on it would not be

¹⁹ From this perspective, scientists are not seen as merely discovering scientific facts out there. Rather they take on more integral and productive role in the formation of facts in going from a collection of effects to the articulation of a being with properties that would make it responsible for those effects.

²⁰ Although here we are specifically referring to experiment, the world in general can be seen as a series of events, in the much richer understanding of the word that is developed in this paragraph.

²¹ Latour continually stresses this point, and ever so more poignantly in the following: “Facts are fabricated; we make facts, that is, there is a *fait-faire*.” Of course the scientist does not make up facts – who has ever made *up* anything?...I do not deny that people have minds – but the mind is not a world-creating despot that makes up facts to suit its fancy. Thought is seized, modified, altered, possessed by nonhumans, who, in their turn, given this opportunity by the scientists’ work, alter their trajectories, destinies, histories” (*Pandora’s Hope* 282).

²² The term “evention” is original to this paper and not directly used by Latour, although his ideas spurred its formation. Evention is meant to capture the understanding of scientific experiments, which gives rise to new scientific facts, as events. The term is useful in describing the situation as such while not getting trapped in the ideologically loaded words of discovery and invention that are bound up with the materialist and social constructivist traditions.

endowed with competence that they will *acquire* in the event... This list of inputs does not have to be completed by drawing upon any stock of resources, since the stock drawn upon *before* the experimental event is not the same as the one drawn upon *after* it. This is precisely why an experiment is an event and not a discovery... This is also why the list drawn up after the experiment needs no addition of Nature or society, or whatever, since all the elements have been partially transformed: a (partially) new Pasteur, a (partially) new yeast, and a (partially) new Academy are all congratulating one another at its end. The ingredients on the first list are insufficient, not because one factor has been forgotten or because the list has not been carefully drawn, but because the actors *gain* in their definitions through this event, through the very trials of the experiment” (126).

Thus, the experiment as an event does something to, changes to some degree, the participants involved. From the experiment nature emerges different. The experiment is a happening in which the yeast rises to an occasion that is the challenge of the experiment, which test its character. The experiment itself is designed by Pasteur as a trial for yeast to show its mettle. This test specifically allows the possibilities for yeast to come to the fore and demonstrate its effective abilities; and it is this regular performance that comes to define what it is. Through the course of Pasteur’s experiment, “...it begins as a barely visible entity and takes on more and more competences and attributes until it ends up as a full-fledged substance” (PH 138). Before Pasteur the yeast was literally no-thing, just some unimportant residual by-product of fermentation, but by the end the yeast comes to be the central actor in the fermentation process, with its own independent autonomous existence.

In addition to actants the other central concept of Latour’s metaphysics is networks.²³ Indeed, the concept of actant carries with it the concept of network. Since an

²³ In fact, Latour’s metaphysics can be thought of as being primarily about networks, as nested sets of hybrid networks, a network of networks, in that actants themselves are manifestations of the networks of their internal parts. However, this is not to say the concept of actant is any way less significant since it retains the experimental foundation of his metaphysics, as well as the central role it plays in sorting out the world and parsing phenomenon in a meaningful way.

actant is defined in relation to the sum of effects it has on others, its existence entails the existence of other actants. These other actants and the web of relations between them form networks and so actants are equally defined in relation to their surrounding networks. More specifically, the particular effects it elicits is a reflection of the relationship between its own internal network of constituent parts and that of the other actants along with the surrounding network of relationships between them. Hence, it is not as if external relations exist between prior existing things, but rather the relationships between things become internalized in their definition such that it comes to constitute a part of what the thing is, like the overlap of a Venn diagram. This in effect brings to the fore another way things, qua actants, are hybrids. Due to the networks that bridge nature-culture collectives the world of nature and culture are now, as they have always been, casually connected. As such, actants are defined by the effects they have on nature and nonhumans as well as culture and humans. For instance, nonhumans are no longer defined by just their physical effects in the natural world but also by their effects on humans.²⁴ Thus, in the nonmodern age, the definitional understanding of a thing "...can no longer be detached from the unexpected consequences that they may trigger in the very long run, very far away, in an incommensurable world" (*Politics of Nature* 24).

The above quote also points to another way Latour is extending the existential perspective: granting a history to all hybrids. Similarly to how we typically think of humans, once a hybrid comes into existence as a full-fledged actor with some form of thinghood it is not merely given by the context from which it formed, by its initial effective definition. Rather a thing has the potential to change over time in an ongoing

²⁴ In particular, Latour cites asbestos as one such example and how when it was first "discovered" it was articulated in terms of physical effects on other natural things, but later this articulation came to include its association with humans, namely its harmful effects, as well.

process of redefinition. Thus what a thing is is the map that traces its trajectory throughout its history of direct interactions and effects as well as its side effects. As such, Latour claims that we should, "...view essences as events and trajectories" (*We Have Never Been Modern* 87). The two dimensional space of non-modernity that Latour lays out is designed to capture exactly this trajectory based essence. In particular, the vertical dimension serves as "...a gradient that registers variations in the stability of entities from event to essence" (85). It effectively monitors and tracks the degree of stabilization: the progress of entities from their original event found in the work of mediation throughout its historical development in particular practices and networks of purifications that eventually refine it to its accepted essence. For example, in the case of Boyle he contends that the air-pump does not have a given essence in-itself, which has always existed and is either natural or social. Rather its essence is the outcome of the path it traces through the collective network during the history of its existence. What the air-pump is depends on the time it is being considered from. Are we referring to the air-pump of 17th century, which is a newly created heated mixture and mediated event, or the one that results after the work of purification as a stabilized essence in the 18th or 20th century. Thus, things have history too, and this "History does something" (NBM 81).

While some hybrids, such as the vacuum, take more convergent paths toward a stabilized essence via the work of purification, they all theoretically have the potential to change more radically. In the course of their intermingling with others over time all hybrids have the possibility to pursue more divergent lines, via ever more complex mediation, and become something different. Unlike the being of objects that is fated to a deterministic existence which is given and fixed from the outset and throughout, all

hybrids have a becomingness about them in that they have an unknown potential and “...are defined by lists of actions that are never complete...” (*Politics of Nature* 80). This is because hybrids and mediation, for Latour, involve an element of surprise, uncertainty, novelty, complicatedness, and unpredictability such that “...consequences always slightly exceed their causes...” and an event “...cannot be exactly defined by its input and its output...[it] always exceeds its condition” (82, *Pandora’s Hope* 307).

The view of the world as becoming instead of simply being is corroborated by contemporary science’s understanding of networks. For instance, Prigogine and Stengers point out in *Order out of Chaos* how network phenomenon such as feed-back loops, resonance and interference effects, and non-linear causality²⁵ in complex and far-from-equilibrium systems can produce emergent effects, instability and even bifurcation points that can cause irreversible changes. They maintain, “In complex systems, both the definition of entities and of the interactions among them can be modified by evolution” (204). More specifically, small individual fluctuations can lead to the establishment of new order through bifurcation regions such that “...an individual, an idea, or a new behavior can upset the global state,” by exploiting “... to their advantage the nonlinear relations guaranteeing the stability of the preceding regime” (206). Such an understanding subverts the hegemonic order of nature put forth by modernity. Each individual actant not matter how small or seemingly inconsequential has the potential to redefine itself as well as the larger network it is apart of. Latour nicely expresses this,

²⁵ By *non-linear causality* I mean the way in which due to the network of relations the sum of the effects of actor A, e.g. society in case of global warming, along with that of actor B, e.g. nature, does not equal the sum the their individual effects but rather the coupling of the system produces emergent effects due to resonance or interference. In *Vibrant Matter*, a non – linear system is described as one in which by adding a small cause to one that is already present this can induce dramatic effects such that effects resonate with and against their causes such that impact/agency of an added element cannot be grasped at first glance but is slowly brought to light as the assemblage stabilizes itself through mutual accommodations of its heterogeneous components.

saying, “An infinitesimal cause can have vast effects; an insignificant actor becomes central...A snail can block a dam; the Gulf Stream can turn up missing; a slag heap can become a biological preserve; an earthworm can transform the land in the Amazon region into concrete” (*Politics of Nature* 25).

The experimental metaphysical foundation of hybrids as actants in turn leads us to his concept of quasi-objects. By defining all hybrids by their effects over time Latour essentially grants a type of existential and historical dimension to all hybrids, turning mere object into something more – a quasi-object. Like the modern counterpart, the concept of quasi-objects is used to further articulate and sort the world. Quasi-objects refer to the more natural, nonhuman side of the ontological spectrum of hybrids.

However, as the “quasi” prefix indicates these are not the clear-cut, discrete, polarized objects of modernity. The hard and fast distinctions drawn between objects and subjects as well as inside and outside, thing and environment, have become blurred with Latour’s hybrid actant ontology. There are three main characteristics of quasi-objects that differentiate them from the traditional concept of objects. First, as the discussion of mediation first addressed, quasi-objects are hybrids in the sense that they are part nature and part human, albeit much more natural than cultural. Next, drawing from his actant-network metaphysics is the way quasi-objects are fuzzy things. And finally I wish to unpack how embedded in the concept of hybrids is also the idea that they simultaneously share properties associated with objects and subjects. In particular, I will show the ways in which quasi-objects have properties typically associated exclusively with humans. Not only do they have an existential and historical character, but they also share a sense of agency and meaning giving.

As their name suggests, quasi-objects are no longer the pure objects of modernity, existing out there, in the separate sphere of existence known as nature. Rather, as the non-modernity section suggested, they emerge from the human practices of mediation happening somewhere between and below the polar extremes of modernity. Latour elaborates, saying, “Quasi-objects are much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the ‘hard’ parts of nature, but they are in no way the arbitrary receptacles of a full-fledged society. On the other hand they are much more real, nonhuman and objective than those shapeless screens on which society – for unknown reasons – needed to be ‘projected’” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 55). Hence, quasi-objects retain a sense of the autonomy associated with traditional objects in that they have their own voice, physical demands, which gives rise to and defines certain possibilities independent of humans. At the same time, though, they are not wholly independent, in the absolute sense of objectivity, since what they are is bound up with the practices and conceptual framework they are articulated through; and so, in their very conception they become integrated into our world having a human touch and point of reference.

Another characteristic of quasi-objects is that they are fuzzy. The conceptual bracketing schema of modernity parsed the natural world into discrete entities with fixed and given essences such that objects are presented in a smooth and clear-cut fashion. For non-modernity this image changes due to the way quasi-objects qua actants are intimately linked with various complex and dynamic network of associations. According to Latour, there are “...no clear boundaries, no well-defined essence, no sharp separation between their own hard kernel and their environment. It is because of this feature that they take on aspect of tangled beings, forming rhizomes and networks... They have numerous

connections, tentacles, pseudopods that link them in many different ways to other beings as ill assured as themselves and that consequently no longer constitute another universe, independent of the first..." (*Politics of Nature* 24). Lacking a clearly defined boundary between where an entity ends and its natural and social environment begins, in addition to the way they can evolve over time, conceptually what a thing is becomes uncertain and fuzzy. Similar to the change in conception of electrons, entities go from being discrete and delimited objects, like billiard balls, to resembling clouds lacking a definitively set shape.

Moreover, quasi-objects share properties typically associated with human subjects. They are not necessarily passive, inert, or fixed, but have a sense of agency in that they are active and efficacious.²⁶ Not only can they change and adapt to given circumstances but their actions can have a significant and decisive impact on events such that they can change both the natural environment and social landscape. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett develops this line of thought that grants a form of agency to things with her notion of "thing-power." Blurring the dualistic categories of object and subject, she defends that there is a certain vitality in nature, even in inanimate materials. Such a vitality involves the "capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede, block the will and design of humans but also to act as quasi-agents/forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (*Vibrant Matter* viii). Unlike the traditional object that is merely a source of resistance, a force of inertia, things are

²⁶ This extension of agency to nonhumans results from the distribution of agency amongst the actants making up a particular network. For Latour, agency is not an inherent property of individuals but rather is a network phenomenon. Jane Bennett puts this as follows: "...an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (VM, 21). As such the efficacy associated with agency becomes distributed amongst a heterogeneous field of actants, each with their own trajectories.

productive agents that participate in events, helping to direct and shape the outcome.²⁷

While not denying the impact of human intentionality, she is simply asserting that humans have a less than definitive impact on events. Humans are not the only ones who have a say in how events play out, rather things have, to various degrees, the “...power to make a difference that calls for response” (32). And so, while nonhumans may lack a full blown sense of agency associated with human intentionality, in which they reflectively choose to act so as to realize their goal, they still retain the active power to effectively make things happen and potentially alter the course of events according to their own trajectory.

Finally, quasi-objects are more than mere objects because of the way they constitute humans and culture. Contrary to the modern story which depicts objects as being constructed and revolving around the human will as tools, in non-modernity the reverse is true as well. That is, a certain type of human subject is seen arising out of and revolving around particular quasi-objects. In this way quasi-objects act as a center of gravity in that they attribute a particular sense of meaning by placing humans in certain nonhuman frame of reference. In *The Parasite*, Michel Serres’s interpretation of a game of soccer offers an illustration of this process of co-constitution that quasi-objects are actively engaged in. He states,

A ball is not an ordinary object, for it is what it is only if a subject holds it. Over there, on the ground, it is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function, and no value. Ball isn’t played alone...Let us consider the one who holds it. If he makes it move around him, he is awkward, a bad player. The ball isn’t there for the body; the exact contrary is true: the body is the object of the ball; the subject moves around this sun. Skill with the ball is recognized in the player who follows

²⁷ In this way nonhuman things have a vector nature to them, in the mathematical sense that involves a force in a particular direction. Such a trajectory is the manifestation of the organization and constitution of the thing’s internal network. This vector nature in turn causes humans and other nonhumans to interact with them in particular ways.

the ball and serves it instead of making it follow him and using it. It is the subject of the body, subject of bodies, and like a subject of subjects. Playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance. The laws are written for it, defined relative, and we bend to these laws (225-226).

From this we come to see how the object is in part fabricated in the social collective. That is, the soccer ball is what it is in virtue of the game being played and its rules, which allow for the players to interact and use it in particular way. The object-nature of the ball is revealed in the way that as long as the players abide by the rules, they can manipulate it according to their interest. Simultaneously, unlike a shapeless material that humans can bend to whatever they will, the ball has its own objective autonomy and physics that the players' behavior must conform to. The ball makes demands, much like a subject, on the players which they must take into account in order to first of all be players, but, moreover, to be good players, their very being must bend around and incorporate these into their play. The soccer players are ultimately defined in relation to the ball, amongst other things. They would not be the same players in relation to another ball and in this way the soccer ball grounds the being, the meaning, of what it is to be a soccer player. Thus, the ball revolves around the collective and at the same time the players revolve around the ball.

Chapter 4: Quasi-subjectivity

Latour's experimental metaphysics and concept of mediation ultimately leads to a hybrid ontology involving a spectrum of actants ranging from quasi-object to quasi-subject. The concepts of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects serve as the organizational categories for non-modernity. Despite the significance of both of these terms in his system of thought, the vast majority of his work seems to only discuss quasi-objects in the form of nonhumans. Responding to this lack of discussion, I am interested in understanding what it means to be human living in a non-modern hybrid world by articulating the concept of quasi-subjects. Similar to what Pasteur's work did for the yeast and Latour's work did for Pasteur's drift through multiple ontologies, from attributes to a substance, by connecting seemingly disparate ideas going on with Latour I hope to bring to presence the conception of humans qua quasi-subjects in his work.²⁸ At one point in *We Have Never Been Modern* Latour too briefly acknowledges this lack, not only in his work but throughout previous literature:

We possess hundreds of myths describing the way subjects (or the collective, or intersubjectivity, or epistemes) construct the object... Yet we have nothing that recounts the other aspect of the story: how objects construct the subject. Shapin and Schaffer have access to thousands of archival pages on Boyle's ideas, and Hobbes's, but nothing about the tacit practice of the air pump or on the dexterity it required. The witnesses to this second half of history are constituted not by texts or languages but by silent, brute remainders such as pumps, stones, and statues (*We Have Never Been Modern* 82).

Proceeding from this description, my investigation into the nature of humans as quasi-subjects seeks to specifically articulate the ways in which humans are conditioned and co-constituted by material things. Like Latour's move with the sciences, which sought to

²⁸ As Latour describes the situation: "Despite the metaphor of "trails" implies, phenomena are not "out there" waiting for a researcher to access them. Lactic acid ferment have to be made visible by Pasteur's work (just as Pasteur's philosophical innovations has to be made visible by my work, since this was as invisible before my intervention as the ferment was before his!)" (PH 139)

unpack the sciences and reveal the behind the scenes history of human sweat and labor as well as social interest that is bound up with the resultant scientific laws defining a field of study, I want to reveal how nature, nonhumans, and material bodies do not merely compose a background setting or serve as mere means, intermediaries, for human activity and society. But rather, they are actively involved in shaping human experience and subjectivity: what we can experience and the quality of those experiences, how we think of ourselves, and our agency.

Before getting into the specifics, it is insightful to briefly sketch some essential differences between the modern conception of humans as subjects and the non-modern conception of humans as hybrid, quasi-subjects. Overall, the non-modern account is less extreme and not solely individually and socially oriented. There is no hard and fast line separating humans from nonhumans. As the prefix “quasi” connotes, humans are hybrids too in that we share properties typically associated with objects, namely our physical bodily being, and our sense of self and agency are co-constituted and mediated by nonhumans. Humans just represent the more complex, multi-dimensional, end of the scale of embodied beings having an existence marked by consciousness, temporality, and meaning. Although we can develop a greater sense of self and agency, these are not absolute or inherent features of human existence. Nor is the self seen as independent, autonomous individual which is exclusively defined with respect to the cultural domain such that who is a person is based on their own intentions, choices, and actions in relation to a broader social context of meanings involving other people, norms, culture, economics, government, and class. Rather, as will become clear in the proceeding discussion, human identity and agency develops out from, depends on, and is defined in

relation to others – nonhumans as well as humans.²⁹ Ultimately, my work could also be described as an attempt to make the phenomenological significance in Latour’s work visible by showing the ways in which material bodies, nonhumans as well as our own, as quasi-objects and mediators co-constitute human experience. In doing so, what it is to be human qua quasi-subject is defined by the dialectical relationship between nature and culture, inside and out. We are the synthesis, the linking together, of our own internal networks of materiality and meaning with external networks of materiality and meaning.

With the concept of nature-culture collectives comes the understanding that a particular state of nature and a particular state of culture emerge together out of various practices of mediation such that the two are conceptually defined in relation to one another and causally linked. Running with this non-modern understanding, I am interested in how out from our practices and engagement with the world a certain type of person emerges in relation to the type of nonhuman that also participates in these practices. While not following up on it, Latour himself seems to be aware that human practices not only have a reverberating impact on the state of nature and culture, but also and more directly, reshape and to some degree change those involved, both human and nonhuman. For instance, he asserts, “Nature will emerge altered from Boyle’s laboratory, and so will English society; but Boyle and Hobbes will also change to the same degree” (NBM 81). While he doesn’t explicitly explain the latter part of this claim, one way in which Boyle and Hobbes both can be said to change is conceptually, in that through their work we see them, and they see themselves, as humans qua subjects, which is understood via the subject’s oppositional definition with respect to scientific objects and the modern

²⁹ Although, the focus on my work will be how humans qua quasi-subject are co-constituted by nonhumans and material bodies since this is where I feel the novelty lies in my work, and originally in Latour’s.

conception of Nature. Furthermore, the two can be said to change in the sense that they and their work are viewed differently with the resulting schism between Nature and culture that they usher in. Boyle and Hobbes now work in different practices with different means of operation – Boyle in the world of Science and Hobbes in the world of politics.

In the preceding section Serres' example helped introduce this non-modern idea that nonhumans no longer revolve around humans as mere objects but rather humans and nonhumans co-revolve around each other and the practices of which they are a part. The process of co-constitution between humans and nonhumans is expressed in the field of science studies via the concept of factishes. This concept describes the creation of new actants, i.e. facts, through scientific experiments. For instance, how out from Boyle's laboratory and the air-pump there emerges the existence of a vacuum along with a new Boyle. In her book, *Cosmopolitics*, Isabelle Stengers compares this process with the process of reciprocal capture involved in the formation of symbiotic species. Reciprocal capture is an event from which "a dual process of identity construction is produced: regardless of the manner, and usually in ways that are completely different, identities that coinvent one another each integrate a reference to the other for their own benefit" (*Cosmopolitics* 36). Analogously, the fabrication of factishes connotes the way in which new modes of existences emanate from eventful scientific experiments. For instance, in her case study of the "discovery" of the neutrino, there is a coproduction of identities between the physicist and the neutrino, each defining who and what the other is and does within the larger scientific and natural context. In this regard their existence is

intertwined such that "...the neutrino exists for physicists and, somewhat differently, the physicists exist for the neutrino" (38).

Ultimately, the two help ground and co-constitute each other's being. Physicists are who they are in part because of the nature of the set of nonhumans that they study. Neutrinos are what they are in part because of the type of scientist that studies them and the particular conceptual theory and experimental procedure they are articulated through. Put differently, the two would not be the same without each other. What a neutrino is would not be the same without the physicists and their particular scientific frame of reference involving both a theory laden with certain concepts and structure as well as their particular institutionalized experimental methods and accepted findings.³⁰ Nor would the physicists be the same without the neutrino and the subatomic particle's plane of reference.³¹ The two simultaneously emerge as actors in relation to the systematic organization of scientific practice with particular identifiable behaviors, modes of being; that is, the way the neutrino interacts with other subatomic particles and the scientific conduct of the scientist with respect to their interpretation of the experiment, how they conduct the experiment and engage with the laboratory equipment.³²

³⁰ For example, the particular form of existence the neutrino takes is in part due to the surrounding theory of particle physics as well as the physicist and laboratory which allows the neutrino become visible and show its mettle.

³¹ The same can be said of the soccer player and the soccer ball each is defined by and oriented around the other as well as the larger practice they participate in, namely the game of soccer which defines the rules of their engagement and the context of meaning. What makes a person a soccer player is their playing with a ball according to the rules of soccer. As Serres points out what makes a good soccer player in the integration of the physics of the ball in relation to the rules and nature of the field into one's thinking and behavior as if it were second nature.

³² This co-constitution between human scientist and nonhuman natural is an ongoing process such that the two go back and forth in defining each other in a spiral motion. Indeed, Serres elsewhere speaks of such processes as Latour points out: "I imagine, at the origin, a rapid whirlwind in which the transcendental constitution of the object by the subject would be nourished, as in return, by the symmetrical constitution of the subject by the object, in crushing semicycles that are endlessly begun anew, returning to the origin..." (*We Have Never Been Modern* 84).

Furthermore, since the sciences qua science must conform and map onto nature, the practices of the sciences are especially apt to elucidate the very non-modern notion that non-humans construct humans and shape subjectivity. More specifically, scientists must go out of their way to try to see and think of the world in terms of nature and create scientific experiments tailored to natural phenomena so as to create a stage suitable for them to appear on their own.³³ The construction and repetition of experiments itself function as training exercises for the scientist involved. Latour describes this process, saying “At the moment when the entity is at its weakest ontological status... shuffled among clouds of chaotic sense data, the experimental chemist is *in full activity*, extracting, treating, filtering, dissolving, adding, sprinkling, raising the temperature, introducing carbonic acids, fitting tubes, and so on” (*Pandora’s Hope* 131). Through the time and effort the scientist expends in the laboratory, they come to gain an intimate experience with the workings of the experiment: theoretically, the functioning of the laboratory equipment, and the overall running of the experiment. This slowly but surely, if the experiment is going to be a success, develops into a relationship between the two such that the scientist’s subjectivity becomes oriented around the demands and needs of the particular thing being studied. The scientist comes to think and respond according to their equipment and the natural thing being studied.

Recall, for example, the scientific couple of Pasteur and yeast that Latour brings to our attention and how Pasteur is described as emerging differently from the experiment due the relationship he forms with the yeast. In order to understand the transformation of Pasteur it is important to remember that the experiment is an *event*. It is a process that tested Pasteur as a scientist the whole way, as much as it tested the yeast. From setting up

³³ See *Pandora’s Hope* p.130.

the experiment, involving the meticulous construction of the experiment as a stage suitable for the yeast to give its performance, to consistently carrying it out time and time again, to even the prior thought process that called into question the organic residue as potentially being something more, each challenged his ingenuity and abilities as a scientist. Over the course of the experiments and the experience he gains with the yeast via the laboratory equipment and scientific theory he develops an intimacy with the yeast that molds his being: his perception, dexterity, sensitivity, and thinking. He becomes receptive to the subtle changes in the sample and the readings from his laboratory apparatuses in such a way that they are meaningful to him as the indirect indications and signs of the yeast itself, which in turn direct his thoughts and actions.³⁴

The shaping of human subjectivity by nonhumans is not limited to the esoteric events of the laboratory, but permeates human existence in general. Similar *events* happen in the everyday world in which humans emerge differently as a result of the intimate relationships they form with the particular nonhumans that play a meaningful role in their life; for example the way technology like cellphones and social media shapes our relationships with others, the way we respond to them, and how these effect how we express and think of ourselves and the way we conduct our day. Or take for instance how our natural setting plays an active, versus passive, role in shaping our sense of self. From the weather's immediate impact on our mood and disposition, shaping how we feel about ourselves and our perception of the day, giving rise to a corresponding set of possible activities we can, and want to, perform and inclining us to do them in a certain manner. To the way geographical landscapes and climate contribute to different ways of life and

³⁴ This is comparable to the way a lover's identity is co-constituted by the one they care for. Their sense of self becomes oriented around the other such that they identify with loved one's perspective. They come to relate and see the world in terms of the other as well as themselves.

identities; e.g. the persona associated with south or the more laidback attitude of life by the beach. Then there is the way that a person's relation to particular material things co-constitutes their identity. Whether it be the type of vehicle a person drives, a Prius versus an SUV, to the type of food they eat, from a vegetarian diet to red-blooded meat, each of these serves as an objective extension of themselves that attests to their values, and how they value themselves, and their larger world views.³⁵ This last point gets at a larger point that culture is not only conceptually defined in relation to the concept of nature, but is also physically, as it is not only defined by the autonomous physicality of nature but also defines itself through it. The particular meaning and values of a culture takes root and hold of people by being physically grounded, that is instantiated in material bodies and their configuration.³⁶ The idea that nonhumans serve to stabilize social order is captured in the following line of questioning by Latour:

And if religion, arts or styles are to 'reflect', 'reify', 'materializes', 'embody' society...then are objects not, in the end, its co-producers? Is not society built literally – not metaphorically – of gods, machines, sciences, arts, and styles? Maybe the social sciences have simply forgotten that before projecting itself on to things society has to be made, built, constructed? And out of what material could it be built if not out of nonsocial, nonhuman resources? (*We Have Never Been Modern* 54).³⁷

While the co-constitution of human identity by nonhumans is a ubiquitous feature of human existence in general, the non-modern, Western, self is specifically shaped in relation to the large population and demography of nonhumans that is characteristic of

³⁵ Such talk also brings to mind Marx's analysis of labor as a means of self-affirmation. Through our labor we create products that we identify with, in that, a part of our self is infused in, and represented, by them. In the products of our labor we take on a more definite and objective extension. However, given our nonmodern, hybrid ontology a necessary amendment to this would be that the creation is not a mere reflection of human will but is part human part nature, an overlap of both human intentions and nonhuman possibility.

³⁶ One such example of this is racism in the South. The physical separation of facilities like bathrooms, water fountains, and public transportation sought to reinforce the idea of racial separation and inferiority.

our non-modern nature-culture collective. From scientific facts to technological objects, the demography of the nonhuman population of non-modernity arises from the salient role the sciences have played in it and continue to do so. As Latour puts it, "... the most fundamental aspect of our culture, since Boyle's day... [is that] we live in communities whose social bond comes from objects fabricated in laboratories..." (21). Furthermore, the exponential and unrestrained growth of the sciences and technology under the ruse of modernity has multiplied hybrid nonhumans at an unprecedented rate and intermingled nature and culture like never before. According to him, "The fact that one of the collective needs ancestors and fixed stars while another one, more eccentric, needs genes and quasars, is explained by the dimensions of the collective to be held together. A much larger number of objects requires a much larger number of subjects. A much greater degree of subjectivity requires a much greater degree of objectivity" (108). With scientific advancement, and greater objectivity, came a more broad and nuanced understanding of nature that came to be composed of more and more things, each of which being articulated with more and more details and precision. In other words, the expansion of the sciences led to the creation of new, and more refined, facets of the world. From this greater and more precise understanding of nature we have come to better understand our relation to the rest of nature, even seemingly disparate parts from stars to bacteria. Furthermore, humans too are objects of scientific scrutiny, which has given rise to psychological objects like ADHD and OCD that we are now defined in terms of. It is this ever expanding and detailed web of connections between human and nonhuman given to us by our scientific understanding of nonhumans around us as well as humans that has given rise to our more acute and scientific articulation of the self. From

the basic, individual self that was a source of action and bearer of responsibility, to one that nowadays is described via personality traits, genetics, culture and mental states, humans have taken on a greater degree of subjectivity.

Not only do nonhumans co-constitute our subjectivity in a relational sense, but they also do so much more fundamentally by conditioning our agency. Challenging both the modern understanding of freedom and action, this conditioning arises from the conception of network agency. Rather than being absolute, the ability to do whatever we want whenever we want, and possessed by the single individual emanating from their will and inherent powers, action and freedom are realized in relation with other humans as well as nonhumans.³⁸ Jane Bennett expresses this succinctly, saying, “...an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (*Vibrant Matter* 21). That is, human projects and goals are never carried out alone but require the help and enlistment of others to the cause. Action and freedoms manifest due to our association with others through the overlap and alignment of human networks of possibility, meaning, and intention, and nonhuman networks of possibility and directedness. Latour nicely captures this, saying,

It is by mistake, or unfairness, that our headlines read “Man flies,” “Woman goes into space.” Flying is a property of the whole association of entities that includes airports and planes, launch pads, and ticket counters. B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force flies. Action is simply not a property of humans *but an association of actants*...actants are in the process of exchanging competences, offering one another new possibilities, new goals, new functions (*Pandora’s Hope* 182).

³⁸ While this as well as the prior point made concerning identity is similar to a care ethicist view in which our sense of self and action emanate from our relationships with others, the main difference is in the expansion of the meaning of other so as to include nonhumans in addition to humans. Nonhumans have in general been neglected throughout the history of philosophy which why there is a need to pay special attention to them.

By themselves, neither planes nor humans fly. It is only together, along with the greater behind the scene collaborations such as between physics and engineering, that flying through the air becomes possible, something we are free to do.³⁹

In this regard, the subject-object dichotomy of modernity can be seen as a misleading way of thinking about the world, presenting a false dilemma that makes either the subject or the object the bearer of possibility and power rather than the association between them. Indeed, even Sartre's conception of transcendence and immanence also comes off as misleading in this light. While consciousness, and in effect detachment from one's self and the world, provides the possibility of choice and hence freedom, the actual possibility of my being and assertion of my freedom is co-constituted by the nonhuman and human givens of my situation. My openness towards the future although infinite in theory, is always situated in the here and now, and so, amounts to re-envisioning and artistically playing around with the possibilities of nonhumans and humans that make up my situation. Thus, transcendence and immanence are not oppositional features defining human existence. Transcendence, and the exercise of our freedom, is derived from our downright immanence; after all, what is an artist without a medium?

Due to this network derived sense of agency in carrying out our projects we naturally find ourselves engaged with others. However these others are not the intermediaries of modernity, but the full-fledged mediators of non-modernity. Consequently, humans lose the purity of Kantian autonomy as intentionality itself is mediated by nonhumans such that we too become hybrid actors. In other words, with the dawn of non-modernity we can no longer think of an individual as a mirror reflection of

³⁹ The non-modern self then has a greater degree of freedom, as well as subjectivity, due to the greater number of nonhumans in the non-modern collective such as planes.

their willful intentions and values – their laws onto themselves. In order to understand the shift in conception it is necessary to return to the idea that the self, like the sciences, is founded in practice. Humans are not just defined by the ideas and plans in their head, but also in the actual implementation of them, by their actions, which involves other nonhumans. These enlisted others are not merely passive tools but participants in the activity. In the process of working with them they effectively modify and redirect our original intentions and how the action is carried out as our plan literally takes form.

As Latour describes it, the coupling of humans and nonhumans results in modified programs of action for both of them. A program of action is “...the series of goals and steps and intentions that an agent can describe in a story...” (178). He illustrates this through an example involving a man and gun, each alone having their own program of action – their respective goals or functions they seek to accomplish. When the two come together they form a third, emergent agent, a gunman, with a new, original, composite goal that does not correspond to either agent’s original program of action or a mere summation of the two. Rather the third agent’s program of action is a translation of the other two: a “...displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies the original two” (178). While he is not denying that there are cases of the NRA story in which people enlist a gun to help carry out their *premeditated* plan to murder, or other cases of the materialist story which give credence to the slogan “Guns kill people” where an otherwise innocent person is seized by the script of the gun and is transformed into a criminal, he is contending that more often than not this translation in programs of action occurs such that “You only

wanted to injure but, with a gun now in your hand, you want to kill” (178-179).⁴⁰ Thus, intentionality is not simply a pure reflection of the human agent, but the very formation of intentions as well as the carrying out of them via actions is mediated by the nonhuman actants that we have had previous experience with and the ones we find in our current environment.

Furthermore, the mediation of intentionality alters the actants involved such they are no longer the same as they were alone. Through the cooperation of their individual agencies together they form a new agency, which emerges with new and different possibilities. In light of Latour’s metaphysics, this coupling of action no longer necessarily proceeds in a linear fashion. Rather the third agent is an emergent phenomenon that reflects the particular network of relationships between the individual actants and whose agency is more than the sum of its individual parts, which is to say the individual agents’ directedness and capacities. As such Latour’s concept of translation associates action with uncertainty and surprise. In carrying out one’s intention something happens in the actual act due to this fusion of human and nonhuman agency such that we are overcome and surprised by the outcome of my action. Latour nicely elucidates this, saying,

⁴⁰ While Latour’s gunman is an example of the way our intentions are mediated by external nonhumans, because the gun is a human construction its program of action is more artificial and so it could be contested that the gunman’s intention is not a hybrid phenomenon but rather human action being mediated by further humans. However, the gun itself is hybrid of the laws of physics, combustion, material configuration and human design, and so there still is nonhuman component that is being integrated to human life. Or the same problem could be resolved by replacing the gun with a rock. The rock opens up similar, new possibilities for the angry, albeit weak, person with the intent to injure and directs the conduct of their action to a certain extent. Together the two represent a new agent with new possibilities and a new character. In entering this particular association, the rock changes what the person is via changing what they are capable of, i.e. granting them the ability to hurt in a particular way and so making them intimidating, while the person changes what the rock is, making it into a weapon. The engineering example of mediation in the second section is another good example of the modification of human intentions by more natural nonhumans.

The scientist makes the fact, but whenever we make something *we* are not in command, we are slightly *overtaken* by the action: every builder knows that... That which slightly overtakes us is *also*, because of our agency, because of the *clinamen* of our action slightly overtaken, modified... But there are events. I never *act*; I am always slightly surprised by what I do. That which acts through me is also surprised by what I do, by the chance to mutate, to change, to bifurcate, the chance that I and the circumstances surrounding me offer to that which has been invited, recovered, welcomed (281).

Ultimately, this co-constitution of identity and agency by nonhumans comes about due to the human condition of embodiment. Humans are thinking bodies. It is because of our bodily comportment, specifically our outward openness that we are able to develop identities at all.⁴¹ As such we are effectively and affectively dependent on both the outside material world as well as our internal physical constitution. The co-constitution of the human self by material bodies is most tangibly and universally expressed via our own bodies. The effect that the subject's own physical constitution has on consciousness is insightfully pointed out by Erwin Schrodinger: "Consciousness finds itself intimately connected with, and dependent on, the physical state of a limited region of matter, the body. (Consider the changes of mind during the development of the body, as puberty, ageing, dotage, etc., or consider the effects of fever, intoxication, narcosis, lesion of the brain and so on)" (88). While in *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett focuses on the effect that external material stuff, i.e. food, has on the whole of our well being as humans. Food is not only vital to our physical health but also constitutive of our mental states. She contends that dietary fats, through a type of emergent causality, can effect human moods and cognitive dispositions such that "...particular fats, acting in different ways in different bodies, and with different intensities even within the same body at different times, may produce patterns of effects, though not in ways that are fully predicable. This

⁴¹ See Russon's *Human Experience*

is because a small change in the eater-eaten complex may issue in a significant disruption of its pattern or function” (*Vibrant Matter* 41-42). Here is another example of the agency of nonhumans. Like other nonhuman actants, the agentic capacity of food “includes the negative power to resist or obstruct human projects, but it also includes the more active power to affect and create effects” (49). She also points out Nietzsche’s similar assertions, which went so far as to say that not only our psychological and cognitive states but also our aesthetic and moral complexions were altered and reformed by what is ingested. All of which elucidates the hybrid nature of humans. We not only share the naturalness of physicality as primordially material beings, but our physical and mental states are interdependently tied and co-constituted by external material bodies.

Chapter 5: Ethical Conclusions

In the traversal of the above discussion, we have come to grips with the myth of modernity and come to terms with what we never have ceased to be, non-moderns. Modernity divorces the world into the mutually exclusive and entire separate categories of Nature/object and society/subject. As a whole, modernity discredits the existence of hybrids and practices of mediation, dismissing them as mere intermediaries, and relies solely on the practices of purification. While this reductionist method of analysis proves to be very effective and leads to the success of modernity, in the form of scientific and technological advances, ultimately this very success is its undoing. Such advances give rise to a plethora of hybrids, ranging from the sciences themselves to dangerous ones like global warming, that modernity's conceptual schema is unable to sort or simply dismiss; and so, sends it into crisis. From there we traced the way non-modernity conceives of practices of mediation as the foundation of reality, around which the categories of nature and society are conceptually co-defined and causally connected, forming nature-culture collectives. Due to mediation, the world at large is an ontological continuum of a hybrid actants that vary in their degree of complexity⁴², ranging from quasi-object to quasi-subject, as well as their constitution, ranging from mostly nonhuman to mostly human. All of which though, qua actant, are relationally and existentially defined through their various networks of associations with humans and nonhumans. Thus, the non-modern ontology mixes together the traditional categories of nature/object and society/subject such that hybrids share properties from both and represent part nonhuman part human; which we first witnessed via Latour's chief example of quasi-objects. With the Latourian stage set, the question became how does this all this impact what it is to be human? In

⁴² In regards to their receptivity, possibilities, capacities, and directedness.

other words, using Latour's organizational schema, what does it mean to be a human qua quasi-subject? Given the felt lack of explicit discussion on such matters we then embarked upon such a task. By connecting seemingly disparate topics within Latour's literature, from factiches to network agency to modified programs of action to embodiment, the concept of quasi-subjectivity was articulated.⁴³ Given the non-modern conception of human existence, as one mediated by humans and nonhumans such that our identity and agency is co-constituted in relation to them, the last thing that remains is to start to chart the implications this has for ethics.

Working from a similar philosophical background, in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* Jane Bennett is also interested in retelling the modern narrative so as to reveal the ways in which enchantment still pervades life, and ultimately the role this plays in ethics. At the outset of her work she asserts, "But what is at stake in such a retelling? The answer for me has to do with the effect – always indirect – that a cultural narrative has on the ethical sensibility of its bearers" (*The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 12). In this vein, this section seeks to understand the shift in ethical orientation that comes with the change from a modern to non-modern narrative. Given the emphasis on a more expansive sense of existentialism and relational ontology, the ethical aim of non-modernity should not be to provide a fixed, absolute, and universal set of moral principles that apply to all people for every situation. Instead, like care ethics, the focus of such an ethic will be on developing a virtuous character, meaning an internalized disposition such that we relate, and in effect respond, to the specificity of our situation in an appropriate way. However, this re-conception of ourselves as quasi-subjects that are relationally

⁴³ With the thought in mind, "...existence is not an all-or-nothing property but a relative property...An entity gains in reality if it is associated with many others that are viewed as collaborating with it. It loses in reality if, on the contrary, it has to shed associates or collaborators (human and nonhuman)" (PH 158).

constituted in ways even more expansive than previously thought entails a shift in not only what virtues are central for a non-modern ethic but also in how ethical responsibility is thought of. Rather than the modern virtues of self-sufficiency and purity of intention associated with its conception of the self as being one of discrete and independent selfhood, via the autonomous individual, authenticity and considerateness become the central virtues of non-modernity. In addition, the retelling of agency via a metaphysics of actants and networks that distributes agency throughout a network entails a redistribution of ethical responsibility as well. Thus not only does the normative framework change but also the associated standards, values, and sense of responsibility that we should hold ourselves to and strive for, as well as, the way we ought to interact with other humans as well as nonhumans.

In order to make good choices and effective actions, we must first acknowledge our current situation – how who we are is defined in relation to those around us – as choice, in the first place, is contingent on being conscientiously aware of my given situation and the success of my future projects depends on having a realistic understanding of who I am and what I am capable of in relation to the possibilities afforded by others.⁴⁴ Hence, given the shift in conception of what it means to be human, the most central and vital virtue that needs to be stressed and dwelled upon, especially due to how the modern mentality has become so engrained, is authenticity. Authenticity is a particular relation to one's self such that one can be said as being true or honest to one's self, meaning that who they are and who they take themselves to be coincide. The non-modern conception of authenticity most closely resembles that put forth by Simone

⁴⁴ See Macintyre on the connection between adequate self-knowledge and realistically imagining alternative futures (*Dependent Rational Animals* 94, 95)

de Beauvoir in the *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. There authenticity amounts to assuming and living consciously of the ambiguity of human existence, which refers to the simultaneity of facticity and transcendence, matter and mind, finite and infinite, and inwardness and bond with the world, as well as separation and interconnectedness. The way in which these two poles of antinomy come together in lived experience, especially facticity and transcendence, mind and matter, internal and external, is very similar to the way humans and nonhumans as well as nature and culture, along with the particular possibilities and meanings each opens up and closes off, co-constitute human existence. Putting everything together, the virtue of authenticity for non-modernity amounts to avowing the ambiguity of our existence, integrating this understanding into our sense of self and our future projects, that is the simultaneity of a facticity which now also includes the way we are hybrid beings co-constituted both within and without by nonhumans, and this new sense of transcendence involving how intentionality and agency is also co-constituted from networks of associations with humans and nonhumans. Ultimately, authenticity is the most vital virtue for humans living in a hybrid world because of the way human flourishing, in the form of health, happiness, and meaning, is dependent on it.

One aspect of this non-modern authenticity is coming to grips with the fact that we are not self-constituted individuals. We can no longer think of ourselves as completely self directed, with a given set of inherent powers. Human intention is mediated by the directedness of autonomous nonhumans, while our capabilities and freedom are co-constituted by the relationship between our internal and external networks of associations with both humans and nonhumans. Thus, human agency and our sense of self is thoroughly relational in that they are developed in relationships with others and

rely on others for the formation and exercise of their capacities. While my thoughts on how such a non-modern ethic would take shape are very aligned with and rooted in such perspectives as that of Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics and feminist care ethics, what I feel Latour's understanding adds to the picture, which has been previously neglected throughout much of philosophy and is why my position seeks to move beyond them, is in this expanding notion of other so as to include networks of nonhuman hybrid actants. Overall then, realizing this virtue of authenticity amounts to understanding the sources of one's sense of self and agency, and responding accordingly.

More specifically, humans, like all actants, are fuzzy beings that while appearing to have a well-defined bodily boundary, who we are and what we are capable of is dispersed throughout networks and time.⁴⁵ As such, self-reflection is not simply a matter of looking within, at say our inner psychological and emotive selves as well as other

⁴⁵ On the self being dispersed throughout space and time I mostly have in mind John Russon and the idea that "As experiencers, then, we simply are synthetic process of imaginative interpretation" (14). As synthesizing subjects we can recognize the togetherness of things in the form of unitary wholes or set patterns between things. More importantly, with regards to the temporal dimension of our being, is the role of imagination and the ability to think in terms of things that are not currently present (13). Human existence is marked by temporality in that my present experience is laden with habits from the past, which present themselves in the form meaningfully charged environments that carry with a directional force – directing me to some end (16), and future projects, which literally project themselves onto my interpretation of the present. He likens the way in which human experience of the present is temporally laden to that of listening to music, in which, "The listener must come to inhabit the music, join with it in anticipating its further development, and hear the notes that present themselves in the context of what has already sounded" (12). One difference being that in addition to the way the present is temporally laden due to the synthetic, imaginative subjects we are, the present is also temporally laden because of the nonhumans that inhabit it which comes from kinds of different time periods. Although not touched on before, with non-modernity comes a different understanding of time. Instead of history being divided by revolutionary ruptures such that each period is contained, recognizable by the coherent cohort of entities that belong specifically to that time, past historical periods have a way of persisting and even recurring such that a given temporal frame consists of a mixture of diverse time periods. Latour elucidates on this saying, "I may use an electric drill, but I also may use a hammer. The former is thirty-five years old, the latter hundreds of thousands. Will you see me as a DIY expert 'of contrasts' because I mix up gestures from different times? Would I be an ethnographic curiosity? On the contrary: show me an activity that is homogeneous from the point of view of the modern time. Some of my genes are 500 million years old, others 3 million, others 100,000 years, and by habits range in age from a few days to several thousand years. As Peguy's *Clio*, and as Michel Serres repeats, 'we are exchangers and brewers of time' (Serres and Latour, 1992). It is this exchange that defines us, not the calendar or the flow that the moderns had constructed for us" (*We Have Never Been Modern* 75).

features of our internal bodily being, but, must also involve thinking of ourselves from without. In *Human Experience*, John Russon follows a similar line of thought with regards to outwardly looking form of self-reflection. In particular, he says, “Self-knowledge, that is, does not come through the easy reflection upon ourselves that we typically rely upon, but, on the contrary, will only come through a study of the determinate forms of interpretative synthesis that can be discerned within the character of objective calls to action (“objective” in the sense of, “pertaining to the nature of the object”): the terms in which we experience the object as calling upon us reflect the value and projects through which we experience the world” (17). While Russon elucidates how the way things appear to us is not as an independent discrete object but rather its very unity of being in appearance automatically incorporates its relation to ourselves,⁴⁶ what I am trying to articulate is the opposite end of this relation. That is, how our sense of self reflects our relationships to a larger nature-culture network, and in particular, the hybrid nonhumans we personally are intimately familiar with that play a role in everyday experiences, shaping our habits, and our comportment to the world. Therefore, learning about ourselves involves looking around at the meaningful nonhumans (“meaningful” in the sense that they contribute to what we take to be a meaningful life) in our life to see what they say about us. Essentially, this move develops upon the self-affirmative sense of identity that thinkers from Hegel to MacIntyre have put forth. As MacIntyre describes it, “...self-knowledge too depends in key part upon what we learn about ourselves from

⁴⁶ Specifically, Russon says, “...experience is always interpretative: whatever perception we have of the world is shaped by our efforts to organize and integrate all of the dimension of our experience into a coherent whole. How we go about this will be dictated by the level of our education, by our expectations, by our desires, and so the vision we have will always be as much a reflection of ourselves and our prejudices as its is a discovery of “how things really are.” In other words, the very way that we see things reveals secrets about us: what we see reveals what we are looking for, what we are interested in. This is as true of our vision of things we take to be outside us as it is of our vision of ourselves” (10).

others, and more than this, upon a confirmation of our own judgments about ourselves by others who know us well, a confirmation that only such others can provide” (94). The difference being that this criterion grounded ascription of identity by others includes nonhumans as well as humans. In this way, our sense of self is intersubjectively, as well as objectively, based.

Another aspect of this non-modern authenticity is letting go of the self-appointed master role, both with respect to ourselves and nature, associated with modernity. With regards to ourselves, this means relinquishing the idea that we are these absolute choosers with an unfettered and inherent freedom in the face of objects. Rather we must embrace the more realistic, non-modern sense of agency that is derived from and contingent on its network of relationships. What we are capable of, and the achievement of our goals, depends on the network of relationships we have with both humans and nonhumans that enable us to do so. As MacIntyre astutely points out, “Acknowledgment of dependence is key to independence” (85). This is because, as he explains, without truthfully and realistically acknowledging our dependency and attachment to others we are held captive by them such that we cannot move beyond them. It is important here to remember Bennett’s assertion that in addition to things being sources of resistance, as in their traditional conception, they also have productive capacities – “thing-power” – in that nonhuman materials with their autonomous possibilities and directedness have a defining impact on the way events play out. Moreover, our very source of our freedom, and the realization of it, is found in our relation and engagement with such things. De Beauvoir provides a very useful and insightful portrayal of human freedom in asserting: “...to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given

toward an open future...” (91). Tying the two together, while nonhumans represent the constraints of what is given in the present they simultaneously also co-constitute the backdrop of possibility from which our future opens up and the mediating means through which our freedom is concretely realized via actions. Thus, it is through realizing our dependency on the material world that we find ourselves in a better, more able, situation to make use of our freedom so as to make realistic plans for the future as well as the necessary means and obstacles in the way of realizing those goals.

One practical implementation of this authenticity is that when it comes to caring for ourselves, as well as others, our actions should not only be directed individually, but on the network of relations that actively engage in our and their co-constitution. In this light we should aim at strengthening the beneficial ones that foster and cultivate one’s physical and mental well being in addition to their ethical character and conduct, while weakening and supplementing those that are harmful or undesirable. Furthermore, in cultivating oneself and pursuing various meaning giving life projects, we must give up the idealistic attitude of immediate change in regards to making a decision, as well as, having things exactly our way and bending matter to whatever way we will. Instead we need to learn to work on ourselves through working with other nonhuman materials over time such that we come to develop a mutual understanding, meaning we come to see them not only in relation to ourselves but also in terms of their own directedness, possibilities, and meaning as well as the integrity of the network of relations that sustains them. In doing so, we will learn how to best surround ourselves with the appropriate nonhumans to work with, and environments to work in, that are conducive to making desirable choices and effective actions, having aligned programs of action, so as to

realize our projects and goals and overall become who we want to become. Moreover, the larger context of meaning they are associated with should contribute and express who we want to be as a person and the values we want to be associated with, since as mediating means they not only help us realize our ends but in process redefine them and their integrity.

Another ethical corollary of this non-modern perspective, and in particular how agency is understood as being derived from and dispersed through networks and time, is that our conception of cause and assignment of responsibility must be stretched. Rather than focusing on the detached individual existing solely in the present or societal issues at large as the source of the blame, responsibility needs to be distributed throughout the collective of human and nonhuman associations. In doing so we must also take into consideration non-linear and emergent phenomenon, and the existence of composite actors having a fusion of pre-existing programs of action. In these regards it is insightful to recall Latour's quote about how neither people nor planes fly alone, but rather, flying is the result of all the associations that make up airlines. Similarly, when it comes to composite actors, we must move beyond the subject-society and subject-object dichotomies in assigning responsibility. For instance, in the gun debate Latour contends, "It is neither people nor guns that kill. Responsibility for action must be shared among various actants" (*Pandora's Hope* 180). Among the various actants that share the responsibility in this case would include the synergetic combination of societal causes, along with familial upbringing, that go into shaping the individual in conjunction with the presence of nonhumans such as guns and their regulation and distribution. Instead of singling out one of these factors, we must broaden the scope of our understanding and

focus on the dynamic relationships between these actants under the assumption that an individual never acts alone.

One last way this authenticity spells out pertains to how as hybrids we share the property of embodiment, and like all bodily beings we will perish. As such, this non-modern virtue is also an authenticity towards death. Like all other living things we will die and in order to understand what it is to be human we must understand this. Moreover, this is all the more penetrating as humans, as Heidegger so astutely pointed out, because we have come to terms with our own death; that I as an individual will cease to exist at some time. The inherent finitude of my life is marked by an uncertainty that is a darkness of meaninglessness encompassing even the farthest outreaches of light that is my life. Ultimately, this dark feature of human existence serves to illuminate one's life by forcing us to think about life, what kind of life do we want to lead, what kind of person do we want to become, and what kind of meaning do we want to attribute to a life without inherent meaning through the course of our life.⁴⁷ Furthermore, this form of authenticity is particularly pertinent for non-modernity as facing one's own death puts into focus some of the central concepts of modernity, such as uncertainty, lack of control, the connection we have with the rest of nature, and the meaning that arises without essence. Such thoughts cause us to slow down, pause for a moment, and take a step back to

⁴⁷ After all, without essences there is no longer any answer at the back of the book defining who we are, what we should strive to, and what is actually meaningful. Without this one right answer, the burden of proof rest on our shoulders and can only be found and demonstrated in the course of one's own life. As such, like in real life science, we must turn to experimentation in order to figure this out for ourselves. In doing so we literally become the test subject and life experiences are the experiments from which we can come to understand ourselves based on performances, successes and failures, the effective capabilities we demonstrate, along with the aversions and predilection elicited by interactions with certain others. While some things are beyond the scope of this experimental method, another way to find out what to do with our lives and what gives it meaning is by employing thought experiments. For instance, Nietzsche's eternal return allows us to abstract from the immediacy of our day-to-day lives and gain a perspective on the entirety of our lives and what is meaningful by asking if we had to live this life over and over again what is really worth doing, what would be willing to affirm for an entirety.

reconsider and reevaluate life as whole as well as the relative importance and value of various things in our life and the way we have and want to conduct our life. This slowing down, as we will see shortly is a virtue in itself.

With the non-modern virtue of authenticity outlined in regards humans, we now turn our attention to what authenticity means in relation to nonhumans and nature at large. Let's begin by returning to the idea that authenticity requires letting go of our self-appointed master role this time in relation to nature. Such fantasies of mastery were based on the modern conception of nature as an inexhaustible reservoir of resources in the form of passive, shapeless objects that we can bend to whatever way our will desires without consequence given the divide between nature and society. This view is brought to light by Heidegger's analysis of the modern understanding of technology, in which nature is revealed purely in terms of human use value as a standing reserve. Such an understanding prompts humans to manipulate nature as we see fit so as to meet our needs. The problem with this is that it conceals the autonomous structure and way of nature, which must be respected to some threshold extent in order to maintain the integrity and functioning of the system as whole as well as overall well-being of the organisms dependent on it. Consequently, modernity failed to take into consideration the effects that our actions have on nonhumans as well as the networks existing between them as a whole; much less the repercussions that the disruption, short-circuiting, and destruction of the "natural order" might have for us.⁴⁸ Ultimately, this discounting and disfranchisement of nature as an inexhaustible and brute means to human ends lead to the de-realization of its loss, borrowing a phrase from Judith Butler, meaning moderns not only fail to consider the significance of what is being lost but do not even realize its happening.

⁴⁸Such examples include global warming, the straightening of rivers, and unlimited hunting and agriculture.

The ruse of modernity came to end with the proliferation of problematic and recalcitrant hybrids such as global warming, so it is fitting to end my discussion by addressing such concerns as well as taking up the philosophical import of non-modernity in regards to environmental ethics. With regards to the proliferation of undesirable, disruptive, and destructive hybrids the virtue of slowing down and being more universally considerate is imperative for the collective as a whole in facing these problems and preventing future ones. Latour himself points this out, saying, "...we are going to have to slow down, reorient and regulate the proliferation of monsters by representing them officially" (*We Have Never Been Modern* 12). Latour's work can thus be seen as taking the first step in trying to regulate the proliferation of dangerous hybrids by officially representing them via his hybrid ontology. In particular, given the intricacy and complexity of the natural networks, the close connections between the state of nature and the state of society, as exemplified by global warming, along with the co-constitution of humans by nonhumans, in moving forward we must proceed with caution, be more careful, and slow down so as to have the time for due diligence and thoroughly thinking things through instead of absent mindedly taking up various practices of mediation that gives rise to the production of hybrids. In doing so, we must consider a far wider range of both direct and indirect effects on the nature-culture collective as a whole over both human and natural time frames so as to try and prevent the careless introduction of dangerous and detrimental hybrids. The idea being that "...those who think the most about hybrids circumscribe them as much as possible, whereas those who chose to ignore them by insulating them from any dangerous consequences develop them to the utmost" (41). For instance, this might entail questioning the direction and degree of technological

research that intervenes and replaces natural things and processes with artificial and synthetic counterparts. In addition to considering the impact the practices of mediation and introduction of hybrids might have on natural environments we must also take into account their impact on the social landscape, on the essence of humanity, and an individuals' sense of self, e.g. the modern feeling of being estranged from nature and alienated from ourselves and others. This is because nonhuman hybrids are not innocent objects and passive tools but introduce ways of living, relating to the world, and impart particular meanings to life; that is, hybrids can impact and create lifestyles, outlooks, values, which reinforce certain social structures and ways of interacting with nature. Ultimately, Latour declares, "This slowing down, this moderation, this regulation, is what we expect from our morality. The fourth guarantee – perhaps the most important – is to replace the clandestine proliferation of hybrids by their regulated and commonly-agreed-upon production. It is time, perhaps, to speak of democracy again, but of a democracy extended to things themselves" (142).

Such talk about a democracy of things highlights the overall versatility of the non-modern perspective and the way in which it equally lends itself to environment ethics. In particular, this idea suggest not only that the production of hybrids, e.g. via scientific research, should be open to discussion and more frequently discussed, but also that all things should get a say in the deliberative process of democracy such that their well-being is represented and taken into consideration. One way non-modernity does this is by elevating the status of all material, nonhuman actants, bestowing a greater sense of value on them, both in their own right but also in relation to the roles they play in networks. With regards to first form of bestowal of value, I am specifically referring to how in

conceiving of the world as ontological continuum non-modernity reveals the way nonhumans share human properties such as having agency, having a sense of directedness, receptivity, openness of possibility to them, and autonomy to varying degrees of complexity – ranging from the dirt on the ground to the elephant walking upon it. As such, it extends our traditional, democratic, conception of respect so as to include everything from minerals, to plants, to animals, to ecosystems. Indeed, Latour explicitly asserts this:

We can define morality as *uncertainty* about the proper relation between means and ends, extending Kant’s famous definition of the obligation “not to treat Human beings simply as means but always also as ends” – provided that we *extend it to nonhumans as well*... Ecological crises, as we have interpreted them, present themselves as *generalized revolts of the means*: no entity – whale, river, climate earthworm, tree, calf, cow, pig, brood – agrees any longer to be treated “simply as a means” but insists on being treated “always also as an end.” (*Politics of Nature* 155-156).

Finally, thinking through the hybrid nature of human existence seems to naturally call for the expansion of care ethics so as to attend to relationships with humans as well as nonhumans. Our newfound and greater sense of interdependency and intersubjectivity give rise to greater circles of care. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett develops on this idea of distributing value more generously to all bodies and points out how it is accompanied by a newfound attentiveness, which, “...can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations. And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be harm to oneself” (*Vibrant Matter* 13). This kinship with other bodies and nature in general and the way in which all our well-beings are all bound up in webs of relationships with one another, also gets at how the modern conception of self-interest and society-nature dualism and the barriers they create for environmental ethics break down with the

relational ontology of non-modernity. Given the ways in which our physical well-being, intentionality, capacities, and sense of self is bound up with networks of material things both within and without, one's own good, as well society's at large, is not completely separable from and to some degree intertwined with the good of nature. As such, caring about ourselves and other humans entails caring about nonhumans and the network of associations that exists between us and them, as well as the ones that independently exist between them and them. While we might start caring about nature and nonhumans in relation to ourselves, similar to the development of human relationships all too often through the time shared with them we come to appreciate and value them in their own right. Ultimately, this caring about affectively motivates and moves us to care for them. In this way, the responsibility to care for other humans as well as nonhumans and nature in general comes not from without in the form of external laws, but from within as a felt internal obligation. Thus, in conclusion, not only does the conceptual change between modernity and non-modernity prompt the need for new relations between humans and themselves and other humans, but also new relations between humans and nature. The difference that a cultural narrative makes in regards to our perception of and interaction with the natural world is poignantly pointed out by Serres via Prigogine and Stengers:

“Where man is in the world, of the world, in matter, of matter, he is not a stranger, but a friend, a member of the family, and an equal. He has made a pact with things. Conversely, many other systems and many other sciences are based on breaking this pact. Man is a stranger to the world, to dawn, to the sky, to things. He hates them, and fights them. His environment is a dangerous enemy to be fought, to be kept enslaved” (*Order out of Chaos* 304-305).

While the intention of this paper was to bring into focus the basic character of human existence in non-modernity, this in no way was meant to be the end of the discussion. Rather the survey of the basic concepts of non-modernity and dimensions of

quasi-subjectivity was intended to open up new discussions and shine a new light on old discussions by providing the appropriate framework from which we should think about our personal and social problems. This conceptual framework however was just a bare bones sketch that outlined what it means to be human living in a hybrid world. In order to develop this account future work would include fleshing out this outline so as to address the specificity of our current human situation as well as the particularities of the problems we face. For instance, considering specifically what nonhumans and quasi-objects fill our world and the ways in which they co-constitute our identity and direct our agency. Furthermore, while this work sought to highlight how humans are defined in relation to other nonhumans and quasi-objects due to the lack of attention this has been given in the past in order to articulate a more robust and normatively substantial ethic there needs to be more work done taking into account the social dimension of our constitution and its relation to our quasi-object and nonhuman constitution. Upon doing so, such a non-modern ethic must find and build political as well as social outlets. It must become a public agenda that motivates governments and industries to supply the necessary social resources and produce the appropriate nonhumans and quasi-objects which cultivate ethical character and consciousness and enable people to pursue their own meaningful and authentic sense of self. This can only come about through more open and regular discussions about scientific and technological research and the development of consumer markets and industry that question whether the directions these are taking and the quasi-objects they are giving rise to are ones we really want to follow and be associated with. In pursuing these various projects we must seek to do our best to balance the interest of both humans and nonhumans alike. While none of the questions raised will be easy and have

straightforward answers in order to start to address the problems society is facing and begin to live out a non-modern ethic it is crucial to at least start to think and talk more publicly about these issues from a non-modern perspective which captures the complexity and multiplicity of interest at stake.

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