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► **To cite this version:**

Bruno Latour. Reflections on Etienne Souriau's Les différents modes d'existence. Harman Graham, Bryant Levi, Srnicek Nick. The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism, re.press, pp.304-333, 2011. hal-01054002

**HAL Id: hal-01054002**

**<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01054002>**

Submitted on 4 Aug 2014

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# Reflections on Etienne Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*<sup>1</sup>

Bruno Latour

translated by Stephen Muecke

« Reflections on Etienne Souriau's *Les Modes d'existence* », in (edited by Graham Harman, Levi Bryant and Nick Srnicek *The Speculative Turn Continental Materialism and Realism* re.press Australi, pp. 304-333, Melbourne, Australie] [http://www.re-press.org/book-files/OA\\_Version\\_Speculative\\_Turn\\_9780980668346.pdf](http://www.re-press.org/book-files/OA_Version_Speculative_Turn_9780980668346.pdf)

‘There is no ideal existence, the ideal is not a type of existence.’<sup>2</sup>  
—Étienne Souriau

If we have never been modern, then what history are we supposed to inherit? For twenty years or so, I have been interested in the following question: if we have never been modern, then what has happened to us? This question is relevant to history and anthropology, as well as to the philosophy of the period that Whitehead describes with the phrase ‘the bifurcation of nature’.<sup>3</sup> This bifurcation begins somewhere between Galileo and Locke and comes to an end, in Whitehead's opinion, with William James. This brief period, which I call ‘the modernist parenthesis’—during

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Isabelle Stengers for having led me to Étienne Souriau (and to Whitehead, and to so many authors I would never have approached without her constant tutoring). The book under discussion is Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*, originally published by Presses Universitaires de France in 1943. The book was republished in 2009, also by PUF, with an introduction by Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour.

<sup>2</sup> Étienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1943, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920.

which we *thought* we were modern—has three main characteristics: the conviction that the world can be divided into primary and secondary qualities (which can be called ‘naturalism’<sup>4</sup>); the ever increased intermingling, in ever larger assemblages, of these same primary and secondary qualities (which can be called ‘hybrids’); and lastly, a watertight division between the constantly repeated assertion that the division between primary and secondary qualities must be maintained, and the practical reality which is in fact the exact *opposite* of this theory (which one could call the ‘obscurantism of the Enlightenment’).<sup>5</sup>

This all revolves around the anthropological riddle that I think is captured by the phrase attributed to Indians in Western films: ‘White man speaks with forked tongue...’ And, sure enough, ‘white men’ always do the opposite of what they say, because they have defined modernism with a feature that is the exact contrary of what they do. While they insist on the strict separation of objectivity and subjectivity, science and politics, the real world and its representations, they have also worked in the other direction and mixed up humans and non-humans, natural laws and political ones, on such a massive scale that today we find ourselves, after four or five scientific or industrial revolutions, still sitting around discussing the politics of global warming or the ethics of stem-cell research. And yet this increasingly clear contradiction has done nothing to unsettle the certitude that the wave of modernization has swept or will sweep over the world. In the form of postmodernism we encountered only a slight doubt about this: a mere suspicion.

And yet this contradiction belongs not just to the present, since we already see it on one of Galileo’s beautiful manuscript pages, dated 19 January 1610;<sup>6</sup> on the top left of this folio manuscript is one of the tinted sketches of the craters of the moon made visible by telescope for the first time, and on the bottom right Cosimo de Medici’s horoscope, calculated by Galileo himself. Is Galileo ‘still a bit irrational’, then? Not at all. He is just like all the other moderns, doing the opposite of what he says: he insists on the importance of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities (which, incidentally, he was almost completely rethinking) while discovering in the very same breath a new way of *linking* the movement of the universe with universal mobility, and courtly flattery with the precise way to paint projected shadows in perspective,<sup>7</sup> thus producing the very monster that the idea of modernity was supposed to banish to the dark ages.

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<sup>4</sup> In the sense used by Philippe Descola, *Par delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Latour, *We have never been Modern*, Trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Owen Gingerich, *The Book Nobody Read: Chasing the Revolution of Nicolaus Copernicus*, Penguin, New York, 2004, p.198.

<sup>7</sup> Mario Biagioli, *Galileo’s Instruments of Credit: Telescopes, Images, Secrecy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006; Erwin Panofsky, *Galileo as a Critic of the Arts*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1954.

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So, enough said by way of framing philosophical anthropology, to which I was led through many years of exploring the history of science and also what is called *science studies*. If we have never been modern, then what has happened to us? And more importantly, what can we derive from a history comprising the three features I have just described, instead of pretending to inherit just one of them? I want to inherit the *whole* of Galileo's page. I will not be bought off with part of this legacy, by being left just the top half, for instance—Enlightenment history— or just the bottom half—the disappointment of noting that Galileo, too, was 'subject to the temptations of the irrational'...

So the initial question now becomes: is there an alternative philosophical tradition that allows us to take up European history in a different manner, by relocating the question of science and reason, even while forbidding the bifurcation of nature? If we follow Whitehead's suggestion we should be turning to James, and towards what the latter calls *radical* empiricism, but which I would rather call the second empiricism.<sup>8</sup> You will recall that as James saw it, the first empiricism would only take elementary sense-data into account. In order to create a synthesis, a human mind was supposed to enter at this point to create the relations that the initial experience could not initially provide. Here we find ourselves in such a 'bifurcated' nature that everything that comes out of experience has to make a choice, so to speak, and either line up on the side of the thing to be known, or on the side of the knowing consciousness, without having the right to *lead* somewhere or to *come from* somewhere.<sup>9</sup>

Now the originality of James, which was clearly recognized by Whitehead, was to attack this situation— but not (as had been done for two centuries) in the name of subjective values, transcendence, or spiritual domains, but quite simply *in the name of experience itself*. It is undignified, says James, to call oneself an empiricist yet to deprive experience of what it makes most directly available: relations. For him it is scandalously inaccurate to limit experiential facts to sensory data, while waiting for a hypothetical mind to produce relations by some mysterious manoeuvre of which the world itself is entirely deprived. Here is the famous passage from the *Principles of Psychology*:

But from our point of view both Intellectualists and Sensationalists are wrong. If there be such things as feelings at all, *then so surely as relations between objects exist in rerum natura, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known*. There is not a conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech, that does not

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<sup>8</sup> Bruno Latour, *What is the Style of Matters of Concern. Two Lectures on Empirical Philosophy*, Van Gorcum, Amsterdam, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage création de concepts*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002.

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express some shading or other of relation which we at some moment actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought. If we speak objectively, it is the real relations that appear revealed; if we speak subjectively, it is the stream of consciousness that matches each of them by an inward coloring of its own. In either case the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades. We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue*, a feeling of *cold*. Yet we do not, so inveterate has our habit become of recognizing the substantive parts alone that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use.<sup>10</sup>

James explains this with typical humour: certainly, the radical empiricist wants *no more* what is given in experience, but he also wants *no less*. Thus, what the first empiricism thought it could impose on common sense is in fact a huge *reduction* of what is accessible to experience: ‘You don’t have the right’, the philosophers seem to be saying, ‘to keep the sensation of *red*, and to set aside the sentiment of *if*, or *and*...’ And the really amazing thing, at which both James and Whitehead always marveled, was that common sense *accepts* this incredible ruling. For three centuries it remained locked in the position of discerning nothing in experience other than red spots and the tingling of cold, while at the same time scratching its head and trying to understand where all the other stuff it needs in order to live is going to come from. All it can do then is turn towards its sad interiority, which it knows very well to be a total wasteland... In the other direction, if prepositions are also a part of what we are experimenting with, it is perhaps superfluous to go looking for their place of origin in the solitary human mind—whether collective or individual—and especially in the types of domains towards which they seem to lead us. We know that Whitehead later draws an even more radical conclusion from James’s lesson. In the *Concept of Nature* he states quite calmly: ‘Natural philosophy should never ask, what is in the mind and what is in nature’. (30) It is ‘fraudulent’, he says, to drag in the question of knowledge to interfere with the passage of nature.

Radical empiricism wants to put experience (and not the severely amputated experience found among the first empiricists) at the centre of philosophy by posing a question that is both very ancient and very new: if relations (prepositions in particular) are given to us in experience, *where then* are they leading us? Could their deployment allow us a total rephrasing of the question of knowledge? Can the bifurcation of nature be brought to an end? We can put it even more simply: can philosophy be forced at long last to count beyond one or two (subject and object) or

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<sup>10</sup> William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1. p. 245. This can be found, in a similar form, in numerous passages in William James’ *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Longman Green and Co. New York, 1912.

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even three (subject, object, and going beyond subject and object through some dialectical sleight of hand)?

### Two Largely Forgotten Books on Different Modes of Existence

Now, in the same neighbourhood as the pragmatism of James and the speculative philosophy of Whitehead, there is a tradition that seems to shine direct light on prepositions defined as *modes of existence*. The term is to be found in a fairly well-known book (though one with scarcely any successors) by Gilbert Simondon, a book that deals specifically with technology.<sup>11</sup> *Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques* is a philosophical work that obviously knows how to count beyond three. Simondon even goes as far as seven, linking his modes of existence in a kind of genealogy—he calls it ‘genetic’—which is largely mythical, but which also has the great advantage of not reducing the number of possible solutions to only two or three. For Simondon there is no initial requirement to begin with the division of reality into subject and object positions. One quotation is enough to point to the trail he is trying to blaze:

Let’s assume that technicality is the result of a de-phasing of a unique, central and original mode of being in the world, the magical mode; the phase that balances technicality is the mode of being religious. At the neutral point between technique and religion, there appears a moment where primitive magical unity is doubled up: aesthetic thought. This is not a phase but a permanent reminder of the rupture of the unity of the magical mode and the striving for future unity.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly enough, Simondon has some interest in rehabilitating magic, in making the technical the counterpart of the religious, and later in extracting ethics from the technical, science from religion, and finally philosophy from aesthetics. But quite apart from all of this, it is the very notion of a plurality of modes of existence, each of which must be respected in its own right, that makes his strange intellectual adventure totally original. Although there was no real follow-up (the philosophy of technology continues to see Heidegger’s likes and dislikes as profound thought)<sup>13</sup> Simondon grasped the idea that ontological questions could be removed from research on a particular material, a fascination for a particular knowledge, or the obsession with bifurcation, and could instead be put in terms of *vectors*. For him subject and object, far from being the beginning of thought like two hooks used to

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<sup>11</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Paris, Aubier, [1958], 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Simondon, *Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques*, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> Ustensility [*L'ustensilité*] is precisely the mode of existence the furthest from technicality. See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago, Open Court, 2002.

suspend a hammock destined for philosophical snoozing, are only the rather *belated* effects of a real history of modes of existence:

This de-phasing of the mediation between figural characters and background characters translates the appearance of a distance between man and the world. And mediation itself, instead of being a simple structuration of the universe, takes on a certain density; it becomes objective in the technical and subjective in religion, making the technical object appear to be the primary object and divinity the primary subject, whereas before there was only the unity of the living thing and its milieu: objectivity and subjectivity appear between the living thing and its milieu, between man and the world, at a moment where the world does not yet have a full status as object, and man a complete status as subject.<sup>14</sup>

Yet Simondon remains a classical thinker, obsessed as he is by original unity and future unity, deducing his modes from each other in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Hegel. Having reached a count of *seven*, in the end he returns to *one*... Multirealism turns out to be nothing more, in the end, than a long detour that brings him back to a philosophy of being, the seventh of the modes he sketched. I would now like to turn to another book, this one *completely* forgotten, written by a philosopher who did not even enjoy the polite respect accorded to Simondon. With the assistance of this book, we will see if we can really take seriously this business of a prepositional philosophy as an alternative to the first empiricism.<sup>15</sup> When Étienne Souriau published his unique work *Les différents modes d'existence* in 1943, in the midst of war, he said nothing about geopolitics or the causes of the catastrophic defeat, nor did he attempt to boost the morale of the troops.<sup>16</sup> Instead, with amazing audacity, he tried to explore a metaphysics— one invented completely from scratch by means of a stupendous freedom of expression. His question was that of multirealism: in how many different ways can one say that a being exists? To make this quite ordinary phrase resonate further, one could suggest that Souriau is interested in *manners of being*, taking the verb ‘to be’ quite seriously of course, but also retaining the idea of manners, etiquette, protocol— as if following several centuries of bifurcation, the philosopher would finally get around to inventing the polite respectfulness of *good manners* in one’s conduct with others.

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<sup>14</sup> Simondon, *Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques*, p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> On Souriau I have only been able to find Luce de Vitry-Maubrey, *La pensée cosmologique d'Étienne Souriau*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, and in English from the same author, a lively introduction: ‘Étienne Souriau’s cosmic vision and the coming-into-its-own of the Platonic Other,’ *Man and World*, 18, 1985, pp. 325-345.

<sup>16</sup> Étienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, Paris, PUF, 1943 (to be republished by PUF with a foreword by Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, followed by “Le mode d'existence de l'oeuvre à faire” [1956]).

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## Prepositions and Instaurations

In order to understand Souriau's explicit definition of an empirical and systematic inquiry, we should keep two essential notions in mind.<sup>17</sup> The first we already know about, since Souriau explicitly links his project to the passage from James cited above, in which he defines empiricism as a respect for experience as given through prepositions:

We know how much William James valued, in his description of the stream of consciousness, what he called ‘a feeling for *or*, a feeling for *because*’. Here we would be in a world where the *or* rather, or the *because of*, the *for*, and above all the *and then*, *and thus*, would be true existences... This would be a sort of grammar of existence, which we would thus decode piece by piece.<sup>18</sup>

The essential point is that the ontology of prepositions immediately takes us away from the all-too-familiar sorts of inquiry in the philosophies of being. Here, the preposition indicates neither an ontological domain, nor a region, territory, sphere, or material. The *if* or the *and* has no region. But as its name perfectly suggests, the preposition *prepares* the *position* that has to be given to *what follows*, giving the search for meaning a definite inflection that allows one to judge its direction or vector. This is why I quite often use, as a synonym for the mode of existence, the idea borrowed from semiotics of *regimes of enunciation*.<sup>19</sup> Just like prepositions, regimes of enunciation set up what comes next without impinging in the least on what is actually said. Like a musical score, the regime merely indicates the tonality, the *key* in which one must prepare to play the next part. So this is not about looking for what is *underneath* the statements, their condition of possibility, or their foundations, but a thing that is light but also decisive: their mode of existence. It tells us ‘*what to do next*’, as Austin would

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<sup>17</sup> I have to confess that the present reading of Souriau's book is quite different from the one we offered in the republication of his book. The reason is that here I used Souriau quite freely for my own inquiry on various modes of existence. But when we had to introduce the readers to what Souriau's own philosophy led to, it was a very different affair, and it is Isabelle Stengers's interpretation that should be followed. In this paper what interests me is how to define modes—a question of first degree says Souriau—while in reality, as we show in our introduction, it is really *instauration* that is the topic of the book.

<sup>18</sup> Since the book is not available in English, I will quote at length, which will also give the reader an idea of his style. Unless otherwise stated, all the references are from *Les différents modes d'existence*. The italics are Souriau's.

<sup>19</sup> Bruno Latour, in *Eloqui de senso. Dialoghi semiotici per Paulo Fabbri. Orizzonti, compiti e dialoghi della semiotica*, P. Basso and L. Corrain (Eds.), Milano, Costa & Nolan, 1998, pp. 71-94.



say; his idea of *illocutionary force* could quite easily be a another useful synonym here.<sup>20</sup> Illocutionary force, one will recall, is not about the statement, but tells *how* one should entertain the felicity conditions so as to avoid category errors, such as mistaking a fictive narrative for a description, or a request for a prohibition. Whether we are concerned with a preposition, a regime of enunciation, a mode of existence, or an illocutionary force, the vector is the same: can one carry out serious research on relations, as one has for so long on sensations, without requiring them immediately to align themselves in one and only one direction leading either towards the object (and thus away from the subject) or towards the subject (and thus away from the object)?

And yet, by utilizing terms drawn from semiotics or linguistics as synonyms for modes of existence (metaphors which Souriau is also inclined to use) I run the risk of derailing the project before it ever gets on track. We are usually in the habit of asking questions either about language or about ontology, a habit that is obviously the consequence of the bifurcation we want to put to an end by learning to count on all fingers instead of just two or three. So we have to add a caveat: not only should we differentiate research on prepositions from research on substances or foundations, but we should also look for a term that allows us to link questions of language to the question of being, and this despite the demand that they be distinguished. This is Souriau's most important innovation in philosophy. He devoted his whole career to it, giving it the wonderful name of *instauration*.<sup>21</sup>

Those who have heard of Souriau tend to think of him an aesthetician. And he is one, true enough, being the main author (along with his daughter) of *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he did teach this branch of philosophy for quite a long time. But I think this is the wrong way to approach him. Souriau is a metaphysician who always operates on the privileged 'field' (if I may say so) of the reception of the artwork, all the better to grasp his key idea of instauration. How can we come to terms with the 'work to be made' (*l'oeuvre à faire*) if we avoid the necessary choice between what comes from the artist and what comes from the work? This is what really interests him, rather than aesthetics as such. The question is whether we can apply to this deeply bifurcated domain what Whitehead said about epistemology: 'No question can be clarified by the fact of introducing a mind that knows', by saying equally, 'There is no aesthetic question that can be clarified by the fact of introducing a subject who will create it...' In order to understand Souriau's obsession, let's consider one of his numerous descriptions of the creative act<sup>23</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup> J L Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1962, citation in English in the original—trans.

<sup>21</sup> It is already in the title of Étienne Souriau, *L'instauration philosophique*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1939, but the clearest version is in a much later paper by Souriau, *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*, 4-44, 1956 (republished in the 2009 edition of *Les modes d'existence*).

<sup>22</sup> Étienne Souriau, *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> And incidentally, he is also not very interested in contemporary art. His examples come more from philosophical types than from art history.

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A pile of clay on the sculptor's base. An undeniable, total, accomplished, *thingy* [*réique*] existence.<sup>24</sup> But nothing of the aesthetic being exists. Each hand or thumb pressure, each stroke of the chisel accomplishes the work. Don't look at the chisel, look at the statue. With each act of the demiurge the statue little by little breaks out of its chains. It moves towards existence—towards the existence that will in the end blossom into an existence that is intense, accomplished, and actual. It is only insofar as the mass of earth is destined to be this work that it is a statue. At first only weakly existing via its distant relationship with the final object which gives it its soul, the statue slowly reveals itself, takes shape and comes into existence. First the sculptor is only pushing it into shape, then bit by bit he achieves it with each of the things he decides to do to the clay. When will it be finished? When the convergence is complete, when the physical reality of this material thing comes to correspond with the spiritual reality of the work to be made, and the two coincide perfectly. In its physical existence and its spiritual existence it then communes intimately with itself, each existence being the mirror of the other.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously we would misinterpret Souriau if we took this to be a description of the movement between form and matter, with the ideal of the form moving progressively into reality, a potentiality that would simply become real through the medium of a more-or-less inspired artist.<sup>26</sup> It is rather a case of instauration, a risk taken, a discovery, a total invention:

But this growing existence is made, we can see, of a double modality that finally comes together, in the unity of a sole being progressively *invented* in the labouring process. Often there is no warning: up to a certain point the finished work is always a novelty, discovery, or surprise. So that's what I was looking for! That's what I was meant to make!<sup>27</sup>

What fascinates Souriau about art (and what fascinates me about the laboratory), is the *doing of making* [*le faire faire*], the *making exist*, or in other words the replication and redundancy. It is the artist (or researcher) bouncing off the action and the reception

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<sup>24</sup> '*Réique*' or 'thingy' is a neologism that we will later learn to call a phenomenon and which bears no relation with reification which is one of the favourite concepts of the "bifurcators".

<sup>25</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> This is Deleuze's classical distinction between the oppositions potential/real and virtual/actual. It is the latter that interests Souriau, which also explains why Deleuze was interested in him.

<sup>27</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 44.

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of the work (or the autonomy of the fact). Souriau explains this again in a remarkable book, of which an entire chapter anticipates the one I am discussing here:

Generally, one can say that to know what a being is, you have to instaure it, even construct it, either directly (happy are those, in this respect, who *make things!*) or indirectly through representation— up to the point where, lifted to the highest point of its real presence and entirely determined by what it thus becomes, it is manifested in its entire accomplishment, in its own truth.<sup>28</sup>

Instauration and construction are clearly synonyms. But instauration has the distinct advantage of *not* dragging along all the metaphorical baggage of constructivism—which would in any case be an easy and almost automatic association given that an artwork is so obviously ‘constructed’ by the artist.<sup>29</sup> To speak of ‘instauration’ is to prepare the mind to engage with the question of modality in quite the opposite way from constructivism. To say, for example, that a fact is ‘constructed’ is inevitably (and they paid me good money to know this) to designate the knowing subject as the origin of the vector, as in the image of God the potter. But the opposite move, of saying of a work of art that it results from an instauration, is to get oneself ready to see the potter as the one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores, and invents the form of the work, just as one discovers or ‘invents’ a treasure.<sup>30</sup>

But take careful note: despite the dated style, this is by no means a return to the Ideal of Beauty for which the work would be the crucible. In both cases Souriau does not hesitate at all: without activity, without worries, and without craftsmanship there would be no work, no being. Therefore, it is certainly an active modality. The emphasis falls in a rather different place when it is a question of constructivism versus instauration. The constructivist can always sound a bit critical, because behind the designation of ‘constructor’ one imagines some god capable of creating *ex nihilo*. There is always a certain nihilism in the Potter God: if facts are constructed, then the scientist constructs them out of nothing; all they are in themselves is so much mud permeated by the divine breath. But if there is an *instauration* by the scholar or artist, then facts as much as works come together, resist, oblige—and their authors, the humans, have to be devoted to them, which of course doesn’t mean they act as simple catalysts for them.

Apply instauration to the sciences, and all of epistemology changes; apply instauration to God, all of theology changes; apply instauration to art, and all of aesthetics changes. What falls aside in all three cases is the idea, which is ultimately

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<sup>28</sup> Étienne Souriau, *Avoir une âme*, Lyon, Annales de l’Université de Lyon, 1939.

<sup>29</sup> We should note, by the way, that architects don’t always speak in French of ‘constructing’ a building, but of *obtaining* [*obtenir*] it... which proves how much we are not using a vocabulary fine-tuned by late modernism.

<sup>30</sup> The French legal term for someone who discovers a treasure is actually the “inventor”... French is constructivist by construction!

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preposterous, of a spirit at the origin of the action whose consistency is then carried by ricochet onto a material that has no other maintenance, no other ontological dignity, than what one condescends to give it. The alternative, which is incorrectly called 'realist', is in fact only the ricochet of that ricochet, or a boomerang effect. It favors the work, the fact, the divine, which impose themselves and offer their consistency to a human devoid of any invention.<sup>31</sup> Instauration allows exchanges and gifts that are interesting in other ways, transactions with rather different types of being, in science and religion as well as in art.<sup>32</sup> For Souriau all beings should be on the path of an instauration: the soul as well as God, the artwork as well as the physical thing. No being has substance. If it persists, it is because it is always restored (the two words restoration and instauration have the same Latin etymology). Without a doubt, what is usually called 'reality' is still desperately short on realism.

### **A Systematic and Empirical Inquiry on the Modes of Existence**

With the two notions of preposition and instauration, we can now begin to look at what Souriau presents as a systematic inquiry into *multi-realism*. The key to this project is that he wants to be able to differentiate the modes of being themselves, not just the various different ways of *saying* something about a given being. The notion of modes is as old as philosophy itself, but up until now one's discursive orientation on the problem was that the *modus* was a modification of the *dictum*, which had the special status of remaining precisely the same as itself. In the series of phrases: 'he dances', 'he wants to dance', 'he would really like to be able to dance', 'he would so like to know how to dance', the 'dance' doesn't change despite the sometimes vertiginous encasing of the series of modalizations.<sup>33</sup> At first philosophers used this discursive model for the modalization of being by, for example, varying the degree of existence from potential to actual, but without ever going so far as to modalize whatever it was that went into the act. Predicates might be numerous and they might wander far afield, but they would always come back to nestle in their pigeonholes, in the same old dovecote of substance...

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<sup>31</sup> Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> It is not so distant from the delicate operation allowed for by 'factishes'. Bruno Latour *Petite réflexion sur la culte moderne des dieux Faitiches*. Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996, and La Découverte, 2010; *On the Cult of the Modern Factish Gods*, trans. Catherine Porter, Duke University Press –in press). the whole difficulty with 'realism' comes from interferences between these three domains. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Eds.), *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> 'We have to then assume that the modality attributes another mode of existence to the predicate it modifies,' Jacques Fontanille, *Sémiotique du discours*. Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 1998, p. 169.

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You can see the abyss that separates his project from the tried and true procedure of collecting categories, which goes all the way back to Aristotle: if in effect there are several ways of saying something about something, you cannot get around the fact that it is always a question of *saying*. So you remain in the same key, that of categories, which consist precisely of ‘speaking publicly about or against something’ according to the very etymology of the Greek word *cata-agoureuo*. In other words, the ancient Thomist expression ‘*quot modis praedicatio fit, tot modis ens dicitur*’ does not leave the narrow path of the several ways of *saying something of something*. Now, multirealism would like to explore rather different modes of existence than the sole action of saying several things about the same being. Its whole aim is that there be several ways of being.<sup>34</sup>

Once Souriau realized, not without considerable modesty, that philosophy has always been asking itself about this very issue of the plurality of modes—in Plotinus, for example—he saw that it was now obliged to confess that it has never really counted beyond one *single* mode. The point is simple: the tradition has been obsessed with the identity of substance ever since Parmenides’s challenge. Of course non-being had to be added to being—this began with Plato, and philosophy has defined itself ever since with the addition of one form or another of non-being—but all these add-ons are more like epicycles that never contest the central privilege of substance. Hence Souriau's project of asking whether it is possible to ask the question about multiplicity not by beginning with being qua being (*l'être en tant qu'être*), but being qua another (*l'être en tant qu'autre*)? This formulation is my own, but it perfectly captures Souriau’s intention: ‘It is a matter (as the scholastics would say) of aseity or abality as if they were two modes of existence: being in and of oneself or being in and of something else’.<sup>35</sup>

So, one can see that research is no longer on the diverse ways that one and the same being can be modalized, but on the different ways the being has of *altering* itself (the verb ‘alter’ contains all the otherness we need). In a strange passage, in which Souriau wonders at how rarely philosophy has attempted to multiply the modes of existence, he makes an astonishing statement: ‘Absolute or relative, this [philosophical] poverty is in any case sufficient reason for conceiving and testing the Other as a mode of existence.’ Here everything is defined: can we perhaps try *alteration* as a mode of *subsistence*, instead of always going to look for the substance lying beneath the alterations? Souriau’s formulation is not so distant from another thinker who has also been swallowed up by tradition. I speak of Gabriel Tarde. As he puts it: ‘To exist is to differ; difference, to tell the truth, is in a certain way the substantial side

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<sup>34</sup> The same problem arises with Spinoza, according to Souriau: ‘The *esse in alio* should mean not the fact of existing in another manner than that of substance, but the fact of being in its existence. In this proposition, the meaning of the word *in* is the key to all Spinozism, this attempt, not to go beyond, but to annul existential specificities, with an apparatus borrowed entirely from ontic order, is effective only in that order’.

<sup>35</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 35.

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of things, what they have that is both their very own and what they have in common.’<sup>36</sup> But Tarde did not ask himself the question: ‘*How many* different ways are there to differ?’, or ‘*How many* distinct ways are there for a given being to alter itself? It was Souriau, and no one else before or since as far as I know, who took up this task in his book of 168 pages, printed on the low-quality paper of wartime. He sums up his project in one long citation:

A key question we were discussing earlier, a crucial point where the biggest problems converge: what beings will we take on with our spirit? Should knowledge sacrifice entire populations of beings to Truth, striking out their existential positivity? Or in order to admit them, should it double or triple the world?

And a practical question: there are such huge consequences for each of us to know if the beings one suggests or has suggested, dreams or desires— to know if they exist in the world of dreams or in reality. And if in reality, then in what reality? What kind of reality is being set up to receive them, is present to sustain them, or is absent to annihilate them? Or, if one mistakenly considers just one single genre, if one’s thought lies fallow and one’s life is left unable to inherit these vast and rich existential possibilities.

On the other hand, there is a more significantly limited question. It is found, we can see, in whether the word ‘exist’ has the same meaning in all the different ways it is used; whether the different modes of existence that different philosophies have been able to highlight and distinguish deserve fully and equally the name of existence.

And finally a positive question, and one of the most important as to its consequences into which philosophy can enter. It presents itself in the form of precise propositions that can be subjected to methodical critique. Let’s make an inventory of the principles in these propositions, in the history of human thought. Let’s draw up tables and find out what kind of critique they answer to. This is quite a task.<sup>37</sup>

It is now understandable why this has nothing to do with the questions put forth by those who cling to a bifurcated nature. They cannot even imagine that there are several modes, because everything one encounters is already caught in a pincer movement between subject and object, and then drawn and quartered into primary and secondary qualities. But we can also see that there might be good reasons not to

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<sup>36</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *Monadologie et sociologie*, Paris, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1999 [1895].

<sup>37</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 9-10.

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embark on such a project. To gather up the multiplicity of categories was never going to get us very far as long as being qua *being* would be the guarantee of unity. But if you want to ‘cash in’ being qua *another*— well, then you have to be prepared for some rather different alterations, and without any guarantee of unification.

It’s just that the world becomes so vast, if there is more than one type of existence. And if it is true that we have not exhausted it once we have covered everything within just one of these modes (physical or psychical existence, for example); if it is true that to understand it one needs to encompass it with all that its meanings and values entails; if it is true that at each of its points, the intersection of a determinate network of constitutive relations (such as spatio-temporal ones), then like a portal opening onto another world, we need to open up a very new grouping of determinations of being: atemporal, non-spatial, subjective perhaps, or qualitative, or virtual, or transcendental. And we must include those in which existence is only grasped as a fleeting and almost unutterable experience, or which demand an enormous intellectual effort to understand what it is they are not yet made of, and which only a more extensive thinking could embrace. If it is even true that it would be necessary to understand the universe in all its complexity, not only to make thought capable of all the multicoloured rays of existence, but of a new white light, a white light which unified them all in the brightness of a superexistence which surpasses all these modes without subverting their reality.<sup>38</sup>

We would find this vast world all the more astonishing if, in discovering it, we had to count an indefinite number of alterations. Giordano Bruno horrified the Holy Inquisition with his hypothesis of a plurality of inhabited worlds, but we are dealing here with an *infinity* of worlds within a sole mode. What would we do if we had to entertain the hypothesis of an infinity of modes?!

Yet Souriau is not just in favour of multiplicity for its own sake; this would run the risk of coming back to the same thing: the undifferentiated. This is the problem of atomists or Leibnizians who keep finding more and more atoms or monads, but end by considering them as the producers of assemblages that may be different, but which are composed of exactly the same ingredients.<sup>39</sup> Once again the multiple ends up in

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<sup>38</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> “There are on the other hand philosophers who, far from proposing the unity of being, recognize a multitude of real and substantial beings. But the more these become a multitude, the more their existential status becomes similar and unique. Look at the atomists, whether Epicurus or Gassendi, or even in certain respects, Leibnitz. They divide a being to the limits of division. But these beings are similar, based for example on antitypicality or indivisibility, and, in spite of the apparent richness and complexity, the gathering of these innumerable beings is evidence in the end of only one kind of existence, for which the atom is presented as the prime and unique type.” Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 3.

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the one; the counting goes no further. Research into multirealism, into what James calls the ‘multiverse’, should therefore make sure to escape both unity and multiplicity. This is why Souriau has the good sense to announce that his inquiry has nothing systematic or *a priori* about it. Sure, he wants to ‘sketch the outlines’, but he also wants to avoid like the plague the mad idea of *deducing* modes of existence. ‘A false lead’, he calls it, or ‘deceptive clarity’.

This is why we have to resist vigorously the temptation to explain or to deduce these ear-marked modes of existence. We should beware of the fascination for the dialectical. No doubt it would be easy, with a little ingeniousness, to improvise a dialectics of existence, painted in broad brushstrokes, in order to prove that there can only be just those modes of existence; and that they engender each other in a certain order. But by doing this we would subvert everything that might be important about the assertions being made here.<sup>40</sup>

We can see that Souriau would have been critical of Simondon’s ‘genetic’ derivation of modes necessarily deriving from unity, found in the citations I made above. Even though the term may seem strange when applied to such a speculative philosopher as Souriau, the research he is proposing is certainly empirical, at least in the sense that it depends on ‘fieldwork’.

It is not a matter of following the ontic beyond its attachments to phenomena and experience, all the way through to the void; this is the error of so many metaphysicians (and no doubt of phenomenology too). It is a matter of discovering or inventing (as in inventing a treasure) positive modes of existence, coming to meet us with their palm fronds, to greet our hopes and aspirations, or our problematic speculations, in order to gather them in and comfort them. All other research is a metaphysical famine.<sup>41</sup>

For someone like me who has always alternated between books of empirical field work and of speculation, there is some comfort in the idea (again so close to James) of following experience, but following it all the way to the end. The empiricists of the first order are like those who are so obsessed with the idea of building a bridge between two banks of a river, that no one considers perhaps *going down* the river to see what is there, or *following it upward* to discover its source. And yet, it is not ridiculous to entertain the idea that the *lateral* exploration of this river is just as integral a part of experiencing the river as the will to cross it. Above all else, Souriau’s solution draws us away from all transcendental philosophies. In fact, the proof that the discovery of

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<sup>40</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 92.

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modes depends on experience is the very fact that such discovery remains fortuitous and contingent:

They have to be taken as they are: as arbitrary. Consider it thus: a primitive painter might find coloured earths in his palette that give him his base and technical range: yellow ochre, red ochre, green clay, soot-black...

From an initial contingency, [the artist] perhaps necessarily draws out his modulations on the *other* in relation to this given, but the initial given is arbitrary. It is the same with modes. *The modes of being are contingent*. Each one taken as the original can call for such and such another in dialectical fashion. But each one taken in turn as original is arbitrary.<sup>42</sup>

To put this in my own words, let's say that these modes correspond to certain *contrasts* that European history has led us to believe we could settle on, and which we have turned into the most cherished *values* we hold, to the point that we would die if they were taken away from us: 'There where your treasure lies, there lies also your heart'. Here perhaps is a way of already defining the legacy I was speaking of at the beginning: inheriting a bit of modernism does not just mean that we inherit a little bit of Reason, but also what I call contrasts. Contingent? Yes. Arbitrary? Yes. But in any case these contrasts are historical, and they have made us into what we are now so attached to. Let me simply recall Souriau's quotation: 'positive modes of existence, coming to meet us with their palm fronds, to greet our hopes and aspirations or our problematic speculations in order to gather them in and comfort them'. One can understand why Souriau added: 'All other research is a metaphysical famine'. With Souriau ontology becomes historical, and the project of philosophical anthropology that I pursue entertains the idea, which one must admit is pretty crazy, of a 'European ontology'.<sup>43</sup> It is as if we said to other cultures (though we know they are no longer cultures), if we said to the 'former others': 'Here are the contrasts we thought we were able to figure out in the course of our history, which was supposed to be the history of modernization. Now it's your turn, you others, to define the contrasts that you have extracted, and the values to which you are so attached that without them you too would die.'

At no point does Souriau speak of anthropology. He is not preparing us for a planetary diplomacy in which Europe is henceforth weakened (should one say 'henceforth *wiser*'?) after having closed the modernist parenthesis, and which is asking itself what history it has really inherited and how to make this heritage useful. But he has fixed our attention on the main point: the modes of existence are all of equal dignity. This pluralism and egalitarianism are enough to put him in the great

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<sup>42</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> Thanks are due to Bruno Karsenti for this summation of my project.

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anthropological tradition: ‘Let us therefore reject any temptation to structure or hierarchize the modes by explaining them dialectically. You will always fail to know existence in itself if you deprive it of the arbitrariness that is one of its absolutes’.<sup>44</sup>

Before moving to the main part of Souriau’s book—the description of the different modes—let me summarize the conditions of his inquiry. Philosophy has only ever generated differences by taking being qua being as a starting point (the Copernican revolution never happened: philosophy is still geocentric). It should be possible to adopt another position by ‘trying out the Other’. This inquiry into the different ways of altering certainly has something empirical about it; in any case, it should stick as closely as possible to what is given in experience (in the full sense of the second empiricism, not the limited version of the first). The number of modes is greater than two, so we will ignore the subject/object dualism and call an end to the bifurcation of nature, not through going *beyond* it (that would only be counting to three) but through erasing it in a thousand different ways. The modes are of equal dignity; they are the product of a specific history—I would add of an historical anthropology—which does not aim to define a general ontology.

### **A First Mode That Has Always Been Treated Unfairly: The Phenomenon**

The inquiry can now begin. Each mode will define itself through its own way of differing and obtaining being *by way of the other*. From mode to mode, therefore, the comparison should not be conducted by passing through the intermediary of a substance common to all, of which each would be a mere variation. Instead, each should be granted the capacity to produce, in its own way, the assemblage of ontological categories that are its very own. The situation is as if each mode possessed a specific *pattern* (in the sense that this word [*patron*] is used in the clothing trade), an ontological pattern that cannot be applied to other modes, or applied only by bringing about distortions, folds, discomforts, and innumerable category mistakes. To take an industrial metaphor borrowed from the procedure of ‘putting out a tender’, it is somewhat as if each mode of existence were following a specific set of terms of reference to which it had to conform.

The first mode taken up by Souriau may seem surprising. It is the *phenomenon*. Let us recall that Souriau (like James and Whitehead) is not operating within a bifurcated nature. What he calls the phenomenon has nothing to do with matter, with the plain empty object to be used as a picture hook for the sickly subjectivity of the modernists. No, he just wants to capture the phenomenon *independently* of the badly formulated notion of matter, and without immediately getting entangled in the eternal question of how much belongs to the object and how much to the subject. The experience offered by the phenomenon is quite different from what the first empiricists called sensation: ‘In sensations the phenomenal character is very intense,

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<sup>44</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 121.

but very mixed. Sensations are in a sense the rowdy side of phenomena'.<sup>45</sup> What will define this mode is its 'obviousness'. (Souriau, who loves little-used words drawn from the mediaeval tradition, here says *patuité*).

It is presence, flash, a given that can't be repelled. It is, and it announces itself for what it is. One can no doubt work to exorcize it of this irritating quality of presence by itself. One can denounce it as tenuous, labile, and fleeting. Would that not simply be admitting that one is unsettled by a rare existence in one sole mode?<sup>46</sup>

The phenomenon is unsettling! The phenomenon is 'rare' because it ultimately appears in one mode, one sole mode. Here as for Whitehead (and for the same reason) we find ourselves, for the first time since the first empiricism, in the presence of a *vector* (Souriau actually says 'vection'). We are finally delivered from the question of knowledge, and above all from the obligation of the phenomenon only being a respondent to intentionality. This phenomenon is the polar opposite of that found in phenomenology. With wicked humour, Souriau cites Kipling: 'In the end phenomenology is where one is least likely to find the phenomenon. *The darkest place is under the lamp*, as Kim says.'<sup>47</sup> As in Whitehead, Souriau's phenomenon is no longer caught in a pincer movement between what might be behind it (primary qualities) and what might be ahead of it (secondary ones).

Let me insist that, in order to grasp phenomenal existence, one must above all avoid seeing the phenomenon as a phenomenon *of* something or *for* someone. That would be the aspect the phenomenon takes on when one has first begun to consider existence via some other modality, then meets up with it after the fact, such as in its role as manifestation. (...) One can really only conceive of it in its own existential tenor when one feels it to be supporting and presenting to itself alone what it is relying on and consolidating in, with and by it. And it is on this basis that it appears as a model and standard of existence.<sup>48</sup>

The phenomenon is not a phenomenon *of* anything else. What is attached to the phenomenon does not lead either to the stand holding it up, not to the mind that has it in sight: it has better things to do; it is a grown-up; it is self-sufficient; it can quite simply lead to other phenomena, going all the way along a chain which gives itself permission to ignore absolutely any bifurcation into primary or secondary qualities.

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<sup>45</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 55.

<sup>46</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 54. Citation in English in original.

<sup>48</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 54.

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This is a kind of chain the first empiricism never told us anything about. Here then is the phenomenon well and truly freed of its Procrustean bed; it can reply to its own terms of reference, it can finally lead to relations one could call *lateral* as opposed to only transversal relations. One can see from this how misleading it would be to always take as an example some blunt object, like a pebble, in order to demonstrate in a somewhat macho fashion that one is a ‘realist’ (As we know, philosophers love talking about pebbles, yet without ever getting down and dirty among the geological multiplicities of stones and gem-stones.)<sup>49</sup>

It is true that one clogs the mind right up by saying: the phenomenon implies... it is called... it presupposes... So it doesn’t exist independently of what surrounds it, teaches it, relates to it; and without which it would not exist. This is the effect of a mongrel kind of thinking, where one is looking for the phenomenon and the same time as inappropriately moving away from it. It is presupposed that the phenomenon is dissected. Bloodless, surrounded by its organs. If you take it in its living form, you see that the phenomenon sets up in its phenomenal state its intentions and other real factors. Its vectors of appetite, its tendencies towards the other, can be followed as they fan out, to the extent that they remain of the same material as the phenomenon.<sup>50</sup>

James would have loved these ‘vectors of appetite’, which direct our attention towards a phenomenal material no longer be warped by the need to come to terms with the human mind, or to lean on the solid foundations of primary qualities. This is what von Uexküll tried to render in a different register with his distinction between the *Umwelt* (environment) and the surroundings of a living being. One might say that phenomena define an *Umwelt* where each establishes its own relations, whereas surroundings come from a rather different mode of existence.<sup>51</sup> But the ‘natural philosophers’ who since the nineteenth century have ceaselessly protested against the confusion of knowledge and phenomena never really succeeded in getting back to the original bifurcation, because they never had the power to deploy modes of existence that were sufficiently differentiated in quantity and quality. Above all, it is not clear by what sleight of hand two different modes of existence were confused in the notion of matter. From here Souriau does not appeal to a higher, organicist, vitalist knowledge. Like Whitehead, he quite simply asks that we respect the particular path that phenomena take. For him this is the best way to respect what is most particular about a second mode of existence: that of objective knowledge.

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<sup>49</sup> See, *a contrario*, the last chapter of Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Jakob von Uexküll, *Mondes animaux et monde humain. Théorie de la signification*, Paris, Gonthier, 1965.

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### **A Second Mode that Was Never Clearly Recognized: The Thing**

Souriau's second mode (this ordering is mine, not his own) goes by the name of *thing*. How, it might be asked, can we distinguish the patuity of the phenomenon from the thing? Does this not amount to designating the same object twice? But these objections have meaning only from the point of view of a bifurcated nature, a nature which under the name of matter has already confused two operations which are not linked by anything: the movement by which a phenomenon subsists, and another quite distinct movement by which we manage to remotely transport something which is not near us without losing it. Let us recall the celebrated phrase from Whitehead:

Thus matter represents the refusal to think away spatial and temporal characteristics and to arrive at the bare concept of an individual entity. It is this refusal which has caused the muddle of importing the mere procedure of thought into the fact of nature. The entity, bared of all characteristics except those of space and time, has acquired a physical status as the ultimate texture of nature; so that the course of nature is conceived as being merely the fortunes of matter in its adventure through space.<sup>52</sup>

Although he knows Whitehead's work and mentions him a number of times in his book, Souriau never cites this particular phrase. But he introduces the same distinction, and follows with surgical precision the dotted line that finally allows the separation of the Siamese twins to which history gave birth in such monstrous form.<sup>53</sup> The terms of reference for the two modes of existence are not therefore the same: what counts in the second is the possibility of maintaining continuity despite distance, a question that does not differentiate the first mode because distance has no meaning for it. In the second mode, it is as if two opposite conditions have to be held in opposition: to traverse the abyss that separates us from the object with continual transformations, but on the other pole to hold something constant—the future 'thing' in fact—via these transformations. Hence I call these 'immutable mobiles', corresponding to the invention of the 'thing' in Souriau.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> A N Whitehead *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> And, just as with Whitehead, it is precisely through respect for the demands of reason that he does not allow himself to confuse the transport of knowledge and the movements of the known thing. It is probably their shared indifference towards politics which allows them to no longer confuse 'matters of fact' and what I call 'matters of concern'.

<sup>54</sup> This is an idea I have been working on ever since Bruno Latour "Drawing Things Together," in Mike Lynch and Steve Woolgar *Representation in Scientific Practice*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, right through Bruno Latour, *What is the Style of Matters of Concern. Two Lectures on Empirical Philosophy*, Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 2008.

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The thing is defined and constituted through its identity as it passes through different apparitions. There is an agreement on the systematic character of the thing, and on the fact that what characterizes it specifically is that it remains numerically one through its appearances as noetic utilizations.<sup>55</sup>

Phenomena do not form systems, but things do. Phenomena are not the appearance of anything, but things are. The two can be linked, certainly, but they must not be confused:

A technique of making-things-appear, as it dialectically informs both the experience of the physician and the mystic, is an art of branching any ontic onto the phenomenon. The manifest phenomenon thus becomes manifestation, the appearance apparition. But it is by sharing it with what supports it and in providing it with its unequivocal patuity. Such is the generosity of the phenomenon.<sup>56</sup>

A word of caution: we are engaged here in a project very different from that of ‘being as being’; continuity of time or space—what semioticians call *anaphor*—is not surreptitiously guaranteed by the subterranean presence of a substance or self-identity. ‘We try out the Other’ and consequently, every continuity or subsistence that is gained must be *paid* for in genuine currency. If no alteration, then no being. This is what I designate as *being qua another*. For each mode of existence, we have to specify how many mediations are expended in order for it to gain its *isotopy*, its continuity in being. Now, if the phenomenon prolongs itself and shores itself up with its own type of ‘fanning out’, the ‘thing’ on the other hand can in no way take advantage of this type of vehicle. It must remain ‘numerically one’ through its ‘multiple appearances’. So it needs a rather different type of go-between in order to remain similar to itself despite the succession of changes it must undergo to get from one point to another. We can think here of the cascade of operations necessary to do a brain scan, for instance, or of the number of steps gone through by a probe on Mars in order to send back signals as it sifts through the dust. Our brain is not maintained in existence in the same way as the successive passes of a scanner. Mars does not persist like a signal. Obvious, you might say? All right, then: let’s draw out the consequences. Even though Souriau doesn’t talk much about the sciences, he has the idea of treating knowledge as its own mode of existence.

Let us take note that [thought] cannot be conceived as the product or result of the activity of a psychic being, itself conceived in a thingy fashion distinct

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<sup>55</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 60.

<sup>56</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*

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from the assemblage of the thing, and which might be a subject or a carrier [*suppôt*] separated from thought. The latter has no other carrier than the thing itself which it assembles and probes. In some ways it is purely impersonal, and one has to prevent oneself from seeing it as it is working in its thingly status by putting everything we understand and know from elsewhere into thought. As this status implies, [this thought] is purely and simply liaison and communication. It is also a consciousness, but this is understood only as a phenomenal glow [*luisance phénoménale*](...) In the final analysis, it is above all systematic cohesion, liaison, which is here essential and constitutive for the role of thought. One should even ask if it is not rather a *factor* more than an *effect* of thought.<sup>57</sup>

The passage is difficult, but the innovation is clear: the known object and the knowing subject do not *pre-exist* this mode of existence. There is not first a thought which then turns towards an object in order to draw out its form. There is first of all ‘liaison and communication’. There is ‘systematic cohesion’, which he called in the previous citation the capacity to ‘remain numerically one’. And only as a later consequence is there a particular capacity for thought, which he boldly designates as ‘a phenomenal glow’... Objective thought only glows when things pass by it!

In other words, there is no objective thought in the first place: there are objects, or rather *things*, whose circulation in the world will give objective thoughts to souls—another mode to be described shortly—which will find themselves amplified and deepened by this offer. To put it bluntly, a thinker begins to think objectively because s/he is traversed, bombarded by things, which are not in any way phenomena themselves, but an original mode of existence that adds itself to other modes without being able to reduce them to its own terms of reference. Thought ‘has no other carrier than the thing itself which it assembles and feels’. This is why Souriau reverses the usual relationship by making objective thought the ‘effect’ and not the ‘factor’ in this mode of weird displacement of immutable mobiles invented in the seventeenth century. But instead of seeing a unique mode of existence here, philosophy of the modernist type thought it needed to split nature in two by inventing matter, that badly formed amalgamation of phenomena and things—and essentially for political reasons.<sup>58</sup>

Now we can understand why classical philosophy was never able to cash in on multiplicity except by attaching multiple predicates to one and the same substance: it never realized that it could grasp knowledge as a *separate* mode of existence. This is why Aristotle, for instance, can think that he is speaking of different categories of

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<sup>57</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> My little addition to the history of bifurcation, following Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science* (translated by Daniel W. Smith), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, and more recently *La Vierge et le neutrino: les scientifiques dans la tourmente*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2005.

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being, even though he never escapes from a single mode of interrogation: knowledge. It is also why Kant, when setting up his own table of categories centuries later, does not imagine for a moment that they are all in the same ‘key’, such that this multiplicity of approaches leads to the one never-ending *libido sciendi*. The epistemic mode of existence has always been exaggerated, always made out to be the one mode that asks of all beings nothing other than how they can be *known*. This does not take away from its dignity, originality, or truth, but does deny its right to take originality, dignity, or truth away from the other modes of existence.

Souriau fully and truly undoes the Kantian amalgam. We no longer have a knowing mind on one side and on the other side things-in-themselves, with a point of encounter in the middle where phenomena are generated (as in the First Critique). We have phenomena (as defined above) that finally circulate with their own ‘patuity’ without having to be accountable to a support behind them or an intentional subject in front of them. In addition, we also have *things* whose circulation, if I might say so, leaves (by way of traces) objective thoughts in the heads of those who are capable of allowing themselves to be towed along by them... It is this fundamental innovation of Souriau —objective knowledge is a mode of existence, it does not reduce phenomena— that no doubt inspired Deleuze and Guattari in their definition of ‘functives’, probably picking up on Souriau’s inversion of ‘effect’ and ‘factor’.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Third Mode of Existence: The Soul, and the Danger of Having It**

It is meant euphemistically when I say that Souriau undoes Kantianism. In fact, he does not stop once he has liberated things-in-themselves—these are now *phenomena*—and obtained objective thought by allowing thought to circulate as a *bona fide* mode of existence. If we stopped at this point, we would have certainly unscrambled a badly trussed-up amalgamation of matter, but we would still only be counting as high as the number two... But from here, Souriau will be able to profit from the opening created as the Kantian ship goes down, to encourage philosophy to add other modes of existence, by specifying other terms of reference and proposing other patterns, other ‘envelopes’ for many other types of beings.

At one time such a project would have been systematically forbidden. If something had to be added to matter, one would turn towards mind, since there was no other option. And if this mind could really attribute values, dimensions and qualities to the world, these would be cut off from any access to beings themselves—just as one says of a country that it might have, seek, or lack ‘access to the sea’. Kant

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<sup>59</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* New York, Columbia University Press, 1996. Recall that ‘fonctifs’, are, along with ‘concepts’ and ‘percepts’ the three modes recognized by Deleuze and Guattari. For a less philosophical treatment of this idea, see Bruno Latour, ‘A Textbook Case Revisited. Knowledge as a Mode of Existence,’ in E. Hackett, O. Amsterdamska, M. Lynch and J. Wacjman *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies -Third Edition*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2007.

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illustrates this deficiency perfectly: he stacks up his critiques one behind the other in order to add morality, religion, aesthetics, politics, but without in the end being able to accord them some kind of being. Being finds itself entirely monopolized by knowledge. And in any case knowledge is absolutely incapable of understanding how it can happen to understand the world objectively: a world which it is finally obliged to relinquish to the uninhabited desert of ‘things-in-themselves’! What amazes those who know just how much we have never been modern is how this Kantian disaster was able to pass for good sense... And indeed, Locke was already seen as the philosopher of common sense!

But Souriau does not have these kinds of limitations. All the modes of existence have an equal ontological dignity for him; none can monopolize being while referring to subjectivity as the one and only way out. And certainly not this one mode among others, which is capable of leaving objective knowledge in its slipstream. With Souriau we will finally be able to count to three, and even higher: philosophical celebrations after centuries of forced abstinence! Unlike Whitehead whose speculative effort addressed itself essentially to cosmology, what really interests Souriau are the third and fourth modes. The particular pattern for the third is to produce what he is calling by the very old-fashioned name of ‘souls’. A word of caution: this has so little to do with immortal substances that Souriau defines them pointedly ‘as what can be lost, what can be instaured’. ‘Having a soul’ is no sinecure: it is a task to be accomplished, and it can be botched and most often is. But nor are these souls (which one might or might not have) the stuff that comes to inhabit the interiority of a subject. By the way, this is the subject that we just learnt does not have any knowledge either, since it is the effect rather than the cause of it!

The complete originality of the project now begins to unfold: souls too have their own existence, but one should not size up this mode by using the terms of reference belonging to others. Ontological politeness and etiquette now depend on a new respect for other modes of existence.

If the phrase ‘reified status’ seems shocking, along with this ‘thinginess’ inapplicable to the soul, then let’s keep the word thinginess [*réité*] for the special cosmos of physical and practical experience, and speak more generally of an ontic mode of existence which will be suitable for psychisms as well as for reisms.<sup>60</sup> All we can be sure about with regard to psychisms, in asserting here this same mode of existence, is that they have a sort of monumentality, which makes a law of permanence and identity from their organisation and their form. Far from compromising life in seeing it like this, it would be missed in other ways, for instance by not seeing the soul as architectonic, as

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<sup>60</sup> Actually, in the book Souriau counts what he calls ‘psychisms’ as another case of ‘things’ since they too obtain a continuity in space and time through some type of instauration.

an harmonious system which can be modified, enlarged, sometimes subverted or wounded... in a word, a being.<sup>61</sup>

It was previously impossible, under bifurcated nature, to ask the question about the monumentality or even objectivity proper to a soul. Even if Souriau acknowledges that the question is ‘shocking’, one can still not doubt that souls thus defined compel our recognition. Or rather, it was precisely in modernist times that one had such doubts, since any psychism that came on the scene took the form of a subject and not of a monument. It is now possible to define a type of requirement adapted for each mode: what defines psychisms is that they wound you; they can enlarge, diminish, or disappear... What do we think we know about the world if we decide in advance, *a priori* and with no inquiry whatsoever, that this is ‘quite obviously’ a matter of unconscious fantasies? Once we are capable of letting phenomena run around the world as they please, could we not ‘try out the Other’ once more by letting psychisms off the leash? Where would they go if we detached them? Where would their infallible nose for things lead us? Surely not towards subjectivity, anyway.

What is absurd and gross about thingness is the way it considers the soul as an analogue to something physical and material—especially in its conditions of subsistence. It is no longer permissible, or even adequate, to conceive it according to the ontic model of living things and their conditioning. But it is up to psychology, a psychology that would not fear the ontic (let it be called psychism if one is frightened of words), to spell out the specific conditioning. This would include the plurality of souls, their assemblages, their counterpoints, and all the interpsychics that put them together as a totality, or a cosmos.<sup>62</sup>

Oh dear, if epistemology is so profoundly bogged down in the question of objective knowledge, psychology is even further away from good ontological sense. What daring! To demand that the most modernized of the sciences ‘not fear the ontic’... and as if one could speak of the ‘cosmos’ in relation to souls? Really, this Souriau has gone too far! Yes, far beyond the narrow bounds which require that there be only two modes of existence: one for pebbles and one for the unconscious (or to count to three, the real, the imaginary and the symbolic). So, just as stone-phenomena no longer resemble stone-things (or either of the two pebbles of the anti-realist polemicist), so too do souls no longer resemble subjectivities. If the soul is not a thing, it is in the first place because things in no way resemble matter, despite the absurd

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<sup>61</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 71.

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train of thought of those who want to ‘solve the mind-body problem’.<sup>63</sup> No, souls have their own envelopes of thinghood, their own definition of *anaphor*, their own understanding of how to subsist.

Let us not forget that the status of ontic existence in no way excludes the transitory nature of existence. Its basic ubiquity never presupposes a temporal subsistence that would be continuously guaranteed in a lazy, heavy, or mechanical manner. Rather we constantly observe, especially in the psychic domain, such rapid and flighty instauration that we scarcely notice them. Thus we are sometimes presented with momentary souls (or they are presented in us), whose rapidity and kaleidoscopic succession contribute to the illusion of a lesser and weaker existence: even though these could have more grandeur and value than those which we instaure with the greatest of ease on a day-to-day basis.<sup>64</sup>

‘Souls are presented in us!’ I have no idea what experience Souriau is alluding to here—probably delicate scruples about marriage, as one finds in the deliciously quaint anecdotes of his book *Avoir une âme!* But for my part I was shaken to the core by the thinginess of the psychisms that were worked over, manipulated, redirected, deflected, and displaced by Tobie Nathan during the ethnopsychiatric sessions I was privileged to attend.<sup>65</sup> And I can attest to the fact that I was really worried about attributing a given ontology to these beings. For in fact they never stopped joining ‘monumentality’ with ‘their transitory nature’, not having any ‘continuity’, and not being present long enough ever to define a subjectivity or interiority, while at the same time being well and truly real, but *in their own way*. Yes, there is more than one dwelling place in the kingdom of realism. And each house is built of its own material. How have we been able to live for so long in this state of misery which forces us to construct all dwellings out of pebbles or out of interiority, the former freezingly sterile and the latter without any solidity or monumentality? We can understand that the moderns were only able to survive by doing the exact opposite of what they claimed: by multiplying the very modes they prohibited anyone from tabulating. Is it now possible to draw the map of what they were really capable of building, or rather to provide with an instauration? Has an anthropological philosophy of modernity finally become possible?

#### **A Fourth Mode: How Do Fictional Beings Exist?**

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<sup>63</sup> This relation is reworked by Souriau in the surprising form of ‘a certain habit of being together’ in a clearly plurimodal situation, Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 129.

<sup>64</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Tobie Nathan, *L'influence qui guérit*, Paris, Editions Odile Jacob, 1994

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For some unknown idiosyncratic reason, Souriau knows nothing about the narrow limits of modernism. He is not especially interested in negativity or consciousness; the question of the subject and the object leaves him cold. Apparently no one told him that philosophy should not count beyond three —and he is in magnificent ignorance of dialectics, in conformance with that French tradition (where does it come from?) running from Bergson to Deleuze.<sup>66</sup> This is why, very calmly and in all innocence, he gets ready to target a *fourth* mode of existence as different from souls as these were from things, and as those were from phenomena. What, then, are these *fictional beings*?

On the other hand there are fragile and inconsistent entities, whose inconsistency makes them so different from bodies that one could hesitate to attribute any manner of existence to them at all. We are not thinking of souls here, but of all those phantoms, chimerae and spirits that are represented in the imagination: fictional beings. Do they have an existential status?<sup>67</sup>

At one time this question had no meaning, since fictions, just like souls, thoughts, and values, were all to be found ‘in the subject’ and all equally prohibited from opening out onto beings. But Souriau restores to this question all its meaning, from the moment that the aforementioned interiority is found to be dissolved and crossed out (and in no way ‘gone beyond’) as much as the abovementioned materiality. There is no doubt that fictional beings do not have the same density, continuity, or discontinuity as souls. And yet, can one assert that they do not exist?

Wouldn’t it be quite a nuisance to give them a specific existence, or even a mode of being, both because of their phantom character and their acosmic nature? Basically, fictions are beings from which all controlled and conditioned ontological cosmoses have been driven one after the other. They are united by one common complaint, which nevertheless does not make their whole company a *pleromos*<sup>68</sup> or a cosmos. Of course, one cannot characterize them essentially by the fact that, by way of representation, they do not correspond to objects or to bodies. This consideration relates to a second-degree problem, which in any case is purely negative. They exist in their own way only if they have a positive reason to exist. And they do.<sup>69</sup>

How could we define their terms of reference? We will see that the inquiry takes a systematic turn and that the picture that needs to be sketched will not be completed

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<sup>66</sup> Pierre Montebello, *L'autre métaphysique. Essai sur Ravaisson, Tarde, Nietzsche et Bergson*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2003.

<sup>67</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 74.

<sup>68</sup> Pleromos [*plérôme*] is a Plotinian term that designated all the beings assembled in plenitude: another word beloved by Souriau, the philosopher of the architectonic.

<sup>69</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*.

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in a haphazard fashion. We now know that the continuity of constants is not a general property: on the contrary, it is the requirement of the anaphor that applies to ‘things’, to ‘immutable mobiles’, but which puts neither phenomena nor psychisms under any obligation. It would make no sense therefore to define fiction as ‘true lies’ or ‘the suspension of disbelief’,<sup>70</sup> which would come back to measuring them by the yardstick of the other modes— or, as would make even less sense, on the basis of the intentions of the receiving subject.<sup>71</sup> There is a thingness specific to fictional beings, an objective isotopy that Souriau defines by the pretty word *syndoxic* (that is, common *doxa*). In a certain way, we all share Don Juan, Lucien de Rubempré, Papageno, the Venus de Milo, Madonna, or *Friends*. This is certainly *doxa*, but a *doxa* held enough in common by us that we can recognize these beings as having a monumental form that is specific to them. Our tastes can vary, yet they are concentrated in elements that are shared sufficiently widely so as to sustain a common analysis. Psychisms may be aborted or bungled: fictional beings cannot. They possess more *objectivity* (if one is permitted to recycle this polysemic term).

When Napoleon reread Richardson on St. Helena, he carefully constructed Lovelace’s annual budget; Hugo, as he was researching *Les Misérables*, even ran the accounts for ten years of Jean Valjean’s life when he was not in the novel. (Think about it: the *remote presence*<sup>72</sup> of a character in a novel, in relation to the novel. Now *that* is really an imagination on fire!).<sup>73</sup>

Incidentally, it was in order to grasp this form of syndoxic continuity peculiar to fiction that Greimas (a friend of Souriau) borrowed the expression ‘isotopy’ from physics.<sup>74</sup> A story can only obtain continuity for its characters through redundancies that have to be extracted from alterity itself, because each page, instant, and situation are different from each other. In a fictional narrative, a fictional cosmos has to be rebuilt. ‘In what way can one say that in *Don Quixote* the episode with the windmills precedes that of the galley-slaves?’<sup>75</sup> In a philosophy of being as other, continuity is never an acquired right, status, or effect of a substratum. Rather, it is always a result that causes one, appropriately, to wonder via which intermediary one managed to get there. Parmenides is the one who should draw the substance of isotopy from Heraclitus’s river. Now for Souriau, this intermediary has the peculiarity of depending also on the way in which a work is received:

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<sup>70</sup> This phrase in English in the original—trans.

<sup>71</sup> See Thomas Pavel’s critique, *Fictional Worlds*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986.

<sup>72</sup> English in the original—trans.

<sup>73</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> In Algirdas Greimas’ *Sémantique Structurale*, Paris, PUF, 1968, a curious book of Souriau’s is cited: *Les deux cent-mille situations dramatiques*, Paris: Flammarion, 1970.

<sup>75</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 77.

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Therefore, on the one hand this world tends to take on a quite positive syndoxic, social existence. There is, to paraphrase Lewis, ‘a universe of literary discourse’. But on its other frontier, this world dissipates and frays at the edges (...) it is precisely to this transitory and transitive character that imaginaries owe their particular dialectical situation.<sup>76</sup>

Today, one might say he is talking about ‘[reader] reception aesthetics’. Perhaps. But that would mean imagining social beings already in place, as it were: beings whose existence could not be in doubt, who would then lend their subjectivity to something that had no solidity in itself. But, like all modes, they have to be welcomed by an instauration. And in Souriau's hands the notion of reception takes on a quite different ontological dimension:

Their essential character is always that the size and intensity of our attention or sympathy is the basis of support of their monument, the bulwark on which we elevate them, without any other reality conditions than that. In this regard, the things that we would otherwise believe to be positive and substantial, are completely conditional and subordinate, and they have, when one looks closely, only a solitudinarity existence! These are by definition precarious existences; they disappear along with the basic phenomenon. So what is missing in them? Ubiquity, consistence, and an ontic and thingly bedding. These *mock existences*<sup>77</sup> or pseudo-realities are real; but false in that they formally imitate the status of things, without having the proper consistence, or, one could say, the matter.<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, works of art have syndoxic objectivity. On the other hand, they depend on our *solicitude*. People do not necessarily produce works in the same way that they receive them. But they must guarantee that they do get a welcome, support them—yes, their reception!—because they constitute their ‘basis of support’. It is as if works were leaning on us, or would fall over without us: like a Gallic chieftain standing on a shield that no one was carrying... It is a strange metaphor to describe the contours of an envelope so peculiar that it has to include in its set of categories not only its solidity—‘it is always the same Don Juan’—but its lack of being—‘without anyone to interpret him, Don Juan disappears’.

Psychisms, for their part, need neither this syndoxy nor our *solicitude*. On the contrary, they grab us, knock us about, destroy and obsess us, and no amount of effort will make them let go and stop attacking us. Yet if you turn off the radio, leave the cinema, or close the book, fictional beings disappear immediately. If they

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<sup>76</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>77</sup> In English in Souriau—trans.

<sup>78</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 79.

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continue to obsess you, it is only because you really want them to. Do we have to assert that the one lot exists and the others not? Not at all, because it has to be said about all beings that they can vary in intensity: ‘Before asking, does this exist and in what way, one has to know whether it can respond with a yes or a no, or whether it can exist a little, a lot, passionately, or not at all.’<sup>79</sup> You can see how unjust it would be to call Souriau a mere philosopher of aesthetics, when his fictional beings only occupy a few pages of the book. What is important for him is to compare them as exactly as possible with the *other* modes of existence.

But one can exist by way of the force of the other. There are certain things—poems, symphonies or homelands—that do not possess by their own means an access to existence. People have to devote themselves to their coming into being. And perhaps in this devotion people might, incidentally, find a real existence.<sup>80</sup>

### **A Fifth Mode: Speak of God in His Own Language, if You Dare**

It would take several thick volumes to summarize this little book by Souriau... But I don’t want to let him go without making him sit through a couple of little tests that will allow us to grasp even more clearly the amazing originality of his project. The first test concerns the mode of existence most often associated with the idea of God; the second deals with those situations that blend together several different modes, and which he calls *synaptic*.

Let us recall the phrase cited above: the ‘basic ubiquity’ of a mode of existence ‘never presupposes a temporal subsistence which is lazily, heavily, or mechanically guaranteed, not even in continuity’. If this is true for all modes, it is all the more so for beings ‘seized’ by the religious mode. Their subsistence, isotopy, or anaphor cannot be obtained ‘lazily, heavily or mechanically’. So why talk about God?, someone might object. Either because He is simply there or, at the very least, because our tradition has developed the idea of Him. Let us recall that the modes are not deduced *a priori*; they are not necessary. We find them, as Souriau says, in our ‘environs’ in the same way that a Palaeolithic painter might grab some ‘red ochre’ or some charcoal that he finds in his cave where he has made camp. Discovery is arbitrary and contingent, but from that moment on it becomes a part of the contrasts that we will have to make use of in order to sort things out for their rest of our history.

No doubt. But to discern that God too is a mode of existence, isn’t this suddenly revealing that Souriau is committing the ‘spiritualist’ crime? (An accusation

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<sup>79</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 46.

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that we know is sufficient to put an end to the conversation as well as to his reputation).<sup>81</sup> Yet this accusation cannot gain traction against someone who has just shown that his *vis-à-vis*, ‘materialism’, is itself but a more or less confused amalgam of two modes: the phenomenon and the thing, and that two types of movement are mixed there, that of the ‘passage of nature’ and that of the ‘immutable mobiles’, as we saw earlier. In any case materialism is a particularly hypocritical theology since, as Tarde put it so well, it presupposes a voice coming from Heaven which announces, without mouth or larynx, the (in)famous laws of nature to which phenomena are supposed to bend. How, no one knows. Souriau is no hypocrite, and if there is one thing he is not afraid of, it is doing metaphysics— and, let’s not forget, ‘trying out the Other’. So if we are to speak of God, let us do it clearly. Or better yet: let’s ‘speak God.’

We should get a good fix on his project. There is not on the one hand an immanent world down here, lacking souls, mind, and meaning, to which on the other hand any sort of transcendence would have to be added via some sort of bold leap. No, there are plenty of transcendences in Souriau, in any mode you choose, since it is always *via the other* that being is extracted. Let’s leave the phantasm of immanence to those who believe in being qua being. As for identity with oneself, even a rock does not have it. Didn’t Whitehead teach us that there is a transcendence of rocks also, since they form societies that persist?<sup>82</sup> What is impossible is persistence without change, and this applies to rocks as much as to God. But if everything is changing, it is nonetheless not all changing in the same fashion, extracting the same differences from the other, the same tone of otherness. If it is OK to talk about God, it is with *dignity* and *politeness* and therefore not giving him any extra concession than *speaking in his language*, but also without refusing him the right of pleading in his own name. As a matter of theology the expression might be a shock, but the best way of respecting ‘talk of God’ is by way of gathering his testimony and accepting that he is fulfilling his own ‘set of categories’, and not that of his neighbours. Phenomena, things, souls or fictions: none of these can be used to judge God exactly.

God does not reveal himself in his essence; without which he would be incarnated in phenomena and in the world. He would be of the world. Yet he exceeds it, he distinguishes himself from it: his ‘to exist’ is developed beside it and outside it. Whether you want to or not, you define this mode of existence. In presupposing it, you set up this existence (albeit problematically) as a definite mode in itself. This is what is strong and ineluctable at the heart of the ontological argument. This is undeniable. It can be expressed in yet another way. One can say: By taking on board the ontic universe of

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<sup>81</sup> Especially because he wrote another book, in the opinion of Stengers his most accomplished: Étienne Souriau, *L'ombre de Dieu*, Paris, PUF, 1955.

<sup>82</sup> See Didier Debaise, *Un empirisme spéculatif. Lecture de Procès et Réalité*. Paris, Vrin, 2006.



representation, you have taken God on board, because he is part of it. He represents in it the mode of existence peculiar to him and his definite ontic status: a transcendent and even absolute mode. Now it is up to you to prove that he has to be done away with, that this existence is not one, or does not correspond to anything. The burden of proof lies with you.<sup>83</sup>

What? Is this the same old ontological proof coming back again? How can this apologetic invention possibly be of any use to us? How can the recourse to the notion of proof lead to anything but a very poor rationalization? But let's listen to how Souriau rehearses this traditional trope. You will remember the argument as put by the venerable St. Anselm. Either you are thinking about God, and he exists since existence is part of his essence, or you say, 'like a fool', that God doesn't exist, but that is because you are thinking about quite something else, whose idea does not imply its existence. Now, Souriau's clever move is to take up this argument once again: not to prove anything by way of a mode of existence defined elsewhere for 'things', but by way of a special, unique, mode, which in point of fact defines the peculiar mode of existence that we call God. He is a being who is *sensitive to what one says about him*: a being who appears and disappears according to the way he is spoken of, proclaimed, pronounced, or uttered. So yes, he is one of these special beings who are dependent on the precise conditions of their utterance, including whether the tone that is made to resonate around them is true or false.

So the ontological argument makes its way not from essence to existence, or from existence to essence, but from one mode of existence to the other (...) namely, to whatever mode of existence that one wishes to assert in the following conclusion: God exists. It is the passage from one mode of existence to another that *constitutes* the argument. In any case it presupposes that a positive answer, in the form of a real, concrete proposition, has been given to this question. What are we talking about when we ask what the divine is? And that some kind of model of it has been uttered, or some sort of glimpse, or conception, or example; that it has in some manner put in play, in movement, in action, in presence; that God has been summoned, has pleaded on his behalf, just as Job had requested him to appear in court. A terrible requirement. The only philosophers who would respond (the only ones to objectify the divine?) are those who dare to make the Word speak: St. Augustine, Malebranche, Pascal. In general, one could say that there is no divine testimony in the universe of human discourse, except in some twenty pages or so of all the Writings of all religions where one has the impression of hearing a God speak of God. And twenty is a lot. Perhaps there are really only five altogether.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>84</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 95-96.

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A hundred million pages of theology, but just five pages where God himself appears because he has been spoken to *in his language*! Even St. Anselm probably didn't realize that his argument could engender such terrible requirements. How negligible now is the feeble link between predicates and substances! We are talking here about the creation of a battleground, a judicial arena, more violent than the one where Jacob did battle with the angel, and in which the speaker and addressee find themselves convoked by the same absolutely specific mode of existence. 'One must be well aware, the problem [of ontological proof] does not arise except when the subject whose existence one claims has been compared to something. There are so many theological and metaphysical speculations where he makes absolutely no appearance!'<sup>85</sup> This is the Souriau one would accuse of spiritualism? Yet here he is stating that virtually no one has been able to carry the 'burden of proof' and that the majority of the remarks 'on God' or 'by God' are just lamentable category errors, applying to this precise mode of existence patterns cut from the cloth of others. Yes of course, we *lack* or *miss* God, but not because pathetic humans engulfed in the mire of immanence just need to follow believers and finally turn their eyes up to heaven. We miss God in the same way that we *miss* the phenomenon, *miss* knowledge, *miss* the soul, or even *miss* fiction: because we are incapable of recognizing that each mode of existence possesses its own tonality, a key to open its own speech, and that modernism has jumbled its own discoveries to such an extent that it can't even manage to make us inherit its treasures.

If there is one huge blunder in the way that we have inherited the contrasts discovered in the course of European history, theology is no doubt the place to find it. We have to wait for Whitehead and Souriau finally to begin to work out some new ways of speaking respectfully and politely of God.<sup>86</sup> Everything else, if one is to believe the Decalogue, is ultimately just a kind of blasphemy: 'Do not take the name of the Lord in vain'. Oh dear, what else do we do, when we run at the mouth, spitting and spewing the unpronounceable? 'To live on God's terms is to bear witness for this God. But be careful also, about which God you bear witness for: he is judging you. You think you are responding for God; but this very God in responding for you, situates you within the scope of your action.'<sup>87</sup> What is as rare in ethnography, no less than in theology is work that respects the exact ontological contours of religious beings.

This scarcity can be explained through the difficulty in exactly specifying the conditions of this mode of existence, even though this difficulty is not any greater than those pertaining to phenomena, to things known objectively, to the soul, or to

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<sup>85</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 96.

<sup>86</sup> On the originality of Whitehead's God, see the second section of Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage création de concepts*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 163.

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fictions. In this sense God is not particularly irrational, he is simply pitched in another key (but so is a rock, and the same goes for any scientific instrument...) But Souriau does add one feature: the religious being is sensitive to the word, and produces paradoxically the effect of ‘an existence for the self’.<sup>88</sup> This is obviously a paradox in a philosophy of ‘otherness,’ and yet: ‘Isn’t this the way love thinks of them?’ And in a note, Souriau adds: ‘we are quite willing to believe that true faith is expressed not so much in “God for me”, but in “me for God”’. The ‘divine as it is objected’ (in the sense of objection and not of objectivity), must also need instauration at the end of the day: God no less than an artwork, fiction, or objective knowledge. To say that people ‘construct’ or ‘fabricate’ gods therefore has none of the critical incisiveness imagined by those in whose bifurcated world one always has to choose between reality and mediation. The only worthwhile question (in theology as much as in art and science) concerns what it is *good* to fabricate, which then allows us to turn the initial relation on its head and allow the emergence of those beings that we knew we have to welcome in the first place:

More than ever before, it is not a question of argumentation or speculation: it is the effective realization of certain acts or dialectical moments that would produce a transcendentalization (as it were) more than a transcendence of the divine as it is objected. This is situated entirely, as we can see, in an architectonic transformation of the system, which substitutes the pair in which God depends on man, with another pair made up of semantic elements— but one where, morphologically (to be precise about it) it is henceforth man who depends on God.<sup>89</sup>

We now see that Souriau’s innovation is not one of adding spirituality to matter, as if that were the only opening available. His ideas are coming from somewhere else. On the one hand Souriau makes the modes of existence proliferate, but at the same time he *rarefies* the product in each of the modes. Let us recall: he said that the phenomenon itself is ‘rare’. In theology there are only ‘five pages’ where He has been summoned to appear. The work of art? It can fail. The soul? You mostly run the risk of losing it... The adherents of a philosophy of being-as-being really had it good! All they had to do was discover the foundation, the substance or the condition of possibility, and from that point on nothing could go wrong; continuity was assured by way of self-identity. When in doubt, just garnish with dialectics: even history, with as much sound and fury as you need, will inevitably lead you in any case to this ‘for the self’ of the ‘in the self’ which was already at the beginning and turns up again—

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<sup>88</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 99-100.

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heavens be praised!—at the end. But for the philosophers of being qua other (where are they? who are they?) history is not so gracious. It does not have these bolsters, these ‘supports’ [*suppôts*] as Souriau calls them. It can miss, it can fail, all can be lost. Being is there to be *made*, yes, to be the fragile and provisional result of an instauration.

### From the Modal to the Pluri-Modal

To sum up, we could say that the inquiry into different modes of existence comes down to constructing a type of spectrograph. With such a device the composition of a distant body is depicted via the particular distribution of those *traces* that make up its unique signature— something astronomers know how to do so well for stars. We cannot try to hide the fact that the ‘signatures’ obtained by Souriau’s spectrometer are also characterized by *missing* bands.<sup>90</sup> He says nothing about technology that would indicate the presence of Simondon. Also absent is the law. There is nothing on economics, nor on politics, despite (or because of?) the tragic historical situation in which the book was written. A few traces are there, but they are scarcely discernible. And the same goes for morality.<sup>91</sup> And yet, in the last section of the work, Souriau in fact applies himself to the problem of how the modes are enchained. So far, in fact, we have only spoken of the modes of existence that he calls ‘ontic’ or monomodal, though any situation, any real body or entity is obviously *multimodal*. To move from the question of taking modes of existence one by one to modes of existence that are enchained with several modes— it is a bit like moving from a piano tuner who tries the notes one by one to the piano player who makes them all resonate in a melody. Now what really surprises Souriau is the way that philosophers continually exaggerate their preferred mode of existence. It is as if they wanted to make music by holding one note continually, or as if they were composing repetitive music. It seems that thinkers never have the necessary politeness for a true multirealism. Once they have sorted out the terms of reference for a particular mode, it will be through it and

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<sup>90</sup> With Souriau I could say, ‘Even though we have not counted the genres of existence on [all] our fingers, we hope not to have left any essentials out’, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 131. It is always possible that I have missed detecting certain spectra, either because my spectrogram is tuned to a different wavelength, or because the second half of Souriau’s book is so elusive that I have to confess to finding it hellishly difficult. See our Introduction to the new edition for a more coherent treatment.

<sup>91</sup> ‘In truth, we believe we can reason otherwise for good, or for bad, just as for the beautiful or the ugly, the true and the false. In other words, in response to the question, how do they exist, one can say they exist in something else [*en autre chose*], they reside in certain treatments of reality, among which the idea of perfection can be a prime example. Without undertaking this huge problem, let us concede that we can say that they exist in themselves, which merely comes down to recognising that a *morally qualified existence* as a new pure mode of existence, to be added to those which we have already recognised’. *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 135-136.

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it alone that they imagine they can evaluate the quality of all the others: which will lead, or course, to a whole cascading series of distortions, category types and category errors. To remind us of the rules for philosophical politeness, Souriau includes an amazing sentence in another book that I have already mentioned:

One does not have the right to speak philosophically of a being as real if, at the same time as one says that one has found in it a type of direct or intrinsic truth (I mean its way of being in its maximum state of present lucidity), one does not also say on what plane of existence one has, in a manner of speaking, sounded its death knell; in which domain one reached it and broke through.<sup>92</sup>

I will leave it up to the reader to take the trouble of figuring out if there is a single philosopher in existence who has been able to thus delineate his or her hunting ground... In order to avoid this continual exaggeration, to allow the modes to 'keep their distance', to mutually respect their different types of verification, we have to define yet another mode (one of the 'second degree' as he says) and which is defined this time by the movement and the variation or modulation of one mode into another: this is what he calls the *plurimodal*. Only they can make the superimposition of the 'traces' finally 'compossible', and give metaphysics the amplitude that it should have.

In order to completely achieve both the separation of the beings and the innovation of the existential status which is represented by the consideration of sole morphemes,<sup>93</sup> one would have to follow, for example, this imaginative enchainment:

First imagine a picture where the being is detached from a determined ontic status, by being successively transposed into different modes, at different levels; for example a human personality successively transposed into a physical existence, by way of being a body present in the world of bodies, then into a psychic existence, by way of being a soul among other souls, then into a totally spiritual existence outside of time, etc (...) Finally, without worrying about the problem of the correspondence of these beings or their unity (which would happen at the second degree of existence), what if one took these very movements as sole realities. Let us evoke an existential universe where the only beings would be such dynamisms of transitions: deaths, sublimations,

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<sup>92</sup> Souriau, *Avoir une âme*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> In Souriau's philological metaphor, 'morphemes' are opposed to 'semantemes' just as verbs or relations are opposed to nouns or adjectives. *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 101.

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spiritualisations, births and rebirths, fusions with the One or separations from him or individualisations.<sup>94</sup>

As you can see, this is quite a step. Souriau already had the signal audacity of defining several modes of existence, each of which could circulate freely in the world without encroaching on its neighbour. But now it is *variation itself* that has to be considered equivalent to true beings. Alterity alters yet another degree. Difference differs even more differently. At the beginning of this presentation, I cited the sentences where Souriau was linking his project with that of James on prepositions as things we experience directly even though the first kind of empiricism has always denied it. ‘Here we would be in a world where the *or rather*, or the *because of*, the *for*, and above all the *and then*, *and thus*, would be true existences.’<sup>95</sup> Listen now to how Souriau continues that passage:

The modulations of existence *for*, existence *before*, existence *with*, are just so many types of the general mode of the synaptic. And by this route one can easily cure oneself of the over-importance given in certain philosophies to the famous man-in-the-world; because the man before the world, or even the man against the world (*adversus*: the against as conflict, which strikes and violently hits, which tries to gain the ascendancy in any offensive) are also real. And inversely, there is also the world in the man, the world before the man, the world against the man. The crucial thing is to get the sense that existence in all these modulations is invested neither in the man nor the world, not even in them together, but in this *for*, in this *against* where the fact of a genre of being resides, and from which, from this point of view, are suspended the man as much as the world.<sup>96</sup>

Heidegger is a typical case of a melody played on just one note, but the danger would be no less if one moved too quickly to define the unity of the melody by some collectivity greater or higher than the modes. This is why Souriau devotes the whole of his last chapter to guarding against the danger of returning too quickly to unity: ‘So let us be careful, in wanting to cure ourselves of multimodality (which is the inherent condition of existence) of also curing ourselves of both existence and

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<sup>94</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 104.

<sup>95</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 108.

<sup>96</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 111.

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superexistence, in looking for the One to go towards the Nothing.’<sup>97</sup> Just like substance, unity is once again a nihilism. There is nothing surprising in that, since a being as being is by definition impossible: it is precisely lacking the other through which it alone it can arrive at subsistence. Here is a ‘revaluation of values’ as radical, in another way, as Nietzsche’s. To search for any persistence of identity in itself—at the level of the parties involved as much as the overarching level—is evidence only of a will to head towards nothingness.

A totalization does not have more reality at all because it assembles or unites. What interests us more about a totality like that is, beyond the plurality of genres of existence, is the way something appears that not only embraces them, but distinguishes itself from them and goes beyond them. So if superexistence has to be considered, it is not through any axiological consideration, not as if at a higher or more sublime degree of existence (even though it could have this sublime); it is though a strict and severe idea of a movement to second degree problems concerning existence, but stretching out of its plane.<sup>98</sup>

In the same way that each mode has the same dignity as all the others, one can say that each composition has the same dignity as all the others, without harmony or totality being able to predominate. Or rather, in the same way that each mode can fail its own existence, each totalisation runs the risk of crushing ‘this Tree of Jesse or Jacob’s ladder: the surexistential order’.<sup>99</sup>

It would be tempting to multiply the possibilities. But Souriau is once again just as reluctant to proliferate as he is to unify, since this alternative is nothing more than the consequence of the incapacity to qualify the modes and their combinations starting from the position we are in at the moment. If the one is not privileged, then nor is the multiple. He indicates this with a very funny remark: who would go to a young man to advise him to be *both* a Don Juan and a saint on the pretext that there are two possibles there instead of one?!<sup>100</sup> Father Charles de Foucault lived first the good life *before* being an ascetic, but he could never have been both at once... compossibility works in a quite different way from simple accumulation. Here again, the difference lies in good and bad ways of protecting the multiplicity from the dangers of both unity and dispersal.

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<sup>97</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 140.

<sup>98</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 140.

<sup>99</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 151. A metaphor picked up later: ‘Tree of Jesse and Jacob’s ladder: there is an order and as? A genealogy of surexistence’ *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 155.

<sup>100</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 150.

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If the philosopher is the ‘shepherd of being’, the job of a Souriau-type shepherd would require more care, more attention, and more vigilance, as well as more politeness. First, because each being must be instaured according to its own special procedure which can also go wrong; and then, because each flock is made up of animals of different sorts that take off in different directions... No doubt about it, the shepherd of beings qua others has more work than the shepherd of beings qua beings: ‘Be careful which reality you are witness to, rich or poor, heading towards the more real or towards nothingness. Because if you are witness for this reality, it will judge you.’<sup>101</sup> And on the previous page, he had written the ultimate definition of the real Copernican revolution allowed by the notion of instauration: “What made Michelangelo or Beethoven great, what turned them into geniuses, it was not their genius as such, it was their attention to the qualities of genius, not in themselves, but in the work.”<sup>102</sup>

### **Conclusion: What philosophy bears witness for the moderns?**

We really do have an inheritance problem. How can we have confidence in an academic tradition capable of burying philosophies so profoundly and so forcefully? Does Souriau deserve to be forgotten like he has? And what can be said about Tarde, who was only recently disinterred? Or James, Dewey, and Whitehead, of whom we have almost completely deprived ourselves? But there is worse: when we inherit modernism, what and who do we inherit? Anthropology certainly knows the difficulties there are in other cultures in figuring out who is a reliable informant. Who should the anthropologist of the moderns confide in, in order to track down finally who they were, what they believed themselves to be, or what they might become? If he chooses John Searle or Étienne Souriau, will that not mean recreating completely different versions of his culture? I hope I have said enough to give a taste of Souriau, to show that it is not impossible to give an infinitely richer version of the ancient moderns than the usual miserable naturalism. Exoticism is always detestable, for Whites as well. If they ‘speak with forked tongue’, it is because they remain philosophically and anthropologically more interesting than they think they are, even if they pride themselves on having virtues they do not have, even if they despair about sins that they are really incapable of committing. I can’t think of a better way of finishing this overly long presentation than with the final passage from Souriau’s book. Here is the cosmos we would have to find a way to anthropologize:

With Amphion’s song the city walls began to rise. With Orpheus’s lyre the Symplegades stopped and stared, letting the Argo sail by. Each inflection of

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<sup>101</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>102</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 161.

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our voice, which is the very accent of existence, is a support for higher realities. Within our few seconds of existence, between the abysses of nothingness, we can speak a song which rings beyond existence, with the power of magic speech, and which can make even the Gods, in their interworlds, feel a nostalgia for existence, and the desire to come down here to be by our sides, as our companions and our guides.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, p. 166.

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