Chapter 12
On Habit and Fiction in Latours' *Inquiry* and Fictional Knowledge on Habit in Proust's *Recherche*

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ABSTRACT

Latour's Inquiry into Modes of Existence *undertakes a re-evaluation of both modern ontology and ANT: Adding qualitative differentiation to quantitative network analysis is tantamount to the outline of a pluralist ontology distinguishing a variety of different modes of being in the world. The aim is to make more space in order to provide proper accommodation for all enti-ties, especially for those a monist ontology could not account for. Both [HAB], habit, and [FIC], fiction, are modes that deserve a particular amount of space; [HAB] due to its all-pervasiveness in everyday courses of action, [FIC] due to its crucial role in anthropogenesis and its vital importance for many other modes. Nonetheless, there is an opposite tendency to restrict the possibilities of these modes. This is elucidated first by comparing [HAB] with other philosophical assessments of habit and [FIC] with Serres' readings of works of art and literary texts, and second via a confrontation of [FIC] and [HAB] with Proust's* In Search of Lost Time, *a work of fiction inquiring deeply into the workings of habit.*

INTRODUCTION

In his recent book *Enquête sur les modes d'existence/An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (*AIME*), Bruno Latour (2013a) undertakes the systematic extension and specification of what was once ANT. The overall principle of reticulation, the network character of existence, was meant as a general revision both of a traditional, substantialist ontology and of the constructivist refusal of many moderns to attribute any ontological value whatsoever to any entities, reducing all things to historically changing epistemological constructions and thus to imagination about truth.[1] Yet, it could not account for any qualitative differences between different types of reticulation (Latour, 2000; 2012; 2013a; 2013b). Latour, maintaining,

of course, the overall idea of network-actors represented by the "grammatical" mode [NET],[2] therefore suggests differentiating between a dozen "semantic" modes of existence. These are subdivided into trios, whose succession traces an ascending movement from non-differentiation between subject and object (including the mode [HAB] for habit), an emphasis on the construction of quasi-objects (including the mode [FIC], which for Latour includes, in a broad understanding of the term, fiction), to the emphasis on quasi-subjects and to a final group that reunites quasi-objects and quasi-subjects (including the mode [ATT] for attachments) (cf. Latour, 2012; 2013a, pp. 283-292). How exactly actors or entities thus reticulate themselves, how entities become involved and enrolled in those networks, how some of them work slavishly or reliably as intermediaries, or how they translate treacherously as mediators is exactly what is supposed to differ from mode to mode. A given mode – [FIC] or [TEC], for instance – directs the sense of a given course of action (without determining them substantially, there are still no substances in this pluralist ontology) by taking the [PRE]-position. In order to account for the interrelations between several modes, Latour speaks of crossings when modes meet and when there are co-presences of resonances, and speaks negatively of amalgams when the over-lapping is simply due to a modernist misrepresentation.[3] Latour's declared goal is to make enough room for all sorts of entities with different ontological statuses by creating or restoring a proper, spacious institution for each of them: Lack of space for them is the main defect of the modern's own understanding of the world in which they live.

In this paper, I am particularly interested in the modes [HAB] and [FIC]. Instead of applying these modes to an object of inquiry, I will rather make these parts of Latour's *Inquiry* the object of an investigation. Not only do both modes concern phenomena of mediality, but they also raise the question as to whether Latour's modelling of those modes actually meets his objective to provide maximum space, or whether, for the sake of distinction between different modes, their space is unintentionally restrained. As for [HAB], this will eventually also include the question whether it can effectively be distinguished from the mode [ATT]. As regards [FIC], it is the crossing – that is the point where modes meet to clash, interrelate, etc. – with [REF], the mode of scientific knowledge that deserves close examination. I do not wish to debunk a contamination or amalgam in those accounts that should be rectified. There is no mess that has to be put in order: what is problematic is precisely the attempt to properly distinguish between those modes.

Turning to Marcel Proust's spacious novel *À la recherche du temps perdu/In Search of Lost Time* (which, incidentally, is briefly mentioned in Latour's chapter on fiction), I will furthermore establish a relation between [HAB] and [FIC]. Following Proust (and Michel Serres), I shall not only search for auto-reflexive knowledge of fiction in Proust's text that can be paralleled with or serve as a commentary on and further specification of Latour's remarks. I also want to treat [FIC] as a mode that can offer deep insight into the workings of habit in all its facets, including its relation to attachments or rather habit's attaching qualities. The question whether such a relation is thinkable within the framework of Latour's model then arises. Consequently, instead of simply applying Latour to Proust, I treat Proust's text, despite its fictionality, as a nonetheless highly valid account of habit as attachment that subjects Latour's account of both [HAB] and [FIC] to severe scrutiny.

The Mode of Existence [HAB]

As I have stated elsewhere, [HAB] is central to the AIME project for architectural reasons– given that *each* institution relies on habit to be operational – and is at the same time difficult to situate in a univocal manner in one single location within Latour's (re)construction of the edifice of the modern's mode

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