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Never Left the Dreaming: A Study of Decolonization and Enchantment

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Never Left the Dreaming:

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Thank you, Dad, for helping me to ask big, important, and foolish questions. I
hope that one day I learn from your patience and am able to
answer a question or two myself.

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Preface

Please excuse my anthropology, but when I was in the Amazon, a medicine man told me something interesting.

He had arrived at the lodge in a shallow canoe, and after a silent boat ride down a tributary of the Amazon River, I found myself sitting naked in the clay. Although I had bathed during the final phase of the tobacco ceremony, as soon as I sat back down, the mud began climbing back onto me. One is always wet and muddy when in the Amazon. Sometimes it feels like the whole place wants to swallow you.

It was late May of 2023 about two hours upriver from Leticia, Colombia. After finishing our ceremony and sharing an old legend, the middle-aged Ticuna man smiled for the first time, the sides of his eyes wrinkling. I took this as an invitation to ask questions. He had spoken for a long time about Ticuna cosmology, particularly Yo'i and Ip and the creation of the world from the felling of a great ceiba tree, so I asked the medicine man if any of the tall trees which were alive today dated back to the time of Yo'i and Ip. He laughed and explained that ceibas don't live that long.

As I listened, I watched the ripples of bugs skimming across the shallow water of the riverbank. The water is always murky because it is always churning and flowing, kicking up mud and sediment. In many places, the ground spends half of the year underwater. The day before, a guide had spoken of what he called the "three Amazon Rivers" which keep everything in a state of motion – the one we all know, the one which flows underground, and the one in the sky which brought ceaseless rain.

Because of all this movement, as well as the geology of the Amazon basin, the soil is poor – almost everywhere, the nutritional layer is less than a foot deep. For this reason, plants

extend their roots horizontally far more than vertically. You can knock your galoshes into a thick root as you walk and not be able to see the same tree's trunk until you walk another thirty feet. Even the oldest ceibas don't live very long, despite their six-foot-wide and hundred-foot-tall trunks. It was at the base of one of these sacred trees, the tallest I've ever seen, that a Ticuna elder purified me with holy water; he sprinkled it by tree branch in lieu of an aspergillum, and whispered in Ticuna in lieu of Church Latin. They grow tall fast, topple, and decay even faster.

Life is short in the Amazon – everything is constantly dying, composting, and growing anew. Everything is eating everything else.

But zoomed out ever so slightly, life is very, very long there too. At the scale of individual creatures, sure, most plants, animals, and fungi die quick. But a scale which is slightly less common for the modern mind, but which is equally thinkable, the ancient forest itself has been alive for millennia – and constantly eating itself throughout. It is a strange place, full of strange magic. Everyone there says that you can feel the whole thing breathing at once, and when you look into the trees, you can see the millions of eyes looking back at you.

The phenomenon of 'uncontacted tribes' haunts that forest. As you traverse it, you can look any direction and imagine that, at some unknown distance *that way*, people live completely outside of colonial modernity. Down this estuary or that one, after a day or two by boat, there are villages where we of the 'outside world' cannot go. Many people are terrified of the uncolonized people who live deep in the trees. I think what might be most telling about the uncontacted tribe is a term I will reference a couple times, which I draw from David Graeber and David Wengrow's *the Dawn of Everything: A New History of* Humanity. It is Gregory Bateson who introduced 'schismogenesis' to refer to the ways in which one society invents itself against another. *We* do *this* here, while over there, *they* do *that*. The 'uncontacted' tribes of the Amazon

are not actually uncontacted – they know very well who white people are, and they know that most indigenous villages of the forest have been settled: first by conquistadors, then by rubber traders, then by the capitalist market. That they are removed from colonial modernity is an active choice, an intentional schismogenesis on which the survival of their lifeway depends. They also remember the brutality of colonization. That is why they withdraw deeper into the forest, protecting their borders at arrow-point.

I too come from a place of three rivers – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Today on ancestral Lenape, Shawnee, Osage, and Seneca land, students are liberating the courtyards of the University of Pittsburgh in support of Gaza, demanding that their administrations divest from Israel. I hear that this encampment and the dozens more like it, which have been popping up daily at schools across the country since late April, are animated by song and dance, and by ritual. I've seen as many videos of instruments as I have of loudspeakers, and images of both banquets on Passover and students locked arm-in-arm protecting students praying during salah times from riot police. They say that thousands have already been arrested, most violently. The students calling for not only a ceasefire in Gaza but for a free Palestine, claim to take the land they are on and retrieve it from the institution and from the state, for common use by the people. And in a movement which explicitly condemns the Israeli genocide as settler colonial, many protesters seem to agree that the small encampments belong to any and all indigenous Americans: "you're on native land" and "land back!" are written on red paint on the sides of tents. I am struck by the many causes and peoples in entangled in this struggle against settler imperialism: protests which echo Occupy Wallstreet, which are born of —and led by a

generation raised in— the 2010s struggle for Black Lives, and which are punctuated by Muslim and Jewish ceremony, Arabic song, and the mantras of Native American liberation.

I recall the songs and ceremonies of the water protector movement, which began at the Standing Rock encampment during the 2016-2017 protests against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. In 2021, I and a small group of Anishinaabe-led protestors helped convert a construction site on the Line 3 pipeline into a liberated zone. After the sun set each night on a long day of blockade, Southern Ojibwe elders would share traditional songs and old poems around the many campfires that dotted the surrounding Minnesota countryside. It was the most joyful side of community brought together in common struggle that I had ever seen; the marches of my childhood in Pittsburgh always had the bittersweet end of getting on the bus and going quietly back home. At Line 3, the singing and ceremony lasted for as long as people could continue to care for and share with each other. And people can share forever. At least, until the police showed up in their armored trucks and dragged us away in zip ties.

Both the water protection movement and the campaign for a free Palestine, along with the countless other struggles which define the contemporary fight against coloniality, demand the return of ancestral land to indigenous people; and on the land liberated by each struggle, ceremonial magic blossoms. It is in this fray of music and protest that I locate this project, which investigates aspects of the role of magic in the decolonial struggle against modernity's capitalist hegemony.

Introduction

"Theory—the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees—theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth."
—Adrienne Rich, "Towards a Politics of Location" (1984, 213-214)

The two broad question which guide this senior thesis paper are *how do we decolonize a colonized reality*, and *does the discourse of re-enchantment, sacredness, and magic support decolonization?* I argue at a basic level that, as a preliminary answer to both questions, decolonization must be able to take indigenous thought seriously. On a political level, the problem with this is that of the 'colonized mind' – across the globe, human thought is canalized more and more into the single and universalizing ontology of late modern capitalism. While I will unpack some of the foundations of such a system later in this paper, the problem for decolonization is obvious: the way of thinking spread first by the European colonization of the globe is hegemonic, nearly framing how all human beings think about our world. How can the indigenous ontologies which existed before what Povinelli calls the 'ancestral catastrophe' of colonization again be understood, so that decolonization does not fail and revert to the logics of the colonial thought we are used to?[1] We know that these ontologies are so often defined by gods of the natural world, relationships with nonhuman bodies and entities which are understood to be interpersonal, transcendent and intangible energies, and ancestral worship. How can we take such ideas seriously when we live in a world that actively denies them? On a more personal level, I have always wanted to believe in such things, which I generally call *magic*, but have struggled to do so. Despite having grown up with a Vajrayana Buddhist and Bön pantheon peopled by gods,

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[1] Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*, Duke University Press, 2016.

demons, and spirits from indigenous Tibet, I remember doubting their existence even as a little boy. There's no way such beings can be real.

The circumstances which contextualize a more-than-human decolonization cannot be sidestepped. Colonization does not only bear a genocidal history, but an ecocidal one. The ecological colonialism of extraction heats the sky, erodes the earth, burns the forest, splits open the mountains, and bleaches the sea. The spread of plastic and commodification unsettles our bodies in ways that leave us less and less able to think. I situate this project in reference to the claim that this catastrophe, stained by unthinkability, is the result of *secularization*.

The most common contemporary response to what is understood to be a loss of magic in the modern world —be it due to colonization, Christianization, capitalism, or otherwise— is the belief in and call for the 're-enchantment of this disenchanted world.' In this project, I not only investigate the term re-enchantment, but also its inverse '*disenchantment*.' Re-enchantment is considered important because in popular imagination, nature used to be considered sacred, now it is not, and the consequences of the shift have been catastrophic. In response to this conviction, I am writing this senior project to argue that 're-enchantment' as a strategy of decolonization does not work, and to explore in contrast what could instead. But to examine the terms disenchantment and re-enchantment, I first question the definitions of magic, modernity, nature, the human, and culture on which the idea of disenchantment relies, and I follow this analysis by investigating why we frame radicality against this ostensibly disenchanted modernity.

My analysis of dis- and re-enchantment primarily consults anthropological and political theory; it is a theoretical investigation which is interested in the political implications of unraveling these terms, and what kinds of politics emerge when the concepts are used and understood quite differently. Anthropology is the discipline whose body of work is most

generative for my analysis because the anthropological scholarship I consult ties the notions of magic, meaning, and myth to the politics of indigenous life. In contemporary decolonial discourse, indigenous knowledge is often associated with enchantment: it is usually taken as a framing of an ecological world peopled by both humans and nonhumans as inherently sacred, animate, and magical. My project both appreciates and problematizes these associations by consulting the scholarship. Because the agenda of the project is decolonial, it is indigenous life which this project hopes to encourage, nourish, and contribute to.

In a footnote of the 2016 article "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties," which I site throughout the paper, Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson mention that "one point in need of further consideration concerns itself with the Latourian proposal for an 'anthropology of the moderns.' How does one carry out this project without reifying the modern as a specific geography disjointed from its colonial underside?" For this reason, I do not devote this project entirely to analyzing how we who call ourselves modern see our world. My interest is instead in unpacking how we might see it differently. We have established our modernness plenty; I am more interested in destabilizing it through what has been called the 'ontological turn' of contemporary anthropology, and thus situating modernity as one ontology among others. I ask how modernity, understood to be inherently colonial, might in fact be a powerful illusion, and as such a form of enchantment. That is, rather than exclusively associating modernity with a dead, desecrated, disenchanted world, I will show that modernity and capitalism can be instead strategically analyzed as catastrophic modes of enchantment. This will mean that re-enchanting the world cannot simply be assumed to benefit the project of decolonization.

There are four closely related concepts I use throughout the paper which must be defined. These are enchantment, magic, the sacred, and myth. The term enchantment, which I have already introduced through the terms dis- and re-enchantment, is the key category of my project. It is a category which is usually universal: as an adjective, it is either present or absent in describing the whole world or cosmos. Are things disenchanted or enchanted? Can they be otherwise? Hence our understanding of it is intertwined with our understanding of global forces (namely colonization, capitalism, and Anthropocene), how they operate, and what kind of a world they operate in: are these forces disenchantments of a disenchanted world? The opposite? Something else? Disenchantment is nearly synonymous with secularization, and re-enchantment is closely related to sacralization. Numerous ecological, place-based, land back, and re-wilding movements assume the language of re-enchantment. I spend particular time on these distinctions in the third chapter.

Enchantment is a totalizing force – it has to do with everything. When I write about magic, I am writing about the *verbiage* of that universal enchantment: magic is the kind of activity that brings motion and meaning to an enchanted world, where mechanical causality alone makes up a disenchanted world, and is inherently meaningless. Magic is to enchantment what gravity is to a solar system – it is the force that holds the whole enchanted system together. The terms 'magic' and 'enchantment' are the most closely related of these four concepts, and I often use them interchangeably throughout the project, though I will also define them separately.

The sacred is the holy, the explicitly not-profane state of being which has been removed from the human world of immanence. I define this term in more depth in Chapter Three, but for now it should be recognized that enchantment is in some ways a sacralization of the world. Under disenchantment, the world is inherently profane, insofar as it has no room for the value

and meaning associated with sacred things. However, the sacred is not the enchanted, because enchantment is also closely related to the term animism. It can refer to a kind of world-magic which is rich with meaning and movement but does not see itself as inaccessible to earthly relations of intimacy and use. Following the use of these terms that I employ, enchantment as animacy can be understood as immanent to the earth where enchantment as sacralization is better defined as a *transcendence of the earth*. Generally, however, a thing which is 'enchanted' can be read as roughly equivalent to a thing which is 'sacred' or 'magical.'

Lastly, through a longstanding discourse in anthropology,[2] myth is a particularly interesting category because it has to do with veiling; to name it is to recognize its untruth, but to not name it leaves it as naturalized fact. One is skeptical of something referred to as a 'myth' in a way that they are not skeptical of something referred to as 'fact,' or history. Though I outline the primary mythos of the colony in the second chapter, namely the "modern myth" of division between nature and culture, its power of veiling becomes particularly operative in the third chapter.

Following Bruno Latour, I take this modern myth as one point of departure. This myth is the belief in the intrinsic division between nature and culture, which I also write as the nature/culture dualism or other similar phrases. This idea is closely related to the popular 'nature versus nurture' question and can be understood also as nature/society, or nature/humanity. Of the modern myth, Timothy Morton writes that "humans never actually severed their indigeneity to the symbiotic real, and this thing we keep telling ourselves with our words and our social space and our philosophy and our Stockholm syndrome feelings, that we are outside of that world, like Adam and Eve, is killing us and all life on this planet" (Morton 2017, 102).

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[2] Bronislav Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life"

It is in questioning this myth that I disturb the solidity of the modern understanding of the human. I do so primarily by exploring how the recent ontological turn towards an anthropology of ontologies rather than epistemologies addresses the nature/culture dualism upon which classical anthropology depends. Writing of the kind of dislocation of the human I will employ in the paper, Eduardo Kohn says that "learning about how humans interact with our worlds often unbinds our understanding of that human, but that absolutely does not mean it ignores us. Rather, it accounts for *everything* that makes us who we are, our full situation. 'Ontological anthropology is for the most part posthumanist but that does not mean it sidesteps humans and human concerns altogether'" (2015, 313). He explains that it is not a coincidence for such a turn to emerge in the age of Anthropocene, which both centers the human and, by violently rendering the balance of the nonhuman world contingent upon human activity, reveals the ways in which anthropology "can no longer be only about humans. […] One has to say why 'we' should care about ecological problems, but this needs to be done in such a way that allows those other 'voices' that compose this common 'we' to articulate their values as well" (Kohn 2015, 321).

I question the idea that enchantment is a thing of the past in the same way that I question the nature/culture binary; this belief is also divulged as mythic. That said, a myth is not merely a lie, but a far more complex and potent force of world-making. By cutting through the myth that enchantment is something that once was, indigeneity becomes not only a memory of the past, but a project for the future which is alive today.

In the first chapter of the paper, I investigate the concepts of dis- and re-enchantment in detail, surveying different perspectives on the desire to re-enchant the world, as well as the theories of enchantment and magic engaged in the work of a few different anthropologists. I end

by arguing that contemporary anthropology complicates the foundations of the ideas of magic and enchantment by dispersing agency from its confinement to the modern human mind. Enchantment is traditionally conceived of as something done by humans to the nonhuman world; I contest this theory by arguing that if enchanting and disenchanting are both cultural impositions upon the world, the two ideas rely on a nature/culture distinction that the ontological turn is able to undermine. That is, I am arguing that the 'enchantment of the world' is premised on the belief that human agency and culture alone possess the power to sacralize. This presumption is based on the idea of a 'dead' natural world that is the mere canvas upon which the human may paint their magic. If the nature/culture duality is not presumed, then the entire logic of re-enchantment disappears.

In the second chapter, I build up to and elaborate the qualities of the ontological turn in anthropology, arguing that not only is the enchantment theory outlined above merely an illusion of the modern myth of nature/culture separation, but that through the ontological turn, a more expansive anthropology emerges that is able to actually take seriously the magic and animacy of indigenous ontologies. No longer is indigenous thought reduced to fallacy or even relegated to epistemology and 'collective belief,' nor even relativistically assumed to be one of many 'worldviews' that interpret reality. Instead, the world begins to look like something both inherently enchanted and pluriversal, a state of being which is disguised by colonial modernity to assert itself as the hegemonic arbiter of knowledge and truth. In short, the ontological turn can be provisionally defined as an anthropological methodology that takes all ontologies seriously, to the extent that indigenous ontologies reflexively push back against modern ontological assumptions such as the nature/culture binary. In this way, as Eduardo Viveiros de Casto will claim, the ontological turn is an inherently decolonial project which operates with the explicit

intention to permanently decolonize thought (2014, 40). The anthropological and political

theorists that I draw upon in this thesis are thereby made comrades of, and diplomats for,

decolonization.

 To further introduce the idea of the ontological turn, which I consult alongside

posthumanist thought in general, through one of my primary sources for Chapter Two in

particular, Kohn

> take[s] the broader turn to ontological anthropology as a theoretically and politically important addition to our discipline—one that should seek not to replace, but to augment traditional anthropological critiques based on attention to social construction, political economy, and the human. Although anthropology as a discipline needs to make conceptual room for ontology, not all anthropology should necessarily be ontological. (2015, 322)

Explaining how the ontological turn is in many ways an organic destination of classical

anthropology, Kohn argues that if anthropologists like Marcel Mauss and Michael Taussig[3] are

comfortable suggesting that magic and "religion can be treated as [] cultural system[s]," then

"taking spirits seriously further forces us onto ontological terrain" (2015, 316). I conclude this

chapter with Viveiros de Castro's concept of *multinaturalism*, which subverts modern logic

entirely in a complete ontological *turn*. Where the multiculturalism of traditional anthropology

sees nature (the world of objects) as a universal fact and cultures (the world of subjects) as the

many perspectives on that one nature, multinaturalism sees culture, or subjecthood, as the

universal category, and nature, or objecthood, as the particular. I read multinaturalism as a breath

of fresh air born in the lungs of the world – the Amazon.

 In the third chapter, I argue that colonial modernity has itself enchanted the world

through what it calls disenchantment or secularization, claiming that all things are reducible to

dead matter through mechanical, mathematic, material logic. This claim relies on a modern myth

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[3] See also Geertz, Hubert, Chakraborty, Durkheim…

that became hegemonic across the planet during centuries violent of colonization, and is sustained today through techno-capitalist algorithms of subtle coercion. I will suggest that Agamben's concept of *profanation* as a political approach to subverting the modern myth, without relying on a notion of re-enchantment. The concept of profanation first articulates capitalism as a force which has sacralized the world, making it profoundly inaccessible to us, and then offers a possible subversion of this hegemony in the form of rendering it inoperative from the inside, and opening the world to free play. I conclude the project by synthesizing the some of the illuminations of the ontological turn with the world of common use and play opened up by destituent power, suggesting an intrinsically enchanted world that emerges when capitalist and colonial logics are rendered inoperative, and new forms of life are allowed to pour forth from a destituted modernity. I take this to be a hint at what a decolonized world can look like.

I frame this project as one which asks what happens *if* we think a certain way, as opposed to one that argues that we *must* think a certain way. I do not know if the approach I suggest in any way aids the project of decolonization, but I hope that it at least charts a possible theoretical course out of a colonized delimitation of thought which restricts us to a distorted and devastating metaphysics. Decolonization in this sense, like enchantment, must not be the attempted reversion to an impossible past, but the process by which certain futures can finally be allowed and encouraged. In this spirit, Viveiros de Castro said the following during a 2015 lecture called "Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf?"

> I must leave the relation between the ontological turn and the ecological concern to another occasion; let me just say I am convinced that in the sombre decades to come, the end of the world 'as we know it' is a distinct possibility. And when this time comes (it has already come, in my opinion) we will have a lot to learn from people whose world has already ended a long time ago – think of the Amerindians, whose world ended five centuries ago, their population having dropped to something like 5 per cent of the pre-

Columbian one in 150 years, the Amerindians who, nonetheless, have managed to abide, and learned to live in a world which is no longer their world 'as they knew it'. We will soon all be Amerindians ['in this sense,' he adds in the original spoken lecture]. Let's see what they can teach us in matters apocalyptic. (2015, 6)

1: The Enchantment Theory

"I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life—from life, from the dance, from wisdom."
–Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000 [1950], 43)

I. Re-Enchantment

Contemporary politics are filled with magic. I do not mean 'magic' here as a theoretical term to describe electoral illusions or deceived masses (I'll get to all that later), but as a genuine interest in occult, neo-Pagan, animist, Dharmic, witchcraft, and so-called 'shamanic' ceremonial practices which are proliferating on both the left and the right. On the political left, much of this can be understood by recognizing the common sentiment that the present day, defined by hegemonic techno-capitalism and climate catastrophe, is meaningless and in some way or another, *doomed*. The feeling is not only that practicing magic might possibly unite late modernity's atomized masses into ideological cohesion, but more acutely, that an overwhelmingly secular world leaves very little that feels *meaningful*. There is little to base one's identity on that isn't tied to their work or organized religion, both of which seem to generally see the world as damned to insignificant drudgery. In her 2019 article "The Great Awokening: The Rise of Progressive Occultism, Or why Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez felt compelled to share her birth chart," Tara Isabella Burton writes that "the contemporary millennial Left, increasingly alienated from a Christianity it sees as repressive, outmoded, and downright abusive, has used the language, the imagery, and the rituals of modern occultism to *re-enchant its seeming secularism*" (2019, emphasis added).

Perhaps the most common instance of the effort to "re-enchant" is in response to the belief that capitalism and other such forces have drained life on earth of its sacredness. Why else would humanity be destroying the planet, putting most —if not all— life on earth in jeopardy? If

this is so, then we must collectively re-enchant the world in all human minds; we must cultivate a collective belief in its inherent sacredness, a believe which we must once have had. To re-enchant the world is nothing less than what is needed to prevent total ecological and social collapse.

The call for re-enchantment exists also in the academy. In his article 'the Trouble with Re-Enchantment,' English scholar Jason Crawford voices a question asked by many contemporary scholars – "was it possible that enchantment could answer our need for something better: for ecologies that reimagine human participation in the life of the earth, for communities that root individual identity in mutual habitation, or for theologies that make space for the mystery of divine presence in the material world?" (2020).

Those who oppose this call might think it naive to believe that things would be better if we only brought magic back. We know that in modernity, there is no longer any magic. Magic is not what makes the world go round; that honor is reserved for astronomy, physics, gravity itself, or perhaps human ingenuity. But most importantly, the common person does not *believe* in magic. We wonder if 'magic' was ever there in the first place.

To better understand this idea of enchantment, we must understand it as a binary opposition. To name the enchanted implies that things can, and *do*, exist in a state without it. In this way, enchantment always contains within it its opposite: the threat of disenchantment. Max Weber is the primary scholar associated with the term *disenchantment*, which is "Entzauberung" in the original German: the negation of 'Zauber,' magic. It is for this reason that I see magic and enchantment as deeply interconnected, magic being the verbiage of enchantment; that which animates it. He lectured in 1917 and 1918 on the enlightenment turn towards scientific reason as

a dismantling of magic in the world. Weber christens the modern present *secular*, and in doing so conversely implies an enchanted past, notable for its ritual sacrifices, myriad cosmologies, and communities brought together by shared faith. Weber saw the turn towards the rational as a demystification of how people understood their reality, and names this presiding rationality as a turn away from deities, religion, spirits, superstition, and even God. In Weber's thought, these forces did once hold sway over human life, but not through the gods' power as agents in the real world. Instead, the power of gods existed through faith in powerful myths and mysteries, which manifested in transcendent values shared by community (contrastable with today's *disenchanted* anomie) that permeated activity and choice, undergirding the social order. Gazing back across all of human history and prehistory, Weber reduces eons of social arrangements to different kinds of *belief*, be it in the divine right of kings, the power of the gift, or another sacred mandate for ethnoreligious harmony. The soul-bearing person, fruit of a history which stretches back past the horizon and into legend, used to know right from wrong for fear of a universe so much bigger than the delicate human body.[4] But all this began to change with what became known as the European enlightenment.

But for the liberal subject, at once animal servant of evolutionary biology (eat, shit, fuck) and conscious human agent (think, fight, win), anything goes… within *reason*. It is reason which allows the human to transcend animality and demonstrate mastery over, even *disavow*, his biological needs. Morris Berman calls it the Baconian-Cartesian-Newtonian syndrome in *The Reenchantment of the World* (1981), and for Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (2007)*, it is the birth of the most powerful thing there is – the modern human mind, from which all meaning seeps. This* drains the material world of any meaning of its own. Only we have agency over what

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[4] It was on this basis that one could transcend a single human lifetime – in both life and death, good deeds meant salvation, and sins meant punishment. But with disenchantment comes the tremendous weight of mortality.

things mean, be they moss, storms, stars, or our own bodies; and so, when we determine that they mean less, they do. The only secrets which remain to this mental, disembodied subject are those which can yet be brought into the light of scientific conquest, which is no longer the enclave of priests, alchemists, witches, and magicians. It is by the power of the human mind alone that the peasant is freed from their caste and compelled instead to play the game of economy, and the king's symbolic power is handed over to the calculative biopolitics of cunning bureaucracy and its informants. For theologian Jeremy Kidwell, Weber's disenchantment of the world is defined by the "deference to calculation" (2019, 4).

For Kidwell, disenchantment can be summarized as an unmaking or remaking of the world as less mysterious. Rational governance and science conquer, subsume, and make *sense* of the natural and experiential world, increasingly centering the human and rendering the rest of the universe more impersonal (Kidwell 2019, 3). Everything becomes understandable and tamable. Here, Weber makes an important distinction: "modern life is not about the possession of, but rather the (supposed) accessibility of knowledge" (2019, 3). In one of his 1917 disenchantment lectures, he uses the example of a streetcar – we don't know *how* it works, we just get on it and ride, and our whole world is changed because we can. "Increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation does not mean an increasing general knowledge of the conditions in which we live. It means instead something else: the knowledge, or the belief, that if one only wanted, one could establish what these conditions are—that there are, in principle, no enigmatic and unpredictable forces that are here at work, but rather that all things—in principle—can be controlled through calculation" (Kidwell 2019, 4).

Importantly, Kidwell explains that most of critical thought since Weber has reduced his stance to an absolute disavowal of enchantment. Weberian disenchantment as it is usually

documented "shed[s] his ambiguity and sharpen[s] the sense of permanent anomie and alienation" (Kidwell 2019, 4). It is with some nuance missing that that many thinkers after Weber run with what Kidwell calls a "neo-Weberian framing" (2019, 5), concluding that disenchantment means that the more we make sense of things subjectively as humans, the less meaning there is in the (external) world – and so we are increasingly *barred* from the other (2019, 4-5). While disenchantment closes off the modern world from enchantment, Weber held the more nuanced perspective himself that disenchantment is not the only way we can understand the world; because enchantment was possible in the past, he seemed to be at times hopeful that enchantment could return again.

The neo-Weberian perspective is more aligned with the markedly evolutionist thought of anthropologist James George Frazer than with Weber himself. Writing on the same themes before Weber, Frazer argued for a "three-stage theory of civilizational advance" (Kidwell 2019, 3) from magic to religion to science in 1898. "It is only when men find by experience that they cannot compel the higher powers to comply with their wishes, that they condescend to entreat them. In time, after long ages, they begin to realise that entreaty is also in vain, and then they try compulsion again, but this time the compulsion is applied within narrower limits and then in a different way from the old magical method. In short religion is replaced by science" (Frazer 1898, via Kidwell 2019, 3).

Indeed, Weber also centered religion: according to the scholars Irene Skovgaard-Smith and Alison Hirst, whose discussion of the Maussian theory of magic I will introduce shortly, "this evolution of religion to transcend magic involved the 'rationalization of metaphysical views and a specific religious ethic'" (2023, 4). Weber's view was itself Edenic. It isn't that we've eradicated magic, but that we've *lost* it. The Weberian fall from Eden is drastic. Sociologically

alone, it engendered a multitude of individuals who could no longer coagulate around shared morals. Neo-Weberian framing recognizes the turn to be final, rendering all thought before it obsolete and therefore inaccessible. It is the nature of this logic that we cannot escape it and go back to older forms and faiths. No matter how atavistic we feel, the past is rendered an innocent and inscrutable mist into which we can never return, and in stepping into modernity, we were doomed to a cynical truth. There is no way to conjure magic which has faded and gods who are dead.

But "the tragedy may not be a permanent one and one gets the (albeit fleeting) sense that for Weber, magic is not wholly unavailable, but rather has been separated from our" (2019, 4) social sphere. The implication becomes that aspects of reality are in fact *lost* in the process of disenchantment, and therefore disenchantment cannot be framed as a search for truth alone. "In Weber's view, human deference to science is aspirational, perhaps even tragic. One pursues this kind of comprehensive calculative knowing (e.g. science) precisely because their experience in the modern world is so fragmentary and difficult to hold together intellectually" (Kidwell 2019, 4). Weber understood things to be marked by the incommensurability of transcendent perspectives. Unlike Frazer, Weber's understanding of disenchantment was not merely progress from the false to the true. Processes of secular rationalization are not necessarily the unveiling of reality, but instead operate in the world as "external intellectual forces" (Kidwell 2019, 4) of their own – ideologies which require indoctrination.

Both in his intellectual and personal life, Weber "held out the possibility of a valorous pursuit of mysticism" (2019, 4). Enchantment, then, remains a foil for disenchantment – an alternative intellectual force which has a remaining, if apparently waning, influence on thinkers like Weber. Weber himself seems to see mysticism as a possible alternative to, or opposite of, the

enlightened reason which killed God. These mystical seeds were planted by Weber in the

scholarship on disenchantment, and have grown to haunt the term to this day. As Kidwell

explains of Weber and others, "even the champions of rationalisation, mechanism, and

disenchantment have rarely held this conviction in a simple way" (2019, 5).

Crawford's article narrates the discourse which spills forth after Weber's thesis, first by

naming the crowd of writers who respond by "intuit[ing] in various ways that cultivating

renewed forms of something called 'enchantment' can help us to cultivate renewed forms of

ecological habitation, of sacramental communion, of epistemic humility and wonder, of ethical

attachment and care" (2020). I quote his list at length here to provide a sense of the enduring and

increasing influence of Weber's concept of re-enchantment:

> Bernard Stiegler's *The Re-Enchantment of the World*, Gordon Graham's *The Re-enchantment of the World*, Silvia Federici's *Re-enchanting the World* and Joshua Landy and Michael Saler's *The Re-Enchantment of the World*. There's George Levine's *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-enchantment of the World* and James K. A. Smith's *After Modernity?: Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-Enchantment of the World*. And there's much more, because you can re-enchant much more than just the world. Other book titles from the past two decades or so include *The Reenchantment of Art*, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature*, *The Re-Enchantment of Morality*, *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth Century Fiction*, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*. David Morgan and James Elkins's essay collection about religion in contemporary art is called simply, *Re-Enchantment*. So is Jeffery Paine's book about Tibetan Buddhism in the West. (2020)

For Crawford, the ethic of re-enchantment does not escape the Weberian fall, though it

strives for Eden. This is because the re-enchanted world conjured here is only derivative of a lost

enchanted past. Its unreal "'alternative' worlds […] might offer some solace to the citizens of a

disenchanted world, but they don't really change the condition of that world" (Crawford 2020).

Crawford is clear about what is consistent across the different instances of this trope – not a

belief in old magic, but the survival of a persistent skepticism. The re-enchantment's discourse

seems apprehensive, anxious not to really enchant anything. From Crawford's perspective, most

authors seem content to use it as a metaphor for various other secular critiques of late modernity and are lukewarm about summoning anything up from beyond the grave. Enchantment beyond allegory is merely primitive naivete; Weber's banal modernity persists.

In Sylvia Federici's take on re-enchantment, for instance, the trope of enchantment itself doesn't show up very often. Federici instead focuses on the commons and collectivist alternatives to the logic of capital. Federici names "the way capitalism [wants] to change our relationship with the natural world; the way capitalism has affected our relationship to each other, [as we are] continuously obsessed with [other] people as a threat. The self-made individual, the fear of the other; the other person as fear [and] not as a wealth, not as an enrichment. So, the magic that always exists" (2023), she offers, is found in rediscovering an interrelationship which enriches – a *secular enchantment* of the commons.

"There's a recurring notion of enchantment as a kind of willed forgetting, a controlled ignorance of what we actually and inescapably know. […] The[se] enchantments frankly confess their distance from the material world of our waking experience" (Crawford 2020). This is particularly important for my thesis: the world remains at a fundamental level disenchanted, leaving enchantment to mean a symbolic emphasis given to certain values (community, for Federici). Anything beyond that requires withdrawing from the material world, and so magic remains relegated to the *unreal*.

Fiction does have power here, but only in the recognition that belief is powerful insofar as it can either ensnare or save. Crawford traces this language and discussion to the Protestant Reformation's disavowal of enchantment both as Catholic seduction and as Satanic bewitchment, wherein the right faith trumps the kind of beliefs which seduce the good Christian. In this form, enchantment retains the power to seduce, and magic is still very much alive and lurking. Even in

modernity, only the Truth, the right kinds of belief (à la Martin Luther), eclipse 'magical thinking' and superstition.

In originating the dis/enchantment binary in a 16th Century European fear of magic, Crawford recognizes that the ontological category of the other is itself enchanted. Enchantment is, in some sense, an inherent quality of the other. If modernity is disenchanted, then everything at modernity's edges, everything which harkens back to a lost premodernity, also carries in it the possibility of magic as seductive trickery: *witchcraft*. Crawford asks if we can liken "the Jesuits, exorcists, witch-mongers, and seducers who haunted the imagination of the culture in which [Shakespeare] lived and worked" to "the figures—immigrants, 'inner city' communities, sexual and religious minorities, ideological extremists, the working class—who haunt current narratives of rational civic life and its cultural others?" (2020). In the binary, the modern is disenchanted. So, where might we find enchantment but at modernity's underbelly?

Crawford elaborates on details found across this postcolonial world of cultural commerce and racialization, calling upon "one example from contemporary American life:

> Think about the tendency of certain populations to regard other, socially marginalized populations as zones of social, sexual, and moral disorder and, at the same time, as sites of charisma, erotic allure, and spiritual authenticity. Or think about our tendency to manufacture spiritual vitality by appropriating, into a modern Western economy of privatized religion and consumer choice, exotic cultures of religious and magical practice. These tendencies might prompt us to *ask how disenchanted we really are*. Or they might suggest exactly what the discourses of early modern England suggest: that disenchantment is not so much a static condition of liberated rationality or disappointed skepticism as it is a dynamic, unstable practice of mystification, fascination, suspicion, and exclusion. (Crawford 2020, emphasis added)

The crux of Crawford's article is that re-enchantment is troubled by its very foundation in the logic of disenchantment – it uses the same schematics and runs on the same fuel. Re-enchanting literature calls upon images of fantasy, simulation, and childlike innocence for a reason. Re-enchantment is "dreamlike" precisely because it understands disenchantment to be

the waking *reality*. "The contradictions of early modern disenchantment are bound to trouble any program of postmodern re-enchantment. If enchantment is illusion, melting like snow, then there's a kind of absurdity in willing your own enchantment. At the very least, the work of re-enchantment will always involve the willing suspension of a disbelief that must remain the baseline of our cognitive and spiritual existence" (2020). The dis/enchantment binary opposition is a product of modernity, so therefore in rethinking modernity via re-enchantment, "we might […] have adopted a language that bears within itself the very histories, ideologies, and forms of violence on which it was supposed to help us reflect" (Crawford 2020). At its most simple, upon admitting disenchantment, enchantment could never have really existed in the first place. Sure, people *think* that it did. But it was merely an illusion of shared beliefs – a common delusion.

I arrive at my site of intrigue – the colony. Decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo explains that "there is no modernity without coloniality, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity. […] While modernity is presented as a rhetoric of salvation, it hides coloniality, which is the logic of oppression and exploitation" (2007, 162). Introducing the dis/re-enchantment duality to this thesis, colonization can be understood as stripping away the magic of the colonized world to make that world productive and consumptive. In modernity, colonies produce and metropoles consume; and in late modernity, the whole (postcolonial) world is given the freedom to do both, and only both, asymmetrically and with no alternatives. Few can even consume what they produce, though colonized billions cannot afford to consume anything else. Because in this understanding modern colonization is inherently at war with enchantment, it is imperialism which must invent vast techniques of suppression to keep all possibility of rebellious counter-logic at bay. Enchantment certainly becomes a counter-logic for the colonial tactician, and its

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policing becomes an art. Perhaps this is the best example of disenchantment as an "external intellectual force," per Weber's critique. It can reduce all things and people into their roles in the machine of colonial modernity. Aimé Césaire reminds us that "between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses" (2000, 42). It is this situation which Mignolo calls 'coloniality.'

In my use, term coloniality refers specifically to the epistemicidal characteristic of colonization. Epistemicide, meaning the destruction of an episteme or epistemology, is another form of mass violence inflicted on the colonized world by colonial modernity.

Enchantment can in this moment be defined as shared belief, especially referring to those classically understood to be central to indigenous epistemologies. For this reason, enchantment as collective belief is the victim of coloniality as disenchantment. To illustrate this understanding, I turn to Marcel Mauss, Michael Taussig, and Charles Taylor.

II. Magic and Belief

Today, one word stands out as perhaps the most enticing form of that which is rendered unthinkable by disenchantment: magic. In the modern world magic is no longer thinkable, but in medieval Christian Europe where 'modernity' began to gestate, magic was evil and dangerous precisely because people thought it to be unproblematically *real* – in the past, magic *was* thinkable. An impossible entity who exists in our world despite its rules – and who thereby renders it all unsettled, strange, precarious, like a black hole which swallows physics itself. Past the event horizon, the possibilities burst into infinity.

There is a strong correlation between *magic* and *meaning* which remains present throughout this paper. In traditional anthropology, meaning is often defined for indigenous people by their proximity to ritual. Victor Turner, for example, describes the 'multivocality' of meaning through symbols which are present in rituals (1975). At the first level, outsiders of a ritual can see what is called 'manifest' meaning, where the symbols at play take their most obvious form – ornate focal objects and so forth. At the second level, some anthropologists can study the ritual carefully enough to pick up on 'latent' meaning. But the 'hidden' meanings at play in a ritual is only at the disposal of its participants who are in and of that community – who exist within its epistemology. *Magic* might exist at this innermost level, where the sacred is still concocted, and the world regularly re-enchanted. But we moderns certainly can't see it.

Magic can be defined many ways, and anthropology's efforts to do so in recent history are outlined concisely by David Graeber as follows: "19th century anthropologists had an attitude almost identical to that of most ancient intellectuals: magic was simply a collection of impostures and mistakes. Most twentieth century anthropological literature on the subject then has consisted in trying to find some way to avoid this conclusion" (2012). But it seems consistent that to refer to it is to suggest that its other-worldly, irrational forces are accessible to certain humans. Magic becomes a sort of doorway from the disenchanted to the enchanted, where potential is expanded through intention. For Marcel Mauss, it's a bit more specific: "magic is 'the art of changing', 'of doing things' by vague, indeterminate, and invisible means. 'With words and gestures, [magic] does what techniques achieve by labour'" (Mauss 1950, via Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 2). Most importantly, for Mauss, this capacity is both real and explicable – it is a definition of magic as embodying the 'action at a distance' principle.[5] But it is

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[5] Generally associated with the likes of Newton and Bacon, Bourdieu connects this idea to Mauss's scholarship (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 3).

not reducible to extant physics: magic acts "emotionally, cognitively, socially and sometimes also physically" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 6), the latter being its referent but most of its operativity found only in thought and sign. Therefore, it must be studied epistemologically. "Magical acts" are possible because they are "derived from collective imaginings of invisible powers that imbue them with an efficacy that is out of the ordinary. As such, magic is a social phenomenon" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 2). Magic is possible because of and by way of collective beliefs; this makes their effects real, however. In culture, meaning is incredibly powerful when it is shared; just as in art, where meaning is incredibly moving when it is personal.

Mauss breaks here with many of the thinkers before him, unwilling to hold to a particularly primitivist understanding of magic which saw it as a pseudo-science or a juvenile religion. Magic is a real aspect of the social order, which emerges not only without historical and geographic limitation, and cannot be universally "reduced to deception" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 10). Magic is not merely the activity of the illusionist; or, perhaps, reflecting some of the inconsistencies of his scholarship on the subject, illusion is by no means inoperative. For Mauss, "many activities are simultaneously both technical and magical" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 4) – it is not an aspect of social life which can be detangled from the rest of social being, but instead imbues preexisting forms and activities. "These elements are not inherently magical, but they become so as and when they are given a meaning that attributes them with out-of-the-ordinary efficacy. No act, agent or idea is in itself magical, and any act, agent or idea can become so" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 5). The potential for magic exists in all things, but only manifests when certain things are classified as magical, and only in juxtaposition to what *isn't* magical. It is the "separateness" of the magician from other people in society which gives

them power. Overall, Mauss's understanding of magic is structural, taking it to be an epiphenomenon of human linguistic thought which classifies all things in oppositional relation. Magical things and acts "are constituted through relational differentiation" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 5). This means that classification is how a thing becomes magical – nothing is never *already* that, and therefore anything can become magical by being constituted as such.

This constitution is not, and can never be, individual. You or I can call anything we want magical, but that will simply not be true unless others believe the same. The seance is best when there's someone else there to help you light the candles. The pretty feather you found, grandma's locket, and the ancient rattle bathed in sage smoke all have no power over anyone but you or I, unless others see it the same way. In fact, no matter how magical you decide it is, we moderns are likely to let it collect dust unless we know many others expect us not to. Magic is born of community. A thing is magical insofar as it is understood to be such by the collective – it is not a truth of one imagination, but of many, together.

For Georges Bataille in 1967's *The Accursed Share*, "ancient societies found relief in festivals" (1988, 24). His enchanted past is defined by the sacred, which was cultivated in indigeneity through potlatch and gift economies – which centered sacrifice, and thereby the sacred, where we today pretend only to have the profane. In this text, his politics is a sort of early call for re-enchantment – the necessity of the sacred to our understanding of the world, exercised by a necessary epistemological shift to what he calls general economics. For him, the sacred is quite real, though everywhere repressed in the restricted economics of modern capitalism – if I may, a *disenchanting* epistemology. Though he doesn't use this term, disenchantment is, for him, the illusion that we no longer rely upon the sacred, and instead are trapped in a world of the profane – mere objects valued only by the illusion of utilitarianism. "Sacrifice restores to the

sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane. Servile use has made a *thing* (an *object*) of that which, in a deep sense, is of the same nature as the *subject*" (1988, 55). What is important to recognize from Bataille's re-enchantment is the same conclusion as Mauss makes – magic is shared belief, an invention of the collective imagination: "the wealth that is actualized in the potlatch, *in consumption for others*, has no real existence except insofar as the other is changed by the consumption. In a sense, authentic consumption ought to be solitary, but then it would not have the completion that the action it has on the other confers on it. And this action that is brought to bear on others is precisely what constitutes the gift's power" (1988, 69-70).

Focusing on magical beliefs responsive to violent capitalist mines and plantations in a rural South America in 1980's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Michael Taussig asks "why [a] particular set of ideas, with its pointed meaning and wealth of embedded mythology, [is] chosen in this specific circumstance and time, rather than another set of ideas and practices" (2010, 15). Instead of defining *what magic is,* he studies why it chosen as a response to capitalist violence. To some extent, the answer is fairly simple, and in line with Weber's formulation: "the magical superstitions associated with production and exchange [are] one of the greatest obstacles to the rationalization of economic life" (2010, 22). Thinking after Mauss, Taussig also argues beyond scholars (including Frazer) for whom "magic was a pseudoscience, which was invoked to relieve anxiety and frustration when gaps in knowledge and limitations of reason overcame people in a prescientific culture" (2010, 14). Taussig does not see this kind of invocation as by any means reducible to illusion. Like Mauss, magic for Taussig exists definitively and comprehensibly in the realm of shared belief – but he is not only interested in what *kinds* of activities and objects magic defines/imbues and thus allows. When he investigates magic, he is curious about how a given social order makes sense of its shared reality, especially

during great shifts in worlding like the introduction of capitalism. Magic emerges as what gives

reality coherence to a social order, especially at the threshold between old and new

socioeconomic conditions and ways of knowing. "Magic takes language, symbols, and

intelligibility to their outermost limits, to explore life and thereby to change its destination"

(Taussig 2010, 15).

Disinterested in the function or consequence of magic, Taussig instead explores what

certain beliefs ("metaphors and motifs," 2010, 15) tell us about the changing conditions of the

emergence of capitalism in Colombia and Bolivia. The rites and rituals Taussig studies are

themselves responses to their social conditions, just like all magic is constituted by social

relations for Mauss; but in this case the condition at play is specifically capitalist. Taussig is not

trying to make a universal claim about magic so much as explore the way devil-beliefs among

this specific, indigenous, emerging proletariat can be seen "in their own right with all their

vividness and detail as the response of people to what they see as an evil and destructive way of

ordering economic life" (2010, 17). At its most simple, the emergence of these devil-beliefs

directly associates the devil with commodity fetishism and capitalist alienation, and thereby both

make sense of the forces as being evil, and having been able to bewitch them despite this. They

have lost control over their own lives (and more specifically, their means of production), and

something devastating has taken it from them – the devil.

Taussig's analysis is not willing to build far beyond the claim that magic is how (these)

people make sense of their world, seeing universalizing claims about magic based in

utilitarianism and the 'function' of beliefs as among "the sorts of functionalist interpretations

[…] which […] have an affinity with capitalism and capitalist epistemology—the very cultural

form against which the devil-beliefs seem to be pitted" (2010, 16). He argues that the association

made here between capitalist production and the devil is more than an expression of discontent with the conditions this new institution creates. This magical thinking is not merely useful to a culture in question, a particular perspective questionable by scientific positivism. Instead, he understands this magical implication of the devil as knowledge which is *true* in its context. The devil-beliefs are not to be corrected or reduced by anthropologists but can be taken as the true basis for good ethnographic work, "the raw material for critical evaluation" (2010, 19). "Any explanation that uses function or consequences tells us next to nothing about the metaphors and motifs that the cultures have elaborated in response to their new social condition" (Taussig 2010, 15). But what does Taussig's understanding of magic not as "ill-conceived instruments of utility but […] poetic echoes of the cadences that guide the innermost course of the world" (2010, 15) have to do with enchantment?

Taussig is in conversation with Weber, who understands "reactions" such as this devil-belief to be the persistence of "primitive traditionalism" which can only be 'transcended' by rational calculation. Recall that Weber saw "a long and arduous process of education" as the only means by which capitalism might (mandatorily) supersede the obstacle of "magical superstitions associated with production and exchange" (Taussig 2010, 22). It is Marx who Taussig calls upon most heavily to explain such a conversion – capitalist epistemology is a cosmology itself, a hegemonic culture which must be coercively *naturalized*. To be blunt, capitalism is itself a system of magic cast upon the world… the first step to denaturalizing the belief in disenchantment is to be able to name it as an enchantment itself. This is the line if thought that I will further develop in the chapters to come.

Taussig's argument at some level seems to be simple: "it is reasonable to ask why we regard our social form and economic process as natural" (2010, 23). "Given this historically

induced amnesia and cultural stupefaction, it is important for us to take note of the critique offered us by the neophyte proletarians of the Third World today, whose labor and products are relentlessly absorbed by the world market but whose culture resists such rationalization" (2010, 22). For Taussig, this is the indigenous critique: "the lower classes will persist in viewing the bonds between persons in their modern economic activities for what they really are—asymmetrical, non-reciprocal, exploitative, and destructive of relationships between persons—and not as natural relations between forces supposedly inherent in potent things" (2010, 38). Taussig centers commodity fetishism as the primary magical force which undergirds capitalist enchantment. Where the fetishism of precapitalist societies has as its origin the unity of people and their 'products,' which is not alientated, "the fetishism of commodities in capitalist societies […] results from the split between persons and the things that they produce and exchange" (Taussig 2010, 37). Introducing a key thread of Chapter Three, Taussig explains that as a result of this split, humans laborers are subordinated to the commodities they produce for the market, rather than for their own use.

David Graeber discusses the coinage of the term 'fetishism' in his article "Can't Stop Believing: Magic and politics," originally used by 15th century European merchants to refer to pacts made between West African merchants to seal trade deals: "the act of swearing the oath transformed the object into a divine power capable of wreaking terrible destruction on anyone who violated his new commitments. The power of the new god was the power of their agreement. All of this was just one step away from saying the object was a god because the humans said it was, but everyone would insist that, no, in fact, the objects were now vested with terrible invisible power" (2012). Through this process an object is imbued with magic because of shared belief, as Mauss would discern. It is the collectivity which gives the thing power.

What is absolutely certain is that Europeans, used to thinking in theological terms, simply could not get their minds around [magical] practice. As a result they tended to project their own confusion onto the Africans. Soon the very existence of fetishes was being held out as proof that Africans were profoundly confused about spiritual matters; European philosophers began arguing that fetishism represented the lowest possible stage of religion, one at which the fetishist was willing to worship absolutely anything, since he had no systematic theology at all.

Before long, of course, European figures like Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud began asking, *But are we really all that different?* […] Hence Marx's famous argument about *commodity fetishism.* We are constantly manufacturing objects for our use or convenience, and then speaking of them as if they were charged with some strange, supernatural power that makes them capable of acting on their own accord—largely because, from an immediate practical perspective, that might as well be true. (Graeber 2012)

But ultimately, despite whatever beliefs, capitalism is not *actually* 'the devil,' right? At the end of the text, Taussig is willing to ask the more metaphysical questions. "The atmosphere of myth and magic takes on a reality, to be sure, but what sort of reality? It is not as much an actual reality as a possible and hypothetical one. It is a reality in which faith and skepticism easily coexist. Ritual endorses the truth of this hypothetical reality; but outside of ritual other realities intervene and the mind finds no tension between spiritual and secular explanations" (2010, 230). These other realities, namely capitalism as an "external intellectual force," coexist with the magic of the hypothetical – the key being, these are different planes of existence. One is concrete and provable, the other strange and impossible/full of possibility. One is the world of physics and dead matter, and the other, a wholly different world of human psyche and cultural symbol. They can affect each other, but their rules are entirely different.

Even from the 'neo-Weberian' perspective on disenchantment, the notion that meaning is now absent from the world is narrow. The standard conclusion is that for scholars like Weber, disenchantment is a loss of meaning in the *external* world. But perhaps this does not mean that meaning is gone, only internalized. This is what Charles Taylor echoes the same idea in his essay

"Disenchantment—Reenchantment" (which continues from his thought in the aforementioned *A Secular Age*) where he writes of modernity that "thoughts and meanings are only in minds […and] the causal relations between things cannot be in any way dependent on their meanings, which must be projected on them from our minds" (2014, 291) This does not mean that meaning (and perhaps therefore magic) are *gone*, only relocated. "The new image of the cosmos produced by our scientific advances does not necessarily uproot meaning, only a particular read of it does" (2014, 296). He is curious ask if "a scientific account of the world 'disenchant[s]' it beyond recall" (2014, 299), arguing that despite ubiquitous and advancing secularization, meaning is still quite possible in modernity. All that it requires is that the reductive thought of science, mechanism, and utility do not eliminate the individual agent's ability to "evaluate" and marvel at the cosmos and respond to it emotionally.

For Taylor, the crucial form of meaning which survives disenchantment is found in *wonder*. He wonders at the universe, an affect which is not inherently opposed by science. In fact, wonder seems only to increase as science 'progresses' into late modernity, and its discoveries are revealed to be as utterly bewildering (in spite or even *because* of empiricism, positivism, and the scientific method) as any belief held in a magical cosmology.

Taylor's conception of enchantment is quite closely related to what Mauss saw as magic, though for him it is certainly lost in disenchantment and the internalization of meaning. In the enchanted world from before Weber's fall, meaning and magic were real aspects of the world, not just lenses through which we perceive it, affect it, and are affected by it. In enchantment, magic "bring[s] us, as it were, into its field of force" (Taylor 2014, 291). Meaning was not located in human response to its environment, but inherent to the environment itself – more like *heat* than like *green*.

Taylor explains the internalization of disenchantment as follows: "things only have the meaning they do in that they awaken a certain response in us, and this has to do with our nature as creatures who are thus capable of such responses, which means creatures with feelings, with desires, with aversions – that is, beings endowed with minds, in the broadest sense" (2014, 288-289). Things are not magical, but instead *imbued* with magic, as Mauss and Graeber both suggest. It is about "the significance, importance, meaning we *find* in things" (Taylor 2014, 288, emphasis added). In enchantment, things have their own agency – an ability to *impinge* on human beings, whose boundaries are "porous" (Taylor 2014, 287). Things impinge on us. In disenchantment, however, human beings lose their porosity and become "buffered" (2014, 288) individual subjects. Simultaneously, things lose their agency, and it is the mind *alone* which can act to generate meaning: meaning only exists when it emerges *in* our minds in response to inert, mechanical stimuli, and is therefore merely "a function of how we as minds, or organisms secreting minds, operate" (Taylor 2014, 290-291); like Mauss's magic, an epiphenomenon of human thought.

Taylor would question if my language of "*merely* a function" is valid here – the threat of *reduction* on the existence of meaning, which would for him be the final disenchanting nail in the coffin, comes down to if science can distill "our own psychology and behavior" (2014, 299) to quantifiable data; a "reductive explanation" of not only physics, but of psyche and "of human life" (2014, 302). Because scientific thought intentionally "avoid[s] teleology or intentionality, purpose or evaluation" (2014, 300), Taylor does not think that it poses much of a threat – but in the age of medication and self-optimization, it's worth accounting for.

Aligned with Crawford, Taylor believes that the opposition, the desire for re-enchantment, "may indeed reproduce features analogous to the enchanted world, but does not in

any simple sense restore it" (2014, 287). This does not concern him, though – meaning lives on, though it is "secreted" by humans who in turn secret (or secrete?) our intangible minds (Taylor 2014, 291).

Based on the authors cited throughout this chapter, I have defined enchantment as conventionally understood to be something humans socially and willfully do or do not do to the world through their own agency. Weaving language, ritual, and social practices into a spell, humans either enchant the world, or do not. In the canon of political and anthropological thought, the world is either enchanted or disenchanted (and in modernity it is the latter, if in some cases ostensibly so), and the alternative is an illusion which is cast upon it by human minds. The underlying presupposition of dis/enchantment is that we're getting closer to what's really real, really natural, really out there beyond the mind: usually (in the secular status quo), that the world is truly, ultimately disenchanted.

But this does not work for the decolonial ecopolitics which re-enchantment so often plays a role in. As Crawford and Taylor agree, we cannot simply fool ourselves back up into Eden. Disenchantment is irrevocable.

What if we could recognize that anthropology's subjects, the subaltern masses who are first made other so that they can then be re/collected through methodical inquiry, *do not live in the same ontologies that we do?* Indigenous peoples do not *do* enchantment by performing certain rituals, nor *impose* enchantment on their world (the same as ours) by believing certain illusions, which we moderns in turn revoke with the potent thrust of rationality, sometimes in exchange for our own illusions like the commodity fetish. No; things are not so simple, as they say.

We live amid a pluriverse of ontologies, of which disenchanted modernity is just one.

In summary: the work of 're-enchanting' is casting a spell on a dead nonhuman world in hopes to revitalize it. But that will never work, because you do not, and cannot, believe the spell that you are casting; you don't even believe that the spells of premodernity were real. *That* disbelief is the spell of colonial modernity, which we are under.

Why do people find the re-enchantment claim so attractive, despite its implausibility? Because it remains trapped by the belief in the nature/culture fissure, which is the basis of all modern thought. Re-enchantment shimmers like a way out, but it relies on the very magic of modernity. Enchantment, for Frazer, Weber, and Taylor, is what *cultures* do to the world – to *nature*. Even in Bataille's version of re-enchantment, sacrifice and sacralization is strictly human activity. The human can itself be enchanted, but culture, economy, industry, and activity, the ontological facts of the world, remain pure and disenchanted logics – enchantment necessarily only enchants nature.

In the next chapter I turn towards the ontological turn in anthropology as the only viable means of escape from disenchantment. In outlining the qualities of this turn to ontology, a world comes to the fore which is *already* alive and always has been. It need not, and cannot, be either dis- or re-enchanted.

2: Enchanted Ontologies

"Haven't we shed enough tears over the disenchantment of the world? Haven't we frightened ourselves enough with the poor European who is thrust into a cold soulless cosmos, wandering on an inert planet in a world devoid of meaning? [...] Haven't we felt sorry enough for the consumer who leaves the driver's seat of his car only to move to the sofa in the TV room where he is manipulated by the powers of the media and the postindustrialized society?!"
—Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993 [Nous n'avons jamais eté modernes: Essai d'anthropologie symétrique 1991], 115)

"From the point of view of a multinaturalist counter-anthropology, which is what is at stake, the philosophers are to be read in light of savage thought, and not the reverse."
—Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2014 [Métaphysiques cannibales 2009], 93)

I disagree with the idea that enchantment is something that can be added to or taken away from the world. Both dis- and re-enchantment imply that culture is *on top of* nature, existing at an interpretive distance from base reality. This idea is dispensed with by the ontological turn in anthropology, a contemporary shift in anthropological research which does not differentiate peoples based on their distinct 'cultures,' but the different *ontologies* in which they live. The primary guide through my summary of this turn is the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, whom I quote throughout the chapter. From its perspective, re-enchantment is an indigestible solution to colonial modernity, because putting magic on top of coloniality is not a solution. But that does not mean that there is no enchantment. Our worlds are *not* disenchanted.

In this term colonial modernity, modernity can be defined simply as the worldview in which we humans are inherently modern, a state defined by being separate from nature.

I am now going to summarize a critique of postmodernity and connect this critique with the theme of disenchantment. I will use Latour's assessment of modernity, especially his claim that modernity is based on separation of nature from culture, to introduce the ontological turn in anthropology as an alternative to this separation.

III. Amodern Anthropology

In 1988, Donna Haraway reworks the notion of objectivity to base knowledge on situation rather than abstracted positivism. In "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), certainty about reality is derived not from 'removed' analysis of it, but from your own concrete relation to (and in) it. Haraway considers herself among the "feminists [who] have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything." (1988, 579). Whether ontological illusion or material reality, the world you engage *is*; it *is* your world. Reducing that world to its linguistic structure or to its constitutive corpuscles is not sufficient to encounter reality as it is. With this text, Haraway casts away the possibility of one objective world to be either synthesized scientifically from various perspectives, or utterly denied because it is an inaccessible or intangible noumenon. She is does not see the splitting of subject from object as the way one meets the world, nor is she interested in any other act which believes that transcendence is the path to knowledge. Instead, she takes being-in-the-world as our starting place, and works from there, content to accept all the limitations of a given horizon. "We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (1988, 580).

Postmodernism, arguably *the* Modern Critical Theory, exemplifies this kind of denial. With it one can deny any presumed solidity at the foundations of subjectivity, gender, sex, race, humanity, the state, selfhood, and thought itself. Deconstruction is a powerful and perhaps undeniable tool, even or especially when it comes to projects like *de*colonization[6] (to which I

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[6] *De*stituency and *de*cryption emerge later in this text; see also *de*territorialization.

will return). In her essay "Anthropology as an Agent of Transformation" (2011), anthropologist Faye Harrison points out that "cultural critique as politicized deconstruction of various hegemonic ideologies and discourses can be a significant and necessary component of broader struggles for equality, social and economic justice, and far-reaching democratization" (2011, 6). Any anthropology which is politicized beyond the 'pure' purpose of 'advancing' 'knowledge' or 'truth' greatly benefits from, or is perhaps based in, deconstruction. However, postmodern values (or valuelessness) in and of themselves do not align with those I've outlined as driving my research: my interrogation of enchantment is expressly political, in that it has as its agenda the abolition capitalist of coloniality and/or dispersal of agency beyond the human. Our critical theory must engage the immanent world rather than deny it, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) alongside Haraway.

Harrison therefore calls for "an authentically critical anthropology equipped to identify and help solve the world's problems" (2011, 9), taking a critique of postmodernism in anthropology as one of her essay's foundations. Her stance includes the two following points: first, that the critique of science risks invalidating other forms of political critique and ethnographic research which rely on scientific evidence; and second, that postmodernism holds "a notion of cultural critique that is largely limited to giving privileged Americans the benefits of cross-cultural knowledge" (2011, 5) alone. These two claims employ the interesting maneuver of endorsing scientific analysis against postmodernism's critique of scientism while simultaneously decentering the exclusivity traditional to science's colonial history – that a specific minority of elite voices, amplified over all others by imperial power, have had near-exclusive access to the title of scientific 'objectivity' or impartial access to fact.

Harrison is not alone in this claim. Anthropologists Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson echo the same claim against postmodern anthropology, politicizing it even further. While their own critiques will be present for the remainder of this chapter, they parallel Harrison with David Graeber, who "concurs in his recent indictment of the postmodern turn in anthropology. Graeber reasons that the unmitigated rejection of truth-claims robbed anthropology of its critical tool kit amid the neoliberal consolidation of financial and corporate power, structural adjustment programs, and the reinvention of the university as an incubator of the managerial classes" (2016, 139). Graeber's anthropology makes an anarchist turn here where Ryan and Jobson instead emphasize decolonization, criticizing Graeber as of the "established professional fraternity" (Ibid.) and evading the decolonial critique. But in the interest of eventually uniting the two separate but deeply related paths of anarchism and decolonization, I will instead trace on a third move against postmodern anthropology: a turn to realism.

Bruno Latour's seminal *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) is one of the foundational texts of the contemporary realist break from postmodernism. Latour sees modernity as a network – a unified system of inference, with all the limitations and reductions inevitable in any map. "When we see them as networks, Western innovations remain recognizable and important, but they no longer suffice as the stuff of saga, a vast saga of radical rupture, fatal destiny, irreversible good or bad fortune" (1993, 48). Modernity is not unreal, but its foundational myth, the split between nature and culture, is not fundamentally true. Its logics remain useful and operative tools, but the recognition of its omissions refuse its hegemony.

His argument in this book is based in centering the necessity of pragmatically studying the way modern thought metabolizes the world into something entirely reducible to logic, which Latour calls 'purification.' For him, this must be anthropologically studied, not only

deconstructed. But "instead of moving on to empirical studies of the networks that give meaning to the work of purification it denounces, postmodernism rejects all empirical work as illusory and deceptively scientistic" (1993, 46). Here he recognizes that meaning is inherently present in this system (providing a justification for the 'utilitarian' explication of all things) despite the claims of disenchantment. Identifying Baudrillard Lyotard with these ideas, Latour argues that "postmodernism is a symptom, not a fresh solution" (Ibid.). It correctly perceives a deep problem with modernity as a framework which reduces the world into its logic, but postmodernity is unable to escape modernity despite doubting it. It successfully dismantles modern thought, but on its own terms, and hence offers nothing else; so, it persists. "Postmoderns no longer believe in the reasons that would allow them to denounce and to become indignant" (Latour 1993, 46), leaving the most thorough Derridean with nothing after deconstruction. It still relies on "the legacy of Cartesian thought [that] continues to tell us that state formation, class structure, commodification, and world markets are purely about relations between humans . . . which they are not" (Moore 2016, 96). But where social constructivism might conclude of the world that there is nothing outside the text, Latour's thought requires only the oppositional claim that there is still *something* – and *so much*, at that. Bodies, meanings, actors and actants everywhere, always.

For anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, the utter deconstruction of the world is not merely a postmodern invention. Referencing the work of foundational anthropology, she argues that "the fact that Indigenous societies had their own systems of order was dismissed through […] a series of negations" (1999, 31). The imperial process negated that very order by denying them 'civilization' and rendering 'illiteracy' a state of having inadequate language, and therefore inadequate thought. Every phenomenon was taken as a signifier for lack and dearth, first to

confer exploitability and killability, and then later to confer wonder and magic. Either way, the colonized is rendered other, on the far side of an unbridgeable gap. From this side, the colonizer or the modern might hope to shoot, enslave, or bow down before them, but cannot conceive of being or thinking *like* them. That would be first savagery, and later, the equally disturbing *going native.*

This othering is complex. Walter Mignolo writes that "the concept of human, as it has been articulated in Western discourse since the sixteenth century—from Francisco de Vitoria to John Locke to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—went hand in hand with Frances [sic] Bacon's conceptualization of Nature as something that has to be controlled and dominated by man" (Mignolo 23). The primary force here is the weaponized unification of racialization and androcentrism for scholars like Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, who writes that "racialized gender and sexuality serve as an essential horizon of possibility for the production of 'the animal' as a preoccupation of Modern discourse" (2020, 14). This "mutual imbrication of 'race' and 'species' in Western thought" expresses how "antiblackness prefigures and colors nonhuman animal abjection" (Ibid.). But the result of this process was the insertion of "complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world," (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999, 31). Indigenous bodies were cleaved from themselves and from each other, and not only the human ones (scattered though they are across museums, mass graves, circuses, residential schools, homogenized identities like the mestizo, and academic disciplines), and in this liminality they remain, a category identified by its rootedness yet utterly lacking it in colonial modernity. "Fragmentation is not a phenomenon of postmodernism as many might

claim. For Indigenous peoples fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism" (Ibid) – Povinelli's ancestral catastrophe.

Latour's thesis that we have never been modern emerges amid the 1990s' dispute (the 'Science Wars') between postmodernists and scientific realist modernists, who debated objectivity in science. For Latour and his contemporaries like Haraway, the kind of social constructivist reflection brought forth by postmodernity had the value of resulting in better science, rather than an utter dismantling of it. For them, science is best considered one tool or methodology to engage the world: one among a myriad. It is necessary to draw upon any extant model, empirical or otherwise, to make sense of the world. But these are just *models*, each a reductive synthesis with profound limitations – the map which cannot account for everything in a kingdom unless it is the same size as the kingdom itself. Chiefly calling upon Eduardo Kohn's 2015 article "Anthropology of Ontologies," a summary of the members of the vanguard of the turn towards ontology in anthropology, there is a "critique [of] social construction" not as false but "as the sole way to account for difference" (Kohn 2015, 317) that I will reference throughout the rest of the chapter.

When modern logics which reduce and delimit the world are considered the *truth* of that world —when the map is taken to *be* the kingdom— we get Latour's purification. This is the thought which draws its conclusions from, before all else, the premise that the world is divided foundationally between the categories of nature and culture. Jason Moore tellingly writes from a Marxist perspective of "the birth of Nature, which implied and necessitated the birth of Society, both dripping with blood and dirt, the necessary ontological counterpoint to the separation of the producers from the means of production" (2016, 98-99). The goal of Latour's purification, then, is the positivist effort to remove subjectivity and, as much as possible, strive for objectivity, all

via this nature/culture division and its unprecedented productive output. For the scientist, this purification is sought through controlled experiments where subjective variables (namely, 'human error') are reduced to negligibility as much as possible. Of course, in most scientists' eyes, this goal is never reached; total purification is a value of scientism, not science. Purification is then, essentially, the construction of a clean, objective, unified nature which is separated off entirely from culture.

Timothy Morton calls this fundamental division between nature and culture/the human 'the Severing.' Once this partition is cut, the rest of the world can too be subdivided, sorted, and classified under its fields. Jeremy Kidwell argues that "disenchantment […] parallels, to some extent, Bruno Latour's critique of modernity as consisting of a kind of intellectual purifying of categories" (2019, 2). Like disenchantment was for Weber and his lineage, purification is an epistemological force external to the world which subsumes all things into its logic once it has been applied. But unlike the re-enchanting response, Latour reacts to purification not by trying to undo or reverse it, but by contextualizing its foundations. Latour's thesis is simple: "as soon as one outlines the symmetrical space and thereby reestablishes the common understanding that organizes the separation of natural and political powers, one ceases to be modern" (1993, 13). He suggests that both sides of the nature/culture division are mirror images of each other, and the recognition of this which reestablishes their commonality is to break from modern thought. This is not an undoing of modernity, but the recognition that

> No one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world. The use of the past perfect tense is important here, for it is a matter of a retrospective sentiment, of a rereading of our history. I am not saying that we are entering a new era; on the contrary we no longer have to continue the headlong flight of the post-post-postmodernists; we are no longer obliged to cling to the avant-garde of the avant-garde; we no longer seek to be even cleverer, even more critical, even deeper into the 'era of suspicion'. No, instead we discover that we have never begun to enter the modern era.

Hence the hint of the ludicrous that always accompanies postmodern thinkers; they claim to come after a time that has not even started! (1993, 47)

We ourselves have never been modern. We have made sense of all things through modern logic, but we are not humans separated from nature. That is the modern myth.

Thus, we have never been postmodern either, and it becomes clear that the postmodern anthropology of which the decolonial anthropologists are critical relies on the same modern "nature/culture binary [that] has traditionally allowed anthropological comparison. We stabilize or bracket out nature to compare cultural (or historical or social) differences" (Kohn 2015, 318). The only real difference is that postmodernism erases the category of nature completely as also socially constructed, but it does not also erase culture. Even in situating science *within* culture, the structure in which nature is an object on top of which cultures observe and interpret it remains.

Now, to say we have never been modern is not antimodernity. For Latour, the antimodern stance is conservative, a desire to return to a Great Again past. His thesis is not pitted against modernity, but a recognition of its limits, a *noticing*. "The antimodern reaction struggles fiercely against the effects of the [modern] Constitution, but accepts it fully" (1993, 47); they "have accepted their adversaries' playing field" (1993, 48). This is precisely the thinking of re-enchantment, which believes disenchantment's mythic claim, seeking to restore the magic that it has *ostensibly* taken away. But just as magic has not been taken away, neither have our intimate interconnections with the worlds in which we live, which I will soon reassess without 'culture.'

The scholarship of Latour, Haraway, and others outlines the constant negotiation between the two categories of nature and culture, which the purification is unable to account for. Their symmetry is not a mirroring alone, but a total overlap at every point, where culture and nature constantly inform and rely on each other, and where the reality of things is a hybridization

between the two. A hybrid is a thing which operates as one, but in modernity, is two. It consists of both natural and cultural elements. For the modern, really *any* physical thing has both its natural fact and its cultural conception. In general, the more entrenched the nature/culture division is, the more hybrids come into being – culture and nature map the very same ground and occupy the same territory, though they both identify each thing in that territory differently, and so their taxonomy rends everything in two. You and I are hybrids of our nature and biology on the one hand, and on the other, our culture, our identity. Latour refers specifically to "the populations of hybrids that [modernity] rejects and allows to proliferate" (1993, 47). These hybrids are everywhere, though unaccounted for. Each hybrid human is not purely cultural and social, their autonomy subverted by their mortality and the rule of their biology. Likewise, their basic needs are completely controlled and met by society. Modernity claims that we have transcended nature, and yet nature is all powerful – we cannot act against its laws. It also claims to have created a free society where we are free from the constraints of those natural laws, and yet it too is also all-powerful, and its laws inescapable. We are left with a series of infolding paradoxes about nature and culture (Latour 1993, 32, 36). Modernity's ability to "explain[] everything" was achieved "only by leaving out what was in the middle. 'It's nothing, nothing at all,' it said of the networks, 'merely residue.' Now hybrids, monsters —what Donna Haraway calls 'cyborgs' and 'tricksters' […] whose explanation it abandons— are just about everything; they compose not only our own collectives but also the others, illegitimately called premodern" (Ibid.). Hybrids, for Latour and Haraway, mean natureculture as one network. Hybridity is essentially amodern, because it cannot be accounted for by (or reduced to) either nature or culture.

The disenchanting purification profoundly limits on what we can think. And despite its failure to account for hybridity, "it would be a mistake to deny the effectiveness of the

separation" (1993, 13). It is still totalizing, a hegemonic mode of thought which has rendered the whole world modern – a world disenchanted. Except… it isn't total. Wiping the fog from the windshield leaves us with a clearer view on a much less disenchanted, much less omnipotent, much less supreme modernity. Hybrid life is the living representation of the nature/culture split's inability to effectively make sense of reality.

Latour's primary theoretical tool here is Actor-Network Theory (ANT), by which he recognizes that all actors, beyond the human alone, have agency, and that 'the social' is a synthesis, a *network* (read: gestalt) of myriad actors. This framework situates the social field (and the world writ large) not as the context for agents, but as the network created between agents. Each person and thing is a vector, and between all vectors reality emerges, highlighted as a matrix of shifting relations. ANT "bring[s] nature into culture and culture into nature" and is defined by "its refusal to give explanatory priority to one actor or entity over another" (Kohn 2015, 316). ANT therefore sees a world that is the product of many different agencies, none privileged to subjecthood or reduced to objecthood more than any others – its counter to modern dualism is that it assumes "that everything has mind-like agential as well as matter-like properties" (Ibid.). To recognize the interpenetration of nature and culture is to recognize that there really are nonhuman actors on and in culture, and likewise, humans are proudly influential on nature, not just to the point of conquering or escaping it, but manipulating it, directing it, employing it, bioengineering it.[7] Our relationship with nature is incredibly intimate and interconnected. Capitalism, for instance, is not merely the socioeconomic organization of modern culture or society, but is indistinguishable from its extractivism (for the Marxist, its most base

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[7] See Jason Moore's scholarship, especially *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Moore 2016, editor).

robbery of resources from the crust of the earth). Modern life is sustained by mining, fracking, soaking up, poisoning. The modern myth has profoundly real effects, but it is not the Truth.

We are inseparable from nature; we just don't tend to see it that way.

I am pursuing the line of thought that any new politics and any new ontology must recognize and include nonhuman actors. If we accept Latour's claims, then the idea that everything is socially constructed or is just a play of human language is in many ways anthropocentric. It ignores nonhuman actors and is unable to see our hybridity. Everywhere that 'culture' is defined as the socially constructed, we are concurrently unable to see exactly where and how 'nature' is too. "Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man' or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit itself is modern, because it remains asymmetrical. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of 'nonhumanity'" (Latour 1993, 13).

Morton writes in 2017's *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman Peoples* that "since nonhumans compose our very bodies, it's likely that the Severing has produced physical as well as psychic effects, scars of the rip between reality and the real. […] The phenomenology of First Peoples points in this direction, but left thought hasn't been looking that way, fearful of primitivism" (2017, 12). "What am I doing extending this belonging to nonhumans," he writes earlier, "like a hippie who never heard that doing so is appropriating the Other?" (2017, 3). As ghastly as going native.

This fear of primitivism is perhaps most skillfully named by Graeber and David Wengrow, who argue in *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (2021) that "what needs to be investigated, instead, might better be called the 'myth of the myth of the noble

savage'" (2021, 69). Today's left is usually the critic of the noble savage, a fantasy created by perhaps well-meaning people who don't realize that **"**the racist denigration of the savage, and naive celebration of savage innocence, are [to be] treated as two sides of the same imperialist coin" (Ibid.). But in the text they elucidate how in fact the "noble savage" myth was first weaponized by the British Ethnological Society in 1859, a century after Rousseau and during the British Empire's height, to invalidate anthropological scholarship that did not call for indigenous genocide.

Nevertheless, indigeneity did indeed emerge as a category onto which the colonial anthropology of 'the West'[8] could offload alterity. "In its search for an unblemished object of study—a pristine native crafted in accordance with the discursive project of Western modernity—anthropological discourse has been structured upon silences that conveniently obscure the conditions of intellectual production from which a taxonomy of enlightenment Man qua human was birthed and sustained" (Allen, Jobson 2016, 131). For Graeber and Wengrow, the noble savage never existed, but neither did the barbaric or boring one. These ideas are all the product of a classical anthropology that has historically used cultural difference to differentiate and establish 'the West,' an act of various names which Graeber and Wengrow call 'schismogenesis,' where the subject (in this case 'Western' culture) determines itself by and through rejecting its ('nonwestern') other.

From there, we get cultural relativism, which Latour rejects. This is not to say that we are all the same (though indeed, for him, "only minor divisions separate us from other collectives" 1993, 47). Instead, the critique is that *culture* does not exist. "We are indeed different from

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[8] After Édouard Glissant, Allen and Jobson conclude that 'the West' is not a place, but a project – a project based in the abjection of "representations of anthropology's other as the 'savage slot' from which the West conjured itself as the singular arbiter of what we have come to describe as modernity" (2016, 131).

others, but we must not situate the differences where the now-closed question of relativism had located them. As collectives, we are all brothers. […] We can recognize a continuous gradient between premoderns and nonmoderns" (1993, 114). Cultural relativism is co-constitutive with the idea of culture itself, which identifies differences between groups of people and frames each of these as its own unique, collective perspective on reality – nature. "The very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off" (1993, 104). Purification does not only create an objective background called nature for the theater of human life, but also concurrently creates an equivalent but distinct plane of human activity. This translates into anthropology as its guiding principle up until this point: cultural relativism, wherein each culture has a different perspective on the unitary, external fact of nature. There are many kinds of local customs, many *cultures* — multiculturalism— which vary in (the 'precision' of) their understanding of nature, due to their geography, ethnicity, and history. For some anthropologists, each perspective is equally valid – like how Michael Taussig, for instance, discusses magic in the circumstances of Colombian and Bolivian proletarians as something quite real and sophisticated. But through purification, the 'West' has generally made the effort to understand nature *best* via the sciences, a procedure that has been spread globally as and through colonial modernity – hence a status-quo anthropology founded "the West['s] self-assured modes of comprehending the world" (Allen and Jobson 2016, 133). Likewise, when we ask who gets to decide what multiculturalism is and the eyes settle on the Western anthropologist,[9] culture seems paradoxically to be an idea totally unique to *us.* To expand the same question, we could ask, *who decides what counts as nature and what counts as culture?*

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[9] Not to mention its marketability. Indigenous studies sociologist Ángela Santamaría Chavarro writes of "multiculturalismo como una forma de instrumentalizar y 'valorizar' la diversidad cultural en beneficio de los grandes negocios corporativos," multiculturalism as a way to instrumentalize and 'valorize' cultural diversity for the benefit of big corporate business (2013, 82).

Latour elaborates that one of the pillars of cultural relativism is our familiar myth of disenchantment. "The difficulty of relativism does not arise only from the bracketing off of Nature. It stems also from the related belief that the modern world is truly disenchanted. It is not only out of arrogance that Westerners think they are radically different from others, it is also out of despair, and by way of self-punishment" (1993, 114). Disenchantment for Latour has a masochistic quality. It's a story which simultaneously convinces us that we alone live in a world void of meaning, while veiling the hybridity that overflows from the shallow buckets of 'nature' and 'culture.' In some ways, we are infatuated with our meaninglessness – it means the world to us. Without it, the modern world crumbles into many worlds, confusing and absurd. We need the meaningful teleology of civilizational and species evolution, progress, and development to make sense of our meaningless modernity. Acknowledging the shift from neoliberalism to a hegemonic surveillance state (right-wing authoritarianism) doesn't change the profound, disenchanted atomization of late capitalism. The Orwellian 1984 doesn't free us from Fukuyama's 1989 apotheosis. Pinochet made sure of that in 1973. So we remain in the 1980s forever,[10] proud to be the Nietzsche's modern epigones who see ourselves woefully at the end of history. Sometimes we rattle the chains which bind us to hyper-ahistorical late capitalist simulacrum (we spectral spectators), and sometimes we simply giggle through "our morose delight in being in perpetual crisis and in putting an end to history" (Latour 1993, 114). But is it so? Is the world disenchanted? We must rethink our dungeon, and I suggest that we do so first by rethinking anthropology.

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[10] Despite the moving demonstrations in 2019 Santiago, a 2022 referendum left the Chicago Boys' constitution in place.

How can anthropology be understood beyond the confines of cultural relativism? Having established that 'Western' modernity is based on the myth that we have broken from nature, I turn now to what Allen and Jobson understand to be an "encouraging stream of thought" (2016, 138) addressing "the problem of modernity as a fictive ideal that nonetheless engenders the uneven development and productive relations of global capital" (Ibid.): the ontological turn. It is through this turn that I engage the most fundamental move for addressing the Anthropocene – decentering the anthropos. This is easier said than done when too many "critics of anthropocentrism often proceed by humanizing animals in the form of rights, welfare, and protections without […] subject[ing] the very humanity they want to decenter and/or expand to sufficient interrogation" (Jackson 2020, 15). The following offers a beginning to such interrogation.

IV. The Ontological Turn

The ontological turn is a complication of anthropology's conviction that all cultures are very interesting. What if the argument isn't that other perspectives are valuable, but that what other cultures describe is how the world really is? With enough curiosity about the other, it is not only that *they* don't see the cosmos how *we* do, but that they don't divide it in the same way that we do.

Ontology does not study what exists, but how things exist. For an ontology beyond the modern myth, a foundational postulation I make is that all things exist in somewhat the same way – be it a hammer, a unicorn, or Justice, a thing has a gap between what it is and how it appears. Despite the unsurpassable transcendence of this gap, the thing's being and its

appearance are inseparable. Things are not so easily split into the two categories of subject and

object – some things perceive, others are perceived.

> The broad ontological turn in anthropology has an affinity with a related turn today in
> philosophy, which is also trying to free itself from the Kantian reorientation of
> philosophy as the study of human thought. This orientation has, according to Quentin
> Meillassoux (2008), kept philosophy from appreciating what he calls the 'great
> outdoors'—the world beyond human representation. (Kohn 2015, 315)

In "the Thing Itself," Arjun Appadurai takes recognizing personhood in objects as not

only revealing "the fragility of objecthood," but also as identifying an inherent *sociality* in

object-relations. Extending and uniting the thought of both Mauss and Marxism, Appadurai

argues that India today is a world a world of profusion, where the scale and density of things —

shapes, fabrics, colors, dirt, vendors, innumerable identities— blur into each other to the point

that there are no longer easily-identifiable boundaries between people and objects. "In Mauss's

sense, things in India never lose some of the magic of their human makers, owners, or handlers"

(Appadurai 2006, 17). Despite its apparently human origins, magic seeps into the ontology of

things themselves. It becomes less clear that magic, sociality, and identity come from one place

(the human psyche) and is applied to another (the nonhuman physis); instead, following Marx,

Appadurai sees both things and humans as being united in this vivid vortex by their common

commodification and "the underlying metric of labor" (Ibid.).

> Persons and things are not radically distinct categories, and [] the transactions that
> surround things are invested with the properties of social relations. Thus, today's gift is
> tomorrow's commodity. Yesterday's commodity is tomorrow's found art object. Today's
> art object is tomorrow's junk. And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom.
> Furthermore, any and all things can make the journey from commodity to
> singularity and back. Slaves, once sold as chattel, can become gradually humanized,
> personified, and reenchanted by the investiture of humanity. But they can also be
> recommoditized, turned once again into mere bodies or tools, put back in the
> marketplace, available for a price, dumped into the world of mere things.
> In some way, all things are congealed moments in a longer social trajectory. All
> things are brief deposits of this or that property, photographs that conceal the reality of
> the motion from which their objecthood is a momentary respite. (Appadurai 2006, 15)

In Appadurai's thought, personhood and sociality are not imbued in objects by active human thinking. While he sees the "investiture of humanity" into objects as an act of re-enchantment, it is not the human which here does the enchanting. The force he identifies as agent here, the source of verbiage, is the thing. Building from "the importance of focusing on the social life of things (Appadurai 1986), ethnographic attention to materiality problematizes the relationship between human (social) subjects and nonhuman object" (Kohn 2015, 315). Things are always shifting, their appearances contingent on their situation and perpetually in flux. If "the world of mere things" is a lower place to be, it is the place where all things are. It is the immanence which we are unavoidably rooted in. We are always in our thingness, never transcendent but bound by our fragile objecthood; our living, breathing, animate 'dead matter.'

For both philosophy's traditional materialists and idealists, all things are representations (images to/for/in the mind), though for the former these mental representations are also reducible to the activity of matter. But with Jakob von Uexküll's biological concept of the Umwelt processed through Heidegger and others, Western philosophy begins to process the possibility of there instead being many unique worlds for each species. A tick's world is almost entirely made up of feeling heat and smelling blood; not only does the tick perceive their world that way, but it is that world which creates the tick. Likewise, it is not only that the human ear receives soundwaves, but soundwaves which (evolutionarily) create the arcs and waves of the flesh of the human ear. The phenotype is the interval between the organism and its world. Neither ontological nor ontological idealism alone, the emergence of phenomenology begins to suggest that reality is not merely generated by the mind, nor that the mind is merely an epiphenomenon of reality. Husserl calls this co-constitution 'the constitutive duet.'

The category of nature remains here. The matter of the external world is made up of representations, where a waterfall is the potential for a dam: Heidegger's standing reserve.

Across new materialisms, there is a consistent break from one specific assumption of enlightenment —perhaps primarily Cartesian— thought, which is that we humans have better access to our relationship with objects than objects do with each other. Moving on from this assumption leads to many important conclusions about a world made up of many kinds of things. First, that subject-object relation is one kind of object-object relation, as stated. It agrees with Kant that that when humans meet the world, we do not meet the fullness of it – we encounter only the phenomenal world, not the thing-in-itself. The next step is easy: like humans, when two nonhumans interact, they do not encounter the whole of themselves either. Without a nature-culture relation, it is all relations which are haunted by the unknowable (to the self) essence of the other. I take philosopher Graham Harman's thought to be the most clear-cut step forward from the Descartes-to-Kant-to-modernity status quo because his process is clear: he is critical of "the second basic metaphysical claim of Kant [which], though it is never made quite as explicit as the first," is that "since the thing-in-itself can only be thought and never known, philosophy must confine itself to discussing the human-world relation rather than the relation between raindrops and wood in themselves" (Harman 2015, 101).

The point is straightforward. Where for Charles Taylor the 'discoveries' of science reveal a wonderfully mind-boggling —though *disenchanted*— world, Harman asks "why should spirit, mind, the subject, or the human make up a full half of metaphysics? Science forever reminds us how tiny we are, how we are just one isolated species in a vast cosmos. Certainly we are interested in humans for the obvious reasons that we are humans ourselves, but why give this

self-obsession a full half of philosophy?" (2015, 101). From there, I ask where such disenchantment could possibly be coming from?

I am not a metaphysician and my intention is not to make grand claims about how reality is, only to unwork the alike grand claims which limit our ability to think beyond the culture-nature/subject-object/mind-body/idea-fact/psyche-physis split. This is because "the Severing" ultimately manifests as a master-slave relationship and continuously begets the brutal domination of some aspects of life on earth by others (whoever is understood to be the former in the duality, under Anthropocene the human). Conclusively, half of reality is free and able to control, and the other half is mechanical and must be controlled. Epistemology bound by the modern myth, which in this sense is far older than modernity,[11] operates as a sort of *subjunctive politics*, as the anthropologist Chloe Ahmann puts it – a "speculative winnowing of options [which] impose an economy of choices by foreclosing certain futures" (2019, 329).

The ontological turn is largely born of Latour's work and takes Philippe Descola as its other founding French anthropologist. Descola dissolved the category of nature and in its place recuperated animism, primarily through the lens of the Archuar of the Amazon. For him, "animism is no longer treated as the mistaken belief in an animated nature […] but as an extension of social relationality to nonhumans in ways that imply a set of ontological assumptions distinct from the one with which anthropology traditionally works" (Kohn 2015, 317). Though I will engage animism further shortly, it should be made clear that the ontological turn is not itself a metaphysics, but a methodological shift in anthropology which in turn allows

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[11] This last point is related to Gerda Lerner's period from 8000-3000 BC in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), during which men used new agricultural surplus to gradually turn the division of labor based on biological sex into patriarchy, and impose patriarchal familial structures onto the society as a whole, namely through changing forms of religion and government (see also the conclusion of Graeber and Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything*).

anthropologists a new framework upon which to reveal the existence of other ontologies. It intends to open anthropological thought to further possibilities about what can be, rather than to further condition thought into one specific conception of what is. This is what distinguishes it from other more rhetorical turns in the discipline, which seem instead to retain the effort to purify through suggesting more and more 'accurate' ways to 'make sense of' 'other cultures'; when Latour was writing, it was clear to him that "we have never really left the old anthropological matrix behind" (Latour 1993, 47). Traditional anthropological thought is governed by what is essentially standpoint theory. But a distancing from language of 'perspectives' occurs with the ontological turn – it emerges as a possible answer to this problem of cultural relativism. It is a literal *turn* which eliminates ethnocentrism to be replaced by questions of ontology: it flips the relationship between ethnographic materials and analytical resources on its head. Ethnographic research becomes the source, rather than the object, of concepts for the anthropologist – the ethnography is no longer the site where anthropology improves (purifies) its claims about reality, but instead is the ground of its thinking, from which —rather than *onto* which— reality is posited. "Rather than having a concept of truth and belief" brought 'from one's own culture' of modernist anthropology (or wherever, really) "and trying to apply it to the ethnographic material, it's precisely the *lack of fit* onto the ethnographic material that has this 'the ethnography bites back' effect, and makes you transform —in this Copernican Revolution way— your own concept of truth, your own concept of culture, your own concept of society" Holbraad 2015). In an echo of Husserl's constitutive duet, the ethnographer is transformed by their ethnography, what Holbraad and Kohn refer to as the recursive quality that emerges from comparative ethnographic thought which allows the possibility that one's thinking may actually be changed by what one is thinking about.

At stake, then, is a basic reversal from striving to grasp 'the native's point of view', to finding ways to overcome what one already grasps in order to better be grasped *by* it – and that's all 'the turn' is! As we shall see throughout this book, however, this basic move has profound consequences for how we think about the whole project of anthropology, including its basic modi operandi and methodological wherewithal, as well as its political ramifications and critical potentials. (Holbraad 2017, 7).

The choice to be grasped by rather than grasp the subject of ethnographic research is in some sense the pith. It is here that the possibility of a decolonial praxis based in anthropology materializes: putting this move into practice cannot coexist with the ongoing existence of colonial power. From resource extraction to sexual coercion, the colony can only persist by and through maintaining its capacity to *grasp* the colonized, as bodies to be fetishized, de/humanized, analyzed/taxonomized, and (ab)used. Recognizing a "yearning"[12] for decolonization in contemporary anthropology, Allen and Jobson are both hopeful for and critical of the ontological turn, pointing out that "what remains understated" in introductions like Holbraad's "are the ways in which such 'North Atlantic universals' are made manifest, not only concocting ways of seeing the world but creating worlds unto themselves […]. This, in essence, is the problem of modernity as a fictive ideal that nonetheless engenders the uneven development and productive relations of global capital" (2016, 138).

More plainly, the notion of being grasped rather than grasping is a (perhaps often overlooked) necessity for any anthropology which takes itself seriously. What anthropologist could possibly hope to learn anything about the world they are in if they are unwilling to, even for a moment, put aside their assumptions about what that world is so that their ethnography can teach them something new? What will the anthropologist then do when they come across

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[12] Allen and Jobson write of Harrison's 1997 book *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* that "the prevailing mood of [the book] is one of *yearning* for liberatory potential in a political and intellectual field seemingly bereft of potent challenges to Euro-American capitalist democracy after the fall of the Soviet bloc" (2016, 134, emphasis added).

something different from what they expected? It is not that anthropology doesn't constantly come up against alternative thought which threatens the modern metaphysics on which it relies, but rather, that those metaphysics constantly frame it to the point of being unable to think alterity. Kohn offers the possibility of the ethnography which "presents no argument and certainly no metaphysics; rather, it dissolves many of the conceptual structures that hold us together so that we can be made over by the unexpected entities and forces that emerge" (2015, 313).

But how exactly does this turn step outside of cultural relativism? Doesn't taking other perspectives on reality seriously still base itself on recognizing theirs to be *different cultures*? Kohn writes that "the hallmark of modern anthropology, as prefigured by [Émile Durkheim and Franz Boas], is the recognition of the reality of phenomena that we can term 'socially constructed.' Socially constructed phenomena are the product of contingent and conventional contexts, be they historical, social, cultural, or linguistic" (2015, 314). For most of anthropology, any system of symbolic representation which is understood to have boundaries is a culture – a closed system inside which certain rules about reality apply, but beyond which different ones do. This is epitomized by Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, which expands de Saussure's semiology into a structural linguistic account of all human reality. "One result of this take on language is a sharp division between the world of signs and the world to which those signs refer without an account of how these worlds may be connected" (Ibid.), which emerges as a profoundly problematic dualism and the deepest problem of reality – the gap between the human self and the world. This is the thought which takes us from structuralism through Foucault and into postmodernity, where the human face is already being lapped away by the waves of meaninglessness. Reality is not

only at base disenchanted and meaningless without the human mind to encounter it but is in fact

utterly unthinkable, and hence, unreal.[13]

Kohn's own anthropology takes the structural linguistic problem seriously, using

semiotics in his ontological turn. Starting with his work, for the remainder of the chapter I

unpack exactly why the ontological turn does not see the fact of difference as a matter of

different perspectives on the same reality (which is otherwise a sea of meaningless objects), held

by different collections of subjects 'from' and 'in' different cultures. The conclusion is an

ontological turn to a world of many different worlds, many different ontologies – pluriversality.

In his 2013 book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, one

of Kohn's basic arguments is that animals don't merely think they're just brute bodies eating

each other, as the modern fissure might suggest. Countering this myth, he attends to the ways in

which the forests peopled by nonhumans are made up of complex, semiotic webs of meaning,

just like human language. He describes "how humans communicate with a host of nonhuman

beings in a world that is itself communicative but not symbolic or linguistic. This allows us to

see language 'from the outside,' so to speak, by looking at its relationship to a broader series of

forms of communication that are representational but not language-like" (Kohn 2015, 314).

This semiotic shift turns from one linguist to another, centering Charles Peirce rather than

Saussure due the space left for nonhuman representational processes in Peirce's thought. Kohn

does "not think it is warranted to see the turn to language, which provides the foundations for

anthropology, as 'wrong.' Quite the opposite, it gets at something fundamental about the reality

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[13] "When Foucault (1970), for example, writes that 'life itself' was unthinkable before the historical conditions that made such a concept possible, he is reflecting the human reality that this broader turn to language and social construction reveals at the same time that he is voicing the difficulty, given an analytical framework built on human language, to conceptualize that which is outside of language or culture" (Kohn 2015, 314).

of human life. In this sense, focusing on language is also ontological. Yet, by attending to a certain aspect of reality, it forecloses attention to others" (2015, 315). Kohn follows Peirce in insisting that pattern and meaning are properties of the world as an ecology of selves. Meanings are here not mere inventions that humans impose on a meaningless, disenchanted world, but instead enchant that very world. Kohn sees this project as a decolonial one which argues that "the world is also 'enchanted.' Thanks to this living semiotic dynamic [Kohn's animist 'ecology of selves'], *mean*-ing […] is a constitutive feature of the world and not just something we humans impose on it" (2013, 16).

For Kohn, taking after Latour, the self in the ecology of selves is the self who is not constituted but arrives spontaneously as a node, a point at which all these relations fold into a wholly dependent being, a non-self. However, it must be made clear that indigenous animism is not a figurative projection of substantive human qualities over nonhumans. What it expresses is a real equivalence between the relationships that humans and nonhumans maintain with themselves. While material like this powerfully seems to suggest that the very concept of the human is a modern creation which is a nightmare, in the authors I survey next, the ontological turn provides possibilities of understanding indigenous thought and the more-than-human world in radically anti-anthropocentric ways.

The ontological turn is understanding that there is a difference in worlds, not a difference in worldviews. What we study in anthropology is not different cultures, but different ontologies. To elucidate this view, I turn to the anthropologist who has perhaps taken the ontological turn most seriously.

V. We All Have Always Been Human

Anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro sees the ontological turn as the departure of anthropology from pure epistemology. He counters the "reductive interpretation-explanation of allegorical meanings with the proposal that we should move from the epistemological critique of ethnographic *authority* to the ontological determination of ethnographic *alterity*" (Viveiros de Castro 2015, 4). Allen and Jobson argue that his writing "demonstrates the potential vitality of [the ontological turn] to […] inaugurate a renewed critique of Eurocentrism [which] complicat[es] an ethnological deportment that seeks to explain the irrational components of 'native' discourse through appeals to the absolute rationality of Western science and its analytical repertoires" (2016, 138).

In Kohn's recollection, Viveiros de Castro's work is perhaps most directly in Descola's lineage. Descola's work accounts for the differences in ontological assumptions between groups of people (across space and time) without thinking in the terms of culture. He is best known for his four ontologies, the first of which is animism. For Descola, the animism which he most closely associates with Amazonian and far-North American indigenous thought

> holds that all beings are persons (animals and spirits have a kind of interiority or selfhood that is comparable with that of human persons), but these beings are differentiated by their exteriorities— the bodies that these various kinds inhabit. Given this understanding, a shaman can become a jaguar by wearing as clothing elements of a feline body, such as canine teeth and spotted hides, that make jaguars distinctive predatory beings. A psychic continuity permits movement across physical discontinuities. (Kohn 2015, 317)

For Descola, animism is the opposite of 'naturalism,' which he sees as the default mode of thought for the 'West.' Under naturalism, different beings are compared and made similar based on our physical traits and distinguished by our minds (in modernity) or souls (for pre-Enlightenment Europe). As Latour writes in a 2009 editorial on a "disputatio" between Descola and Viveiros de Castro, Descola's "'animism' takes the opposite position" from naturalism,

"holding that all entities are similar in terms of their spiritual features, but differ radically by virtue of the sort of body they are endowed with" (Latour 2009, 1). The naturalist, then, merely holds one perspective on a world that might instead be animated; where "all beings are persons."

To extend personhood beyond the human has already been suggested in this chapter by Latour and Appadurai. Here, however, this becomes less of a game which can easily fall victim to what I've been calling 'the anthropomorphism critique.' There have been many times when I've been walking with a friend and suggested that the qualities of consciousness, of *mind*, are so clearly all around us. Look how the branches of the trees bend against the curvature of the ground and towards the sun – can we not call that intention? And look how the bees know to hide when the clouds gather before rain – are they not aware? "Whatever," the response might be; "you're anthropomorphizing them." We cannot know *how* or *if* they think; for us alone, we know that cogitamus, ergo sumus. Thus the underlying thought is that where other forms of life behave mechanically —their actions reducible to the grand and vague category of *instinct*— we humans are more 'highly' evolved (as if evolution was teleological) and hence ratiocinative, granting us either free will and consciousness, or utter captivity to our language and unconscious drives. I do not mean to challenge the claim of human exceptionalism head on – *How Forests Think* has already offered plenty to sit with, and likewise hesitates to anthropomorphize.[14] Instead, I only point out that in Descola's reading of the metaphysics of animism, 'personification' is no longer merely a poetic device, but a basic state of being. What is held in common across all forms of life is personhood. Besides, as Morton jabs, "prove that I have imagination, as a human being. Prove that I'm not executing an algorithm. More to the point, prove that my idea that I'm not executing

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[14] "Projecting our morality, which rightfully privileges equality, on a relational landscape composed in part of nested and unidirectional associations of a logical and ontological, but not a moral, nature is a form of anthropocentric narcissism that renders us blind to some of the properties of that world beyond the human. As a consequence it makes us incapable of harnessing them politically" (Kohn 2013, 19).

an algorithm isn't just the variety of algorithm that I've been programmed to execute" (2016, 31).

Humor me as I again take Bataille's theory of animality as a foil for the ontological turn. For Bataille, the most important moment for understanding animality is *"the situation [...] when one animal eats another"* (1989, 17). Viveiros de Castro would agree: in the introduction of 2009's Cannibal Metaphysics, the text's translator Peter Skafish writes that "predation is the basic mode of relation" (2014, 12): it is during the hunt that Amazonian relationships between the human and animal are defined. But the contradiction between modern thought and the ontological turn is elucidated by the differing conclusions Bataille and Viveiros de Castro draw from the same idea. For Bataille, it is clear in the moment of predation that the two animals are utterly indistinct from each other. "The goshawk eating the hen does not distinguish it clearly from itself, in the same way that we distinguish an object from ourselves. The distinction requires a positing of the object as such" (1989, 18). Bataille argues that it is only the human which establishes a relation of subordination between themself and the consumed – the domination of *self* and *other*. This uniquely human access mode is juxtaposed by that profound statement, "the animal is in the world like water in water" (1989, 23). Such immanence is a state of being utterly closed to the human who establishes subject and object in the moment of violence, *objectifying* the prey, the victim, the foe. Therefore, "nothing, as a matter of fact, is more closed to us than this animal life from which we are descended" (Bataille 1989, 20).

For Viveiros de Castro, on the other hand, the conclusion is quite distinct – 'perspectivism,' through which animals too have subjectivity, or perhaps better, *selfhood*. The predator sees themself as such, and their prey as prey. The confrontation with the other wherein Bataille distinguishes the human from the animal is no longer the site at which "subjectivation"

occurs for Viveiros de Castro: "self-consciousness is reached not through confrontation with the other and subsequent self-return but through temporarily occupying […] the enemy's point of view, and seeing 'oneself' from there" (Skafish and Viveiros de Castro 2014, 12). By temporarily becoming other, one sees onself.[15] In perhaps the most dramatic reversal from Bataille (for whom it is in the animalistic, frenzied pandemonium of the festival where role-reversal dissolves selfhood rather than affirming it), it is sacrificial and at times cannibalistic rituals which exemplify this process and thereby *grant* one selfhood, rather than taking it away. The same also results from the shaman who dons the jaguar skin, better able see what makes a human body human from the perspective of the alter: in prowling, the shaman encounters the appetite for human flesh, and thereby invents the human.

In the 2009 editorial, Latour recalls a short story from Lévi-Strauss's work. During the early colonial period, Spanish conquistadors had brought home captives and accounts from the New World for Vallisoletano theologians to debate. The inquiry of the day, fundamental to determining what strategy the conquest would employ going forward (Conversion? Extermination?), was if the indigenous Americans had a soul. But back in the Americas, captured conquistadors were also undergoing examination – they were being drowned to see if their corpses would rot. Quite the opposite of the concern of Catholic Spain, the doubt in America was if the conquistadors' *bodies* were real. "That they had a soul was not in question" (Latour 2009, 1).

Perspectivism is not a matter of different perspectives on the same world of objects, but of a world of objects which is defined by the existence of different perspectives. Like for Descola, Viveiros de Castro sees difference in perspective as rooted in different externalities

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[15] See also Lacan's 'mirror stage.'

– different bodies, not different minds. Different natures, not different cultures. But where Viveiros de Castro departs from Descola is that in his thought, the revelation of animism versus naturalism should not be extended into a typology. For Descola, it can be – cultural relativism is replaced by ontological relativism: a *new* relativist universality.

Descola builds upon the difference between naturalism and animism to create a broad structural anthropology based in ontology, meant to replace the old form of anthropology as epistemology. Descola adds totemism and analogism to the distinction between naturalism and animism, which articulate distinct understandings of human-nonhuman relations. His intention is to categorize all epistemologies and ontologies across the globe into this fourfold. "Descola was able to achieve what neither modernists nor post-modernists had managed: a world free of the spurious unification of a naturalist mode of thought. Gone was the imperialist universality of the 'naturalists', but a new universality was still possible, one that allowed careful structural relations to be established between the four ways of building collectives" (Latour 2009, 2).

But Viveiros de Castro considers the idea of creating a taxonomy the of different kinds of human collectives the opposite of what perspectivism should reveal. To see a world of types and categories merely recreates the old colonial anthropology which helped create what we call modernity. What we should really be paying the most attention to is what he calls *multinaturalism.*

> Whereas hard and soft scientists alike agree on the notion that there is only one nature but many cultures, Viveiros wants to push Amazonian thought (which is not, he insists, the '*pensée sauvage*' that Lévi-Strauss implied, but a fully domesticated and highly elaborated philosophy) to try to see what the whole world would look like if all its inhabitants had the same culture but many different natures. The last thing Viveiros wants is for the Amerindian struggle against Western philosophy to become just another curio in the vast cabinet of curiosities that he accuses Descola of seeking to build. (Latour 2009, 2)

Latour calls Viveiros de Castro's idea a bomb, which has in it "the potential to explode the whole implicit philosophy so dominant in most ethnographers' interpretations of their material" (2009, 2). The suggestion is that perspectivism, which I will detail shortly, must not merely be read as a new method for extracting knowledge or making sense of the world. Viveiros de Castro does not locate his project in the same world – he is not driven by 'interest' or 'curiosity' in nonwestern thought. Instead, his intentions are radical subversion of our philosophical and anthropological status quo.

I return to animality to explain multinaturalism. The sentence from *Cannibal Metaphysics* quoted earlier as the foil to Bataille begins as follows: "in effect, nonhumans regard themselves as humans, and view both 'human' humans and other nonhumans as animals, either predator or prey, *since predation is the basic mode of relation*" (Skafish and Viveiros de Castro 2014, 12, emphasis added). To say that nonhumans are humans is to attribute to them conscious intentionality, and all the other abilities that constitute 'agency' for us. It is grant other forms of life the same enunciative position given to the human subject.

If this is indeed the case, at least among the many nations of the Amazon whom Viveiros de Castro learns from, the conclusion is necessarily that 'culture' is not what defines and differentiates human societies. Collectives which cross species and even the life/nonlife split —a perhaps even more venerated, embedded form of the modern myth than our Severing/Great Divide between human and animal— are instead the baseline social order: "what Descola once called 'the society of nature'" (Skafish and Viveiros de Castro 2014, 12). Minerals, tools, flora, fauna, sun, moon, stars, gods, and ideas all exist in the same social arrangements as humans. All of these entities implicate, use, encounter, conceive of, communicate with, affect, and are affected by, each other. Kohn summarizes the key argument of *Cannibal Metaphysics* as follows:

Under normal circumstances, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals, and spirits (if they see them) as spirits. But predatory beings such as jaguars and spirits will see humans as prey, and prey animals (such as wild pigs) will see humans as predators. Furthermore, all beings, whether human, animal, or spirit, will see themselves as persons. From an 'I' perspective, then, a jaguar will see himself as a human person. He will experience himself as drinking manioc beer, living in a thatch house, etc., but he will be seen by other kinds of beings, such as humans (under normal circumstances) and prey animals, from an external 'It' perspective, namely as a predatory being. Thus, from their own perspectives, all beings see things in the same way—similar to humans, jaguars see themselves drinking manioc beer—but, crucially, what they see in this same way is a different world. And yet the knowledge of being in a different world can only be achieved comparatively by grasping how those on the outside see us: When one is drinking manioc beer, one never knows if that beer is 'just' beer or if it is the blood of one's enemies. This sort of knowledge is available only by comparison to an external perspective." (Kohn 2015, 318).

Seeing, perspective, is something shared across all being, by all beings. In fact, this new, expansive notion of personhood can be defined as *having the capacity to take a point of view*; hence the term perspectivism. This is not just an extended relativism,[16] as Descola calls for, because there is no form of being which exists without a point of view, hence, a kind of personhood. It is more a *relation*ism, where all things exist comparably on the same plane. Personhood is shared across all beings. "All my relatives."

But the point of departure from Descola's animism is that under this Amazonian metaphysics, while two different beings both see in the same way, the seen world is different. When two people look out into reality, they see different things; for instance, each other. When they walk through that reality, they use different limbs, and feel with different skin, and lick different things with different tongues. Each of the jaguar's teeth tears through muscle filaments, while the wild pig's chew plant fibers. We notice ourselves biting both, though we are picky.

Again, one may ask, is this not relativism? Does this not just leave us all with different cultures, animal or human? Different views perhaps beget different versions in different minds,

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[16] Though it is closely related to Deleuze's relativism, both seeing not only a *variety* of natures, but ultimately readable as understanding difference and variation to be *what 'nature' really is* (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 74).

but ultimately, doesn't this leave each different perspective with one world in common? The critical question is, "does Amerindian perspectivist theory in fact postulate a plurality of representations of the world?" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 71). For multinaturalism, the answer is the exact opposite. It is a full ontological turn. The reason is actually rather simple: when the two look out at reality, they see different things. That difference in the things seen is the origin of all difference, or rather the *only* difference. It is the real implication of perspectivism, and the original thought of multinaturalism.

> All beings see ('represent') the world in the same way; what changes is the world they see. Animals rely on the same 'categories' and 'values' as humans: their worlds revolve around hunting, fishing, food, fermented beverages, cross-cousins, war, initiation rites, shamans, chiefs, spirits.... If the moon, serpents, and jaguars see humans as tapirs or peccaries, this is because, just like us, they eat tapirs and peccaries (human food par excellence). Things could not be otherwise, since nonhumans, being humans in their own domain, see things as humans do—like we humans see them in our domain. […] What humans perceive as a mud puddle becomes a grand ceremonial house when viewed by tapirs. (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 71)

Keeping Kohn in mind, what the world is made up of is not dead matter upon which we humans apply meaning – the verbiage of enchantment. There is no fact of unambiguous nature which animating perspectives (cultures) illuminate in their own special ways. Instead, there are many natures, many bodies, many *ontologies*. What is meant by bodies here is not necessarily physiology or anatomy alone, but the way an agent physicality exists in the world. Its habitus: the way it moves or sits still, the noises it makes, its smell and what it exhales, the way it heats or cools a room, the footprints it leaves.

This world of many worlds, defined by the unity of psyche, is Viveiros de Castro's multinaturalism. It is a full reversal from multiculturalism, in the same way that animism reverses naturalism. Through the methodology of the ontological turn, what he sees broadly as an Amerindian metaphysics emerges as multinaturalist. The term departs from what Descola's

naturalism, which was defined earlier as "the assumption that others have dissimilar interiorities but similar exteriorities […] which is typical of the modern West" (Kohn 2015, 317). To further define naturalism, it is distinct inner worlds —minds or souls— that engender difference, not the outside world of bodies. This operates on individual, group, and species levels, defining respectively the distinctions of made between I versus you – (solipsism), us versus them (culture), and we versus it (the human). I take the human to be in some ways the most thought-provoking.

If it is true that the only being who boasts authentic interiority is the human, and if that capability is in fact what defines us as human, then, with multinaturalism in mind, it is all beings who regard themselves as human.

Where, then, is culture? It remains everywhere, but there is only one. The episteme, thought, consciousness, mind – it is that personhood which all beings have. The variation between beings is only their different bodies, which encounter each other. The shaman can transgress that difference by occupying the perspective of another body, which becomes a much more conceivable feat when the two beings share subjecthood in common. Multinaturalism then inverts multiculturalism at the same time as it supersedes naturalism, seeing the differences between bodies, however small, as the only basis for difference.

Recall that in the modern understanding, it is human collectives and cultures which impose or remove enchantment from the world. But if there are no cultural differences, only bodily ones, such a conception of enchantment must be dispensed. It is for this reason that Descola and Viveiros de Castro see this world as *inherently* (rather than epistemologically) animated, and perhaps therefore, enchanted.

Multinaturalism seems therefore to be a far more inclusive basis for anthropology than multiculturalism. It can account for difference in a far more total way, where there is no possibility for a primacy of one perspective over another. In some sense, this is what Viveiros de Castro sees as the real predation at play: the way in which multinatural metaphysics predate (perhaps in both senses of the word) and cannibalize our modern metaphysics. "By extending this logic beyond Amazonia, Viveiros de Castro makes anthropology a practice of cosmic philosophical predation that may allow us to actualize a multinaturalism immanent in the bowels of multiculturalism" (Kohn 2015, 319). Remember that for Latour, his thought is a bomb which he plants firmly in the belly of naturalism and cultural relativism.

Put simply, multiculturalism can condone any alter metaphysics (especially that of the colonized) which runs counter to it only if it can explain it away and thereby subsume it. It necessitates that all other ontologies conform to it – both inoffensively through what we've called purification and paraphrasing, and brutally through colonization. Conquest necessitates explanation; power is knowledge. But for multinaturalism, it is precisely the difference of bodily situations that begets the truth of a given ontology; what one experiences is the direct result of their very experience, not an illusion cast over and distorting what's really real. In colonial-modern thought we obsess over the thing-in-itself and its inaccessibility, even as we recognize that all we can know is the phenomenal world where things only *appear* to us in all their deficiency, partiality, and variation. But what if "beer could always be a kind of blood, and blood could be beer-like for somebody" (Kohn 2015, 319)? Multinaturalism does not assume that there is an in-itself which is "partially apprehended through categories of understanding proper to each species. […] What exists in multinature are not such self-identical entities differently perceived but immediately relational multiplicities of the type blood/beer. There exists, if you will, only the

limit between blood and beer" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 73). The thing-in-itself is a concept which makes sense only if there exists a single nature. But there is no objective language behind all languages,[17] only one or another. In perspectivism, why are there different kinds of perception? Because there are different kinds of bodies.

I will finish my description of multinaturalism with a simple question: instead of asking how a certain group, human, fish, tree, or mountain sees the world, can we ask what world the group, human, fish, tree, or mountain sees?

In review, anthropologists before the ontological turn assumed that there was one true world called nature made up of bodies, matter, objects. Each culture had a different cultural perspective on/epistemology of that world. Reality was one nature with many cultures, and anthropology was the study of those different cultures from its own perspective – a practice called ethnocentrism.

Latour, Descola, Kohn, and Viveiros de Castro argues that this is the unique view of European modernity. What I have been calling the modern myth is itself an ontology. For the people Viveiros de Castro studies with in the Amazon, namely the Awaweté, the world is not like that at all. For them, there is instead *one* subject/mind/spirit/soul that everyone and everything shares, and the only difference is that of bodies. In his understanding of the Amerindian world, the nature/culture opposition of colonial modernity is completely reversed, an utter turn.

It is important that the claims covered so far (that we have never been modern, that all things are objects, that the forest thinks, that animals are subjects) are not understood to be the projection of human society *onto* nature, which would indeed be the appropriate victim of the

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[17] Viveiros de Castro references François Jullien.

anthropomorphism critique. In saying that all beings see themselves as persons, even as the 'human' or 'subject' of a given prey-predator, subject-object relationship, the conclusion drawn must not be that humanity can be rewarded to more-than-humans. Instead, it must be that humanity is utterly dislocated, an undefined thing which is not exclusive or transcendent but utterly in and of its given world, like water in water.

The point is that the very terms culture/nature, animate/inanimate, mind/matter, conscious/unconscious, even alive/dead are myth invented by and for modernity, which has never been the truth, the *essence*, of our realities. The claim is that this modern myth is untrue, not unreal. It is one of the realest things – a very powerful force which is devastating to the world, rending brutal fissures on both the great scale of metabolic geophysical flows, and on the intimate scale between you and me. But it is a myth nonetheless, a formidable lie.

Echoing the definition of ontology as the study of how things exist, here the ontological turn is at its most turned, a full 180º reversal from multiculturalism and cultural relativism. "If nature is our ground, it is natural for us to think of ontology as a search for what really exists. But in a multinatural metaphysics, there is no stable ontological ground" (Kohn 2015, 319). It is for this reason that we cannot call multinaturalism a mere description of how things are, at least insofar as such a description would entail specificity, solidity, or underlying truth. Instead, each thing has infinite potential to be in different ways, because it is different for everything that encounters it, and is therefore never, on any level, no matter how withdrawn, one definite thing. Multinaturalism is "a call for a form of thinking, available to anyone, that is able to see possible ways of becoming otherwise […and] recognizing that there is a form of relating that allows differences to be held together rather than to be subsumed" (Kohn 2015, 320-321).

VI. A Return to Enchantment

Anthropology at its beginning loved to wonder if indigenous peoples could think. Now it wonders the same for animals. Sometimes it even asks if ancestors, gods, and spirits are thinking too, and perhaps even beyond our own imaginations. But "the shaman walking through the forest does not ask whether spirits exist (that would be the multicultural question); he wants to know only how to actualize a relation with them" (Kohn 2015, 319).

Certain conclusions drawn from the ontological turn can be read as positive affirmations of the inherent and original sacredness of the more-than-human world. This is because it is in fact animated already, without needing human activity to come animate it. One cannot enchant or disenchant what is inherently enchanted with meanings. In the previous chapter it was suggested by Victor Turner that magic was hidden away in unthinkable ethnic meanings, available only to participants of a ritual from a culture foreign to our own. But what about when there are no cultures, and when indigenous ontologies are not so clouded by exoticism? For Jason Crawford, magic might be an inherent quality of the other. What then is magical when all things are only defined by their otherness? Nothing? Everything? Marcel Mauss defined magic as a social phenomenon, a shared belief. But when all things are defined by how they are believed to be by other things, a sociality that exists far beyond the human and in fact undergirds all relations, all difference, all being… is magic nowhere, then, or everywhere? For Weber, Bataille, Taylor, Taussig, and so on, magic is also strictly human. But what about when humanity, *personhood*, has been dispersed across all being? What can be strictly human when everyone sees themselves as human?

Kohn sees the ontological turn "as a response to a conceptual, existential, ethical, and political problem—how to think about human life in a world in which a kind of life and future that is both beyond the human and constitutive of the human is now in jeopardy" (2015, 315). He centers Latour again as the key figure of this ecological take on the ontological turn, for whom the "goal is to recognize and give dignity to multiple modes of existence, or ontologies, and to how the beings such modes institute may find a way to dwell together in a common *oikos*. […] Stones, spirits, poetry, and scientific objects can all be described as having unique and valid modes of existence" (Kohn 2015, 321). It is this turn to political ecology which I will engage in the next chapter, not only alongside the ontological turn but also through the questions regarding enchantment that have been revealed by it.

I return briefly to the myth of the myth of the noble savage. Morton writes of the "destructuring [of] Western philosophy" I have invoked here that

> to include nonhumans in a meaningful way starts to look, from within culturalism, like appropriating non-Western cultures, and in particular the cultures of First Peoples, indigenous people. If it's not possible to cross from one […] domain to another, it is because they are totally different realities […]. Despite the fact that some Western philosophers are allowing non-Western thought to influence them, and despite the fact that this allowance in part disarms the bomb to make the world a safer place, what this looks like to some is doing the unforgivable, gauche, hippie thing of dressing up like a Native American. (Morton 2017, 10)

Of course, in no longer thinking within (multi)culturalism, that gamble is less risky. But it remains important to specify the operation of "totally different realities" for multinaturalism. The incommensurability of different realities is an idea that Graeber and Wengrow also critique, writing that "indigenous people are assumed to have lived in a completely different universe, inhabited a different reality, even; anything Europeans said about them was simply a shadow-play projection, fantasies of the 'noble savage' culled from the European tradition itself" (2021,). Though Graeber and Wengrow are not of the ontological turn —retaining the category of

culture in their anthropology— the counterargument is shared with Morton: the colonizer and the colonized do not live in different realities, even without modernity's hegemony. For multinaturalism, the basic state of reality is the fact of many natures, many bodies, many ontologies. One reality, many worlds. Where traditional anthropology contends with an unthinkable universe, the ontological turn experiences a thinkable pluriverse.[18]

Perhaps "noble savagery" should be listed among the critiques of the ontological turn, of which Kohn names the following three: "the major concerns voiced by the anthropological community with respect to the narrow ontological turn are that it is (*a*) excessively structuralist, (*b*) overly concerned with alterity, and (*c*) not sufficiently political" (2015, 322). It certainly admits this structuralism where some anthropology even tries to hide it, but of course it should be open to deconstructive critique. Nevertheless, that critique should at least account for its foundational claims about modernity, and how they might contradict said poststructural approach. Likewise, alterity is always the concern of anthropology, as difference is its basic curiosity; but that alterity must be accounted for in a way that does not further the colonial modern project of subsuming all things into its logic. From there the final question emerges: can the ontological turn be sufficiently political?

In taking the stance that the ontological turn has decolonial potential, we must again remember Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's argument against 'settler moves to innocence.' Born of "a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore" (2012, 9), the authors highlight the trend across contemporary academia and social movements that "conceal[s] the need to give up land or power or privilege" (2012, 21) by reducing decolonization to a trope that evades its unconditional intention of subverting the colony. But this does not mean that the

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[18] See *A World of Many Worlds* edited by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018).

ontological turn is fundamentally colonial, or decolonial – rather, that an anthropology which can serve the decolonial project through "an opening of its inquiry beyond the constrained limits into which it had been disciplined" (Allen and Jobson 2016, 133) may necessarily take this turn.

I by no means aspire to exhaustively name the implications of multinaturalism or perspectivism for anthropology, much less for decolonial thought. Instead, I turn to the political implications. As outlined in the introduction, my agenda is a thinkable decolonization. In Allen and Jobson's words, "while the ontological turn contents itself with the assertion of multiple ontologies as a corrective to enduring North Atlantic universals […], the decolonizing project insists that even in the recognition of multiple ontologies, the work of dismantling a hegemonic Western ontology—and its adjunct systems of colonialism and racial capitalism—remains" (2016, 139).

Anthropology is ready to fully assume its new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought.
—Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2014 [Métaphysiques cannibales 2009], 40)

"The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man. The patriarchal family planted the seed of domination in the nuclear relations of humanity; the classical split in the ancient world between spirit and reality — indeed between mind and labor — nourished it [...]. But it was not until organic community relations, feudal or peasant in form, dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly."
— Murray Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" (1971 [1965])

VII. To Coax Forth Whatever Comes Next

Rather than seeing the difference between colonial and colonized modes of thought as an unbridgeable cultural abyss, the ontological turn —and a multinatural metaphysics in particular— offers novel potential for the reemergence of indigenous ontologies. Importantly, these ontologies *threaten* colonial modernity's hegemony; but I do not argue that they should replace it. It is for this reason that Viveiros de Castro, Allen and Jobson, and others engage the ontological turn with decolonization on the tips of their tongues. But a key problem raised in Harrison's text remains: "Native anthropologies […] and meaningful reconciliations between Western and non-Western theories and epistemologies […] are contingent upon a sociopolitical climate and institutional alignments that allow for and support the democratization of intellectual and theoretical authority" (1991, 8). This would mean that anthropology and the other Humanities not only diversify the faces in their ranks, but also their intentions. If the academy is not politically neutral but remains deeply participant in the maintenance and expansion of

colonial modernity, then perhaps these disciplines really must center decolonization.[19] Perhaps this would look like more "anthropology of Western institutions—science, law, and religion are important ones—that have their own metaphysics and their own ways of instituting beings" (Kohn 2015, 321). Latour's work, a kind of anthropology foundational to the ontological and decolonial turns in the discipline, exemplifies this. But decolonial anthropology might also look like more anthropologists who are indigenous. Or it might be a question of allowing the whole field to be "grasped by" thought that has precolonial roots – an anthropology which takes American, African, Asian, and Oceanic indigenous life as its history and future, rather than as its exotic curio.

Distilled from these decolonial anthropologists, the broader point here could be understood as a specification of what is entailed in decolonization. Decolonizing does not mean merely to get rid of the colony, as if we can follow the exit signs, kick open the emergency exit door (setting off the alarm and surely summoning the police), and once we're standing safely outside, set it on fire. Colonial modernity has already been established as a hegemonic force – it's everywhere. When the building is everywhere, setting it on fire could kill everyone.

For Jean Baudrillard in *The Agony of Power* (1978), hegemony is domination which is pervasive and total. Within its structure, understood to be the ultimate form of domination, the power to dominate is not exerted by one subject over another, but exerted by both onto each other. Where the topology of domination is of master and slave, the topology of hegemony is rhizomatic, expressed from everywhere at once, without center and upon itself. This occurs through the destruction of the dominator-dominated binary. The integral quality of this system is

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[19] "It is one thing to destabilize a crude opposition between non-Western cosmologies and Western rationalism but another entirely to interrogate the practices of graduate training, professional advancement, publishing, and knowledge dissemination that tacitly enforce this division" (Allen and Jobson 2016, 139).

characterized by the networks and calculations that uphold it in capitalist biopolitics, where the abstraction of immanent power into a transcendent logic shared by all parties is an expression of the very logic of the dominator being fully accepted by the dominated, to the point where a single dominator is usually no longer necessary. The dominant logic is encrypted and made immanent, and therefore cannot be escaped; a simulated matrix without alterity, without difference, without an *elsewhere*. "Hegemony begins here in the disappearance of the dual, personal, agonistic domination for the sake of integral reality—the reality of networks, of the virtual and total exchange where there are no longer dominators or dominated" (Baudrillard 1978, 33).

The colony is hegemonic because everywhere we look, we see the colony. Everyone thinks like a colonizer, but it is their own body, labor, and image which are sold. Every object capitalism sees is fetishized as a commodity; it employs everything it touches for its grand and impossible project of infinite growth: Jason Moore writes of "what Marx understood better than most Marxists is that capitalism "works" because it organizes work as a multispecies process" (93): "capitalism's specific degradation of nature occurs through its specific mobilization of the 'forces of nature' as 'forces of production'" (2016, 111), creating the category of nature not only as a resource but also as a source of cheap labor. And the ashes of its relentless bulldozing are everywhere too: plastic in the fish, plastic on Everest and in the Mariana Trench, plastic in our blood. Decolonization, then, is not an escape from our situation, which is impossible; instead, it is a necessary *composting*. First, of course, we must stop making plastic; but we must also learn to live with the plastic that cannot be eliminated. Decolonization can't mean "throw everything out" – the landfills are already overflowing. We produce so much that the pollutive byproducts are choking the planet's ability to metabolize. We can't follow the old logic of a sick and dying

modernity. The necessary decolonial action is to bend what continues to exist within the colony towards forms of life which do not rely on extraction and exploitation, ecocide and genocide. This is decolonization as a hospicing,[20] an allowing-to-dissolve which would in turn allow life to grow where it could not before. As Baudrillard says, "opposition to global hegemony cannot be the same as opposition to traditional oppression. It can only be something unpredictable, irreducible to the preventative terror of programming, forced circulation" (1978, 75).

The argument is not that multinaturalism and other such metaphysics are the correct replacement for colonial modernity, but that these alternative modes of thought eat away at it, undermining its foundations not in order to replace them, but to coax forth whatever comes next. The discussion of total decolonization must be ongoing. My intention here is only to use this decolonization-as-composting to introduce the idea that decolonization, rather than colonization, is an act of disenchantment.

VIII. Disenchantment is Enchantment: Capitalist Animism

If multinaturalism is the enchanted state of thought that exists when colonial modernity has failed to replace it with purification and multiculturalism, at least for the Araweté in the Amazon, and in Viveiros de Castro's view for all indigenous Americans, it would be easy to circle back to the original conclusion: colonial modernity is disenchanted. But coloniality is not only a process of extermination. To eliminate one ontology is to foist another. I return to the ostensible duality between magic and modernity with which this project began and ask if the fundamental problem with disenchantment is that it is in fact enchantment. Is late modern enchantment so destructive precisely because we say it isn't enchanted?

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[20] *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism* by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021).

As any empire expands, it must assert its own logics. When the magic which soaks the world is desiccated, extracted, and distilled for the factory and the museum, it must necessarily be replaced. Nazism was not only the infolding of the brutality projected outward from Europe, as Césaire argues in the *Discourse,* but an evocation of older European methods of conquest internal to the continent —especially at its edges— which vary (along with who and what was considered Europe, the West, or civilization) back past Greco-Roman antiquity and into ambiguity. The Iberian Inquisitions were an ongoing laboratory for Catholic methods for theocratic supremacy over the Americas, and racialized chattel slavery was reared in Romania. And who can decide where capitalism started – as Graeber and Wengrow write in *The Dawn of Everything*, it was Weber who did his best to figure out "why capitalism emerged in western Europe, and not elsewhere. Capitalism, as he defined it, was itself a kind of moral imperative. Almost everywhere in the world, he noted, and certainly in China, India and the Islamic world, one found commerce, wealthy merchants and people who might justly be referred to as 'capitalists'. But almost everywhere, anyone who acquired an enormous fortune would eventually cash in their chips" (2021, 178). It is here that Weber famously illuminates *The Protestant Ethic*, another European, not to mention Christian, origin for a convention of the modern colony; and perhaps *the* convention at that: capitalism. And who would argue that Christianity does not imbue the world with meanings both sacred (the church) and profane (everything else), especially when it is in the service of conquest? But regardless of the origin of the colonial procedure that is hegemonic today, and regardless of when 'disenchantment' was absorbed into it, it can itself be understood *as an enchantment*.

To take disenchantment at face value is to recognize that there is no longer inherent meaning in this postcolonial and postmodern world. But to turn to ontology is to recognize that

meaning remains, and not only in the mycelium wriggling beneath the layers of asphalt that the colony has paved its territory with, but also in the asphalt itself, and in the act of paving. Why only apply Kohn's Peircean semiotics to the jungle when they can be applied to the concrete jungle, too? It is as much an inherent quality of a branch to convey meaning to the monkeys who witness it as it is for a bus to convey meaning to all the things which encounter it – pedestrians, pigeons, the street itself.

The colony kills alter/native meaning because it is a threat to its own monopoly on thought – its own definitions, its own language, its own meanings, its own enchantment. Yes, the inaugurated mode of understanding is disenchantment, but it is that disenchantment which enchants the modern world. Its power, just like everything else in the colony, comes not only from being imposed, but from then being naturalized. The myth of modernity demands to be seen as Truth; the colony's enchantment demands to be seen as a disenchanted: cold, hard fact. This is the power of the phrase 'common sense.' That nature is separate from culture is common sense! That humans think and other things are simply biological machines is common sense! That some humans are more human than others (savages, criminals, terrorists, heretics, and women) is common sense! But when it is revealed that we understand reality no better despite purifying it, the whole framework is revealed to be merely an enchanting tool for expanding hegemony, and not for discovering answers. A New World is never discovered, only conquered; no Eden, no paradise. I digress.

To better understand colonial modernity is to recognize that it is enchanted. 'Disenchanted' modernity exists today as a colonial enchantment of the globe. To describe this further, I will return first to Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst's text on Mauss and magic. The two sociologists take Mauss's thesis on magic as socially constructed, exercised through in common

belief, and real in its effects and extend it to late capitalism. Money, the market, Wall Street, Amazon, Uber Eats – late capitalism is a world populated by middlemen and abstraction, whereby action at a distance is not merely a force of social belief but a luxury pumped out by a service economy that gets faster and brighter and newer every year. Elaborating this, Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst argue that many of the professionals on which the smooth operation of the market relies are, in a Maussian sense, *magicians*. Because "belonging to a profession 'shrouded in mystery and not without prestige' or being in a position of authority in society 'makes a magician'" (2023, 5), they quote Mauss to identify magicians everywhere: "leaders, consultants, entrepreneurs, marketeers and creative professionals, to name a few, are significant figures of the capitalist order, whose acts are imbued with 'a special kind of efficacy.' With words, images, and numbers, these magical agents 'put to work collective forces and ideas'" (2023, 2). Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst place particular emphasis on the ilk of self-help gurus and publicists, going into detail about how their methods are at times indistinguishable from those of more classical magicians – from witchdoctors to conmen, they settle on outlining a sort of 'corporate voodoo.' But the key to the text is framing individualistic humanism as a magical collective belief, particularly based in "mythologies of creative potential and genius" (2023, 8). They argue specifically that this can be understood as a kind of "disenchanted magic" (2023, 7), wherein a modern zeitgeist that sees the ordinary, individual human mind as capable of extraordinary acts of ingenuity. This collective belief in the power of the individual human mind is a profoundly patriarchal mode.

This paints capitalism as "profoundly magical, dominated by a constant tsunami of all manner of things being done at a distance with words, images and numbers" (Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst 2023, 11). Emphasizing not only the strange power of algorithmized media over the

multitudes,[21] Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst are particularly interested in how particular modes human creativity are granted magical (social) efficacy. The individualism of Great Man theory takes on a life of its own beyond the textbook, advertising not only Elon Musk, but your own productive potential.[22] You too can be great, or more specifically, *optimized*.

This resonates particularly with Byung-Chul Han's analysis in *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (2017), where he describes a giving-way of the control society to something more reflexive. He writes of the ways in which the externally imposed violence of "physical discipline has given way to mental optimization" (2017, 25). This compulsion to self-optimize as "a more efficient kind of subjectivation and subjugation. As a project deeming itself free of external and alien limitations, the *I* is now subjugating itself to internal limitations and self-constraints, which are taking the form of compulsive achievement and optimization" (2017, 1). Han describes the 'compulsion to be free' as a far more powerful force than the compulsion to work – it is insofar as neoliberal capitalism has managed to create a system of universal auto-exploitation. It is for this reason that *Psychopolitics* mirrors Baudrillard's thought on hegemony, where dominator and dominated become one: writing of the late modern subject who is compelled to be as free as possible, Han states that "in so far as [the "achievement-subject"] willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an absolute slave" (2017, 2). This kind of mastery is the most efficient for the market and the state, requiring little cost for great benefit. It is also for this reason for both Baudrillard and Han, no traditional "resistance to the system can emerge in the first place. In contrast, when allo-exploitation prevails, the exploited are still able to show solidarity and unite against those who exploit them" (2017, 6). Our revolutions are therefore impossible, because there is no king to dethrone, nor even one clear

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[21] See Hardt and Negri's work.
[22] See the Human Potential Movement.

'rich' to 'eat.' Radical rage then turns inward in depressive self-blame (this self being both dominator and dominated) for not doing enough, for not doing more, for not doing better. Why do I continue to trap myself? Why can't I just let myself be free?

> In our world, we no longer work in order to satisfy our own needs. Instead, we work for Capital. Capital generates needs of its own; mistakenly, we perceive these needs as if they belonged to us. Capital therefore represents a new kind of transcendence, which entails a new form of subjectivation. We are being expelled from the sphere of lived immanence – where life relates to life instead of subjugating itself to external ends. (Han 2017, 7)

One thought-provoking mode of this auto-exploitative compulsion to be both as free and ameliorated as possible is expressed in the tie between spirituality and capitalism (hence, for instance, that term "self-help *guru*"), which especially comes across in the many contemporary 'countercultural' spiritual movements. Insofar as one seeks to profit, one seeks to transcend. For Skovgaard-Smith and Hirst, "New Age-inspired ideas and practices in corporate contexts are closely intertwined with capitalist mythologies of 'market forces' and the dominant ideal of utilitarian efficiency based on a calculative rationality" (2023, 8). In "Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," Anthropologist Lisa Aldred depicts the New Age as an "imperialistically nostalgic" attempt to escape modern malaise through its own consumerism. "Despite the New Agers' professions that they are working toward social and cultural change, their commercialization of Native American spirituality articulates well within late-twentieth-century consumer capitalism. There is strong historical and social evidence that the commercialization of ideas and values, as well as the fetishized image of a social body perceived to be ethnically Other, stems in part from thought and practices produced within the context of recent consumer capitalism" (Aldred 2000, 346). The same is identifiable everywhere in the world of 'Eastern'[23] spirituality that I grew up in. I

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[23] I place quotes here for the same reason I do around the 'Western' – this category is as schismogenetically other to (and hence internalized and negated within) the 'West' as nonwestern indigeneity.

think in particular of what is often referred to as the Mindfulness Movement, which emerged in

the 1970s as a secular take on Buddhism which teaches individuals techniques to feel better

about themselves and has sold lots of books. Expressed here is a strange new collapse of church

and state (in the form of market) where neither institution requires any formal power over the

individual subject – obedience is of no great concern when it is one's own aspiration to buy the

right yoga mat for inner peace. Aldred sums up the problem in two key points: first, that despite

identifying as 'countercultural,' the form of spiritual community sought by New Agers "is only

imagined, a world conjured up by the promises of advertised products, but with no history, social

relations, or contextualized culture that would make for a sense of real belonging. Meanwhile,

their fetishization of Native American spirituality not only masks the social oppression of real

Indian peoples but also perpetuates it" (2000, 329-330). With Mauss's theory of magic alone, it is

clear that the New Age can't quite create because, or re-enchant anything, because it has no

foundation in collective belief. To imbue something with magical power, there must be a shared

history between a group which has established it as such. And even with the problem of the

modern myth that underlies re-enchantment aside, the collective belief which is shared across the

New Age is not in Pachamama or Wakȟáŋ Tȟáŋka, but the expressly disenchanted logic of

consumerism and, more broadly, colonial modern capitalism.

In the 2012 article "Can't Stop Believing: The Politics of Magic," Graeber extends the

Maussian understanding of magic onto contemporary politics.

> Consider what one is saying when one says a magician is a fraud. One is saying that there
> are some people who clearly are powerful and influential, but whose power is really
> based on nothing other than their ability to convince others that they have it. Is this not a
> profound insight into the nature of social power? In fact, I suspect this is the real reason
> social theorists feel uncomfortable acknowledging this political aspect of magic—or
> perhaps, in talking about magic at all. Magic captures something of the essence of
> political power: the fact that there is always something paradoxical, circular, and just a
> little bit stupid about the whole thing. (2012)

Throughout this article, Graeber centers magic's use as a tool for terror and seduction. His suggestion is that what defines a magician is the same thing that defines a king or politician, which is based in illusion and strives to both threaten the insubordinate with "annihilation," and back up the "preposterous lies" that help keep the throne or office. He writes that "magic is pretty much inherently sensationalistic. If it can't amaze and titillate, what power does it have?" (Ibid.). Magic accounts for skepticism with a fairly basic logic. Though when "presented with a person who claims to be able to cast lightning, it is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is not true," there is a clear counterargument: "Why take chances?" (Ibid.). In this sense, magic harnessed by the state is intimately tied to its monopoly on violence.

On the opposite side of the equation, at the end of *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* Taussig argues for the "myriad of improbable ways [in which] magic and rite can strengthen the critical consciousness that a devastatingly hostile reality forces on the people laboring in the plantations and mines" (1980, 232). In some ways this mirrors Marx's famous diagnosis of religion as the opiate of the people. While Marx was certainly critical and sought better than what he saw to be an illusion, his is not as firm a rejection of magic as that which can be found in Fanon, who calls for the moment when "after centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which content for his life—the forces of colonialism" (Fanon 2004 [1961], 56). But in this more recent anticapitalist, anticolonial thought of Taussig and others, magic is a powerful and even essential tool for political struggle, and though "the religion of the oppressed can assuage that oppression and adapt people to it, […] it can also provide resistance to that oppression" (Taussig 1980, 231). In the case of Bolivia and Colombia, Taussig sees the central role of what he calls "defetishization" (1980, 232). It is through devil belief that the power of the commodity

fetish remains held at arm's length, rather than utterly naturalized as part of the disenchanting process. By associating commodity fetishism with the devil, the enchanting power of capitalism remains in the spotlight, caught with its pants down.

A decade later, Taussig wrote *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. In this book, Taussig asks that we "think-through-terror" (1991, 5), terror being an expression of colonial magics as tools of authority, and as organic to the extreme brutality of colonies such as that of the rubber boom in the Colombian Amazon. Taussig seeks to reveal the subtle operations of coloniality by "penetrat[ing its] veil while retaining its hallucinatory quality," arguing that "the great mythologies […] work best when not dressed up as such but in their guise and in the interstices of the real and the natural. To see the myth in the natural and the real in magic [is] to demythologize history and to reenchant its reified representation" (1991, 10), whereas to detangle the overlapping realms of matter and meaning is to reduce through realist or naturalist logics and thereby uphold the power of the colonial mythos. To reiterate, myths are powerful insofar as they are veiled and naturalized.

To "reenchant" here is not an act of returning magical meaning lost to the colonized world, but of recognizing its powerful survival in colonial myth.

As such, in the text Taussig attends acutely to the need to study the colony not by reducing the ways in which it enchants its territory and subjects to social construction, but by analyzing how colonial dominance relies on an affective, semiotic network of fear and magic which is both orderly and utterly delirious. For Taussig, we run the risk of upholding the myths of the colonial state when we do not fully engage them as they are – exposed as powerful spells and world enchantments.

And what is the modern myth of nature, culture, and the impermeable boundary between the two if not a powerful spell cast the world? The same goes for absolute sex-gender dualism, and for the apportionment and delimitation of humanity and animality on the basis of racialization ("*racism subtends speciesism,*" as Morton *emphasizes*; 2017, 31).

"The more the real is deprived of enchantment, the more people yearn for enchantment" (Mbembe 2019, 110). For Achille Mbembe in *Necropolitics*, the definitive enchanting force within colonial modernity is what he describes as *a capitalist animism*. Returning again to the fantasy of our enchanted past, Mbembe describes a "*transactional world*" wherein "agency was shared between different entities and co-agency was itself a key element in the nurturing and circulation of all kinds of vital forces," and personhood was "was always a matter of composition and of assemblage of a multiplicity of vital beings" (2019, 107). This is because the basic state of being for the human in the "old African cognitive world" (Ibid.) was of one of determining humanness not by negating the other, but by supplementing the human body with it. Attributing the properties of plants and animals to oneself (and to the very definition of the human), alongside meaningful tools, treasures, and symbols, granted and extended humanness to and beyond one's 'bounded' corporeality. The material world was by no means separate from the human world.

Mbembe traces a shift in modernity that shuns these kinds of relationships with the nonhuman world. Things are other than us, as I have elaborated. However, simultaneous to this modern purification of the world during which nonhuman animacy is disenchanted, the development and extension of industrial technology subverts the claim "that the human person (who the West mistook for the white man) [is] neither a thing nor an object, [nor] an animal or a

machine" (Mbembe 2019, 108). Instead, despite our ostensible belief in the bounded and

bracketed human, "the technological devices that saturate our lives have become extensions of

ourselves" (Ibid.) and we understand our bodies to be *peopled* by many smaller, animate parts.

Not only is the work of the brain partially dislocated to the cellular phone, and the soul or social

identity is stationed online, but even the limbs and organs are understood to be replaceable. The

world is undermined, reduced to its parts which are on their own mechanical, but when

assembled, are animate.

> Neoliberalism has created the conditions for a renewed convergence, and at times fusion,
> between the living human being and objects, artifacts, or the technologies that
> supplement or augment us and are in the process transfigured and transformed by us. This
> event, which we can equate to a return to animism, is nevertheless not without danger for
> the idea of emancipation in this age of crypto-fascism. (Ibid.)

Mbembe places an emphasis on extractivism, which has also changed. Though

epistemologically we still understand that the global economy seeks and is fueled by raw

materials and cheap labor, as colonialism always has been, the ontology with which late modern

capitalism is concerned is "the world of processors and biological and artificial organisms"

(Mbembe 2017, 178). He calls this biopolitical world "the astral universe of screens, fluid shifts

in meaning, glimmerings and irradiation" (Ibid.), where what I have been referring to as mind is

much more commonly reduced to the individual brain. Brains, computers, both microscopic and

satellite technology… these are by no means simple and are in so ways, like science, defined by

their unfathomability (depth, speed, scale). But they are created both for and by immense

reduction. And it is through these technologies which interlock with our both bodily and

imagined personhood, our psychosoma, that "today's human is now firmly wedded to its animal

and its machine, to a set of artificial brains, of linings and interfacings (*de doublures et de

triplages*) that form the base of the extensive digitalization of its life" (Mbembe 2017, 179).

The same anthropological analysis which makes semiotic sense of indigenous animacies can also be applied to capitalist animism, where biopolitical state and market algorithms not only govern, but determine knowledge itself. Computation the most reliable source of "information about information" (Mbembe 2019, 109), meaning that it is the interconnected, vast but mathematically reducible network of meanings which are the arbiter of truth – in other words, animated symbolic algorithms. Who else to consult but the internet?

In the 1992 article "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," Mbembe argues that the analysis of colonial power must "go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination" including even the language of "hegemony v. counter-hegemony" (1992, 3). Instead, he calls attention to more subversive or subtle forms of counter-power. This is because for Mbembe, it is not only the commodity which is fetishized in the modern postcolony, but the very terms and symbols of what he calls the "master code": "the signs, vocabulary and narratives […] officially invested with a surplus of meanings which are not negotiable and which one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge" (1992, 4). Instead of engaging this encoded hegemony from merely the perspective of opposition, Mbembe puts an emphasis on how ordinary postcolonial subjects are able to "deceive and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly" (1992, 25), suggesting that it is from within —not beyond— the status quo of power that radical thought and activity burst forth.

Mbembe evokes laughter as an example of this internal and subtle subversion of hegemony: "by laughing [the postcolonial subject] drains officialdom of meaning and sometimes obliges it to function empty and powerless" (1992, 25). For Graeber and Wengrow, laughter is in fact anarchic. Much of *Dawn* is an effort to complicate the Rousseauian search for the '*Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*,' and it is laughter which they identify as having the power

to invalidate the 'inequality' of domination and the state: "humans may not have begun their history in a state of primordial innocence, but they do appear to have begun it with a self-conscious aversion to being told what to do. If this is so, we can at least refine our initial question: the real puzzle is not when chiefs, or even kings and queens, first appeared, but rather when it was no longer possible simply to laugh them out of court" (2021, 133). Here in Mbembe's colony, the laughing postcolonial subject does not simply deny the colonial master code, but instead laughs at it, rendering it impotent, *inoperative*; it is a laugh which takes power and threatens to "play with it and modify it" (Ibid.). I will return to the seditious act of *play* shortly.

It is in echoing Baudrillard (and Han) that Mbembe writes, "the great paradox of the twenty-first century is therefore the appearance of an ever-growing class of slaves without masters and of masters without slaves" (2019, 179). As an African scholar, his two resulting claims are all the more staggering. First that through the synthesis of the master-slave binary, blackness is reduced to the even more profound social death of "the 'depth Negro' [who] is the Other of this software humanity, the new figure of the species and typical of the new age of capitalism, in which self-reification ['optimization'] constitutes the best chance of self-capitalization" (2019, 178). In a world utterly subsumed by capitalist animism, the subaltern is no longer defined by their thingification and objectification, because all the things —both objects and beings— of late capitalism are employable, exploitable, extractable, profitable. Everything is enslaved by production. This new black non-subject is then rendered utterly killable, dislocated to the underside of biopower where necropolitics demands that some live while many must die.

And his second claim: that in a world "with no slaves, it is thought, no revolt can take place" (2019, 179).

Writing in an earlier moment of this same increasingly simulated reality, Baudrillard offered an aphoristic critique of hegemony as the collapse of the master-slave dialectic that is, to me, unforgettable. On page 47 of *Agony*, he declares that "power itself must be abolished —and not solely because of a refusal to be dominated, which is at the heart of all traditional struggles—but also, just as violently, in the refusal to dominate" (1978, 47). Extending the same thought to the bloody and scarred specificities of the postcolony, Mbembe writes, "so long as the newly emancipated slaves expend themselves in wanting to become the masters they will never be, things will never be able to be other than as they are. The repetition of the same, always and everywhere: such will be the rule" (2019, 179).

In this context, I rephrase my critique of re-enchantment: returning animacy to the world cannot possibly address capitalism because capitalism animates the whole world already. In a world where capitalism is the ultimate animist, I argue that the refusal to be dominated or dominate despite hegemony, and the effort to be neither slave nor master despite being both, is best expressed through Agamben's profanation.

IX. Profanation

Our greatest myth is that humans have broken from nature, a fall from Eden which has somehow left us as the sole conscious entity on Earth. By now in this paper, this modern myth — which has both allowed and spread with the European colonization of the globe— has been quite problematized. For Taussig, it is one of numerous obscure and covert myths which uphold colonial power, rendering colonies and postcolonies sites enchanted by hallucination and haunted

by the devil. For Mbembe, Baudrillard, Han, Skovgaard-Smith, and many others, these qualities extend as far as late capitalism does. Its animate web of myth, magic, and meaning spreads to cover the world, a rhizomatic pervasion and interpenetration of everything. The cables and signals of capital writhe over and through every inch of everything. But the question with which this project began remains: what do we do about it?

Of all the thinkers I have referenced, if Mbembe's claim that capitalism animates the world is true, it is perhaps Giorgio Agamben's claim that capitalism sacralizes the world which is most intimately related. Understanding both animation and sacralization as forms of what I have variously called enchantment, I offer Agamben's term *profanation* as a generative way to render colonial-modern enchantment inoperative.

Agamben's essay "In Praise of Profanation" begins with the key categories of the sacred (the consecrated) and the profane, which I introduced in chapter 1 with Bataille. He explains the two as follows: in ancient Rome, "'to consecrate' (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, [and] 'to profane' meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men" (2007, 73). Consecration makes things sacred, bringing them closer to the divine. At this level, there is nothing as irreconcilably opposed in human thought as the division between sacred and the profane: they are utterly, fundamentally different. They are mutually exclusive. The sacred repels the profane. The royal court, for example, is in this sense like the solar system, where people cannot touch the king (nor speak to him directly, instead using the avoidance register, just as one cannot refer to YHWH by name) just as a planet can never touch the sun; but nevertheless, *gravity* draws profane people to the sacred, like planets to the sun or insects to flame. It is the strange polarity announced by Durkheim between seduction

and attraction, where respect and honor for the sacred is defined by a fearful distance, an allured but averted gaze.

Profanation, on the other hand, is the removal of things from the realm of the sacred which returns them to the common. It is in being common that things can be freely used; *use* is a central concept in Agamben's work. To define profanation as such first requires understanding the consecration process. Like Bataille, Agamben draws on the scholarship of Hubert, Mauss, and Durkheim to argue that sacrifice is the apparatus which "sanctions the passage of something from the profane to the sacred, from the human sphere to the divine" (2007. 74). Put simply, sacrifice removes whatever it slaughters and/or offers from the profane realm of human use to the sacred realm, where it is utterly separate; when something has been sacrificed, it can no longer be put to use, classically meaning that it is thereby either manipulated and exploited or extracted from. The most common reversal of consecration is human touch, which Agamben refers to as having an inherent contagion to it – the earthly, dirty human touch "disenchants and returns to use what the sacred had separated and petrified" (Ibid.). When one touches the statue on the shrine, in Agamben's terminology, the object then becomes profane. It is for this reason that the sacred is in some sense implicitly inaccessible, totally formidable because it is totally forbidden. One can never touch it, nor even destroy it, because in attempting to do so, one only ends up coming into contact with the profane. Desecration is not destruction. We humans live in the profane, completely and always; the only possibility of departure is in death, when one no longer engages the world through touch, through *use*. Agamben also introduces the term 'pure' here, referring to a state of being not cleansed of profanity, but utterly profane: the "'pure' was the place that was no longer allotted to the gods of the dead and was now 'neither sacred, nor

holy nor religious, freed from all names of this sort'" (2007, 73). A pure thing is a profaned thing freed from sacredness.

For Agamben, what is most essential to attend to in this process is neither sacralization nor profanation alone, but "the caesura that divides the two spheres, the threshold that the [sacrificial] victim must cross, no matter in which direction" (Ibid.). It is this caesura, this gap, which religion exists to uphold: "*Religio* is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct" (Agamben, 2007, 75) – it affirms the division between (and hence definition of) heaven and earth. Profanation, then, in violating the boundary between the human and the divine, "open[s] the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use" (Ibid.).

Here Agamben draws an important distinction between profanation and secularization. "Secularization is a form of repression. It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact" (Agamben 2007, 77). Though the terminology of sacred and profane is no longer used, the categories and their influence remain. In a secular world, what was once consciously religious becomes unconsciously so – the religious distinction between the secular and the profane is completely naturalized. In this sense, secularization is identical to disenchantment.

And like how Jason Crawford traced the origins of the notion of disenchantment to medieval Europe, Agamben outlines how it is in the Christian adaptation of the sacred/profane duality that religion itself begins to secularize. Because in Christian thought it is God Himself who is sacrificed, transubstantiation and other rites which recall that sacrifice (upon which the

entire system is based) require a powerful emphasis on faith in the form. Christians' belief in the split between the divine and the human must be constantly tested and maintained. Here, the clear separation between human and God becomes gray, a "zone of undecidability[] where the divine sphere is always in the process of collapsing into the human sphere and man always already passes over into the divine" (Agamben 2007, 79).

And it is from Christianity that Agamben argues capitalism is born, and not merely as a secularized Protestantism per Weber, but as a "cultic religion" (2007, 80) of its own. It is Walter Benjamin who Agamben cites here, who argued that capitalism "develops parasitically from Christianity" and is defined first by its cultism; second, by its relentless permanence which dissolves all time into "a single, uninterrupted holiday, in which work coincides with the celebration of the cult"; and third, with its effort to create guilt rather than redemption.[24] Following this last characteristic, Agamben argues that "because it strives with all its might not toward redemption but toward guilt, not toward hope but toward despair, capitalism as religion does not aim at the transformation of the world but at its destruction" (Ibid.). Where Christianity complicated the coherency of the caesura, capitalism is utterly indifferent to it, though it maintains both of its categories.

> Capitalism, in pushing to the extreme a tendency already present in Christianity, generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion. Where sacrifice once marked the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of separation that assails every thing, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. This process is entirely indifferent to the caesura between sacred and profane, between divine and human. In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate. An absolute profanation without remainder now coincides with an equally vacuous and total consecration. (Agamben 2007, 81).

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[24] Atonement reconnects: at-one-ment. Reconciliation brings together: re- conciliare (Latin for 'bring together').

For Agamben, it is the commodity which defines this process. In commodification, the single object contains the division between the sacred and the profane in itself, the boundary completely dissolved. The commodified thing includes both use-value (profane) and exchange-value (sacred) and is fetishized through that internalized division. Despite its use value, it is also ungraspable, untouchable – you cannot touch the commodity part of the object itself, only the profane material which contains it. This commodification is extended to all things, including all inventions and tools, language, the forces of 'nature,' sexuality, animal and human bodies, and all experience and activity. Commodification is itself a form of sacralization, and therefore in commodifying the world (rendering the whole world productive and every aspect sellable), capitalism also *sacralizes the world*. It is in this way that capitalism, through the 'secular' (read: disenchanted) form of Christianity, enchants. Under this spell, even time must be 'spent' well: one must always be working towards *optimization*. You must become fully *you*, meaning that you are not yet you in the eyes of capitalism. In being sacralized, you and every other thing is barred from itself. As such, capitalism subscribes to Agamben's earlier definition of "religion […] as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere" (2007, 74). He refers to the separate sphere specific to capitalism, and into which it dislocates the world, as *consumption*: that which divides things from themselves.

"If to profane means to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred, the capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims at creating something," in fact an entire world, which is "absolutely unprofanable" (Agamben 2007, 82). The inability of consumer subjects under capitalism to be manifestly unable to profane things is the same as being unable to use them. Capitalism veils this act by rendering commodities 'property,' implying that the owner has access to them/mastery over them. But when a thing is property, it is removed from common

use – in other words, per the basic definition, sacralized. One cannot use the thing anymore, only wear it down.

For Agamben, the response must be to try to profane the unprofanable; we must return what is inaccessibly sacred to the common use. People must be able to live in, with, and of the world, not everywhere removed from it. To live is to use – to both consume and produce, to give and take, to push and pull. Life must be able to use. In a great reversal, to profane the unprofanable sacred world of commodities is to disenchant the enchanted and unveil what magics are hidden by secularity. Unlike secularization, profanation "neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both [secularization and profanation] are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized" (Agamben 2007, 77).

The kind of profanation necessary here is, calling back to Mbembe, what Agamben exemplifies by *play*. Following Benveniste, Agamben explains that "the spheres of play and the sacred are closely connected. Most of the games with which we are familiar derive from ancient sacred ceremonies, from divinatory practices and rituals that once belonged, broadly speaking, to the religious sphere" (2007, 75). But what makes play so radical is that it "frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it" (Agamben 2007, 76).

The methodology here is play as a deactivation, like Mbembe's laughter, which does not try to face hegemony (of capitalist sacralization) by destroying and replacing it, but by rendering it inoperative. In play, the mechanisms for religious division "are not effaced, but […] deactivated and thus opened up to a new, possible use" (Agamben 2007, 85). In being able to again use, life is able to continue. Selfhood survives and is in fact returned to the propertied,

bracketed consumer subject. The sacred and the profane remain in the world, but the power structures through which the sacred was made immanent and universal are drained. "The activity that results from [play] thus becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end" (Agamben 2007, 86). For example, children can play as cops and robbers, even manipulating the same tools and ideas (guns, criminality) as 'real life,' which we know to be trapped in twisted and violent systems of power. But they use these tools and ideas differently, draining them of their implication.

It is for this reason that capitalism works tirelessly to capture all expressions of use and free play as they emerge: "capitalism is nothing but a gigantic apparatus for capturing pure means, that is, profanatory behaviors" (Agamben 2007, 87). Radicality is always captured: every revolutionary ends up on a T-shirt. Acts which intend to profane the unprofanable, or disenchant the naturalized meanings of the capitalist world, are read by capitalist logics as the lunatic acts of individuals[25] And indeed, individual acts of liberation tend to become only parodic, psychotic, or perverse. These kinds of capture are facilitated by a sort of *encrypted*[26] language, related to what Mbembe called the colonial master code. Language itself is captured by capitalism, all playful, profane (and therefore liberatory) potential being everywhere estranged and subdued.

If we ask in response, "is a society without separation possible?" Agamben argues that "the question is perhaps poorly formulated" (2007, 87). Profanation is not based in abolishing the separation between sacred and profane, but in playing with this separation, and thereby rendering

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[25] Which is why, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari read the 'schizophrenic' act of deterritorialization as ultimate, profound subversion through severance and dislocation.
[26] See Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo's 2018 book *Decrypting Power*, as well as his and Marinella Machado Araujo's 2020 article "Is the Constitution the Trap? Decryption and Revolution in Chile."

it inoperative. It is capitalist colonial modernity which abolishes the separation, thereby rendering the whole world dominated and enslaved to production and the market, self-regulating and atomized into obedience. A universal working class which extends even to the nonhuman, which is not only extracted from, but exploited. "The classless society is not a society that has abolished and lost all memory of class differences but a society that has learned to deactivate the apparatuses of those differences in order to make a new use possible, in order to transform them into pure means" (Ibid.).

In summary, to articulate capitalism as animistic is one of the first moves we can take to re-implicate religious, spiritual, and magical thought in the social order. Disenchanted modernity is a hegemonic, universalizing enchantment. Modernity's claim that the human and the natural are distinct is nothing if not a deeply religious claim, upon which so much thought is built and yet which is so easily questioned by alternative perspectives and plural thought. The possibility of profanation then sees this myth as an enchantment that can be drained from our civilization.

In doing so, profanation leaves new room for *new* meaning, and perhaps new animism or multinatural enchantment, which has been waiting to burst forth. "Abolition is creative," I've heard people say recently. A prescribed burn leaves room for new growth.

By arguing that the ontological turn is a positive affirmation of the inherent and original animacy of the more-than-human world, I concluded that the world does not need human activity to enchant it. It is already enchanted. Capitalist animism and the hegemony of the colonial-modern myth are therefore enchantments which assert themselves only by declaring that the world they enchant is inherently disenchanted, along with their own activity on it. Colonial

capitalism is a secular religion which maintains its hegemony by declaring itself natural: a system of scientific and algorithmic operations based in pure fact and natural law.

It is not only that capitalism animates the world, but that capitalism is essentially a process of sacralizing everything, enchanting everything, so much so that its highest aim is to make it impossible to profane the world. If to profane, according to Agamben, means to return to common use, then what is needed to decolonize existence is not to re-enchant a dead world, but to profane a world animated and enchanted by colonial-capital.

We have now come a long way from my first chapter, which rehearsed the claim that a decolonial politics should reenchant the world. Instead, following Taussig, Han, Mbembe, and Agamben, it may be that the most powerful way to decolonize would be to profane the world: to break the spell and return lands and lives to common use, and free play.

X. Inoperativity

The following are the lyrics from the spoken word poem which introduces Godspeed You! Black Emperor's 1997 song "The Dead Flag Blues."

> The car's on fire and there's no driver at the wheel / And the sewers are all muddied with a thousand lonely suicides / And a dark wind blows.
> The government is corrupt / And we're on so many drugs / With the radio on and the curtains drawn
> We're trapped in the belly of this horrible machine / And the machine is bleeding to death
> The sun has fallen down / And the billboards are all leering / And the flags are all dead at the top of their poles
> It went like this:
> The buildings toppled in on themselves / Mothers clutching babies / Picked through the rubble / And pulled out their hair
> The skyline was beautiful on fire / All twisted metal stretching upwards / Everything washed in a thin orange haze
> I said, "Kiss me, you're beautiful / These are truly the last days"
> You grabbed my hand / And we fell into it / Like a daydream / Or a fever
> We woke up one morning and fell a little further down / For sure as the valley of death / I open up my wallet / And it's full of blood.

(Godspeed You! Black Emperor 1997)

Amid such chaos, I ask again, what do we do?

Perhaps nothing.

The act of profaning the enchantment of colonial-capitalist modernity is the suspension

and cessation of a system which demands from the entire world a constant productivity, a

constant *doing*. Capitalism demands that every single one of us works ourselves to death; but

what if we could stop doing. What would we do then?

In the state of free play, meaning remains, but it has no purpose. In this nihilism,

potentiality is not depleted, but freed.

The perpetual sense of labor – of tasks, of always having to *do*, is rendered inoperative by

profanation. Just like the recognition of never having been modern, and just like the recognition

of a baseline animation and meaning found in the real living world, profanation recognizes our

inherent freedom to not have to *do*. We do not need to *destroy* modernity, because we have never

even been modern; we have only been seduced, bewitched, *enchanted* into thinking that we are.

And we do not need re-enchant the world, because it has never been devoid of enchantment.

Likewise, we do not need to *do* in any sense of the word that capitalism has invented, but instead

need to actively, radically, and perhaps violently *refuse to do.*

The formal political theory that is closest to profanation is known by political

philosophers as destituent power. Destituent power is an approach to radical political change that

does not have as its goal the creation or constitution of a new law, a new political order, but

instead deactivates the endless cycle of revolutions that had defined much of politics. In this

deactivation, political violence is brought to an end rather than perpetuated. As an ending to my

study, I would like to suggest that inoperativity, the guiding principle of destituent power, is the appropriate response to the hegemonic modes of power that govern our reality, and that it provides the generative basis for 'what comes next.' When one reads the capitalist and colonial world as disenchanted, the response usually has something to do with *returning* or *adding* enchantment to the world; re-sacralizing what has been made profane by the relentless despondence of capital everywhere on a postcolonial globe. In contrast, my suggestion is that what might be more *decolonial* is the *negating* act of destituency, as expressed already through profanation. As with profanation, this kind of negation is only something I want to propose.

How disturbing that the motto of neoliberalism should be 'laissez faire' – *let it happen.* And how appropriate that it should remain the defining phrase even as the market becomes the despot: a logic which forces itself upon everything. But of course, in the details, this seems paradoxical – how can an expressly liberal economy coexist with absolute state and police domination in most countries across the globe? As Agamben explains in "For a Theory of Destituent Power" (2014), this is possible because late modern governance exists in a perpetual 'state of exception.' The modern liberal state creates circumstances under which they can make use of their powerful military capacity anytime and anywhere within their territory (which, in the case of an imperial superpower like the United States, effectively encloses the planet). In order to make sure that this state of exception exists ad infinitum, a "stable state of creeping and fictitious emergency without any clearly identifiable danger" is maintained perpetually, through the manipulation of concepts such as 'security reasons' and crisis. "While the state of exception was originally conceived as a provisional measure, which was meant to cope with an immediate danger in order to restore the normal situation, the security reasons constitute today a permanent

technology of government" (2014). This is a very effective tool to maintain total power, because colonial state apparatuses realize that "*since governing the causes is difficult and expensive, it is more safe and useful to try to govern the effects*" (2014, emphasis original). Where the ancien régime sought to control "the causes" of its domain, modern biopolitics knows that it exerts more effective, efficient, and universal power by operating on the basis of protecting and securing the populace; it becomes a control society where police do not impose order but manage disorder. If everything is in active crisis, always, then it is perfectly justified to record everything everywhere on camera, and to track the biological, spatial, and digital data of each subject. In fact, it justifies seeing each subject as a possible criminal. "The unspoken principle which rules our society can be stated like that: *every citizen is a potential terrorist*. But what is a State which is ruled by such a principle? Can we still define it as democratic State? Can we even consider it as being something political?" (Ibid.).

This security paradigm is marked by an inherently fearful calculus – it is so afraid of death that it ends up rendering more and more life killable. It reads everything as constantly verging on anarchy which intends to overthrow it and takes each of these threats as an opportunity to govern more profitably. It is in response to this perpetually-fearful state that Agamben argues against the liberal "political tradition of modernity" which, beginning with the French Revolution, "has conceived of radical changes in the form of a revolutionary process that acts as the *pouvoir constituant*, the 'constituent power' of a new institutional order. I think that we have to abandon this paradigm and try to think something as a *puissance destituante*, a 'purely destituent power', that cannot be captured in the spiral of security" (Ibid.). Again drawing upon Benjamin, this time in *Toward the Critique of Violence*, Agamben calls for what the former refers to as "a pure violence which could 'break the false dialectics of lawmaking

violence and law-preserving violence'" (Ibid.). This is destituent power, defined first by a total refusal to uphold and perpetuate the extant form of power (a compelling example of which is the general strike), and second by the refusal to constitute more forms of power after it. Destituent power suggests that not only can law be rendered destitute by refusing to obey it, but so can the market, the military, the patriarchal family structure, the extractive and productive industries, the colonial apparatuses of racialization and subordination, and all the other world-enchanting forces of late modern capitalism. It places tremendous weight on the possibility of refusal. Where late capitalist power clenches its teeth and exhorts, "laissez faire!", destituency takes as its stubborn motto the words of Herman Melville's Bartleby, who counters, "I would prefer not to."

But the form of refusal which is most important in destitution is that which is exemplified by profanation. Profanation does not seek to replace the old forms of capitalist sacralization with its own new mode, but instead, to open the world to free play. Most forms of revolutionary politics intend to replace the old with the new, which is defined as destituent power's opposite: constituent power. Most forms of power are constituent, constituting themselves on whatever basis, be it a liberal constitution or the divine right of kings. They outline a set of truths which frame reality in their favor, and then operate based on them. But destituent power is a fairly simple alternative: "while a constituent power destroys law only to recreate it in a new form, destituent power, in so far as it deposes once and for all the law, can open a really new historical epoch" (Agamben 2014). This is why, again recalling Baudrillard, we must both refuse to be dominated and refuse to dominate (by *constituting* new, ideal forms of life, and then imposing them).

To re- or dis-enchant the world is a constituent act, because it first names what the world *really is*, and then asserts how it *must be*. But destituent power does not seek to assert what the

world really should be: instead, it *allows* the world to blossom forth in response to itself, not to imposition.

Left thought has always understood that alternative ways to think and live can exist, and sometimes even do *already* exist. Alter-lifeways are alive everywhere, demanding recognition: as soon as the oh-so-impenetrable concrete is allowed to wear down and fissure, grass begins to grow through the cracks. For a Hegelian, perhaps, such alterity is what allows life in the first place; what keeps life pushing forward against "the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of 'objective' knowledge" (Haraway 1988, 592). If this is true, then we know that if the extant forms of power were rendered inoperative, alter-life would immediately come into being. I cannot possibly claim to know what this would look like, but I can trust the many human and nonhuman peoples of this world to life in harmony if the conditions which keep them from doing so are deactivated.

I argue that this would lead to what Viveiros de Castro calls "permanent decolonization" (2014, 40). Just as the Mayan revolt against the colonizers has never really ended, and in the 20th and 21st centuries taken on strikingly generative forms where modern coloniality has failed to govern them. ("As the Zapatistas also show, it was in the[Chiapas] territories, where no major state or empire had existed for centuries, that women came most prominently to the fore in anti-colonial struggles"; Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 376.) The rendering inoperative of colonial enchantment is not the negation of life in the postcolony (for which Haraway, Harrison, and others critiqued postmodern anthropology) but the negation of negations – it is constituent power which renders democracy, anarchy, the commons, indigeneity, and ecological metabolism inoperative. This is why profanation is the necessary response to the enchantment of

disenchantment. Profanation renders usable what capitalist sacralization takes away from the

world of common use, the living world.

Conclusion

At the end of the 2009 debate with Descola, Latour quotes Viveiros de Castro as having answered a question from the audience with the following words: "'Anthropology is the theory and practice of permanent decolonization. […] Anthropology today is largely decolonized, but its theory is not yet decolonizing enough'" (2009, 2). In listening again to Viveiros de Castro's advice, I return here to the decolonial anthropology which reminds us that alter-life is possible after (and through) the destitution of colonial modernity. As a final source I call upon ontological anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena's suggestive politics, where the "aim is not to induce to action but, once again, to slow down reasoning and provoke the kind of thinking that would enable us to undo, or more accurately, unlearn, the single ontology of politics" (2010, 360-361). It is through undoing and unlearning that colonized and racialized human life can gesture towards future worlds which are recall ancestral webs of life: the ecologies of the precolony. Like for Haraway and Latour, de la Cadena sees emergent hybrid life as a key category in politics. The nonhuman demands to be accounted for in politics; in fact, after Agamben, perhaps it is only politics if all the beings involved can speak, and contribute their perspectives, their ontologies. De la Cadena's is "an invitation to take seriously (perhaps literally) the presence in politics of those actors, which, being other than human, the dominant disciplines assigned either to the sphere of nature (where they were to be known by science) or to the metaphysical and symbolic fields of knowledge" (de la Cadena 2010, 336). Not unrelated to Latour's ANT, de la Cadena highlights a politics of emergent actors which demand to be centered, rather than contextualized. Where politics is traditionally situated within a positivist world, de la Cadena's different but interconnected worlds-of-actors and the distinct political relationships they bring into being demand that we attend to them rather than situate (taxonomize) them in 'political

contexts.' This *demand* is the language of the persistent reality of the actors at play, a form of

politics which defines the simultaneously ecological and decolonial emphases of contemporary

indigenous movements in South America and elsewhere. And it is this *demand* that gives de la

Cadena's "earth-beings" (Ibid.) like mountains, forests, and nonhuman species not only primacy,

but agency.

To undo and unlearn leaves room for new thought,[27] and for de la Cadena and the other

anthropologists of the ontological turn, this may manifest as and through pluriversal ontologies

like multinaturalism. But we do not arrive at these changes by merely thinking differently. De la

Cadena's move here is to "disrupt[] the consensus that barred indigenous practices from politics,

assigned them to religion or ritual, and occluded this exclusion" (2010 360). We must

specifically "force the ontological pluralization of politics" (de la Cadena 2010: 360), wherein a

pluriverse of worlds coexist without commensurability, against any unification under one

hegemonic mode of thought. In this politics of many different worlds, things beyond the human

have agency. The magic of the ontological turn is not merely recognizing the influence that

nonhuman lifeforms, objects, and symbols have on us, but allowing their influence to be heard as

loudly as any voice, and to affect politics as such. And, after Morton in *Humankind*, we must

allow instinctive solidarity to emerge between us. Kohn, referencing Descola's animism, argues

that "what […] becomes important is the continual investment by humans and nonhumans in

maintaining and capacitating a shared world" (2015, 317). Later, he writes that "anthropology

can become a project of cosmic 'diplomacy.' […] The anthropologist as diplomat is invested in

successfully moving among worlds, as she recognizes that our shared survival is at stake in

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[27] Recall that for Kohn, "all thoughts are alive. It is about 'the living thought'" (2013, 72).

making room for these various modes of existence and what they may have to contribute" (2015, 321).

When the Maroons of the Caribbean came down from the mountains to demand that this antiblack world remember black life, remember African history, traditions, and myths, as well as those of the Taíno, they did so first not by seizing but by *burning* the plantations. Destituent power acts on the basis of this same memory and should be able to burn what must be burned. Just as Mbembe suggested in not facing hegemony with counter-hegemony, nor facing enslavement with the intention to become a master, this form of radicality becomes not that which replaces old power, nor "a strategy to win hegemony" (de la Cadena 2010, 360), but that which renders its logics fragile and ultimately destitute. I believe that recognizing the magic, the animacy, the *enchantment* of the living world leaves room for such "unlearning" of "the single ontology," as de la Cadena put it.

The core ontology of colonial modernity is this myth of the nature/culture Severing. Politically, we must be able to see that other people (both human and nonhuman) have lived, do live, and can live again in other ontologies. This requires destituting, rendering inoperative, and profaning the enchantments which blind us to this immanent reality. It is in the charnel ground of late modern myth that we can plant seeds. But what kinds of seeds to we plant? How might me remember how to sow them? When reality only makes sense one way, is it just magical thinking to suggest anything alternative?

Yes, but we can think magic.

In summary. There is a belief in contemporary left politics that we must re-enchant the world because it has been disenchanted by coloniality: the meanings and sacredness which

uphold community and sustain harmony with the earth have been drained through the 'Western' project of colonization, modernization, and capitalism. The problem with this belief is that we cannot re-enchant what we understand to be inherently disenchanted.

Via the ontological turn in anthropology, an understanding of the world emerges that is not disenchanted, but inherently imbued with meanings. Enchantment is not applied upon or removed from nonhuman bodies by human minds but is woven into the very polymorphous matter of the multiplicity of bodies. All things are animated.

From this perspective, coloniality is not a disenchanting force but the opposite – a hegemonic enchantment defined by capitalist animism and the modern myth. In response, its ontological/epistemological force must be subverted not through the constituent creation of a new form of life, but the rendering-inoperative of the colonial form's perpetuity. This destitution, which I focus on in the form of *profanation,* would not leave a world desolate and disenchanted in its wake, but instead *allow* life to take forms of growth and death which perpetuate in total responsivity. I argue that the specter of such a decolonized world can be glanced in our own, through the metaphysics of *multinaturalism*.

I would like to finish with a 1968 poem written by Diane di Prima in her collection *Revolutionary Letters*. This poem illustrates the idea that life can emerge in, through, and after the old colonial-modern logics are rendered inoperative.

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #4

Left to themselves people grow their hair.
Left to themselves they take off their shoes.

Left to themselves they make love sleep easily
share blankets, dope & children they are not lazy or afraid

they plant seeds, they smile, they speak to one another. The word coming into its own: touch of love; on the brain, the ear.

We return with the sea, the tides
we return as often as leaves, as numerous
as grass, gentle, insistent, we remember
the way,
our babes toddle barefoot thru the cities of the universe. (di Prima 2021, 7)

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