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COVER STORY

Bruno Latour

by David Berreby

THOMAS F. GIERYN IS GOING OVER WELL. The white shoebox-size gizmo he's dragged all the way to Paris has hooked up to a French Macintosh without a burp, and now the green light is blink-blinking and the compact disc inside is spinning. On the big screen in front of him, pictures flash by: documents, photographs, blueprints. When he clicks on an architect's plans for a laboratory, a photograph of the finished space appears on the screen. Another click, and the scrawled handwriting of an in spector's report pops up. The knot of French graduate students in the basement of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines in Paris is suitably impressed. Exclamations of approval waft over the computers and book-filled metal shelves and institutio nal green carpeting.

Gieryn, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Indiana at Bloomington, is displaying a hypertextual account of the construction of a biotechnology lab. Gieryn's web of links has no story line, no heroes or villains, no overarching theory about the search for biological truth or even the inescapable social forces that rule the building trade. As he moves from document to interview to photograph, following suggestions tossed out by students, the building comes to seem less like a work of a rchitecture than an organism that somehow assembled itself out of a dense soup of history, science, and politics.

"See, what we've done here," Gieryn says with an eager grin, "is black-box Bruno Latour."

SITTING ON A BOOKSHELF behind his students, Bruno Latour smiles back. Latour is the man who turned "black box" -- originally a term in engineering for any device into whose workings one does not peer -- into a central concept in the soci ology of science. A black box in Latourspeak is any combination of ideas, things, and people whose output is assumed to be truth. Latour is one of the most rigorous thinkers in the loose combination of disciplines known as "science studies" -- an amalgam of the sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and rhetoric of science -- and if there's one thing he dislikes, it's the naïve concept of truth required to place your faith in a black box. His is an unusually uncompromising brand of skepticism, and th ough Gieryn plays up to it, elsewhere it has earned Latour little affection. The scientists he studies are used to having their work treated as just such a box -- at least by nonscientists -- so many of them loathe Latour's approach. And many social scien tists who ought to be his allies find him slippery; they interpret his skepticism as a refusal to commit to a methodology. At the moment, though, it is not disengagement that shows on Latour's face. It is amusement. He's clearly entertained by the notion of Gieryn's American undergraduates diligently translating his ideas onto Hypercard.

EARLIER IN THE DAY, as Gieryn and Latour traded gossip over lunch in a Paris restaurant, a fax arrived at Latour's office -- three pages of a new book, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels With Science,* in whic h Latour comes in for some particularly extravagant bashing. The book, published last spring by Johns Hopkins University Press and now in its third printing, is a shotgun blast at critical theory in general, but it is particularly cutting in its attacks o n science studies. Back in the United States, its rebukes were already prompting exchanges of soul-searching e-mail among science studies scholars.

Latour, it turns out, is one of the book's most prominent targets. Latour doesn't believe in facts, complain the authors, Paul R. Gross, a former director of the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory, and Norman Levitt, a professor of math at Rutgers. L atour, they say, depicts science as "a savage brawl in which, from day to day, the dominant chieftain is he who assembles, by dint of wealth, prestige, and warrior cunning, the biggest and nastiest gang of henchmen." Objection gives way to protestation - - "effrontery is far too mild a word for Latour's wisecracks" - - which soon becomes ad hominem: Latour is "a Panurgian imp, come to

catch all those solemn scientists with their pants down, a project that delights his largely antiscientific audience." Wo rst of all, they seem to think, is Latour's "seductive charm."

That last accusation is unquestionably true. Charm is the first thing you notice about Latour. At forty-seven, in the rumpled serenity of his red turtleneck and corduroys, he is a tall man whose easy grin and merry eyes peering down a long face give him t he look of a Gallic Jimminy Cricket; he has an air of being, as the French say, *bien dans sa peau:* at ease in his own skin. Born in the city of Beaune, in Burgundy, into a famous wine-growing family -- its wine is bottled under the name Louis Latou r -- Latour is an epicurean through and through. He refuses to allow himself to be called a French intellectual, that term having been tainted, he says, by "fifty years of bad German influence on French academic writing." "My only ambition," he told an interviewer a couple of years ago, "is that people would say 'I read a Latour 1992' with the same pleasure as they would say 'I drank a Latour 1992.' "

After class, however, Latour's aristocratic poise frays a bit. He contemplates the fax with faint distaste, twirling a paper clip in his fingers. "Of course things are real," he says. "What do you call those things that make a car slow down? A speed bump . The British call them 'the sleeping policeman.' I like to say, 'the sleeping policeman is not a sign. The sleeping policeman will break your damn car.' "

But, he adds, "truth works by inscribing signs into things. I say, all right, yes, it's true. But that doesn't explain how it's made. Science and technology are constructed, as a house is constructed, of many different things. Science is interesting not because it is outside society but because it isn't."

THE NICETIES OF Latour's arguments have been missed before. Four years ago, a professorship at the prestigious Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton seemed such a sure thing that Latour gave notice at the Ecole des Mines and he and h is wife, their son, and their daughter began househunting in New Jersey. Latour had been nominated by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Harold F. Linder Professor at the institute, and vigorously championed by other faculty members in the social science s. Latour was pretty pleased about it, too. Institute appointments are famous not only for their salaries -- the going rate, says one Princetonian,

is 10 percent higher than the average salary elsewhere -- but also for their lush offices, their ample supp ort staff, and the complete freedom they offer to work as one pleases. "I was surprised they nominated me in the first place," Latour says. "It was a stamp of approval for the field."

But then his dossier hit the desks of faculty members at the IAS's math and science schools. While nobody will speak in detail about what happened next, the outline is clear. All twenty-two members of the IAS's four schools -- Mathematics, Natural Scienc es, Historical Studies and Social Sciences -- must approve a candidate for a full appointment. The scientists and mathematicians were infuriated, and -- in a reversal that is extremely rare at this usually collegial institute -- Latour's appointment eithe r lost a faculty vote or never came to one.

Latour says he withdrew before a final vote could be taken, "because I knew I would embarrass the people who backed me. It took me months to get over it." The stories vary, but to judge by the number of unreturned phone calls, and refusals to comment, fe elings are still bitter.

"It was my responsibility as a faculty member to learn a bit about the subject, and when I did I was appalled," says Frank Wilczek, a distinguished particle physicist who is a faculty member in the institute's School of Natural Sciences. Wilczek wouldn't discuss the Latour appointment specifically, but he was willing to talk about what he calls "this school of science studies."

"Roughly speaking," he says, "this school takes the techniques anthropologists have used to study preliterate cultures -- going in without preconceptions and observing -- and applies [these methods] to science. That is clearly inappropriate in the study o f modern science. You can't make sense of the endeavor without reference to what it is about. It is a human endeavor and scientists have all the human motivations, but ultimately the test is a confrontation with reality."

OF COURSE, PLENTY OF academics take exception to work being done across campus in some field of which they vaguely disapprove. But the outrage scientists feel for science studies is fueled by more than intellectual disdain. Government an d business are funding less basic research in science. Congress has voted to kill the superconducting supercollider. Doubts have been raised about the space station, even about

the human-genome project. The turf is shrinking, and so, like tribes forced to ward the same oasis by a drought, scientists and sociologists of science are starting to threaten and skirmish. Gieryn was in the audience at a recent opening of a Smithsonian exhibit on science in American life at which the keynote speaker -- the chairma n of the board of the American Chemical Society -- decried all incursions of critical theory into the sciences, calling postmodernism the "new nihilism" and warning that this intellectual contagion "is slowly moving out of the humanities and is now questi oning the core beliefs of science."

But science studies seems unlikely to go away. What began as a movement inside the sociology department of the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s has gained a firm foothold on the American academy. The Society for the Social Studies of Science, founded in 1976, now has 650 members, according to Steve Fuller, who runs a program in social policy in the sociology department at the University of Durham in England and runs the Internet science-studies bulletin board. Science-studies programs, once forced to stay in the wings of engineering schools, are proliferating in American sociology and anthropology departments. UC-San Diego's science-studies program, which is supported by a grant of $2 million spread over five years from the National Science Foundation , is the best-known of the bunch, but there are others: Rensselaer, Cornell, MIT. Then there's the ultimate proof of a discipline having entered the corridors of power: approval from Washington. Among the jobs posted recently on the science-studies Intern et BBS was that of program director for the Congress-ional Office of Technology Assessment's Industry, Telecommunications, and Commcerce Program. This September, the National Science Foundation awarded a National Medal of Science for the first time to a s ociologist, Robert K. Merton. Though he is far better liked by scientists than Latour is, Merton also studies their work from the outside.

DEBATES OVER CONSTRUCTIVISM -- the assertion that knowledge is made, not simply discovered -- undergird most thought in the humanities and social sciences of the past twenty years. Science, though, is a special case. The reputation of tr anscendental truth may be at an all-time low in the liberal arts, but science still gets away with talking about fact. Even students who dismiss the notion of a better or worse interpretation in English literature will cite scientific studies of acid rain as the basis for signing petitions and putting up banners.

Science-studies scholars put all that to one side. Wilczek is right -- Latour does place scientists in the position usually occupied by Trobriand Islanders and other "native" peoples. Rejecting the more traditional history of science as something akin to military campaigns recounted by victorious generals, Latour studies, he says, what scientists really do. "For Latour, the Heart of Darkness is the solid-state-physics laboratory," grouse Gross and Levitt. Latour accords the scientific tribal belief syste m the respect one would accord any other *Weltanshauung*, but no more. In fact, he reflects, perhaps a bit less. "We can be tougher with scientists than with aborigines," he says. "Scientists are not used to opponents." And whereas historians of sci ence are used to having their work evaluated by scientists, Latour argues that sociologists need not submit to such vetting. This is not to say he does not respect science, Latour says. But, he adds, a friend of his who studies baboons "has great respect for the baboons. But the baboons do not review her grant proposals."

Not that scientists still hold to the absolutist view that they climb inexorably from one truth to the next. Thomas Kuhn put that model to rest in 1962 with *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn's framework -- in which science passes from one consistent and well-defended world-view, or paradigm, to the next -- is familiar to anyone who has passed through an introductory philosophy or history of science course over the past thirty years. Kuhn was succeeded by more radical thinkers who storm ed science's barricades with a kind of intellectual republicanism. The late UC-Berkeley philosopher Paul Feyerabend, for example, argued that creationism should also be taught along with evolutionary theory in the schools.

But none of these thinkers dislodged the conviction that science has a subject, which is nature, and that nature really exists "out there." Kuhn may have dispelled our wide-eyed faith in the selfless pursuit of truth by disinterested scientists, but he s till considered the ultimate test of a theory to be how well it measured up against objective reality. Feyerabend argued for greater democracy among intellectual styles, but he never doubted there could be an account of nature that could be said to be tru e.

Latour doesn't address whether a theory is true or not. Frankly, he doesn't care. "To call a claim 'absurd' or knowledge 'accurate' has no more meaning than to call a smuggler trail 'illogical' and a freeway 'logical,' "

Latour writes in his most famous w ork, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Harvard, 1987). "The only things we want to know about these sociological pathways is where they lead to, how many people go along them with what sort of vehicles, and how easy they are to travel; not if they are wrong or right."

What Latour is after is not only the epistemology of scientific inquiry but also the culture in which that inquiry takes place. Scientists generally shrug off as faddish nonsense much of what is embraced by their counterparts in the softer disciplines. M ost scientists, if confronted with a philosophical objection, would bring up Leibniz's definition of a philosopher: someone who kicks up a lot of dust and then complains that he can't see. Most scientists would agree with Lewis Wolpert, a professor of med ical biology at University College in London, who, in a popular apologia called *The Unnatural Nature of Science* (Harvard, 1992), argues that science is a collection of rigorously-arrived-at truths that differ from common sense, in much the way that the knowledge that the earth spins is different from the common-sense language that refers to "the sun rising."

Latour and his followers make no such concessions to the separateness of science. For them, as Latour once said, even Feyerabend "is a Protestant, criticizing the religion from within." Fuller puts it this way: "There is this tradition from Karl Popper and the logical positivists through to Kuhn, which is that science is separate from the rest of society. In the late 1970's different people started pointing out that all the evidence for science as a rational, truth-seeking activity came from the scientists. And they began to argue that the laboratory is not all that different from other social organizations, like the factory floor or the tribe."

FOR MANY PEOPLE IN science studies, reading Latour was the intellectual bolt of lightning that knocked old habits of thought out of them. "The breakthrough book was *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts,*" says Full er. Published in English by Sage in 1979, it is a case study of what scientists in a California laboratory "really do" -- that is to say, what they're up to when they, for example, feed carefully prepared samples of chemicals, tissue and so on into "inscr iption devices" and take down what the devices say. "*Laboratory Life* convinced me that conventional philosophy of science is just rhetorical trappings, not what science is really about," Fuller says.

But again and again, Latour stresses that he *likes* science. He likes to remind me that he and his co-author, Steve Woolgar, got Jonas Salk to write an introduction to *Laboratory Life*. And, like scientists, he loathes the smug, self-important , "gotcha!" quality that characterizes much recent work about science in both the social sciences and the humanities. "Most of the literature, when it isn't boring, is debunking and cynical. It doesn't even believe in itself," he says.

What Latour dislikes most is the way sociologists and anthropologists tend to privilege certain social categories over other ones. For one thing, scientists have no trouble batting away such theories. "Some where, Durkheim remarks that even astronomy is a ctually the study of society," says Seth Lloyd, a physicist and complexity theorist at Los Alamos National Laboratory. "Well, that is as reductionist as the most hard-core physicist's claim that everything can be boiled down to just quarks and electrons."

"The social sciences have no 'out there' or 'up there' to serve as a foundation," Latour once told an interviewer. For that reason, Latour objects to feminist critics of science (who elevate gender to a transcendant principle), Marxist critics of science (who do the same with economics), and Foucauldian critics of science (who repeat the process with power). They, in turn, object to him. The British feminist epistemologist Hillary Rose, for instance, in a review of *Science in Action,* wrote: "By cu tting himself adrift from those who point to the dominant interests which science serves and to the masculine composition of its workforce and its knowledge, [Latour] sidesteps the crucial challenge.... Unless feminism engages in a rather sharp struggle f or social and conceptual space, both networks and analysis are likely to remain integral to masculinist hegemony."

Quite a few sociologists dislike Latour in return. One year ago, Latour resigned from a visiting professorship at the UC-San Diego science-studies program, in which he had been active since it was founded in 1989. The reason was not another donnybrook wit h scientists but the refusal of the sociology department to approve the interdisciplinary program's choice of sociologists. "The sociology department, which used to be good and which is now terribly bad, has overruled all of us [in science studies]," Lato ur writes by e-mail. "Instead of appointing

[Latour's candidate] for the sociology of science slot in our program, they prefered to appoint nobody."

Latour also butts heads with scholars within science studies. Though he admires the much-praised *Leviathan and the Air Pump,* by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (Princeton, 1985), Latour criticizes the way its authors give precedence to social categories. A study of the disputes between the philosopher Thomas Hobbes and the physicist and chemist Robert Boyle, the book argues that the ideas of reliability and accuracy that prevailed in seventeenth-century British science derived not from experimentation in and out of the laboratory but from codes of gentlemanly conduct. Fine, says Latour, but we must be careful not to set up ideas of society and gentlemanly conduct -- ideas themselves created by the special "laboratories" in which sociologists work -- as absolute truths.

Many in Latour's field find this resistance to terra firma irritating. Fuller, for one, says, "Latour never wants to be forthright: should science be refereed by nonscientists? Should the public be more involved? How can you not ask these questions? The philosophy of science has to be reincarnated as policy. Should we be spending $9 billion dollars on a superconducting supercollider? The discipline has to have something to say."

All this puts Latour right where he wants to be: in the middle, assailed by left and by right, by scientists and by sociologists. Friends and adversaries alike describe him as evasive -- half the trickster, half the little kid who says the emperor has no clothes. Of Gross and Levitt, Latour says, "They're fighting the modernist fight. But they choose me wrongly. Of course it's ridiculous to say it's all politics, all signs, or all gender. It is ironic, because the French postmodernists hate the stuff I do -- I believe in objectivity, options, democracy. They see me as reactionary. They think I've gone back to naïve realism."

SO WHAT DO SCIENTISTS actually do? They create, and strive to extend, networks of human and nonhuman actors. "Scientists and engineers [are] constantly mobilizing large numbers of allies, evaluating their relative strength, reversing the balance of forces, trying out weak and strong associations," Latour writes.

For instance, the Louis Pasteur who emerges in Latour's *The Pasteurization of France* (Harvard, 1988) -- a study of how Pasteur succeeded in winning over France to his germ theory of disease -- is a thinker-politician, a skilled manipulator of the g overnment and the press as well as a great researcher. *All* of his skills are important. "Pasteur went to blind wine tastings to demonstrate his theory of fermentation," Latour says. "That's not just showmanship. That's why he's such a good scientis t."

This egalitarianism is reflected in a favorite Latourian word: "symmetry." To understand symmetry, consider, again, *The Pasteurization of France*. To say that Pasteur succeeded because his discovery was true about nature, for instance, suggests that "nature," a realm neatly separated from society, can be used to explain the causes of activities within society -- that once some discovery about "nature" is shown to be true, society rearranges itself to conform to this truth. According to Latour, this is asymmetrical, because it suggests that an understanding of nature is somehow more powerful, more dispositive, more fundamental, than an understanding of society. On the other hand, one might discard the idea of truth entirely and argue that Pasteur's s uccess can be explained entirely through the lens of "society" -- that, say, the hygienic regulations that stemmed from Pasteur's work were in fact enacted in order to give those in power a new way to control the lower classes. This explanation, Latour ar gues, is a mirror image of the first. Instead of saying that the truth of nature determines social arrangements, it says that social arrangements determine what is construed as nature's truth.

Both views are equally naïve, Latour says, because both proceed from the assumption that "nature" and "society" are somehow divisible. The symmetrical way to see Pasteur, Latour argues, is to see the split between nature and society as false. Thus, p art of Pasteur's success was his alliance, in the social world, with hygienists, for whom he provided a good explanation of the diseases they fought. But part of his success was also his alliance, in the natural world, with the microbes themselves, for wh om he became spokesman and interpreter. In other words, Latour rejects neither insight: not the insight into society nor the insight into nature. He simply claims that neither should be used to explain the other. It is a position of radical humility: poi nting out an asymmetry does not require the pointer to stand on some higher theoretical ground. It's a gesture not unlike pointing out that a painting in a hallway is hanging

crooked.

Before all this really makes sense, however, you have to understand Latour's most remarkable claim: that when you track the shifting alliances that scientists form as they go about producing scientific knowledge, you mustn't draw an impermeable line betw een human and nonhuman. In *Science in Action,* Latour introduces the concept of the "spokesman or spokeswoman," by which he means anyone who speaks for anything in the competition of networks: "Bill [a union representative], for instance, represents people who could talk, but who, in fact, cannot all talk at once. Davis [a scientist] represents neutrinos that cannot talk, in principle, but which are made to write, scribble and sign thanks to the device set up by Davis. So in practice, there is not m uch difference between people and things; they both need someone to talk for them." Latour would not deny that neutrinos "really" exist, he says. But that is not what interests him. He wants to know what social, political and cultural business the spokes people are up to and how they attach the truth of neutrinoid existence to things such as the pages of textbooks, the agendas of Congressional committees, and the representations of the world that pass through art and popular culture. Given the intricacy o f the web, he argues, it is impossible to say where truth-seeking ends and politics, or theology, begins.

IN LATOUR'S LONG RECTANGULAR office, papers pile up next to a Minitel, the French phone-computer that looks like a miniature PC. An assistant whom Latour pays himself works against the far wall on a first-generation Macintosh. Hanging f rom a push-pin is the motherboard of a personal computer, flecked like a bright green sea with the shiny ceramic colors of transistors, to which has been pasted a tiny reproduction of the fifteenth-century altarpiece of the cathedral of Beaune, painted by Roger van der Weyden. "I studied that painting from my earliest childhood," Latour says. "My father was curator of the art museum. I would look at it for hours."

The distinction between modern and postmodern -- the distinction between modern and premodern, too -- is among those that Latour would like to cast onto the ash heap of asymmetry. Latour says he learned early to see the past not as an oppressive weight to be thrown off, as it is in the modernist drama of progress, nor as a museum of now-meaningless fragments, as it sits in the postmodernist landscape, but merely as a part of the present. If there is one way Latour would like to be remembered, it is

as a thinker who pointed the way out of the dead-end that is postmodernism.

"Modernist time used to flow in an orderly manner," Latour wrote recently in an essay on "nonmodern" painting. "The past had to be subverted by new avant-gardes who would, years in advance, indicate to the ignorant public what to like and what to dislike. Each generation was as revolutionary as the former, hence the predictable order, hence the ever-resumed fight against the Philistines." Postmodernism broke with this tradition, he continues, "but postmodernism is still modernist to the core: its avant-ga rdes ridicule everything of the earlier generations, including the modernist dreams of revolutionary avant-gardes! It mocks itself to destruction." Because it preserves the same distinction-filled, category-ridden structure of thought, postmodernism, he writes elsewhere, "is a disappointed form of modernism. It shares with its enemy all its features but hope."

Still, you have to wonder, isn't his shifting elusiveness a sort of transcendent principle too? Doesn't Latour's souped-up empiricism descend from somewhere? Can it really be any freer than what he seeks to subvert? The language of his books and paper s would seem to combine two streams of thought: one, hard-nosed and political, describing networks, constituencies, and spokespeople; the other, a philosophical apparatus of symmetries, objects, and quasi objects that certainly sounds like an offshoot of French semiotics.

"I share many stylistical elements with the postmoderns," Latour replies to this question. "The taste for style, the humor (although they prefer irony), but then the whole thrust is different. They love deconstruction, they are critical, they are for f ragments and against united and systematic discourse, they have a conception of time that cites the dead past, they are above all in full and complete and absolute despair -- that is the only absolute thing they have. I do not share any of those attitudes ."

As for the notion that he portrays science as a savage war of all against all, Latour says: "The military metaphor is only a literary ploy to show that even in what was supposed to be reason, force is at work. It is a Spinozan and, if you wish, a Niet zschean ploy. To equate force and reason is a necessary preliminary tack to avoid the double language of those who have force on one hand and reason on the other. But it is not as

in Nietzsche -- for instance, a belief in a world really made of military f orces. It is not a metalanguage. It is just that to bring those metaphors into the reality of pure peaceful science was useful. It had an effect, a refreshing and equalizing effect."

WHAT MIGHT A NONPOSTMODERN -- indeed, a nonmodern -- approach look like? Latour cites the book he considers his most successful: *Aramis, or the love of technology*, published in French in 1992 and due out in translation from Harvar d University Press in the fall of 1995 . Aramis was a fourteen-year attempt to build an automated subway system in Paris made up of little cars, each unit so flexible it could speed passengers to their individual destinations without stops or transfers. A ramis was supposedly crushed under the weight of its own bureaucratic inertia -- it was an impractical plan for which there was no need but which no one would terminate until it simply died.

Latour, however, writes it as a kind of love story. Everybody fell in love with this neat, futuristic technology to a greater or lesser degree; the story of Aramis's failure is the story of the inconstancy of its lovers. In good Latourian fashion, among t hose given speaking parts is the object of everyone's wavering affections -- Aramis itself.

The book is structured as a graduate student's odyssey through his study of the project. Latour himself appears as a knowing, enthusiastic, slightly comical figure called Norbert, to whom the student, a sort of cross between Candide and Dr. Watson, turns from time to time for wisdom and guidance. The book quotes straightforwardly from actual documents and interviews, as well as from the imagined thoughts of the student, the engineers, the politicians, Aramis itself, and another, rather jealous subway syst em. It is a remarkable hybrid, feeling at one moment like a raw, unmediated report -- like Gieryn's hypertext -- and at the next like an intelligent comic novel written in a mood of self-satisfied ingenuity.

Latour considers it his most successful work, "because unlike *Science in Action* and *Laboratory Life,* it has none of that debunking tone." As the lovable Norbert says at the end of Aramis: "I denounce nobody. There are no suspects in the cas e. There is no scandal, nobody's screwed up. It's a collective mistake, where there was never anything but good intentions. And, just so, I would like to write a book where there is no metalanguage, no master discourse, where you can't know which is stron gest among

sociological theory -- documents, interviews, literature, fiction. All these genres will be placed at the same level, and each will interpret the other, without any being able to say that it judges another."

Of course, having laid it all out in a systematic fashion, Latour can't possibly let it stand. His diligent and disappointed student immediately replies: "But that's impossible. And anyway, it'll be a terrible bore. And what good will it do?"