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# **Digitality, (un)knowledge and the ontological character of non-knowledge.**

Alexandre Monnin

**The opposition between knowledge and non-knowledge tends to obscure the very fact that digitization has also "remedied" knowledge lending it the character of a commodity instead of a norm (as it used to be previously considered, despite the disagreement philosophers and epistemologists could entertain among themselves). Hence, one is required not only to situate non-knowledge vis-à-vis knowledge but also knowledge vis-à-vis digitization. We do so by shifting the interrogation from an epistemic perspective to an ontological one.**

*Keywords: non-knowledge, unknowledge, ontology, digitality, distance, proximity, absence, presence.*

*Although we have no word for it, establishing an appropriate degree of “middle connectivity” to the world is such a basic feature of the human condition that doing it successfully has been lifted into the rarefied reaches of sainthood and enlightenment; failing to accomplish it, identified as a cause of paralytic anxiety.*  
Brian Cantwell Smith

The relationship between knowledge, non-knowledge and digitality is a complex one still waiting to be fully explored. As evidenced in this volume, efforts to shed some light on "non-knowledge" open up new directions of research especially relevant as we'll see in a world that's becoming everyday more digitized. On the other hand, as such the opposition between knowledge and non-knowledge tends to obscure the very fact that digitization has also "remedied" knowledge lending it the character of a commodity instead of a norm (as it used to be previously considered, despite the disagreement philosophers and epistemologists could entertain among themselves). Hence, one is required not only to situate non-knowledge vis-à-vis knowledge but also knowledge vis-à-vis digitization. Such will be our attempt in this paper.

## **Knowledge, digitality and unknowledge**

### **Knowledge and digitality: epistemic issues**

Knowledge both admits of a vast number of characterizations and comes in different flavors. While it is possible to hold shared views on the purview of knowledge while disagreeing at the same time on its exact definition disagreement may still loom on the horizon. Whether tacit or practical knowledge for instance refer to a phenomenon that can be subsumed under one Heading along with scientific knowledge or knowledge as traditionally conceived by epistemologists is a question that remains largely open to debate.

For that reason, at first glance it would seem pretty much illusory to contrast a unified concept of knowledge to non-knowledge. Yet, without such a unified concept, the opposition seemingly becomes moot at best. This is where digitization comes in. Digitization and knowledge entertain a complex and very paradoxical relationship. Going back to the concept "knowledge economy"<sup>1</sup>, made possible by the advances of digitization, one immediately sees this relation for what it is: a relation of commodification. "Knowledge", in "knowledge economy", no longer denotes to any norm or domain of knowledge (which it merely connotes) but rather betokens a broad assimilation to a commodity essentially cultivated in order to sustain growth. Both the normative and pluralistic aspects have thence simply vanished.

While paradoxical this evolution shouldn't come as a surprise for it may very well characterize digitization as such. As a consequence, our claim in this paper will be that digitality has both overplayed *and* downplayed salient aspects of knowledge to the point that we might on initial approximation think of this evolution as bringing knowledge nearer to non-knowledge (as we shall see however, as we progressively move away from epistemic questions the drive to introduce an additional category will be more and more compelling).

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<sup>1</sup> See the contribution of Christoph Wulf in this volume.

Overplayed since models and abstractions have become non only a sign of the portability of conceptual knowledge but a way to perform assemblages that induce new realities instead of deferring one way or another to an existing world (let's not be mistaken: deferring to the world includes taking into account the way it is transformed by our own activity - especially at the time of the Anthropocene). Google's PageRank algorithm is a good example of that since it construes incoming "links" as votes (never votes of defiance!) in its willingness to redefine the Web by using measures of authority, pretending to remain neutral whereas its own presence modifies the very topology of the thing it was supposed to independently measure.

Downplayed since the commodification of knowledge, made possible due to the lack of regards towards the traditional norms of knowledge (in a sense "anything goes" in the knowledge economy as long as its goals are achieved), resulted in more and more data, metadata, documents, and so on and so forth - what we'd call "knowledge traces" - being produced and made available with unforeseen consequences well-worth examining.

Innovation is better served or so it seems by people who have little regard to the nooks and crannies of everyday life, assured as they are of the well-foundedness of their mission to transform it. Of course, why on earth transform that which is not fully apprehended and make sure it is replaced (or modified) by something genuinely *new* and relevant? The answer to the second objection is only induction through enumeration should provide an answer and it is well-known to be insufficient. Let's just put it aside basically because we have to live with similar "uncertainties". The answer to the first objection is much less straightforward. Digital technologies produce new assemblages while at the same time claiming to operationalize *preexisting realities* (intelligence, authority, vote, trust, etc.). Changing the meaning of those concept is not an explicit goal, rather such realities are taken for granted and whether or not the ensuing operationalization and these new assemblages turns them into something wholly different, even in logical contradiction to what they previously stood for, is no one's business.

Assemblages and performance have always marched hand in hand since assemblages do by definition perform a specific effect<sup>2</sup>. Whence the legitimate fear that focusing on assemblages and their performances might obfuscate any reference (and deference) to the world. But here it is rather the lack of care displayed by innovators which is misleading, leading to abstain from paying attention to the nooks and crannies of the assemblages produced (the results of the aforementioned operationalization). We thus go from "unknowledge" to "unknowledge" - here we introduce this concept in order to characterize a specific contrast to knowledge akin to a lack of willingness to defer to the world still unabashedly regarded as full-fledged knowledge.

Unknowledge is very well illustrated by this quote from Phil Agre about AI:

As a practical matter, the purpose of AI is to build computer systems whose operation can be narrated using intentional vocabulary. Innovations frequently involve techniques that bring new vocabulary into the field: reasoning, planning, learning, choosing, strategizing, and so on. Whether the resulting systems are really exhibiting these qualities is hard to say, and AI people generally treat the question as an annoying irrelevance. What matters practically is not the vague issue of what the words "really mean" but the seemingly precise issue of how they can be defined in formal terms that permit suitably narratable systems to be designed. If you disapprove of the way that we

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<sup>2</sup> (Centre de sociologie de l'innovation 2013)

formalize the concept of reasoning or planning or learning, they are likely to say, then you are welcome to invent another way to formalize it (Agre 1997)."<sup>3</sup>

### **Non-knowledge and unknowledge: an ontological characterization**

Let's go back to non-knowledge. With unknowledge in sight, what can we now say about non-knowledge? We here follow Brian Cantwell Smith who contends that content, a technical term in analytic philosophy used to designate the basis of knowledge and action, can be either conceptual or non-conceptual. Conceptual content involves positing a world consisting of objects, properties and relation which amounts to carving reality into discretized individuals (seen as the bearers of properties and in relations with one another). Non-conceptual content, while still representational, doesn't register the world likewise but rather in terms of unindividuated "features" that precedes the advent of objects or individuals – which, for Smith, is essentially an ethical matter (a matter of "mattering" as he puts it). The picture offered by non-conceptual content is essentially a "subobjective"<sup>4</sup> one. Whereas non-conceptual content depicts the world in overwhelming details, fit for situated and local encounters, conceptual content and objectivity in general strip those same details so as to make it possible to refer over a long distance (to things long gone and buried in the past, not yet born in a distant future, or too shrouded in vagueness to do otherwise)<sup>5</sup>.

With objects and ontology predicated on ethics, what remains metaphysically essential is to give room to reference making. That is, to articulate the causally effective local encounters with the world with non-causal long-distance reference. In other words, what is valued here is less one overarching metaphysical category (the One, the transcendental a priori, ideas, the body, and so on and so forth.) than enough room to fit local proximal connections and distal reference:

it is essential (...) and also an anchor of common sense, that the multi-various parts of the world do not march in lockstep together. The world is fundamentally characterized by an underlying flex or slop - a kind of slack or "play" that allows some bits to move about or adjust without much influencing, and without being much influenced by, other bits. (...) The world's flex and slop is so obvious that it is a little hard to talk about. As a contrast, therefore, imagine a world quite unlike ours, consisting, as suggested of nothing but an endless series of interlocked gears. Suppose, to make this precise, that every gear is constructed so as to mesh with one or more immediate neighbors, and that the entire gear universe is interconnected, but in such a way that it is still possible for them all to be turned (...) so that it does not lock up. Suppose, too, that the gears are perfect: no friction, no play between the teeth, and shaped so that rotating one at an

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<sup>3</sup> We have suggested (Monnin 2015) that the roots of formalization thus conceived lie in Rudolph Carnap's concept of "explanation" to which scholars have turned their attention in recent years. See especially (Carus 2007), (Richardson 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See (Lowe 1992) whose subtitle is composed of three texts by Adrian Cussin, Brian Cantwell Smith and Bruno Latour (currently being translated by the author).

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the best way to summarize this is by an analogy. I sometimes think of objects, properties, and relations (i.e., conceptual, material ontology) as the long-distance trucks and interstate highway systems of intentional, normative life. They are undeniably essential to the overall integration of life's practices - critical, given finite resources, for us to integrate the vast and open-ended terrain of experience into a single, cohesive, objective world. But the cost of packaging up objects for portability and long-distance travel is that they are thereby insulated from the extraordinarily fine-grained richness of particular, indigenous life-insulated from the ineffable richness of the very lives they sustain. (Cantwell Smith, s. d.), p. 37.

even speed causes the others to rotate evenly as well, though at a potentially different speed. The gear world would lack slop. Effects would not dissipate. If one gear were to move by even a tiny amount, every other gear in the universe, no matter how far flung, would instantly and proportionally be affected." (...) If the flex were too little (...) the world would lock up like the gear world, and everything would be correlated with everything else. Such a world would be too rigid, too straight, too stuffy intentionality would be neither possible nor necessary. If the flex were too great, on the other hand, it would have the opposite problem: things would be too loose, everything would be random, and effect-transcending coordination would be impossible. Imagine (...) an infinite space randomly occupied by an indefinitely large number of particles, all of which drift aimlessly around, none of which ever interact (Cantwell Smith 1998, p. 199-200).<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, unknowledge appears to threaten long-distance reference since according to the definition we adopted it no longer defers to the world preoccupied as it is by its own self-centered efficiency. But such a criticism would be mistaken if left at that. While unknowledge denotes a peculiar lack of knowledge it is also defined by what it produces: namely, "knowledge traces". In other words, it adds gears where there were none, where space gave enough room to the "world's flex and slop", filling in preexisting gaps with no special care for long distance reference, favoring the multiplication of interlocked gears and short-distance communication to simulate continuity over long distance reference. The strategy adopted is rather one of generalized padding where gears can be endlessly introduced and correlated with one another. Therefore, both unknowledge and non-knowledge also raise ontological - rather than purely epistemic - issues of absence and presence, distance and proximity.

## Non-knowledge and (un)knowledge

We will address the way these ontological issues manifest themselves by looking at the followings examples, all three drawn from digital cultures and technologies.

### The Internet of Things

The Internet of Things (IoT) stands as one of the main promises of digital innovation for the coming years. Out of the numerous features of IoT is the possibility to interact with concrete

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<sup>6</sup> Compare with William James who put a great emphasis on the fact that "Not all the parts of the world are united mechanically, for some can move without the others moving", (*Some problems of philosophy* in (James 1996), p. 1046. Latour's project in *An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence* (Latour 2012) has been summarized the following way: "What is at stake: to take seriously the first proposition, to civilize the moderns until they do not successfully "make room" [for] others. The inquiry indicates that the function of its metaphysics is simply to make a place", commentary signed by the GECO (*Groupe d'Etudes Constructivistes*) on the online version of (Latour 2012), available at [http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/#a=SET+DOC+LEADER&c\[leading\]=DOC&c\[slave\]=TEXT&i\[id\]=#doc-257&i\[column\]=DOC&s=0&q=make+room](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/#a=SET+DOC+LEADER&c[leading]=DOC&c[slave]=TEXT&i[id]=#doc-257&i[column]=DOC&s=0&q=make+room). Giving room to modes of existence (whether modern or non-modern) is the new diplomatic goal of metaphysics. Of peculiar interest here is the fact that modes of existence themselves are all described by certain kinds of continuity and discontinuity ("hiatuses"). This is very much in tune with Cantwell Smith so much so in fact that it generalizes it in a pluralistic fashion. While a systematic comparative study of Brian Cantwell Smith's and Bruno Latour's positions hasn't been undertaken it would be definitely be a task well-worth embarking on.

physical objects out there in the "real-world". The perspective to go "beyond" the screen and to re-territorialize computation is a very powerful and appealing one indeed. At long last computation shall escape the realm of the "virtual" and reach out to concrete objects. Or such goes the saying.

What is fascinating with the IoT is how much of a thorough attempt to circumvent the boundaries of objects through technical means it proves to be. One may wonder whether it is sufficient to attach an apparatus to a patch of reality in order to reality get a good grip on its identity conditions. Probably not. But maybe this is beside the point. At least attaching and RFID chip or any other prop will make it possible to *localize* the object, potentially throughout time, even allowing to grasp it less through deictic encounter - this object here and now - and rather in an abstract way as a space-time arrow, something we can barely conceive of, less so encounter directly.

Remember though, abstraction is no part of the sales pitch for connected objects but rather their concreteness, proximity and availability through direct encounter. While we may still conceive of objects as abstractions what connected objects continuously produce are ever more traces, making it possible not to refer in a non-causal way but rather to reach out in a causal way by artifactualizing the path to the object, adding enough gears to fill in the gap between agent and objet (or between objects) to make that happen.

Eventually, there precisely lies the paradox behind the whole enterprise. The boundaries of connected objects are defined and "maintained" through technology and the active production of knowledge-traces. While discussing the importance of "boundary-maintaining"<sup>7</sup> Donna Haraway quotes Brian Cantwell Smith in support of her argument: "You have to stop being what you were when you start paying attention to the work it takes to maintain your clear distinctions". That perfectly sums up the situation we found ourselves in: just as devices are introduced that should help to circumscribe as precisely as possible the boundaries of objects (allowing for direct interaction and localization over time), the latter nevertheless expand in unprecedented ways.

Just ask yourself "what exactly are the boundaries of a connected object?". "It is truly wholly present as I interact with it?" The answer is no, of course, and not only that but being wholly present would simply defeat the very purpose of the IoT. Connected objects as their very name betokens communicate with servers on the cloud and/or other objects in their vicinity (sometimes even using Blockchains - public inviolable ledgers!). They also display behavior dictated by the algorithms using for the programming, sometimes going as far as betraying their original purpose as exemplified in the recent Volkswagen scandal. For all these reasons, not only are the boundaries not maintained or even expanded - they literally shatter!

In a nutshell, the IoT is an attempt to substitute digital devices for abstractions and place upon their shoulders the onus of providing identity conditions to objects. The morals of the story ends up being an ontological one: it is not possible to replace abstraction, causally ineffective reference making, distance and absence with actual technical devices, causally effective localization, proximity and presence. Or expect paradoxes like the one we've just encountered.

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<sup>7</sup> (Haraway 1997), p. 67. Smith's quotes comes from a discussion that took place in 1994 after he presented a paper entitled "Coming Apart at the Seams: the Role of Computation in a Successor Metaphysics" at Stanford University.

## Love and felicity

The second example has been studied by Eva Illouz<sup>8</sup> in her inquiry on love and the new digital life that shapes our most intimate relationships. Illouz' diagnosis romantic encounter become increasingly saturated by knowledge practices - that thanks to the generalization of online profiles, and the metadata they contain, knowledge play a role that has gone awry, obliterating, as she puts it, other types of knowledge and reshuffling the boundaries between proximity and distance (an ontological feat of no little consequences as we've seen), among other things.

Nowhere else is the subtle dialectic between absence and presence, distance and proximity, more at play than in the phenomenon called "love". It is not surprising then that unbalancing this relation with knowledge (even under the guise of unknowledge) should put it at risk. Before intimacy grew to become a norm we never knew that much about our love interests. Additionally, before the advent of digital cultures, social networks, online profiles and the likes, we never knew that much about our *potential* love interests ahead of encountering them.

In the wake of what we said about the IoT, we might want to assess that the boundaries personhood in a relationship have by and large been displaced. While profiles do seem to provide accurate (if coarse) knowledge, making visible "who" we are by maintaining the boundaries of our identity, in fact what happens is that they delegate (outsource, really) what was previously left to chance and hazardous encounters to algorithms that calculate our best match.

Of course, pretending that love owes nothing to chance is not entirely new. Sociology, for one, is the discipline that literally saw as its mission (as opposed to novel writing for instance) to shed light on the social dynamics underneath the most intimate and private phenomena, including lovers felt attraction. It held dear and strived to uncover the unseen determinants at play behind the curtain. And it was correct in his own right of course. There's no denying that love might not escapes determinism.

Yet, we should nonetheless pay heed to a paramount difference between these two cases. While sociologists did provide statistical conclusions in favor of their claims, no one ever (mis)took them as spiritual advisers. In a sense, so much so has happened with the advent of social networks and dating websites. Filling in innumerable fields on a daily basis means people become both providers and consumers of the (un)knowledge thus produced. Whereas sociologists' take on love used to be discussed mainly among peers or the educated readership with an interest in the *discipline* it may be said to have now infused many if not most of our daily transactions.

Then again, such a move might be readily welcomed. Aren't relationships, now that we can mimic the behaviors and functional possibilities of connected objects (especially the localization bit and the availability of "leaky" knowledge traces), all the better for that? After all, no talk about the identity conditions of objects will likely dispel the belief that cheating is cheating and that mobiles phones (undoubtedly the IoT's first citizen) do provide an efficient way to learn the truth. Must we eventually backtrack on the idea of unknowledge if deferring to the world (apparently) means deferring to such simple truths?

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<sup>8</sup> Her presentation at the CDC during the winter semester dedicated to non- and entitled "Knowing way too much... Love, Therapy, Technology" is available online: <https://vimeo.com/153692828>



The point rather is that deferring to the world might precisely mean something else, at least as far as love is concerned. In (Latour 2012), Bruno Latour suggests that we adopt a pluralistic view on metaphysics so as to give space to phenomena that are amenable each to specific felicity or infelicity conditions. Going back to Agre's remark, we may begin to understand why digitality is by no means harmless. Digital tools do promise transparency. It is all too easy then to treat love as demanding it. Paying attention to the felicity conditions of love should however advice otherwise. Indeed, the latter may lie less in the search for truth (or knowledge) than in love's own subsistence; a matter of delicate, finespun, dialectic between proximity and distance, presence and absence, knowledge and non-knowledge, put at risk when (un)knowledge takes over in its "profusing transparency" (talk of "transparency" bears witness to an interesting choice of words as the immediate danger is either to be *blinded* by the abundance of digital traces of all kinds or to treat them indeed as transparent intermediaries). However, in order to properly understand the key role played by non-knowledge with regards to love one has to overcome unknowledge first.

### **Art: caring for the artists**

Let us dig further by taking one final example that will hopefully prolong the previous discussion.

Since 2014 I have had the luck and opportunity to work as the architect of the digital platform of Lafayette Anticipation<sup>9</sup>, the Galeries Lafayette's foundation for contemporary art. The challenge was (and remains) to foster interest in contemporary art beyond the small circles of aficionados (be them critics or patrons). Contemporary art notoriously challenges the logic of the exhibition and as a symbol of the excesses of capitalistic markets is subject to criticism from both the general public and intellectuals. The aim of the project soon became to dispense knowledge about contemporary creative process, loaded as it is with uncertainties, so as to share an understanding of art in the making, a risky process that generates its own criteria of judgement (far from presupposing that it should always be successful).

That is how the idea emerged of developing an archive that would centralize both data and documents (traces, really) generated by the foundation's various members in their daily activities, from the treasurer to the head of production. Pioneering laboratory studies published in the 80's have completely modified our understanding of the scientific process by insisting on the hidden contribution of a great many actors previously left in the dark by epistemologists. The fulcrum of their description underscored the importance of practice, distributed action and hidden (dirty) work. Shifting the narrative from geniuses inhabiting ivory towers to a more realistic depiction of science did upset some scientists although in fairness deconstructing the robustness of scientific results had never been on the agenda of the ethnographers who produced these descriptions.

Neither is it our intention to ultimately "deconstruct" the figure of the artist or the work of art. The ideas behind the platform were thereupon discussed at a very early stage of development in the summer 2015, in Paris, during a two days session involving about 40 artists, designers, architects, critics, philosophers and curators<sup>10</sup>. Reactions among the artists were mixed, some expressing fears that unveiling their "secrets" of creations would be tantamount to yielding to a

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<sup>9</sup> <https://lafayetteanticipation.squarespace.com/accueil>

<sup>10</sup> <https://lafayetteanticipation.squarespace.com/lafayette-re-source>

broader demand for transparency and mimic the extractivist logic exhibited by the likes of Google or Facebook.

Even though scientists admittedly found no significant hindrance in ethnographers work, artists had every right to express their fears. And for the exact same reason mentioned above in the preceding section: transparency shouldn't put artists at risk. The goal of the foundation had always been to assist them and cater to their (or their work's) needs.

The willingness to open a new window on the artist labor did not entail a primacy of transparency over creation. Not unlike love, art has its own conditions of felicity. Subsistence, then may adequately translate into being able to listen to the call of the work of art (to speak Etienne Souriau's language<sup>11</sup>). And that might imply to obfuscate part of the creative process if needs be. Immediately comes the question “does it amount to lying?”. Whenever truth is equated with transparency, with little to no regards to the phenomenon at stake, the answer is yes. By contrast, when subsistence, understood as the continuation of the phenomenon at stake, takes priority, the answer shall be a clear "no", knowledge then being subservient to care. Going back to the ethnography, this is reminiscent of "ethnographic refusal", a decision not to write about a subject matter to avoid putting it at risk, being exploitive or unhelpful (among the many traps that await researchers)<sup>12</sup>.

Latour himself expresses the need for a “crooked language” in politics:

nothing is more important for this inquiry than to find the difference between truth and falsity in politics. If there is one area where our inheritance has to be revisited, it is surely that of the hopes placed in politics and its capacity for extension. What will we have to do to situate appropriately crooked speaking once again at the center of our civility as the only means to collect the collective, and above all to universalize it? Does the Circle give us a thread like Ariadne's that will let us speak here again of the rational and the irrational but in a well-curved way, that is, in its own language, provided that we don't seek to judge it with the help of a different touchstone? We need this thread, for how could we stand up straight on the agora, with no hope of help from any Science and yet without giving up on reason, about controversial issues that have taken on the dimensions of the planet and in the heat of a crowd that now numbers in the billions? (Latour 2012)<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to Latour, we would not restrict such a crooked language to politics. Or rather, to put it more adequately, this kind of language can be seen as the political answer provided to a broader issue. Throughout the discussion of the last three examples we have come to give precedence to subsistence over truth with respect to non-knowledge<sup>14</sup>. Subsistence requires care<sup>15</sup> and a

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<sup>11</sup> See (Souriau 2009) and (Souriau 1955).

<sup>12</sup> A note on ethnographic refusal with a bibliography was recently published online:

<sup>13</sup> Online notes available at [http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#29&b\[subheading\]=#541&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=VOC&s=0&q=nothing+is+more+important+for+this+inquiry+than+to+find+the+difference](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#29&b[subheading]=#541&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=VOC&s=0&q=nothing+is+more+important+for+this+inquiry+than+to+find+the+difference)

<sup>14</sup> “Add some transparency, some truth (still in the sense of Double Click), and you still get only dissolution, stampede, the dispersal of that very agora in which the fate of all categories is judged.” [http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b\[chapter\]=#13&b\[subheading\]=#211&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=VOC&s=0&q=agora](http://modesofexistence.org/inquiry/?lang=en#b[chapter]=#13&b[subheading]=#211&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=VOC&s=0&q=agora)

<sup>15</sup> This is tacitly acknowledged in a recent tweet published on the AIME account: “It's one hypothesis of AIME that beings of [POL] are so fragile that their mode of existence may disappear entirely through

hospitable middle-ground, whether in politics, love or the arts. Unknowledge, by contrast, unable as it is to defer to the world even as it conveys trite truths, striving to unbalance the middle-ground, sorely lacks this aspect. As Phil Agre puts it, “a reformed technical practice [should] employ the tools of critical inquiry to engage in a richer and more animated conversation with the world”<sup>16</sup>. For this conversation with the world to be genuinely fruitful non-knowledge shall not be overlooked.

## Conclusion

The aforementioned crooked language is no enemy of reason yet neither is it to be understood in term of truth or falsity as science does. As we have seen, non-knowledge unlike knowledge (and to a lesser extent unknowledge, which not only is a degraded norm but also has an ontological dimension) is less of an epistemic value than an ontological middle ground allowing for the subsistence of a multiplicity of generic phenomena according to their own requirements (much akin to Latour's modes of existence). William James himself noted that “the same thing (...) can belong to many systems, as when a man is connected with other objects by heat, by gravitation, by love, *and by knowledge* [my emphasis]”<sup>17</sup>. Tellingly, knowledge in his enumeration was but one among many such systems. James also noticed our relentless propensity to add what he called new “systems of concatenation”: “We ourselves are constantly adding to the connection of things, organizing labor-unions, establishing postal consular, mercantile, railroad, telegraphs, colonial, and other systems that bind us and things together in ever wider reticulations.”<sup>18</sup> It is somewhat ironic that we only have a negative expression like “non-knowledge” at our disposal to refer to the multiplicity of these systems of concatenations minus one... Such is, today, the overwhelming weight of unknowledge: no longer a norm but rather a system of concatenations that not only overshadows and twists others but eventually jeopardizes their conditions of subsistence.

*I would like to thank the CDC for the kind invitation I was offered to be part of the semester dedicated to non-knowledge as a fellow in November 2015. I hereby express my special gratitude to Martina Leeker.*

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lack of care.”, <https://twitter.com/AIMEproject/status/756786152548409344>. That the generalization is not made outside [POL] is a testament of Latour's rather complex relationship to care.

<sup>16</sup> (Agre 1995).

<sup>17</sup> (James 1996), p. 1048.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

# I AM A SECTION HEADLINE

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