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What's Wrong with a One-World World[1]

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The Problem[2]

Helen Verran tells a story that has been retold by many[3].

In a power-saturated set of relations stretching over 200 years, Australian Aboriginal people have been systematically excluded from the land upon which they lived. Genocide and policies of cultural incorporation have been followed too, but the land rights issue turns partly around the question of ownership. Did Aboriginal people *own* the lands over which they walked, or not? The English *terra nullius* doctrine determined that Aborigines were not *settled*, they didn't *cultivate* the land and neither did they *parcel it up*. Then it argued that since they didn't do these kinds of things, it followed that the lands were empty.

So why didn't aboriginal people parcel up their land? The answer has been well rehearsed. It is that they saw, they see, the world very differently. In Aboriginal cosmology this isn't a volume or a surface with features, or a space to be occupied by people. Instead it is a *process* of creation and re-creation. The world, including people, but also what Europeans would think of as topographical features, plants, animals, ritual sites, and ancestral beings, are all *necessary participants* in a process of continuing creation. And if this doesn't happen then the world starts to hollow itself out. It stops existing.

So here's the difference: in a European or a Northern way of thinking the world carries on by itself. People don't *perform* it. It's *outside* us and we're *contained* by it. But that's not true for Aboriginal people. The idea of a reified reality out there, detached from the work and the rituals that constantly re-enact it, makes no sense. Land doesn't *belong* to people. Perhaps it would be better to say that *people* belong to the land. Or, perhaps even better still, we might say that processes of continuous creation redo land, people, life and the spiritual world altogether, and in specific locations.

Over the last two decades this grim historical Australian tragedy has been slightly undone. In the teeth of opposition from a series of vested interests, the *terra nullius* doctrine has been overturned. That's the crucial political bottom line of this story, though it is still being frustrated and contested. But also significant, politically and intellectually, is the work that Verran and other post-colonial scholars in Australia, in Latin America, and among the First Nations in North America have been doing to re-think this kind of encounter. And this is the core question that they ask. *Are we dealing with matters of belief*? Are we simply saying that white people believe one thing, and Aboriginal people believe something different? Or is something different going on? The new post-colonial

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[2] In this section I use Helen Verran's work to explore a position that has been developed more generally in post-colonialism. Work in this tradition that has shaped my understanding of the issues includes the following: Blaser, Feit and McRae (2004); Blaser (2010); Chakrabarty (2000); Conway (2008); de la Cadena (2010); Escobar (2008); Noble (2007); and Verran (2001). Less directly, anthropological work on 'cosmologies' that enact the world differently have also been good to think with. See, for instance, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's writing on Amerindian perspectivism (1998) (which needs to be distinguished from the 'perspectivalism' mentioned in this paper), the work done by Marilyn Strathern with relational configurations and ruptures derived from the practices in Papua New Guinea (see for instance Strathern (2002)), and the issues raised by taking objects seriously considered, for instance, in Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007). Finally I am also drawing on a conversation with Wen-Yuan Lin, a part of which has appeared in print (Law and Lin (2011).

[3] Verran (1998).

response is that the differences are *not* simply matters of belief. They are also a *matter of reals*. What the world *is*, is also at stake. Here's how the reasoning goes.

If we say that Aboriginal people believe one thing and we believe something else then we may not realise that we're doing this, but in effect we are buying into a version of the *terra nullius* doctrine. This is because we're saying that the world, let's get big and say the *universe*, is really something like a large space-time box that goes on by itself. And then we're adding that there are people with different beliefs living in this space-time box. If we're liberal then we will respect the differences and we won't try to impose our own version of the world on those who see it differently. But even so, and however nice we are, we haven't abandoned our basic commitment to the idea of a single all-encompassing reality. Neither have we really stopped assuming that Aboriginal people have got it wrong. Their idea, the idea that the world is a set of differently woven, specific and heterogeneous creating practices, is a *story*, but it isn't the way things actually *are*. The idea that reality is a set of contingent, enacted and more or less intersecting worlds in the plural, perhaps we might call it a *fractiverse*, may indeed be a nice story, but is indeed just a story.

So that's what is at stake. Is it simply that people *believe* different things about reality? Or is it that there are *different realities* being done in different practices? If the first of these positions is right, then we're in the business of beliefs, perspectives and *epistemologies*. If it's the second then we're being backed into issues of *ontology*. Here's the analytically radical nature of this second position. We're in the business of treating reals as *effects of contingent and heterogeneous enactments, performances or sets of relations*.

And here, in turn, is why this is politically important. If we live in a single Northern container-world, within a universe, then we might imagine a liberal way of handling the power-saturated encounters between different kinds of people. But if we live, instead, in a multiple world of different enactments, if we participate in a *fractiverse*, then there will be, there can be, no overarching logic or liberal institutions to mediate between the different realities. There *is* no 'overarching'. Instead there are contingent, local and practical engagements.

The implication is that if we are to work well in post-colonial encounters we will need to craft ways of doing so that are themselves contingent, modest, practical, and thoroughly down-to-earth; ways of proceeding that acknowledge and respect *difference* as something that cannot be included. So that is the problem. Whether to assume the world is one and we're all inside it. Or to wrestle with the implications that worlds in the plural are enacted in different and power-saturated practices.

Closer to home

I start by talking of aboriginal practices because once we make the journey back to the North from the post-colonial places of contact in the South it tends to become difficult to see the *importance* of ontological difference.[4] Instead the latter tends to look like an elaborate and self-regarding intellectual game for intellectuals who aren't interested in getting their hands dirty. You will understand, given what I have just been saying, that I think this is profoundly wrong. This is because what we might think of as 'single-reality' doctrines were: one, *worked up* in the North; two,

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[4] For certainly it can be found, ontological difference. As can what one might think of as ontological *work*. Work that makes this argument includes Mol (2002) and Law (2004)

embedded in Northern practices; three, *reproduced and re-enacted* in those practices; and then, four, they were *transported* to the South and imposed on reluctant First Nations. The corollary seems to me obvious. In the North we have our own set of post-colonial questions that urgently need to be addressed. First, *how on earth did one-world doctrines get to be so powerful for us? Second, how do they retain their grip? And, third, how might they get shifted?*

There's a self-sealing response to the first two of these questions. It says that since there *is* only one world, it's scarcely surprising that most people see it that way. That's why one-world doctrines are so powerful. It is simply that they're right! Obviously, this is a position that is metaphysically self-contained, and it is, of course, precisely what the Northern imaginary tells itself. It's also why questions about fractiverses, about multiply enacted realities, tend to look eccentric or self-indulgent when they're raised in the North. After all (this is important), single-reality doctrines are endlessly being done in the daily practices of Northern life as well. It isn't just philosophers who think in this way.

But, here's the point, even in the North we do have a choice. And if we don't go that way, if we don't opt for a one-world metaphysics, then this opens up a whole field of intellectual inquiry that is at the same time a field of political intervention. As I have just noted, it becomes possible, indeed urgent, to *inquire about the practices that enact one-world realities*. It becomes urgent to inquire about *the practices that Other multiple-world realities*. It becomes urgent, too, to pick through the practices within the north that multiply realities, even as they insist on a universe rather than a fractiverse.[5] And it becomes important to ask how fractiversal realities might be freed up.

So those are the challenges. But how to tackle them?

We are not without resources. No doubt these come in many forms, but we find them in the humanities and social sciences, including anthropology and post-colonialism and my own discipline, science technology and society, or STS. Here's what STS has done. It has tackled what are perhaps the exemplary institutions of the North, science and technology. And it has sought to understand how they are able to pronounce with so much power about the nature of the real. To be clear, and fair to other scholars, I should make it clear that much of STS is precisely built upon a one-world metaphysics, and its practitioners wouldn't buy into the arguments that I want to make. At the same time, parts of it do bite on this particular fractiversal bullet. These include the writing of feminist technoscience scholar Donna Haraway[6] and so-called 'actor-network theory' together with its successor projects[7]. ANT and Haraway have in common that they assume that *heterogeneous relations enact realities*, and therefore that *different practices enact different realities*. Neither is committed to a one-world metaphysics.

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[5] I am drawing here on a large STS literature. The problem is perhaps first and most clearly spelled out in Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) in which they messy heterogeneities of practice are contrasted with the purifications that distinguish the social and the natural, an argument on which I draw below. The issue of ontological multiplicity is very clearly worked out in Annemarie Mol's *The Body Multiple* (Mol: 2002). Note that the term 'pluriverse' comes from William James. For discussion see Latour (2010).

[6] The term appears in her essay on situated knowledges (Haraway: 1991), but informs all her work. See, for instance, her most recent work which is on companion species (Haraway: 2007).

[7] For a concise account of some of the many literatures that go into 'actor network theory and after' see Law (2008).

How to catch this? Perhaps it might help to put it this way. The feminists used to say that biology is not destiny. In this STS line of work, let's call it *material semiotics*, we might extend, perhaps distort, this feminist slogan. It is *reality* that is not destiny. And in what follows I will try to show why this might make sense – and I'll do by touching briefly on four exemplary STS case studies.

Reality is not destiny

I start with an argument made by STS scholar Harry Collins who wrote a paper in 1975 about an attempt to detect gravity waves[8]. (Collins' position, let me add, is rather far from the material semiotics that I am advocating). He tells us that cosmologists believe that gravity waves were created at the time of the big bang, but that by now they are so faint that they are undetectable. His paper describes an attempt by a minority group to move against this orthodoxy and detect their presence. The experimentalists in question suspended an aluminium bar in a vacuum at a very low temperature. The idea was that the bar would be set resonating by the residual gravity waves. The experiment worked by insulating the bar from other 'noise' that might also set it resonating. Collins describes the experimental trials and tribulations of the group, and also records that the experiment ended in controversy: the experimenters thought they had detected gravity waves, and everyone else thought otherwise. So why was there disagreement? One answer is that the experiments done by other physicists were slightly different. Reasoning that the work of first group of experimentalists was flawed, they sought to invent *better* experiments, but their attempts to do so met with failure, and they concluded that gravity waves were undetectable. Controversy ensued and it rumbled on, but in the end almost everyone said that whatever it was that had set the bar in the first experiment ringing, it wasn't gravity waves.

So that's the story. But how does it show that reality is not destiny? The answer is that the controversy was about three things all ravelled up together. First, it was about which *experiments* were working properly and which were not. Second, it was about the competence or otherwise of different *experimenters* – about *scientific expertise and authority*. So how was this sorted out? It's tempting to say that reality was the judge, but Collins shows that this is wrong *because there was no way of knowing about gravity waves outside the experiments themselves* and (as I've just said) those experiments produced different results. So that's the third strand in the weave. *This was a controversy that was also, and at the same time, a debate about reality*.

What does this tell us? The answer is that it tells us that realities, experiments, and scientific competences were *all being simultaneously negotiated*. None came first. Reality wasn't destiny. Indeed it only appeared in the course of scientific experiments. I'll say that again and make it slightly more grand. Whatever Northern metaphysics may be telling us about realities that exist out there in the space-time box of the universe, the gravity wave experiment suggests *that in practice such realities depend on the particular practices from which they emerge*. And (I guess I need to add) there is nothing outside practice. We're embedded in practices all the way down.

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[8] See Collins (1975).

Multiple realities

The argument, then, is that realities are enacted in practices even in the citadels of Northern technoscience. They don't float free and untethered. That's the first lesson. But here is a second lesson about metaphysics from STS. Indeed it's implied in the first. *Different realities are enacted in different practices*, and this is a chronic condition. And, once again, we don't have to go to the post-colonial encounters of the Northern Territories of Australia or to the James Bay Cree to see this. We can see *different practices enacting different realities alongside one another* in the heart of Western technoscience.

Here's another STS study, this time by Annemarie Mol[9]. Mol spent a year looking at the practices around lower limb arteriosclerosis in a town in the Netherlands. She visited GP's surgeries where patients complained that when they walked, their legs hurt. She spent time in the radiology department where radiographs were taken. Here lower limb arteriosclerosis took the form of pictures of blood vessels highlighted against a dark background. She spent time in the hospital Doppler laboratory where technicians spread gel on the skin of patients and bounced ultrasound off the blood moving through their vessels. Here arteriosclerosis took the form of changes in the frequency of sounds. And finally she spent time in the operating theatre, where it took the form a grey-whitish putty-like substance blocking blood vessels – arteriosclerotic plaque.

So what to make of this? The obvious answer is a one-world explanation. A patient *has* lower limb arteriosclerosis. That's the *reality*. Then there are different *perspectives* on his or her condition. This is certainly how the textbook and those involved tell it. But *this is Northern one-world metaphysics at work again*. It's being *assumed* that there's a single object and it looks different because different people have different viewpoints. And Mol washes this assumption away. She says: *realities are done in practices*. She says that if there are four practices which do lower-limb arteriosclerosis, then *there are four arterioscleroses*. This she calls 'the problem of difference'. Then she notes that in practice (always in practice) there is the problem of co-ordinating these realities. Perhaps they fit together fine, in which case good. On the other hand, perhaps they don't. Indeed, often this is the case, and a necessary negotiation in the case conference follows about how to hold them together, or what to give up. And then, Mol adds, sometimes there's not even a negotiation, and the different realities are simply held apart in different places.

There are shades of Collins' gravity waves at work here. Once again, *reality is not destiny*. And there are shades of Verran's legal land right negotiations too, for *different realities are somehow or other being patched together in practice*. But remember that we aren't on the Southern periphery here. We're right at the heart of Northern technoscience, and it *thinks* that it is dealing with a single reality. Indeed it is doing its best to *enact* a single reality. But at the same time if we attend to the *practices*, we find that it's dealing with *multiple* realities and the contingent business of trying to patch these together. So the metaphysics may be wrong, but it's still a powerful imaginary. And here's the complicating qualification: since it is a powerful reality, it follows that *it isn't all wrong either*. Indeed, this is a paradox that Mol encapsulates in the title that she gives the book. Not *Bodies Multiple* because there aren't a lot of disconnected bodies, but *The Body Multiple*, because they also overlap. She might have called it *The Body Fractional*.

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[9] Mol (2002). For further context on multiplicity see Law (2004).

Divisions of labour

So that is a brief characterisation of Northern one-world doctrines. But where did they come from and how did they get themselves so thoroughly embedded? To answer these questions we need help from historians and theologians[10], but we also need to think structurally. This is because *differences are hidden by divisions of labour*. Mol's study can be read this way. As I have just implied, the health care system copes with *different* arteriosclerosis-realities *until it tries to put them together*. It's only then that problems blow up. And once this happens, then how are the differences handled? Again, I've just been rehearsing the answer: realities get downgraded to perspectives on a *single* reality. But keeping them separate has its merits too. In particular, you don't have to put all your eggs in one reality basket[11]. Indeed you can shuffle between realities. And then again, you can *rank* the places where differences are generated. You can *disqualify* people and practices by creating *authorities*. In that way only a few get to pronounce on the real.

Here's another version of the division of labour tactic. You can separate the world into two domains. There's the part where you *expect* difference. This you call this the *social*, the *political*, or the *religious*. It's the place where irreducibly different perspectives jostle together in a cacophony with which carries little or no metaphysical weight. And then there's the part where you *don't* expect difference. This is called *nature*. So how does nature get known? The answer is that you look for properly qualified people and you send them off to sequestered places such as laboratories, and you get them to report back when the reality work has been done. And this is the place, the natural world, where a one-world reality prospers.

One. Qualification versus disqualification. Two. Nature versus society. If you put these versions of division together you get a two-by-two table. And in the corner of the table occupied both by qualification *and* nature you find natural science. That's where the serious reality work gets done in the Northern settlement – a double division that was erected, historically, in seventeenth century England. And this takes me to my third quick visit to the literatures of STS, because I want to borrow from the work of social historians Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer[12], who describe how Robert Boyle built an air pump and at the same time established the outlines of the settlement that I have just described. Boyle did this, say Shapin and Schaffer, by deploying three *'technologies of truth'*: one, the *material*; two, the *literary*; and three, the *social*. A word on each of these.

At the core of Boyle's work was an air-pump. Large and elaborate by the standards of age, this was seventeenth century 'big science'. The working assumption here was that truth about the world comes, or should come, from experiments – and in this context, experiments using the air pump. This was a strong assumption. Henceforth truths about nature wouldn't come from the Bible. They wouldn't come from speculative philosophy. And they wouldn't have anything to do with politics or

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[10] For me it was a revelation to discover that chaos, cosmogony, cosmology and the habit of seeking a single order, in short a large part of the apparatus of one-world metaphysics developed in the western philosophical doctrines of classical antiquity, are more or less alien to contemporary Chinese metaphysics. The latter, I learned quite recently, does without a single universe Hall and Ames (1995). I can't do the historical work myself, but the sharp surprise that accompanied this discovery reminded me that looking for difference is a vital antidote to metaphysical self-sealing.

[11] This is implicit, and very often explicit, in Bruno Latour's diagnosis of non-modernity. See, for instance, Latour (1993), but also his revealing remarks, precisely about colonialism, in his *Irreductions* (1988).

[12] Shapin (1984) Shapin and Schaffer (1985).

political opinions. This, then, was the first material technology at work, and it also laid down a division of labour. *Nature was being distinguished from society, from religion, and from politics*.

So far so good. But most people couldn't get to London to see the air pump and look at the experiments. So how were they to learn about and assess the truths being produced? The answer was technology number two: the *literary*. Boyle argued and assumed that you didn't need to be there if you could read about it, *so long as the writing was done in the right way*. Which meant? Writing modestly. Avoiding speculation. Not voicing opinions. Steering clear of politics and religion. Admitting experimental failure. Being pedantic. Including illustrations. Being cautious. Writing firmly, but only about matters of fact. And indeed, this literary technology was the forerunner of the contemporary scientific paper. And it created and helped to sustain division of labour number two. Henceforth *reports about nature were to be separated from the world of the human*. Indeed, in this way of writing (this was its art) nature was being made to speak for itself. Humans were no longer active agents. They simply reported what had happened, what they had seen. In this way what Shapin and Schaffer call 'virtual witnessing' was created. But who should read the reports? Who was competent to do so? The answer, of course, was not everyone.

This moves us to the third innovation, and the issue of *social technology*. Who should be included? Or, turn the question round, who should be *excluded*? Here the issue was: who should count as a reliable witness? And the answer (which came from the law) was that you could only trust the testimony of people who were of independent means. So, for instance, you couldn't trust a servant to tell the truth in a court case because he or she might be influenced by his or her master. S/he might be constrained. A similar logic applied to women who were legally subservient to men in seventeenth century England: to their fathers, their husbands or their bothers. They too were not disinterested. So this was a way of reasoning that was transferred from the law to natural philosophy. Only the disinterested person could be trusted as a witness. Only the disinterested person could form part of the community of witnesses. Which in practice, as I have just said, meant men of independent means. And this was the third aspect of this division of labour. The views of most people could simply be written off.

There has been lots of debate in STS and feminist writing about the character of independence, and it's gendering[13]. But it we stick with the reality-work we can see that Shapin and Schaffer haven't only told us an important story about the origins of Northern science. They've also described *another set of tactics that help to sustain Northern one-world metaphysics*. Here's the secret. *You need to get the division of labour right*. You have to distinguish between nature and culture on the one hand, and facts and values on the other. And you need to do this in material, literary and social forms. Oh yes, and then you need to embed these divisions in an appropriate set of social institutions. And once you've done all that, the assumption that there is a single reality, a universe, is firmly embedded. Or at least got itself firmly embedded in the seventeenth century. For from then on, one world metaphysics starts to work in the North, as it were, by *stealth*.

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[13] See, for instance, Haraway (1997).

Metaphysics by stealth

And it's still at work. So let me switch domains and illustrate this in a fourth brief STS-informed example. This time, and I apologise for the swerve, I will talk briefly about a social survey. This is the story.

Twice a year the Eurobarometer surveys the citizens of Europe. For instance in 2007 it interviewed 27,000 people in 29 countries in the EU about their attitudes to farm animal welfare.[14] Here are some sample questions. One. '*Please tell me on a scale of 1-10 how important is it to you that the welfare of farmed animals is protected?*'[15] Two. '*Would you like to be more informed about the conditions under which animals are farmed ..?*'[16] And three. '*Would you be willing to change your usual place of shopping in order to be able to buy more animal welfare friendly food products?*'[17]

The 2007 results of these questions were as follows. It turns out that, one, quote: '*Animal welfare is seen as a matter of great importance*'. … 'the average rating given was marginally under eight (7.8).'[18] Two, that 58% of EU citizens want to be better informed about farming conditions.[19] And three, that over 60% say they'd shop somewhere different to buy more welfare-friendly food.[20] Here's this last result in the form of a map:
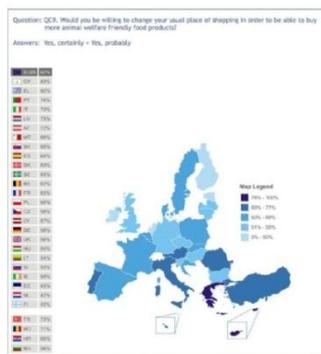
So what's going on? What is it that these possibly rather mundane findings are telling us about one-world doctrines and stealth?

In the first instance we're being told about something that has nothing to do with stealth: we're being told explicitly about how people think, and about country differences. But there is also a bunch of hidden assumptions embedded in these results and in the survey more generally, and it is these that are interesting in the present context. It's being assumed, one, that the *person* speaks an *appropriate national language*; it's being assumed, two, that she knows what an *interview* is (and please don't make the mistake of thinking that this is self-evident. The 'interviewee' is a twentieth century invention[21]); it's being assumed, three, that she's *arithmetically competent* (she can, for

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[14] European Commission (2007, Annex, Technical Specifications, no page number). This case is more fully discussed in Law (2009).
[15] European Commission (2007, 4).
[16] European Commission (2007, 11).
[17] European Commission (2007, 37).
[18] European Commission (2007, 4).
[19] European Commission (2007, 11).
[20] European Commission (2007, 37).
[21] Savage (2010).

instance, answer 'seven' on a scale from one to ten with some idea what this might imply); its being assumed, four, that she possesses some more or less *stable attitudes* which influence her behaviour; and it's being assumed, five, that those attitudes intersect with information which further influences her behaviour. All of this is pretty obvious. To make it explicit is to risk the accusation of pedantry. Most of the time it is simply there, at work below the radar. But this is what makes it interesting: precisely the fact that it *is* going on beneath the radar. Because, this is the important point, it is *how the person is being <u>enacted</u> in the survey*. Let me put that more strongly. It is how survey person is being *done*. It is what the survey person is made to *be*. And other kinds of people aren't getting into the survey at all.

None of this is stupid. It is clear that people can be *formatted* in this way. Surveys work, precisely because they are able to do this. That's their reality. That's how they see individuals. And, to extend the argument, similar work is also being done for *collectivities*. So in the Eurobarometer, nations, social groups, and the European Union are all being rendered as *collections of individuals*. You do the statistics on your sample, you scale your findings up, you enter the appropriate health warnings, and then you have a picture of that collective. It's this vision that allows you to make claims about the EU, or about the difference, say, between Hungary on the one hand and Denmark on the other. Let me again make the point as strongly as I can. That's what the collective *becomes* in survey practice: a *collection of individuals*. It is a population with attributes. In the survey, and wherever the results of the survey circulate. For instance in the corridors of power in Brussels.

So where do the one-world metaphysics creep in? The answer is: they are being done by stealth in the survey. They are taking the form of what we might think of as *blank realism*. In surveys nation states are containers filled with people. So the UK becomes a space with 48 million people in it. Not *terra nullius*, but *terra plenus*. The space isn't empty. It is filled with people. But it's the same metaphysics. And, here's what's interesting. No one has noticed or commented on the fact that collectivity is being created in this way. Which, surely, is precisely the art of the whole mechanism. So we don't have to imagine that the pollsters sat there rubbing their hands together and saying: 'hah, let's smuggle in a commitment to one-world metaphysics'. What's happening is a whole lot more powerful. It's just going on. And then this effect – I'm calling it 'blank realism' – is underpinned by *perspectivalism*. The UK isn't just 48 million adults. It is other things too, for instance a liberal democracy. And finally, this blank realism is also abetted by equally *realist* forms of *criticism*. For instance, if I complain that people aren't containers of stable attitudes but are really (say) active, puzzle-solving interpretive agents, do you see what I've done? The answer is that I've *also* committed myself to a one-world metaphysics. I'm saying that people are like this, and not like that. I'm saying, then, that like blank realism and perspectivalism, criticism also works, not always but often, *to embed and enact one-world doctrines*. Indeed criticism can be understood as a non-permissive version of perspectivalism.

Conclusion

Let's move to a conclusion.

My argument, it isn't original, is that one-world metaphysics are catastrophic in post-colonial encounters. They reduce difference. They evacuate reality from non-dominant reals. They turn other

worlds into the beliefs, the mere beliefs, of people who are more or less like you and me. It insists, in the end, that there is a universe and that we are all inside it, one way or another.

Like Helen Verran I've been arguing that it doesn't have to be this way. If reals are contingent and relational enactments, if they are done in performances and rituals in specific locations, then there is no reason to suppose that those performances will all add up to generate a single reality. On the contrary. It seems much more likely that they *won't* all fit together. That there isn't a single container universe. That, instead, there are multiple realities, there's a fractiverse. In which case the analytical and political question follows: *how might we craft encounters across ontological difference well*?

That's the domain of postcolonialism. It struggles to understand and work in the power-saturated interactions between Northern realities and those of the South. But then what to make of the North itself? This is the question I have tried to open up in this paper. For, though its metaphysics are monstrous and utterly painful in a colonial and post-colonial context, I also want to suggest that the North can also be seen as an emperor clad in rather erratic metaphysical clothing. So I've tried to show that if reality is destiny in the North, this is an achievement that gets itself enacted in ways that are both uncertain and patchy. For there *is* multiplicity, ontological multiplicity, in the North. Realities in the plural are endlessly being done alongside one-world imaginaries. So my question has been: how *is* it that those imaginaries sustain themselves? And in thinking about this I've talked about the importance of *divisions of labour*, of *perspectivalism*, and of *stealth* – the creation of what one might think of as collateral realities, that is, those realities that get done incidentally and powerfully along the way, as it were by default[22]. So, here's the argument, though the one-world metaphysics of the north are powerful, they aren't quite as powerful as they appear, or indeed imagine themselves, to be. They rest on a raggedy set of strategies that are also in the business of repressing difference. And, here's the hope, if we can detect those strategies at work then we can start to try to unstitch them. *We can create imaginaries within the North that include differences*. Perhaps, then, two kinds of suggestions follow.

The first has to do with the places of post-colonial encounter. The question is: how might these be imagined? How, in particular, might the North be imagined? Because it is powerful, for sure, but we don't need to add to that power. In particular, we don't need to add to its weight by re-enacting it as if it were simply singular. We don't need to collude with it by *participating* in its attempts to enact a one-world world. We don't have to treat it as if it were indeed an 'it' rather than a motley crowd of partial differences, and an ontological muddle. I can't do this work myself: in the context of post-colonialism I am simply an amateur. But surely if the North *is* multiple, if it does reals in different ways, then in a politics of encounter between North and South it should somehow be possible to play the differences internal to the North off against one another.

The second has to do with the North itself: with the belly of the beast. It seems to me that various consequences follow. First we surely need to find ways of levering open its multiplicities. This is because if different reals are done in linked practices (think of the case of arteriosclerosis) then no doubt some of these reals are better in particular contexts than others. This, then, is a judgement that needs to be made in local political circumstances: which real to try to enact, and which to erode and where; and then, to be sure, what it is that counts as 'better' in the circumstances. Second, we

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[22] Law (2011).

need to find ways of puncturing the propensity of the North to self-sealing one-world metaphysics. I've touched on this above, but the mechanics of self-sealing – and its weak points – deserve systematic attention. And then, third, surely it is crucial to find ways of connecting the great politically critical traditions of Northern social science with the openings afforded by post-colonial, anthropological and STS work on ontological difference. This, of course, is its own large set of agendas. But here I hope I have said enough to show that the occasional radical propensity to treat metaphysical multiplicity as if it were a simple intellectual pastime is a serious political mistake. If the North more or less successfully colonises its own fractionalities and seeks to reduce these to singularity, then this too deserves resistance. For, and this is my final point, the post-colonial encounter is to be found not simply at those points where the North meets the South, but also deep within the North itself. The reality-injuries at the raw edges of the North are real and they are a moral and political scandal. It is a triumph that the post-colonial scholar-activists who work in these places have started to find ways of articulating them. But the injuries that the North hides within – and from – itself are a scandal too. If we live within the North, indeed as I do, it surely becomes an urgent task to craft ways of undoing just some of our own reality-injuries.[23]

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[23] Here I gesture to the work of Isabelle Stengers (see {Stengers, 2008 #3348} and Pignarre and Stengers {, 2010 #3367}) who draws the metaphor of craft from neo-paganism,

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