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Abstract

Today, the impact of the work of both Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour is increasingly evident in anthropology, most notably in the subfields of medical anthropology and the anthropology of science and technology. However, so far the oeuvres of these two thinkers have not been compared in a systematic fashion in the secondary literature. The present consideration intends a sustained comparison of their work to the end of problematizing the notion of the human or the *anthropos*. We suggest that both Foucault and Latour provide us with vital means to question human exceptionalism. Instead of calling upon the essence of human subjectivity by drawing on the notion of intentionality, for instance, they break open the interiority and autonomous hidden essence of the human. While Foucault does this mainly with his notion of the death of Man, Latour's work calls human essence into question by asserting the respective birth of non-humanity. We argue that it is especially the two thinkers' mutual concern with relationality that makes their work central to recent discussions of 'posthumanism' by proposing a form of 'dhumanism'. However, at the same time Foucault and Latour tend to neglect the 'outside' of relations, although both see it as providing the resources for every assemblage.

Keywords

anthropos, Foucault, intentionality, Latour, non-humans, posthumanism, relationism

Introduction

Today, the impact of the work of both Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour is increasingly evident in anthropology, most notably in the subfields of medical

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anthropology and the anthropology of science and technology. In addition to a vast body of secondary literature discussing their work (see, for example, Kendall and Wickham 1999; Keller 2005; Schroer 2008), there are also various scholars working within the field of anthropology as well as science and technology studies (STS) who have applied Latourian and Foucauldian notions and juxtaposed them with one another (see for example Haraway 1989, 1992, 1997; Gomart and Hennion 1999: 221; Law 2002: 91–2; 2004: 35–6; Jensen 2008: 361–3).

However, we feel that, so far, not only are the oeuvres of Foucault and Latour lacking a sustained and systematic comparison but also the enormous potential they *together* have as regards rethinking the presuppositions and basic assumptions of anthropology remains to be discovered or at least made more explicit. In the work that follows, we set out to compare the theoretical endeavours of Foucault and Latour in the light of the question of the human or the *anthropos*.¹ We contend that both thinkers provide posthumanist anthropology and philosophy with vital means to challenge human exceptionalism – and this despite the fact that both Foucault and Latour bracket the question of the human in their work and seem to lack even interest in examining the boundary-making practices by which the human is distinguished from its ‘others’ (animals, plants or things, for example). We will argue more fully later that it is in their *a*-humanism, that is, in their manner of breaking open the interiority and autonomous hidden essence of the human,² that the importance of Foucault and Latour to posthumanist anthropology lies.

Of course, we acknowledge that a detailed comparison of Foucault and Latour may be questioned down to even its sense, on account of the several obvious differences between the two in their work. Firstly, while Foucault focused exclusively on games of truth where the object of knowledge is man, Latour’s concerns are not confined to the boundaries of the human sciences. Instead, he characteristically studies the ‘hard sciences’ by focusing on laboratories, microbes, technology and the like. Indeed, Latour regards Foucault as a rather traditional epistemologist, although at the same time he admits that Foucault might have become absorbed in his thinking more than he has recognized and acknowledged (Latour and Crawford, 1993).³ Secondly, the research strategies of the two thinkers are quite different. While Foucault worked mainly in the field of historical studies by using textual sources – that is, ‘on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times’ (Foucault 2000b: 369) – Latour carries out anthropological studies by doing ethnographic fieldwork, having worked at sites such as laboratories, the Boa Vista rainforest in the Amazon, and the Conseil d’Etat. Thirdly, there is also a considerable difference in scale between Foucault’s and Latour’s explorations. If the first, especially in his early work, looks for the conditions of the possibility for knowledge and truth in the epistemic structure encompassing a whole era (see Foucault 2003), for the latter these conditions are situated in much more limited settings or in the local connections creating networks – which can be considered as ‘micro-epistemes’ of a sort – in various sizes and shapes.

Given the differences mentioned, it is perhaps not at all surprising that the theoretical endeavours of Foucault and Latour have not received systematic

treatment in the secondary literature. However, at least when it comes to the question of the *anthropos*, it is their *differences* rather than their similarities that are crucial, as the perspectives of the two thinkers prove to be complementary. Stressing the complementary nature of their research projects is central to our argument in this article.

We begin with the very question of the *anthropos* and how the perspectives of Foucault and Latour contribute to our understanding of it. We claim that, for both Foucault and Latour, human subjects are defined not by some autonomous essence but by the specific networks in which they participate. In his archaeology of knowledge, Foucault links the question of ‘man’ to various historical knowledge practices. Latour in his symmetrical anthropology, by contrast, sheds light on the production of the human in the present tense with his explorations of the non-humans participating in our collective life. Accordingly, both view humans as compounds of relations. The second section of the present article sets out to undermine the human-centred notion of action by examining intentionality as a product of the coming together and interchange of both human and non-human elements. The discussion of the relational composition of the human leads to the third theme of the article – the relationism integral to the work of both Foucault and Latour. At the same time, we come to pose the question of the nature of the *outside* of relations. Notwithstanding their relationism, neither Foucault nor Latour holds that relations would exhaust the whole of the real. We argue that for both Foucault and Latour it is the outside of associations that ultimately provides the resources for every action and also for every compound of the human, but, equally, both of them also fail to do this justice. We conclude the article by reassessing Foucault’s and Latour’s possible contribution to the recent discussion of the forms of the human today, which in its most radical form can be formulated as the question: Have we ever been only human?

The *anthropos*

In his work, Foucault casts systematic doubt on anthropological ‘universals’, whether concerning man’s biological, mental or social features. He is wary of all assumptions of an autonomous inner essence of man or self-enclosed homology of humanity. Instead, he regards the human as contingent and temporary, for it is dependent upon relations and their changes. It is in *The Order of Things* (2003) that this idea finds its most radical expression. In the book, Foucault famously asserts that, while the notion of the essence of human subjectivity has underlain the analysis of everything that can be given to our experience from Kant until the present day, Man as the capitalization-accorded figure who appears as the basis and measure of things is someone from whom we are already departing. Thus the well-known Foucauldian prophecy, according to which Man is bound to ‘be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’ (Foucault 2003: 422).

Now, decades after the high tide of structuralism, it seems that Foucault’s prophecy was clearly exaggerated, if not even completely mistaken. Man has not

disappeared entirely. On the contrary, to some extent, Man is still an integral part in the *logoi* of contemporary thinking every time the essence or intrinsic faculties of human beings are invoked or sought (Rabinow 2003), as is the case when humans are distinguished from animals, plants and things, and culture is set apart from nature. However, that Foucault's announcement about the death of Man was perhaps premature does not render his account erroneous or futile. It is not so much as an epochal claim as it is as a *methodological* principle that the idea has significance. Namely, it draws our attention to the production of the human in its various entanglements with forces and forms outside it. From the constitutive human subject, it turns to the ways in which the human has been constituted.

Accordingly, in his work Foucault shows us again and again how the form of 'man' is produced at the intersection of the historical conditions of knowledge and the relations of power. In *The Order of Things*, for example, he depicts how the form of Man appeared at the threshold of modern knowledge through Life, Labour and Language: man was not only one who lives, labours and speaks but also one who can be known only insofar as he lives, labours and speaks and, finally, one who experiences and has knowledge of life, labour and language (Foucault 2003: 341, 383). The very empiricity in man – that is, the fact that he lives, works and speaks – became the transcendental foundation of knowledge. Thus, Life, Labour and Language appeared as 'quasi-transcendentals' (Foucault 2003: 272).

The lesson to be learned here is that the characteristic of modern knowledge is therefore not the application of objective scientific methods (to man), as classical rationalism maintains, but instead the emergence of such a figure of Man who is at once both the object and subject of knowledge – literally an 'empirico-transcendental doublet' (Foucault 2003: 350). However, because they persistently adhere to the idea of constitutive Man, for Foucault modern forms of thought have come to their end in the sense that they no longer render knowledge possible. The generative relations that constitute the figure of the human have been removed and replaced with the reified Man that assures the human sciences the basis of their knowledge. Their belief in the truth granted by the *cogito* is only one historical form of knowledge in the order of truth games (see Foucault 2003: 351).

However, in his analyses Foucault does not answer the question of to which forces the human is connected today. It is not possible for the Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge to describe our contemporary preconditions; because its own speech is always already conditioned and restricted by them, it is always already from within them that it speaks (see Foucault 2004: 146). Foucault's manner of study is based upon a 'discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practice' (Foucault 2004: 147). That is why it is possible for Foucault to describe only those discourses and practices that have ceased to be our own, and at most draw sketchy lines of embryonic assemblages not yet in full operation.

It is here that the work of Latour significantly complements Foucault's analyses by shifting the focus from the archaeological and genealogical past to the anthropological present. In this sense, Latour can be lined up with thinkers such as

Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway and key Foucault interlocutors Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose. In *Foucault* (1999: 102, 108), Deleuze asks, having noted the limitations of Foucault's analysis, with what forces the human enters into a relation now, and what kind of compound emerges as a result, if it is not the Man-form any more than the God-form. For Deleuze, we are constituted by our relations with information technology and computers instead of thermodynamic machines, with silicon instead of carbon, with the chains of the genetic code instead of the organism and with modern literature instead of the sovereignty of the signifier (Deleuze 1999: 109; 1995: 180). Haraway (1989, 1997) has suggested something quite similar to this, as she has examined subjectivity as a cybernetic compound of a biological body, information networks, cells and silicon in the form of concretely materialized information.⁴ Finally, Rabinow and Rose have postulated the transformation of the *anthropos* 'from ontological to artificial' in the practices of 'biopolitics', 'bio-power' or 'biosociality' (Rabinow and Rose 2003, xxxi; see also Rabinow 1992; Rabinow and Rose 2006; Rose 2006).

While sharing with them the belief that humans are shaped by forces 'other' to them, Latour holds a perspective on the form of the human that nevertheless differs greatly from the above-mentioned thinkers. He does not seek any distinctive features or forces that would define our whole era or the present stage of man.⁵ On the contrary, he studies empirically the concrete ways in which humans are enmeshed with what he terms *non-humans*. According to Latour (2002), various non-humans, such as technology, things and natural phenomena, are an integral part of our existence. This is so to the extent that 'the human [...] cannot be grasped and saved unless that other part of itself, the share of things, is restored to it' (Latour 1993: 136). We are significantly dependent on the capabilities of various non-humans in our everyday existence. For example, in order to be able to type these words, we must join forces with a heterogeneous network or assemblage of all kinds of other forces, ranging from word processors, email messages and books to the tiny components of our laptop computers, electricity, ancestors within the Indo-European language group and even food. And, while the present-day conception of hygiene is close to being phobic of bacteria, they too are necessary in the production of several joys of life (such as wine, beer and cheese), and we need swarms of bacteria just to keep our skin sufficiently moist.

By contrasting active humans to assumedly passive non-humans a priori, Latour thinks, we are in danger of losing our understanding not only of humans but of non-humans as well: 'The human is not a constitutional pole to be opposed to that of the non-human. The two expressions "humans" and "nonhumans" are belated results that no longer suffice to designate the other dimension' (Latour 1993: 137). Humanity and non-humanity are inextricably enmeshed.

Given that, according to Latour, humans owe their agentic capability to a coming together of a large number and variety of elements, agency should be 'distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field' (Bennett 2010: 23). Latour holds that action is not an intrinsic trait of entities, such that we, for example, could assign only human subjects the ability to act, and what entities

are capable of is defined, according to him, in sets of 'trials' in the mutual relationships of entities. He defines action in terms of *influence* or *effects* on others. In *Pandora's Hope* (1999: 122), he insists that 'there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed or created by the character that is the focus of attention'. Therefore, for Latour, the capacity to act 'implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor humans in general' (Latour 1996). Non-humans – such as houses, airplanes, mobile phones, foodstuffs, plagues or missiles – do not merely form the background, foundation, transparent means or passive object of human actions; they too are capable of producing effects and making something happen. Floods, tornados and tsunamis occasionally cause suffering and misery to tens or even hundreds of thousands of people; erupting volcanoes can bring the flight traffic of a whole continent to a halt; catching a virus makes us sick, but when a virus becomes a pandemic, it may lead nations to close their borders and equally make lots of money for the companies producing vaccination; and the food we eat can make us not only slimmer or larger but happy or depressed, energetic or tired.

To come back to the relation between Foucault and Latour, while Foucault's archaeological analysis of the historical contingency of Man as a figure of knowledge succeeded in decentring the notion of an autonomous subject, it fell short in at least two respects. First, because of the historical distance that it necessitates, the Foucauldian archaeology can only state, in a negative manner, our difference from the assemblages and forms that no longer constitute our present. Here Latour's studies of the concrete ways in which human and non-human elements fold into one another complement the Foucauldian announcement of the death of Man significantly. Second, the power that Foucault assigns to the materials alien or other to the human subject ultimately remains relatively restricted. In his archaeology of knowledge, discourses appear as the historical conditions of possibility and boundaries of subjectivity, and even in his genealogical studies Foucault assigns explicit agency only to humans. In his work, humans are not *surprised* by the actions of things. Latour, by contrast, suggests that the actions of humans depend on these humans' 'allies', so to speak: humans owe their agentic efficacy and capabilities to the larger assemblage of elements that they are part of. In the next section of the paper, we look more closely at how both Foucault and Latour undermine the all-too-human notions of action by questioning any direct links between agency and intentionality.

Prostheses of intentionality

Needless to say, the Latourian idea of non-human agency poses a challenge to the human-centred notions of action. Therefore, it is also bound to face the obvious objection that, even though non-humans may produce effects, the intentionality behind their action nonetheless remains entirely human. After all, action is usually considered to necessitate intentionality, purposefulness, will and the like. While video cameras, airplanes and freezers, among other things, admittedly enable

humans to do things they would not be able to do without them (e.g. capture moving images, fly and keep foodstuffs fresh and edible), one might still object to the idea of non-humans as actors or 'actants' (Latour 1996, 1999) in their own right. One might argue that, no matter what, the supposed actions of these non-humans are possible only because of humans, for it is humans who have designed and built them for a specific purpose.

This argument, however, suffers from two flaws. First, there are various non-humans, such as animals, plants and bacteria or such as earthquakes, meteors and storms, that do not need humans before being effective. On the contrary, it would be an insane case of human hubris to assume that all natural disasters are ultimately caused by human actions. In fact, it is quite safe to assume that, as argued by Jane Bennett (2010: 151–2, note 38), 'humans need nonhumans to function more than nonhumans need humans, for many nonhumans – from a can rusting at the bottom of a landfill to a colony of spores in the Arctic – fester or live beyond the proximity of humans'. In other words, while humans initiate and/or mediate *some* of the actions of non-humans, practically *all* human actions are mediated by non-humans.

Second, not even human-made things are sheer passive and transparent means of human action. On the contrary, there is an element of *surprise* in all action. We are always to some extent surprised by what things do. But not only that: 'That which acts through me is also surprised by what I do' (Latour 1999: 281). Often we are even surprised by what we ourselves do; our own actions are not always crystal clear to us (as psychoanalysis famously stresses). Nevertheless, the point is that no entity is a perfectly loyal, passive instrument of action; on the contrary, each modifies, transforms and mutates what it mediates, transports and transmits. Or, to draw on Latourian parlance, all these 'mediators' bring about a 'translation' (Latour 1986: 267–8).

The import of anthropology (and sociology), against simple materialisms, is, without doubt, the insight that material objects are only rarely nothing but brute matter. Rather, often they also embody social relationships. A wedding ring ties spouses to one another, a ball has significance only as part of a game and a sacramental object mediates the relation of believers to their god. It is only when completely detached from human actions, perception and existence that materiality is all that there is to objects. One of Latour's instructive examples of how material objects are not *only* material is the speed bump found on the campus:

In artifacts and technologies we do not find the efficiency and stubbornness of matter, imprinting chains of cause and effect onto malleable humans. The speed bump is ultimately *not* made of matter; it is full of engineers and chancellors and lawmakers, commingling their wills and their story lines with those of gravel, concrete, paint, and standard calculation. (Latour 1999: 190)

In the speed bump, various intentions and goals – to reduce road deaths, ensure obedience to traffic regulations and thereby guard public morality, for

example – are folded into concrete. Nevertheless, this is not the same thing as to say that the agency of the speed bump would be reducible to human intentionality. It is no neutral carrier of human will. On the contrary, by translating the respect for law and for the life of students into concern over the suspension of one's car, it fundamentally modifies and shapes the initial enunciations. First, it brings about an 'actorial' shift: the speed bump is not a policeman, nor does it resemble one (even though in French it is called a 'sleeping policeman'). Second, it forges a 'spatial' shift: 'on the campus road there now resides a new actant that slows down cars (or damages them)'. Finally, it accomplishes a 'temporal' shift: the bump is constantly present and acts, day and night, independent of the engineers, the policemen and the lawmakers who have disappeared from the scene (Latour 1999: 188).

In the rest of this section, we try to loosen the notion of action from its strings to intentionality even more by looking at how human intentionality itself may be produced in and by the interplay of human and non-human elements. Both Foucault and Latour challenge the idea of autonomous intentionality. They distribute intentionality over the relational field of networks. For them, intentionality is carried and supported by various extra-somatic materials instead of being an activity confined within the human mind alone.

Let us begin with Foucault. His archaeology of knowledge sets out to open a new manner of examining the history of thought. It studies knowledge and thought free from the theory of subject and the principle of the knowing subject. Instead of the knowing, intentional subject, it explores the knowledge (*savoir*) that occurs in discursive practices and that makes it possible for something to appear to the consciousness of a subject. In other words, instead of asking how our knowledge is theoretically conditioned, Foucault poses the question of how our theories and the knowledge that we know (*connaissance*) are conditioned by certain historical apriorisms. By focusing on discourses, Foucault dethrones the sovereign subject: knowledge becomes something that nobody knows and thinking is something that nobody has thought; it does not presuppose the knowing and thinking subject (see Foucault 2003: xiv–xv; 2004: 14, 17, 61). This becomes evident already in his manner of defining 'thought' as 'the act that posits a subject and an object' (Foucault 2000b: 459): the subject of a discourse is not identical to an 'author' but merely 'a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals' (Foucault 2004: 107). For the speaking individuals, discourses offer different subject positions and define who is allowed to use certain language (for instance, medical language) and whose speech is taken for real in its statements.

For Latour, intentionality and thought (or reflexive intentionality) owe their power to a successful mobilization of a multiplicity of elements. In *The Pasteurization of France* (1988: 218), for example, he rejects the whole idea of there being any special activity called thought: 'When we talk of "thought", even the most sceptical lose their critical faculties. Like vulgar sorcerers, they let "thought" travel at high speed over great distances.' Latour's point is that thought should be seen not as an activity attributed to the mind only but as a

coming together of heterogeneous human and non-human elements. As he notes of science in his first book, *Laboratory Life* ([1979] 1986), co-authored with Steve Woolgar, it is crucial 'to try sociologically to understand what is all too frequently transformed into stories about minds having ideas. A useful maxim is Heidegger's observation that "Gedanke ist Handwerk": thinking is craftwork' (Latour and Woolgar 1986: 171).

Latour refutes the common criticism according to which non-humans, because they lack intentions, cannot 'act'. According to Latour, neither do humans have intentionality: 'Purposeful action and intentionality may not be properties of objects, but they are not properties of humans either. They are properties of institutions, of apparatuses, of what Foucault called *dispositifs*' (Latour 1999: 192). In other words, intentionality, for Latour, is a property of networks. One is reminded here of Foucault's conception of power, not least because Latour himself makes the reference to Foucault's notion of the *dispositif* (to which we shall return in the next section). Foucault (1990) thinks that power is at once 'intentional' and 'asubjective'. While constantly being injected with aims, purposes and calculation, power is not reducible to the ambitions and decisions of any individual subjects. Nowhere can one find an all-powerful individual, a master under whose control the workings of power might be.

However, instead of claiming, as Latour does, that humans do not possess intentionality, it is perhaps more accurate to say that they do but that their intentionality is only possible thanks to interrelations with various non-human elements. On this account, intentionality would be seen as a product of the interfolding of human and non-human forces (Bennett 2010: 31). This is precisely the point Bernard Stiegler makes in *The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998), the first volume of his *Technics and Time*. Stiegler suggests that the use of stone tools gave rise to our ancestors' psychological interiority. Prior needs were articulated with the stone of the tool, which thus gave recollection to the previous use of the tool. Not dissimilarly, Gregory Bateson (1972) has maintained that the 'mind' is immanent only in a system of relations and becomes operational by particular, material relations of exteriority upon which it can act both symbolically and materially. Bateson's famous quotation about a blind man's mind and action illustrates this point nicely:

But what about 'me'? Suppose I am a blind man, and I use a stick. I go tap, tap, tap. Where do I start? Is my mental system bounded at the handle of the stick? Is it bounded by my skin? Does it start halfway up the stick? Does it start at the tip of the stick? But these are nonsense questions. The stick is a pathway along which transforms of difference are being transmitted. The way to delineate the system is to draw the limiting line in such a way that you do not cut any of these pathways in ways which leave things inexplicable. If what you are trying to explain is a given piece of behavior, such as the locomotion of the blind man, then, for this purpose, you will need the street, the stick, the man; the street, the stick, and so on, round and round. (Bateson [1972] 2000: 465)

So, we feel that, to challenge the reduction of action and agency to intentionality and will, it is not enough to examine how experience and knowledge are historically conditioned by certain discursive practices, as Foucault does, nor to deprive humans of intentionality by saying that only networks possess it, as Latour does. Both Foucault and Latour remain too indifferent for the question of human capabilities. It would be necessary to examine in a manner more explicit than Foucault and Latour apply (and more along the lines of Stiegler and Bateson, for instance) how human intentionality emerges in and by the association of human capabilities with non-human forces.⁶

The outside

There is a strong relationism in both Foucault's and Latour's work. Many commentators have acknowledged this. Foucault examines not just man as a relational compound; Deleuze (1999: 102) notes that Foucault's general principle is that every form is a nexus of relations among forces. Graham Harman (2009: 80), in turn, claims that for Latour entities 'come to birth only *on the occasion* of their associations' and are transformed whenever they leave associations or enter new ones. For Latour, actants receive their efficacy by allying themselves with others. An actant is 'not the source of action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it'; it 'is what is *made* to act by many others' (Latour 2005: 46).

The relational emphasis of Foucault's thought is betrayed by, for instance, the notion of the *dispositif*, which was mentioned in the previous section, and the central position it holds in his later works. It would not require too much imagination to consider the 'actor-network' a certain kind of *dispositif* and vice versa. In fact, actor-network theorists themselves have remarked upon this (see Gomart and Hennion 1999; Callon 2008). As does the *dispositif*, an actor-network embodies various elements from science and technology to equipment, buildings, infrastructures, legal frameworks, ethical codes and black-boxed truths. And, similarly to the actor-network, a *dispositif*, as Foucault (1980: 194) puts it, is a 'system of relations', which can be set up between elements of different types. In addition, *dispositifs* and actor-networks are neither coherent nor stable structures – they change and move: in both cases, the relations that make up the network are in a state of ceaseless association and differentiation. The relations among the elements that make up *dispositifs* or actor-networks are also different across various situations and locations in the societal field.⁷

Notwithstanding their relationist emphasis, neither Foucault nor Latour would say that there is no 'outside' to the networks of relations. Therefore, both would also be likely to reject the idea of the human subject being reducible to one's relations. In the case of Foucault, the interpretations of his work often fail to acknowledge the existence and importance of the outside. Of course, Foucault does stress that there is no outside to power relations in the sense of there being any sense in trying to eliminate them or reach beyond them. Foucault (2000a: 291–2) stresses that

power is present in every human relationship, whether communicational, amorous, institutional, epistemic or economic, as a strategic element. Nevertheless, in *The History of Sexuality* (1990), he pictures *life*, which is at the same time within and outside power, as a resource of resistance. According to Foucault, with the birth of 'bio-power', life becomes the new aim or object of power, as bio-power seeks to govern life, to optimize, reinforce, control and organize its forces (Foucault 1990: 136). However, at the same time, life resists power. Life cannot be completely integrated into the techniques that control and administer it; instead, it 'constantly escapes them' (Foucault 1990: 143): life is that which is *unknown*, unformed; it is not yet governed, not yet measured and not yet administered. In fact, in his last piece of writing, entitled 'Life: Experience and Science' (2000b), Foucault even proposes a reformulation of the theory of the subject in line with the vitalism of which we get a glimpse in *The History of Sexuality*. In 'Life: Experience and Science', Foucault specifies that the radical feature of life is 'that which is capable of error' (Foucault 2000b: 476): 'Should not the whole theory of the subject be reformulated, seeing that knowledge, rather than opening onto the truth of the world, is deeply rooted in the "errors" of life?' (Foucault 2000b: 477).

Neither does Latour claim that entities are nothing apart from and beyond their relations. He seems to be merely suggesting that we should only *study* them in their relations. Latour acknowledges the existence of a vast hinterland of material that is simply *unconnected*. He calls it the *plasma* (see Latour 2002, 2005: 241–6). With the term, in Latour's own words, he refers to 'that which is not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialized, not yet engaged in metrological chains, not yet covered, surveyed, mobilized or subjectified' (2005: 244). So Latour does not think that there would be no outside to the relational grid. Rather, he admits that the networks of relations do not cover all of the real. In fact, if we are to believe Latour, networks cover only a small part of the real. According to him, if the social terrain would occupy as much room as the London tube network, the plasma would amount to the rest of London (Latour 2005: 244). Provided that we can know entities only in their relations – in their relations to *us*, a 'correlationist' (see Meillassoux 2008) would say – there is a lot to the world that is simply unknown. 'The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms', Latour (2005: 245) maintains.

Accordingly, both Foucault and Latour would probably have it that ultimately the ingredients of any action must come from the outside – that is, from life or plasma. For example, Foucault stresses that, vis-à-vis power, resistance comes first, and Latour notes that the plasma 'provid[es] the resources for every single course of action to be fulfilled' (Latour 2005: 244). Overall, one could argue that there must exist something in relation before, or at least simultaneously when, relations are spun. Nevertheless, for us, both of the two thinkers equally fail to give the outside – whether pictured in terms of life or as plasma – its due. Neither Foucault nor Latour succeeds in providing a detailed and comprehensive account of life/plasma itself and of its share in network relations.

One of the problems associated with the gesture of dissolving anything in relations is the inability to account for singularity. While individual objects do exist for Foucault and Latour (instead of being *fully* dissolved into a global system of relations), they nonetheless appear individual only as individual *sets of relations* (see Harman 2009: 161 for Latour) – an idea widely used as an analytical tool in current relational anthropology (see e.g. Strathern 2005).⁸ Accordingly, it seems that both Foucault and Latour would deny the idea of the ‘virtual’ (despite Latour’s flirtation with the notion here and there). For Foucault, each age says everything it can say according to its historical *a priori*s laid down for its statements (Foucault 2004: 134–5, 138; Deleuze 1999: 46), and for Latour, there is no virtual dimension to entities, and they are fully defined by their actual relations at every given moment – the reality is ‘flat’ by its actual beingness.

We feel that here the Foucauldian and Latourian perspectives would need to be supplemented with a Deleuzian philosophy of the virtual, for example. According to Deleuze (1991: 96), the virtual is something ‘real without being actual, ideal without being abstract’. There is a virtual dimension to entities that is not reducible to their actual relations. What is more, with his thinking concerning ‘a life’, which amounts to virtuality, Deleuze (2001) succeeds in addressing haecceities not of individuation but of singularization.

Another conceptual tool of use in trying to fathom the outside of relationality beyond the horizons of Foucault and Latour would be that of *noise* as employed by Michel Serres (1995, 2007). With the notion of noise, Serres aims to consider in positive terms a state that is usually described only negatively, as a lack or absence of order – that is, disorder. Noise designates chaos, the static, perturbation and interruption. It is that which comes before any systems, forms, language, logic, even the word. Any order can be brought about only through exclusion of noise; this is the precondition for undisturbed communication, pure understanding, smooth production, uniform community and the equilibrium of any system. No system can be absolutely inclusive, since sooner or later noise would block it completely and make it collapse. At the same time, noise can never be removed completely, for as soon as there is a channel, there is noise. Oral communication is always exposed to the perturbations of dialect, speech defects or unclear articulation, for example, just as the message of a text may be blurred by poor writing, spelling errors or unclearly reproduced graphic signs (see Serres 1982: 66). The total elimination of noise would therefore require that one eliminate the channel as well. Communication, understanding and the collective are therefore possible thanks to noise, not without it – in contrast to what Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) assume in their famous transformation model of communication. Accordingly, Serres claims that all forms (including language, logic and social formations) spring from noise:

Background noise may well be the ground of our being. It may be that our being is not at rest, it may be that it is not in motion, it may be that our being is disturbed. The background noise never ceases; it is limitless, continuous, unending, unchanging. It

has itself no background, no contradictory. How much noise must be made to silence noise? (Serres 1995: 13)

When compared to the perspectives of Foucault and Latour, Serres's philosophy of noise has two considerable strengths when attempting to come to terms with the outside. First, Serres's work illustrates well how noise, while representing the other or the absolute outside of a system, is still an integral part of the functioning of any system. Second, whereas for Foucault and Latour the way in which life or plasma participates in agentic assemblages ultimately remains relatively unclear and vague, Serres provides an accurate account of what it is that noise actually *does*. Noise intervenes, interfering and disturbing the normal functioning of a system. Thus any successful relation requires the exclusion of noise. But at the same time noise may also generate a new, more complex system (Serres 2007: 14). It is both the ground and the interruption of connections.

Concluding remarks: Foucault's and Latour's posthumanism

In this article, we have pursued two general aims. On the one hand, we have set out to compare how Foucault and Latour link to one another in their conceptual apparatuses and research strategies. At the same time, we have tried to explicate how the two thinkers provide tools for reconsideration of the *anthropos* and how, in particular, they prove to be complementary in this task.

The deconstruction of the essence and inherently fixed properties of humanity required that we find a novel place from which to think on the human and reflexive intentionality as well as rearrange and redefine their respective spheres. Foucault and Latour share the bid to study the human without the intellectual baggage that comes with anthropological thought. Both stress that the human cannot be defined by invoking an essence, or by appealing to any ideas of mental structures, personality or identity, any more than one can understand agency or knowledge by reducing these to the human subjects who act and think. Quite to the contrary, both Foucault and Latour conquer the whole interior/exterior division regarding the form of man: the *anthropos* appears as an unstable assemblage of manifold inner and outer forces of which he or she is constituted, as an always already artificial product of relations.

Therefore, in contrast to claims made in many versions of so-called posthumanism (Hayles 1999; Fukuyama 2000; Badmington 2003), which more or less adopt an evolutionary frame, or those predicting a *transformation* into an artificial *anthropos* (Rabinow 1992; Rose and Rabinow 2003; Rose 2006),⁹ Foucault and Latour *do not* suggest that, in a historical succession and because of recent technological developments (the genome project, global warming, genetically modified organisms, pharmacogenomics, information theory, artificial intelligence, cybernetics etc.), we have moved from an ontologically defined human to an artificial one.

Instead, the perspectives of Foucault and Latour are much closer to the posthumanism of, for example, Serres (1995, 2007) and Karen Barad (2007), who consider posthumanism to be not something that comes *after* humanism but, rather, a way of

being attentive to the production of the human in its various entanglements with its 'others'.¹⁰ For Serres, objects always participate in our collectives. 'Humanity begins with things; animals don't have things', he notes in conversation with Latour (in Serres with Latour 1995: 166). Elsewhere, he also suggests that, despite there being no inherent properties of man as 'givens', 'one can still think of man, universally. But this universal is empty and blank' (Serres 1995: 47). Humans are quasi-subjects, produced in and by confederations of relations. As for Barad, she notes that her take on posthumanism 'is about taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and differential positioning of the human among other creatures' (Barad 2007: 136).

In a manner not very dissimilar to that of Serres or, more recently, Barad (whose work is not without influences of both Foucault and Latour), Foucault and Latour problematize the very matter of whether we have ever been *only* human in the first place. Denouncing any grounding in Man, Foucault and Latour propose a post-humanism or, rather, an *ahumanism* and call into question the grounds for any claim about the inherently determinate properties or capabilities of the human. Here, analysis based on the historical trajectory of the human sciences (what is the moment of humanism and what comes after it) or technoscientific development (scientific facts and their entanglement with the non-humans that enact them) must not be confounded with the *radical onto-politics* Foucault and Latour suggest. The human and the non-human have always been outcomes of reasoning and products of meticulous cultural and material practices (scientific or not), not points of departure as pure, stable and clear-cut categories from which these proceed. There is no escape from the radical connectedness of the human with its relations of exteriority – it is only that these relations have been radically reworked in our present contemporaneity. This is the 'ontological' (or, should one say, the 'ecological?') condition of the *anthropos* in its corporeal immanence of thought.

In posing our challenge to the division into human and non-human (or the world) as distinct ontological zones, our purpose has not been to engage in the old anthropological practice of 'brutalization', which Rabinow (2008: 14) specifies as the act of treating something 'viciously, without care'. Instead, as Foucault, Latour and anthropologists of the contemporary such as Rabinow suggest, we have only tried to reinstate the old question of 'what *logos* is appropriate for *anthropos*' (Rabinow 2008: 14) and answer it with perhaps more care, more reflexivity and more humility than applied before. We feel that this is crucial when one is faced with today's complex and materially mediated problems, such as the ecological sustainability of our way of life.

Notes

1. Our choice of thinkers is in no way intended to celebrate the revolutionary character of white male thinkers within the domain of anthropology or in science and technology studies. It would be equally possible to examine the work of Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway or Karen Barad, for example. However, we feel that discussion of Foucault and Latour is of special importance in attending to the question of the production of the

- human, as their work is so widespread and has influenced much of the current research in these fields.
2. For a project fairly similar to ours, see Michael (2000), who draws on Latour, Haraway and Serres.
 3. For Latour's comments on Foucault's work, see, for example, Latour and Crawford (1993) and Latour (1993: 137; 1999: 192, 262; 2005: 76, 86, 161, 212, 213).
 4. Of course, the figure of the cyborg is only one of her tools in analysis of what Haraway calls the technoscientific present. Others include non-human figures such as the OncoMouseTM (Haraway 1997) and, more recently, 'companion species' (Haraway 2004).
 5. In fact, Latour discards the very idea that our own present time would somehow be radically different from the past. He does not picture history in terms of the sort of total ruptures with which Foucault and the authors mentioned above frame it. For Latour (1993: 85), by contrast, 'we are still in the Dark Ages or, if you prefer, we are still in the world's infancy'. Latour's conception of time and his critique of modernity are clearly influenced by the philosopher Michel Serres, who thinks that nothing is in fact more ancient than the gesture of presuming a revolution that made way for a new era. Modernity merely repeats this gesture that has been repeated so many times in the history of Western thought (Serres with Latour 1995: 144). Therefore, for Serres, '[w]e are ancient in most of our actions and thoughts' (Serres with Latour 1995: 138).
 6. See also Callon (1998) for an account of how agents become calculative thanks to their entanglements in a web of relations. According to Callon, calculating is a complex practice which is not reducible to the brain of human beings nor to their culture or social institutions, but involves the use of various 'equipment'.
 7. Latour himself has also made a connection between Foucault's notion of the panopticon and his concept of the laboratory. In an interview, Latour avows his debt to Foucault in this respect: 'the panopticon is the very sort of intellectual technological dispositif which interests me. In that sense, the dissemination of laboratories, their ability to reverse scale, to completely reverse micro and macro order, is very much a confirmation of Foucault's tradition' (Latour and Crawford 1993: 253). Nevertheless, the laboratory differs from the panopticon in that it is not an all-encompassing assemblage but a small, more localized and specific one. What is more, Latour goes as far as to deny the very possibility of a 'panoptic' view. According to Latour, 'All . . . images are partial' (Latour and Hermant 2006: 29): the totality of things 'cannot be captured at a glance' (Latour and Hermant 2006: 1), since 'we have no access to the divine view, the view from nowhere' (Latour and Hermant 2006: 9, cf. Haraway, 1988). Accordingly, Latour replaces the Foucauldian notion of the panopticon with that of the 'oligopticon': instead of being seen entirely in one view, Latour thinks that any totality can be grasped only in a montage of images (Latour and Hermant 2006: 29), hence the necessity of moving from place to place and examining many specific 'micro-epistemes'.
 8. Marilyn Strathern (2005: 12) addresses the problem of relationism by claiming that '[w]hether entities pre-exist relations or are brought into existence by them is another way of referring to the contrast between applying the creative work of the relation (invention) or uncovering its prior status (discovery). But this does not exhaust the interest of conceptual relations: above all they can be invested with creative or generative power'. Her acknowledgement opens up two different ways of taking an ontological stance on 'materiality' of 'things' within relationist thinking and makes more explicit the wavering stances both Foucault and Latour take on the issue.

9. For the forms of posthumanism that stress the transition of the human, see, for example, Thacker (2003).
10. Donna Haraway too has recently distanced herself from the concept of the posthuman for its evolutionary beliefs. She worries that the 'human/posthuman is much too easily appropriated by the blissed-out, "Let's all be posthumanists and find our next teleological evolutionary stage in some kind of transhumanist technoenhancement." Posthumanism is too easily appropriated to those kinds of projects for my taste' (Haraway in Gane 2006: 140).

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