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Bruno Latour and the anthropology of the moderns¹

Imagine the brainwashing in store for a provincial, bourgeois Catholic with an advanced degree in philosophy who finds himself transported into the cauldron of neo-colonial Africa, with a wife and child, no less! In the Abidjan of 1973–75, I discovered all at once the most predatory forms of capitalism, the methods of ethnography, and the puzzles of anthropology. And one puzzling question in particular that has never left me: why do we use the ideas of modernity, the modernizing frontier, the contrast between modern and premodern, before we even apply to those who call themselves civilizers the same methods of investigation that we apply to the ‘others’ – those whom we claim, if not to civilize entirely, then at least to modernize a little?²

Bruno Latour is a hybrid thinker whose work lies at the intersection of anthropology, sociology and philosophy. As the above epigraph suggests, his work may be read as one sustained effort to make the tribe of ‘The Moderns’ the object of anthropological analysis: an in-depth ethnography of their modes of truth production, their institutions and experiences. Questioning what is usually taken for granted in one’s own society is of course a common outcome of the tension exerted by fieldwork. Few thinkers, however, have been so rigorous and insistent in meticulously dissecting what holds together the modern collectives that make up our everyday modes of existence. Trying to think the world anew – provoking something like that African ‘brainwash’ in the mind of his readers – pretty much summarizes Latour’s intellectual project. In contemporary social theory, his radical revisions of how social existence should be studied – and hence his new understanding of what the social sciences ought to be like – have been applauded and occasionally rejected. But, as one sociologist put it, they have by now become ‘an obligatory reference for many working in the social sciences’ (Harris 2005: 163). If that is indeed a fair assessment, then we must conclude that anthropologists have remained somewhat muted about his work. Clearly, there are some rooms in the building of anthropology where his works have been picked up and debated. Anthropologists

¹ This special issue results from a workshop entitled ‘Thinking with Latour’ convened by David Berliner and Mattijs Van de Port during the 2012 EASA conference in Paris. Special thanks are due to our paper givers, Valentina Bonifacio, Ebru Kayaalp, Jeremy Lecomte, Roger Sansi and Ehler Voss, whose contributions made this panel an exceptional arena to discuss their engagement with Latour.

² <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/126-KARSENTI-AIME-BIO-GB..pdf>

who have been pushing for an ‘ontological turn’ (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Strathern 2005 [1991]; Henare *et al.* 2007) seriously engage with Latour, having found in him a strong ally to postulate the existence of multiple worlds and to put into question what Westerners consider to be real. Similarly, his pragmatic sociology has inspired the work of anthropologists dealing with material culture (Buchli 1999; Vokes 2007; Holbraad 2011), urban life (Jansen 2012), religion (Keane 2007; Piette 2011; Sansi-Roca, 2007; Chau 2012), science (Houdart 2008; Keck 2010; Candea 2010), bodies (Lock 2001; Mol 2002), virtuality (Hine 2000) and the environment (Descola 2013; Kohn 2007). Moreover, in the corridors of anthropology departments we’ve registered an overall curiosity as to what ‘this Latour character is all about’. Yet, for all of this interest, he is certainly not an obligatory reference in anthropology (in comparison, for instance, Bourdieu has reached the status of what might well be called a hegemonic figure). We venture to say that for most anthropologists, the figure of Latour is not too far removed from the way Latour imagined his public profile to be ‘that adherent of a “social construction” according to which “everything is equal”, objective science and magic, superstition and flying saucers’.³ Anthropology’s reluctance to engage with the work of Bruno Latour is surprising. However one wishes to engage with his provocative interventions in the study of social life and being, the disruptions he brings about in received ways of thinking the social, or in common understandings of the condition of modernity, are always challenging. His writings are a constant invitation to reflect on and reconsider one’s theoretical positions, and they seek to open a space for a creative reshuffling of one’s thoughts. It is in that spirit of opening up new avenues for the study of social life that this special issue presents a number of articles that exemplify what may come out of the encounter between anthropologists and the work of Bruno Latour.

Latour has expressed his love for anthropology in no uncertain terms. In his writings, he often points to anthropology as the exemplary discipline within the social sciences. In fact, he frequently identifies himself as an anthropologist. Published in 1991, the French original of his famous study *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) came with the subtitle *Essai d’anthropologie symétrique*. Similarly, his latest book, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013a) is specified as *An anthropology of the Moderns* in its subtitle. He praises the ‘science of being-as-other’ for its ethnographic method and holistic ambitions; for its questioning and relativising of the categories of thought and ontological premises of the Moderns; and for its keen attention to the specificities of the local and the situational. Faced with the tendency among anthropologists to question the scientific calibre of their own endeavours, Latour exclaimed ‘no one has acknowledged that anthropology is already one of the most advanced, productive and scientific of all the disciplines – natural or social’ (1996a: 5). And elsewhere we read: ‘Anthropologists had to deal with pre-moderns and were not requested as much to imitate natural sciences. [...] If, as I claim, “we have never been modern”, sociology could finally become as good as anthropology’ (2005: 41). Anthropologists, so he intimates, are well equipped to derail the truth claims of the Moderns. They have everything to join his project to ‘add realism to science’ (Latour 1999: 3). All they need to do, really, is to become more radically anthropological. This is the point where Latour is most critical of anthropologists. He criticises ethnographers for not being

3 <http://www.bruno-latour.fr>

1 ethnographical enough: instead of contenting themselves to describe a given situation
2 in terms of the local metaphysics, they keep returning to their privileged modes of
3 understanding, claiming to be able to unearth realities that the locals themselves cannot
4 grasp. In a similar vein, he argues that the relativist stance of anthropologists is not
5 relativistic enough – he recently urged researchers to achieve a posture that he terms
6 *relationism* (2013a). If anthropologists can be praised for acknowledging different
7 ontologies and the plurality of knowledge systems, most of them fail to question a
8 fundamental asymmetry between these different ontologies and knowledge systems.
9 For example, most anthropologists would subscribe to the idea that everywhere in
10 the world the concept of nature is somehow constructed, and that we are no exception:
11 we are all too eager to deconstruct the version of the ‘natural’ that gets displayed in
12 commercial ads, in the brochures of the tourist industry or the marketing of organic
13 food products. These are representations of nature, we will argue, a commercial trick.
14 Few anthropologists, however, are ready to give up on the idea that with science, we
15 – unlike the non-moderns – hold the key that gives us access to nature *as it really is*.
16 And it is exactly *this* claim of the Moderns that Latour wants to tackle.

17 Latour is critical of those anthropologists who ‘return from the tropics’ and start to
18 study their own society. In the exotic setting, he says, they dedicate themselves to the
19 laudable ambition to study beliefs, practices, objects and occurrences in their inextric-
20 able relatedness. Yet this dedication, he observes, evaporates the moment anthropolo-
21 gists start to study their own society. Instead of studying that which is at the heart of
22 the expanding empires of the Moderns – industrial technologies, economisation,
23 development, scientific reasoning, and so on – the anthropologist at home studies the
24 most peripheral aspects of modern societies – ‘communal festivals, belief in astrology,
25 first communion meals’.⁴

26 Given Latour’s courtship of anthropology – not to mention his exhortations to
27 anthropologists to be more radically and assertively *anthropological* – one wonders
28 why the latter have been somewhat reluctant to requite his love of the discipline.
29 Although we can only speculate about this, some thoughts are worth considering.
30 For one, Latour is a radical thinker. As stated, he asks his readers to give up on deeply
31 held convictions as to what a science of the social is. Indeed, he offers not simply
32 another theory but, rather, a kind of alternative ontological order in which few things
33 remain untouched. Given such grand revisions, it is difficult to do a ‘bit of Latour’ or
34 take on Latour ‘à-la-carte’. In a way, one has to convert oneself to his perspective,
35 throw one’s ideas overboard and – ‘born again’ – start thinking from scratch. One
36 also has to become acquainted with a new Latourian vocabulary that has come into
37 being over the years. Terms such as ‘actant’, ‘nonhuman’, ‘mediation’, ‘blackboxing’,
38 ‘double-click’, ‘factish’, ‘hybrid’, ‘inscription’ and ‘*mode d’existence*’ take on very
39 specific meanings in the work of Latour, which adds to the somewhat sectarian
40 character of ‘the Latourian school’. Tellingly, his book *Reassembling the Social* is
41 set up as a kind of ‘how-to-do-proper-ActorNetworkTheory-manual’, complete
42 with explicit do’s and don’t’s for anyone wishing to join the movement. In *An*
43 *Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013a), Latour goes one step further and invites
44 his readers to take an active part in his research programme. Surely, this latest book
45 can be read as an attempt to de-singularise his work and to train scholars to do
46 Latourian researches without becoming ever so many clones of Latour. It remains

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to be seen, however, whether scholars – many of whom ‘*modernes angoissés*’, anxious Moderns, who are not ready to give up on the good old ways of doing research – will appropriate such radical thinking to pursue their own scientific agendas.

This invitation to give up on the old ways and start thinking anew, some might want to add, does not come with an in-depth consideration of what anthropologists have actually been doing and arguing. Latour is not the kind of scholar who begins his inquiries with a thorough survey of the existing scholarship in anthropology on his topic. Apart from a few names who appear and re-appear in his texts (Viveiros de Castro, Descola, Sahlins), the work of anthropologists is not really recognised and discussed, while generally speaking, he rarely cites sources other than Tarde, Garfinkel, Whitehead, James, Souriau, Serres and Stengers. For example, one of his key ideas is to rethink the excessive ambitions of universalism and, in the same way, to provincialise our Western/Modern ‘factishes’ (Latour 2009a, for instance). Albeit with a different twist, these questions have been debated for a while by American (Abu-Lughod 1991, among many others) and British anthropologists (Strathern 1988). Yet these discussions do not figure in his oeuvre. Likewise, while debates about the power of things are central to Latour’s theories, anthropologists such as Igor Kopytoff (1986), Alfred Gell (1998), Daniel Miller (2005), Tim Ingold (2011) and archaeologists like Ian Hodder (2012) have long discussed them. Apart from the methods of ethnography and the few whose works are currently focused on the study of diverse ontologies, most of Latour’s references originate outside the discipline. That is not bad in itself (quite the contrary), but it makes reading Latour more difficult.

Last but not least, the discipline of anthropology he invokes very much reflects classical French *ethnologie*, which has been criticised for quite a while now.

Anthropology is no longer exclusively interested in local savages and so-called ‘archaic aspects of modern societies’. The development of anthropology *at home* has legitimated scholars’ interests in these nearby worlds (an anthropology looking ‘into ourselves for what we have so long plundered in others’, as Georges Perec describes it so eloquently in *L’infra-ordinaire* (1989)) long before Latour’s research among scientists in the USA. With some exaggeration, one might say that the anthropologist that appears in his work is a generic figure, moulded to fit the Latourian project, heir to what could be termed a Collège de France ethnology, but not a concrete, contemporary individual researcher. This relative neglect of anthropological research may well rest behind the often-heard remark, ‘Latour is merely proposing what we anthropologists have been doing all along’.

Whatever the grounds for the anthropological reservations *vis-à-vis* Latour may be, this special issue seeks to bring to the fore that anthropologists have every reason to study his work, as he directs our attention to new ways of thinking about society and the constitution of modernity. In the remainder of this introduction, we will briefly introduce Bruno Latour and present some of the core intuitions underlying his project, before assessing to what extent and in what ways his perspective opens up new vistas for the anthropological study of human ways of being.

The difficult task of introducing a prolific writer and explorative thinker such as Bruno Latour is facilitated by a biographical note that can be found on his website,⁵ which he qualifies as ‘[the recounting of] the chaotic emergence of a systematic argument whose

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persistence over more than thirty years is astonishing even to me'. We will take the main facts from this source, but urge those who are interested to read the full story to visit the website.

Born in 1947 in Beaune, France, Latour studied theology and philosophy at the University of Dijon from 1966 to 1973. He remembers himself as 'a militant Catholic student'. His thesis – 'a bit of Derrida and Lévi-Strauss plus a large dose of Deleuze' – pondered the work of Charles Péguy, a Catholic socialist poet and essayist and was defended in 1985. As indicated in the opening epigraph of this introduction, anthropology came fully to his attention when he started to teach in the technical *Lycée* in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The confrontation with the flagrant asymmetry of 'Whites anthropologising the Blacks', yet avoiding to anthropologise themselves in an equally radical manner, was crucial for Latour's future research agenda as well as for the direction of his theoretical interventions.

His ambition to anthropologise the Moderns inspired him to carry out ethnographical fieldwork in a scientific laboratory in San Diego, which resulted in his famous monograph *Laboratory Life* (1986), written in collaboration with Steve Woolgar. The work reports how scientific facts are not simply out there, waiting to be discovered and registered, but come into being in the myriad, everyday exchanges between laborants, scientists, microbes, animals, knowledges, texts and instruments that are present in the laboratory.

Back in France, after what he describes as an exhilarating experience with the baboons of Shirley Strum in Kenya, he pursued this project of grasping what is by following the different actors that come together in any given situation. New empirical research resulted in the brilliant *Pasteurization of France* (1988) in which he put to the test his method and his conception of networks, associations and translations. *Irreduction*, a book within the book, summed up and tied together these conceptions in a sort of philosophical manifesto, an extremely dense text, as opaque as any radical philosopher could write. Indeed, Latour is increasingly given over to the writing of theoretical treatises (although these times in crystal clear writings), such as *Science in Action* (1987), *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), *Pandora's Hope* (1999), *Reassembling the Social* (2005), *On the Modern Cult of Factish Gods* (2009a) and *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013a). In addition, his bibliography now covers a wide range of research fields, including the arts (Latour and Weibel 2002), religion (2002, 2009a), law (2009b) and political ecology (2004). And yet, underlying these multiple fields and foci are some core intuitions about the making up of collectives, these human and non-human assemblages that social theory had not been able to perceive, let alone trace and absorb. 'I know of no other author', he writes about himself, 'who has so stubbornly pursued the same research project for twenty-five years, day after day, while filling up the same files in response to the same sets of questions'. And indeed, for those familiar with Latour, his work is an on-going reinvention of the same line of questioning reality, each new text being a repetition by transformation.

Bruno Latour's core intuitions move against a general mode of Western/Modern thinking, which he calls the Modern Constitution. He suggests that the Moderns (i.e. those who love to think about themselves as being part of the 'modern world') have long entrenched themselves in this epistemological position, from which they seek to conquer all of reality. The Modern Constitution is guided by a particular metaphysics that leads

its followers to believe that nature is the given reality ‘out there’, independent of human passions and politics. In other words, the Moderns take nature to be the default setting of life and being, and to know nature is to hold the key to indisputable truth and the real. From this original thought were derived a series of dualisms – nature/culture, humans/non-humans, objectivity/subjectivity, body/mind, fact/value, visible/invisible – which provided the Moderns with a programme to arrive at a sense of ontological certainty: much of their efforts were geared to keep these basic distinctions separate, absolute and pure. In fact, Latour argues that this Constitution fatally misdirected the Modern’s understanding of how reality comes into being and blotted out the political role of the Nature–Culture divide. ‘After objects or things were pacified, retreating to an exterior, silent and uniform world of “Nature”’, says Viveiros de Castro, one of his famous fellow travellers on the same ontological path, ‘subjects began to proliferate and to chatter endlessly: transcendental Egos, legislative Understandings, philosophies of language, theories of mind, social representations, logic of the signification, discursive practices, politics of knowledge – you name it’ (1998, quoted in Henare *et al.* 2007: 9). Latour’s intellectual project is to bring these fallacies to light, and to point to alternative ways of studying and understanding reality.

Yet it is not only ‘Nature’ that should be stripped of its essentialist aura. ‘The Social’, this tautological trickster, ought to be challenged as well. In opposition to Durkheim, Latour argues against the idea that there exists a social context in which *social* activities take place; that the social is a specific domain of reality; that it can be used as a specific type of causality to account for the aspects that other domains (psychology, law, economics) cannot completely deal with. His anthropology is thus strongly opposed to critical sociology. A euphemism: he is in a constant positioning against French critical sociology *à la Bourdieu* (an idea that is probably not immediately apparent for readers who are not familiar with the sociological wars in France). In this view, he argues, ordinary agents are always thought of as being inside a social world that encompasses them. They can at best be informants about this world and, at worst, be blind to its existence, whose full effects are only visible to the eyes of the social scientist. Latour prefers to think of his informants as co-investigators, fully able to deal with the uncertain nature of the entities they bring into being. He therefore urges social scientists to take the words and actions of the actors very seriously, as this invented dialog exemplifies:

The pilgrim said: ‘I came to this monastery because I was called by the Virgin Mary’. How long should we resist smiling smugly, replacing at once the agency of the Virgin by the ‘obvious’ delusion of an actor ‘finding pretext’ in a religious icon to ‘hide’ one’s own decision? Critical sociologists will answer: ‘Just as far as to be polite, it’s bad manners to sneer in the presence of the informant.’ A sociologist of associations meanwhile must learn to say: ‘As long as possible in order to seize the chance offered by the pilgrim to fathom the diversity of agencies acting at once in the world’. If it is possible to discover today that ‘the Virgin’ is able to induce pilgrims to board a train against all the scruples that tie them to home, that is a miracle indeed! (2005: 48)

Faced with this pilgrim, the worst thing the researcher can do is to impose the categories of social theory onto the specificities of the situation, of the experience, to thus provide an explanation. In a Latourian approach, one has to ‘follow the natives, no matter which metaphysical imbroglios they lead us into’ (2005: 62).

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3 Just as the explanatory force of the social is discarded in Latourian analysis, so is the
4 notion of 'society'. Sure, the *notion* of society is out there in the world, as an idea. But it
5 should not be taken as the pre-given context in which everything else is framed. For Latour
6 the social sciences can only engage themselves with the tracing of associations – seek to
7 establish what is tied together in a given state of affairs. Researchers should not study
8 society, but 'actants', these connecting elements that circulate in tiny conduits to form
9 assembled collectives (one of which might be the idea of society).

10 Given their centrality in Latourian thinking, these actants merit some elaboration.
11 Drawing on the work of the semiologist Algirdas Julien Greimas, Latour famously
12 insists that actants may be human or non-human entities: a person, an idea, an object,
13 the weather condition, a virus, a sentiment; anyone and anything that leaves a trace in
14 the unfolding of a situated event qualifies as an actant. The notion of the actant not only
15 covers a notoriously protean collection of entities, but individual actants are also unsta-
16 ble: they lack neatly delineated identities as their being may metamorphose from one
17 situation to the next. Here, one recognises the influence of J.L. Austin and his theory
18 of speech acts. One can never simply say what an actant *is*: all one can ever do is to
19 observe and describe what they *do*, how they articulate themselves as they meet up
20 with other actants in a given situation (for instance, the controversies that mostly
21 interest Latour in his study of science worlds).

22 The one important distinction between different actants that he does make is
23 between those that behave as 'intermediaries', and those that act as 'mediators'. The
24 intermediaries are actants that behave as black boxes: they transport meaning or
25 force without transformation: defining their inputs is enough to define their outputs
26 (2005: 39). The mediators, by contrast, 'transform, translate, distort and modify the
27 meaning or the elements they carry' (2005: 39). The insight that 'Nature' or 'the Social'
28 or 'Society' is nothing more (and nothing less) than what comes into being through
29 these ever-changing mediations is at the heart of his anthropology, an enterprise he
30 has lately described as 'a long struggle against the erasing of the work of the mediations'
31 (2012: 551). In a Deleuzian spirit, nothing is fixed in a Latourian analysis, everything
32 is always becoming. The analyst has to learn to live with the fact that she is operating on
33 shifting sands, that there can be no prior certainty as to what neatly delineated
34 substances and beings may eventually emerge as the temporally stable and coherent
35 outcome of the work of the mediations. Substances and beings can be stabilised, but
36 this necessitates an even greater number of mediations to be called into play. There is
37 no law of inertia. 'What was an event must remain a continuous event' (1999: 168).
38 Therefore, the analyst is urged to let the mediations proliferate before trying to
39 reconfigure them; to let every mediation play its role; to allow each mediation to divert
40 the action in its own way; to accept the messiness of new assemblages teeming with life.

41 With these methodological imperatives, Latour advocates an anthropology that
42 accepts *uncertainty* over what *is* as the inevitable – but potentially profitable – starting
43 point for the study of life and being. The study of the unstoppable movement that
44 makes up a collective does not aim at the discovery of origins, and rejects the possibility
45 of an 'ex-nihilo creation'. It does not seek to formulate some generalisable laws or
46 recurrent patterns, but seeks to create the conditions under which the researcher may
47 become witness to the 'emergence of a novelty' in the ever-changing configurations
of the network (Latour 1996b: 237). Tracing the continuous movement of human
and non-human mediations and their various articulations with others allows the
enquirer to observe the moment of displacement and translation through which actants

and a collective come into being. In *Pandora's Hope*, his profound analysis of geology-in-the-making constitutes a perfect example of this posture. Dropped in the Amazonian forest, driven by a concern over the advancing of the savannah and a puzzle to be solved (is it really expanding or diminishing?), scientists use instruments to give them 'a handle on the earth' (1999: 51). One of these instruments (the Munsell code, a little notebook assigning a number to each of the colours of the spectrum) compares the colour of soil samples. Each sample is turned into a number, easily transportable, understandable and reproducible by all those who use the same code (pedologists, cartographers and so forth) (1999: 58–9). He examines these hiatus, these episodes of metamorphosis through which a clod of earth is, step by step, from the Amazon to the laboratory, changed into a number in the final scientific report. Looking closely at the successive alterations produced by scientific/reductionist operations, at these data which are, at one and the same time, constructed and real, invented and discovered, he keeps instability centre stage and, more generally, allows us to see the shifting sands on which all world-making is grounded.

In his latest work (2013a), Latour imaginatively equates social analysis with the observation of a 100-metre hurdle. Social life is like a steeplechase with discontinuities to be overcome in order to produce temporary moments of stability. He suggests that by looking for the multiple actants that are present in a situation, describing the way they are tied together, and analysing how their co-presence modifies their being, the social scientist eventually contributes to highlighting the complexity of operations of continuity and discontinuity that preside over social life.

As already mentioned above, in the coming about of reality, humans are not a privileged category; non-humans are as important. Latour has thus de-centred social analysis from the thinking subject (the social actor) and incorporated in it many non-humans, so as to ponder their agency on humans. Repopulating the world emptied by the Moderns and thus repopulating the social sciences (Thiery and Houdart 2011), Latour and his followers have carved out a space in the social sciences for studying viruses, peptides, clouds, baboons, spirits and fungus spores as active mediations. They take in even the most humble of actants such as a key, a door, a fence, a seatbelt, a speaking grill at the post office, pigeon-holes in administrative structures, receipts and tickets, ink and so forth. This epistemic move reveals itself very helpful for anthropologists who are used to explore ways of life that involve different types of non-humans that are said to possess agency and interact with humans in the same ontological register (such as invisible entities and objects said to be endowed with agency). In a Latourian perspective, these entities are no longer to be explained away – as if they were the products of a false consciousness – but are to be followed in how, by association, they make up collectives and contribute to the making of reality.

If Latour's radical revision of the study of human existence is motivated by a drive to 'bring reality to science', it is not without political and theological implications. Some of his recent positions (2013a) adopt an apocalyptic tone intended to alert the world to the risk of global ecological destruction. Replacing the universe of the Moderns by a *plurivers* open to the negotiation of a common world (Latour 2010), he sees the anthropologist as a diplomat who will interconnect diverse ontologies. As Moderns have spoken poorly about humans and non-humans for centuries, as they have 'universalized too fast' (Latour 2013b: 955),⁶ it is now time

6 All translations from French to English are ours.

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3 to open the arena to negotiated discourses. In this world to come, the anthropologists,
4 diplomats-translators *par excellence*, capable to find the 'right word' and 'to learn to speak
5 well to someone about something that really matters to that person' (Latour 2013a: 46),
6 will have a vital role to play.

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9 To end this introduction, we would like to assess what we see as the strengths and
10 weaknesses of a Latourian approach in the study of social existence. We see this special
11 issue as an invitation to think *with* Latour, and to show how his work constitutes a
12 stimulating invitation to rethink the scope of our discipline. As cultural anthropologists,
13 we are sympathetic to Latour's stance on diverse truths and the workings of
14 translation. He has certainly greatly contributed to rethink the question of
15 *universalité*, provincialising Western cosmology and promoting the development of
16 *pluriversalité*. Sure enough, his thinking has contributed to the ontological turn as
17 well as to the construction of a more relational paradigm in anthropology with the
18 help of famous go-betweens such as Marilyn Strathern. No doubt some Latourian
19 notions such as 'collectives', 'nonhumans', 'hybrids', 'purification' and so on, fought
20 their way to the top. And we believe that his motto ('allow the proliferations to occur
21 and translate') has the potential to help anthropologists carry on their fieldwork,
22 make the data emerge from the empirical, connect unexpected entities and engage
23 in fierce debates over taken-for-granted notions such as society, nature, culture, be-
24 lief, globalisation and objects. Certainly, following the actants along the networks'
25 lines can help overcome sterile dichotomies such as global/local or micro/macro.
26 Above all, Latour is a trickster, who puts everything upside down, and thus forces
27 one to reconsider one's position. His rejection of a priori ideas, the worship he ded-
28 icates to experience and his critique of the master narratives that have dominated the
29 social sciences over 150 years create the conditions for anthropologists to be witness
30 to unexpected relations and find connections that were as yet unimagined. In brief,
31 his innovative line of inquiry holds the promise to push anthropology beyond
32 well-trodden paths.

33 However, there are also a series of questions that remain open about the Latourian
34 project. We would like to carve out some space for these in the final pages of this
35 introduction. First of all, there are the main protagonists in the Latourian oeuvre,
36 the 'Moderns'. If there is an anthropology to be conducted about them, we need to
37 be more specific about who these Moderns are, with all their fetishes who deserve
38 'one or two Musées du Quai Branly' (Latour 2013a: 174). Are they contemporary
39 Europeans? Americans? Asians? Intellectual elites or *Madame-tout-le-monde*? We
40 cannot help but notice that the 'Modern' that is targeted in his writings very much
41 resembles the typical French Bourdieusian sociologist, demonised for all ills on earth.
42 Moreover, along with their essentially colonising *logos* and *ethos*, the Moderns seem to
43 suffer from a strange epistemic disease diagnosed by Latour: they are more opaque to
44 themselves than anyone else in the world. They are portrayed as people who are totally
45 mystified and ignorant of their Modern condition. Here, we feel that his political
46 imagination seems to be taking over, which somehow contradicts his ambition to build
47 an interpretive sociology. His stance is at times reminiscent of that adopted by
Benjamin Whorf towards the Hopi, caricaturing an imagined exotic Other so as to
better challenge the so-called 'Modern exception' (a relativist trick that Geertz
(1988) analysed in the work of Ruth Benedict).

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2 We wonder whether the Moderns are such an exception today.

3 Reading Latour leaves us pensive about the global dissemination of peoples, ideas
4 and forms of life; about Achuar youngsters being educated in large cities; about Indian
5 architects and Aboriginal teachers who are now taking part in the constitution of
6 modernity. Are they fake Moderns, while we are the 'real' Moderns? Clearly, at this
7 point an ethnography of the Moderns calls for more ethnographic plasticity. Latour
8 seems to exaggerate cultural differences and the complexity of communication. Yes,
9 anthropology is historically about finding the right translation. And yes, there is some
10 kind of diplomatic exercise in its endeavours. In a political sense – i.e. the way Latour
11 seeks to contribute to the coming about of a better world – one understands
12 why he promotes 'a position of weak universality to be composed step by step' (Latour
13 2013a: 955). Yet by focusing on differences, the Latourian approach somehow deprives
14 anthropologists from a continuation of scientific (although tactical) universalism.

15 As fieldworking ethnographers, we are uncomfortable with the way the
16 ontological turn seems to side-track the notion of a shared humanity. This
17 discomfort is not only about having to give up on a beautiful but naïve dream; it also
18 follows from our experiences in the field. For fieldwork is not only an encounter
19 with difference: it is as much the encounter with the human capacity to *share*
20 moments, situations, moods and experiences with people unlike oneself; it is to *find*
21 each other in laughter, excitement or grief over what the situation brings; it is to
22 make joint spheres, joint histories, joint memories, all of which produce a world
23 of commonality. To give primacy to the way we are separated from each other
24 provides few incentives to ponder the question what exactly this 'sharing',
25 'finding-each-other', 'shifting between ontologies' and 'making of common worlds'
26 entails, and how it comes to be experienced as fully real. Above all, the
27 entanglement of science and politics, which is omnipresent in Latour's work, leads
28 to reflect on their (im)possible autonomy. This question is an old one for
29 anthropologists, which famously played up in the fierce debate between Nancy
30 Schepher-Hughes (1995) and Roy d'Andrade (1995) about the moral aspects of
31 research. Clearly, Latour has always emphasised the affinity that exists between
32 research processes and political debates. The question remains open whether such
33 lack of autonomy becomes an obstacle when it comes to scientific practice.

34 Latour's position also poses concrete epistemological and methodological
35 problems for anthropologists doing fieldwork. We subscribe to his rigorous
36 empiricist stance, his exhortations to register the endless proliferation of mediations
37 and to follow the dense continuum of experience, the 'great blooming, buzzing
38 confusion' as William James (2007 [1890]: 488) put it when he tried to tackle the
39 way babies experience the world. Yet let us consider what this theoretical inflexion
40 implies when it comes to ethnography. If reality is obtained through very complex
41 mediations, and our role as anthropologists is to distil these mediations out of the
42 messiness of various situations, then what are the limits of such proliferations? For
43 sure, 'infinite regression' is a difficulty often felt by those who want to put his
44 conceptions to the test (see Lecomte, this volume). How are we to cut the network
45 (Strathern 1996)? In particular, how are we to describe it ethnographically, *thickly*?
46 Concretely, where and when do we stop following actors, institutions, interactions,
47 ideologies, texts, emotions, objects and technologies? Is Latour claiming for some
48 'ultra-multi-sited' ethnography, a reminder of Georges Marcus's call for various
49 modes of 'tracking' (1995)?

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There is yet another set of epistemological issues regarding the question of proliferation and networks. As stated, Latour advocates that social scientists take the words of the actors extremely seriously. The actors' explicit knowledge is the anthropologists' wealth, and the Latourian anthropologist is an *interpreter* only. To us, that sounds like a serious scientific limitation. What to do with associations/ties/assemblages that the researcher discerns, but that are *not* articulated by the locals? Is there any room for implicit knowledge in his approach? And what about our desire to build *explanatory* models from/for social life? Epistemologically, what is a social science that aims at tracking chains of humans and non-humans, but, at the same time, refuses all kinds of models that are out of the agents' conscious reach? Can a sociology of translation escape the question of the implicit, whether it is psychoanalytical or cognitive? Is not this prohibition to bring silent associations into the world – to see possible connections (rather than actual ones) and explore them for what insights they might bring – a numbing of the author's imagination?

This last point brings us to a last hesitation, namely the kind of text that the Latourian approach produces. Should the anthropological text be reduced to the kind of descriptive narrative Latour favours? We feel that this would be a serious impoverishment of the anthropological corpus. For most of us do not only read a book to know what is really out there in the world; we read it as much to see how the author recreates the world in his or her text. Indeed, one of the joys of reading Latour is exactly this. He is a wonderful writer. His writing style is original and unique, as are his uses of concepts and metaphors. Latour would probably dismiss this concern by pointing out the difference between scientific and literary/philosophical projects: the scientist should restrict herself to the task of finding ways to approach empirical realities as close as she can, *not* to celebrate her authorship.

In our attempt to assess the possible contribution of Bruno Latour to anthropology, we found ourselves wavering between two possible portrayals. Our hesitations concern the unique thinker, who sternly wakes over his creation. At the same time, we admire the trickster that he is, the irreverent, creative figure, whose writings 'throw doubt on the finality of fact', as Barbara Babcock (1975: 186) succinctly phrased it, and thus opens up avenues for renewal and change.

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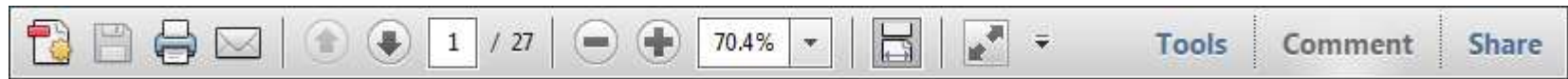
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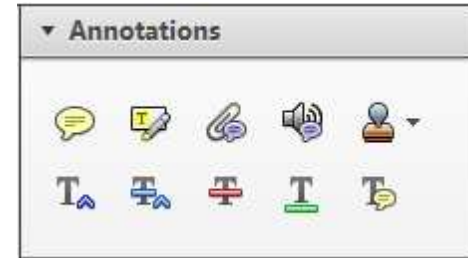
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Once you have Acrobat Reader open on your computer, click on the **Comment** tab at the right of the toolbar:



This will open up a panel down the right side of the document. The majority of tools you will use for annotating your proof will be in the **Annotations** section, pictured opposite. We've picked out some of these tools below:



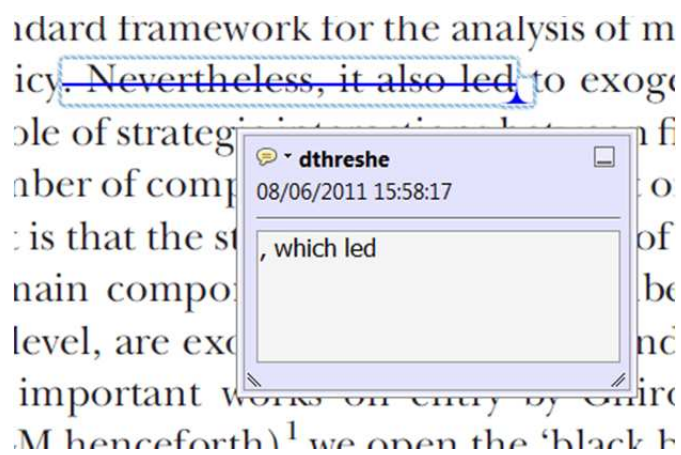
1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.



Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.

How to use it

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the **Replace (Ins)** icon in the Annotations section.
- Type the replacement text into the blue box that appears.



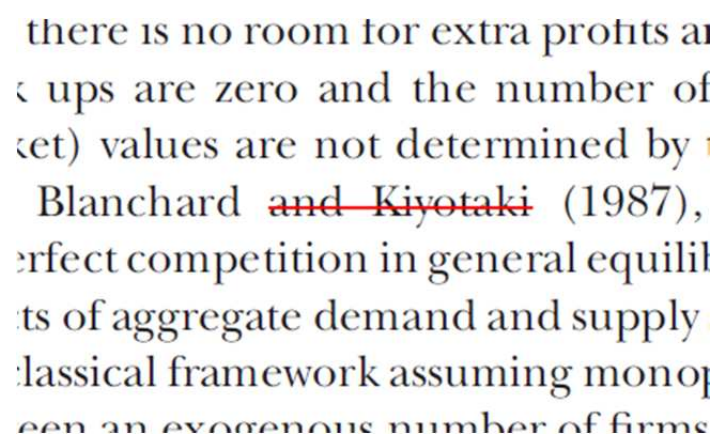
2. Strikethrough (Del) Tool – for deleting text.



Strikes a red line through text that is to be deleted.

How to use it

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the **Strikethrough (Del)** icon in the Annotations section.



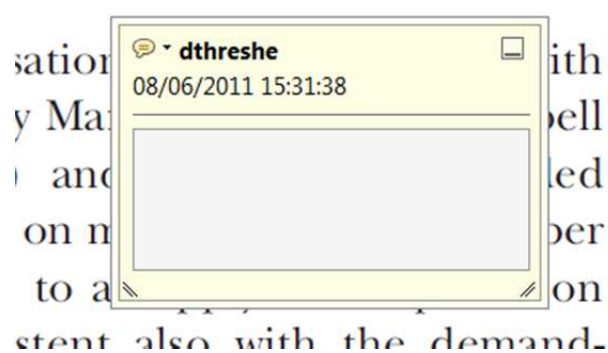
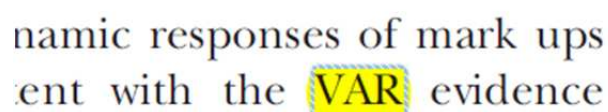
3. Add note to text Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic.



Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.

How to use it

- Highlight the relevant section of text.
- Click on the **Add note to text** icon in the Annotations section.
- Type instruction on what should be changed regarding the text into the yellow box that appears.



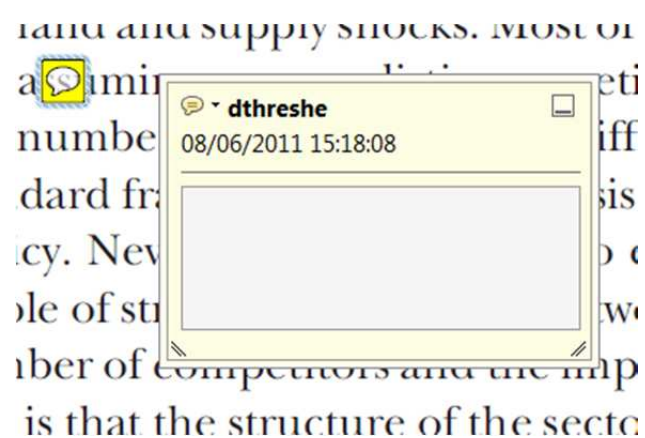
4. Add sticky note Tool – for making notes at specific points in the text.



Marks a point in the proof where a comment needs to be highlighted.

How to use it

- Click on the **Add sticky note** icon in the Annotations section.
- Click at the point in the proof where the comment should be inserted.
- Type the comment into the yellow box that appears.



USING e-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

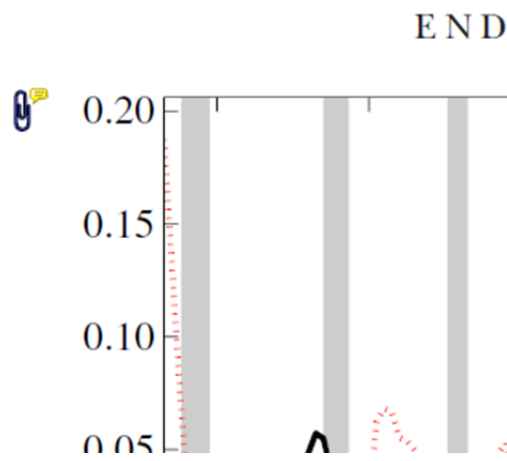
5. Attach File Tool – for inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures.



Inserts an icon linking to the attached file in the appropriate place in the text.

How to use it

- Click on the [Attach File](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Click on the proof to where you'd like the attached file to be linked.
- Select the file to be attached from your computer or network.
- Select the colour and type of icon that will appear in the proof. Click OK.



6. Add stamp Tool – for approving a proof if no corrections are required.



Inserts a selected stamp onto an appropriate place in the proof.

How to use it

- Click on the [Add stamp](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Select the stamp you want to use. (The [Approved](#) stamp is usually available directly in the menu that appears).
- Click on the proof where you'd like the stamp to appear. (Where a proof is to be approved as it is, this would normally be on the first page).

of the business cycle, starting with the
 on perfect competition, constant ret
 production. In this environment goods
 extra profits and the entire market
 he market is assumed to be perfectly
 determined by the model. The New-Key
 otaki (1987), has introduced produc
 general equilibrium models with nomin
 ed and supply shocks. Most of this literat

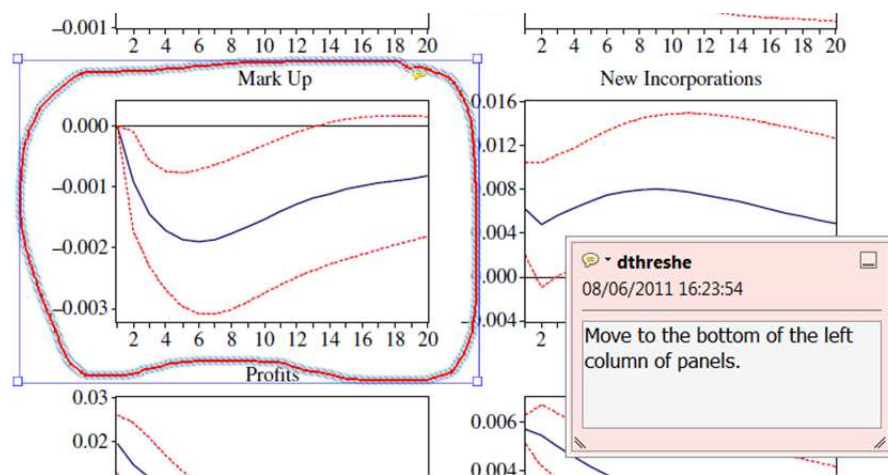


7. Drawing Markups Tools – for drawing shapes, lines and freeform annotations on proofs and commenting on these marks.

Allows shapes, lines and freeform annotations to be drawn on proofs and for comment to be made on these marks..

How to use it

- Click on one of the shapes in the [Drawing Markups](#) section.
- Click on the proof at the relevant point and draw the selected shape with the cursor.
- To add a comment to the drawn shape, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears.
- Double click on the shape and type any text in the red box that appears.



For further information on how to annotate proofs, click on the [Help](#) menu to reveal a list of further options:

