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*presupposes* rather than exhibits that McDonald's has functioned as a model for the design, or has served to condition the development, of myriad institutions and processes. Ritzer asserts the existence of assembly lines, bureaucracy and scientific management, of predictability, control and efficiency in different spheres of activity, but he never seriously documents McDonald's as underlying the spread of these things. Claims about McDonald's as a model whose principles dominate the social world being essentially causal claims, their verification requires detailed historically-informed sociological comparison of McDonald's against other possible influences, investigation separating out their mutual interactions and weighing their relative importance, but this is not work that Ritzer has undertaken. Further, there is nothing in his discussion to justify his claim that McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants are an exemplar or paradigm of a qualitatively higher rationalization than Weber's bureaucracy. As it appears in Ritzer's chief version of the thesis (the characterization involving 'formal' principles), McDonaldization is effectively indistinguishable from Weberian rationalization. He claims with surety that hardly any corner of American society (politics, sport, sex, newspapers, car care, accounting, work, health, retailing, manufacturing) remains untouched by McDonald's principles, but all that means is it has undergone pronounced rationalization. Ritzer may be right about this, but he is not original.

Whether American and international society are as rationalized as Ritzer makes out is a fair question, to be considered in light of possible *countertendencies*. The present paper has attempted something less ambitious, showing that the privileged role Ritzer assigns to McDonald's as an engine of rationalizing change is a thesis which as it stands is, for all its interest and colour, mere speculation, lacking careful articulation and wanting rigorous empirical defence.

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## Forget postmodernism: Towards a nonmodern sociology

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The structure of this paper is as follows. We begin with a brief discussion of Michel Foucault's (1970) account of the centrality of 'Man' to the modernist project. We suggest that the emergence of this figure is connected to the practice of interpretation, or hermeneutics. We restate Foucault's (1972) call for a method, which is non-interpretive and non-anthropological. We then move on to a

discussion of Bruno Latour's (1993) critique of modernism and postmodernism. There are important lessons in his analysis for a sociology, which wishes to develop some of the lines of thought characteristic of postmodernism. We then discuss Latour's attempt to construct a new type of inquiry that we can call a 'sociology of criticism'. Latour's new 'methodology' learns from the errors of postmodernism. This sociology of criticism, a nonmodernist sociology, should not be hermeneutic, but relational, or what Dean (1994) calls semiological.

### Postmodernism is exhausted

Perhaps we are suffering from millennial fever, but in a time when we are told of the end of so many themes (history, philosophy, Man, the social, organised capital - you name it, it's finished) it seems that the postmodern era is over. Nowadays its protagonists are reduced to empty assertions of intellectual and moral superiority (Kendall and Michael 1997; Latour 1993; Michael and Kendall 1997) and methodological inactivity masquerading as scepticism (Kendall and Wickham 1999); while the recent death of Jean-François Lyotard has robbed postmodernism of its most coherent spokesperson. What we want to address in this paper—necessarily schematically—is what comes next. Our answer is a nonmodern sociology that gives up hermeneutics in favour of semiology or relationalism.

### Modernism begets 'Man' and hermeneutics

Foucault (1970) analyses the central place given to the figure of 'Man' by modernism. Foucault describes how Man was born as simultaneously the *principle* and the *subject* of history (Man, and only Man, can know history because Man, and only Man, makes it). In Foucault's account, the premoderns (crudely speaking, those who live before the French and American revolutions) have no need of Man. In the classical age, there was a congruence between theories of language, natural history, and wealth and value, a way of understanding the world that precluded Man. In principle, it was possible to produce an harmonious taxonomy out of the chaos and disorder of the world. In the classical episteme, knowledge is just about better ordering, precisely because the relationship between words and things is one of transparency - there is, as yet, no problem of interpretation. It is only for the moderns that interpretation, or hermeneutics, becomes necessary. Of course, the moderns did not invent hermeneutics, but they raised it up until it became the fundamental form of inquiry of the nascent human sciences.

We can make this a little clearer by discussing one of the examples from Foucault (1970). Foucault makes a distinction between a premodern knowledge, the analysis of wealth, and modernist economics. For the premodern knowledge, simply *describing* the circulation of wealth, which was represented by money, could solve the problem of the analysis of wealth. In typical eighteenth-century texts dealing with wealth, for example, wealth springs from the land (either through the mining of precious metals or through the growth of produce); the value of things is linked with exchange; money represents wealth and is used to designate it as it circulates; and the circulation should be as simple and complete as possible. Man has no place in this schema; there merely exists a 'table' of wealth to which Man is extraneous. Note also that the analysis of wealth requires no *hermeneutic* practice - it merely requires description.

So what is different in the nineteenth century? Man has been invented - Man speaks, Man lives, Man's labour is the principle of production. These three domains are understood as having their own internal laws and rule systems, and Man is understood as a part of them all. In the new economics, and especially clearly in Adam Smith (1776/1961), Man enters the equation both as the dynamic force which makes wealth (through labour) and as the only one who can make sense of the economy. Smith's emphasis on the wealth-creating possibilities of labour led him to dispute previous economic systems that stressed the place of gold and silver (mercantilism, cameralism) or the land (physiocracy) as sources of wealth. Labour is now the source of a nation's wealth. If you have a healthy, productive and large population, the gold and the silver will come in anyway. Smith suggests that we let the gold and silver take care of itself, and points to the cases of Spain and Portugal, who have a virtual monopoly of newly-mined precious metals, but cannot retain them because the labour power of other nations drags them away.

The new complexity that has suddenly invaded the analysis of wealth depends upon a double act - Man and hermeneutics. Now in Foucault (1972) there seems to be something of a nostalgia for the premodern predilection for description rather than hermeneutics: in fact, the central methodological principles focus on the development of an approach which is nonanthropological (ie. which eschews the myth of Man as the centre of the world) and noninterpretive (ie which doubts the value of endless interpretation and suggests that careful description may be a better bet). In short, Foucault deconstructs the two central planks of modernism, and calls for a new, nonmodern method. Nearly thirty years later, so does Bruno Latour.

### **Against postmodernism**

While 'Man' has disappeared from the postmodern project, hermeneutics has become an obsession. An endless round of critique based upon the compulsion to 'unmask' provides Latour (1993) with a reason to attack postmodernism. Latour's main task is to demonstrate the limits and confusions of modernism, but along the way postmodernism gets quite a hammering. Postmodernism refuses the task of empirical description as 'scientific' (modernist), yet it accepts the modernist idea of dividing time into successive revolutions, leaving it in the 'ludicrous' position of coming after the moderns while arguing against the idea of any 'after' (1993: 46-7). Postmodernists "really believe... that scientists are extraterrestrials, that matter is immaterial, that technology is ahuman, that politics is pure simulacrum...[Postmodernists are] simply stuck in the impasse of all avant-gardes that have no more troops behind them" (1993: 62). Later in his book, Latour emphasises the theme that:

[P]ostmodernism is a symptom, not a solution. The postmoderns retain the modern framework but disperse the elements that the modernisers grouped together in a well-ordered cluster. The postmoderns... are wrong to retain the framework and to keep on believing in the requirement of continual novelty (1993: 74).

### **Against modernist sociology**

Given this rejection of postmodernism as an alternative to modernism, Latour makes several methodological points about modernist sociology. In his quest to overcome the effects of the moderns' division between nature and society, Latour

sees sociology as a hindrance rather than a help - it contributes to this division through its perpetuation of the idea of a separate sphere of the social. For Latour, sociology produces a dichotomy between objects and society whereby society is a double basis for denunciations - alternately being so strong as to determine everything about objects and being so weak as to be completely determined by objects, depending on the requirements of the particular site of denunciation. This is the basis, he says, for all society/other dualisms (like society/individual or society/community), in some hard/soft combination. These dualisms, he says, provide "99 per cent of the social sciences' critical repertoire" (1993: 53-54).

Latour is convinced that sociology can dispense with distinctions between knowledge, belief and science (1993: 94) and can thereby dispense with the need to be critical. He aims to escape from the imperative to unmask (that is, always to be trying to reveal something supposedly hidden) and proposes a "sociology of criticism" in place of "critical sociology" (1993: 44).

The appeal of these arguments is perhaps easier to see when consider some of Latour's insights about anthropology. It seems his approach is more akin to anthropology, but only when anthropology is in the field, that is, when it is gathering information about other cultures. He says anthropologists have no problem seeing things in networks when they are dealing with 'other' societies, but cannot do the same to their 'home', western societies. They cannot because the boundaries between the natural, the social and the discursive seem so real to them, trapped as they are within modernism (1993: 7).

Anthropology 'at home', or rather 'of home', Latour argues, makes a false distinction between humans and nonhumans. He says it can be rescued by being made 'symmetrical', made to give up the asymmetry of sociology of knowledge and epistemology which together have promoted yet another false division, this time between true and false science, not allowing the techniques for examining true knowledge to apply to false knowledge, forcing us to account for false knowledge through such devices as ideology (1993: 92). Latour wants sociology to follow the lead of a certain type of ethnology:

every ethnologist is capable of including within a single monograph the definition of the forces in play: the distribution of powers among human beings, gods, and nonhumans; the procedures for reaching agreements; the connections between religion and power; ancestors; cosmology; property rights; plant and animal taxonomies. The ethnologist will certainly not write three separate books: one dealing with knowledge, another with power, yet another with practices (1993: 14).

By Latour's new 'nonmodernist' method, comparative anthropology "no longer compares cultures, setting aside its own, through which some astonishing privilege possesses a unique access to Nature. *It compares natures-cultures*" (1993: 96, emphasis in original). It thereby begins to treat 'home' in the way it treats the 'tropics'. The proposed 'symmetrical anthropology' "uses the same terms to explain truths and errors... finally it refrains from making any *a priori* declarations as to what might distinguish Westerners from Others" (1993: 103).

Nonmodernism is not about entering a new era: "we are no longer obliged to cling to the avant-garde of the avant-garde; we no longer seek to be even cleverer, even more critical". He summarises: "This retrospective attitude, which deploys

instead of unveiling, adds instead of subtracting, fraternizes instead of denouncing... I characterize as nonmodern" (1993: 47). He goes on to ask, how can we make the series of shifts the nonmodern suggests? - from the world of objects to that of quasi-objects? from immanent/transcendent society to collectives of humans and nonhumans? how can we gain access to networks? "We have to trace the modern dimension and the nonmodern dimension" (1993: 77), we have to realise that the nonmodern approach aims to restore the "mediating role to all agents" (1993: 78).

Later in his text Latour offers more discussion on the direction of these possibilities of nonmodernism:

by traversing... networks, we do not come to rest in anything particularly homogeneous. We remain, rather, within an intra-physics... we do not fall into immanence alone, since networks are immersed in nothing. We do not need a mysterious ether for them to propagate themselves... What sort of world is it that obliges us to take into account, at the same time and in the same breath, the nature of things, technologies, sciences, fictional beings, religions large and small, politics, jurisdictions, economies and unconsciousnesses? Our own, of course (1993: 128-129).

Latour asks a series of 'haven't you had enough?' questions about our attitude to the modern critical repertoires, including the following about sociology: "Are you not a little tired of those sociologies constructed around the Social only... because sociologists cannot cope either with the content of objects or with the world of languages that nevertheless construct society?" (1993: 90).

### **Nonmodernism and relativism**

In addressing the problem of relativism, Latour discusses two variations:

Absolute relativism presupposes cultures that are separate and incommensurable and cannot be ordered in any hierarchy... As for cultural relativism, which is more subtle. Nature comes into play, but in order to exist it does not presuppose any scientific work, any society, any construction, any mobilization, any network. It is Nature revisited and corrected by epistemology (1993: 104).

Latour criticises anthropology for traditionally allowing 'modest relativism' while at the same time allowing "the surreptitious return of arrogant universalism - we Westerners want to see ourselves as a special culture... We Westerners cannot be one culture among others, since we also mobilize Nature", we think we actually control Nature through science. "Thus at the heart of the question of relativism we find the question of science" (1993: 97). He argues that the "relativists have never been convincing on the equality of cultures, since they limit their consideration precisely to cultures". The solution, according to Latour, "appears along with the dissolution of cultures. All natures-cultures are similar in that they simultaneously construct humans, divinities and nonhumans" (1993: 106). Differences between cultures might be sizeable,

but they are only of size. They are important... but they are not disproportionate... The fact that one of the collectives needs ancestors and fixed stars while another one, more eccentric, needs genes and quasars, is explained by the dimensions of the collective to be held together. A much larger number of objects requires a much larger number of subjects (1993: 108).

Absolute relativism, Latour goes on, has "accepted the universalists' viewpoint

while refusing to rally round it: if no common, unique and transcendental measuring instrument exists, then all languages are untranslatable... all rites equally respectable, all paradigms incommensurable" (1993: 112). He argues that this is not taking relativism seriously—it ignores the fact that the process of inventing measuring instruments is also the process of seriously inventing commensurability. What is needed, he says, is a relativist relativism (what he later calls 'relationalism' [1993: 114]): "The relativist relativists, more modest but more empirical, point out what instruments and what chains serve to create asymmetries and inequalities, hierarchies and differences... Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else" (1993: 113).

### **Nonmodernism and time**

Latour's nonmodern approach also provides a potential means of overcoming the confusions about temporality that he regards as a defining feature of modernism. "Time is not a general framework but a provisional result of the connection among entities" (1993: 74). As an example of this point, Latour says he uses both a drill and a hammer, yet one is thirty-five years old, the other hundreds and thousands of years. We all "mix up gestures from different times" (1993: 75). "We have always actively sorted out elements belonging to different times... *It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting*" (1993: 76, emphasis in original).

### **Concluding remarks: uniting Foucault and Latour**

There is much in Latour that echoes Foucault: the attack on the critical approach, the concern about simple stories of causality, and the acceptance of a carefully worked form of relativism are all apparent. Yet while Foucault's problematisation of modernism was the spur to much postmodern work, Latour presents us with the disturbing possibility that postmodernism is no position to cash out some of its theoretical advances. We suggest that where Foucault and Latour can be used together is in the formation of a sociological approach that reserves judgement in its attempts to avoid being 'critical', that avoids being anthropological in that it forgets the modernist invention of Man and the Constitution which cleaves the human from the nonhuman, and that is noninterpretive in that it deliberately avoids the endless rounds of hermeneutics. A recent book by Mitchell Dean (1994) ends up requesting a form of sociology which is not hermeneutic (which forgets to ask questions about what something 'really' is), but is rather semiological (which concentrates instead on describing relations between entities). It seems to us that this should be the direction for a self-consciously nonmodern sociology. And if we want to know what this type of sociology might look like, there are plenty of good examples in the recent sociology of science (eg Latour 1996).

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## **Social change and narrative identity.**

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### **Introduction**

The communitarian challenge which emerged in response to John Rawls' (1972) *A Theory of Justice* has provided 25 years of debate in which theories of the individual have moved from a politico-economic base to a socio-cultural one. Rawls (1972) radical revision of liberalism has been met with an equally radical critique. Each thesis is partly a response to changes in the structure of society and partly a result of internal theoretical debate, and each has attempted to provide solutions to the problems that beset us as we reach the end of both modernity and the millennium. One recurring problem is identity: it has become an issue again, a sure sign that it is in crisis.

The liberal and communitarian theses begin from very different positions. Whereas Rawls (1972) regards justice and individual rights as the foundations for an individual pursuit of the good life, MacIntyre (1985) regards the virtues, which he says can only be derived from community, as the dispositions to cultivate for the pursuit of the good life. These views define identity as very different propositions for each thesis. Rawls (1972) identity is an abstract, given one, whereas MacIntyre's (1985) is deeply embedded in community. This essay will examine MacIntyre's (1985) proposition in light of changes occurring in the contemporary landscape. In doing so, it will be shown that his concept of identity is conceptually problematic and ultimately fails when confronted with these changes.

### **The self and plural society**

For MacIntyre (1985), the modern liberal self is fragmented. The partitioning of human action, the atomization of practices to a set of basic actions and the separation of individuals from their roles all prevent a conception of the individual as a unity. Thus the liberal individual cannot be seen as a bearer of virtues, as an individual separated from his or her roles loses the arena of social relationships in which the virtues function. For the virtues to be cultivated, a unity of self is required and this can only emerge from a narrative which contains the self as the