

Disciplinary Translations: Remarks on Latour in Literary Studies and Anthropology

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In the following I offer some comparative remarks on the reception, interpretation and translation of Bruno Latour's work in literary studies and in anthropology. I end by reflecting on the relation between Latour and the humanities today.

Schematically, literary studies has followed a trajectory in which the strong emphasis on "theory" in the 1970s and 80s gradually came to be challenged by cultural-studies inspired approaches that centered on the themes of race, class and gender and invited engagement with broader socio-political issues. Since Latour had virtually nothing to say about any of these topics, and since his focus on science located him on the distant side of the two cultures divide, interest in his work among literary scholars was practically non-existent in the 1990s (Smith 2016a).

In stark contrast, Latour is currently presented as offering new perspectives for literary studies and for the humanities at large (e.g. Best and Marcus 2009, Felski 2015a, 2016, Love 2010, Witmore 2016). The turning point was probably "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam" (Latour 2004), which suggested that social construction had been hijacked by climate deniers and was now correspondingly impotent as a critical tool. Apparently remote from the central concerns of literary theory, this suggestion could be aligned with Latour's earlier disparaging remarks about postmodern theory in *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour 1993: 5-6, 46, 62, 67, 98). To literary scholars skeptical of deconstruction or disturbed by other current forms of critique, the prospect of a novel a-critical approach came to hold increasing appeal.

Yet, this was not Latour's first entry into literary studies. For a period in the 1990s, his work had figured prominently in the journal *Configurations*, home of the small Society for Science and Literature. In an early interview there (Crawford 1993), Latour depicted postmodern critique as embodying "disappointed enlightenment," contrasting it with the writings of Michel Serres (e.g. 1982), who, he observed, did not believe in any critical meta-language. He further suggested that while the traditional role of the critic "is a sort of policeman...who adjudicates the meanings of...words [,]...the interesting task is...following the translations" (Crawford 1993:

266).ⁱ Subsequently, the interviewer, T. Hugh Crawford (1997: 14), analyzed *Moby-Dick* as a “great network novel,” paid special attention to Latourian “nonhuman delegates,” and argued that the novel’s image of agency resembled that of fluid mechanics.

In another *Configurations* article, the German theorist Robert Koch (1995: 340) picked up the a- or anti-critical impetus of Latour’s work, writing that the “abandonment of notions such as ‘author,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘intentionality’” by poststructuralism had also entailed the disappearance of the object. A Latourian approach, Koch argued, would recover the object in the form of nonhuman agents. Not only an issue of theory, Koch further linked the object’s disappearance to the “dynamics of literary criticism in its institutional environment.” Comparing Derridean deconstruction to Latour’s description of Louis Pasteur’s laboratory, he described it as “disciplined by obedience to a central body of texts.” Like Pasteur’s laboratory, Koch remarked, the deconstructive laboratory was engaged in building an empire that defended itself “against attacks from ‘outside’ dissenters” by rendering “‘naïve’ anyone who opposes it.”

In 2001, William Paulson (2001: 118), a scholar of French literature, turned to Latour, Isabelle Stengers and Jean Paulhan to sketch a cosmopolitical philology in which language would be an “immanent part of a world in flux.” In a separate piece, Paulson analyzed Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* as a “nonmodern hybrid world of socialized and meaningful objects” (Paulson nd). Yet, Paulson’s cosmopolitical proposal went unheeded and, exemplifying the unpredictable paths of translation, his paper is cited mainly by cultural geographers.ⁱⁱ Fifteen years later, Rita Felski (2015a: 739) would once again invoke Emma Bovary in a discussion of Latour and literary studies.

In the aftermath of the “science wars” and the Sokal affair, John Guillory (2001: 508), siding with the traditionalist defenders of science, argued that literary studies, rather than prolonging the “conflict of the faculties,” should search for its own place among the sciences. Not an especially careful reader of Latour, Guillory took him to task for claiming to overcome all binaries “with a few sweeping gestures” while continuing to rely on the “business as usual of ethnographic case studies” (491n4). He thus failed to notice the novelty of Latour’s reconfiguration of the relation between empirical and the conceptual, which, among other things, enabled

ethnographic materials to become conceptual elements. Although neither philosophy nor ethnography is really “business as usual” in Latour, Guillory were able to perceive only a flawed “‘ontological’ project” that ultimately posed an obstacle to the search of literary studies for its own modest place among the sciences.

Published around the same time as Guillory’s polemical piece, another bid for redefining the relations between literary studies and the sciences was Franco Moretti’s (2000) influential “Conjectures on World Literature.” During the next decade, as discussions concerning the survival of literary studies became increasingly connected with the promise or threat posed by the digital humanities, Moretti’s notion of “distant readings” based on big data sets gained significant attention. In this changing context, Latour’s work in was also picked up with increasing enthusiasm. His views of the technological mediation of knowledge now provided ammunition for scholars arguing that technology should be seen not as an enemy of the humanities but rather as offering opportunities for creative appropriation. Along these lines, in a recent article featuring a counting algorithm that analyzed the word patterns in all 38 Shakespeare plays, Michael Witmore (2016: 371) suggests that “it probably takes a figure like Latour to convince humanists, as he does in greater numbers, that we need not refuse certain types of allies in the work we do; that our insights will not perish under the weight of technoscience, sociology, or mathematics.”

Meanwhile, Latour’s a-critical impulses were also once again welcomed. Thus Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (2009: 17) wrote that, rather than aiming to “correct the text,” (cf. Latour’s comments on “policing metaphor”) the literary scholar “might aim instead to correct for her critical subjectivity.” Unlike the detailed readings of *Moby-Dick* and *Madame Bovary* previously offered by Hugh Crawford and William Paulson, however, these new a-critical suggestions were made in support of “surface readings” that did not aim “to plumb the hidden depths” (18). Critical subjectivity would be corrected not by close textual interpretation but “by using machines to bypass it” (17).

Parallel to these discussions, another significant development in Latour’s reception was related to the ever more visible crisis of climate change and the emergent concept of the anthropocene. This parallel development was also set in motion by “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam,” where Latour had strategically conflated the systematic effort to undermine climate facts made by Republican spin-

doctors with the arguments of social construction and deconstruction. Subsequently, the themes of planetary environmental destruction were highlighted by the Indian post-colonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009, 2012, 2016) in a series of publications in *Critical Inquiry* and *New Literary History*. Finding inspiration in Latour's analyses of nonhuman agency and "the politics of nature" (Latour 2004), Chakrabarty argued that conventional critiques of capitalism are inadequate for tackling the anthropocene, since large-scale socialism engaged in similar forms of environmental destruction, and because the earth is becoming an increasingly unpredictable actor whose "acts" harm capitalists and others indiscriminately (though not, of course, evenly). Related arguments also inspired the much-debated *The Great Derangement* (2016) by the anthropologically trained novelist Amitav Ghosh, which, among other things, meditates on the disjuncture between the quotidian concerns of the modernist novel and the reality of exceptional environmental events. More generally, Latour's strong ecological reorientation has created possibilities for a rather uneasy alignment of his work with literary approaches such as eco-criticism and with emergent disciplines such as the environmental humanities.

As this brief account indicates, Latour's reception in literary studies basically occurred in two stages. Almost entirely neglected throughout the 1990s, the situation began to change in the mid-2000 as his work was selectively adopted to address a changing set of disciplinary problems. Thus, his "enlightenment without critique" was (re-)activated against the fading, but evidently still haunting image of "high theory" based on a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Some scholars began to conceive novels as "networks" of human and nonhuman actors, an interest that proved connectible with new forms of digital analysis. Meanwhile, Latour's ecological orientation and emphasis on material agency enabled new but unstable alliances with scholars interested in "new materialism" and other quasi-Marxian developments.

It is not irrelevant that Latour's most sustained empirical work on various natural sciences and technologies has generated only limited interest among literary scholars. Mainly finding inspiration in more programmatic texts like "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam," *We Have Never Been Modern* and *Reassembling the Social*, the central emphasis has been on the "critique of critique," on the attendant idea of following the actors without preconceived ideas, on awarding agency to material and other nonhuman entities, and on challenging various conventional

binaries including nature/culture, the latter an endeavor which, ironically, had previously been affiliated with Derrida and deconstruction. I return later to the question of what has been gained and lost in these translations. For now, I turn to anthropology.

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While Latour has given us terms such as “symmetrical anthropology” and “the anthropology of the moderns,” he is not typically seen *as* an anthropologist. Indeed, in the 1990s Latour was hardly taken seriously in anthropology at all. Nor did he take the then budding field of the anthropology of science and technology very seriously. In 1990, he wrote a scathing review of Sharon Traweek’s (1988) study of Japanese and American physicists, which, Latour argued, got almost everything wrong (Latour 1990).ⁱⁱⁱ However, his relations with anthropology slowly began to change.

Influential anthropological theorists, including Marilyn Strathern (1995, 1999) at Cambridge and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) based in Rio de Janeiro, engaged in critical but sympathetic interaction with actor-network theory. In the US, a key entry point was California, where Latour had conducted fieldwork, and where he was, for a while, part of the faculty of University of San Diego. California was also home to a number of researchers working at the borders of sociology, anthropology and feminist technoscience, not least among them Donna Haraway.

The initial encounter was troubled. Reviewing *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (Haraway 1991) in *American Anthropologist*, Latour described Haraway’s style as “oracular” and observed that she attempted the impossible feat of being a modernist, a postmodernist and a nonmodernist at once (Latour 1992c: 502). Haraway returned the favor in *Modest_Witness* (1997: 33-35), observing that Latour painted a picture of technoscience as warfare, a “powerfully tropic system” in which, she pointed out, the “structure of heroic action is intensified.” Political and stylistic differences aside, they would nevertheless end up as close allies.

Even so, the early anthropological interest in Latour’s work was neither limited to California nor exclusive to specialists in science and technology. For example, Chicago based anthropologists Judith Farquhar, John Kelly and Margaret Wiener found his work appealing due to its loosening up of rigid dualisms, such as nature/culture, human/nonhuman, modern/premodern, which seemed germane to their studies. Despite these early exchanges, however, his work did not become widely

known in the field until the mid-2000s. Much to his chagrin, Latour's first real claim to fame came with the science wars, where he was often grouped with postmodernists like Baudrillard and Derrida.

In the early 90s, there was thus no anthropological analogue to the marginalized yet intense interest exhibited in Latour in the pages of *Configurations*. And indeed, although Latour is now widely known and cited there has been limited in-depth discussion of his theoretical corpus in the field (but see Oppenheim 2007). This is not to say, though, that he has escaped criticism. In fact, ever since actor-network theory was first noticed by anthropologists, many have been, and continue to be, inordinately skeptical.

After the postcolonial turn of the 1970s, questions of politics, political engagement, and the complicity of anthropology with power have been central to the anthropological disciplinary consciousness. This sensitivity made many anthropologists worry about Latour's notion of symmetry, usefully summarized by Helen Verran (2002: 163) as a refusal of "*a priori* separations," including between "the material and the symbolic, the world and its representation." For many anthropological readers, this amounted to a form of self-imposed blindness in the face of actually existing inequalities. This, then, was relativism, and an abdication of politics. In an early overview article, Sharon Traweek (1993: 9) commented that attention to social power was generally missing from Latour and other STS studies. After observing—or lamenting—that since 2010, "the Latour effect in American anthropology" had been remarkable, Kim Fortun (2014: 134) denounced his inattention to the politics of late industrialism. Separated by two decades, and bridged by innumerable versions, the critique is practically identical.

Although Latour and others have repeatedly insisted that symmetry entails only that separations are "achieved not given" (Verran 2002: 163), the understanding that it *outlaws* the study of hierarchies and inequalities is thus alive and well. At issue, obviously, are deeply held convictions about theory and politics. After all, the Latourian refusal to define the shape of hierarchies in advance is also a refusal to do so in accordance with the canons of critical anthropology.

Though prominent, the (supposedly missing) politics of symmetry is far from the only problem anthropology has with Latour. An equally long-lasting objection has focused on his particular brand of empiricism. In their influential *Anthropology as*

Cultural Critique, George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986: 154) described *Laboratory Life* as “essentially satirical” (140), noting with bemusement that Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) “go so far as to compare themselves and their subjects repeatedly to a classic ethnographic-fieldwork situation abroad.”

In one sense, this was a curious observation, since Latour and Woolgar were, in fact, in a more or less “classic” fieldwork situation abroad. But if Marcus and Fischer (1986: 154) saw *Laboratory Life* as descending into “caricature,” it was likely because the book’s relatively straightforward narration of the production of facts in the Salk Laboratory seemed to exemplify the naïve belief in the ability to represent the other that these postmodern anthropologists sought to combat with elaborate textual experiments.

Sharon Traweek (1993: 9) also complained that Latour’s writing was based on a “resolute empiricism.” To her, however, the problem was not his obvious lack of interest in postmodern style but rather that his brand of empiricism “steadfastly refuse[d] to accept the ontology” of the people it studied. This line of critique, too, has endured. Thus, Martin Holbraad wrote in 2004 that, whereas “no anthropologist should dream of ‘correcting’ his informants[, it] seems that Latour is giving himself this license,” and Zoe Todd (2016) has recently denounced Latour for his failure to engage with indigenous thought. In a more nuanced formulation, Bill Maurer (2005: 14) suggested that Latour’s self-proclaimed “realism” was problematic and useful for the same reason: while symmetry enabled and indeed required the opening of all the “black-boxes” that make up “reality,” the outcome was often alien to the people whose black-boxes were opened.

The general anthropological agreement on this point is particularly striking given the very different intellectual orientations of the researchers I have just cited: Sharon Traweek is a cultural anthropologist of science, while Zoe Todd works on colonial legacies among indigenous people in the Canadian arctic and Bill Maurer is a creative inheritor of postmodern anthropology with an interest in finance. Yet all come together in agreement with the verdict offered by proponents of the “ontological turn” in anthropology (with which none of them are otherwise sympathetic): Latour’s work is abstract and reductionist, offering a “meta-theory” that reduces everything to “a network of hybrids” (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2007: 7)

This view is of course strikingly different from Latour’s (2005:12) own often

declared aim to “try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands.” It is equally striking that, while this self-description seems very dubious to many anthropologists, it is widely accepted by Latour admirers in literary studies, who indeed highlight it as a particularly appealing feature of his work since it offers an antidote to “suspicious” readings (Love 2010: 376, Felski 2015a: 740).

Responding to different intellectual problems and situations, it can further be observed that these disparate interpretations and evaluations are significantly enabled by Latour’s own pervasive equivocations (Gad and Jensen 2010, 2016). While he has certainly promoted the idea that researchers should let go of theory and “simply” trace actors as they build networks, thereby encouraging the view of him as a “resolute empiricist,” Latour himself takes liberties far beyond such tracing and his texts are evidently elaborately conceptual.

Rather than as a pure empiricist or a conventional metaphysician, Latour’s analytical practice might thus be described as a series of open-ended experiments seeking to put diverse concepts into conversation with heterogeneous empirical realities, always in the context of addressing particular problems. While this description removes the sting from the accusation that Latour is building a universal meta-theory, it simultaneously puts to rest the idea that his practice is wholly empirical and devoid of preexisting conceptual commitments.

Latour’s recent interventions in anthropology, like those in literary studies, have also centered on climate change. In a keynote given to the *American Association of Anthropology* in 2014, he described the anthropocene as “a gift” (Latour 2014b), to the discipline. Since the anthropocene brings to light the entwinement of geological and human agency, it provides anthropological license to roam freely across the terrain of the natural sciences. Consequently it becomes necessary to deal once again with the now severed connection between physical and cultural anthropology. Finally, the anthropocene hands over to anthropology the politically important question of specifying ways in which humans can sustainably inhabit the earth. Yet while the anthropocene has certainly become a very prominent topic in anthropological discourse the concept has not been widely perceived as a “gift.” To the contrary, anthropologists have generally been very critical of its universalizing assumptions and its lack of attention to histories of colonialism and capitalism.

These responses thus connect with the recurrent charge that Latour's agenda is basically apolitical. Like Kim Fortun (2014), the French anthropologists Jean-Pierre Delchambre and Nicolas Marquis (2013) criticize *Modes of Existence* (Latour 2013) as a navel-gazing exercise, which says more about Latour's worldview than about the environmental problems facing the world. The important exception to this negative verdict is Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2016) recent *The Ends of The World*, which draws on Latour along with Deleuze, Stengers and Chakrabarty to offer a novel interpretation of the demands the anthropocene makes on intellectuals and politics today. Experimentally juxtaposing philosophy, fiction, and ethnography, this work makes no pretense of being pure anthropology. Significantly, this work originates in Brazil rather than in the anthropological centers of the US or Europe.

While Latour's went from being generally ignored to being intensively but selectively promoted, his reception in anthropology does not conform to a 'two-stage model,' exhibiting instead a complex pattern of interests and concerns. While anthropologists of science and technology continued to worry about Latour's "lacking" politics, they sympathized with his emphasis on impure (quasi-) subjects and objects and material agency, which aligned with Haraway's cyborg analyses. More broadly, while Latour's efforts to undo the dichotomies of nature-culture and modern-nonmodern, and his symmetrical treatment of humans and nonhumans, found a sympathetic hearing among anthropologists with an inclination to conceptual experimentation, these efforts were resisted elsewhere because of their unorthodoxy.

Indeed, it is noticeable that while the strongholds of American and British anthropology – with some key exceptions – continue to view Latour with considerable hostility, the situation is quite different among anthropologists situated more peripherally --- in different countries or less prestigious institutions -- and themselves involved in developing non-mainstream forms of inquiry.

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In both literary theory and anthropology, the reception of Latour's work has operated by selective appropriations and transformations rather than through any linear process of dissemination and adoption. The dynamics, in this sense, conforms to his own notion of translation.

In the early 90s, writers in *Configurations* found in Latour an alternative to the two-cultures dichotomy that pitched humanities against the sciences. Since the journal focused on the examination of interrelations between these fields, this interest was not coincidental. Armed with Latour's critique of critique, scholars of literature and science affiliated tried to turn the tables on critical theorists hostile to any interest in science. At the same time, Latour's depiction of hybrid subjectivities and distributed agency provided a means for tracing networks of human and nonhuman actors in texts, an orientation that aligned with the preexisting interest in uncovering scientific metaphors and allusions in literary works. As noted, however, these explorations had no lasting disciplinary impact.

After "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam," various Latourian ideas were taken up in the very different context of anxious discussions about the reinvention of the humanities. At this point, his emphasis on technical mediation was used to support the idea that literary scholarship, rather than being threatened by big data, might turn them to its own advantage (e.g. Witmore 2016). Within this constellation, moreover, Latour's replacement of depth hermeneutics with a tracing of associations between heterogeneous actors could be brought into contact with the idea of distant reading in arguments for surface readings (Best and Marcus 2009), for "close but not deep" readings (Love 2010), and, indeed, for "neither distant nor close but mid-level" reading (Felski 2015a: 741). Yet, though technical mediation and the tracing of networks *in general* are Latourian concerns, the usage of these ideas in the context of digitally enabled literature analysis is obviously not. We remain firmly in the realm of translation and, thus, deformation.

On the one hand, it is not difficult to connect the notion of tracing of associations with an idea of surface reading *in some form*. Indeed, Latour has dabbled in "automated" network analysis throughout his career (Teil and Latour 1995; Venturini, Jensen and Latour 2015). On the other hand, the elicitation of data patterns obviously does not as such get one closer to the actors' categories that Latour *also* insist are crucial,^{iv} and thus it remains undecidable whether he offers either support for or critique of digital humanities and forms of analysis

No strictly parallel to this discussion is found in anthropology. Yet the discussion emerges in another form since it is much debated whether Latour is in fact "following the actors" or not.

The persistent anthropological critique of Latour for applying the same theory everywhere is notable, among other things, because it is diametrically opposite to the view found in literary studies that one of the major benefits of ANT is to dispense with the need for “preexisting theory.” Along these lines, Rita Felski (2015a: 740) has recently contrasted a Latourian ethos of “attentiveness, respect, and generosity” with critical approaches that pick texts apart. Meanwhile, many anthropologists view the Latourian principle of generalized symmetry as entailing a denial of glaringly obvious inequalities that are far more adequately analyzed with existing critical frameworks.

For Latour, generalized symmetry is premised on scrupulous evenhandedness, and thus on engaging any setting with the fundamentally open-ended stance that anthropologists routinely mistake for a lack of politics. But for the same reason it also entails a denial of the relevance modes of analysis and analytical categories to which many others remain committed. Thus, it holds potential for making judgments that are not respectful or generous.

As an example, we can consider “An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto,” dedicated to Donna Haraway. There, Latour (2010: 475) repeats almost verbatim the critique of critique he had offered in his *Configurations* interview with T. Hugh Crawford almost twenty years earlier. At this point, however, Latour had evidently changed opinion about his erstwhile mentor Michel Serres, whose perspective is now bluntly rejected as “insufficient” (479), problematic and “quaint” (Latour 2014a: 6). As an addition to the already long list of off-handed Latourian put-downs, these formulations are indicative of limits to the alleged ethos of generosity. There is no doubt also a relation between this style of often-not-too-serious critical engagement and the hostile reactions that his writings regularly generate among scientists both social and natural.

More generally, Latour’s style significantly influences the appropriation of his ideas across fields. Routinely relying on reversals, irony and equivocation, this is a style that enables, if it does not actively encourage, divergent interpretations. If literary scholars and anthropologists can so easily take different views on whether Latour dispenses with the need for pre-existing theory or promotes the same theory everywhere, it is not only because they approach from different angles but also because his various writings support both versions. If there is disagreement on whether Latour’s treatment of other scholars is respectful and, generous, indifferently

symmetrical, or condescending, it is because, although he espouses the former attitudes as a principle, he regularly exhibits the latter in practice.

Latour's rhetorical slipperiness makes it easy for interested parties to pick up the bits of argumentation most congenial to their projects, something evidently useful for the translation of his ideas into a wide range of contexts. The flipside, however, is that it is similarly easy to avoid engaging with those aspects of his work that align less well with the interpreter's own projects. To each, so to speak, his or her own Latour.

Thus anthropologists have picked up the notion of nonhuman agency but separated it from the principle of symmetry in order to maintain a general distinction between people and things and to protect a conventional image of politics. In the same way, literary scholars have drawn on the concept of technical mediation and the association of actors in a network to advocate for digital alternatives to "close reading," while downplaying the fact that mediation—a synonym with translation for Latour—designates a condition of unpredictability that comes with no guarantee of improvement and further disregarding that taking actors seriously also entails dealing *closely* with what they say and do.

But a corollary of this *internal Latourian variation* is that he hardly *adds up*: either to the villain perceived by critical anthropologists or to the savior of the embattled humanities. He might instead be described as an unpredictable and sometimes inconsistent, but often wildly creative *joker*.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith (2016b: 72) has recently proposed as a "law of academic history," that "everybody complains of being misrepresented and caricatured, and everybody *is* misrepresented and caricatured." Nobody embodies both parts of this law better than Latour. Symmetrically, however, it also applies to those writing the supposedly outdated critiques critiqued by Latour and others. If, for example, Paul Feyerabend's arguments against the existence of any true method in science simply make people "believe it is important to find the true method," as Latour asserted (Crawford 1993: 255), it can also be assumed that repeated arguments about the limits of critique will lead to reaffirmation of its virtues. And if deconstruction could be depicted as an empire with Derrida sitting at its center (Koch 2004), Latour's comparable situation today might give pause.

This is indicative of certain problems with promoting Latour's work as a general framework for the humanities. For one thing, there is a high likelihood that

such a campaign will simply generate its own backlash. But its potential success would arguably be a bigger problem, since turning Latour into a paradigm or orthodoxy would make it progressively more difficult to “invent around” his ideas (Strathern 2002: xv) thus stifling their potential for creative or unorthodox redeployment.

The early laboratory studies replaced the classical image of the scientific hero always situated at the peak of history with a far richer depiction of entangled histories, multiple agents, layered mediations, and plenty of room for translation. This is an image of the disciplines as a “noisy and colorful parade” (Smith 2016b: 73) that makes knowledge through multiple, incongruent styles of thought and practice. The parade needs no leader. As an intellectual joker of the first order, however, Latour plays an incomparable role within it.

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ⁱ While Latour himself has not written extensively about literature (but see Latour 1998, 1999: 266-293; Latour and Powers 1998), he has written much about texts in general, and a considerable amount about visual art. In an early article, he flagged an interest in examining how “space-times” are textually generated through the establishment of relations between diverse agencies such as: “Gods, angels, spheres, doves, planets and steam engines” (Latour 1988: 25). This focus, exhibited in his “partial semiotic analysis” of Pasteur’s diaries (Latour 1992a), inspired Crawford and, later, others (Luckhurst 2005, Vint 2012, Idema 2015). For Latour, examination of how worlds were made out of the relations of diverse agencies—angels ... planets ... steam engines—was a way of uncovering the shape of reality. But, as suggested by the mixture of elements on his list, this shape was rather unusual. In a short comment on the painter Adam Lowe, Latour (1992b: 37-38) wrote that art is a regime “that sends meaning out of matter... a strange regime of representation.” This view, according to which art emits “strange forms of meaning,” resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994: 174) argument that art “invents unknown and unrecognized affects and brings them to light.” The distinction between representation/world or between art/life, is thus replaced with a porous boundary, a “membrane through which [a] double exchange flows” (Deleuze 2003: 12). What Latour called the “regime” of art in 1992, would later be redefined as a “mode of existence” (Latour 2013).

ⁱⁱ In the new millennium scattered references to, or deployments of, similar Latourian themes, are found in e.g. (Frow, 2001; Mitchell 2001; Brown 2001, 2006; Alworth 2010). None of them refer back to Paulson or the earlier *Configurations* articles.

ⁱⁱⁱ While this review was unfair to Traweek, the early anthropology of science (e.g. Hess 1995) was indeed somewhat conventional in comparison with the emerging field of science and technology studies with which Latour was associated.

^{iv} Ironically, in a recent piece in *New Literary History*, Latour (2015: 145) has praised Charles Péguy for his insistence that one should always aim to “experience the full impact of the text,” which requires sticking “close to” it (cf. Stengers 2011).