



**Paulo Frazão Roberto, *The Concept of Man in Foucault's Les mots et les choses [O Conceito de Homem em Les mots et les choses de Foucault]*, M.A. Dissertation in Philosophy, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2014.**

The main object of our dissertation is the concept of man in Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, analysed from a critical and hermeneutical point of view. The *leitmotiv* of our study is a common misunderstanding of the controversial utterance on "the death of man" at the end of *Les mots et les choses*. Our attempt of conceptual elucidation is, at least, partially, a critical problematization of that one formulation, whose persistent misunderstanding has been, in our opinion, an obstacle to the intelligibility of the *concept of man* in Foucault's thought.

Like the other works of the archaeological period, *Les mots et les choses* (1966) is *grosso modo* a historical-philosophical analysis of the conditions of possibility (the historical "subsoil") behind the emergence of some human sciences. However, unlike *Histoire de la folie* (1961) or *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963), works focusing on *specific* sciences (psychiatry and medicine) that consider man in his concrete "depth", *Les mots et les choses* is, as its subtitle clearly indicates, an archaeology of the human sciences. The question of man is not only understood in a broader sense, but problematized *as such* in the form of a greater *conceptual framework*.

It is clearly established in *Les mots et les choses*' preface that one of the basic principles of the archaeological analysis is that all thought, knowledge or empirical perceptive experience is developed within an existent *order*, i.e., within a given relation between "words and things". Being a fundamental and constitutive dimension – a "historical *a priori*" –, although not eternal or immutable, this order presents different and changeable historical modes of being. Each order establishes its own *episteme*, i.e., the general configuration of knowledge (*savoir*) that defines the conditions of thought and knowledge (*connaissance*) in a given time period.

Being a historical-philosophical analysis, archaeology is, however, quite distant from the "traditional" history of ideas or of science's ap-

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proaches. While these privilege a retrospective and continuous narrative of the progress of knowledge (*connaissance*) and science, archaeology explores the historical modes of being of the order that constitute knowledge (*savoir*) in a certain period (*episteme*). In *Les mots et les choses* two great distinctive and *discontinuous spaces* of order, and consequently of knowledge (*savoir*), are identified: the classical *episteme* (XVII and XVIII centuries) and the modern *episteme* (from the XIX century to the present).

From the Renaissance to Modernity, the archaeological analyses of *Les mots et les choses* consider mainly the domains of life, labour and language in each of their underlying epistemic configurations. It is in this temporal scope, and in these fields of knowledge, that Foucault problematizes the question of the concept of man.

The conclusion of *Les mots et les choses* states two strong – polemic and seemingly odd – theses on the concept of man: man is a recent “invention” in the order of knowledge – it only emerged and established itself as an epistemological object in Modernity – that is *maybe* on the verge of disappearing (“the death of man”).

Challenging an evidence more or less accepted since Socrates, Foucault sustains that man is not the most ancient and constant “object” of knowledge in history.

It does not date from the Renaissance either, even if Man is commonly understood as the major example of the renaissance microcosm. Strongly permeated with a cosmological point of view, the renaissance *episteme* is ruled by the category of *resemblance*. In the great book of nature (macrocosm), knowledge is built on relations of analogy, and through the interpretation of similarities between signatures (words and things). Therefore, the knowledge that man may have of himself as a microcosm is formed based on the search and identification of resemblances with and *in* the macrocosm. This means that, in the Renaissance, man is reflected in the great *mirror* of the *Cosmos*, more than actually constituted as an object of knowledge.

And it does not date from the Classical Age either, which is precisely the period in which man himself comes through as a rational being, closely connected with the figure of the Cartesian *cogito*. Ruled by the category of *representation*, the classical *episteme* has its paradigm in that very same figure. Analogously to Velázquez’s *Las meninas*, understood as a representation of the classical representation, the Cartesian cognition is described as a process in which the subject is placed in an *invisible* central point that opens the space of the world and in which all the *visible* things are disposed, as “subjects”, to his *sovereign* gaze and the ordering force of

his representation. Nevertheless, like the “absent” sovereigns of *Las meninas*, man as “subject-*cogito*” does not appear in the *tableau* of cognitive representation. Foucault shows it in the analysis of the classical “sciences” of life (natural history), labour (analysis of wealth) and language (general grammar). Since representation is an instance of the subject, existing and being developed *inside him*, and not of the things themselves, in the cognitive process man never places himself as otherness of that very representation of which he is, however, the founder. This means that man is not yet known *as such*, but presented in the image of *God*, with an *infinite* power of “omni-representation”. Recalling Kant, Foucault will speak of a sort of representative metaphysics of reason under whose *dogmatic sleep* the classical thought and knowledge will fall.

Consequently, despite the central and privileged role it has in the renaissance humanism and in classical rationalism, man did not exist as the epistemological object of a proper and specific domain of knowledge.

In the threshold of the modern *episteme*, the empirical sciences (biology, economics, philology) and Kant’s transcendental philosophy will open the possibility for a knowledge in which, according to Foucault, man will appear *effectively* seen and constituted as an epistemological object for the first time.

The substantial change that occurs with the empirical sciences is the fact that a new relation is established between subject and object in knowledge. No longer ordered in the infinite representative instance inherent to the *cogito*, to the empirical sciences the object is now something that has a concrete and independent existence from the knowing subject. To the point that such a subject is now projected as an object of knowledge by those sciences, in his concrete otherness of human being. While studying the empirical phenomena of life, labour and language – “objects” that have their own immanent laws of behaviour, independent of the cognitive subject – the empirical sciences provide knowledge of man represented in his *finitude*, as a living animal being (biology) that produces, exchanges and desires things (economics) or speaks (philology).

Kant’s transcendental philosophy researches the human faculties in the cognitive process; it aims to determine the *a priori* conditions of possibility that allow the subject to be the founder of knowledge. However, unlike classical rationalism, in which knowledge is based on the infinite representative power of the *cogito*, Kant restricts the cognitive scope of human faculties. Knowledge is, in the subject, a synthesis between an intellectual representation (understanding) and a spatial-temporal representation of the phenomenal diversity (sensibility). Inextricably linked to sensibility in the in-

itial foundation of its possibility, human knowledge is limited and finite. This means that, on the cognitive level, the transcendental position of the subject is always accompanied by the conscience of the limits of his human *finitude*.

Due to this double position – as *object* of *empirical* knowledge and *transcendental subject* of knowledge – man assumes the strange position of an *empirical-transcendental doublet*. Being at the same time a transcendental subject and an empirical object of knowledge, it is now possible to man, by means of a synthetic operation of thought, to place himself as “target” of his own knowledge. It is in this sense that Foucault holds the thesis that man only appears in the modern order of knowledge (*savoir*).

Given his intrinsic transcendental limits and his projection as an empirical object, a constitutive *finitude* is inherent to that double position of man. To Foucault, the empirico-transcendental finitude of man acquires the status of a positivity upon which modern thought and knowledge are grounded and constituted. To such an extent that one might say that the modern *episteme* has the “Man-Form”.

Modern philosophy will not avoid it. In fact, it is essentially anthropological and finds its major reference in the ultimate question of Kant’s philosophical system (to which converged the questions of the three *Critiques*): *Was ist der Mensch?* Despite this lineage, unlike Kant, modern philosophy will not distinguish between the transcendental and the empirical levels. Due to this confusion, it is no longer the transcendental structures of the subject but rather man as an empirical-transcendental finitude (in his undistinguishable anthropological whole) that is the positive *foundation* of thought and knowledge. Philosophical reflection takes then the form of an *analytics of finitude*, in which man incessantly and bi-directionally exists and is known in those two “poles”: improperly assimilated as his exclusive property, the empirical modes of being of man are unfolded in a transcendental presumption; and it is in this tainted way that the transcendental groundwork considers, in its turn, those modes of being. Ensnared in the vicious circle of an endless analysis enclosed in human finitude, the Kantian transcendental is ‘anthropologized’ and modern philosophical thought falls, according to Foucault, into a deep *anthropological sleep*.

Embedded in the same epistemic “magma”, the human sciences reveal an even greater hybridism concerning the transcendental and the empirical levels. Presuming to abide the transcendental requirement, they are a knowledge that generates a *new form of representation* developed by means of a *relational reduplication* of the objectivities (about man) produced by their homologous empirical sciences. Psychology, sociology and

language analysis study the representations that man constructs of himself: as a living being (biology), as a social being that works, produces, exchanges and needs (economics), and as a speaking being (philology). This form of representation of the human sciences is the field in which is played the groundwork of his knowledge: a sort of *transcendental mobility* between what is given to representation (man's empirical modes of being) and the subject that makes that representation possible. Albeit having implicit the figure of man as an undistinguishable empirical-transcendental doublet, the knowledge of the human sciences is not based on its own grounding: redoubling them, it is dependent of the relations established with (and between) the empirical sciences and the anthropological philosophy.

This absence of proper grounds is manifest when Foucault, using the figure of a trihedron, analyses the position of the human sciences in the panorama of modern knowledge. In that trihedron each one of the faces corresponds to a given domain of knowledge: empirical sciences, formal sciences (mathematics, physics), philosophy; kinds of knowledge that preserve their own autonomous surface, insofar as they do not communicate by interpenetration. Human sciences do not even have a surface. Suspended in the vacuum of the trihedron's open base, they lack a proper grounding (that is, foundations). The human sciences only develop their knowledge by placing themselves inside the trihedron's volume, parasitizing the epistemological territories of the other three domains. In this sense, their groundwork comes from a mixture of and with those domains of knowledge, an amalgam from which they sustain and erect the eclectic construction of their object: man.

In spite of their feeble foundations, human sciences were successful: namely, in their application in institutional domains in which the definition of "man" is at stake, as Foucault shows in his accounts of the asylum, the clinic or the prison. From the point of view of those sciences, the reason why they succeed in becoming a sort of supreme synthesis – a more scientifically exact, comprehensive and proficient form of knowledge about man –, is that they incorporated the concepts and methods of the formal and empirical sciences. In the opinion of Foucault, to whom the practical affirmation of a form of theoretical knowledge is inseparable from a relational exercise of power, the human sciences became predominant because, given precisely the amalgam of their feeble foundations, their conception of man was mouldable enough towards the strategies and objectives of "institutional knowledge" (that exercises *power* and imposes *order*) dealing with the resistances that, at the individual and social levels, rose against their implementation.

Foucault considered this “moulding” possibility: based on the relational reduplication of man’s representation as a living being gifted with *functions* in his adaptation to the social environment (biology), with *conflicting* needs and interests (economics), and whose conducts have *meaning* (philology), psychology, sociology and language analysis formulate, respectively, *norms* of adjustment, *rules* of organization and *systems* of signs to interpret those conducts. The order of the terms will be, however, *inverted*: norms, rules and systems will become the foundation and explicative principle of the biological functions, socio-economic conflicts and human meanings. Given the wide-ranging assumption of the human sciences, these principles constitute a sort of universal “categorical imperative” (ought-to-be) that covers the entire human dimension, postulating (ought-to-have) such and such ends. This grants a positivist optimism to their knowledge in what concerns the possibility to control the nature and being of man – freeing him from subjection and alienation – based on that “categorical” net of norms, rules and systems. To Foucault that possibility is not only *illusory* but also, and fundamentally, potentially *dangerous*. Expansion of an inversion erected on an amalgam of feeble foundations, there is a kind of “malleability” inherent to those “categories” that, specifically in their institutional application, makes them susceptible of being adapted according to the ends intended (sometimes justified by philosophical and/or moral humanist ideologies). This not always brings about the best results. For instance, when the human sciences “entered” the asylum (*Histoire de la folie*) or the prison (*Surveiller et punir*), instead of freeing man, they contributed to his subjection and alienation. This is why Foucault states, in *Les mots et les choses*, in a somewhat anti-humanist way, that ‘anthropologization’ is the major internal danger of modern knowledge (*savoir*).

However, the debility that makes human sciences potentially dangerous is also what places them “in danger”, what makes them *precarious*. That debility is manifest in three particular domains of knowledge – psychoanalysis, ethnology, linguistics – that Foucault names human “counter-sciences”. Mostly, they reveal the epistemological error in which human sciences fall into when they pretend to ground the *origin* of man’s knowledge exclusively in man, that is, in the alleged *a priori* principles that emanate from his being and grant him the possibility to constitute, in his *sovereign finitude*, the knowledge of himself. In this sense, psychoanalysis shows that the nucleus of thought is not in the conscience but in the unconscious; when one analyses individual behaviour one finds instincts and drives, one does not find “man”. Ethnology, on the other hand, shows that other societies are irreducible to the regulating principles of western

society; when one analyses the way in which a society functions one finds organizing structures, one does not find “man”. Finally, linguistics shows that language has pre-existing autonomous laws within which we speak: it is in those laws, and not “in man”, that the analysis of meaning is carried out. So, without using the concept of man, showing that they can provide a more positive knowledge of man, the “counter-sciences” cause an epistemological rift in the human sciences, helping the disaggregation and dissolution of “man” (as an empirical-transcendental doublet) on whose representation they lay and erect their knowledge.

This dissolution is reinforced by *history*. History shows that, in their historicity, the ‘empiricities’ (life, labour, language) that human sciences ‘anthropologize’ in order to provide knowledge not only possess an autonomous dimension, pre-existing man, but cannot be assimilated as exclusively human (in both cases, the most obvious example is life).

The “counter-sciences” and history show that the constitution of the knowledge that man has of himself is made in connexion with what is not (exclusively) human, that the foundations of that knowledge obey to conditions that elude his control and to which human sciences (and philosophy) are necessarily indebted. These not exclusively human determinant foundations (individual and social unconscious, language), given their greater positivity and temporal scope, lay bare that man – as a subject of knowledge that does not sovereignly and absolutely hold his conscience or his language – is more constituted than the constitutive place of the knowledge of himself, a sort of “epiphenomenon”.

Therefore, man does not occupy “the place of the king” in the order of knowledge (of himself) that the human sciences and philosophy grant him. In an epistemological and ontological conceptual dimension, the “counter-sciences” and history show that man, the human being, is essentially characterized by his *transitivity*, in a triple sense: he is a “place of transit” in what regards less transitive dimensions (life, language); he needs the complementation of those less transitive dimensions in order to constitute himself (in his being and in his knowledge); historically, he is something transitory, something whose form is always becoming.

Insofar as he needs less transitive dimensions (specifically, language), it is in this *transitivity* that man is archeologically understood throughout *Les mots et les choses*. Unlike the partisans of humanist philosophies who, based on the essentialist presupposition of a teleological or dialectical progress of human reason in history, conceive man as a temporal but perfectible being, Foucault does not consider that man possesses an intemporal essence or nature. Far from that kind of ideal horizon, Foucault

analyses man as a *concept* in his historical constitution and functions in the domain of knowledge (*savoir*): man appeared, and acquired a given form that, in time, can be transformed or even disappear.

Therefore, it is in this epistemological conceptual sense – and, obviously, not in an organic or vital one – that Foucault announces that man, that recent “invention” in western knowledge, is *maybe on the verge of disappearing* as the major figure that shapes the modern *episteme* (to which we eventually belong). Signs of this possible epistemological change are, on the one hand, the already mentioned transitivity of man exposed by the “counter-sciences” (which have some affinities with *some* of the theoretical positions of structuralism), and, on the other hand, a certain inflexion in the “fundamental question” of contemporary philosophy: not so much “what is man?” (Kant) but rather, more and more, “what is being?” (Heidegger).

Incidentally, this *disquiet* in the modern archaeological subsoil, symptom of a possible and impending disappearance of man, was already “suspected” by Nietzsche. We find it in the “prophecy” that the death of God would imply, but not immediately, the “death of man” that would be a preparation to the future advent of the *Übermensch*. Indeed, although “having killed” God, man did not emancipate himself of all the related divine “omni” attributes. In order to compensate the void left by such a death, man (in his fundamental finitude) sought to transfer the essence of those attributes – metamorphosing and consubstantiating them – to a rational Subject understood as origin and foundation of knowledge, as “master” of his conscience and freedom that accomplishes and destinies himself teleologically in the world.

It is a reconfigured and essentialist image of man, reassuring concerning his place in the world, that the ancient and tenacious humanism, now under a new guise (close to the positivist optimism of the human sciences and the anthropological philosophy), adopts and redefines, reinforcing the anthropological sleep in which modern thought has fallen. However, as the archaeological analyses of *Les mots et les choses* have shown, pointing to an eventual evanescence of the humanist ideal, it is an image not only epistemologically feeble and illusory but also, on an ideological and political level, potentially manipulatable and dangerous.

Facing a humanism that stubbornly considers man in his sacred unquestionable essence, the polemic “death of man” seems to be the assumption of a kind of active nihilism that is the previous and indispensable condition to awaken and free the modern thought from the anthropological lethargy in which it is incarcerated. It is therefore in the context of a critical diagnosis of Modernity, whose *episteme* has the “Man-Form”, that

one may understand Foucault's "anti-humanism". This liberating nihilism connected to the "death of man" (which is not an end in itself) does not imply, however, a gap to fill. It rather aims to unfold a *space*, potentially communicative, where it will become truly possible to think anew. In this sense, man will tend to disappear from the order of modern knowledge (*savoir*) as soon as a new form is found. Eventually placed in the threshold of a new *episteme*, that different exercise of thought may *give place* and contribute to the constitution of *another* form of knowledge (*savoir*), that to us is still undetermined, i.e., *heterotopic*.

To conclude, besides trying to elucidate that the often misunderstood "death of man" has a liberating intention for modern thought (challenging it), our hermeneutical analysis of *Les mots et les choses* aimed to show that for Foucault there is no irreducible secret nature or essence of man whose truth one must unveil or that, as a knowing subject, man might constitute himself as an intransitive instance and seminal place of the groundwork of knowledge. Unlike the traditional historian of ideas, seeking to provide a continuous and teleological sense of unity of man in time, to the archaeologist, man is analysed as a subsidiary and operative concept inside determinant but provisory historical conditions.

Dissertation full-text available online at:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10451/12208>

**Bruno Giancarli, *Il concetto di Grazia nel pensiero del primo Lukács*. Tese de Mestrado em Filosofia, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2016. Orientador: José Barata-Moura.**

### **Premissa**

Expor uma dissertação significa mostrar não apenas o seu conteúdo mas também a sua forma lógica. Esta sinopse estará dividida em duas partes: na primeira serão indicadas as razões da tese em si, ou seja, as suas premissas metodológicas, e na segunda os motivos fundamentais que a compõem. Trata-se de uma operação preferível ao simples resumo. Convém, portanto, começar por explicar tudo o que está implícito na tese.

### **Contextualização**

A premissa fundamental da dissertação é essencialmente uma: o trabalho faz sentido apenas a partir de uma perspectiva hegeliana. Sem consi-