

Actor-Network Theory

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Artefacts do not “reflect” society:
they **transcribe** and **displace** the contradictory
interests of people and things

All we can do it to follow the translations of human
and non-human competences, instead of referring to
“human agency”.

Social constructivism = idealist position

Society is more than just bodies + norms

What is missing from social theory is the non-humans

Example of “baboon society” (Sturm & Latour, SST)

1. Latour on the “missing masses”

(From: Bijker-Law, *Shaping Technology / Building Society*)

Consider the door hinge

Delegation to non-humans – **prescriptive** role of the mechanism. We delegate force, but also values, duties, ethics. Mechanism shape human action by prescribing certain forms of behaviour.

Where others see:

human relations (society) + non-human relations (techniques)

Latour sees:

only actors exchanging their properties

Engineers: break down competences into smaller components and redistribute them to many different actors.

Example: the “Berlin key”

Inscribing a program of action into the shape of the key.

The lock proscribes certain moves.

Artefacts are part of **programs of action** (which include people + artefacts)

Therefore we should re-think society completely.
Society= a **collective** of humans + non-humans

Latour on machines

(Latour, *Science in Action*, ch. 3)

The invention of Diesel's engine.
No stages, no trajectories.

The engine is itself part of an idea of society

Diesel needs:

- to **enrol** others
- to **control** their behaviour

Various strategies to do that:

1. **Translation** of interests

Offering new interpretations and thus channelling people in different directions;

Recruiting allies

2. Keeping the **interested groups** in line

enrol + control others by making their behaviour predictable

e.g. building a machine (different from a "tool")

windmill = **negotiations** to interest the wind in the fabrication of bread

all the elements have to be made **interested** in the work of each others

hence the increasing complexity of machines (automaton)

Translation vs Diffusion

“Diffusion” derives from technological determinism:

Facts/artefacts exists and move around without people;

Great men have ideas, some groups might resist them;

Ideas and machines are diffused within “society” (a fictitious creation).

Diagrams in chapter 3 (sociogram-technogram)

The case of the Post-it

The settlements of technical controversies stabilise society (not the other way around)

M. Callon, "Society in the making..."

(Bijker, Hughes, Pinch, *The social construction of technological systems*)

Study of technology = tool of social analysis

Heterogeneous technoscience (no distinct phases in the process of innovation: technical, economic, marketing...)

Failure of the electric car in France

New machine = new society

Renault engineers needed to reconstruct French society

Actor-network = heterogeneous associations of unstable elements, which influence and re-define each other continuously

ANT = new description of the dynamics of society

Differences from **Hughes**:

- No stages
- No distinction system / its environment
- Question of agency (human, non-human)

Criticisms of ANT:

1- no "explanation" provided

2- "conservative implications

3- back to the narrative of technological determinism? (things described as they appears to technologists/scientists and users)

key move of SSK was: deconstruction of T in terms of S