

SESSION 6

(1) Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

What is ANT?

There are four things wrong with ANT: The word "actor", the word "network", the word "theory" and the hyphen.

-- Bruno Latour

What is ANT?

1. Like us, technologies are members of society and can have agency.
2. Society is a network, made up of more-or-less stable assemblages.

Approaches to studying technology

Historians and Sociologists of technology look especially at three phases of activity and debate about a particular technology:

1. When the innovation is under development (Bijker on the bicycle)
2. Just after it comes into the consumer market (Fischer on the telephone)
3. **When there is some sort of breakdown or black boxing (Latour and Actor-Network Theory)**



Approaches to studying technology

- By contrast to Winner 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?'
- By contrast to Fischer's User Heuristic
- By contrast to Social Construction of Technology (SCOT)

Each of these is critical of technological determinism, in their own way and tone.

Technology as a reflection of society

“The object does not reflect the social. It does more....”

Technology as a reflection of society

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- Winner: existing social biases (racism, ableism) can be further entrenched through tech design and deployment
- Fischer: social actors can develop their own uses for tech outside of what is intended by designers
- Bijker: design of tech can be explicitly guided by the social concerns of users and non-users

Technology as a reflection of society?

“The object does not reflect the social. It does more....”

So what do objects do?

Technology as a reflection of society?

There is a crucial difference
between technological
development as a social process
(Winner, Fischer, Bijker)
and technologies themselves as
fully-fledged members of society

ANT as Critique of *Sociologism*: ANTs **symmetrical** treatment of humans and nonhumans

- Rejects “the bizarre idea that society might be made up of human relations” (Latour, pg. 239)
- **Alternately**, “...some materials last better than others. And some travel better than others. Voices don’t last for long, and they don’t travel very far. If social ordering depended on voices alone, it would be a very local affair.” (John Law, 1994 Organizing Modernity)
- Shirley Strum and Bruno Latour on the limits of social ordering in baboon societies

Delegation from humans to non-humans

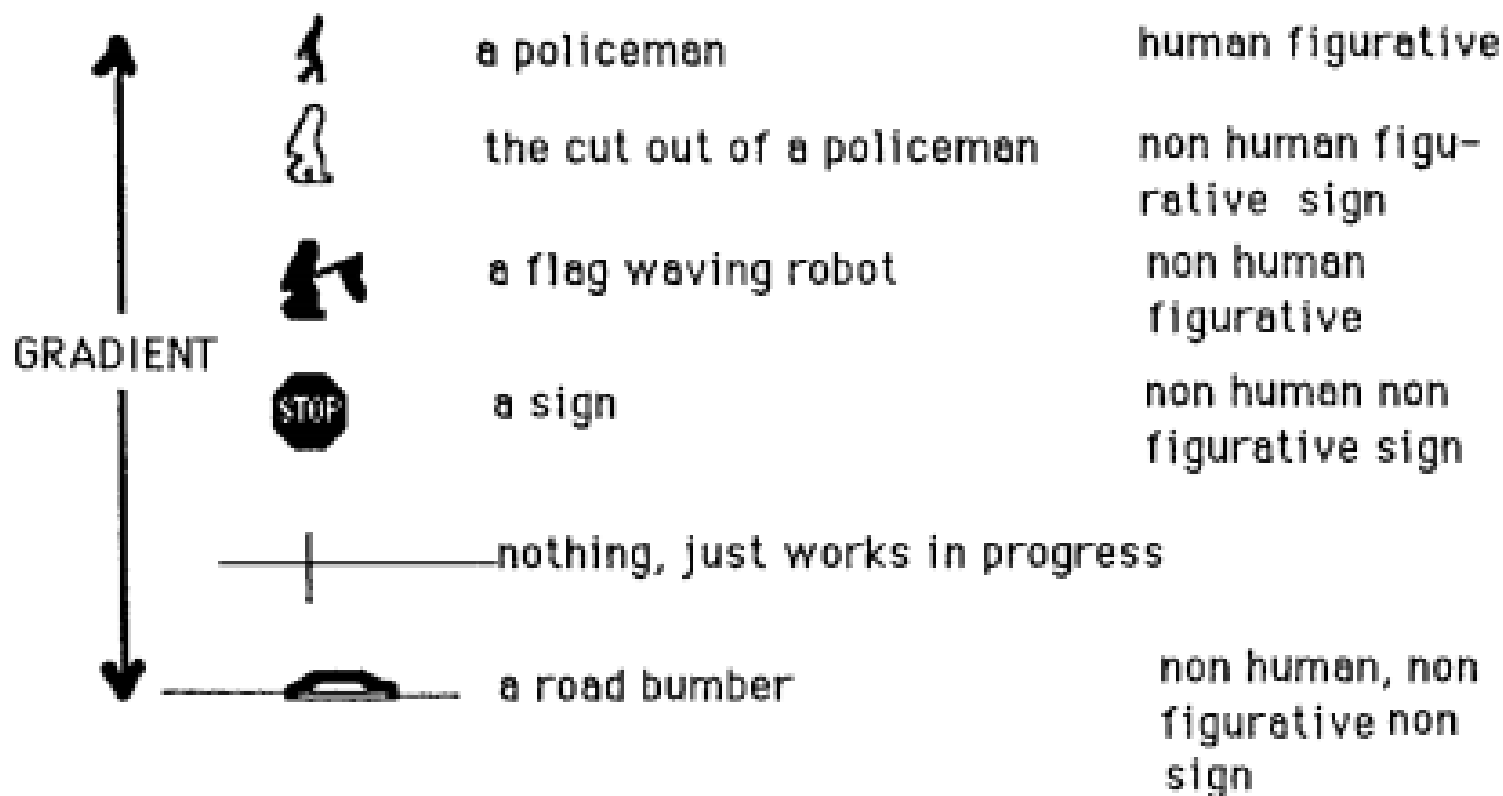


Figure 10.3

The consequences of delegation

When we delegate a task to a non-human, there are often far-reaching consequences:

Who configures and implements it?

Who maintains and fixes it?

Who is able to contest it?

Who even thinks about it anymore?

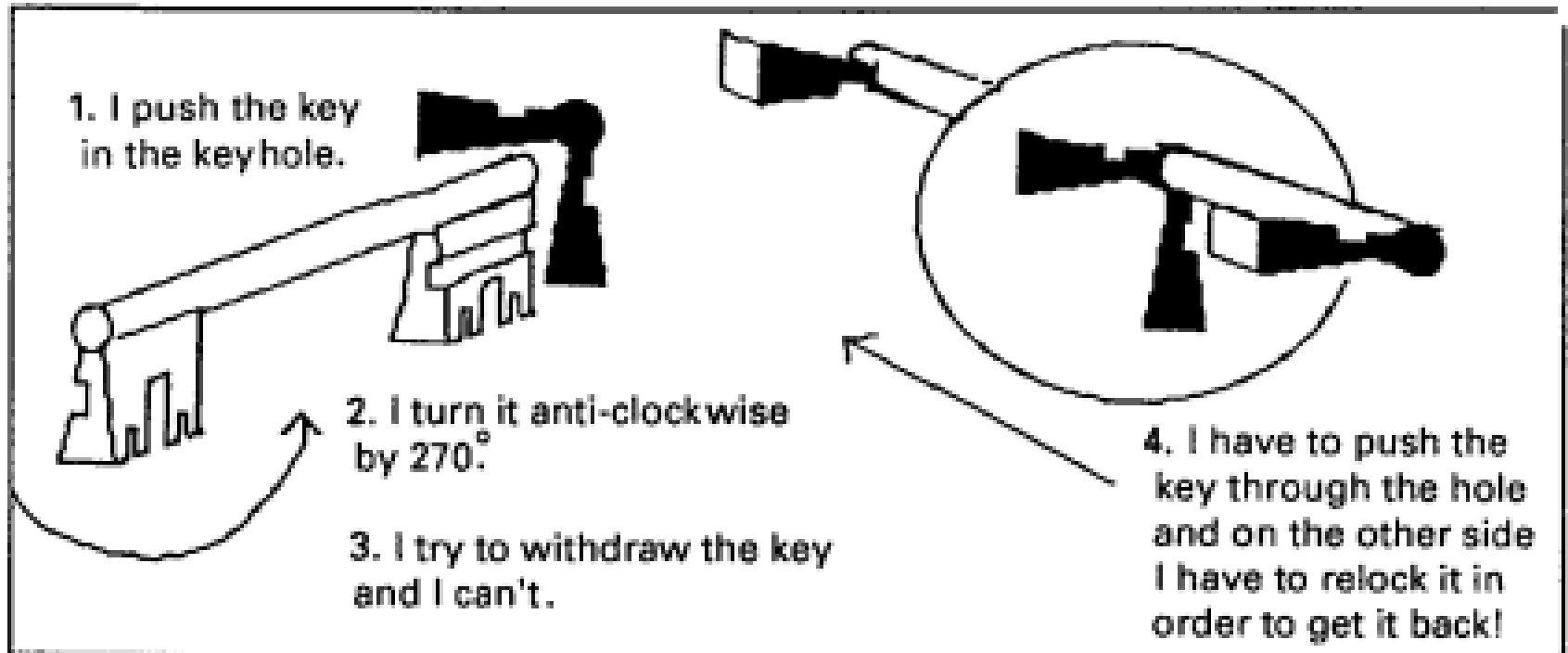
Delegation from humans to non-humans

Can you think of any cases of delegation gone wrong?

How could the problem have been avoided?



Programs and anti-programs



Thinking like a network



U.S. Navy photo by Ryan McLearnon

Tracing networks in Wikipedia

Why has Wikipedia not completely succumb to the stupidity of the crowds by now?

Are social rules and norms enough to explain why some online spaces are full of nonsense, spam, and vandalism and others are not?

Tracing networks in Wikipedia

The screenshot shows the Huggle web browser interface. The title bar reads "Huggle". The menu bar includes "System", "Queue", "Go to", "Revision", "Page", "User", "Browser", and "Help". The status bar shows "183 edits per minute, 12 reverts per minute". The main content area displays a comparison of two revisions of the "Dr. Dre" article from February 19, 2009.

Left Revision (15:12): Revision as of 15:12, 19 February 2009 (edit) by Alansohn (talk | contribs). The text is highlighted in yellow. It contains a revert message: "m (Reverted edits by 209.104.175.3 to last revision by Thingg (HG))".


Right Revision (21:36): Revision as of 21:36, 19 February 2009 (edit) by 72.68.228.176 (talk). The text is highlighted in green. It contains a revert message: "(→Early life)".

The main text in both revisions is: "Young attended Centennial High School in Compton during his freshman year, in 1979, but transferred to Fremont High School due to poor grades. Young attempted to enroll at [[Northrop|Northrop Aviation Company]] in an apprenticeship program, but poor grades at school made him ineligible. Thereafter, he focused on his social life and entertainment for the remainder of his high school years.<ref>{{harvnb|Ro|2007|p=2}}</ref> Young fathered a son with Lisa Johnson, Curtis, born on December 15, 1981. Curtis Young was brought up by his mother and didn't meet his father until he had become a rapper about 20 years later, with his stage name being Hood Surgeon.<ref>{{harvnb|Ro|2007|p=11}}</ref>".


The right revision includes a bolded redaction: "**He will bury you if you look at him the wrong way. He wants trouble.**<ref>{{harvnb|Ro|2007|p=11}}</ref>".

On the left side of the interface, there is a "Filtered edits" list with 22 items, including "Dr. Dre", "The Mirror (album)", "Brian Moll", "Sterling Beaumon", "List of cancer types", "Daniel Craig", "Smear Campaign (alb...", "Nazareth Academy (W...", "Joseph P. Hurley", "User talk:Taroaldo", "User talk:Kelapstick", "Ritchie Valens", and "Outline of the Bahama...".

Tracing networks in Wikipedia


 Welcome to Wikipedia. Although everyone is welcome to make constructive contributions to Wikipedia, at least one of your recent edits, such as the one you made to [The Mirror \(album\)](#), did not appear to be constructive and has been reverted. Please use [the sandbox](#) for any test edits you would like to make, and read the [welcome page](#) to learn more about contributing constructively to this encyclopedia. Thank you. **DiverseMentality** 21:37, 19 February 2009 (UTC)

If this is a shared IP address, and you didn't make the edit, consider [creating an account](#) for yourself so you can avoid further irrelevant notices.

 The [recent edit](#) you made to the page [808s & Heartbreak](#) constitutes [vandalism](#), and has been reverted. Please do not continue to make unconstructive edits to pages; use the [sandbox](#) for testing. Thank you. **J.delanoy**^{gabs}_{adds} 21:43, 19 February 2009 (UTC)

 Please stop. If you continue to [vandalize](#) Wikipedia, as you did to [808s & Heartbreak](#), you *will* be [blocked](#) from editing. Your edits have been **automatically** marked as [vandalism](#) and have been **automatically** [reverted](#). **If you believe there has been a mistake and would like to report a false positive, please [report it here](#) and then remove this warning from your talk page.** If your edit was not vandalism, please feel free to make your edit again after reporting it. The following is the log entry regarding this vandalism: [808s & Heartbreak](#) was [changed](#)  by [72.68.228.176](#) ([u](#)) ([t](#)) making a minor change with obscenities on 2009-02-19T21:45:51+00:00. Thank you. **ClueBot** ([talk](#)) 21:46, 19 February 2009 (UTC)

 **This is your last warning.** You will be blocked from editing the next time you vandalize a page, as you did with [this edit](#) to [808s & Heartbreak](#). **Eric Wester** ([talk](#) · [contribs](#) · [email](#)) 21:47, 19 February 2009 (UTC)

 You have been **temporarily blocked** from editing in accordance with [Wikipedia's blocking policy](#) for [abuse of editing privileges](#). Once the block has expired, you are welcome to [make constructive contributions](#). If you believe this block is unjustified, you may [contest the block](#) by adding the text `{{unblock|Your reason here}}` below, but you should read our [guide to appealing blocks](#) first. **J.delanoy**^{gabs}_{adds} 21:50, 19 February 2009 (UTC)

In Summary

- Attention to **breakdowns** (of enrollment and what they make visible)
- **Chains, Assemblages** (of humans and nonhumans) generate effects
- Symmetry between humans and nonhumans as constituting society (and both have agency)
- **Programs** and **anti-programs** – material orderings are not fixed and permanent
- **Punctualization** of smoothly functioning assemblages into black boxes

Photo assignment

Photograph an artifact/entity (human or non-human) that is not in use in the way we typically expect (either **broken** or **enrolled** in an **uncommon** or **counter-intuitive** way).

Post to our Flickr pool by Feb 12th:

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/2170379@N23/> or e-mail to Stuart

Photo assignment

In the caption section answer one of these questions:

What (missing) entities must it be enrolled with to make it what it more typically is?

How is it enrolled in this particular case to make it what it isn't?

Photo assignment



The social norm:
don't take up too
much fridge space.

The bins don't stop
anyone, but they do
guide us into policing
ourselves and others.