



EDCP 585

Fieldwork in Actor-Network Theory

Lecture Notes

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1. Fieldwork & Homework in ANT: Mapping Controversies

- a. See *Sine controversia: Controversial Case Studies / Controversy Studies*
- b. MACOSPOL (Mapping Controversies on Science for Politics)
 - i. is a joint research enterprise that gathers scholars in science, technology and society across Europe. Its goal is to devise a collaborative platform to help students, professionals and citizens in mapping out scientific and technical controversies.
 - ii. Technical democracy requires spaces and instruments to facilitate public involvement in technological and scientific issues. Such democratic equipment is yet to be assembled, even though much theoretical research has been done to envision its articulation. At the same time, digital innovations are providing an increasing number of new instruments and forums that can be used to promote public participation.
 - iii. MACOSPOL has been set up to facilitate the connection between these two developments, allowing the best research in science, technology and society to ally with the best research on web-based tools.
- c. Latour (2008, p. 129): “Controversies” is a very general term to describe the fact that we have moved from matters of fact to matters of concern. That is linked to the end of modernism. In the modernist project you could stabilize most of it by saying that the matters of fact part is essentially solved, and then we disagree, but when we disagree it is about opinions, political opinions, religions, art, and so on. But the basis, 90 percent of our world, is matters of fact, and of course the problem now is that the basis has disappeared because every matter of fact is becoming a matter of concern. It is very difficult now to find matters of fact. In the exhibition for *Making Things Public*, we were actually looking for a way to do a little installation about what we would have called “the last matters of fact.” We wanted the installation to be about the last matters of fact, but we could not find one. Every time I was proposing one, in the end, it was not one! Every single factual statement now becomes a matter of concern. I am sure that this tea, for instance, is immediately associated with poor children in India. So suddenly these poor children in India are attached to your tea. It is the same with scientific issues; they become more and more contentious. The more science extends, the more contentious it becomes, because it is coextensive to whole fields of practice.
- d. The methodological and conceptual roots of this approach stem from the discipline of Science Studies, with the writings of the French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour forming the primary source for its subsequent development. Latour first developed his ideas in relation to the analysis of scientific and technological controversies in his book *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987. Controversy analysis is also part of the Actor-Network-Theory developed in his most recent book *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. <http://www.msa.ac.uk/mac/Main/HistoryOfTheConcept>
- e. **What does an ANT of a controversy provide that another analysis or method does not?**
 - i. Case of the controversy over fur
 1. Olson & Goodnight (1994, p. 274): Social controversies are not impenetrable discourse formations; understandably, advocates involved in various controversies borrow strategies, premises, and stylistic moves back and forth

from each other. For example, Zarefsky (1991) demonstrates how the abortion controversy echoes aspects of the slavery controversy, and some anti-fur advocates not only appropriate material from the slavery and Civil Rights controversies (Rosenberg 1992; Malveaux 1991), but also present animal rights as the logical extension of movements designed to overturn sexism, racism, and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Rosenberg 1992; Carroll 1990; "Animal Welfare" 1992).

2. While such borrowing makes it possible to use insights gained by studying one social controversy to inform analyses of other controversies, as well as to investigate the same controversy from a variety of useful perspectives (e.g., undertaking a feminist analysis of the fur controversy), our critical approach here is to allow a controversy some integrity in order to examine it on its own terms to learn what it reveals about communication norms and social conventions.
 - a. What would an actor-network theory of fur provide that Olson & Goodnight (1994) do not?
 - i. See "Fur on the catwalk: Is it worth the controversy?"
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/15/living/fur-controversy-nyfw/>