



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

EDCP 585

**Fieldwork in Actor-Network Theory: Fieldwork, Homework, Patchwork,
Network, Webwork**

Lecture Notes

S. Petrina (8 February 2019)

1. Fieldwork, Homework, Patchwork, Writingwork, Readingwork

a. Field

- i. Scur (1975, p. 162): First, the term "field" denotes phenomena whose nature varies; second, there are too many definitions of the concept itself that are often applied to other concepts. Nevertheless, both the number of disciplines where the concept "field" is utilized and the number of definitions are constantly growing. In consequence, the use of the term "field" assumes a pandemic character.
- ii. Physics
 1. Scur (1975, p. 176): Compare the definition of this concept in physics: "The term 'field' is usually used in physics to denote a region of space (or the entire space) in which some physical phenomenon is examined.
 2. Haraway (1976, p. 178): The field concept defined developments in dynamic instead of geographical terms. Every aspect of ontogeny had to be viewed in a double light, as the result of "interactions between the material whole with its field properties on the one hand, and the material parts on the other."
- iii. Bourdieu & Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992)
 1. Koo (2014, p. 796): Special attention is paid to two crucial components of Bourdieu's theoretical framework: 'habitus' and 'field' (Dumais, 2002). 'Habitus', one's view of the world as well as 'a system of lasting and transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18), refers to the orientation one has toward using available resources. 'Field' refers to 'a network or a configuration of objective relations between positions... that follows rules, or better, regularities, that are not explicit and codified' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97-8), and is a pivotal idea about the rules of the game that sets standards and values for those resources.
- iv. Verne (2012, p. 561): Generally it is agreed that the field refers to the specific location where the empirical research is done, including the people and objects in this place. Whereas in most cases the field is a certain region, city or neighbourhood, the recent interest in translocal connections and networks has led not only to multi sited research but also to mobile methodologies which increases the complexity of defining the field. Seeing the field as a set of relations rather than as points on maps, defining the field also means to create the field! Following the ideas of Latour or Deleuze requires one to follow the established lines and connections, but where can the limits be set? Where is the centre of the network or rhizome for the research? And where should the study stop following the networks? Ultimately, it is the researcher's decision how to delimit the field.
- v. Digital or Virtual Field
 1. Kuntsman, "Cyberethnography as Home-Work," (2004, pp. 2-3): So what does it mean when research about cybercultures evokes, yet again, the traditional notions of travel, distance and discovery? How can fieldwork in cyberspace be understood and (re)defined? Where should it be located?

- a. Many have suggested new definitions of the ‘field’ in cyberspace. For example, Annette Markham (2004) puts forward the concept of discursive, rather than geographical, boundaries of the field; Christine Hine (2000) describes the idea of ‘virtual ethnography’ that follows an event rather than a culture or a location; and Kate Eichhorn (2001) suggests using the term ‘textual community’ in relation to the ethnography of ‘sites unseen’ in order to contest the anthropological ‘legacy of the field’. These and other studies propose, in different ways, that cyberspace enables (and even forces) us to re-examine and reframe old concepts of fieldwork.
 2. Burrell (2009, p. 186): Ethnographies of virtual spaces have implications beyond the study of the Internet. The principles and new possibilities proposed by this approach can be extended to the study of mass media spaces and imagined spaces. Extending fieldwork in this way raises some interesting questions. Should we define the field site by the movement and dwelling of the fieldworker or, alternately, as the space in which a social phenomenon takes place? These are no longer considered one and the same. As Marcus (1998b) notes, contemporary ethnography is often a study of parts rather than wholes. Researchers cycle in and out of the field, skip certain areas entirely, and may rely on the recollections of participants in interviews to map out the space. Fieldworkers’ movements are no longer coextensive with the way the social phenomenon under study extends across space.
 3. Hine (2015, p. 70): The understanding of the field is built on the ethnographer’s embodied experiences, reflecting on moves that are easy and difficult to make, and on the experience of following connections that mirror those that participants themselves might make. The field also encompasses both everyday and topicalized Internet, exploring the contingent connections between these two experiences of the Internet that are forged in the practices of participants and being alert to frictions that may arise between specific experiences and the universalized notion of “the Internet,” as Tsing (2005) counsels. The form that the field site takes is thus highly unique to each ethnographic project, reflecting the huge variability in potential meanings and practices woven through and around the Internet.
 4. (p. 87): Some key components of this adaptive approach for an Internet which is embedded, embodied, everyday, and above all emergent, are as follows:
 - a. A holistic approach to ethnography need not imply that there is a pre-existing field site to be comprehensively known.
 - b. The field is a fluid and emergent construct. Field sites are rarely contained wholly within either online or offline space, and also build in a consciousness of what might be thought of as different scales of analysis, encompassing both “the Internet” as a notable and topical cultural object and as it is manifested in disaggregated form in specific local instances of use which might, or might not be labelled as “the Internet.”
- b. Field Site (Setting)
- i. Typology
 1. Bounded
 2. Constructed
 3. Multisited
 4. Virtual or Webbed
 5. Episodic

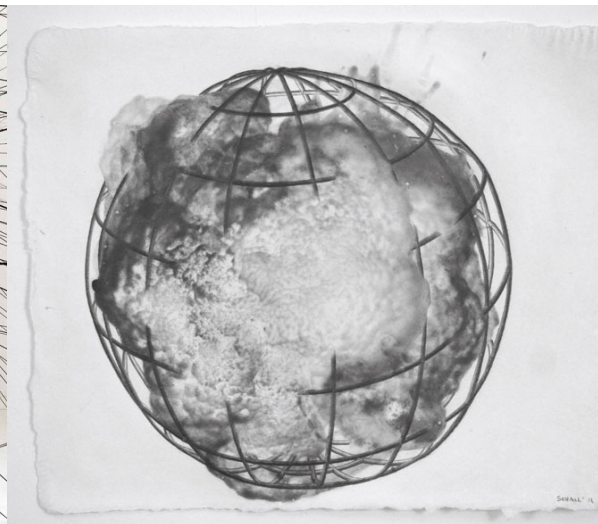
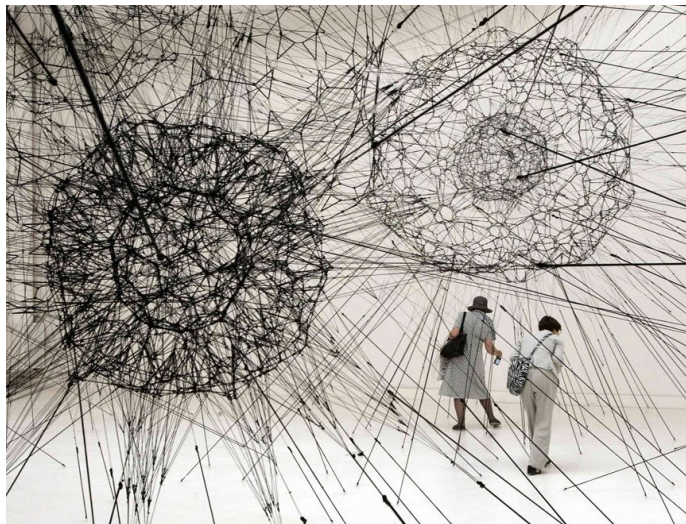
- ii. Burrell (2009, p. 182): The term field site refers to the spatial characteristics of a field-based research project, the stage on which the social processes under study take place. For ethnographers, defining this space is an important activity that traditionally takes place before and in the early stages of fieldwork. It involves identifying where the researcher should ideally be located as a participant observer. Once fieldwork concludes, an ethnography cannot be written without at some point defining this spatial terrain where the social phenomenon under study took place. This is both an act of exclusion and inclusion, indicating what the research does and does not cover. A realization that the field site is in certain ways constructed rather than discovered is crucial to contemporary practice.
- c. Writingwork & Readingwork
 - i. Taussig (2010, p. 26): Anthropology graduate student finishes two years of fieldwork and returns home with a computer full of notes and a trunk full of notebooks. Job now is to convert all that into a three-hundred-page piece of writing. No one has told her or him (1) how to do fieldwork or (2) that writing is usually the hardest part of the deal. Could these omissions be linked?
 - ii. For is there not something else going on here, something connecting fieldwork to writingwork, something they have in common? For instance, fieldwork involves participant observation with people and events, being inside and outside, while writingwork involves magical projections through words into people and events. Can we say therefore that writingwork is a type of fieldwork and vice versa?
 - iii. Godina (2003, p. 475): the essence of fieldwork involves work with informants; this fact complicates the anthropologist's situation even more. This complication is connected to the fact that "contrary to the traditional anthropological views of fieldwork, our informants are not simply giving us 'facts'; they are involved with us in a crucial intersubjective relationship and are engaged in continuing dialogue with us.
- d. Homework
 - i. Kuntsman, "Cyberethnography as Home-Work," (2004, pp. 2-3): The notion of travel and distance has traditionally constituted the anthropological idea of the 'field'. The field appeared in the disciplinary imagination as located 'out there' and inhabited by people whose culture is different from that of the researcher. In the past decades these epistemologies were challenged and deconstructed by feminist and post-colonial (or non-white or 'third-world' or 'halfie') anthropologists. They theorized their experience as the simultaneous 'selves' and 'others' of anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991) and disrupted the distinction between 'here' (in the West) as the locus of knowledge and 'there' (outside of the West) as a series of fixed and exotic cultural locales (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996).
 - 1. Thus, these theorists have challenged the very dichotomy between the 'field' as the location of the 'culture' to be studied, and home as a place where the field notes of the anthropologist are read and analysed.
 - 2. So what does it mean when research about cybercultures evokes, yet again, the traditional notions of travel, distance and discovery? How can fieldwork in cyberspace be understood and (re)defined? Where should it be located?
 - 3. Many have suggested new definitions of the 'field' in cyberspace. For example, Annette Markham (2004) puts forward the concept of discursive, rather than geographical, boundaries of the field; Christine Hine (2000) describes the idea of 'virtual ethnography' that follows an event rather than a culture or a location; and Kate Eichhorn (2001) suggests using the term 'textual community' in relation to the ethnography of 'sites unseen' in order to contest the anthropological 'legacy of the field'. These and other studies

- propose, in different ways, that cyberspace enables (and even forces) us to re-examine and reframe old concepts of fieldwork.
4. The central idea of anthropology as home-work unfixes the very idea of 'home'. No longer an unproblematic location of 'belonging', home becomes a site of investigation and negotiation.
- e. Patchwork
- i. "a thing composed of many different elements so as to appear variegated."
 - ii. Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987, p. 476): an amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways.
 - iii. Chouard (1998, p. 16): In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Levi-Strauss further shows how mythical thought, which he defines as a kind of intellectual "bricolage," is similar to patchwork technique. With no precise equivalent in English, the word "bricolage" expresses a do-it-yourself activity, whose rule is to make do with whatever is at hand... Patchwork, a type of bricolage, endlessly recycles second-hand items into new combinations, just as myth does.

2. Network and Webwork

- a. [*Topsell's*] *History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* (1658, p. 1071): all Net-workers and Web-workers amongst Spiders, do grow to have greater skill by age.
- b. In the early days of STS and dawn of ANT, network, system, and webwork were entirely interchangeable. This remains the case.
 - i. This is most evident in Hughes's "The Seamless Web: Technology, Science, Etcetera, Etcetera," (1986, pp. 281-282): A way out of the constraints of contextualism and into an interactive mode is now posed by the use of the 'systems' or 'networks' approach. Heterogeneous professionals — such as engineers, scientists, and managers — and heterogeneous organizations — such as manufacturing firms, utilities, and banks — become interacting entities in systems, or networks. Disciplines, persons, and organizations in systems and networks take on one another's functions as if they are part of a seamless web.
- c. As ethnography and fieldwork migrated into digital and virtual places and spaces, again the problem of conflating internetwork, online system, and webwork was thrown into relief.
 - i. This is most evident in Markham's "Ethnography in the Digital Internet Era" (2018, p. 652): Through its ambiguity, the internet remains a persistent umbrella term, covering many different aspects of sociotechnical relations in the era of global high-speed networks. It also avoids persistent false binaries that alternative terms might carry, such as online (offline), virtual (real, actual), or digital (analog).
 1. (pp. 652-654): The "internet" accurately focuses on the means by which digital technologies have become a central feature of 21st-century social life. It describes the actual backbone of transmission, which facilitates the coordination of computers and information-processing devices and the growth and complexity of networks. The early internet provided new possibilities for community. The contemporary internet is the foundation for more diverse and naturalized forms of mediatization, transmediation, and remediation than we would have seen prior to the mid-1990s, when the World Wide Web made the Internet more publicly available and commercialized.... Particular system elements encode our everyday social activities into "a computational architecture."... An information or media ecology view enables us to think about (eco)systems emerging from interactions and relations... An ecological perspective can help us recognize and study structures, codes, and networks as part of this ecosystem.
 2. (p. 656): Networked sociality is a recent term used by many scholars to describe such cultural formations, which emphasizes how technocultural

- microsystems of meaning coalesce through the convergence of many elements, including content, technological infrastructures, and use patterns.
- ii. Of course, with such conflation comes confusing assertions: (p. 653): The ethnographic attitude doesn't necessarily change when we study the digital. But the digital is transforming what it means to be social and human in the world.
 - iii. If “the digital is transforming” everything to this degree, including what it means to be human, how could “the ethnographic attitude” not necessarily change? To Markham’s defense, she does advocate “rethinking the elements of ethnographic method:” (p. 654): Part of this rethinking, I would argue, requires an intentional effort to move away from thinking about the field as an object, place, or whole.
- d. As time online through the 2000s and 2010s increased to 24-7-365 and time at online work increased in tandem, time at online research increased disproportionately compared with time at research in other settings, including the field, office, and library. One might say that here we are doing internetwork or network but the problems inherited therein are quite obvious. Similarly, the nomenclature of information highway no longer has currency and no one suggests anymore that they are in the information highway or doing highway work.
 - e. By and large this work is more productively or richly described as webwork rather than fieldwork. Whether we are making and spinning webs (of connection or meaning) or in the web doing research, this work more specifically refers to webwork. What then does it mean to do webwork? What is webwork?
 - f. From fieldsite to website...



3. Data Collection

- a. Textualization
 - i. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988, p. 38): the process through which unwritten behavior, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual come to be marked as a corpus, a potentially meaningful ensemble separated out from an immediate discursive or performative situation.
- b. Minimal v Maximum Data Collection
 - i. **Gesture**
 1. Hayes (1957, p. 218): any movement, excepting that of vocalization, made consciously or unconsciously so as to communicate either with one's self or with an other.
 2. Kaulfers (1931, pp. 249-250): any external expressive movement of the body which accompanies, which accompanies, supplements, or replaces oral speech.

3. *See Thick Description @ “the wink”
- ii. **Instance**
 1. Hollywood (2004, p. 84): instance is defined as a data object pointing to a linked dataset.
- iii. **Fragment**
 1. Kirk (1953, p. 276): A fragment is “an isolated word or group of words which are known to have been actually used by [an author], but which cannot be assigned to any particular context.
- iv. **Segment**
 1. Tesch (1990, p. 116): a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information.
 2. AT&T Video Optimizer: A video segment (or chunk) is a fragment of video information that is a collection of video frames. Combined together, these segments make up a whole video... Video segments, like all video content, are made up of a series of frames. Each frame is a still image that when played in sequence creates a moving picture. The pace of the sequence is usually denoted in FPS (frames per second). So, content created with an FPS of 30 means that there are 30 “still images” that will play for every second of video.
- v. **Sample**
 1. *OED*: An excerpt of recorded sound or music reused or modified as part of a new recording or performance; a sound excerpt stored in digital form for this purpose.
 2. *Online Etymology Dictionary*: small quantity (of something) from which the general quality (of the whole) may be inferred.
 3. Bad Mister (2010, June 22): like a audio loop or like 10 seconds of sound effects (perhaps a fire engine approaching and going past, or vocal clip of someone singing or speaking).
- vi. **Slice or Strip**
 1. Slice of Life
 - a. Microdrama
 - i. Postlewait (1978, p. 477): Unlike most novelists and dramatists, Beckett is not primarily concerned with the matter and manner of social realism, and this disinterest (or calculated disregard) makes the transition to drama for him even more difficult. His slice of life is a dissection of the malignant disease called consciousness.
 - ii. Muse (2017, pp. 27-28): *Quarts d’heure* took seriously the naturalist project of recording the minutiae of life as it occurs second by second. It is telling that playwright and critic Jean Jullien was describing a short naturalist play when he coined the most famous description of naturalism— *tranche de vie* or slice of life: these incisive performances take biopsies from societal tumors and put the offending portion on display, in the flesh.¹⁹ Naturalist playwrights envisioned themselves as experimental scientists, and the quart d’heure was the case study, the microscopic slide that served simultaneously as their evidence and findings. By shrinking the size of the sample to a collection of moments, they pushed the limits of the synecdochic logic underlying all naturalism (scientific, literary, or theatrical), and at times fell prey to the same reductionism that plagued early

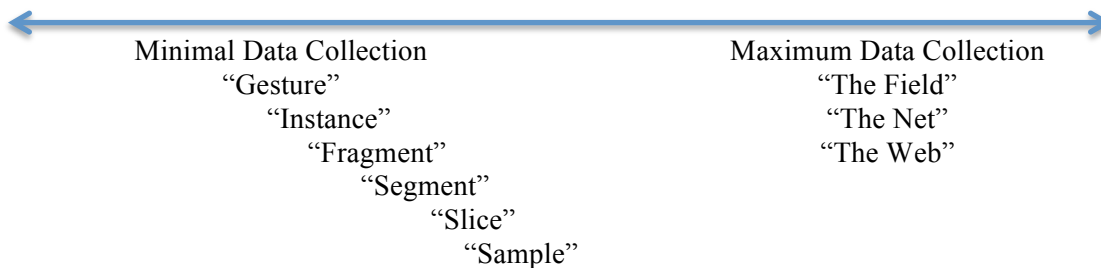
anthropology. In these plays, a few moments in the life of a thug or a thief come to stand for not only his whole life but for a way of life.

2. Strip

- a. Goffman (1974/1986, p. 10): The term "strip" will be used to refer to any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including here sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them. A strip is not meant to reflect a natural division made by the subjects of inquiry or an analytical division made by students who inquire; it will be used only to refer to any raw batch of occurrences (of whatever status in reality) that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point for analysis.

vii. Field, Net, Web

1. Goodman (2001, pp. xix-xx), *Maya Apocalypse: Seventeen Years with the Women of a Yucatan Village*, "vacuum-cleaner anthropology:" Approach to fieldwork that involves collecting "as much of everyday life as is meaningful to the investigator or cleaner."



c. Micro-Data Collection

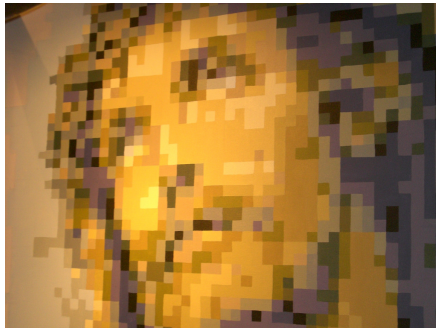
i. The Gesture

1. The Wink

- a. Ryle (1968, pp. 494-495): Two boys fairly swiftly contract the eyelids of their right eyes. In the first boy this is only an involuntary twitch; but the other is winking conspiratorially to an accomplice. At the lowest or the thinnest level of description the two contractions of the eyelids may be exactly alike. From a cinematograph-film of the two faces there might be no telling which contraction, if either, was a wink, or which, if either, was a mere twitch. Yet there remains the immense but unphotographable difference between a twitch and a wink. For to wink is to try to signal to someone in particular, without the cognisance of others, a definite message according to an already understood code. It has very complex success-versus-failure conditions. The wink is a failure if its intended recipient does not see it; or sees it but does not know or forgets the code; or misconstrues it; or disobeys or disbelieves it; or if anyone else spots it. A mere twitch, on the other hand, is neither a failure nor a success; it has no intended recipient; it is not meant to be unwitnessed by anybody; it carries no message. It may be a symptom but it is not a signal. The winker could not not know that he was winking; but the victim of the twitch might be quite unaware of his twitch. The winker can tell

what he was trying to do; the twitcher will deny that he was trying to do anything.

- b. Geertz (1973, p. 6): Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal is winking. That's all there is to it: a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and *voilà*— a gesture.
 - i. (p. 9): Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications. Winks upon winks upon winks.
 - ii. (p. 12): But to draw from such truths the conclusion that knowing how to wink is winking and knowing how to steal a sheep is sheep raiding is to betray as deep a confusion as, taking thin descriptions for thick, to identify winking with eyelid contractions or sheep raiding with chasing woolly animals out of pastures.
- ii. The Head of a Pin, Grain of Rice, Grain of Sand, and Pixel
 1. Blake (1803/1880, p. 107): To see a World in a grain of sand, And a Heaven in a wild flower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, And Eternity in an hour.
 2. Moerman (1987, p. 84): In Chiangkham, and throughout northern and northeastern Thailand, one can express his [her or their] social position by the rice he [she or they] eats.... People seldom speak of rice as a sign of status, but all recognize it as such.
 3. Pixel
 - a. Booth (2005, p. 599): a picture element, meaning the smallest unit of a digital image.
 - b. How to interpret a pixel?



- iii. The Strand of Web, Thread of Silk, and Strand of Hair
- d. Archive v Field
 - i. Ewald (1987, pp. 10, 11, 12-13): the key difference between archival and field research is found in the relationships that exist among the evidence, its environment, and the researcher. Documents in an archive have been removed from the setting in which they were created and then used.
 1. This means that what the fieldworker regards as evidence for reconstructing history has its own independent life, meanings, and uses for other people. Indeed it is those uses in the living world, outside the canon of historical sources, which preserve evidence in the field.
 2. Fieldwork involves successive stages of decontextualization and contextualization

3. The fieldworker interprets evidence in a variety of contexts: the specific relationships that created, preserved, and altered a trace of the past; the wider relationships to which that trace belonged; and, finally, the context of academic scholarship outside the field.

4. What is fieldwork in ANT?

- a. Work with informants
 - i. Human
 - ii. Non-human
 1. Animal
 2. Non-biological
- b. Archive + Field + Home
- c. **The Field in Flux**
- d. **Fieldwork in ANT is a Five Interactive Step Process**
 - i. Follow the Controversy
 - ii. Follow the Actors
 - iii. Map Associations—Trace Connections—Register Links
 - iv. Account for Translations—Account for Network Building
 - v. Code the Data
 1. Develop the Codebook
 2. Revise and rewrite the thesis statement
- e. **Rules of Method**
 - i. Peirce
 1. *Collected Papers* (1899/1932, s. 1.35):
 - a. §4. The First Rule of Reason
 - i. 135. Upon this first, and in one sense this sole, rule of reason, that in order to learn you must desire to learn, and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think, there follows one corollary which itself deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy:
 1. Do not block the way of inquiry.
 - ii. Law & Callon (1988, p. 284): There is an old rule of sociological method, unfortunately more honored in the breach than the observance, that if we want to understand social life then we need to follow the actors wherever they may lead us. We should, or so this dictum suggests, avoid imposing our own views about what is right or wrong, or true and false. We should especially avoid assuming that those we study are less rational or have a weaker grasp on reality than we ourselves. This rule of method, then, asks us to take seriously the beliefs, projects, and resources of those whom we wish to understand. It suggests that an analysis of social life depends upon such understanding, and it implies that we make best sociological progress when we are sociologically humble.

Rules of Method

Latour, *Science in Action* (1987, pp. 258-259)

1. *Rule 1* We study science *in action* and not ready made science or technology; to do so, we either arrive before the facts and machines are blackboxed or we follow the controversies that reopen them.
2. *Rule 2* To determine the objectivity or subjectivity of a claim, the efficiency or perfection of a mechanism, we do not look for their *intrinsic* qualities but at all the transformations they undergo *later* in the hands of others.
3. *Rule 3* Since the settlement of a controversy is the *cause* of Nature's representation, not its consequence, we can never use this consequence, Nature, to explain how and why a controversy has been settled.

4. *Rule 4* Since the settlement of a controversy is the *cause* of Society's stability, we cannot use Society to explain how and why a controversy has been settled. We should consider symmetrically the efforts to enrol human and non-human resources.
5. *Rule 5* We have to be as *undecided* as the various actors we follow as to what technoscience is made of; every time and inside/outside divide is built, we should study the two sides simultaneously and make the list, no matter how long and heterogeneous, of those who do the work.
6. *Rule 6* Confronted with the accusation of irrationality, we look neither at what rule of logic has been broken, nor at what structure of society could explain the distortion, but to the angle and direction of the observer's *displacement*, and to the *length* of the network thus being built.
7. *Rule 7* Before attributing any special quality to the mind or to the method of people, let us examine first the many ways through which inscriptions are gathered, combined, and tied together and sent back. Only if there is something unexplained once the networks have been studied shall we start to speak of cognitive factors.

Principles

1. *First principle* The fate of facts and machines is in later users' hands; their qualities are thus a consequence, not a cause, of collective action.
2. *Second principle* Scientists and engineers speak in the name of new allies that they have shaped and enrolled; representatives among other representatives, they add these unexpected resources to tip the balance of force in their favour.
3. *Third principle* We are never confronted with science, technology and society, but with a gamut of weaker and stronger *associations*; thus understanding *what* facts and machines are is the same as understanding who the *people* are.
4. *Fourth principle* The more science and technology have an esoteric content the further they extend outside; thus 'science and technology' is only a subset of technoscience.
5. *Fifth principle* Irrationality is always an accusation made by someone building a network over someone else who stands in the way; thus, there is no Great Divide between minds, but only shorter and longer networks; harder facts are not the rule but the exception, since they are needed only in a very few cases to displace other on a large scale out of their usual ways.
6. *Sixth principle* History of technoscience is in a large part the history of the resources scattered along networks to accelerate the mobility, faithfulness, combination and cohesion of traces that make action at a distance possible.