



# How We Learn (Media & Technology Across the Lifespan)



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## HWL Tracer Bullet #60a (see #60b)

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### Hermeneutics, Interpretation

#### 1. Hermeneutics

- a. Definition
  - i. Ricoeur (1981/2006, p. 43):
    1. hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts. So the key idea will be the realisation of discourse as a text.
- b. Phenomenology is *not* hermeneutics
  - i. c.f., “hermeneutic phenomenology”
    1. Heidegger SZ (*B&T*), (1927, 7.c.37, p. 37): *Phänomenologie des Daseins ist Hermeneutik*.
    2. “Phenomenology of Da-sein is hermeneutic.”
    3. See Ricoeur, “Existence and Phenomenology,” (1965/1974)
  - ii. Purpose of Phenomenology
    1. Phenomenology aims “to give a descriptive rather than ‘reductive’ or ‘analytical’ account of the structure of experience, or, in Husserl’s words, ‘consciousness’.” (Weinzweig, 1977)
    2. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962, p. vii).
      - a. Phenomenology’s “efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world.”
      - b. Phenomenology “tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.”
    3. Neuman (1997, p. 65): “the goal of phenomenology is to describe the essence of all the ways in which a phenomenon can be experienced.”
- c. Conceptual History
  - i. See Dilthey “Rise of Hermeneutics;” Ricoeur, “The Task of Hermeneutics”
  - ii. Augustine
    1. *On Christian Doctrine*
  - iii. Aquinas, *Contra Errores Graecorum* (1263)
  - iv. Ricoeur (1981/2006, p. 43):
    1. The real movement of deregionalisation [i.e., movement toward general hermeneutics] begins with the attempt to

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extract a general problem from the activity of interpretation which is each time engaged in different texts. The discernment of this central and unitary problematic is the achievement of Schleiermacher. Before him, there was on the one hand a philology of classical texts, principally those of Greco-Latin antiquity, and on the other hand an exegesis of sacred texts, of the Old and New Testaments. In each of these two domains, the work of interpretation varies with the diversity of the texts. (p. 45)

2. Dilthey poses his fundamental question: how is historical knowledge possible? or more generally, how are the human sciences possible? This question brings us to the threshold of the great opposition which runs throughout Dilthey's work, the opposition between the *explanation* of nature and the *understanding* of history. (p. 49)

v.

## 2. Interpretation / Understanding

- a. *Pia Interpretatio, exponere reverenter, expositio reverentius*, reverent interpretation (Hoye, 1997, p. 425).
  - i. Aquinas, *Contra Errores Graecorum* (1263, Prologue, pp. 43-44) (Trans., P. Damian):
    1. Unde, si qua in dictis antiquorum doctorum inveniuntur quae cum tanta cautela non dicantur quanta a modernis servatur, non sunt contemnenda aut abiicienda, sed nec etiam ea extendere oportet, sed exponere reverenter.
      - a. Hence, if there are found some points in statements of the ancient Fathers not expressed with the caution moderns find appropriate to observe, their statements are not to be ridiculed or rejected; on the other hand neither are they to be overextended, but reverently interpreted.
  - ii. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1970/1994, pp. 80, 81).
    1. **Commentary v criticism**
      - a. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970, pp. 80, 81):  
 Commentary “halts before the precipice of the original text, and assumes the impossible and endless task of repeating its own birth within itself.” It is a practice of drawing “copious deductions” and illuminating a text; *pia interpretatio*, reverent interpretation. Criticism questions language and the text “as to its truth or falsehood, its transparency or opacity... examines the forms of rhetoric: the analysis of figures, that is, the types of discourse, with the expressive value of each, the analysis of tropes, that is, the different relations that words may have with the same representative content... defines its relation to what it represents.” Commentary “sacralizes language” and criticism judges and “profanes it.” In erudition, Foucault is careful to concede that commentary and criticism are mutually

pedagogical even over time when “commentary has yielded to criticism.”

- b. Foucault, “What is Critique?” (1978/2007, p. 42): Critique and criticism range from “the high Kantian enterprise to the little polemical professional activities,” albeit too often mistakenly distinguished by differentiating between objects— criticism of works versus critique of practices and positions.
2.
    - b. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)
      - i. Thesis XI: The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.
    - c. Welby & Significs
      - i. “Sense, Meaning and Interpretation” (1896a, p. 31): What are we to call the act of ascribing, attributing, assigning to, bestowing or imposing upon, the sensation or impression or object, the sense— or meaning, which constitutes its 'sign-hood'? Is the process a 'referential' one? Though Signification as the 'signifying act' would bear the sense above proposed for it, it has the serious disadvantage of being already appropriated to another use. In the absence of anything better I would therefore venture here to speak of the act or process of *sensifying*. It is true that 'to sensify' must share the uncertainty of reference which belongs to sense itself. It might mean e.g. the attributing of our 'senses' to a tree or rock, which we suppose to hear, feel, see, etc. like ourselves.
        1. Welby (1896a) from Keynes’s (1895) definition of interpretation: “assignment of the precise degree and amount of significance to be attached to” an object or phenomenon (p. 35).
      - ii. Welby (1896b) focuses on the value of “significance” and eventually founds a fledgling discipline she calls “sensifics” and then “significs” (1896b, p. 200): the “study of the conditions of meaning and its interpretation” (p. 202). See Welby (1902, 1903, 1911).
        1. “Sense, Meaning and Interpretation” (1896b, pp. 186-187): We are told much of the impulse to imitate or mimic, but rarely or never of the equally deep and primordial impulse to 'sensify'— to touch with 'meaning'— every stimulus, excitation, imitation, impression, sensation, perception, idea, till we reach conception, which may be identical with the 'result of interpretation,' and is often identified with 'meaning.'
        2. 'What does it all mean'? How far is the doubling tendency to see everywhere thing plus meaning, or sign plus significate, ineradicable because primordial? (p. 188).
      - iii. *Grains of Sense* (1897, p. 16): Do we care for art, for science, for philosophy, for religion, for the solutions of social or "economical" problems? Are we poets or mathematicians, musicians or astronomers, painters or tradesmen, missionaries or manufacturers, philosophers or politicians, novelists or journalists or explorers? In every case the first need is to develop immensely the power of Communication between "mind " and "mind": the power of

Expression of all that passes or grows in "mind": and the corresponding power of interpreting, understanding and finally translating expression of every kind and of every degree of complexity and subtlety.

1. (pp. 83-84): The Thinker was once called the Seer, or the Magician and the Wizard, then the Prophet, then the Philosopher, then the Mystic; whereas now he [she, or they] is proud of being called the Critic. Let us hope that in the future he [she, or they] will be called the Interpreter or the Translator, and that there will be "chairs of Interpretation."... The Medicine-man must become the Meaningman [and Meaningwoman]; the Soothsayer must become the Sensesayer. We want language farms and gardens, and Scholarships of Expression, Interpretation and Translation.

iv. *What is Meaning?* (1903)

1. Significs "aims at the concentration of intellectual activities on that which we tacitly assume to be the main value of all study, and vaguely call 'meaning.'" (p. 83).
  - a. (pp. 6-7): Experience can only be enriched through the acquirement in a broad sense of fresh symbols or fresh significance: expression needs development in the same way for the same reason. Thus it follows that, as already suggested, every conceivable form of human interest is centrally touched and transformed by Significs.
  - b. (p. 161): Significs then, will bring us the philosophy of Significance; i.e. a raising of our whole conception of meaning to a higher and more efficient level; a bringing cosmos out of the present 'chaos' of our ideas as to sense, meaning, and significance... Thus Signifies involves essentially and typically the philosophy of Interpretation, of Translation, and thereby of a mode of synthesis accepted and worked with by science and philosophy alike.

2. Significance

- a. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as the Sense of a word, but only the sense in which it is used— the circumstances, state of mind, reference, 'universe of discourse' belonging to it. The Meaning of a word is the intent which it is desired to convey— the intention of the user. The Significance is always manifold, and intensifies its sense as well as its meaning, by expressing its importance, its appeal to us, its moment for us, its emotional force, its ideal value, its moral aspect, its universal or at least social range. All science, all logic, all philosophy, the whole controversy about aesthetics, about ethics, about religion, ultimately concentrate upon this: What is the sense of, What do we mean by, What is the significance of, that is, Why do we

care for, Beauty, Truth, Goodness? Why do we value experience? And why do we seek for Significance?

b.

3. Interpretation

a. [Our] sense-world includes much which requires the discipline of a meaning sense to interpret rationally; and this sense, this sensitiveness to the meaning, intent, purport, purpose, 'end' of experience, direct and indirect, culminates in the sense— now become the recognition— of Significance. (p. 194)

b. Interpretation is the “perception of... significance.” (p. 199)

4. (pp. 119-120, 194): Significance, on the other hand, is the gathering, the concentrating into its focus of radiation; it is in a deep and predictive sense the assimilating, the life-generating, the life-crowning term.... Significance: the import, the importance, the ultimate value, the supreme moment of all experience and all knowledge.

v. *Significs and Language* (1911, pp. 91-92): “interpretative expression” “is what many of us—vaguely or ambiguously or conventionally— call Revelation. There is no veil over ineffable priceless Reality to be withdrawn: only over clouded human eyes. One sees with reverence its reflection even now in the eyes less clouded than those of most of us; in the eyes of the saint, the thinker, the worker; above all, in the heavenly transparent simplicity of the true child's eyes. All these express in their degree and at moments, and in so doing reveal.

1. Let us then resolve that articulate expression shall at last become worthy of Man [i.e., Human Being], of one whose first duty and highest power is to interpret and thus to reveal; whose prerogative it shall be to lay open to the pure eye of the candid and fearless because faithful mind, what are only secrets and mysteries to our ignorant sophistry and our often grotesque but enslaving belief.

2. For there is no ultimate difficulty. Truth is not innately mysterious. So far from trying to baffle us in order to enhance its command of us and keep us humble, as creatures of the ground; so far from inducing spiritual coma or delirium or dangerous obsession, Reality throws wide her blessed arms, opens wide all ways and paths which lead to her very heart, the heart of the Real. She asks only that the word of the enigma shall become a fitting word.

3. (pp. 92-93): let us bear in mind that Reality, our true goal, never breaks us up into rival, and thus mutually defeating and impotent, groups; never creates cults which exclude a hundred types of humanity in order to dominate one.

vi. Welby, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911, p. 78):

1. The term "Significs" may be defined as the science of meaning or the study of significance, provided sufficient recognition is given to its practical aspect as a method of

- mind, one which is involved in all forms of mental activity, including that of logic.
2. In Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (1901-1905) the following definition is given:— "I. Significs implies a careful distinction between (a) sense or signification, (b) meaning or intention and (c) significance or ideal worth. It will be seen that the reference of the first is mainly verbal (or rather sensual), of the second volitional, and of the third moral (e.g. we speak of some event 'the significance of which cannot be overrated,' and it would be impossible in such a case to substitute the 'sense' or the 'meaning' of such event, without serious loss).
  3. (p. 79): Significs treats of the relation of the sign in the widest sense to each of these.
- vii. Hayakawa (1945, p. 116): The study of 'significs' was to her far more than the study of words, it was also the study of actual situations.
- d. Freud
- i. Williamson, (1955, p. 37): Freud viewed the activity of interpretation as the penetration of a disguise. The distinction between latent and manifest content existed by virtue of the censorship function of the ego.
    1. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899/2010, p. 89): dreams have a disguised meaning.
    2. (p. 167): A similar difficulty [of interpreting one's own dreams] confronts the political writer who has disagreeable truths to tell to those in authority. If he [she or they] presents them undisguised, the authorities will suppress his words— after they have been spoken, if his pronouncement was an oral one, but beforehand, if he had intended to make it in print. A writer must beware of the censorship, and on its account he must soften and distort the expression of his [her or their] opinion. According to the strength and sensitiveness of the censorship he finds himself compelled either merely to refrain from certain forms of attack, or to speak in allusions in place of direct references, or he must conceal his objectionable pronouncement beneath some apparently innocent disguise... The stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent of the true meaning.
    3. (p. 515): But as soon as we endeavour to penetrate more deeply into the mental process involved in dreaming, every path will end in darkness. There is no possibility of *explaining* dreams as a psychical process, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known.
  - ii. Freud (1899/2010, p. 160): Nevertheless, there is no great difficulty in meeting these apparently conclusive objections. It is only necessary to take notice of the fact that my theory is not based on a consideration of the manifest content of dreams but refers to the thoughts which are shown by the work of interpretation to lie behind

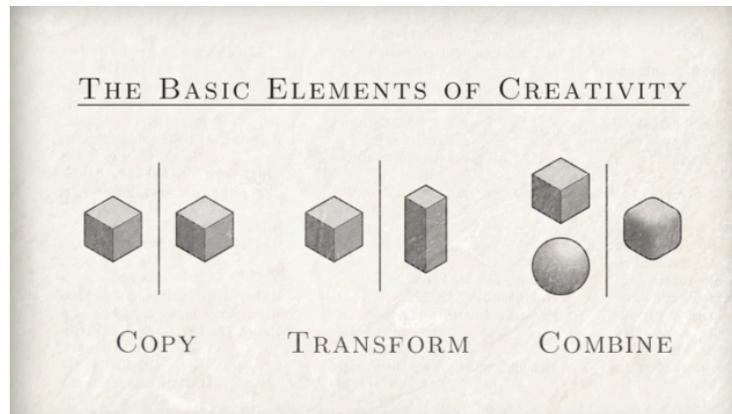
dreams. We must make a contrast between the *manifest* and the *latent* content of dreams. There is no question that there are dreams whose manifest content is of the most distressing kind. But has anyone tried to interpret such dreams? to reveal the latent thoughts behind them?

- e. Dilthey
  - i. Dilthey (ca. 1900/1965, p. 225) (Watson-Franke et al., Trans.):
    - 1. Interpretation would be impossible if the expressions of life were totally foreign. It would be unnecessary if there were inherently nothing foreign in them. **Between these utmost extremes lies interpretation.** (Watson-Franke et al., (1975, p. 251)
  - ii. Dilthey, “Rise of Hermeneutics” (1900/1972, p. 233): hermeneutics “is the theoretical basis for the *exegesis of written monuments*”
    - 1. Exegesis = “exposition of... rules” of interpretation.
    - 2. “re-experiencing [*Nachfühlen*] of alien states of mind” and “recomprehension [*Nachverständnis*] of individual existence” (pp. 230, 231).
- f. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (1970)
  - i. Interpretation is a “recollection or restoration of meaning” or and “revelation through the word” (pp. 9, 28)
  - ii. Interpretation is a “tactic of suspicion and as a battle against masks... an exercise of suspicion” (pp. 26, 32). i.e., destruction, demythologization, critique, etc.
  - iii. “school of suspicion” v “school of reminiscence” (p. 32).
  - iv. Bruns (1980, p. 300): To interpret means to produce a version of what something means, thus producing, or presupposing, the need for (some would say, the problem of) authority. In fact, no interpretation ever takes place apart from a specific, authorizing tradition of doing such a thing. What is called “Romantic hermeneutics” is one of these traditions— the one in which modern textual and literary criticism came to flourish. It is one of the functions of any hermeneutic tradition to provide you with a way of answering the question, How do you know when you have interpreted Scripture (or any text) correctly? From the standpoint of Romantic hermeneutics, to interpret correctly means to stand in place of the author. Antecedent traditions have wondered, What does it mean to speak in the name of someone else? To interpret means to speak in the name of authority— in the name of God or Moses or Socrates or Jesus. “For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.”
  - v. Bruns (1991, p. 2): the main question in hermeneutics is reflective and historical rather than formal and exegetical; that is, the question is not how do we analyze and interpret but how do we stand with respect to all that comes down to us from the past? In our own time we have brought this question under the rule of an analytical distinction between the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion, that is, between interpretation as recollection or retrieval and interpretation as unmasking or emancipation from mental bondage. The one seeks to overcome the alienation of forgetfulness or of historical or cultural difference; the other seeks to produce this alienation where historical and cultural difference has

been repressed in favor of institutionalized systems or doctrines that claim to speak all at once and once for all.

- g. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (1971, p. 15): *The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.* The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth.
- h. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1973/1978): Interpretation is not open to any meaning. This would be to concede to those who rise up against the character of uncertainty in analytic interpretation that, in effect, all interpretations are possible, which is patently absurd. The fact that I have said that the effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel, a kern, to use Freud's own term, of non-sense, does not mean that interpretation is in itself nonsense.... Interpretation is not open to all meanings. **It is not just any interpretation. It is a significant interpretation, one that must not be missed.** This does not mean that it is not this signification that is essential to the advent of the subject. What is essential is that he should see, beyond this signification, to what signifier— to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning— he is, as a subject, subjected. (pp. 250-251)
- i. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1975/2004, p. 398): To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas [i.e., the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo] and one's own thinking. To try to escape from one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. **To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play** so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us.
- j. Ethnographic Interpretation
  - i. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973, pp. 14, 18):
    - 1. Nothing is more necessary to comprehending what anthropological interpretation is, and the degree to which it is interpretation, than an exact understanding of what it means— and what it does not mean— to say that our formulations of other peoples' symbol systems must be actor-oriented.<sup>1</sup>
      - a. [Footnote #1] Not only other peoples': anthropology can be trained on the culture of which it is itself a part, and it increasingly is; a fact of profound importance, but which, as it raises a few tricky and rather special second order problems.
    - 2. If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens— from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world— is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant. A good interpretation of anything— a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society— takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else— into an admiration of its own elegance, of its author's cleverness, or of the beauties of Euclidean order—it may have its intrinsic charms; but it is something else than what the task at hand— figuring out what all that rigamarole with the sheep is about— calls for.

- ii. Weick (1985, p. 568): Ethnography is “sustained, explicit, methodical **observation and paraphrasing of social situations** in relation to their naturally occurring contexts.”
  - 1. Daft & Weick (1984, p. 286): “*interpretation* is formally defined as the process of translating events and developing shared understanding and conceptual schemes... **Interpretation gives meaning to data.**”
- k. Greimas and Courtés, *Semiotics and Language* (1979/1982, p. 159) (Trans. L. Christ & D. Patte):
  - i. interpretation is no longer a matter of attributing a given content to a form which would otherwise lack one; rather, **it is a paraphrase** which formulates in another fashion the equivalent content of a signifying element within a given semiotic system or the translation of a signifying unit from one semiotic system into another.
- l. Fish (1980)
  - i. “What Makes An Interpretation Acceptable?”
    - 1. Strictly speaking, getting "back-to-the-text" is not a move one can perform, because the text one gets back to will be the text demanded by some other interpretation and that interpretation will be presiding over its production. This is not to say, however, that the "back-to-the-text" move is ineffectual. The fact that it is not something one can do in no way diminishes the effectiveness of claiming to do it. As a rhetorical ploy, the announcement that one is returning to the text will be powerful so long as the assumption that criticism is secondary to the text and must not be allowed to overwhelm it remains unchallenged. (p. 354)
    - 2. The critic is taught to think of himself as a transmitter of the best that had been thought and said by others, and his greatest fear is that he will stand charged of having substituted his own meanings for the meanings of which he is supposedly the guardian; his greatest fear is that he be found guilty of having interpreted. That is why we have the spectacle of commentators who, like Stephen Booth, adopt a stance of aggressive humility and, in the manner of someone who rises to speak at a temperance meeting, declare that they will never interpret again but will instead do something else ("I mean to describe them"). (p. 355)
    - 3. What I have been saying is that whatever they do, it will only be interpretation in another guise because, like it or not, interpretation is the only game in town. (p. 355)
- m. Interpretation as Paraphrasing : : Interpretation as Remixing



i. Remixing

1. Dasgupta (2016, p. 1): the reworking and combination of existing creative artifacts, usually in the form of music, video, and other interactive media
2. Practices
  - a. Copying
  - b. Transforming
  - c. Combining

n. Interpretation in ANT

i. Interpretation

1. What interpretation in ANT is not
  - a. Latour (1991/1993, p. 44): To unmask: that was our sacred task, the task of us moderns. To reveal the true calculations underlying the false consciousnesses, or the true interests underlying the false calculations. Who is not still foaming slightly at the mouth with that particular rabies?... the human sciences are no longer the ultimate reservoir that would make it possible at last to discern the real motives beneath appearances.... The tradition of the human sciences no longer has the privilege of rising above the actor by discerning, beneath his [her or their] unconscious actions, the reality that is to be brought to light.
2. Latour (1988, p. 166): For a long time it has been agreed that the relationship between one text and another is always a matter for interpretation. Why not accept that this is also true between so-called texts and so-called objects, and even between so called objects themselves?
3. Latour (1988, p. 192): I don't know how things stand. I know neither who I am nor what I want, but *others* say they know on my behalf, others who define me, link me up, make me speak, interpret what I say, and enroll me. Whether I am a storm, a rat, a rock, a lake, a lion, a child, a worker, a gene, a slave, the unconscious, or a virus, they whisper to me, they suggest, they impose an interpretation of what I am and what I could be.

4. Latour (1988, p. 196): Since a spokesman [spokeswoman or spokesperson] always says *something other* than do those it makes speak, and since it is always necessary to negotiate similarity and difference, there is *always room* for controversy about the fidelity of any interpretation. A force can always insinuate itself between the speaker and those that it makes speak. It can always make them say something else.
  5. Latour (2005, p. 138): [To interpret or] deploy simply means that through the report concluding the enquiry the number of actors might be increased; the range of agencies making the actors act might be expanded; the number of objects active in stabilizing groups and agencies might be multiplied; and the controversies about matters of concern might be mapped.
  6. Latour (2005, pp. 244-245): interpretation is not a characteristic of individualized human agents— just the opposite. To interpret some behavior we have to add something, but this does not mean that we have to look for a social framework [i.e., via sociology].... To interpret some behavior we have indeed to be prepared for many different versions, but this doesn't mean that we have to turn to local interactions [i.e., via phenomenology].... What is meant by interpretations, flexibility, and fluidity is simply a way to register the vast outside to which every course of action has to appeal in order to be carried out. This is not true for just human actions, but for every activity. **Hermeneutics is not a privilege of humans but, so to speak, a property of the world itself.** The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms.
- ii. Interpretation & Translation
1. Callon & Latour (1981, p. 279): By translation we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force: 'Our interests are the same', 'do what I want', 'you cannot succeed without going through me'. Whenever an actor speaks of 'us', s/he is translating other actors into a single will, of which s/he becomes spirit and spokesman. S/he begins to act for several, no longer for one alone. S/he becomes stronger. S/he grows.
    - a. (p. 280): *There are* of course macro-actors and micro-actors, but the difference between them is brought about by power relations and the constructions of networks that will *elude analysis* if we presume *a priori* that macro-actors are bigger than or superior to micro-actors. These power relations and translation processes reappear more clearly if we follow Hobbes in his strange assumption that all actors are isomorphic. Isomorphic does not mean that all actors have the

*same* size but that a priori there is no way to decide the size since it is the consequence of a long struggle. The best way to understand this is to consider actors as networks.

- b. (p. 286): To summarize, macro-actors are micro-actors seated on top of many (leaky) black boxes. They are neither larger, nor more complex than micro-actors; on the contrary, they are of the same size and, as we shall see, they are in fact simpler than micro-actors.
- c. (p. 286): What is an 'actor'? Any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own. An actor makes changes in the set of elements and concepts habitually used to describe the social and the natural worlds.
- d.

iii.