

# The Embedded Disembeddedness of the Economy via Michel Callon, Bruno Latour



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# The Embeddedness of the Economy...

*What does this framing assume, imply?*





# Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness (Granovetter 1985)

“The extent to which economic action is embedded in structures of social relations”

Undersocialized  $\leftrightarrow$  Oversocialized

“to show why **the social cannot be construed as a kind of material or domain** and to dispute the project of providing a ‘social explanation’ of some other state of affairs.” (Latour, RTS)



Instead of hypothesizing that in all cases there are activities and/or forms of behaviour which can be located in *the economy of the society...* to speak of economization... **the processes through which behaviours, organizations, institutions and, more generally, objects are constituted as being ‘economic’.**  
(Caliskan & Callon)



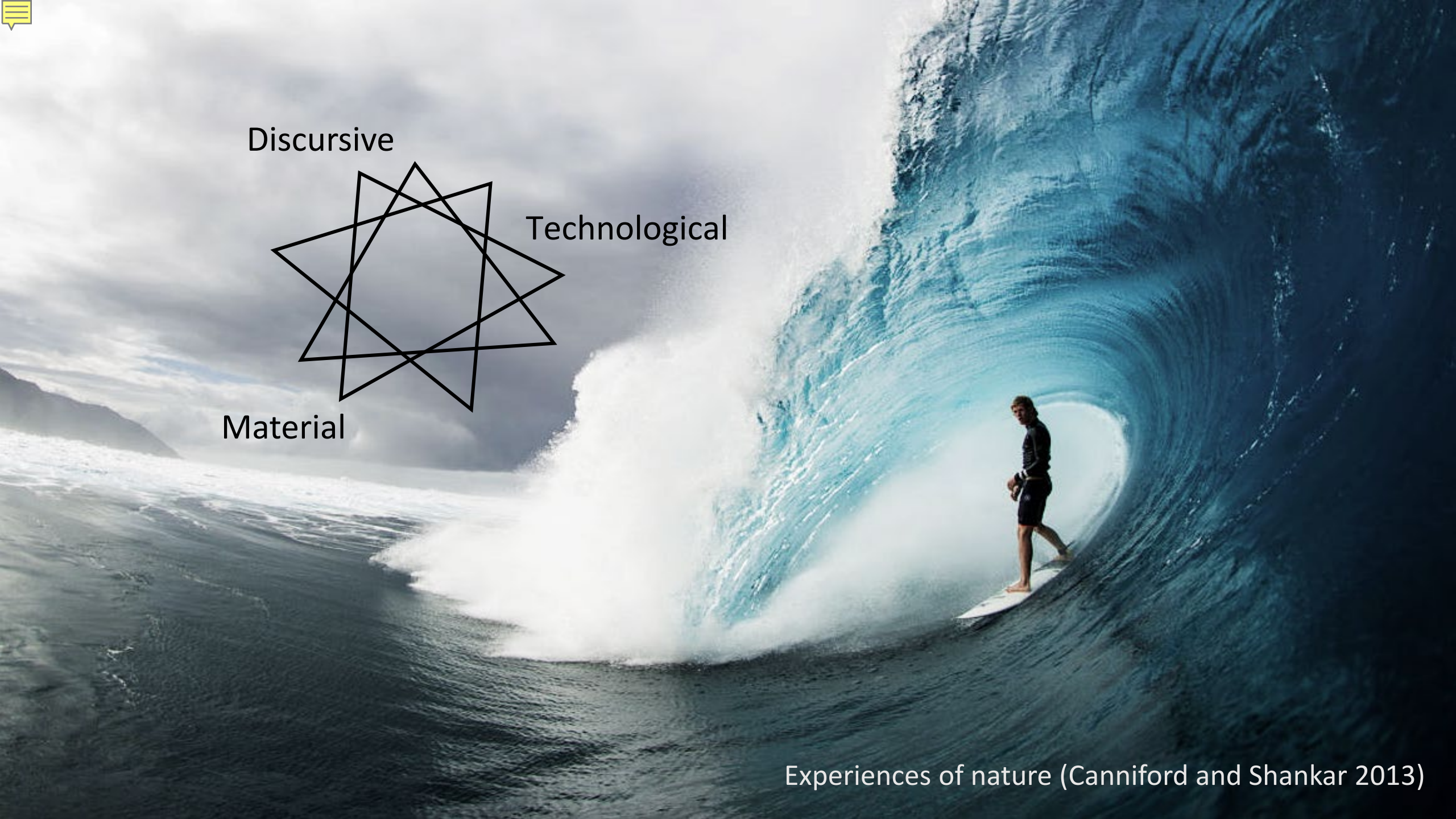


Discursive



Technological

Material







# Paradoxes of 'the Moderns'

## Purification/Hybridization

- Purifying the discourses of **nature and society** - expunging from each the traces of the other - that, for Latour, is definitive of modernity (Pickering)
  - ... Nature and Society
  - ... Social and Economic



purity ... hierarchy ... scale ...

ANT as a “machine for **waging war on essential differences...** it has shown that what appears to be topographically natural, given in the order of the world, is in fact **produced in networks**”

(Law, 1999, p. 4)





# The actor-network

1. Principle of agnosticism: no resorting to, and/or prioritizing of natural/social/cultural/economic force ... no a-priori hierarchies
  2. The principle of general symmetry: no a-priori actors ... anything can be an actant ...  
→ flat ontology
- Not inverted assymetry/hierarchy, or universal symmetry/flatness!**





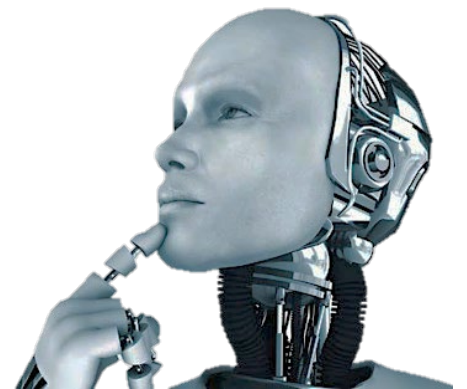


They've taken something problematic [agency as a property of the person], and then think that they're being radical by transferring it from the person to the thing.





“You discriminate between the human and the inhuman. I do not hold this bias (this one at least) and see only actors—some human, some nonhuman, some skilled, some unskilled...” (Latour, *Where are the missing masses*, 160)





Bruno Latour:  
Philosopher of  
togetherness in  
action





# The Once and Future **Philosopher** (Restivo 2010)

- Studies in theology and **philosophy** - dissertation on Charles Péguy
- Military service in Africa, working for **anthropologist** Marc Augé (colonialism, race & industrial relations in Côte d'Ivoire)
- 1975 invited by neuroendocrinologist Roger Guillemin to do a laboratory ethnography at the Salk Institute in California
- Founding member of the Society for Social Studies of **Science**
- Working at École des Mines de Paris - Center for **sociology** and innovation (1982-2006)
- 2006 Professor at Sciences Po Paris – **politics** and **philosophy**



# TOGETHERNESS IN ACTION

Individual ... Relational/Collective  
Essence ... Process



# Togetherherness in action: Individual $\rightarrow$ Relational/Collective

- Agency is not an individual property, but rather a capacity emergent from networks of relations...



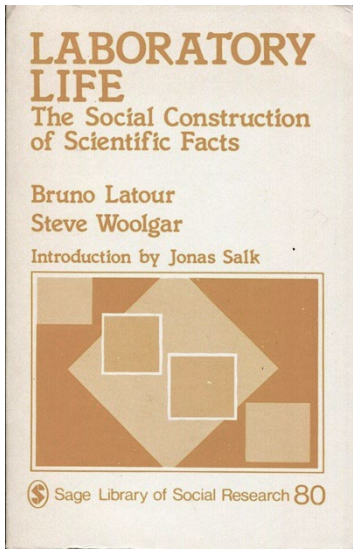




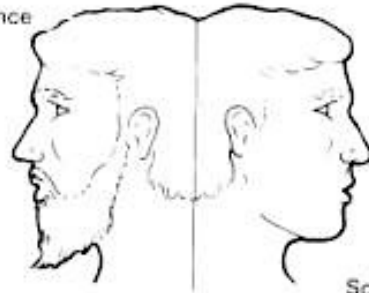
# Togetherhness in action: Essence $\rightarrow$ Process

- In action = In the making
- What is commonsensically taken as a self-evident starting point becomes a surprising outcome (something to be explained)

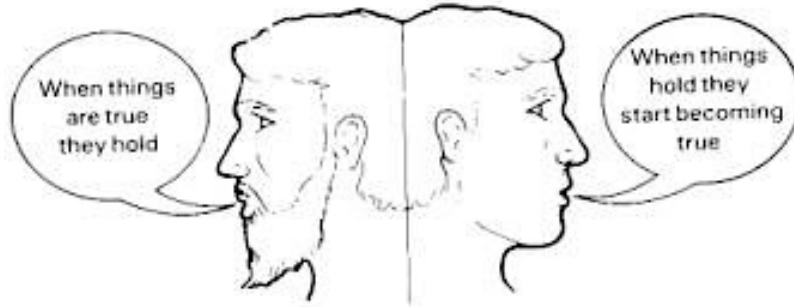
*The Social, The Economic...*



Ready Made Science



Science in the Making



A decorative rectangular frame with ornate scrollwork at the top and bottom centers, and vertical lines with arrows pointing inward on the left and right sides. The word "Intermission" is centered within this frame.

Intermission

# Michel Callon (Cochoy 2014)

- Trained as an engineer at the prestigious École des Mines de Paris
- Publishes his first paper in a Sociology journal on relation between economy and science
- Together w. Latour a pioneer in Science studies / Sociology of science
- Gradually moves towards studies of economy and markets ... focusing (among others) on anthropology of calculation and performativity of Economics/economic knowledge

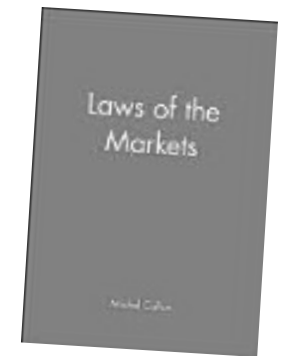




# The making of *economic*

- The Economy/Market/Economic man ... not a given entity or mere abstraction → a process of ongoing construction (economization)
- But *constructed* does not mean immaterial or less real

*The perfect market, the economic man are both an abstraction and a reality...*





# Under what conditions is calculativeness possible?

- **Framing** ... an operation used to define individual agents which are clearly distinct and dissociated from one another. It also allows for the definition of objects, goods and merchandise which are perfectly identifiable and can be separated not only from other goods, but also from the actors involved, for example in their conception, production, circulation or use.

... Cleansing

... Disconnection

... Disentanglement





# No economic man without investments...

- Material, metrological, procedural devices
- Economic theory → Performativity of Science

*“[T]he crucial point is not that of the intrinsic competencies of the agent but that of the equipment and devices which give his/her actions a shape.”*

Economic man → Actor-network

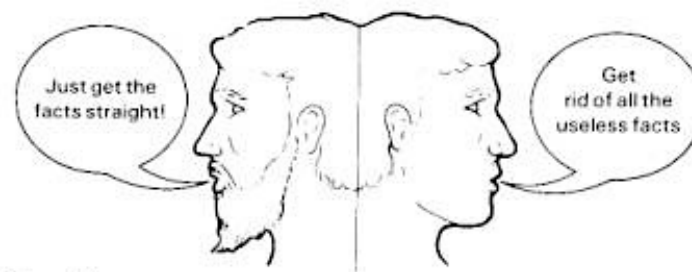


- **Framing** ... an operation used to define individual agents which are clearly distinct and dissociated from one another. It also allows for the definition of objects, goods and merchandise which are perfectly identifiable and can be separated not only from other goods, but also from the actors involved, for example in their conception, production, circulation or use.
- Yet, always **overflow** = the relations and devices that enable framing, while simultaneously provide an opening onto other worlds, thus constituting leakage points...

→ EMBEDDED DISEMBEDDEDNESS



The process is always much messier than the outcome.

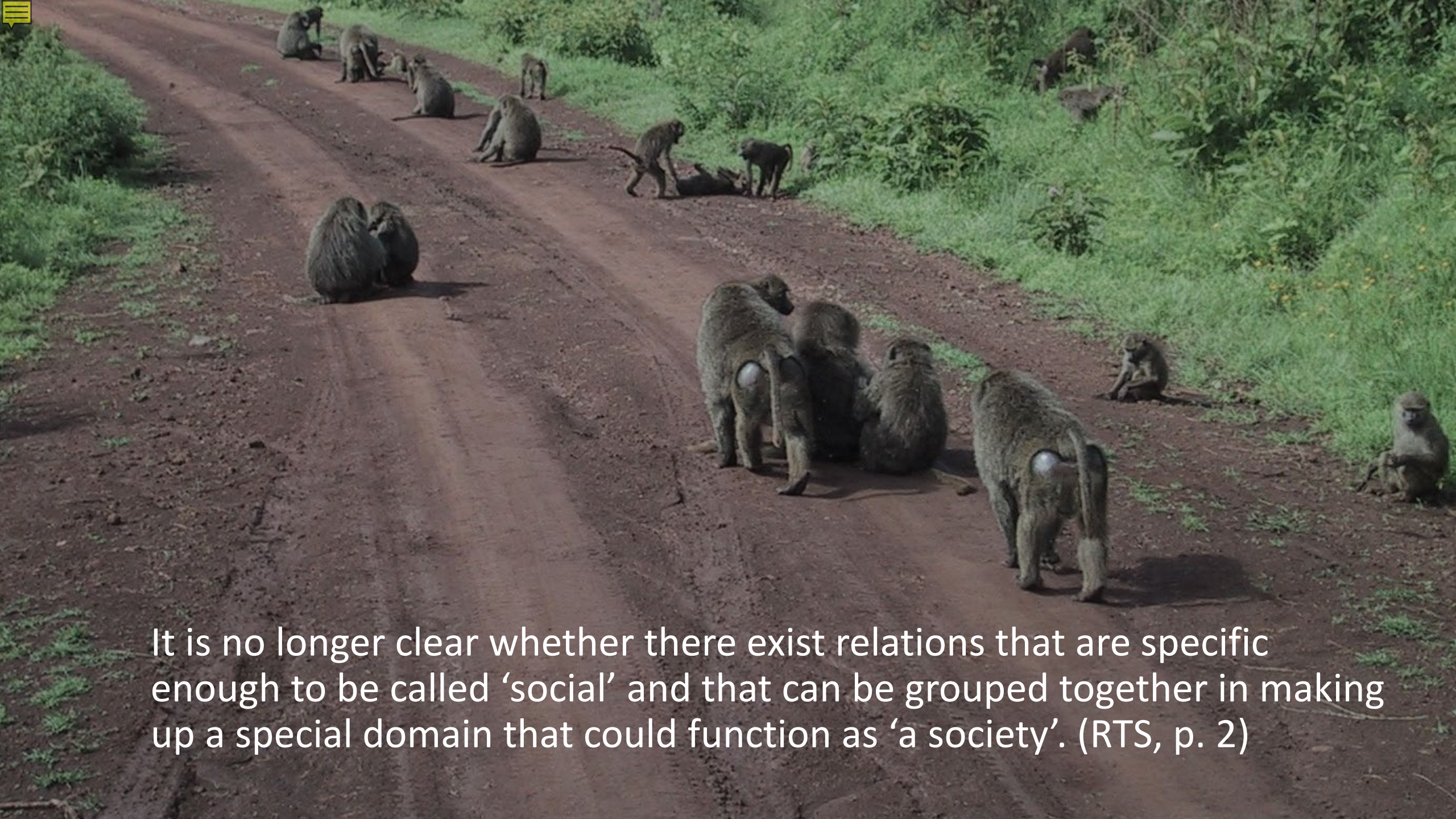




## DISCUSSION: Beyond the *Sociology of the Social*

1. Why does Latour want to redefine 'the Social'?
2. How his version of sociology differ from conventional Sociology?  
(i.e., Sociology of the Social)





It is no longer clear whether there exist relations that are specific enough to be called 'social' and that can be grouped together in making up a special domain that could function as 'a society'. (RTS, p. 2)





## From pure to heterogeneous...

“The **bizarre idea that society might be made up of human relations** is a mirror image of the other no less **bizarre idea that techniques might be made up of nonhuman relations**. We deal with characters, delegates, representatives ... some figurative, others nonfigurative; some human, others nonhuman; some competent, others incompetent. Do you want to cut through this rich diversity of delegates and artificially create two heaps of refuse, “society” on one side and “technology” on the other?” (Where are the missing masses, 162)





*BL/MC "...made considerable service to sociology merely by providing this space for technology and physical artifacts in their discussions on power, knowledge and society."*

(Kavanagh 1994)

ANT's deliberate questioning of what society is...

- questioning the anthropocentrism of sociology
- central position given to physical artifacts
- deliberate conflation of the social and the technical



# The limits of actor-network theory

- Structuralist **mis**interpretations (fixtures vs. action-nets)
- **Boring** surprises: surprising in the same way – invisible actors, heterogeneity, hybrids...
- Loosing sight of the **specific tonalities** of different networks (e.g., see Latour's 'An Enquiry into Modes of Existence')



# TO SUM UP...

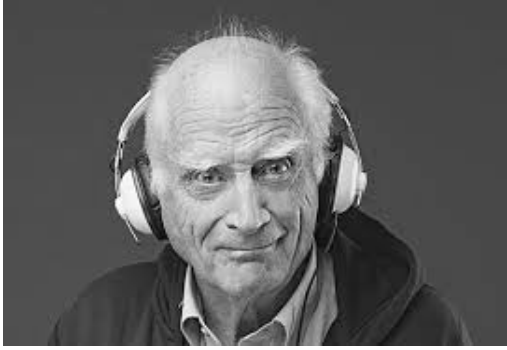
1. The course of action is rarely decided by as **single** actor, and commonly defies the boundaries of **pure** domains and **universal** ontological hierarchies
2. Order and stability constitute a surprise - a precarious and costly achievement of **heterogeneous** (net)works
3. To study the economy, the market, the social, etc. thus also means studying **the production** of disembodiedness, purity...

# Embeddedness...

- Of what? ... given/pure entities → actor-networks in the making
- In what? ... the Social → social
- How?... framing/overflow ... embedded disembeddedness



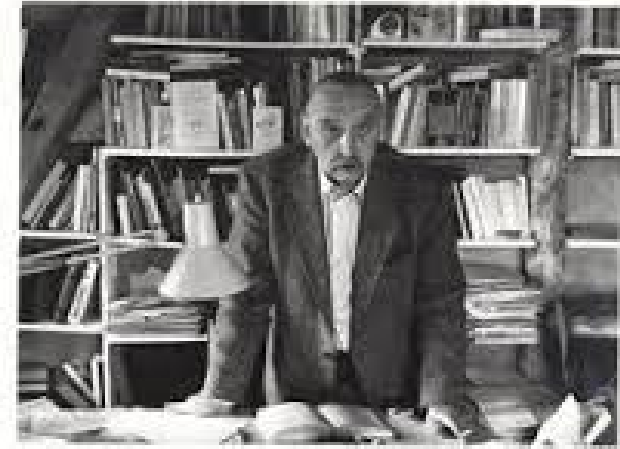
# We are out of slides.



Michel Serres



Gabriel Tarde



Algirdas Julien Greimas



Gilbert  
Simondon



Marc Auge

Alfred North  
Whitehead



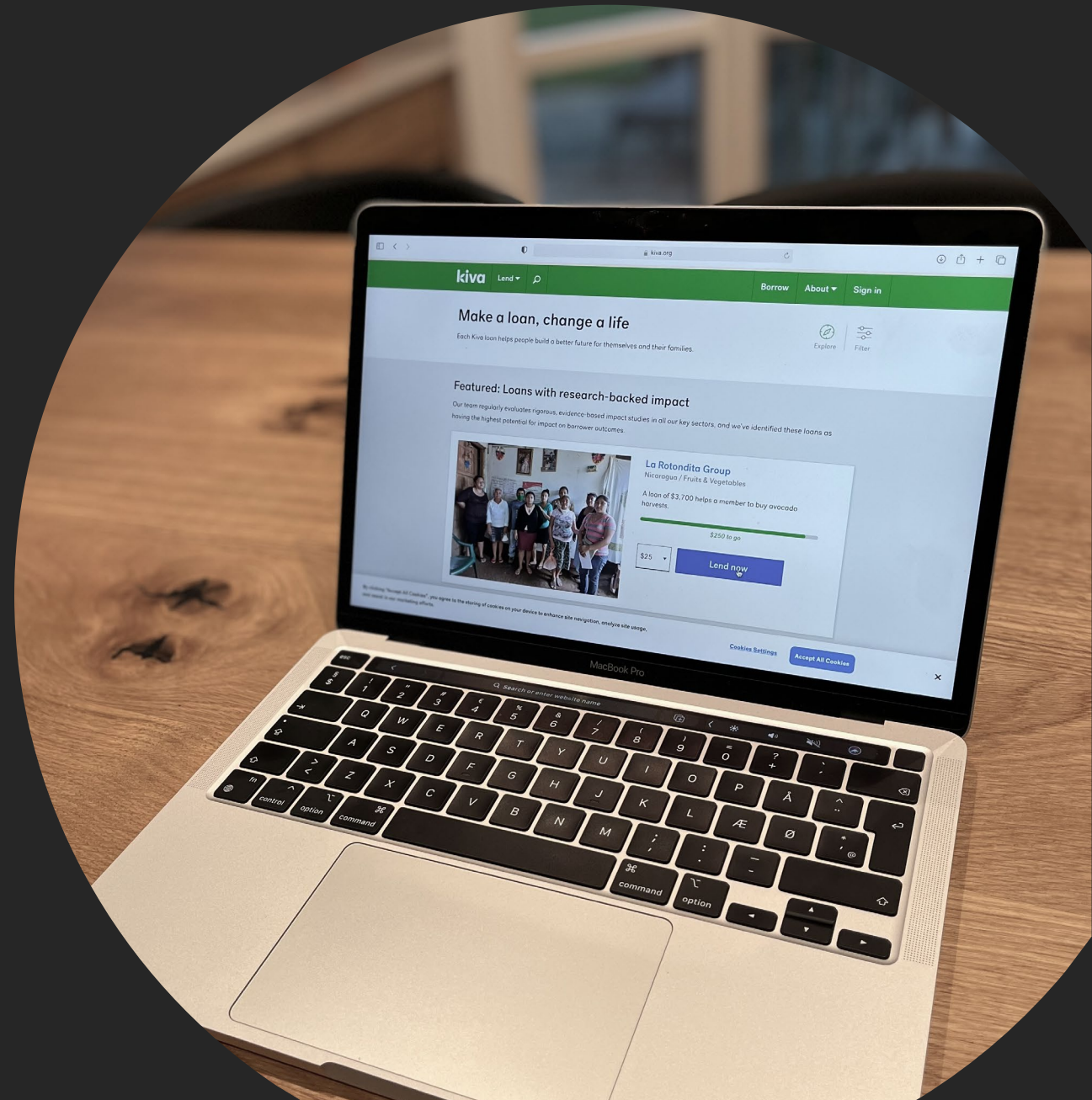
Harold Garfinkel

Gilles Deleuze





Bajde, D., & Rojas-Gaviria, P. (2021). Creating Responsible Subjects: The Role of Mediated Affective Encounters. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(3).

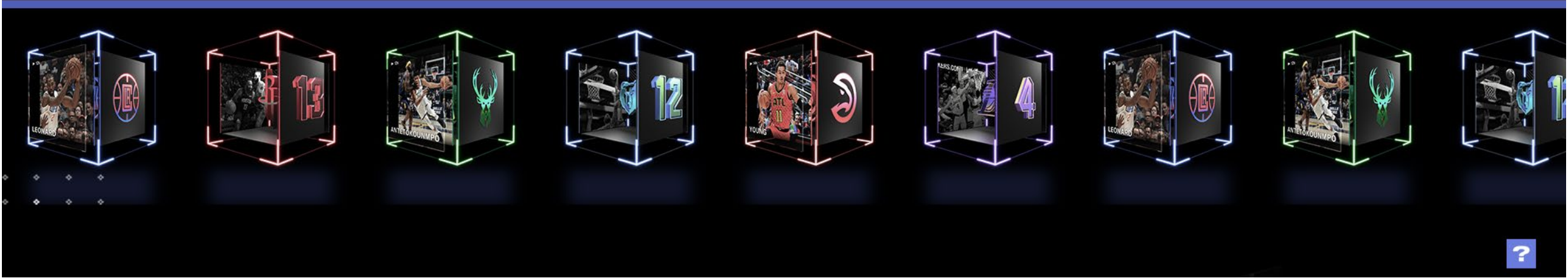




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# Digital ownership

Under what conditions does ownership of digital objects become meaningful?

- Beyond the qualities of objects to be owned
- Beyond socio-psychologized accounts of craze, hype, etc.