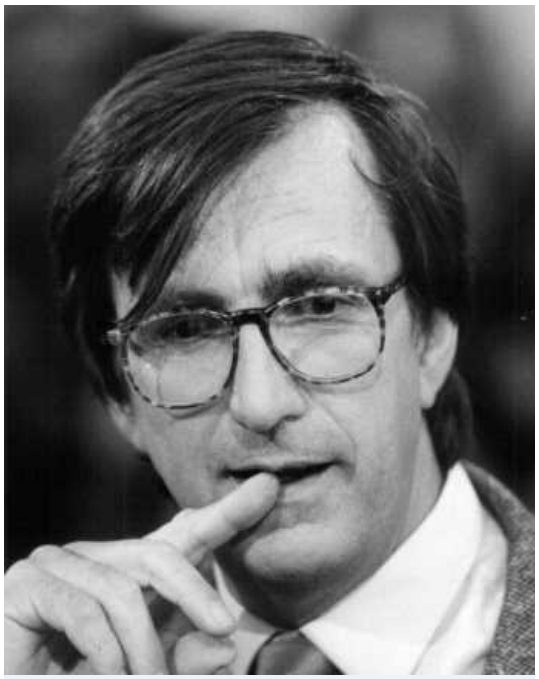
Bruno Latour



Basic info

June 22, 1947 – present

b. Beaune, Côte-d'Or, France

Important figure in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Achievements

1992: Bernal Prize, 4S Society

1996: Doctorate Honoris Causa, U. of Lund

2005: Spinoza Chair, U. of Amsterdam

2006: Doctorate Honoris Causa, U. of Lausanne

2007: Listed as 10th most-cited intellectual in the humanities and social sciences by *The Times Higher Education Guide*

2008: Doctorate Honoris Causa, U. of Montreal

2008: Medal of Honor, Institute of Advanced Studies, U. of Bologna

2008: Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA

2008: Siegfried Unseld Prize

2008: Doctor Honoris Causa, U. of Goteborg

2009: Doctor Honoris Causa, U. of Warwick

2010: Kulturpreis, U. of Munich

Career

- Philosopher by training: PhD, 1975, University of Tours, France.
- Anthropologist by experience: fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire.
- Developed interest in anthropology of knowledge, joining his philosophical studies of epistemology with his experience studying culture in Africa.
- Conducted ethnographic studies of communities of scientists, launching his career into Science and Technology Studies (STS).
- Currently holding a position in sociology as a professor and vice president of research at Sciences Po Paris.

Influence

Vanguard figure in science studies, into which he pulled anthropological methods. Influential intellectual contributions include:

- **The Social Construction of Science**
  - "Science Wars": social constructivism (Latour) vs. positivism.
  - Social constructivism: Scientists work within a culture, which determines what type of knowledge is "correct".
  - Positivism: scientists discover truth using a series of natural and logical processes.
  - For Latour, positivism is a socially constructed phenomenon.
- **The Relationship of Science, Technology, and Culture**
  - Science, technology, and the social are one in the same.
- **Science in time and space**
  - Scientific cultures are not static entities, have historical context.
- **Actor-Network Theory (ANT)**
  - Along with Michel Callon and John Law, devoted much of his time during early 1990s to developing ANT.
  - Cultures work as networks, with objects and people acting and being acted on to create culture.
  - Objects (the actors, be they human or non-human) and ideas interact on the same level and with the same ability to create change in a culture.
  - Driving force = desire of individuals, institutions, and objects to win acceptance for particular kinds of knowledge.
  - Acceptance is garnered by the actors interacting with one another, sharing knowledge and expanding the network.
  - Controversial: treatment of objects as equal players with humans, too reductionist, mistakenly prioritizes knowledge, science, and technology as the driving forces in all cultures.

After ANT, focused on the relationship between science and technology themselves, particularly with respect to the concept of modernity.

Important publications

- *Laboratory Life: the Social Construction of Scientific Facts* with Steve Woolgar, 1979
  - Pioneering text of "laboratory studies".
- *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*, 1987
  - Challenges the historical assumption that scientific theory is an immutable maxim incapable of being questioned or explored.
  - Seeks to explore science in the context of its past, present and future as well within its culture and environment
  - Displaces the mythos of a solitary scientific genius putting forth theories and looks to network of people and objects which might have made scientific breakthrough possible.
- *The Pasteurization of France*, 1988
  - Undermines notion that the acceptance of scientific theories is only a matter of experimental evidence or reason.
- *We Have Never Been Modern*, 1991
  - Argues the modernist distinction between nature and culture does not actually exist.
- *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, 1999
  - Defends relevance of science studies by questioning the authority and reliability of scientific knowledge.
- *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 2005
  - Reappraisal of his work and of how we use the concept of the social.

Relation to other thinkers

- **John Law**
  - A primary founder of Actor-Network Theory.
  - Brought up issues regarding stability within an actor network and how elements in the network can change.
- **Michel Callon**
  - A primary founder of Actor-Network Theory.
  - Talked about the elements of translation: (a) problematisation: how to define the problem; (b) interessement: how to get other actors interested in the problem; (c) enrollment: how to get other actors to accept their roles; and (d) mobilization: how to get the public to accept actors as their representatives.
- **Harold Garfinkel**
  - Known for developing ethnomethodology, which influenced ANT.
- **Wanda J. Orlikowski**
  - Known for exploring the concepts of Sociomaterial/Constitutive Entanglement
  - ANT and Constitutive Entanglement share a similar premise, but Orlikowski places more emphasis in how humans (socio) and things (materials) define or enact one another.

References

- *Bruno Latour.* Bruno Latour, n.d. Web. 31 January 2012. http://www.bruno-latour.fr/
- "Harold Garfinkel." *Wikipedia.com.* Wikipedia, n.d. Web. 31 January 2012.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Garfinkel
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- Lowood , Henry and Sarah Sussman. "Bruno Latour." *Stanford Presidential Lectures and Symposia for Humanities and Arts.* Stanford University, n.d. Web. 31 January 2012. http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/latour/index.html
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- Wilk, Richard. "Biographies: Bruno Latour." *Sociocultural Theory in Anthropology.* Indiana University Department of Anthropology, n.d. Web. 31 January 2012. http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/sociocultural_theory.htm