

Lecture 4, Sep 16, 2022

Relations Between Actors

- Relationships are never really “finished”
 - Law refers to this as power shifts
- Actors have resistances, but in a “functioning system” (i.e. when relations are working as we expect), these are overcome through relationships with other actors
 - Over time, these resistances can become more apparent and break down the system
 - Overcoming resistance is where power emerges
- Actors in relationships are more than the sum of their parts

Power

- Can be used to oppress or liberate
 - ANT allows us to see problematic systems of power
- Concentrated in large structures, but ultimately a component of all relationships, contexts, and situations
- Power is generated through relationships between actors
 - A power differential is not always present when power is created through a relationship
 - Relationships can have power over the system
 - * We’re not looking for the powerful actor, but the most influential relationship
 - How does a relationship stabilize? How do they overcome resistance? How do they generate effects?
- Resistance needs to be overcome or hidden to create a network
- This can help us dismantle a situation where power is problematic

Translation

- All the things that happen to bring actors together in a set of relationships to create a functioning system
- Involves a process (patterning, social orchestration, etc) and effects (devices, organizations, concepts)
- Creating convergence and hiding resistances
- Sometimes the network delegates work for humans to technology and vice versa
 - e.g. we delegate managing breakout rooms to Zoom, but the technology delegates managing technology to us

Patterning/Ordering

- Material durability: patterns are maintained over time
 - e.g. even though we’re back in person, we’re still sometimes using Zoom
- Pattern: a set of relationships
- Scope of ordering: when a pattern in a network works, it replicates
 - People’s tendency to stick to patterns

Punctualisation

- When many actors with their own characteristics and resistances are concealed in a coherent entity
 - Abstraction
- When systems work effectively, they tend to become punctualised
- Things in the network can act contrary to the network as a whole, breaking down the network
 - Law refers to this as “leakiness”
 - Can be human or nonhuman actors, even conceptual actors
 - Can result in problems or shifts in the system
- When things break down, systems become depunctualised and networks are exposed

- Depunctualisation can happen due to things breaking down (unintentional), or when we explore something (intentional)
- Related to Postman's claim that technology tends to become "mythic"

Intermediaries and Mediators

- Intermediaries transport the force of another entity
- Mediators are actors for which outputs cannot be predicted by their inputs
- Another way of understanding power

Summary

Actors can act as mediators or intermediaries.

Translation describes the process of building relationships to create a system or technology. Resistances are overcome and as relationships solidify, ordering/patterning takes place, and actors/systems become punctualised.

Actors can break off from the system, which depunctualises it. We can also depunctualise something to understand it better.

This helps us understand locations and shifting of power.

Language of Affordances

- Affordances are the perceived and actual properties of the thing
- Mechanisms of affordance:
 - Request
 - Demand
 - Allow
 - Encourage
 - Discourage
 - Refuse
 - These are the "how" of human-technology relations
- Conditions of affordance:
 - Perception: people perceive a range of functions
 - Dexterity: people have varying skill in operating/interacting
 - Cultural/Institutional Legitimacy: people experience different levels of support due to cultural norms or institutional regulations
 - These are the "when" of human-technology relations
- Affordances are a good way to describe relationships between actors (but not necessarily all relationships)