Chapter 16
ANTi-Human:
The Ethical Blindspot

Michel Schreiber
University of Constance, Germany

ABSTRACT

In his writings on the gunman, Bruno Latour (1994) paraphrases the anti-human ideology of the National Rifle Association of the USA. Amongst a long list of stances one can find nonsense such as: "One is born a good citizen or a criminal. Period." I will not suggest that Latour is an advocate in favor of the NRA's strange cause or in favor of their ideology. Nevertheless, will I use this example to point out the biggest flaw in the so called Actor-Network Theory – or at least Latour's version of ANT: The absolute ignorance to ethical doubts towards that specific approach of describing our world and what ONE calls society. I will bring forth this argument using not much more than this one example, this absolute nega-tion of ethical philosophy and humane thought. I will therefore use a very fundamentalist approach to ethics, as it was developed by Emanuel Levinas (1988). Within this framework it will become obvious why ANT may be a good tool to describe technical processes within a society, but will always fail to explain the human side of things.

INTRODUCTION

I'm with you in Rockland, where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes, roaring over the roof, they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital, illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O, starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here. Allen Ginsberg (1996, p. 69)

In his writings on the gunman, Bruno Latour (1999) paraphrases the anti-human ideology of the National Rifle Association (NRA) of the USA. Amongst a long list of stances including nonsense such as "one is born a good citizen or a criminal. Period" (p. 177). Or: "With a gun, one kills better, but at no point does it modify one's goal" (p. 177). The part problematic to Latour is the "troubling suggestion

that we can master techniques, that techniques are nothing more than pliable and diligent slaves." (pp. 177-178). I will not suggest that Latour is an advocate in favor of the NRA's strange cause or in favor of their ideology. Nevertheless, will I use this example to point out the biggest flaw in the so called Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – or at least Latour's version of ANT: The absolute ignorance to ethical doubts towards that specific approach of describing our world and what ONE calls society. I will bring forth this argument using not much more than this one example, this absolute negation of ethical philosophy and humane thought. This may seem harsh, even unacademic, but it happens to make a point, to show that in principle the way of thinking of relations within Actor-Network Theory can never be ethical (cf. Couldry, 2008).[1] I will therefore use a very fundamentalist approach to ethics as it was developed by Emanuel Levinas (1988; 1989; 1992a; 1992b; 1995; 1997; 2005). Within this framework, it will become obvious why Actor-Network Theory may be a good tool to describe technical processes within a society, but will always fail to explain the human side of things. It is not nonhierarchical or using flat hierarchies. ANT is in fact the negation of the humane within the human as it refuses to acknowledge the defining part of a human being: the other.

Imprisoned at Columbia Presbyterian Psychological Institute in Rockland NJ, Allen Ginsberg met Carl Salomon. Inspired by that experience he wrote his masterpiece *Howl* (1996 [1956]). Situated at the end of the third part of *Howl*, the preliminary quote offers some insight to the imprisoned mind (cf. p. 69-70). Once a free spirit and admirer of Antonin Artaud, Salomon had become a prisoner to US authorities, to himself and to shock therapy. In Ginsberg's poem, his pain of imprisonment has grown to a point where hope of freedom is found in the rain of angelic bombs dropped from planes roaring in the sky and mercy is to find oneself in eternal war (cf 1996).

War has become real. War has always been. In a globalized world it is a civil war of brothers against brothers and a well-hidden power of wealth, weapons and disguise, some have called Empire, against the human race. This war is fought not against or for technology or technological advancement, but through it (The Invisible Committee, 2014, p.21). It is a war fought in the Arab world, South America, Africa and your front lawn. It is fought with smartphones, drones, psychological warfare and ideological tactics (Tiqqun, 2007). It is a war that causes statements that sound terribly similar to Ginsberg's fictional writing: "Now I prefer cloudy days when the drones don't fly. When the sky brightens and becomes blue, the drones return and so does the fear. Children don't play so often now, and have stopped going to school. Education isn't possible as long as the drones circle overhead" (McVeigh, 2013). The Pakistan boy afraid of blue skies is a common narrative today. He also is definite proof of a world at war and the insanity that comes along with it, the fear and the changes in habit. The drones became the very real "starry-spangled shock of mercy" (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 70). A shock of mercy can be described as one of the biggest atrocities of our time or as a nonhierarchical hybrid of drone and pilot combined in the perfect killing machine.

I will not try to explain a global political development or go into deep criticism of global, social or economic forces. However, I will raise to question the ways we choose to describe this world and what ONE calls progress. I fully understand that it is necessary to get knowledge of the workings of technological development and the inevitable condition it is to modern life (cf. Hörl, 201, p. 11-12). Is it necessary though to describe the development of an airplane, a bomber intended to kill, like a circle of life? (cf. Law & Callon, 1992). What is gained when we describe a change from knife- to gun-culture with the use of Latour's terms? (cf. Ellerbrock, 2014). What is gained when we know that a murderer's guilt may be shared between killer and gun? (Latour, 1999). It does not change the fact that planes are built to drop bombs on living persons. It does not change the fact that instead of stabbing each other, people

Related Content

Competitive Data Use, Analysis, and Big Data Applications in Online Advertising
Sinan Akseki (2024). *Advancements in Socialized and Digital Media Communications (pp. 264-291).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/competitive-data-use-analysis-and-big-data-applications-in-online-advertising/337953

The Multimedia Memoir: Leveraging Multimodality to Facilitate the Teaching of Narrative Writing for Preservice Teachers
Donna E. Werderichand Michael Manderino (2014). *Exploring Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing (pp. 316-330).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/multimedia-memoir-leveraging-multimodality-facilitate/78604

Multichannel Modality in Displaying Information
Elisa Benettiand Gianluca Mazzini (2014). *Digital Arts and Entertainment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 485-504).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/multichannel-modality-in-displaying-information/115030

Media and the Moving Image: Creating Screen Media Literacy
Paul Chilsen (2014). *Digital Arts and Entertainment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1419-1431).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/media-and-the-moving-image/115082

Empathic Brands: Proposing a Model for Its Measure and Evaluation
Alexandre Duarteand Mafalda Sotto Mayor Gregório (2022). *Navigating Digital Communication and Challenges for Organizations (pp. 168-185).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/empathic-brands/301388