Boston College

SC572: Sociology of Science Studies

(Subtitle: Actor-Network Theory: An Introduction and Some Applications)

Spring Semester 2010

Dr. Brian J. Gareau

LOCATION: McGuinn 415
Thursday 4:30-6:50

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Actor-network theory (ANT) is becoming quite influential in many areas, from sociology to techno-science studies, to feminist studies, to economics, to geography and environmental sociology. As one BC sociology doctoral student told me, “I noticed it popping up in unexpected places during the ASA’s last summer (a session on culture and agency), … [another] grad. student in sociology was inundated with it at workshops with the SSRC, and Anne Fausto-Sterling opened our [Sociology] departmental seminar with a quote from [Bruno Latour’s] *Reassembling the Social.* I think it’s going to be increasingly difficult to avoid bumping into the perspective and, more specifically, Latour’s works, no matter what sort of sociological specialty one works in. In fact, I sort of stumbled upon ANT a few years back while trying to figure out what “social constructionism” is and means and I’m glad I did, as a few of ANT’s concepts and its broader approach have really influenced how I think about my research.”

I have had similar experiences with ANT “popping up” in and around my work in environmental sociology, political economy, and critical sociology. So, here we have a brief introduction into the world of ANT. Readings from Weeks 1-4 follow the trajectory of some of ANT founder Bruno Latour’s foundational works. Weeks 5-9 involve debates in and around ANT as applied to environmental problems from within ANT, and from “ANTish” critical environmental sociology/ geography. Weeks 10-11 visit Latour’s *Reassembling the Social.* While *Reassembling the Social* claims to be an introduction to the world of ANT, my initial perusings of this text lead me to believe that some background will help the reader understand this overview of ANT’s ontology and application from a critical perspective.

Readings: Readings are available on the Library Course Reserves (under “SC572). One reading, “War of the Worlds,” is available on Blackboard Vista, and all books are on reserve at the O’Neill Library. The two books, *Reassembling the Social,* and *We Have Never Been Modern* will have to be bought. They will be available at the BC bookstore, or you may purchase on-line.
Grade: Graduate students: Your grade will be based on 1) your level of participation, and 2) your opening comments, which will be given at least once. Undergraduate students: You will be required to 1) write a 1 to 2-page reflection on the readings each week, and 2) provide a short final paper reflecting on the experiences of this course.

Auditors: Must be graduate students and are asked to read the readings for the weeks in which they choose to participate as much as possible.

*** December Break: Recommended reading: Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Kuhn 1996).

Undergraduate Reflection Guidelines:
1. In the first paragraph, provide the general thread of argument, ideas, concepts, and/or themes that run through the readings for the week.
2. In the body of the paper, discuss in detail some of the key concepts and arguments. Discuss the readings in an integrative way; put the current readings in conversation with previous readings. Dig deep into the readings; do not provide a superficial summary. Rather, engage with the reading by giving a critical review of what you choose to focus on.
3. Then, give your view on some of these concepts. Which concepts, arguments make sense to you? Which do not? Use readings from previous weeks to support your claims.
4. This assignment will take some time to master, but it is a valuable skill, so work hard at it.
5. Readings should be studied before the class for which they are assigned. These assignments also count for your attendance, and you may not turn them in late or in absentia from the class.

Reading List:

1. Week 1 (January 21): Introductions
   a. Read: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

Further reading that might be useful as an introduction: (Dolwick 2009)

Opening comments: ________________________________

3. Week 3 (February 4) *** No Class ***
   a. Instead: Please Attend the Sociology Distinguished Visiting Scholar Series Lecture by David Harvey in Higgins Room 300.
      i. *** Undergrads: Weekly write-up based on the talk, please. ***

4. Week 4. (February 11): We Have Never Been Modern (Latour 1993)
   a. Read: Entire book

Opening comments: ________________________________
5. Week 5 (February 18): Callon’s “Some Elements” (Callon 1986), Latour’s “Where are the Missing Masses?” (Latour 1992), and selection from Pandora’s Hope (soils chapter) (Latour 1999)
   a. From Pandora’s Hope, read: Chapters 1 and 2

Opening comments: ________________________________________

   a. War of the Worlds piece is available on BBVista. If you are auditing, email me and I will send it to you.

Opening comments: ________________________________________

7. Week 7 (March 4, Spring Break) No Class

   a. Read: Chapters 1, 5, and Conclusion

Opening comments: ________________________________________

9. Week 9 (March 18): Critical Sociology/Geography and ANT
   (Fine 2005; Castree 2002; Gareau 2005; Rudy and Gareau 2005)

*** I am chairing a session at the ESS this day- Who can lead the discussion???

Reading in chronological order is best.

Opening comments: ________________________________________

10. Week 10 (March 25): ANT and the Environment
    (Perkins 2007; Holifield 2009; Harrison 2007; Bakker 2009)
    Chronological reading probably best.

Opening comments: ________________________________________

11. Week 11 (April 1, Holy Thursday, No Class):

12. Week 12 (April 8) Climate Change, Technocracy, and Scientific Uncertainty
    (DuPuis and Gareau 2008; Shackley and Wynne 1996; Lahsen 2005)
    Reading in chronological order might be best.

Opening comments: ________________________________________

13. Week 13 (April 15) *** I am presenting at the AAG- No Class ***
14. Week 14 (April 22): Class Climate, Boundary organizations, and Surveillance
(Agrawala, Broad, and Guston 2001; Miller 2001; Gad and Lauritsen 2009)

[Recommended (for understanding Foucauldian notions of surveillance, governmentality):
Selection from A History of Sexuality (Foucault 1990) available from Course Reserves]

Opening comments: ________________________________


Opening comments: ________________________________


Opening comments: ________________________________

17. May 7-10 Study Days, No classes
18. May 11-18 Term Examinations

Readings to be used:


