



John Law, Sociologist

“The world is interdisciplinary, and it demands an interdisciplinary approach.”

About

John Law is currently a Professor of Sociology at the Open University in the U.K. and director of the Centre for Research and Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) at the University of Manchester. One of his most influential works is on Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed with Science, Technology, and Society (STS) scholars Michel Callon and Bruno Latour.

Since 1973 to date, he has published papers, chapters and translations of 170+ documents, some as the main author, and others as a co-author. He has also authored 4 books, and edited 12 selected books, with other academics such as Michel Callon, and John Urry (both also sociologists).

Law has been active in many different areas such as 1) method, non-coherence and performativity, 2) people, technologies and animals, 3) biosecurity, agriculture and disaster, and 4) alternative knowledge space.

Important Publications

- Shaping technology/building society: Studies in sociotechnical change (1994)
- Notes on the theory of the actor-network: ordering, strategy, and heterogeneity (1992)
- After method: Mess in social science research (2004)
- Mapping the dynamics of science and technology (1986)
- Technology and heterogeneous engineering: the case of Portuguese expansion (1987)

Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, Heterogeneity

Actor Network Theory treats social relations, such as power and organizations, as network effects. The primary principle of the theory is the idea of a mixed network. The members of the network do a lot of “work” so that they work together, instead of creating their own separate networks.

In his 1992 paper titled “Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, Heterogeneity”, Law describes what he means by a heterogeneous network and provides examples to examine and explain further.

Related Authors and Thinkers

Law calls himself an interdisciplinary thinker. He has worked with anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, engineers, medical practitioners, geographers, and animal scientists in his career as part Sociologist, part STS.

Susan Leigh Star, a sociologist and also one of the major figures for our class, authored one of the chapters of the book Law edited, ‘A Sociology of Monsters’. In this book, Susan discusses the heterogeneity and emerging need of standardization of socio-technical networks.

‘A Sociology of Monsters’ also has chapters from Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, co-inventors of the ANT. Law published scores of papers with the three authors above, exploring ANT, societies, sciences, and the evolution of socio-technical networks.