**Great SCOT! It’s All Turned to Node(l) Soup.**

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The readings this week encompass a wide range of perspectives which all relate to the relationship between the individual and the material world they inhabit. The perspectives offered in these papers are varied including Actor Network Theory (ANT), Science and Technology Studies (STS), and finally what could be termed the study of ‘thing’.

Within this response paper I would like to engage with the perspectives offered by two specific articles, namely, ‘Thinking Through Material Culture: Chapter 4’ (Knappet 2005) and ‘Things Are Us! A Commentary on Human/Things Relations under the Banner of a ‘Social’ Archaeology’ (Webmoor & Witmore 2008).

Knappet (2005) introduces us to the complexities of trying to define human verses non-human interactions through using ANT. Within this chapter he seeks to quantify a hybrid form of topology which is situated between “the regular, and the random, between structure and flow.” (Knappet 2005:68) To achieve this aim the author takes the reader through a verity of different examples of networks taken from both society and nature. Broadly, these can been seen to fit into three overarching categories, namely, organismal (which is not actually a word), neural, and socio-technical networks. One of the preoccupations of this paper is how to account for “the semiotics of materiality” (Knappet 2005:76), and rightly so for how are we to define human non-human interactions without including such issues as; indication, designation, likeness, [analogy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analogy), [metaphor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor), [symbolism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol), signification, and communication. Knappet (2005:76) states that within ANT the role of semiotics is poorly theorized as an accretion of associations that build-up between objects, and thereby forming some sort of low-level and self-organizing network. It is at this point that the key problem with ANT becomes clear, if we cannot adequately define and integrate semiotics with the ANT system then all we are left with is, basically, a topological abstraction of cultural meanings, whereby we have to admit that the network we have created is always not going to equal the sum of the social totality of past cultures.

Topology is of great importance within Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. It can be defined as containing the parameters for the relationships between the polygons, polylines, and points within the spatial environment. These spatial environments are often outputted as cartographic maps, and it is here that I see a similarity between cartography and ANT. Since the publication of Woods seminal work ‘The Power of Maps’ in 1992 a growing critique has formed, which suggests that (very basically) cartographic maps represent a point of view abstraction whereby too much authority and privilege has been granted to one specific way of viewing the world, which also denies human agency, what Olsson memorably called the ‘abysmal perspective’ (2007). I believe that a similar critique can be leveled at ANT . It is one (incomplete) way of abstracting reality to gain a partial view of the relationship between human and non-human actors. The exact configuration of the network in terms of its relationship to the regular and the random, or between structure and flow is somewhat immaterial. It is still a form of heuristic abstraction, although it is true that how you define your network would have significant effects on the resulting view.

It is therefore interesting that a cartographic illustration also finds itself at the heart of Webmoor and Witmore’s (2008) article in which they suggest that the ‘social’ has become too reified and out dated as a concept within archaeology. The result of this situation is that humans have been invested with too much agency, based on a dialectic which has come to mean, not discourse (debate), but rather a splitting of analytical units into dichotomies relationships. This has led to an oversimplification of the relationship between human and non-human actors which presupposes that the former is ontologically distinct *a priori.* Therefore, what the authors wish to do in this article is create a ‘distributed agency’ (Webmoor & Witmore 2008:62) whereby the aforementioned map (as a non-human) would be able to ‘persuade’ and ‘enable’ a course of action. This article raises a number of very interesting and important points in relation to the prevailing ideology of the ‘social’, however, I find there suggestion that they do not want to spin the revolving door of archaeological theory just as disingenuous as their somewhat faint praise of Hodder and Meskell’s body of work. It seems to me that what the authors are proposing is ANT, without actually having to say that it is ANT. If we do accept that their approach is substantially the same then we run into the same critique as I offered for Knappet (2005). However, this said I largely agree with the suggestion of distributed agency and I believe that a definition of the innumerable links it shares with both human and (other) non-human actors can give valuable insights into the social totality. My main point would be that this is no less of a heuristic abstraction than the ‘social’, although I do believe it that could have more potential. Also I would like to ask how the tents of ANT could be applied to an object biography, and more broadly how could ANT be applied to the concept of ‘change through time’?

In conclusion, although I do believe that distributive agency and ANT do have much to contribute within the study of archaeology I would suggest that they are both still only models of a past society that are largely inaccessible to us, both in terms of the evidence (data) we have, and the ability for us to understand or apply modern post-enlighten intellectual models to pre-enlightenment societies.

**FYI: LSJ**

[**διαλεκτ-ικός**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=dialekt-iko%2Fs&la=greek) , [ή](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%2F&la=greek&prior=dialekt-iko/s), [όν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=o%2Fn&la=greek&prior=h/),

**A.** *conversational,* “[χορός](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=xoro%2Fs&la=greek&prior=o/n" \t "morph)” *Demetr.Eloc.167*.

**2.** [δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=xoro/s). [ὄργανα](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=o%29%2Frgana&la=greek&prior=d) organs *of articulate speech,* opp. [φωνητικά](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=fwnhtika%2F&la=greek&prior=o%29/rgana), *Gal.16.204*.

**II.** *skilled in dialectic,* “[ὁ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=o%28&la=greek&prior=fwnhtika/) [ἐρωτᾶν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29rwta%3Dn&la=greek&prior=o%28) [καὶ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kai%5C&la=greek&prior=e%29rwta=n) [ἀποκρίνεσθαι](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=a%29pokri%2Fnesqai&la=greek&prior=kai%5C) [ἐπιστάμενος](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29pista%2Fmenos&la=greek&prior=a%29pokri/nesqai)” [**Pl.Cra.390c**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,005:390c&lang=original); “[ἦ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%29%3D&la=greek&prior=e%29pista/menos) [καὶ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kai%5C&la=greek&prior=h%29=) [δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=kai%5C). [καλεῖς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kalei%3Ds&la=greek&prior=d) [τὸν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=to%5Cn&la=greek&prior=kalei=s) [λόγον](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=lo%2Fgon&la=greek&prior=to%5Cn) [ἑκάστου](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%28ka%2Fstou&la=greek&prior=lo/gon) [λαμβάνοντα](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=lamba%2Fnonta&la=greek&prior=e%28ka/stou) [τῆς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=th%3Ds&la=greek&prior=lamba/nonta) [οὐσίας](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ou%29si%2Fas&la=greek&prior=th=s);” [**Id.R.534b**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,030:534b&lang=original); *dialectical,* [**Arist. Metaph.995b23**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,025:995b:23&lang=original); “[δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=ou%29si/as). [συλλογισμός](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=sullogismo%2Fs&la=greek&prior=d)” *Id.Top.100a22*; [πρὸς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=pro%5Cs&la=greek&prior=sullogismo/s) [τοὺς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tou%5Cs&la=greek&prior=pro%5Cs) [δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=tou%5Cs)., title of work by *Metrodorus*, [**D.L.10.24**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0004,001:10:24&lang=original), cf. *Phld.Rh.1.279* *S.*, al.

**III.** [ἡ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%28&la=greek&prior=d) [διαλεκτική](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=dialektikh%2F&la=greek&prior=h%28) (sc. [τέχνη](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=te%2Fxnh&la=greek&prior=dialektikh/)) *dialectic, discussion by question and answer,* invented by Zeno of Elea, *Arist.Fr.65*; *philosophical method,* “[ὥσπερ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=w%28%2Fsper&la=greek&prior=te/xnh" \t "morph) [θριγκὸς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=qrigko%5Cs&la=greek&prior=w%28/sper) [τοῖς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=toi%3Ds&la=greek&prior=qrigko%5Cs) [μαθήμασιν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=maqh%2Fmasin&la=greek&prior=toi=s) [ἡ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%28&la=greek&prior=maqh/masin) [δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=h%28). [ἐπάνω](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29pa%2Fnw&la=greek&prior=d) [κεῖται](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kei%3Dtai&la=greek&prior=e%29pa/nw)” [**Pl.R.534e**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,030:534e&lang=original): “[τὸ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=to%5C&la=greek&prior=kei=tai" \t "morph) -[κόν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ko%2Fn&la=greek&prior=to%5C" \t "morph)” [**Id.Sph. 253e**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,007:253e&lang=original); [περὶ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=peri%5C&la=greek&prior=ko/n) -[κῆς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kh%3Ds&la=greek&prior=peri%5C" \t "morph), title of work by Cleanthes, [**D.L.7.174**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0004,001:7:174&lang=original).

**2.** *the logic of probabilities,* “[ἡ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%28&la=greek&prior=kh=s) [δ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=d&la=greek&prior=h%28). [πειραστικὴ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=peirastikh%5C&la=greek&prior=d) [περὶ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=peri%5C&la=greek&prior=peirastikh%5C) [ὧν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=w%28%3Dn&la=greek&prior=peri%5C) [ἡ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%28&la=greek&prior=w%28=n) [φιλοσοφία](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=filosofi%2Fa&la=greek&prior=h%28) [γνωριστική](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=gnwristikh%2F&la=greek&prior=filosofi/a)” [**Arist.Metaph.1004b25**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,025:1004b:25&lang=original), cf. [**Rh.1354a1**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,038:1354a:1&lang=original).

**IV.** Adv. “-[κῶς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kw%3Ds&la=greek&prior=gnwristikh/" \t "morph)” *dialectically,* [**Pl.Phlb.17a**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,010:17a&lang=original), etc.; *for the sake of argument,* opp. [κατ᾽](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kat%27&la=greek&prior=kw=s) [ἀλήθειαν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=a%29lh%2Fqeian&la=greek&prior=kat%27), *Arist. Top.105b31*, cf. *de An.403a2*; *by argument on general principles,* opp. scientifically, *Phld.Rh.2.134* *S., Mus.p.89* K.: Comp. “-[ώτερον](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=w%2Fteron&la=greek&prior=a%29lh/qeian" \t "morph)” [**Pl.Men. 75d**](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0059,024:75d&lang=original); *more logically,* *Dam.Pr.97*.