

## **That was Then, This is Now -- Paper Abstracts**

### **Latour Revisited: Computers as Inscription Devices in the Digital Laborator**

**Nathan Ensmenger**  
**Indiana University**  
[nensmeng@indiana.edu](mailto:nensmeng@indiana.edu)

In his landmark study of "laboratory life" at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, the anthropologist Bruno Latour revolutionized the field of science studies by asking some basic questions about the material culture of contemporary scientific practice. If the primary work of most scientists was, as Latour suggested, the "coding, marking, altering, correcting, reading, and writing" of paper documents, then it is essential that scholars pay careful attention to the techniques and technologies (or "inscription devices," as Latour calls them) that they use to transform the complexities of the natural world into representations amenable to literary manipulation. The tools we use to think with affect the character of our thoughts, Latour argued, and instruments and information technologies are epistemologically significant.

In a recent essay in the journal *Technology & Culture*, I used an imaginary (re)visit by Latour to the present-day Salk Institute to explore the profound and pervasive influence of computer, computer-based instruments, and computational techniques on the theory and practice of modern biology. If to write a thing down is to transform it, as Latour famously suggested, then surely it means something to make the same object digital? In the T&C article I only hinted at the potential value of reinterpreting Latour through the lens of the recent developments in computing and information technology. In this paper, I develop these line of thought to include not only the computer as instrument and production technology, but also digital "documents" (including databases and code) as elements in the modern scientific "cycle of credit."

### **LinkedIn's Weak Ties**

**Ilana Gershon**  
**Indiana University**  
[igershon@indiana.edu](mailto:igershon@indiana.edu)

In 1973, when Granovetter first wrote about weak ties, letters and telephone calls were the channels for experimenting with social networks, not Facebook or LinkedIn. Granovetter wanted to provide a sociological framework for transformations across scale – he wanted to link individual micro-interactions with larger structural patterns. To do so, he studied job seekers. He interviewed 100 people about how they received information about jobs, tracking which media used and how this correlated with the strength of the social ties the job seekers were mobilizing to get information about possible jobs. In this paper, I discuss how the various media now available have transformed the process both of finding out about jobs and presenting oneself to others as a jobseeker. That is, the media used have transformed how information in a labor market circulates and how people represent themselves as being able to circulate. I explore what

these changes in micro-interactions reveals about the contemporary neoliberal labor markets. I address how the concept of weak ties not only has its roots in an earlier form of capitalism and older media, but has recursively shaped how people understand and navigate job markets in contemporary networks.

## **Tracing the Shadow of the Sandman in Today's Posthuman Imaginary**

**Mark Deuze**

**University of Amsterdam**

[mdeuze@uva.nl](mailto:mdeuze@uva.nl)

In this contribution we will revisit the classic work “The Sandman” (1816) by E.T.A. Hoffman – serving as the inspiration for operas and ballets, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, and for the computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey” – and ask how Hoffmann would look at the emerging field of man-machine hybridization – considering literature on biomedicine, sex and love between humans and robots, technogenesis, technobiophilia, mediatization, and posthumanism. This experiment will enable us to historicize current concerns, allow us to look beyond media when studying media, and open up new ways of producing what Bruno Latour advocates as ‘nonmodern’ theory and research when studying the relationship between people and (their) media.

## **Sports as Culture: Carey Revisited**

**Gordon Carlson**

**Fort Hayes State University**

[gscarlson@fhsu.edu](mailto:gscarlson@fhsu.edu)

James Carey introduced an important distinction between the primary views of communication in the United States with his seminal text “A Cultural Approach to Communication” (1989). Carey argues that Americans predominantly look at communication through the lens of transportation but goes on to make a case for a ritual view of communication. Prior to the World Wide Web his first and classic example was the place newspapers had in American life. This paper will ask what James Carey would think of the changes professional sports have experienced in the last 20 years. This paper argues that prior to the 1980s professional sports had a foothold in society primarily as a cultural phenomenon (ritual in Carey’s context). Expansion in several sports during the 1980s and early 1990s aided by an explosion in cable television and a concerted effort by several sport leagues, professional sports rapidly shifted into a traditional “big business” phase modeling other successful industries (transmission in Carey’s context). However, in the 1990s they began, perhaps without even realizing it, to transition away from simply a business within society and instead to societal institutions marrying their cultural and

financial significance to a degree most industries have never experienced. This new status is a social construct related to the Carey's ritual view. This paper argues this occurred because of the rapid increase in speed and richness of information about professional sports brought about by ubiquitous web access. Free fantasy leagues, message boards and blogs supplanting talk radio, and the commercialization of stats and data all combine to create a convergence of media and society that has in return affected professional sports themselves. Taken to the extreme it is possible to draw a line from this phenomenon to socially significant events such as the Erin Andrews tape (an issue of privacy intrusion), Brett Favre sexting (an issue of interpersonal boundary change), and the increasingly common viewer-constructed commercials or programming (an issue of fan labor and social fandom). This paper argues various disruptive new media allow the traditional divide between sport and fan to be breached with impacts on both parties, most notably the return of professional sports to a ritual in communication contexts.

## References

Carey, James W. (1989). A Cultural Approach to Communication. In \*Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society\*. New York: Routledge.

Granovetter, Mark S. (1973) The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6): 1360-1380.

Hoffman, E. T. A. (1816). The Sandman. New York: Dodo Press.

Latour, Bruno and Steve Woolgar. (1986) Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts. Princeton: Princeton University Press.