Stefano Mazzilli-Daechsel

Latour's troublemakers: a contribution to an object-oriented criminology

Latours Unruhestifter: Ein Beitrag zu einer objektorientierten Kriminologie

Object-oriented ontology reframes reality as the interplay of "objects", with no precedence given to the difference between humans and nonhumans. In this article, I treat the work of Bruno Latour as an exemplary expression of this emergent perspective in contemporary continental thought. I argue that Latour's philosophy is especially interesting for criminology because it theorizes recalcitrance and resistance as ontological features of all beings. After developing this thesis, I discuss its general implications for criminological theory, and its specific ramifications for zemiology, i.e. the study of harm.

Keywords: object-oriented ontology, Latour, resistance, harm, zemiology

Objektorientierte Ontologie reformuliert Realität als Zusammenspiel von Objekten, wobei weder Menschen noch nicht-menschlichen Entitäten Vorrang eingeräumt wird. Im folgenden Beitrag beziehe ich mich auf Bruno Latours Werk als beispielhaftem Ausdruck dieser aufkommenden Perspektive in gegenwärtigen kontinentaleuropäischen Diskursen. Dabei zeige ich auf, dass Latours Philosophie vor allem deshalb für die Kriminologie von Interesse ist, weil sie Widerspenstigkeiten und Widerstand theoretisch als ontologische Eigenschaften aller Entitäten begreift. Nach einer Ausführung dieser Argumentation werde ich auf grundlegende Implikationen für eine kriminologische Theoriebildung sowie die spezifischen Verzweigungen für eine ‚Zemiology' (Wissenschaft der Schadensorientierung) eingehen.

Schlüsselwörter: Objektorientierte Ontologie, Latour, Widerstand, Schadensorientierung, Zemiologie

Introduction

Object-oriented ontology (OOO) argues that "the world consists exclusively of objects and treats humans as objects like any other, rather than privileged subjects" (Behar 2016: 1). Although Latour never endorsed this label, I agree with Graham Harman (2009: 151) when he characterizes Latour as "a pioneer of object-oriented philosophy." Echoing the calls for an object-oriented sociology (Pieredis/Woodman 2012), object-oriented geography (Shaw/Meehan 2013), and object-oriented feminism (Behar 2016), I will explore the idea of an object-oriented criminology with Latour as my tentative guide. In fact, I argue that Latour's ontology is especially well suited for criminology because his basic units of reality are fundamentally "troublemakers" (Latour 2004:

81). With Latour, recalcitrance – understood as the stubborn resistance to control – is promoted to the status of an ontological principle.

What does an ontology of recalcitrant objects mean for criminological theory? Section 1 outlines OOO in general terms before delving into Latour's particular ontological framework. From this vantage point, reality becomes a patchwork of alliances between human and nonhuman objects that retain their individuality even as they appear to be subsumed in a greater whole. Latour argues that it is this resistance to full incorporation that defines objects, even as they act in concert. In Section 2, I consider how Latour's ontology might contribute to zemiology, i.e. the study of harm. I argue that his perspective is especially important for the analysis of harms against humans that are isolated from essential alliances with nonhumans, as is the case with malnutrition, and the harms against nonhumans that are increasingly garnering attention from green criminologists.

Objects, Difference, and Resistance

OOO follows a long and fascinating genealogy of pluralist philosophy. Rather than the more familiar question "why is there something instead of nothing?", the pluralist asks "why are there many things instead of one thing?". Holists in the opposing camp argue that the diversity of existence given to us by phenomenological experience is an illusion caused by the limitations of human understanding, and existence is actually unified into a grand totality. Pluralists, meanwhile, maintain that "[t]hings can be related to each other in multiple ways but there is no higher single relation which encompasses them all or which could contain them all" (Lazzarato 2010: 25). The universe is a swarm of differences, and "humans are beings *among* the swarm of differences and hold no special or privileged place with respect to these differences" (Bryant 2011: 267, emphasis in original). So as to stress this last point, OOO uses "object" as a generic term for any individual entity that makes a difference. Therefore, the use of the term "object" is polemical (Miller 2013), aiming to promote that which has hitherto been subordinated in the binary opposition of (human) subject and (nonhuman) object.

The moon, coffee beans, human bodies, pianos, and political parties – to name but a few – are all objects according to this philosophical position. Even seemingly immaterial entities such as ideas and languages are objects. These objects, however, are not "objectifying" in the quotidian sense of the term, each having its singular capacities to act on the world. Nor are they "objective" in the sense of impartial. Quite to the contrary, objects are inherently political beings, in part because objects are always composite. From protons to prisons, all objects emerge from the connections between other objects that are already several themselves. Objects are compositions of compositions, and they are constantly entering into new compositions. Consequently, what many social scientists call structures, OOO transforms into ob-

jects as well. This is what is meant by a flat ontology: a single level of beings that differ in their spatio-temporal dimensions and their connective capacities, but not in their ontological status.

For a given criminological issue, it is generally assumed that "there should exist *two levels* of analysis: the micro level that focuses on individuals; the macro level that focuses on the aggregates" (Latour et. al. 2012: 590, emphasis in original). Stated plainly, structuralists argue that aggregates determine the actions of individuals, while their opponents maintain that individuals – by which they usually mean human beings – are ultimately free to choose how they act, even if their choices are made in conditions not of their making. Against the structuralists, OOO rejects the idea that aggregates – or structures – determine individuals. Against their opponents, however, OOO repudiates any anthropocentric understanding of action because humans are always acting in collaboration with nonhumans.

To understand why OOO opposes structural determinism, a rather simple illustration might be helpful. Consider a book. It is composed of an external shell, a number of paper leaves that are bound at a hinge, a combination of words and illustrations, ink, and symbolic characters. For an object-oriented ontologist, a single leaf is as much an object as the book itself, or the letter "z" found on page six. Does the book determine or master its constituent objects? I am inclined to say "yes, the book imposes order on these objects." And I would be right – to an extent. The book emerges as the object that gathers a horde of objects to act together in some way, to bond them to each other over time. This bond, however, is seldom unbreakable. Pages can be ripped or burnt, ink can fade or mix with moisture. No matter how forcefully it enforces order on its constituents, the book is vulnerable to a number of potential mutinies from its constituents, for the latter have capacities to connect that exceed the configuration enacted by the former. Thus, an object is never *greater than* the sum of its constituents, but merely a *different* element that emerges with new connective capacities, including the (fallible) capacity to maintain the connections between its constituent objects.

For Latour, there is another interconnected reason to reject determinism or mastery of any sort. A steadfast pluralist, he agrees that "[t]o exist is to differ" (Tarde 2012: 40) in the dual sense of being different and making differences. But Latour adds an element to this equation that echoes thinkers like Nietzsche and Spinoza, namely, that every object strives to persevere in its existence. This drive for durability is "a sort of vital minimum" (Latour 2004: 61) that explains two general tendencies: the tendency for objects to build alliances, and the tendency for objects to resist. The first tendency speaks to the weakness of an object in isolation. An object "can gain strength only by associating with others" (Latour 1988: 160). The second tendency, however, discloses the lack of harmony and congruity in a world stripped of unity. Objects resist to exist, but they also resist because they exist, and both types of resistance further obstruct determinism and mastery.

Indeed, there are two types of resistance that must be distinguished here. On the one hand, objects resist annihilation, although some more than others. A mouse running away from a cat resists with greater determination than a house of cards against a gentle breeze, but even the flimsiest of objects resist. It always takes another object to annihilate the first by overcoming the latter's existential resistance. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as suicide. On the other hand, objects resist each other because they are different. This second type of resistance is especially abstract. Fortunately, Latour offers us a neat formulation to help us work through his reasoning called the principle of irreducibility.

"Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else" (Latour 1988: 158). To call this statement the principle of irreducibility is clearly problematic, but it is fitting nevertheless. The principle affirms first and foremost that every object is a unique individual, different to all others. No object is *automatically* reducible to any other because that would make them one and the same. Thus, an object is defined by an essential irreducibility. Be that as it may, an object's irreducibility is always given by other objects, those that brought it into existence and those that continue to compose it. An object is never "by itself," just as nothing is created *ex nihilo.* Everything is composed.

If, however, nothing is "by itself," then the principle of irreducibility actually states that objects can be reduced, the same way that they are made irreducible by others. In this context, "reduction" has several meanings. Having successfully caught its prey, the cat physically reduces the mouse to its constituent objects. But reductions are not necessarily so dramatic or violent. Reduction occurs every time an object forms an alliance with another. No matter how intimate their alliance, there is always an irreconcilable difference between objects that prevents them from fully revealing their reality to one another. This irreconcilable difference is the second type of resistance that prevents determinism and mastery by placing a limit on connection. All alliances are negotiations – or "translations" (Latour 1986) – achieved by the partial overcoming of this second type of resistance. Hence, "the best that can be done between actants is to translate the one into the other" (Latour 1988: 168), with the assurance that the translation is always different to the original.

Having transformed the universe into a swarm of resistant differences, it might seem miraculous that anything happens at all. Why should objects go through the effort of translating others in spite of their resistance? And why are new objects always being added to the throng? Once again, the answer lies with the claim that objects strive to persevere in their existence. In so doing, they must lean on each other to become more durable, knowing full well that "[n]one of the actants mobilized to secure an alliance stops acting on its own behalf" (Latour 1988: 197). Alliances take work, but no object is so self-sufficient that it can be spared the effort to compose with others, just as no object is so resistant that it cannot be reduced in part by another. There is

no metaphysical entity, no divine being, that is so omnipotent that it need not connect with another object. Instead, "all objects are engaged in the work of both resisting [...] and making available what is resistant" (Miller 2013: 49) with the hope that this work will uncover allies.

Unfortunately, there is no way for an object to know beforehand whether the translated other will make it more or less durable. An object is always hiding something and must therefore be treated with suspicion. In the words of the object-oriented ontologist Timothy Morton (2016: 65), "all objects are deviant." If this claim appears to validate the paranoid desire for ever greater control, it also precludes the notion of total control. A control apparatus, for all its austere appearances, is an assailable alliance of deviant objects. Drug tests fail, security cameras malfunction, files are misplaced, and police officers look the other way. Criminologists know all too well that the objects that are meant to make others more predictable are often the most unpredictable. By extension, even the most disciplined control apparatus cannot be assured of the total compliance of the objects it is meant to keep in line – these too remain recalcitrant as long as they endure.

How, then, does this strange ontology change the study of crime and crime control? To begin with, it proliferates the number of relevant actors to include all the nonhuman objects that make human life durable. Of course, there is nothing inherently original about this expansive gesture. You would be hard pressed to find a criminologist who wouldn't concede that nonhuman objects have a role to play in the drama of crime and crime control. The difference here is that I can no longer treat a nonhuman object as a faithful representative of a human subject, or a group of subjects. The intentionality that motivated an object's creation is secondary to "the difference[s] it creates in resisting [and translating] others" (Latour 1988: 159). Every object betrays its creators. In this respect, the social construction of technology (SCOT) approach is limited because it reduces human-made artifacts to a site of conflict between competing human interests (Pinch/Bijker 1984), without properly accounting for the resistance of the nonhuman objects involved in the production process – manufacturing tools and materials – not to mention the resistance of the finished artifact itself. It is not that human interests do not matter, but that they must contend with a multitude of nonhumans that resist and endure.

Instead of asking what something *means* for humans, Latour wants us to ask what it *does* to the objects it encounters, regardless of whether they are human or not. He writes that "there is no other way to define an [object] but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other [objects] are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the focus of attention" (Latour 1999a: 122). As criminologists, the characters we tend to follow are hybrids of human and nonhuman objects acting in concert to perpetrate or prevent a crime. However, the actions that concern us, I believe, are not just those that revolve around crime as legally

defined by a political authority, but also the harmful acts that evade the criminal label, including those caused by crime control itself. In the following section, I will discuss how Latour's ontology of recalcitrant objects affects zemiology, i.e. the study of harm.

Harmful Translations

For many critical criminologists, the notion of harm acts as the remedy for criminology's dependence on legal definitions of crime (cf. Hillyard et al. 2004). They reason that harm is a more general category than crime and that, all too often, mechanisms of crime control bring about harmful consequences themselves. The concept of harm also sheds light on the selective nature of criminalization by drawing our attention to all of the detrimental activity that is not controlled by criminal law. Many of these harms are the byproducts of complex interactions, making it virtually impossible to identify an individual offender with criminal intent. Thus substituting harm for crime as the primary object of criminological inquiry exposes the political nature of criminalization as well as a government's tolerance for other non-criminal harms.

There is, however, a problem of definition. What is harm? Strangely, this question has garnered little theoretical attention, as if harm were a self-evident phenomenon which, like pornography, can be recognized when you see it. In *Beyond Criminology: Taking Harm Seriously*, Hillyard et al. (2004) do not actually define harm in their introduction, opting instead for a typology of harms (physical, financial/economic, emotional and psychological). This lack of conceptual rigour undermines a harms-based approach to criminology, or what is also called zemiology. Although Latour never theorizes the topic explicitly, it is both possible and desirable to extrapolate a definition of harm from his ontological framework that can overcome zemiology's current conceptual murkiness.

Latour's objects are defined by a drive for durability. Given that an object can only be made durable through associations with others, and that it has no way of knowing beforehand whether it is translating a friend or a foe, it is bound to encounter objects that decrease its durability. When this happens, the object is harmed. But how exactly is an object's durability decreased? Much like our ill-fated mouse, an object might encounter another that irreparably destroys the relations between its constituent objects. The cat eradicates the rodent's existential resistance, reducing it to the caloric energy contained in parts of its body. In different circumstances, an object discovers that one of its constituents has unilaterally pulled out of their longstanding alliance: the diabetic's pancreas ceases to release insulin, or your car battery dies. Both cases require new allies to restore the affected object's capacities and remind us of our dependence on other objects for our durability. Regardless, an object loses durability when its abilities to maintain or forge alliances are compromised.

Harm, therefore, reveals a new *ethical* dimension to Latour's ontology. This ethical dimension is not a moral spectrum between "good and evil", but a spectrum of power. For every alliance or translation made, there is an ethical implication for the objects concerned because their respective durabilities have either been augmented or diminished. Any translation is a difference made, but not all differences agree with one another. Many of these disagreeable translations are already listed in most penal codes as crimes: assault, murder, rape, and damage to property, to name but a few. Others, however, are tolerated or ignored. Among these neglected harms, there is an overrepresentation of what I call harms of isolation.

Whereas violence acts on existing alliances, isolation acts on alliances that do not exist yet. This second harmful strategy exploits the basic insight that an object "left to its own devices [...] can achieve nothing" (Tarde 2012: 34). Objects are always made durable in collaborations. When an object is "deprived of ties that render existence possible" (Latour 1999b: 29), it struggles to retain the ones it already has, and will be vulnerable to mutinies and external threats. The most horrific example of this kind of harm is the hunger and malnutrition suffered by some eight-hundred million human beings (FAO 2015). Seeing as no legal claim can be made to food that is not already one's property, the harm inflicted on a tenth of the global population evades the label of crime.

Other harms evade criminalization because the objects concerned do not speak as we humans do. Because every object has connective capacities that operate on an ethical dimension, all objects are susceptible to harm or be harmed by another, human and nonhuman alike. The difference is that nonhumans have ways of expressing their grievances that are not easily grasped by humans and their legal institutions. If there is a recurring theme in Latour's vast *oeuvre*, it is his commitment to expanding the ethical and political spheres to include the objects, human and nonhuman, that have hitherto been denied a seat at the table. Science, broadly speaking, becomes the multitude of ways by which silent objects are made to speak, or deaf objects are made to hear. Green criminologists (cf. Halsey/White 1998; Brisman/South 2014) striving to expand the discipline's auditory range to detect the appeals of nonhuman victims would benefit from a closer engagement with Latour's non-anthropocentric philosophy and other OOOs.

I do not mean to suggest that hunger or environmental harms ought to be criminalized or governed through a punitive lens. Rather, I am arguing that Latour and OOO offer a theoretical compass to navigate these controversies and others where objects are either harmed by isolation, or their suffering goes undetected, if it isn't discounted outright.[1] Once the "multitudinous en-

1 Beyond the example of malnutrition, and the various instances of environmental harm – air pollution, deforestation, species extinction, etc. – I could also add the many controversies related to intellectual property rights, not only in the clear case of prohibitively expensive life-saving pharmaceuticals, but also those concerning the restrictions placed on the dissemination of technological innovations and academic knowledge.

tities that give rise to action" (Latour 1999b: 24) become ethico-political actors, every controversy forces us to answer the question: "[h]ow many humans and nonhumans are to be taken into account?" (Latour 1999a: 297). For zemiology, the task at hand is to conceptualize harm in such a way that more human and nonhuman allies and victims are heard. Ultimately, such matters of definition are secondary to the political mobilization of concepts such as harm and crime beyond academic circles, in search of solutions that invariably require considerable support from nonhuman objects themselves.

Conclusion

There are two ways criminologists can misconstrue the relationship between human and nonhuman objects, especially those said to be designed by human hands: technological determinism and social reductionism. According to the latter, artifacts are to be treated "as an expression of social relations [between humans]," while the former sees technology "as a kind of explanatory *deus ex machina*" (Law 1991: 8, emphasis in original). With OOO and Latour, neither of these approaches are tenable. Human and nonhuman objects are all too resistant to forfeit their differences so readily, no matter how powerful the other may be. Instead of trying to pick sides, an object-oriented criminology would start from the recognition that alliances are what make humans and nonhumans durable. It is only with the greatest of hubris that man (*sic*), this relative newcomer to the universe of objects, thought himself the measure of all things.

Undoubtedly, the de-centring of the human subject started well before OOO or Latour. In fact, much of what is most interesting about Latour can be found in the works of Deleuze, Guattari, Tarde, William James, and Foucault. Part of the work to be done is to retrace this genealogy of pluralist thought both in criminological theory and beyond. Still, to his credit, Latour manages to elevate criminology to "first philosophy" by developing an ontology of troublemakers with no absolute being to make them conform. There is and always will be more deviance than control. Unfortunately, this lack of higher unity is a double-edged sword. It is only by forging durable alliances with those afflicted by harm that theory translates into practice.

References

Behar, Katherine (2016): Object-Oriented Feminism, Minneapolis.

Brisman, Avi/South, Nigel (2014): Green Cultural Criminology. Constructions of Environmental Harm, Consumerism, and Resistance to Ecocide, Oxford.

Brown, Sheila (2006): The Criminology of Hybrids. Rethinking Crime and Law in Technosocial Networks, in: Theoretical Criminology 10 (2): 223-244.

Bryant, Levi (2011): The Ontic Principle. Outline of an Object-oriented Ontology, in: Bryant, Levi/Srnicek, Nick/Harman, Graham (eds): The Speculative Turn. Continental Materialism and Realism, Melbourne, 261-278.

Deleuze, Gilles/Guattari, Félix (1983): Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Minneapolis.
FAO (2015): The State of Food Insecurity in the World. <http://www.fao.org/3/a4ef2d16-70a7-460a-a9ac-2a65a533269a/i4646e.pdf> [05.03.2017].
Halsey, Mark/White, Rob (1998): Crime, Ecophilosophy and Environmental Harm, in: Theoretical Criminology 2 (3), 345-371.
Harman, Graham (2009): Prince of Networks. Bruno Latour and Metaphysics, Melbourne.
Harman, Graham (2014): Bruno Latour. Reassembling the Political, London.
Hillyard, Paddy/Pantazis, Christina/Tombs, Steve/Gordon, Dave (2004): Beyond Criminology. Taking Harm Seriously, London.
Latour, Bruno (1986): The Powers of Association, in: Law, John (ed): Power, Action and Belief, London, 264-280.
Latour, Bruno (1988): The Pasteurization of France, Cambridge.
Latour, Bruno (1999a): Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies, Cambridge.
Latour Bruno (1999b): Factures/Fractures. From the Concept of Network to the Concept of Attachment, in: RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics 36, 20-31.
Latour, Bruno (2004): Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy, Cambridge.
Latour, Bruno (2010): An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto," in: New Literary History 41 (3), 471-490.
Latour, Bruno (2011): Il n'y a pas de monde commun. Il faut le composer, in: Multitudes 45, 38-41.
Latour, Bruno/Jensen, Pablo/Venturini, Tommaso/Grauwin Sébastian/Boullier, Dominique (2012): 'The Wholeis always smaller than its Parts' – a Digital Test of Gabriel Tardes' Monads, in: The British Journal of Sociology 63 (4), 590-615.
Law, John (1991): Introduction. Monsters, Machines and Sociotechnical Relations, in: Law, John (ed): A Sociology of Monsters. Essays on Power, Technology and Domination, London, 1-25.
Lazzarato, Maurizio (2010): Multiplicity, Totality and Politics, in: Parrhesia 9, 23-30.
Miller, Adam (2013): Speculative Grace. Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology, New York.
Morton, Timothy (2016): All Objects are Deviant. Feminism and Ecological Intimacy, in: Behar, Katherine (ed): Object-Oriented Feminism, Minneapolis, 65-82.
Pierides, Dean/Woodman, Dan (2012): Object-oriented Sociology and Organizing in the face of Emergency: Bruno Latour, Graham Harman and the Material Turn, in: The British Journal of Sociology 63 (4), 662-679.
Pinch, Trevor/Bijker, Wiebe (1984): The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other, in: Social Studies of Science 14 (3), 399-441.
Shaw, Ian/Meehan, Katharine (2013): Force-full: Power, Politics and Object-oriented Philosophy, in: Area 45 (2), 216-222.
Spinoza, Benedict (1996): Ethics, London.
Tarde, Gabriel (2012): Monadology and Sociology, Melbourne.

Stefano Mazzilli-Daechsel, Vitkovics Mihaly Ut 9, II/12, Budapest 1052,
sdm31@kent.ac.uk