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The Knife, the Starfish and the Sandcastle: an inquiry into the ontology of governance by infrastructure

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, a new movement has developed in philosophy under the banner of New Materialism, best known through the work of Manuel DeLanda and Karen Barad. In this talk, I would like to compare assemblage theory (DeLanda), agential realism (Barad) and waves and forms (my own work in STS), and discuss the potential contribution of each framework to questions of governance by infrastructures. To integrate this theoretical reflection concretely into the workshop theme, I will examine examples of infrastructures that guide digital data flows, considering the perspectives offered by each approach. I will also draw on a paradigmatic example for each framework: a knife (assemblage theory), a starfish (agential realism), and a sandcastle (waves and forms).

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