

Concerning the Apparition of a Mobile Phone in a 17th Century Painting and Its Issuefication

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Abstract

Through focusing on a specific case study of a viewer going to a museum and seeing for a short moment a mobile phone in a 17th century painting, this article aims to address the concerns of some modern thinkers who are extremely worried about the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their substitution of more traditional domestic artefacts. In response to the need to address the causes and consequence of this latent technophobia in critical theory, thinkers like Bruno Latour are looking for theoretical allies to build up a more accurate "Thing Theory." This article argues that Latourian approaches, by offering sociologists and philosophers an enriched conceptual toolbox, open up more space in theory for non-human entities and recognise their affordance in the composition of what is usually called society.

Keywords: Thing Theory – quasi objects – material culture – Bruno Latour – object-centred theory – participatory objects – politics of artefacts – second empiricism



A close up of Pieter de Hooch's painting "Man Handing a Letter to a Woman in the Entrance Hall of a House" (1670).

Introduction

About a year ago, while I was listening to one of my favourite French radio broadcast before dashing off to teach my Tuesday morning seminars, I heard a very curious story.¹ The broadcaster told that during a recent visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, while looking at one of the painting of Pieter de Hooch, a painter of the Dutch Golden Age, he saw next to a young *bourgeoise* sitting on a chair a man holding a mobile phone!

¹ The broadcast, called "La vie numérique," was presented by Xavier de La Porte on France Culture for the first time on May 16th 2017. Here is the link to that specific radio programme: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-vie-numerique/pourquoi-cet-homme-tient-un-telephone-dans-sa-main>

Of course, after a close inspection of the plate next to the painting, he quickly realised that what he took for a mobile phone was *actually* a letter that the young man was reading or about to give to the lady. But my curiosity was even more piqued when the presenter recognised that his first impression was one of terror, asking himself if he was alienated to the point of seeing phones, computers and screens everywhere – even on a canvas painted more than three hundred and fifty years ago. Especially as he later realised that the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, was victim to the same optical illusion.¹ It got even more interesting when the broadcaster highlighted that this optical illusion was not entirely his fault since, as far as he could recall, he had seen many paintings from the 17th, 18th and even 19th centuries representing figures reading a letter with a similar posture. Consequently, his hypothesis – his “aesthetic revelation,” as he calls it – was that in those paintings, the persons who are reading letters do not have the same postures as those reading books. The broadcaster went on saying that this is mainly due to a certain immediacy, urgency of the short format of the letter, which demands a certain dramatization that says something about this gesture of reading a letter that resembles our relation to the phone nowadays. He concluded his deductive analysis by highlighting that the recurrence of this pattern – of a character reading or handing a letter to someone else – through the history of European painting could be explained by the importance of letters in the process of alphabetisation and gaining knowledge, a situation comparable to the daily situation that most of people live with their (smart-) phone.

The argument was clear and convincing, and this anecdote would pass unnoticed, if it did not contain so many elements that demanded to be explored more explicitly; if this optical illusion of seeing a *mobile phone* instead of a *letter* was not in a nutshell, in the eyes of many intellectuals, another glaring example of the domestication of individual and collective consciousnesses by an “information society” (Webster, 2006: 9). Like the presenter, I believe that this sort of illusion is not as horrific as it looks. If one moves from the traditional binary paradigm, which divides everything in absolute material entities and ideals, towards a perspective that gives more credit to the context and relations, this sort of scenario would not appear so terrifying.

The broadcaster was right when he asserted that if the viewer, instead of focusing on a specific object (the letter/the phone), would pay more attention to the body posture of the *messenger*, the situation would be quickly dedramatised. She or he would realise that it is not the letter/phone *per se* that is misleading, but its position in the hand, and by extension of the whole body. A young man standing in a living room, reading or looking at a message, before handing it to a lady sitting on a chair. How many times has one seen this sort of scenery, not only in painting, but in one’s everyday life? Even the tension in the gaze, the angle of the elbow, the inflexion of the head, and the relaxed position of the legs match what one can see every day at home, at a bus stop or in a pub. It can be seen as a daily scene that has survived through the centuries. However, is this aesthetic explanation sufficient to soothe the worries and concerns of all the modern viewers who might experience a similar illusion? Allow me to doubt it, because the *letter* and the *mobile phone* are “participatory objects” that in particular situations might perform or be invested with a moral or political agency (Marres, Lezaun, 2011).

Therefore, I would like to offer in this article some arguments to highlight the potential of these particular objects to invoke concerns, by considering them as “quasi-objects,” to use Bruno Latour and Michel Serres’s terminology (1995). In a first instance, I will explain why the proliferation and replacement of some traditional artefacts by modern technological devices is so problematic for thinkers of the humanist tradition. In the second section, following the example Latour and Serres, I will argue that the classic instrumentalist assumptions that some modern philosophers have about objects are too limited and consequently need to be upgraded with new conceptual tools to provide a more convincing thing theory. Finally, I will propose briefly two theoretical paths to explore the de Hooch case in order to understand how objects, such as the mobile phone, can be invested with moral and political issues, and think them beyond the limited Heideggerian philosophy of technology and things in terms of “scripted object,” “augmented objects” or “issued objects”(Marres, 2014).

Matters of Concern

Peter Sloterdijk, in his essay *Règles pour le parc humain* (Regeln für den Menschenpark),² argues that “the era of national and bourgeois humanism has come to an end because the art of writing letters, which inspires the love towards a nation of

¹ As a point of interest, it is said that shortly after his visit at the Rijksmuseum, during a chat at the Start-up Fest event in Amsterdam, on 24 May 2016, Cook said that “[he] always thought [he] knew when the iPhone was invented, but now [he is] not so sure anymore” (in Kharpal, 2016).

² As far as I know, there is not any English version of this essay; therefore all the translations in the text are mine.

friends (...), is not enough anymore to establish the tele-communicative relationship between the members of a modern mass society" (2000: 13). In other words, the progressive emergence and proliferation of mass media have relegated the literary and epistolary forms to a category of "*sui generis* subculture" (ibid). Therefore, this replacement of the letter by information and communication technology (ICT) has caused inevitably a crisis of the Enlightenment project, which has been irremediably put in doubt in the dark years just after the WWII.

According to Sloterdijk, classic humanism since Plato is essentially based on finding ways of getting mankind out of the state of nature through the mediation of literary canons that would help to "domesticate" (*apprivoiser*) and eventually drag mankind out of barbarism that comes, since the Roman Empire until today, in "the form of an immediate imperial and war brutality or in that of a daily bestialisation through the inhibiting mass media" (2000: 16). This gets to the heart of the worries illustrated by the de Hooch case. It is the same terror that the broadcaster first experienced when he saw a phone on the painting. His first reaction as an intellectual was that of suddenly worry of being someone who has been "infected by the bestialisation" of mass culture, to use Sloterdijk's terminology, to the point of being unable to recognise, when he sees it, what is supposed to be the basis of his *humanitas*, of his humanistic education thought during all those years at the *école républicaine*: the letter. Eventually the terror would pass when he realised it was an illusion, but the question of the media remains: whether the new technology, the phone, can be trusted as a valid variant of the domestication work done by books and letters until now?

Of course, one can adopt an empiricist attitude and see this worry as going over the top. One can even show a mocking rictus at what looks more like the philosophising hysteria typical of some ivory tower thinker who is afraid whenever she or he gets out of books and experiences what is really going on in the *real* world. For the empiricists, it is about *facts*; and here the fact is that if you look a second time closely to the painting, you can see that it is actually a letter and not a mobile phone. As already mentioned, the visual illusion is clearly due to a repetition of a scene seen so many times in your daily life that your brain makes a direct correlation between the scenery, the body posture and the mobile phone. However, this is not enough.

As Bruno Latour states, many critical theorists, after a too quick reading of Baudrillard or Heidegger, have become suspicious of everything, to the point of sharing some similarities with conspirationists, "in the structure of the explanation, in the first movement of disbelief and, then, in the wheeling of causal explanation coming out of the deep dark below" (2004: 229). It is difficult to deny that notions like "alienation," "reification" or "commodity fetishes" are having difficulty explaining the new forces and modes of interactions that the proliferation of ICTs have imposed in how we define the *social* nowadays.¹ But the classic empirical explanation does not work with them, and comparing them to conspirationists – or worse those believers that those same Enlightened thinkers have criticised for so long for worshiping idols and gods – who are naive victims of their own imagination would be humiliating and counterproductive (Latour, 2002b: 27; 2004: 239). What Latour says about critical theorists and humanist philosophers is quite simple: despite their loftiness, they are not different from most people, they are realists and even sometimes positivists for the all the objects they cherish, but act as merciless "antifetishist[s] for everything [they] don't believe in" (2004: 241). Under these circumstances, a letter becomes a trustworthy object – of devotion sometimes, but a mobile phone, even more in the form of an apparition in an old painting, is seen as a threatening omen.

Therefore, the aim here is not to blame modern thinkers and their concerns, quite the contrary. As Isabelle Stengers argues, it is important to take their worries seriously, because rethinking about objects inevitably implies to redefine what has been for such a long time considered by them as the organising centre of everything: the human subject (2010: 4). The aim here is to not criticise them too harshly because they might even become "allies" to think with, if they are ready to stop jabbering about the dangers of technologies for education, arts and philosophy and listen to what Stengers, after Whitehead, calls "Oliver Cromwell's cry which echoes down the ages: 'My brethren, by the bowels of Christ I beseech you, bethink you that you may be mistaken.' (...) [C]reating the space in which the voice of those who are silent becomes present" 2011: 368).

¹ It is important to notice that for Bruno Latour the words "society" and "social" can be attributed to any type of collectives and not only human ones. In the debate between Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim, he stands for the former, by saying that conceiving society as an already existing notion or cause, instead of a consequence to come has been very harmful for critical theory and social sciences in general (see Latour, 2002a: 120; Latour, 2004: 230).

Latour echoes this idea by suggesting the critically minded to consider updating his or her “critical arsenal” in order to “retest the linkages between the new threats he or she has to face and the equipment and training he or she should have in order to meet them—and, if necessary, to revise from scratch the whole paraphernalia. (...) [T]here is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one” (2004: 231). These are very harsh words. I would not go as far as to demand a full inventory of the conceptual toolbox of (post-) modern theory, but I am not going to argue with Latour’s diagnosis. He is right in denouncing the responsibility of some modernist critical theorists in the latent technophobia that exists among intellectuals. What kinds of theory would always favour, among all the critical tools available in its conceptual toolbox, “a hammer ready to expose, to denounce, to debunk, to show up, to disappoint, to disenchant, to dispel one’s illusions, to let the air out?” (Latour, 2002b: 20). When surrounded by so many artefacts and technological devices, the modern thinkers have tried to get away from them when they should have got closer to them.¹ Nonetheless, in spite of his sometime mocking tone, Latour decides to dedicate most his work to address what he calls their *matters of concern* and demands an even more radical criticism than the mere explanation given by traditional empiricism, because the *matter of facts* “are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called states of affairs” (Latour, 2004: 232).

Thinking about/with things

It is well known to philosophers that this concern about *matter* goes back to Plato. However, in modern times, it is certainly Heidegger who was so concerned by technologies to the point of dedicating a large part of his writing to them. His method is to go back to the epistemological source of the word “thing” in order to highlight its political potential: “the Old German words *thing* and *dinc* become the names for an affair or matter of pertinence. They denote anything that in any way bears upon men, concerns them, and that accordingly is a matter for discourse. The Romans called a matter for discourse *res*. The Greek *eiro* (*rhetos*, *rhetra*, *rhema*) means to speak about something, to deliberate on it. *Res publica* means, not the state, but that which, known to everyone, concerns everybody and is therefore deliberated in public” (2001: 172, emphasis in the original). But his investigation is imbedded in his philosophy of the Being; and eventually it gives him ground for making an unquestionable distinction between essential entities for human existence called *things*, “ready-to-hand” (*zuhanden*) for any purpose, and the industrially made *objects*, which are the fruits of techno-science that causes him so much concern. He states that: “[e]verywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm it or deny it. But we are delivered obey it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology” (1977: 4). Accordingly, from a Heideggerian perspective, a *letter* would be a thing – at the service of poets or philosophers – and the *mobile phone* would be an evil techno-scientific device that hides some obscure purpose. This perspective, one has to admit, does not give any ontological dignity to any of these artefacts – certainly not for the second at least.

Now, the reader is entitled to protest at this stage and say “so far so good, you made a good critique of Heidegger, it is a trend these days...but what is the mobile phone if not an object or a thing then...especially if it is not even real, but just a virtual presence, a visual illusion that appeared to the presentator during his visit to the Rijksmuseum?” To this question, I would reply that this is exactly the issue with critical theory today: its lack of imagination when it comes to think about something else than humans and human societies. As Latour says, talking about himself and his colleagues when they try to think about technology, “[they] always appear to *weaken* them, not *strengthen* their claim to reality” (2004: 237, emphasis in the original). Therefore, it might be better to stop thinking about them, about their essence, their “thingness” as Heidegger would say, and rather *think with* them or rather about *the relation we have with them, and vice versa*. In this new conception of things, artefacts and ICTs are not divided anymore between the Heideggerian categories of objects and things, but are gathered and relocated as hybrid, uncertain and changing “quasi-objects” (Latour, 1993: 55; 1997: 100; 2004: 236). This

¹ In various occasions, Latour acknowledges his admiration for Whitehead’s intellectual audacity: “[o]f all the modern philosophers who tried to overcome matters of fact, Whitehead is the only one who, instead of taking the path of critique and directing his attention away from facts to what makes them possible as Kant did; or adding something to their bare bones as Husserl did; or avoiding the fate of their domination, their *Gestell*, as much as possible as Heidegger did; tried to get closer to them or, more exactly, to see through them the reality that requested a new respectful realist attitude” (Latour, 2004: 244, emphasis in original).

term, borrowed from Michel Serres,¹ is a good start to moving away from any binary paradigm or ontological distinction and start thinking about a “thing theory” (Brown 2001).

I consider Serres’ conceptual contribution as giving continuity to the Deleuzian proposition that “[p]hilosophy in itself is always as matter of inventing concepts” (1995: 136). The creation of new concepts, such as “quasi objects,” challenges the anthropocentric statement “man is the measure of all things.” It displaces the tradition definition of what it means to be human towards a conception that “designates the human as a passion, as capable of becoming ‘affected by all things’ in a mode that is not that of contingent interaction, but of the creation of meaning” (Stengers, 2000: 166). In creating and using new concepts such as “quasi object,” thinkers like Serres and Latour do not want to suppress the traditional concepts of object and subject: there is no doubt that a rock and a human are different entities. They rather seek to demonstrate how limited and ossified the traditional concepts are when they are applied the complexity of contemporary state of affairs. Consequently, this need of new concepts makes the creation of concepts a vital activity for a philosophy that “in itself calls for a future form, it calls forth a new earth and a people that do not yet exist” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1994: 108). They produce and put at practice a very rich conceptual toolbox that does not try to give a definition of things and beings, as modern philosophers like Heidegger strived to do, because this would fix them in a definitive state of affairs. What Latour means by a renewal of the “critical arsenal” is aiming rather at a Deleuzian intellectual adventure that attempts to “share what the concept ‘does,’ as something that exists, to those who create it. It is a proposition that says that the concept makes the philosopher while the philosopher creates concepts, ceaselessly rearranging and changing them” (Stengers, 2006: 156).² This means that they have to put the concept at risk, apply it, which implies that their approach cannot be compared to the philosophical tradition based on immutable transcendent idealist categories, neither can it be assimilated to the primary empiricism of the positivists. It is not a “return,” but a call for a “second empiricism [that] doesn’t look at all like the first: its science, its politics, its esthetics, its morality are all different from the past. It is still real and objective, but it is livelier, more talkative, active, pluralistic, and more mediated than the other” (Latour, 2005b: 115).

This second empiricism – full of useful and pragmatic concepts – should be seen as a relief to the terrified minds of some philosophers and critics when they are confronted to strange experiences such as the de Hooch case. Mainly because this second empiricism is not obsessed about their mind – and its possible alienation by some strange fetishes or techno-scientific objects – but rather moves the tension from entities to relations: “[i]t is not the question ‘Does the intelligible come from the sensible?’ but quite different question, *Relations are external to their terms.* (...) This exteriority of relations is not a principle, it is a vital protest against principles” (Deleuze, Parnet 2007: 55, emphasis in original). Among those principles that are put in doubt, one can certainly find the reductionism that limits objects to their utilitarian design and the technophobia that see them always as a threat. In other words, part of the problem for most traditional philosophies of technologies and objects, is that *they think about them from above or from below*, limiting or exaggerating their agency, when actually they should in most – if not all – occasions *think with them* and give voice to those non-human masses, as they so often do for the human masses: “[o]ne of the tasks of sociology is to do for the masses of nonhumans that make up our modern societies what it did so well for the masses of ordinary and despised humans that make up our society (1988: 310).

Beyond the category of domestic tool

In the previous section, I have tried to explain why the apparition of a mobile phone in a 17th century painting in the Rijksmuseum is so worrying for humanist philosophers. I have highlighted that this unexpected presence is a matter of concern because it challenges “an instrumentalist explanation of the role of things in politics, which would straightforwardly define domestic technologies as neutral tools for problem solving” (Marres, 2010: 179). It is disruptive of the traditional (Heideggerian) binary system that conceives a hammer is a good thing, because its purpose is clear: it holds and serves perfectly in the mastering hand of its owner to hammer nails in different surfaces. From the same perspective, a mobile phone is not good domestic tool: it is an obscure object which purposes are not clear; it listens, it speaks and it memorises.

¹ In a conversation with Bruno Latour, Michel Serres defines his concept as follows: “a quasi object, which traces or makes visible the relations that constitute the group through which it passes, like the token in a children’s game. A quasi object that nonetheless remains a useful technical object, even a high-tech one, directed toward the physical world. It often happens that the most sophisticated tools play their main role socially but without losing their objective purpose” (Serres, Latour, 161). See also Serres, 1982: 55.

² There is not an English version of this essay yet; therefore all the translations in the text are mine.

Worst of all, it is not restricted anymore to the safe private space of the home, but moves around everywhere and can even appear in very old paintings in public museums!

Contra this dualistic perspective, there have been in recent decades, an emergence of several post-instrumentalist currents in theory that have done an important effort to draw attention to the affordance of objects to not only mediate but also interact and change, for good or ill, the political relations that constitute what is usually called the social or society. Thanks to the emergences of these new things theories, Latour can finally say contra Heidegger's instrumental reductionism: "things have become Things again" (2004: 236).

The reintegration of material things both in the discussions about a reconsideration of the classic political concepts and practices is what is usually termed as the "return to the empirical" or the "material turn" for academic sociology (Adkins, Lury 2009; Marres, Lezaun 2011). Bruno Latour in his early collaboration with other thinkers of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) opened up an important step towards a constructivist re-conception of the relation between humans and non-humans through what they call "material semiotics" (Law, 2009: 142). The works of Madeleine Akrich offer a set of very useful concepts to understand and explain the articulation of human and non-human "agents" entangled with of networks and assemblages that constitute societies.

Applied to the de Hooch's painting case, the mobile phone could be seen as a "scripted object" (Akrich 1992), which would inscribe a series of actions upon the person that interacts with it – in this case, the viewer. In this "scenario," the human subject and the objects – the letter and the mobile phone – are at a *symmetrical level of action*, where one acts upon the other and make it/him/her do something, consequently creation a moral or political situation. This theory has the advantage of getting away from classic Kantian and Heideggerian dualisms that restrict any political intention to human subjects, and establishes between the different actants of a particular situation an "ontological symmetry" (Latour 1993). Although very convincing, I argue that this approach is too limited to explain the de Hooch case. This does not mean that it is invalid, but I claim that an inscription theory is a too simplistic approach for a wider exploration of the political and moral agency of more complex technological devices. As Noortje Marres argues, in an inscription approach, the "inscribed object" is latently political because at both ends of the process, there are human agents that program the object (the designer) and examine its effect (the sociologist) (Marres 2014: 263).

Drawing on the works of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and on latter works of Latour,¹ Marres tries to find an alternative to think non-human entities beyond their inscription into the everyday. She argues that a Deweyian approach helps to explore the potential of more complex and broader "heterogeneous assemblages" to compose what social theorists call society or the *public* that goes beyond causal forces.² Applied to the de Hooch case, this statement displaces the matter of (political) concern from the human subjects (the painter/the viewer) as an organizing centre towards a more constitutive situation "in which things that are designed to function as means of human action produce unanticipated effects" (Marres, 2010: 194). I would say that Dewey's concepts enrich the toolbox used by later Latourian sociologists, like Noortje Marres, who envision technologies more as heterogeneous networks or assemblage. Consequently, "matters of public concern in Latour's account are no pure entities that would fit one rather than another concept of the common good, but rather present messy bundles of things and questions" (Marres, 2010: 189).

Indeed, in this situation, the agency of the (virtual) mobile phone is not limited to the pre-inscription of a designer, but acts as an "augmented object" that is "called 'political' insofar as it comes to resonate with issues" (Marres, 2014: 263). Here the object is explicitly political because it comes equipped with a series of equipments – screen, keyboard, microphone, camera... – that explicitly interact with the environment, which means that their political potential "does not seem to derive exclusively, or even principally, from their ability to act on subjects. Their normativity is more open-ended than that: it hinges

¹ Those are generally his post 2000 works where Latour started a closer collaboration with philosophers like Isabelle Stengers. He does a sort of parallel between the need of realism the European thinkers need when they talk and writes about politics that they should learn from some of their American colleagues: "[t]hose American philosophers call their tradition pragmatism, meaning by this word not the cheap realism often associated with being "pragmatic" by the costly realism requested by making politics torn toward pragmata – the Greek name for Things. Now that's realism!" (2005a: 28).

² In his seminal work *The Public and its Problem*, Dewey writes: "[t]here is no mystery about the fact of association, of an interconnected action which affects the activity of singular elements. There is no sense in asking how individuals come to be associated. They exist and operate in association. If there is any mystery about matter, it is the mystery that the universe is the king of universe it is. Such a mystery could not be explained without going outside the universe" (23).

on the capacity of the object, not to project a definite role onto human actors, but to become 'charged' with issues" (ibid: 264). This approach goes even further than an inscription theory in its critique of the determinism of an instrumentalist conception of objects, and the question becomes what the artefact *is capable of*, which brings us back to Latour and Deleuze call for a second empiricism. Accordingly, the apparition of a mobile phone in an old painting is a matter of concern because of the specific potential of the object that appears. If it was an apple or a jug replacing the letter, the worries of the viewer would have been of a different nature, and he would have been certainly more amused than terrified. Nevertheless, it is a mobile phone: an object that contains lines of forces can be described as what Deleuze defines sometimes as *dispositif* others as *assemblage* (Deleuze, 2007: 339; Deleuze, Parnet, 2007: 69-70).

These two approaches do not give direct answers to the concerns of the viewer who sees a mobile phone in 17th century painting. They do not say "yes, you should be terrified" or "don't worry, it is just an illusion," but rather offer the advantage of resisting those preconceived certitudes of what Serres calls "the detective logic of judgmental philosophies" (Serres, Latour, 1995: 133). Those approaches allow thinkers to say "I don't know. You should be concerned but certainly not terrified." They offer nonetheless the possibility of getting closer to the objects without feeling the need to say any certitude about their essence or nature, and initiate the passage from *terror* to *concern* and sometimes *care* about "for the nonhuman masses that beg us for understanding" (Latour, 2008: 153).

Conclusion

More can be said, but I need to keep this paper short. I just wanted here to indicate a direction, or at least join my voice to what Stengers and Latour named a call for a more empirical attitude in critical theory towards things. Whether modern thinkers are right to be concerned about the proliferation and (omni-) presence of ICTs in domestic and public spaces must remain an open question here. To leave this question open means that there are endless ways to address it depending on the special affordance of each actant – human or non-human – in constituting that situation. To leave this matter open to concerns means also to get closer to the objects, giving them voice rather than taking the path of the traditional instrumentalism of "modern humanists [that] are reductionist because they seek to attribute action to a small number of powers, leaving the rest of the world with nothing but simple mute forces" (Latour, 1993: 138). To leave this question open demands a redefinition of the classic concept of *politics* because "[it] is no longer limited to humans and incorporates the many issues to which they are attached" (Latour, 2005a: 31), and because as Stengers reminds us with a beautiful Leibnizian maxim: "Not everything is political, but politics is everywhere" (2011: 359). Even in the brief apparition of a mobile phone in a 17th century painting.

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