

National Research University
Higher School of Economics

As a manuscript

Evgeniy Popov

**Systematization of the Flat Ontology Concepts in Sociological Theory: a
Critical Analysis**

Thesis Summary for the purpose of obtaining academic degree PhD in
Sociology

Academic Supervisor:

PhD

Svetlana Bankovskaya

Moscow, 2024

The relevance of the research topic

The need for the theoretical and methodological research presented in this dissertation is due, first of all, to the lack of a systematic view of how ideas develop within the sociological and socio-philosophical traditions of what is commonly referred to as the turn to the material. In the history of the development of sociological knowledge we can find a large number of turns that originated outside the discipline but through intellectual transfer found themselves within its boundaries – discursive, narrative, visual. All these turns have been conceptualized and inscribed into sociological knowledge. Now similar operations are required in the context of the material turn. There is a lack of a systematically created vocabulary to adequately discuss the inclusion of the material in the focus of sociological theory. Often the absence of such a discourse leads to contradictory interpretations of approaches within the framework of the material turn and the absence of an adequate operational scheme for conducting applied research. This is particularly striking in the context of the lacuna of flat ontology formulated in this dissertation, which manifests itself in the substitution of notions – the object is taken not as itself but as a set of practices for its realization.

In this regard the main subjects of the dissertation research – its practical and theoretical relevance – are centered around the following areas:

1. The formulation of the lacuna of applied research within the material turn;
2. Filling the formulated lacuna based on the intellectual resources of the flat ontology
3. Linking the initial assumptions of flat ontology with the sociological tradition.

But first things first. First of all, it is necessary to conceptualize the role of the thesis research in the context of the general theoretical sociological background.

After the emergence of grand theories such as those by T. Parsons and N. Luhmann, sociological theory continued to develop in a postmodernist vein, which

is described by J.F. Lyotard as the "end of metanarratives"¹. This led to an interdisciplinary approach, conceptual uncertainty, openness of conceptual boundaries and paradoxes in sociological theory. The anarchic view of the functioning of science, as described by P. Feyerabend, also influences contemporary sociological theory². For instance, the term "discourse" in sociology is subject to multiple interpretations by different authors. Openness of conceptual boundaries is manifested in the use of mixed empirical methods of data collection, while conceptual paradoxes can be found in object-oriented research, where material objects are attributed agency.

The scope of the dissertation does not include evaluating the influence of postmodernist tendencies on sociology as a whole. However, one of these tendencies has a noticeable impact on the traditions of social research: modern social science, including sociology, does not have its own method. There is no tool that could help researchers learn about the processes occurring in the unified world and filter out false hypotheses. In his book, J. Law notes that creating such a method is the main task of modern researchers³. The creation of such a method, called the conceptual-methodological approach in the dissertation, is the central theme of the work. However, attempts to create a grand theory in the postmodern era are doomed to fail because it is extremely difficult to take into account the discoveries of all social sciences in one approach. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to create a medium-level method that would help conduct research within a specific problematic. In this dissertation, the focus is on object-oriented sociological research, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. The main aspect of such research is the use of a flat ontology, a term coined by M. DeLanda. Flat ontology implies the equality of

¹ Lyotard, J.F. *Sostoyanie postmoderna* [La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir]. Trans. From the French by N. A. Shmatko, "Institut eksperimental'noy sotsiologii". Moskva [Moscow]: Izdatel'stvo "ALETEYa", 1979. 160 s. (In Russian).

² Feyerabend, P. *Protiv metoda. Ocherk anarhistskoy teorii poznaniya* [Against Method. Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge]. Trans. From the English by A. L. Nikiforova. Moskva [Moscow]: AST. Khranitel', 2007. 413 s. (In Russian).

³ Law, J. *Posle metoda: besporyadok i sotsial'naya nauka* [After method: mess and social sciences]. Ed. by S. Gavrilenko. Trans. From the English by S. Gavrilenko, A. Pisareva, P. KHanovoy. Moskva [Moscow]: Izd-vo Instituta Gaydara, 2015. 352 s. (In Russian).

all objects in the context of their performative power to create associations, collectives, assemblages, communities, etc. The use of flat ontology resources already has a stable tradition in urban studies⁴, game studies⁵, medicine studies⁶, and STS⁷.

In sociology and social philosophy, flat ontology has received numerous interpretations, but no common understanding of its concepts and resources has been formed. Often in the literature, concepts such as assemblage and network are mixed⁸, which leads to confusion and distortion of research results. The essence of the problem lies in the unclear relationship between different theoretical approaches to flat ontology, for example, between transcendental realism and neutral realism. The solution to this problem lies in the systematization of concepts, which will clarify what intellectual resources are introduced into sociological theory through the use of flat ontology.

Statement of research problem

The problem of the theoretical research presented in the dissertation lies in the fact that the approaches of "new realism," "first philosophical perspective," and "new materialism" still lack a "hard core" in the scientific discourse, as well as their connection with the existing classical trend of sociological thought has not been defined. The absence of a "hard core" suggests that these trends in scientific literature are represented as separate texts of authors that are not integrated into any of the existing perspectives of philosophical and sociological ontologies.

Aims and objectives

⁴ Farias, I. (2011). The politics of urban assemblages. *City*, 15

⁵ Sergeeva, O. V. *Sotsiologiya nauki i tekhnologii* [Sociology of science and technologies]. *Sotsiologiya* [Sociology]. 2021. №12. S. 171-184. (In Russian).

⁶ Law, J. *Posle metoda: besporyadok i sotsial'naya nauka* [After method: mess and social sciences]. Ed. by S. Gavrilenko. Trans. From the English by S. Gavrilenko, A. Pisareva, P. Khanovoy. Moskva [Moscow]: Izd-vo Instituta Gaydara, 2015. 352 s. (In Russian).

⁷ Latour, B. (1999). For David Bloor and Beyond. *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 30(1), 113–129

⁸ Erofeeva, M. *Aktorno-setevaya teoriya i problema sotsial'nogo deystviya* [Actor-network theory and the problem of social action. *Sociology of Power*]. *Sotsiologiya vlasti* [Sociology of power]. 2015. № 27(1). S. 15-40. (In Russian).

The aim of the dissertation is to create a solid core of flat-ontological approaches in social philosophy and sociology. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to systematize existing developments in this area and include them in the sociological canon, based on the works of E. Durkheim. Such an approach will provide a theoretical and methodological foundation for conducting both theoretical and empirical sociological research. This will help address a key challenge in the field of object-oriented research, which is the constant rebuilding of ontology and the absence of conceptual a priori for synthesizing study results. In addition, in some studies, concepts are replaced, and the ontology of objects is replaced by human perception. To achieve this goal several tasks need to be solved:

1. Developing a criterion for systematizing the perspectives of a flat ontology⁹;
2. Systematization and the creation of a "hard core" of key ideas that are part of the philosophical perspectives of flat ontology;
3. Systematization and creation of a "hard core" of key ideas within the sociological perspective of flat ontology.
4. Incorporation of the ideas from all perspectives of flat ontology (philosophical and sociological) into the canon of sociology established by E. Durkheim.
5. Identification of a gap within modern object-oriented research.
6. Synthesis of the key principles of flat ontology that are necessary to fill the identified gap and proposing a theoretical and methodological approach for conducting object-oriented sociological research.

Object of dissertation research

⁹ The criterion was created after the fact (after processing the existing relevant scientific literature). According to the results of the analysis of the texts, the links of citations were revealed, which allow us to speak about the closeness of some of the perspectives indicated in the text of the dissertation (philosophical and sociological). In this regard, the systematization was carried out on the basis of mutual citation – for example, in the context of the systematization of philosophical perspectives, or on the clarification of already existing attempts at systematization based on the codification of common features of approaches – as was done, in particular, during the systematization of the sociological perspective. In the process of ordering the sociological perspective, there is an emphasis on the existing attempt to systematize Fox and Alldred, but a body of additional authors is added to it, whose ideas are also developed within the framework of a flat ontology (again, the method of identifying mutual citations is used).

The object of the dissertation research is a set of theoretical approaches to the conceptualization of object-oriented ontology. The sub object of the research, on the other hand, is the systematization of the theoretical connotations of ideas that form the flat ontology basis in social philosophy and sociological theory.

Literature review

The previously described problem is developed in various approaches to conceptualizing ontology in social philosophy and sociological theory, including "new realism," "American flat ontology," "new materialism," and Émile Durkheim's classical social realism:

1. Contextual realism by J. Benoist, which develops concepts of context and adequacy. Context helps to understand how usage formulates concepts, while adequacy is a criterion of correspondence that creates a pattern of usage situations¹⁰.

2. Transcendental realism by M. Ferraris, which asserts the dependence of epistemology on ontology and the role of the documentation process in their relationship. Epistemology helps to understand ontology, and constructivism can be useful rather than contradictory¹¹.

3. Neutral realism by M. Gabriel, which is based on facticity and ontological pluralism. Neutral realism is a methodological setting that does not introduce new categorical apparatus or formulate new positions¹².

4. Practical realism by L. Baker, which includes concepts of primary kinds, constitutions, and artifacts. Primary kinds are natural objects or artifacts constitutions are conditions that influence the development of primary kinds¹³.

5. Thing-power materialism by Bennett emphasizes the importance of matter in its hylomorphic understanding and rejects the constructivist approach in social

¹⁰ Benoist, J. (2012). Making ontology sensitive. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 45(3), 411-424.

¹¹ Ferraris, M. 2014. "Chto takoye novyy realizm? [Che cos'è il Nuovo Realismo?]" trans. from the Italian by O. Popova. *Voprosy filosofii [Problems of Philosophy]*, no. 8, 145–160. (In Russian).

¹² Popov, E.V. *Novyy realizm [New Realism]: Idei i granitsy [Ideas and limits]*. *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta [Bulletin of the Tomsk State University]*, no. 477, 67–73. (In Russian).

¹³ *Ibid.*

theory. It takes into account the natural aspects of materiality, unlike the philosophy of Lynn Baker, which focuses only on artifacts¹⁴.

6. R. Braidotti uses the concept of "zoe" as a dynamic self-organizing structure of life that connects previously separate spheres and categories, forming assemblages of different objects linked to a specific event¹⁵.

7. Deleuze's assemblage approach focuses on the interaction of matter and social forces in the process of forming stable relationships, as opposed to a passive approach to matter and an active approach to social forces.

8. Latour's actor-network theory emphasizes the relational nature of objects and criticizes sociologism, which does not take into account materiality. Latour demonstrates that objects have properties because of their relationships with other objects.

9. Karen Barad's agential realism asserts that social sciences should study phenomena that develop within intra-action, where intra-action determines the functions of elements, their meanings, and boundaries. Meanings and boundaries are formed through discursive practices that change matter and determine possibilities for further development of the phenomenon. Barad emphasizes that the emergence of things is viewed as an action aimed at bringing agents together¹⁶.

10. Harman's Immaterialism emphasizes the importance of in-itself closed-off objects that cannot be reduced to their practices.

11. Bryant's Ontology demonstrates that access to in-itself closed-off objects is only possible through their qualitative component, obtained through informational feedback within the system, but the properties of the system cannot be ontologized due to the contextual nature of the information.

¹⁴ Bennett, J. (2004). The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter. *Political Theory*, 32(3), 347-372.

¹⁵ Braidotti, R. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2021. *Postchelovek [The Posthuman]*. Ed. by V. Danilov. Trans. From the English by D. Khamis. Moskva [Moscow]: Izdatel'stvo Instituta Gaydara. (In Russian).

¹⁶ Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801-831.

12. The key theoretical propositions concerning genealogical analysis and the search for the roots of flat ontology in classical sociological theory are the conceptual positions outlined in Émile Durkheim's work "The Rules of Sociological Method":

- a. "Science should borrow its initial definitions from sensory data."
- b. Ontology should be distinguished from epistemology.
- c. A social fact becomes real when textually fixed.
- d. The weakness of idealism.
- e. Defining the research object by initially describing its boundaries.
- f. The research object is always a combination of several elements, and cannot be a "seamless entity"¹⁷.

Methodology

As the dissertation research is purely theoretical, the key method used in the study is the analysis of relevant scientific sources related to the research problem. The analysis is carried out using the method of historical-sociological (theoretical-sociological) reconstruction, which makes it possible to identify the conceptual framework of the key theoretical elements of philosophical and sociological perspectives of flat ontology concepts (examining a particular concept in the general context of its interrelations with other concepts within the framework of the perspective), as well as meta-theoretical analysis/synthesis, enabling the creation of a "hard core". The reconstruction itself is carried out through theoretical codification and conversion of ideas traced in different approaches, which involves identifying the key connotations of a particular concept within the framework of the theory.

Contribution to the discussion of the problem in existing literature

1. The ways of conceptualizing ontology within the philosophical perspective of new realism have been systematized, and two main axes of theorizing within the framework of this perspective have been identified: contextual and artifact-oriented.

¹⁷ Durkheim, E. *Sotsiologiya. Ee predmet, metod i prednaznachenie*. Trans. From the French and ed. by A. B. Goffmana. Moskva [Moscow]: Kanon, 1995. 322 s. (In Russian).

2. The ways of conceptualizing ontology in object-oriented sociological theories have been systematized, and the semantic boundaries of the examined concepts have been outlined.

3. The theoretical connection between É. Durkheim's classic work "Sociology: Its Subject, Method and Purpose" and the main ideas of flat ontology has been reconstructed.

4. A gap has been identified in the methodological foundation of contemporary object-oriented sociological research, which limits its heuristic potential by focusing only on human perception.

5. The theoretical and methodological extension of object conceptualization in sociological research is proposed, which makes it possible to fill the previously highlighted lacuna and bring the conceptual and methodological foundations of object-oriented sociological research to a meaningful unity.

Statements to be defended

1. In contemporary sociological research conducted within object-oriented ontologies, there is a gap that prevents the consideration of the inclusion of the material into social processes. This leads to the replacement of ontology with human perception, as in the works of Mol and Law.

2. The adequate theoretical and methodological approach to conducting object-oriented research is based on a systemic unity of objects and information derived from objects rather than recipients perceiving objects. Such an approach can more fully describe the social reality of material objects.

3. E. Durkheim's sociological method can be synchronised with the basic ideas of flat ontology, thereby overcoming the limitations of the reductionist intentions of the material turn.

Scope and limitations of research

Among the main limitations of this dissertation research, the following should be highlighted:

1. Only literature published in Russian and English languages was included in the process of systematization. For example, only English-language works by Ferraris, Gabriel, and Benoist were analyzed.

2. The incorporation of flat-ontological ideas from all perspectives into classical sociological theory is based on deconstructing the works of one sociologist – E. Durkheim.

3. The gap in object-oriented applied research is formulated with reference to one area of study - the sociology of medicine.

Structure of dissertation

The presented dissertation includes an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter describes the philosophical origins of the flat ontology perspective, the second chapter discusses the sociological aspects, the third chapter focuses on Émile Durkheim's classic sociology on flat ontological foundations, and the fourth chapter addresses the logic of object-oriented sociological research and the development of theoretical and methodological systems for studying objects in sociology.

Analysis of data and findings

The introduction of the dissertation describes the relevance of the selected problem, analyzes the extent to which the problem in the investigated area has been scientifically studied, formulates the object and subject, aim and tasks of the current dissertation. In the same section, the positions presented for defense, scientific novelty and significance of the conducted research for sociological theory are set forth.

In the first chapter two philosophical perspectives of ontological theorizing are analyzed. At the beginning of the chapter, the boundary between what can be attributed to flat ontological approaches and what cannot be defined. As a result, the works of some representatives of the "Goldsmithean group" (K. Meillassoux, I. Grant, R. Brassier) are considered separately, without participating in the systematization. The first philosophical perspective is represented by the works of

L. Bryant and G. Harman, while the second is represented by the works of the new realists - M. Ferraris, M. Gabriel, J. Benoist, and L. Baker.

Section 1.1 is devoted to the analysis of the differences between ontological realism and anti-realism and epistemological realism. It is concluded that anti-realism and epistemological realism are similar approaches that are aimed at constructing reality by humans rather than investigating it per se. The most adequate approach for analysis may be ontological realism, which allows material objects to exist autonomously and be cognitively determined in a certain way. This approach aims to restore the ontological status of objects, reducing the degree of anthropocentrism created within the framework of epistemological realism (anti-realism). Key representatives of ontological realism include G. Harman, M. DeLanda, L. Bryant, and M. Ferraris.

The key conclusion of this section can be formulated as follows:

1. Flat ontologies are quite eclectic in nature - they are based on a multitude of concepts from various fields of knowledge and areas of social philosophy and sociological theory.
2. There are a large number of specific flat ontologies in contemporary philosophy and theoretical sociology.

In section 1.2 the ideas of Brassier, Meillassoux, and Grant are described, and their exclusion from the analysis of this dissertation is justified. Brassier is excluded because he asserts the primacy of scientific knowledge and does not consider false beliefs that may play a significant role in social philosophy and sociological theory. Meillassoux is excluded because he maintains that only mathematics can provide access to the primary qualities of things. Grant is excluded because his philosophy of nature does not account for the significance of the human in sociological perspective for the development of new approaches and research questions.

In section 1.3 the ontological approaches of Harman and Bryant are analyzed. Harman's immaterialism distinguishes objects as real and sensuous, possessing both real and sensuous qualities. The operations of theory and allurements allow for working with objects and their qualities. Bryant's ontology employs a systemic

view of objects, which possess their own substance, allowing them to produce local manifestations or manifestations for the object or subject. An object can never be considered as a sum of its own qualities since its manifestations depend on the state of the system, not external influence.

In section 1.4, the approaches of several authors within the framework of new realism are discussed, including Ferraris, Benoist, Gabriel, and Baker. Ferraris develops transcendental realism, which establishes the existence of natural objects, social objects, artifacts, and ideal objects. For Ferraris, an artifact is a product of human activity, and a social object is immaterial. Meanwhile, L. Baker grounds practical realism on primary seeing, constitution, and artifacts. M. Gabriel emphasizes facticity and ontological pluralism, while J. Benoist focuses on the ideas of context and adequacy.

Section 1.5, "Systematization of the Philosophical Perspective of Flat Ontological Theorizing," is dedicated to the systematic organization of the main positions of the previously described philosophical perspectives of flat ontological theorizing. This systematization allowed for the formulation of the "hard core" of the first philosophical perspective of flat ontology (Harman's Immaterialism and Bryant's Onticology):

1. Flat ontologically oriented researchers should include in their conceptual approaches a methodological attitude according to which objects are intrinsically closed and unknowable.

2. Material objects are themselves active. The activity of material objects within the framework of flat ontology is considered a property that arises within certain relations.

3. Researchers have access to only some qualities of an object that are determined by the specific type of relation (the relation in a particular situation here and now).

The systematization of the analyzed new realisms allowed them to be arranged along two theoretical axes - contextual and artifact. The contextual axis includes the approaches of J. Benoist and M. Gabriel, which incorporate positions on ontological

pluralism and the influence of context on the formation of concepts and objects, while on the artifact axis, the realisms of M. Ferraris and L. Baker, which include positions on the invariance of the basic component of the artifact as well as on virtuality.

Chapter 2, "Sociological Perspective of Flat Ontological Theorizing," is dedicated to exploring approaches to conceptualizing ontology in a flat format within the framework of sociological conceptualizations. The chapter analyzes the works of authors such as J. Bennett, K. Barad, B. Latour, R. Braidotti, and M. DeLanda.

Within the first section of the Chapter 2 the positions of this approach are systematized. The basic systematization was previously carried out by N. Fox and P. Alldred, who identified four main characteristics of New Materialism¹⁸. However, this basic systematization requires further clarification and more detailed description. Therefore, it is proposed to systematize these positions by relating them to the works of specific authors who develop the issue of the relationship between the material, cultural, and social aspects in explaining the world.

The second paragraph of the Chapter focuses on authors who develop their ideas within the sociological perspective of flat ontological theorizing.

J. Bennett develops a materialism of things, seeking to overthrow constructivist assumptions in sociology and social thought that do not take materiality into account. She creates an approach that shifts the focus onto matter in its hylomorphic understanding, which acts independently. She also differs from Lynn Baker, who operates with the concept of artifact in her attempts to weaken constructivist assumptions.

R. Braidotti creates a new materialism or vitalistic materialism, which is aimed against individualism in scientific discourse and equalizes materiality and sociality through the concept of zoe. Zoe allows us to consider the social and material as creative layers of reality without the predominance of one of them.

¹⁸ In the final version of the "hard core" of the new materialism we have included only three provisions, since one of them belongs more to the first philosophical perspective, namely to the immaterialism of H. Harman.

Latour's new materialist actor-network theory is his attempt to criticize a sociologized approach that removes materiality from its analysis. Latour criticizes the sociologized approach that does not take materiality into account and emphasizes the relationality of objects in a network view. In his material ontology, objects are described by what they do and do not have a vitalistic characteristic.

Barad's agential realism asserts that social sciences should investigate phenomena that develop within specific contexts, where the elements of the phenomenon are determined not only by their functions, but also by their meanings and boundaries. Matter changes its state within discursive practices that determine the possibilities for the development of the phenomenon.

DeLanda developed an assemblage approach that is an integral part of the new materialist ontology. It draws on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari and suggests examining socio-material aggregates through parameters of territorialization/deterritorialization, coding/decoding, and materiality/expressiveness. DeLanda also develops the modus of virtuality to study assemblages.

The third paragraph of the second chapter compares the positions of the "hard core" of the sociological perspective of flat ontological theorizing with the theses of specific authors:

1. The researcher's focus on matter (J. Bennett and R. Braidotti);
2. The focus on what matter does, not what it is (M. DeLanda and B. Latour);
3. The locality of the force of material actions (K. Barad).

The third chapter is dedicated to establishing a theoretical connection between the variations of flat ontology discussed earlier in the dissertation and classical sociological theory through the work of French sociologist and anthropologist Émile Durkheim. This is necessary in order to attempt to reconstruct the classical foundations of sociology and demonstrate that the foundations for a flat ontological approach to research were already laid out in Durkheim's text.

Within the first paragraph of 3.1 "Flat Ontology in the Work of Emile Durkheim" and the second paragraph "Conclusion: Émile Durkheim as a Proto-Flat Ontologist," the main propositions are identified that can be traced in the texts of the classical sociologist and in the works of flat ontologists from both philosophical and sociological perspectives:

1. "Science must borrow from sensory data its initial definitions";
2. Ontology should be distinguished from epistemology;
3. The social fact becomes real when it is textually fixed;
4. The impossibility of idealism;
5. The definition of the object of study through an initial description of its boundaries;
6. The research object is always a combination of several elements; it cannot be a "seamless entity."

The concluding fourth chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the analysis of applied areas of sociology that deal with the analysis of object-oriented relations. Within the chapter, the key issues of such research are identified, and an approach is proposed to minimize their negative impact.

In the first paragraph of the Chapter 4 the positions of applied conceptualizations characteristic of the Lancaster branch of the Actor-Network Theory are analyzed, where the key methodology is the ethnography of the here-and-now state. Law and Mol use medical cases to demonstrate that one object can have different manifestations, and that objects are conceptualized through practices that people undertake to interact with them.

Within the second paragraph of the section 4, the formulation of the flat ontology gap in sociology based on the ideas of G. Harman and J. Benoist is described as a key gap in applied object-oriented research in sociology related to the uncertain ontological status of objects within the Lancaster branch of Actor-Network Theory. Researchers Mol and Law identify different modes of existence of objects and indicate that reality depends on practice and regular reproduction. Objects are studied through the manifestation of their qualities, which are determined by practice

and investigated using soft ethnographic methods. In this regard, there is a suspicion that researchers consider generalized sensory qualities from the perception of the object, which may lead to the study of the reproduction of discourse rather than the properties of the real object. The gap in this case is formulated as the absence of an adequate conceptual model of the real object.

The third and fourth paragraphs of the chapter are devoted to filling the formulated lacuna and creating a systemic conceptual and methodological extension of flat ontology. It is formulated with reference to the works of L. Bryant, G. Harman, J. Benoit, M. Deland, M. Ferraris and L. Baker.

The last section of the thesis summarizes the research conducted and summarizes all the intermediate conclusions. It is concluded that the proposed theoretical and methodological approach allows conceptualize within the framework of sociological research, the results of which can provide non-trivial results and formulate non-trivial hypotheses.

General conclusion: at the end of the summary of the thesis research, some conclusions and assumptions about further directions of study in the developed area should be made. The key results of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. The initial premises of flat ontology are connected and embedded in the general narrative of the sociological tradition - through correlating the key statements of the flat ontology with the basic premises of Durkheimian sociological method;

2. The lacuna of applied research within the turn to the material is formulated, which shifts the focus from the material to human perception, elevating the human being to the ultimate instance of material existence. This lacuna is formulated on the basis of analyzing the works of the researchers of the Lancaster branch of ACT - A. Mol and J. Low;

3. A refined optics is constructed to minimize the negative impact of the previously mentioned lacuna on applied research. Synthesis of the provisions of various branches of flat ontology in sociological theory and social philosophy

allowed us to formulate the principles of conducting applied sociological research within the framework of the turn to the material:

a) The object under study is in itself unknowable; it is possible to study only its relational properties (including the amount of power) that it exhibits within a relational framework;

b) It is necessary to initially define the system (which always includes the researcher himself) that the object forms, as well as to distinguish it from the environment;

c) The context or contexts in which the system identified in the previous step is investigated must be initially defined;

d) On the basis of the contexts identified in the previous step, it is necessary to determine the system properties that are part of the actual mode of being of the object, as well as those that may be part of the virtual mode.

It seems that at the general theoretical level there are no open questions of systemic character left at the moment - in particular, questions about the constituent ideas of flat ontology, key authors and concepts. In the future it will be necessary to reflect private criticism of researchers about some direction of flat ontology, about its incorrect interpretation, etc. But this is the normal development of scientific knowledge.

More important work can be done in the applied area of research. Since this study is a purely theoretical exploration of the material turn and flat ontology in sociology, the next step could be to conduct applied research that would show the degree of adequacy of the proposed operational alternatives to the existing lacuna in the flat ontology. In particular, it seems necessary to write a study in the theoretical framework of a systematized flat ontology with an updated operational resource. This will make it possible to evaluate in practice the resource of the approach proposed in the framework of the thesis. At this stage, it cannot be clearly tied to any middle level theory. It is now an wide-open resource that is worth trying to test in as wide a range of subject areas as possible. Nevertheless, it seems that the approach outlined in the thesis may have the greatest demand in the future for urban studies,

game studies and the sociology of medicine. However, the potential of the model outlined in this thesis should not be limited to these areas - it is possible that the flat-ontological framework could be adequately incorporated into other perspectives as well.

AUTHOR'S LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE THESIS

1. Popov, E. V. Ontologicheskiy analiz issledovaniy lancasterskoy vetvi aktorno-setevoy teorii: ot vospriyatiya k ob"ektu [Ontological Analysis of the Research by the Lancaster Branch of Actor-Network Theory: From Perception to Object]. *Sotsiologicheskoe obozrenie* [RUSSIAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW], 2021, no. 3, 261-279. (In Russian).

2. Popov, E.V. Novyy realizm [New Realism]: Idei i granitsy [Ideas and limits]. *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* [Bulletin of the Tomsk State University], 2023, no. 477, 67–73. (In Russian).

3. Popov, E.V. 2023. Zhestkoye yadro novogo materializma v sotsial'noy teorii [The Hard Core of the New Materialism in Social Theory]. *Filosofiya. Zhurnal Vysshey shkoly ekonomiki* [Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics], 2023, no. 7 (2), 86–115. (In Russian).

REFERENCES

1. Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801-831.

2. Bennett, J. (2004). The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter. *Political Theory*, 32(3), 347-372.

3. Benoist, J. (2012). Making ontology sensitive. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 45(3), 411-424.

4. Braidotti, R. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2021. *Postchelovek* [The Posthuman]. Ed. by V. Danilov. Trans. From the English by D. Khamis. Moskva [Moscow]: Izdatel'stvo Instituta Gaydara. (In Russian).

5. Durkheim, E. Sotsiologiya. Ee predmet, metod i prednaznachenie. Trans. From the French and ed. by A. B. Goffmana. Moskva [Moscow]: Kanon, 1995. 322 s. (In Russian).
6. Erofeeva, M. Aktorno-setevaya teoriya i problema sotsial'nogo deystviya [Actor-network theory and the problem of social action. Sociology of Power]. Sotsiologiya vlasti [Sociology of power]. 2015. № 27(1). S. 15-40. (In Russian).
7. Fariás, I. (2011). The Politics of Urban Assemblages. City, 15.
8. Ferraris, M. 2014. "Chto takoye novyy realizm? [Che cos'è il Nuovo Realismo?]" trans. from the Italian by O. Popova. Voprosy filosofii [Problems of Philosophy], no. 8, 145–160. (In Russian).
9. Feyrabend, P. Protiv metoda. Ocherk anarhistskoy teorii poznaniya [Against Method. Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge]. Trans. From the English by. A. L. Nikiforova. Moskva [Moscow]: AST. Khranitel', 2007. 413 s. (In Russian).
10. Latour, B. (1999). For David Bloor and Beyond. Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science, 30(1), 113-129.
11. Lo, Dzh. Posle metoda: besporyadok i sotsial'naya nauka [After method: mess and social sciences]. Ed. by S. Gavrilenko. Trans. From the English by S. Gavrilenko, A. Pisareva, P. KHanovoy. Moskva [Moscow]: Izd-vo Instituta Gaydara, 2015. 352 s. (In Russian).
12. Lyotard, Zh.F. Sostoyanie postmoderna [La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir]. Trans. From the French by N. A. Shmatko, "Institut eksperimental'noy sotsiologii". Moskva [Moscow]: Izdatel'stvo "ALETEYa", 1979. 160 s. (In Russian).
13. Popov, E.V. Novyy realizm [New Realism]: Idei i granitsy [Ideas and limits]. Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta [Bulletin of the Tomsk State University], no. 477, 67–73. (In Russian).

14. Sergeeva, O. V. Sotsiologiya nauki i tekhnologiy [Sociology of science and technologies]. Sotsiologiya [Sociology]. 2021.№12. S. 171-184. (In Russian).