

Editorial Preface

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Dear readers,

The second issue of Volume 9, 2017 presents four texts – three papers and book review of the important book of Manuel DeLanda and Graham Harman, published recently in Polity Press.

The first two papers apply Actor-Network theory as both methodological and analytical tool in the analysis of seeming different cases – the new literature genre of weblog, and specific approach in developing skills of university graduates that increase their chances to find employment. Yet both articles, if in a different way, reveal actionality of the new technologies introduced and how they reconfigure specific settings of heterogenous relationships (between human and nonhuman actors).

Analyzing the weblog genre, Hassen Rabhi has studied the blog entries of American political bloggers. Facing the limitations of genre theory, he claims that ANT “provides practical tools for not only conducting a generic analysis of the blogging phenomenon, but also in following the network relations that shape the process of its construction”. While genre theory basically delimits genre features, the author claims, it cannot handle their construction procedure. Approaching the weblog genre through the lenses of Actor Network Theory (henceforth, ANT) and based on the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of 497 blog entries by 39 A-list American political bloggers covering the events in 2016 US presidential race, the author discovered that power and agency are effect of the interactions of network components and not property of a particular bloggers: “the fluidity of networks along the 2016 presidential race acknowledges that reality is not predictable and that multiple realities can co-exist together, with reality being actively performed in different contexts and by different actors”. Rabhi claims that “actors involved in the formation of the weblog genre are assemblies or gatherings of myriad things brought together and linked through processes of translation”. He applies the notions of multiplicities and micro-contexts to better apprehend different perspectives of human actors, to reveal the ways non-human actors are involved in the process of formation of the weblog genre, and the “subtleties of the social and the political realities shaping the American political blogging practice”.

The paper of Seema Pillai focuses on interesting innovation in university education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), aiming at developing graduate employability skills, termed as *CoreLife Skills*. She approaches her subject – vocational training through the perspective of technology innovations applied in the field. Application of Actor-Network Theory allowed her to “unfold the socio-material assemblages” relying on already established frameworks of in theory of education (*Levels of Teaching Innovation* (LoTi) and HEAT (higher order thinking, engaged learning, authentic learning, and technology use).

The research stirred the development of technology-enhanced learning and CoreLife Skills development (TEL-CSD) framework for effective integration of technology to enhance students’ CoreLife Skills. Based on the findings, two conclusions are drawn: CoreLife Skills cannot be developed independently of general learning and cognitive skills, and technology alone cannot promote CoreLife Skills. Seema key research finding is that technology-integrated learning environment should be designed with the objective of enhancing both learning and CoreLife Skills since successfully performing the tasks at higher cognitive levels increases chances of enhancing CoreLife Skills. She also reveals that encouraging students; initiative and adoption of innovative learning technologies

mediates (is precondition for) the established practices and procedures. ANT approach allowed Seema to practically reveal how adoption of new educational technologies provide "...excellent platform for learning, practising and on-going development of these skills to keep pace with the dynamic needs of industry and employers..."

The next paper of Peter Kopanov and Ivan Tchalakov offers to the IJANTTI audience the current results of authors' ongoing efforts in mathematical modelling specific class of actor-networks they called "stacked actor-networks" (SAN) or "layering of autonomous networks that shield the processes going on inside yet related to other layers/networks". In SAN approach each actor is considered as small 'Ego'-network comprising the identities she is acting under in corresponding layers/networks. The paper justifies the use of differential equations (of Ricatti type) as a tool for constructing quantitative models of actor-network interactions with the specific aim to find and analyze different qualitative effects (similarly to those found in the well-known, predator-prey model in system ecology). The mathematical model calculates the behavior of basic SAN network comprising three stacked networks for three stable states (out of six possible) in which two of subnetworks dominate over the third one. The graphical properties of each state are explored, stemming from the solutions of general differential equation for each of them. The comparison between three solutions and the graphical expressions of SAN behavior reveal interesting differences in SAN behaviors under three states – correspondingly linear, exponential and hyperbolic. Especially interesting are differences in the behavior in first and second state - at first glance they look similar, however, after approaching a critical value T the solution for the first state begins to grow indefinitely. The authors claim that some of the discovered qualitative effects might be explained through the differences in the number of dominant network connections, which vary from $n-1$ for hierarchical tree-like networks, to the maximum of $n(n-1)/2$ for the 'commercial/business type' of networks, the 'expert' (or 'Connectors') type of networks taking intermediary position.

The volume ends with the book review written by Steven Umbrello, managing director of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies in US. This timely review bring to us the latest ideas of Manuel DeLanda and Graham Harman - two very influential contemporary philosophers, both related in some way or another with Actor-Network Theory. As Steven points out in the beginning, their latest book on written as dialog between the two "is a provocative study of realism, both as a historical idea as well as their respective realist positions". He briefly traces the development of the dialogue between DeLanda and Harman in the five parts of the book to sharpen our attention at the second part titled *Realism and Anti-Realism*, which, according to him "best levies the dialectical style that the book employs". I will not go further with the introduction of Steven Umbrello's excellent piece of analysis, but I do claim that the debate he presented touches crucial points in the current state and possible directions in the development of Actor-Network theory.

I would like to conclude again this editorial with encouraging IJANTTI community to continue submitting the results of their research to our journal. Since almost a decade it established itself as useful platform for sharing theoretical visions, new research findings and simply keeping ANT community informed about the newest developments in science and technology studies.

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Ivan Tchalakov, PhD, is professor at Department of Institutional & Applied Sociology, University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. His research interests are in the field of Sociology of science, technology & innovation; History of technology; Economics of technical change. He has carried out ethnographic and historical studies of development of holography and optoelectronics and emergence of innovative entrepreneurship in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. Recently he studied New Space Entrepreneurship in US and Europe.