Introduction

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In 1978, the American anthropologist Alvin W. Wolfe wrote an article with the title *The Rise of Network Thinking in Anthropology*. In his paper, he discuss a recent, but prominent theoretical trend, namely the use of the concept and model of network in explaining social and cultural phenomena. Wolfe argues than in less than 25 years the model of network has established itself in anthropology as an approach permitting more advanced studies of social networks that enables anthropology to engage in an ever-expanding list of complex social problems. So, why this rise in the use and application of network thinking, he asks. In an attempt to answer his own question about the increase and usefulness of a theoretical network approach, Wolfe points to three distinct qualities that such an approach carries as he defines network as a set of links, as generated structures and as flow processes. These qualities and thus the background for the rise of network thinking are, according to Wolfe, identifiable in at least four areas: in social theory, in

ethnographic experience, in mathematics and in the technology of electronic data processing (Wolfe 1978, p 56).

Wolfe identifies four mutually reinforcing trends in the current social theory, which taken together lead toward a network approach. As he describes: "(1) There is a trend toward interest in *relations rather than things*. (2) There is a trend toward interest in *process rather than form*. (3) There is a trend toward seeking out *elementary phenomena rather than institutions*. (4) There is a trend toward constructing *generative models rather than functional ones* (Wolfe 1978, p. 56)". The field experience of the anthropologist is the second area where Wolfe see another grounding for the network thinking. The hallmark of ethnography, the direct, first-hand observation is highly dependent on getting access to the communities, people and places that the anthropologist wish to study. An access, which requires getting in contact, building relations and creating links with the people and places. This ethnographic experience gives the network approach an almost intuitively entry in anthropology. Finally, Wolfe points to how the influence of mathematics and the expanding use of computers play an immense role in establishing network thinking as a key feature of modern anthropology. With computers, he foresee a bright future where anthropologists will be able to processes huge amount of data in collaboration with mathematicians and create formal models of complex social networks.

Since Wolfe, network theories and methodologies focusing on agency, interactions and relations have become even more influential and widespread in the social sciences and humanities. In the 1990's two important additions or corrections to the network concept appeared. In 1996, the Spanish / American sociologist Manuel Castell described how global economy, production and consumption are created through networks that cannot be isolated geographically, but that envelop and shape the entire world. He coined the term of the 'Network Society' as a concept for a society no longer bounded and shaped by geography, but which emerges and exists by way of social, economic and information streams linking industry, organizations and people in large global networks. Another addition came with the theoretical fields of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as formulated by, among others, the French philosopher of science Bruno Latour (see

for instance Latour 1988, 1993 and 1996). A principal idea in ANT is that an entity is not significant in and by itself, but attains meaning and produces effect through its relations to numerous other entities (Blok and Elgaard Jensen 2001). The term actor-network thus describes this constant and changing establishing of relations that helps stabilize or destabilize a given phenomenon. Furthermore, a key feature of this understanding of network is their hybrid heterogeneous constitution as they consist of relations between humans and material objects.

In sum, the network perspective seem to have become the go-to analytical approach within the social sciences and the humanities that emphasizes relation-making processes, descriptions of how phenomena come into being and discussions of the effects and implications of the phenomena. So, some 40 years later, we found ourselves asking a related question to the one Wolfe asked in 1978 – not a question of a rise in network thinking, but a question of the continued significance of a network approach, both on a theoretical and empirical level to researchers of human culture and society. Acknowledging that the network approach has consolidated itself as an almost axiomatic way of thinking about social and cultural occurrences, with this issue, we wanted to engage in a discussion of the appropriateness and relevance of the network approach, and to ask; what do we (still) gain by applying a network perspective?

The call for paper that we sent out for this issue was deliberately very open, as we wanted to invite articles dealing with a broad - both thematic and methodological - approach to the network concept, including those taking a critical stance. The response to the call, represented by the articles in this issue, clearly reflects and confirms that the concept of network is still very much on the research agenda. Though never as a taken for granted concept, but as a vivid and stimulating approach for dealing with a diverse set of problems and discussions such as the intricate relation between social media and public debate and between social media and visual practices of memory, as well as discussions of networks of surveillance and networks as socio-technical infrastructures.

In the article *Unscrewing social media networks, twice* Andreas Birkbak investigate an often made claim that social media is an important new force in politics where the public voice can be heard. Through an analysis of seven Facebook pages mobilizing citizens

either for or against in the heated debate on road pricing in Copenhagen in 2011-2012 Birkbak discuss the way social media comes with a predefined understanding as facilitating democratic processes where many actors are united into some kind of unified larger force or public voice. In a critical engagement with the network understanding in ANT, Birkbak argues that the classic ANT notion of network is so vague that it too easily can be combined with liberal notions producing exactly this image of social media, where one facebook page, is seen as a proxy for a singular public spheres despite profound differences among the participants.

In their article, *Reassembling surveillance creep* Ask Risom Bøge and Peter Lauritsen analyses the way surveillance technologies are constantly introduced, transformed, and spread to new practices for new purposes - in other words how surveillance creep. In their article, they thus address a fundamental dynamic whereby our current surveillance societies are created and maintained. This is done through a historical study of the Danish DNA database. The database has evolved from a small-scale database introduced in year 2000 with a very restricted purpose to a large-scale DNA collection with profiles from more than 110.000 citizens, integrated in all types of police investigations and which is accessible not only to the Danish police force but to all EU police forces. Using the concept of chains of translation from ANT the article seeks to understand the nature and impact of surveillance creep on the various actors involved in or affected by the database. This involves an understanding of the processes of translating interests and forming adequate alignments between heterogeneous actors such as laws, technologies, the watchers and the watched.

In her article *Visualising Historical Networks: Family Trees and Wikipedia* Henriette Roud Cunliffe explore different methods for visualising and understanding a historical family network using the Drachmann family of 19th century Copenhagen as a case. The first method is a more traditional way of visualising family networks with a hierarchical family tree and an encoded data structure using the file format GEDCOM. The second method looks at the same family in Wikipedia first through hyperlinks and secondly as linked data in Wikidata. The article thus discusses the similarities and differences between these network representations of the same family, employing a theoretically informed network perspective from ANT

and feminism. Using a network approach is, according to Roud Cunliffe, very useful to the identification of and engagement with persons and connections that otherwise disappear in the visual representations, thereby making it possible to create a more holistic and equalizing understanding of historical relations.

This way of using the network approach as a way to improve and develop methods is also a key point in the next article *The Photograph as Network. Tracing – Disentangling – Relating: ANT as a Methodology in Visual Culture Studies* by Frauke Wiegand. In the article, Wiegand discusses the usability of the concepts entanglement, relationality, and traceability as analytical tools for studying visual materials and visual practices as well as the dynamic visual work of cultural memory. Reading the net-work of two tourist snapshots taken in Regina Mundi Church in Soweto, South Africa, Wiegand shows how the photographs are much more than just a snapshot of a situation or a material visual representation. According to Wiegand the photos holds all the acts and technologies that created it which makes it possible to trace and engage with other, more hidden, stories also entailed in the photographs. By way of the three concepts she makes visible how approaching snapshots from a network perspective opens for an understanding of photographs not only as cultural objects, but also as continuous mediators of memory.

The emphasis on the workings of networks is also very prominent in Marie Anna Svendsen and Astrid P Jespersen's article. In **"***Here comes my son!" On the underlying invisible work and infrastructure of a telepresence robot in a Danish nursing home,* focus is on the many unseen elements at play in the establishment of an infrastructure to support the implementation of a technological solution in old age care. The main argument of the article is that implementation of new technology is dependent on large amounts of work on the part of both of human and technical actors. Much of this work is normally invisible to and often lack acknowledgment, and the article argues that a focus on infrastructure proves crucial in the understanding the importance of this invisible work taking place in implementation processes.

In the next article *Reconnection work: A network approach to households' dealing with ICT breakdowns* Nina Heidenstrøm and Ardis Storm-Mathisen investigates the effect of an ICT infrastructure

breakdown on the concerns of households viewed as socio-material networks. The purpose is to use the ICT breakdown in Lærdal, Norway in 2014 as a lens to show how crises open up the black box of these household networks that normally functions as a whole. Throughout the analysis, Heidenstrøm and Storm-Mathisen describe how the networks reconnect and are stabilised at a household level through strategies where people mobilise actants such as cars and intact pieces of ICT to establish new temporal associations of actor-networks. The article thus highlight the need to pay attention to the workings and changes in the interplay between material and human actors in the management of crises and disasters.

Mikkel Jensen chooses a very different take on the concept of network in is his article Social Reproduction and Political Change in The Wire. In the article, he performs a systemic analysis of how society is portrayed and framed in the acclaimed TV-series The Wire. The network approach is hereby highlighting the interconnectivity of the social system as a complex web of relations. Jensen points to how the shows insistence on social reproduction at an institutional and structural level create a coherent and consistent political argument, and must be interpreted as a call for political and paradigmatic change. By making this claim, Jensen contributes to, the ongoing scholarly debate about the political potential of The Wire and more broadly to the debate about political elements and potential in TV series. The article thereby contributes with insights into the current societal role of mass communication and fiction and how fictional worlds interplays with interpretations and conceptualizations of "real world" societies.

The interplay between humans and things external to the human mind such as material objects or communication technologies is at the heart of the article *Networks as a case of distributed cognition,* written by Bo Allesøe. In the article, Allesøe analyses networks as involving distributed social cognition. He employs an extended mind approach that allows him to focus on the contribution to cognitive processes by structures and things external to the mind. Through a presentation of the extended mind hypothesis and the illustrative use of a crime scene investigation he shows how participating in a network is committing to something macrocognitive, involving a normative relation between a communality both presupposed and projected. Allesøe thereby shows how the network approach has

the potential to enrich perceptions of cognition to something that inevitably goes beyond the mind of the individual.

The final article in the issue *Networks of expertise: an example from process consulting* by Casper Elmholdt and Klaus Elmholdt deals with the configuration and enactment of expertise in consultancy work in public sector organizations. Through an empirical example from a process consultancy assignment in a hospital, they discern four modes of practice by which a network of expertise comes to work. In doing so, the article contributes to recent discussions of the role and enactment of expertise and skilled performance in organizational settings and contemporary work. Moreover, the article contributes to practice-based studies of expertise and a sociology of expertise by showing how expertise is assembled and enacted in action.

In the light of our ambition with initiating a renewed discussion of network, it is thus interesting to see with this fantastic palette of articles how much of what Wolfe described and predicted 40 years ago that still influences the thinking in social sciences and humanities. However, what is also striking is that the approaches and discussions in this sample of articles never appears dated. The articles are all very much concerned with phenomena and debates, which are high on the societal agenda, contributing both empirically, methodologically and theoretically.

We hope that you will enjoy reading them.

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