

Gundela Hachmann

Network Analysis in Literature and the Arts: Rethinking Agency and Creativity

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jlt-2023-2010>

Abstract: The essay proposes to think of the creative subject as an actor in a network, that is, following Bruno Latour, as a »moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it« (Latour 2005, 46). It explores what it means to bring a network analysis to lectures on poetics by employing both a structuralist visualization informed by a computational method and a sociological method according to Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). ANT is used to make traceable what with Hugh Kenner is called »elsewhere communities« consisting of spirits and minds along with objects and spaces. This serves to defend a method of criticism that is not oriented towards unearthing deep textual meanings, but which foregrounds the arts' relatability and potential for provoking association and attachments. Network analysis in the arts and humanities, so goes the argument, has the potential to be much more than a formalist description of connections made. It offers means for detecting the implicit and explicit presences of a variety of different actors in or relating to works of art and challenges us to move beyond established analytical categories such as intertextuality and intermediality by opening the inquiry to a wider diversity of actors and to redefine our understanding of creativity.

The article focuses on networks that emerge in lectures in which renowned artists from around the world share with general audiences their views on work processes, motivations to create, and artistic self-understandings. These are known as *Poetikvorlesungen* in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but do not have a distinct label outside of the German-speaking literary scene. The article departs from the observation that making connections and forming artistic associations are key components of these lectures as this feature can be found frequently. It first outlines genre characteristics of lectures on the arts with particular focus on networks that such lectures participate in. Emblematic examples are the Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics by the German novelist Daniel Kehlmann (given in 2014) and the Tanner Lectures by the Canadian writer and critic Hugh Kenner (given in 1999). Kehlmann depicts his artistic influences, sources of inspiration, and references to existing contexts by pretending to summon spirits, a rhetorical gesture akin to a

Corresponding author: Gundela Hachmann: Louisiana State University, Department of World Languages, Literatures & Cultures, Baton Rouge, LA, USA, E-Mail: ghachmann@lsu.edu.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1503-7434>

necromancy. Kenner calls networks that evolve from making such connections »elsewhere communities«.

The essay explores what a network-oriented analysis of this genre could look like by turning to the Norton Lectures by the German filmmaker Wim Wenders (given in 2018). These serve to test two different analytical approaches. The article relies both on network visualization and on tracing of networks according to Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). The article thus offers both a graphic representation of references from Wenders' lectures and a textual tracing of associations according to the methodology outlined by Latour.

An important finding is that network analysis, no matter its method, offers exciting opportunities in revealing the significance of relations and associations. Network analysis challenges literary scholars to revisit and rethink intertextuality, intermediality, or intersubjectivity and invites them to unearth a new diversity of actors. The article argues that graphic visualizations done with computational methods can be instrumental in the immediacy with which they communicate findings, especially when it comes to findings from a large corpus. The article then moves on to explore the nuances and theoretical implications that ANT offers in addition to the network visualization. A major appeal of ANT is, so the argument, that it offers insight into processes that are central to literary criticism: translation, mediation, and the evolving dynamics that stem from them. Since lectures on poetics are located at the intersection of artistic creation, authorial self-presentation, and criticism, they offer a particularly good window into the interactions of *poiesis* and *aesthesis*, of creative work and its dependency on the reception of other artworks. The argument concludes by suggesting that network analysis invites theorists to reconceptualize reader-response theory toward what scholars call comparative media studies.

Finally, the article briefly considers lectures on the arts not as objects of criticism, but as a blueprint for scholarship that looks to re-envision literary criticism and its engagement of the reading public.

Keywords: network analysis, Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), poetics, *Poetikvorlesungen*, intertextuality, intermediality

In 2014, the popular and acclaimed writer Daniel Kehlmann invites an enraptured audience in a full lecture hall at the University of Frankfurt to join him in performing necromancy. »Come, you Spirits« *Kommt, Geister* (Kehlmann 2018, 68) is the title of a series of five lectures Kehlmann delivered as part of his appointment to the Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics. Lady Macbeth famously uses the phrase at a moment when she seeks to invoke dark forces and muster up the resolve necessary

for her part in the murder of the king (cf. Shakespeare 1993, 13). Kehlmann likewise beckons spirits but turns it into an emblem of his poetics dedicated to representing the unrelenting and often uncomfortable presence of the past. He summons specters and spirits, ghouls and ghosts, demons and devils to make vivid his life-long fascination with uncanny tales, »unheimliche Geschichten« (Kehlmann 2018, 43). His sources range from Shakespearean dramas, Grimmshausen's picaresque novels, Ingeborg Bachmann's poetry, and W.G. Sebald's memory writing, to Stephen King's horror fiction and J.R. Tolkien's fantasy epics along with Peter Jackson's films, and the list goes on. Uncanny moments in post-war German film and the unnerving indifference to atrocities displayed in Germany's Holocaust trials of the 1950s and 1960s supplement the panorama of phantasms and fears that he lays out for his listeners. In doing so, he not only associates different temporal occurrences with one another, but also links different spaces, both fictional and non-fictional. Shakespeare's Illyria, Tolkien's Middle-earth, Grimmshausen's recreation of Central Europe during the Thirty-Years' War, and Germany post World War II jointly appear in Kehlmann's panorama because ghosts, so he explains, »rise from our fear of the past of spaces« (ibid., 65, transl. G.H.). Kehlmann's eclectic showcase culminates in an encounter with the mathematician Kurt Gödel and his theory of time travel. Both creation and invocation of spirits thus appear as ways of counteracting the »persistent illusion« (ibid., 170, transl. G.H.) of chronological time.

His gesture of summoning spirits past, present, and future provides an interesting case for a network analysis as its reliance on multiple meanings of *Geist* opens the door to a broad spectrum of agents. The word can denote a ghost or specter, but can also describe a human mind, or for that matter, the prevailing thoughts of many minds – as in *zeitgeist* or, most notably, in *Geisteswissenschaften*, German for Humanities. I suggest taking Kehlmann's implied double-meaning of his lecture as science of the spirits and the minds at face value and ask what it may have to offer to the Humanities. In a manner typical of poetological lectures, Kehlmann creates what the Canadian literary scholar Hugh Kenner calls in his Tanner lectures 1999 an *Elsewhere Community*. »It can name where you dream of going – where blue-birds fly perhaps. Or it can describe the people you've met somewhere, memories of whom have helped to change you. Or it's an awareness of your own growth and change, arising from the places you have been« (Kenner 2000, 6). It is a community that »people travelling after what they do not know« (ibid., 13) can get access to. The term captures well the prevailing sentiment and *modus operandi* of Kehlmann's necromancy. In virtually visiting all manner of fictional, historical, and geographical spaces he seeks the community of displaced spirits to learn both about his world and about himself.

In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, lectures such as the ones by Kehlmann and Kenner are known as lectures on poetics, *Poetikvorlesungen*, and have become

fixtures in the literary landscape as such events regularly take place at over thirty institutions of higher education (cf. Hachmann/Bohley/Schöll 2022, 519–530). Outside of the German-speaking literary scene, they don't have a distinct label and typically occur in the context of events on the Arts and Humanities more broadly, such as the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University or the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at several institutions in North America (cf. Hachmann 2022). From a network-oriented perspective, these texts/events present many opportunities. Positioned between fiction and non-fiction (cf. Wohlleben 2005, 55–59), they are marked by a formal openness that engenders broad visions and approaches uninhibited by genre expectations or conventions (cf. Bohley 2011, 228). »These lectures by contemporary authors discuss and reflect the diversity, the plurality of postmodern literature« (Lützeler 1994, 18, transl. G.H.), concluded Paul Lützeler in 1994, their smallest common denominator being that they share aspects of »the subjective, the self-reflexive, the pastiche-like, the mixing of high and every-day culture, the historical, and the autobiographical« (ibid., transl. G.H.). Lecturers are free to let their thoughts roam in speaking of themselves and their work. And roam they do! Speakers regularly associate their own creative endeavors with other people, places, or objects, and each one conjures up their own idiosyncratic elsewhere community. As Kehlmann's and Kenner's lectures illustrate so well, these lecturers frequently discuss or narrate how other artists work; what they see in other texts; how they respond to others' pieces of art; what happens in different artistic media; what intrigues them in cultures of their own as well as those other than their own; how the plights of previous generations continue to be relevant; how an anticipated future informs the present; how the challenges other people face move them; or what happens in fields like science or politics. In the words of Kehlmann summarizing Ingeborg Bachmann: »Who appears to be speaking of something else entirely, is speaking of their own self in the most undisguised manner« (Kehlmann 2018, 14, transl. G.H.).

The creative self is best described then, so one can conclude, by talking about others, by providing points of connection or drawing relations rather than by seeking to grasp those qualities or features that characterize the individual itself or their artistic style. Following Bruno Latour, I propose to think of the creative subject as an actor in a network, that is as a »moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it« (Latour 2005, 46). I provisionally sketch what it means to bring a network analysis to lectures on poetics by employing both a structuralist visualization informed by a computational method and a sociological method according to Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). I rely on ANT to make traceable elsewhere communities, to use Kenner's term, consisting of spirits and minds along with, as I will show, objects and spaces, and thereby defend a method of criticism that is not oriented towards unearthing deep textual meanings, but which foregrounds the arts' relatability and potential for provoking association and attachments. Network

analysis in the arts and humanities, so I contend, has the potential to be much more than a formalist description of connections made. It offers means for detecting the implicit and explicit presences of a variety of different actors in or relating to works of art and challenges us to move beyond established analytical categories such as intertextuality and intermediality by opening the inquiry to a wider diversity of actors and to redefine our understanding of creativity. While Kehlmann's and Kenner's lectures provide the blueprint for my analysis, I ultimately move to analyze lectures given by the filmmaker Wim Wenders to highlight the applicability of this approach beyond literary criticism.

1 On Performing Creative Networks

Traditionally, we think of references that authors, wittingly or unwittingly, make in their texts as forms of intertextuality or intermediality. In such a reading, the lectures by Kehlmann and Kenner support the conclusion that referring to other texts or works of art – be it by quoting an important influence, for the purpose of outlining existing schools of thought and style, or to dissociate oneself from other writers – is a means to situating the author-self within the thus generated field of references (cf. Schöll 2022, 12–14). Seen through this theoretical lens, making textual references is a way of setting a virtual stage with props made up of other writers and texts to demonstrate where and how the own author persona fits into the display (cf. Schmitz-Emans 2022, 361, 369 sq., 376 sq.). What is more, this has evolved as a key feature of lectures on poetics as such events routinely offer speakers opportunities for »an (attempted) positioning within the literary field« (Kempke 2021, 72, transl. G.H.).

So, what changes when we swap the lens of intertextuality for the network goggles? The journal *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* devoted in 2019 an issue to this question. The editors draw the conclusion that such a change in the critical point of view »makes it possible to look at authorship as a collective creative process and textuality as a widely ramified model of social relations in which multiple actors are always participating from the onset on« (Thomalla/Spoerhase/Martus 2019, 8, transl. G.H.). This highlights the *collective* nature of agency and suggests understanding literature as much as social phenomenon as it is an aesthetic one, or better yet: to see the aesthetic as a mode for social connectivity. Creating fiction, using storytelling, and employing poetic language are thus both the result of transforming impulses from other actors and a means to connect to and associate with new ones. Unlike the focus on intertextuality, the network approach insists on a diverse spectrum of possible actors. Not just writers and their textual creations are potential agents, but

as Latour famously proclaimed »objects too have agency« (Latour 2005, 63) and so do theoretical concepts which he treats as »conceptual characters« (Latour 2016, 463). Not unlike the intertext-oriented approach, the tracing of networks also decouples agency from intentionality, i. e., an actor can have a transformative effect simply by virtue of being part of a network. Whether he, she, or it intends to do this or even has the ability to form intentions remains irrelevant (cf. Latour 2005, 44).

In said journal issue, Lore Knapp and Natalie Binczek explore the ramifications of a turn toward networks for the reading of select lectures on poetics. ANT intrigues them with its promising implications for how we can speak of authors and texts. Binczek underscores the diversity of actors and mediations she observes in Marcel Beyer's Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics from 2016. She describes the text-based event as »a field of multitudinous relations« (Binczek 2019, 106, transl. G.H.) comprised not just of the acts of communication between academia and the literary field, but also of the media transformations that occur along with them: the production of a written manuscript using writing tools and technologies, its transformation into an orally presented speech staged inside an auditorium, interactions between the presenter, the presented, and the listeners, as well as the subsequent publication of a book based on the manuscript and the ensuing publications of advertisements and critical reviews (cf. *ibid.*). One could add the numerous social media interactions and online video recordings that are currently common practice (cf. Ernst 2022). This, so Binczek concludes, dramatically alters how we should speak of a literary work or an author's *œuvre*. Literature now appears as »fundamentally unlimited, heterogeneous net of different institutions, genres, practices, and media« (Binczek 2019, 106, transl. G.H.). To illustrate this, she traces associations Beyer makes in his lecture between his own writings, the physical space in which he speaks, the memories he harbors of the university from childhood visits, and the infamous last lecture Theodor Adorno delivered there in 1969 when three bare-chested female student protesters forced him to terminate his instructions. His lecture is embedded in and contributes to the formation of knowledge of the philosopher and of the institutional history such that »the text as a web generated by mediators belongs itself to the social« (*ibid.*, 109, transl. G.H.).

Knapp draws attention to the writing process wondering how, in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, »our writing tools contribute to the work on our thoughts« (Knapp 2019a, 86, transl. G.H.). She showcases several descriptions contemporary authors give of their work as writers. Among the statements she reviews are passages from Juli Zeh's Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics given in 2012 (cf. Zeh 2013). Zeh speaks of moments when working on her computer proves unproductive, and she switches to handwriting or, vice versa, when repeated revisions of a handwritten text require changing to a digital tool (cf. Knapp 2019a, 91 sq.). In listing resistances or challenges experienced in the writing process and describing the transformative

agency of writing tools, Knapp points to a need for more empirical data collection. Such a network-oriented approach to Writing Process Studies (*Schreibprozessforschung*) would enable scholars, so she contends, to overcome existing categories and preconceived notions and to arrive at »different forms of authorship« (ibid., 96, transl. G.H.) by way of deduction.

Nonetheless, some scholars also have their reservations. Knapp, for example, raises the legitimate concern that »such an expansion of the concept of actor towards mental processes begs the pragmatic question of empirical feasibility« (ibid., 91, transl. G.H.). In other words: Isn't this network approach with its messy tangle of countless associations utterly impractical? Knapp's solution is to select a narrow and well-defined research focus. However, there is no denying that analyzing literary networks requires the same kind of »blind, myopic, workaholic, trail sniffing, and collective traveler« (Latour 2005, 9) who elects to »trudge like an ant, carrying the heavy gear in order to generate even the tiniest connection« (ibid., 25) that Latour's sociology of associations calls for. The question I see behind Knapp's concern is: Which options present themselves for the description of those complex networks that include literary texts and authors? In the following sections, I first outline how a network analysis with computational tools could be used to describe networks in lectures on poetics according to a structuralist paradigm and then, in a second step, how ANT provides critical tools that enhance and enrich such an analysis to move beyond formalist considerations.

2 On Visualizing Creative Networks

Under the programmatic title *The Network Turn*, Ruth Ahnert, Sebastian Ahnert, Catherine Coleman, and Scott Weingart, make the case for employing quantitative network analysis in the Arts and Humanities. They highlight that »networks are inherently domain-crossing«, and they see the primary benefits to arts and humanities research in »cross-disciplinary exchange and collaboration« (Ahnert et al. 2021). They are aware that the concept of networks has been used for analytical purposes in the Humanities before, and their goal is to advocate for wider, more diverse, and specifically quantitative approaches in disciplines that have traditionally been hesitant to embrace them. The two most critical steps toward any application of quantitative, computer-based network analysis are, so they explain, »that arts and humanities scholars need to theorise the construction of data sets and the use of visualisation« (ibid.). As is typical for computational cultural analysis (cf. Gius/Jacke 2022, 1), their method is effectively a structuralist one, even if they do not discuss these theoretical underpinnings.

What I am proposing subsequently is not a roundabout re-introduction of Structuralism through the back door. Much rather, I use the visualization in a manner that Gius and Jacke recommend as tool for »exploration of literary texts [that] can be regarded as supplementing/alternative approach to hypothesis development that offers its own assets« (ibid., 15). A key challenge in doing this lies in the abstraction. Ahnert et al. point out that, from a network-focused perspective, »the interactions of characters in *Hamlet* are [...] comparable to the dissemination of memes on Facebook, or the chemical compounds shared between food ingredients« (Ahnert et al. 2021). This, of course, they explain, is not due to »some shared property intrinsic to each of the subjects«, but to the method scholars opt for in analyzing them. »What makes them comparable is an intellectual and methodological shift by which we abstract our objects of study into data points that can be entered into a database or spreadsheet« (ibid.). In thinking about such »intellectual manoeuvres that refigure cultural objects in our minds as abstract systems of nodes and edges« (ibid.), Ahnert et al. remind us to think of the ensuing networks more in terms of maps that provide directions or complex images that give impulses for new questions. Such networks, they caution, cannot provide fully accurate or complete representations of a given corpus or issue. A visual network is more likely going to be a point of departure for scholarly interpretation or explanation than a final destination or result that speaks for itself.

In what follows, I bring their approach to the Norton Lectures that the German filmmaker Wim Wenders gave at Harvard University in 2018. Relatively short in duration, but aesthetically complex, the two lectures entitled »The Visible and the Invisible« and »Poetry in Motion« (Wenders 2018a; 2018b) lend themselves as test case. Wenders purposefully creates connections across disciplinary boundaries by applying the term poetry to literature, film, and dance and he speaks of multiple other filmmakers, artists, and people to position his œuvre relative to them. What makes his lectures particularly interesting for thinking about network analysis is how Wenders lays out a wide variety of associations and describes how they dynamically changed over time. As lectures on poetics are clearly centered on the performing lecturers, what is called »egocentric network« offers itself most readily as analytical tool. However, the commonly used concentric circles aren't the best possible visualization as these rely on varying proximity to the center I to describe levels of affinity (cf. Hollstein/Töpfer/Pfeffer 2020) and those would be difficult to determine in the context of lectures on poetics. Ahnert et al. advocate for networks composed of nodes and edges (points connected by lines) in which nodes represent data points or entities, and edges describe relations between them. The thickness of the edges can denote frequency of connections, different colored edges can represent different kinds of connections, different colored nodes can show different types of entities. Below are manually generated visualizations.



Fig. 1: Manually generated visualization of Wim Wender's lectures *The Visible and the Invisible* and *Poetry in Motion* (Harvard University, 2018)

So, what are the benefits? Which additional information, analytical insight, or level of comprehension does the visualization offer that a textual analysis does not convey, or not as easily? The most apparent benefit is the immediacy with which it renders relationality tangible. It »makes it possible to convey a tremendous amount of information all at once, in one view« by expressing »an internal logic of relationships between entities that is inherently intuitive« (Ahnert et al. 2021). The network visualizations communicates instantly that the forming of associations is central to the logic of these lectures and visualizing several of such lectures can make this quality immediately apparent. The thickness of the nodes communicates just as efficiently the relevance that specific references have for each lecturer. Another benefit is the display of media diversity in the making of connections. For someone

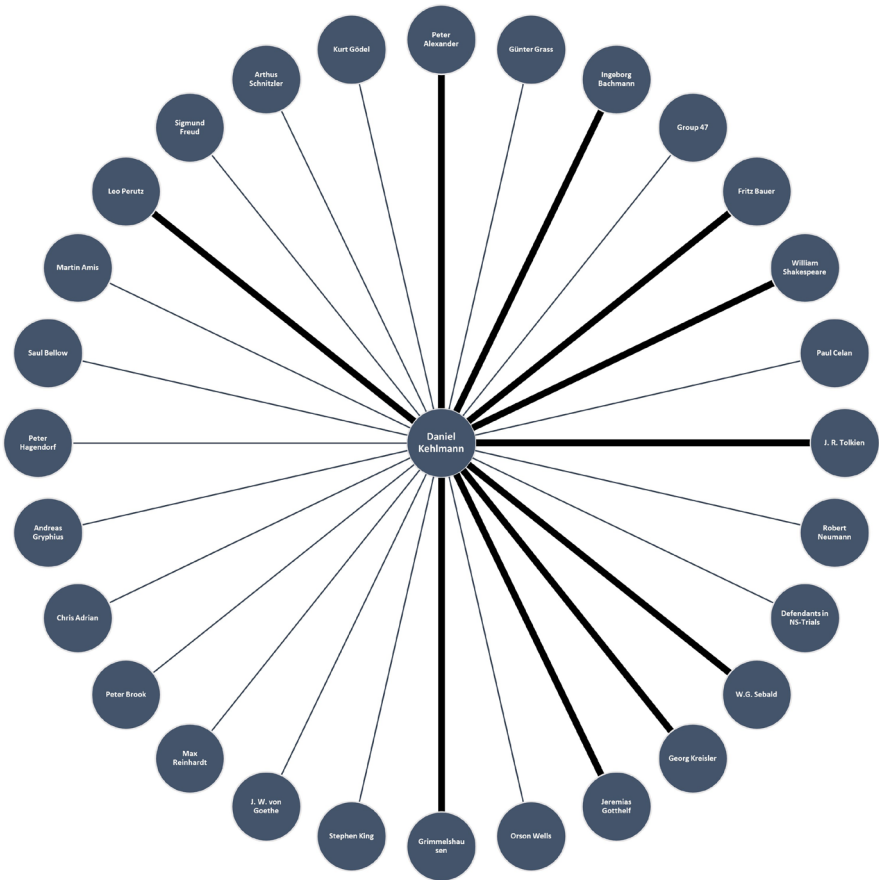


Fig. 2: Manually generated visualization of Daniel Kehlmann’s lectures *Kommt, Geister* (University of Frankfurt, 2014)

familiar with most or all the actors listed, the visualizations make it immediately transparent that the references include a variety of different artistic and non-artistic disciplines. Both Kehlmann, a writer, and Wenders, a filmmaker, refer to people in literature, film, and science. Kehlmann also names actors in politics when commenting on the Auschwitz trials and the involved general counsel Fritz Bauer; Wenders strongly associates with dance performances in discussing the choreographer Pina Bausch. It would also be possible to use color coding of the nodes to mark the cross-disciplinary nature of connections (cf. Weingart 2013). This would have to be limited to a few rough distinctions but could render the interdisciplinarity and interart connectivity visible.

The visualizations transfer the quality that Roland Barthes called the »plural« of the text (Barthes 1974, 6) to authorship. What Julia Kristeva coined as »inter-textuality« (Kristeva 1980, 37) and which was later extended to »intermediality« to describe resonances and relations between and across media (cf. Wolf 2017, 63 sq.), is inscribed into the creative subject. The visual networks above foreground referentiality and make it a central feature of what it means to be an author or filmmaker. They present authorship as network-driven and conditioned by multiple actors, thereby highlighting the multiplicity of artistic agency. From such a perspective, reading becomes writing and writing becomes reading – or viewing or listening – that is, any creator appears as engaged with other people (and their works), while the reception of an artist becomes an integral part of her significance. For example, the visualization indicates, albeit vaguely, that Wenders' engagement of Bausch and Yasujiro Ozu needs to inform how we think of Wender's authorship and, vice versa, which significance we attribute to Bausch and Ozu.

Such visualizations also lend themselves to be connected into a larger network which could represent many (possibly all) lecturers on poetics. Networks, as Ahnert et al. highlight, »can represent relationships at human visible scale, or scale to dizzying, visually indecipherable complexity« (ibid.). Lev Manovich highlights this potential in his reflection on the use of computational analytics for cultural criticism: »While we can apply them to a single or a few artifacts, they become especially important if we want to explore millions of artefacts« (Manovich 2020, 1). A representation of numerous lectures would allow both a distant reading that takes in the complexity and cross-referentiality within the corpus, and a close reading that focuses on a specific actor. Such a highly complex network would exceed the scope of this article, but it is nevertheless important to stress that it could be a tool for exploring new questions such as: Who is most frequently referenced? With whom from the eighteenth (or nineteenth or twentieth) century do contemporary writers, artists, or filmmakers most frequently associate? Which actors make a lot of references to others? Which ones make few connections? The network's descriptive visualization could then lead to an argumentative presentation of findings. Ahnert et al. underscore with emphasis that a network analysis, in most cases, will not be a research outcome in and of itself, but that is more likely a means towards a larger interpretive goal. Scholars still need to interpret and relate their analysis to those details and developments that cannot be displayed in the network's abstract visualization. While the numerical data itself would be only of moderate interest to literary criticism, as tools for further exploration it might prove instrumental in provoking new lines of inquiry and bringing evidence to larger projects. Studies that seek to explain, for example, how certain actors emerge as figures of influence or how practices of authorship have changed over time could benefit from it.

3 On Tracing Creative Networks

Beyond such large-scale considerations, a network analysis also offers means to describing more nuanced aspects of socio-aesthetic relations and this is where Latour's theory can be instrumental. Binczek and Knapp argue in their engagement of ANT that the diversity of who and what can be an actor is precisely what makes the network approach so enticing for literary studies. Latour's insistence on transformative impacts in distinguishing intermediaries – »what transports meaning or force without transformation« – from mediators – which »transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry« (Latour 2005, 39) – radically shifted the focus from questions of origins of agency (intention, volition, or consciousness), to its effects. This opened new realms of possibility to the critical gaze seeking to understand agency, as for example when Latour argued for the agency of bacteria or telegraph wires (Latour 2005, 108). The visualizations above provide only a limited representation of the possible diversity and heterogeneity of actors. In what follows, I look for ways to include the writing tools that Zeh discusses, the lecture hall and university buildings Beyer speaks of, or the ghostly presences Kehlmann beckons. As far as literary theory and poetics are concerned, the translations between media, objects, concepts, and human agents and the generative power that stems from these mediations are of foremost interest. Knapp underscores: »ANT conceptualizes persons as heterogenous networks [...] to which the body belongs as much as acquired cultural practices and the objects involved in them. One becomes a writer only by integration in actor-networks« (Knapp 2019, 89). This perspective renders interrelations between *poiesis* and *aesthesis* visible, that is between creation, self-creation, and reception of and in art works. Such interrelations go beyond established categories like intertextuality, intermediality, and intersubjectivity and challenge theorists to readjust or let go of concepts that have long served as critical tools of the trade. To further develop this thought, let us look at Wenders' Norton lectures beyond graphic visualization and trace networks by describing instances of controversy, contradiction, translation, and mediation.

When bringing network analysis to the study of literature and the arts, the question ultimately needs to be: To what end? Latour embarked on a life-long quest of employing science studies as means towards reassembling the social. In doing this, he points out how scientific findings are the result of complex social dynamics and, vice versa, how social dynamics are fueled and propelled forward by scientific findings. The basic premise on which he built Actor-Network-Theory is that the social is not in any way opposed to, standing behind, providing the context, or adding an additional dimension to all else that goes on in communities, large or small, but that *all* interactions are part of and contribute towards forming the

social. »In this meaning of the adjective, social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social« (Latour 2005, 5). Things that are not themselves social, but are involved in creating it, include literature, art, music, films, and any other form of artistic creation in what he calls the fictional and reference modes of existence (Latour 2018, 233 sq.). This begs the question if literary studies can be a vehicle for social analysis in the same way that Latour employs science studies.

A significant portion of ANT-informed approaches to literary works traces how characters or objects in plays, novels, or poems become part of associative networks. These scholars emphasize how material objects can take on agency and functions as actors (mediators) within networks that unfold within a work of art. Others widen the scope of their inquiry to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the literary field and describe the agency that literary works and their authors have within social networks. Extensive examples are the edited volume by Knapp on literary networks in the eighteenth century (cf. Knapp 2019b) or Felski's tracing of the affective attachments artworks provoke across period and genre distinctions (cf. Felski 2020). A considerable number of scholars takes the engagement of ANT beyond methods of analysis. Many point to and imitate Latour's literary style of writing – his frequent use of figurative language or storytelling as well as his reliance on literary works for illustration (cf. Alworth 2016, 306 sq.). Following Latour's provocation that traditional critique has »run out of steam« (Latour 2004, 225 sq.), they look for ways to prioritize matters that are of concern to a wide audience and shun detail-oriented, deep analysis of texts. Most prominently, Felski challenges her fellow literary critics to rethink their role in creating associations that make up the social (cf. Felski 2015). Instead of employing hermeneutical methods to extrapolate meanings from texts that would otherwise remain hidden, she suggests, that critics should prioritize »curating, conveying, criticism, and composing« (Felski 2016, 216), thus purposefully and consciously acting as mediators.

Ultimately, all these studies are attempts in coming to terms with the broader challenge Latour's redefinition of the social poses: Describing not just how it changes our understanding of literature, authors, their critics, and their tools, but also how these diverse actors contribute to the assembly and reassembly of the social. David Alworth calls for »a radically literary sociology« (Alworth 2016, 313), Yves Citton proposes that literary studies evolve into comparative media studies:

The development of a ›media archaeology‹ creatively hybridizing historical inquiries, science and technology studies, aesthetic analyses, political philosophy, and artistic practices allows for media studies both to craft fascinating new objects of research-experimentation and for vital technopolitical issues to be revisited from the kind of reflexive standpoint to which literary studies have so much to bring. (Citton 2016, 325)

The lectures on poetics described above support this sentiment. These lectures are themselves involved in numerous networks across media and disciplines, and what is more, present artworks as principally dependent on and integrated in such heterogeneous networks. When reassembling poetics along the lines of Latour's reassembly of the social, intra- and intertextual relations matter as much as impacts across media or disciplines, and objects are as substantive in their materiality as concepts in their (ghostly) figurations. Wenders clearly communicates his desire for category crossing in the title *Poetry in Motion*, and his genre-defying lectures provide an excellent example of how literary studies can engage in comparative media archaeology.

As Wenders narrates conceptual connections and styles he pursued throughout his career, he quickly reminds his audience that their relevance to him was transient. With an amused expression on his face, he revisits ideals and ideas dear to his former filmmaking selves. In returning to one of his earliest movies *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1972), he shows a scene that bears astonishing similarity to Latour's definition of the term ›network‹. Latour points to a female character who suffers from post-partum depression by citing from Denis Diderot's *Le rêve d'Alembert*, a philosophical dialog containing key elements of a materialist theory (cf. Latour 2005, 129 sq.). Led by the motto ›You must conquer or die‹ (ibid.), this woman builds up resilience by making herself the ›center of her network‹ (ibid.) and relying on relations she established to objects in her home. Wenders screened film clip portrays a strikingly similar strategy. It shows a young man named Bloch (played by Arthur Brauss) who, as he moves through a kitchen, ›has to touch everything as if that could help to constantly affirm his existence‹ (Wenders 2018a). Wenders thus chronicles his former ›fascination, if not obsession, with things and their surfaces‹ (ibid.), a fascination nourished by Siegfried Kracauer's 1960 publication *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* along with Marxist Materialism. Wenders' strict materialism culminated in a brief shot of an apple hanging from a tree, which, as he is adamant, has absolutely no symbolic or metaphorical meaning. In revisiting his former beliefs, Wenders opens his own network, touching on references much like his main character touches material objects.

As tantalizing as this may appear to a scholar eager to dive into comparative media archaeology, it must be noted that it is also utterly ephemeral. Peter Handke's namesake 1970 novel which was key in starting the New Subjectivity literary movement, Kracauer's film theory, Marxism and the socialist convictions fueling the student protests of 1968, as well as the distinctive visual style of Alfred Hitchcock are all conceptual characters Wenders associated with, but these associations did not last. Just as swiftly as Wenders rhetorically sketches these connections, he erases them. The allure these theories used to hold on Wenders has since faded. The socialist ›creed that films dealt with the material world. Period‹ (ibid.) lost its

traction on him; and he shed his former convictions that »no metaphysics loom behind the surface«, or that, indeed, »there was no behind« (ibid.). This is where a major methodological advantage of a network analysis according to ANT becomes visible: its potential to describe how »networks are [...] animated, volatile, contingent, and messy« (Alworth 2016, 309) makes it possible to describe »the genesis, fragility, and changeability of networks« (Thomalla/Spoerhase/Martus 2019, 10, transl. G.H.), rather than a static shape.

Wenders' erasure of connections occurs by way of discussing *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987). He recalls the onset of »doubts about materialism and the monopoly of the visible« and describes how, in response, this film »ventured into the vast territory of the unseen« (Wenders 2018a). He juxtaposes the main character, the soul-searching guardian angel Daniel (played by Bruno Ganz), with the strict materialist Bloch, the utterly non-symbolic apple with a stone that Daniel picks up. This stone epitomized Wenders' newfound affinity for metaphysics as he sees in it »the idea of a stone« and argues it »carried all the weight of the world« – a reference to Peter Handke's 1977 journals *The Weight of the World*. Whereas *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* denied metaphysics, transcendence, or even figurative meaning, Wenders' masterpiece *Wings of Desire* places them front and center. In this, an important parallel to Kehlmann's poetics takes contours as Wenders likewise insists on being able to cross the borders between fictional and non-fictional worlds while also virtually travelling through time.

To further challenge his early-career beliefs, Wenders revisits his documentary *Invisible Crimes* (2007), a work antithetical to the airy aesthetics of *Wings of Desire*. The NGO Doctors Without Borders commissioned Wenders to contribute to a film project they could use as educational tool in combatting wide-spread sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Wenders produced the film out of Kabalo, a place made famous by Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* which in turn is connected to the adaptation *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola. Wenders' film addresses the suffering caused by soldiers who roam the war-torn country and abuse women whose houses they invade. To simultaneously grant the female victims and their testimonies a strong presence and to portray their »absence in the public eyes of men« (Wenders 2018a), Wenders' film interrupts the synchronicity of visual and audio representation. The female witnesses visually fade in and fade out while their spoken testimony continues throughout, sometimes as synchronous sound, then again as voice-over accompanying the depiction of empty spaces. This creates eerie, ghost-like visuals that clash with the brutality in the narrations of rapes they experienced and of killings they witnessed. From his purposeful juxtaposition of what he calls »contrasting [...] mindsets« or »contra-distinctions«, a different slate of conceptual characters emerges, among them the »visible, invisible, presence, absence, respect, disrespect, attraction, repulsion« (ibid.).

Wenders' lectures do not present a stable network of people and ideas that he relied on throughout his career. Much rather, he sheds light on processes of association and attachment, disassociation and detachment: how relations to people, things, ideas come about, what makes these relations significant, why such emotional or conceptual bonds turn brittle, when they break apart, and whether they can be replaced. Wenders lectures are not just of interest in this context because they offer an example of how a creative subject presents and constructs itself by virtue of relating to other, but also because he thinks through the implications that his self-presentation has for defining a work of art by turning to the question »What exactly is a film anyway?« (ibid.). Having recalled his own associations and attachments, Wenders is just as keenly aware that a film's audience equally forms such bonds. As such, he refuses to define film by legal ownership, by *auteurship*, or creative cooperation among the many members of a production team. Wenders ultimately arrives at »the simple truth that films only exist when they are being watched [...] by somebody with a curious or open or even caring look«. Indifferent watching does not bring a film to life, so he explains, only »a loving look« (ibid.). He extends this notion of co-creation to the reading of literature, what he calls »reading between the lines« which »sets how and where you contribute your own experience, your memory, your imagination, and all your associations« (ibid.).

Wenders' definition of the work of art has much in common with how ANT scholars look at and define it. They all foreground not just *that* the artwork is connected to others and other things, but also *how* such connections make a difference, focusing their attentions on mediations, translations, or transformations that occur as part of the processes of attachment and detachment, association and disassociation. Antoine Hennion, who devoted much of his sociological work to the implications of ANT on understanding culture, notes: »Whether it is a popular song, a contemporary art installation, an opera aria, or a painting, once a work is created, it escapes from its author; it resists, it has effects or it doesn't. These effects change according to circumstance; the work lives its life« (Hennion 2016, 302). In directing critical attention to affects such as love of or passion for art, Hennion explains, ANT proves to be a way of taking »pragmatism [...] back to its founding principles, *pragmata*, the *agency* of things« (ibid., 299, emphasis in the text) as it inevitably leads to the conclusion that art »has its own capacity to act« because it »forges identities and sensibilities; it does not obey them« (ibid., 294). Hennion points to musical pieces to underscore the changes, resistances, innovations, and added meanings each individual performance introduces to the »heterogenous tissue« (ibid.) that is the artwork.

Wenders lectures provide some clues as to what such a pragmatist understanding of art could entail when he offers three approaches to cinema as poetry. He singles out two artists whose works affected him especially deeply – had him

»hooked« Felski would say (cf. Felski 2020) – Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu and German dance choreographer Pina Bausch. In making the case that Ozu's film *Tokyo Twilight* (1957) and Bausch's choreography are poetry in motion, he not only describes qualities he sees in these works of art but also inserts his own emotional and intellectual responses. This provides a fitting example for how works of art can take on agency and lead to transformations within a network. Wenders begins by screening several disconnected homecoming scenes taken from Ozu's film to show that the film repeats the same gesture of crossing the threshold of a family home in slightly different ways by different characters. The scenes are, he explains, »all clearly repetitive, in their sounds, yeah, in their set-ups, in their grammar. [...] It dawned on me that in the realm of imagery, this was coming as close as I could think of to what rhymes do in a poem« (Wenders 2018b). This experience of poetry in Ozu's film set in motion Wenders' search for poetic expression in his own filmmaking and made him realize how departing from notions of storytelling could help him in finding a new freedom and a new language for his films.

His emotional reaction to Bausch's choreography was even stronger. Wenders explains how the poetry he witnessed in the dance made him resolve to translate it into the medium film, which eventually led to his 2011 documentary *Pina*. He confesses to previously having been disinterested in the art form of dance and describes how a performance Bausch choreographed in Venice, Italy, in 1984, profoundly changed his mind, even got him »weeping and [...] moved [...] to tears« (ibid.). In Bausch's choreography he discovered »a new language [...] with such an emotional impact« that he »had never witnessed before« (ibid.). He had to wait though for another actor to enter his network before he could fully do justice to the poetic quality: 3D technology. Due to Bausch's unexpected passing away this film evolved into a cinematic requiem in memory of the choreographer. The dialog consists of unscripted, freely presented messages from the dancers to the deceased Bausch, often played as voice over to accompany loosely connected dance scenes. The unscripted nature of the filming allows for deeply personal, individual messages to unfold – unplanned gifts as Wenders would call them – and the filmmaker places these into a sequence to make them resonate and reverberate. Just as he describes it in Ozu's film, there is rhythm and rhyme in the sequencing as both dancers and the spaces they move in reappear, albeit never as duplicates, always with some modification.

Hans Robert Jaufß argued in the early 1980s quite convincingly that a hallmark of modernity's art is that *aisthesis*, the act of experiencing and understanding art, requires acts of *poiesis*, creative work, of its audience as people need to insert their own experiences and ideas to supplement what the work of art offers. Wenders' lectures push such aesthetics of reception even further. Jaufß' conclusion that »poiesis and aesthesis interact« (Jaufß 1982, 608), really holds true both ways in this context.

Much in line with Jauß, Wenders speaks of various ways in which he experienced other works of art or how engaged spectators respond to and complete the films he makes; yet, additionally, he shows that the reception of artworks stands at the beginning of his creative process, that creating a new film for him is intimately connected to and dependent on his appreciation of literary texts, his enjoyment of dance, or his rapture in watching the films by other filmmakers. Since lectures on poetics are located at the intersection of artistic creation, authorial self-presentation, and criticism, they offer a particularly good window into the interactions of *poiesis* and *aesthesis*, of creative work and its dependency on the reception of other artworks. What makes a network analysis of Wenders' Norton lectures theoretically relevant is not so much that he relates his work to Ozu and Bausch – this is already well known – but how he describes the processes of translation initiated by their work, that is, how these artworks and performances act as mediators and thereby gain agency independent of their authors or creators. Scholars like Rita Felski, Lore Knapp, and Antoine Hennion have done significant pioneer work in this respect and there is potential for more exploration, especially in artists' self-reflexive statements about the emergence of their work, but also in the form of a reconceptualization of reader-response theory toward what Citton calls comparative media studies.

4 The Network Turn and Literary Studies

Network analysis, no matter its method, offers exciting and potentially quite fruitful opportunities in revealing the significance of relations and associations in the arts. It challenges literary scholars to revisit and rethink intertextuality, intermediality, or intersubjectivity and invites us to unearth a new diversity of actors. Communicative networks that social historians visualize with network graphs are not the same as the literary networks that emerge in lectures on poetics and that works of art more generally are involved in, and ANT in particular offers terminology and tools that allow critics to embrace the heterogeneity of such literary networks. Kehlmann's spirits, Zeh's writing tools, Beyer's architectural memories, Wenders' materialist apple as well as his idealist stone along with the conceptual figurations which he creates for the visible, the invisible, or for poetry itself, all enter these assemblies that constitute the different networks. In tracing such connections, it is, however, critical to remain mindful that »attachments should not be confused with roots; they are made and unmade over time, intensify or fade away, oriented to the future as well as the past, can assume new forms and point in surprising directions« (Felski 2020, ix).

Finally, any network analysis no matter its particular methodology confronts the Humanities and Social Sciences with their own shortcomings in making connections beyond disciplinary and methodological differences. The authors of *The Network Turn* are deeply invested in bringing humanities and social studies research into productive dialog with natural sciences and technology development. They see a great chance in the Digital Humanities as it opens not just new methodologies, but also new avenues for reaching broader audiences. Interestingly, scholars who take their cues from Latour are equally invested in making research findings in the Humanities and Social Sciences more accessible and relatable, albeit with different means. Here, lectures on poetics may have much to offer, not just as object of study, but also as stylistic blueprint or model with proven success in reaching broad audiences. These texts demonstrate a style of critical inquiry that we can call, following Kehlmann, a science of the spirits and the minds. Lecturers on poetics do not dissect ideas, unearth hidden meanings, or expose texts' weaknesses. While they may be critical or self-critical, they do not foreground critique. The gesture they introduce is to invite thinkers, writers, creative minds, and their works to join an assembly and to play their part in conversations which they bring to a public stage for others to enjoy and learn from. Given how popular lectures on poetics are both with live audiences and virtual viewers, literary critics may be well advised to take their cues from them.

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