

# Network Realism

A virtual ethnographic  
perspective on visual knowledge in networks

Anne Beaulieu

Copenhagen Business School Summer school

**ANT: from methodological principles to concrete strategies for managing the in-between**  
20 - 23 September 2010

# Network Realism

[www.networkrealism.wordpress.com](http://www.networkrealism.wordpress.com)

- 4 databases of images on the web
  - Rijksakademie (art institute in Amsterdam)
  - Tropenmuseum (ethnographic museum, Amsterdam)
  - Funda (real estate db)
  - Flickr (street art)



# network realism

Characterised by

Networked databases of digital images

**How are images in networked databases  
used in knowledge creation?**

Novel roles and behaviours

(lay/expert; preserving/ interacting)

**What is new about these practices?**

**How do we learn and adopt them?**



# Fieldwork through ANT motifs

- authority in a network
- following the actors & symmetry of people and things



# Authority in a network

- Vignette: Flickr as used by researchers
  - STS sensibility to power/knowledge
  - New platforms and discourse of democratization, challenge of traditional experts (producers, Wikipedia logic, etc)
- When researchers use this platform, what are the ways in which certain material becomes important? How are knowledge claims made, on what basis?



That's my big problem, because when I post a picture of a rainbow, my followers are either not going to comment, or else they will un-follow me.

They're going to say: 'What?!!! This guy who photographs graffiti also takes pictures of rainbows! He's too sensitive, he's not a real graffer. Cause a graffer can't like rainbows—he's gotta be a MAN!'

And because of that ambiguity, followers are going to be disgusted. And then you're not using the platform as it should be. Not that there IS a way it should be used, but that's how people use it. That's how it's become configured through use. (Interview 2 December 2009)



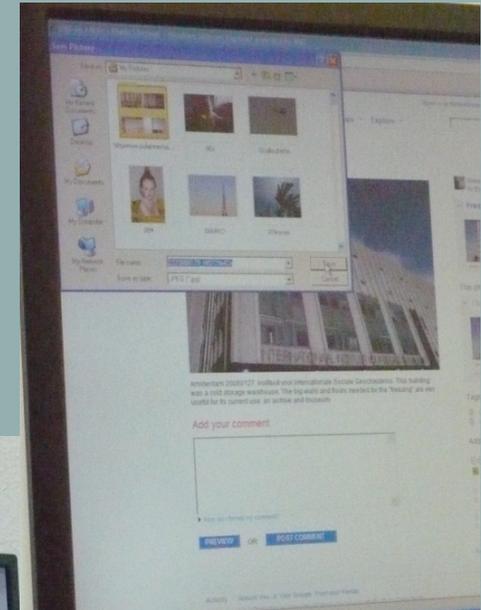
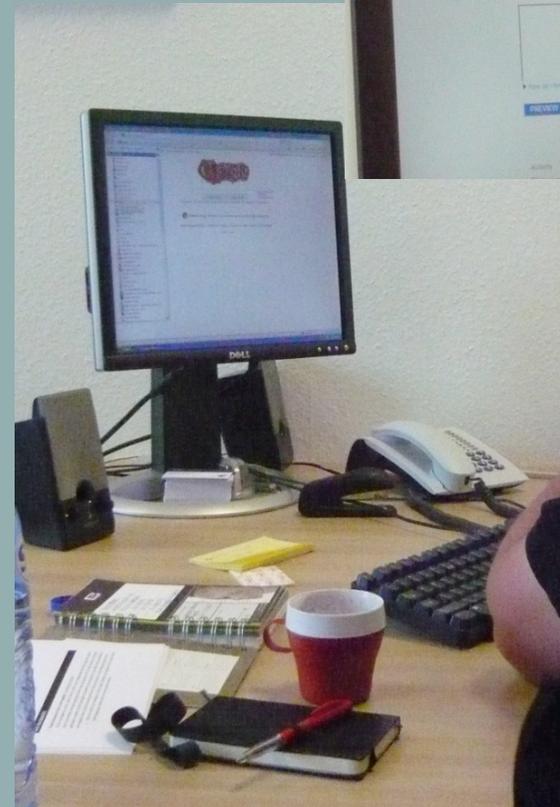
# Authority in a network

In considering how important the infrastructural dynamics of identity and sociality can be for the meaning of specific photos and for the value of particular collections,

we are reminded of the importance of asking why authority might be ascribed to one particular actor rather than as distributed throughout networks of people and devices (Latour 1988, Shove 2007, Hand 2008).

*From Beaulieu, de Rijcke and van Heur, 2011*





# Following... capturing

- Trying to get it all down is typical of fieldwork
  - But 'capture' is related to promise of the digital
    - Seductive, making other kinds of fieldwork possible, teamwork
- (Bruun Jensen 2010, Beaulieu 2004, Newman 1998)



Google agenda

Zoeken in mijn agenda's [Zoekopties weergeven](#)

Afspraak maken

**september 2010**

M	D	W	D	V	Z
30	31	1	2	3	4
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13	14	15	16	17	18
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27	28	29	30	1	2
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- Mijn agenda's**
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    - Articles
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    - Tropenmuseum
    - Veni Sarah
    - Visual material
    - visual technologies special issue
    - vks chapter
    - Trash
  - Group Libraries
    - soctech
    - vks bibliography

**fieldnotes Mennes fotosessie**

Paragraph

above and dan trek ik de hoeken recht. And he adds more colour. If there is a lot of light, then the colours will not be as strong, so it's not that i enhance one colour or the other, but make all colours more intense, so that it looks less gray and so on.

I asked about order: and he said yes, very important, I pay lots of attention to the routing.

Then he returned to a question i had asked in the interview, about video, he said that he might start to use video because that was important for the ranking, having more info is important for ranking on Funda, and video is one of the things that improve ranking, so does having photos, but no one looks at a house without photos, that is absolutely essential these days, so he might use video, but not using video material for reasons he explained in the interview, but using a video montage of the photos.

at the end, he asked me what i was going to do with all of this, i told i would be tying it all out, comparing it to other material i have been collecting, and also analysing it in relation to the other cases, i told a bit about how it was interesting to see the changing relation of photos to a house, and that this was something we also saw in terms of the art photography, although they are both documentary kinds of photos, there is a lot happening, dynamism, for example in relation to the market, etc. he was a photographer before becoming a makelaar, and he enjoyed that part of the conversation, he said: if you need anything else, geef een gill, and i mentioned that the other option we had discussed, of seeing a house with an extreme makeover, would also be interesting, he gave me Jose's direct number, saying that on the site, they give their Mennes number, he also more or less offered to also attend the photo session, following the extreme makeover, which was very nice, he also gave me her email, 'cause she would also have to know the background to all this [our research], and why it's so interesting'.

jose schildkamp: 0615004184 joseschildkamp@home.nl

As soon as we were inside, he started, noting that he was going to tell the story of the house, using particular objects as visual markers.

[just tweeted about morning: [YKSethno](#)

voor [#NetworkRealism](#) onderzoek: vandaag meegemaakt hoe Groningse makelaar heel kundig fotografeert! Ben benieuwd naar resultaten op Funda. Jonnie is one of people I am following.]

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view, I had asked about the possibility of a session when he would be making photos with his assistant, Nicky, and we made an

any day in Groningen. He was already there when I arrived, double parked and unloading equipment from the car. he had two bags, one computer, one photocopier and a very long tripod for taking photos from a height (he'd mentioned in the interview.) It turned out that there was no one home, and he called his office. he asked his secretary (diff from Nicky) to couple the appointment with the client, so that he could see the klantgegevens and financial information. The secretary did that, and he could not reach the house, but he got the phone number, but no mobile. he called the house, but got an answering machine. He then had to call the secretary and ask her to look on the paper form, telling her where the house was in the room. He got a 06 number in this way (this was with the paperless and officeless way of working). he had reached the owner, he heard that the house was

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# Following the actors

- Co-presence
- Think through media use
- Prolonged observation
  - what matters will return
  - or, if a one-off, will be talked about, resonate





# Human/non-human

- ‘problem’ of interviews
  - Drew attention to spatial/material configuration of work
  - Interface as intimate, solitary, etc.
- some ‘successes’

Ed is supercomfortable with all kinds of media, electronics and computers, and just goes right to work on my Mac (I had expected him to have a laptop... but he didn't. or didn't pull it out). In any case, I offered to get my mouse, when I saw that he didn't have a laptop, and he said that wasn't necessary, and indeed, was even better than I am at handling it. [here, referring to the touchpad]



It was funny to do an interview at home, and earlier today, I had given some thought to where we should sit. Not my office, because it's hard for 2 people to sit together, and not the dining room table, cause then you really have to sit next to each other.

So I was thinking the kitchen table, which is square, would be best. (thinking back to our discussions and difficulties with sitting with people behind the computer...).

That worked well, except it meant I had to empty the dishwasher and clean the countertop before he came.



# Human/non-human

- some 'successes' (very informative!)

*How to get the techno-human network to come to the interview?*

- Issues of material culture of digitality, organisation of work, intersection of spaces, infrastructures and activities (Mackenzie 2005; VKS 2008)





# Cutting the network

- Visual knowledge in action
  - Mediation practices of real estate agents with regards to producing media for database
    - ...own infrastructure (virtual office)
    - ...relation to other professionals (stylist)
    - ...relation to market (sellability)
- Cutting:
  - further fieldwork
  - reading and thinking (Stathern 1996)
  - writing



# conclusion

- "less fuss about the methods, but greater caution when apportioning the world into inherited categories"

Czarniawska

- Caution through 'middle-ranging': a reflexive interrogation of the relation between problems, cases and methods that is eminently practical

