Chapter 9
Anaphoric Trajectories of Creative Processes:
The Case of a Failed Film Project

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ABSTRACT

This chapter critically questions the strategy of applying the Actor-Network Theory to media studies. Arguing that an application of a fixed ANT-approach fundamentally opposes the ambition of Actor-Network Theory, this chapter outlines a different way of drawing inspiration from ANT. Based in the writings of the French cultural sociologist Antoine Hennion, who has been a pioneer in developing a cultural sociology inspired by ANT, and the recent writings of Bruno Latour addressing cultural production, the chapter suggests investigating the "anaphoric trajectories" of creative development processes. To illustrate this approach, the chapter analyzes the case of a failed film project and considers how the content of creative production processes may be incorporated into cultural production studies.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I tell the story of a film that was never made. In fact, the project never even reached the state of consisting in a manuscript. After fourteen months of development, the project ended while it was still in the initial phase of a tentative synopsis. Whereas the filmmakers, a trio of debutants: two producers and a director, set out to make a full-length feature film, their ideas of the format were scaled down over time and the final proposal was for a short film. When the project was terminated, the pitch for the film had been changed about seven times, and the director concluded that, once again, the proposal was not adequate. Also, the director's withdrawal of the proposal happened shortly after a film consultant of the Danish Film Institute had sent a rejection letter to the team, arguing that the project was not long enough in its development to receive a grant.

Although this failure case may seem unimportant and inferior I will propose that it may offer important insights into the questions about how a film project is developed. Most often, studies of film production tell the stories of successful filmmakers and completed, if not famous, films. While it is, of course, an interesting and popular genre of its own to convey post-rationalizations from filmmakers that have experienced success, I think the stories of unsuccessful filmmakers may also teach us a lesson or two. Failure cases provide a perspective that highlights difficulties of materializing, stabilizing and translating a project. Hence, I think that the case in this chapter – precisely because it is small, fragile and ends in failure – offers important insights into the trajectories of creative processes, and thus the nature of development work.

Furthermore, there is a theoretical argument why a failure case about the development phase of a film project is interesting to include in a book about Actor-Network Theory in Media Studies. Previous research that has imported inspirations from Actor-Network Theory into production studies has often focused on the role of materials and technologies (Mould, 2009; see also Pinch & Trocco, 2002; Yaneva, 2009). By focusing on a phase in production that entails very few materials and technological devices, this chapter aims to illustrate how a methodology informed by Actor-Network Theory has wider relevance for production studies than addressing the active role played by technology. With the concept of anaphoric trajectories, the chapter will look into how the process of development consists in testing and revisiting the idea of the project. By investigating the talking that goes on among the filmmakers, the paper will track the specific and mundane trajectories of altering the storyline and thus the course of the project. By doing so, the chapter will describe the chain of mediations that composes the development of the project and suggest this as a research methodology for future studies within production studies.

APPLYING ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY VS. RESEARCHING ANAPHORIC TRAJECTORIES

As this book sets out to present ways in which Actor-Network Theory can be applied in Media Studies, let me start by declaring that I do not necessarily think this endeavor is very productive. Speaking of "applying the Actor-Network-Theory" is problematic, in my view, because it risks cementing and dogmatizing what John Law (2009) has called "Actor-Network theory 1990" (p. 142). By doing so, we turn an empirically informed research approach into a theory which it was never meant to be. This argument will be explicated below. Yet, I also do think that the idea of this book to draw inspiration from ANT into Media Studies can be modified into a highly fruitful research strategy. To do so, I suggest drawing inspiration not only from "actor network theory 1990," but particularly from the vast and quickly growing body of literature that constitutes the diaspora of research that has affinities with the acronym ANT (Law, 2009, p. 142). Hence, in this section I turn attention to the ways in which creative production processes have been discussed by Latour in his later work, outlining how this research may add to the existing literature within the field of production studies. In making this proposition, look into the work by Latour's former colleague, the French cultural sociologist Antoine Hennion, and the tradition of cultural production studies. Thus, the chapter will propose an empirical research agenda informed by studies of diasporic ANT to follow anaphoric trajectories of creative production processes.

As Latour (1999) famously proclaimed, nearly fifteen years ago, "there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen!" (p. 15). According to Latour, the three words have the wrong connotations (network may be misinterpreted

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