Chapter 3
From Intermediality to Intermateriality:
Actor–Network Theory as a "Translation" of Post–Essentialist Media Studies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses Actor-Network Theory in the context of post-essentialist theories in Media Studies. In doing so, the similarities and differences between different models and concepts will be taken into consideration, such as dispositive, assemblage and actant networks. The chapter argues that instead of replacing models of micro-political analysis of media with ANT, it should rather be combined with such in a productive way. This argument will be put to the test by using the example of the remote control.

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter deals with the significance of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a post-essentialist theory, dismissing constructions of entities in favor of thinking in processes and relations: this includes clear-cut demarcations of humans, animals, things and/or technical devices, as well as such resulting concepts as technical artifacts as isolatable elements of culture and society. In addition to this, Actor-Network Theory objects to certain concepts of "acting" that are related to processes of the production of meaning. And finally ANT dismisses the construction of media as stable units. ANT is by far not the only theoretical approach that puts forward a de-essentialist perspective, moves away from the concept of *the* "media"[1], and rather focuses on processes that, in a broader sense, can be termed "mediatization" Nevertheless it steers this way of thinking in a particular direction, which will be discussed in this chapter. The question will be raised in what manner ANT "translates" Media Studies' post-essentialist approaches. From which perspectives is media dealt with? Which shifts in perspective are accompanied by this "translation"? In this chapter the argument is advanced that within the frame of Media Studies,

ANT is particularly productive when it is not applied as a substitution of such related micro-political approaches as dispositive analysis, but instead used in addition to and/or in combination with such. A dislimitation of the concept of media, in the course of which all processes of re- and destabilization of agency can be considered *as* mediatization, appears to be useless from a Media Studies perspective, although epistemologically speaking this would be achievable with or seem obvious in Actor-Network Theory.

POST-STRUCTURALIST MEDIA STUDIES AND MEDIAL LOGIC

The assumption that media are *more* than neutral transmitters between sender and receiver and that they play a distinct part in the process of transmission and mediation is central to Actor-Network Theory, although it is not specific to this model of theory. This assumption has been discussed at length in Media Studies – often in the context of medial logic – and can, to some extent, be considered its starting point. Analyzing the role media plays in the processes of cultural production of meaning is the core business of a branch of Cultural Media Studies that examines media as intersections of technical devices, cultural artifacts, and social relationships.

Thereby, medial logics are both presupposed and epistemologically relativized, as the observation is reliant on media itself. Thus, the focus of such an observation is placed less on the "characteristics" of media and more on what can be made perceivable and describable from a difference-theoretical perspective on the basis of media comparisons. Consequently, the "logic of media" is relative and can be determined "intermedially" only. Sybille Krämer (2003) referred to this circumstance as epistemic intermediality[2] and thus provided an important component for a de-essentialist way of thinking about media, which was developed further in different directions. In this context mention should be made of both the emergence of media characteristics in the course of their description and the treatment of processes of transmission and mediation as constituting factors, which also makes reference to theories of performativity. In this respect, transmissions are not exclusively considered medial realizations (e.g., of messages or contents), but instead are regarded as productions, embodiments, or translations.[3] Thus, a central aspect of a specific branch of Cultural Media Studies is formulated that has been inspired by post-structuralism since the 1990s. Following this academic perspective, media do not necessarily have to be the starting point of research in Media Studies. Instead the focus is shifted to the processes of mediatization or remediatization, which, depending on the specific theoretical approach, can be specified as restaging, embodiment, iteration, or transcription – as coming into being or becoming form.

FROM INTERMEDIALITY TO INTERMATERIALITY: ANT AS "TRANSLATION" OF POST-STRUCTURALISM

The post-structuralist assumption that transmissions and mediations always imply some sort of constitutive act forms the starting point of an application of ANT within the context of Media Studies. Media Studies assign the terms "translation" and "enactment" to this type of process. These terms not least provide an alternative to the concept of construction, which has the disadvantage that instead of being understood as a production of reality, it is frequently misunderstood as the artificial counterpart of reality, as was shown by John Law and Bruno Latour (Law 2009). Furthermore, Bruno Latour (2005) criticized

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