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*A rite in the light of the  
Actor-Network Theory  
– the research perspectives  
(as exemplified by the feast of  
Corpus Christi in Spycimierz)*

*Obrzęd w świetle Teorii Aktora-Sieci – perspektywy badawcze  
(na przykładzie Bożego Ciała w Spycimierzu)*

Research on annual rituals as conducted within the current of structural semiotics has permitted to define a ritual as a text, and more precisely, assuming the semiotic perception of culture, as a text of culture. Following the semiotic-functional approach, one of the options of interpretation is the communicative approach to culture and ritual practices, which makes it possible to apply, e.g., methodologies of textology and folklore research to the study of rituals and customs (Smyk 2020a). As pointed out by the semiotician of culture Umberto Eco, „[t]his means that not only *can* culture be studied in this way but (...) only by studying it in this way can certain of its fundamental mechanisms be clarified” (Eco 1979: 22). In view of this, I hereby pose the hypothesis that the application of the Actor-Network Theory may bring about a broadening of our knowledge concerning the culture-creating nature of ritual. The aim of the current essay is to delineate research perspectives that this may open to the researchers of ritual practices.

In order to substantiate the theoretical considerations, I propose to refer to the example of the well identified and relatively thoroughly described tradition of the Corpus Christi celebrations in Spycimierz (Łódź voivodeship, Uniejów commune). Unique to these celebrations is the practice of creating 1.5 to 2 m wide flower carpets on the entire 2-kilometre-long path of the Corpus Christi procession. The existence of this spectacular, deeply religious custom had been recorded for about 200 years. Creating these flower carpets requires advanced, jointly perfected logistics and a huge work input from parish members and persons arriving from outside the parish to help; as a result, the practice constitutes a bonding agent for a community encompassing several generations. The practice is inseparably bound with the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, a feast of great importance in the Catholic Church, which is celebrated on the second Thursday after the Pentecost. In the Polish ritual, this feast, which has been observed in the country since 1320 and which in both its contents and its form is linked with the spring/Easter cycle, has retained its agrarian and apotropaic nature. In 2018, the Spycimierz tradition was entered into the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in Poland, and in 2021, into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Spycimierz tradition of celebrating Corpus Christi has been given scholarly attention in the form of a few essays and two monographs. The first of those, entitled *Procesja Bożego Ciała z tradycją kwietnych dywanów w Spycimierzu. Raport z badań i rekomendacje do planu ochrony* (Smyk 2020b), combines multidisciplinary analyses with proposals for their application in the practice of protecting intangible heritage. The second monograph, *Obrzęd jako tekst kultury. Przykład Bożego Ciała w Spycimierzu* (Smyk 2020a), is the fundamental reference point for the current essay and the hypothesis reviewed therein, since it constitutes a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the ritual as a text of culture with the application of the proposed operative definition of a text of culture, taking under consideration two approaches to a text: as a process in the functional-communicative perspective and as a structure. The monograph opens with an interpretation of a rite in the categories of a process that extends over a period of time, occupies multiple spaces, is characterized by a variety of codes, has clear-cut organizational principles, and varies over time, both in terms of hours and in terms of decades. It also presents an example interpretation of a ritual structure, namely the distinguishing element of the Spycimierz feast: the flower carpets. This structure is therein interpreted in reference to a succession of defining features of a text of culture, describing spatial traits, textual framework, distinctiveness in comparison with other texts of culture, multi-codedness of the ritual structure, and clear-cut principles of construction. The final chapter presents an attempt at reconstructing the mechanisms of the rite's cohesion, first on the level of semantic cohesion, correlated with the cohesion of the community practising the rite, and later on the level of structural integrity. In the course of the analysis, a rite turns

out to be a carrier of an idea, a shared property, a cultural model of the world, and a product of culture, and its formal cohesion is based on a drive towards maximum multi-codedness evinced by each of the integrative cohesion schemata that transform objects into ritual signs and unite signs to form ritual texts. For this reason, the theory of the text of culture is systematically reconstructed in order to provide terminology for a re-definition of a rite and its comprehensive reinterpretation in a new semiotic, communicative and textual perspective. Overcoming the one-sidedness of the semiotic, textological, folkloristic or ethnological perspectives, the monograph attempts to sustain a balanced multidisciplinary approach characteristic of the contemporary discourse in the humanities and cultural studies. However, the monograph encourages the question whether it is possible to carry the analysis forward by employing further methodological conceptions, for instance those offered by the Actor-Network Theory.

### **Why the Actor-Network Theory? Four arguments in favour**

The Actor-Network theory<sup>1</sup> (henceforward: ANT) has as far not been applied in researching ritual; however, some arguments can be given suggesting that this is not impossible. This theory was created in the 1970s within the framework of the sociology of knowledge and sociology of science; foundations for its classic form were laid in the 1980s by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. Today, it functions on the borderline of several disciplines (cf. Abriszewski 2010a: 19) including sociology or philosophy; however, from the point of view of this essay, and the legitimation of the posed hypothesis, the more important areas are anthropology and ethnology (in ANT, in the versions of the anthropology/ethnology of the laboratory and of science), which are principally predestined to research rituals and customs. Bruno Latour repeatedly emphasised that from ANT's point of view, anthropology

offers a unique cognitive perspective, since only anthropology does not persistently question whether the object under research is cultural or natural in nature. An anthropologist in the field is curious about simply everything, no matter whether it is myths, religious rituals, farming methods, ways of raising and training fighting cocks, kinship structures, technology of stone axe production, or encounters with ghosts (Abriszewski 2010b: IX).

Thus, since it is possible to apply the tools of anthropology and ethnology in the analysis of the work of scientists and the processes occurring in a laboratories, it should also be possible to review a ritual in the categories of a laboratory and to apply ANT in the description of ritual processes.

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<sup>1</sup> On the ANT, cf., above all, Latour 2005; Abriszewski 2010a; Abriszewski 2010b.

The second area where ANT and the textual cultural approach to ritual meet is their shared methodological fundament, namely structuralism. ANT is a “closed structure” (Abriszewski 2012: 13); but above all, as a theory it lies close to Ferdinand de Saussure’s emphasis on the concept of *network*: “The Swiss linguist described the world of language not as a mirror of the world of entities, but as a network of objects that acquired their own identity because they differed from one another” (Abriszewski 2010a: 20). Also, by writing, among others, that “language is a system whose parts can and must be considered in their synchronic solidarity” (de Saussure 1966: 81), he inspired the ANT theoreticians – as well as the entire scholarly world – to think about phenomena in terms of assemblages of elements forming a system and linked by interconnected relationships. It must be noted, however, that what is meant by the structuralism that inspired ANT scholars are works by authors labelled as structuralists and post-structuralists, as well as ones who are difficult to place unambiguously, such as Gilles Deleuze or Jacques Derrida; valid are “all conceptions that perceive the employment of the notion of structure, or structuring, as important to them” (Abriszewski 2010b: XI). This angle may liberate to the researchers of ritual in the ANT perspective, as they would no longer be labelled as making use of archaic conceptions and instead of being assigned to a strictly defined current of thought, they would only be perceived as employing inspirations based on structuralism; inspirations which nowadays are, in fact, hard to evade.

The third area shared by ANT and the study of ritual is semiotics<sup>2</sup> (which ANT acquired, in fact, through the mediation of structuralist semioticians), which fact is clearly linked with the research of ritual as a text of culture. This is because the semiotics of culture relies on the assumption that culture has the nature of signs and that those signs, which – for the purpose of cultural communication – create texts of culture, are structural in character. Let us, at this point, confirm whether a scholarly text analysed in ANT can be substituted with a text of culture that is a ritual. This point was made easy by Bruno Latour himself, who, in shaping the Actor-Network Theory, made use of the works by the structuralist semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas, subsequently arriving at the conclusion that “on a certain level a scholarly text tells us a relatively simple story, in which the main heroes are subjected to a series of trials, which changes their status and reveals who they ‘truly’ are” (Abriszewski 2010a: 46). Latour and Françoise Bastide compared a scholarly text to a fairy-tale (Latour, Bastide 1986: 62–64; Abriszewski 2010a: 46); and let it be remembered that Vladimir Propp’s theory, and the types of hero and functions of agents he had defined, may also be applied in the analysis of a ritual (Smyk 2020a: 104–119). Thus, the study of

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2 K. Abriszewski speaks about “important traces of semiotics” in ANT, pointing to Law 1996 and Law and Mol 1995 (Abriszewski 2010a: 19). He also cites John Law: “The actor-network theory is a ruthless application of semiotics” (Law 1999: 3, cited in: Abriszewski 2010a: 150).

ritual as a text of culture and its research from the ANT standpoint revolves around the fairy-tale seen in the narratological perspective.

As noted by Krzysztof Abriszewski, “the heroes of scholarly texts are subjected to various laboratory tests and conceptual trials whose aim is to confirm the existence of a new actor (...) by demonstrating what the hero can do, that is, in what manner it influences other actors” (Abriszewski 2010a: 46).<sup>3</sup> In a ritual, in turn, for instance in the Corpus Christi with the flower carpet tradition, the heroes are the parishioners setting the flowers on the stretch of the carpet assigned to their team. Also their action can be analysed in terms of a hero’s trial: they are assigned “a difficult task to complete. They can be described as positive heroes, who in the happy finale to the ritual shall receive a reward. In the earthly dimension, the happy finale and the reward acquire the shape of an Eucharistic procession that is as splendid as the community had envisaged it (...)” (Smyk 2020a: 107). In this case, the hero’s trials are, for instance, the acts of acquiring flowers, fighting antagonists who may obstruct the gathering of flowers, separating petals from stems (reminiscent of the fairy-tale task of separating poppy seeds from ash), building two unusually tall gates, setting a pattern with a theme assigned by the parish priest (e.g. the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fátima apparitions), combatting weakness or tiredness caused by hard work, facing inclement weather – heat, rains, sudden thunderstorms – which is thus perceived as an antagonist of a kind. In this manner, to return to the description of a narrative analysed in the ANT perspective, during a series of trials (not laboratory tests in this case, but ritualistic ones) the parishioners demonstrate what they can do, that is, in what manner they influence other actors: they change the substance of the world by building a cohesive text of culture. This is done by making use of materials belonging to a variety of codes, namely, most generally speaking, the kinesic, personal, objectual, verbal and verbo-musical ones (Smyk 2020a: 98–130, 166–177), which conforms to the observation of the ANT theoreticians that “scholarly texts combine in themselves a variety of diverse elements intended to reinforce them (...)”; they unite those elements “into one whole, that is, into a network of various relationships, where social, natural, technical and other phenomena are bound into a single knot” (Abriszewski 2012: 132–133). In the case of a ritual text, those are integrative strategies which guarantee the semantic and structural cohesion of the ritual. They make use of social phenomena, such as the family, the parish, community leaders or tourists, natural phenomena – flowers, saplings, sand from the nearby river, water for sprinkling the greenery – as well as technical ones – large and small tractors, cars, trailers, pulleys and ropes, wires, various vessels, photographic and film cameras, the Internet, sound amplifiers etc.

In addition, the parishioners create a “new actor”, just as the researchers do during laboratory processes analysed in the ANT approach, and reinforce its manner of

3 More on this topic, cf. Abriszewski 2012: 144–145.

existing; in this case, this “actor” are the flower carpets and the entirety of the village’s Corpus Christi decoration, which can “do” many things and “influence other actors” in many ways. This is because, if we assume a ritual to be a carrier of ideas, the Spycimierz celebration of the Corpus Christi expresses the ideas of truth, goodness and beauty, to which can be ascribed, respectively, the functions of *docere*, *delectare* and *movere*, especially the function of influencing multi-faceted changes in the attitudes of the guests arriving to witness it (Smyk 2020a: 210–212, 219–221, 244–245).

This is linked with the ANT researchers’ enquiry into what stories are told by the participants of the analysed discussion and scholarly texts (Abriszewski 2010a: 46), which can be answered also by referring to a ritual. For instance, an analysis and interpretation of patterns arranged on the flower carpet makes it possible us to state that the Spycimierz parishioners give a collective testimony to their “respect for the sacrum, chiefly the Holy Sacrament, to deep faith, and to participation in the community of the Catholic Church and Christendom. They deeply revere Christ and the Virgin Mary and demonstrate their belonging to the parochial and national communities” (Smyk 2020a: 274, Smyk 2019: 61).

Finally, the fourth, serious argument in favour of making use of ANT in the continuing semiotic and text-cultural research on ritual: the ANT theoreticians are fascinated with ethno-methodology and make broad use of it, by which they essentially increase the value of field research that applies various traditional and modern techniques and tools, thus returning it to its proper position. Ethno-methodology – a variation of interaction-focused theories with a phenomenological slant that appeared in the 1960s (Turner 2006: 480–494), and the closely connected cultural anthropology “oblige us to construct a scholarly report by means of acquiring knowledge from respondents. It is the researched agents (that is, actors) themselves who are able to conceptualise and explain everything that they do” (Abriszewski 2010b: VIII). Moreover, putting it more emphatically,

[e]thno-methodology is particularly rigorous in this area, stating that the researched actors themselves possess not only appropriate specialist language, but also all the necessary meta-languages, and they are able to explain everything on their own (the explicability principle), whereas the researcher is forbidden to impose on them his own invented meta-language (Abriszewski 2010b: VIII).

Research on ritual as a text of culture which is being referred to here emerged in the current arising from ethno-methodology and ethno-linguistics as practised in Lublin, that is based on the cognitive approach to a text of folk culture; an approach that requires the researcher to remain in the closest possible contact with his respondents’ manner of thinking and their way of perceiving and naming the world. For this reason, the analysis presented in the monograph *Obrzęd jako tekst kultury...* (Smyk 2020a)

was based on statements of thirty-three parishioners elicited during field interviews (Smyk 2020a: 291–294), resulting from the empowerment approach and the assumed perspective of a participant in the ritual process. Such a participant may be called, following the anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, a “native”, making it possible to accept her injunction that “the native voice must be heard and respected” (Hastrup 1993: 174; Smyk 2020a: 14). The approach accepted therein assumes reconstructing and interpreting the parishioners’ knowledge and perceptions concerning their own ritual sphere, in many cases referring to their statements, keeping a clear delimitation between the *emic* and *etic* approaches (Smyk 2020a: 85, 183, 203).

In sum, the above demonstrates that research on ritual in the ANT current constitutes a natural continuation of research on ritual as a text of culture, conducted in the light of semiotics in the structural-functional approach and based on material obtained during ethnographic field research.

### **Methodological advantages of applying ANT to research on ritual**

The first methodological advantage of researching ritual in the ANT current is a new view on the elements of the structure of such a text of culture: entities or objects, that is the ritual’s actors, in ANT known as *actants*. “By adding material and technical factors”, the ANT “redefined society, at that point calling it a ‘collectivity’”<sup>4</sup> (Abriszewski 2010b: X) consisting of “humans” and “nonhuman factors” jointly creating a shared history of people and things.<sup>5</sup> This history is shaped by the principle of symmetry, which is based on the achievements of structuralism and cultural anthropology and which commands us to abandon the division into nature and culture perceived as an opposition:

Instead, these two poles are perceived as arrival points – various innovations consist of a range of factors: physical, biological, textual, technical and others, and for this reason what matters is the point of arrival: the time when the fully formed innovation is classified as belonging to either nature or culture. (...) Hence, humans (the human factors) and nonhumans (the nonhuman factors) should be treated symmetrically (Abriszewski 2010a: 149).

In ANT, this claim is followed by the assumption that it is no longer possible to stereotypically distribute traits arising from the nature/culture opposition, which – to simplify – means that not only humans, but also the nonhuman entities have the

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4 The concepts of *society* or *community* continue to be reserved for their classical understanding that focuses on the human aspect (cf. Abriszewski 2010a: 22–21). More on this issue, see Latour 2005: 74–78.

5 Without distinguishing the history of the society, culture or nonhuman factors (Abriszewski 2010a: 150–153). On the power and subjectivity of objects as actants, see Latour 2005: 63–86.

option of negotiating their situation (see Abriszewski 2010a: 149–150), since “objects too have agency” (Latour 2005: 63). In the analyses of the Corpus Christi ritual as a text of culture, traces of this research position are visible in the discussion of the parishioners’ interactions with nature which can be described as “cooperating with nature on its own terms” (Smyk 2020a: 247; cf. 247–250). Assuming the ANT perspective would legitimate the inclusion of, for instance, the weather conditions into the category of the ritual’s antagonists (a sudden thunderstorm, strong winds, rain setting in two days before the festival etc.) or the hero’s helpers (weather conditions facilitating the blossoming of flowers, their gathering and preserving etc.) without running the risk of being accused of overinterpretation. According to ANT, it is not possible to “place the actors in compartments assigned to them beforehand” (Abriszewski 2010b: XIII; cf. Latour 2005: 217–218); each object “is identified not through its essence, but its connections with other actors” (Abriszewski 2010a: 150) and assumes its form and attributes only as a result of relations with other entities – relations based mainly on constant negotiation (Abriszewski 2010a: 151):

Each time, the destiny of actors – also those actors we call “humans” – depends on the network of relations in which they are embedded. This means that I share my destiny with the entities I am linked with; but also that by linking myself with new entities I mark a new direction for my destiny (Abriszewski 2010a: 150).

It turns out that differences between the agent entities are of key importance in these relations and that a change in those differences “results in a change in the shape of the world” (Abriszewski 2010a: 21). Concurrently, those relations are so strong and stable that the entire structure – like a spider’s net (Abriszewski 2010a: 21–22) – is permanent, linking heterogenic actors on a range of planes (Abriszewski 2010a: 32), and it is also controllable. The result of this with regard to researching rituals is that since the relations between agents are strong and stable, such relations – links – can be discerned, identified and investigated by a researcher of post-folk customs or folklore in a performative dimension; and this has so far not been studied. For this reason, it seems worthwhile to depart from the mere describing of the network’s elements, that is the elements of the structure of a text of culture, in favour of a systematic interpretation of the links between those elements and the results of those links. Let us imagine, for instance, research that focuses on interpreting the relation between a parishioner and his garden in which flowers for the Corpus Christi are grown, between a procession attendant and the costume he wears on that day and which normally is kept in the sacristy of the parish church, or between the residents of the Leśnik village and parts of the gate they annually erect before Corpus Christi at the entrance to the church square.



An extremely interesting idea is to broaden the considerations to include Latour's distinction between active and passive links. When ANT's methodological directive, expressed as the injunction to "follow the actors themselves", is added to it, what results is endorsement of the methodology of ethnographic field research, and of the approach to analytic material as a subject, on the one hand;<sup>6</sup> on the other, when we decide to "follow a flower", for instance, or a crêpe paper ribbon, foil stencil or some such object used during Corpus Christi celebrations in Spycimierz, we may prognosticate a change of perspective in studying a multi-code ritual; a change resulting from a departure from anthropocentrism. Thus the structural-functional analyses of ritual as a text of culture harmoniously open themselves to post-anthropocentrism, trans-humanism, trans-relational ethnography etc. (cf. e.g. Majbroda 2019).

The second, and in my opinion the principal methodological advantage of researching ritual in the ANT current is the research tool known as 'translation' – a concept central to this theory and a fundamental principle of network-building. It focuses on the relation (i.e. the already mentioned network) and its dynamics, thus meeting the requirements of the structural, functional and semiotic research on ritual, since – as has been systematically demonstrated on the example of Corpus Christi in Spycimierz (Smyk 2020a) – a ritual as a text of culture can be analysed, first, as a structure and, second, as a process. It is owing to translation that ANT enables us to discern the multidimensional dynamics of ritual processes and describe it in a novel manner. Hence, this tool (hopefully, the future tool of ritual semiotics) must be briefly described.

According to ANT, the significance of elements discerned in a researched network is described "through dynamic relations into which it enters with other objects" (Abriszewski 2010b: XI). At this point, Abriszewski makes a reference to Michel Callon's terse definition: "*Translation* refers (...) to all the operations that link technical devices, statements, and human beings. The notion of translation leads to that of *translation networks*, which refers to both a process (...) and a result" (Callon 1995: 50). In the case of the Spycimierz feast of Corpus Christi, technical devices have already been mentioned; statements are given by parishioners in interviews with the media, conversations with researchers or songs devoted to the feast (Smyk 2020a: 129–130); human beings are the parishioners, priests, guests, researchers, tourists etc. Omitted in the above definition are materials of which the village's festive decorations are made, attributes of the Corpus Christi procession, and the entire kinetic code which constitutes the ritual (Smyk 2020a: 98–104).

This first definition of translation is complemented by Callon and Latour's observations regarding "all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and

6 "The best it [ANT] can do for you is to say something like: 'When your informants mix up organization and hardware and psychology and politics in one sentence, don't break it down first into neat little pots; try to follow the link they make among those elements that would have looked completely incommensurable if you had followed normal academic categories.' That's all" (Latour 2004: 62–63).

violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes on, causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force (...) Whenever an actor speaks of 'us', s/he is translating other actors into a single will, of which s/he becomes spirit and spokesman" (Callon, Latour 1981: 279). Translation in this sense can be spoken of also in reference to Corpus Christi in Spycimierz. The pronoun *we* (Polish: *my*) in all its forms or verbs in the second person plural appear constantly in field interviews, interviews in the media or in the song *Spycimierskie Boże Ciało* [*The Spycimierz Corpus Christi*], for instance: "We are glad to be appreciated somewhere. Because this is really an, an appreciation of our work. We are appreciated. Our work is",<sup>7</sup> "Civilisation is advancing, our carpets are also advancing";<sup>8</sup> "We are doing our best to make it look nice so that people come and watch us working".<sup>9</sup> Father Dariusz Ziemniak, the parish priest, says: "To our small community, because we are only six hundred people, this is always a special day. (...) The flower carpets we make are not just an adornment or a showpiece of the Spycimierz parish, but they are above all an expression of our deep faith" (Ziemniak 2018). The refrain of the song runs as follows:

Kwiaty pól, kwiaty łąk,	Field flowers, meadow flowers,
Łany zbóż, liście drzewa,	Grain fields, tree leaves
Wszystko to z nami śpiewa,	They all sing with us
Chryste, chwałę Twą	Your glory, Christ

(quoted after: Smyk 2020a: 129–130).

On the basis of these and similar statements, the ritual can also be analysed as common property (Smyk 2020a: 231–240). The translation of power and force onto one person as suggested by ANT is thus evident: one person being cited or a single parishioner singing a song speaks in the name of generations who for nearly two centuries have been cultivating the custom of laying flower carpets; s/he speaks also in the name of their family who in the given year are entrusted with a certain stretch of the carpet, in the name of the community etc. This would encourage comprehensive investigation of ritual translation in the ANT framework.

Following Callon's formula: "A translates B" (Abriszewski 2012: 232), translation is effectuated by each actor, that is, actant A defines actant B, which may be a human being or a nonhuman factor, a community, a single entity etc. The actions of actant A, in turn, are conditioned by earlier translations, that is selections of assemblages made earlier by this actant or other actors. Thus we obtain an image of a chain of translations

7 Testimony of the female interviewee Z.G. from Spycimierz; quoted after: Smyk 2020a: 221.

8 Testimony of the male interviewee L.Ł. from Człopy; quoted after: Smyk 2020a: 274.

9 Testimony of the male interviewee S.I. from Łódź; quoted after: Smyk 2020a: 226.

which lay a foundation for the construction of larger networks by means of various tactics of translating interests and controlling or reinforcing the stability of those networks (Abriszewski 2012: 230–241). A vision of this process tempts us to more comprehensively review its concepts and adapt it to the analysis of rituals; this, however, lies outside the scope of the current essay. Also, before any all-encompassing analyses are carried out, it is necessary to focus on generalities: examples of translations pointed out by the ANT theoreticians, with special emphasis on such expressions as “to change into”, “to be translated into”, or something “is being translated” into something else. Krzysztof Abriszewski writes:

The most lucid examples of whole chains of translations can be derived from scholarly practice. Thanks to the work of the sociologist and his research team, the society changes into a stack of filled-in questionnaires and those, in turn, into coloured graphs on a computer screen. The efforts of neurobiologists translate the process of axon regeneration into a set of photographs and tinted photo-montage images. The efforts of the editors of automotive magazines and their hosts of researchers change a real-life appraisal of a series of winter tires into a chart with numbers in it (Abriszewski 2010b: XI).

Krzysztof Abriszewski describes the chains, in similarly picturesque manner, also elsewhere (Abriszewski 2010a: 28–30), showing the result of a translation of a given element into new forms: its new representations, each successive one of which is enabled by the preceding ones and, if a strong bond between the representation and the represented entity is to develop, cannot be generated at random (because, perhaps, it is curbed by the poetics of ritual). The issue of translation chains and relations between them must, however, be postponed to another essay; here, let us review single translations evinced in the Corpus Christi customs as practised in Spycimierz.

Thus, to paraphrase Abriszewski’s points, it may be said that thanks to the efforts of the parishioners, their piety changes into the village’s festive decoration: the flower carpet, the gate, the row of little birches, or the musical compositions performed by the parish brass band. Owing to the flower sorters, knowledge regarding the nature of each plant species changes into the orderly preservation of plants in boxes, on fabric, in lofts or cellars. Such a box changes into a vessel with a key role in the preservation process. Owing to the work of parishioners who design the patterns, their vision is transformed into a new representation: stencils made of foil, wood or cardboard, large-format computer printouts etc. Later, the efforts of the persons responsible for the drawings transform those stencils into the patterns sketches on asphalt or paving stones. The efforts of the persons laying the carpets transform flowers known from fields, meadows and gardens into areas of colour on the path of the Corpus Christi procession. Those areas are then translated into national or religious symbols. Thanks to tourists and other professional and amateur photographers,

the carpets – still in the making or already finished – are replaced by hundreds of photos and films. Later, editors change them into films posted on YouTube, shown in the news etc. As a result of all-inclusive analyses carried out in the ANT framework, the process of semiosis occurring during the Corpus Christi may thus be viewed in a new manner, with many facets being considered and with a clearly visible logic of the reflexive layering of meanings and intentions revealed in the chains generating successive representations in the ritual's translation processes.

### **Conclusion. Additional benefits, inspirations and research perspectives**

The Actor-Network theory can be applied in researching ritual on condition that we accept the concepts of network and translation; this makes it possible to redefine the ritual, its structures and processes in the ANT framework, as well as to redefine the respondent,<sup>10</sup> and the entirety of the subject code used in the ritual, with their clear appreciation (up to their empowerment as proposed by ANT). It may also be expected that it shall yield a new perspective on the concept of text, especially the analysis of a text of culture that is a ritual, in terms of indexation, which may be high or low (Abriszewski 2012: 138–139). Other analytic concepts of ANT, which have a considerable interpretative potential with regard to ritual, are also worth pointing out. Translation is linked with noteworthy transformations, metaphors, connections, delegation, substitution, inscriptions and other forms and models of translation<sup>11</sup> (Abriszewski 2012: 230–241, Abriszewski 2010a: 77–89, 151, Abriszewski 2010b: XII; Latour 2005: 159–246 and elsewhere), as well as the concept of active mediators and passive intermediaries<sup>12</sup> and the description of the categories of mediators and intermediaries on the material of rituals (among others, Latour 2005: 39–42; Abriszewski 2010b: XI–XII). It seems that equally interesting will be the analyses of rituals in terms of the translation of interests (Abriszewski 2012: 233–235), calculation centre (Abriszewski 2010a: 29), long-distance ethics (Abriszewski 2010a: 158 and elsewhere), resource mobilisation (Abriszewski 2010a: 42 and others), tension between the internal and the external (e.g. Abriszewski 2012: 26–27), ritual in reference to the concept of location (Abriszewski 2010b: XVIII),

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10 E.g. by making use of the concept of actors in the ANT perception: as having a number of philosophies; as mediators revealing the movement of what is social; as fully competent; as a fully artificial and fully researchable collective, etc. (see Latour 2005). This includes the acceptance of ANT's concept of knowledge (see Abriszewski 2012).

11 Perhaps also re-combinations (Latour 2005: 252) or inclusions (Smyk 2020a: 130).

12 Abriszewski points to Latour's inspiration, i.e. Ludwik Fleck, "who speaks of active and passive elements and of the cognitive process as a play with them" (Abriszewski 2010b: XII). This thread is worthy of attention, especially considering that ANT makes a reference to a Polish scholar (cf. Fleck 2006: 107–107, 42, 176 and elsewhere).

localness and globalness (Latour 2005: 159–246), laboratory (Latour 1983) or to Latour's five sources of uncertainty (Latour 2005: 27–140).

"ANT's interests (...) do not concentrate on knowledge, but, while remaining ontological, focus on the enquiry into the shape of the collectivity and its changes" (Abriszewski 2010a: 20–21): the attention of ANT theoreticians remains focused on transformation understood as an act of actively transforming the world (Abriszewski 2010a: 18–33). This may result in a new description of ritual processes. The Actor-Network Theory constitutes a natural bridge between a structural-functional-semiotic description of a ritual (e.g. Smyk 2020a) and constructivism, since, first, it shifts the focus from structuralism (i.e., how a thing is constructed) towards functionalism (i.e., how this thing constructs worldviews and value systems) and, second, it opens an option of interpreting the way, or ways, in which texts of post-traditional culture construct a collectivity.

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## Summary

The author begins with the research on annual rituals in the current of structural semiotics, on the basis of which it is possible to define a ritual as a text of culture. Then, the author proceeds to demonstrate that the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) can be a natural continuation of the structural-functional research on rituals, because these two approaches meet in four methodological areas: anthropology and ethnology, structuralism, semiotics (of a text) and ethnomethodology, and are inspired by them. In the second part, the authors outlines two basic “methodological benefits” which the research on rituals may derive from the application of ANT: a new look on elements of structure of a ritual culture text and the use of translation as an *in spe* tool of ritual semiotics. In the conclusions, the author opens new research perspectives, in particular by presenting ANT as a natural bridge between the structural-functional-semiotic description of a ritual and constructivism, and as a chance to interpret the way in which texts of post-traditional culture build a community.

**Keywords:** semiotics, text of culture, constructivism, structuralism, ethnomethodology, post-folk culture

## Streszczenie

Autorka wychodzi od badań obrzędowości dorocznej w nurcie semiotyki strukturalnej, które pozwoliły określić obrzęd jako tekst kultury. Wykazuje następnie, że Teoria Aktora-Sieci (ANT) może być naturalną kontynuacją strukturalno-funkcjonalnych badań obrzędowości, gdyż te dwa podejścia spotykają się w czterech przestrzeniach metodologicznych, które je inspirują: antropologii i etnologii, strukturalizmu, semiotyki (tekstu) oraz etnometodologii. W drugiej części autorka nakreśla dwa zasadnicze „zyski metodologiczne”, jakie może przynieść badaniom obrzędów zastosowanie ANT: nowe spojrzenie na elementy struktury obrzędowego tekstu kultury oraz wykorzystanie translacji jako *in spe* narzędzia semiotyki obrzędowej. W podsumowaniu otwiera nowe perspektywy badawcze, szczególnie pokazując ANT jako naturalny pomost między strukturalno-funkcjonalno-semiotycznym opisem obrzędu a konstruktywizmem i jako szansę na interpretację sposobu, w jaki teksty kultury posttradycyjnej budują wspólnotę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** semiotyka, tekst kultury, konstruktywizm, strukturalizm, etnometodologia, kultura postludowa

Translated by K. Michałowicz