# Chapter 8
# Applying Actor–Network Theory in Production Studies:
## The Formation of the Film Production Network of Paul Lazarus' *Barbarosa* (1982)

**Markus Spöhrer**
*University of Konstanz, Germany*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the possibilities of ANT as an approach to Production Studies. On the basis of a detailed production log written by producer Paul Lazarus, the coming-into-being of the film Barbarosa (1982) is described. By using ANT, the assemblies of the film production, the hybrid networks and interconnections, which are established by human and non-human actors alike, are dealt with. Production is not a one sided process of inscriptions by humans on non-human actors. Rather, it needs to be understood as a reciprocal process of inscribing and acting. Finally, the "effects" are discussed which are produced by approaching film with ANT and conclusions are drawn as to how the theoretical scope of Production Studies needs to be modified: Films can be understood as "epistemic things" that are produced and produce themselves in reciprocal processes. They translate themselves into other networks after postproduction and are thus constantly subject to translational processes and not endlessly stable.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Nowhere is Murphy's Law – If something can go wrong, it will – more constant than in the shooting of a film.* [2]*(Paul Lazarus III, film producer)*

A film production[3] is generally considered an ephemeral project, a network consisting of different entities (studios, directors, film actors, producers, camera-teams etc.), which is limited to a fixed time span. Such temporary forms of organization aim at performing complex tasks, which are oftentimes only

vaguely defined (cf. Apitzsch, 2010, p.1). In contrast to repeating (or repeatable) procedures, a film project can be defined as "an operational production of goods, which is executed only once in a distinct manner" (Niemeyer, 2008, p. 12).[4] For this reason certain operational procedures of film productions as well as particular skills, which are required of the actors of such networks, are hardly predictable. This circumstance impedes pre-planning, especially since certain unpredicted problems may arise *during* production – a fact that is clearly reflected in the pessimistic undertone of the initial quotation by Paul Lazarus III. More than in the production of "regular goods," a film project is confronted with a great many of risk factors, which appear to be almost incalculable (cf. Rimscha, 2010, p. 125). Consequently, this mode of production implies a certain kind of instability and unpredictability of the work process. In case of complications such as delay of shooting, exceeding of budget or cancellation of a leading role, production companies may cancel the production at an early stage (cf. Sragow, 1990). Thus, unpredicted problems require a high level of flexibility from the actors enrolled in a film production network. Success or failure depends on a variety of factors, but especially on how stable the various entities of such a network are related to each other throughout the collaboration.[5]

In the production of the western film *Barbarosa* (USA, 1982), producer Paul Lazarus III acted as a central assemblage point in such a network. His main task was to maintain the chains of relations between the actors enrolled, in order to prevent the network from collapsing. In consideration of the "collaborative nature of motion pictures" (Lazarus, 1989, p. 2) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) appears to be a potential method since case studies dealing with this approach explicitly carve out the collaborations that are formed in order to establish actor-networks (e.g. Callon, 1986). Thus, Actor-Network Theory could serve as an approach to describe the translation processes as well as the recruitments of actors that provide the composition and maintenance of the film production network (cf. Mould, 2009; also cf. Hemmingway, 2008). Actor-Network Theory is thus capable of locating weak links in a production network and can be used to describe insufficient translational efforts, which lead to the destabilization of the relations between the enrolled actors. Latour (2005) argues that Actor-Network Theory is especially suited for forms of organizations in which "things are changing fast" (p. 142). Hence, for a film production, which is subject to constant rapid change, especially such a problematic one as *Barbarosa*, Actor-Network Theory appears to be a thoroughly justifiable instrument of analysis. According to Bruno Latour (2005), Actor-Network Theory "allows you to produce some effects that you would not have obtained by some other social theory" (p. 143). Actor-Network Theory's premise is, in contrast to other methods used for film production analysis (such as discourse analysis or context analysis, e.g. Hickethier, 2007, historiographical approaches or those approaches, focused on economic factors exclusively;), that the film itself acts as one of the main actors in a film production network. This premise moves the film itself into the center of film production analysis – a step that is strangely enough omitted by some other Actor-Network Theory case studies on film production (cf. Strandvad, 2010; 2012).[6]

The case study at hand will show that Actor-Network Theory is especially suited for describing the mutable states of identity of the film during production and *beyond*. I will show that even after post-production, the phase, which is conventionally described as the film's "closure,"[7] the film continues to be subject to further inscriptions and translations. As a consequence, the definition of a "project" as provided by Niemeyer (2008), is suitable only within the preset frame of *preproduction*, *production* and *postproduction*. As I will show, the process of production of a film may theoretically be continued infinitely (cf. Strathern, 1996). Also, if the application of Actor-Network Theory implies that the film itself is an actor, it consequently cannot be considered a passive, static object that may be neglected in favor of the (human) alliances formed around it like in many conventional film production histories. In

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/applying-actor-network-theory-in-production-studies/164085

# Related Content

Digital Data Security Strategies in the COVID-19 Pandemic Period: An Evaluation of Domestic Messaging Applications
Serkan Karatayand Baak Gezmen (2024). *Transformed Communication Codes in the Mediated World: A Contemporary Perspective  (pp. 59-77).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-data-security-strategies-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-period/335356

Typical Innovative and Involvement Characteristics of Contributors to Consumer Generated Media
Eric Shiu (2014). *Digital Arts and Entertainment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications  (pp. 1091-1112).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/typical-innovative-and-involvement-characteristics-of-contributors-to-consumer-generated-media/115063

Smartphones and their Increased Importance in U.S. Presidential Elections
Ramona Sue McNeal, Mary Schmeidaand Lisa Dotterweich Bryan (2017). *Handbook of Research on Citizen Engagement and Public Participation in the Era of New Media (pp. 283-303).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/smartphones-and-their-increased-importance-in-us-presidential-elections/172238

Writing Remixed: Mapping the Multimodal Composition of One Preservice English Education Teacher
Lindy L. Johnsonand Peter Smagorinsky (2014). *Exploring Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing (pp. 263-281).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/writing-remixed-mapping-multimodal-composition/78601

The Benefits and Challenges of New Media for Intercultural Conflict
Amy Janan Johnson, Sun Kyong Lee, Ioana A. Cioneaand Zachary B. Massey (2018). *Reconceptualizing New Media and Intercultural Communication in a Networked Society (pp. 171-197).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-benefits-and-challenges-of-new-media-for-intercultural-conflict/202781