

Akulow M. From symmetric anthropology to political ecology: a dramatic history of the principle of generalized symmetry in actor-network theory

This article is devoted to the history of the principle of generalized symmetry in the actor-network theory (ANT), and, especially, in the particular, Bruno Latour's approach.

The starting points for generalized symmetry are the semiotic concept of the Paris Semiotician School (in particular, the concept of actants), D. Bloor's "strong program" (especially the principle of symmetry, which in actor-network theory was spread beyond the explanations of sciences to the explanations of human and non-human actors) and anthropology.

The principle of generalized symmetry allows us to give symmetrical explanations of the agency of human and nonhuman actors, describing them in the same terms. It also allows you to switch between the reducibility and the irreducibility of the same actant, or entity.

However, it brought some problems: the unification of heterogeneous actants, implicit preservation of the dichotomy "culture-nature", from which Latour tried to move back even in his earlier texts.

The rejection of generalized symmetry, however, does not solve the problems of actor-network theory, in particular, the role of human and non-human entities, in various texts (including Latour's), varies between dissolution of actions and self-referencing (which is a special case, and does not receive satisfactory conceptualization within ANT).

Key words: actor-network theory, principle of generalized symmetry, semiotics, "strong program" of sociology of knowledge, symmetry, self-reference.