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## Bruno Latour and Niklas Luhmann as organization theorists

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## ABSTRACT

Bruno Latour and Niklas Luhmann are two authors who, not being management and organization scholars, have had a significant impact on MOS studies. Their works are even more appreciated in time, yet their influence has not crossed the Atlantic. The texts of the two authors, and the predecessor they evoke, demarcate a truly European development of management and organization theory.

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“What did Luhmann and Latour do to European organization studies?” Were I writing this text 20 years ago, the question would have been “What did Foucault and Deleuze do to European organization studies?” But it is 2017, and as much as the insights of Deleuze and Foucault have been incorporated into organization studies to the point of being taken for granted, it is Latour – and ANT and Luhmann and self-observing autopoietic systems – that are the most original and visible influences today.

In what follows, I am presenting my personal view (see also Czarniawska, 2005; 2014), and will mention some of my personal works influenced by those two authors, but I hope to do justice to at least some part of a still-growing number of organizational scholars who were similarly impressed by the works of those two. I also claim that, although the approaches of two authors were innovative and can be seen as radical, they were in harmony with earlier observations of management and organization scholars.

## 1. Latour and actor-network-theory

### 1.1. How macro actors are constructed

For many decades, social scientists dutifully studied the phenomenon of power, usually assuming its existence as a starting point, and then illuminating its effects and consequences. Yet after the end of the power of hereditary monarchies, a legitimate question should be: Who has power, and why is it those people and

organizations and not the other? The question was rarely formulated, at least in English, until 1981, when two French authors – Michel Callon and Bruno Latour – published a chapter in an anthology edited by Karin Knorr and Aaron Cicourel.<sup>1</sup> The chapter's title was “Unscrewing the Big Leviathan or How Do Actors Macro-structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So”. It began by reminding the readers of Hobbes' idea that society emerged from a contract among individuals who form an association and have their wishes expressed by a common spokesperson. In this way, a “Leviathan” is constructed. To outside observers, such macro actor – a State, a global corporation – appears to be much larger than any of the individuals that form it, and its true character – that of a network – remains hidden and forgotten. And yet Callon and Latour insisted that it is the very construction of such macro actors that needs to be studied, including negotiations, conflicts, even wars – but first of all, the building and maintaining of associations.

As I noted earlier (Czarniawska, 2017a), two sources of inspiration could be detected in Callon and Latour's chapter. One was Michel Serres' (1974/1982) concept of *translation* (moving anything from one place to another changes not only what is moved, but also the mover – the translator. The other was *actant theory* (a version of structuralist analysis proposed by Algirdas Julien Greimas). An actant is a being or a thing that accomplishes or undergoes an act; thus actants could be people, but also animals, objects, and concepts (Greimas and Courtés, 1982: 5).

<sup>1</sup> The same anthology contained a chapter by Niklas Luhmann: “Communication About Law in Interaction Systems” (1981).

The use of the Greimasian model is especially visible in Latour's "Technology Is Society Made Durable" (1992), in which he analyzed the history of the Kodak camera and the emergence of a mass market for amateur photographers<sup>2</sup>. The story is built as a story of meetings of "narrative programs" (another Greimasian term) of many actants, with Kodak as a macro actor and a winner.

But stories never end. The once powerful Eastman Kodak is now but a memory, while the Kodak Company, a micro actor, re-emerged from bankruptcy in 2014, and is trying to survive by trying new narrative programs. This turn of events is not strange, as it was not the "nature" of Eastman Kodak that made it into a macro actor in its time. It simply managed to convince many other actants to join their acts with it. Each time an anti-program was launched by competitors, Eastman Kodak managed to attract new allies, thus winning subsequent trials of strength. But digital photography proved to be a competitor too strong to win over, its network too large ...

Actor-network theory is not a theory, but an approach, a guide to the process of answering the question "How do things, people, and ideas become connected in larger units and remain so?" Indeed, the name is misleading. The more adequate term would be "an actant-net approach", but in 1981, when Latour and Callon<sup>3</sup> launched ANT, nobody knew who or what actants were, and ANT is a better acronym than "ANA." Its methodological consequences are well summarized by the "symmetrical anthropology" concept, introduced by Latour in 1993.

## 1.2. Symmetric anthropology

According to Latour, the idea came to him while playing anthropologist:

If, I told myself, those who defend the value of science can maintain such a gap between what they say science is, and what I and my many colleagues in the thriving field of science studies, through a very banal use of ethnographic and historical methods, can see it is, then it is no wonder that the 'front of modernization' that I had observed first hand in Africa and then in California, had some trouble defining itself positively. There must be something deeply flawed – and also, then, deeply interesting – in how the moderns define, defend and project their 'universal values'. (2010: 62)

Traditional anthropology used "modern" lenses to look at "premodern" societies; something that Latour found absurd, in comparing his studies of French industrial education in Abidjian and laboratory life in California (Latour and Woolgar, 1979/1986). This conviction deepened during his next study of the failed project of an automated subway called ARAMIS (Latour, 1996). That work is not only an example of how to study according to principles of symmetric anthropology, but also how to write it up<sup>4</sup>.

*Aramis or the Love of Technology* is basically a detective story. A Master and a Pupil are given a task to solve the mystery of death of beautiful Aramis, or *Agencement en Rames Automatisées de Modules Indépendants dans les Stations*. The Master is a sociologist of science and technology, the Pupil an engineer who takes courses in social sciences at École des Mines, and Aramis is a piece of transportation

machinery, with cars that couple and decouple automatically, following the programming of the passengers. Born in the late 1960s, Aramis promised to be the kind of technology that serves humans and saves the environment, yet in November 1987 it was nothing but a piece of dead machinery in a technology museum. How did it happen? Did the machines fail? Had the engineers used a wrong design? Did the politicians destroy the project? Did competitors conspire to have it dumped?

The reader gets three versions of the narrative, all realist versions, emitted by the Voices of the Field, the New Sociologist of Technology, and Aramis himself – all activated in a dialogue with a pupil – an engineer who wishes to learn his technoscience. This work, rich in textual devices, is especially interesting, because it finds an ingenious solution to the well-known problem facing all field researchers: How to avoid smothering the variety of voices in one sleek version and the kind of fragmentation that occurs when all the voices are reported simultaneously.

Not being a philosopher, and therefore with no ambitions to study *anthropos* as such, I paraphrased Latour's term into a *symmetrical ethnology* (Czarniawska, 2017b). Management and organization studies are not about human nature, but about certain ways of life, and, more specifically, about certain ways of work. Still, the approach I adopt follows Latour's precepts, which are:

- Use the same terms to explain truths and lies, failures and successes, trials and errors – in other words, render the method judgment-free.
- Simultaneously study the emergence and conduct of both humans and non-human actants. (This approach requires that greater attention be directed toward things and machines.)
- Avoid any a priori declarations concerning the differences between westerners and non-westerners, primitive and modern societies, rationality and irrationality, identity (sameness) and alterity (difference).

"Ethnologizing" management and organizing does not mean that these practices need to be mystified or demonized; it is yet another reminder of the fact that "we have never been modern" (Latour, 1993). The fact that contemporary managers engage in rituals must not diminish respect for their work; it must only change the prevalent understanding of modernity, as John Meyer and Brian Rowan already noted in 1977.

## 1.3. Reassembling the social

Latour's *Reassembling the Social* (2005) is subtitled "An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory," but it is more a summary of rather than an introduction to the approach. He intended it to be used as a textbook, although it is not written as one. Nevertheless, it is used even in management and organization courses, and translations proliferate.

Latour's declared intention was to convince social science students that they need to abandon the taken-for-granted idea that social is a kind of essential property that can be discovered and measured (a stuff of which something is made) and return to the etymology of the word. "Social" is not a material or a property, but a relationship: something is connected or assembled, in contrast to being isolated or disconnected.

The first part of *Reassembling the Social* contains a presentation of five uncertainties – positions on which ANT differs from, or is critical toward traditional sociology. These uncertainties concern the "nature" of groups, of actions, of objects, of facts, and of type of studies conventionally (and incorrectly) called "empirical." This part ends with a dialogue with a student who is confused by the difficulty of doing ANT-inspired studies of organizations. The

<sup>2</sup> Several business historians found ANT to be a useful approach in their studies (see e.g. Durepos & Mills, 2012; Ponzoni & Boersma, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Callon's influence on management and organization theory is also obvious, but it is not my goal to tackle it in this text.

<sup>4</sup> The influence of this work is especially visible in such organization studies as those of Porsander (2005) and Tryggestad (2005).

dialogue represents many a doubt voiced by beginning researchers. The fictitious professor of the dialogue may be poking fun at the student (who reciprocates, creating a symmetry), but Latour the author takes the student's difficulties to heart. He admits at the outset of Part II that it is not easy to trace the social, and gives advice on how to study associations. To begin, new maps are needed – or rather maps must be taken literally, as representing a flatland. Thus new scholars of the social will not be moving between local and global or between micro and macro, because there are no such places, only different positions of a zoom. Such scholars will notice that what happens locally, rarely occurs in only one place; it is possible to speak of a redistribution of the local or of localizing and globalizing. While doing so, one thing immediately comes into focus: the type of connection. If what seems to be global consists of many connected times and places and what seems to be local is a product of many connected times and places, what kind of connections are those, and what makes them stable? After all, the world of organizations is anything but flat – but how were the hierarchies made, and of what?

The metaphor of the flatland is one way to differentiate the standpoint of the observer from that of an actor (something about which Luhmann will have much to say). An ANT observer is a skeptic who wants to discover how mountains and valleys have been constructed. Such organization study topics as standardization, formalization, and classifications of all kinds become obviously relevant in that endeavor.

In the concluding chapter Latour suggested a political stance of a symmetric anthropologist.

We first have to learn how to deploy controversies so as to gauge the number of new participants in any future assemblage (...); then we have to be able to follow how the actors themselves stabilize those uncertainties by building formats, standards, and metrologies (...); and finally, we want to see how the assemblages thus gathered can renew our sense of being in the same collective (Latour, 2005, p. 249)

He proposed to replace the traditional political question, “How many are we?” with the question, “Can we live together?” Commonsensical as it may sound, it is a truly revolutionary question, not least in organization theory, in which the distinctions between leaders and followers, men and women, employers and employees, producers and consumers – followed by counting the forces – was a matter of routine for all political factions. The idea of assembling a collective and a subsequent “progressive composition of one common world” will allow animals, plants, and objects to join in, preserving the heterogeneity. After all, “to study is always to do politics in the sense that it collects or composes what the common world is made of” (2005: 256). And the social scientist's task is that of *representation*, in the political sense of the word (Latour, 1988).

## 2. Luhmann, the autopoietic systems, and the society of the observers

### 2.1. Organizations as autopoietic systems

Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco J. Varela introduced the cybernetic notion of autopoiesis (self-reproduction) to immunology (1973). German philosopher and sociologist, Niklas

Luhmann (1927–1998) observed that social systems (societies, organizations, interactions) are no doubt open in their energy inputs. As communication systems, however, they can be more fruitfully conceived of as autopoietic – self-reproducing and self-referential – just like the DNA cells<sup>5</sup> (Luhmann, 1984/1995).

DNA cells, like any other part of an organism, depend on oxygen, water, and nutrition for their survival and, in this sense, they are open to the environment. But their mission is to carry information that will allow for the reproduction of the same organism, no matter what the environment. The possibility of inheriting functional adaptations has long been rejected as fraudulent. It is assumed that evolution happens via random mutation, creating variation, which is, in turn, reduced by selection. Thus, DNA cannot improve upon itself.

Autopoietic systems are not only self-organizing in the sense of structuring their elements and processes, but also self-producing: They construct their elements and processes. They exist in an environment, but the relationships with this environment are of their own making. By saying this, Luhmann spoke in parallel with Karl Weick (1988), whose concept of *enactment* was close to Luhmann's idea, although in Luhmann's terms the environment is “encommunicated” rather than en-acted.

Luhmann's “cognitive constructionism”, as Karin Knorr Cetina (1994) labeled it, is truly helpful in understanding otherwise puzzling developments in formal organizations, which constantly attempt to reform themselves without achieving the desired results (see e.g. Brunsson & Olsen, 1993; for a review of studies of such reforms).

In Luhmann's terminology, people move from acting to observing, from action to communication. The system observes itself; it cannot change, because it observes itself from the same set of categories that constitutes it. But for a while, it stops doing whatever it was doing. One consequence could be reinforcement of its past functioning in the future; another could be a faulty reproduction of previous patterns, which, indeed, can introduce change.

But if so, what do management consultants do, employed by organizations to help them introduce change, and usually plentifully rewarded for doing just that? Luhmann was among the first of social scientists to pay attention to the phenomenon of consulting.

### 2.2. So, what do consultants do?

Luhmann questioned any possibility of a successful communication between consultants and their clients, as their acts of communication form two distinct and closed systems (Luhmann 1989/2005). A communicative event, according to Luhmann, consists of information, utterance, and meaning. Whereas the information transmitted and received may be identical, and although all parties may perceive the fact of the utterance, the meaning is produced within the system, where communications can refer only to what belongs to the system itself. Autopoietic systems are, by definition, idiosyncratic, and a successful communication among different systems is impossible. Any communicative event over the system boundaries will become different when processed inside. The systems can shout to each other, as it were, but what reaches them is but a reflection of their own voices. So what, if anything, is the role of management consultants?

According to Luhmann, consultants were supposed to communicate the accessible results of science in such a way that their clients could put them to practice. This would mean either that science is completely understandable (and thus there is no need for consultants) or that consultants speak exactly the same language as their clients (which means that there is no difference between them, and again no need for the consultants).

<sup>5</sup> Maturana protested against the idea that non-biological (social) systems can be autopoietic, but gave up later: “I was not prepared to accept all the consequences of my own theory” Maturana and Poerksen (2004: 106).

That a group of consultants [...] cannot communicate itself completely (but is nonetheless capable of communicating internally about this impossibility of external communication) is due to the fact that communication is the operation by means of which the group carries its own autopoiesis, and thus the means by which it regenerates its own unity, as well as the difference between this unity and its environment. (Luhmann, 1989/2005: 355)

From Luhmann's radical viewpoint, clients and consultants live in two worlds, and will never meet. They do try to communicate, however, and with increasing frequency, but not so much with one another as with their own wider system, including those organizations and institutions that shape their world views: institutionalized practices, communities of practices, taken-for-granted norms and values, for instance.

Building on Luhmann's ideas, and connecting it to the institutional theory of organizations, Alfred Kieser (2002: 216) has noted that this all happens because organizations are able to react "only to the environmental changes as they are recorded and interpreted by the system", and act only according to their own logic – by the means of organizational routines and codes embedding these memories and interpretations – even while trying to change. If this is so, why does consulting exist and prosper? Luhmann has offered an explanation for and justification of the existence of management consultants. In his view, the attempts at communication produced by management consultants serve as an irritant to the client system (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2012). Left to themselves, clients would be enacting their own visions of the world (Weick, 1988) until some serious crisis stopped them. Thus, even if consultants cannot communicate their different vision of the world to their clients, their very attempts to communicate may provoke client reaction in a way that is similar to the external jolts that Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) have described as change triggers.

In a similar vein, but with no reference to Luhmann, Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes (2004) use the word "parasites" – a term borrowed from Michel Serres – to describe the role of consultants in their relationships with clients.<sup>6</sup> In the Clegg et al. conceptualization, "parasitic consultants" are able to disturb a system because "they are in between, neither here nor there but in the middle" (2004: 39). This suggestion does resonate with Luhmann's concept of consultants as external irritants, who produce changes not by directly relating to clients, but by stimulating (from outside) the client's social system.

### 2.3. Organizing as de-paradoxifying

One of Luhmann's interests concerned paradoxes and the ways in which people deal with them (Luhmann, 1991). He noted that the usual criticism of paradoxes and the urge to "solve them" has to do with the fact that they violate logic. Yet logic is but a conventional way of describing the image of the world, which came into being through the Indo-European languages. It is a linear, one-dimensional set of rules, and the fact that people agreed to and adhere to logic (or at least claim doing so) makes it easier to communicate with one another. Or so it is believed. Thus paradoxes are not attributes of social systems, but the result of using the logical analysis as an observation tool (Luhmann, 1986/2005).

According to Luhmann (1995: 95), logic is possible only because the world of meaning encompasses all the contradictions: "Otherwise, the minute one first encountered a contradiction, one would

fall into a meaning gap and disappear." The very awareness of an alternative would be paralyzing: "Even Buridan's ass, placed, as it were, between two equally tempting bales of hay, will survive, even if it notices that it cannot decide, for that is why it decides nevertheless!" (Luhmann, 1995: 360). The donkey is not an observer; if hungry, it will start eating whichever bale, without making a decision. Contradiction – in life and in science – grinds observation to a halt and demands action. Observations can occur only at a distance, establishing distinctions until they become paradoxical.<sup>7</sup> Then it is time to drop the observer's stance, to come closer and start acting.

This is why the prescription for dealing with paradoxes is clear: they must be eliminated. This urge to dissolve paradoxes does not come merely from the unpleasantness of encountering a logical error: No matter how reflective their attitude toward paradoxes, actors necessarily engage in the process of "deparadoxization" (Luhmann, 1991).

In traditional organization studies, as noted by Van de Ven and Scott Poole (1988), a quest for coherent and consistent theory led to the neglect of organizational paradoxes. The paradoxes observed during fieldwork were taken to be cases of "anomalous communication" (Manning, 1992). And yet this anomalous communication lies at the heart of contemporary institutions. In my study of Swedish public sector organizations in the late 1980s (Czarniawska, 1997), I noticed that the existence of paradoxes in everyday organizing seemed not only to paralyze action, but also to stimulate it. My findings were corroborated by Luhmann's suggestion that "... because the paradox cripples observation, it can be understood as an inducement, even as a compulsion to solution" (1998, p. 112).

At least three well known and practiced strategies in organizations exist in order to deparadoxify: temporization, spatialization, and relativization. *Temporization*, according to Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, Luhmann's follower and a literature theoretician, amounts to narrativization (1991). The contradictory elements become detached in time and the conflict is resolved in the future. Thurman Arnold had already claimed in 1935 that "[t]his technique is as old as the parables of the New Testament. It is only its dialectical formulation that is modern" (p. 30).

Conflicting issues can be decoupled not merely over time but also in space; thus the strategy of *spatialization* (March, 1988; Manning, 1992): The antitheses are simultaneously present, but not in the same place. Separate committees or working groups can deal with contradictory matters simultaneously; once resolved, they may not be contradictory anymore.

Sometimes, however, neither temporization nor spatialization works. The promise of a synthesis in the future was not convincing; the committees meet in the corridor by mistake, and no longer stick to the issues in their domains. Decentralization is perceived by the people subjected to it as centrally ordered – a paradox that is a source of frustration and a cause of apathy for them. The *deparadoxization* strategy used in this context consists of explaining different perceptions by the different levels of observation, where first-level observers are assumed to be blind to their own positions and roles in the system ("... if you were in their place, you would see it differently ...").

It should be added that even this strategy fits the possibilities of the narrative perfectly. It is a matter of *actorial shifting operations* (Latour, 1988), whereby the reader or listener can see the world through the eyes of one or another first-level observer, but by virtue of being a second-level observer, can also understand the limitations of that "native" point of view. Luhmann talked in this context

<sup>6</sup> Luhmann was familiar with Serres' notion, however (2000: 60).

<sup>7</sup> On paradoxical character of decision-making, see Pors and Andersen (2015).



not of a narrative but of a rhetorical tradition.

When none of the deparadoxization strategies works, plunging blindly into action may. It requires the creation of a blind spot, a jump into one part of the paradox, into a distinction, therefore losing sight of the site on which the distinction must be made. Acting may produce “a difference that makes difference” (Luhmann, 1991, p. 69). In this way, autopoietic systems resolve their paradoxes themselves, and only an observer perceives it as a problem merely for the observer.

The autopoiesis does not stop when confronted by logical contradictions: it jumps, provided that possibilities of further communication are close enough at hand. (Luhmann, 1986/2005: 180)

Luhmann was right: Practitioners tend to abhor reflection and escape into action, hoping for its deparadoxifying effects. Indeed, the increased visibility of paradoxes signals an epistemological crisis within a tradition (MacIntyre, 1988), which in an organizational context usually takes the form of a legitimacy crisis or an identity crisis. The direct experience of paradox is threatening to people and institutions; as a topic for reflection – when the experience is indirect – it may lead to renewal. Paradox can thus be seen as an opportunity for the renewal of language and the transformation of institutions.

Luhmann (1998) was not that optimistic: He saw modern society as a society of observers of systems,<sup>8</sup> a society that was forced, therefore, to resign from authority and to espouse ignorance. In present times, his consequent opinion about protests may be of interest:

Protest movements (...) result from the transformation of ignorance into impatience. They replace ignorance through the knowledge that waiting is no longer an acceptable option, because knowing would come too late if at all. They are superior in this reflectivity to all others that offer any resistance. But this produces an uncertainty that can slip into irresponsibility. We already have a culture of concern, if not to say a cultivated fear, that is in search of goals. Whether we can get to a culture of unconvinced understanding is still open (Luhmann, 1998, p. 103)

#### 2.4. In other words: can we live together?

##### 2.4.1. What do Latour and Luhmann have in common?

A lot. First of all, transdisciplinarity. Is Latour a philosopher, a sociologist, an anthropologist, or a science and technology scholar? He claims different affiliations in different interviews. Was Luhmann a philosopher, a sociologist, a political scientist, a law scholar or a practitioner of administration? Although they both contributed to social sciences, their inspiration came from art and literature, from engineering and biology. Whereas neither of them would consider himself to be an organization scholar (but see Latour, 2012), both appreciated the importance of organizing process and made a strong contribution to refreshing the way it is being studied and written about. They were also keynote speakers at EGOS conferences: Luhmann in 1985, Latour in 1991 and 2012. The two volumes of collected works, *ANT and organizing* (Czarniawska and Hernes, eds, 2005) and *Niklas Luhmann and organization studies* (Seidl and Becker, eds, 2005, 2006) are early and good examples of

their influence, which continues (see e.g. Kühn, 2013/2016; Belliger & Krieger, 2016; and Mike, 2017).

Next, they were both constructivists, though Luhmann did not use the word (see Czarniawska & Mazza, 2012), and Latour changed the verb “construct” to “assembly”, after constructivism had been kidnapped by idealists, who use it in the meaning practically opposite to that intended by, for example, Russian *konstruktivists* (Czarniawska, 2003). The difference lies mainly in the fact that Luhmann was interested in communication, and Latour was interested in things. In Luhmann's opinion (2001: 13), philosophers are interested in things, and poets in communication (he was preparing a new project focusing on connections between poetry and social sciences).

They both knew and quoted Gabriel Tarde before “tardomania” settled in (Latour, 2001; Luhmann, 1998), and were interested in Whitehead's philosophy. And although Latour was skeptical about “autopoietic systems” when treated as “an underlying framework” (2005: 156) and “a description what is the common world” (2005: 189), he also called a text an excellent narrative if it prepares us “to take up the political tasks of composition” (Latour, 2001) and quoted Luhmann's works on law systems. Pity that Luhmann could not answer Latour's comments. As I see it, the idea of autopoietic systems does not have to be an underlying framework (and certainly not an ontological axiom), but is a useful way to explain strange phenomena that may be noted while using ANT-approach.

They both wrote in a rather complex way in their mother tongues, though Latour soon started writing in English, while Luhmann is at the mercy of his translators<sup>9</sup> (whose mercy varies, alas).

Finally, if you happen to believe some literature scholars, from Propp (1928/1968) to Booker (2004), who claim that archetypal plots exist, the analogy between those plots and the DNA is only too obvious. Macro actors are built in accordance with the same plot, and organizations reproduce themselves in accordance with the same template.

This text is about European influences on management and organization theory, and there is no doubt that both Latour and Luhmann influenced it – but, again, the European version of it. Our US colleagues somehow did not become interested in those two thinkers, although they should be well known even on the other side of the Atlantic. In 2007, Bruno Latour was ranked by the Times Higher Education Supplement as one of the ten most cited authors in the humanities, living or dead, and his first study published in English was conducted in Stanford, California. Niklas Luhmann has been made known to the US scholars not least due to the efforts of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, a professor at Stanford University. Yet there must be something uniquely European about their work that does not resonate in the USA. They are both better known in Canada, and are often quoted together by the same authors (see e.g. Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren, Taylor, Every, & Elizabeth, 2006; Cooren, 2015). Perhaps, as Moeller (2012) suggested, the US readers of social sciences are used to textbook style, with pedagogical way of introducing and summarizing the author's arguments. Well, none of the two wrote in this way, and I for one am grateful.

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<sup>8</sup> In Gumbrecht's (2001: 52) opinion, Luhmann was less interested in autopoietic systems in his final years, and more in the observer theory. But “self-observation is an essential characteristic of autopoietic systems” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 244).

<sup>9</sup> But see Moeller (2012), the chapter “Why he wrote such bad books”. I was not able to read more than an article in German, and know Luhmann's books from the translations, so I am unable to share or oppose this judgment.

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