

Metatheorizing as Prelude in Latour and Luhmann: A Comparative Perspective

Las metateorizaciones prelude de Latour y Luhmann: un análisis comparado

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Resumen: El trabajo reconstruye y compara las estrategias de metateorización prelude de la Teoría general de sistemas sociales de Luhmann y la Teoría del actor-red de Bruno Latour. La metodología retoma el modelo de análisis de las estrategias de metateorización de George Ritzer e incorpora una operacionalización adicional que desagrega dichas estrategias en dos dimensiones: doble diferenciación y elaboración de antecedentes. Sin desmedro de divergencias puntualmente señaladas, los resultados alcanzados establecen dos convergencias significativas entre ellas: en materia de doble diferenciación, ambos programas deslindan una tercera posición radical y, en materia de elaboración de antecedentes, ambos optan por dialogar reflexivamente con el interaccionismo y justificar la interdisciplina en términos de déficits de la sociología.

Palabras clave: metateorización, elaboración conceptual, Teoría de sistemas sociales, Teoría del actor-red, diadismo.

Abstract: This paper compares the strategies of metatheorization used in Luhmann's General Theory of Social Systems and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. The methodology is based on George Ritzer's approach and techniques, with an additional operationalization to disaggregate the strategies into two dimensions: double differentiation and elaboration of antecedents. Without prejudice to the divergences pointed out, the results obtained show two significant convergences between the two strategies. Firstly, in terms of double differentiation, both programs define a third radical position. Second, in terms of elaboration of antecedents, both programs opt for a reflexive dialogue with interactionism and for the justification of interdisciplinarity in sociology's deficits.

Key words: metatheorizing, conceptual elaboration, Social Systems Theory, Actor-Network Theory, dyadism.

Translated by:
Sergio Pignuoli

Proofreading by:
Caridad Rodríguez
Hernández

Received:
31/08/2023

Accepted:
26/01/2024



Introduction

This article compares the reception of disciplinary materials and from other fields of knowledge by the scientific research programmes of Niklas Luhmann and Bruno Latour in a positive and systematic manner.¹ Actually both sociological programmes, Luhmann's General Social Systems Theory (hereafter: GSST) and Latour's Actor-Network Theory (hereafter: A-NT), enjoy wide prestige and have a set of research problems in clear and open development.

The investigation into the dialogues and synergies between the two scientific programs began twenty years ago. Albertsen and Dicken (2004), Nassehi (2006), Teubner (2006), and Kneer (2008) established shared elements and projected relationships regarding modernity. Braun (2017) revisited and examined these relationships more recently. Several empirical studies have successfully triangulated the two programs in various case studies, such as agribusiness (Noe and Alore, 2006), artificial intelligence (Marton, 2009), and petroleum resource governance (Richert, 2019). Various theoretical and systematic analyses have demonstrated that the differences between A-NT and GSST do not invalidate their convergences, particularly in central concepts such as virtuality and meaning (Fariás, 2014), hybridity (Karafilidis, 2015), sociological dyadism (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2016a), weak ontology and strong facticity (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2016b), organizations (Czarniawska, 2017), and the temporality of actuality (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2022). This is evidenced by highly attainable questions arising for anthropomorphic and modernist concessions (Lindemann, 2009 and 2014) and for disregarding the Third and thirdness (Fischer, 2022). Similarly, the investigation of dialogues between GSST and A-NT has become a consolidated, fruitful, and heuristically positive line of work in both empirical and theoretical terms.

Despite the issues mentioned above, there are significant vacancies, gaps, and pendant tasks in the current state of the art. Addressing these issues will enhance the robustness and flexibility of program interfaces. One such area that requires investigation is the receptions and receptive strategies utilized by GSST and A-NT in developing their sociological innovations. Analyzing this object will clarify its intertextual dimension and operative cores. Systematic analyses will facilitate examination of the

1 Although the term 'scientific research programm(es)' is not the best choice stylistically, it is used here to preserve the reference to the work of Imre Lakatos.

dialogical aspect of convergent conceptual plots. This will establish new programmatic divergences and convergences that complement, but do not replace, previously referred to theoretical analyses. Additionally, it will improve the sensitive detection of new objects of this type.

Luhmann and Latour process and analyze a vast corpus of antecedents, drawn both from social science in general and sociology in particular, as well as from other disciplinary fields, whether scientific or humanistic. The dialogical orientation has been extensively studied in the specialized literature, with specific receptions being the focus of studies by Guy (2023), Giordano (2023), Schiermer (2021), Harman (2009), among others. However, while the antecedents have predominantly been analyzed conceptually, there have been few studies on reception strategies for GSST and A-NT, especially in a comparative scope. This paper aims to analyze the reception of materials from both programs comparatively, without neglecting conceptual analysis but rather complementing it. For this purpose, George Ritzer's methodological developments on metatheorization strategies are implemented, specifically his prelude-type metatheorization category.

Metatheory is a theoretical project in sociology that originated and developed in American academic circles during the 1990s. Its most notable representatives are George Ritzer (1988, 1990a, and 1990b), Jonathan Turner (1990), and Paul Colomy (1991). Metatheory proposes two integrations of the field: between different modes of conceptual comparison in sociology and between traditions, authors, and concepts in an expanded universe of study. The aim of the project is to identify existing paradigms in the field using the three modes of conceptual comparison, rather than selecting them. This is achieved through research into the history of the discipline. The purpose of this study was to compare and integrate paradigms in order to address the multi-paradigmatic nature within the discipline (Masterman, 1970).

This paper will focus on the first integration approach. The proposal includes methodological and technical instruments that are sensitive to receptions and will facilitate the task of identifying and analyzing various strategies of metatheorization of the study case. It is important to note that the adoption of Ritzer's approach is selective and limited to the system of categories and techniques used for observing metatheorizations. We will not adopt the metatheoretical perspective proposed by the author due to its significant deficiencies. Firstly, it assumes a static and poorly differentiated concept of 'paradigm.'

Secondly, it does not provide justification for the hierarchy of theory and metatheory. Thirdly, it fails in its attempt to integrate the ‘paradigms’ of sociology through transversal arcs due to its weak connection with the fundamental problems of the discipline (Turner, 1990; Mascareño, 2008; among others). Given the objectives, I find George Ritzer’s concept of ‘metatheorizing as a prelude to theory development’ particularly relevant. Let’s further examine this concept.

In order to encourage the systematic study of sociological theory, Ritzer developed the concept of metatheorizing, which involves the systematic reception of theoretical material. Ritzer classified metatheorizing into three types:

- ‘Metatheorizing as a means of attaining a deeper understanding of theory’ (Mu) is used to gain a better and more profound understanding of existing theory. Thus, Mu encompasses both the study of theories, theorists, and communities of theorists, as well as the broader intellectual and social contexts of theories and theorists.

- ‘Metatheorizing as a prelude to theory development’ (Mp) is used to prepare for the development of theoretical innovations by studying existing sociological theory with a view to producing new theory.

- ‘Metatheorizing as a source of perspectives that overarch sociological theory’ (Mo) is used as a source of perspectives capable of forming an arc across much, if not all, sociological theory and its paradigms. Therefore, it involves the study of some part or all sociological theory with the aim of producing an overarching disciplinary perspective, which Ritzer refers to as *metatheory*.²

Ritzer argues that the metatheorizing as a prelude (Mp) is the most common way of metatheorizing in sociology. This is because the study of existing theories and traditions is frequently used to justify and introduce new theories (Ritzer, 1990b: 4-5, 8).³ Mp involves critical, positive, and

2 The author distinguishes between Mo and Om (Overarching Metatheory). Om involves the creation of a cross-cutting metatheory without a systematic study of the theory. Therefore, it does not constitute any kind of metatheorization. Mo differs from Om because it does not itself impose a theory, but derives from it (Ritzer, 1990b: 4).

3 Colomy (1991: 279) introduced the concept of metatheorization by adjudication (Ma) as a fourth type of metatheorization within the framework of Ritzer’s (1990a) proposal. This concept yields a similar result. The author suggests that Ma involves making assessments about the analytical strengths of different traditions. In my case study, this is observed in the adjudication to contemporary programmes of demerits usually imputed to their traditions of origin, but without attending to intra-differentiations.

reflexive reception practices that precede the development of conceptual innovations. By observing these strategies, it is possible to distinguish the various systematic articulations given to the materials and establish a more abstract level of analysis than usual. This includes critically examining the self-descriptions of theories and theorists. Additionally, this approach allows for a comparative analysis of Mp strategies, enabling the study of their convergences and divergences.

To enhance Ritzer's approaches, I operationalized Mp in order to identify sublevels of analysis and disaggregate its dimensions:⁴

1) The process of double differentiation involves critical elaboration to create a theoretical program by distinguishing its materials from others. This process consists of two dimensions:

- a. Extra-differentiation, which involves differentiation from external, outward, or contrary traditions and disciplinary perspectives, and
- b. Intra-differentiation, which involves differentiation within one's own tradition.

2) The construction of the background involves selecting and weighing materials to organize the program's dialogic dimension and complement its double differentiation. It is important to note that no program is constituted solely by differentiation. This construction can be disaggregated into two dimensions:

- a. Sociological or intra-disciplinary materials, and
- b. Materials from other disciplines or extra-disciplinary sources.⁵

Thus, the intricate maps of GSST and A-NT receptions are presented as Mp strategies. The hypothesis suggests that both programs prelude their conceptual innovations in a dialogical framework and in a similar manner. The double differentiations of GSST and A-NT demonstrate convergent elements around the outline of a third radical position

4 The study of Habermas' work by Pignuoli Ocampo (2020: 91) already employed this set of further operationalizations and methodological distinctions. In this paper, however, it is explored its use in research with comparative objectives.

5 In regards to the treatment of materials from other disciplines, through Ritzer we can go beyond Schluchter (2015: 15) and Alexander (1982: 2-5) and assume that the premises of the more general sociological program may come from philosophy (Schluchter) or metaphysics (Alexander), but also from other disciplinary fields. This allows for the exploration of interdisciplinary backgrounds in a broader sense, both positively and reflectively. This statement aligns with the structuralist epistemology approach to building theoretical cores (Sneed, 1971; Stegmüller, 1976). For comments and details see Moulines (2011) and Abreu (2020).

founded on a dyadic sociological quality with respect to other discourses of sociological theory. The creation of precursors demonstrates similarities and convergence between the reception of interactionist and pragmatic traditions. Both programs are open to contributions from other disciplines. It is important to note that while there may be similarities and convergences between the respective traditions of origin that each research program subscribes to, these do not negate the divergences. However, it is also important to recognize that the extension of such differences to the programs is not unlimited and does not necessarily lead to irreconcilability between them. In fact, there is a clear and distinct limit to these differences, which is precisely at the meta-theoretical level. The GSST and A-NT pursue a common and convergent programmatic purpose: to thoroughly consider the dyadic quality of the social and use it to inform the conceptual elaboration of their respective units of analysis in sociology. One unit focuses on 'communication' while the other focuses on 'association'.⁶

This statement challenges the notion that both programs are intertextually isolated. This holds true regardless of whether they are evaluated positively (Izuzquiza, 1990) or negatively (Schluchter, 2015). Instead, both programs introduced their own conceptual innovations on communication and association through a complex, critical, and reflective disciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogues.

The selection of materials did not present any particular challenges. Luhmann's materials were chosen from the 'autopoietic period,' which began in the 1980s. During this period, the author formulated categories related to communication, the emergence of social systems, and autopoiesis.⁷ This corpus was centered on the main work of the phase: *Soziale Systeme* (1984) and was further complemented by other materials that prepare or

6 Pignuoli Ocampo (2016a) provides a conceptual analysis of this convergence. This comparative study of the Mp strategies presented here complements that systematic analysis by shedding light on the metatheoretical preparation of the theoretical innovations of GSST and A-NT.

7 I would like to clarify that in the mid-1980s, Luhmann made three turns in his research program. These included an autopoietic turn in his conception of the self-referential system, a communicative turn in his conception of the sociological unit of analysis, and an emergentist turn in his conception of the emergence of novel entities and qualities in the world. For a detailed discussion of these turns, please refer to Pignuoli Ocampo (2015a). For reasons of space and relevance, I will not focus on the second turn here, as it pertains to the sociological operative core of GSST. I appreciate the feedback received during the paper evaluation that highlighted the need for this clarification.

reinforce it (Luhmann, 1981, 1987, and 2005). The selected materials from Latour's 'symmetrical period', which began in the 1980s, include *Irréductions* (1984), *Science in Action* (1987), a paper co-authored with Strum (Strum and Latour, 1987), *Nous n'avons jamais été moderne* (1997), and the later synthesis *Reassembling the Social* (2005).

The presentation will proceed as follows: Firstly, a comparison of each MP strategy will be made separately, starting with the GSST strategy (2), followed by the A-NT strategy (3). Subsequently, both strategies will be analyzed comparatively (4), and finally, the results and discussions will be summarized in the conclusions (5).

Mp Strategies

GSST's Mp strategy

The principle of consistency of the Mp-strategy of the GSST is the self-reference of theory. It involves adjusting the components of the theoretical framework to each other beyond their disciplinary origin and tradition (Luhmann, 1984: 11-2). Through this strategy, Luhmann engages in dialogue with other positions, problematizes some in order to weaken them through double differentiation, while critiquing others to present and adjust them in accordance with other antecedents of the communicative turn. Table 1 summarizes the strategy.⁸

Double differentiation of GSST

The communicative turned operative core reframed the double differentiation of GSST. On the one hand, it deepened its longstanding debates with 'action theory', 'subject theory', 'systemic functionalism', and 'specialization in classics'. On the other hand, it engaged in discussions concerning the 'amalgamation of theories', 'intersubjectivism', 'action/structure articulation', 'micro-macro-link', and the 'linguistic turn'.

Extra-differentiation

In regard to extra-differentiation, Luhmann proposed a revision of sociological theory, viewing 'classics' as epistemological obstacles. He

⁸ All tables can be found in the Appendix at the end of this article (Editor's note).

suggested discussing them within the context of the history of sociological theory rather than general theory. The aim of this proposal was to rework theoretical problems rather than solve them in a classical or traditional manner. This communicative turn differentiated the GSST from 'action theory'. The critique of unilateralism is used against it: action is a sociologically ambivalent object. If its unit is the individual, it is not necessarily social. If its social meaning depends on that source, it falls into infinite regress. Furthermore, due to individual unilaterality, it is logically impossible for such a theory to access the emergence of communication. Luhmann objected to the tradition of 'action theory', specifically targeting the 'classical' theses of Max Weber, Habermas's CAT, and some new rational action theorists (Coleman and Elster). However, he did not provide an in-depth analysis of these theorists.

Luhmann argued against the theories of the subject (or 'subjectologies') by asserting two main points. Firstly, he claimed that the philosophical concept of subject (*subiectus*) is not applicable to the system/environment difference, as complex systems are structurally oriented to the environment and cannot ground themselves. Secondly, he argued that a subject of communication is unnecessary. The materials in question were the 'classical' theses of Karl Marx and German idealism. This critique of the theory of action has been strengthened by the argument that individual consciousness cannot be considered a subject. Luhmann further extended this critique by rejecting intersubjectivism as a 'compromise formula' that fails to address previous objections and falls into logical contradiction by postulating an *intersubject*. Apel and Habermas (Luhmann, 2005: 166) were the target of this criticism.

Although Luhmann (1981: 58) did not completely reject the synthesis of theories, he considered it a better option than the unilateral development of theories 'of (social) action' or 'of (social) system(s)'. He even remarked the synthetic efforts made by Parsons in this direction. However, the German author noted that theoretical syntheses of this kind are exposed to the combinationist risk of the 'amalgamation of theories'. Luhmann criticized the action/structure articulation and the micro-macro link, especially the former. He argued that without the elaboration of integrating criteria of a more abstract nature, the amalgamations fail the articulation. The initial theories are not synthesized, but merely aggregated one together with the other. In this way, a broader scope may be achieved, but no generality is gained and the capacity for determination is lost. Luhmann criticized Crozier, Friedberg and Schluchter.

In opposition to the linguistic turn, the author presents a dual criticism. Firstly, he disputes the ‘amalgamation of theories’, arguing that language, as a sociological object, remains indeterminate since it facilitates both communicative and psychic operations, indicating its medial nature. Consequently, language cannot be solely classified as a social medium. Secondly, Luhmann critiques holism, highlighting that assigning social a priori status to the collectivity of language leads to a tautology, as it presupposes what requires demonstration. These objections are directed towards the foundational theses of ‘classical’ figures such as Saussure, structuralism, Gadamer, and Apel, as examined by Luhmann.

Intra-differentiation

In terms of intra-differentiation, the adoption of the communicative operative core modified Luhmann’s inscription in the systemic tradition. The program of communicative emergentism distinguished itself from other systemic alternatives without creating a rupture with them. Additionally, the communicative turn widened the gap with action-oriented systemic sociologies. The autopoietic turn also impacted systemic sociologies that relied on functionalism and structural-functionalism. However, the tension within this tradition is often overlooked, leading to a common error in the interpretation of Luhmann as a holistic and collectivist theorist. For instance, Habermas falls into this trap when he places the GSST within the ‘functionalist paradigm’.

Against the systemic action theory the author raised, on the one hand, the criticism of unilateralism, since the adoption of the systemic perspective does not solve the problems of the theory of action; on the other hand, the criticism of combinationism, since the definition of the social system as a system of action entails indeterminacy. The materials on which these objections operated were the “classical” theses of Parsons of ‘37 and the action/system articulations of Hejl and Martens.

Luhmann raised objections to functionalism on several grounds. Firstly, he criticized its adoption of the physiological systemic model, which resulted in the reduction of the operational level to the structural level. Secondly, he pointed out the inability of functionalism to adequately describe the function of structures, thus undermining its causal basis. Thirdly, he criticized the lack of a general concept of the problem within functionalist theory. Fourthly, he highlighted the failure of functionalism to identify the operational specificity of

problems, leading to a reduction of the operational level to the structural level. Fifthly, he noted functionalism's inability to identify the operational specificity of communication, reducing it to mere transmission. Lastly, he criticized functionalism for falling into tautology by postulating "collective" entities without demonstrating the emergence of the social system. These objections were directed towards the "classical" theses of anthropology (such as Malinowsky and Kingsley Davies) and functionalist sociology (including Merton)

Luhmann objected to structural-functionalism, firstly, because of its inability to solve the problems of functionalism; secondly, because of the adoption of the open systemic model and the consequent inability to determine the limits of the system, since the principle of intra-systemic stabilization implies indeterminacy when it assumes only inter-systemic exchange and its reduction of communication to exchange. The materials that deserve this reception are the "classical" theses of Parsons' AGIL, the referents of the first structural-functionalism (Shils, Barber) and of neofunctionalism (Münch).

The background constructed by GSST

The construction of the background by the GSST is an important aspect of the GSST Mp strategy. It had previously been neglected because of the strong polemics regarding its double differentiation. However, the GSST not only rejected other proposals, but also critically reviewed various sociological materials, especially regarding the scope of communication.

Intra-disciplinary precursors

The GSST has a background in the interactionist tradition and has partially embraced the revival of this tradition proposed by the 'micro-sociological revolt.' In *Soziale Systeme*, the author explicitly referred to 'classical' theorems of this tradition, such as Simmel's concept of 'social relation' (Luhmann, 1984: 177). Luhmann further developed his understanding of the intersubjective creation of meaning in Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology. He placed particular emphasis on Schutz's idealization of

the reciprocity of perspectives (Luhmann, 1984: 172).⁹ The German author evaluated concepts of symbolic interactionism, including Mead's thesis of 'adopting the perspective of otherness' (Luhmann, 1987: 117), Garfinkel's alter ego thesis (Luhmann, 1984: 154), and Goffman's 'presentation of the self' (Luhmann, 1984: 182). Additionally, contributions to interaction from systemic theory, such as Parsons' concept of double contingency, were also examined (Luhmann, 1984: 149).¹⁰

Although these materials have been received since the first phase of the GSST, the communicative turn has modified this early reception, and given it a more critical tone. The common denominator with the earlier studies was the questioning of the criterion of sociality based on reciprocity. Luhmann argued that an improper access to otherness and difference —both constitutive for alter ego/alter ego (Luhmann, 1984: 154)— occurs when interaction is considered either partially unilateral, disregarding the dyadism of interaction and focusing solely on the individual instance of interaction, or partially holistic, failing to specify the dyadism of interaction and incorporating normative factors.

Regarding Mp strategy, it is remarkable that, in contrast to the criticism of extra-differentiation, these objections have the logical structure of "true... but" (zwar-aber): Luhmann (1984: 153) acknowledges their relevance but points out their inadequacies. Therefore, we maintain that interaction possesses a metatheoretical status different from that of action and collectivism. Furthermore, the GSST justifies the reformulation by acknowledging successes and pointing out

9 Luhmann offers the thesis of the emergence of the social dimension of meaning as a response to the phenomenological problem of intersubjectivity (a legacy of Husserl's Fifth Meditation) and to the systemic problem of double contingency (a legacy of Parsons), due to the experience of the non-identity of perspectives. The GSST can also be considered a phenomenological theory in its own right.

10 Luhmann's attention to interactionism was noted by Heintz (2007: 345) and Tyrell (2011: 57) over a decade ago. Both analysts focused on the author's early writings. The present paper proposes an extension of these analyses, suggesting that the persistence of such intra-disciplinary antecedents extends at least as far back as *Soziale Systeme*. In this work, Luhmann's mature approach is characterized by a reflexive selection and treatment of interactionist antecedents. He questions them not because of their interactionism, but because their dyadism is insufficient. There is no negative or refractory attitude towards them. I thank one of the reviewers for their feedback. Their comments have prompted me to provide further clarification. To enhance the traceability of the thesis, I will reference specific passages from the book where the author discusses and engages with the aforementioned body of work.

shortcomings. In this case, the program's alleged radicality is justified by its construction of antecedents rather than rejection. Similarly, Luhmann justifies the analytical superiority of the alter ego/alter ego constellation's dyadic substrate, mutualism, and communication, and declares the primacy of solutions based on excluded middle.

Extra-disciplinary precursors

The GSST engages in interdisciplinary dialogues. In this text, we will focus on the extra-disciplinary background of the concept of communication, as it is impossible to present all dialogues briefly. Some advances already made (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2015a: 321-2) will be taken up here. Luhmann conceptualized communication by critically reviewing non-sociological contributions to mutualism and interaction, including cybernetics, information theory, emergentism, romantic philosophy, and the biology of autopoiesis. The German author adopted Pask's concept of conversation from cybernetics as an alternative to the concept of action in "action theory", and von Foerster's concept of order from noise. From information theory, he adopted MacKay's concept of information. Luhmann distinguished between the selective function and potential states of information by differentiating between the actual and the possible of the concept of meaning. In turn, the author re-interpreted Shannon's mathematical theory of communication by replacing the telecommunicative aspects with sociological ones. The author achieved this by utilizing Watzlawick's concepts, including reciprocal perception and the situation of impossible non-communication, as well as Ruesch and Bates' distinction between communication and metacommunication. To support the thesis of the emergence of communicative synthesis, Luhmann adopted Bråten's perspective of emergence through multiple constitution. He revisited the concept of autopoietic autonomy from Maturana and Varela's biology of autopoiesis, and generalized and re-specified it in terms of his operative conception of communication as a synthesis of three selections. Finally, the author connects philosophically the GSST with early German Romanticism, namely with Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics, from which he took the premises of otherness and difference to conceive communication and the social sphere in a dyadic key.

A-NT's Mp Strategy

The Mp strategy of A-NT is a typical refoundational proposal that suggests a double differentiation based on generalized symmetry and dyadic quality. It includes a strong extra-differentiation of the main sociological traditions and an inflexible intra-differentiation of Bloor's Strong Program. The proposal also introduces a new disciplinary canon, including another founding father (Tarde) and alternative post-classical (Garfinkel) and contemporary (Callon and Boltanski) theories. He proposed an interdisciplinary strategy, which is summarized in Table 2.

A-NT's double differentiation

Double differentiation distinguishes A-NT from other sociological traditions, such as the 'sociology of the social,' 'the theory of action,' and 'sociological reconciliations.'

Extra-differentiation

According to Latour, the 'sociology of the social' assumes that 'the social' is a substance or homogeneous matter that exists in the world and acts causally on other phenomena. Latour critiques this collectivist view. The argument has several flaws. Firstly, it assumes an asymmetrical causal basis by not applying the same terms to the explanans (society, 'the social') as to the explanandum. Secondly, it is inconsistent as it fails to explain the social construction or the causal power of 'the social' or society. Thirdly, it superimposes its macro frame of reference on the frame of reference of other actants. Finally, it gives ostensive definitions of the social, assuming it as given and limiting it in the face of associative novelties. Latour criticized the tradition of the 'sociology of the social' and singled out two 'founding fathers' (Early Durkheim, late Marx) and the 'theory of society', where he placed Luhmann (Latour, 2005: 167 n. 213).

Latour extended his critique to three variants of the tradition of the 'sociology of the social': 'contextualism', 'diffusionism', and 'systemism'. 'Contextualism' does not solve the problem of holism, but only reoccurs by replacing 'the social' with 'the context'. However, it explains neither socially nor contextually. It only postulates an asymmetrical causal basis and a scheme of imputation of correspondences between context (explanans) and

phenomenon (explanandum). According to Latour, 'diffusionism' does not resolve holism; rather, it perpetuates it. This is because it considers the social or society as the source of meaning, claiming that meaning could be diffused to other entities that are informed by it. Therefore, the sense of the source is considered a primary property, and the sense of the receivers is considered a secondary property. This passage postulates a causal relationship and an asymmetrical imputation scheme from major premises (society, the social) to minor premises (social epiphenomena) (Latour, 1987: 134), assuming that the latter can be reduced to the former. According to Latour, systematism, which is the convergence of structuralism and systems theory, deepens holism by conceiving of society as a unit of pre-established harmony. The parts of this harmonious whole are functionally or structurally reduced to it and its harmony. Latour criticized this tradition entirely, with a particular emphasis on Levy-Strauss (Latour, 1984: 183-4, 230).

The second tradition Latour questions is the "theory of action". Against it he raises the critique of unilateralism. According to the author, this tradition postulates that the actor, the subject and/or the human individual is an efficient and primary source of the action of interaction. After the diagnosis, the 'theory of action' has an asymmetrical causal basis. Specifically, the subject/object schema reduces the sense of the object to the individual sense, but it is unable to explain the dislocation of social sense from action at a distance and translations. Latour directed this critique against the tradition of the "theory of action" as a whole but placed particular emphasis on Boudon's "methodological individualism". However, it is important to note that the author only placed Boudon within this tradition and did not analyze his analytical programme in depth.

Latour (2005: 169) questions the third tradition of 'sociological reconciliations', which aims to establish a golden mean between 'actor and system' or 'actor and structure'. According to Latour, this assumption of both the concept of 'individual' from the 'theory of action' and the concept of 'society' or 'social' from the 'sociology of the social' results in a *double* asymmetry, leading to unilateralism and holism at the same time. The resulting theoretical framework from these 'compromise formulas' is not more abstract than the traditions it aims to reconcile, namely 'sociology of the social' and 'action theory'. Therefore, its causal basis incorporates the respective weaknesses of both traditions, such as inconsistent and asymmetrical causal basis and conceptual overlapping and narrowing.

Additionally, it introduces a new problem, namely discrete sequencing, which refers to the justification of micro-macro or macro-micro leaps. These leaps are fallacious because they are based on a golden mean between ‘action’ and ‘society’ that is sociologically unfounded, if not non-existent. Latour directed this critique against the tradition of ‘sociological reconciliations’, including Bourdieu, Giddens, and Friedberg, and especially against the theorists of the micro-macro link (Latour, 2005: 169).

Intra-differentiation

At this point, our conclusions are based on previously established findings (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2015b: 102). Within the field of Social Studies of Science and Technology, the A-NT program gradually distinguished itself from the ‘Strong’ Program, or Bloor’s socioconstructivism. The A-NT program raised the same objection to ‘the sociology of the social’: it tends towards collectivist holism. According to Latour, Bloor’s conception of the social has a substantialist bias by positing it as a factor that can explain the content of science. Latour objects that this concept of the social is asymmetric since it explains socially but is not explained socially. The author, ironically, redirected a criticism aimed at the A-NT (Collins and Yearsley, 1992) to Bloor. According to Latour (1997: 130), his constructivism about nature assumes a realism about society. Therefore, Latour proposes redefining the social as an association *from* the study of science and technology, without renouncing it, and thus inverting the explanans-explanandum relation.

The background constructed by A-NT

The critique of sociology’s traditions inspired Latour to create an alternative canon of secondary and forgotten authors to provide background for his program.

Intra-disciplinary precursors

In order to present this theme, we refer to some previously identified elements (Pignuoli Ocampo, 2012). Latour connected his associative perspective with the theses of Gabriel Tarde, whom he referred to as the ‘founding father of sociology’ *alternative* to Durkheim. Unlike Durkheim, Tarde did

not presuppose a solidary substance whose existence, manifested in social ties, guarantees the *given factual* character of ‘the social’, but rather studied the contingencies and precariousness of associations. According to Latour, Tarde’s perspective on associative ties is a direct antecedent of his thesis of the performance of the social.

Latour proposed a “post-classical” theory alternative to action theory (individualism) and structuralist-systemism (collectivism): the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel, of whom he declared himself a disciple. The author discusses Garfinkel’s perspective on indexicality and its relation to his own thesis on the constructive force of associations in assembling (and disassembling) collectives, without attributing centrality to meaning, but subordinating it to interactions. He also resumed Garfinkel’s notions of accountability, the researcher’s relativity, and formal analysis.

Latour expressed interest in two contemporary authors, Michel Callon and Luc Boltanski. Callon, a French engineer and reader of Serres, discussed the sociological foundation of science studies at the same time as Latour and was the first to formulate the principle of generalized symmetry. The two collaborated during the 1980s and 1990s. The latter was a disciple and collaborator of Pierre Bourdieu, with whom he broke in search of a pragmatic turn for the sociology of the habitus.

Extra-disciplinary precursors

Latour did not limit himself to proposing an alternative sociological canon. He also incorporated non-sociological materials into his background schema, which he justified by applying the principle of generalized symmetry to a sociological approach. This does not limit valid perspectives on associations with the field of hermeneutic sciences, but rather calls for an extension to all discourses and metrology that are compatible with the concern for the equality of human and non-human materials and properties. These should be capable of focusing on different aspects of the sociological object. Latour combined his new canon with extra-disciplinary backgrounds. He adopted Serres’ philosophy of translation, which is fundamental to A-NT. He also incorporated Shirley Strum’s primatology discussion on the performativity of ‘the social’ from comparative primatology. This theory suggests that *Homo sapiens sapiens* is not the only higher primate that performs its social ties through

interactions. Haraway's Cyborg perspective discusses the production of social meaning through interaction, even on non-social and non-human matters. This perspective draws from the narratology of actants of A.J. Greimas and Mieke Bal, specifically the notion of *actant* and *narrative force*. Additionally, Latour engages with American pragmatics, including William James and Dewey.

Comparison

In general terms, the analysis found more convergences than divergences between the Mp strategies. Specifically, I observed the following convergences: 1) similar extra-differentiation and 2) similar intra-differentiation, 3) intra-disciplinary antecedents related to interactionism, and 4) interdisciplinary openness. On the other hand, more divergences were found in double differentiation than in the construction of the backgrounds. Outstanding among these are: 1) reciprocal evaluation, 2) varying adopted traditions, 3) diverse intra-disciplinary backgrounds regarding the 'classics', the selection of dissimilar 'interactionist' materials, and 4) the weighting of scientific disciplines and different philosophies among the extra-disciplinary backgrounds.

Convergences

The convergences related to double differentiation are significant. Regarding extra-differentiations, both authors differ programmatically from the same theories and traditions: the unilateralism of individualistic action theory, the holism of meta-individual collectivism, and the combinationism of the micro-macro link or action-structure. The reasons for distancing oneself from all of them are the same: insufficiency due to epiphenomenalism, disinterest in the dyadic basis of the social, reductionism in dealing with sociological quality, and objectual provincialism with fragmenting potential. The convergence of extra-differentiations is congruent with the critique of deficient constructions of the sociological object and its field, as well as with the critique of positions that oppose the proposal of new social spaces. Extra-differentiations help identify critical factors and locate gaps that programmatic innovations must fill. Specifically, they reveal the vacancy of *a third radical position*. The GSST and A-NT programs reach the same conclusion through distinct

methods. The authors of the 'new combinationist synthesis' (Giddens, Alexander, micro-macro link, the structure/action articulation) differ from the GSST and A-NT in their programmatic foundations.

The convergences in terms of intra-differentiations are less spectacular, but equally relevant, since despite the divergences between the traditions of origin, both authors establish lines of differentiation between them because of the difficulties they pose for the study of sociological quality based on dyadism. Luhmann criticizes Parsons and systemic functionalism, while Latour criticizes Bloor and socioconstructivism. Parsons and Bloor do not provide enough clarity to answer this question definitively. Without breaking definitively with the traditions respectively adopted, both programs proposed innovations within them. That is to say, none of them considers that the *third radical position* is inherent or already given in the adopted perspective. This position *can be* developed within the tradition, but it requires the Mp strategy. For this reason, intra-differentiation underlies the distinction between GSST and A-NT program and tradition.

Below I add a topic that is usually given little attention. I call it the convergence of *cross-criticisms*. It is the coincidence between different programs of some elements of intra-differentiation and some elements of extra-differentiation. This is the case of the convergence of Luhmann and Latour in the critique of "functionalist systemism". The same is true of the "strong program". The difference is not in the content of the critique, beyond questions of minor emphasis, but in the decision to either criticize and break with the program and treat it from extra-differentiation, or to criticize and renew it from intra-differentiation. In the one case, the objections are reason enough to reject the tradition as a whole; in the other, they are reason enough to reformulate it completely, but not to reject it. Thus, the divergence between perspectives and traditions is reintroduced and coexists, in a certainly entangled way, with the convergence of the content of the crossed critiques.

The construction of intra-disciplinary antecedents contains one of the most striking convergences of the present research, namely that both programs take the heterogeneous interactionist tradition as a relevant antecedent of their radical outlines. Remarkably, they even converge in their critique: both authors agree that the tradition got the locus of sociological quality right but did not radicalize its perspective sufficiently to adequately theorize the dyadism that underlies interaction. Although there are divergences in the authors' reflections, Luhmann and Latour ponderate Garfinkel. All these convergences are presented as inexplicable

in terms of systematic norms or reciprocal receptions, but for us they are consistent with the previous convergences: the search for a radical third position and the interest in the dyadic property of sociological quality require antecedents related to interaction.

Both programs value extra-disciplinary antecedents in a convergent manner. When disciplinary responses are insufficient or absent, it is necessary to critically consider non-sociological elements in the sociological operative core. Although Luhmann dialogued with biology and cybernetics, and Latour with primatology and narratology, the purpose of these dialogues is to broaden the sociological perspective with data and comparisons, and to channel unresolved problems of traditions in crisis through interdisciplinary channels. Moreover, all three authors sought alternative extra-disciplinary bases for sociology's structural conception. They found the discipline to be in a particularly deficient situation.

It is important to note that both programs engaged with philosophical perspectives that were not commonly explored in the discipline at that time. Luhmann was interested in the interpersonal pragmatics of Palo Alto (Bateson, Watzlawick), while Latour was interested in pioneers (William James and Dewey) and contemporaries (Boltanski). In both cases, they connected this reception with sociological inquiry of dyadism. Another notable convergence is the shared interest of Luhmann and Latour in Whitehead, particularly in the philosophy of Michel Serres. These convergences reveal a common discontent with the rationalist and enlightened philosophical foundations of sociology. They also demonstrate a desire to incorporate alternative philosophies to expand and complicate the field while marginalizing the concept of the subject and its sociological application.

Divergences

Regarding double differentiation, the main divergence between the two extra-differentiations is the systematic evaluation of each program in the context of the other. This can have negative consequences. The debate centers around whether to systematically evaluate each program based on its own double differentiation or that of other programs, following the dialogical tradition. At this point, both extra-differentiations exhibit a common operation in reciprocal evaluations.

The main effect of this is to intensify the differences between them. This is due to the identification of the program with the tradition, based

on the omission of the program's intra-differentiation. This operation is evident in both the identification of GSST with systems theory and A-NT with Edinburgh socio-constructivism, without any control or consideration of the intra-differentiation of such programs within such traditions. Therefore, each systematic evaluation may underestimate the programs. Identifying Luhmann's GSST with the systemic tradition overlooks in toto its foundations and pretensions for differentiation within it.

The same happens with the identification of Latour's A-NT with the socio-constructivist tradition. It is observed that the identification between program and tradition facilitates the negative evaluation of other programs and quickly generates divergences between them. Luhmann criticized actionism and constructivism, placing Latour without any special consideration. Similarly, Latour placed Luhmann within systemism without any qualms. However, these divergences predominantly follow the dominant dialogical lines of the respective traditions, and the dialogical lines that each program could launch overlap.¹¹ Whether or not they have a polemical purpose, such judgments ultimately generate and exaggerate divergences between traditions, leading to antanacsis, omissions, and misunderstandings. This omits the convergent and even transversal potential of intra-differentiations. Therefore, Mp strategies bring to reciprocal receptions underinterpreted "textual proofs".

In my case study, underinterpretation is even more serious because the foundations of the respective intra-differentiations *converge*. Luhmann and Latour were interested in dyadism and interaction and considered, with converging cross-criticisms, that these were undervalued objects in their traditions of origin. Both authors justified the differentiation of their programs within them. From a systematic point of view, it is incorrect to solely identify a program with a tradition or to only consider divergences. Both approaches are incomplete.

¹¹ The use of this fallacy is not limited to GSST and A-NT. It extends to the dialogical premises of the two residualized theoretical traditions. The programs studied here questioned the 'action theory' in its entirety, but none of them engaged in dialogue with its emerging programs, such as Udhen's weak methodological individualism or Esser's integrated action theory. The collectivist tradition was also examined in our programs, but without engaging in dialogue with emerging programs such as Bashkar's realism. Both traditions reduced the micro-macro link to an object that could be criticized for being both actionist and holistic. However, they did not engage in dialogue with emerging programs of the articulation of levels.

The differences regarding the antecedents are more pronounced. In terms of intra-disciplinary antecedents, the main divergence can be observed in receptive strategies: Luhmann stated that sociological theory is subject to revision, while Latour proposed an alternative canon. This is not a coincidence: Luhmann rejects dialogue, and Latour suggests a new one.

The reception of the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology, namely Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, represents a second divergence. This divergence follows from the previous one and helps to clarify it. On one hand, Luhmann considered the ‘classics’ as epistemological obstacles and suggested that they be studied as objects of the history of sociology. On the other hand, Latour held the figure of the ‘founding father’ in high esteem and proposed replacing them with Tarde. There is no coincidence here either. However, this difference implies divergences on the criteria of validity. Luhmann believes that the ‘founding fathers’ are anachronistic in diagnostic and epistemological matters, while Latour argues that they were wrong and subscribed to an asymmetrical epistemology. The differences are quite evident: the systemic tradition has never favored dialogue with the “classics” (with the great exception of Parsons in ‘37), while the tradition of science and technology studies has always raised its own “founding fathers” (Mannheim, Merton).

The convergence mentioned earlier between the interactionist tradition and Garfinkel does not necessarily imply a similar convergence with respect to the corpus of this tradition. Due to its heterogeneity, it is challenging to establish a single corpus. Two major criteria can be identified: the basic corpus (Simmel, Mead, Blumer, Goffmann, Garfinkel) and an extended corpus that includes post-Husserlian phenomenologies (Schutz, Berger, Luckmann). Luhmann incorporated Parsons’ proposals on double contingency into his extended corpus. In contrast, Latour focused on ethnomethodology and disregarded the rest of the tradition, particularly phenomenology, which he categorized as part of the ‘field of the hermeneutic sciences.’ Luhmann did not share Latour’s strong objections to non-Garfinkelian interactionism and even less to phenomenology. This statement highlights the divergence between Latour’s and Luhmann’s concepts of meaning.

When comparing extra-disciplinary backgrounds, significant differences can be observed. One of the most obvious concerns the disciplines chosen by each program for interdisciplinary dialog. The second concerns the expected returns from interdisciplinary dialogue: the GSST expects to gain generality, abstraction and comparability, while

the A-NT expects to generate an openness to heterogeneity based on scientific research results. A third divergence arises from the connection between the extra-disciplinary background and the measurement of the human being in sociology. It is striking how the respective disciplines consider the place occupied by 'man' or 'the human'. The GSST establishes antecedents with disciplines that dismiss such a place, while the A-NT establishes them with disciplines that decenter it. The A-NT justifies its choice of primatology and determines its relevance by measuring the human, which helps it differentiate between the measures of the human and the social, and displace the latter. The GSST's interest in multiple disciplines is based on the absence of a human measure in them, thus strengthening its own foundations without conceding intrusions of such a measure into the sociological object.

Another divergence, as important as the previous ones, is observed in the structural conception considered and taken from other disciplines. Notwithstanding the common interest of both programs in enriching the concept of social structure through transdisciplinary means and the shared esteem for those disciplines that make structural organization and its transformation more flexible and reticulate it, the GSST and A-NT diverge in the type of structural conception they seek: Latour distinguishes between the lower complexity of social structuring in humans compared to higher primates and values technical mediation. Meanwhile, Luhmann explores the general foundations of structural self-organization within the framework of the GSST.

In philosophical matters, the main divergence between the GSST and the A-NT is the place given to the dialogue with Kant, despite their convergence in questioning the concept and theory of the transcendental subject. Contrary to early romanticism and subjective transcendentalism, the GSST incorporates Kant into the debate with German idealism. The A-NT situates Kant in the consolidation of the subject-object asymmetry and contrasts him with Serres' philosophy of translation. The A-NT differs from the GSST in that Luhmann does not engage in polemics with Kant. As Rasch (2000) pointed out, Luhmann prefers the conception of irreducible alterity of romanticism over the conception of synthetic identity of idealism. Conversely, the A-NT specifically argues with Kant and criticizes him for similar reasons, namely the centrality of the rational subject. It seeks to displace him en bloc along with the entire asymmetrical tradition.

Conclusions

Table 3 summarizes the obtained results, which show both convergences and divergences in all axes, albeit with varying intensity. The double differentiation exhibits more convergences than divergences, while the antecedents show a predominance of the latter. However, it is worth noting that the significant convergences in this aspect ultimately balance the comparison.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the GSST and the TA-R employ similar strategies of double differentiation and share convergent elements. However, it is important to note that they still maintain significant points of contrast with their traditions of origin. The convergence between the two is based on the establishment of a third radical position founded on a dyadic sociological quality that distinguishes itself from other discourses of sociological theory.

In this sense, both strategies avoided the narrative of a “systematic history of sociological theory” cultivated by Habermas (1981) and Schluchter (2015), among others, and instead focused on differentiating the program itself from actionist, collectivist, and combinationist theories, establishing antecedents with the interactionist and pragmatist traditions, and being open to contributions from other disciplines.

The position and direction of the programs within the sociological field are defined by the configuration of this axis, i.e: GSST and A-NT differentiated themselves discursively as emerging forms against the dominant character of the ‘two sociologies’ (action theory and collectivist theory), but also against another contemporary emerging formation (‘combinationism’), which ultimately became the dominant alternative formation against the ‘two sociologies’. Both Luhmann and Latour criticized *in vivo* the concept of ‘combinationism’ for offering nothing more than a weak third position based on compromise formulas. This critique is consistent with the convergences regarding interactionism and the justification of interdisciplinarity in both strategies of antecedent construction. It is important to acknowledge that while there are convergences in the strategies of discursive differentiation, they do not negate the points of contrast between the two programs, both in the receptive strategies pursued and in the disciplines explored.

Thus, the Mp strategies of the GSST and the A-NT aimed to establish themselves as emerging formations through provocation and polemic.

However, at that time, their successes were relative, with no significant editorial or curricular impact, much less on the public agenda. Their achievements were more related to the distinction of original positions within the field. The programmatic dialogue differentiates a discursive strategy strongly oriented towards residualization. It complements the radicality of the third position with the radicality of residualization, but the former is linked to an emerging formation and the latter to a dominant tradition. The former does not reach the latter; if anything, it boosts and expands it. The programmatic function of extreme criticism is an important factor of differentiation and distinction.

The final section of the conclusions is reserved for evaluating the methodology and techniques used in the research. The concept of prelude metatheorization and its operating techniques have proven effective in identifying, processing, and comparing the receptions of the research programs under study. These results provide a new perspective on the questions raised by Turner and Collins years ago. It was observed that this methodology does not block conceptual analysis or the generation of new theory, as those authors criticized, but opens the way to systematically productive abstract and precise theoretical discussions, as well as to valid and impressive comparisons of the analyzed materials. Thus, it is heuristically positive for the development of theoretical innovations, because it places conceptual elaboration on a terrain of dialogical originality, since originality without dialog is immediately unknown.

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Appendix

Table 1

GSST’s Mp Strategy

	Double differentiation	Construction of background	
Intra-dif.	Social Systems Theory	Interactionism Post-Husserlian Phenomenology Garfinkelian ethnomethodology	Intra-disc.
Extra-diff.	Action Theory Functionalism Amalgamations of Theory Critical Theory	Cybernetics of information Second-order cybernetics Mathematics of communication Palo Alto ’s interpersonal pragmatics Multiple constitution emergentism Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics Biology of autopoiesis	Extra-disc.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on Latour (1984, 1987, 1997, 2005) and Luhmann (1981, 1984, 1987, 2005).

Table 2

A-NT's Mp Strategy

	Double differentiation	Construction of background	
Intra-diff.	“Strong programme” for Social Studies of Science and Technology (Bloor, Barnes)	Alternative “founding father”: Tarde Alternative “post-classic”: Garfinkel Alternative “contemporaries”: Callon y Boltanski	Intra-disc.
Extra-diff.	Sociology of the Social (contextualism, systemism, diffusionism) Action Theory Sociological reconciliations Critical Theory	Michel Serres’ Naturalism and Translation Shirley Strum’s Primatology Cyborg theory of Haraway Greimas and Bal’s Narratology First american pragmatism	Extra-disc.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on Latour (1984, 1987, 1997, 2005) and Luhmann (1981, 1984, 1987, 2005).

Table 3

Convergences and Divergences of Mp Strategies

		Convergences	Divergences
Double differentiation	Intra-differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of the third radical position - Tradition/program distinction - Cross-criticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematic Evaluation
	Extra-differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polemics against actionalism, collectivism and combinationism. - Vacancy of third radical position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Origin traditions
Construction of backgrounds	Intra-disciplinary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaccionism - Garfinkel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receptive strategies - “Founding fathers” - Interactionist corpus
	Extra-disciplinary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Necessity of interdisciplinarity - Criticism of the structural conception - Discontent with the philosophical basis - Alternative non-subjective basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disciplines weighted - Type of structural thought - Measure of the human - Kant

Source: Author’s elaboration based on Latour (1984, 1987, 1997, 2005) and Luhmann (1981, 1984, 1987, 2005).

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