THE CIRCULATION OF EUROPEAN KNOWLEDGE

Niklas Luhmann in the Hispanic Americas

Leandro Rodriguez Medina

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The Circulation of European Knowledge: Niklas Luhmann in the Hispanic Americas

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To Claudia
The only one who believes I can meet deadlines

Contents

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a three-year journey that began the day I obtained an International Fellowship at Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg, Germany, to work on the project "The Universality and Acceptance Potential of Social Science Knowledge: On the Circulation of Knowledge between Europe and the Global South." Wiebke Keim, Ercüment Çelik, Veronika Wöhrer, Christian Ersche, Maren Eichmeier, and José Gabriel Jiménez have created a fantastic environment to think about the circulation of social science knowledge. From my participation in the fellows' seminars held between January and March 2013, I gained insightful feedback and ideas for exciting new directions for my project. My participation in workshops in Freiburg (2012 and 2013) and Strasbourg (2014) allowed me to share some of the findings, which are now presented in Chapters 2 and 3. I would like to thank the participants and organizers very much for the unbelievable opportunity they gave me to be part of this group of people, with whom I expect to stay in touch with for a long time. I would also like to thank Birgit Wollgarten for her invitation to participate in the two-day conference "Theorietransfer: Zur Internationalen Rezeption Deutschsprachiger Theorie-Autoren" held at the Deutsches Literatur Archiv Marbach in 2013, where I outlined some of the ideas presented in Chapter 2 and where some interesting questions about my project were posed. Laura Angélica Moya López and Margarita Olvera Serrano, organizers of the Jornadas de Pensamiento Sociológico, held at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Azcapotzalco in 2013, gave me

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Introduction

Abstract: *In the Introduction I point out how this research unfolded for the past three years, recognizing the value of the reception of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America as a case study. I connect this research with my previous one about political scientists in Argentina and show that both are part of a research program to understand how centers and peripheries work and their epistemic consequences. Finally, a description of the content of each chapter is provided.*

I am not a "Luhmannian," as experts on Luhmann's systems theory usually call themselves. In fact, I have read a very small portion of the more than 80 books and 500 articles that Luhmann wrote during his career. As I will show in the following pages, some scholars have devoted their entire academic lives to his work, and they are still working on new projects to expand his influence. Moreover, the circulation of Luhmann's theory can be thought of as unsuccessful if we are interested in theories that have become mainstream in the receiving fields. His work is still ignored by many social scientists and is used by only a very small sector of the disciplines upon which he has had some influence, from law to education to sociology. His marginal position, from my perspective, does not imply that it does not deserve to be studied, nor does it mean that we cannot learn important lessons from it. In fact, precisely because of this marginality and the more or less reduced circle of people who have been involved in its reception, it is a very useful case study. If we add that most of the scholars who actively engaged in receiving his theory are still alive, we have also access to first-hand data about them, their interests, strategies, and decisions. They may perhaps be too utilitarian, but these have been the reasons behind my decision to focus on Luhmann's theory. The reader, in the end, will be the judge.

Luckily, I was able to find more than I expected. First, I was in touch with a fantastic group of scholars from Chile and Mexico who told me their working life stories, in which I could identify the relevant role of Luhmann. Second, I could continue my observations of the ways that scholars in peripheral settings organize their work around foreign theories that, as described elsewhere (Rodriguez Medina 2014), became subordinating objects. By these I mean the scholarly works produced in the metropolitan fields that, given the powerful symbolic and material networks enacted during their production, are able to shape the receiving field and, by so doing, to structure academic careers. In this regard, this research is a follow up of a previous investigation of political scientists in Argentina (Rodriguez Medina 2013; Rodriguez Medina 2014; Rodriguez Medina and Baert 2014) and the mechanisms by which they cope with foreign knowledge in their daily activities. While that research did not focus on specific theories, this one has gone one step further, identifying the connections between the content of theories—Luhmann's systems theory in this case—and the kind of work that scholars have to undertake to appropriate. Third, my current research has allowed me to see once again that peripheriality does not mean uncritical acceptance

or pure academic imperialism. Being peripheral is, on the one hand, a position within a relationship that includes, as a constitutive element, a center from which new knowledge usually is irradiated. On the other hand, being peripheral is a way of organizing a scholarly career and, in this context, of dealing with foreign knowledge. Put differently, if being metropolitan/central is to ignore or underestimate the knowledge produced abroad, then being peripheral is, among other things, to over-estimate the knowledge coming from the centers. Such overestimation might deserve ethical evaluations but, from my point of view, it deserves empirical analysis of its epistemic mechanisms and consequences. This research is an attempt to explore this in some detail.

This book is organized in four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces a theoretical framework based on Baert's (2012) idea of intellectual inter-ventions, STS's approaches to boundary work (in particular Gieryn 1999; Lamont and Molnar 2002; and Star and Griesemer 1989), and the geopolitics of knowledge circulation (Alatas 2003; Connell 2007; Mignolo 2000; Rodriguez Medina 2014). Instead of a typical reception study, mine is a case study of knowledge circulation, which means that I have not focused exclusively on those academics whose goal was to introduce Luhmann's theory in the region but also the work of scholars who have used Luhmann's theory in different ways, both on an intel-lectual and a practical level. This is supplemented by methodological considerations around life history and specifically about working life narrative, an approach whose focus is the professional lives of people. In this context, I describe the interviews I conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Chile, Mexico, Denmark, and Germany as well as the epistemological benefits and disadvantages of this qualitative approach to knowledge production.

Chapter 2 deals with the empirical findings of this research and shows that three generations of scholars have been involved in the reception of Luhmann's systems theory in Hispanic America.[1] While the first one was oriented toward teaching, translating, and writing introductory studies on Luhmann's works, the second and third, which were more research oriented, have been involved in putting the theory into use (second generation) and hybridize it (third generation). Although they are usually seen as "Luhmannians" and have important similarities (explored in Chapter 3), in this chapter I show the different boundary work that they have undertaken and the consequences in terms of the possibility of

Luhmann's theory finding a place in the landscape of imported theories from the metropolitan center.

In Chapter 3 I change the focal point to similarities and explore in detail three shared features of these generations. First, I show how dealing with Luhmann's theory has forced scholars to what I call a comprehensive reading; that is, a reading of his entire work (or at least the more relevant parts of it) in order to apprehend the vocabulary and the basic theoretical relationships proposed by the theory. A comprehensive reading is strongly associated with the work of translators and writers of introductory studies that still continue to appear today (e.g., Ibáñez Aguirre 2012 and Dallera 2012), since this reading strategy makes these studies necessary for a first contact with the complexity of Luhmann's work. The second similarity refers to the problem of correct interpretations of systems theory and gives rise to what I call embodied exegesis. Despite the availability of translations and introductory studies, empirical evidence suggests that the social scientists involved in the reception of Luhmann's theory believe in the need to be "introduced" to such a corpus by someone whose experience can, in practice, reduce its complexity and contextualize it within systems theory (not only in sociology, but in other disciplines such as Biology, Cybernetics, and Mathematics). A third similarity is the shared belief in the "power of theory" and the capacity of this theoretical framework to explain almost everything. This power is not limited to its intellectual dimension, but also to the practicalities of scholarly life on which the theory has also been influential. Thus, scholars have organized courses and Master's programs which use Luhmann's theory as their basis and by so doing they have been involved in assigning the theory of agency to shape the local, receiving fields.

Relying on secondary sources, in Chapter 4 I compare my study of the reception of Luhmann with others which have dealt with Euro-American theorists such as Weber, Freud, Marx, Dewey, Bourdieu, Lacan, Klein, Foucault, Sartori, and the Frankfurt School. I do not try to compare the reception of these theories as social phenomena, but rather to find similarities and differences between my investigation and these other analyses. The chapter is split up into two parts. In the first part, I recognize shared concerns regarding the creative and original nature of any reception process, the multilayered structure of the theories analyzed (which, in some ways, seem to be an intellectual prerequisite for theories to become classic, as Davis [1986] has shown), and the importance of

political factors in the receiving field for the reception to take place. These differences, on the other hand, have allowed me to suggest three variables according to which reception studies could be classified: (a) the time span, (b) the variety of intellectual interventions, and (c) the level of awareness of an international division of intellectual labor. In the second part of this chapter I compare and classify reception studies and attempt to show that these dissimilarities end up contributing to an understanding of the reception of theories (especially in peripheral regions) rather than being a sub-genre of socio-historical analysis or as a reconstruction of the diverse studies through which an author and his/her work can be introduced in a context which is beyond the realm of its original enunciation.

In the Conclusion I state the main findings and examine the relevant questions that this research has brought to light, as well as the future research suggested by them, and assess the relevance of paying attention to the process of knowledge circulation. I also return to some theoretical points made in the previous chapters and suggest new directions for the investigations of the mobility of ideas and knowledge. Specifically, I call for the formulation of an original vocabulary that might overcome dichotomous distinctions such as internal/external and objective/subjective that, so far, seem to have obscured our understanding of knowledge circulation.

Note

1   I will use the expression "Hispanic America" here instead of the more frequently used "Latin America" because, for practical reasons, I have intentionally excluded Brazil from my research although I recognize that Luhmann has been actively appropriated by some Brazilian scholars, with Marcelo Neves probably the best known in the region. It is only because of its linguistic roots in Spanish language that I use "Hispanic America" in this book

1

Conceptualizing Knowledge Circulation: Methods and Theories

Abstract: *Chapter 1 introduces a theoretical framework based on Baert's (2012) idea of intellectual interventions, Science and Technology Studies' (STS) approaches to boundary work (in particular Gieryn 1999; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Star and Griesemer 1989), and the geopolitics of knowledge circulation (Alatas 2003; Connell 2007; Mignolo 2000; Rodriguez Medina 2014). Instead of a typical reception study, mine is a case study of knowledge circulation, which means that I have not focused exclusively on those academics whose goal was to introduce Luhmann's theory in the region but also the work of scholars who have used Luhmann's theory in different ways, both on an intellectual and a practical level. This is supplemented by methodological considerations around life history and specifically about working life narrative.*

Niklas Luhmann was not particularly interested in making his theory travel abroad. Although he did not obstruct the projects through which scholars around the world tried to make his theory available to different audiences, he did not encourage them but warned about the complexity of his work and the difficulties of any translation. When a visiting scholar offered to publish the lectures he delivered at the end of his teaching career in Spanish, he doubted it made sense to try it. He was not sure how to transform an oral lecture into a readable, understandable book. The scholar recalls:

> Then I let him know that it was not about transcribing (his lectures). "I'll take notes, re-articulate (them), reconfigure (them) and then we publish them, following somewhat the logic (of his lectures)." So he said "Ok, do it".[1] (8.51; in translation)

Luhmann believed that his theory has European roots. In an interview conducted in Mexico City in 1992, he was asked, "A theory produced in Europe, like yours, would there be any problems if it was translated and applied to Latin America?" and he replied,

> Certainly, I assume that this theoretical effort has a European context. I've just been to Melbourne for a conference about European rationality, in which the focus was second order observation. The observation of observation, instead of a direct description of the world as it actually is. It's clear that this way of thinking is only possible as a consequence of European history, despite the rupture within this tradition.... This has to do with the assumption, which I accept, that modern world society was born in Europe. This does not mean that the European components develop as regional specificities in other places, but it does mean that certain aspects, especially the strong accentuation in the effectiveness of functional differentiation...only can be understood from the context of the European experience. (Torres Nafarrate and Zermeño 1992: 804; in translation)

Luhmann did not encourage the creation of international networks of scholars who would expand his theory. As one interviewee for this research responded, when questioned about his role as a sort of "master,"

> He was never interested.... He did not gather disciples, we became his disciples by ourselves. In the end, his school, which still exists and is strong in Germany, was not "founded" by him. He never made any effort to generate groups of thought, to connect us with each other. He did not tell us "Write to him or work with her." No. This was not his interest. (5.85; in translation)

He neither paid attention to specific spaces or places, because he saw his theoretical contribution as universal. In one of his most influential works, he argues that social systems "are not at all spatially limited, but have a completely different, namely purely internal form of boundary" (1997: 76, cited in Borch 2011: 137). For some, he "de-privileged…the spatial dimension" (Stichweh 1998: 343) and this seems to be one of the blind spots of his theory (Borch 2011; Filippov 2000). Even if his theoretical apparatus is assumed, the lack of interest in space can be seen as a weakness of his understanding of communication not as a theoretical concept but as an empirical, spatially grounded phenomenon (Borch 2011: 138).

Despite this, his theory has circulated worldwide and his influence in the social sciences is enormous (Poggi and Sciortino 2011). Moreover, there seems to be a "discovery" of his contribution to social theory in the United States and this foreshadows a new wave of interest in his theory. This chapter is a study of how his work, having overcome these obstacles, traveled to, and still circulates in Hispanic America.

1.1   Work life narrative: a methodological approach

Many different methods and techniques can be used to study the circulation of knowledge, from quantitative examination of citation patterns (Schott 1993, 1998) to hermeneutic analysis of specific works (Burke 1995) and to institutional-biographical accounts of thinkers (Isaac 2012). Moreover, conscious reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of these macro- and micro-approaches has led some to propose meso-level comparisons between particular research projects (Shrum et al. 2007). The challenge is to connect the situated experiences of people involved in the process of circulation with the broad patterns, tendencies or structural factors that condition such experiences. For the purpose of this research, a work life narrative approach has been used because we think of the circulation of knowledge as a result of strategic decisions made by scholars (or knowledge workers) in order to structure their careers.[2] In other words, knowledge circulation has to be analyzed vis-à-vis the intellectual and professional trajectories of those who actively participate in the process.

There are three assumptions that lie behind my use of life history and work life narrative. The first one is that narratives are important not only because they give us information about persons, things or events but also because they "lead to plans of action in the real world" (Goodson

2012: 8). Participants tell their stories in the way they do because that story has been (more or less) successful in giving meaning to their lives and consequently has become a guide, a plan, a project from which they judge their decisions and evaluate their future. Second, I assume, against some postmodern thought, that macro- or meso-narratives (such as the one necessary to understand any process/case of knowledge circulation) can be enacted and are the result of small narratives being permanently articulated. If something such as "structure" or "network" exists, it is because of the ongoing (re)configuration of people (with their bodies and narratives) and objects (with their semiotic and material dimensions intertwined). Third, life histories are more than life stories. The "life story that is told individualizes and personalizes. But beyond the life story, in the life history, the intention is to understand the patterns of social relations, interactions, and historical constructions in which the lives of women and men are embedded" (Goodson 2012: 6). In this regard, life history, as well as the work life narrative, functions as a link between the individual(s) and the collective(s) and also as a way of situating people, objects, and processes, avoiding the temptation of indemonstrable generalizations.

If a life-history approach is useful to contextualize the individual life story, the work life narrative will also be an appropriate tool to contextualize individual life stories about work. Although the idea of career as an institution seems to be at risk (Flores and Gray 2000), individuals—and academics in particular—still refer to it as a sort of organizing principle, or predetermined path, which has to be respected and followed or challenged and changed. In any case, "the issue people face today is not merely job insecurity, but more the loss of meaning that occurs when working life no longer has a discernible shape" (ibid.: 11). This uncertainty is what makes life stories more and more necessary: they provide meaning to a trajectory that is otherwise messy and insecure.

To study the reception and circulation of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America, I decided to inquire into the work life stories of those actors who play a decisive role in the process. In order to determine who these actors were, I relied on a pioneering text on the topic, Rodriguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate's "La recepción del pensamiento de Niklas Luhmann en América Latina" (2006). At the same time, using databases such as Scielo and Redalyc, I obtained information about Latin American scholars who have published on Luhmann. Finally, through snowball sampling, other key informants were identified and contacted. The result of this search was a sample of 12 scholars (8 from Chile and 4 from Mexico) with whom I conducted in-depth interviews between 2012 and 2013.

Although the main source of information was the set of work life stories, secondary sources were fundamental to becoming familiar with the field of Chilean and Mexican social sciences, as well as the specific contributions of the scholars interviewed. Additionally, some of Luhmann's works, when translated into Spanish, include important introductory studies written by leading scholars. These studies allowed me not only to become familiar with Luhmann's biography and understand parts of his complex theory but also to know specificities of the links between Latin American scholars and Luhmann. These texts describe the reasons, obstacles, and goals of translating Luhmann's books into Spanish in order to make them available to a broader audience. Along with the interviews, the introductory studies provided elements with which to identify strategies developed by scholars in the past four decades to position Luhmann's work in the landscape of Hispanic American social sciences. However, before describing and critically evaluating these strategies I shall explain why Luhmann's theory is relevant to studying the circulation of knowledge, and will justify my focus on social science in Chile and Mexico.

There are important reasons for choosing Luhmann's work as a case study. The first is that Luhmann's social theory is one of the most comprehensive attempts to develop a grand theory and probably the most ambitious since Parson's sociology. As a grand theorist, Luhmann's contribution lies in his scope of application, his multidimensional understanding of social processes, his influence on many disciplines, and his interest in new foundations for the social sciences, one linked to evolution theory, cybernetics, and communication. An indication of Luhmann's relevance is his inclusion in a recent publication on "great minds" of 20th-century social science (Poggi and Sciortino 2011). As the authors point out, the book introduces theorists "who have made particularly significant, distinctive, and controversial, contributions to the development of modern social theory" (ibid.: i). Table 1.1 shows the relative importance of Luhmann in Latin America, by exploring how many articles have been devoted to analyzing (some parts of) the work of leading sociologists.[3]

TABLE 1.1   *Articles devoted to leading sociologists in Latin American journals*

Database	Foucault	Bourdieu	Marx	Habermas	Gramsci	Luhmann	Giddens	Sartori	Althusser
Scielo	190	76	100	107	55	31	13	2	7
Redalyc	215	156	122	103	55	62	32	17	7
Mean	202.5	116	111	105	55	46.5	22.5	9.5	7

Sources: Redalyc (1969–2014) and Scielo (1996–2014). Accessed March 2014.

TABLE 1.2   *Articles devoted to Luhmann's work in Latin American journals, by country*

Country	Redalyc	Scielo
Mexico	28	6
Chile	10	3
Colombia	7	n/d
Brazil	6	15
Spain	4	n/d
Venezuela	3	2
Others	4	5
Total	62	26

Sources: Redalyc (1969–2014) and Scielo (1996–2014). Accessed March 2014.

In turn, Table 1.2 shows where the articles were published, pointing to the relevance of Mexico and Chile in the Spanish-speaking world, along with the important role played by Brazil.

The second reason is the tension between the scope of Luhmann's theory and his contextualization of it as a "European endeavor." Although general and abstract, his theory seems to have roots in an idea of rationality—as functional differentiation—that is Western and European. In an interview conducted with Luhmann in Mexico, Torres Nafarrate and Zermeño asked him whether his theory could be translated and applied to the Latin American context, and he replied that "in undeveloped regions these conditions [of differentiation] are not completely set up" (1992: 805; in translation). The third reason is that Luhmann's work is complex and innovative to allow room for local social scientists to "interpret" it and, by so doing, their intermediary role in its reception deserves attention (Davis 1986).

The reception of Luhmann's work in Hispanic America was possible because of a specific set of circumstances that prevailed in Chile and Mexico. The first translation into Spanish of Luhmann's main work (Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie), originally published in Germany in 1984, appeared in Mexico in 1991. The translation was undertaken by Silvia Pappe and Brunhilde Erker, under the supervision of Javier Torres Nafarrate, Professor of Sociology at Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico. The book was published by Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico, and Alianza (a Spanish publishing house) and Luhmann visited Mexico when the book was launched as a strategy to make both himself and his work even more visible in the context of Mexican social sciences. In the Spanish second edition (1998),

Nafarrate wrote a preface (1998: 17–26) in which he showed a deep understanding not only of Luhmann's theory but also of the controversies that it had produced, particularly in the German context. However erudite it might be, the preface is, as he acknowledges, a first and basic approach to Luhmann's contribution. Since then, Luhmann's work has seen a presence in Mexican social scientific literature (Varela 1995; Galindo 1999; Torres Nafarrate 1999; Vallejos 2005) and a recent scholarly conference, held at Universidad Iberoamericana in 2007, was devoted to his work. In such a context, Luhmann was compared with Aristotle because of the depth of his theoretical contributions and with Marx, Durkheim, and Weber because of his relevance to modern social theory (UIA 2007; see also Zamorano-Farías 2008).

In Chile, Luhmann's reception has also been broad. Perhaps one reason is that Luhmann took one of the main concepts of his social theory, Autopoiesis, from a Chilean biologist. Humberto Maturana—a Chilean scientist trained in London and at Harvard—has been a major theoretical influence through his studies of the capacity of systems of self-creation and reproduction, which Luhmann considers an essential feature of social systems. The second reason is that some Chilean social scientists were trained in Bielefeld, where Luhmann worked for several decades. Juan Miguel Chávez, Marcelo Arnold, Aldo Mascareño and Darío Rodríguez were some of the most relevant of Luhmann's followers and responsible for his introduction to Chile (Rodriguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate 2006). Recent publications on Luhmann and the possible applications of his theory to different fields are the third reason for his wide reception in Chile. Farías and Ossandón (2006a) have presented an edited volume in which they analyze the influence of Luhmann on fields such as music, gastronomy, literature, education, science and technology studies, and sociology. The reception of this book in the context of Chilean social sciences seems to be an indication of the relevance not only of Luhmann but also of his disciples, and of system theory as a valid theoretical framework (Carballo 2009). The final reason for choosing Chile and Mexico is that Luhmann's importance is such that international conferences have recently been held to evaluate his contributions (Rodriguez Mansilla 2008; UIA 2007).[4] In February and March 2007, the Universidad Iberoamericana at Mexico City organized an international conference on Luhmann entitled "La Sociedad como Pasión" (Society as Passion) in which experts from Chile, Mexico, and Europe met to "celebrate the first complete translation [into Spanish] of Luhmann's *La*

Sociedad de la Sociedad, the most comprehensive systematic explanation of modern society in current sociology" (Torres Nafarrate and Rodríguez Mansilla 2011: 9; in translation). As a result of this meeting, Javier Torres Nafarrate and Darío Rodríguez Mansilla edited "Niklas Luhmann: la sociedad como pasión. Aportes a la teoría de la sociedad de Niklas Luhmann," published by Universidad Iberoamericana Press in 2011. In October 2008, academics from Universidad de Chile, Universidad Católica de Chile, and Universidad Alberto Hurtado (a private, Jesuit University based in Santiago) organized and attended an international seminar on Luhmann, ten years after his death, at the Goethe Institute, Santiago de Chile. The conference was titled "The challenge to observe a complex society" and helped to consolidate the network of international scholars of the region whose work is connected to Luhmann's.[5]

Along with the strong influence exerted by Luhmann, the social sciences in Chile and Mexico are interesting case studies because they are peripheral scientific fields. This asymmetry with metropolitan (or central) social scientific fields has at least three implications (Rodriguez Medina 2010, 2014). The first is that ideas coming from centers of knowledge production are highly valued and endowed with prestige, producing some specific effects on the reception process. The second implication is that when knowledge moves from centers to peripheries it needs to be understood as an instrument for fostering locally oriented careers. The introduction of an author and his or her ideas into a scientific field is a strategy used to obtain a dominant position within the local field (Bourdieu 1999) or to becoming an "obligatory passage point" in networks (Callon 1986). Finally, knowledge circulation between asymmetrical fields has to be thought of as a socio-technical phenomenon. In other words, knowledge has to be simultaneously studied as an object (the book, the paper, the article) and as an idea (the content) because the asymmetry between fields affects both the material and textual dimensions.

In order to contextualize this research, I shall review relevant literature on the topic in the next section and introduce the theoretical framework to be used to interpret my qualitative data.

1.2   Circulation of knowledge: state of the art

In a context of globalization, circulation (of people, goods, services, ideas) has become a major topic in the social science literature. The emergence

of a knowledge economy or knowledge society has also shifted the focus of analysis from industry to services and from manufacturing to knowledge. The attention to ideas, despite their intangibility, has opened the door to a diversity of approaches to studying how these new economies and societies are organized and can be improved. In this context, the sociology of knowledge and science and technology studies have been fertile domains for new empirical and theoretical developments.

Some studies have focused on circulation of skilled workers and have shown how this process affects knowledge circulation, giving rise to phenomena such as brain drain or brain gain. These studies frequently described large-scale processes of migration, long-term socio-economic or demographic tendencies, and international competition for the most brilliant scientists or experts. Tejada and Bolay (2010) have shown "the potential of skilled migrants and scientific diasporas from developing countries to promote socio-economic progress in their countries of origin through innovative ways of transferring knowledge, skills, and other values" (ibid.: x). Ackers and Gill paid special attention to the role of networks and connections in highly qualified migration and knowledge circulation. They found that "networks based on the science of what they do and not their national ties are perceived as both more legitimate and more effective. Moving through these 'international scientific' networks does facilitate mobility.... For connections to function as an effective conduit for knowledge there must be an active and willing agent in the sending country. In many cases, this agent will be someone who has 'opted' to move on a shuttle basis rather than for longer periods as this form of mobility enables them to function at an international level" (2008: 235).

Others have emphasized the role of the university as the quintessential knowledge organization, to compete for talented people in the global context of scarce, highly qualified experts. Angel-Urdinola et al. (2008), for example, pointed out that "for developing nations, making the best of student emigration is a challenge. Countries would like to see the students return to be productive researchers at home, but this is not easy if the research infrastructure and the pay scale at home is not competitive enough . . . The results from (this) analysis suggest that at the world level, student migration to the US may indeed generate a drain if the students who study in the US do not come back home" (199). The consequence of this flow is that "[o]nce a critical mass of foreign talent was in place in America's halls of academe, those students in turn contribute their

brainpower to further advancing the United States' intellectual reputation—a virtuous cycle marked by, and powered by, mobility" (Wildavsky 2010: 20). From the perspective of institutions competing for the most brilliant scholars and students, the future looks more like a battlefield for talent than a brain-gain process based on international cooperation.

From these perspectives, knowledge circulation seems to be a by-product of people's decisions to move in search of proper working and living conditions (Özden and Schiff 2006; Kapur and McHale 2005), and the focus is less on a particular theory or specific (tacit or explicit) knowledge than a profession (scientists, engineers, experts), institution (Ivy League and Russell Group), or nationality (Indian, Chinese, Mexican). Thus, an orientation toward people brings with it a lack of interest in the knowledge that people carry with them.

Second, the circulation of knowledge has been studied from a hermeneutic perspective. On the one hand, there is a textual hermeneutic approach, in which the focus is how a text has been read in different contexts. As Livingstone has put it:

> scientific knowledge is not just about how and where the worlds of natural objects or material artefacts are experienced, nor about how the rendezvous between human culture and nature is stage-managed. It is also about the encounter with scientific *texts*. It is about engagements between publications and audiences, writers and readers, producers and consumers. We need to recall that knowledge usually does not move around the world as an immaterial entity. It routinely circulates in textual form. (2005: 391; emphasis in original)

From this perspective, Livingstone studied the circulation of Darwin's theory of evolution in three different contexts (South Carolina, US, New Zealand and Russia) and found that "along with my initial conceptual remarks, this brief survey of the different ways Darwin's theory was construed in a sequence of different spaces is intended to open up a few strands in the historical geography of reading. Attending to the *spaces of textual circulation* has alerted us to the different sites at which scientific theories are encountered and their local meaning constituted" (2005: 399, emphasis in original). Most of the analyses of circulation of knowledge in this tradition tend to emphasize the fact that theories change when they travel. For example, Said (1991) studied how Lukács' *History of Class Consciousness* was read by Goldman in Paris (1950) and by Williams in Cambridge (1970); Rupke (2008) describes how von Humboldt's writings

on the political economy of Mexico were read in different European countries; and Bruno-Jofré and Schriewer (2012) have studied the reception of Dewey's idea about education at an international level.

On the other hand, there is a material hermeneutics (Ihde 1998, see also Latour 2005; Hodder 2012; Leonardi et al. 2012) according to which the material dimension of objects (from scientific instruments to books) plays an important role in explicit and implicit meanings. In his analysis of Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, Secord (2001) focuses on the ways that the book was printed and reprinted, modified and promoted, in order to present a picture in which "social class, local politics, religious creed, and professional interests all had a bearing on the book's patterns of reception" (Livingstone 2005: 395). In similar fashion, Vitkine (2009) has studied Hitler's *Main Kampf* not only as a source of Nazi ideas, but also as an intellectual and material product of its time. In the first pages of his book, Vitkine acknowledges that "the content of *Main Kampf* has been exposed, analyzed and de-codified many times. But its production, the comments appeared when published, its impact on the origins of Nazism and the Third Reich, its reception, its international diffusion, its journey after the war or even the question whether the book…was actually read by the millions of Germans who had bought it, have never been an object of study" (2009: 9; in translation). Others have left aside particular texts and analyzed "the" book as a product, and the media as the message. Manguel (1996) and Petrosky (1999) deal with reading (as an act intimately connected to books) and the bookshelf and contribute to the idea that only materialized knowledge circulates geographically and historically, bringing about new practices (i.e., reading alone) and new spatial configurations (i.e., personal libraries). The revolution produced by digital media has not altered this assumption that materiality is crucial to understanding (construing) meaning/knowledge and how it travels. As Hayles has nicely pointed out:

> We think through, with, and alongside media…Starting from mindsets formed by print, nurtured by print, and enabled and constrained by print, humanities scholars are confronting the differences that digital media make in every aspect of humanistic inquiry, including conceptualizing projects, implementing research programs, designing curricula, and educating students. The Age of Print is passing, and the assumptions, presuppositions, and practices associated with it are now becoming visible as media-specific practices rather than the largely invisible status quo. (2012: 1–2)

Following Hayles' assumption, there is abundant literature and case studies about the influence of digital media and the internet on scholarship and the circulation of knowledge. Although recognizing the transformative effects of information and communications technology (ICT), this literature has found important evidence to conclude that circulation of knowledge – as well as collaboration between scientists and the gathering and processing of data at international levels—still depends on the same structural factors, such as the organization of local scientific networks and their international connections. In their study into the use of the internet by scientists in peripheral regions, Ynalvez et al. found that "while the vast majority of scientists describe themselves as current email users, far fewer have ready access to the technology, use it in diverse ways, or have extensive experience" (2005: 39). These findings support Thompson's, according to whom "evidence from a survey of academic Internet users in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the US shows an empirical correspondence to the center—periphery framework of academic dependency" (2005: 41). Duque et al. (2005) present similar evidence and argue that "while access to email does attenuate research problems, such difficulties are structured more by national and regional context than by the collaborative process itself" (2005: 755). The consequence of these studies has been summarized by Gläser:

> The internet affects the relative importance of communication channels and makes communication and access to information easier and faster. It also helps to integrate new and more partners into the networks of collaboration. But qualitative changes in the work practices and social structures of scientific communities cannot be observed. Studies of supposedly new phenomena created by the internet tend to miss that point because they limit their focus to the new phenomena and do not compare them to "pre-internet" practices. (2003: 47)

To understand knowledge circulation from a hermeneutic approach, both textual and material, we need to take into account the geography of reading and reception; that is, we need to understand how knowledge has been put in use. In order to do so, knowledge has to be conceived not only as a set of (more or less) organized propositions but also as a material device. In practice, knowledge is (re)configured by being introduced into a network of people and objects that enables or constrains the possibility of circulation. However, in order to avoid oversimplification and prejudgment (i.e., the impact of the internet on scientific practices),

the study of knowledge circulation should be made through case studies and qualitative methodologies that help us to follow the actors (Latour 2005). In the next section I shall introduce a theoretical framework through which to conceptualize the reception of knowledge as a positioning strategy based on boundary work.

1.3   Understanding the circulation of social knowledge

The reception and circulation of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America have aspects that need theoretical reflection. It is an example of a theory produced in a metropolitan center (Germany) and arriving in two peripheral regions (Chile and Mexico). At the same time, both the network of people (scholars, PhD students, translators) and objects (manuscripts, books, PhD applications), and the content of the theory have played important roles in its circulation. The reception and circulation of this theory have been influenced by the set of specific operations undertaken by scholars in both countries in order to position themselves in the local academic field. Finally, in order to receive the theory, scholars have relied on a particular strategy: to set (or break) boundaries that exclude some actors and ideas and include others. In the next paragraphs I shall introduce the theoretical framework to connect these aspects of the process of reception and circulation.

Knowledge changes when moved from one place to another, because it arrives in a new material and textual context. According to Livingstone:

> The meaning that any new work has for an individual reader is shaped by the other texts and theories and practices they have engaged. Meaning bleeds, as it were, from one text to another. New texts take their place within an already established private web of textual interlacings. These are manifestly different from person to person, from place to place, from site to site, and have a key bearing on the spaces of knowledge making. (2005: 393)

However, this view seems to imply that there are no important (structural) differences between contexts. In other words, this is a perspective from which to understand the circulation of ideas between contexts that are, in principle, similar. The international landscape of the social sciences, in which I shall embed the story of Luhmann's reception in Latin America, is not like this.

Although many metaphors have been used to describe the social sciences at an international level, I will follow a growing literature that sees them as centers and peripheries (Alatas 2003; Baber 2003; Beigel 2010; Burke 2012; Connell 2007; Connell and Wood 2002; Keim 2008; Kuhn 2010; Rodriguez Medina 2014; Schott 1998; Wagner 2006; Weidemann 2010). According to Keim (2008), centers and peripheries differ in (a) infrastructure and internal organization: development vs. underdevelopment; (b) conditions of existence and reproduction: autonomy vs. dependency; and (c) internal position and recognition: centrality vs. marginality. Rodriguez Medina (2013) argues that the differences can be identified at the level of scientific fields/networks: (a) conditions of entry: high vs. relaxed; (b) number of actors: high vs. low; (c) sources of capital: local vs. foreign; and (d) autonomy: high vs. low. Pointing to the relational nature of centers and peripheries, Connell has chosen the "term 'Southern' not to name a sharply bounded category of states or societies, but to emphasize relations—authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony, partnership, sponsorship, appropriation—between intellectuals and institutions in the metropole and those in the world periphery" (2007: viii–ix). Alatas, on the other hand, lists three countries as central, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, and pays attention to the defining features of the center—or West, as he calls it.

> These are defined as countries which (1) generate large outputs of social science research in the form of scientific papers in peer-reviewed journal, books, and working and research papers; (2) have a global reach of the ideas and information contained in these works; (3) have the ability to influence the social sciences of countries due to the consumption of the works originating in the powers; and (4) command a great deal of recognition, respect and prestige both at home and abroad. (2003: 602)

Weidemann argues that peripheriality rests on the colonial past of many places in the world, in which "social sciences were a transplant from the United States and Europe and have therefore featured a strong international orientation from their beginning…In these countries, research topics, publications, and careers are closely modelled at and dependent on Western countries" (2010: 357). The consequences of such a colonial arrangement have been pointed out by Baber (2003), who has focused on the epistemology of the knowledge produced in centers and peripheries and concludes that the scope of generalizations seems to be the main difference between both. As he puts it,

> Conceptual, theoretical work that sought to universalize its findings from particular, provincial locations was the preserve of the colonial scholars. Knowledge produced by scholars located in the colonized societies had a particular geographical referent, constituted a case study and hence had no theoretical contributions to make, except indirectly in its role as raw material for abstract theorizing by colonial scholars. (Baber 2003: 617)

Interestingly, even those who accept a more positivistic and traditional approach to knowledge circulation, paying attention to international co-authorship of articles as a main indicator of collaborative scientific work, have acknowledged the existence of centers and peripheries. Schott has pointed out that the "belief in universal validity, a common ownership of knowledge, and an autonomy to pursue ties with peers have become institutionalized around the world during the twentieth century.... These institutional arrangements are a foundation for the formation of a hierarchy of centers and attached peripheries" (1998: 117). The logic behind these institutionalized arrangements has been provided by Wagner (2006) in her analysis of new invisible colleges. Because it is a scale-free network, the growth of scientific networks is guided by "preferential attachment," a principle according to which some members of the network are more attractive and consequently become central nodes. According to Wagner:

> The theory of preferential attachment describes how new entrants choose the actors with whom they want to connect when joining a network. These choices are typically constrained by the availability of connections and by the entrant's standing in the network, but by and large new network members try to connect with those who are better known and better connected...Well-connected scientists control data, equipment, funding, and access to other resources and opportunities. As a result, they attract connections—and a higher quality of connections—at a far higher rate than less famous researchers. Ultimately, this process generates a scale-free structure, in which a few stars or hubs outshine the far larger number of ordinary researchers. (2006: 42–43)

The importance of recognizing that a center/periphery structure is at work in the social sciences lies in the kind of exchange that can take place between the central social sciences and their peripheral counterparts. Elsewhere I have argued that when knowledge travels from centers to peripheries it has to be thought of as a subordinating object; that is, a textual and material device which is able to (re)structure the peripheral field by forcing the local actors to react to it (Rodriguez Medina 2013).

Given the symbolic and material network that supports it, central knowledge is not just a "foreign idea" but rather an instrument used by local actors to structure their own careers and, if successful, to reconfigure the local field.[6]

The idea of knowledge as a device is based on recent developments in Science and Technologies Studies according to which content of knowledge and its material manifestations are entangled. In their classic study of the air pump, Shapin and Schaffer introduce three technologies to understand the success of Boyle's philosophy of nature: a material technology (air pump), a social technology (experimental conventions), and a literary technology (scientific report/article). However, they add that "despite the utility of distinguishing the three technologies employed in fact making, the impression should not be given that we are dealing with distinct categories: each embedded the others" (Shapin and Schaffer 1985: 25). The dichotomous framework to deal with knowledge in modernity (mind and body, idea and media) is radically transformed because both poles are intertwined. Following Law and Mol (2001), Allen argues that "facts, instruments, objects and theories form particular patterns of relations when held stable within a network which implies a particular form of spatiality" (2012: 33). Hodder has put it clearly by stating that "humans think through material culture" (2012: 35), and Hayles has point out that "we think through, with, and alongside media" (2012: 1). From the point of view of reception and circulation, there are at least three implications of the entanglement of knowledge and materiality.

The first implication is that both the content and the media might have effects, and should be taken into consideration. For example, in the introduction to her study of Michael Polanyi's generation and their contribution to the origins of the social construction of science, Nye tells the story of a young historian of science who tried to link quantum theory to the widespread philosophical criticism of determinism. She explains:

> Kuhn's Structure presaged revolutionary developments still to come. One of the earliest was the 1967 manifesto by Kuhn's student Paul Forman at Berkeley. As a graduate student in Madison, I heard rumors for Forman's PhD dissertation almost immediately, but it was not readily available. Its main argument appeared in 1971 in Russell McCormmach's new journal *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, where Forman laid out his case that Werner Heisenberg's quantum theory of indeterminacy had its origin in physicists' capitulation to popular philosophical resistance in Weimar Germany to

> scientific determinism. "Forman Thesis", as it came to be called, did not reach a broad public audience, in part because it never appeared as a book. (Nye 2011: xiii–xiv)

In the last sentence, Nye's idea of the lack of success of Forman's thesis for a broad audience rests not in its content but in its format. As an article, it was available for a small community of experts; as a book, it could have reached a broader audience and perhaps become a classic text.

The second implication for circulation is that the focus on materiality introduces new actors to the landscape, from publishing houses to institutions. Organizations such as DAAD (*Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*), Fulbright, the British Council, and national councils for promoting scientific and technological research usually play an important role in promoting the circulation of people (students, scholars) and by so doing they contribute to directing the flow of knowledge between different regions. In the same fashion, publishing houses commodify knowledge and force authors and translators to pay attention to aspects such as length, writing style, use of images, audiences, and markets.

The third implication, linking the first and second, is that actors interested in moving knowledge from one place to another may be engaged not only in fostering knowledge as an intellectual practice (theoretical development or empirical application) but also in the rearrangement of material actors (e.g., a new journal or postgraduate program). Thus, a new journal that becomes an "obligatory passage point" for the network of experts as well as administrative positions within prestigious universities might help to encourage a particular theory, author, or school of thought.

In this landscape of centers and peripheries, the remaining questions are why and how foreign knowledge is used. The first question is related to the final goal of academics—becoming dominant actors in the field—and will be answered from the perspective of positioning theory. When applied to the sociology of knowledge, positioning theory

> relies firstly on the view that the reception, survival and diffusion of intellectual products—whether as research programs, theories, concepts or propositions—depends not just on the intrinsic quality of the arguments proposed or the strength of the evidence provided, but also on the range of rhetorical devices which the authors employ to locate themselves (and position others) within the intellectual and political field. (Baert 2012: 304)

Under this assumption, and in order to understand why scholars act as they do, the theory introduces the notion of intellectual intervention, which refers to

> any intellectual product, whether it is a book, a passage in a text or a speech at a conference [that] locates the author or speaker within the intellectual field or within a broader socio-political or artistic arena whilst also situating other intellectuals, possibly depicting them as allies in a similar venture, predecessors of a similar orientation or alternatively as intellectual opponents. (ibid.: 312)

Intellectual interventions are not only linked to ideas (content) but also to material products (books, speeches, presentations) and consequently the researcher has to pay as much attention to the intellectual product (knowledge) as to their effect. Intellectual interventions attempt to position a scholar within a field while contributing to framing other actors (i.e., allies and enemies). If these interventions are successful—that is, shared by those who get involved—then "effective positioning might help to diffuse the ideas or it might help the agent's career and material prospects" (ibid.).

According to Baert (2012) it is possible to differentiate between two ideal types of positioning: intellectual positioning and politico-ethical positioning. While the latter refers to taking a position on socio-political issues that may transcend the academic realm, the former can be divided into two types of claims:

> One about the general intellectual orientation of the agent (for instance, Habermas' description of his project as "critical hermeneutics" …) and the other about the significance of the intervention or of the general outlook. Claims about the significance often come down to claims about the originality or intellectual power of the intervention or general orientation. Alternatively, they may locate the work within a broader tradition, linking it to important figures in the field, including possibly a mentor. (Baert 2012: 313)

Scholars have many different strategies for positioning themselves in the field. They may label their own position (e.g., Hayles' "technogenetic approach") or other positions (e.g., Said's "orientalism"). They may form teams, networks, or schools (e.g., Chicago's sociologists and the Frankfurt School in philosophy) that help to produce as many intellectual interventions as necessary in order to achieve effective positioning because, as Holton has argued, "ideas are not derived from brain chemistry but from social interaction" (2008: 111). They may react to the context, since

the effects of positioning depend on intellectual, economic, and socio-political contexts. Regarding this issue, Baert points out that:

> Given the significance of context, it follows that, through time, the same types of intellectual interventions might bring about different positioning even when the same people are involved. It also follows, crucially, that the same intellectual intervention might generate different positioning when transposed to different contexts. (2012: 315)

They may react to the positioning of other actors, since positioning is a relational consequence of the ongoing (re)arrangement of actors. This is particularly important in those contexts in which two or more teams, networks, or schools are competing to be the dominant tradition in the field because, as Collins has stated, "it is conflicts—lines of difference between positions—which are implicitly the most prized possessions of intellectuals" (1998: 6).

However, if we pay attention to the strategies listed by Baert (2012), it is easy to realize that there must be a prior undertaking. Labeling, networking, and reacting to the context or to other actors imply a preceding separation of us from them. In order to create labels that help identify our own position (or that of our adversaries), enact networks in which scholars can actively share and participate, and react to the positioning of other within and outside the field, agents have to be able to (re)generate divisions and to enhance differences and similarities. To do this, they engage in boundary work, a concept which I will explore in the next paragraphs.

The question of how such knowledge is used takes us to the specific practices of social knowledge (Camic et al. 2011) that allowed a theory to travel from Germany to Hispanic America in the 1980s. To do so, let me introduce the idea of boundary work, boundary objects and, finally, subordinated objects. While the first refers to a process (by which some sort of exclusion/inclusion is produced), the other two point to specific intellectual products, from standardized forms to ideal types, in which knowledge is embedded. The distinction between the last two types of object, however, rests on the necessity to explain knowledge circulation in the context of the centers and peripheries that characterize the current social sciences.

According to Lamont and Molnar (2002), Gieryn (1983) was the first to refer to academic boundary work as the "discursive practices by which scientists attempt to attribute selected qualities to scientists, scientific

methods, and scientific claims" (2002: 178–179). The goal of such a work is to produce a "rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative, residual non-science" (Gieryn 1999: 4–5). In his original study (1983), there are three types of goals of academic boundary work: expansion, monopolization, and protection of autonomy. Expansion means the extension of expertise into new domains (previously claimed by other professions), highlighting the differences between rival groups. Monopolization implies a boundary work that will exclude some members of the field because they lack the attributes that are considered constitutive of the profession. Finally, boundary work is used to protect "professional autonomy against outside power (legislators, corporate managers) that endeavor to encroach upon or exploit scientists" epistemic authority for their own purposes (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 179).[7]

However, while Gieryn (1983, 1999) seems to focus on boundary work as conducive to differences and hierarchies, for Lamont and Molnar, "the notion of boundaries is also an essential tool to map how models of knowledge are diffused across countries and impact local institutions and identities" (2002: 177). Its usefulness lies in (a) its relational nature, (b) its pertinence to deal with very different complex phenomena, from sexual inequality to class and to science (Lamont and Molnar 2002); (c) its ability to explain conflict and consensus as two faces of the same phenomena (Star and Griesemer 1989); (d) its hierarchical structure of categories that "valorizes some point of view and silences others" (Bowker and Star 1999: 5); and (e) its capacity to combine textuality and materiality since boundaries can be seen as socio-semiotic tools to produce and hierarchize categories (Fox 2011; Star 2010). As a result of these properties of boundaries, they are not an obstacle to knowledge circulation but a condition, since they are partially responsible for the specific transformations that knowledge goes through when transplanted. Consequently, I will use the notion of boundary work to describe the complex, (not always) articulated, international, and material/textual practices through which some actors have created the conditions for a theory to circulate.

The material dimension of boundary should not be underrated. In fact, Star has pointed out that the "material and organizational structure of different types of boundary objects" (2010: 602) has been less used and cited than the idea of their interpretive flexibility—the alternative interpretations that different groups may provide of an object. However, materiality plays such an important role that Star and Griesemer (1989) coined the term "boundary object" to refer to elements that have the

capacity to have meaning (even conflicting meanings) in more than one setting. Thus boundary work is not only related to the production and reproduction of boundaries but also to the strategies and elements implemented to overcome or reinforce such boundaries. These elements "can be representations, abstractions or metaphors (and) have the power to speak to different communities of practice" (Fox 2011: 72), which make them a useful object to study knowledge circulation. Thus, any traveling theory can be seen as a boundary object that connects different settings and enable communication by being "adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to maintain identity across them" (Star and Griesemer 1989: 387).

Although useful to understand the circulation of scientific and technological knowledge, one major problem in the theory of boundary work and boundary objects is that they seem to focus on circulation between more or less equal settings, between two sites evenly endowed in terms of material and symbolic resources. However, in a context of centers and peripheries, boundary work and boundary object need to be reconceptualized. Elsewhere (Rodriguez Medina 2013, 2014) I argued that when boundary objects travel from a powerful site (e.g., a metropolitan university) to a less endowed one (e.g., a peripheral book market) we are actually dealing with subordinating objects. Among other defining features, subordinating objects tend to (re)structure peripheral fields by encouraging (or forcing) local scholars to react to that intellectual production. Subordinating objects usually compel peripheral scholars to make intellectual interventions that, in one way or another, are responsive to the knowledge embedded in them.

The main reason theories need to be thought of as subordinating objects is that the boundary work that takes place in peripheral contexts is not the same as that performed in central areas. So, as well as the uneven distribution of resources that gives rise to centers and peripheries, it is possible to find important differences in the way academic boundaries are enacted in either case. These differences have been nicely pointed out by Chew (2005) in his analysis of philosophy in China and Japan. He argues concisely that the academic boundary work that Gieryn (1983) described does not work in the same way in non-Western academies because (a) there are weak institutions and loose coordination between them; (b) scholars feel less need to fight for disciplinary identity, which was given by colonial legacy; (c) pre-given boundaries are imported from Western countries and have successfully excluded scholars from

neighboring disciplines; (d) "professional" scholars struggle against "traditional" counterparts in order to monopolize the discipline; and (e) there is weak protection against foreign influence, such as civil society and the state (Chew 2005: 531–534).

Using this theoretical framework, I will present and discuss empirical findings in the next chapters. In order to organize the argument and focus on the scholars involved and their strategies, the process of reception and circulation of Luhmann's theory has been split into three "generations." Thus, although continuities, disruptions, and overlaps can be found, it will be shown that these generations have made—or are making—specific and synergistic contributions.

Notes

1   Interviews were transcribed and analyzed with Atlas.TI. After every quotation, readers will find a two-number code. The first number refers to the interview and the second to the passage within that interview. Since interviews were conducted in Spanish, all quotations are in translation. Similarly, all quotations from books or articles in Spanish have been translated by the author.

2   I will call "work life narrative" to the partial life histories in which the professional trajectory is the axis of the narrative, although other factors (such as family or political context) can eventually be brought to the front.

3   Notwithstanding the biases introduced by databases in general (Ortiz 2009), Latin American databases are still developing and their information should be taken cautiously. My intention, however, is to show the relative weight of each leading sociologist and of each country in comparative terms. I thank Gustavo Sorá for this observation.

4   See http://www.facso.uchile.cl/noticias/48071/encuentro-internacional-niklas-luhmann and http://desarrollo.sociologia.uahurtado.cl/2008/11/encuentro-niklas-luhmann-a-10-anos-el-desafio-de-observar-una-sociedad-compleja/. Accessed 20 May 2013.

5   See http://www.facso.uchile.cl/noticias/48071/encuentro-internacional-niklas-luhmann and http://desarrollo.sociologia.uahurtado.cl/2008/11/encuentro-niklas-luhmann-a-10-anos-el-desafio-de-observar-una-sociedad-compleja/. Accessed 20 May 2013.

6   Hence the relevance of life history and work life narrative in order to appreciate the intertwined development of some ideas and some academic trajectories.

7 Regarding academic boundary work in peripheral regions (which is the subject of this research), Chew has argued that "one would expect processes of academic boundary work in non-western academies to be considerably different because they do not have to begin them from scratch. Instead of reinventing crucial components such as boundaries between disciplines or professional academic role definitions, non-western academies can directly import them from the West. Importation is also encouraged by isomorphism in higher education institutions and the global academic dominance of the West, as these two factors discourage non-western academies from establishing entirely new knowledge classificatory schemes or building on the inheritance of indigenous traditional ones" (2005: 531).

2

Bounding Luhmann: Different Strategies to Appropriate Foreign Knowledge

Abstract: *Chapter 2 shows that three generations of scholars have been involved in the reception of Luhmann's systems theory in Hispanic America. While the first one was oriented toward teaching, translating, and writing introductory studies on Luhmann's works, the second and third, more research-oriented than the previous one, have been involved in putting the theory into use (second generation) and hybridizing it (third generation). In this chapter I show the different boundary work that they have undertaken and the possibility of Luhmann's theory finding a place in the landscape of imported theories from the metropolitan center.*

The reception of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America has been depicted by Torres Nafarrate and Rodríguez Mansilla (1996) by a communicative process that does not necessarily imply acceptance. In this regard, they point out that reception of a theory (i.e., being aware of its existence) is not the same as its use by scholars. Interestingly, if this were the case, it would be really difficult to decide whether any theory has arrived in a new setting since the acknowledgment of its presence cannot be derived from its utilization for teaching and research. Following Luhmann's claim that circulation of theories has to be understood as communication, they state that

> The communication of theory . . . rests on the selection of themes as well as on the possibility of making them visible, diffusing them, and on the disposition of those (sociologists) at local level to be aware of what is going on in other places. It is another issue whether the theory is accepted and its distinctions used for research. (1996: 55; in translation)

However, evidence from this research invited us to re-read the reception and process and interpret it in a different way. First, reception of any theory is an intellectual intervention and, as such, it has consequences that may lead—or not—to general (or partial) acceptance of foreign theories in a local field. Second, the use of a theory does not imply its becoming mainstream theory within a scientific or intellectual field. The adoption of new knowledge by a small group of scholars, well positioned and with enough symbolic and material resources, might produce effects in the relationships that constitute the field. Third, reception involves not only traditional intellectual interventions (e.g., books, introductory studies, syllabi) but also alternative interventions, such as occupying administrative positions at universities and encouraging and supporting young academics to go abroad for postgraduate education.

There have been three generations of scholars involved in the process of reception and circulation of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America. Almost all of them are alive, working and producing new knowledge on this topic, General System Theory or applications to new topics/problems and geographical regions. Therefore, generations in this context is not necessarily a matter of age or academic cohorts, but rather of sharing similar types of boundary work, positioning strategies, and work orientation. Although these generations have similarities that allow us to refer to continuities throughout the process of reception and circulation (see Chapter 3), in this chapter I will focus on the differences.

2.1   The first generation: conceptual boundaries

The first generation of scholars were directly involved in taking Luhmann's theory from Bielefeld to Hispanic America, in particular to Chile (since the 1980s) and Mexico (since 1990s). They were responsible not only for making this theory available to the Spanish-speaking audience of Latin American social scientists, but also—and more fundamentally—for making it comprehensible. That is why they were in charge of formal and informal translations, of writing dense and useful introductory studies to Luhmann's work, of teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels, of beginning (not always) fruitful dialogues with other Latin American scholars, and of positioning General System Theory (the one produced after Parsons) and Luhmann's functional theory in the landscape of Latin America social sciences.

The obstacles to bring a German grand theory from Bielefeld to Latin America in the 1980s were many and included the costs of communication (e.g., intercontinental trips, subscription of international journals, phone calls), language, and ideologization of sociological debates (in the context of a military dictatorship) (Torres Nafarrate and Rodríguez Mansilla 1996: 55–57). Besides, for those scholars who were not aware of Luhmann's theory, his work was linked to Parsons' and embedded in the structural-functionalism without any further distinction. Thus, the criticisms to Parsons' theory were also directed against Luhmann's, which diminished its attractiveness and led to his labeling as a conservative theorist. Additionally, "the Habermas-Luhmann debate that gave birth to their book in 1971 (Habermas and Luhmann 1971) and continued in their subsequent publications had not been heard of (in Chile), so the Parsonian consensus continued to be seen as the expression of conservatism in (Luhmann's) theory" (Torre Nafarrate and Rodríguez Mansilla 1996: 57; in translation).

If reading Luhmann through Parsons' lens was a problem, another—and more important—was the fact that sociology was under risk in Chile when the first generation tried to position itself in the field. Pushed by the dictatorial government of Pinochet, Chilean social science tended to disappear from universities and shelter in the less-articulated, foreign-financed, postgraduate-oriented, and infrastructural-deficient arena of extra-university research centers. Undergraduate education in social science is practically eliminated an only economics (in fact, neoliberal, Chicago-inspired economics) is taught in higher education institutions.

This lack of institutional settings mirrors the "absence of unique and all-comprehensive paradigms [which] allows for the development of new areas such as communication or international relations and the reflection on topics such as culture, democracy, socialism, public opinion, from different angles and combining methodologies" (Garretón 1989: 16). In addition, only theories that supported the political and economic decisions of the regime or those that appeared as "neutral" were accepted in the universities where social sciences were still taught (Garretón 2005).

In this intellectual and material context, the first generation developed its positioning strategy by presenting Luhmann's theory as (1) non-ideological (i.e., harmless and neutral); (2) scientific; (3) all-comprehensive (i.e., useful for understanding diverse socio-political processes); and (4) interdisciplinary.

De-ideologizing Luhmann was important because the possibility to undertake research (and to transcend the few institutional settings in which it was performed) depended on the presentation of knowledge as science, not ideology. At the same time that Chicago-inspired neoliberal economics reached the status of a scientific discipline in Chile by mathematizing its axioms and theorems, social sciences attempted to look as scientific as possible and Luhmann's systemic theory seemed to be an ideal case. Its theoretical complexity, conceptual richness, and lack of normative pretensions helped it to appear as neutral and far away from the dangerous theories of conflict that had been influential in the late 1970s, especially those of Gramsci and of Athusser (Garretón 1989). Thus Luhmann's theory was seen (probably wrongly) as a theory of consensus and order from which the status quo can be defended. In this sense, a common misinterpretation of this theory (i.e., the absence of conflict) seems to have played an important role when transplanted to Pinochet's Chile in the 1980s. In Mexico, however, the situation seems to have been different: there was no dictatorship and social sciences were well consolidated by the 1990s, when Luhmann's theory was first introduced. In this case, this theory had to face other adversaries, such as Bourdieu and Foucault, who still are the most-cited authors in the country. Left theorists, such as Marx and Habermas, were important in Mexican social sciences, but their influence had been stronger in the 1970s and 1980s.

This boundary between ideology and science was highlighted by students of scholars of the first generation. As the passages will show, for some, Luhmann himself appears as a guarantee of de-ideologized

knowledge because of its inherent complexity and of its interconnections with other (more scientific?) disciplines, such as Biology or Cybernetics:

> (Students), at least as a façade, wanted to present themselves as more scientific and less ideological. It's like…Luhmann is so complicated that, if it's ideology, nobody will understand. (…) For me it was a fascination at the beginning. Finally something technical…distant (from other theories). My impression is that, for me and some fellow students, we were finally doing something scientific. He (Luhmann) was actually a scientist, not an ideologist! (6.46; in translation)

> (We have to) end with the ideological discourse, that is, we are training scientists (so) we are going to read (texts) from psychology, cybernetics, biology. (7.34; in translation)

Along with complexity, de-ideologization of Luhmann' theory has been based on the absence of normative principles; his is not a teleological theory. From the Habermas-Luhmann debate it was clear that Luhmann was not attracted by a critique of Modernity—and Modern rationalism— that had characterized much of German philosophical and sociological debates since the times of the Frankfurt School. It could be argued that Luhmann and the scholars of the first generation share the idea of theory as a neutral (in normative terms) set of concepts and relations which does not necessarily lead to political commitments. According to Borch, his

> Technical vocabulary easily let itself to the critique that Luhmann was preoccupied with technocratic concerns, far remote from the daily sufferings and injustices that people might experience. In a sense, this was correct. Luhmann did not envision any political mobilization to arise from his theorizing. His ambitions remained scientific and, more specifically, theoretical. This, Luhmann reasoned, was more important than promoting a normative political program that was based on what he considered insufficient theoretical grounds. (2011: 10)

For Luhmann (1995), scientificity has been associated to second order observations; that is, the observation of observation and the radical constructivist epistemology implied in such a position. According to Borch, Luhmann "basically argues that knowledge is possible only through distinctions made by systems that separate themselves from the environment" (2011: 59). The task of a scientific theory is consequently to show the original distinction that structures systems by reducing

the complexity of the world (natural or social). However, for scholars involved in the reception and circulation of Luhmann's work, scientificity seems to be associated with theory and theoretical development and this association was transmitted to scholars of the following generations. As Farías and Ossandón have put it, "theoretical and conceptual abstraction is an intrinsic and necessary characteristic of any enterprise which seeks to explore social reality from an original perspective" (2011b: 41). Accordingly, one interviewee has argued that systemic theorists attract students because of

> This thing of being scientific: we have concepts, we have glossaries, and we have theories. (It seems they say) "We aren't going to write normative laments all the time. We want to take this to a higher level of intellectual sophistication and this guy (Luhmann) can help us, cannot he?" (6.47; in translation)

Another way to gain scientificity has been to link Luhmann's theory with the canonical core of social sciences through different, but intertwined, intellectual interventions. First, in undergraduate courses Luhmann was introduced vis-à-vis other major sociologists such as Weber and Durkheim. Referring to their first contact with Luhmann, two young scholars remember that "one important thing they (first generation scholars) did was to establish a direct relation to Durkheim…and Weber, as fathers of this institutional sociology. (Regarding) Weber (we were taught) rationalization, modernization as a process of rationalization, etc. But Durkheim was already understood as a sort of…systems proto-theory" (11.10; in translation). Second, in a conference held at Universidad Iberoamericana in 2007 and devoted to his work, Luhmann was compared with Aristotle because of the depth of his theoretical contribution/his relevances and with Marx, Durkheim and Weber because of their relevance for modern social theory (UIA 2007). Third, this comparison mirrors praise by Habermas, who has argued that Luhmann's "theory of systems is not properly Sociology, instead it should be compared with those meta-theoretical projections that serve as world views" (1989: 451; in translation). In same fashion, Borch (2011) has compared Luhmann's contribution to those of Habermas, Foucault and Bauman, while Poggi and Sciortino (2011) have put Luhmann to the same level with Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Mead, Parsons, Goffman, and Garfinkel. As can be seen, by putting Luhmann in the sociological canon, scholars, especially those of the first generation, have made younger academics accept the scientific status of his contribution

and, at the same time, have shaped the field of the social sciences at local level (Ramos et al. 2008).

The theoretical nature of scientific development has led scholars of the first generation to think of theory as universal theory, that is an all-comprehensive knowledge that can be applied to different geographical settings and historic periods without losing its fruitfulness:

> A theory of society is a universal theory unavoidably. But the fact of being universal does not imply exclusivity. Luhmann's theory is able to explain all social phenomena, from the simple conversation of two pedestrians in which one asks the other about time, to the functioning of the economic system, the political system, or society as a whole. (Rodríguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate 2008: 14; in translation)

Similarly, a scholar interviewed for this research has highlighted the scope of Luhmann's theory and takes it to be one of the main attractiveness of this contribution:

> Luhmann's theory is seductive. It gives you a capacity to understand from the foundation, the constitution of society, the original distinction: what is inside and what is outside, the system as something that allows you to understand the evolution of society, since the initial distinction to the large functionally differentiated systems. That explanatory power is very interesting! (2.18; in translation)

The final feature of Luhmann's theory that contributes to the positioning strategy of the first generation scholars is interdisciplinarity. On the one hand, Luhmann has always relied on interdisciplinary sources to develop his thought, which led him to biology, philosophy, mathematics, cybernetics, history, and sociology—to mention but a few. Consequently, "the interdisciplinary inclusion of this variety of inspirational sources, with which only few social scientists are familiar, has contributed to the highly difficult, if not outright inaccessible, character that many sociologists think that Luhmann's work has" (Borch 2011: 3). However, empirical evidence for this research challenges this claim:

> Luhmann had this systemic view that included society, politics, economy, law. So you can approach someone and talk to colleagues from other disciplines and tell them something interesting about their own discipline...Clearly, [for me] it was something important, especially [talking] to engineers because I've always worked at departments of Engineering. So, if I studied with a systemic theorist, how won't I be there? I've never had any problem to communicate with engineers, never. (5.70; in translation)

Regardless of the relevance of interdisciplinarity in Luhmann's work, first generation scholars have been more concerned with explaining Luhmann than with using and hybridizing Luhmann. Thus, one of the intellectual interventions of these scholars was the translation of his work. However, in this context translation has two different but entangled levels. First, a linguistic level that implied the translation from German into Spanish of many of Luhmann's books and articles, which, according to Torres Nafarrate and Rodríguez Mansilla (2006), explains why there are more texts of Luhmann in Spanish than in any other language. Second, a cultural level according to which translating is not only about words and grammar but also about semantics, that is about the complex world of meanings circulating around any language. Put differently, translating the work of a theorist is an

> exercise of internal systematization, at a theoretical level, that attempts to make intelligible a theoretical tradition (System Theory) and an original thought (Luhmann's) which, as part of that tradition, introduces new theoretical designs from which it is possible to deal with social reality understood as complexity. (Rodríguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate 2006: 64; in translation)

Translation, as intellectual intervention, has been one of the crucial activities of the first generation of scholars. Although the process began in Chile in the 1980s, where Dario Rodríguez translated some of Luhmann's chapters and articles in order to use them in class, translating most of Luhmann's work became a life-long project when it was suggested to Javier Torres Nafarrate, a professor at Universidad Iberoamericana-Mexico City (UIA), by a colleague, Luis Vergara Anderson, who had heard about Luhmann but had not read any of his works. From that time, at the beginning of the 1990s, Torres Nafarrate devoted himself to reading, understanding, and translating Luhmann's works into Spanish, a project well supported by UIA Press. However, to do so, he was to enact a network of scholars (other translators, German native-speakers, other experts on Luhmann) and objects (from specialized dictionaries to notes taken by hand during his time in Bielefeld) that allowed him to develop his career as a prolific translator. Besides articles, he translated the following books: *Soziale Systeme* (1991), *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (2000), *Das Recht der Gesellschaft* (2002), *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (2005), *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (2007), and *Organization und Entscheidung* (2010). Along with this impressive task, he has himself become an authority in systems theory by writing some of the most used

and cited introductory studies on Luhmann (Torres Nafarrate 1992, 2004; Torres Nafarrate and Luhmann 1996; Rodríguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate 2008) . He also has written more than 15 prologues to different works, some written by Luhmann and others by experts in the field.

Introductory studies (be they prologues, prefaces, or books) are crucial intellectual interventions because they (a) allow a broader audience to become familiar with Luhmann's work; (b) explain the process behind translation; (c) position some scholars as authorities in the field; and (d) strengthen networks by inviting colleagues to make contributions to edited volumes devoted to systems theory and/or Luhmann's theory. According to one interviewee,

> Without any doubt the (introductory) texts helped! We were especially lucky to have them because when I started to read *Sistemas Sociales* I remember I read the introduction and understood nothing! And from the few pages I read, when I talked to Torres Nafarrate, I had got it all completely wrong! (6.9; in translation)

Armed with translations and introductory studies, the first generation has relied on teaching as a key strategy to disseminating Luhmann's theory. Teaching was important because it allowed them to have the physical and symbolic "space" in which preliminary translations could be circulated and improved. It also allowed them to identify and support young scholars who were impressed by the power of systemic theory. Teaching was also the opportunity to recognize which topics of Luhmann's theory were more difficult to understand, that were somehow counterintuitive, and accordingly their classroom became the first step to new, deeper introductory studies. Finally, teaching Luhmann helped scholars of the first generation to differentiate themselves from other colleagues who had been working under different paradigms, from Gramsci's neomarxism to Bourdieu's theory of field. Moreover, Luhmann was taught in such a way (with such a passion) that some students went through a gestalt change that made them read other authors through a Luhmannian lens:

> There was one seminar in which Darío (taught) systems theory, in fact, Parsons and Luhmann…the trajectory of systems theory, from Von Bertalanffy to Luhmann. But, of course, he said a few things about Bertalanffy, about Parsons, and then [the course] was about Luhmann fundamentally, which was highly appreciated. [It helped that] Darío is like professor of professors of sociology in Chile. He has a pedagogical perspective for any topic he explains. Because of that he's so recognized. He has a high professorial commitment. (1.4, 1.7; in translation)

> What happened [in a seminar with Darío] was very important. I think that Darío is a great professor and [because of that] we discovered social constructivism with Luhmann. So that changed radically the way we dealt with other theories, other courses, seminars about other topics—in which Luhmann also appeared as mandatory reading. But that was it: a radical switch. (11.18; in translation)

Owing to this role as translators and exegetes, the first generation scholars contributed to the creation of a differentiated audience: specialists and generalists. According to Davis,

> Specialists view the theory as an increasingly clear, highly articulated organization of many concepts and their complex relations (as well as a collection of definite problems with some of these concepts and relations). Generalists, on the other hand, have only an indistinct "general impression" of the theory, which they experience as a loose organization of a few famous concepts, the clichés' of the theory. (1986: 294)

The implications of this segmentation are manifold. First, it has given rise to a group for whom Luhmann and his work are part of its identity. An example of this is Mascareño's (2006) classification of *Alt-* and *Jungluhmannianer* with which he not only describes important differences between the experts on system theory (using politico-ethical goals as the differentiating factor) but also accepts the internal logic of Luhmann's theory as the source of division.[1] Second, the segmentation allows some scholars to use Luhmann's works without the need to resort to his impressive production of more than 80 books and 500 articles. Thus, generalists, though likely accused by experts of misinterpreting the theory, are prone to putting it into dialogue with other theories (hybridization) and, consequently, to act like bridges between Luhmann's theory and other theoreticians'. Third, the general impression to which Davis refers in the passage might play a fundamental role in circulation of knowledge, because, as is often the case, a theory travels in the form of some parts which become attractive to other academics. As far as these parts can be identified, isolated, and put in use, a theory can be (re) used and circulated. When comparing Luhmann's theory of science with other, newer approaches, one interviewee illustrates this point:

> Science is constructed and has a logic which is global and long-term and that logic is well explained in Luhmann. *Science is also a system of communications that develops, with a certain code that precisely connects expectations from thousands of scientists around the world and those communications settle down*

throughout time, centuries. It's this logic which is not well described in theories like Latour's, about networks. On the other hand, what is gained at the global level in Luhmann has lacunae that those other theoretical perspectives and logics allow us to fill. (2.15, emphasis added; in translation)

Obtaining powerful positions in the field should also be seen as intellectual interventions. From these important administrative positions (such as dean or head of department), scholars have been able to encourage systems theory and Luhmann's work. They did this by adapting institutions to their agendas, building institutions and encouraging postgraduate studies abroad. In some instances, first generation scholars adapted previously institutionalized programs to their needs and projects and, in so doing, they opened up space for younger scholars. They were able to obtain funds (scholarships), to circulate informal, preliminary translations of Luhmann's work, to teach specialized courses on Luhmann and systemic theory, to offer positions (usually as part-time lecturers), and to introduce young academics into the sub-field of systems theory. Thus, some institutions (e.g., Universidad Iberoamericana, Universidad Católica de Chile, and Universidad Nacional de Chile) have become actors in the network of people and objects which is necessary for knowledge to circulate. The following long passage, from the narrative of a third generation scholar, illuminates the consequences of occupying powerful positions in the field:

> The last author I read in a course on social theory at UAM was Luhmann and I had heard about him because the aunt of a friend, who worked at UIA Press, used to give Luhmann's books away.... So Javier Torres (who was in charge of the course) had just returned from one of his trips to Germany and brought the manuscripts of the "Glossary" and "Introducción a la Teoría de Sistemas" that I still have with me.... For me, reading Luhmann was shocking, but brutally intellectually shocking, so I knew that from then on I'd be devoted to studying Luhmann. [Because of] Javier Torre's passion about Luhmann's work, I began to study German and did the most important thing in my life: I went to see Javier at UIA, because my idea was to do a Master's and then to apply for a PhD at a German university. So I went to ask Javier if he wanted to be my Master's supervisor, although I had thought to do it at UNAM....
>
> Javier was not very well-known at that moment and I told him, "I want to study Luhmann, and I'm studying German and I want to do a Master's at UNAM and I want …" and I remember he said to me: "This is too good to be true." So he made an offer that changed my life completely: "Why don't you leave UNAM and come here?" I said "Well, I have no money and this is

a private institution." And he replied: "Well, but we can see if a scholarship is available."…But when I applied, the scholarship scheme was cancelled and Torres, who had been appointed Head of Department, offered me a job.…I could not only study my Master's but practically live at UIA in close contact with Torres. I took every seminar that he taught.…Later on, he asked me (and other students) to revise some translations, even during the courses he was teaching.…So he took me to several [courses] he was invited to…Those were my projects and gradually I began to get involved in translations.

He became an important instrument [to leave to Germany] because when I told him: "I want to go to Germany," he said "Yes" and helped me to contact people, at Bielefeld. For me, that was the Mecca! The town where Luhmann had lived! His archive! So he helped me to contact Kieserling, who had been assistant to Luhmann and, by that time, was occupying Luhmann's Chair (and through Kieserling) I reached Nassehi, my PhD supervisor. (6.4–6.29; in translation)

The transformation of the Master's program in Anthropology and Development (MAD for its acronym in Spanish) into the Master's program in Systemic Analysis Applied to Society (MASS) is another example of the outcomes that powerful positions may produce. At Universidad Nacional de Chile, where a first generation scholar was appointed Dean of Social Sciences, this Master's program "has the goal of training postgraduate students with professional leadership abilities to be able to develop comprehensive understandings of cultural and social phenomena from a systemic perspective through complex theoretical and methodological tools."[2] This Master's "brings together multiple interests that have certain reference points in common. There're always conflicts, we are not a harmonious family,…but it's an umbrella under which we can sit and talk, discuss and think" (13.46; in translation). The creation of a Master's program has helped to reproduce the group of experts and to institutionalize the influence of Luhmann and systems theory in Chilean social sciences.

The third example of the power of these positions for circulation of knowledge is provided by the encouragement to go abroad (obviously, Germany as the first option) for postgraduate studies. First generation scholars have become gatekeepers in the relation between Chile and Germany, and this can easily be inferred from reading the letters of recommendation that scholars trained abroad presented in applications. Through the canonization of Luhmann vis-à-vis the introduction of other Germany-based systemic scholars (Willke, Stichweh, Stäheli,

Nassehi), first generation scholars have built a kind of academic circuit that connects Hispanic America with Germany, and that has been a path for many younger scholars of the following generations.[3]

While the first generation set the boundaries between Luhmann and other theoreticians perceived as ideologists and by so doing positioned themselves in the field, the next generation attempted to apply Luhmann's work to Latin American reality, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.2   The second generation: geographical boundaries

In the beginning of one the most important texts of this generation, it is argued that "the goal of this book is the description of what, as a general category, can be called the Latin American trajectory of functional differentiation" (Mascareño 2010: 11; in translation). And then, "the main hypothesis of this book is that Latin America is a region of the world society in which it combines formal performances of institutions coupled to functional differentiation through informal operations of stratification and reciprocity networks for which functional differentiation acts as a horizon of inclusion" (ibid.). If we take the systemic language out of his claims, it is recognized that Latin America has some specificities for which Luhmann's systems theory needs to be reconceptualized. Therefore, the conclusion is that "differentiated organization was structured in a different way, in a concentric way, which challenged the construction of the social world as decentralized, diffusing the limits between systemic logics regulated by different symbolically generalized media of communication" (ibid.: 82; in translation).

By acknowledging the particularities of the modernization process in Latin America, the goal of the second generation of Luhmannian scholars emerges: the application of systems theory to understand local reality. For these scholars, theory is something that has to be "corrected" or "complemented" by adapting it to a setting which was ignored altogether by Luhmann. Actually, the second part of the book previously mentioned (Mascareño 2010), entitled "Interpretations," "is made up of diverse (empirical) interpretations proposed as applications of the theoretical model outlined in the first part" (ibid.: 14; in translation). In this part, the author analyzes the sociology of Latin American Law, the

Chilean coup d'état of 1973, education in Latin America and the paradox of equality through education, and Chilean knowledge society.[4] This part illustrates the main contribution of the second generation of scholars.

The task of contextualizing or situating Luhmann's theory has been undertaken by many scholars of the second generation throughout Latin America. Bolos and Estrada Saavedra, for example, have studied conflict and social protest in Oaxaca (Mexico) by focusing on the Asamblea de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Assembly of People from Oaxaca) between 2005 and 2010. For this analysis, they state that,

> From a theoretical perspective, it is an open space for advancing an alternative theory instead of the traditional perspectives about resource mobilization and new social movements to study collective action. In fact, what we want to propose here is a theoretical-methodological perspective based on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems that considers collective action as a system of "protest." (Mascareño 2010: 231–232; in translation)

Estrada Saavedra (2012) extended the study of collective action using Luhmann's theory by analyzing the Frente Popular Francisco Villa (Francisco Villa Popular Front) and the Federación de Estudiantes Técnicos del Instituto Politécnico Nacional (Federation of Technical Students of Polytechnic National Institute).[5] Additionally, a recent book by Estrada Saavedra and Millán (2012a) points, in the title, to the fundamental objective of the generation: *La teoría de los sistemas de Niklas Luhmann a prueba. Horizontes de aplicación en la investigación social en América Latina* (Niklas Luhmann's systems theory on test. Horizons of applicability for social research in Latin America). According to the description of the book on the publisher's website, "using those methods and through artful exercises of application, a set of new propositions has been achieved that, besides engaging with theoretical traditions, allows for the enhancement of the conceptual and methodological apparatus of sociologists in Latin America."[6]

The idea of applying Luhmann's theory as the main goal of this generation of scholars also transforms their teaching. First, it obliges academics to teach Luhmann's theory as a starting point, as a reference point from which new developments are necessary. In the words of one of the interviewees for this research:

> (I and a colleague) were asked, in a seminar in Brazil, "Professor, Luhmann was able to identify eight systems, so are these systems the only ones?" We saw each other, think about it, and said "No! The challenge, *the remaining*

task is yours. He (Luhmann) stopped there"…However, if we're going to talk from systems theory we need a code, differentiation. (7.56, emphasis added; in translation)

Second, Luhmann's theory is taught in the context of specific problems, usually connected to the research interests of the scholar and to local realities in Latin America:

> I was lecturing on Contemporary Social Theory and Luhmann was there. He was the most unintelligible of all [the authors] and the most hated by students. But he was one author among many others. [In that moment] I realized that I had to change everything about collective action and that I couldn't do it in terms of action but social system, in line with Luhmann. And this impacted in the fact that I started to offer a course called "Systems of Protest," which was a re-appropriation of his notion of movements of protest, one that he didn't develop fully.…I taught the course in 2007 and then I did twice. (12.30; in translation)

The consequence of inserting Luhmann in a course on local socio-political problem is that his theory is not an object of study any longer, but rather a set of propositions that, as lens, allows students to understand some problems in a different way. When scholars are successful, the outcome is a sort of gestalt change in students' theoretical perspectives, one that positions Luhmann in the sociological canon and scholars in the local field:

> Students didn't like Luhmann and I understand that, because they couldn't get it, because Luhmann implies a break with the great sociological tradition, it implies to think in a way which is too innovative for traditional sociological analysis. They had, and still have, some prejudices, they had problems to understand it, but gradually they saw they could have a different image of the phenomenon and of the social if they used Luhmannian lens. (12–31; in translation)

Third, by teaching Luhmann's theory as a lens to understand local reality, the scholars of this generation are transmitting what Kuhn called tacit knowledge, that is "knowledge that is acquired through practice and that cannot be articulated explicitly" (1970: 44). Perhaps this assumption regarding application (know-how) and contextualization (Latin America) is behind the contributions to a volume (Farías and Ossandón 2006a) in which many scholars applied Luhmann's theory to different knowledge areas, from gastronomy to art, from law to culture. In the preface, the editors state that among second generation scholars there

is a shared understanding "that the goal of the theory is beyond itself, before anywhere else, it is in the application and utilization as a tool for observing concrete phenomena" (Farías and Ossandón 2006b: 12; in translation). And they add that "the theses and investigations presented in this volume can be understood as embedded in a regional and linguistic context in which different authors have received and appropriated systems theory" (ibid.: 14; in translation). Thus, this book illustrates that reception cannot be seen as separated from other socio-epistemic activities such as applying or contextualizing knowledge. Moreover, it shows that reception is never a passive position but rather the consequence of different, sometimes contradictory, frequently overlapping positioning strategies and boundary works.

While teaching was a conscious objective of the first generation, for scholars of the second generation research is more important. In this context, Luhmann's theory is put at the same level as others, although its benefits and conveniences are frequently highlighted. One interviewee has argued that Luhmann's theory is just a discourse because he thinks,

> It's not about theory and the empirical, but rather about how we articulate, how we build that artefact for us to be able to explain what we call "reality." This is a question that we can find in Kant, in cybernetic theorists, it's a question that is present in constructivists since Piaget. It's a question that has always been there—although perhaps we forgot it—so it's a discourse. (7.52; in translation)

In similar fashion, other interviewee has pointed to the epistemological influence of Luhmann by arguing that he accepted systems theory without changing his methodological commitments. However, he did understand that Luhmann's constructivist epistemology implied a different—and useful—approach to the object of study: collective action. For him, using Luhmann's theory did not force him to change his methodological tools:

> I still do ethnographies, interviews, archive field work, document revision. But it led to a change, very important, of the meaning of the construction of knowledge, the object of knowledge and to accept that it is constructed. . . . We repeat that but we [don't] understand it as a process that, from a certain perspective, can be seen as arbitrary [because] it's not an objective mirror of reality, but there're many possibilities to do so [although] it still is scientific knowledge. It was a consciousness change: epistemological consciousness. (12.35, in translation)

Epistemological consciousness is an expression that allows us to understand the main consequence of the boundary work undertaken by second generation scholars. While first generation scholars were more or less successful in creating a niche for Luhmann's theory by excluding Left and French theorists, second generation scholars have been more concerned with excluding non-scientific approaches to socio-political problems. As a theoretical framework, the theory is utilized, paraphrasing Kuhn, to solve puzzles, to produce a sort of paradigmatic agreement (normal science) that, although recognizing the existence of other theories, tends to emphasize its extraordinary capacity to understand "normal" problems.

When a theory (or set of theories) is accepted, then the goal is to refine it, to make it more apt to deal with the "external" world. According to Kuhn, "to scientists, at least, the results gained in normal research, are significant because they add to the scope and precision with which the paradigm can be applied" (1970: 36). And this seems to be the goal of the production of knowledge based on Luhmann's systems theory. For example, in the prologue to a book devoted to the universal legacy of Luhmann's work, Cadenas et al. state that,

> The present volume takes the universalistic pretension of the theory and aims at observing the modern contemporary society in different dimensions: formation and characteristics of a world society, theoretical reconstruction, philosophical, political, socio-legal, economic, semantic and scientific. We don't want to employ systems theory as a metaphor of reality, but *to show its effects in the capacity of description and reflection about contemporary society*. (2011: 14, emphasis added; in translation)

In his book about differentiation and contingency in Latin America, Mascareño (2010) describes his argument by pointing to the connection between a case (Latin America) and a theory (Luhmann's systems theory), and how the former leads to modifications of the latter. Nevertheless, these modifications are presented as subtle refinements of Luhmann's theory:

> Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the problematic from the perspective of functional differentiation. Latin America is evaluated from different contemporary sociological theories in order to observe the possibilities of a systemic orientation in the Latin American context and draw some reference point for the analysis. Chapter 2 discusses the systemic interpretation of functional differentiation . . . and *introduces conceptualizations, at theoretical level that allows*

> *for smooth interpretations of problems and characteristics of functional differentia-*
> *tion in the Latin American region.* (2010: 14, emphasis added; in translation)

Farías and Ossandón argue, in an edited volume in which it is possible to observe the overlapping between second and third generation scholars, that "this book…aims at showing different ways through which new generations of Latin American researchers appropriate this theory and utilize it *creatively*" (2006b: 11, emphasis added; in translation). Creativity is here a crucial issue because, as Kuhn has pointed out, "though its outcome can be anticipated…the way to achieve that outcome remains very much in doubt. Bringing a normal research problem to a conclusion is achieving the anticipated *in a new way*" (1970: 36, emphasis added). Thus, the authors describe the position of the second generation as an "engineering perspective" on Luhmann because it "constitutes a more analytical task whose goal is the growth of complexity and precision of the theory" (2006b: 12).

Before moving to the positioning strategies and boundary work undertaken by scholars of the third generation, let me make clear three entangled consequences of the ones used by academics of the second generation. First, while exegesis requires a profound commitment with the theory as a whole, as an object of study, application and contextualization only demand a partial, fractional understanding of it. In turn, however, this pragmatic approach, according to which researchers take what they need from the theory and use it to illuminate certain aspects of socio-political reality, allows them to be more innovative (Kuhn 1970; Farías and Ossandón 2006b). Second, "generations" refers to a group of scholars that choose similar intellectual interventions as positioning strategies in specific historic-geographical contexts. Thus, following Foster, a generation is a "vehicle for thought and action, a concept and a mental structure that provides people with, and limits them to, specific way(s) of understanding, speaking about, and acting in the world around them" (2013: 198). Because of this we can find scholars who, at different moments and employing different strategies, "belong" to different generations, as well as edited books that may summarize the goals of one generation while containing parts that reflect the characteristics of other generations. Third, unlike the scholars of the first generation, academics of the second can be thought of as generalists (Davis 1986) who have not wanted to enter in hermeneutic debates about the theory itself but who have transformed its "obscurity" or complexity pragmatically, that is, they

have been able to reduce the theory to a finite set of propositions (not necessarily the most important ones from the perspective of exegetes) which can legitimately be taught in association to some methodologies and some problems. They have been responsible to convert Luhmann's theory into a tool-kit ready to be put on (empirical, situated) test.[7] Finally, the intellectual interventions used by second generation scholars has demonstrated that Luhmann's theory has one of the defining features of classic sociological theory: it is multilayered. According to Davis,

> Since a social theory's audience comprises both those with a low level of interest in and sophistication about the theory, and those with a high level, a successful social theory must be "multi-layered" to appeal to both groups. classical social theories…contain enough seemingly easily grasped famous concepts to attract generalists, and enough difficult (but not impossible) to grasp complexity within and between these concepts to attract specialists. (1986: 295)

2.3   The third generation: theoretical boundaries (to break)

If the second generation has worked "with" Luhmann, the scholars of the third generation seem to have thought "beyond" Luhmann. One could argue that after paradigmatic research, some problems remain and new theoretical improvements become necessary. Thus, normal science, in Kuhnian sense, has to be replaced, eventually, by a new paradigm which solves the problems that the previous one had posited and gives birth to a new period of normal science. However, for third generation scholars, the change looks less as a paradigm shift than a theoretical hybridization, because they still think that the potential of Luhmann's theory is such that it cannot be ignored in sociological analyses.

Three intellectual interventions deserve our attention in relation to the goal of the third generation. In chronological order, the first one is Galindo's book *Entre la Necesidad y la Contingencia. Autoobservación Teórica de la Sociología* published by the Spanish publishing house Anthropos and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa. Although it was published in 2008, the book is based on his doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Armin Nassehi and presented at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München in 2004. The second is the participation of Farías and Ossandón in an international conference held

in Santiago (Chile), in 2008, to honor Luhmann's legacy ten years after his death. In this conference, it seemed to be clear that some scholars were less interested in the previous approaches to Luhmann's work and more inclined in putting it into a dialogue with other theoretical contributions, some of them perceived as more challenging and illuminating for current social problems. As a consequence of the second, the third intervention is a book (Farías and Ossandón 2011a) and especially the chapter "Introduction: Why Luhmann" (Farías and Ossandón 2011b), in which the authors have been able to express their discomfort with Luhmann vis-à-vis highlighting his tremendous contribution to sociological theory. This apparently contradictory objective is well achieved not only in the introduction but also in the edited volume, because the other authors illustrate the kind of break that the editors were pointing to in the introduction.

If the first two generations were interested in Luhmann's theory owing to the uniqueness in explaining social phenomena, the third generation assumes—and has orientated its work toward—a theoretical complementarity. While for García Andrade it is possible to combine Luhmann's and Giddens' theories into a new theoretical synthesis that explains the social and individual aspects of action sociologically (2013: 431), for Galindo (2008) the complementarity comes as an intuition. "Despite differences, there is, in contemporary sociological theories, a potential for complementarity that has not been exploited" (Galindo 2008: 11). Interestingly, García Andrade and Galindo are explicitly stating that contemporary social theories share more than it is usually thought by social scientists. They also recognize that one important intellectual task is to find convergence points around which apparently contradictory theories can be clustered.

Galindo's interests led him to attempt an unified social theory during his MA (under the supervision of one scholar of the first generation), but he quitted this project when applying for his PhD at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, when he decided explore connections between theories by finding what he calls a guiding distinction: necessity/contingency. From the moment he undertook postgraduate studies in Germany, he was convinced that becoming a sociologist did not mean accepting a sociological tradition or author, though sociological education was strongly influenced by the idea that identity (as functionalist or Marxist) was indeed necessary. Instead, his sociological goal was to combine to produce something new, that is, to hybridize.

Galindo focused on Bourdieu, Giddens, and Luhmann. Besides its canonical effect, the choice of Luhmann has to be seen in the context of the contemporary theories that have made important contributions to two theoretical problems that, according to Galindo, are the most important for modern societies: structuration and differentiation. Thus we can observe one of the defining features of third generation scholars: its critical appreciation of Luhmann's theory and its search for inter-theoretical connections that may lead to theoretical improvements. Galindo acknowledges this when he introduces these theories and says,

> Although the three theories depart from the contingent character of the social, it is possible to identify differences in how they handle the possible/impossible distinction. While Giddens and Luhmann are more interested in possibilities (agency and double contingency), Bourdieu focuses almost exclusively on the limits of the possible (correspondence between habitus and field). Evidently, this does not mean that Giddens' and Luhmann's theories do not have concepts (structure, system, etc.) to deal with contingency reduction. I consider, however, that none of these concepts play the role as well as Bourdieu's habitus. Nevertheless, since Bourdieu tends to formulate (quasi) deterministic theses, it is hard to discover contingency sometimes. Therefore, I consider that the concept of structure I will outline here should keep Giddens' and Luhmann's contributions. (2008: 16–17, in translation)

One important consequence of Galindo's claim is that the use of Luhmann's theory for empirical research (something that characterizes the work of second generation scholars) should be revised. In the last section of his introductory chapter, titled "Positioning: towards a cosmopolitan sociology," Galindo argues that one reason behind his project is the search for a global sociology because "if sociology wants to keep on being a competent description of society (understood as world society) it should be able to incorporate as much complexity as possible" (2008: 21). Put differently, only a sociological theory that has received contributions from the periphery is as complex as necessary to deal with contemporary modern society. Consequently, and against some second generation scholars, taking Luhmann's theory as a conceptual tool with which it is possible to understand local (peripheral) social, economic, cultural, or political problems can be misleading. The complexity of Luhmann's theory in terms of concepts and relations that can be used to understand pre-modern societies (or alternatives modernities) is insufficient. Galindo's notion of structure attempts to grasp the weaknesses of these theories as individual intellectual projects and the strengths of them taken together.

The focus of Luhmann's theory on European modernity was not the only obstacle for success. In the conference held in Chile in 2008 to honor his memory ten years after his death, two members of the third generation decided that it was time to shake up things a little bit and list the obstacles that Luhmann's theory had. The factual problem was that "the theory of social systems occupies a relatively marginal position in contemporary social sciences; it has been hardly used, and after Luhmann's death in 1998, it has been increasingly overlooked" (Farías and Ossandón 2011b: 39). When interviewed for this research, they recalled the conference and argued that "the rhetoric (of the conference) was like 'Luhmann is great, he is superb.' Our rhetoric [was] Luhmann is a failure, a failure [they laughed]. It's a failure [because] nobody understands [his work]. The truth is he's a freak" (11.93; in translation). This intellectual intervention has at least two consequences. First, they were seen as members of a new generation somehow breaking with the legacy of previous ones. Second, other actors' reactions to this break illustrate how interventions shape boundaries or, put differently, why interventions has to be seen as boundary work. While some opposed the reading of Luhmann proposed by Farías and Ossandón, others backed it up because they saw it as a sign of maturity of the community of Luhmannian scholars:

> Prof. A. was happy but Prof. C. went out indignant. She said "What do you think? You're kids. Luhmann is a great master, you have to be patient…but you're the typical irreverent young people. But Prof. A. said to C., " We are grown, it is fine that they did it. This is what everything is about. But there was a small schism, so to speak, in this micro community of ten systemic scholars in Chile. These people realized they actually couldn't count on us. (11.94; in translation)

One of the main reasons behind this break within the small group of Luhmannian experts was the growing and imposing influence of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) that somewhat forced open a dialogue between Luhmann's theory and other theoretical frameworks. In 2006, José Ossandón was doing his PhD at Goldsmiths College, University of London, on the rise of private health insurance in Chile and he read the work of Michel Callon, one of the founding fathers of ANT. That the French theorist became a strong influence is easily proved by the fact that 15 articles, books, and/or chapters written by Callon can be found in the reference section of Ossandón's PhD dissertation. Moreover, he

explicitly recognizes the role of ANT and science studies from the very beginning of his work:

> Mainly after certain development in economic anthropology and science studies, market things, such as goods, commodities, and prices, ceased to be assumed as technical objects that are of interest merely of economists and other experts that directly work with them, and were gradually seen as things that can be analyzed in the way in which other objects such as gifts had been previously studied. Particularly in the last eight years, the most productive field for this type of work has been the analysis of financial markets. (2008: 8, emphasis added)

This theoretical shift and the interest in materiality to understand markets led Ossandón to share ANT readings with other colleagues—some of whom were also undertaking doctorate research. The impact seems to have been strong (two interviewees refer to this influence as pandemic) since ANT helped them to see their research from a new angle, one from which Luhmann's approach, though still interesting, was rethought. Ossandón himself acknowledges the changes regarding his Luhmannian legacy:

> At the end, Luhmann ended up being a very tiny part of my thesis (particularly what Luhmann claims about risk). I think I made a particular connection with sociology and finance and that was fine…but at the end the PhD thesis ended up being a thesis [based on] Callon. (11.80; in translation)

Accordingly, one of his colleagues, Ignacio Farías, argues that the influence of ANT "solved my thesis because it allowed me to study tourism, machines, and framing" (11.82; in translation). Moreover, the contributions of an ANT perspective are pretty clear in two other intellectual interventions by Farías (2010a, 2010b). In the introductory chapter on a book on urban assemblages, he follows Latour (2005) in stating that "we are perhaps confronting a Tardean moment in urban studies" (Farías 2010a: 1) by which he means the necessity to rethink the social not as a kind of "stuff" but as a result of associations. In his words, "scholars in urban studies have begun to explore relational, symmetrical, and even flat perspectives to make sense of cities, urban phenomena and transformations" (ibid.). In the same fashion, in his chapter on tourism in Berlin, he mentions that, "I empirically explore the thesis that tourist situations are sustained by sociotechnical frames by presenting the main findings of my ethnographic research" (Farías 2010b: 214). So it can be observed that not only has ANT provided new conceptual tools (e.g.,

sociotechnical frame) but it has also given methodological guidance (e.g., ethnography). However, Luhmann's theory is also present in his analysis, especially when Farías deals with how tourism is virtualized; that is, how touristic situated practices are "only partially contained within the frames of tourist situations" (ibid.: 223). Owing to the fact that, according to Farías, virtualization is achieved through communication, Luhmann is relevant because "communication, understood as a way of processing sense, as Luhmann…has put it, involves thus a permanent dynamics of actualization and virtualization" (ibid.). The entire section on "The Virtuality of the Tourist City" can be read as an example of the fruitful dialogue between theories in which third generation scholars have put Luhmann's work.[8]

Influenced by ANT and other post-structuralist approaches, Farías and Ossandón (2011a) edited a volume titled *Comunicaciones, semánticas y redes* (Communications, semantics, and networks) with a very provocative sub-title: *Usos y Desviaciones de la Sociología de Niklas Luhmann* (Uses and deviations of Niklas Luhmann's sociology). Although the word "uses" refers, once more, to the power of Luhmann's theory for empirical, applied research, the word *desviaciones* has to be carefully taken, because it implies two different things in Spanish. On the one hand, it means "detours," so it could refer to possible new uses and applications, new paths for which the theory has never been thought. On the other, it means deviation, which implies a kind of betrayal and walking away from tradition or orthodoxy. The book, as the final intellectual intervention I will refer to in this section, is an example of both meanings of the word.

In the introductory chapter entitled "Why Luhmann?", Farías and Ossandón clearly state their goal: "it is necessary to decide how to connect Luhmann's concepts with notions coming from different theoretical traditions *which are useful* to observe, distinguish and theorize about extremely relevant facts in the respective areas of research" (2011b: 39, emphasis added). Then they add, with ironic humor, "the dilemma is how to say something about any phenomenon, without having to explain beforehand *Social Systems*" (2011b: 40). Yet, Luhmann matters, because the authors find one answer to the question that opens the introduction: "Luhmann [is necessary] in order to describe sociologically the differences which make up certain social phenomena" (2011b: 42). In this regard, it seems that some of the social phenomena in contemporary society, and the basic distinctions that it introduces, can be seen only through a Luhmannian lens.

As a consequence of this tension between recognizing the relevance of Luhmann's work and the importance of other theoretical frameworks, Farías and Ossandón claim that "what makes Luhmann a unique and irreplaceable author is the emphasis that he places on what we want to call 'the reality of abstraction'" (2011b: 44). By which they mean that Luhmann's theory must not be seen simply as an abstraction but rather as a "historical-phenomenological description of abstract entities" (2011b: 45). Resembling Weberian ideal-types, entities such as money, art, or truth are abstractions that oblige researchers to overcome theoretical speculation and rely on observation, self-observation, and reflection "in order to show the abstract nature and uniqueness of modern objects and processes, and to explore new methods for social research" (2011b: 48).

The tension mentioned above also contributes to the structure of the volume (Farías and Ossandón 2011a) by pointing to the limits of Luhmann's theory. Succinctly it can be argued that the authors recognize the role of abstraction not only in Luhmann's work but for sociological analysis as well but, at the same time, they clearly see its limitation. The embodiment and materiality of some social relations (openly acknowledged by some other theoretical perspectives, such as phenomenology or ANT) are introduced as a challenge to which the contributors to the volume actually respond. Thus, the goal of the volume is "to be capable of specifying with growing precision the contributions which the theory of social systems makes to sociology, while understanding that the latter requires a greater sociological tool box than that reintroduced by the concepts of social systems theory" (Farías and Ossandón 2011b: 58).

By pointing to the conceptual and methodological limits of Luhmann's work, third generation scholars have been able to position themselves as heterodox system theorists who are more committed to sociology (or other disciplines) than to systems theory. At the same time, they have shown that recognizing weaknesses is not a problem for the theory but a departing point from which new theoretical developments are required. Thus, their theoretical contributions aim at strengthening Luhmann's theory through hybridization which usually increases the complexity of the theory and discourages some students and social scientists to apply it for empirical research. Nevertheless, by hybridizing the theory, third generation scholars are trying to reshape the canon of sociology, one in which Luhmann has seemingly found his place.

2.4   Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the reception of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America was a complex, active, sometimes contradictory, process. I have also show that three generations have been involved in this process, each one with different goals, strategies, and boundary work. While the first generation, strongly orientated toward teaching and translating, was crucial to making Luhmann's theory available through translated books and articles and introductory studies, the following generations have been more interested in research, although differences have been found. Second generation scholars seem to be more preoccupied with the application of Luhmann's theory to Latin American social reality, which eventually has led to new conceptual developments. In Kuhnian terms, this generation has internalized Luhmann's theory as a sort of paradigm within which certain questions can be asked, certain solutions can be found, and the growth of scientific scholarship is guaranteed. In this period of normal science, the search for more precision and accuracy in the understanding of local problems has led scholars to endeavor to link systems theory with traditional techniques of social sciences, such as ethnographic work or interviews. Finally, the third generation has defied Luhmann's theory in different terms. Influenced by other theoretical perspectives that deal with some of the problems for which systems theory does not seem to be adequate (e.g., embodiment and materiality of social relations), these scholars have attempted to hybridize Luhmann's work and they have produced interesting empirical studies in different disciplines. If the previous generations were interested in expanding (diffusing and spreading) Luhmann's work, the third generation has been focused on its limits and ways to overcome them. They tend to think that the future of the theory depends on a fruitful exchange with other theories (e.g., Actor-Network Theory, Giddens' Structuration Theory).

It remains necessary to contextualize Luhmann's reception in Hispanic America in the light of the center-periphery structure I described at the beginning of the chapter. The question is, to what extent did the reception of Luhmann's theory depend on its being an intellectual intervention by a leading German sociologist? Put differently, what made Luhmann's scholarly work subordinating objects to be received in peripheral Latin American social sciences? Although responding to these questions would require another study, I will try to answer them by resorting to my interviewees' work life narratives.

Scholarly works are subordinating objects when, coming from central academic fields, they are able to (re)structure a peripheral field by forcing its members to react to them. This (re)structuring does not mean a general and radical change of institutions, intellectual traditions, and worldviews but rather subtle transformations of everyday practices that contribute to (re)shape intellectual interventions in the field (e.g., syllabi, articles, conferences, and so on). In this regard, the major change observed was the development of the Master in Systemic Analysis Applied to Society, at Universidad Nacional de Chile.[9] According to a third generation scholar, "this program is an institutional reality that self-reproduces and continues producing systems scholars. [It has] people who use the categories, who create concepts, who differentiate [from other sociologists]. I mean, there's a factor of academic differentiation. In so far as you share language, you have force" (2.33; in translation).

Other impacts of Luhmann's theory in the (re)organization of the field, without changing its institutional configuration, have also been observed. On the one hand, Luhmann's work was included as mandatory reading in some courses on sociological theory, putting it at the same level as Parson's, Weber's, Marx's, and Durkheim's theories. Moreover, sometimes, half of the time of the course was devoted to Luhmann, which contributed to the perception that Luhmann was "the" systems theorist. An example of this change in teaching was provided by a scholar who was in charge of a course on sociology of art:

> Luhmann gave me the skeleton of the course....I bought this book in which there's a chapter about differentiation—it's all underwritten!—And it's great. He proposes a model to understand the socio-cultural evolution of art based on the distinction between symbolic art, allegoric art, the art as sign and formal art. This is understood as media of communication analyzed through art but with different ways of structuring communication between images, objects...I loved it and made much sense to me. (3.20; in translation)

A last indirect transformation of the field is the consolidation of UIA Press as the publishing house that supports the diffusion of this theoretical contribution. From the 1990s, when Torres Nafarrate began the impressive project of translating Luhmann's works, the university press showed interest and got partners to publish them. Two subsidiaries of European houses, Alianza (originally from Spain) and Herder (originally from Germany) were involved at different times, but in both cases UIA had to fund the project, since these houses were willing to put their

names (brands) but not to invest or help with copyright issues. In Latin American academic publishing industry, the print run is about 1,000 books and, since the first edition of Soziale Systeme in Spanish in 1991, UIA was able to sell them all. In fact, Luhmann became a best-selling author for the house and that has facilitated the publication of new translations and related works (e.g., introductory studies, glossaries, and critical analyses):

> UIA Press is recognized, in the publishing world [because of] Luhmann's works. Due to the fact that it has exclusive rights on Luhmann's books, it has got a worldwide reputation as the house that publishes Luhmann [in Spanish]. He is the only author that do not go through editorial judgment. I mean, other books [even from known authors] have to be positively judged by the editorial committee, but if it was written by Luhmann, well, there's nothing else. It's just a matter of having—or not—money to publish it. The guarantee is that one or two thousands books will be easily sold. (8.68; in translation)

The previous examples illustrate the performative nature of some texts—in this case, theories—to the extent that they are able to (re)shape academic fields. They also show that not only humans (translators, scholars, students) but also objects (books, publishing houses, and scholarships) may be (re)organized when reacting to subordinating objects. Finally, they point to an understudied aspect of center-periphery relations: the practical side. Put differently, even when uneven distribution of symbolic and material resources has configured centers and peripheries in knowledge production, the structural constraints and opportunities must be seen at the level of individual and group practices (Camic et al. 2011), where micro and macro collide and become visible. By focusing on these practices—described here as boundary work and positioning—we have been able to observe how Luhmann has been (un)bounded in Hispanic America.

Notes

1   According to Baert, "the introduction of labels can facilitate the dissemination of ideas, but once many other adopt the same label … they may undermine the clarity of its meaning or the distinctiveness of those associated with it" (2012: 312). So, segmentation of the group of "Luhmannians" may end up losing their more or less strong relations by

bringing to the front other (professional and intellectual) links which may be seen as more productive. The boundary work of the third generation seems to point in this direction.

2   http://www.facso.uchile.cl/postgrado/mad/01_intro.html. (Accessed, 28 May 2013).

3   Interestingly, for the members of the first generation the road to Bielefeld was fortuitous and, paraphrasing Luhmann, contingent. Unlike the younger scholars, who have been aware of the difficulties and competition in the academic field, the first generation scholars did not see the opportunity to be in touch with Luhmann as a strategic step in their careers, although this changed after their return to Latin America and their reinsertion into the local academic fields.

4   Interestingly, Mascareño seems to defend an abstract and counterfactual notion of theory that prevents it from refutation through empirical analysis. Following Luhmann's idea of second order observations (his radical constructivist view of science), Mascareño argues that his study of the Chilean coup d'état of 1973 "does not recognize facts as the measure of validity for the theoretical propositions …. Insofar as the world appears by observation and the observer observes through communication … the world is … what is communicated about communication" (2010: 184; in translation).

5   Although these works seem to rely on Luhmann's theory without further theoretical development, what is worth noting here is that they defy one of the assumptions of Luhmann's systemic perspective: its modern, European roots (Torres Nafarrate and Zermeño 1992).

6   See https://publicaciones.colmex.mx/libros.php?depto=CES. (Accessed 29 May 2013; in translation).

7   An important consequence of this change is that Luhmann's theory-based empirical research has made it to some of the most prestigious journals in Latin American social science, such as *Revista Mexicana de Sociología o Estudios Sociológicos* (both published in Mexico).

8   For a theoretical development of Luhmann's idea of communication in relation to Actor-Network Theory see Farías (2013).

9   Before changing its name, this was the Master's program in Anthropology and Development. Given its orientation toward systemic analysis, the Chilean National Commission for Accreditation recommended to change the name and to include this orientation as part of its new name.

3
Luhmannization: Identity and Circulation

Abstract: *In Chapter 3 I explore shared features of these generations. I show how dealing with Luhmann's theory has forced scholars to comprehensive reading; that is, a reading of his entire work (or at least the more relevant parts of it) in order to apprehend the vocabulary and the basic theoretical relationships. The second similarity refers to embodied exegesis. Data suggests that social scientists involved in the reception of Luhmann's theory believe in the need to be "introduced" to such a corpus by someone whose experience can reduce its complexity. A third similarity is the shared belief in the "power of theory" and its capacity to explain almost everything. This power is limited not only to its intellectual dimension, but also to the practicalities of scholarly life.*

While the previous chapter focused on the differences between the three generations of scholars who have been involved in receiving and circulating Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America, here we will concentrate on the three similarities that have contributed to building their identity as "Luhmannians." First, they have developed and relied on a particular way of coping with the theory, both materially and intellectually. I will call this strategy "comprehensive reading." It refers to an intellectual intervention that consists of dealing with Luhmann's theory as a complete body of work that needs to be studied and understood comprehensively before putting it into use. Second, the similarities are based on, and reproduce, a shared understanding of the power of theory; that is, its capacity not only to deal with diverse phenomena but also to organize other intellectual interventions, such as conferences, syllabi, and MA programs. Third, scholars from three generations share the idea that mastering Luhmann's theory requires newcomers to go through embodied exegesis. Put differently, they assume this theory is so difficult and complex that it cannot be grasped by generalists (i.e., social scientists who are not experts in systems theory) without the help of some authorities in the area.

Before examining in detail these similarities, it is necessary to show that they all revolve around the idea of complexity. While comprehensive reading refers to the way that complexity has to be dealt with (i.e., the work as a whole), the power of theory is, at least in part, based on its complexity, because it invites scholars to appropriate it creatively, putting it into use for a wide range of different goals. Finally, the idea that understanding Luhmann's work requires embodied exegesis, that is, to go through the initializing process to understand, at least rudimentarily, the main concepts and relationships of the theory, is a consequence of its complexity. Furthermore, this chapter will begin by showing a very brief theoretical landscape of definitions of complexity that will take us to the strategies scholars use to cope with it. The final section aims to connect both by arguing in favor of a practical notion of complexity, one rooted in academic daily life.

3.1   Some theoretical ideas about complexities

The literature on complexity is now so abundant that any review of it is condemned to be incomplete and biased.[1] It is our intention, however, just to give a short introduction to the idea of complexity in order to

connect it to the strategy developed by Hispanic American scholars to appropriate Luhmann's work. With this goal in mind, we could start this review by saying that a phenomenon is perceived as complex when a multiplicity of actors, explaining factors, and interdependency are found. According to van Dijkum et al.,

> phenomena can be described as complex when there are: many actors, a lot of interdependency between actors, many influencing variables, several cause-effect relations, and multiple values. One aspect is then most of the time missing: the non-linear feedback relations between variables to be expressed in non-linear differential equations. (2013: 5)

As a consequence of this idea, chaos emerges as a defining feature of complex systems, since linear explanations are not possible and the multiplication of causes and effects makes it impossible to predict possible future states of the system. Byrne's idea of reality as complex, on the other hand, refers to "complex open systems with emergent properties and transformational potential" (2005: 97), which emphasizes the productive dimension of complexity. Since systems are open, they are embedded in an ongoing process of transformation, permanently negotiating their limits with the environment and giving rise to new properties. Thus, the chaotic nature of these systems should not prevent them from obtaining new properties that cannot be reduced to those of their components.

Sagaris prefers to focus on change as the defining characteristic of complex systems. For him, "complexity involves things that are constantly changing, seeks to describe and explain things that seem inexplicable, looks at the patterns of change" (2013: 76). Change might be based on the openness of systems and on multi-causal relations and interdependency of variables. In any case, it seems that complex systems cannot be studied through static methods but rather through flexible and dynamic approaches that allow us to see how they transform in time.

Byrne adds that the idea of putting change at center stage does not mean that explanation cannot be achieved. Instead, we need to contextualize change (and the systems) in order to understand them:

> The complexity project necessarily confronts the subjective relativism of postmodernism with an assertion that explanation is possible, but only explanation that is local in time and place. Complexity science addresses issues of causation with cause, necessarily, understood as complex and contingent. (2005: 97)

Urry has analyzed complexity and has coined "the complexity turn" to understand how the social sciences have been transformed by this theoretical contribution:

> Complexity approaches both signify and enhance a new "structure of feeling"; one that combines systems and process thinking. Such an emergent structure involves a sense of contingent openness and multiple features, of the unpredictable of outcomes in time-space, of a charity towards objects and nature, of diverse and non-linear changes in relationships, households and persons across huge distances in time and space, of the systemic nature of processes, and of the growing hyper-complexity of organizations, products, technologies, and socialities. On the last of these we can note the huge increase in the number of components within products. (2005: 3)

It is worth mentioning the place of time and space in Urry's approach, which is connected to the idea that complex systems differ from non-complex systems in their self-organization in time and space. Their openness and adapting limits allow systems to be constantly evolving, producing new emergent features that may change the very defining properties of the system. However, no matter how well equipped we are to deal with these non-linear—even contradictory—forces, we cannot be sure about the future of the system, how it will unfold in time and space, and how it will get transformed by exchanges with other systems and its environment. In addition, if we introduce Luhmann's idea of second-order observation, we cannot know how the system will see and think of itself in the future either. Urry has nicely described complexity by differentiating it from complicatedness:

> Complexity…is not the same as simply complicated. Complex systems analyses investigate the very many systems that have the ability to adapt and co-evolve as they organize through time. Such complex social interactions are likened to walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves as one walks through; new footsteps have to be taken in order to adjust to the walls of the maze that are adapting to each movement made through the maze. Complexity investigates emergent, dynamic and self-organizing systems that interact in ways that heavily influence the probabilities of later events. Systems are irreducible to elementary laws or simple processes. (2005: 3)

If this constant adaptation of the system to the internal and external variations is a fundamental characteristic of complexity, then one major consequence of dealing with this system is the impossibility of certainty

as it had been once conceptualized by science and epistemology. In a classic article, Prigogine puts it this way:

> Rationality can no longer be identified with "certainty," nor probability with ignorance, as has been the case in classical science. At all levels, in physics, in biology, in human behavior, probability and irreversibility play an essential role. (1987: 102)

So if we must summarize the theoretical notion of complexity, it refers to a changing, self-organizing, uncertain set of elements that have the ability to produce new emergent properties when reorganization takes place as a consequence of adaptation to modifications of their constituent parts and of their environment. If this idea rests on the properties of complex systems (or objects, or groups, or networks), then we need now to observe how complexity is conceptualized when embedded in practical life, in quotidian decisions, in the very experience of those who deal with it as a professional activity.

3.2   Dealing with complexity

In this section, I want to concentrate on complexity, not as a property of systems but rather as a notion around which experts on Luhmann have organized their scholarly lives. The relevance of complexity here will not reside in its capacity to describe how systems are shaped and transformed in time and space but in the different meanings scholars have assigned to the concept and how these meanings contribute to (and justify) their intellectual interventions in the field by acting as a kind of organizing principle. Consequently, since Luhmann's theory is "complex," scholars have developed three strategies to deal with it. The first strategy is "comprehensive reading" and refers to an intellectual intervention that consists of dealing with Luhmann's theory as a complete body of work that needs to be studied and understood comprehensively before putting it into use. Second, they have empowered the theory, thanks to its complexity, not only to deal with diverse phenomena but also to organize other intellectual interventions, such as conferences, syllabi, and MA programs. Third, scholars think that, given its complexity, Luhmann's theory should be introduced to younger academics by those experts whose knowledge is the result of

comprehensive reading of his work.. These similarities will now be examined in detail.

3.2.1   From intensive reading to comprehensive reading

For some historians of the book, there were important changes in the way that people read books toward the end of the eighteenth century. Although critical about the revolutionary nature of such changes as well as the periodization originally proposed by Engelsing in the 1970s, Blair describes the transformation of reading as

> a rapid shift from a predominantly intensive reading focused on a careful and repetitive reading of a small number of texts that carried authority, to extensive reading that involved skimming and browsing through a much larger quantity and range of material—especially the new periodicals and vernacular reference books that all offered indirect access to recently published books, through reviews, excerpts, debates, and cursory references. (2010: 59)

Lakus (2008) adds that intensive reading was undertaken in the midst of family (as a collective reading) and allowed for memorization of parts of the texts. In a time of scarcity of books and when the Bible was not only a text but rather an organizing principle of social and religious life, intensive reading permitted illiterate people to be in contact with authoritative, sacred texts. On the contrary, "extensive reading was characterized by the individualization of the act of reading, its separation from other cultural activities and the deserialization of the book" (Lakus 2008: 66).

This classification of the act of reading should be taken cautiously since, for many historians, reading was a different action for different social groups and in different geographical areas (Darnton and Kato 2001; Darnton 1990; Brewer 1996). On the other hand, focused on the general audience, this theoretical model does not pay too much attention to scholarly reading; that is, the habit of reading scholarly texts usually undertaken by academics and/or students in their daily activities. The empirical evidence in my research suggests that we need to move to another idea of reading, which I will call "comprehensive reading." Comprehensive reading has four clear characteristics. First, it implies that in order to understand a text the reader has to know (or at least to be acquainted with) most or all of the work of the author. As one of the interviewees put it:

> I had been reading action theory (basically, Habermas) and then we moved to the Luhmann-Habermas debate. And (perhaps immaturely) I said to myself:

> "The problem here was that I wouldn't be able to work with…to dominate both theories. I had to go deeper (into the theory) to understand it correctly, to look for failures, to criticize it." It didn't make any sense to take a little bit of both theories. Only stubborn persons do that! (3.7; in translation)

The second characteristic of comprehensive reading is that it allows readers to observe intertextual connections that put them "in the head" of the author. Again, in the words of one of the interviewees, "Luhmann, at the end, becomes predictable, even robotic. Each time he says the same and quotes the same authors. And one already knows when he is going to quote to whom. And this makes it a kind of game" (3.53; in translation). Thus, comprehensive reading foregrounds a logic of argumentation that transcends the individual text and emerges as a consequence of this particular strategy. The third characteristic is that it creates a stronger bond between the author and the reader. Given the intellectual and material investment that comprehensive reading demands, scholars who opt for this type of relationship with an intellectual corpus tend to become "experts" in the area. It is not only a matter of working with a theory, of taking some parts in order to produce new knowledge. It is also about attaching their intellectual development and their career to the work of an academic to whom they contribute to canonize.

3.2.2   The embodied exegesis

Since comprehensive reading is the main strategy for dealing with Luhmann's theory, and with regard to its complexity, interviewees seem to share the idea that newcomers of systems theory should rely on exegetes in order to understand it. For first generation academics, one of the main goals was to make the theory available for an audience with no previous knowledge on Luhmann and his theory. That is why they devoted themselves to producing translations and introductory studies. However, for those in the second and third generations, there seems to still be a need for help when dealing with Luhmann for the first time:

> For me, reading Luhmann was shocking, but brutally intellectually shocking, so I knew that from then on I'd be devoted to studying Luhmann. There's no doubt that [translations] helped us. I remember that I got excited when I started to read Social Systems. I remember reading "Introduction to Social Systems" and understanding almost nothing. And, the few things I understood, when I talked to Torres Nafarrate, I had got it wrong. (6.9; in translation)

The message is clear: if even an expert on Luhmann needed exegetical works to get into the complexities of his theories, everyone has to go through a similar process. Why is it the case? Another exegete, José Antonio Ibáñez Aguirre, provides an answer. When justifying his recent book entitled *Para leer a Luhmann* (Reading Luhmann), he argues that there is a need to "follow the traces of Luhmann's main theoretical decisions or, to paraphrase Gabriel García Márquez, to understand Luhmann in his labyrinth" (2012: 13). It seems clear that the more complicated and complex the theory, the more necessary the work of exegesis become. This rule not only explains a proliferation of books on Luhmann's theory as a puzzle that has to be solved but also the need of exegetes even when one important part of Luhmann's works is now translated into Spanish and available in most Spanish-speaking countries. Two scholars of the first generation show clearly the relationship between the need for help and the comprehensive reading:

> Given the fact we wanted to write a book to be helpful in understanding Luhmann's theory of society, we considered it necessary to include references to other, indispensable authors. . . . Despite our efforts, it's likely that, for some, relevant authors haven't received proper consideration . . . but, in our defense, we can say that we have tried to facilitate the understanding of Luhmann's theory of society. . . . This is only one of the possible readings [of "The Society of Society"], and we don't take it as the only one. Nor even the best one. It's just one possible reading that would help the reader to undertake his/her own. This book, like all communicative proposals, is an invitation to go into a fascinating thought, full of suggestions, that brings a point of view to observe modern society, not from a vantage perspective, but from within the same observed society. (Rodríguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate 2008: 11–13; in translation)

Another introductory study (Corsi et al. 2006) presents Luhmann's main concepts as a glossary that attempts to help and guide the reader. Interestingly, the authors acknowledge that one of the factors that has negatively affected its circulation is the difficulty in understanding the theory, which makes this kind of study extremely necessary, especially for young scholars. As the authors put it:

> The intention of the authors is that this glossary might become a working tool. The unusual idea of writing a piece to support the study of a theory which is still under debate, as in Luhmann's systems theory, emerges from the impression that in the current situation there is a series of factors that obstacle a proper understanding of it. They are factors related to the specific

characteristics of the theory as well as its specific path and make it particularly hard to approach it, which makes it useful as a work that can facilitate the first contacts. (2006: 15; in translation)

They nicely describe later the nature of these obstacles, illustrating some of the points we have made before. First,

one relevant part of the difficulties lies, without hesitation, in the internal articulation of Luhmann's theory. Its first feature is in fact an extreme complexity that is expressed, on the one hand, in the amount of concepts that constitute it…and, on the other, in the multiplicity of relationships and reciprocal dependencies related to such concepts. (ibid.)

That intrinsic difficulty is complemented by one characteristic of Luhmann's works that helps in explaining why comprehensive reading is so necessary. According to Corsi et al.,

With some few exceptions, in each of his works Luhmann works on specific distinctions about a specific problem assuming, however, the theory as a whole and in particular the other distinctions presented in previous works. The range of discussion cannot be fully grasped without a global knowledge of the theoretical framework, which, nevertheless, cannot be legitimately demanded to those who are interested only in one—or a few—of the multiples sociological analyses of Luhmann's work. (2006: 15–16; in translation)

The main point of the introduction to this glossary is that, besides its logical structure that forces the reader to understand the complete articulation of concepts and relationships, the intertextual connections of Luhmann's work requires the reader to be familiar with his entire work in order to follow his argument. Consequently, and here it is possible to find one major obstacle for circulation, readers are not allowed to focus only on a part of the theory (the one they need for empirical or theoretical research) and have to devote time (perhaps too much) to understand the "big picture." Classic theories in the social sciences, as Davis (1986) has shown, are multilayered, and different audiences (from experts to generalists to lay people) might translate them differently. Against the implicit opinion of scholars who are experts on Luhmann's systems theory, some theoretical and empirical approaches to knowledge circulation indicate that it does not require full understanding but rather the scholar's ability to make it adaptable to diverse circumstances.

The need for exegesis makes interpreters valuable in the academic labor market, which underpins some positioning strategies. Along

with materialized exegetes (such as introductions and translations), embodied exegetes have become what Actor-Network Theory calls "obligatory passage points," key actors that control not only the possible interpretations of Luhmann's theory but also some positions in the field. Asked about his current post in Denmark, one scholar answered, "At Copenhagen Business School there are many who know about Luhmann, who work with Luhmann's theory. So it's funny. Even though I don't want (to work on Luhmann), it's happening again. In fact, it's like a currency, a medium of exchange" (11.101; in translation). Although he has had a critical approach to Luhmann's theory in the past years, he had to teach it when he went back to Chile after his PhD in London, and many years later, in Europe, he had found that Luhmann is the key to meaningful contact with colleagues. In this regard, something that seems to have transcended the generational approach I described previously is the recognition, by the academic market as well as by their peers, that experts on Luhmann are "Luhmannians" before becoming economists, sociologists, or anthropologists. Despite it being like a curse, it has been an opportunity more than once.

3.2.3   Theoretical power

The third feature that scholars from the three generations share is the idea that Luhmann's theory has a tremendous theoretical power. The power of the theory is such that they can recognize it even when scholars are not able to fully understand it. Before becoming his translator into Spanish, when Torres Nafarrate read the work of Luhmann for the first time, he realized that it was a major contribution to sociological thought:

> I realized that I didn't understand anything. Luhmann was referring to things I had never heard of before. But I said to myself: "This guy talks like a great thinker." Because he could deal with Hegel in one moment, then with Kant and everything with deep knowledge and nice prose. So I thought: "Well, this guy is quite a thing!" (8.21; in translation)

This also happened to scholars of other generations, who were fascinated by Luhmann's work despite its complexity. One interviewee remembers that:

> Two things happened to me in relation to Luhmann's theory. The first one: I didn't understand a thing! But, the other, is that although I couldn't understand it, it was possible to perceive something like mystic, if you want. A very

powerful coherence in the way it was formulated. For me, and for many of those who have followed this path, this invited us to see what it was about. In that regard, the theory is transformed into an obsession, because you want to know how it was built. So the first approach is kind of obsessive precisely because you don't get it. Because there's no a direct, obvious access to the theory. The whole Luhmannian [theoretical] construction is kind of counter-intuitive and, as Luhmann himself pointed out in the 60s, his is a perspective not in line with the social environment of the time. (1.5; in translation)

As Kuhn (1970) has already pointed out, the selection of a theory (or paradigm) seems to depend more on external factors—the mystic feature the interviewee talked about—than on the logically coherent argument that the theory proposes. The passages show that the fascination with Luhmann's theory is related to its obscurity, to how difficult it is to be followed, and to its hidden meanings. In other words, to what is beyond comprehension. Compared with other authors, whose theories appear as self-explanatory, Luhmann's invites a gestalt change and a revelation:

The Luhmann issue was shocking for me. But brutally shocking, in intellectual terms. So I decided to devote myself to study Luhmann. I mean, the course on Giddens was ok, Habermas was ok, but Luhmann was like a revelation, like those situations when you feel that something is opening up a world that you didn't know and where you feel that there's something important going on. (6.6; in translation)

Why do some scholars embrace a theory without fully understanding it? One possible answer, with major consequences for circulation, is that it is not necessary to master a theory to use it or even to anticipate its power as an explanatory device. Instead, scholars can consider it simple enough to have a more a less limited set of core concepts and relationships but complex enough to deal with a multiplicity of empirical phenomena. We can call this the flexibility of a theory:

This is one of the most seductive aspects of Luhmannian theory: its capacity to understand the foundations of society, the creative distinction, the very first distinction [between] what is inside and what is outside; the system [or systems] that allows you to understand the evolution of society from its initial forms to the large functionally differentiated systems. So this explanatory power is something very interesting and it's obvious that, for many, this is a theory able to frame everything else. (2.18; in translation)

This flexibility involves the adaptability of the theory to different research techniques and methodologies, as one interviewee has put it:

> I have been doing ethnography, interviews, archive work and review of docu-
> ments (but) I have…worked with Luhmann, against Luhmann, and beyond
> Luhmann. So systems theory, for me, is a very powerful observation tool,
> highly flexible, very complex, and I liked it a lot because it helps me doing
> empirical research. (12.43; in translation)

It is worth noting that the fascination with the flexibility of this theory
has been related to the specific conditions of academic labor that char-
acterize theoretical development. For some scholars, the power of theory
translates into the fascination with a country like Germany and with a
particular kind of intellectual interventions—theories:

> I was amazed by this pretension of dealing with everything, writing a glos-
> sary and, of course, Germans! Wow! Because it became into a fascination
> for Germany in a way. It was like, "These guys really devote themselves to
> building theories!" So, when the course on Luhmann finished, I had already
> made a decision. I was so dazzled by Luhmann that I began to study German
> and decided I'd go to Germany to do a PhD. In particular, I'd go to meet
> Luhmann! (6.10; in translation)

Other scholars referred to the flexibility of theory as a projection, that is,
as future possibilities for scholars interested in different topics. Instead
of focusing on its inner logical structure or the capacity to deal with
diverse empirical phenomena and research methods, these academics
described the theory as a map that not only explains what you see but
also anticipates what you will find:

> Prof. Rodriguez has just arrived from Germany, where he had lived [in
> Bielefeld] and studied with Luhmann. He made me see, in a straightforward
> manner, the importance and power of Luhmann's thought. He decided to
> unfold it, in a reasonable, suggestive way. Especially in terms of projections.
> Since then…I was told that this theory was the most important, the most
> interesting and I felt attracted to it. (4.5; in translation)

Another reason to accept a theory is connected to its ability to organize
academic interventions. Elsewhere, I introduced the notion of subordi-
nating objects to refer to the scholarly products that originated in the
developed world, travelled to the developing world, and are appropriated
by local scholars who use them to structure their own careers (Rodriguez
Medina 2013). The agency of these objects resides not only in their ideo-
logical content (the knowledge as a set of propositions logically connected)
but also in their materiality (the packaging). So when scholars refer to the
power of theory, they also mean the ability of it to have an impact on

daily activities of their lives, such as curriculum development and syllabi design. In this way, an intellectual intervention becomes a structuring force, to paraphrase Bourdieu, which is able to shape the field.

This view of a theory as a socio-material device that is able to contain ideas and structure academic lives has been found in some of the interviewees' narratives. Some of them have recognized that Luhmann's theory has been crucial to structure the courses they taught:

> This is a course on sociology of art, so we begin by studying the different modes of art as a social phenomenon. So I lecture on symbolic art, but I don't use Luhmann to understand symbolic art but rather to structure (the readings), although we read texts on symbolic art. Then, allegoric art, the art as sign, or modern art. So I use Luhmann as a frame and introduce social historians of art or sociologists of arts in each phase (7.36).
>
> So I realized that I had to reframe the whole topic of collective action and I couldn't do it in terms of action theory but rather as a social system, in line with Luhmann's proposal. And this got reflected in a course I began to teach, "Systems of protest," which is an appropriation of Luhmann's conception of movements of protest. (12.30; in translation)

Others have claimed that Luhmann's theory has been responsible for some struggles that gave rise to changes in the field of Chilean sociology. Taken as a reason for confrontation, the theory is something more than ideas interrelated and becomes an organizing principle useful to define "us," "them," and the fissures between both:

> I think Luhmann's theory is a contribution, but with serious limitations. And something similar has happened in Chile. It has made a contribution, but in some point, it became a negative factor because it has created closures and groups that consider themselves enlightened, calling into question everyone else. Inversely, there are people who strongly question Luhmann but not reasonably. (2.39; in translation)

3.3   Situated complexity

I would like to finish by suggesting a distinction that is useful to go beyond the theoretical idea of complexity. While almost all definitions of complexity emphasize the internal components of a system and their relationships, when dealing with a theory this forces us to remain at a textual level. In this way, complexity is about propositions and their interconnections. However, embedded in the lives of scholars, complexity

appears as a bridge between, on the one hand, the textual dimension of a theory and, on the other, the specific set of practices through which academics *deal with* the text. I will call this alternative view situated complexity. Situated complexity refers, at the same time, to the internal, logical structure of texts (and its intertextuality) and to the intellectual interventions that scholars produce in order to position themselves in the field. The concept aims at grasping the particular configurations that articulate academics, their material environment, and their daily activities (institutionalized or not) in order to appreciate the epistemological implications of theories when they are put in use.

There are at least three implications of this idea of situated complexity. First, the concept exemplifies our need to develop a vocabulary that allows for identifying the middle ground between, on the one hand, the text and its content (the par excellence product of academic life) and, on the other, the practicalities of scholarly activities that play a fundamental role in shaping the field. Without this vocabulary, it seems that ideas are produced and circulated in a more or less ethereal, disembodied, almost abstract "space" and, at the same time, those who are involved in this process (be them people, objects, institutions, practices) seem to be playing a different, embodied, materialized game in order to get prestige, promotions, awards, and recognition (Bourdieu 2004). For students of the circulation of knowledge, concepts such as situated complexity might help them to overcome the distinction between, on the one hand, content and internal properties of a text and, on the other, the contextual factors that might encourage or discourage its reception. In several studies, political, economic, cultural, or religious situations in which the reception process of a particular theory is embedded tend to become a more or less general environment mysteriously connected to the text under study. One example will illustrate this point.

Bruno-Jofré and Jover (2012) have analyzed the reception of Dewey's ideas in Spain and Chile. To do so, they

> situate the readings in relation to the political, educational, and religious ideas of the time, ideas that functioned as *mediating configurations* with an unstable quality [and they recognize that] the intersection of Catholicism was relevant in the two spaces although *mediations* were substantially different. (2012: 24; emphasis added)

The point here is what exactly "mediation" means and how it can be traced in the empirical analysis the authors undertake. Throughout

their study, it becomes clear that mediations are a series of intellectual interventions that shaped the way that Alberto Hurtado (Chile) and the members of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (Spain) understood Dewey's idea of education. These interventions go from PhD training at Catholic University of Louvain to intellectual and political disputes in the realm of Chile's educational system (Hurtado) to reading of philosopher Daniel Tröhler's interpretation of Dewey's transcendence (Institución Libre de Enseñanza). This movement back and forth between the world of ideas (Dewey's philosophy of education) and the world of actions (PhD education or specific readings) is what still requires further original conceptualization because, in a way, the phenomenon of reception does not depend on one or the other but on the articulation of both. To put it differently, reception studies focus on a fluid and elusive phenomenon, but they have not necessarily attempted to grasp such a fluidity or elusiveness but to recognize a more or less continuous mobility.

Situated complexity might help to compare different cases of reception of theories. If the concept refers to the articulation of textual complexity and the practices that this textual dimension produces in the academic field, then we could observe whether there is a specific relation between both. Can we say that the more textually complex a theory is the more changes it might produce in the field? Or the simpler a theory is, the more apt for circulation it is? If we take Davis's (1986) analysis of classic social theory about multilayered meanings that make the theory relevant for different audiences (e.g., generalists, experts), the first observation seems to be true. In the same token, Gingras (2002) has pointed out that the more technical the language of theory is, the easier its circulation becomes. Highly modeled disciplinary knowledge, such as neoclassical economic theory, appears as an example of this abstraction whose mathematical configuration contributes to make it look as universally true and/or applicable. Similarly, in her account of the circulation of Derrida's theory, Lamont has recognized that "rhetorical virtuosity contributes to the definition of status boundaries and maintenance of stratification among French philosophers" (1987: 591–592). Even my own analysis of Luhmann in the previous chapters also suggests that complexity might have played a key role in the appropriation. Put differently, the obscurity of a complex theory seems to require more efforts (i.e., more people producing more intellectual products) than a simple theory that can be appropriated without this army of intermediaries. But there is no consensus about it. In his book on Marxism, Gouldner has argued that

the success of it is because Marx's texts are somehow close to ordinary language:

> This discussion is about how an historically sensitive theory, focused on the distinctive character of capitalist societies and its industrial proletariat, could be refocused to encompass societies that were not capitalist and hardly any proletariat at all. Basically, my answer will be that Marxism exists as an archaeologically stratified symbolic system, in which its historicist political economy is only the more recent layer, a "technical" or extraordinary language, an EL, that does not exhaust Marxism. Underneath this there is an older, more elemental layer of language, an ordinary language or OL, nucleated with "paleosymbolic" elements on which there is continuing if unnoticed reliance but to which recourse is had specially when difficulties are encountered in using EL. (1985: 222)

If we take into account these positions on the complexity of theories and their likelihood of becoming classic or successfully circulate widely, and we add the strategies developed by Hispanic American scholars who have participated in the reception of Luhmann's work, then we could claim some hypotheses. It could be the case that the more complex a theory is, the more necessary explanation (first generation) and hybridization (third generation) become. Explanation is, to some extent, the logical consequence of a complex theory that needs clarifications for different audiences as it circulates. The experience of one of the interviewees, now an expert on systems theory, illustrates to what extent explanations were necessary when dealing with Luhmann's works for the first time:

> Two things happened to me in relation to Luhmann's theory. The first is that I didn't understand it. I understood almost nothing of what I was reading. The other is that, despite understanding nothing, it was possible to appreciate a kind of mystical thing. A very powerful coherence of its propositions and, at least to me, it invited me to try to understand what the theory was about. (1: 5; in translation)

Hybridization, in a way, is also an outcome of a theory whose complexity opens up space for inter-theoretical connections, which, is assumed, may contribute to new developments. Although scope and complexity are not, strictly speaking, synonyms, when comparing the theories of Giddens and Luhmann, García Andrade has argued that:

> In this book two contemporary sociological theories are compared: Structuration Theory (Anthony Giddens) and Systems Theory (Niklas Luhmann). To do so, given the scope of both, I focus on only one concept

that has been central for sociology, i.e. action…The goal [of this research] was to search, in these theories, some arguments to…provide elements in favor or against each one. During the process, it became clear that each has virtues which can complement the other; in that way…the final achievement was to point out how a cross-cutting between both theories is possible in order to undertake a more fruitful analysis of social reality. (2013: 15–16; in translation)

Even more explicit is the attempt, by Farías and Ossandón (2011b), to highlight the relationship between complexity and hybridization. They state that

The Luhmannian program is incompatible with other projects of comparable ambition. Luhmann resolved antinomies of classic sociology in a fundamentally different way from Bourdieu or Giddens, with the consequence that these theoretical projects cannot be easily reconciled. However, if we widen the focus of attention, we can observe that the Luhmannian program shares important premises with other theoretical frameworks of social post-structuralism and with authors such as Serres, Derrida, Castoriadis, Foucault, and even with Deleuze: complexity, difference, sense, externality of the human, are some of the theoretical premises which are more or less shared. (ibid.: 38)

In order to summarize, we could argue that the complexity of a theory calls for people who engage in explaining it to different audiences and, eventually, to make connections with other theories perceived as more or less similar. Interestingly, these strategies tend to shape the field in particular ways. One example is translators and writers of introductory studies. These people, although fundamental for the circulation of a theory, are not necessarily recognized by their peers for this activity. Concerned with original thinking and innovative ideas, the academic and scientific fields sometimes underrate the importance of these actors and discourage the production of translations and textbooks.

The second hypothesis is that the simpler the theory is, the more likely it is to be used as a toolkit in empirical research, which resonates with the boundary work undertaken by the second generation. A paradox seems to appear here: how have these scholars used Luhmann's theory as if it were a simple one? The answer, which we sketched in Chapter 2, is that they reduce the theory to some relevant relationships and concepts, and by so doing, they transform it into a limited set of intertwined propositions whose application is relatively straightforward. In a study about social protest in Mexico, the editor of the volume argues that

in *Protesta social* the reader will find an unusual approach to social movements and collective action. The theoretical bid of the authors is to consider these phenomena as social systems. This implies to abandon the

"actionalist" assumptions frequently used by the North American and European schools.... The basis of this paradigmatic change is the theory of social systems of Niklas Luhmann.... It is necessary to emphasize that, although the authors in this book found in Luhmann's theory of society—in particular in his conception of "protest movement"—an inspiration to deal with social movements and collective action as social systems, they never the less used it only partially and in a critical way.... Thus, the three authors of this book deal with systems of protest, but only analyzing some aspects or elements of them. (2012: 15, 19–20; in translation)

Finally, the idea of situated complexity brings to light one dimension of the peripheral fields that needs further study: the role of academics as exegetes whose main role is to "adapt" theoretical development of the metropolitan centers to local contexts. There is, first, a diagnosis:

With respect to modern science, the heart of the process is neither the stage of data collection nor that of the application of theoretical findings to practical issues. Rather, it lies between the two, in the stages of theory building, interpretation of raw information and the theoretical processing of the data collected... The one essential shortcoming of scientific activity in colonial [countries] was the lack of these specific theory-building procedures and infrastructures. (Hountondji 1996: 2)

In this context, it emerges an international division of academic labor, which Hountondji has highlighted for Africa:

African scholars are often tempted, especially in the social sciences, to lock themselves up into an empirical description of the most peculiar features of their societies, without any consistent effort to interpret, elaborate on, or theorize about these features. In so doing, they implicitly agree to act as informants, though learned informants, for Western science and scientists. (1995: 4)

This landscape, also depicted by Alatas (2003) and Baber (2003), is due to one of these features of peripheral social science production: either there is a lack of theorization (Centeno and López-Álvez 2001) or theory produced in these areas is ignored or underestimated (Connell 2007). In any case, the complexity of theories coming from the most advanced scientific fields help to emphasize the role of peripheral scholars as interpreters. On the one hand, it is true that conditions for theoretical development seem to be found more frequently in the metropolitan countries than in their peripheral counterparts. By these conditions, I refer to the academic labor environments in which up-to-date libraries and software, autonomy from the State, well-funded postgraduate and

postdoctoral students, wide networks of scholars, rigorous peer-review processes (e.g., for promotion and application for research grants), and high-quality journals come together to produce an innovative atmosphere. On the other, in the few cases in which reflection from peripheral areas is produced the outcome is a challenge: the focus on peripheral regions usually shows the constraints, limitations and misunderstandings of grand (metropolitan) theories. It means that complexity, and the obscurity it carries, seems to hide the fact that "grand theory, in order to remain such, needs to incorporate narratives and empirical data different from the realities that inspired its original formulation" (Centeno and López-Álvez 2001: 3).[2]

Situated complexity is just one example of the vocabulary we need to develop in order for our analyses to concentrate on the interstices between practices and texts. Some texts may be complex, but they can have no impact on a field. When they have, when they somehow transcend textuality, then they have situated complexity. Thus, the concept brings to the forefront that textual dimensions of theories have effects beyond their hermeneutic appropriation: they contribute to shape the field and to (re)structure it according to debates and scholarly positions (i.e., intellectual interventions).

Notes

1   See, for example, Morin's impressive works on complexity (1992, 1999, 2007, and 2008) and especially his monumental work, in six volumes, *La Méthode* (1977, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, and 2004).
2   It is interesting to note that Centeno and López-Álvez's attempt to promote a "dialectic between universal theory and specific history" (2001: 3) in a book where senior scholars working in the US academia make contributions appears as ground-breaking and almost a niche. As Knight patently puts it, "with the possible exception of dependency, Latin America has neither produced an endogenous body of grand theory nor attracted much attention from grand theorists elsewhere. This book, in seeking to unite what is so often put asunder, is therefore performing a useful service; indeed, it may be that—shifting to a more topical metaphor—it has found a profitable market niche" (2001: 177). What Knight calls a niche is, precisely, what many scholars in the academic periphery have been doing for years but, as it is obvious, without ever being able to enter into a dialogue with their metropolitan counterparts. No wonder that for Knight (2001) there is no one single contribution from Latin America to the theory of the State.

4

Comparing Knowledge Circulation: Euro-American Social Theories in Latin America

Abstract: *In Chapter 4 I compare my study of the reception of Luhmann with others, which have dealt with Euro-American theorists such as Weber, Freud, Marx, Dewey, Bourdieu, Lacan, Klein, Foucault, Sartori, and the Frankfurt School. I try to find similarities and differences between my investigation and these other analyses and recognize shared concerns regarding the creative and original nature of any reception process, the multilayered structure of the theories analyzed, and the importance of political factors. Differences that have allowed me to suggest three variables according to which reception studies could be classified: (a) the time span, (b) the variety of intellectual interventions, and (c) the level of awareness of an international division of intellectual labor.*

In previous chapters I introduced a theoretical and methodological framework to understand the circulation of knowledge, followed by a case study: Niklas Luhmann's systems theory in Hispanic America. In this chapter, I want to delve further into the comprehension of the reception of theories by paying attention to other analyses, all of them focused on Latin America in general, or certain Latin American countries in particular. Three intertwined goals are pursued here, which aim at proposing possible criteria to classify reception studies at a metatheoretical level.

First, I want to explore the idea of intellectual interventions (Baert 2012) as theoretical devices that enable an understanding of the scope of the reception of a theory in a given place. Thus, on the one hand, there are studies that deal with very different types of intellectual interventions, from movies to conferences to personal collections, while, on the other, there are also analyses whose focus is on a specific intellectual intervention, such as a book, from which the researcher is able to draw relevant conclusions about the reception of a theory.

Second, reception studies vary according to the period covered. In general, they deal with a limited period that goes from the moment the theory is received, which usually means the moment in which it is cited to the time when such a theory has been more or less accepted in the field. While the first contact can usually be traced, the final moment of the analysis is a more or less arbitrary decision made by the researcher. In this regard, reception studies can cover a prolonged period—a situation that allows the discovery of patterns—or specific moments in that reception process, such as occasions that had a significant impact on the actors involved and the future of the process itself. Instead of focusing on tendencies, this historically focused case-study approach provides insightful knowledge about the intricacies of reception as a multidimensional and multilayered phenomenon.

Third, I want to include in this analysis the geopolitical dimension as one that undoubtedly affects the circulation of knowledge. If one considers that there is a continuum between, on one pole, the idea that circulation has to be seen as a process that articulates centers and peripheries of knowledge production and, on the other, the idea that such a structure is irrelevant for understanding how and why theories travel, it is possible to locate every reception study in-between the two. The recognition of the international division of academic labor, as Alatas (2003) has put it, does not imply that researchers need to accept that structure as given,

or that they should uncritically admit that receiving a foreign theory is always a case of academic or intellectual imperialism. As will be shown, in some cases, the international structure is defied by the assemblages of actors, practices, and objects that are enacted in the receiving field. The case of Argentine psychoanalysis illustrates precisely this point.

Before delving deeper into these dimensions, I would like to introduce important similarities between reception studies of social theories in Latin America. These similarities will show that receiving a theory from abroad (often the developed world) is an innovative process that triggers local actors, reshapes fields, reassembles objects and practices, and might eventually lead to new institutions. At the same time, the differences, positioned along the axes outlined in the previous paragraphs, will allow me to propose a classification of reception studies in which the contributions of each one to the understanding of knowledge circulation can be evaluated.

4.1 Reception studies of Euro-American social theories in Latin America: some similarities

In this and the following sections, I will rely on secondary sources to determine similarities and differences between reception studies of Euro-American social theories. In order to segment the vast universe of theories that, in one way or another, have been appropriated by Latin American scholars throughout history, I have focused on some theorists and schools: Sigmund Freud (Bosteels 2012; Gallo 2010; Plotkin 2001, 2009), Max Weber (Blanco 2007), Karl Marx (Bosteels 2012; Tarcus 2013), Michel Foucault (De la Campa 2012; Molloy 2012; Rama 2012; Sommer 2012; Trigo 2012a, 2012b), John Dewey (Bruno-Jofré and Jover 2012; Caruso and Dussel 2012), Jacques Lacan (Russo 2009), Melanie Klein (Dagfal 2009), the Frankfurt School (Lenarduzzi 2001), Giovani Sartori (Rubí Calderón 2009), and Pierre Bourdieu (Baranger 2008; Pinheiro Filho 2009; Suárez 2000). This list in no way exhausts the extremely massive literature on the reception of theories, but it allows a comparative view of not only the reception of Luhmann in Hispanic America but also how to study reception.

Based on these analyses and my own research, the first thing to be highlighted is that reception is a creative process in which scholars engage with specific goals and intentions in mind. Expressed in the

vocabulary I have used in this book, reception has always implied some kind of boundary work that gives the receiving theory its specificity in the light of local debates and theoretical configurations. This is one reason to consider theories as nonneutral devices: they are used, under certain circumstances, to achieve intellectual objectives in the academic realm or beyond. Moreover, they are read and interpreted in such a way that they can support these objectives. In his analysis of the reception of Weber in Argentina, Blanco argues that

> interpretive struggles around the meaning of Weberian methodology were the result of different conceptions of the discipline and that, as such, they can only be understood as part of a wider debate around the discipline's affairs and its methods. (2007: 32; in translation)

In this context, Blanco (2005, 2007) contextualizes Weber's reception by Germani as Germani's attempt to break traditional sociology, influenced by law and philosophy, and to give rise to a new, empirical, theoretically informed sociology inspired by the US experience, in particular by the structural functionalism of Parsons.[1] The very boundaries of sociology were at stake in Germani's project. Against this interpretation, sociologists such as Poviña and Orgaz, among others, interpreted Weber's methodology as a way to overcome the dispute between positivism and hermeneutics. For them, the merits of Weber's sociology lay in replacing the notions of cause and effect with those of variable and function, which opened up sociology to multicausal explanations and took it away "from the appealing but risky path of introspection and intuition" (Blanco 2007: 20).

As Baert has suggested, "positioning is achieved overtly, and indeed intellectuals often use the introduction or concluding part of their text or speech to situate their intellectual intervention and themselves, whilst positioning others" (2012: 311). This is the case with Miceli's introductory text to Bourdieu's *A Economia das Trocas Simbólicas* (1974) (An Economy of Symbolic Exchange), which has served as a map of the relevant sociologies of the time:

> Entitled *A Força do Sentido* (The Power of Meaning), Miceli's essay seeks to extract Bourdieusian concepts from the discussion of the impasses to which reliance on the classics of the discipline has driven the more relevant lines of modern sociological theory. As such, it organizes the debate at the heart of the structuralist fronts, referring them back to Durkheim and Marx....It also aligns the parallels and differences between Weberian and Bourdieusian

theories of domination.…This strategy of exposition succeeded in constructing new nexuses for the discussion then in vogue among the Brazilian academic milieu, which mobilized, among others, the currents of Althusser, phenomenology and the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. (Pinheiro Filho 2009: 3)

The originality of reception may sometimes refer to the adaptation of a theory to a new setting. In this case, theory is used to understand a local reality that, in many ways, challenges its assumptions, concepts, and relationships as originally outlined. The analysis of Freud's theory by the Mexican poet Salvador Novo illustrates this point. In a patriarchal context in which sexuality was a forbidden topic, Novo defied the norms of his time by thinking (and acting) through the lens of psychoanalysis:

Novo was one of the first serious readers of Freud in Mexico: he acquired the *Complete Works* published by Biblioteca Nueva, reviewed psychoanalytic publications for literary journals, and wrote an autobiography that doubled as an exercise in self-analysis. Novo was especially interested in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, a book he used to arrive at a new understanding of his own sexual identity. At a time when analysts and psychiatrists debated the psychoanalytic view of homosexuality, Novo used Freudian theory to affirm his identity as a gay man and counter the prejudices of an extremely conservative society. (Gallo 2010: 6)

It is worth noting that if reception studies almost unanimously show that appropriation is always a creative process, the idea of the passive acceptance of the knowledge generated by the centers of knowledge production by peripheral scholars has to be overcome. By bringing to the front the transnational nature of the diffusion of psychoanalysis, Damousi and Plotkin (2009) have recognized the challenge that this discipline/worldview has represented for the structures of centers and peripheries, especially because it shows the movement of the center of knowledge production from Vienna to Paris to Buenos Aires. "Transnationalism encourages a move away from traditional analytic paradigms to those which are framed by intersection and interdisciplinarity, challenging accepted categories such as center and periphery" (Damousi and Plotkin 2009: 6). Nevertheless, Plotkin (2001) also acknowledges that while it is possible to find a French school of psychoanalysis, or even a Kleinian English school located in a country with almost no tradition of psychotherapy, there is no such thing as an Argentine school. This is not a direct indicator of the peripheral nature of Argentine psychoanalysis, but it is

surprising that those who see a change in the center of the psychoanalytic community over the past century have not always focused their attention on the creation of knowledge and only concentrated on the wide acceptance of a theory/worldview in a specific context.[2] Accordingly, although the reception of Lacan in Brazil and Argentina is seen by Russo (2009) as a challenge to the same international structure of knowledge production, she ends up accepting it but highlighting the fact that the most interesting and promising developments are taking place in the periphery. She states that her analysis "challenges cursory analyses that, focusing on the hegemonic centers of scientific diffusion, do not see the great ebullience taking place in the periphery" (Russo 2009: 221). Furthermore, the innovative dimension of the reception of theories in a peripheral context should be emphasized without losing sight of the pervasive presence of an international division of intellectual labor that conditions not only the circulation of knowledge but also the way in which it can be appropriated beyond its context of production.

The second point worth mentioning is the multilayered structure of the theories that have been analyzed in reception studies. Although it is true that the aforementioned theorists are not the only ones who have influenced Latin American social sciences, their impact on the regional field is, without doubt, the most relevant, as I showed in Chapter 1. Notwithstanding their profound dissimilarities, one thing they share is the fact that they work at different levels for multiple publics. These contributions can be thought of as extremely complex theoretical frameworks, materialized in enormous oeuvres the comprehension of which requires a total commitment by their exegetes but, at the same time, they have frequently been "reduced" to some basic, fundamental points that have enabled them to be appropriated by nonexpert publics. Thus, the Marxist class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is more than a simplification of Marx's proposal, but one that has been key in facilitating its dissemination. As Eagleton (1991) has put it, this reduction transforms a complex theory into an ideology, which must meet different requirements than those for scholarly theories:

> In order to be truly effective, ideologies must make at least some minimal sense of people's experience, must conform to some degree with what they know of social reality from their practical interaction with it.... Ruling ideologies can actively shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them but they must also engage significantly with the wants and desires that people already have, catching up genuine hopes and needs, reinflecting them in their

own peculiar idiom, and feeding them back to their subjects in ways which render these ideologies plausible and attractive. They must be "real" enough to provide the basis on which individuals can fashion a coherent identity, must furnish some solid motivations for effective action and must make at least some feeble attempt to explain away their own more flagrant contradictions and incoherencies. In short, successful ideologies must be more than imposed illusions, and for all their inconsistencies must communicate to their subjects a version of social reality which is real and recognizable enough not to be simply rejected out of hand. (Eagleton 1991: 13–14)

In his extensive study of the reception of Marx in Argentina, Tarcus (2013) has seen that this ideologization of Marx's theory has been fundamental for workers and other nonintellectuals who appropriated it in the context of the late nineteenth century. He argues that "the initial theory, when becoming doctrine, loses its complexity and richness: when reduced to a minimum set of easily handled variables in order to facilitate processes of identification by the masses, it is necessarily cheapened. The vocabulary is diminished, syntax is impoverished, and language is simplified" (Tarcus 2013: 26; in translation). Because of this reduction, what Tarcus has called *intelectuales obreros* (intellectuals from the working class) become fundamental actors of the process of reception. They are workers who not only went through an autodidactic training but also became journalists, speakers, or editors who contributed to the diffusion of Marxism among nonintellectual sectors (ibid.: 50ff; in translation).

If Marxism went from an economic theory of society to an ideology of doctrine, psychoanalysis has also been transformed since it left Freud's desk in Vienna and London. Although not necessarily a simplification of the original propositions, psychoanalysis became, throughout the twentieth century, a worldview—a way to understand not only the inner psychological life of human beings but also cultural and societal development. In this transformation from theory to worldview, what is gained in diffusion compensates what is lost in conceptual accuracy and theoretical discernment. In his analysis of Argentine psychoanalysis, Plotkin clearly states this by arguing that

the term "psychoanalysis" refers not (or not only) to a particular psychological theory or therapeutic technique but to those discourses and practices that find legitimacy in their Freudian inspiration, thus generating what could be called a psy universe.... Psychoanalysis was read in many ways for different purposes by a variety of social groups, each of which tried to use it to satisfy its own needs. Psychoanalysis thus spilled into fields far from the therapeutic

realm. In some countries, Argentina among them, psychoanalysis has become a central element of culture, one could say a belief system. (2001: 4)

In a similar fashion, Damousi and Plotkin (2009) have suggested that psychoanalysis can be seen as a transnational system of beliefs and thought, a conceptual framework, a methodology, and a cultural phenomenon. Bosteels has added that psychoanalytic theories are "neither philosophical views nor positive sciences, but rather an intervening doctrine of the subject in…clinical-affective situations" (2012: 23). In any case, these scholars see psychoanalysis as something that extends well beyond the boundaries of a scientific theory of psychological phenomena. Paradoxically, the mechanism to transform scientific knowledge into something larger involves reducing it to some core concepts and relationships that can be appealing for different audiences. Sherry Turkle (1992) has called this "appropriable theory" and by that she means "objects to think with" or, in Plotkin's terms, "concepts and ideas that are easily manipulable" (2001: 5). This is strikingly clear in the reception of Dewey in Chile and Spain, as Bruno-Jofré and Jover have pointed out:

> Dewey's ideas were often separated from their philosophical basis and integrated in political, philosophical, and theological discourses, thus becoming part of [a] localized configuration of ideas. The pedagogical and political readings led to "mutilated" but living readings of Dewey's work that generated new variants of progressive education. (2012: 36)

This reduction that makes a theory more transportable seems to be based in a specific way of dealing with theories from abroad: selective reading. In his introduction to a book about the reception of Foucault in Latin American cultural studies, Trigo argues that in "the essays by Elzbieta Sklodowska, Doris Sommer, Román de la Campa, and Kelly Oliver, the impulse toward a selective appropriation of Foucault's work turns into a critical appropriation in some cases" (2012a: xii). Coincidentally, in his critical analysis of the reception of the Frankfurt School in Argentina, Lenarduzzi argues that this process was characterized by a fragmentary appropriation (2001: 128), and Caruso and Dussel, dealing with the reception of Dewey in Argentina, have stated that "Argentinean educationalists did not create an 'Argentinized' Dewey by attaching new meanings to his work"; instead, they "selected strongly legitimated texts and readings in order to fit him into their professional and political strategies" (2012: 55). Similarly, the use of Luhmann's work, in particular by scholars of the

second generation, has shown a similar pattern, one in which Luhmann's theory is fragmented in order to be appropriated for particular reasons. One Chilean scholar, who has done extensive research on science, has expressed it in this way:

> [I have included] Luhmann's work in my courses related to science, and scientific research. There Luhmann is a referential point to understand science...but [my appropriation] is confrontational. I continuously converse with him; I question him and try to complement his work. However, his theory allows you to comprehend some fundamental issues regarding science....On the other hand, what Luhmann says about science is the same as he says about any other aspect (of social life). What Luhmann does is to repeat his schema with regard to the economy, politics, and law. (2:14; in translation)

Analyses of theoretical reception also show that the political environment in the receiving field has always played a fundamental role. Recognizing this does not imply that linear generalizations can be suggested. In fact, the indeterminacy of this relationship between theory diffusion and politics (and other "contextual" factors) needs to be highlighted here. In other words, no matter how successful the boundary work to define an "us" and "them" is, there are always porous boundaries because, at the end of the day, those limits do not prevent knowledge from being entangled with its material and symbolic surroundings. One example will illustrate this point. Nondemocratic regimes can be thought of as obstacles to knowledge circulation (they are quintessential constraints for original thinking) and in some cases they have affected the reception of foreign ideas. Explaining how Dewey's theory was introduced in Argentina, Caruso and Dussel recall this story:

> in February 1946...during a meeting...the director of the local Teachers' College and well-known fascist ideologist Jordan Bruno Genta shouted in front of 25,000 teachers who had been required to attend on threat of dismissal: "The pernicious influence of John Dewey...must be eradicated from Argentina's schools....The progressive school must be replaced by the traditional school." (2012: 43)

Not surprisingly, in the 1930s and 1940s in Argentina, Dewey was read as an expert on education, in particular pedagogy and didactics, and his political ideals could be detached from his educational philosophy. Depoliticizing Dewey, "many teachers from the field of progressive education asserted the possible articulation of their pedagogy to many

regimes and ideologies, thus reducing Dewey to a provider of neutral techniques" (Caruso and Dussel 2012: 54). The first lesson to learn from this is that politics may condition the way in which a theory is received, but the theory can still travel to a hostile setting insofar as it is originally interpreted in a depoliticized way. Sometimes, dictatorial regimes might contribute to the circulation of a theory, as the Chilean experience of receiving Luhmann's work seems to suggest. In his description of Chilean social sciences at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, Garretón has argued that

> the official tendencies in universities were to abandon theoretical frames, areas and relevant research issues that were in conflict with the predominant orientations of the regime, to suppress those projects that were difficult to "sell" and to privilege those that coincided with the official view or were responsive to market or state demands or *were considered to be neutral*. (2005: 385, emphasis added)

In this context, only a theory which was perceived as neutral, without ethical and political engagement and without teleological intentions, could have been imported,[3] and this seems to be the way in which Luhmann's theory was taught and learned. Accordingly, one scholar interprets the role of systems theory in his teaching by saying that

> we have to finish with this myth, with this ideological discourse....We're training scientists; we're going to read from Psychology, Cybernetics, and Biology. This has to do with the fact that social sciences need to open, but this not only comes from Luhmann. This comes from the classics! (7:33; in translation)

Another scholar, recalling his days as a student, recognizes this scientific neutrality when he states that "Luhmann is so complicated that if you're doing ideology, well, nobody will understand you. For me, as a student, it was a very technical thing, detached, [which] made me think we were doing something scientific" (6:46; in translation).

Germani's use of Fromm's psychoanalytic theory is another example of the politicization of the environment, and how this forces scholars to read the incoming theory originally, conditioning its reception. The rise of Peronism had impacted Germani's view of the social reaction to accelerated modernization. "Germani's preoccupations were of a more political nature [than those of his Brazilian counterparts]. [He] was worried about the origins and possibilities of totalitarianism. Psychoanalysis (in its 'culturalist' version) could provide social sciences with a subjective

dimension to analyze the problem of authoritarianism" (Plotkin 2009: 167). With this goal in mind, Germani introduced the work of Fromm in Argentine social sciences, attempting a double innovation:

> On the one hand, his version of psychoanalysis was antithetical to the ortho-dox Kleinian version adopted by the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association. On the other hand, his introduction of psychoanalysis to social thought was an innovation in the traditional Argentina sociological establishment and was associated with Germani's interdisciplinary concept of social science. For Germani, psychoanalysis had a specific place in social science in moments of crisis produced by fast social change, when explanations of social action required the elucidation of the psychological aspects of human behavior. (ibid.: 168)

Although it seems clear that psychoanalysis did not impact Germani's empirical work, the way in which he used it is also an example of the need to overcome a distinction between "external" and "internal" factors of reception, which is the second lesson to be learned. Some studies focus on the textual dimension of reception (i.e., the new texts produced in the receiving field based on the imported theory) and tend to consider politics, economic situations, and cultural landscapes as the environment: as contextual elements, that might—or might not—influence the production of new knowledge. The examples of the politicized climate in which some psychoanalytic theories were adopted show that what seems to be external (e.g., Peronism) ends up impacting the writings that appeared as a consequence of its reception in a new field (e.g., a theory to understand the subjective dimension of authoritarianism). The limits between external and internal are so blurred that it does not seem to be productive to retain them. Instead, the traces of the process of reception should be followed by looking at the actors, their interests, their actions, and their articulations in human-material networks (Latour 2005).

The relationship between politics and the reception of foreign theories has gone one step further in the case of Bolivia and the *Grupo Comuna* (Comuna Group). Interested in reflecting on the role of social scientists and sociology in society, a group of intellectuals in Bolivia wrote a collective work, *Bourdieu Leído desde el Sur* (Bourdieu Read from the South), in which they introduced the work of the French sociologist in order to structure the problem and to follow Bourdieu's steps in terms of his social commitment. In the introduction, as if it were a manifesto, Suárez (2000) questions the discipline and its practitioners and finds in Bourdieu's texts and professional life a referential point to compare

Bolivian and French social sciences. At the same time, by recognizing that this group of intellectuals is not made up of experts on Bourdieu's sociology, he points to another feature of reception studies that needs to be underlined: reception can be done by people who are not totally committed to a theoretical corpus but rather simply interested in reflecting about the potentialities of it:

> What to do with sociology? What is the relation between Sociology and social action? Which are the common grounds between scientific research and political positioning? What should the bond between the researcher and the object of study be? What about the bond between the sociologist and the social actor?... This essay is, before anything else, an inquiry. We are not a group of specialists in Bourdieu's works and even less supporters of dogmas and the worship of personalities of the intellectual world. We do not want to defend an academic position against others, and we do not follow ephemeral conceptual fashion that lasts only some years until the next enlightened person appears. We do not do sociology of the great sociologists and we do not do apologies of great theories. We are interested in (a) reflecting on Bourdieu's works because we find them particularly helpful for understanding some local phenomena..., (b) researching some social phenomena from our position as academics to comprehend where our society is heading..., (c) establishing bonds with actors we study..., engaging ourselves in the social scene, [and] (d) studying Bourdieu's political position while maintaining academic rigor and detachment because that position provides clues for social action and critical reflection. (2000: 8–9; in translation)

This passage illustrates how a theory can be appropriate more for political reasons than for intellectual enrichment. Recalling the experience of writing this collective piece, Suárez argues that "the most interesting thing was that, in that moment in Bolivia, we were able to set up an extremely dynamic discussion about the French thinker and the local political situation, which later became the *Grupo Comuna*, around which many people gathered, and finally resulted in the government of Evo Morales. Vice president Álvaro García was one of the main driving forces."[4]

The *Grupo Comuna* became an influential collective within Bolivian social sciences, especially because of its analysis of social movements and their role in the process of counterbalancing neoliberal politics. According to Varnoux Garay (2005), the *Grupo Comuna*'s attempt to rely on Bourdieusian concepts fell short of explaining the behavior of local social movements, despite their success in challenging some public

policies of neoliberal origins. However, the group seems to have been able to grasp the relevance of those social movements to transform Bolivian reality, and the position of some members of the group within the government confirms the political commitment of its members from the very beginning of the reception process. In this regard, politics have passed not only through intellectual interventions (such as the *Grupo Comuna*'s works) but also through the social sciences as academic fields, transforming the receivers of a foreign theory into dynamic actors in the local sociopolitical realm.[5]

4.2   From differences to classification

In this section I want to explore in some detail the classificatory potential of the three variables around which this study on the reception of Luhmann in Hispanic America was organized. These are (a) the time span, (b) the variety of intellectual interventions, and (c) the level of awareness of an international division of intellectual labor. The first one takes into account the period to be studied, under the (more or less shared) assumption that reception, being an active process, requires time to unfold and only by tracing the actors involved can a robust reconstruction be achieved. The second variable refers to the nature of the sources that the research can use in order to describe and explain a process of theoretical reception. Finally, the third variable denotes a conscious appreciation of knowledge circulation in terms of the epistemic consequences of important asymmetries, at an international level, between intellectual and academic fields.

Two clarifications need to be made at this point. First, I do not want to present these variables in order to suggest that "more" means "better." Paying attention to a multiplicity of intellectual interventions does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of a reception process than focusing only on one intervention; neither considering longer time span indicate a more comprehensive knowledge of it . In a similar fashion, while some studies assume the existence of a landscape of centers and peripheries of knowledge production, others do not share such an assumption or take those asymmetrical relations as fundamental for understanding the circulation of ideas. Second, other variables could be used to classify reception studies, which means that there could be alternative classifications with different epistemic implications. The one

proposed here, however, has the advantage of being able to articulate studies from different disciplines such as political science, literary criticism, history, and sociology, to mention only a few. In this sense, studies of theoretical reception could be seen more as a reconstruction of multiple analyses undertaken by scholars of many disciplines than a genre of sociohistorical investigation with a specific set of defining features.

With regard to time span as a variable, reception studies can be either focused or extensive. Focused studies often pay attention to one specific event in the history of reception, looking for specificities that allow the researcher to reach a deeper understanding of mechanisms, actors, strategies, interests, and articulations. These studies of reception might revolve around periods more or less clearly delimited, such as the years after the publication of a groundbreaking book or the time in which an academic debate or controversy took place. In the title of his study of the reception of Weber's theory in Argentina, for example, Blanco (2007) explicitly states the time span: *The Early Reception of Max Weber in Argentine Sociology (1930–1950)*. For Blanco, this period is particularly relevant for two reasons. First, it shows that Weber's work was received in Argentina even before it was in other metropolitan countries, perhaps due to the influence of German thought on local social sciences. Second, these were the years in which two models of sociology were debated in the Argentine field. On the one hand, there were "traditional" scholars concerned with theories as systems of thought and as a corpus to be critically interpreted, but with no empirical interests beyond this hermeneutic appropriation. On the other, led by Germani's works, other social scientists were influenced by US sociological schools, in particular structural functionalism, and believed that theories were devices to be tested—ways of understanding reality that need to be put into practice by empirically oriented researchers. In the context of this debate, Blanco (2007) has been able to deal with subtleties of the organization of the field, how Weber's texts were read, what controversies it triggered, and how they ended up being solved. He is also able to perceive the professional intricacies of any process of reception, because it is not only an intellectual exercise but also a set of interventions with consequences for the field and all its members. Moreover, given Germani's interest in linking sociological research with Fromm's psychoanalysis (Plotkin 2009), scholarly debates such as this one on Weber's methods usually have repercussions beyond the academic field, as the involvement of Germani with the new field of mental health after the fall of Peronism in 1955 illustrates.

Extensive studies of reception usually cover a wide period in which researchers attempt to find, describe, and explain some patterns that can only be discerned by means of this kind of study. Tarcus's (2013) analysis of the reception of Marx in Argentina is an example of this work. He studies the period between 1871 and 1910 and, by so doing, he has been able to find three "receptions." What he calls the first reception (1871–1875) is characterized by the role played by French émigrés who left France after the failure of the Paris Commune in 1871 and the diffusion of a Marxist socialism. The second reception lasts ten years (1882–1892) and the German émigrés are responsible for this appropriation. Expelled from Germany because of the antisocialist laws passed during the Bismarck's years, these immigrants attempted to create a socialist club in Buenos Aires and founded *Vorwärts*, an association with a weekly publication through which the members contacted each other and organized social meetings. Additionally, some notable scientists went to Argentina invited by the government or the university. One of them, Hermann Avé-Lallemant, who introduced "scientific socialism" in the country (Tarcus 2013: 177), was the founder of the working-class newspaper *El Obrero* in 1890. In 1893, a third reception begins, one characterized by the incorporation of Marx's "Comunist Manifesto" and "Das Kapital." Tarcus (2013) highlights in this phase the role of Domingo Risso, the first Argentine editor of the *Manifiesto Comunista* (1893), and the translation of *Das Kapital* into Spanish by Juan B. Justo, a leading member of the recently founded Argentine Socialist Party (1897–1898). Justo's boundary work consisted of unlinking Marx's theory from its Hegelian roots, and from its contemporary intellectual adversary, Spencer's theory of social development. By so doing, Justo recovered the "scientific" side of Marxism and connected it to a local working movement with real chances of success. As Tarcus (2013: 374) puts it, Justo's role has been to "interpret, rectify or broaden" Marx's works.

It is in no way surprising that the analysis of the reception of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America resembles that of Tarcus regarding Marxism in Argentina in terms of finding that several processes of reception have actually taken place and each of them has specific features that need to be addressed. When the period under study is long, some phenomena come to the surface and can be identified and explained. As a hypothesis, I would like to suggest that the longer the period studied, the more differences there are between the strategies of the actors participating in the process, which forces researchers to understand reception as a complex

set of related, but not necessarily logically interconnected, events whose analysis allows for the emergence of some recognizable patterns.

Regardless of the time span, reception studies differ in terms of the sources of information from which researchers reconstruct the process of receiving foreign knowledge. These studies might focus on a few intellectual interventions undertaken by scholars and other social actors in order to create the conditions (boundary work) for appropriating knowledge produced elsewhere or they can take into consideration a wide variety of these interventions and observe their interconnections. From a methodological point of view, this variable sheds light on the varying nature of the evidence that is required to trace knowledge in circulation. Furthermore, and considering the literature reviewed for this research, while some studies rely almost entirely on one intellectual intervention (or a limited set of intellectual interventions), such as a specific journal or book, others lean on a diversity of sources, such as interviews, autobiographical accounts, personal correspondence, conferences, public speeches, university curricula and syllabi, informal exchanges, audio-visual material, and even antiquities collected through time. Both strategies have epistemic consequences.

The advantages of focusing on one intellectual intervention (which is associated with narrowing down the time span considered) are that researchers might explore in depth the actors and strategies used to appropriate foreign knowledge. They can also show that the reception process leaves traces that may be easily underestimated as valid sources of information, from objects to institutional practices. Nevertheless, reception studies which concentrate on one specific intellectual intervention generally tend to favor textuality and interpretative skills over other media formats and what Don Ihde (1998) has called material hermeneutic methods of understanding the social. Bosteels's (2012) study on Marx and Freud in Latin America and Trigo's (2012a) edited volume on Foucault in the region are good examples of this kind of studies of reception.

From the subtitle of Bosteels's book, *Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, it seems clear that the goal of the author is recovering Marx and Freud from the shadows of the past, as he puts it (2012: 1). Bosteels gives clear indications of the intentions of his book as an intellectual intervention in the field of critical studies. First, departing from the struggle in Marxism and psychoanalysis between some modern dichotomies (e.g., subjective vs. objective and psychic vs. historical), he recognizes that "it is with an eye on studying the intricacies of [these]

struggles that" he turns "to a small corpus of texts and artworks from Latin America" (Bosteels 2012: 20). Trying to recover texts which were suppressed in the past because of their sociopolitical content, the author sees his book as an

> effort in constructing an archive of counter-memory [which] concerns not only the books that were actually buried and, in some cases, disinterred [but also] the ideas, dreams and projects that were otherwise forced to find a more figurative hiding place in the inner recesses of the psychic apparatus of their original readers and proponents. (ibid.: 21)

Bosteels argues that in recent years there has been an increasing body of literature about the intellectual and ideological debates of the 1960s and 1970s, although they still need to be systematized through a theoretical labor that, so far, remains undone. For that reason, he adds that his book "seeks to reassess the untimely relevance of certain aspects of the work of Marx…and Freud…in and for Latin America, with select case studies drawn from Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba" (ibid.: 23). For the author, art and literature as sources for understanding the circulation of knowledge are as valid as "the militant tract or the theoretical treatise [because they] provide symptomatic sites for the investigation of such processes" (ibid.). The consequence of this approach has been pointed out by the author, who states that "most of the figures discussed in [his] book are absent from the extant histories of the reception of Marxism and psychoanalysis in Latin America" (ibid.: 25). However, what seems to be Bosteels' weakness is, from my point of view, one of its most interesting strengths.

While the so-called traditional approach to the reception of theories is the study of citation patterns and the use of it by scholars in the receiving fields, the choice of tracking the reception in other contexts, bringing to light the often-ignored intellectual interventions that have been almost invisible for academic or political reasons, appears promising. Bosteels thinks of his work as an attempt to break "down the traditional lines of demarcation between object and subject, criticism and theory, or literature and philosophy" (2012: 25) and, by so doing, he also challenges the way we should interpret studies of theoretical reception. In this case, the skills of scholars involved in literary or film criticism look as necessary as those of scholars working in the social sciences, especially sociology and STS, which tend to underrate—or ignore altogether—the aesthetic value of the intellectual interventions to be studied.

Trigo's (2012a) edited volume moves in the same direction as Bosteels' work. Trigo begins his introduction to the book by clearly stating the nature of the connections that reception studies (in the area of literary criticism) may undertake:

> since the mid-eighties, Michel Foucault's work has informed much of the critical thought about Latin America's cultural, literary, historical, and political events. Influential works written in the United States such as *La Ciudad Letrada* (1984) by Angel Rama, *Myth and Archive* (1990) by Roberto González Echevarría, *Foundational Fictions* (1991) by Doris Sommer, and *At Face Value* (1991) by Sylvia Molloy draw from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punishment* (1975), *The History of Sexuality* (1976), and *Technologies of the Self* (1988) to develop concepts like the consciousness of an intellectual elite (or *letrados*), the archive model, the foundational fiction, and self-writing, all of which are now the common currency of critical analysis in and about Latin America. (Trio 2012b: xi–xii)

As this quotation shows, from Trigo's perspective, the reception of Foucault in Latin America includes (a) the foreign theorist, Michel Foucault, (b) the concepts provided by the foreign theory, (c) the receiving intellectuals (Rama, González Echevarría, Sommer, and Molloy), and (d) the new vocabulary derived from Foucault's innovative work (e.g., self-writing). This model assumes that reception is, before anything else, a process of the circulation and appropriation of concepts that, as such, should be traced in the texts produced in the receiving field. Since the context of the original text, as Bourdieu (1999) would put it, seems to be precluded from traveling with the work, reception is limited to the articulation of textual interpretations and local adaptations, which, nevertheless, implies a certain level of novelty. At the same time, the passage quoted above also shows that the implications of this new vocabulary go far beyond the intellectual field: this vocabulary enables, in Trigo's (2012b) terms, an understanding of Latin America's cultural, literary, historical, and political events. Expressed differently, reception studies, from this perspective, seem to focus on the process through which foreign concepts are transformed from a foreign theory to a local vocabulary whose power transcends the intellectual realm and penetrates other areas of social life.

However, some researchers make almost the opposite choice and pay attention to different types of intellectual interventions, perhaps with the assumption that the reception process usually follows several parallel, overlapping, and even contradictory paths. In this research, meaningful

material might be found everywhere, from life stories to lost and recently rediscovered archives, to forgotten newspapers for the working class, to libraries burned down and only partially recovered. Similar to a detective's work, researchers look for a multiplicity of narratives which, together and intertwined, can give rise to a more or less coherent process of reception. As a consequence, the investigation must articulate the material recollected, identify possible patterns, and generate a new, reliable story of how and why a particular foreign theory was received.

Among the most impressive reception studies of foreign theories in Latin America, Tarcus's (2013) study of the appropriation of Marx in Argentina illustrates this point. To begin with, he has not focused exclusively on the great names but also on the contributions of "divulgators, editors, translators, journalists, . . . usually considered second-order characters of this story" (Tarcus 2013: 15; in translation). As a consequence, "biographical data become scarce when moving away from the small circle of great political leaders" (ibid.; in translation), but this lack of information is compensated by archive work in Argentina, The Netherlands, Spain, and France, as well as by interviews with descendants of those émigrés who went to Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Tarcus has been able to obtain the handwritten letters exchanged between R. Wilmart, A. Aubert, E. Flaesch, and Karl Marx, and to find a collection of issues of the journal *Vorwärts* that was believed to be lost.

It could be thought that one consequence of such a massive search for data is a thorough understanding of the reception process, one in which ambiguity and misreading can be avoided. The truth is that, as is frequent in the social sciences, the outcome is exactly the opposite: the more information is searched, the more difficult the articulation of data becomes. In this context, the researcher ends up understanding his or her object of study as a multiplicity of interpretations that prevents him or her from accessing the "right" understanding of a theory. This is why Tarcus recognizes the intrinsic value of misreading:

> Far from considering Marxism a universal theory available for an adequate use and ready to be correctly applied to local reality, I am interested in the structural misunderstanding which is inherent to any process of the adoption of ideas in a heteronomous context with regard to its context of production. [That is why] the reader will find in this book a series of paradoxes opened by this misunderstanding. . . . I have assumed that the original and productive reading of an author leads to some "misreadings," while at the same time

"orthodox" readings are also necessarily constructions, interpretations, and not always very productive [ones]. (2013: 11; in translation)

Even when the time span is reduced, it is possible to resort to multiple sources of information in order to analyze many intellectual interventions to reconstruct the reception process. This has been effectively done by Gallo (2010) in his study of Freud's Mexico. His book swings harmoniously between Salvador Novo's poetry, philosopher Samuel Ramos's (textual) interpretation of the national character of Mexicans, Octavio Paz's "The Labyrinth of Solitudine" and the "collective melancholia" it embraces, Freud's books in Spanish and the opportunities they opened for the Viennese psychologist, and even the Mexican antiquities that Freud collected regarding the strong influence of some authors who had written on Aztec human sacrifices. Expectedly, Gallo recognizes that his methodological decisions might sound strange to those interested in reception studies of a more traditional fashion:

> this is a work of cultural history influenced by psychoanalytic theory, and as such it deals with facts—documents I uncovered in the course of archival research at the Freud Museum London, the Library of Congress, and Mexico City's Casa del Poeta—but also with images, perceptions, affects, and fantasies. Some readers might object that some of my interpretations are too speculative. I do take some interpretative liberties, but my strategy is not without precedent: Freud himself taught us that interpretation is an art that must encompass unconscious as well as conscious material, and that the analyst—including the cultural analyst—must not be afraid to propose bold hypotheses, strong arguments, and speculative constructions. (2010: 9–10)

If literary studies have already shown the necessity of thinking about reception processes as a situation in which the epistemic and the aesthetic value of the knowledge received is at stake, Gallo has demonstrated that given the complexity of this process, its conscious and unconscious dimensions, speculations about it can proceed within bold arguments and based on reliable information. Expressed differently, the study of Freud's Mexico gives us reasons to think that researchers always play a creative, enactive role during their investigations, since reception is not only multilayered but also contains lacunae which need to be filled by researchers' imaginations. The second lesson to be learned from Gallo's analysis of Freud in (connection to) Mexico is that reception studies should pay attention to materiality as well as textuality. Since ideas travel because they are carried by people or objects, the material dimension

of the process is often neglected because it is seen as insignificant or, at best, secondary. The reception of Luhmann in Mexico can exemplify this relevance of materiality. When Javier Torres Nafarrate was preparing the launch conference of the Spanish version of *Soziale Systeme*, he wrote a letter to Luhmann in order to let him know the details about the academic event which would take place in Mexico City. According to Torres Nafarrate, at that time (1991) Luhmann asked him to invite Chilean sociologist Darío Rodríguez to the event because Rodríguez had been working on systems theory for a while by then. Torres Nafarrate states that this was the first time, after years of working on the translation of Luhmann's book, he heard about his Chilean colleague and realized that there could be other Latin American scholars doing research similar to his own and using Luhmann's theory. Obviously, he invited Rodríguez to Mexico City and there began a long friendship and scholarly collaboration that has never ended to this day. They have published together, been in charge of translations, written introductory studies, held visiting scholarships in Chile and Mexico, and have been key academics of the first generation I described in Chapters 2 and 3. From my point of view, this long-term collaboration is the outcome of materiality (the book as a cultural product to be launched in an academic event) and not of textuality (the ideas contained in such a book). Had Torres Nafarrate and his colleagues at Universidad Iberoamericana decided to translate any other book written by Luhmann, the two scholars would still have met and likely begun this extended relationship.

The final variable to take into consideration for the classification of reception studies, especially in peripheral regions, is the level of awareness of the asymmetries within an international division of intellectual labor. Elsewhere (Rodríguez Medina 2013) I have argued that when knowledge travels from an endowed scientific or academic field to peripheral areas, it undergoes some transformations because, in opposition to Bourdieu (1999), I have shown that the context of production is actually contained in the traveling text. Asymmetrical fields are not involved in symmetrical exchanges. Given the uneven distribution of material and symbolic resources, the receiving field is partially reshaped by the moving ideas that come from abroad because local actors use them to structure their scholarly careers. Due to this structuring effect, I have suggested that the notion of a boundary object (Fujimura 1992; Star and Griesemer 1989) be abandoned and the concept of a subordinating object (Rodriguez Medina 2014) be used instead because in this case circulation does not

take place between equally endowed social worlds but asymmetrical ones. Leaving aside the theoretical and empirical reasons to have a geopolitical sensibility toward knowledge production, I would argue in this last part of the chapter that reception studies could be grouped on the basis of their (lack of) recognition of these asymmetries.

In his research on the early reception of Weber in Argentina, Blanco (2007) has argued that the appropriation of Weberian methodology has to be understood as part of the philosophical concerns that characterized the decade of 1930 in the country—a decade in which an antipositivist, culturalist reaction has been observed. In this context, "the German culture becomes a central reference point within the criticism of positivism. Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger and Hartmann were the most cited philosophers" (Blanco 2007: 14). Interestingly, in this game of centers and peripheries, much of the German culture arrived in Argentina thanks to Ortega and Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* and the *Biblioteca de Ideas del Siglo XX*, which heavily influenced the local republic of letters. In this regard, the case illustrates how a peripheral philosophical community, such as the Spanish one, played the role of the center for the Argentine social science and philosophical circles. For Blanco, "a derivative effect of this openness to German culture was the editorial implantation of German sociology in Argentina" (2007: 14; in translation), a phenomenon which included the translation of the works of Simmel, Spann, Tönnies, Freyer, and Sombart and the writing of local books in which a thorough analysis of the European theoretical landscape was introduced. In turn, in the following years, the influence of German sociology also affected teaching and methodology, so from the 1930s to the 1940s it became a reference point for students and practitioners of the discipline (Blanco 2007: 15).

Plotkin's (2001) study of the reception of Freud also recognizes the existence of centers and peripheries in psychoanalysis, although he challenges this vocabulary in many ways as well as some of its implicit assumptions. The peripheral position of Argentina in the psychoanalytic landscape, at least until the 1960s, is acknowledged by Plotkin when he points out that

> researchers working on the evolution of the international psychoanalytic movement have largely neglected the study of the development of Argentine psychoanalysis. [This] may be related to the fact that, unlike their American and French colleagues, Argentine analysts have not produced a distinctively national psychoanalytic school. . . . Argentine psychoanalysts have gone from (British) Keinianism to (French) Lacanianism, [although this] does not imply

that psychoanalytic theory has been accepted blindly or uncritically.... As members of the analytic community have recognized many times, however, the Argentine psychoanalytic movement has not evolved into a distinctive Argentine school. (2001: 2)

It is worth noting that the peripheral situation may imply a vantage position when it comes to adaptability to different sociopolitical contexts. According to Plotkin, "the failure to create a native school may help to explain psychoanalysis' lasting popularity:... by following the changing international theoretical currents, Argentine practitioners enabled psychoanalysis to adapt to an ever-changing and highly unstable political context, and thus to be always relevant" (2001: 4). If we accept that Freud's theory was connected, at different moments, with Marxist ideas but was also seen as functional in relation to the dictatorial government because it helped suffering people deal with the trauma of an extremely violent context, Plotkin's claims seem to be corroborated by the historical experience.[6]

Like Freud's theory, Dewey's was inserted into the Argentine political field because of the liaison between the philosopher and the United States in a context of exalted nationalism and limited democracy. Since Peronism had been able to forge its own identity, at least partially, as antagonistic to US imperialism, "mentioning Dewey was not merely a scholarly reference, but it was used to evoke a series of associated meanings—needless to say, most of them negative" (Caruso and Dussel 2012: 44). On top of this political resentment, the Argentine school system had foreign roots, since it had been modeled after the French "model of a common, secular, and free primary school [which] supported the importation of French positivism [and] became the founding educational philosophy of the Argentinean school system" (ibid.: 45). Foreign influence was, therefore, a constitutive part of the educational system as well as of the philosophy that sustained and justified it.

At the level of disciplines, Dewey was also perceived through the lens of geopolitical concerns. Aníbal Ponce, a professor who had been expelled in the 1930s for being communist, saw

Dewey's pedagogy as a utilitarian and purely methodological expression of American bourgeois civilization.... He considered Dewey as part of the "methodological trend" of the New School, which sought to increase the performance of students by adjusting pedagogy to a child's personality, both biological and psychical. (ibid.: 48)

This politicization of Dewey's philosophy led to the strategy, described above, of depoliticizing his educational theory. As a result, his "popularity gained momentum among teachers when his texts became more 'pedagogic' and less 'political', and could thus be less identified with a liberal democratic creed" (ibid.: 49). This boundary work that separated Dewey's ideas on education from his philosophical foundations rooted in a deep democratic commitment is the kind of work that scholars in the periphery are usually forced to undertake (i.e., to "adapt" theories to local conditions) if foreign knowledge is to be appropriated. At the same time, even if it ends up being based on selective reading and not on original knowledge production, the reception of a theory may include creative work which also has the power to structure the field, as the history of the New School movement in Argentina illustrates.

Nevertheless, the asymmetrical relation between centers and peripheries is not always a constitutive element of the analysis; neither is an implicit assumption to be taken for granted. In some studies, especially those oriented toward textuality and focused on the use of some concepts created outside the context in which they are applied, geopolitical awareness does not play any role in the analysis. In their introduction to the book *La Teoría de los Sistemas de Niklas Luhmann a Prueba*, in which a group of Latin American scholars use Luhmann's theory to understand local problems, Estrada Saavedra and Millán argue that,

> Regardless the high level of abstraction of a theory, there are two factors of knowledge creation that should not be excluded: the necessary bond between conceptual networks and the empirical, on the one hand, and, on the other, the recognition that universality…is feasible to use as an analytic resource to understand certain particular "realities." If these two last points are taken into account, it could be observed that they are impossible to meet without a transition which requires robust methodological efforts. (2012a: 11; in translation)

For the editors, the inconvenience of dealing with a theory that was not intended to be applied to the Latin American context needs "robust methodological efforts," that is researchers' imaginations to create and implement the methods with which the theory and the empirical (i.e., local reality) can be reconciled. Later on, they add a clear message for those who doubt the epistemological possibility of this task:

> facing social scientists of the "center," whose egocentric perspective does not allow them to transcend their idea of the "world," those in the Latin

American periphery have a double advantage: the empirical knowledge of their reality leads them to appropriate "grand theories" [in order] to modify them and include therein their and others' "worlds" without the need to assume beforehand a sort of disciplined nationalism. Second, this operation of appropriation tends to deprovincialize grand theories in order to make them truly global despite local differences. (Estrada Saavedra and Millán 2012a: 20; in translation)

The recognition of a structure of centers and peripheries does not prevent the editors from claiming that, at the end of the day, the role of scholars in the periphery is to adapt grand theories because they are the only ones who can apprehend them and test them against the local sociopolitical conditions. To what extent the theory is precisely a prerequisite to deal with empirical knowledge is something that remains unclear in the text. In fact, Estrada Saavedra and Millán's study seems to imply a realist notion of the empirical according to which reality is out there waiting to be described and explained by scientific theories. If Latin American scholars, as they argue, have this privileged point of view, why do they not create theories instead of applying foreign ones?

López Rubí Calderón (2009) has also acknowledged the place of asymmetries in knowledge production but, interestingly, when it comes to the national distribution of political knowledge in Mexico. He refers to the hyperconcentration of institutions and scholars in Mexico City, which contributes to the creation of the idea that there is a strongly institutionalized Mexican political science, as described by foreign scholars (Altman 2005). However, "in general, the institutional university context, beside the economic one, is adverse for young people interested in research as well as for professors" (López Rubí Calderón 2009: 21; in translation). In this situation, López Rubí Calderón uses the expression "privileged islands" to refer to the fragmentary reality of Mexican political science, characterized by "low salaries, partisan contamination, improvised professors, outdated university curricula, inadequate pedagogies, encouragement of ideological indoctrination, lack of research (and sometimes everything together)" (2009: 20; in translation). Paradoxically, when he focuses on the role of foreign knowledge, and particularly on the relevance of Giovanni Sartori's works, he does not extrapolate his thoughts to the international level, but concludes that because of the lack of pertinent conditions, students and professors alike misread Sartori's theory. According to López Rubí Calderón, "Sartori is 'the most famous political scientist in the world'. In Mexico he

is a celebrity. However, everything points to the fact that his work is as known and used as misread" (2009: 40; in translation). When the focal point is reading, an act usually perceived as decontextualized and purely intellectual, some factors such as academic labor conditions are underestimated and the responsibility for the correct reception of a theory is on the shoulders of local scholars and students who, not surprisingly, end up misreading the theory. In any case, López Rubí Calderón sends to the back the structure of centers and peripheries at an international level and calls for the improvement of local intellectual interventions (from students' readings of the theory to scholars' interpretations of it in their classes and published works), to which his book seems to make a contribution.

Figure 4.1 shows one possible way to visualize what I have done in this chapter. It presents the three variables I have analyzed and illustrates what can be called a sample of the landscape of studies of theoretical reception in Latin America. At a moment in which reception studies are
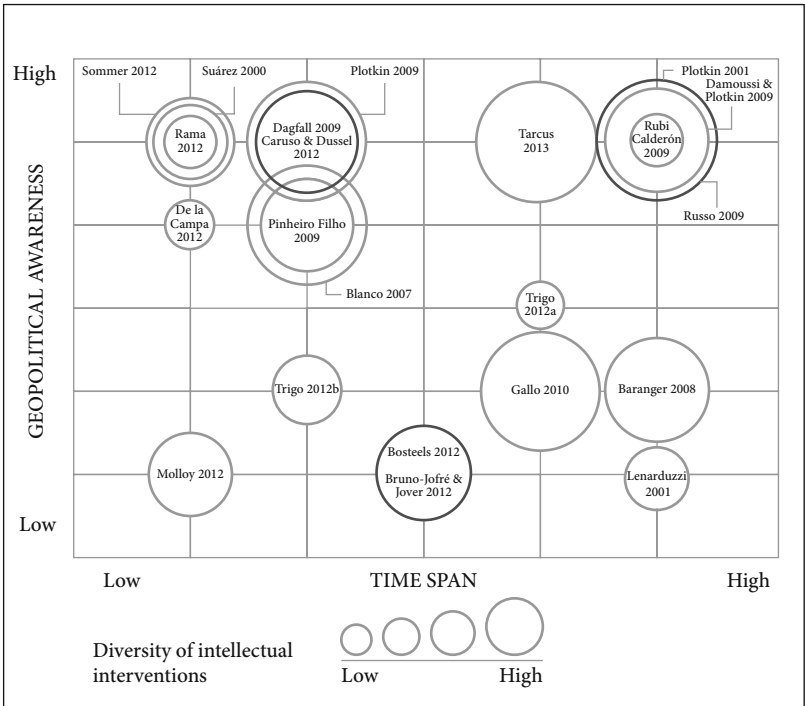
FIGURE 4.1   *Landscape of studies of theoretical reception in Latin America*

flourishing, this book about the circulation of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and, in particular, this chapter in which I have compared some other analyses attempt to show the need for articulation in order to appreciate the contribution each kind of study is making to the theme. The study of how theories travel from their contexts of production to other settings in which they are (more or less) creatively appropriated still requires more case studies but it urgently calls for theoretical contributions that help systematize empirical findings and put into question previous knowledge that assumed the universality of social science knowledge under the umbrella of what Walter Mignolo (2000) has called "global designs."

Notes

1 Similarly, for Pinheiro Filho, "the conditions of reception [of Bourdieu in Brazil] were favourable insofar as they provided powerful means by which to consider the scientific field at a time in which it was affirming its standard of professionalization" (2009: 14).

2 In Plotkin's words, "the derivative nature of Argentine psychoanalysis does not imply that psychoanalytic theory has been accepted blindly or uncritically. No body of ideas is ever absorbed passively. … There were creative deviations, elaborations, and selective appropriations of foreign theories in the process of reception and diffusion of psychoanalysis in Argentina" (2001: 2).

3 Interestingly, some scholars have recognized that Luhmann's theory leaves room for conflict and, by so doing, does not deserve the adjective conservative: "there was no need to reconcile conflict and order because conflicts are social systems. … Moreover, conflict is inherent to social systems because communication can be constantly denied … so conflicts are observed permanently. Conflict is consubstantial to a systemic view which is so dynamic precisely due to the assumption of the contingency of the social, where everything could be otherwise and is constantly reconfiguring [and] articulating" (12: 46; in translation). Moreover, Dallera, explaining why Luhmann's theory has not had repercussions in Argentina, argues that "the answer is quite easy. The sociology of Luhmann irritates because … it questions, challenges and gives traditional thought in both its pre-modern and modern versions a hard time. How is that? Basically, the theory does three things: (1) it took away, from the social scene, the authorities of traditional thought (God … and transcendental reason); (2) it makes observation the drive of the social construction of reality

[because] observations change what can be observed, [and] (3) it assumes that everything beyond society (that is, communication) is part of the environment, even the human beings" (2012: 131–132; in translation). So, in a few words, Luhmann's theory has failed to impact Argentine social sciences because it is too revolutionary!

4   Personal communication, February 21, 2014; in translation. Alvaro García Linera wrote a chapter entitled "Espacio Social y Estructuras Simbólicas: Clase, Dominación Simbólica y Etnicidad en la Obra de Pierre Bourdieu" ("Social Space and Symbolic Structures: Class, Symbolic Domination and Ethnicity in Pierre Bourdieu's Works").

5   Given the entanglement of an academic and a political logic in this dynamic, it could be said that some of these scholars acted as knowledge brokers— people who seem to have a special interest in mobilizing knowledge beyond its context of production for reasons that are not necessarily connected to academic goals. For a detailed review of the notion of a knowledge broker, see Meyer (2010).

6   In Plotkin's words, "from its beginnings, psychoanalysis was meant to provide 'sufferableness' rather than relief" (2001: 5).

Conclusions

Abstract: *In the Conclusion I state the main findings and examine the relevant questions that this research has brought to light, as well as the future research suggested by them and assess the relevance of paying attention to the process of knowledge circulation. I also return to some theoretical points made in the previous chapters and suggest new directions for the investigations of the mobility of ideas and knowledge. Specifically, I call for the formulation of an original vocabulary that might overcome dichotomous distinctions such as internal/external and objective/subjective which, so far, seem to have obscured our understanding of knowledge circulation.*

In order to summarize the findings of this research, I will present factors that have encouraged and discouraged the diffusion of Luhmann's theory in Hispanic America. The facilitating factors I noted in this book are (i) the translations and introductory studies developed by the first generation scholars; (ii) research undertaken by second and third generation scholars who have used the theory to understand local problems and to hybridize it by putting it into dialogue with current theoretical developments such as Actor-Network Theory or Structuration Theory; and (iii) the perceived power of theory that can be embraced not only because of its innovative content (flexibility) but also because of its capacity to structure academic careers. In the opposite direction, factors that have hindered its circulation are (i) the need for a comprehensive reading of the theory that impedes generalist scholars from taking only those parts which can be useful for empirical and theoretical research without a thorough commitment to the theory; (ii) the need for exegetes who, as gatekeepers, are entrance gates to the complexity of Luhmann's theory and become the guarantors of "proper" interpretations; (iii) the theoretical landscape of social sciences in Hispanic America, where other contributions, such as those of Bourdieu and Foucault, have been more easily translated into research questions and frameworks to deal with local problems because they have been successfully "reduced" to some guiding hypotheses or concepts (such as biopolitics or habitus); (iv) Luhmann's lack of interest in enacting an international network of scholars or disciples who have been working under the umbrella of systems theory; and finally (v) the European roots of the theory (e.g., its reliance on functional differentiation), which have been highlighted by scholars who have attempted to adapt it to Latin America. The main lesson of this narrative is that knowledge circulation seems to be less dependent on the content of the theory than of the socio-material circumstances that create proper conditions for it to travel.

At this point, one question has to be raised: does this research teach us something about knowledge circulation and, in particular, about centers and peripheries? I do think so and the next pages will give a preliminary answer to this question. First, it supports previous research which has brought to light the creative and innovative nature of the intellectual work undertaken in the periphery when a theory is introduced, which contradicts some studies on academic dependency. The Luhmann case also shows that some of the scholars of the periphery have frequently published in German journals devoted to systems theory, which is a way

to challenge the center from the margins. However, this has to be taken cautiously because (i) the reduced number of experts in systems theory worldwide is an important factor to explain this "small" community of researchers who share the more or less limited spaces for publications; and (ii) systems theory as such is peripheral if we take into account the international landscape of the social sciences, whose center stage is still located in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in the United Kingdom, with English as the dominant language. Put differently, Germany seems to be a center of knowledge production in systems theory due to the relative lack of interest in this theoretical contribution in other metropolitan fields.

Second, this book has illustrated the need for a broad understanding of intellectual interventions. On the one hand, these interventions should include not only the pieces through which scholars attempt to position their thinking within and beyond the field, but also more day-to-day simple activities, sometimes associated with administrative responsibilities, sometimes with actions that involve intellectual products as commodities (e.g., events organized to launch a new book, regardless its content). It does not mean that everything is an intellectual intervention, but it does mean that a narrow focus on typical ones may prevent us from understanding aspects of the reception process that might be invisible at first sight. Additionally, analyses of intellectual interventions should take into account the international division of academic labor, that is the multiple flows of knowledge that, usually concentrated in the North, travels all over the world endowed with prestige. The reception of Derrida in the United States (Lamont 1987) or Heidegger in France (Bourdieu 1999) may parallel that of Foucault's or Sartori's theories in Latin America in a formal way, that is in the morphology of the process (e.g., participation of academic departments, scholars who attempt to position themselves in the fields, writing of introductory studies). However, there are intellectual interventions that seem to be very important in peripheral areas, such as teaching specific courses at certain institutions (especially under the chair system that characterizes Latin American universities) and occupying administrative positions from which institutions themselves can be adapted to scholars' needs and interests—this is the academic side of the weak institutionalization of Latin American countries that many political scientists have described (O'Donnell 1996, 1998).

Third, this research has shown the importance of scholars' mobility to trigger processes of knowledge circulation. Although sometimes these

processes are accidental rather than rationally planned, they still activate mechanisms through which theories may travel from one site to another. When they occur randomly, it is difficult to anticipate results that may benefit the local receiving field because many different and overlapping research interests and agendas are in play (e.g., funding bodies, such as Fulbright, DAAD, or the British Council, become as powerful actors as local public or private agencies and the student's interests in specific topics). The life story of one of the leading scholars in the reception of Luhmann in Chile illustrates this point. Having been accepted for postgraduate studies in several US universities, problems in his home institution hindered his chances to undertake his PhD there. Instead, this mishap opened up the opportunity to apply for a PhD program in Germany and he ended up studying under Luhmann's supervision. However, in more recent times, the mobility of scholars has followed more institutionalized patterns, with national and international funding organizations supporting it and Latin American universities investing in this process as part of their strategies of internationalization. To what extent this encouragement of mobility can foster the circulation of theories and, even more important, can contribute to move theories from South to North is something that has to be studied.

Fourth, in the previous pages I showed that Luhmann's theory (as well as that of the other scholars I focused on in Chapter 4) is multilayered and, because of that, it has been able to become useful for different audiences. The most engaged in the process of circulation are the experts, those scholars who invest a great deal of time in mastering the theory for explaining, applying, or hybridizing it. For them, as Davis (1986) has argued, the fact that these theories have several layers has been fundamental to understand their own role in the process of reception. As I analyzed in Chapter 3, the complexity of this theoretical corpus has not only justified strategies of comprehensive reading and embodied exegesis but also transcend the textual dimension to become an instrument of the transformation of the field. Complex theories, put differently, are better tools to be used in shaping the field according to scholars' interests. At the same time, an increasing number of academics have been using Luhmann's work with other goals in mind. They want to take some parts of it and apply them to understand local reality and solve specific problems. While they consider Luhmann's theory or systems theory as a paradigm that sets up research problems and solutions (Kuhn 1970), they have reduced it to a manageable set of propositions that are rich

enough to play the role of theoretical framework but simple enough to not need profound understanding of the entire work of Niklas Luhmann. This research-oriented use of the theory, characteristic of the second and third generations, has helped create a group of academics who can be considered "generalists" (Davis 1986) and who do not see themselves as exclusively committed to systems theory but rather willing to extricate the esoteric nature of it by putting it into dialogue with other theoretical traditions and empirical applications.

Fifth, this book has made a case for the need to study specific, situated, historically contingent and materially embedded practices to set up the conditions of appropriation. Due to its methodological limitations (i.e., case study), this research has attempted to bring to the fore the intricacies of the circulation of Luhmann's theory without trying to generalize them. In fact, the permanent search for similarities and differences not only among scholars participating in the process (Chapters 2 and 3) but also with regard to other reception processes (Chapter 4) is an indicator of my interest in prioritizing tensions over agreements. Generalizations tend to be dangerous, but when it comes to knowledge circulation they will make us assume that it is possible to find (and replicate) recipes for moving knowledge. In an era of globalizing forces affecting the production and dissemination of knowledge, generalizations might become recommendations, which in turn end up becoming public or institutional policies with objectives that, from the very beginning, we know cannot be achieved with all-purpose formulas.

Sixth, throughout this book it has been argued that reception involves transformation. A theory, as a definite, immutable and identifiable set of propositions, cannot be the object of study of those interested in the circulation of knowledge or ideas because it cannot be traced as such. Theories travel embodied in people or materialized in objects, so studying circulation implies the practical impossibility of disassociating the content from its material/embodied containment. Seen from this perspective, when I say "Luhmann's theory" I mean some books and articles, written in certain languages, travelling in specific directions, mobilized by particular actors in their attempt to position themselves in local and international fields. Moreover, when the light is on the reception of such theory, the texts analyzed should also be contextualized, located in the middle of networks of objects and people. At the end, the "original" theory (the first circulating texts) and the "appropriations" (texts produced and circulated as a consequence of reading and using the

original ones) end up constituting a body of knowledge whose boundaries are difficult to establish. In what sense can we say that Luhmann (or his theory) is present in Mascareño's (2010) analysis of Latin American modernization? In what sense can we say that Mascareño's ideas can be separated from Luhmann's contributions? The nexus itself is a central part of the reception process, because the focal point is precisely new articulations that take place when knowledge produced in one part travels to other sites.

Seventh, in this book I have introduced the idea of generations to reveal that the way a theory is used depends, to some extent, on factors that are shared by groups of scholars. Individual decisions appear as by-products of generational strategies. Although the idea of generation is more associated with types of boundary work and less with age, it seems to be necessary to understand that senior scholars have been more engaged in the explanation and diffusion (via translations and writing of introductory studies) than their junior counterparts. At the same time, along with changes in the university system that have forced academics to research and publish, the younger generations have contributed to the reception by applying Luhmann's theory and comparing it with other theoretical developments, such as those of Latour, Giddens, or Bourdieu. They recognize the value of the first generation's work not only importing systems theory but also making it available for a wide audience; nevertheless, they seem to be more aware of the limitations of the theory and the necessity to overcome them. Whether they will be able to invigorate Luhmann's work with empirical analyses and theoretical hybridization to the point that systems theory can occupy a more relevant position in the academic field is something that cannot be predicted at this time. The growing interest of some US institutions in the work of Luhmann (e.g., Stanford University and its press) may be a compelling impulse in that direction.

It is time now to turn to important questions that this research has generated and that point to future investigations in the area of knowledge circulation. The first one is whether a different pattern could have been observed if I had paid attention to citations in books and articles written by Hispanic-American scholars since the 1980s. Of course, I cannot answer this because I have not undertaken such an analysis. However, it is necessary to point out that the lack of reliable information about publications in the region has been, and still is, a problem. The tables in Chapter 1 about articles devoted to leading sociologists in Latin

American journals are a clear indicator of this weakness. How reliable can a database be that indicates in four decades less than a couple of hundred articles were devoted to Marx, the most cited theorist ever? Insofar as this is the only information available, it seems to be clear that we will depend on it for basic preliminary studies. It is also clear that better databases are required and, in many ways, the future of reception studies rests on it. With improved databases it will be likely shown that other overlapping patterns, besides the generational approach I proposed here, can be discerned.

The second question is related to the role of Brazil in the Latin American reception of Luhmann's work. Practical limitations prevented me from undertaking research in Brazil for this book and that is an important shortcoming of my investigation. Rodriguez Mansilla and Torres Nafarrate have pointed out the role of Brazilian scholars in the reception process:

> In Brazil, it is worthy of comment Marcelo Neves' studies of Law applied to the periphery of modernity—to which Luhmann himself cited frequently in relation to that topic. Luhmann travelled several times to Brazil. As a result of a seminar delivered in 1990 at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, the Goethe Institute in Porto Alegre published a book with his lectures: *A Nova Teoria dos Sistemas* in 1997. At the same university, professors Clarissa Eckert Baeta Neves, Eva Machado Barbosa Samios and Elida Liecke have developed a relevant critical analysis of Luhmann's work in Brazil. The achievements of such an effort, as well as the interest of leading Brazilian sociologists, is patent in the fact that at Brazilian conferences on sociology there are frequently sessions devoted to systems theory. (2006: 58; in translation)

At this point, it is difficult to see whether our generational approach as well as our understanding of the boundary work that Hispanic-American scholars have undertaken will be useful to comprehend the specificities of the Brazilian case. More empirical research will be necessary along with consideration of the particularities of the Brazilian university system and research traditions in order to identify similarities and differences. In any case, the linguistic barrier and the only recent influence of Brazilian social sciences in Latin America have surely been obstacles for the circulation of the local analyses at the regional level.

Finally, I want to bring to the fore a problem that can be formulated as a question: do we have a proficient vocabulary to deal with the subtleties of the interconnections between the content of a theory and its context? As I made explicit in Chapter 3, I think we do not. Trapped in the same

kind of problem as Actor-Network Theory or Structuration Theory, that is the need to overcome dichotomies such as subject/object, agent/structure, and culture/society, I have pointed out that the vocabulary of the social sciences, and sociology in particular, appears very limited when these middle grounds become focal points. Bourdieu uses the notion of habitus to mediate between a rational agent and a determining structure. Latour's idea of actor-networks attempts to highlight that every actor is a network (it is just a matter of scale) and that the flows (translations) are more important than the fixations. In Chapter 3, I introduced the notion of situated complexity to try to overcome the dichotomy between an internal dimension of texts (its complexity as a property of the articulation of propositions) and an external dimension (its complexity as a discourse and practice that, opened by its textual dimension, may transcend it and have impact on the world of practices). If there is something we should learn from case studies it is that they can show us subtle mechanisms through which a text gets agency (as part of networks of humans and non-humans) and is able to have an impact beyond its textuality (i.e., beyond the act of reading in certain ways and producing certain interpretations). While from macro-sociological perspectives we can obtain information about general patterns and tendencies, it is my contention that micro-sociological approaches (originally combined with life-history, ethnographic analysis, and material sensibilities) can provide us the data from which new concepts will emerge to dissolve dichotomies and lead our attention to the interconnections, the flows and the entanglements of people, objects, and practices. Thus, the challenge is not only to refine our data gathering strategies but also, and more fundamentally, to step up our theoretically informed vocabulary in light of our (local, though comparable) Latin American experience.

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