POSITIONING JOURNALISM RESEARCH

IN WORLD SOCIETY

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by
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The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.
Leslie P. Hartley: The Go-Between, 1956: 3.

Introduction

This paper falls into three parts. The first part is overlooking journalism education and journalism research from a birdeyes view. Journalism is conceptualized as a self- circulating communication system, interrelated with world society with a production side and a reception side. Recalling the late 17th and the 18th Century Enlightenment in Europe, scholarly *journalism research* had its *take-off* – as a policy of reading newspapers and journals. The second part of the paper reviews very briefly the two basic *epistemological tendencies* of *today's journalism research*, we indicate *Realism* and *Constructivism*. In the third part it is asserted: If journalism research is globalizing in modern world society, *system/environment differences* and *communication* are the *key concepts* for differentiating journalism research.

1 Searching for approaches in journalism research history

In the morning of my life, I entered the world's journalism system on its reception side, as a reader of a local paper. In high school, I entered journalism on its production side, this time as a free-lancer, reporting for newspapers and radio, and working in newsrooms on weekends. In the later fifties, while majoring in economics, with a minor in public communications [Publizistikwissenschaft], I hoped to obtain another role in the world's journalism system, this time as a scholar. But journalism wasn't taught and there were no textbooks on journalism at West German universities at the time. But *Geschichte des deutschen Journalismus* [*The History of German Journalism*] by Robert Eduard Prutz (1845) was available, for self-study so to say.[1] Prutz observes journalism as an entity, and I was reading the text as a history of journals, events, and early writings on journalism.

A decade later, when I was re-reading the book, I made a surprising discovery. In the meantime, I had obtained a diploma in economics and continued studying social sciences, crossdisciplinarilly. I befriended with cybernetics, system/environment-theories, and the method of comparative functionalism.[2] For a doctoral dissertation, I did an empirical case study: *Die Zeitungsredaktion als organisiertes soziales System* [The newsroom as an organized social system],[3] and for habilitation, I wrote a draft on *Journalismus und Gesellschaft*

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[1] Robert E. Prutz, *Geschichte des deutschen Journalismus* (1845) [History of German Journalismus] Erster Teil. Reprint (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971)

[2] Manfred Rühl, "Systemdenken und Kommunikationswissenschaft" [Systems thinking and communications], *Publizistik* 14 (1969), pp. 185-206.

[3] Manfred Rühl, *Die Zeitungsredaktion als organisiertes soziales System* [The newsroom as an organized social system] (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1969; revised edition Fribourg / Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1979).

[Journalism and society].[4] Now, for re-reading *Geschichte des deutschen Journalismus,* I took up a perspective by incongruity.[5]

Perspective by incongruity is an epistemological technique treading new paths for sensemaking, not intended at the beginning of research.[6] From this new position, I observed that Robert Prutz designed journalism *and* democracy as a societal co-production within the normative framework of a constitutional monarchy. The period of examination he named *literary journalism* bridging the time between the Lutheran reformation and the middle of the 19th Century. The period was classified with the help of a *theory of stages* [*Stufentheorie*], a meta-theory popular with the German Historical School of Economics.[7] Prutz distinguished three stages of literary journalism he tagged *theological-scholarly*, *belletristic-critical*, and p*hilosophical-politica*l. And the author maintained that literary journalism was uttering timely themes, public moods, and public opinion. In respect to society, Prutz defined journalism as its literary diary, producing *the public* [*die Öffentlichkeit*]. *Freedom of the press* (then spelled *Preßfreiheit*) was understood as a democratic freedom held responsible for the growth of the a*utonomy of the mind* ["Autonomie des Geistes"], and *the infinite legitimacy of the individual* ["die unendliche Berechtigung des Individuums"].

Of course, this pioneering approach has its shortcomings. Like all generic descriptions, the text does not enable to formulate researchable questions for conducting empirical analysis. In fact, the book explains very little. However, *Geschichte des deutschen Journalismus* is the first thorough conception of journalism as a social entity in a democratic monarchy, as a system of public communication's societal circulation. It is astonishing that neither present day journalism textbooks nor journalism research literature do discuss this macro-systemic text.[8]

In 1958, when the School of Public Relations and Communications at Boston University celebrated its tenth anniversary, Harold D. Lasswell presented the key address entitled *Communications as an emerging discipline.* Provided with free fantasy and operating with "maddening methods" (Heinz Eulau), Lasswell was already a famous interdisciplinarist. He began his speech as follows: "No change in the academic world has been more characteristic of the age than the discovery of communication as a field of research, teaching, and professional employment […] The university system of the United States is more flexible in adapting itself to new intellectual interests than corresponding institutions abroad." As to the contribution of

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[4] Manfred Rühl*, Journalismus und Gesellschaft. Bestandsaufnahme und Theorieentwurf* [Journalism and society. Inventory and a theoretical design] (Mainz: v. Hase und Koehler, 1980).

[5] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and change. An anatomy of purpose* (1935). With an introduction by Hugh Dalziel Duncan. 2nd edition (Indianapolis, New York: Bobbs-Merill, 1965), pp. 69 – 163.

[6] For historical examples see Manfred Rühl, "Ist eine Allgemeine Kommunikationswissenschaft möglich? Eine Autopolemik"[Is General Communications possible? An autopolemic], *Medien und Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 52 (2004), pp. 183–185.

[7] Karl Knies, Albert Schäffle and Karl Bücher are noted members of the Historical School of Economics, contributing to emerging Communications. See Hanno Hardt, *Social Theories of the Press. Early German & American Perspectives*. Forword by James W. Carey (Beverley Hills, London: Sage, 1979).

[8] Recently, the book was reviewed again by Michael Schmolke in Christina Holtz-Bacha & Arnulf Kutsch, eds., *Schlüsselwerke für die Kommunikationswissenschaft* [Key works for Communications] (Wiesbaden: WV, 2002), pp. 356-359.

journalism to communications as an academic discipline, Lasswell argues: "One might legitimately ask why the lead was not taken by schools of journalism […] The answer, I belief, is not difficult. At the time they were trade schools [Berufsschulen, M.R.] in outlook. Although affiliated with universities they were marginal members of the commonwealth of scholars."[9]

Today, common sense conceives journalism as an institution for the production and transmission of factual news. This was not the case at the end of the 17th century, when the Germans were ruled in an absolutist manner, and early journalism research focused on *reading the newspapers and the journals*.[10] *Kaspar Stieler*, a well educated language and literature scholar, working in many European countries, but outside the university system, plead for everybody's reading or reading from the newspaper.[11] *Christian Thomasius*, a professor of law and philosopher of Enlightenment, authored a new philosophy of science,[12] and he coordinated in his *SittenLehre* [Ethics] the concepts of communication, man and society.[13] Thomasius edited a *scholarly journal* [*Gelehrte Zeitschrift*] in German, not any longer in Latin. The University of Leipzig in the Electorate of Saxony was dominated by a scholastic Protestantism, banning Thomasius from teaching and writing. He found academic refuge at the newly founded Brandenburg-Prussian University of Halle, just 35 km away, were Thomasius (and *Johann Peter Lud(e)wig*) introduced reading scholarly journals into courses and lectures.[14] Some eighty years later, *August Ludwig Schlözer*, a professor of political science at the University of Göttingen, and co-founder of half a dozen empirical disciplines, became the protagonist of *academic newspaper reading*.[15]

Only at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, there was a growing interest in *training and education* in the *production journalism* at the universities of Heidelberg (1895), Zürich (1903)

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[9] Harold D. Lasswell, "Communications as an emerging discipline", *AV Communication Review* 6 (1958), pp. 245-254.

[10] Manfred Rühl, "Zeitunglesen und die Lesbarkeit der Welt" [Newspaper reading and the readability of the world] in Heinz Bonfadelli & Priska Bucher, eds., *Lesen in der Mediengesellschaft. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung* [Reading in media society. State and perspectives for research. (Zürich: Verlag Pestalozzianum, 2002), pp. 82-96; Manfred Rühl, *Publizieren. Eine Sinngeschichte der öffentlichen Kommunikation* [Publicizing. A history of public communication's sensemaking] (Opladen, Wiesbaden: WV, 1999).

[11] Kaspar Stieler: *Zeitungs Lust und Nutz*. Vollständiger Neudruck der Orginalausgabe von 1695, hrsg. von Gert Hagelweide. [Newspaper's fancy and benefit. Complete reprint of the original of 1695, Gert Hagelweide, ed..] (Bremen: Schünemann, 1969).

[12] Christian Thomasius, *Die neue Erfindung einer wohlgegründeten und für das gemeine Wesen höchstnöthigen Wissenschaft* (1692) [The new invention of a well formed scholarship urgently needed for the common good] *Kleine teutsche Schriften* (= Ausgewählte Werke, Bd. 22), Reprint (Hildesheim: Olms, 1994), pp.449-490.

[13] Christian Thomasius, *Einleitung zur SittenLehre. Von der Kunst vernünfftig und tugenhafft zu lieben ...* [Introduction to moral philosophy. Of the art to love reasonably and virtuously …] (1692), Reprint (Hildesheim u.a.: Olms, 1995). See also: Rühl, *Publizieren*, pp. 91-92.

[14] Manfred Rühl, „Des Journalismus vergangene Zukunft. Zur Emergenz der Journalistik" [On journalism's past future. The emerging of scholarly journalism] in Martin Löffelholz, ed., *Theorien des Journalismus*. [Theories of journalism], 2nd edition. (Wiesbaden: SV) (forthcoming).

[15] August Ludwig Schlözer: *Entwurf zu einem Reise-Collegio, nebst einer Anzeige seines Zeitungs-Collegii* [A draft of lectures on travelling, together with an announcement of lectures on newspapers] (Göttingen: Vandenhoek. 1777). For Schlözer's theory and practise of publicizing, see Rühl, *Publizieren*, 1999, pp.129 – 137.

and Leipzig (1915). Soon, in and outside Germany's university system, journalism training almost mushroomed.[16] However, we know very little about the rationality and effectiveness of this kind of training and education. But we do know, that at the time journalism education had its American take-off at some colleges and universities –not yet journalism research.[17] In Germany, journalism education discontinued, when in 1935 under the control of the National Socialist *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung and Propaganda* [Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda], the *Reichspresseschule* began to instruct journalists ideologically for work in newspapers. In 1939 the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht recruited soldiers for a *Propaganda-Kompanie (PK)*, to be trained on the job as military and wartime journalists.[18]

In the aftermath of World War II, when Germany was divided into an Eastern part, the German Democratic Republic, GDR (with a population of approximately 16 million people), and a Western part, the Federal Republic of Germany, FRG (with a population of some 62 million people), journalism and journalism education were going different ways.[19] In the GDR, a Soviet-Socialist type of journalism education was organized at the Sektion Journalistik of the University of Leipzig – derisively named "das rote Kloster" ["the red monastery"]. *Socialist Journalism* was defined as an important tool of the dictatorial policy of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), a Marxist-Leninist unity party, engineering journalists - in Lenin's understanding - as collective agitators, collective propagandists, and collective organizers.[20]

In the FRG until the 1970s, journalism training was the result of chances, depending on finding access to newsrooms outside the universities. A journalism of factual reporting [Tatsachenjournalismus] dominated in the sense of the motto of the *New York Times*: "All the news that's fit to print". When Publizistikwissenschaft [public communications] as one of the humanities [Geisteswissenschaften] began to be transformed into social scientific Communications [Kommunikationswissenschaft], some programs for *scholarly journalism* [Journalistik] were institutionalized, first at the universities of München (1973), Dortmund and Stuttgart-Hohenheim (both in 1976). A federal legislation [Hochschulrahmengesetz] enacted in 1976, provided a framework for more specific state legislation [Hochschulgesetze der Länder], requesting universities "to prepare students for professional activities". It was taken for granted that old Publizistikwissenschaft and new Kommunikationswissenschaft were the disciplines proper for teaching journalism. Thirty years ago, there was no researchable definition of

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[16] Bernd Blöbaum: *Journalismus als soziales System* [Journalism as a social system] (Opladen: WV, 1994), pp. 21-44.

[17] Everett M. Rogers & Steven H. Chaffee: *Communication and journalism from "Daddy" Bleyer to Wilbur Schramm. A palimpsest.* Journalism Monographs, 148 (1994); Everett M. Rogers, *A history of communication study. A biographical approach* (New York: Free Press; Oxford, Singapore, Sidney: Maxwell Macmillan 1994).

[18] Wolfgang Müsse, *Die Reichspresseschule - Journalisten für die Diktatur? Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Journalismus im Dritten Reich* [The Reichspresseschule – Journalists for dictatorship? A contribution to the history of journalism in the Third Reich] (München, New Providence: Saur, 1995).

[19] Manfred Rühl, "Journalism and journalism education in the two Germanies today" *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (1973), pp. 767-771.

[20] Emil Dusiska, ed., *Wörterbuch der sozialistischen Journalistik* [Dictionary of Socialist Journalistics] (Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, Sektion Journalistik, 1973).

journalism, and there was scarcely any journalism research to support a scholarly sound teaching.

2 *Realism* versus *Constructivism* – two scholarly paths of knowing journalism

Empirical thinking and operating is clear only, when the apparatus of explanation had its chance.[21] Building theories on journalistic problems, *epistemic theories* (epistemology) help to know, and *methodical theories* (methodology) help to control the conduct of inquiry. With these meta-theories, journalism scholars try to explain to other journalism scholars what they (or others) have done in journalism research, or what they could have done. Reviewing the content of a handbook entitled *Theorien des Journalismus* [*Theories of journalism*],[22] there are two epistemological tendencies of competing theories to be observed. We outline some of their features:

2.1 Realism

- Realists prefer *subject theories*, conceiving journalism as a sum of skilled individuals, factual media, clever techniques, and journalistic products, assuming that the observer is "a knowing I" ["ein wissendes Ich"]. Realists favour ontological "*What-is-questions*", asking for instance: "*What is journalism*?"
- Realists do not conduct journalism research as research on communication systems, explicitly. They do not compare journalistic problems in factual, social and timely dimensions as a theoretical context.
- If dealing with communication, realists - in an Aristotelian tradition - believe communication to be a matter of transportation. They operate with Watzlawicks behavioral hypothesis of communication as negation that "one cannot *not* communicate".[23]
- Despite the growing complexity of journalism as a special communication system in modern world society, realists wish to reduce journalism to individualistic models like *economic man* [*homo oeconomicus*],[24] that is to say, to an ideal type of a purely rational acting man, motivated by personal interests, using given means to maximize given

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[21] Gaston Bachelard, *La formation de l'esprit scientifique.Contribution à une psychoanalyse de la connaissance objective* (Paris: Librairie Philosophic J. Vrin, 1938), cited from the German translation *Die Bildung des wissenschaftlichen Geistes. Beitrag zur Psychoanalyse der objektiven Erkenntnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 46.

[22] Martin Löffelholz, ed.: *Theorien des Journalismus. Ein diskursives Handbuch* [Theories of journalism. A discursive handbook] (Wiesbaden: WV, 2000).

[23] Paul Watzlawick / Janet H. Beavin & Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of human communication* (New York: Norton, 1967), pp. 48–51.

[24] Stephan Ruß-Mohl, "Arrivederci Luhmann? Vorwärts zu Schumpeter! Transparenz und Selbstreflexivität: Überlegungen zum Medienjournalismus und zur PR-Arbeit von Medienunternehmen" [Bye-bye Luhmann? Onwards to Schumpeter! Transparency and self-reflexivity. Considerations to media journalism and to public relations in media enterprises], in Hermann Fünfgeld & Claudia Mast, eds., *Massenkommunikation. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*, Festschrift for Gerhard Maletzke (Opladen: WV, 1997), pp. 193-211.

ends. In their research concepts, definitions, variables and data are considered to be given realities.

- When scholarly realists interview practical journalists, and when they question them about what they know, or what they belief to know about journalism, realists insinuate that answers of practical journalists are researchable [wissenschaftsfähig]. In fact, realists are drawing statistical conclusions, assuming to provide empirical evidence for journalistic problems.
- Despite the epistemic and methodical differences when researchers and practitioners view journalism as a macro-system, in textbooks, even in research literature, realist authors put research knowledge on equal footing with the subjective opinions of journalists, especially the opinions of "Grand Old Men (and Women) of Journalism".
- In journalism research, realists seldom distinguish sufficiently between news and informations, media and technologies, individuals and organizations, journalist's working roles (in newsrooms) and professional roles (in unions). They intermingle communication with action and behavior, as well as with features of physical, technological, biochemical, neuronal, animal, meteorological or other kinds of "communication".
- When analysing newsrooms in operation (or other types of communication organizations), realists are tending to ignore the fact, that one hundred years of organizational research has found special organizational structures like working roles, professional roles, organizational norms and legal norms, professional ethics, practical conventions, trust and confidence, and special decision-making programs, "well stocked" for stabilizing organizational communication.

2.2 Constructivism

- When inquiring into complex human communication problems, constructivists operate regularly on system/environmental differences as epistemic groundwork. And constructivists prefer "*How-to-questions*", asking for instance: "*How can we perceive journalism, although there is no admittance to its reality outside journalism theory?*" Constructivists turn away from the "knowing I" as an unquestioned observer of journalism's reality, to operate with "systems theory" instead. Since systems theory became a catchall concept for different denotations and different levels of journalistic analysis, constructivists choose a system/environment difference, turning towards a reality that consists of solely self-referential systems of journalism and their operations, to be observed empirically.
- In each and every case of research, constructivists do distinguish a system's interior as a *marked space* from an uncertain societal exterior as *unmarked space*,[25] to form a unity in difference. This concept calls to mind the Prutz journalism/democracy-co-production, expressed by the Beatles: "Your inside is out, and your outside is in." Inside/outside-differentiations are a "law" for the functioning of further research of journalism performance in some context of world society.
- In modern world society, journalism, public relations, advertisement and propaganda are forming a complex network of autonomous persuasion systems, with tendencies to

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[25] Spencer Brown, G[eorge] (1979): Laws of Form (1969). Reprint. New York: Julian Press.

manipulation, reconstructed as *Everyday Public Communication* [*Alltagspublizistik*].[26] Functional analysis differentiates Everyday Public Communication, specifying problems of persuasion and manipulation functionally, without isolating and dissolving these systems. Formulating a special function for establishing the world's journalism system needs a restructuring of the system within the EPC-network.

- Constructivists analyse *journalistic productions* in a paradigm for organizational theories, and *journalistic receptions* (reading, listening, viewing, buying, subscribing etc.) in a paradigm for family theories and household theories. Producing and receiving journalism is transferring the functional complexity of world journalism into the complexities of organizations, families, and households – not to forget markets of procurement and distribution as societal institutions for journalism. Societal resources for journalism are in short supply, i.e. they are short of valid money, economized time, public attention, qualified work, public trust, and confidence in the future. These societal resources have to be obtained in markets, just as well as journalistic products have to be distributed in forms of markets.

- Constructivists understand journalism systems as self-referential systems of persuasion and manipulation in a world society, without a world government, a world parliament, or a world supreme court. But the world's journalism system reproduces itself recursively within, and not outside world society.

- For constructivists, real communication is improbable.[27] For them communication is possibly becoming real, when communication elements, i.e. restricting themes, sensemaking informations, arousing follow-up communication [Anschlusskommunikation] do synthesized emerging communication reality.[28] Human communication is a state of affairs sui generis arising from a synthesis of selections, variations, and reconstructions of communication elements.[29] Communication does not target constantly towards *agreement* [Verständigung], as Habermasians claim,[30] because human communication is always imperfect. "Only angels communicate absolutely."[31] In its ambiguous semantics human communication offers to journalism many chances to inform, to entertain, to convince, to irritate, to ironize, to persuade, to manipulate, to express absurdities - and a diversity and variety of "agreements".

- A constructivist definition: "(Re)conceptualizing communication, talking or writing of communication, that is, communication of communication, is what we communication

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[26] Manfred Rühl, "Alltagspublizistik. Eine kommunikationswissenschaftliche Wiederbeschreibung" [Everyday public communication. A communications scholarly redescription], *Publizistik* 46 (2001), pp. 249-276.

[27] Niklas Luhmann, "Die Unwahrscheinlichkeit der Kommunikation" [The improbability of communication], in Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung 3* [Sociological Enlightenment 3] (Opladen: WV, 1981), pp. 25-34.

[28] Manfred Rühl, "Humankommunikation und menschliche Erfahrung. Zum Umbau von Kernbegriffen in der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft" [Human communication and human experience. On reconstructing key concepts in present day society], in Manfred Rühl, ed., *Kommunikation und Erfahrung. Wege anwendungsbezogener Kommunikationsforschung* [Communication and experience. Paths of applied communication research], (Nürnberg: Verlag der Kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Forschungsvereinigung, 1987), pp. 5-66.

[29] Niklas Luhmann, "What is communication?", *Communication Theory*, 2 (1992), pp. 251-258.

[30] Roland Burkart, *Kommunikationswissenschaft. Grundlagen und Problemfelder* [Communications. Basics and fields of problems]. 3rd edition (Wien, Köln: Böhlau, 1998), p. 26.

[31] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and change*, p. xlix.

scholars do",[32] does not claim to posses a fixed knowledge of journalism, nor fixed standards for empirical control. There are not even fixed expectations in order to react definitely in respect to preserved journalism theories. Scholarly journalism research progresses *against* former knowledge on journalism. When choosing perspectives by incongruity,[33] scholars have to control their apparatus of explanation,[34] to formulate researchable problems of journalism. My *thesis* is: By way of communicating communication, scholarly journalism research has a chance to make journalistic problems of world society *more transparent* to other researchers, and to "the rest of world society", than any other communication system can.

3 Globalizing Journalism Research?

When journalism researchers say "system", a kind of unity is taken for granted. For many it is obvious that journalism is a kind of "communication". We have no intentions to engender any doubts. But we shall not accept an epistemological dualism between *systems theory* and *subject theory* in journalism research. It is common use to atomize the journalism system into general subjects (newsmen, gatekeepers, "our reader"), and into special subjects (paparazzi, spin-doctors, "noble pens" ["Edelfedern"], "the citizen") and the like. Journalism systems reduced to journalists make sense to common sense. *But subjects are not researchable [nicht wissenschaftsfähig] in journalism*, because the concepts of subjects do not permit to test the identity of journalism systems in their manifold social, factual and timely dimensions, in reference to politics, economy, law, ethics, and other environmental systems of world society.

Unacceptable for journalism research is the practise to operate with "communication", "behavior" and "action" as comparable journalistic faculties, or the usage to operate with gatekeeper research, newsroom research, media research, the research of attitudes, motives and opinions as theories on the same level of explanation. Forcing a variety of day-to-day experiences with journalism into scholarly journalism research, declaring the exercise a success when, with the help of short-term empirical projects a couple of variables are put through a sophisticated statistical grinder, selling the product as scholarly knowledge on journalism - this is not a convincing process of challenging questions on journalism's past, present or future problems. Considering journalism research as a unity in difference to the journalism system of world society, analyzing the productions and receptions of journalism in reference to changing societal environments, it does not transpire from the discussion that realists and constructivists are talking of the same problems, especially when they discuss *journalism in an era of globalization*.

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[32] Klaus Krippendorff, "A second-order cybernetics of otherness", *Systems Research* 13, (1996), pp. 311-328.

[33] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and change*, pp. 69–189.

[34] Gaston Bachelard, *Bildung*, pp. 46-50