Organizing Husserl

On the Phenomenological Foundations of Luhmann's Systems Theory

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ABSTRACT Whereas the voluminous work of Niklas Luhmann (1927–98) can be considered as a major focus of discussions in theoretical sociology in the German-speaking world, it has only been translated sporadically and remains widely unknown in the English-speaking world. This review article provides a general introduction to Luhmann's systems theory. Section I embeds systems theory in a broader philosophical context and traces its particular legacy. It demonstrates, in contrast to Luhmann's rhetoric of starting afresh, that his theory inherits and reformulates the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In Section II, Luhmann's basic concept of system is developed, modeled on his early understanding of formal organization. The epistemological and ontological uncertainty that lies beneath the necessity of organizing proves to be the raison d'être of social systems in general. Finally, in Section III, the problem of uncertainty is translated into a situation of double contingency which, according to Luhmann, makes up the core of every form of socialization. It is shown how systems theory provides an alternative to conceiving society as being either normatively or rationally constituted.

KEYWORDS double contingency, German philosophy, history of ideas, organization, theory of society, trust

For Heinrich Popitz

In his repertoire of what an educated European on the threshold of the third millennium ought to know, Dieter Schwanitz (1999: 522) lists Niklas Luhmann's *Social Systems* (1995) as a work for which no prior reading whatsoever is necessary,

since it is a completely new proposal for interpreting the world. This character-ization of the book, or of systems theory, if not simply nonsense, is certainly exaggerated and misleading. Most people who attempt to study *Social Systems* without prior preparation will soon lay the text aside as unintelligible. This is all the more likely for a non-German-speaking public that has had little or no contact with systems theory. Admittedly, Luhmann himself is not entirely without blame for his lack of international recognition. His style accommodates neither the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxons nor the elegance of the French, his complex arguments refuse to be knitted into tidy syllogisms and there is no sacrifice of intellectual rigor to the beauty of language. Nevertheless, Luhmann's language and style should not prevent substantive engagement with systems theory, especially since his work offers an alternative both to normative social theories and the theories of rational choice that are increasingly coming to dominate the social sciences as a whole.

This article is therefore directed primarily to a public with no mastery of German and is intended to forge access to the hitherto closed landscape of systems theory.[1] While this means that I will not be able to remain continuously on the level of theoretical abstraction which Luhmann attained and claimed as the only adequate terrain for his thought, it also permits me to keep my distance from the trench warfare being waged within systems theory[2] and to focus only on the essential pillars of the theory. Thus, I do not begin by asserting, together with Luhmann, 'that there are systems' – the opening statement of the initial chapter of his first[3] major work, *Social Systems* (1984a: 30).[4] Instead, I step back and ask why it makes sense to speak of systems at all.

This article proceeds in three stages. Section I begins with some remarks regarding the historical context of the theory and the claims and inner coherence of Luhmann's work. In Section II, I explain the essential features of systems theory, taking the formal organization of social interrelationships as an example. Without restricting the application of the systems concept to objects other than organizations, I show how – and to what extent – his thought is indebted to this prototype. Finally, in Section III, I organize into themes Luhmann's answer to the classic question of how society is possible. I demonstrate how he proceeds from the primordial social situation of a double contingency to develop a systems concept that avoids the alternatives of (utilitarian) barter theory and normative constitution of the social realm.

I

Difficulties in coming to an understanding of systems theory are naturally no argument against its originality. On the contrary: if *Social Systems* really were, as Schwanitz (1999: 522) maintains, an entirely new approach, this would cause a lot of head shaking precisely because of its novelty. However, when one studies the early writings of Luhmann, the fog seems to lift and one detects a relationship

to the classical tradition beyond his references to the at least sociologically rather marginal authors such as Varela, Maturana, von Förster or Spencer Brown, whom he increasingly quotes in his later writings. I am very reluctant to dispute Luhmann's originality, but I find that originality less in a creatio ex nihilo than in his integration of various strands of theory into a single paradigm. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, following the failure of German idealism, he tries once again to elevate the world and everything possible within it to a system. And, similar to Hegel, Luhmann's work is impressive because of its consistency and systematic coherence. Of course there are breaks, inconsistencies and shifts in the theoretical arrangement. It would be more than remarkable if this were not the case in a literary production that spans 40 years, some 50 books (thus far) and 500 articles.[5]

Luhmann's systems theory is nevertheless cut from a single mould; he remains true to his basic assumption that there are *empirical* systems which must find their place within a hypercomplex environment, and find it specifically through building internal or ordered complexity. In this sense, the 'autopoietic turn' proclaimed in *Social Systems* – according to which, systems themselves generate and relationize the elements of which they consist, relate only to themselves and are unable to reach out to their environment instead of being dependent on any informational input – is less radical than it claims to be. It is, to borrow a term from Jürgen Habermas (1985: 430), the 'metabiological' garb and revaluation of an insight important for systems theory in its entirety and already emphasized in the early works. Social situations as such, even and especially as an accidental meeting or association of random individuals, develop a law or dynamics of their own which binds the participants but also provides them with the opportunity to concentrate on the resolution of specific problems. Autopoiesis is a radicalization of the idea that anyone participating in a game necessarily obliges himself or herself to abide by its rules. This insight into the power of the social both to order itself and impose organization gives the motive for adopting the concept of autopoiesis developed outside sociology (Zeleny, 1981). Luhmann's central question is not, or at least not initially: How is social order possible? Instead, he asks: How is it possible, in view of the *increasing* complexity or 'negentropy' of social processes, to maintain and perhaps increase variability? The supposedly new concept of autopoiesis only radicalizes what was already implicit in the theory from the start.

It is not difficult to see that Luhmann's empirical systems concept, in contrast to the purely analytic concept of Parsons, gives rise to difficulties regarding borders and identification. While it is quite simple to identify an informal organization, such as a group of smokers, that withdraws into its usual corner during lunchtime as a particular kind of system, it is not always easy to recognize, for instance, a work of art as such. Recall the now famous cleaning woman who took Beuys' lumps of fat for just that – and fulfilled her duty. Luhmann is aware of the problem of borders, but he believes that he solves it by

shifting systems theory from action to communication, or to the concept of autopoiesis. Social systems consist of communication and not only action because social action achieves its unity only in interaction with others. In other words, the decision as to what is an act is based on communication. More precisely, what is interpreted by others as a conscious, goal-oriented intrusion into the world qualifies as an act. The autopoietic aspect lies in the fact that this interactive interpretation of an act makes some sort of positive or negative reaction on the part of the interpreter likely, even if it does not compel such a reaction (Luhmann, 1984a, ch. 4, esp. 225–36). Society exists where there is communication; it *is* the enactment or autopoiesis of communication. And a social system is nothing more than a self-conditioning communication network oriented about a thematic difference. Art then becomes everything that is described or grasped by applying the evaluative categories of the beautiful and the ugly. Economics is found wherever the issue is one of paying or not paying. Initially this account sounds plausible, but on closer inspection it gives rise to complications. If we accept the claim that it is the subsequent or, better, retroactive identification of communication which constitutes a system – in other words, separates it from its environment – then parents paying an allowance to their children will belong to the economic system, but automobile manufacturers or coal-mines will not. This systems concept, while certainly unrealistic when measured against the agents' understanding of themselves and their situation, is in fact not without empirical justification. Nevertheless, the circumstance in which Luhmann conceives systems as communication networks that are realized independently of the definitions and intentions of the people participating in them motivates a considerable share of the criticism of systems theory. But does the discomfort, unabated since Freud, with the idea that human beings are only to a very limited extent masters of themselves suffice to reject a theory attempting to understand them as entwined in social pressures?

In spite of his rhetoric of starting anew, Luhmann not only stands firmly within the tradition of classical sociology, but also and above all – much to the surprise of most systems theory novices – within that of the modern *philosophy of consciousness*. One could cite numerous authors whose concepts, discoveries or theses have flowed more or less directly into Luhmann's thought. But one philosopher among them stands out in particular: Edmund Husserl. Even if other genealogies are possible, one can hardly overestimate the importance of Husserl's phenomenology for Luhmann (1996). I can distinguish two levels of influence. First, Luhmann extends Husserl's project, bequeathing legitimacy not only on reflection or conscious action but also on the *experience* of the world. Second, his analyses of the constitution of the social follow directly upon the problem posed by Husserl as to whether and, if so, how, intersubjectivity can be understood. I return to this second point in Section III later. Here I wish to recall in a more general way what it was that phenomenology was concerned with.

The dominant philosophical school in Germany at the end of the 19th century was Neokantianism (Köhnke, 1991). Regardless of differences in detail, the Neokantians all sought to defend philosophy as an inquiry either into the good life or the ontological question of what exists, against the practical, technology-related knowledge and, above all, the experimental method of the natural sciences. It was assumed that there was an insurmountable ontological split dividing the world into a realm of facts (or of being) and a realm of values (or of morals). The concepts of the natural sciences were systematized in order that they might be juxtaposed against a method directed towards understanding mental, cultural or social connections. The intention was to supply the social sciences with what Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* had accomplished for the natural sciences. Nevertheless, there was, from the start, an obvious defensive moment in these efforts both in the assumption that nature comprised an ontological realm distinct from culture and in the admission corresponding to this thesis that the social sciences could never achieve the rigor and precision attained by the explanations of natural science.

Husserl sought to overcome this self-imposed restraint on the part of philosophy, its negative dependence on the natural sciences and, above all, its retreat from the 'facts of experience', which intensified with Kant's successors. Husserl's project was termed 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science' and his battle cry ran: 'Back to the things themselves!' He sought to undo the Neokantian dichotomy between being and the 'ought', bringing to light the rootedness of humanity in the world that was presupposed to be foundational by all science. Phenomenology was to 'disclose the meaning that the world has for all of us *prior to all philosophy* and *exclusively on the basis of our experience*' (Husserl, 1992: 155, emphasis added). Husserl initially withdraws from the claim of (natural) science to provide a causal explanation of the what-it-is of the world by placing things or events in a relationship of necessary condition and result, and seeks instead to describe, or descriptively disclose, how the world is given to human beings. Phenomenology thereby becomes participant in and bearer of a re-orientation from the concept of substance to that of function which was described by Cassirer (1980). As such, it represents the modern shift from the *what* to the *how*. It thus becomes – despite Husserl's intentions – not at all the contradiction, much less *the* critique of the mode of access to the world by modern technology and natural science, but rather its fitting expression.

Husserl begins with a renewal of Cartesian doubt: it is not self-*reflection* that provides the certainty on the basis of which alone the world discloses itself to the subject, but self-*perception*. It is therefore perception or a conscious tracking and retracing of perception that provides the base upon which Husserl's 'First Philosophy' must build. First philosophy recovers and makes us conscious of what happens all the time *by itself* in consciousness. It does so not in the psychoanalytic sense of making us aware of suppressed, unconscious desires, but by way of the

continuously enacted *constitution* of the world as consciousness. Setting perception as absolute is, on the one hand, a radicalization of Cartesian doubt since it begins on a pre-reflexive level. On the other hand, the existence of the world is not doubted in the slightest: on the contrary, it is a solid given, and 'bracketed in' only for purposes of human self-enlightenment. In other words, phenomenology can afford its doubt only to the extent that it has unshakable faith that the world is as it is and is not subject to human whim.

On the proximate side of the 'real' world, in the realm of methodological doubt, consciousness finds no basis for distinguishing between what is given as real and what is given as appearance. Reality that does not appear for consciousness is every bit as unreal for that consciousness as what does appear real. Phenomena comprise the sole reality at our disposal. For us as intentional beings, i.e. as desiring, wishing, thinking or otherwise world-related, the phenomena are always *something*. There is no empty desiring. We always want something definite. Every intentional act is, beyond a mere 'movement' of consciousness, the articulation of a piece of reality. Nevertheless, Husserl believes that he can go beyond the private presencing of the world. On the one hand – 'Back to the things themselves!' – one can penetrate to a thing's essence by pursuing a course of 'free variation', playing over the various possibilities of what a thing could be as against how it presently appears. On the other hand, and more important, it is in principle possible to disclose the structure of the world – the de facto reduction of subjective perspectives to a single reality – by analyzing the structures of the consciousness that support it. The fact that Husserl was not able to bring this demonstration to its conclusion (Schutz, 1966) – and indeed, scarcely could have succeeded at it due to the monadic constitution of consciousness – does not alter the fact that, after Husserl, it has hardly been possible to disclose reality as anything but constructed.

And what, one may ask, does all of this have to do with Luhmann? A great deal, since virtually every sentence in my cursory overview of Husserl's phenomenology may be found, reformulated, as a statement within systems theory. Like Husserl, Luhmann claims a universal applicability insofar as he seeks to overcome the separation of spheres of being and to refound the sciences – not only sociology – by retracing them as a conscious and systematic reconstruction of a constituting of reality that has already been carried out subconsciously and communicatively. Like Husserl, he seeks to rehabilitate experience and perception as the human being's basic link to reality, beyond which we cannot go. And, ironically, like phenomenology, systems theory ends in an abstraction divorced from direct perceivability. As for Husserl, so too for Luhmann, reality *is* a construction or a substrate whose underlying object-relatedness or validity is measured by criteria of coherence and consistency that are internal to the construction, but not by objective resistance. This does not mean that reality simply tolerates every imposition upon it, but it does mean that resistance always appears to have its

locus within communication. Melting polar icecaps would not be a problem if people didn't talk about them (Luhmann, 1989a).

What is real, or effective, are the phenomena or communications. Real is what the society regards as real because and to the extent that society talks about it. Like Husserl, Luhmann rejects the claims to a causal explanation of 'social facts' brought to bear upon the social sciences even today in favor of free variation, of description from alternative perspectives. Admittedly, he does so not in order to penetrate to their true essence, but – within the communicatively generated illusions of reality, it must be noted – with an eye to discovering functional substitutes or equivalences. Luhmann turns Husserl's involuntarily implemented amplification of the consciousness of contingency – that it is as it is *but could also be otherwise* – to positive effect, since what is at stake in practical life is not a grasping of essences but the self-assertion of both the individual and the group within a changing environment, the 'anchoring of beings in relation to other possibilities' (Luhmann, 1970a: 47). The relational problem of his functionalism (viewed from the standpoint of a system) is the hypercomplexity of the world (or environment), i.e. the fundamental superabundance of options for perception and action that is again enforced by the medium of meaning as brought into focus by psychological and social systems in contradistinction to other types of systems such as organisms or machines. What we experience or deal with, however, is always merely a segment of the world. Forming a system, separating out an island of experiencing and acting within the sea of meanings, is therefore equivalent to 'reducing complexity'.

I have traced a reversal of phenomenology within Luhmann's thought that has important consequences, without naming it explicitly. Luhmann speaks of systems, whereas Husserl writes of consciousness. It is helpful to keep this conceptual shift in mind so as to gain clarity regarding the origins of the concept of system.[6] At the same time, systems that make use of meaning need not necessarily be a consciousness; they could just as well be a self-grounding communications network closed within itself *like* consciousness, e.g. interaction between persons who are present, as opposed to a formal organization. The system concept is kept so broad that the most disparate of phenomenal realms can be compared with the aid of a common language of theory. Although comparison is the basic form of all understanding (Lévi-Strauss, 1966), the comparability of phenomena does not, of course, assert an equality of their essences. If it is possible to name a relational problem that is common to all the various forms of systems, they may be substituted for one another (certainly in thought, but sometimes also in practice) with respect to their problem-solving capacity. And this relational problem is termed 'reduction of complexity'.

For social systems we can also say that the problem is one of stabilizing and integrating expectations regarding conduct. Negatively expressed, we are not concerned with the avoidance of social contradictions, but with anticipating and

softening disappointments. Formal organizations provide an outstanding opportunity for studying this mechanism.

II

Both Luhmann's first individually published monograph which appeared in 1964 (1999a) and his first posthumous book (2000b) are devoted to the formal organization. Apart from these works, there are numerous articles and sections of works addressing the same topic. Luhmann is fascinated by organizations, or rather by what they accomplish. *In Praise of Routine* is the title of one of his early works (1972a). It is therefore reasonable to imagine systems as organizations or administrative apparatus in order to gain an initial understanding of what precisely a system is and how it functions. Anyone who has spent hours waiting in line at some government agency or other only to learn from a civil servant that the most important application form is missing will have no trouble agreeing that systems tend to be sealed off from their environment. One can understand the notion that systems are autopoietic, i.e. self-generating and self-sustaining, and (are able to) deal only with themselves and their own views of their environment, if one thinks of the prescribed routines in government agencies, the circulating and stamping of documents, the self-nourishing power of procedural errors – or if one reads Kafka. These are, of course, only crutches to aid in understanding. They are no substitute for serious engagement with Luhmann's concept of system, but should serve to facilitate our approach.[7]

One thing that helps our understanding is the fact that an organization represents a system not only for the observer, but also for the people who act within it. At the same time, an organization is not the only system (much less the life world) of its members. These members are also citizens, have families, are regulars at a local bar or belong to a sports club. The organization binds and places demands on its members only in very specific respects. The distinguishing characteristic of a formal organization is that it formalizes membership. Neither in interactive systems nor in larger social systems are there declared members: a person belongs to the group that stands around together during breaks, or the society in which he or she lives. One can withdraw from the former group simply by walking away, but cannot withdraw from the latter at all. In contrast, one joins an organization. Because members freely opt for membership, the organization has a degree of freedom in choosing its purposes and the methods of realizing them that can be achieved neither in interactive nor in societal systems. More can be demanded of members of an organization than of friends or of partners to a contract precisely because the member has assumed the obligation to perform various duties as not yet specified in detail. Formalizing membership also results in the double advantage that, in joining, a member knows the commitment into which he or she is entering (even if the concrete details remain unspecified), and that, from the perspective of the organization, otherwise diffuse expectations

regarding conduct can be broken down, expressed and channelled into particular positions. In organizations, a new 'civilized' style of conduct comes to predominate that no longer requires full personal responsibility for everything that one does, but requires indirect consideration for things that are done at other locations. While this shift results in responsibility being passed off onto others, it also permits objectivized rather than personalized decisions.

A membership role can be generalized temporally, socially and materially.[8] Temporally, this means that expectations associated with membership remain in force even when they are in fact disappointed. Materially, generalization means that the member, as member, shoulders an entire package of expectations and that instructions relating to a vague description of duties will be carried out even if they are unusual, as long as they originate from an authorized source.[9] Lastly, socially, generalization means that individual members accept their roles in relation to one another. A member takes over a procedure from his or her colleagues and processes it further not because he or she is a nice person, but because he or she is recognized as the holder of a position. In this way, a structure of positions, a context for activities and a communications network or an assignment order arises that endures independently of the particular individuals – in short, a system. Moreover, when it succeeds, the generalization of expectations regarding the conduct of members – which will not occur overnight, as the studies of Elias or Foucault on the process of civilization show – brings with it the further, shared expectation that the organizations themselves will change. They take on a life of their own, not only in the sense that they exist independently of individual members, but also in the sense that they develop in and of themselves.

Organizations therefore accomplish the remarkable task of coordinating the conduct and expectations of individuals and, at the same time, remaining oriented towards social transformation. Since Max Weber, organizations have indeed been regarded, if not in practice, certainly with respect to the ideal, as the highest expression of rational dominance. They are rational in that: (i) they seek to translate dominance over human beings into the administration of tasks, so that they essentially seek to eliminate domination and replace it with the necessity that arises from the affairs to be administered; and (ii) they succeed in distributing tasks and duties in such a way that every position makes a defined contribution towards the realization of the organization's goals. Both of these motives are shared by Luhmann. He, too, is concerned with de-politicizing interrelated actions and increasing efficiency through forced specialization. Nevertheless, he also sees that the rationalization of bureaucracies cannot be measured in sums of money, and that it gives rise to structural problems which the traditional sociology of organizations interprets as irrational resistance (Luhmann, 1972b).

Classical organization theory considers anything contradictory – wrangling over authority among officers or departments, for instance – as unjustified, and believes such contradictions should be eliminated. Rationalization entails smoothing chains of authority and procedures so that all participants bring neither more

nor less than their share to the processing and resolution of a particular problem. The secret, or even public, paradigm of the rational organization is the machine, in which no gear or spring is superfluous. Everything else is regarded as a technical error to be rectified by technical means. One does not have be a critic of planning as such to see that this model does not correspond to reality. On the other hand, it is a prejudice not supported by history to suppose that, in themselves, organizations tend to become rigid and resist change; seldom before has there been so much change and experimentation with change as in the societies of the last 200 years, with their huge modern bureaucracies. However, the evidence certainly shows that there is trench warfare within organizations, that corruption is not merely a phenomenon of the third world, that there are conflicts in goals and that budgets are sooner wasted than utilized.

Can organizations thus be regarded as mere forerunners of, or rather as prerequisite to, today's functionally differentiated society to the extent that both the political unification of large territories and their formal unity under law were brought about with the aid of efficient bureaucracies? And have these bureauc-racies now become obsolete in that there are markets, a form superior to the organization, to combine coordination with variation? In fact, the question is being posed today from the perspective of a radical free market economics – or of economic liberalism in the European sense of the word – as to why we should still entrust the resolution of any problems whatsoever to organizations, rather than leaving them to the market. In practice, too, processes bearing the labels deregulation, decentralization and outsourcing are directed towards the elimina-tion of the organization. Even the state is not spared the process of privatization. Everywhere, tasks that were previously the prerogative of the sovereign are being turned over to the highest bidder. Railroads, key industries and the post office are all examples of services previously monopolized by the state that are now being run by private competitors. The question, then, is not whether but, rather, when the schools, the social security system, the police and – why not? – the military, the national mint and the courts of law will be entrusted to the open market.

It cannot be assumed that the problem of the legitimacy of organizations, conjured out of existence in this ultraliberal perspective, can in practice be eliminated from the world (Douglas, 1986). Quite apart from this, however, the fact remains that unquestioned liberalism overlooks the reason for the existence of organizations. The answer formulated within today's dominant neoclassical eco-nomic theory reads: because it is cheaper to employ people permanently or at least relatively long term than to postpone seeking and hiring them until they are needed (Coase, 1988). Unlike a buyer of labor, a company always has an eye on shifting circumstances. Now, what appears to be a critique of economic rationality in fact renders it, strictly speaking, absolute: because the decision for the organization and against the market is, for so-called transaction cost economics following in Coase's wake, nothing other than the result of a cost–benefit calculation. Nevertheless, we must take seriously Coase's intuition that there is a

correlation between organization and uncertainty. It is on the basis of this idea that Luhmann develops his organizations and systems concept (Luhmann, 1960; this text is perhaps the best introduction to systems theory from the pen of its founder). At the root of the question as to why there are organizations, we encounter the problem of uncertainty or unordered complexity. From here, in contrast to a perspective that elevates barter calculations to an absolute norm, it is possible to ask which deeper reason it might have that organizations resist their dissolution in market processes.

Luhmann takes over and radicalizes the idea of a limited and thereby procedural rationality that was introduced into administrative science by Herbert Simon (1962) but previously formulated by Arnold Gehlen (1952).[10] Requiring individuals and organizations to take account of the assumptions and consequences of their actions and decisions is to place too high a cognitive demand on them. From this *epistemological* basis it follows that there are no optimal solutions to problems, but only useful ones. A correct decision is one that makes subsequent actions possible. The best chances for improving the results of a restricted rational calculation are therefore to be found in introducing and integrating measuring and testing procedures and in standardizing decision-making processes while making room for revised or new forecast specifications.[11] Up to this point, Luhmann adds little to Simon. He radicalizes the latter's views, however, by insisting that uncertainty is not merely a cognitive problem but, due to the power of meaningful experiencing and acting to disclose and constitute reality, an *ontological* problem (Luhmann, 1988a: ch. 8). Every intrusion into the world generates consequences that could not be foreseen and perhaps remain undiscovered. In any case, however, it alters the conditions under which the invasion occurred (Arendt, 1958). These 'unintentional consequences of social action' can, but need not, remain 'inconsequential'. This is the reason why an organization can be rationalized only to a limited degree. A goal (of an organization) cannot be unproblematically broken down into a chain of means. Means and ends do not form a transitive order in which one poses no obstacle to the other and serves solely to fulfill that single purpose.

Organizations are primarily concerned with insulating areas of activity and decision-making criteria from each other. This is the only way they can act and make decisions at all. The attempt to fathom all the possible consequences of an action would result not in increased efficiency but in a standstill. The raison d'être for hierarchical structuring within an organization is therefore the same as that for the existence of the organization itself: it is always a matter of excluding alternatives and acting one-sidedly. The primary function of organizations, as of systems in general, is to reduce complexity, which means eliminating uncertainty and, at the same time, constructing an order for which there is no finished blueprint in the environment. And the primary act fulfilling this function is that of establishing a border which filters the environment for the system and makes the system calculable for its environment (or, more strictly speaking, for other systems

in that system's environment). This calculation cannot, of course, be performed in such a way that what goes on in the system can be understood, but it should make evident the significance and range of influence of its accomplishments. Somewhat cynically expressed, the first step towards solving a problem is creating a commission, and the ideal instruments for contact with its environment are the questionnaire and the definitive judgment.

In spite of all this, the differentiation and exclusion of other organizations themselves lead, in Luhmann's view, to subsequent problems that may perhaps be recognized but can no longer be resolved. In the first place, it becomes increasingly impossible – assuming it ever was possible – to regulate rampant growth of the systems and bring them into any sort of 'rational' order. A bureaucracy oriented towards the processing of partial problems presupposes that every independent administrative unit does what it should do, but because of this very autonomy – more specifically, because of the advantages resulting from this autonomy – it becomes increasingly difficult to propagate any sort of *volonté générale* or even an overall purpose. Second, even if a hierarchy is no longer presupposed, increased specialization gives rise to communicative hurdles between individual departments. For how should one office rely on the work of others, that is, relieve them of their decisions, if they no longer speak the same 'language', if what is being decided can no longer be mutually accepted as a presupposition for the decisions of each?

Both problems come up again in Luhmann's theory of society, leading to the thesis that the functionally differentiated society, articulated into partial systems such as politics, law and economy, no longer has a center from which it can be surveyed, let alone controlled. So, fully developed systems theory is not at all a social technology (Habermas, 1971, esp. 146–70, 221–38). On the contrary, it is an instrument, honed by observation of the strengths and weaknesses of administrative apparatus, for the description of modern society and its predecessors. As the evolution of organizations shows, the formation and differentiation of systems follow no particular path – except, perhaps, for the fact that they are always concerned with self-organization. They do not produce an adaptation to environmental forces, but, on the contrary, seek to interrupt causal connections between system and environment, and therefore do not lead of necessity – if at all – to equilibrium. Luhmann radicalizes this idea through his claim that social systems are only possible if they are autopoietic. Systems no longer close themselves off from their environment *in order to* pocket gains in specialization, but are closed *qua* constitution. Everything that happens outside a system, then, is mere noise. This escalation may require a theoretical balancing through the introduction of auxiliary constructions such as 'structural coupling' or 'interpenetration'[12] – or an appeal to the wonderful powers of organization[13] – in order to bring into view the obvious co-evolution and enduring feud among systems, their need for one another and their dysfunctional interferences. On the other hand, the very concept of autopoiesis makes it clear that the process of

evolutionary *maladaptation* of systems may have given rise to an irreparable *de-differentiating* of modern society. What interests us most of all here, however, is not so much where systems formation leads, but how it arises in the first place. An insight into this process will relativize to some extent Luhmann's gloomy diagnosis.

III

Systems theory lays claim to a theory of constitution. That is to say, it does not presuppose its object – society – as one that is already known, so that the sociologist 'only' needs to inspect it more closely, even if it does not call into doubt the sheer existence of society. Nevertheless, society in Luhmann's thought does not correspond to the Kantian thing in itself, of which one cannot say what properties it has independently of the forms of our perception, but must still be presupposed in order for cognition to have something to which it can relate at all. The thing in itself appears in Luhmann's thought as a hypothesis concerning reality. However, he thinks of society rather as the transcendental 'I' that enables itself, although with the dual distinction that society (as a whole) *cannot* become aware of itself, but *is* an empirical object. Strictly speaking, Luhmann makes *one* proposal as to how society *could* be understood as a self-enabling object, and then takes it as 'proof' of the viability of his proposal – which obviously cannot consist of society crying out: 'I have been recognized!' – that systems theory (or the sociologist observing society) occurs within it (Luhmann, 1988b). This is of course tautological, but Luhmann sees the constitution principle of the social at work precisely in the self-reference that arises with the unraveling of psychological and social systems through meaning, and not in the avoidance of logical contradictions.

The question: 'How is social order possible?' is itself rooted in history. It is the basic question, if not the basis, of classical sociology, whose answer to the dissolution of the feudal order, to new class antagonisms, alienation, anomie, disenchantment of the world and the pluralizing of values and life styles, was in the first instance sociology itself. Its appeasing function, which it exercised despite its direct or indirect critique of the existing order, lay in its discovering an order behind the crises and conflicts that could not be shaken. It discovered or formulated in concepts the idea that society is held together even without political rule. The old concept of political order, according to which subjects, whether out of insight or out of fear of themselves, subjected themselves to a sovereign who then had to ensure peace, justice and, later, their well-being, collapsed in the storms of the 'long 19th century'. The hope of the liberals, not fully extinguished even today, that the problem of order can be left to the market mechanism, did not prove really convincing, due to the social upheavals caused by market processes themselves. In opposition to this, sociology developed the idea of a normative constitution of society. Norms, or a cosmos of values that was, if not

absolutely valid, at least collectively shared, were to produce cohesion and enable coordination.

This general thesis of sociology has never been undisputed, least of all today, now that utilitarianism under the rubric of rational choice theory has conquered broad areas of the field. Indeed, the majority of social theories that concern themselves at all with questions relating to the constitution of the social can be assigned to these two poles, norm and barter. Rational choice theorists (James Coleman, for example) do not, of course, deny that there are norms, or that these are indispensable for cohesion; nor do normativists (such as Jürgen Habermas) dispute the claim that actions guided by interest dominate an important segment of society. The one attempts, however, to explain norms through barter, while the other attempts to explain barter through norms, or they both attempt to portray the one category as a deficient mode of the other. Systems theory offers an alternative to these alternatives. It attempts to begin at such a fundamental level that both barter and norm emerge as already developed forms of a basic occurrence that are tailored to the solution of very specific problems.

For systems theory, the primordial social situation is the situation of double contingency (Luhmann, 1984a, ch. 3). This means that (at least) one ego and (at least) one alter ego experience each other as free in their actions but mutually susceptible to the other's influence, so that what the alter does depends on the actions of the ego, while the ego, for its part, makes its action dependent on how the alter conducts itself. For example: at a flea market at which there is no established price range, both the people offering wares and the people interested in them hesitate to make an initial price proposal. The sellers hesitate because they run the risk of chasing away potential customers by asking too high a price and yet supplying their buyers with a standard for comparison. The potential buyers hesitate because they do not know if their offer might be the only one, or the highest one that the sellers have received thus far, so that they might perhaps commit themselves too quickly with their offer instead of gaining room for negotiation. The normative solution to the problem would be something like a 'fair price' that is recognized or can be settled on. The rationalistic solution to the problem (a problem well known to the theoreticians of rational choice and discussed in terms such as 'adverse selection', 'moral hazard' or 'prisoner's dilemma') would consist of deceiving the other about market conditions and talking him or her into concluding a business transaction. It is also conceded that individual calculations of benefit may, due to insufficient information, produce sub-optimal results. Now, the normativists are correct in maintaining that in nearly all the cases there are vague price indications, and the rationalists are correct in saying that the first essential is for one of the two sides to commit to a price. However, neither of these suggestions really satisfies the claims made by social constitution theory because it is not clear what the origin of the norms (or price ranges) is or why someone should barter at all, and not simply steal. Moreover, barter theory evades or trivializes the problem as to the conditions

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under which third parties will passively watch an exchange of goods that they might like to own themselves.

In order to delineate more clearly the problem of double contingency and avoid overly hasty solutions, let me take a step backwards to consider the prior issue of meaning. Meaning, rather than norm or barter, is, for Luhmann (1971), the genuinely basic concept of sociology. In relation to meaning, even system, environment and complexity reduction function as secondary concepts. By means of a phenomenological reduction – which, as Luhmann (1971) admits, 'appears to many a malady rather than a method' (p. 30) – he comes to the finding that meaning always intends or indicates something more or less determinate, but at the same time entails a reference to other 'things'. If, in reflecting on my own experience, I ignore the concrete images with which it is presently filled, I find that my experiencing is extremely volatile, unconcentrated and unsettled. Consciousness is, in the first instance, nothing more than a flow of experiences, and not an instance to which things other than itself are given. Consciousness in the sense of a logical locus, and self-consciousness in particular, are complex achievements of constitution carried out in my dealings with others and in interacting with others. Meaning is not, for Luhmann, merely another name for this experiencing, but yet a differentiated system according to which it orders itself. Nevertheless, meaning-laden or pre-sorted experience still has access to a superabundance of referential possibilities. No system could tolerate constant deviation unless, in fact, it was not a system at all. At the same time – and this is one of Luhmann's key thoughts – experience steers itself by demanding too much of itself. The multiplicity – or should I say the infinitude – of the possibilities disclosed in meaning compels consciousness (or a social system) to select, to secure, to identify meaning and thus to constitute significance. 'Complexity means, in essence, forced selection' (Luhmann, 1971: 33).[14]

A projection of the world generated in this way does not at all vouch for correctness or for truth in the sense of a correspondence between image and thing. The world is a hypothesis generated in meaning through meaning and, as such, susceptible to disappointment, but for just this reason also capable of development. One need only consider the venerable controversies of philosophy, on the one hand, and the large number of cultures on the other, to realize that the questions – what a thing, what time, what the human being is – have not and cannot be answered once and for all. Yet, there can be no doubt that, with the human being, the complexity of the world has been elevated to a new level. And ever since human beings have been cognizant of one another as unpredictable, and have presupposed this unpredictability in their dealings with each other, ordering has been conceived as a task. Actually, it is necessary to distinguish between the pressure of complexity generated through hominization (or the advent of meaning) and its further augmentation through the discovery or self-empowerment of the modern subject (Blumenberg, 1983). Now everyone is a potential other, and the question as to how social order is possible, if it does not

take on contour for the first time, certainly gains urgency. The problem now is to transform the concept of double contingency from a stalemate into the structuring of social systems.

Double contingency entails the supposition of an ego that another is able to experience and that can act as he himself does, *and* (that the ego supposes) that this other, alter ego, thinks the same about the ego. With this understanding, Luhmann (1976) does indeed presuppose something like subjects, before interaction or society occurs, instead of permitting both, subjects and society, to arise through each other (p. 509). The surprising turn that distinguishes Luhmann's theory from the widespread theories of intersubjectivity, however, lies in the fact that, from Husserl's failure to proceed beyond thinking intersubjectivity as 'interobjectivity', he concludes that the social must be allowed to arise, *even though* the subjects are not transparent to one another. For this reason, Luhmann is dealing not with subjects in the full sense (subjects who constitute themselves in mutual acknowledgement) but with mere entities or 'black boxes' who have learned in their dealings with the world to distinguish *themselves* as able to act and capable of experiencing[15] and then to apply *this distinction* to *other objects* as well, because – and to the extent that – it proves reliable. It is sufficient that one reacts (with an act or experience openly characterized as such) to an environmental event as being an intentionally selected act or experience of another to overcome the blockade of double (actually, one-sided but perceived as double) contingency. This may, but need not, and generally will not, involve arriving at a common understanding. An initial gift would be a functional equivalent. One need not accept the gift, but *if* one does, then specific expectations of the giver will be *either* confirmed *or* disappointed. In either case, social complexity is reduced.

Thus, the question: 'How is social order possible?' must be reformulated as the question: 'How can acts or experiences be linked together on the supposition that subjects are locked within their framework of meaning?' Luhmann's answer here – as in the earlier question of how meaning is processed at all – is 'by excessive demanding':

> Ego experiences the alter as alter ego. It experiences the non-identity of perspectives but also the identity of this experience on both sides. For both, this makes the situation indeterminable, unstable and unbearable. In this experience, the perspectives converge, making it possible to impute an interest in the negation of this negativity, an interest in determination. (Luhmann, 1984a: 172; original emphases removed)

One could paraphrase Luhmann's understanding of the social zero-point as *willingness to compromise out of fear* – rather than as consensus. He interprets this scene neither as, nor with the aid of, an original reciprocity essential to human beings, nor again as exchange based upon interest. The first approach presupposes an excess of mutual certitude, and, in addition, fails to do justice to any majority

of system references, i.e. to the fact that a group is not composed merely of dyads. Furthermore, even if every act could be described as goal-oriented, this view fails to account for the fact that the subject can act *and* experience. The reciprocity principle itself is therefore *one* form of conditioning or *one* resolution to the fundamental problem of double contingency. Barter, on the other hand, is an extremely potent form of interaction but occurs relatively late on the evolutionary timeline. It becomes apparent that *any* determination, *any* conduct of another that is interpreted as a reaction to one's own conduct – whereby the act may, on one side or the other, simply amount to passivity – will be perceived as relief from the uncertainty grounded in the freedom of the other, and therefore as a gain.

From the perspective of psychological systems – which is the locus from which the structure of social systems must ultimately be understood, also in Luhmann's thought – *trust* is the foundational mechanism for the reduction of social complexity. According to Simmel (1992), trust is 'an intermediate state between knowing and not knowing' (p. 393). Trusting is a conscious act, a decision that is anchored in aspects of the conduct of the other, but one that remains unable to calculate beforehand whether or not it will pay off. Trust is always a 'risk-laden advance performance' (Luhmann, 1989b: 23)[16] in which one may engage even if the possible damage is greater than the gain one anticipates. Trust cannot be replaced once and for all either by a cost–benefit analysis or by contracts, because gains and losses cannot, as a rule, be calculated before one enters into a transaction, and contracts always presuppose – or even demand – trust in this legal form. That people trust in spite of the ever-present risk of suffering self-inflicted damage – that there is any trust at all, and not rather distrust on all sides – has its roots in the circumstance that only a person who trusts can open up new options for acting that would otherwise lie fallow. Trusting is a 'leap towards indifference' (Luhmann, 1989b: 26) that one risks because the alternative would be self-isolation:

> If the formation of social systems is to overcome an ever-present threshold of fear, then corresponding 'in-spite-of' strategies are necessary . . . *in order to commit before the other has committed himself accordingly. To this extent, trust is a universal social fact.* (Luhmann 1984a: 179, 181, emphasis added)

Moreover, trust tends to grow stronger as soon as it has once been proven warranted. It operates – autopoietically. A system, let me say an interaction that gets rolling with an initial act of trust – a friendly gesture, a smile, a successful self-presentation, for instance – heightens the chances that the process will somehow continue precisely at the moment of its onset. I can see in this a renewed formulation or a modification of Mauss's gift exchange theorem. The thesis of the threefold obligation of giving, receiving and reciprocating (Mauss, 1967) then becomes the morally laden expression of the de facto high probability of

reproduction, increasing still further through reproduction in trust-based systems. Their origin is, however, indeed a pure gift, the very possibility of which some would wish to deny.

So the apparent symmetry of trust and distrust as behavioral types between which we may freely choose can be sustained only in a formal sense. Only a person who trusts progresses (and can still opt for distrust); a person who distrusts, however, is confined to himself or herself from the start. The same applies, mutatis mutandis, for the scarcely less fundamental alternative of a psychological system to react cognitively or normatively to environmental data. It can alter its expectations because of an unanticipated event that it previously held for impossible and attempt to take account systematically of this experience; that is, it can attempt to *learn*. Or it can remain true to its old expectations although certain experiences have caused the validity of these expectations to crumble: which is to say, it can *normalize* its expectations (Luhmann, 1969). If the system went by the name Hamlet, it would declaim: 'To learn or not to learn, that is the question!' The *logical* alternative to normative expectation would be the uninterrupted accumulation and restructuring of knowledge and adaption to the notion that everything can change. *Genetically*, however, norms precede learning, for the forming of expectations is equivalent to fixing expectations, and only on this basis can a system decide to learn.

Does this not cast a 'normative shadow' on systems theory? Are there not norms, are there not 'counterfactually stabilized expectations of expectation' at the root of a decision to trust somebody? Yes, there are such shadows. But perhaps norms are too strong a concept. Luhmann (1988c) himself calls this proto-normative sphere the realm of familiarity. Familiarity is the result of the repeated designation of things, human beings or events (actually, the repeated designation of 'something'; for the differentiation into the three dimensions is itself the result of a 'differentiated negation'). The remainder – what is not expressly designated, but negatively always implied – is the foreign, the unknown, the threatening, everything that lies outside the horizon visible just now and from here, but nevertheless admits of designation and disclosure *as* foreign, unknown, or threatening, although never in such a way as to fall within the horizon that is re-drawn with every new designation. The 'colonialization of the life world' (Habermas) is therefore unavoidable but also like the task of Sisyphus in that it never reaches its end. For the life world is not a common resource, nor is it an exhaustible or explicable reservoir of background convictions shared by the group; it is the 'fission product' of thought and, in particular, of all communication (Luhmann, 1986). And Luhmann sees the function of religion as not leaving human beings by themselves in their drawing of the primordial boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Religion is the first social system, present with the inception of humanity and identical with the group, that transfers an indefinite into a definite complexity. All further reductions are linked to this one; in part, they are only prompted by the refinement of myth and ritual (Luhmann, 1984b).

What *does* change in the course of societal differentiation is that the life worlds multiply and can no longer be brought into harmony even by religion. In the best case, it may be possible to reconstruct their incongruity with the aid of systems theory. Which gives rise to the question of whether there may be religious features in systems theory: if it is no longer possible to think of the world as a whole, one would at least like to know why.

Luhmann is indeed sustained by an almost unshakable faith in the world or, as Hellmuth Plessner (1985: 142) writes of Husserl, by a 'belief that everything is somehow all right'. But what should we then make of Luhmann's concern with the 'anchoring of beings in relation to other possibilities'? What of Luhmann's warning concerning the flood of complexity that must be confined to its banks and even tamed? Is Luhmann not more of a decisionist than a Romanticist? The opposition could perhaps be eased by an appeal to history insofar as 'the early Luhmann', following the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, had an earnest political interest in stabilizing the situation; later, however, and to the extent that the political balance held and totalitarianism in the West became a thing of the past, he was able to encounter reality with irony. But Romanticism and decisionism need not be opposed. After all, the romantic consciousness of possibility cannot exclude the possibility of finite decision, while, on the other side, the will to decision is often, if not always, driven by a longing for relaxation. Perhaps we need not trouble ourselves with either biography or dialectic. The shock effect cherished by Luhmann has always had something of a methodological character: one should imagine how it would be, he suggests, if the world were not what it is. In this way, he generates or revives the Aristotelian wonder that marks the beginning of all *philosophy*.

Notes

1. Where I speak of systems theory below, I am referring exclusively to Luhmann's variant of the theory. Other 'styles' of systems theory within recent sociology, or at least directed primarily towards the social, include the systemic theory based upon Gregory Bateson and the work of Edgar Morin.

2. Since its foundation in 1995, the journal *Soziale Systeme* has been the main forum where sometimes quite heated debates are being fought out, e.g. on questions like the real or only assumed universalism of systems theory or inasmuch as systems theory may be (re-) instrumentalized as a tool of political planing and administration. Internet archive of further contributions to internal problems of systems theory can be found under http://luhmann.culthea.de

3. Luhmann's second, some would say, *the* main work is *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (1997). But it is not only for chronological reasons that I refer to *Social Systems* as the first main work; for in no other place has Luhmann devoted so much attention to concept.

4. Here and henceforth I cite and translate from the German original.

5. A bibliography of Luhmann's work can be found in the periodical *Soziale Systeme* 4, 1998: 233–63. Meanwhile there are about 10 books available in English, most of them from a later

period of Luhmann's work. For a start, however, one should choose the earlier publications, e.g. *A Sociological Theory of Law* (1985; German original, 1971). For philosophically inclined readers his *Essays on Self-Reference* (1990) will be of interest. Analyses of particular problems of modern society can be found in his books on risk (1993) or media (2000a).

6.   Likewise, Husserl's intentionality is mirrored within systems theory by the concept of communication, behind whose self-reference and reference to others noesis and noema are concealed.

7.   An outstanding genealogy of documents and the recording of them, which can also be read as a genealogy of systems theory, was recently completed by Vismann (2000).

8.   Luhmann assumes a fundamental need to stabilize expectations in a temporal, social and material respect. In every society, certain expectations must become temporally fixed. One must be able to rely on them despite occasional disappointments. This task is fulfilled, for example, by norms. Social stability involves the possibility of consistency in asserting expectations and placing demands on particular persons. This is accomplished by roles, for example. Finally, certain customs and decisions concerning how one should comport oneself in the world and towards other human beings must be protected against a conceivable uncertainty. This task may be performed by institutions. The fundamental issue is that expectations should be restricted, on the one hand, so that, on the other, there can be a latitude with respect to the actions of individuals or the system.

9.   It must immediately be granted to anyone who sees in this formulation a defense of the 'chain of command' principle, and therewith a pardoning of the infamous 'desk criminals', that concentration camps can also be rationally organized (Sofsky, 1997). The susceptibility of organizations to political abuse does not, however, demonstrate the irrationality of organizations per se. It would be fundamentally wrong to conjure up a picture of Luhmann as sympathetic to totalitarianism, even if, or perhaps precisely because, there are only a few places where he expresses his views on National Socialism. On the contrary, as a theory of social differentiation, systems theory has a basic anti-totalitarian thrust: spelling out the inner logic of social systems means opposing the totalitarian political claim that it can gain control of every system (Luhmann, 1999b, esp. 23, 45, 187, 196–7).

10.   Incidentally, Luhmann's links to the philosophical anthropology of Gehlen go far beyond his acceptance of the idea of limited rationality. Like Husserl's consciousness, Gehlen's institution (1964: 7–120) gave rise to Luhmann's organizations, and therewith to his systems concept (Luhmann, 1970b). The decisive difference between Gehlen and Luhmann lies in the fact that the latter dismisses philosophical anthropology's discovery of the human body and its drives in favor of renewed concentration on cognitive problems. Unlike Gehlen's anthropology, systems theory is not a philosophy of acts but a theory of experience. Hence its 'quietist' tone.

11.   Despite his enthusiasm for administration, Luhmann does not ignore the critique of bureaucratically petrified mechanisms. However, the answer to inflexible administrative processes cannot be the elimination or deformalization of bureaucracies. This would mean sacrificing the order that results from integrating expectations regarding conduct, which is the contribution of organizations. Instead, administration must, in the future, be more emphatically restructured in the direction of 'self-variation'. In 1964, Luhmann was already speaking of organizational self-direction that 'uses information about the results of prior action rather than "pure" environmental events as the signals triggering the program selection [of administrative activity]' (Luhmann, 1999a: 232). What does this mean, if not – autopoiesis?

12.   Both concepts characterize the systems's condition of being in a single energy/matter continuum together with the environment and therewith depending on services that they themselves cannot

render. Luhmann speaks of interpenetration insofar as these services, as, e.g. in the case of consciousness and communication, are *reciprocal* prerequisites for two autopoietically operating systems. One-sided 'dependencies', on the other hand, are referred to as structural coupling.

13. How do autopoietically, i.e. blindly operating, systems 'come out of themselves'? Luhmann replies: 'through organizations'. These alone have 'the opportunity *to communicate with systems in their environment*. They are the only type of social system that have this capability, and if we wish to utilize it, we must organize' (Luhmann, 1997: 834, original emphasis). It is clearly indisputable that a company can purchase compliance or that the department of revenue can gather taxes; one can also easily imagine an association of employers and the factory inspectorate division conducting negotiations, but not 'the' economy with 'the' political system. How it comes about, however, that organizations which, autopoietically expressed, generate decisions on the basis of decisions, are able to reach out to systems within their environment by means of these very decisions, remains inexplicable. Either we stay with this idea, applying to organizations the principle that everything that happens outside a system is unimportant for that system; or else we grant – and this seems to me, in contradistinction to Luhmann, to be the appropriate option – that (not only organizational) communications can be understood beyond the boundaries of the system within which they were generated.

14. Selection occurs, as I have stated (note 8), in three directions. The distinction can also be formulated more abstractly: Materially, the task is to distinguish between objects (and contents) or to generate consistency; temporally, it is necessary to separate past, present and future from one another, creating the possibility of (repeated) experience; and socially, we must grasp the alter as alter ego, as the prerequisite enabling consensus. To separate 'this and that', 'before and after' and 'you and I', and to maintain this separation, we must, in each case, admit variance in only one dimension, at the expense of invariance in the other two. This means that I learn to recognize another I (if all goes well) *as* other I (and not as an additional object) because people can come to a common understanding of the same things from ever-different perspectives. Conversely, subjectivity, or, more fittingly, the non-identity of perspectives, is the prerequisite for a shared objective world. If there were something like 'objective experiencing', there would be no motivation to assume the existence of things outside oneself. And time can be conceived as change only if the objective world and the various subjects are subject to one and the same time. A perceptible difference in one dimension presupposes indifference in the others. Intersubjective constitution does not apply to society only, for the objective world and time are themselves intersubjectively constituted, just as, conversely, intersubjectivity is possible only on the basis of an objectified world and synchronized time.

15. In other words, the *inner* subjective differentiation between experience and act has not been around from time immemorial, but is itself historical; this can be seen, for example, in religious devotion, which is regarded as an act pleasing to God.

16. Luhmann's important and accessible book on trust, together with a text on power, has been translated into English (Luhmann, 1979), but unfortunately has been out of print for a long time.

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