The architecture of systems theory as developed by Niklas Luhmann reappears in its description when it is itself treated as a system in an environment. The environment of systems theory comprises other theories. Niklas Luhmann now presents systems theory as a theory of society. This is justified by the use of basic terms such as "communication," "attribution" and "action," even though other basic terms like "time" and "difference" seem to extend beyond mere reference to society.

Society is a system. Social systems consist of events. The raw material of events are communications. Communications in turn describe themselves as actions. They represent, as it were, disorder within the system. From this disorder, the system gains its contours through self-description. This is achieved through attribution. Attribution converts communications into events located in time, and these in turn are actions. This difference in levels between the disorder of communications and the order of actions is central to the understanding of systems theory, and it is at this point that Luhmann purposely differs from the classics of sociology. Placing their approaches in the theoretical framework of systems theory would mean localizing them in their entirety on the level of self-description. For Luhmann, however, the question of self-description is not complete without the question of the self-constitution of communication. It is only the latter which contains the perspective of society itself. From this point of view, Parsons and the classics of sociology, by narrowing their perspective to role or action, abandoned the issue of society. The problem with Luhmann's construction is the fact that communication is only accessible to itself through self-description, that is to say, action. In other words, society itself remains invisible. Like the medium of sounds and phonemes, into which words can be broken down and which remains invisible in speech (although language gains a clear outline through the combination of these), pure communication itself can only be observed as the latent pressure of imminent disorder and as a variety-pool for changes. Society is, as it were, the undercurrent in which social action takes on a more concrete shape as interaction, as organization or as subsystem. This relationship means that the discovery of society as such by Luhmann is a most improbable fact, which is itself the result of the improbability of the social evolution of modernity. There is a certain similarity between this discovery of an invisible omnipresence and Saussure's discovery of language. But that again would correspond to the difference-theoretical character of Luhmann's theory. Saussure's discovery that linguistic and semantic values are not defined positively by their content but negatively through their difference from other terms of the linguistic system is generalized by Luhmann, who made this the basis of his entire theoretical framework. In this sense, systems theory is in accordance with Derrida and the deconstructionists in setting down difference, and not identity, as the basic term.

Thus, society is a system, and the elements of the system are not people, but communications. Communications create problems, which in turn can only be solved by other communications. This means that the system is recursively closed. This closure ensures the self-continuation of society, in other words: its autopoiesis. The problems communication creates--and then solves--for itself are its unreasonableness, opacity, dissent and, in particular, its transitoriness. Structures are created to link communications, such as institutions, media codes, processes, etc. Their relationship is a circular one: only those structures are selected that can link communications, and the chosen structures determine the selection of other communications. Structure is therefore not a basic term; systems theory is not structuralism; structures can only be understood through their relationship to the pressure of other problems generated by the appearing and disappearing [End Page 489] of communications, which are in themselves disordered. This problem is always reproduced by the difference in level of abstraction between communication and action. Unlike Habermas, Luhmann does not see communication as communicative activity, but rather as the reproduction of the necessity of attribution by constantly supplying the social structure with a surplus of social meaning through the constant change of
perspective between information and utterance. If, in deconstruction, everything is motivated by the linguistically induced differentiability of presence/absence, the equivalent of this in systems theory is the difference between information and utterance inherent in communication. Here, information refers to the world, and the utterance to the speaker, and this difference is permanently displaced. And this is precisely the effect of attribution.

In conformity with the difference-theoretical approach, the term "history" is here replaced by the term "evolution." Evolution is a subjectless process set in motion by difference, in this case the difference between system and environment. In this process, temporal horizons evolve with the system. Time itself is a product of evolution. This is disregarded in the concept of history, which tends to identify time and causality, and can then no longer adequately grasp self-conditioned processes, feedback mechanisms, recursivity, and, in particular, the evolution of temporal horizons themselves. Only Koselleck's *Neue Historik* takes this into account and constitutes itself with reference to precisely this problem. Evolution, on the other hand, is understood as the interaction of three mechanisms: variation, selection, and stabilization of successful selections. Here, evolution theory does not reconstruct causal chains, but rather formulates the conditions for the cooperation of the evolutionary mechanisms. These conditions undergo fundamental transformations with every change of the principle of social differentiation. The modalities of this transition now determine the formulation of the relationship between society and the individual. Just like archaic tribal societies, which are segmentally organized into families, clans, and tribes, the structure of stratified societies—that is, societies structured in hierarchical layers—is governed by the principle of placing people in different groups; in this case, layers. In segmental as well as hierarchical societies, the relationship between society and the individual is determined by total inclusion. Individuality and social position are identical. Belonging to a tribe, family, corporation, or estate encompasses all aspects of an individual. Dual membership is not possible: one can belong to one estate only. Social hybrids are monsters. Now the central thesis of systems theory is that, [End Page 490] with the formation of functionally differentiated society, the very principle of social differentiation—placing individuals in families or social layers—has become obsolete: it is no longer groups of people that are distinguished but types of communication. Thus, society increases its systematicity against the systems in its environment, though it nonetheless remains symbiotically attached to them: human consciousness and organisms. In other words, society derives its principle of differentiation from itself and becomes autonomous.

What prompted the differentiation of special types of communication—which Luhmann calls "media codes"—is that they have become increasingly improbable or unacceptable. It is, for instance, improbable to consider something to be true when it is not evident or plausible, yet science ensures that we do. Likewise, we are not likely to accept decisions that are not in our favour, yet the legal system makes this acceptable. Also, it seems absurd to learn things that have nothing to do with everyday life, yet our education system makes this possible. All these are problem areas reacting to the new demands of complexity. Functional subsystems appear key to various functions such as science, law, education, economy, intimacy, etc., which are regulated via binary media codes such as "true or false," "just or unjust," etc. These binary schematisms demarcate the grounds for rejection: under the scientific code it is only possible to reject things when they are false, but no longer, when they are immoral, ugly, or unfair. The individual can belong to the functionally differentiated subsystems of a society only under certain circumstances and transitorily, as an opponent in a lawsuit, a voter at the election polls, as a pupil, etc.; this transitoriness turns every biography into an individually temporalized sequence, punctuated by individual temporal place-values. Every individual's history of inclusions is different. First, he (or she) must be excluded entirely from society as an individual and person. The exclusion from society in turn allows him (or her) to re-enter situationally under specified conditions: one must have money at one's disposal, pass exams, keep to the conventions of litigation, etc. This fundamental exclusion is, however, also accompanied by the ideology of individualism. While pre-modern societies take the individual for granted as something familiar, and do not count strangers to society at all, modernity has developed the semantics of individuality, according to which the individual is seen as unfamiliar, strange, unpredictable, and free.

Thus, in becoming increasingly complex, society endows itself with increasing contingency, and it is contingency—along with complexity [End Page 491]—that is the most far-reaching intervening variable mediating between structural changes caused by evolution and by semantic transformation. Under the guidance of systems theory, literary theory will have as one of its tasks the examination of contingency.

It will then become evident that contingency—the unfathomable will of the gods—is absorbed into this world and socialized; i.e., belief in the stars turns into the "career" of the "rogue biography"; the division of *aeternitas* and
tempus, with eternity as the parallel present of transcendence, from which constant intervention into the here and now is possible (ghosts, demons, miracles), is replaced by the division of past and future in this world, which means that uncertainty becomes temporalized and located in the here and now. Or, one could interpret the "code d'honneur"--by which status attributes are made contingent--as a transition symptom in the evolution process from a traditional society to modern society. That is, status attributes such as nobility, bravery and splendor, are morally generalized, turned into virtues, and become personal qualities like generosity, courtesy, manners, etc., which are no longer attributed to rank alone but to an individual: one either has them or not, and must therefore demonstrate them. That makes behavior theatrical and the aristocracy publicity-minded, turns them into patrons, and also marks the beginning of the habit of duelling, and of the Elizabethan revenge-tragedy.

Or, one could regard the evolution of love as having paved the way for the development of the semantics of individuality and elaborate on the relationship between love and literature. One would then find that love only develops in the shape of a story, since, in the story, everything gains its significance only through its place-value in time, that is, as hope, fear, expectation, desperation, memory, or anticipation; in short, from the significance of what happens next, which enables us to differentiate love as a kind of code in which the individuality of the other person becomes our only focus, so that, like art, it constitutes a world of its own.

The next step would be to examine the development of the codes themselves and then to deal with the question of what the code of literature actually looks like. There have been many attempts at providing the answer to this question--even by Luhmann himself--which, however, have not been altogether convincing. Personally, I have avoided this issue so far and would like to approach the matter, as it were, from the other side. The relationship between various systems-theoretical terms will be illustrated along the way.

The first of these, the difference between communication and action, [End Page 492] has already been mentioned; it forms the basis of the entire theory. It is held together by attribution, that is, self-description of communication through self-simplification. The effect of this can be seen in re-attribution: the finest illustration of this is, once again, love. In love, transgressive activity is disguised as suffering, as passion, so that the lover cannot be made responsible for the liberties he takes. Later, we find this replaced by "Empfindsamkeit," "Liebesleid," sensibility and feeling. In any case, "activity" is transformed--in cultural terms--into "experience."

The second difference is that between society and the individual, typified by exclusion. And, thirdly, this distinction is radicalized in systems theory as the difference between communication and consciousness as two distinct systems. I believe this difference to have been discovered during the Romantic period, when literature became autonomous: thus discovering the problem of incommunicability. And it is at that point, according to Lionel Trilling, that "sincerity" gives way to "authenticity." From now on, solitary consciousness is the model of authentic consciousness, the awareness that any kind of communication would only adulterate it. Thus it looks to nature for resonance and communicates only via distant objects like the moon, which are not particularly prone to excite dissent. At the same time, the discourse of Sentimentality discovers body language such as sighs, tears, swoons, etc., by which one can communicate the fact that feelings are too deep for words. With the discovery of incommunicability--and this is my thesis--literature finds its reference problem. From now on, one can utter things in communication which one is not aware of, and find out that things of which one is conscious cannot be said. I would like to illustrate this thesis with a reference to Derrida.

Derrida explains his analysis of logocentrism with the primal situation of self-affection in speech acts. On the basis of a review of Husserl's analyses of the inner awareness of time, he develops, in La voix et le phénomène, the central idea that the conception of the presence of the logos in speech owes its existence to the acoustic simultaneity of speaking and hearing oneself speak, and that this simultaneity, due to the invention of phonetic transcription, led to the establishment of Western metaphysics through an acoustic illusion. By recurring to Husserl's pure intuition, Derrida thus combines those elements in his model which Luhmann separates with a drastic cut: perception and communication. In systems theory, perception--even in the shape of mere imagination as inner perception--is limited to consciousness alone and is not accessible to communication. In separating [End Page 493] consciousness and communication, systems theory thus disposes of the problem Derrida focuses on in his review of Western metaphysics: the establishment of meaning that is identical with itself on the evidence of immediately accessible experience in the internal sphere of a transcendental subjectivity stripped of every empirical, earthly remnant. Therefore, Derrida's
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The reciprocal inaccessibility of perception and communication must be imagined in such a way that events of consciousness cannot be linked to communications, or vice versa. Both can reproduce themselves only through operations peculiar to their own system. At the same time, they are structurally linked and cannot function without each other. This means that each system is present in the other only in the form of irritations, which in turn are transformed into information for the respective system according to its own operations. Communications, however, have no direct access to consciousness: i.e., they cannot pass on conscious content, and psychic systems cannot communicate via perception. The structural linking of consciousness and communication is achieved through language. The strategic value of Derrida's approach is attested to by the fact that he focuses precisely on the duplication of signifier and signified as simultaneity of immediacy and temporal differentiality. This duplication grants access to consciousness on the one hand and communication on the other.

It is evident, however, that communication can refer to perception. It can thematize it, and for this there are rules. An example in which this becomes obvious is the simultaneous processing of perception and communication in face-to-face interaction. Here perception forms the basis of communication and confirms it, endows it with relativity or irony, or denies it. The unequivocal direction of its relativity shows that perception itself is not easy to negate, which is why it provides communication with a surplus of pre-understanding, which in turn is treated as an "inviolate level" by communication itself. This is confirmed by the disruptive effect that suspected madness or
hallucinations have on communication: perception is then negated and becomes liable to dissent at the same time. Thus perception must be protected against communication by rules of thematization, so that one can assume a presupposed consensus that would be lost immediately in the case of communication. In interaction, for instance, the mutual perception of partners is protected by tact: the partner's physical façade or personal habitus may not be thematized. This taboo can only be breached under special conditions in intimate communication, or in insults. Recombination possibilities like these are constantly used in the world of acting and drama.

This does not, however, mean that perception is tailored to communication; it has only been rendered thematizable. They are both brought directly into relation with each other in the familiar poetic devices of rhyme, rhythm and the overlapping of the signified by a structure localized in the signifier, which increasingly tints the linguistic transparency and endows the signifier with an importance of its own. This description may seem unduly complicated, nevertheless the phenomenon itself is familiar to everyone: "A drum, a drum, Macbeth doth come"--here, the signifier gains importance because the arbitrariness of its materiality is transformed into the foil for a miracle: the miracle that the material form in this case is not arbitrary but confirms and duplicates the semantics. Not only does this line tell us that Macbeth appears as the drums start up, it also communicates the sound accompanying this event. By adjusting the materiality of language to meaning, perceptual potential is released in language itself, which can then profit from its greater speed vis-à-vis communication. Also, temporal retardation and sequentiality are now at the disposal of psychic systems, which can then perceive and enjoy their own perception in a virtual second edition that is richer and more complex. This duplication is not a sufficient, but a necessary condition for aesthetic perception.

Another paradox of communication can be found in the novel with an impersonal narrator. Here, the crucial matter is the uncertainty of attribution of the narration as a communicative act, which can be referred both to the character experiencing the events and to the invisible narrator. This is expressed in the narrative technique of combining both perspectives in free indirect discourse. The literary effect mobilizes paradoxical attributions. In other words, the very production of a work of art is stylized as "experience," and thus apotheosized through notions of inspiration and enthusiasm, and displaced to the realm of the infallible. Or communication suggests, by breaking off and continuing in the body language of sensitive gestures such as tears or swoons, that some things are too deep for words and can only be expressed by appealing to perception, thereby showing that, beyond its own internal limits, its aim is the paradoxical one of communicating incommunicability. In the age of Sentimentalism, and in the Romantic period, the inaccessibility of consciousness to communication became one of the central topoi, thus reorganizing the cartography of the poetic landscape. The natural flow of communication is blocked, questioned, and referred back to itself, thus facilitating its linkage to perception. Literature would accordingly be a special form of communication, referring to the difference between communication and perception and making use of this difference for recombinations, rapprochments, thematization, and for emphasizing the inaccessibility of consciousness to communication. In any case we find, in the duplication of perception and communication, the duplication of immediate presence and temporal differentiality, which deconstruction unfolds as the core of the logocentric delusion. If one accepts this duplication as being specific to art and literature, the impression comes as no surprise that deconstructionist reading strategies seem to find the same thing in each and every text: the specificity of art.

I shall try now to shift the perspective from the system of systems theory to its environment. It would seem that, in the opinion of many critics, systems theory exudes a certain coldness. This is closely associated with an intellectual style, which, on closer examination, turns out to be a reprise of Neue Sachlichkeit. It will be recalled that under the philosophical guidance of Helmuth Plessner and others, a new outlook on life was articulated after World War I in reaction to the cult of inwardness and authenticity characteristic of expressionism. Here, modernity, urbanism and society are emphatically affirmed to counterbalance the lures of the ideology of alienated society and of "Lebensphilosophie." According to the new school, the self finds its place not by searching the depth of the soul, but through reference to communication. Participation in the matrix of communication requires that it put on a mask or persona, thus providing itself with a subject-position in society. Its paragon is, of course, the dandy or courtier, who fears nothing more than the ridicule which the exposure of his innermost feelings would cause. The inner guidance of morals is replaced by a subject's external policy. A deliberately cultivated diabolical quality is clearly one of the features of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Its historical models are the sombre anthropologies of Hobbes and Gracian. This reaction to the tradition of German inwardness and to the ideology of community was lost in the rise of National Socialism, even though Ernst Jünger or Carl Schmitt continued to represent it. In post-war Germany, the cult of community and warmth was revived by the leftist generation of 1968. Its philosophically most ambitious expression
is Jürgen Habermas' theory of rational consensus. In social reality, however, the presupposition of consensus is rather liable to generate conflicts, and the demands for community have amply demonstrated their historically explosive potential. Compared to this specifically German cult of authenticity, community and inwardness, Luhmann's systems theory may constitute a reaction, close in spirit to the concept of life outlined in the Neue Sachlichkeit. It, too, displays those hallmarks of the latter's style, such as coldness, stoic calm, a skeptical attitude towards morals, reverence towards the various forms of communication, the masking of the self, distance, accuracy of observation, heroic ataraxy, technical objectivity, and affirmation of modernity. Under these criteria, the boundaries between the system of systems theory and its discursive environment in the Federal Republic are very obvious. In its environment, psychological hedonism, the ecological movement, "alternative" culture, various feminisms and the claim to self-fulfillment have combined to form a culture of spontaneity, direct communication and emotional warmth, in which the yearned-for issues of German social Romanticism such as community, everyday-life, experience, immediacy, and closeness to nature have been granted the seal of approval of political correctness. This is a culture in which contrasts become blurred, boundaries fade, and politics, theory, morals, and lifestyle are mixed and mingled, ever supplying "alternative" culture with ever new impulses for carnivalizing institutions and subsystems. Systems theory, by contrast, contains a number of motifs that must be considered extra-territorial to this culture. Instead of the paths of proximity, it cultivates distance; instead of commitment, it recommends skepticism; instead of emotionality, objectivity. It preaches codes of conduct rather than morals, offers bottomless constructions rather than foundations, relativity instead of fundamentalism, and replaces self-fulfillment with the objectification of original unfamiliarity from the reciprocal point of view of others, in the medium of autonomous communication. In [End Page 498] the relationship between the individual and society, identity and role, "life-world" and the system, nature and culture, body and language, man and woman, systems theory always sees the form-determining primacy of society as an agent of artificiality and estrangement. Drawing the line of distinction, and thus creating distance, is its cardinal feature. This would correspond to the unexcited and ironic style of systems-theoretical discourse, so often interpreted by critics as an expression of frigidity. Certain motifs of Neue Sachlichkeit, then, reappear in systems theory. One of these is Max Weber's theory of disenchantment and rationalization; another, the affirmation of modernity symbolized by the cold "persona," the mask, and the "man without qualities" (the term echoing the title of Musil's novel, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften). Musil's Möglichkeitsmensch, the man God addresses in the subjunctive potential, is virtually an inhabitant of systems theory; the impassibilité of Ernst Jünger's sharp focus anticipates the cold stare of Luhmann's theory of observation, in which the object, through distinctions, is constructed like a microscopic preparation; Carl Schmitt's renowned friend-or-foe distinction as a definition of politics is already devised as a de-mixing and demarcation technique of media codes; the dynamic independence of autopoiesis is anticipated in the model of circulation as a closed system of movements, in which the representations of Neue Sachlichkeit describe a society that has gained autonomy over and against the individual.

Helmuth Plessner's anthropology of eccentric positionality in particular contains many motifs and gestures that reappear in systems theory. In the field of tension between "tribal brotherhood" and "universal otherhood," Plessner polemizes against the German cult of inwardness, celebrating instead the nobility of distance and manners in the form of courtesy and tact and man's self-objectification and socio-cultural artificiality as the basic anthropological condition. His concept of eccentric positionality is devised as a union of differences and, rather like Luhmann's definition of meaning, Plessner understands human beings as the re-utilization by the system of the difference between the system and its environments: it is only in reference to his limits that man finds the duplication of inside and outside, subject and object, being and having a body as the position peculiar to himself. Instead of being expressed directly, communication takes place indirectly. On the personal side, this would correspond to the self as the front-guard, taking control of its social persona by "impression management," and distinguishing sharply between its mask and his merely natural body and unprotected psyche. Plessner's anthropology [End Page 499] includes the dimension of sociality and anticipates Richard Sennett's anti-Rousseauist polemics against the "tyranny of intimacy."

Luhmann's systems theory thus reinvokes the tradition of Neue Sachlichkeit in the context of contemporary discussions. He takes the front-line position against the cult of inwardness, positing an ethics of principle against the condemnation of the general public as the sphere of inauthenticity and alienation from real life, as well as against the rejection of modernity by Kulturkritik. This explains to a large extent the allergic reactions from the camp of political correctness. Such reactions become particularly violent when confronted with the diabolical air of distance and superiority which mark Luhmann's rebuttals of the reproach of emotional coldness on the one hand, and the demands for moral gestures with reference to sociological enlightenment on the other.
Of course, the very term "enlightenment" obscures the darker side of its dialectics. In making observation a basic epistemological category, Luhmann situates his theory in a discourse of visibility and invisibility (theoros meaning "observer"), and hence in a context of tropes which has undergone heavy bombardment from the combined quarters of deconstruction and feminism. Women's studies has rigorously critiqued the pornographic gaze, which isolates, objectifies and dissects its object. Fredric Jameson has further uncovered the subterranean connections between rape, pornography, and observation in *Spectres of the Visible* (1990). And in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1994), Martin Jay retracts a history in which French intellectuals have broken with a tradition of "ocularism" in Western thought and rebelled against the "scopic regimen": Bergson denounces the visual as spatial, static, and mechanistic; Sartre analyzes the threatening character of the stare; Roland Barthes studies the connection between photography and death; Foucault's discourse analysis focuses on the paradigm of supervision, domination, and observation symbolized in Bentham's Panopticon; Lacan concentrates on the self-contradictions unfolded by one's self-observation in the mirror; and Derrida's deconstruction of presence makes him one of the most prominent members in the club of the enemies of a visual discourse. Feminism has popularized this iconoclasm in the shape of a critique of visibility, i.e., a deconstruction of observation as a phallocratic instrument of categorization, identification, and petrifying objectification.

In this context it is hardly surprising that Günter Schulte has devoted a third of his book *Der Blinde Fleck in Luhmanns Systemtheorie* [End Page 500] (1993) to the analysis of his observation theory, reconstructing it as the transformed "phallus ocularus," the oedipal paradox of re-entry and blindness, the double bind of Lucifer which condemns him to observe God by drawing a distinction between the Almighty and himself. Even the identity of names suggests an affinity between the observer of princes, Niccolò Machiavelli, Old Nick, the observer of God, and Niklas Luhmann, the observer of all observers.

Systems theory is a labyrinth constructed to hide the scandal of a paradox, the self-referential monster of the unity of a difference. There is only one way of observing the labyrinth itself: to follow the example of Daedalus and take a bird's-eye view. Luhmann follows Kant's Copernican turn in placing the issue of conceptual distinctions before all existential questions. He follows Kant in calling this *Konstitution*, and gives it a Fichtean-decisionist turn by adopting Spencer Brown's theory of observation with its injunction to draw a distinction. Then, he covers his tracks by denying any epistemological foundation. In this, he conforms with Derrida, who refuses to discuss origins and disappears in a Hegelian cloud of dust. The constitution of reality by categorical demarcation is transformed into the self-constitution of the social system through self-description; here, Hegel's historical dialectic is replaced by the concept of evolution, which is controlled by the triad of variation, selection, and stabilization. This gives Luhmann's systems theory the form of self-inclusion as in the philosophy of history; it is itself the result of an evolutionary process in which the continual self-description of society reaches the point of retrospective self-transparency. This Hegelian turn camouflages the relationship between definitions and descriptions in systems theory by surreptitiously displacing it back into reality, where it allegedly appears as the difference between system and environment, with the corresponding distinction between self-reference and external reference. Accordingly, the epistemological burden of proof is dissolved in the circular self-inclusion process of the theory of evolution, which lends Luhmann's theory a flair of objective Social Realism and the unassailable status of retrospective historical sociology. This Hegelian heritage could lead to its inclusion in the great paradigm of self-historization determining the grand récit of the modern era. By this I mean the self-referential stories which produce the conditions for telling them themselves. Thus evolution leads up to Darwin by attaining consciousness of itself; or: history leads up to Hegel, who transforms it from a term for reality into a term of reflection; or: the modern novel abandons the narrator, only to conjure him up again at the end in the [End Page 501] shape of the hero, who is then able to tell his own story. Luhmann, however, deconstructs this story by claiming that there is neither a beginning, nor a middle, nor an end to evolution, or---to use Derri-da's expression---neither origin, center, or telos. He also shares Derrida's basic categories: difference and time. Unlike Derrida though, Luhmann's horizon of reference is not determined by Heidegger's ontological history or Saussure's semiotic concept of language, but by Husserl's concept of meaning and Bühler's theory of communi-cation.

The connection between meaning and communication is rendered possible by the decisive conceptual innovation of Luhmann's theory: the temporalization of systemic elements into transitory events, which in turn makes it possible to transfer the concept of autopoiesis from cognitive biology into the theory of society and reformulate it as the self-description of communication. Only those structures survive in social systems that can connect the transitory events of
communication by processing meaning. This terminologically strategic decision uses the terms "autopoiesis" and "system" as the two fires of a smelting furnace, in which Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness and meaning are blended with the theory of communication and pragmatics. In this process, time appears as the basic principle of self-selection: meaning enables systems to produce their own variations and to control, anticipate, and simulate their selection strategies. The transformation of phenomenology into pragmatics by Alfred Schütz is combined with the systemic paradigm of cybernetics and self-organization. Like Derrida, Luhmann insists that the basic category here is difference; unity is degraded to a derivational term, and the unity of differences is reconstructed as the invisible paradox of self-observation: observation cannot see itself. Like Derrida, Luhmann tries to make paradoxes productive for the description of communications; unlike Derrida, however, he insists on rendering paradoxes asymmetrical by temporalizing them, or rendering them invisible by making them opaque. The final asymmetry is always the one between system and environment. With the objectification of this Hegelian turn, epistemology is transformed into the so-called "natural epistemology." Thus, the relationship between reality and analytical terms remains undecided. This is the price that has to be paid for promoting self-reference, hitherto the privilege of the subject, to a general principle. On the one hand, one loses the old reference to the philosophy of identity; on the other hand, in all probability, one builds a bridge between the two cultures. In any case, the traditional ideology-critique is itself demystified as a simplistic version [End Page 502] of second-order observation. For Luhmann, in this regard, critique is bound to an ontological observation pattern that operates with the leading distinction between being and not being: observations determined by being are called objective, those defined by observations are called subjective. Ideological critique discovers objective social reasons for observations that are determined by observations, which it then criticizes from a position of superior insight into the objective conditions. In its neocybernetic version, second-order observation abandons this pattern. The fundamental distinction between subjective and objective, between transcendental and empirical, is explained in a different way. The idea of a subject equipped with the special ontic quality of reflection is abandoned. On the contrary, operations of subjects can best be understood when described as being themselves actuated by observations. The object observed is seen as an observer. Thus the subject/object distinction is not explained by referring to the state of being, but is ascertained as a distinction that has withstood the practical test of observation. Observation of observation is thus an emergent phenomenon. With this construction, truth is explained constructivistically and detached from all links to reference. Through the code of science, all knowledge is subjected to a second edition and reorganized as the observation of observation. Accordingly, literature would have to be observed as a type of observation.

The characterization of modernity as a functionally differentiated society enables Luhmann to find an entirely new place for that description of society which appears in the form of critique. Function is defined as the range of equivalence of solutions to problems. Functions are thus defined spaces for alternatives. On the one hand, this represents a relief from the pressure of the actual as it reveals possibilities for change; on the other hand, it provokes criticism, as things that could be changed have now become obvious. The origins of criticism lie in the reference to hierarchically organized control, that is, power. But its heyday was in the transitional period between stratified and functionally differentiated societies. That is not surprising, considering the latter type of society established the alterity of problem references as the principle of its organization. The functional alternative to hierarchy, however, is function itself. Hierarchies only endure when their function remains visible; as soon as it is not, they are criticized. Functions themselves, however, already represent forms of evidenced contingency. They encourage criticism, but they incorporate it as well. This results in a double bind: the language of criticism is the language of function. Alterity represents the principle of functionality [End Page 503] itself. It is, however, the principle of the modern age to offer a choice of alternative solutions to the question of the organization of society. It is exactly the criticism levelled at modernity that effects it. On the other hand, there is no alternative to function, as it cannot offer its own abolition. Here systems theory has been fundamentally misunderstood: the concept of function has been assumed to maintain the status quo and has accordingly been interpreted as an element of conservative ideology. Functions do not, however, protect the stability of the structure of the system, but only the autopoiesis of its operations. And autopoiesis in systems utilizing meaning, such as societies, only happens with the aid of negations, criticism, changes, and innovations. In this sense, the enlightenment of the function of enlightenment is still a task for the future, which is the reason why Luhmann gave his theory the title Soziologische Aufklärung ("Sociological Enlightenment"). It is my hope that I have contributed to the enlightenment of this meta-enlightenment.

University of Hamburg
Dietrich Schwanitz is a Professor of English at the University of Hamburg. Among his recent publications are Systemtheorie und Literatur, Englische Kulturgeschichte (2 vols.), as well as the campus novel Der Campus.

**Bibliography**


