

The Missing Bodily Situated Subject.

Practical problems in reflecting Luhmanian empirical systemic research results back into a democratic society of embodied, legally, politically and ethically responsible subjects

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Luhmanian Sociocybernetics is an observation of socio-communicative systems from a specific difference, a second order observation of observations.

The system of observation is an autopoietic communication system with a functional specialization, as for instance one of the symbolic generalized media such as money, power, science, love, art and religion. Only communication communicates, and the social is communication.

These systems make up the social, and they have the human interpenetrated biological and psychological systems as vital surroundings. The bio- and psychological systems establish boundary conditions for the socio-communicative systems, but it does not control the socio-communicative system.

From Luhmann's, and many other researchers' point of view, a human body-mind is not really a human being when it is without language. It is language that creates the reflective social self-consciousness, which takes us out of animal awareness. That is one reason why there are no persons in system science.

There are bio-autopoietic, psycho-autopoietic and socio-communicative systems. But there are no individual animal or human observers in system science, only recursive self-organizing patterns of communication, although a Spencer-Brownian Luhmann understanding must rest on the basic concept of an observer. This concept is not consistently theorized in Spencer-Brown and Luhmann's theories, but is a common sense concept "smuggled" in. The problem is that it is smuggled in from a world view that operates with conscious subjects. But it is treated as a rather abstract figure. It is not biologically connected, not is it religiously connected. It is neither body nor soul!

This means, that in this theoretical framework, we do not have a personal core with a free will, and a communication-independent great variety of qualia that controls the communications and actions, and can be held responsible for them. Rather it is the other way round, that the communication creates conditions to which the psychic system can

make structural coupling, through interpenetration. We are discussing an abstraction, in which we essentially separate out the communications that are occurring, as if nothing else existed but communications.

Another problem is that first person experiences including emotions and qualia are principally accepted as real in the psyche in Luhmann's system theory inspired by Husserl's phenomenology. But it is as a closed system that thinks and feels; only communication communicates and communication is an autopoietic system.

Thus emotions and free will do not really have any causal influence on what is communicated. Like in many other sociological and systemic-cybernetic functionalistic systems on one hand and on the other the biochemical, physiological and neurophysiological scientific understanding of the human, the idea of any causality stemming from a first person experiential subject, would destroy the foundations of the paradigms of natural and social sciences, including Luhmann's system theory – and still in the everyday language we and the researchers cannot do without it. This theory then - like the theories of natural sciences - gives us the problem of how to reintegrate the knowledge gained in and with it into a common sense world of persons.

One problem is that this attacks the core metaphysics in the democratic societies after the Enlightenment. Although we do believe in the social forces of language and its models of reality and social institutions, of coercion, group pressure, status and power, our society is still based on the belief that the individual is a responsible subject, able to make personal and individual decision and taking political, moral and legal responsibility for them. They are punishable for their acts, which might violate the laws, and their vote has political consequences that cannot be withdrawn.

Both the Christian concept of the soul, and later constructed human rights, have been influential, although the Enlightenment was not really Christian. As the scientific world view develops, the problem of subjective consciousness as a causal factor becomes a major problem for consistency in the scientific grand story about the place of the human in an evolving material universe. The physical, chemical and bio-molecular view of the living human seen as a product of evolution has to deny any causal effects to first person experiences as such. It simply does not have any theoretical concepts for qualia, experience and free will, or if they did exist, how they should interact with the material body.

Thus there seems to be a deep contradiction in the metaphysics, especially the view of the human, between the self-conception of the researched society, and the paradigm in which the research is going on.

Many social science paradigms based on some kind of constructivistic metaphysics including discourse theory and advanced critical realism already doubt the idea of a stable subject with essential characteristics. They see the individual emerged in social and cultural meaning and power relations which the individual is not aware of, and which therefore controls him – like the habitus concept of Bourdieu and discourse and power in

Foucault. The individual is totally molded by the social forces. Luhmann seems to share this view but in a realistic open or empty ontology. The world and society exist, but they do not have any specific form in advance, before human perception. Form is then determined through observation. This is again based on socio-communication. Luhmann writes on this question:

"The effect of the intervention of systems theory can be described as a de-ontologization of reality. This does not mean that reality is denied, for then there would be nothing that operated - nothing that observed, and nothing on which one would gain a purchase by means of distinctions. It is only the epistemological relevance of an ontological representation of reality that is being called into question. If a knowing system has no entry to its external world, it can be denied that such an external world exists. But we can just as well - and more believably - claim that the external world is as it is. Neither claim can be proved; there is no way of deciding between them. This calls into question, however, not the external world but only the simple distinction being/non-being, which ontology had applied to it. As a consequence, the question arises: Why do we have to begin with precisely this distinction? Why do we wound the world first with this distinction and no other? Systems theory suggests instead the distinction between system and environment."

(Luhmann 1990, p.132-33.)

But humans are not systems, bodies and psyches are, and of those only human psyches based on a human autopoietic system can connect to language communication, but system science does not look at their activities per se, but only as prerequisites for communication, analyzed for patterns and loops.

But, this way of operating with "empty ontologies" or what is also called "cookie cutter theories" likens the world substratum to dough, in which perception and words can cut any kind of form. This is in its extreme a kind of magical thinking: the world is created and formed by words, or in discourse theory the world only appears through discourse or only the discourse aspect of the world can be understood.

When applying systems theory, you have to be explicit about your own role as an observer. You have to make yourself visible and accountable so that other observers may be able to evaluate your observations. The social system is both structurally and operationally coupled to human beings. The operational coupling is through language and higher-order media of communication, while the structural coupling is a priori.

On the basis of Thomas Kuhn's (1970) analysis of the conditions of incommensurability of the communication between different paradigms, to which many of these scholars ascribe, one wonders how these researchers can feed back into society the results obtained in applied Luhmanian systemic investigation, in a way that is useful to a democratic society based on human rights?

I also think that a non-theoretical notion of "an observer" is introduced by Luhmann through the second order cybernetic theories of Heinz von Foerster, Maturana and Bateson, who do not have a theory of first person consciousness either. The observer in these theories oscillates between a human observer and an abstract non-human cybernetic concept of "observer" as recursive differences, traveling information networks and loops. This is how I understand Bateson's "ecology of mind" based on his cybernetic idea of mind and information, as a difference that makes a difference. (Brier 2006, Bateson and Peirce).

I agree that Luhmann's threefold autopoietic view is a very useful conception of the human being. The problem is that he has no way or any intension of seeing the human embodied conscious communicative system as an overall conscious system.

But I think that the embodiment of knowing in living systems is a prerequisite for the psychological, and that the psychological systems organisation as a subject is a prerequisite for the socio-communicative, as they provide the very field of meaning that the socio-communicative feeds on and manipulates!!

In many sociologies from the Marxist inspired over Symbolic interactionism to Parson's and Luhmann's functionalism we have this philosophy of a social reality almost completely independent of the individual psyche's first person experiences. Sociological models should not be micro-founded based on analysis of social-psychological meaningful interaction as in Symbolic Interactionism or modeled as an aggregate of "rational actors", as in classical economical thinking and rational choice theory according to this theory.

Luhmann also claims that his program is aimed at "de-ontologization", because the social systems do not exist in a sense similar to biological systems. They are not naturally "given", but socially constructed. Still Luhmann explains the construction at the social level in Darwinian terms, i.e. variation and selection. For instance, in science your hypotheses are selected by a relevant scientific discourse and experimental practice. But this is actually a biological argument on a different time scale. Species are evolving constructions of the interactions between the gene pool and the changes in the surrounding ecology, or rather the individual's interpretation of their ecological niches.

Even Husserl emphasized that we have access to this domain of "intersubjectivity", as he called it, but only through his very special methodological idea of "bracketing" the phenomena in consciousness. Luhmann was inspired by this theory and saw its limitations. He changed the foundations considerably by deciding to model this domain as the dynamics of communication. He made communication the foundational unit of social systems in this specific way. But he also, in my opinion, took the whole level of experience and stuffed it into a closed autopoietic system, which he called the psyche. Functionalistic meaning can probably be described for certain uses as an operator. But it is not an operator in itself. Generally Luhmann does not use the interpersonal phenomenological dimension he originally introduced from Husserl, because from a

sociological point of view meaning cannot be seen, only inferred, as a dynamics. This means that you are observing observers constructing their reality while being embedded in some reality you believe to be able to observe, and you believe to be possibly different from the one constructed by the observers you observe. Second-order observations are, therefore, the basic concept of sociological systems theory or sociocybernetics. But how can human embodied beings be observers based on this theory? They do not make distinctions. Distinctions are made in the three autopoietic systems and their mutual structural coupling with each other and the environment and their interpenetrations. But no persons make observations and choices.

A baby is already structurally coupled before it has learned to speak. Language and other media add to the coupling, because there is an interface within language, which animals do not have. Language plays an eminent role in the coupling between the psychological system and the social system, and the structural coupling precedes linguistic capacities.

But, in my view, biology is foundational for a theory of meaning and signification. That was what Tom Sebeok saw when he started! Embodiment has both a scientific and a phenomenological side to it. Merleau-Ponty (2002) saw that. The meaning of information can be ascribed only with reference to a system that is able to organize the information operating over time. That is, a system contains a medium for the communication that is the field of meaning. In humans it is generated by the embodied mind in living systems. Un-embodied systems like the computer can therefore not really produce meaning that means anything to humans. It is my point of view that all meaning and value comes from our existential awareness of being an embodied openness in being, in relation to nothingness and surrounding objects and other human beings, as Heidegger (1967) expresses it.

Thus the biological and the psychological autopoietic systems produce this substance of meaning that the socio-communicative system then operates in modulating! In Luhmann's theory there is on the level of biological autopoiesis hardly any influence on actions that counts in sociological studies. But, in the ethology of Lorenz (Lorenz 1970-71 and 1973) and Tinbergen (1973), animals were seen as having developed refined and different sets of instinctual motivations governing their cognition and communication in hunting, mating, fights for rank, mates and territory, caring for the young etc. This can be connected to a biosemiotic theory (Brier 2000, Emmeche 1998). There is a deep contradiction between this knowledge and Luhmann's lack of reflection on the consequences of embodiment. See also the work of Lakoff (1987) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999). I have summed up these arguments in Brier (2006b).

I have problems with seeing whether the paradigm is consistent. As far as I understand, system science cannot deal with persons at all. I do think it is a problem to claim observations and agents without subjects.

One strategy could then be an eliminative materialistic one like Churchland's, claiming that folk psychology is all wrong. But instead, what I often see is that a non-theoretical

are interpreted back into our common sense reality of responsible persons. Luhmann has such tendencies also. But this means that you have to operate with two different philosophical conceptions, which again means that you need a third to integrate them.

But I see that it is also persons that deliver the field of meaning system science takes for granted. I agree with Qvortrup (2003) that one way of combining them is to say that the psychic and the social communicative system has a much stronger structural coupling than the other systems, and that is what makes them stand out as what we call persons or subjects. But I want to integrate the living body also, as it is the source of life, which is the source of meaning and evolution, and the living body's cognitive system is setting up some essentials for the human being, and some limits to how far it psychically can be molded without the whole system – all three autopoietic systems – collapsing.

Shannon-information is also independent of interpretation, but it is made to be used on systems where a meaning context is assumed. We can here use Luhmann's idea of distinguishing between information and meaning, where for instance a repetition does not give new information, but it can give new meaning. So we can measure the bit in a message and there are no direct connections between bits and meaning. But it does not make sense to count bits if there is not a meaning content.

The meaning of information can be ascribed only with reference to a system that is able to organize the information operating over time. The specification of a system of reference provides the objective information with system-specific meaning. That is, a system contains a medium for the communication that is the field of meaning. In humans it is generated by the embodied mind in living systems (Kirkeby 1997). Un-embodied systems like the computer can therefore not really produce meaning that means anything to humans.

The argument in autopoiesis is that there is a radical shift because of the closure, and individuals are created. That does not make sense on a molecular level. It cannot be seen from a molecular level. There will be some downward causation from the new boundary conditions controlling for instance the environment, which determine how proteins are folded.

I cannot see how there can be any direct connection between neg-entropy and meaning. I agree that it is only living system that can attach meaning to information patterns. This is done, because living systems are individuals with an interest in surviving. This is the first level of meaning. C. S. Peirce (1931-58) talks about *signification* when an organism gets meaning out of non-intentional signals and turns them into signs by giving them meaning in relation to its form of life.

I agree with Luhmann's threefold autopoietic view. I think Luhmann - to my knowledge fails to produce such a theory of meaning. That is why I want to semiotize Luhmann (Brier 2002/2003).

We need to distinguish between information and meaning (bio-psycho and psycho.-social), signal, sign and language. To me the informational mostly starts with the chemical, because here the pattern fitting becomes the most important form of interaction. (Brier 2005b)

This view of course makes me shy away from the idea that we should be able to define meaning on any mathematical level, as I see meaning as embodied attached to the evolutionary fight for existence, and when you add awareness you have the start of the existential dimension of meaning. This leads to discussions of values, the good life, the meaning of life, religion and philosophy in the socially conscious human, as Heinz von Foerster saw it and Maturana still does.

The problem of how to interpret results from a paradigm that does not recognize the existence of persons back into a democratic political, social system based on persons, their rights and responsibility, seem a crucial one to me. Even abstract classical economics have a person in form of the crude model of 'rational man' on which they base their highly abstract mathematics, so they do not face the same magnitude of problems when relating their findings into our common sense reality. A Transdisciplinary paradigm where these different approaches can be compared, and their results integrated through various methods of triangulation, seems necessary Brier (2006).

I find Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity very strange in its transcendental world view, and anyway Luhmann puts it into a complete other frame than Husserl's. Luhmann's theory is not really phenomenological at all. His intersubjectivity is not going on in the experience of phenomena, but seems closer to Bateson's development of Wiener's informational world view, and like Bateson he does not have a theory concerning to whom it is that the difference makes a difference (Brier 1992). Who makes the interpretation? On what background of reality is meaning created in a world without persons? The answer from the social sciences is often that meaning is created in society. The counter answer is that a society is also based in a biological and physical environment of embodied conscious humans (Brier 2006a and b). But cybernetics and systems theory do not have a theory of embodied subjects capable of interpretations of meaning. In Brier (2005a and 2006c) I have contrasted von Foerster's, Bateson's and Luhmann's theories with Peirce's concepts of mind and the sacred. I am pointing out that Bateson's "Lonely Skeleton of Truth" (Bateson and Bateson 2005) can never produce first person qualia, but its idea and dynamics – and thereby Luhmann's - becomes meaningful on an embodied Peircean semiotic background.

Both Heidegger, Wittgenstein (1958) and Luhmann (1995) agree that we live in communication and language, but only Merleau-Ponty starts including the body in his philosophy in its double status as subject and object at the same time. Lakoff and Johnson show how the objective body forms our way of making classificatory concepts in language. The ethological tradition adds concepts of psycho-physical motivations in living bodies seen as representing species, (Deacon 1997) which are selected through a constant interaction with their life world in the form of a habitat being part of a greater ecology (Brier 1998). This selective interaction embodies the cognitive processual

connectedness Bateson terms the ‘pattern that connects’. Maturana and Varela (1980) call it structural couplings connected with autopoietic systems. Maturana is not happy with Luhmann’s (1999) generalization of the autopoietic concept, and one must admit that Luhmann loses track of how important it is that mind is embodied, because the material individuality of the body alone is one important source of the emergence of a subjectivity. Language, of course, is the other source, and makes self-consciousness possible partly through the possibility of representing oneself as an object for thinking, through the concepts of “self” that a given culture and language provide.

As Peircean semiotic provides the most Transdisciplinary semiotic framework, especially in its biosemiotic form, I suggest that Luhmann’s theory is transferred into that framework Brier (1995). It semiotizes the body, accepts a phenomenological dimension to all living systems and can when avoiding a pure pan-semiotism be connected with the whole informational, cybernetic and system theoretical background that Luhmann draws upon, especially when we reach the second order level.

1. I accept Qvortrup’s idea that it is the psychological and socio-communicative system’s mutual structural couplings that make something equivalent to the traditional subject possible.
2. I suggest that this is compatible with Peirce’s idea, that the subject or self is a sort of symbol, knowing that he was a conceptual realist, who viewed signs to be as real as stones – if not more real.
3. I argue further that it is the embodied cognition that makes this possible as well.
4. I argue that information as difference turns into triadic signs with meaning, when living autopoietic systems interact and communicate.
5. I argue that embodiment is the first basis for a virtual field of meaning in the form of individual, group or species reduction of complexity based on a psycho-biological meaning (conatus) for the survival of autopoietic systems.
6. In doing that I also suggest that we enlarge the traditional biological view of the body with a biosemiotic one.

With this Cybersemiotic framework I then create a theoretical theory of self and subjectivity compatible with the natural as well as the social sciences and the humanities, which does not contradict the systemic and cybernetic dynamics that Bateson uses in his concept of information as a difference that makes a difference. This is foundational to Luhmann’s theory. But I do now allow for a ‘whom’ to which the difference makes a difference that is not only a cybernetic system, but also a semiotic embodied one that can make meaningful interpretations. Even if this whom may “only” be a symbol, this embodied openness is still a ‘Dasein’.

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