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Repairing a Blind Spot in Luhmann's Sociology
with Parsons' General Theory of Action

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Summary

The blind spot of sociology in respect to emotions is not merely its lack of an account of emotions, but primarily its conception of emotions as something pre-social or pre-cultural and thus failing to recognize their genuinely social character. Expressed in the terminology of Niklas Luhmann, emotions are seen as part of the environment of social systems. What is ignored thereby are the affective processes and structures of social systems. The reason lies in an essentialist definition of sociology and the basic concepts derived therefrom. In the case of Luhmann, it is the merging of the elementary social operation communication with *meaning* by definition and subsequently of social structure with *semantics*. The precondition of the ability to see emotions as social phenomena lies in a conceptual differentiation, demonstrated via the example of Parsons' functional definition of the social. Drawing on Parsons' theory, it is argued – thoroughly in accordance with the concept of autopoiesis so central for Luhmann – to conceive of affectivity as a structurally independent component of communication/action.

At the end of the 19th century, the French philosopher and sociologist Jean Marie Guyau envisioned a sociology which – comparable to the revolution of astronomy and physics through the discovery of the laws of gravitation by Isaac Newton – would revolutionize the knowledge about social phenomena through the discovery of the “force of attraction” of emotions. In a first sketch, Guyau described physical contact as an elementary form of socialization, be it in the course of the education of children or in the formation of (love-)relationships. He regarded the role of the senses, especially the sense of smell, and of emotions aroused by them as the basis of supra-individual cohesion, and he considered what he termed a “complex aesthetic emotion”, as the quintessential paradigm of the creation of social solidarity. For Guyau, the basic social process consisted in the interaction and non-conscious “direct” transmission of affective states and processes through “neuronal streams” (s. Guyau 1987 [1889]).

The early death of Guyau prevented that these considerations could lead to an elaborated new sociological paradigm and in retrospect we know that sociology took a very different path than Guyau had predicted, or, more precisely: different paths. But despite their fundamentally different directions they all have in common what the Swiss psychiatrist Luc Ciompi recently brought into discussion in regard to Niklas Luhmann: a blind spot for the emotions, for the senses, and in general for the fact of the corporeal condition of the social world.

The “Blind Spot”

However, a cursory look into contemporary sociological literature raises doubts. Is sociology really blind towards emotions? Although it might be true that emotionality is still not an issue in many areas of sociological research there are good arguments against the thesis of a blind spot. About two decades ago, the sociology of emotions became fashionable and grew to a

considerable, meanwhile institutionalized field of research. A significant part of the respective studies dealt with the history and the classics of the field and soon it became clear, that emotions occupied a prominent status in practically all great sociological works. The respective terminological repertoire reaches from Weber's "affective action" and Durkheim's "collective affects" to Elias' "affect-structure," constricted and controlled in the course of the process of civilization.

The same holds true for the work of Niklas Luhmann. Already the early outline of his general theory of social systems includes, at least in a sketchy form, a theory of emotions and of the body (s. 1995a: 244-251) which he further pursued in connection with a wide range of topics. Besides in the probably best known work *Love as Passion* (1986) the theme of emotionality and the body is taken up repeatedly: in extensive studies on *Art as a Social System* (2000) as well as in smaller essays like the one on "Perception and Communication of Sexual Interests." (1995b, 189-203)

Regarded "merely empirically", the thesis that emotions, sensuality and corporeality are not seen in sociology or underrated in their significance therefore seems not to be tenable. On the contrary, some of the examples became classics of the sociology of emotions. "No-one," Luc Ciompi writes correctly, and one wants to reassure: not even sociologists "can deny that emotional factors play an important role in social life." (2004) Thus, it is not a matter of blindness in regard to emotions in general or *for* social phenomena in particular.

And yet, the diagnosis of a blind spot is correct. It concerns the inability to see emotions *as* social phenomena or affective components *as* integral elements of all (social) action. What is left out of account is the genuine social dimension of feelings, their existence as "social things" (s. McCarthy 1989) or in whatever way one wants to express the fact of the sociality of feelings. Emotions, the senses, and the body are unanimously regarded as something pre-social or/and pre-

cultural. Although they purportedly shape social phenomena and vice versa are shaped by social processes they are allocated – in the terminology of Niklas Luhmann – to the environment of the social system. The question why this is conceived of in such a way or if it is even justified leads us to crucial crossroads of sociological theory building.

Sociological Essentialism: The Identification of Social Phenomena with a “Substance”

The linguistic hybridity of the word sociology is probably one of the most impressive symbols of its so far unsolved foundational problems. However, it is not only the synthesis of two heterogeneous linguistic roots (Latin and Greek); the concepts in themselves are in no way clarified. There is neither a consensus in respect to the question of how the word part “logos” is to be understood – nomothetic, causal, evolutionary or interpretative concepts of explanations stand abruptly side by side or are tied together rough and ready – nor could more than 150 years after the creation of the word sociology a consensus be reached to what “socius” is related to.

For a solution of the latter problem, a major part of sociology managed with linking it with quasi a substance by definition; a substance which got imported from philosophical anthropology where it was developed out of the question regarding the distinctiveness of human beings. The “old European tradition”, as Luhmann put it, determined the human being through the difference to the animal (s. 1995b: 197 or 1997: 121 or 2000: 5). According to this tradition, corporeality and the ability to sensory perception is shared with the animal. The difference makes the reason. “The mode of contact unique to humans was accordingly believed to reside in (rational) thought.” (Luhmann 2000: 5). Luhmann puts this anthropological model from the head to the feet, as it were, through the acknowledgement of the co-evolutionary significance of sensory perception. Compared to thinking, sensory perception even takes on a functional priority.

Thereby, sensory perception is enhanced in its anthropological and epistemological status. However, Luhmann never took this idea consistently into account for sociology.

Derived out of “old-European” anthropological premises, two matters or substances could make special careers in sociology: meaning and normativity. One of the most successful sociological publications ever, Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* marks out the anthropological prerequisites in precisely this sense: “Human beings have a peculiar status in the realm of animals” (1969, 49) in order to deduce out of the “highly unspecialized and undirected drives” (1998, 50) their compensation by means of meaningful constructions: “*Homo sapiens* is always and to the same extent *Homo socius*.” (1969: 54)

Meaning and normativity gave the term “socius”– “the fellow traveller”, probably only useful for the sociology of tourism – a new turn. Even if in totally different colorations, the equations of social = normative or social = meaningful became the key for answering the question concerning the morphology of social systems. Thus, the structure of the social world is conceived of a material used for its construction and not of functional interactions/combinations of materials which have to be determined empirically. This critique of sociological essentialism can be formulated in a more pronounced way: be it “holistically” with Aristotle, “emergent” with the help of systems theory in general or, even more advanced, with the concept of autopoiesis so central for Luhmann in which the material, to keep the terminology, shows a functional connection with the form of the interrelations, i.e. does not exist as such but “*after* the whole” or “produces itself in a recursive networks.” But Luhmann carried out such an anti-essentialist theory program only in a reduced way in that he incorporated a substance into communication, regarded as the basic social process, namely meaning in an a-priori way.

More generally, the answer to the question which substance is taken as the “actual” one of social phenomena represents the *definiens* of the concomitant sociological paradigm: besides

norms/values in normativistic structuralism and meaning in phenomenological sociology it is economics in materialistic social theories and rationality/self-interest in different versions of behaviourism which could establish themselves in a particular way in sociology. All of these theory traditions determine *apriori* something, which actually can only be determined *a-posteriori* and thus create a blind spot, not only for emotions, but for everything which is categorically outside the substance taken as the *definiens* of social phenomena.

- *The Normative Structure of the Social World*

Let's start with the normativistic approach, the identification of "social facts" with normativity. Patterns of action, roles, institutions, even the whole culture then appear as social imperatives for the right behaviour in more or less specified situations. Once this *apriori* is set up by definition in such a way, emotions are brought into play in a twofold way: they are regulated through social norms (s. „feeling rules“: Hochschild 1979) or they are disruptive factors for social order (s. „bloody revenge“: Scheff 1994), which can be evaluated positively, since this could trigger social change, which itself is regarded as a change of normative structures. However, the blind spot of normativistic social theories – again, not in respect to emotions in general but in respect to emotions *as* components of social reality – is a consequence of the *apriori* conceptual synthesis of "normative" and "social".

As is the case with all conceptual dedifferentiation this also has a reverse implication, namely the inability to acknowledge that normativity *per se* is in no way a general social fact. Seen from the perspective of a differentiated conceptual schema the forming of normativity is to the same extent a genuinely individual phenomenon. Georg Simmel coined the term of the "individual law" to express this. Out of the *apriori* of the equation normative = social, normative

components of a personal identity appear as a sort of import product from the social system acquired in the course of a more or less mechanistically understood process of “internalization.” This is the case in the psychological morphology of Freud (super-ego) or of Mead (me), to remind on the two probably most prominent examples.

- *The Meaning-Structure of the Social World*

Max Weber formed his basic sociological concepts out of a quite different substance. According to him, one can speak “of ‘action’ insofar as acting individuals attach a subjective meaning to their behaviour... Action is ‘social’ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.” (1972, 1) For Alfred Schütz this foundation of an interpretative sociology became the starting point for his studies on *The Meaning-Structure of the Social World* (orig. German title, officially translated as: *Phenomenology of the Social World*), with which he became the founder of a movement, which under the name of phenomenological sociology should have an enormous influence on the course of sociology. Social constructivism, its theoretical sibling deconstruction or the cultural sociology movement took over the decisive premises of Schütz’s phenomenology. Their common denominator is the presumption of the construction or deconstruction of the social world by means of meaning or meaning patterns. Consequently, “understanding” and “interpretation” is regarded as the methodological key for social analysis.

And out of the equation *Homo sapiens = Homo socius* we can inflect the same conclusions for a sociology of emotions like those of the normativistic approach: emotions, the senses, and the body now do not appear as such in social processes but as socially constructed “semantics” related to them or, again, as irritations of meaningful social processes and structures.

Applied to communication, this means that one cannot communicate affectively but at best about affective states. This is clearly visible in the problematic nature of an essay of Alfred Schütz on “Making Music Together.” Although Schütz there “discovers” the high significance of bodily processes and mutual perceptions of musicians by relating and coordinating to each other (1972, 131) these processes are in his view not part of the musical communication as such. Mutual sensual perception and the consequent coordination of action is – insofar as the concept of meaning is connected with communication by definition – in many cases a precondition of the possibility of communication: in making music, in sexuality etc. but precisely not a component of communication itself. Consequently, perceptions and their processing in human minds are regarded as psychological phenomena, cognitive communications as social phenomena.

- *Luhmann: Social Systems as Systems of Meaning-Based Communication*

In this respect, the matter stands the same in Luhmann’s sociology. “For without making use of meaning, no societal operation can start” he writes apodictic in his theory of society (1997, 44). Like in the case of Schütz, meaning is connected with communication by definition and, in consequence, with the structure of social systems. “Social structures are expectational structures.” (1995a: 292) It would even be true “that there *are no other structural possibilities for social systems*” (1995a: 293, in italics by Luhmann, like in all other italicisations in the following quotes). Expectations in turn “are treated as *knowledge*.” (1995a: 328)

Luhmann has distanced himself in many details from the tradition of phenomenological sociology, especially in its action-theoretical version. However, this is precisely not the case in the point which is decisive for our argumentation, the connection of meaning with society by definition and the foundational concepts of a theory of social systems derived therefrom. To

formulate it with a *bonmot* of Luhmann: meaning survives as an action-theoretical “left-over” in his theory of social systems and causes considerable *aporia*. This is all the more remarkable as Luhmann’s adoption of the abstract or “content-less” concept of system for sociology would suggest to pose the question of the content of social processes and structures as an empirical one and not to prejudge it by *apriori* commitments.

In the extensive writings of Luhmann one seeks without success for a theoretical link for the claim of the distinct status of meaning as the only medium of social processes. The starting point leads us again into anthropology. The human being “insofar one grasps him/her as an empirically observable fact” (Luhmann 1995b, 7) would be at any rate environment of the social system, because he/she is conceived of as composed of an organic and a psychological form of (re)production. But human beings as such are on no account empirically observable facts. They are, in specific social worlds indivisible units of experience (in-dividuals) and remain sociologically relevant as such, even if all scientific approaches dissolve this unity, e.g. through the distinction of (operational) levels like organic and psychological modes of (re-)production. “No life reproducing or consciousness reproducing operation which is possible for humans is *as such* a social operation. Nothing which occurs within a human being, produces for that reason already society.” (1995b, 10) Even if one accepts this premise, its inversion is by no means conclusive. Although it is true that nothing which occurs within a human being produces society *as such*, it cannot be ruled out, that still *everything*, which occurs within a human being *can* produce society. Whether I understand this objectivistic, analogous to “specks of fat on a soup”, (Luhmann 1995b, 10) or in terms of differences is of no relevance at this stage. In short, in Luhmann’s theory of social systems it remains unclear, why of all operations, parts, and analytically determined levels – or in whatever form one thinks the human being to be composed of – only meaning is appropriate as a medium of processes and structures of the social world.

Luhmann's linking of Husserl and Parsons, of meaning and function (s. Luhmann 1987: 134) results in a sort of phenomenological reductionism. Everything, which occurs in a social system can only do so in the medium of meaning: the body as "a semantics of corporeality" (1995a: 511), love as the "semantics of passion." Reality and normativity appear as "the semantics of 'is' and 'ought'." (1995a: 322) Norms are interpreted as a special case of meaning, as a sort of a semantics of stubbornness ("expectations not disposed toward learning" (1995a: 321) in contrast to cognitions as more flexible "expectations that are willing to learn." (1995a: 320) Thereby, the completely different qualities of reality and norms, their – Parsons would say: structural independence is dissolved. That expectations on the basis of norms "are counterfactually retained" (1995b: 321) in the case of disappointment may be true in individual empirical cases, however, facts are no criteria for normativity at all and cannot help to determine the latter. In other words: expectations cannot be based on norms but they can be based on the *knowledge* ("semantics of 'ought'") about actual commitments to norms of individuals or groups.

The basis for the conceptual dedifferentiation is the tying of meaning to all basic system-theoretical concepts by definition. In the theory of social systems meaning as a "processing according to differences" (1995a: 67) precedes the concept of information. As a result, corporeal differences can be processed socially only in the medium of meaning. A more accurate solution is to reverse the relationship and introduce the concept of information prior to the concept of meaning. This would make the question of the medium of the information to an empirical one, where meaning is only one of many possibilities. Gregory Bateson used this theory technique e.g. to clarify the question what information means at the example of Balinese art¹. (s. 1972: 128ff)

¹ To my understanding, Gilbert Ryle originally used the concept of "thick description" in the same sense as a grasping of the interconnection of facts and not as in the phenomenological reinterpretation as a description of "webs of significance" (Geertz).

An analogous restriction to meaning can be observed for the concept of structure. “Thus, structure, whatever else it may be, consists in *how permissible relations are constrained within a system*. This constraint constitutes the meaning of actions.” (Luhmann 1995a: 283) If the first part of the sentence leaves completely open (“whatever else it might be” what the reason of a constraint might be (shame, thresholds of embarrassment, factual incompatibilities etc.) we find ourselves in the second part of the quote suddenly transferred into the medium of meaning.

This problem of the theory of social systems finds its continuation both in culture theory as well as in the theory of psychic systems. Culture is “... a supply of possible themes that is available for quick and readily understandable reception in concrete communication processes. ... We would like to call this supply of themes *culture*, and, if it is reserved specifically for the purpose of communication, *semantics*. Thus an earnest conservable semantics is a part of culture, namely, of what is handed down to us by the history of concepts and ideas. Culture is ... a limitation of meaning (reduction)...” (Luhmann 1995a: 163)² Thus, body cultures, affective cultures, cultures of perception, of taste etc. are *as such* banned from the concept of culture.

It stands no differently with the theory of psychic systems. For Luhmann, a psychic system is an autopoietic system on the basis of consciousness „By consciousness we ... mean ... the specific operational mode of psychic systems.“ (1995a: 262) Even emotions are thereby banned into the environment of psychic systems. According to Luhmann, they appear and disappear in the psychic system due to the fulfilment/disappointment of expectations (s. 1995b: 269) „In terms of their function, emotions can be compared to immune systems; they seem to assume an immunizing role for the psychic system ... depending on consciousness’s own experience of itself.“ (1995a: 274) „Emotions arise and grip body and consciousness when the

² „Culture has to do with meaning,“ Stephan Fuchs writes at the beginning of a chapter on culture, paradoxically in a book called *Against Essentialism* (2001: 150) written in the tradition of Niklas Luhmann. In this respect though, he is thoroughly in accordance with the so-called “New Cultural Sociology” which still holds on to the state of the discourse of the 19th century.

autopoiesis of consciousness is in danger” (1995a: 274) and they “die away when order is restored in the self-continuation of the consciousness.“ (1995a: 274) Everything that „cannot be digitalized“ (1995b: 199) leads to incommunicability, a peculiarity of precisely those „semantics“ which are directed towards body communication, which however does not mean bodily communication but communication in view of the body.

The result is a peculiar sociologism which eliminates the sharp distinction of psychic and social systems within the concept of operational closure in Luhmann’s theory. Emotions and emotion cultures now appear as socially conditioned and are functionally specified to social control: „The well-known variety of distinct emotions comes about only secondarily, only through cognitive and linguistic interpretation; thus it is socially conditioned ... This holds even more for everything one could designate a ‘culture of emotions’: for refinements of the occasions and the forms of expression in which emotions take shape. Such transformations serve ... to control emotions socially ...” (1995a: 275)

We can conclude that the reduction of the operational mode, both of the psychic as well as the social system to the medium meaning and the reduction of culture to semantics is the theoretical reason for a blind spot, which makes emotions, but also every other content, invisible. For a cure of the blind spot, as it were, it is necessary to undertake a conceptual differentiation. The question in which concrete theory technique this needs to be carried out, i.e. in which terminology und with which possible theoretical links is for us at this point of secondary importance. Subsequently, it should only be demonstrated at the example of the theory constructions of Georg Simmel and Talcott Parsons how a possible contrasting foil looks like in the decisive point of our argumentation. The basic idea in both examples lies in the theoretical decision to separate social, cultural and psychic systems from the question of the “material” or “medium” of their processes and structures.

Georg Simmel: Differentiation through Form and Content

Georg Simmel wanted his sociological paradigm to be labelled as “formal sociology.” As is well known, the crucial distinction is form and content. With this distinction, Simmel carried out the necessary conceptual differentiation. For the social is becomes clear, that it cannot be defined by a content or, as Simmel expresses it on other occasions, by a matter or substance. Its specificity must be sought in the form of interactions. The conceptual decoupling is of course also valid for the inversion: no content – be it art, religion, eroticism, economic interests etc. – is as such social but only *insofar* as it becomes effective in the purely functional form of interactions. The form – content axiom is widely known. Less known are the theoretical consequences and less known is, that Simmel had applied the analogous principle of theory construction to – as we say today – psychic and cultural systems.

- “*Formal Psychology*”

Already in his early writing on moral sciences he argues – although without using this expression – for a sort of formal psychology. For Simmel, theoretical problems in psychology stem in the same way from the inclination “to substantialize the occurrences within us.” (1989: 108) E.g. on one occasion, sensuality is located in the centre of the Ego and normative demands then appear as exterior, more or less internalized, social coercion; on another occasion, however, morality is regarded as the actual authority of the Ego, which through exterior social seductions can be more or less irritated qua sensuality. “This ambiguities and uncertainties stem to a large extent from the lack of clarity which surround the concept of the Ego in theoretical and in

practical regard.” (1989: 136). Simmel’s alternative conception claims that the Ego „lives in any of my energies.“ (1989: 107). His theoretical consequence is that: „the concept of the Ego is generally a completely formal one, dispensable of all concrete content or all indication to such a content.” (1989, 136) This of course does not mean that the Ego is contentless, but, „the concept of the Ego must be empty, because it must grant space to the most divergent singularities.” (1989: 137). The identification of „the most divergent singularities,“ and the question of their role within the frame of personal identity is thereby a task that needs to be achieved by psychological research.

Therefore, the cybernetics of the psyche cannot be understood out of substantial qualities, for instance according to the conception: norms at the top, drives at the bottom but out of processes of differentiation of each specific content. Emotions are not “sublimated” by normative or cognitive control or corresponding “alloys” but by the differentiation of an, lets say, emotional competence as such. This of course does not exclude the fact of mutual influences of psychological contents, but it renders these influences as special cases which need to be determined empirically.

- Formal Sociology

For psychology, Simmel had expounded these ideas only in a sketchy way. The analogous conception for social phenomena, his formal sociology, however, is accessible for us in extensive studies. Simmel calls „... everything which exists ... as drive, interest, purpose, inclination, psychological condition and movement in such a way, that out of this and based on it originates the effect on others and the sense of its effects ... as the content, quasi the matter of sociation.”

(1992: 18) Sociation then is a functional form of unity which forms a unified reality with its content.

For the sociology of emotions, of the senses, and of the body this means the ability to perceive the processes and structures of interactions which are based on all of these. Emotions are then – on the same theoretical level as meaning, norms and all other possible contents – a potential medium of the structure of the social world. Simmel’s “excursus on the sociology of the senses” does not restrict the senses to the function of pre-communicative perception but shows their genuinely social-constitutive function. This is the theoretical background of the repeatedly quoted sentence that “the social question is not only an ethical one, but also a question of the nose.” The interaction of the eye contact and the affective toning accompanied by it is as such a purely social phenomenon and not firstly in the cognitive grasping of the meaning of an “eye language.” For Simmel, social “understanding” is not – as assumed in interpretative sociology – an operation bound to cognitive meaning but (also) a sort of affective “empathy” without which the individuality of a person would not be accessible at all.

- *“Formal Culture Theory”*

Simmel continues the same basic thought for culture theory as well. For Simmel, culture is the objectified form of the unfolding of all of the contents which are in question for the forming of the Ego (“any of my energies”) and die development of the form of society (any material which causes interaction). Culture is “that perfection of the soul, which it cannot reach directly out of itself ... but in that it takes the detour via the forms of the spiritual-historical work of the genus.” (Simmel 2000, 190) With this theory premise it is possible to acknowledge the

existence of emotion- and body cultures *as such* and not as a product of the sanctioning/control by or fusion with normativity or meaning.

Talcott Parsons: Differentiation through Function

Talcott Parsons carried out a conceptual differentiation with analogous consequences for the sociology of emotions. The decisive basic idea of Simmel's "formal" theory of psychic, social and cultural systems finds its equivalent in the elaboration of Parsons' so-called "structural-functional" action theory.

The decisive step beyond the determination of action by a content, as in the case of traditional theories, was already achieved in *The Structure of Social Action*. (1937) Neither "ideal factors" (meaning, norms) nor "real factors" sufficiently define an act. The structure of action – in the terminology of Georg Simmel: the form – is the unity ("unit act") of *structurally independent* components. Thereby, Parsons identifies at first norms, conditions, means, ends, and, at the end of his discussion of the European classical writers, adds aesthetics/expressivity. (s. Staubmann 1995)

The conceptual differentiation introduced thereby is further developed in the course of the subsequent theory work. Out of the nucleus of the structure of social action in voluntarism Parsons differentiates in his later writings the general action system into functionally defined subsystems: culture, social system and personality. In contrast to Simmel, Parsons forms categories of action impulses, that is – with reference to sociology – categories of "matters" of sociation. The structure of action systems is conceived on the basis of three such categories or action-dimensions: the cognitive-instrumental, the evaluative, as well as – decisive for the

sociology of emotions – the affective-cathectic. The crucial theory technical step, however, is the orthogonal conception of action dimensions and action systems.

The two primary action dimensions are the cognitive and the affective-cathectic. The first one serves to determine the existence of objects of the situation. It is the basis for an instrumental action-code. The concept of cathexis which goes back to Freud denotes the positive (“attachment”, “sympathy”) or negative (“aversion”, “antipathy”) emotional attachment of (social) objects. Both dimensions are thus “modes of relation” between actors and their situation. In social systems, actors are therefore „object to each other in two *primary* respects ... cognitive perception ... and cathexis.” (Parsons 1964: 20) The problem of double contingency – central for Luhmann’s theorizing – has consequently a genuinely affective dimension: “Ego’s gratification must ... be dependent on what alter *may or may not do*; ... It may be a matter of alter’s physical presence at certain places and times, or of various performances in the presence of or in relation to ego. But the essential point is that whatever or not alter ‘does’ something, or ‘how’ he does it, makes a gratificational *difference* to ego.” (Parsons 1952: 35) As a result, the processing of affective “gratificational differences” becomes intelligible as relevant for communication to the same extent as cognitive meaning-differences.

The various action dimensions and modes of relation are now components of all structures and processes of action systems, in the forming of culture, the psychic system, as well as in the social system. Later, Parsons will add the behavioral system in the course of the reformation of his action theory within the AGIL-paradigm. The whole of these affective parts of the general action system could be called “the affective complex” in analogy to “the cognitive complex” which Parsons had elaborated in his monograph on the American university. (s. Parsons/Platt 1973)

- *The Affective Complex*

In *The Social System* (1951), still elaborated within the structural-functional frame of reference, Parsons describes the structure of social systems on the basis of the two primary action-dimensions. Thereby, the cognitive-instrumental social complex is compared with the expressive social complex. The communication-code of the cathectic mode of relation consists of an expressive symbolism, which represents the precondition of emotional communication as such, the communication *of* emotions (s. Staubmann 1995a) and not the communication *about* emotions. Here, Parsons calls the respective action-code as expressive-consummatory, i.e. it is a matter of actions and interactions with a primacy of affective gratification or deprivation. All of the essential concepts for the description of social systems are now delineated according to the primacy of the respective action-orientation.

Interactions then can attain a primarily instrumental character which Parsons calls cooperation. The expressive analogue is solidarity/loyalty. Here it is a matter of the form of interaction systems based on complementary affective-cathectic interests. In regard to possession, the terminology suggested by Parsons is “facilities” in the instrumental case and “rewards” in the affective case. “Rewards” are accordingly affectively relevant objects of immediate gratification. Important are thereby the respective relations to social objects, the „contingent relations to other actors“. Forms of relationships like love (with the help of the pattern variables described as “functional diffuse” and “affective”, i.e. a social phenomenon on the affective action dimension) and “Receptiveness”/“Responsiveness” (characterized as “functional specific” and “affective”) can be classified here. Like instrumental possession, the affective analogue is more or less generalized and becomes relevant for interaction and communication through symbolisms. Money as the symbolism of an instrumental economy circulates and functions analogue to an

expressive symbolism in affective economies of societies. This thought is developed further within the AGIL paradigm to a theory of affect as a generalized medium. (s. the detailed reconstruction by Bershadsky 2004)

But let's stay within the frame of structure-functionalism as applied in *The Social System*. All concepts for the description of the structure of social systems are defined on a level of abstraction which allows a specification to the respective action dimension, therefore also to the case relevant for us of the affective-cathetic mode of relation. Thus, stratification is not confined to the description of the form of instrumental, i.e. economic or political super/subordination but also in expressive-affective forms like e.g. hierarchies on the basis of prestige. Roles and institutions are expressive insofar they are formed around affective action motives. Expressive social control counts to the most important social types of sanctions, because they mean, in contrast to instrumental "exterior" sanctions, an "inner-oriented" form of advantages and disadvantages for personal identities. Based on the central role of emotionality in his theory construction Parsons was one of the very few sociologists who reacted to the specific societal changes of affective patterns. Expressive revolution was the term Parsons used to describe the breakdown of traditional affective forms of relationships and forms of experiences as well as the attempt to establish new and more generalized forms.

There are certainly inconsistencies in the complex architecture of Parsons' general theory of action especially a repeatedly occurring "normativistic bias" which shaped for a long time Parsons' image and the critique of his work. One of the theory technically most consequent studies in the sense outlined here deals with the personality model of Freud (s. 1964). Parsons, who otherwise was very appreciative of Freud, argues completely in accordance with his work on social systems, that the morphology of the Id, Ego and Super-ego is orthogonal to the action dimensions or psychological contents (drive/affect; reality/cognition; normativity) and not, as

within the Freudian model are conceived in a conceptual identity. All contents, therefore not only the normative Super-ego develop out of the dealing with objectified cultural forms and with significant others. In affective learning processes, people develop emotionally generalized action competences analogue to evaluative-moral (value-commitment) and cognitive-instrumental competences (intelligence).

In the first revisions of action theory to the AGIL-Scheme the G-function still is identified with affectivity. It is a matter of “goal gratification and enjoyment of goal-state.” This describes action- and interaction phases in which affective components (e.g. common affective goals or affective tensions in working groups) have a primacy and the result of which is the production of expressive action patterns i.e. of an expressive-aesthetic symbolism. In the following structural reinterpretation of AGIL as a structural framework of action systems much of the theory gain of structure-functionalism gets lost for the sociology of emotions. The most interesting theory development in this respect is the re-conceptualization of the “expressive economy” of the structural-functionally described social system with the help of the generalized exchange medium affect. Affect here is not a quality of individual human beings but a generalized medium of communication and interaction relating to the mobilization and control of factors of solidarity. (s. referring to this: Baum 1975 und Lidz 1991) The resource-basis is the feeling of belonging together in a primordial sense. „In fact, affective attachment of individuals to the collectivities which are constitutive of the structure of the social system and to the other individuals who share membership status with them are at the centre of the mechanisms by which general action factors can achieve the status of institutionalization in defining the structure of social units.“ (Parsons 1977, 219-220) This process of the forming of a generalized medium affect allows more complex “‘criss-crossing’ solidarities” as a basis for the functioning of forms of relationships in a modern highly differentiated society.

- *Affect as a „Structural Independent Component” of Action: Autopoiesis of Emotions?*

A theory-technically decisive precondition for the view to the “affective structure of the social world” exists in Parsonian action theory in the conception of the “structural independence” of action components. For Parsons, this was quasi the point of convergence or the “limes”, which idealistic and positivistic theory traditions did not reach but to which they were directed to (“convergence thesis”) and which Parsons claimed to realize with his voluntaristic frame of reference.

Idealism and positivism had conceded a primacy of ideal action goals on the one hand and conditional action factors on the other hand to reduce the respective other components “in the last instance” to them. To avoid such a fallacy Parsons argued for the mutual irreducibility of action components, which he in precisely this sense called structurally independent. As argued up to now, this implies that emotions *as* social phenomena are precisely not “reducible” to normative or meaningful regulations or to economic-material exigencies.

Thereby, the basic idea is similar to what Luhmann calls closure in the formation of autopoietic systems. “Autopoietic systems of every kind are closed systems (the concept is defined thereby).” (1995b: 110) With Parsons, the idea of closure concerns the subsystems of action, as well as the so-called action dimensions. Whether the theorem of autopoietic systems is thereby fulfilled as such, and one can speak of an autopoiesis of emotions in analogy to an autopoiesis of consciousness must be left open. At any rate, there is no doubt that Parsons’ “structural independence” and “closure” in the sense of autopoiesis mean in the same way the impossibility of mutual structural determination which does not exclude mutual influences and

the fact of mutual preconditions at all³. Decisive here is the fact of the specificity of the logic of processes and structures in the medium of the respective action dimension. The trinity of Parsons' action dimensions must be regarded in the same way as Luc Ciompi characterizes the relationship of thinking and feeling namely "as in fact something inseparably connected but at the same time as essentially different." (1986)

Parsons therefore investigates the "logic of affect" in the narrower sense or the logic of the structure of the general action system and its subsystem in the affective-cathetic mode of relation at first in their specific forming and thus qualitative difference to other action components. Based thereon, in a sort of "second order logic of affect" the "processes of interchange" or the resonance of affect in the totality of the general action system can be determined.

To sum up, the essential principle of theory construction advocated here with reference to Parsons' work consists in a conceptual differentiation of basic sociological concepts and their more complex composition than essentialist approaches allow for. In whatever version this is carried out, it represents the precondition for the view of sociology to the "effects of gravitation" of emotions as a basic social process. In this way, Jean Marie Guyau's prognosis might find a late fulfilment after all.

³ Everything what had been argued in value-judgement debates concerning the relationship between evaluation and cognition can be found accordingly in debates on the relationship between cognition and affectivity. The respective theoretical dividing line lies in the controversial assessment of the possibility of mutual *structural* influences.

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