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The Self-Description of Society: Crisis Fashion and Sociological Theory

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I

CRISIS IS AN ALARMING NOTION, alarming because it is used in science and in everyday life as well. The word is taken as a shoot from so-called theory to so-called praxis. The word may be used to establish the thing, it may be used as "self-fulfilling prophecy." Catastrophe is another example. One may wonder what René Thom thinks by himself when he looks at the catastrophe of catastrophe theory, namely, its sudden switching to a second point of stability in everyday language.[1] Both crisis and catastrophe suggest urgency and speed. We have not much time, approaching an either/or situation. But this is also a self-protective device. We have not enough time, then, for theory-building and reflection.

This alarming use of an alarming terminology—and alarm means finally "à l'arme" (take up arm)—coincides with an incapacity of our world society to observe and to describe itself (Heintz, 1982). The encompassing system is too large and too complex to be immediately understandable. Its unity is not accessible, neither by experience nor by action. No interaction gives an adequate representation of this society.[2] It was one of the many effects of the French Revolution to impress this fact on European consciousness (Gumbrecht, 1979, 1980). In a sense, the "theory of society" now is set free from interactional controls. Sociology becomes possible, but many important turns had been taken before, for example a general awareness of limits of communication, the romantic reformulation of "life" as a basic metaphysical concept, a new fashion to substitute abstract ideas for notions with concrete references, the "dialectical" formulation of society as the unity of economic and political concerns (and "dialectical" meant now: at first sight contradictory and therefore unintelligible),[3] finally the emphasis on "values" in late 19th century.[4] The next century, our century, loses all belief in meta-accounts, in narratives that report about the meaning of the world.[5]

It is this situation which has stimulated negative self-descriptions. The total society, at least, is characterized in negative terms. The negative has, by virtue of its own indeterminateness, important strategic advantages. It can be more general than the positive and at the same time closer to action.[6] Formulas like

emancipation, crisis, loss of meaning, catastrophe, *Unregierbarkeit* seem to make use of this potential to combine generalities and action. Such formulations are used in social communication: they enter the domain which they describe and thereby become self-descriptions of the societal system. Used as self-descriptions they gain their own momentum. They guide self-observation. There are not outside speakers which could contest such assertions. They remain stable, because all communication is societal communication; all societal communication implies communication about the society itself and the society as such is inaccessible to communication.

The structural correlate of this situation seems to be the cleavage between interactional and societal levels of system-building. The historical roots and reasons of this difference, partly writing and printing, are not our topic. Their impact on cultural semantics is well explored (Havelock, 1963, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979). In any case, face-to-face interaction is not likely to provide for *sagesse*—for the experience and knowledge concerning the total society. A journalist who observes high ranking international conferences may see and know lot of things which he cannot report nor read. But who will know his knowledge, who will have confidence in his knowledge and for what ends? If this is true, all cultural semantics have to adjust to the difference of interaction and society, and negative semantics seem to be well adapted to this condition. Are there other possibilities, given the continuity of structural conditions?

Sociological theory, being itself a tiny part of societal communication, may reinforce this appeal of negative self-descriptions. It may, taking distance, observe and describe them as we have done so far. It may hope to be able to have an impact on societal self-descriptions. This hope seems to split sociology into affirmative and rejecting camps, both of course "critical." Sociology may even feel to have an office as successor of *sagesse*. It is difficult to decide how far such an influence goes.[7] We shall leave this question undecided and simply ask: What are the intellectual resources?

Despite all scepticism and all complaints about ideological bias which seem to be a recurrent affair since about hundred years (besides Nietzsche, see von Wiese, 1933, and Tenbruck, 1981) the chances for general theory are exceptionally good today. However, they require interdisciplinary orientations which are overlooked if we continue to focus on the classics. The interdisciplinary scenery has changed very much during the last fifty years, and this makes it theoretically not very rewarding to return to Karl Marx or Max Weber, Emile Durkheim or George H. Mead, except with the intention to avoid the repetition of their failures. At least within the context of societal self-description the classical writers (and today even Parsons) are not very helpful.

It is easy to say and difficult to demonstrate (not to mention prove) that interdisciplinary reorientation of sociology would yield better results. To give a few preliminary ideas I shall select three topics, chosen with respect to their capacity to combine positive and negative descriptions of modern society, namely (1) the theory of evolution, (2) the theory of system differentiation, and (3) the theory of self-referential systems. We shall take them up individually in the following sections.

II

Previous efforts to use Darwin's theory of evolution within a sociological framework have not paid enough attention to the structure of this theory. They did use slogans like "struggle for life" or "survival of the fittest" to give a kind of natural legitimation to whatever survived (Hofstadter, 1945). Their argument, however, did depend on the assumption that survival means progress, in nature and in society as well. It did not outlive this assumption. At the end of the 19th century it became questionable how much planning and social reform would be required to achieve the connection of survival and progress. Even biologists were inclined to suppose that evolution, for human beings, would depend upon conscious design (Huxley, 1943).

Also, the criteria of progress and the general direction of the evolutionary process became controversial issues (Granovetter, 1979). If not human well-being and happiness, is it the division of labour, increasing differentiation, increasing problem-solving capacity, or increasing complexity? These theoretical uncertainties which could not be solved by biological research made it so much more important to insist on planning. It was strongly felt that human society had to control its own fate and to make sure that phenomena like Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin would not come out as successful evolution. Using evolutionary theory as a description of society may lead to freedom and to planning, to liberalism and to socialism as well.

Today, this is no longer a meaningful alternative. We have to recover Darwin and to work out the structure of his thought. Darwin's theory of evolution represents a radical break with all earlier traditions of thinking about development and perfection, or history and order. It is no longer an intelligent cause, no longer God's design, but simply a difference that makes the difference. All "grand theory" of the 19th century uses this scheme of thought. So did Hegel and, of course, Marx.[8] The difference becomes itself the moving force. All movement has to be explained not by a ground, a reason, a telos, but by an unstable situation which requires a next step, leading again into an unstable situation. A difference is no longer a simple distinction which requires to choose the right side and to avoid the wrong. It is the imposition of selection and the guarantee that each selection becomes information for further steps. The theoretical designation of the difference that makes the difference is a meta-ideological stance, but it enforces ideological options on each following decision. Dialectical theories try to regain the meta-ideological position via synthesis. *Evolutionary theories* try to avoid the ideological options altogether and do use difference directly as the processor of evolution. In Darwin's case it is the difference of variation and selection (or in neo-Darwinistic terms: the difference of variation, selection and restabilization) which is used to explain the formation of order, of differentiation, of complexity.

The most general version offered today sees movement as a recurrent recombination of order and disorder (Morin, 1977, 1980; Weick, 1969). It feeds upon order and disorder. It requires the absorption and reproduction of

disorder. Chaos becomes, as in the natural sciences, one of the dynamic factors. This means not simply enhancing freedom and not simply paying sufficient attention to the positive functions of conflict. We have to rely on a process which requires unreliability as condition of its own forthcoming. Or to put it in terms closer to sociology: we have to expect actions, i.e. to build up a stable attitude with respect to vanishing events.

This general framework itself is not yet a complete theory of evolution but offers promising guidelines for its reconstruction. The difference of order and disorder is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for evolution. Disorder itself has to be decomposed into differences. At this point the theory of communication can contribute the necessary specification. Communication unavoidably offers a proposal which can be negated. Providing the possibility of negation, of refusal, of rejection is part of its function. All communication has to run this risk and preadapt to it. Rejection, of course, has to preserve the identity of what has been communicated. If it switches to another topic, it would lose its own meaning. In this way, order and disorder, closure and openness are combined. Increasing specification means at first sight increasing improbability of acceptance. But the process can try to pick up random situations and unusual constellations to transform improbability into probability, either by preadjusting to its own risks or by conditioning rejections (Luhmann, 1981a).

A theory of sociocultural evolution built on these grounds may contribute its own flavour to an emerging self-description of society. It will not encourage struggle for life. It will not legitimate individual or national or partisan ruthlessness. Nor can it promise a better future or progress. Its contributions are more subtle, more adequate, but also more difficult to realize. Describing modern society as the result of evolutionary processes we do not ascertain its perfection. On the contrary, we have to ask: what are the conditions and the costs of this transformation of improbabilities into probabilities? What are the negative consequences of setting up reliable structures on unreliable grounds? The theory does not limit the awareness of negative aspects of modern life. But its scapegoat is not capitalism, not technology, not suppression of freedom or repression of libido. Its scapegoat is the improbability of probability.

Moreover, the theory sees no chance to de-randomize evolution. All attempts to plan the total system or to substitute conscious design for natural evolution will only introduce the awareness of, and reaction to, complexity into the complex system. This may speed up evolution but cannot replace it (Luhmann, 1982a). On the other hand, this does not boil down to the simple message: wait and see. The theory affirms possibilities to cope with ongoing societal evolution. If we cannot plan evolution, we can at least learn how to operate with distinctions, how to gain information by selecting the differences in terms of which the information is supposed to make a difference. Should it be right or wrong, or true and false, or pleasure and pain, or equal and unequal, or more and less? And which one under what conditions? Selection of distinctions means selection of selection. It improves the possibilities of obser-

vation. The feeling of crisis would incite rushing into action. The improvement of capacities of our society for self-observation and self-description is a corresponding or even preeminent strategy.

III

A well established sociological tradition relates social change to increasing differentiation (Parsons, 1961: 239 ff.). Consequently, modern society has to describe itself a highly differentiated system. In spite of many objections and counterexamples (Tilly, 1970) this theory could not be replaced. It cannot be discarded, but it has to be refined (Coleman, 1971). Processes of generalization, simplification and dedifferentiation have to be taken into account. This requires a reformulation of the theory. It is not a solution to admit exceptions or to grant that differentiation and dedifferentiation, specialization and generalization take place. The concept of differentiation needs re-examination.

The sociological classics conceived of differentiation very much as the division of labour. Even Parsons began with "role differentiation." The advantage of differentiation could therefore be treated as self-evident. It required no further argument, a footnote on Adam Smith would be enough. On the whole, increasing differentiation would mean increasing efficiency and therefore progress. Even in the case of Max Weber the strength of this relation between differentiation and rationality can be tested. Being sceptical about modern rationality his sociology pushes the idea of differentiation almost below surface. As a more or less hidden concept it remains operative and moves the more prominent figures, for example formal rationality, from below.

Today, systems theory offers the possibility to discontinue this tradition. The concept of differentiation is no longer used in the large and unqualified sense, including differentiation of tasks, roles, activities, terminologies. It can be confined to mean system differentiation, and this reduction gives access to the rich analytical possibilities of systems theory. All systems are based on a difference between system and environment. Therefore, system differentiation means the repetition of this difference within systems. The differentiated systems become decomposed into subsystem and (internal) environment, for instance as the political system and its societal environment. Subsystem and internal environment add up again to the total system, and this may be repeated several times, according to the number of subsystems. In this sense, system differentiation is equivalent to multiplication of the system by different internal perspectives. It means increasing complexity, depending on the ways in which the difference of systems and environments is realized.

Within this general framework we can distinguish several forms of building subsystems in relation to their internal environment. Segmentation means that subsystems presuppose their environment as a set of equal subsystems. Stratification means that subsystems presuppose their relation to their environment in terms of a rank order of systems. Functional differentiation means that subsystems specialize themselves on specific functions and presup-

pose that their environment cares for the rest. These distinctions coincide roughly with the historical types of primitive societies, culturally developed societies, and modern society. For further details I have to refer to other studies (Luhmann, 1982b: 229 ff., 1980: 9 ff.; Tyrell, 1978).

Within the present context two points have to be emphasized. First, in distinction to Durkheim and the predominant sociological tradition, stratification has to be treated as a case of system differentiation—and not simply as an unequal allocation of power, resources and prestige. Then, the historical process of modernization can be described as a slow replacement of stratification by functional differentiation, with religious secularization (*Entzauberung*), rationalization, economic and industrial development and monetary integration of the economy (capitalism) being partial aspects of this very process. The essential change relates to the primary mode of system differentiation. It transforms the relatively frequent type of stratified (or aristocratic) society into an order of higher complexity and higher improbability: functional differentiation. Everything else is a consequence, including the increasing difference of interactional and societal levels of system building.

Second, modern society is not simply more efficient in terms of division of labour and it is not simply more differentiated compared with traditional societies. It uses a different form of differentiation, another principle of differentiating subsystems and their environments. This may lead to dedifferentiation (e.g. of rank distinctions) and simplification (e.g. of forms of behavior, tastes, gestes) in many respects. It is nevertheless advancement within the context of sociocultural evolution because it realizes a societal system of higher improbability.

Modern society, then, has to be described as a functionally differentiated system. This is its main characteristic, the principle which generates its structures. In consequence we have to drop all attempts to characterize modern society by pointing to structures which belong to only one of its subsystems, be it "capitalistic" economy or scientific progress, populistic governments, organized mass education or industrial production. These traits remain important; they are not de-emphasized by this theory. They are even re-evaluated and accentuated as correlates of functional differentiation and can develop only on the basis of functional subsystems with high autonomy and high interdependencies. However, and this is the thrust of this theory, it is no longer meaningful to single out one of them as the most important trait.

Using functional differentiation as guideline for the self-description of our society does not imply an evaluation as perfection, as the best of all possible worlds, as outcome of progress or as system with superior efficiency. As one of the consequences of functional differentiation we even have to expect more or less permanent crises in some of the subsystems. This is the result of structural preconditions which prescribe high autonomy, self-organization and even self-reproduction of elements (*autopoiesis*) of subsystems and high interdependencies between systems and environments at the same time. Under such conditions, time becomes a scarce resource, the future becomes uncertain and the time

dimension in general the most important dimension of the articulation of meaning (Luhmann, 1982b: 189 ff., 271 ff.). We should not be surprised to find far-spread anxieties and interest in topics which confirm anxieties and the corresponding tendency for using negative self-descriptions. Besides, functionally differentiated societies have no established rank order between function, subsystems, and values. They have to rely on changing priorities and can institutionalize functional primacies only on the level of subsystems. They cannot describe themselves as "hierarchies." They cannot concentrate the "meaning of life;" they have no top and no center. They focus attention on pooled interdependencies or on shortcomings that demand temporary priority. They may supply social support at the level of face-to-face interaction. They cherish personal relations, love, partnership (Luhmann, 1982c). But interactional and societal levels of system building are, as we have seen, highly differentiated. Interaction may provide a retreat from society, the illusion of a small and beautiful world, but no longer social security against change and no longer social legitimation of opinions.[9]

Describing society as a functionally differentiated social system includes a division of labour on the level of organized subsystems. But it does not infer the progress of society from organizational rationality. What is good for individual parts may be a mixed blessing for the total system. Describing society as differentiated with respect to functions includes an awareness, even a prediction of continuing crises, time pressure and the need for restructurations which cannot even claim to open the doors for a better future. But this does not mean that the societal system itself approaches a turning point for the worse if it does not change its structure. It has not even that chance. Its structure is not centralized enough to be in the reach of "revolutions."

Used as a framework for the self-description of modern society, the concepts of system and of functional differentiation are much more complex than other conceptions that actually circulate. Elaborated by means of a developed systems theory they harbour more positive and more negative aspects than, for example, marxist theory. This makes it obsolete to discuss these issues in terms of optimistic vs. pessimistic or affirmative vs. critical attitudes toward society.[10] Such contrasts result from oversimplification (taking into account that all self-descriptions require simplifications). The really relevant question is how abstract, esoteric, complex a self-description can be without losing its capacity for circulation. Or in slighlty different terms: Do we really have to live in a society which is not able to produce an adequate description of itself?

IV

Social systems are self-referential systems. They are composed of elements (actions) which they produce by an arrangement of their elements. Their reproduction requires a distinction between system and environment. This distinction has to be introduced into the system by self-observing, self-describing operations. Actions come about only by attributing selections to a

system and not to its environment, they presuppose therefore the "re-entry" of this distinction into the system (Spencer Brown, 1971; Varela, 1975). In this sense attribution is a kind of indication stating that the system and not the environment is meant as the source of a selection.[11]

If we accept these recent developments of systems theory (and they are the most fascinating changes of a paradigm reconciling systems theory and the humanities) the self-description of the societal system becomes itself reflexive. It includes its own description as a prerequisite for the emergence of action systems. It includes a kind of self-confirming attitude. Self-description means selection of distinctions and indications, of differences and identities; it means self-simplification as prerequisite for complexity. Self-descriptions, then, have to be conceived as the necessity to produce contingent reductions. They can neither be avoided nor accomplished as a true picture of their object. Their incongruence is part of their function, their selectivity part of their performance. And we have known this for a long time: The perception and description of crises concurs in their production and operates as "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Merton, 1949; Boudon, 1977).

The theory of self-referential systems surmounts the level of reasoning at which the "critique of ideology," the unmasking of "false consciousness," and even the classical "sociology of knowledge" were placed. Again, this does not mean denying facts or revoking discoveries. There may be relations between interests and opinions or between social positions and world views. We know protective devices and latent functions connected with problems of internal conflict management or public representation. There may be interests screened by the perception of crises and you will find them out if you look at the measures which are proposed. However, such theories refer to parts of the total system, to particular groups or positions, to losers or winners, to higher or lower layers of a class structure. On the other hand, self-reference means that a unity refers to its own identity; that it copes with its own complexity; that it uses a simplified model of itself to orient its own operations. Since self-descriptions are contingent on selective reductions, they may remain controversial within the system. They may become ideologies in the sense that different interpretations correlate with different social positions within the system. We even may suppose that the current difficulties of producing convincing self-descriptions at the level of the world society encourages ideologies as a substitute. All this admitted we have to maintain that self-descriptions are a special type of semantic performances. They cannot claim to be true like an external description of an object. But the reason for this special problem is not that they are ideologies; the reason is that they are self-descriptions and that self-descriptions are a condition of the possibility of their own objects.

This rather aloof description of descriptions is not at all a purely formal figure pointing to an infinite regress of further descriptions. On the contrary, it proves to be a valuable analytical instrument. Looking back at the history of ideas and theory-building in modern times we find a fascinating connection with functional differentiation. In the course of the 18th century a new kind of

theory emerges focussing on the task, the problems, and the identity of important functional subsystems. For example, the concept of the "state" changes its meaning (Weinacht, 1968; Mager, 1970; Grawert, 1973; Dyson, 1980). It begins to serve as the self-description of the political system and as reference point of practical action, legal responsibility, and "constitutional" theories as well. This requires the conceptual distinction of "state" and "society," introduced at the end of the 18th century. Beginning with the Physiocrats and Adam Smith, the economic system develops self-descriptions using money as a simplifying device and as a measure of state descriptions and comparisons.[12] This requires a new justification of self-interest, cutting off implications regarding the morals of everyday life. The validity of (undoubtedly successful: Newton!) scientific cognition becomes a problem for a new kind of theory of cognition. This requires throwing off all attempts to found science on the natural rationality of human beings or on common sense.

We could continue with theories of education, of art, of love, of law (Luhmann and Schorr, 1979; Luhmann, 1982d, 1981b), but this would not change the overall picture. The fascinating results of this highly specific research show that operative self-descriptions concentrate on the level of functional subsystems, their autonomy, their structural problems, their identities, and today: their crises. Self-descriptive reflections follow the decompositon of functional differentiation. They may have to change their style from "carrying and improving autonomy" and "growth" to "avoiding the worst." They do not describe the society itself.

Were we to depend on inductive reasoning we would have to conclude that functional differentiation means delegating self-description onto the level of functional subsystems. This would coincide with our observation that the world society seems to be unable to yield convincing self-descriptions. However, within the context of historical research we have to consider that the conditions for such conclusions can change. What is valid for a situation in which a society changes the form of its differentiation and realizes a new set of leading distinctions may not be valid for a situation in which the society becomes aware of the consequences of these new structures. What was strongly desired has now to be re-conceived as not that good. The delegation of self-descriptions onto the level of subsystems may require, as in fact all delegation, some kind of control, and if not organized controls at least semantic ones.

V

In conclusion, we may again ask whether theories of this kind and this degree of sophistication can have any influence on the practical job of designing and modifying self-descriptions which are able to gain recognition and circulation outside of narrow intellectual circles. As a first reaction, it seems safe to say *no*. Theoretical sociology will have no voice, it will have to choose between exit and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970). This first impression is endorsed by experience on the level of face-to-face interaction. It is not only the intrinsic dif-

ficulty of a language with high theoretical ambitions which excludes an easy understanding. More important seems to be that practitioners, and particularly politicians, cannot use such a language without being observable as somebody who does not understand what he says. Moreover, theoreticians tend to express, and can hardly avoid to express, a certain nonchalance as to obstacles practitioners regard as insuperable. Under such conditions any attempt to introduce theory via interaction into the societal system will be a futile effort.[3]

This is not yet the whole answer to our question. It is established knowledge since centuries, that interaction in every day life cannot adapt itself to the sophisticated and controversial language of theories,[4] but this has not prevented a strong impact of theories on social affairs. The names of Montesquieu, Kant, Marx, Freud and Keynes and the whole flock of reflection theories for functional subsystems may suffice to prove this point. But can this influence of theories continue, under what conditions and how?

We cannot answer these questions. We would need research on the production, handling and diffusion of systemic self-descriptions for social systems in general and for societal systems in particular. We cannot even be sure that "theory" will be and will remain the right designation of self-descriptions. Even if we neglect all prescriptions of the theory of science for using the term "theory" it connotes at least an instrument for comparisons and changeability. It is a term for conceiving contingency. Using it as a form for self-descriptions presupposes a system which is strong enough to endure its own contingency.

Possibly, we will have to envisage a society in which fashionable semantic predispositions look out for supporting theories. If equality is good, all empirical research can be used to show that the society is bad, because it proves differences (what else could it do?). If the unity of the world society makes us sensitive with respect to internal differences in terms of education, income, participation, regional development, theories can be used that treat these inequalities as avoidable. If macrosystems become intransparent by complexity, theories may be in vogue which state once again (remembering or not Edmund Burke) that small is beautiful and real life is always everyday life. Increasing rates of criminality and the declining self-stimulation of the economic system may be backed by "ingovernability." If personal identity, loss of meaning, apathy on the level of individuals become prominent topics, theories may show up which declare collective identity as a prerequisite for personal identity.[5]

The glitterings of success, of being mentioned, of gaining reputation may have seduced sociologists to deliver the formulations.[6] But in this case as in others, unmasking would not be the appropriate solution. Even without real influence and without a real chance to apply its analytical potential sociological theory could use the theory of self-referential systems to analyze the conditions of its own contribution. It may reflect about withdrawing the notion of "crises" and substituting something else—maybe self-reference. Or it may try to offer package deals: if crises, then as explained by functional differentiation. For in the end, we cannot be sure on a priori grounds that theories of adequate complexity will turn out to be unsaleable.

NOTES

1 Cf. the issue on "Catastrofi e trasformazione" of *Laboratorio Politico* No. 5, 6 (1981).
2 For the semantic reflexes of the increasing differentiation of interactional and societal levels of system building see Luhmann (1980a).
3 The introduction of this terminological innovation came just in time. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B 349 ff. about "transzendentale Dialektik." It is worthwhile to remember that, before Kant, "dialectics" was an interactional term, denoting the art of discussion in face of contrary opinions.
4 It is in this context that Nietzsche's "anti-sociology" and its influence on sociology finds increasing attention in recent years. Cf. Fleischmann (1964) and Baier (1981/82).
5 "Incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits" is the formula for the postmodern age of Lyotard (1979). It is much better than "end of ideology," because the concept of ideology is itself a part of the same history. See also Blumenberg (1979).
6 The extreme case is, of course, terrorism. See the interpretation of terrorist groups as "contradictory subsystem" by von Baeyer-Katte (1982).
7 It was grossly overestimated in German university circles, feeding upon the vanishing prestige of "professors."
8 The functional and pragmatic mode of asking "What makes the difference?" is, of course, of more recent origin. It is probably due to William James and presupposes acquaintance with theories which respond to such questions.
9 It was a favourite topic of the 19th century to discuss the family (and particularly the role of a loving wife) within this context. Cf. for instance Droz (1827) and Michelet (1858). This is, concerning wives, a division of labour argument, turned against the hardships, cruelties and failures of a society characterized by division of labour. Despite many attempts, it hardly can be revived today.
10 This remains, however, the normal scheme of reception in left-wing literature. See, among others, Warnke (1974), Heidtmann et al. (1977), and Luporini (1981).
11 For the corresponding distinction of action and experience see Luhmann (1976).
12 The famous report of Jacques Necker, *De l'Administration des Finances de la France*, 3 vols., Paris, 1784, seems to be the first case. See also Burke (1929).
13 Several of my publications are the results of close interactional contacts within a government commission and the planning group of a political party. Cf. Luhmann (1977, 1981c and 1982c).
14 Cf. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, Vol. IV, Paris, 1754 s.v. conversation; Deslandes, *L'Art de ne point s'Ennuyer*, Amsterdam (Steenhouwer), 1715. The reason for this reluctance has always been an argument of social reflexivity: that persons cannot pick up and enjoy in conversation the theories of others.
15 It may be of interest, that this (like many others of these topics) can produce left-wing and right-wing theories. Cf. Habermas (1974) and Robertson and Holzner (1980).
16 There is much complaint about this in Germany now and, of course, only a small part of the daily work of sociologists is at stake. Cf. Schelsky (1975) and Tenbruck (1980).

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