

Vidar Grøtta

The Transformation of Humanities Education

The Case of Norway 1960–2000
from a Systems-Theoretical
Perspective

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Vidar Grøtta

The Transformation of Humanities Education The Case of Norway 1960-2000 from a Systems-Theoretical Perspective

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This first comprehensive study of Norwegian humanities education employs systems theory to analyze its transformation from a form of teacher training to its modern status as research-oriented generalist education.

Using historical documents and statistical analyses, Vidar Grøtta shows that the expansion of the post-war research system in Norway led to an increase in admissions to humanities education in the 1960s and an ensuing research drift in humanities curricula. Interacting with certain political dynamics and the knowledge economy that has emerged since the 1970s, this research drift resulted in a shift in humanists' career patterns and a transformation of the societal functions of the humanities.

The most recent developments in Norwegian humanities education, from 2000 to 2018, are outlined and discussed in the afterword to this volume.

Vidar Grøtta, born in 1969, holds a graduate degree in comparative literature and a PhD in educational research. He works as a policymaker, alongside various teaching and writing assignments, at the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

For further information:

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Contents

Preface | 7

PART ONE: THEORY

- 1 Introduction to part one | 13
- 2 Niklas Luhmann's systems theory | 23
- 3 Key concepts in systems theory | 27
- 4 Comparing theories for higher education research | 51
- 5 The use of theory in this study | 71

PART TWO: ADMISSIONS

- 6 Introduction to part two | 75
- 7 The humanities and higher education policymaking, 1955–1975 | 123
- 8 Stagnation in humanities education, 1975–1987 | 177
- 9 The second expansionist period, 1987–2000 | 191
- 10 Conclusions to part two | 221

PART THREE: CURRICULA

- 11 Introduction to part three | 231
- 12 History | 273
- 13 English studies | 303
- 14 General literature studies | 331
- 15 Philosophy | 359
- 16 Conclusions to part three | 389

PART FOUR: CAREERS

- 17 Introduction to part four | 407
- 18 The period 1960–1975: Humanities education as teacher education | 429
- 19 The period 1975–1985: The transformation | 449
- 20 The period 1985–2000: Humanities education and “boundaryless” careers | 483
- 21 Conclusions to part four | 507

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

- 22 Conclusions to the study | 515

Afterword, 2000–2018 | 523

Appendices | 539

References | 547

Part one: Theory

1 Introduction to part one

During the last four decades of the 20th century, humanities education in Norway was transformed. By the year 2000, not only the curricular content and the scale of this form of education, but also the overall educational aims were fundamentally different from what they had been as late as in the 1960s. However, neither the “humanities debate” nor the research literature on higher education in Norway has provided a thorough analysis of this transformation.¹ The reason is, or so I will argue in this study, that both kinds of contributions have silently identified the humanities with humanities *research*, and have considered humanities education from that viewpoint. In other words, humanities education has mostly been seen as a cart that follows wherever research may lead. In this perspective there is nothing peculiar about the kind of humanities education we have grown accustomed to since, say, 1980 – nothing which demands further analysis. The curriculum of an educational program is believed, almost by definition, to be the reflection of the current state of research in a corresponding discipline. But as the present study will demonstrate, the research-orientation of humanities education is actually a quite recent phenomenon in Norway. It is one of the most striking outcomes of the transformation that began in the 1960s.

In order to be more precise already at the outset about what is in need of an explanation, a brief and provisional outline of the transformation of Norwegian humanities education may be useful. Prior to 1960, humanities education in Norwegian universities viewed itself and was viewed by the general public as a form of teacher education. About two thirds of the candidates ended up as teachers in

1 There are some exceptions, in particular the contributions of the historian Fredrik W. Thue. This study owes a substantial debt to his work on the humanities in Norway, published mostly in the form of university histories.

secondary school.² The curricular design was intended to further the students' appreciative immersion into various aspects of the cultural heritage, the framing of which was largely nationalist, and overwhelmingly Eurocentric. The specific professional aim (in many cases very explicitly stated) corresponded in large measure with the societal aim of humanities education in general, namely that this cultural heritage, or at least the essentials of it, should be further disseminated to younger generations when the humanities graduates embarked upon their teaching careers in secondary school.³ The students attending the humanities programs were a highly select group whose futures were of great concern to the Norwegian society – whether it was as respected school teachers, or in even more prestigious positions at the university, in museums, or – for a fortunate few – in the national broadcasting company.

By the year 2000, after the transformation which is the topic of this study had been completed, the share of humanities graduates who became schoolteachers had

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- 2 NAVF, *Prognose over tilgangen på og behovet for filologer i årene 1960-1975* (Oslo: NAVF, 1960). This report finds that 70 per cent of the *total* number of humanities graduates became teachers. This is the only reliable figure I have been able to find for 1960. However, since we know that a sizeable share of the female graduates around 1960 did not seek employed work, the share of *employed* graduates who worked as teachers must have been significantly higher than seventy percent – probably as high as seventy-five or eighty percent. A quote from a 1950 student handbook, written and published by student organizations, illustrates the dominance of the teacher profession in philology in the period before 1960: “The philological program [which was then the formal name of the humanities degree] first and foremost qualifies for teaching positions in secondary school. Librarians, archivists, and conservators are also to a large extent graduates from the philological program. The national broadcasting company and the publishing industry have a few positions where philologists are preferred. Journalism also offers some opportunities. But it must be underscored that only very few [*forsvinnende få*] graduates from the philological program find employment outside secondary school.” *Studenthåndboka 1949-1950* (Oslo: Universitetets studentkontor, 1949) 159. My translation. Throughout, translations from Norwegian are my own, unless otherwise stated.
 - 3 Regarding the term “professional,” I refer to the discussion of its conceptual history in part four. In postwar Norway the expression “vocational education” [*yrkesutdanning*] was in use for higher education also (often to highlight the function of qualifying students for working life) but in order to avoid confusion with the more restricted application of this term to secondary education during the last decades, I use “professional” whenever the particular Norwegian historical context is not crucial.

dwindled to 30 percent.⁴ The great majority, about two thirds of the candidates, were now scattered across a wide variety of careers, many of which (probably most of which) did not require an education in the humanities. The curriculum was also fundamentally altered. In all disciplines traditional approaches had given way to a research-driven, critical engagement with a much more diverse set of cultural materials than previously, of which the better part had little direct relevance for school teaching. At the same time, the number of students had risen dramatically. Although a vague cultural remnant of “elitism” seems to have prevailed in the collective identity of humanists, each graduate was no longer perceived as a part of, and no longer had any experience of belonging to, an exclusive group in society.

What is particularly interesting about this trajectory is that the increasing orientation towards specialized, research-driven curricula, without any particular professional aim, goes hand in hand with massification. It is this phenomenon which the present study aims to investigate and explain. More specifically, the ambition is to investigate, by way of policy document analyses, the dynamics and rationales behind the massification of humanities education; to examine curricula documents in search of general trends regarding curricular change; and to use available statistics to trace patterns of change in career trajectories for humanities graduates. The overarching question, wherein all three of these subtopics are united, is whether the societal functions of humanities education in Norway have changed during the forty years from 1960 to 2000, and, if so, how these changes can be understood.

Investigating the development of Norwegian humanities education involves, as it turns out, raising some fairly large questions. For instance: How does policymaking in the field of higher education actually happen? Why has the Norwegian political system depended so strongly upon committees of inquiry in higher education policymaking, and why has admissions to programs like the humanities been such a tricky issue? Speaking of “higher education,” when does that refer primarily to education, when does it include research, and how have the two tasks been related in the Norwegian humanities? Which criteria have been used to fix the content of humanities education? What does it mean to say that humanities education is a form of “general” (or “liberal”) education? Questions of this kind have

4 Figure provided by NIFU, personal communication. As will be discussed in part four, NIFU’s published reports on the results from their regular first destination surveys (*Kandidatundersøkelsen*) has since the mid-1990s grouped the humanities together with theology and certain performing arts. The figures for “humanities and aesthetical disciplines” in these reports are therefore not directly comparable to earlier figures for the humanities (previously called “philology”).

rarely been raised in previous research on Norwegian humanities education. Partly because of the theoretical frameworks employed, the interest has lain elsewhere.

Before I move on to theory and its application to the abovementioned research questions, I should say a few words about how the humanities are defined in this study. For the most part, my definition will be pragmatic, with specific reference to the context of Norway in the period 1960-2000. All disciplines that have been represented at the humanities faculties of two or more of the four oldest Norwegian universities in this period are considered to belong to the category for the purposes of this study. This definition excludes psychology, (social) anthropology, film studies, and several other disciplines that are sometimes included in the humanities in an international context. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the study has little to say on the specificities of certain disciplines that are clearly covered by the definition but are nevertheless atypical in certain respects – such as archaeology and music. Throughout, the discussions will mostly apply to the “mainstream” of the academic humanities.

Unlike many studies of the humanities, I shall not offer a detailed discussion of what characterizes this group of disciplines as such, what their common identity is, or what distinguishes them from e.g. the social sciences.⁵ Historically, the humanities can be understood as the heir to the medieval philosophical faculty, more precisely as what remained of this branch of study after the natural and social sciences had been out-differentiated and were allowed to establish their own faculties in the 19th and 20th centuries – in addition, of course, to all the things that later grew out of these remains. As regards identity and primary characteristics, I am content to say that the Norwegian humanities in the period covered here typically have engaged themselves with history, communication, and culture, using primarily interpretative methods, although many exceptions to this can be found. I shall have more to say about the Norwegian humanities (and particularly about four

5 There is an extensive literature on what characterizes the humanities and what their societal value is, particularly by Anglo-American writers. See for instance Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas. Reform and Resistance in the American University* (NY: Norton, 2010); Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin, 2012); and Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). In particular the last item gives a good overview of the different positions in this debate. In the Norwegian context, cf. Helge Jordheim and Tore Rem, eds., *Hva skal vi med humaniora?* (Oslo: Fritt Ord, 2014).

disciplines selected for further study: history, English studies, philosophy and general literature studies) in part three.

The first part of this book consists of a theoretical discussion running through four chapters. The reason for this rather heavy emphasis on theory is that the ensuing empirical investigation will *not* be based on the most familiar and prevalent theoretical frameworks in the social sciences or in the sociology of education, such as neo-institutionalism, Bourdieuan field-theory, rational choice theory, etc. Nor will it rest (at least not primarily) on the middle-range theories developed within the more specialized field of higher education research. Even though it concerns itself with historical material, neither the framework nor the methodology of the book will confirm to the standard narrative and actor-oriented approach found in most historical work. Instead, its overall theoretical framework will be sociological systems theory in the tradition from Niklas Luhmann. This choice seems to call for an explanation. Why is such a heavy machinery from theoretical sociology brought to bear upon the seemingly straightforward research questions outlined above – questions of a kind which have for the most part been asked within the predominantly applied field of higher education research, or within the highly specialized but not very theory-driven sub-discipline of university history?

The reason is that I think higher education research often conceptualizes the object of study – “higher education” – in ways that I think underplay several important distinctions.⁶ A major problem, which was hinted at above, is that the coupling of higher education with research is often under-theorized. So is the relationship between “academia” (i.e. research and higher education) on the one hand and the systems of politics and the economy on the other. These conceptual problems are connected with another problem, namely that research on higher education very rarely problematizes the self-reference involved in attempting to describe the relationship between such domains as “higher education,” “politics,” “the market,” and “research” – from the viewpoint of research. The result is that analyses of higher education, even those by specialized higher education researchers or histori-

6 A prominent example is the work of Burton R. Clark, and a more recent example is the theory strand called “institutional logics,” both of which are analyzed in some detail later in this part. As for the use of “higher education” as a generic term that includes more or less all academic activities that takes place in “higher education institutions” (HEIs), it seems to me endemic not only in the field of “higher education research,” but also among policymakers and other experts.

ans, are often academic insider reports written for an implied audience of peers, which makes triangulation difficult.⁷

Of course, systems theory cannot cure the condition of self-referentiality or neutralize bias. Research on higher education – even if it is often organizationally demarcated from its object of study – cannot escape its status as research, its participation in the research system, and thus its inability to view the coupling between research and higher education, or their mutual coupling with the political system, from the “outside.” But systems theory offers concepts that can help to disentangle the various dynamics that are involved in the conglomerate we usually refer to as “higher education.” Three features of systems theory are of particular relevance for this task:

- It has a theory of the functional differentiation of modern society that stresses the fundamental difference between societal subsystems, specifying the societal functions, operational logics, and characteristics of (and conditions for interrelation between) each of the systems that matters most to higher education research, namely research, education, politics, and the economy.
- Its offers a conceptual framework for study of the structures and processes of formal organizations – such as universities and ministries.
- It has a reflexive approach which takes the perspective of the observer into account, allowing the self-implication of higher education research (i.e. the academy studying itself) to become available for analysis.

Two more general aspects of systems theory should also be mentioned. First, it provides an exigent analysis of the concept of “system” – which is a frequently used

7 In addition to writers in the tradition of systems theory, this problem has been addressed by several prominent philosophers and sociologists, e.g. Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2002); Robert K. Merton, “Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972), 9-47; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). As far as I can see, the problem is rarely addressed in the field often referred to as higher education research. There are some exceptions, such as Martin Trow, “The Public and Private Lives of Higher Education,” *Daedalus* 104.1 (1975); and more recently, Paul Trowler, *Researching your own institution*, British Educational Research Association, online resource (2014). Without claiming to have read all of the relevant literature, the examples I have found of explicit discussions of self-reference amid the massive output in higher education research are surprisingly few, however.

term in higher education research also, albeit more as a catch-all phrase, perhaps, than a concept in a strict sense. A thorough analysis of this concept is important because it is frequently used to frame, albeit tacitly, the very object of study in higher education research. Secondly, systems theory conceptualizes social processes as communication rather than as action, and thus offers an opportunity to avoid many of the paradoxes resulting from the binary opposition between agency and structural constraint which has plagued the social sciences since the nineteenth century. Admittedly, it is very difficult to escape the actor-structure mindset in practice, especially in extended arguments, since it is so ingrained in Western thought and hence also in previous research. Most often there is no need to, either. But at crucial junctures, when agency-focused models creates problems, it is helpful to have access to an alternative model.

In sum, I believe systems theory might help higher education research move beyond what I shall call the received view in this field (which, as I see it, is essentially a strongly normative, Humboldtian view of the university), and to do so without having to resort to the equally normative notions implicit in formulas like “mode 2” or “the triple helix.”⁸ In contrast to such contributions, systems theory offers neither nostalgia nor speculative futurism, but rather posits an analytically enriched understanding of the many sets of distinctions with which “higher education” (or “the university”) constitutes itself and its particular view of its societal environment. It thereby enables a more realistic assessment of the strains and stresses involved in its various operations, as well as recognizing its legitimate societal functions and merits. No defense of “the idea of the university” (or assault on same) is attempted, and the question of its future and the future of higher education and research in general is deliberately kept open.

Since the material under consideration in this study is historical while the theoretical framework is taken from sociology (and moreover a tradition in sociology that is informed by diverse other disciplines, such as evolutionary biology, anthropology, communication studies, philosophy, etc.), the result is probably best classified as transdisciplinary. While transdisciplinarity has its advantages, it also incurs the risk of confusing and perhaps disappointing more clear-cut, disciplinary expectations. On the other hand, there is actually some precedence for a study such

8 Michael Gibbons & al., *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage; 1994) and Henry Etzkowitz and Loet Leydesdorff, *Universities and the Global Knowledge Economy: A Triple Helix of University-Industry-Government Relations* (London: Pinter, 1997).

as this in the social sciences. The strand it most resembles, and perhaps should be judged in the light of, is the tradition of historical sociology, broadly considered.⁹

More specifically, the aims of the study are on the one hand to contribute new ideas to the theoretical debate within the strand of systems theory (especially as regards the conditions for structural coupling between function systems), and on the other hand to bring to light new historical material concerning the Norwegian humanities (regarding for instance the roles of the research councils in Norwegian higher education policymaking in the 1950s, forty years of incremental changes in humanities curricula at Oslo and Tromsø, and the prevalence of “boundaryless” careers among Norwegian humanities graduates in the 1990s). In addition, it is an aim in itself to provide the first comprehensive analysis of humanities education in Norway. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, the study aims to let the framework of systems theory guide the formulation of research questions as well as the interpretation of empirical material (policy documents, curricula, statistics), thus simultaneously testing theoretical assumptions against historical evidence and providing a different and hopefully richer account of Norwegian humanities education than we have previously had.

Another aspect of the study that needs to be mentioned (even if it is rather obvious), is that it is written in English with an international as well as a domestic audience in mind, while it deals with historical developments that have been documented and researched almost exclusively in the Norwegian language. An obvious advantage of writing in English is the “distancing effect” it has had on me as a Norwegian while writing it, denying me tacit appeal to common preconceptions, helping me to abstain from more or less subtle hints, subtexts and allusions to the Norwegian debates on higher education and related affairs, and forcing me instead to explicate and make clearer (to myself, not the least) the premises on which conclusions are based. The accommodation of an international readership has, however, necessitated descriptions and analyses of the Norwegian context (for instance the Norwegian degree system, certain quirks in our parliamen-

9 Of course, Niklas Luhmann’s work in many ways joins this tradition, particularly his monographs on the various function systems of modern society. Other famous names commonly associated with it are Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, Karl Polanyi, and Norbert Elias. Since the 1970s, Charles Tilley has made an effort to revive historical sociology in the Anglo-American world. In the fields of higher education and science studies, writers like Joseph Ben-David, Randall Collins, John W. Meyer and Andrew Abbott have contributed works that could be included in this category, while Rudolf Stichweh is perhaps the major current example of someone contributing to the tradition of historical sociology using the theoretical framework of systems theory.

tary procedures, particulars of the Norwegian school teacher profession, etc.) that have caused the manuscript to expand beyond the length it would have had were it written in Norwegian for a Norwegian audience. Hopefully, the “distancing effect” will prove useful to the Norwegian readers as well.

A few words on the organization of the book is in order. Following the introductory first part on theory, the main body of the book is organized in three parts on the topics of admissions, curricula, and careers, respectively. A perceptive reader may see a resemblance between the order of these three topics and the much-used model of input-process-output. I confess that this model has played a part in the outline of the book, but only as a heuristic device. Admission of students can indeed be seen as an input; curricula can be seen as prescriptions for the educational process, and careers can be considered, at least from certain perspectives, as the societal output of humanities education (or perhaps outcome, if one should want to make a further distinction here). Obviously, this is nowhere near a perfect model of how higher education actually operates, and certainly many representatives from the humanities would consider such a conception “instrumentalist” and very alien to what they are trying to accomplish. Each of the three aspects – admissions, curricula, careers – surely condition each other, and there is in reality no logical point of departure for an investigation such as this. This is also evident from the fact that the first issue we encounter when examining the policies for capacity building and admissions in the humanities in part two of the book, is the question of forecasting labor market demand, which is analyzed in more depth in part four. When I have decided to follow the order of input-process-output, this is chiefly because in the actual historical evolution of Norwegian humanities education there seems to have been a striking absence of feedback loops from careers and back to admissions and curricula, with the exception of the very first years covered in this study. A hypothesis is therefore that the two first elements are more independent of the third than the other way around. Nevertheless, there are by necessity many cross-references between the three of them.

Since familiarity with systems theory cannot be presumed, the first chapters in part one offer a general outline of its main tenets, emphasizing the aspects that are of particular relevance to higher education research. Thereafter I compare the systems theoretical approach to higher education with the perspective of a highly influential figure and also, I believe, a representative figure in the field of higher education research, namely Burton R. Clark.¹⁰ In addition, I discuss the theoretical

10 A sociologist by training, Burton R. Clark is a representative figure in higher education research in the sense that his work has had a formative influence on this field since its emergence. A citation analysis of 17 English-language specialized journals in “higher

contribution of new institutionalism to higher education research, especially the branch known as institutional logics, which has some similarities with systems theory, but which I argue falls short of solving some of the most pressing problems that a study like the present one raises. In the last part of part one I discuss some recent contributions to the study of higher education within the paradigm of systems theory, and, by way of a tentative conclusion, assess more precisely how systems theory can be utilized in this study to frame the research questions outlined above regarding policymaking for admissions, curricula development, and career trajectories in the Norwegian humanities – which are the topics in the remainder of the book.

education research” outside North America from the year 2000 found that Burton R. Clark was the most cited author, and that his book *The Higher Education System* was the most cited item (along with one other book) after the Dearing report. See Malcolm Tight, “The structure of academic research: What can citation studies tell us?” *Academic Research and Researchers*, eds. Angela Brew and Lisa Lucas (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009) 56.

2 Niklas Luhmann's systems theory

The starting point for sociological systems theory is that particular social processes, like teaching and learning at a university, or higher education policymaking, can only be understood if we have an adequate theory of the society that is the ultimate context of these processes. In this sense, systems theory is “grand theory” – it begins with the big picture.¹¹ It does not, however, pretend to base its theoretical architecture on foundations beyond the reach of time and space; neither does it attempt to deduce from the level of theory to empirical reality. It explicitly distances itself from idealism. On the other hand, it also takes a critical stance on most forms of empiricism, including the Mertonian idea of theories of the middle range based on induction from empirical work. If we had to indicate where systems theory locates itself on the map of the philosophy of science, we could describe it as a constructivist theory which, as Luhmann has formulated it, “incurs the responsibility of testing its statements against reality.”¹² The constructivist stance of systems theory has important epistemological consequences, in particular as regards the issue of reflexivity, which I shall return to below.

But systems theory as developed by Luhmann is not primarily a philosophical venture. Its aim – to develop a “theory of society” – is stated within the disciplinary context of sociology, and enters the century-long debate within that discipline about the major characteristics of modernity.¹³ Like Durkheim and Parsons before him, Luhmann argues that what makes modern society different from its predecessor, *l'ancien régime*, is that the primary organizing principle of society is no longer stratification, but functional differentiation. Since the late eighteenth century, it has

11 Much of the following discussion is based on Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

12 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 12.

13 Niklas Luhmann, preface, *Theory of Society*, Vol. 1, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

become increasingly irrelevant to conceive of society as made up of fundamentally different sets of people (estates, classes, or any other form of fixed strata) which together form a whole which can be adequately expressed or “reflected” from the viewpoint of society’s top or center. The stratified form of society was gradually undermined in the Early Modern period and finally dismantled in the aftermath of the French revolution. Although stratification obviously still exists, making it meaningful to speak of “élites” or “the underprivileged” in particular contexts, society can no longer legitimize using permanent differences between groups of people as its organizing principle, according to systems theory. Stratification is therefore treated either as an unintended consequence which may to some extent be tolerated, or else as a dysfunction in need of a remedy.¹⁴

Modern society as we have come to know it is understood by most people – after a transitional period in the 19th and early 20th century when societal structures were still interpreted by obsolete schemata – as differentiated into different “fields” or “spheres” of action – or, as Luhmann prefers to call them, “function systems.” Rather than defining themselves by particular groups of people who are assigned to them by birthright, function systems offer roles for individuals, e.g. professional roles and client-roles, which are in principle open to all comers.¹⁵ Provided that one is willing and able to accept the premises on which the different function systems are based, anyone can partake of an economic transaction, become a priest, subscribe to a newspaper, run for political office, get married, etc. Or, equally important, one can (with a few exceptions) refrain from participating.¹⁶ This optionality means, ultimately, that individuals relate to function systems as placeholders,

14 See Niklas Luhmann, “Globalization or World Society? How to conceive of modern society,” *International Review of Sociology* 7.1 (1997): 67.

15 See Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 315f.

16 Of course, one might be reminded here of what Anatole France said about the law, which “in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.” (*The Red Lily*, ch. 7). That is to say, “equal opportunity,” although guaranteed by law in modern society, might still be illusory. However, the claim in systems theory that function systems provide roles that are in principle open to anyone, is not, as some critics seem to believe, to deny that in practice some people, through no fault of their own, are unable to join in. In systems theory, this problem is discussed under the concept of “exclusion,” rather than “domination” or “exploitation.” I will not be able to discuss this important issue here, but cf. Niklas Luhmann, “Globalization or World Society? How to Conceive of Modern Society.”

which is why systems theory conceives of individual human beings as strictly speaking not belonging to function systems at all, but to their environment.¹⁷

Unlike for instance Parsons' AGIL scheme, the function systems as laid out by Luhmann's systems theory are not deduced from theoretical axioms, and therefore not fixed in number.¹⁸ How many there are in any given historical period, and how they are demarcated from each other are empirical questions, but there is no real disagreement about the established status of the following nine systems in our time: *politics, law, the economy, the arts, religion, education, research, the media, and the family/intimate relations*. There is also a high degree of consensus within sociological systems theory concerning the systemic nature of *health care* and *sports*, whereas *social work, tourism, and the leisure complex* are examples of possible additions to the list which are still debated.¹⁹ Give or take a few, this list is comparable to the categorizations of many other sociologists and social theorists, and in fact does not depart significantly from terminology employed in, say, the news media.²⁰

Thus, the radical departure of Luhmann's brand of systems theory from both mainstream sociology and ordinary language usage lies not in the observation that there exists in modern society an economic system which is different from, say, "the world of politics", or the arts, but in his conceptualization of how these systems operate, and how they relate to each other and to society as a whole. To perform his analysis of functional differentiation, Luhmann developed a whole set of concepts that are all anchored in the concept that gives his theory its name –

17 See Niklas Luhmann, "How Can the Mind Participate in Communication?" *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*, ed. William Rasch (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

18 Regarding the AGIL scheme, see Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, (London: Routledge, 1970); for a discussion of the historical contingencies of function systems, see Niklas Luhmann, *The Theory of Society*, Vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013) 65f.

19 See Rudolf Stichweh, "The History and Systematics of Functional Differentiation in Sociology," *Bringing Sociology to IR. World Politics as Differentiation Theory*, eds. Mathias Albert, Barry Buzan, and Michael Zürn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

20 Cf. for instance the concept of "value spheres" in Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," *From Max Weber*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1958), and the concept of "fields" in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

“system.” Before I can say much more about function systems, therefore, I must run through some of the most important of these concepts, starting with the core concept of system.