

## Ways to Read this Book

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It is not easy to define ways of reading for this glossary, since, as mentioned, Luhmann's theory eludes a linear logic: he himself once defined the theory as a type of labyrinth in which one sooner or later finds oneself back at the beginning or somewhere in the middle. More has been discovered about the labyrinth, but not a direct way through it as yet. Nor is it possible, as in the case of putting a puzzle together, to simply add the individual ways to read the book to one another. Reading according to the following ways therefore allows no more than excerpt-like observation of the respective topics. Additionally, the references in each of the keywords draw attention to the necessity of diverging from a certain way and following a different way of reading this book. The ways to read this book are a kind of integration of the references that one comes across also through a selective reading.

Despite this obvious limitation, we have persisted with the idea of ways of reading because they offer an additional point of orientation to the reader approaching Luhmann's theory for the first time. The differentiation of the ways of reading primarily serves the purpose of showing how abstract and concrete arguments from Luhmann's theory can be consistently organized and linked to each other. The organization of the different ways of reading reveals a particular logic, which, however, need not be adhered to by readers with their own perspectives and interests. More important is to respect the sequence within the individual ways of reading, since this sequence ensures a certain unity in the line of reasoning despite the fragmentation of the theory's line of reasoning into keywords.

Fundamentally, we have tried to avoid redundancy within the keywords in the ways of reading. In some cases, however, we have considered it necessary to repeat the same keyword in multiple ways of reading. In this way, specialized readings are made easier.

The first way of reading begins with the phenomenological concept of meaning and follows its development in the theory of social systems. Luhmann often referred to the relevance of the concept of meaning in his theory, which aims to achieve an integration of a human and a technical approach. This way of reading follows the former approach, explaining the use of concepts taken from philosophy and their integration in systems theory. In the most recent texts from Luhmann, the relevance of these components is naturally presupposed: it is therefore even more important to gain complete clarity about this background. The concepts in the first way of reading are:

- Meaning
- Complexity
- World
- Meaning Dimensions
- Attribution
- Negation

The second way of reading presents the basic concepts of Luhmann's variant of systems theory; as such, it is complementary to the first. We have not tried to reconstruct the history of the concept of system in Luhmann's theory, but instead refer to the latest formulation of the most abstract aspects of the theory. For Luhmann, insights in systems theory are decisive for the development of sociology—especially in allowing the discipline to gain independence from classical modes of thinking. In this way, Luhmann does not want to negate the relevance of the classics for sociology; his intention is much more to make sociology a scientific discipline, which, like other disciplines, is able to rapidly produce new insights without always having to reference what was said earlier. Accordingly, theoretical research should attain the same status in sociology as empirical research based on data processing: systems theory serves this purpose. The keywords in the second way of reading are:

- System/Environment
- Autopoiesis
- Operation/Observation
- Self-Reference
- Paradox
- Asymmetrization
- Redundancy/Variation

- Structure
- Process

The third way of reading describes the foundation of the theory from its “technological” side. Once again, it concerns Luhmann’s epistemology and, in particular, how he grounds his theoretical and epistemological program. This way of reading primarily concerns the meaning and consequences of the observation of the environment through the system’s own operations. In this respect, Luhmann employs a “constructivist” approach (also called “second-order cybernetics”), which spread quickly into other disciplines (biology, neuroscience, psychology). Contributions to the formulation of constructivism have been made by both logicians (such as Gotthard Günter and George Spencer Brown) and natural scientists (such as Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Henri Atlan and others). Luhmann demands the use of this epistemology on social systems and therefore offers a solid foundation for the development of sociology. This means that sociology can learn from other disciplines without having to forego its autonomy: by abstracting and re-specifying the concepts with reference to their own problems. This way of reading ends with the representation of the outlines of Luhmann’s theoretical and sociological program. The keywords are:

- Science
- Constructivism
- Operation/Observation
- Identity/Difference
- Information
- Re-entry
- Reflection
- Rationality
- Sociological Enlightenment
- Functional Analysis

The fourth way of reading concerns a group of concepts that refer in a narrow sense to sociological questions of the theory of social systems. Here, it becomes clear which changes result in the classic conceptual repository of sociology when one allows system-theoretical and sociological concepts to meet. Luhmann’s theory includes all the basic concepts of sociology: society, interaction and organization, construction and maintenance of social structures,

conflict, communication, action, the relations between society and individuals, socio-cultural evolution. We cannot comprehensively acknowledge Luhmann's full treatment of these topics. Instead, we have tried to deliver a guiding thread through which these questions can be approached. The keywords in this way of reading are:

- Double Contingency
- Expectations
- Communication
- Social System
- Society
- Differentiation of Society
- Semantics
- Interaction
- Organization
- Conflict
- Interpenetration and Structural Coupling
- Psychic Systems
- Inclusion/Exclusion

The fifth way of reading focuses on one of the particularities of modern society emphasized by Luhmann: functional differentiation. First, the idea of the differentiation of society in general is presented along with the previous historical forms of society. Next, Luhmann's explanation of the structural changes and the complexity of today's society are analyzed. This topic is at the center of Luhmann's whole project of social theory. For several years, he has been writing monographs about the different subsystems of the functionally differentiated society. This way of reading ends with the question of risk, which is today gaining more and more significance in the sociological analysis of modern society. The keywords in this way of reading are:

- Differentiation
- Differentiation of Society
- Code
- Program
- Education System
- Art System
- Medical System

- Political System
- Legal System
- Religious System
- System of Families
- Economic System
- Scientific System
- Risk/Danger

The sixth way of reading is a further deepening of sociological questions and a second direction of development within Luhmann's general theory of society. Here, the questions of the improbability of communication and the means of transforming this improbability into probability are treated. The topic of the structures of modern society is treated once again. The fifth and sixth ways of reading are therefore complementary, in that they describe the characteristics of the functionally differentiated society. This way of reading also presents concrete sociological consequences of constructivism, and therefore links up to the third way of reading. In this case, too, we have tried to signal the outlines of the topics that are comprehensively treated in monographs. The keywords in this way of reading are:

- Communication
- Medium/Form
- Code
- Language
- Dissemination Media
- Symbolically Generalized Media
- Property/Money
- Art
- Love
- Power
- Truth
- Values
- Morality

The seventh and final way of reading highlights a particularly important dimension within Luhmann's theory that is not always dealt with explicitly in sociology: the temporal dimension. This way of reading may appear somewhat redundant, because it includes keywords that also appear in the other

ways of reading. The meaning of the temporal dimension (which the theory of evolution also refers to), however, warrants particular attention. The level of abstraction in these keywords is remarkable, but the structure of the references can make it easier to locate connections with the concrete questions presented in the other ways of reading. It is exactly this degree of abstraction that allows this way of reading to more precisely pose the questions that deal with complexity of social systems and communication. The keywords in this way of reading are:

- Meaning Dimensions
- Time
- Event
- Structure
- Process
- Evolution