THE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY SPHERE OF ART AND ITS PLACE IN SOCIETAL-CULTURAL REALITY IN THE LIGHT OF SYSTEM-THEORETICAL AND SYSTEMIC SOCIOLOGY.

A STUDY OF A SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH TRADITION AND ITS ART-THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION
ERKKI SEVÄNEN

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ABSTRACT

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Key words: the sphere of art, system-theoretical sociology, de-differentiation.

This thesis consists of four articles, published between 2000–2006, and of introductory chapters that place those articles into a broader theoretical and historical frame of reference. On the one hand, the thesis considers in what ways representatives of system-theoretical and systemic sociology have understood the position of the sphere of art in modern societal-cultural reality. On the other hand, the thesis clears up how the position of the sphere of art has changed in a contemporary "postmodern" and globalising world. In addition, this thesis explicates how far changes like these can be described with the aid of system-theoretical and systemic sociology.

Modern society has been characterised by a far-reaching differentiation, which means that it has been divided into systems that are relatively independent of each other. Each of these systems has possessed its own boundaries and its own function in the entirety of culture and society. To systems such as these belong, among other things, economics, politics, law, science, education, health care, art, mass media and religious life. According to the theories of postmodernity, in contemporary or “postmodern” society the process of differentiation has ended and societal development has turned towards de-differentiation. Therefore, the boundaries between systems have become obscure and those systems would even have fused with each other. In this way, the sphere of art would also have fused with the rest of societal-cultural reality. Correspondingly, as a result of the process of globalisation, boundaries between societies or between national societal systems have become lower and those societies are nowadays more and more economically, politically and culturally interlaced.

This thesis analytically considers theories of postmodernity, in particular, the views that the concepts of system and society have become useless in sociology. This thesis strives to show that contemporary societal-cultural reality can be grasped by means of system-theoretical concepts; to be sure, this requires that those concepts will be renewed in a way that better serves the needs of present-day research work. Associated with system-theoretical and systemic sociology are figures such as Talcott Parsons, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Münch, Renate Mayntz, Pierre Bourdieu and Vessela Misheva. When describing contemporary societal-cultural reality, this thesis critically and selectively adopts elements from their views; in this connection, the thesis pays its main attention to Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social systems.
PREFACE

Albeit the thesis on hand mainly uses an abstract sociological and system-theoretical language or discourse, its origin lies in my personal experiences. I began my academic studies in 1975 at the University of Turku, in Western Finland; in those studies, comparative literature was my main discipline, but in addition to it I studied sociology, philosophy, linguistics, political science and media research. In the early 1980s, I moved to Eastern Finland, where I started to work at the Department of Finnish Language and Cultural Research at the University of Joensuu. In the late 1980s, I finished my graduate studies in sociology at the University of Joensuu, but literature was still my main discipline. I published my first doctoral thesis on literature in 1994 at the University of Joensuu.

In the 1970s, comparative literature, like literary studies in general, was strictly a text-centric discipline that hardly took into account literature’s societal-cultural contexts. It was dominated by Anglo-American new criticism, French structuralism, the German “text-immanent” approach and narratologist and formalist approaches. Because I was deeply disappointed with the state of that discipline, I began to concentrate on my studies in philosophy and sociology hoping that they would have helped me to better understand literature’s and art’s position and function in culture, society and human life.

As far as I remember it correctly, still in the 1970s Talcott Parsons and his system theory were topical in sociology, even if American and European sociologists had, to a growing extent, already presented criticism against him since the late 1960s. In particular, Marxist sociologists and Marxist theorists used to regard system-theoretical sociology as a hopelessly abstract, unhistorical and conservative approach that was incapable of taking into account social contradictions and the dynamics of societal development. Nevertheless, it was in the 1970s that leftist social theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas adopted the concept of system into their own thinking and at that time they also began to elaborate their own versions of system-theoretical sociology.

When I continued with my studies in sociology at Joensuu in the late 1980s, system theory was again an object of critique in the social sciences. The critique in question was not directed only at Parsons but also at other system-theorists. Those critics or theorists of postmodernity stated that system theory was becoming obsolete, because societal-cultural reality was itself rapidly losing its previous systemic structure or order. Despite this, I found system theory’s holistic approach to societal-cultural reality as interesting and promising, and it helped me to grasp the spheres of literature and art as societal-cultural wholes. Consequently, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s I published my first articles on system theory, and somewhat later I also utilised system theory in my doctoral thesis *Vapauden rajaat. Kirjallisuuden tuotannon ja välityksen yhteiskunnallinen saantely Suomessa vuosina 1918–1939* (The Limits of Freedom. Social Regulation of Literary Production and Mediation in Finland 1918–1939, published in 1994) whose theoretical basis is largely based on Niklas Luhmann’s, Siegfried J. Schmidt’s, Jürgen Habermas’, Peter Bürger’s and Pierre Bourdieus’ investigations. In the late 1990s, I published the monograph *Taide institutionoja ja järjestelmänä. Modernin taide-elämän historiallis-sosiologiset mallit* (Art as an Institution and System. The Historical-Sociological Models of Modern Art Life, 1998) in which I contrasted system theories with theories of postmodernity. In recent years, I have continued this work in the articles of this thesis.

Professors Ari Antikainen and M’hammed Sabour from the Department of Sociology have acted as my supervisors. I warmly thank both of them for the collegial and sympathetic understanding that they have addressed to my research work. In this connection, I have
an opportunity to express my long-term debt of gratitude to Professor Antikainen who has guided my steps in sociology since the mid–1980s. I have been fortunate because during the last two decades I have had a great number of fruitful discussions with him. Professor Sabour, in turn, has, in the same way, kindly helped my later endeavours in sociology. Also Professor Leena Koski from the Department of Sociology has supported my research work by reading the first version of the manuscript of this thesis.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge doctors Sören Brier (Management and Politics Department, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark) and Seppo Raiski (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) for their role as pre-examiners for this thesis. Their critical comments, advices and propositions proved to be invaluable for the completion of this thesis. In their own and equally invaluable way my academic home units, that is, the Department of Finnish Language and Cultural Research as well as the Faculty of Humanities have given their support to my sociological activities. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Regional Studies has accepted my thesis for its publication series. Dr. Greg Watson has, without sparing his own time, checked the language of my thesis.

By making a promise to act as my opponent Dr. Risto Kangas made the end phase of this process possible. I thank him for all of his efforts.

I owe this thesis to my dearest Ulla who has given a deeper meaning to everything I do, including this thesis.

Joensuu, 18 March, 2008

Erkki Sevänen
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1 THE POINT OF DEPARTURE, THE GOAL AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE OF THIS STUDY

1.1 The Need for Clarification

Originally in sociology, the concept of “system” was chiefly associated with Talcott Parsons and his structural-functional school. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that Parsons, together with his collaborators such as Edward Shils and Neil J. Smelser, elaborated upon the concept of system and analysed societal-cultural reality by means of it. Although Parsons and his school did not reach a hegemonic position in American sociology, they widely influenced it, and in Europe they also gained disciples and successors, who later turned out to be central figures in this discipline.\(^1\) Among those figures there were, among other persons, Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas, in Germany, Francois Bourricaud and Alain Touraine, in France, and Anthony Giddens, in Great Britain. Consequently, system-theoretical thinking had a rather secure place in sociology in the decades after the Second World War. However, from the 1970s onward its intellectual value as a social theory has often been called into question. Albeit system-theoretical sociology has had outstanding spokesmen during the last decades as well, several cultural and social theorists have tended to think that ongoing cultural and societal changes have made it obsolete - at least in its traditional form.

Such questioning as this deviated from the criticism that leftist sociologists and conflict theorists had earlier directed against Parsons. Within leftist sociology, C. Wright Mills, for example, regarded Parsons’ thinking as too abstract and unhistorical, and conflict theorists such as Ralf Dahrendorff and Alvin W. Gouldner held that Parsons was incapable of understanding the meaning of conflicts and contradictions in society and its development.\(^2\) Despite their critical attitude towards Parsons’ sociology, those critics did not usually claim that the concept of system would in itself be unusable as an analytical tool in sociological research. In contrast, from the 1970s onward certain cultural and social theorists have argued that it is no longer possible to analyse societal-cultural reality adequately by means of the concept of system. On the other hand, a milder version of a criticism like this stated that the concept of system must be changed fundamentally before it can be utilised in the analysis of contemporary societal-cultural reality. Often proponents of these views were known as theorists of postmodernity.

The most radical theorists of postmodernity thought that, roughly speaking, from the 1960s onward society’s nature has fundamentally changed in the Western world. According to this view, modern Western society and culture were characterised by the structural principle of functional differentiation. In other words, modern Western society and culture consisted of differentiated spheres or systems, each of which had a specific function in society and which, to a great extent, were autonomous with regard to each other. However, this train of thought continued, nowadays, the course of the societal-

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\(^1\) On Talcott Parsons and his position in sociology, see, for example, Alexander 1983, Turner 1991 and Robertson & Turner 1991a.
cultural development has turned into an opposite direction and, therefore, in postmodern culture and society the spheres or systems have lost their clear-cut boundaries. Thus, these spheres or systems would be increasingly fusing with each other in postmodern societal-cultural reality.

A radical version like this manifests itself, for example, in Jean Baudrillard’s (1983: 147–150) and Gianni Vattimo’s (1988: 55–56) writings. According to them, in a contemporary Western world people live in a media and communication society in which the omnipresence of mass media and information technology, on the one hand, and the consumption culture and the aestheticization of everyday life, on the other hand, define the nature of societal-cultural reality. In this sense, the whole societal world would have changed into an “artificial” and “simulated” network of signs, images and pleasurable products – with the result that contemporary society would no longer be divided into differentiated spheres or systems. Thus, in that society the sphere of the art would have merged with mass media, mass culture, design and with the aestheticization of everyday life.

Baudrillard’s and Vattimo’s view of postmodernity has been concerned with the entirety of contemporary society. In principle, rather similar views have been presented by Mike Featherstone (1991; 1993) and Fredric Jameson (1991) as well as by Scott Lash and John Urry (1994), although usually these four theorists do not, in the first instance, speak about the entirety of society but about the relationships between the economics and culture. All of them are inclined to think that the sharp boundaries between these two spheres are, to a great extent, disappearing. In addition, in their works Lash and Urry have also stated that very nearly in the same way the boundary between the social and the cultural, or between society and culture, is tendentiously disappearing in contemporary societal-cultural reality (Lash 1992: 5, 8–11; Lash & Urry 1994: 5, 14, 142–143; Lash 2002: 111–112). According to views like these, in the processes in question the sphere of art would obviously be merging with its economic environment or with the rest of societal-cultural reality.

As far as methodological questions are concerned, theories of postmodernity imply that it is no longer justified to keep culture and society sharply separate from each other in sociological analyses. Every now and then previous sociologists tended to ignore the cultural dimension in their analyses of society and societal phenomena, but in present-day sociology this is not usually a legitimate procedure. Thereby, present-day sociologists do not usually study either society or culture but societal-cultural reality, that is, they take into account both the societal and the cultural dimension in their research work. In the same vein, this thesis endeavours to consider art both as a societal and a cultural phenomenon. A goal like this manifests itself also in the title of the thesis; a careful reader might have noticed that the title speaks about art’s position in modern and contemporary societal-culture reality – and not about its position in modern and contemporary culture and society. In addition, from the title one can conclude that in my opinion sociology should also take into account the cultural dimension when it analyses modernity – and not only when it analyses postmodernity.

At least implicitly, the above-mentioned theorists suggest that when describing contemporary societal-cultural reality sociology does not need the concept of system or that in descriptions such as these it should elaborate upon concepts that are more useful and adequate than the concept of system is. In his own view of postmodernity, Zygmunt Bauman (1987; 1992), a representative of the moderate version of the theory of postmodernity, arrives at more cautious conclusions. According to him, contemporary Western societies develop extremely dynamically, wherefore change is a constant element in them. For this reason, Bauman continues, their basic nature cannot be reached by
means of a “simple” and “mechanical” concept of system; instead, the proper concept of social system should be “complex” and “dynamic”. Bauman did not himself elaborate upon a concept of social system that would fill these requirements, although his view of system-theoretical sociology seems to be more positive than that of the above-mentioned theorists. In the same vein, Ulrich Beck (1994: 24–25) has stated that in its present-day form sociological system theory cannot adequately comprehend the nature of contemporary societal-cultural reality that is called “reflexive modernity” by him; and, like Bauman, Beck himself has not attempted to renew this branch of sociology.

Despite the hard criticism that system-theoretical sociology has received during the last three decades, it has also had its own proponents. For example, in the early 1990s Alain Touraine (1992: 57–62, 76) made his own appraisal of contemporary sociology. According to him, nowadays several sociologists regard present-day societal reality as extremely fluid and dynamic – or, one may say, as a space in which “all that is solid melts into the air”. For this reason, they think that the present-day “social life” cannot be grasped correctly by means of “simple”, “rigid”, “inflexible” and “mechanical” concepts among which they place the concepts of social system and society. Touraine himself sees these concepts as useful and necessary in sociology; in this sense, he resembles sociologists such as Luhmann, Habermas, Giddens and Richard Münch who have worked on system-theoretical sociology during the last decades.

To this group of sociologists one could add Pierre Bourdieu, even if he has often been critical of system-theoretical concepts. Yet, the concept of “social field”, the most central theoretical tool in his sociology, closely resembles the concept of social system. Bourdieu’s criticism against system theory is based on the belief that the concept of social system excludes contradictions and conflicts between social actors from itself, whereas social fields, according to him, consist of power and status relationships between actors (see, nearer, Bourdieu & Waquant 1992). Obviously, this criticism is mainly true of Parsons’ and Luhmann’s sociology, but, on the other hand, Habermas and Giddens do not ignore contradictions and conflicts in their analysis of social systems. Therefore, Bourdieu’s field-theoretical sociology can, at least in part, be translated into the language of system-theoretical sociology (cf. Arnoldi 2001: 6).

Speaking more generally, it is possible to understand Bourdieu’s sociology as a part of systemic sociology. The concept of systemic sociology possesses a wider extension than the concept of system-theoretical sociology does. To be sure, system-theoretical sociology is self-evidently an unquestionable part of systemic sociology, but in addition to it the domain of systemic sociology comprises those sociologists whose thinking is based on concepts such as “social worlds”, “differentiated and institutionalised sub-areas of society”.


6 The expression "all that is solid melts into the air" originates from Karl Marx’ and Friedrich Engels’ *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (Communist Manifest, 1848). In the 1980s, Marshall Berman made it well known in his books *All that is Solid Melts into the Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982). Touraine does not mention it in his appraisal.

and "social fields". All of these concepts are utilised in the study of social wholes that are more or less system-like by nature, that is, they are cognate concepts of the concept of social system.

Consequently, during the last decades systemic and system-theoretical sociology has had its own critics and proponents. Likewise, a tension like this has manifested itself in the sociologically-orientated study of the sphere of art; this sphere comprises both works of art and the art life. On the one hand, researchers such as Baudrillard, Vattimo, Featherstone, Jameson, Lash and Urry and their successors have seen the sphere of art to be largely merging with the rest of societal-cultural reality or with the spheres of the economics, mass media, cultural industry and design. A view like this does not necessarily imply that the sphere of art is disappearing from the societal-cultural world. On the contrary, Baudrillard (1983: 151–152), for example, has suggested that in postmodernity the entirety of the societal-cultural world has, in fact, changed into an art-like formation, that is, into an artificial and aestheticized space. Thus, in this sense the sphere of art would have widened enormously in postmodernity. On the other hand, the representatives of systemic thinking, as well as their disciples and successors, still regard the contemporary sphere of art as a differentiated social system or as a system-like social whole. One can, therefore, speak about the systemic study of art and its way of understanding the position of the sphere of art in contemporary societal-cultural reality (cf. Zepetnek 1997). In particular, Niklas Luhmann and his disciple Siegfried J. Schmidt represent system-theoretical sociology in the systemic study of art, for they have conceptualised the modern and contemporary sphere of art as a differentiated system. Similarly, Bourdieu belongs to the systemic study of art by virtue of that he published several investigations on "the field of art". Likewise, in France researchers such as Antoine Hennion, Raymonde Moulin and Jean-Claude Passeron also represent the systemic study of art, in particular, the empirical study of art life. As for systemic study within the humanities, the American art-philosophers Arthur C. Danto, George Dickie, Marcia Muelder Eaton and Donald Kuspit have been influential within this domain. At least in North America and Western Europe, these philosophers have helped humanists to understand the entirety of the sphere of art, in addition they have influenced sociologists such as Howard S. Becker, Diana Crane, Rosanne Martorella and Vera L. Zolberg of whom Crane, Martorella and Zolberg have concentrated on the exploration of the contemporary sphere of art. Of the representatives of the systemic study of art one must also mention Habermas and his disciples Christa and Peter Bürger who, like Bourdieu and Giddens, carry on the spirit of "critical theory" in the systemic study of culture and society.

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8 See, for example, Sociologie de l’art. Colloque international Marseille 13–14 juin 1985 (Sociology of the Art. An International Colloquy, Marseille 13–14 June, 1985), edited by Raymonde Moulin in 1986. This work contains articles by Hennion, Moulin, Passeron as well as by other French and foreign researchers, and it gives a good overview of the empirical study of art life.
The representatives of systemic study characterise the sphere of art with different concepts. Luhmannian theorists and researchers speak about the system of art, whereas Bourdieu and his disciples use the concept of the field of art. North-American philosophers and sociologists favour concepts such as "the art world" and "the institution of art", and Habermasian theorists and researchers are inclined to operate with the concepts "the institution of art" and, to a minor extent, "the system of art". In part, these concepts are bound to different theoretical presuppositions concerning the nature of society and the sphere of art. However, at the same time they share certain common aims and thoughts: they endeavour to grasp the entirety of the sphere of art which they regard as a more or less well-organised formation or as a more or less system-like whole. Thus, they theorize about the sphere of art on a common basis such as this. Situated close to the systemic study of the sphere of art are Raymond Williams' Culture (1986, originally published 1981) and Janet Wolff's The Social Production of Art (1993, originally published 1981), which deal with central constituents of the sphere of art, that is, with the works of art and their production, mediation and reception. Yet, those investigations are not interested in developing a theory about the entirety of the sphere of art, in that they partly belong to the systemic study in an indirect way.

So far we have seen that sociologists and cultural theorists do not agree on whether contemporary societal-cultural reality is differentiated into systems. Likewise, they do not agree on to what extent that reality can be analysed with system-theoretical concepts. A confusion like this forms the point of departure of my investigation. In general, this investigation is chiefly model-theoretical, methodological and meta-theoretical by nature.

System-theoretical sociologists use to outline abstract theoretical models or representations of societal-cultural reality; theoretical models or representations like these usually aim at grasping the general structure and the general principles of operation of a sub-area of societal-cultural reality. Subsequently, this thesis analyses what kinds of pictures of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality systemic sociology offers us and what kind of position the sphere of art obtains in those pictures. As far as contemporary societal-cultural reality is concerned, this thesis critically considers theories of modernity and at the same time it clears up how that reality could be described with the aid of system-theoretical sociology. In this vein, the investigation pays attention to the tools – that is, to the concepts, methods, presuppositions and beliefs – by means of which system-theorists and theorists of postmodernity have constructed their representations or models of societal-cultural reality. Is it possible to estimate whether representations or models like these correspond to societal-cultural reality? Extreme constructivists like Schmidt have answered this question strictly in the negative, and moderate constructivists like Luhmann have been inclined to think in the same way but not as resolutely as their extreme congenial spirits have done. Although I believe in an equal manner that observations concerning reality cannot be free of conceptual frames of references, I tend to think that to a certain extent sociological representations can be compared with societal-cultural reality; yet, at the same time, those representations contain beliefs and principles whose truth value we are not capable of discovering with a comparison like this.

Traditionally, it has been thought that methodology lies between theory and concrete methods. On the one hand, the methodology of a discipline includes general theoretical suppositions about the nature of the research object of the discipline in question; and, on the other hand, the methodology of a discipline tells us in what ways and with what kind of methods that research object should be studied (cf. Silverman 1985). Thus, the methodology of a discipline contains theoretical suppositions, but it does not present
a wide and systematic theory about the research object of the discipline in question. Conversely, the methodology of a discipline reflects on and elaborates concrete methods, but it is not a mere taxonomy of concrete methods. It is precisely in this sense that my investigation considers systemic sociology from a methodological standpoint. As already stated, at a general level this thesis analyses what kinds of models of societal-cultural reality system-theoretical sociology offers to us. Furthermore, it explicates the methodic instructions and implications that the representatives of the systemic study give to that research work concerned with the sphere of art.

Thirdly, my investigation aims at explicating the philosophical presuppositions and commitments that are included in systemic theories of the sphere of art and society; this task forms the meta-theoretical dimension of the investigation on hand (cf. Österberg 1989). In particular, the investigation pays attention to the epistemological conceptions that underlie systemic theories of the sphere of art and society. In the same vein, this investigation asks what kind of position human action and human actors have in systemic sociology and what kinds of value commitments manifest themselves in it.

1.2 System-Theoretical Sociology and the Concept of System within the Context of General Systems Theory

Actually, system-theoretical sociology can be seen as a part of a wider scientific orientation, that is, as a part of general systems theory. In historical representations regarding the development of general systems theory, the origin of this orientation has been seen in the philosophy of antiquity and in the philosophical thinking of the founding fathers of modern natural science. Thereby, the Swedish system theorist Lars Skyttner (2001: 45–46) begins his historical representation of general systems theory with the philosophy of Aristoteles, in particular, with Aristoteles’ metaphysical view of the hierarchical order of the nature; and the German system theorist Klaus Muller (1996: 30–34), in turn, holds that Nikolai Kopernikus’, Johannes Kepler’s and Galileo Galilei’s thoughts about the system of the cosmic harmony prevailing in the universe is one of the earliest instances of system-theoretical thinking. Yet, both Aristoteles and the pioneers of modern natural science belong to the prehistory of system-theoretical thinking. The same is true of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, even if he is often called “a system-philosopher”. Hegel formulated a number of statements concerning the nature of systems; for example, the following principles originate from his thinking: (i) in systems the whole is more than the sum of its constituents, (ii) in systems the whole defines the nature of the constituents and (iii) in systems the constituents interact with each other in a dynamic way (Skyttner 2001: 45–46). All of these principles can also be found from certain later versions of system-theoretical thinking. After Hegel, system-theoretical thinking was divided into two branches. One branch was represented by political economics, in particular, by Adam Smith and Karl Marx; the latter even characterised modern capitalist economics as a self-regulating system or automat. The other branch was represented by biology in which the concept of system was chiefly associated with the idea of organic whole.

In the early 20th century, system-theoretical thinking manifested itself in Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist theory of language and in structuralist movement and Gestalt psychology. Yet, the most important figure in this connection might be Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a theoretical biologist, who worked in Germany in the 1930s and after that in the United States of America. He inspired a group of American scientists with whom he worked in the 1940s; the group in question generalised his ideas and transformed them into the language of general systems theory. Of these scientists, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver elaborated a mathematical theory of communication, John von
Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern created a game theory and applied it to the economics, and Norbert Wiener developed cybernetics. The proper history of general systems theory begins from Bertalanffy’s and his American co-operators’ research work in the 1940s and 1950s. Somewhat later, Talcott Parsons presented his system-theoretical view of human action and society. In particular, this happened in works like Toward a General Theory of Action (1951, in co-operation with Edward Shils), The Social System (1951), Economy and Society (1956, in co-operation with Neil J. Smelser), Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives (1966) and The System of Modern Societies (1971). From the 1960s onward, Parsons used to utilise cybernetics when describing systems and their mutual relationships.

As for Bertalanffy, he regarded general systems theory as a scientific study of wholes. In this sense, it explores, among other things, the common properties of different systems, wherefore its proponents believe that the gap between the natural sciences and the humanities is not in every respect unbridgeable (Bertalanffy 1971: xvii–xviii). However, unlike positivism, general systems theory does not reduce the humanities and the social sciences to the natural sciences, but it holds that in part they could use a similar conceptual vocabulary, that is, a system-theoretical vocabulary (Bertalanffy 1971: 86–88). Parsons’ sociology is in accordance with these principles. His thinking is holistic in the sense that he attempted to grasp the entirety of society, besides of which he took into account the sphere of culture as well as the personalities and behavioural organisms of individuals. Likewise, Parsons adopted an anti-positivist and anti-reductionist view of the social sciences: in fact, already in the 1930s, when starting to work on his action theory, he defended a view like this (see, nearer, Parsons 1985a: 54–55).

Parsons, Bertalanffy and his American co-operators belong to the first phase of general systems theory. In the early 1970s, they were faced with a competitor. Already in the late 1950s Heinz von Foerster had founded an institute of biological computer laboratory at the University of Illinois. This institute later became famous, for the figures who worked in it, such as W. Ross Ashby, Gotthard Günther, Lars Löfgren, Humberto R. Maturana and Gordon Pask. From the early 1970s onward, these scientists elaborated upon second order cybernetics that deals with the observation of observing systems. Bertalanffy’s and his American co-operators’ systems theory was found to be too technocratic by them. (Baecker 1996: 18–19.) In sociology, Luhmann’s late production, that is, his theory of autopoietic social systems is close to the research work of Foerster’s institute, and the same holds usually true for the investigations of Luhmann’s disciples. However, several well-known system-theoretical sociologists seem, in the first instance, to lean on the first phase of general systems theory. For example, Habermas and Münch have elaborated their sociological thinking on the basis of a critical appraisal of the Parsonsian sociology, and Jeffrey C. Alexander and Paul J. Colomy, two North-American “neo-functionals” and Parsons’ disciples, have done the same in their own sociology.

General systems theory contains a huge number of definitions for the concept of system. Despite this apparent diversity, those definitions seem to agree on the idea that, as Skyttn (2001: 53) says, “a system is a set of interacting units or elements that form an integrated whole intended to perform some function”. Thus, an internal organisation and a specific function are characteristic of a system, and a system has its boundaries that differentiate it from other systems. At a more general level, a number of system-theorists

have been inclined to think that everything that exists in the universe is organised systems of matter, energy and information. Thus, those system-theorists have conceived of the world as an organised whole or as systems that differ from each other with regard to their complexity. Simple systems contain only few elements, the interaction between those elements is highly organised and regulated by clear-cut rules, the sub-systems in simple systems are weakly differentiated, and, in all, simple systems like these are rather closed with regard to their environment. Conversely, complex systems include a lot of elements, interaction between the elements is loosely organised, the sub-systems in complex systems elaborate their own goals, and in many respects complex systems are open with regard to their environment. Machines and automats are often seen as paradigmatic instances of simple systems, but there are relatively simple systems in society as well. For example, small and well-organised enterprises and administrative institutions could be regarded as simple systems, albeit it is generally held that in society systems cannot be as closed as they might be in the mechanical world. On the other hand, usually system-theoretical sociologists characterise functional and societal systems as open formations. However, according to Luhmann (1985a: 555; 1986: 620–623; 1995: 60), modern functional and societal systems are open only in the sense that they take energy and information from their environment. Yet, he adds, they are operatively closed, because they handle this energy and information according to their own principles of operation – or according to their own "media" and "medium codes". Thereby, Luhmann describes these kinds of operatively closed systems as autopoietic formations.

By utilising Table 1 we can say that the art life is one of the functional sub-systems of society. To be more specific, a characterisation like this is mainly applicable to modern Western society and, as system-theoretical sociologists of art think, to its contemporary or postmodern phase; in both of them there has been a differentiated sphere of art. Conversely, it is unclear whether there was a differentiated sphere of art in traditional and pre-modern Western society; most of the system-theorists seem to answer this question in the negative. Likewise, they have been inclined to think that a differentiated sphere of art has been a relatively rare phenomenon outside the Western world, although a sphere like this might nowadays be almost a global phenomenon.

Thus, the art life in modern Western society can be seen as a differentiated functional sub-system. In addition, the concepts of interactional system and organisational system are applicable to the art life, for there are formations like these in it. For example, artistic groups have properties of interactional system in the sense that the members of an artistic group often know each other personally and they distinguish themselves, formally or informally, from other artists. Similarly, theatres, orchestras, publishing houses, museums, galleries and administrative institutions and private foundations in the art life often fulfill the criteria of an organisational system; that is, they have more or less clear-cut rules and roles as well as a division of labour and a formal hierarchy between different roles. Usually system-theorists ignore the state of affairs that there are interactional and organisational sub-systems in the functional system of art; and, conversely, of the sub-classes of social systems they usually only apply the concept of functional system to the art life. Moreover, it should be mentioned that Table 1 implies that the sphere of art is, in fact, composed of two kinds of systems, that is, of a functional system and a cultural system. In this way, the entirety of the system of art contains two levels. Yet, system-theoretical and systemic models of the sphere of art are not necessarily in accordance with presuppositions like these. For example, Luhmann’s model seems to recognise only one level: he does not make a difference between functional and cultural systems, and he thinks that in the last resort the system of art consists of communications concerning works of art, besides which he takes into account works of art in his studies of the system of art (see Luhmann 1986: 626–627; 1997a). For him, the system of art is solely a social phenomenon.
Table 1. Different Classes of Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical systems</td>
<td>(machines, automats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic systems</td>
<td>(flora, organisms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual and analytical</td>
<td>(logic, mathematics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychic systems</td>
<td>(psyches, consciousnesses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional systems</td>
<td>(families, school classes, a circle of friends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational systems</td>
<td>(enterprises, associations, administrative institutions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional systems</td>
<td>(economics, politics, legal system, science, the art life, sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal systems</td>
<td>(primitive societies, archaic societies, feudal societies, estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>societies, industrial-capitalist societies, fascist societies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>socialist societies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural languages and sign</td>
<td>systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive systems</td>
<td>(world views, scientific theories, representations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value systems</td>
<td>(hierarchies of values, moral values, aesthetic values)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Likewise, Schmidt’s early model was, for different reasons, almost equally one-dimensional. Namely, Schmidt (1980; 1982; 1987) thought that the “social system of art” consists of phenomena such as the production, mediation, reception and post-processing (criticism, art education) of works of art. In other words, for Schmidt, the social system of art included the forms of action that maintain the art-based culture in society; but, the art-based culture in itself, that is, works of art, as such, did not belong to the social system of art. However, later Schmidt (1994: 248; 1995a: 18; 1999: 20–21, 34) changed his thinking and made an explicit distinction between the social system of art and the cultural system of art: the former system consists of the action that produces and maintains the latter system or works of art. After having made this distinction, Schmidt could incorporate works of art into his system-theoretical research work.

In Schmidt’s late production, the entire system of art includes two levels, that is, a “social” and a “cultural” level. Rather similar models have been presented by Itamar Evan-Zohar and Habermas. In his “poly-systemic” thinking, Evan-Zohar’s (1990) takes into account both the works of art and the action concerning them - presupposing in this way that the system of art consists of different and relatively independent sub-systems. Habermas (1973b: 14–15; 1987a: 322), in turn, speaks about “the cultural value
systems" (science, art, religion) and about “the corresponding cultural action systems” (the institution of science, the art life, religious communities). Although he does not use the word “social” in this connection, his distinction is parallel with the distinctions made by Schmidt and Evan-Zohar. In general, when exploring “the institution of art”, “the art world”, “the field of art” or “the system of art” most of the representatives of the systemic study take into account both works of art and the activities that produce and maintain those works, and in doing so they do not necessarily make an explicit distinction between social and cultural systems. This indicates that they do not regard the problematics concerning this distinction as especially important.

Table 1 distinguishes between culture and society – or between cultural and social systems. A similar distinction was made by Parsons. In his system-theoretical sociology, Parsons spoke about four kinds of systems, that is, about culture, society, personalities and behavioural organisms. Social systems can be conceptualised as action and interaction systems, whereas cultural systems are mental by nature. For Parsons, culture contains three basic dimensions: a cognitive dimension, an expressive dimension and a value dimension. In this way, one can consider art from a cognitive standpoint or even as a cognitive system, in which case he or she is interested in representations and world views included in works of art. As an expressive system, art has its own language that consists of different signs, symbols and expressive tools. And, as a value system, art expresses, among other things, aesthetic and moral values, and it may also critically appraise the values prevailing in society. Thus, as a cultural phenomenon art can be analysed from the standpoint of these three dimensions – or as a cultural system it possesses these three sub-systems. (Parsons 1951: 6, 17, 24–26, 327.)

What is the relationship between culture and society? Does culture lie entirely outside society? Parsons (1951: 17, 327; 1971: 8) thought that in modern Western civilization the four elements of human action system - culture, society, personalities and behavioural organisms – are reciprocally dependent on each other, but at the same time they are relatively autonomous systems that cannot be reduced to each other. This means, for example, that basic cultural values and symbols have been institutionalised as the cornerstones of social systems and they are also internalised by individual personalities or actors; it is in this sense that social systems and individual personalities are partly determined by culture. From another angle, one can say that in part culture lies inside society and individual personalities, but certain parts of culture are situated outside them. In his theory of autopoietic social systems, Luhmann could not approve a view like this. According to him, in modernity culture functions as “a memory of social systems” and not as an independent entity; therefore, it does not lie outside social systems but belongs entirely to the domain of society (Luhmann 1995: 47–48). In this line of thought, there is no room for a distinction between social and cultural systems. This being the case, Luhmann rejects the concept of cultural system, and that which other theorists call cultural systems is included in social systems in his model of social systems. In contemporary system-theoretical sociology, Dirk Baeckler (1999: 43), among other persons, has adopted a similar solution; in fact, it seems that a clear-cut majority of Luhmann’s disciples and successors has followed this solution, even if Schmidt has spoken for a two-dimensional concept of system.15

System-theoretical sociology of art has mainly applied the concepts of social and cultural system to the sphere of art. Undoubtedly, general systems theory also contains other sub-areas that have proved to be or that might be relevant for the study of art. For example, sub-areas such as communication theory, information theory and, more recently, chaos theory have been utilised in the study of art, in particular, in studies made in the humanities. Yet, usually applications like these have not, in the first instance, been sociological by nature, and during the last decades they have been eclipsed by a research tradition that is based on the concepts of a social system and cultural system. For this reason, my study largely passes over those other sub-areas, and concentrates on the research tradition that speaks about the sphere of art by means of the concepts at issue.

1.3 Three Internal Tensions in Systemic Sociology and in the Systemic Study of the Sphere of Art

So far, I have largely considered system-theoretical and systemic sociology as a relatively homogeneous whole without pointing to its deeper inner tensions. There are, however, at least three fundamental tensions which are relevant from the standpoint of my thesis and which manifest themselves in system-theoretical and systemic study of art. Those tensions concern (A) the epistemological basis of a sociological study like this, (B) the relationship between the concept of social system and the concept of action and (C) the underlying value commitments of this branch of research.

(A) Realistic versus Constructivist Epistemology

Originally, general systems theory grew up in an epistemologically realistic atmosphere. Put briefly, its pioneers usually committed themselves to the belief that there is an objective reality or universe that is internally divided into systems; therefore, its proponents argued, general systems theory offers to researchers the tools by which they can adequately describe the true nature of reality (cf. Bertalanffy 1971: xx–xxi, 87–88; Skyttner 2001: 47–50). Although Parsons belonged to this pioneer phase of general systems theory, his attitude to epistemological realism such as this was complicated. In fact, he represented a way of thought that was called, by himself, “analytical realism”. Parsons’ analytical realism rejects the belief that human beings can acquire direct or immediate empirical knowledge of objective reality. Because this kind of belief was widely approved among logical positivists in the 1930s, Parsons’ analytical realism orientated itself against positivistic epistemology. In contrast to it, he held that human beings can obtain empirical knowledge of reality only by uniting perceptions with concepts and theories. In this sense, empirical knowledge always contains a conceptual – or, we might add, a “constructive” dimension, which does not, however, mean that the concepts of sciences would not be able to give us relatively adequate representations of reality; nor does it mean that all of the conceptual vocabularies would be epistemologically equally well-functioning. Parsons believed that certain concepts simply are more apt for describing reality than other concepts are (see Parsons 1937; 1985 a).\(^{10}\) Albeit Parsons’ epistemology includes a constructive dimension, it should not be regarded as constructivist – particularly for the reason that by sticking to the idea of objective or adequate knowledge it rejects the relativistic conception of knowledge.

Parsons’ sociological system theory must be seen in the light of his analytical realism. In his system theory, he built abstract models that have not, as such, been intended to function as “mirrors of reality”; on the contrary, his models provide researchers with concepts by means of which they can describe and analyse concrete human action. Likewise, the concepts of society, culture, personalities and behavioural organisms are themselves analytical. (Parsons 1951: 3, 6.) Subsequently, these four entities or systems can be distinguished from each other in theoretical models, but they are intertwined in concrete human action and usually human acts contain elements from all of them.

If it is illuminating to compare Parsons’ analytical realism with epistemological constructivism, then a comparison like this is not equally fruitful in the case of the leftist wing of systemic sociology. The wing in question does not represent epistemological constructivism but social constructivism. Within the leftist wing it is Bourdieu (see Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), Giddens (1976: 79, 155, 159–160) and Habermas (1973a: 188; 1987a: 158–159, 162) who have emphasised that the social sciences should take into account people’s beliefs, values and interpretations concerning societal reality, for people organise their own life and their mutual relationships on the basis of their beliefs, values and interpretations – and through this, at least in part, those mental entities change into societal reality. In this sense, societal reality is, as Giddens and Habermas remark, “structured by meanings”; or for this reason, as Bourdieu says, sociology should catch people’s self-understanding and their ways of giving meanings to the world.

These three theorists do not represent rigorous social constructivism. Even if they require that sociology has to take into account the self-understanding of social actors, they also add that it should not limit itself to exploring that self-understanding. For example, in the study of societal structures it is not always reasonable to presume that sociology would be able to obtain an adequate representation of those structures just by clearing up how social actors outline them. In fact, when studying societal structures sociology must usually draw away from actors’ self-understanding and consider the structures in question in an objectivistic way, that is, as if they were independent of how actors grasp them. On the other hand, some extreme social constructivists do not approve a methodology like this; for example, the representatives of symbolic interactionism have been critical of nearly all kinds of objectivistic methodologies – with the result that they have almost confined themselves to exploring how actors make sense of the world.18 Habermas (1973a: 289–291) characterises this kind of methodological thinking as “hermeneutical idealism” – implying in this way that it has a rather limited value in sociological research. Like Giddens (1976), he has elaborated a methodology of “double hermeneutics” for the social sciences. According to this methodology, sociology must first reach the meanings and interpretations that social actors project into the world; and after having achieved this it must explicate and explain those meanings and interpretations and societal reality by means of a theoretical language. Actually, in the latter phase, sociology interprets actors’ self-understanding and societal reality with the help of a language that deviates from or exceeds actors’ self-understanding.

Epistemologically Bourdieu, Giddens and Habermas represent realistic thinking, because all of them believe that sociology is able to obtain a relatively adequate knowledge of society. In addition, they think that societal reality is in itself divided or differentiated into systems or fields. Luhmann’s system theory is based on principles that are quite different

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18 On social constructivism (or constructionism), see, also, Heiskala 1997 and 2000.
from these presuppositions. To be sure, epistemological realism seems to underlie his early production, but his theory of autopoietic social systems mainly follows a constructivist train of thought. Yet, the theory in question does not possess an unambiguous epistemological basis. For the first time, Luhmann presented it widely in his investigation Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeiner Theorie (Social Systems. Outline of a General Theory, 1985a, originally published 1984). There he announces that his theory starts from the principle that “there are systems”, therefore it avoids “an epistemological doubt” (Luhmann 1985a: 30).¹⁹ Thus, in this phase Luhmann was close to realistic thinking. However, in his books Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft (The Science of Society, 1991, originally published 1990) and Soziologische Aufklärung 5. Konstruktivistische Perspektiven 2 (Sociological Enlightenment 5. Constructivist Perspectives 2, 1993d, originally published 1990) the theory of autopoietic systems is presented differently. Now Luhmann explicitly binds it to constructivist epistemology.

In Luhmann’s epistemology, human minds are autopoietic systems that handle sense impressions according to their own principles of operation and transform them into observations. Because the properties of reality have not been registered into our sense impressions and observations, one should not regard human knowledge as a mirror of reality but as a construct. Therefore, Luhmann gave up the the correspondence notion of truth and discarded realistic epistemology; this epistemology is based on the notion that a theory may be accepted as true if there are enough reasons to suppose that it corresponds to reality. According to Luhmann, we cannot know what kind of entity the reality is; we can only know how it shows itself to us. And the reality as it shows itself to us has a contingent nature, because our picture of this phenomenal world varies according to the kinds of positions and angles from which we consider it and also according to the kinds of distinctions and concepts that we apply to it or project into it. (Luhmann 1991: 81, 85, 102, 225, 526–527; 1993d: 7–11, 29, 33, 37, 58.) With regard to system theory, this means that one cannot directly compare system-theoretical representations of societal reality with the societal reality itself; this would simply be an impossible task. This is why theories must be otherwise evaluated. Luhmann held that in the evaluation of theories sociology has to direct its attention to their internal consistency, conceptual riches and analytical utility. With the aid of a good theory, sociologists are capable of describing and analysing the societal world broadly and from many sides. Hence, Luhmann did not regard system theory as the only possible or as the only fruitful way of describing society; theories of other kinds might also be useful, albeit he committed himself to the elaboration of system theory

Luhmann’s constructivism belongs to a broader intellectual movement, for in general systems theory Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, two Chilean biologists, and Heinz von Foerster, a cybernetist, have developed their own versions of constructivist epistemology.²⁰ Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic systems is, in particular, based on

¹⁹ In his Soziale Systeme Luhmann (1985a: 30) writes: “Die folgenden Überlegungen gehen also davon aus, dass es Systeme gibt. Sie beginnen also nicht mit einem erkenntnistheoretischen Zweifel […] Der Systembegriff bezeichnet also etwas, was wirklich ein System ist, und lässt sich damit auf eine Verantwortung für Bewährung seiner Aussagen an der Wirklichkeit ein.” [The following reflections start from the fact that there are systems. Consequently, they do not start with an epistemological scepticism(…) The concept of system points to something that is really a system, and for this reason it let the reality be responsible for the verification of its statements.] See, also, Luhmann 1993b: 29–31

²⁰ See Maturana & Varela 1998 and Foerster 1996.
Maturana’s and Varela’s investigations which launched the concept of autopoiesis. According to Dirk Baecker (1990: 16–18, 30; 1996: 19, 56–57), the third cornerstone in constructivist epistemology is the distinction theory elaborated by George Spencer-Brown, a British logician. Spencer-Brown’s theory includes the idea that observing or perceiving entails making distinctions; one can observe or perceive an entity only by sorting it out from other entities and by naming it. In this sense, observing or perceiving follows the maxim “Draw a distinction!”. In his epistemology, Luhmann (1991: 81) adds to this idea the view that as cognitive activities sorting and naming do not have an access to reality; they are concerned merely with the phenomenal world.

The above-presented remarks on Luhmann’s epistemology do not mean that his conception of knowledge is solely based on a theory of observation. In fact, at the same time he sought to base his epistemology on system-theoretical sociology. In this sense, he declared that knowledge is always system-relative, wherefore researchers must always announce the system from whose horizon they consider the world. The implication here is the thought that our picture of the world varies according to what kind of position we have in the world. At the level of social sub-systems this means that each social sub-system produces its own representation of society, and from the horizon of the system of art the rest of society looks different than, for example, from the horizon of economics or politics. Thus, Luhmann’s epistemology represent relativistic thinking, but not epistemological subjectivism or “anything goes” principle à la Paul Feyerabend. In his theory, it is social systems that, in the last resort, take care of the production of knowledge (Luhmann 1985a: 629; 1993d: 7, 11, 29).

Although Luhmann’s system theory has a slightly ambiguous epistemological basis, he has been seen to represent a moderate constructivist epistemology (Krawietz 1992a: 43–44; 1992b: 297). A more extreme version of constructivist epistemology can be found from Schmidt’s investigations, which, as he remarks himself, manifest a way of thought called “radical constructivism”. Schmidt has also been critical of Luhmann, for in his system theory, particularly, in his works of the 1980s, Luhmann still reflected upon whether there really are systems in societal reality or whether the concept of system is only a more or less useful analytical tool in sociological research work. For a radical constructivist like Schmidt (1989: 28–29; 1992: 22–23; 1994: 13), reflections like these include a wrongly posed question – for the reason that human beings cannot have a direct cognitive access to reality. Such being the case, sociologists should give up ontological questions and, instead, ask what kind of use the concept of system might have in sociological research work or if some phenomena can possibly be observed and classified as a system.

Schmidt’s critique on Luhmann recalls the traditional controversy between ontological and methodological use of system theory. The ontological use of system theory is based on the presupposition that societal reality is itself differentiated into systems, wherefor system theory would offer to sociologists an appropriate tool for the description and analysis of that reality. In the methodological use of system theory, sociologists attempt to avoid ontological commitments and presuppositions; instead, they regard system theory chiefly as a useful conceptual frame of reference by means of which they can classify and systematize their observations – in this way forming and constructing systems. In systemic sociology, Bourdieu, Giddens, Habermas and, to a minor extent, Münch (1976: 21–22) use the concept of system or its cognate concepts chiefly in an ontological way, and Parsons is quite close to this use, as well. Conversely, within system-theoretical thinking Maturana, Varela, Foerster, Luhmann, Schmidt and their disciples and successors tend to use it in a methodological way, although they are perhaps not entirely free of ontological presuppositions.
(B) Actor-Centric versus Anti-Humanist Thinking

In addition to epistemological realism, the second corner stone in traditional sociological system theory was the concept of action. Parsons’ theory of social systems is, in fact, a part of a wider theory, that is, a part of a general action theory that he and Edward Shils introduced in their joint work Toward a General Theory of Action (1951). The other parts in his general action theory are a theory of cultural systems, a theory of personal systems and a theory of behavioural organisms. All of these four theories are, Parsons thought, necessary when researchers analyse, interpret and explain human action. The above-mentioned four systems consist of different elements; here we may focus on social and cultural systems that are relevant in the context of this thesis. Cultural systems consist of beliefs, representations, values and meanings, whereas social systems can be defined as action and interaction systems. The most elementary things in social systems are acts, and at a higher level these systems include status roles. Social systems can, therefore, also be characterised as interaction systems in which actors have certain roles and a certain status. When participating in social systems, actors do not represent themselves as entire personalities, for their personalities cannot be equated with the roles they have in social systems. At any rate, in this sense, Parsons’ system theory represents an actor-centric way of thought.

Luhmann’s early production is also close to an actor-centric way of thought, but there he does not understand social systems precisely in the same way as Parsons did. In the 1960s and 1970s, Luhmann (1973: 1974; 1975; 1976a) explicitly defined social systems, in particular, functional systems as action systems, and still in 1981 he wrote that a system like this consists of actions that have a similar functional meaning (Luhmann 1981: 56,132). Thus, the boundaries between different social systems take shape on the basis of the category of meaning. When social actors comprehend the functional meanings of different acts in the same way, they agree on what kinds of acts can be classified as economics, politics, the practice of science or the practice of art. From another standpoint, one can say that the formation of systems such as these presupposes that social actors interpret the societal world in a relatively homogenous way. In this respect, Luhmann’s early system theory deviates from Parsons’ theory, for the latter did not grant to the category of meaning a central place in system theory. On the other hand, perhaps more resolutely than Parsons, Luhmann emphasised that concrete human beings, that is, their entire bodies and minds, do not belong to social systems, because such systems consist of meaningful actions produced by people as persons or social actors.

In Luhmann’s early production, concrete human beings are situated outside social systems. This stand represents an anti-humanist dimension in Luhmann’s early production, although that production still belongs to the actor-centric way of defining social systems. Anti-humanism must be understood against the background of traditional Western humanism that originates from the Enlightenment period of the 17th and 18th centuries. Humanism can be defined as an ideology or value orientation whose picture of the world is anthropocentric in the sense that it considers the world from the point of view of human beings and groups and the entire humanity.21 Traditional Western humanism regarded human beings as basically free creatures, and it was inclined to emphasise the existence of an inherent antithesis between the individual and society. Humanist conceptions of society, in turn, have been apt to see society as a body of free individuals; and insofar as this individual freedom is threatened by those in power, humanists have

usually criticised them by appealing to democratic ideals and basic human rights. It is this kind of conception of society or of the societal system that is incompatible with Luhmann’s early production.

In Luhmann’s late production, the actor-centric way of thought disappears and, conversely, the anti-humanist dimension becomes stronger. Now he states that autopoietic social systems do not consist of action but of communications which they produce themselves and which, in turn, maintain them (Luhmann 1985: 192–193, 240–241; 1997b: 81–82). This is precisely the core of the concept of autopoiesis, for the concept in question refers to an entity’s ability to produce and reproduce itself (Luhmann 1987: 38; 1997b: 65–67). In order to be able to understand Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems one also needs to know that he uses the concept of communication in a special way. In that theory, it is not people who communicate, since “only the communication can communicate” (Luhmann 1991: 31). By this he meant that one cannot equate communication with the acts and states of mind of entire and concrete people. To be sure, the flow of communication is dependent on people, since it cannot exist without it; but it is incorrect to reduce this flow to their acts, intentions and states of mind. Luhmann (1991: 24, 33–35, 44, 51, 63–65) held that communication is, in the first instance, a characteristic of social systems which maintain it by utilising certain psychic and physical capabilities possessed by actors or individuals. The entities that communication constructs from concrete individuals for its own purposes are called “persons” by Luhmann: those entities ought not be equated with concrete and entire psycho-physical individuals. Communication itself is, for Luhmann (1991: 23–24, 31–33, 38), a combination of three selections: when communicating, a person must choose the information that he or she wants to mediate to other persons, and he or she must also choose the way by means of which he or she mediates that information; the third element in communication is the receivers’ way of understanding the information or message mediated to them, and this understanding consists of the communicative acts, and not of the mental states of affairs, by means of which the receivers react to the information (see, also, Kangas 1996: 239). Through this, Luhmann wished to de-subjectivise the concept of communication and to empty it of anthropocentric presuppositions.

In the same way, Luhmann endeavoured to handle the concept of meaning. In its simplicity, actor-centric sociologists can understand meanings as intersubjective mental states shared by social actors. In contrast to this, in his late production Luhmann speaks about meanings without pointing to actors or subjects. Consequently, he also speaks about meanings in a way that is probably completely unfamiliar to representatives of the humanities and hermeneutics. For example, in his book Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft (Society of Society, 1997) he clears up the concept of meaning with the help of the concepts such as “actual”, “potential”, “possible” and “meaning horizon”. For Luhmann, the meaning horizon of a system is the entirety of what is possible in that system, and every single communicative event in that system realises or actualises only a part of the meaning horizon of the system in question (Luhmann 1997b: 142–144; 1997c: 1136–1137). Frank Becker and Elke Reinhardt-Becker (2001: 46–50) explicate Luhmann’s concept of meaning by using a soccer game and economics as examples.22 All of the events of a soccer game which can influence its course according to the rules of the game: among other things, corner kicks, free kicks, penalty kicks, tacklings, headings of the ball, spurs, warnings and fouls belong

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22 On Luhmann’s concept of meaning, see, also, Lohmann 1987: 166–167; Miller 1987: 201.
to its meaning horizon. On the other hand, Becker and Reinhardt-Becker go on, events such as murders, killings and shootings do not belong to the meaning horizon of soccer game, since these events are a part of another world, that is, a part of the system of criminal events. The meaning horizon of the system of economics, in turn, is defined by activities that concern the exchange of goods; in particular, buying, paying, selling and advertising are typical activities in that system.

In his late production, Luhmann hardly bothers himself with questions of methodology. Earlier he paid more attention to questions concerning concrete or empirical research work. For example, in his *Soziologische Aufklärung. Band 1. Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme* (Sociological Enlightenment. Part 1. Studies of the Theory of Social Systems, 1974, originally published 1970) he reflects upon the empirical study of social systems. According to those reflections, social systems are empirically observable only as far as they are understood as action systems (Luhmann 1974: 39). This is an interesting remark, because with regard to Luhmann’s late production we have good reasons to ask how we can study autopoietic social systems empirically. If those systems cannot be equated with the action of individuals, groups and collectives, what kinds of materials would be able to function as the basis of an empirical study concerning the systems in question?

Luhmann does not provide us with answers to these questions. Yet, his anti-humanist way of thought becomes more unendurable if we take into account that in his production he theorized, in the first instance, about modern society and its sub-systems. According to him, formerly action and interaction were important elements in society, but in the course of societal evolution interaction and society have more and more clearly differentiated from each other. In interaction, social actors are physically close to each other, and they are capable of observing each other. Primitive societies or tribe societies were largely based on an interaction like this, whereas modern society cannot any longer be understood in a way like this. Instead, modern society and most of its functional sub-systems are global formations, and in this world society social actors can observe each other only to a limited extent. Therefore, one could conclude that, in contrast to previous societies, only modern society and its functional sub-systems are based on communication

Every now and then Luhmann seems to think precisely in this way (see, for example, Luhmann 1975: 9–11, 21–22; 1985a: 225, 552–553, 576–579, 584–585). However, more often his late production gives an impression that social systems are always constituted by communication (see Luhmann 1985a: 192, 240–241, 497; 1997b: 79–81). Because Luhmann mainly paid his attention to modern society and its functional sub-systems, in this connection we can pass over his views of previous societies. At any rate it is interesting to note that Rudolf Stichweh, a disciple of Luhmann, is inclined to conceptualise only contemporary society and its functional sub-systems as communication systems (see Stichweh 2000; 2007). In this respect, he has clearly modified Luhmann’s system theory.

Otherwise Luhmann’s and Stichweh’s thinking resembles Manuel Castells’ well-known idea of network society. According to Castells (2000), contemporary society must be seen as a global network society whose basic constituents are flows of communication and digital information. However, in contrast to this, Luhmann and Stichweh underline that, in fact, globalisation is not a new phenomenon, because since its birth modern society has been a global formation. According to them, the contemporary phase of modern society has just made the process of globalisation more and more intensive and concrete.

Luhmann’s anti-humanism has been an object of criticism in sociology and system study. It should be noticed that Schmidt, who had spoken resolutely for the empirical study
of the system of art since the early 1980s, has not approved Luhmann’s anti-humanism. In the mid-1990s he even stated that Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems “is rather a social-philosophical super theory than an empirical-sociological theory” (Schmidt 1995c: 214–215, 223; see, also, Schmidt 1996: 116–118, 127–129). In Schmidt’s own system-theoretical investigations, the starting point has been the concept of action. In the same vein, Hans Joas (1996: 222–223) speaks about Luhmann’s “system-theoretical cosmology” demanding a system theory that is based on the concept of action, and Uwe Schimank (1996: 201–203, 219) wants to complete Luhmann’s system theory with an action-theoretical approach. Although some of Luhmann’s disciples have followed his anti-humanism without questions, most of the system-theorists seem to give priority to the union of action theory and system theory over anti-humanist conceptions of system. Accordingly, Giddens (1979; 1986) and Habermas (1987: 299–303) have understood social systems to consist of relatively stable action practices, besides which in Habermas’ production the concept of system is clearly embedded into a theory of action. Otherwise it is interesting to note that in a sense Giddens understands modern society precisely in the same way as Luhmann and Stichweh do. “Modernity is inherently globalising”, he writes in his The Consequences of Modernity (Giddens 2000: 63. Originally published in 1990. See, also, Giddens 2001: 15). This indicates that it is possible to develop a theory of world society or globalisation on the basis of the concepts of action and interaction. Unlike Luhmann thought, action and communication do not necessarily exclude each other. Actor-centric system theory regards communication as a special dimension of social action and interaction – that is, as a dimension that might be central in social action and interaction without being their sole feature. As far as I can see, this kind of actor-centric concept of communication can be incorporated in a theory of world society or globalisation.

Of Luhmann’s critics one should also mention Münch. In the 1970s and 1980s, he worked on a system-theoretical view of modern society grounding that view on a theory of action and Parsons’ thinking (see Münch 1976; 1988). When elaborating his own conception of contemporary societal-cultural reality he has used an actor-centric concept of communication as a central theoretical tool (see Münch 1991; 1995; 1998). Likewise, North-American neo-functionalists, in particular, Alexander (1988) and Colomy (1992), have elaborated upon and renewed the Parsonsian tradition on the basis of a theory of action.

In systemic sociology, Bourdieu is a rather unusual phenomenon in the sense that his field theory has not been embedded into an action theory, and nor does it follow the anti-humanist way of thought. Bourdieu understands the social fields in a peculiar way, for he thinks that they consist of power and status positions (see Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). However, in his concrete or empirical investigations he mainly analyses people’s actions and their mutual tensions and conflicts in social fields. For this reasons, it is justified to see him to as belonging to the camp of actor-centric systemic sociology. Furthermore, a genuine anthropocentric dimension underlies the goals of his systemic sociology, and similar goals can be found from Giddens’ and Habermas’ sociologies. With the help of their investigations Bourdieu, Giddens, Habermas and their like have attempted to improve people’s capacities to act and to reflect upon the world and themselves. It is, among other things, through this that their sociology is one of the heirs of the spirit of the Enlightenment. Yet, their thinking is not in every respect compatible with traditional Western humanism. In contrast to the individualist and voluntarily accentuated thinking of the humanism, they conceive of individuals largely as products of various historical,
societal and cultural determinants. Therefore, they understand human nature and human action primarily as social-cultural phenomena – and not as something that is inherently opposed to society.

(C) Affirmative versus Radical Point of Departure

Almost from its birth onward, system-theoretical sociology has been an object of political discussions within the academic world. In Parsons’ case, the reasons for those discussions are connected with his habit of speaking about “the needs of systems” or “about the functional necessities of systems”. In other words, he thought that there are four needs or functions that every social system has to take care of somehow. Firstly, every social system should adapt itself to its environment and utilise the resources that are available in the environment. Secondly, every system must make strategic decisions about the use of its resources and about the goals of the actions taking place in that system. In addition, systems cannot survive without a sufficient degree of internal integration or normative uniformity, and finally every system should, at a general level, define what is held as important and as worth pursuing in it. Parsons (1971: 4–5, 10–11) called these functions “Adaptation” (A), “Goal Attainment” (G), “Integration” (I) and “Latency or Pattern Maintenance” (L); in this way he arrived at his well-known AGIL-schema.

Parsons thought that at the level of society it is the sub-system of economics that, in the first instance, takes care of the Adaptation, and, correspondingly, the political-administrative sub-system is specialised in the Goal Attainment. As for the Integration, arrangements such as law, the legal system, the schooling system and different communities increase society’s normative uniformity, wherefore society’s integration is largely due to their activities; together these arrangements form the sub-system of integration. Latency or Pattern Maintenance is primarily taken care of by the socio-cultural sub-system that mediates central cultural values into society; owing to a mediation like this, central cultural values have been institutionalised as the basic or general action principles of social institutions, and individuals have internalised them in the process of socialisation. The socio-cultural sub-system consists of units such as families, schools, religious communities, higher education and the institutions of science and art.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Parsons was accused of conservatism. His thinking seems to imply that certain institutions are necessary in society, because “they satisfy society’s basic needs”. S.N. Eisenstadt and M. Cucelaru (1977: 31), two sociologists close to Parsons, point out that a criticism like this does not necessarily hit the target, since system theory does not deny that a certain need or function can be handled with the help of several different institutional arrangements. On the other hand, the critics remarked that, on the whole, it is inadequate to transfer biological and psychological concepts into sociology: undoubtedly human beings and biological organisms have needs, but the talk about society’s needs causes nothing but confusion. Parsons’ system-theoretical sociology was also seen to blur the state of affairs that as a last resort it is the ruling elite that defines society’s

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23 A formulation like this implies that according to those three sociologists human nature and human action are not entirely determined by culture and society, wherefore actors are, to a certain extent, capable of making free choices. However, Bourdieu might be a problematic case in this connection. For example, Jeffrey C. Alexander (1995: 151, 162–163, 173–175) has stated that in Bourdieu’s sociology actors are strictly determined by their position in society’s class structure. For this reason, Alexander continues, Bourdieu’s thinking is reductionist and deterministic and basically it represents “Neo-Marxism” in contemporary sociology. Perhaps this appraisal is not fair enough, for at least Bourdieu has attempted to avoid both reductionism and extreme voluntarist. See, nearer, Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992.
needs; talk about society’s needs would, then, basically be an ideological construction (see Eisenstadt & Curelaru 1977: 32). However, one has to say in defense of Parsons that it is difficult to imagine an organised society that would have given up the handling of certain tasks; to tasks such as these belong, among other things, the production of foods, the maintenance of order and the development of integrative mechanisms. It is probably necessary that organised societies take care of tasks like these, for otherwise they would be driven into a state of stagnation, recession and conflicts. Yet, this does not mean that in his AGIL-schema Parsons would have managed to name these kinds of tasks correctly. Because it is difficult to specify the tasks in question exactly, all of the functions that are mentioned in the AGIL-schema do not necessarily belong to those tasks. Perhaps the functions in the AGIL-schema can, at least, be understood as the strong preconditions of the existence of social systems; in other words, social systems would lose a great deal of their possibilities to function well, if they do not take care of those functions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Parsons was usually seen as a conservative sociologist who had an affirmative attitude to modern Western capitalist society – or to modern Western democracies. In fact, this opinion was not far from the truth, because in his works Parsons praised contemporary American society and its value, believing that socialist systems in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world will fall into decay. In addition, it was during the decades in question that system theory became an important tool in social technology and in the regulation of societal phenomena. Parsons’ system-theoretical sociology seemed to suit well a purpose like this – among other reasons that it handles conflicts and contradictions as something that do not belong to the normal course of societal life. Despite this, recent American appraisals concerning Parsons do not always see him as a conservative. For example, Bryan S. Turner and Roland Robertson (1991: 252–254, 258–259) point out that in his home country Parsons criticised racist and extreme right-wing movements and he was aware of the shortcomings of the American schooling system.24 Thus, in an appraisal like this, Parsons is mainly understood to represent a moderate right-wing tradition.

In the 1970s, a contrast emerged into system-theoretical sociology that later proved to be a long-term one. From the 1950s onward, Parsons and his disciples and successors had dominated this branch of sociology; among those successors belonged also Luhmann, who published his first investigations in the mid-1960s. Unlike Parsons, in his early production as well as in his late production Luhmann does not speak about the needs of social systems, for he only presents that each social system has a specific function in society; and even if social systems are somehow related to people’s needs, it is incorrect to analyse and explain them by pointing to the supposed needs of systems (see Luhmann 1973; 1974; 1976). However, in the 1970s traditional sociological system theory was faced with a more radical criticism, since at that time leftist or Marxist sociologists began to elaborate their own versions of system theory. At the head of this movement was Habermas. In 1971, he and Luhmann published their joint book *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Theory of Society or Social Technology), which includes two articles by him and three articles by Luhmann (see, nearer, Habermas & Luhmann 1976). It was in that book that Habermas accused Luhmann’s system theory of conservatism and conformism and he tended to regard it largely as a tool for social technology. Yet, the contrast between them has been deeper, for already in 1970 Luhmann had started to publish his series of books under the title *Soziologische Aufklärung* (Sociological Enlightenment) in which he, in fact, imposes limits on social criticism, on Enlightenment thinking and on politically radical...

24 See, also, Müller 1996: 311; Robertson & Turner 1991a; Robertson & Turner 1991b.
movements – that is, on the values that have been genuinely important for Habermas. Thus, in his system theory Habermas has continued the values and the tradition of the Enlightenment philosophy, whereas Luhmann has adopted an ironical and critical attitude toward their certain parts.

There is “an emancipatory knowledge interest” in Habermas’ system theory, which, among other things, means that it criticises “the pathologies of modern society” and modern social systems. A rather similar knowledge interest is shared by Bourdieu and Giddens who also began to work on their own versions of systemic sociology in the 1970s. Albeit the relationship between them and the Parsonsian-Luhmannian tradition has been tense and, from time to time, polemical, system-theoretical sociology contains more alternatives than these two. For example, Alexander, Colomy and Münch have largely elaborated their sociological thinking on the basis of Parsons’ sociology, but at the same time they have taken into account most of the critical remarks and comments concerning Parsons’ sociology. Accordingly, they do not share and approve of the conservative implications of Parsons’ sociology, nor do they practise sociology on the leftist basis. For reasons like these, they can perhaps best be classified as liberal sociologists.

(D) The Above-Mentioned Tensions in the Systemic Study of the Sphere of Art

The above-mentioned tensions manifest themselves also in the systemic study of the sphere of art. As far as the controversy between realistic and constructivist epistemology is concerned, most of the research work in the systemic study of art seem to follow realistic presuppositions. Among this body of research one finds, among other things, Bourdieu’s and Alain Darbel’s *L’amour de l’art. Les musées d’art européens et leur public* (The Love of Art. European Art Museums and their Public, 1969) and Bourdieu’s *Les règles de l’art. Genese et structure du champ littéraire* (The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field, 1992). The former is based on a wide-ranging survey of museum visitors throughout Europe, and it argues that an ability to enjoy art is not a natural or an inherent gift but a socially inculcated disposition that is typical chiefly among the representatives of the upper social classes. In the latter investigation, Bourdieu shows how the literary field and the artistic field in general gradually obtained a differentiated and relatively autonomous position in French society in the 19th century. Thus, in this way Bourdieu has created realistic representations of the field of art. His investigations are realistic in the sense that they were intended to adequately represent the field that exists objectively – that is, independent of Bourdieu’s own opinion and activities – in the societal-cultural reality.

In the epistemological sense, rather similar representations are Becker’s *Art World* (1984, originally published 1982), Christa Bürger’s *Der Ursprung der bürgerlichen Institution Kunst im höfischen Weimar* (The Origin of the Bourgeois Institution of Art in the Court of Weimar, 1977) and Peter Bürger’s *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Theory of Avant-Garde, 1974). Becker’s investigation presents to sociologists of art a conceptual vocabulary by means of which they can make empirical research work concerning the art world. Christa and Peter Bürger have usually explored the modern system of art or the modern institution of art from a historical standpoint. Under the circumstances, in the above-mentioned investigation Christa Bürger explicates Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749–1832) literary and theatrical activities and his conception of art. In his *Theorie der Avantgarde* Peter Bürger, in turn, endeavours to create a theory of the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, in particular, of the early 20th century. In this sense, he pays attention to phenomena such as Dadaism, surrealism, Bertolt Brecht’s political theatre, John Heartfield’s photomontages and Andy Warhol’s pop art.
In the systemic study of the sphere of art, constructivist epistemology manifests itself most clearly in Luhmann’s and, in particular, Schmidt’s investigations, but all of their disciples and co-operators have not necessarily adopted a constructivist train of thought. Some of those disciples and co-operators have simply ignored epistemological questions, whereas researchers like Gebhard Rusch (1993; 1997) and Reinhold Viehoff (1993) use system theory chiefly in a methodological way, that is, as a tool by means of which they wish to classify and systematize their observations and materials.

As a conscious anti-humanist Luhmann is a rather rare phenomenon in the systemic study of the sphere of art. Most representatives of the systemic study consider the art life as a social formation that consists of human action as well as rules, conventions and resources guiding that action; and when those researchers speak about works of art, they understand works of art as manifestations of human meanings and human subjectivity. Only Luhmann and his most loyal disciples seem, as far as it is possible at all, to speak about works of art as if those works were, to a great extent, independent of human actors. To be sure, in his art-theoretical major work Die Kunst der Gesellschaft (The Art of Society, 1997a, originally published 1995) Luhmann thinks that art is a special sort of communication: art communicates by using perceptions and images that concern the world, and in this way it makes perceptions and images available for other people. Therefore, Luhmann also holds that art is close to psychic systems. Yet, he continues, art cannot be equated with psychic systems and mental states of affairs, for it, like other social systems, operates by means of communication and in doing this it only utilises certain psychic and physical capabilities of actors. Thus, in Luhmann’s (1991: 38–39, 44, 63) thinking social systems basically operate by means of communication and psychic systems conduct their operations by means of consciousness.

In Luhmann’s art-theoretical investigations, the system of art is, in fact, connected to communication in a twofold sense. On the one hand, works of art mediate perceptions, images and representations of the world to receivers; in this way, they can be said to function as vehicles of communication. On the other hand, receivers and researchers of art as well as art critics use to present comments on works of art, which means that they practise communication concerning works of art. As Boris Groys (1996: 9) points out, Die Kunst der Gesellschaft is first and foremost interested in communication that takes place through works of art; and conversely, only to a minor extent does it pay attention to communication concerning works of art. Yet, in his other art-theoretical investigations Luhmann takes more clearly into consideration the latter aspect of artistic communication (see, for example, Luhmann 1984: 51–53).

Even if Luhmann theorised about social systems without a theory of action, he could not entirely abandon the category of actor in his art-theoretical books. In Die Kunst der Gesellschaft he uses this category, for example, when speaking about perceptions and images. It should, of course, be noticed that, actually, perceiving or observing is an activity that is performed by an actor or subject. More generally, Luhmann needs terms such as “artist” and “receiver of art works” in his theory of the system of art. What is important here is the fact that for him “artist”, “receiver” and “observer” are abstract figures with no specific social properties. He does not tell us the social class, sexual group, age group, ethnic group and regional area these actors belong to. As a result, he gives us a rather abstract scientific representation of the system of art. This representation seems to pass over the variety of any concrete social world.

Luhmann used an abstract language of this kind because he thought that entire human beings do not belong to social systems. Undoubtedly, he holds, social systems are
produced and maintained by human actors, but the entire bodies and minds of human actors lie outside social systems. Likewise, Luhmann often speaks about the system of art abstractly. Consequently, in the above-mentioned book he pays wide attention to the formal and structural properties of the art works and to the operation principles of the system of art (cf. Hutter 1996: 2–3; Groys 1996: 8). In the same way, he also used to speak about other social systems, for example, about science, law, economics and mass media.

In the systemic study of the sphere of art, Luhmann is not the only representative of affirmative attitude. In fact, there is in the systemic study of the sphere of art a sub-branch that can perhaps be called “administrative research”. This expression derives from the situation that nowadays states in Western countries need explications about the art life and cultural policy that are practised within their territory. Explications like these are, for example, made by universities and, in particular, by separate research units maintained by states, and states then use them as a basis for decision-making in cultural policy. Thus, more or less unambiguously those explications serve the needs of public art administration and public cultural policy. As a typical example of explications such as these one should mention Cultural Policy in Finland. European Programme for National Cultural Policy Review. National Report (1995) which has been published by the Arts Council of Finland, that is, by an institution maintained by the Finnish State. On the one hand, the explication in question offers an overview of the production, mediation and reception of the products of art and mass media in Finland, and, on the other hand, it clears up in what ways the State and the public sector in Finland maintain and support the cultural life. Similar explications have also been made in other countries, especially, in countries belonging to the European Union, since countries in the European Union have, to a certain extent, attempted to follow a common cultural policy, albeit at the same time the European Union declares that it respects the cultural autonomy of its member states.25

The investigations of Habermas, the Bürgers, Bourdieu and their congenial souls represent the spirit of leftist critical theory in the systemic study of the sphere of art. The researchers in question are, to name some typical instances, critical of society’s class structure and cultural inequality as well as of the modern systems of economics and politics. There are in contemporary sociology and cultural studies other kinds of critical voices as well; in particular, the feminist movement and the voices of sexual minorities cannot be left without mentioning in this connection. However, so far there has not been any powerful feminist and sexual-political research traditions in the systemic study of the sphere of art. To be sure, of the feminist sociologists of art it is Janet Wolff who was formerly close to systemic study. Her book The Social Production of Art (1993, originally published 1981) considers themes such as the production, mediation and reception of art works from a sociological, Marxist and feminist standpoint, but after having changed into a truly feminist researcher she almost lost her interest in the systemic study of the sphere of art. Like many other feminists, she has been much more interested in questions of micro-politics than in questions concerning systems.26

26 For example, in Wolff’s books Feminine Sentences. Essays on Women and Culture (1990) and Resident Alien. Feminist Cultural Criticism (1995) the systemic standpoint is almost completely missing.
2 THE ARTICLES IN THIS STUDY

2.1 General and Methodological Remarks

The four articles included in this thesis have been published in different contexts and at different times. The first one of them was published in a Danish system-theoretical journal, the second one in a British sociological journal and the fourth one in an Estonian literary journal. The third article was published in a Finnish collection of articles; thematically, the articles in that collection deal with different manifestations of aesthetic culture. As for the time-dimension, the articles were published during the period 2000–2006. This thesis, then, is based on the following articles:


Thematically these articles form a relatively homogenous whole. Three of them deal directly with questions of system theory and the systemic study of the sphere of art, and one of them, that is the fourth one, is more indirectly connected with those questions.

Articles I and II consider how present-day system-theoretical sociology comprehends modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality or with what kinds of theoretical models and representations of that reality it provides us with. Questions connected with modern culture and society are in those articles on hand partly explicitly and partly implicitly, whereas questions connected with contemporary or postmodern societal-cultural reality are reflected upon explicitly within them. It should be noticed that system-theoretical sociology has expressly concentrated on the study of modern culture and society; thus, modernity has had a pride of place in it. This special position derives from that system-theorists have thought that it is precisely modern society in which different systems have clearly differentiated from each other. In this sense, modernity has made possible sociological system theory, and modern culture and society, in turn, have formed a paradigmatic object for system-theoretical sociological analyses. However, system-theorists do not always explicitly mention their strong bond to modernity or, alternatively, they are not always quite themselves aware of that bond. For example, especially in
the 1950s, Parsons constructed abstract models by means of which sociologists could analyse concrete societal phenomena. Although Parsons did not usually specify to which societies those models would best be applicable, he largely built them on the basis of modern Western or highly differentiated society. The latest ongoing societal and cultural macro-changes, that is, the emergence of the phenomena called “postmodernity” and “globalisation”, have made bonds such as these more visible.

Articles I and II also deal also with how present-day system-theoretical sociology grasps the position of the sphere of art in modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality. In fact, this is one of the main questions in those articles. Yet, a question like this cannot be handled thoroughly without first clearing up how system-theoretical sociology comprehends modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality at a general level. It is just for this reason that those articles begin by considering system-theoretical models of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality, whereafter they explicate what kind of position the sphere of art obtains in those models. Article III deviates from articles I and II in that it focuses on the sphere of art. On this basis, it presents an overall view of how systemic studies of the sphere of art conceive of the contemporary art world or contemporary system of art.

In addition, the above-mentioned articles deal with internal tensions within system theory. On the one hand, they analyse the contrast between Luhmann and the leftist critical theory and, on the other hand, when appraising Luhmann’s thinking they also take into account the critique that system-theorists such as Renate Mayntz, Vessela Mishkva and Richard Münch have directed at Luhmann. In those articles, I outline my own conception of the contemporary system of art by starting from the concept of action and by borrowing ideas from Luhmann as well as from his opponents and critics. Moreover, my conception of the contemporary system of art takes seriously the ideas presented by theorists of postmodernity or reflexive modernity. In particular, I tend to hold that the concept of de-differentiation should be a most important concept when system-theoretical sociology describes the relationships between the contemporary system of art and the other functional and cultural systems.

Model-theoretical, methodological and meta-theoretical questions are important in articles I and II, whereas article III concentrates on outlining a theoretical model of the contemporary sphere of art and article IV, in turn, sketches a theoretical model of modern and contemporary nationalism in Western societies. The central system-theorist in articles I and II is Luhmann (1927–1998) who seems to be the most discussed and the most innovative figure in recent system-theoretical sociology. In the 1980s, Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems was chiefly discussed in the German-speaking countries, but since the 1990s it has increasingly been an object of an international process of estimation. In this respect, the thesis on hand can be seen as a part of that process of estimation. At the same time, the thesis presumes that Parsons’, Habermas’ and Bourdieu’s thinking is already relatively well-known in the Western academic world, whereas Luhmann’s late production has only recently become more familiar to the academic world outside the German-speaking countries. For these reasons Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems obtains a special position in this thesis.

Table I (see page 19) presents a list of classes of different systems. From the standpoint of this list, articles I–III deal, in the first instance, with functional and societal systems, that is, with two sub-systems of social systems; and, secondarily, they deal with cultural systems whose instances works of art can be understood. In part, the fourth article uses the concept of system in the same way, but its main focus is elsewhere. Namely, it considers modern Western nationalism as a cultural system whose position has, according to certain theorists, become problematic in a contemporary globalised and multi-cultural
world. Traditionally nationalism was an especially important phenomenon from the standpoint of the modern sphere of art, since from the late 18th century onward it was firmly rooted in the sphere of art. In other words, it was, in part, just works of art that gave expressions to national sentiments and nationalist ideologies in Western countries; and, on the other hand, official cultural policy practised by Western states attempted to maintain and strengthen the bond between art and nationalism. For this reason, a system-theoretical representation of the sphere of art should not, as often happens, ignore the phenomenon of nationalism. The important question in this connection is what kind of position nationalism has nowadays in cultural policy and in the sphere of art.

Methodologically, the articles are based on the idea of rational reconstruction that is a relatively common principle or procedure in theoretical research work (see, for example, Heiskala 2000: 13). When applying this idea I go analytically and critically through different theories and investigations of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality endeavouring to discover their merits and shortcomings. Although a critical analysis is a necessary tool in a procedure like this, it is also important to define the merits of those theories and investigations, because their merits can be utilised when a systemic study attempts to outline a more adequate model or representation of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality. Articles I–IV outline a model such as this from the standpoint of the sphere of art. The model in question is not a detailed systemic representation of societal-cultural reality; rather it presents some general guidelines for a more detailed systemic representation.

2.2 Article I: “A Long-Term Contrast in Systemic Sociology: Niklas Luhmann’s Anti-Humanist System Theory and Actor-Centric Critical Theory”

The first article deals with the contrast between Luhmann and critical theory in systemic sociology. As the main representatives of critical theory in systemic sociology, the article regards Bourdieu, Giddens and Habermas. The Luhmannian approach is politically moderate, and it consciously rejects humanism’s anthropocentric picture of society. Conversely, the critical approach is closely connected with modern Western humanistic culture and its democratic ideals, and its way of considering systems is actor-centric. Elements of societal criticism are almost entirely missing in Luhmann’s system theory, whereas critical theorists use to practise societal and system criticism in their sociology. When analysing these approaches the article pays particular attention to their art-theoretical views, because the contrasts in question manifest themselves clearly in those views. However, the latter half of the article endeavours to show that when Luhmann’s works are interpreted freely and against his own interpretations certain gaps between him and critical theory can be overcome. Through this, systemic sociology can utilise both of these prominent and interesting approaches in a contemporary analysis of societal-cultural reality.

In this article, a partial synthesis between the Luhmannian approach and critical theory is based on an action-theoretical point of departure. In other words, when considering the functional social sub-systems the article understands them as systems of action and interaction. Thus, the art life can be seen as a one of the functional action and interaction systems of modern and contemporary society. However, this dimension contains only one side of the sphere of art; the other side consists of the state of affairs that art is also a cultural system. Among other things, works of art and artistic traditions form this other
side which cannot be adequately conceptualised by means of the concepts of action and interaction.

A partial synthesis between the Luhmannian approach and critical theory is possible because those two approaches have certain things in common. First of all, they agree that modern society has been a functionally differentiated formation in which several sub-systems or fields have obtained a high degree of system autonomy. Similarly, both of them hold that aesthetic values and codes have been prevalent in the modern art world that constitutes one of the functionally differentiated sub-systems or fields of modern society. Where they differ from each other in this connection is the different rank of theoretical tools with which they have interpreted this situation. According to Luhmann, each functionally differentiated sub-system is based on a value distinction that characterises this whole sub-system. The value distinction in question manifests itself in the medium code of this sub-system, and the basic value, in turn, manifests itself in its medium. In the 1980s and in the early 1990s, Luhmann was inclined to think that in the system of art Beauty functions as the medium and the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful as the medium code; thereby Luhmann committed himself to the aesthetic view of art. However, later he arrived at the conclusion that the category of Beauty cannot be regarded as the medium of the system of art, in particular, of the contemporary system of art. In his last investigations, that is, in his works *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (The Art of Society, 1997a, originally published 1995) and *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Society’s Society, Two Volumes, 1997b and 1997c) he proposed that we may regard the category of Fittingness as the medium of the system of art and the code of Fitting/Non-Fitting would, then, be its medium code. The category of Fittingness says that in a successful work of art the details or components must fit the rest of the work; otherwise a work of art does not function well. This category is obviously more general than the category of Beauty, for the latter can be understood as a special case of the former. As such, transformations like these in Luhmann’s thinking are important and interesting; yet, they did not change his basic way of considering systems.

Basically, Luhmann considers the media and medium codes of social systems as if they would largely function independently of people who act in those systems. According to him, when society was differentiated into functional sub-systems, these sub-systems began to develop their own media and medium codes. Gradually, the media and the medium codes settled, and at the same time functional differentiation became society’s main structural feature; this constellation guarantees the autopoiesis of functional sub-systems. Naturally, people use the media and medium codes in question when acting in sub-systems, but their action does not define the identity and boundaries of each sub-system. It is the media and medium codes that provide functional sub-systems with their identity and boundaries. In Bourdieu’s *La distinction. Critique social du jugement* (Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, 1979) and in Peter Bürger’s *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Theory of the Avant-garde, 1974) aesthetic codes are seen differently. Bourdieu and Bürger regard them as the attitudes and dispositions of their social actors. On the level of their consciousness and self-understanding, actors use aesthetic codes but the sociology of art should not limit itself to the stating of this state of affairs; it should not limit itself to the phenomenology of aesthetic attitudes and codes. It must go beyond the individual actors’ self-understanding and ask what underlies this kind of phenomenon or what kinds of consequences this phenomenon has.

By adopting an aesthetic attitude certain art devotee groups do, in Bourdieu’s theory, unconsciously attempt to distinguish themselves from lower social classes that are unable to draw complicated distinctions between different attitudes or codes. In this sense, an
aesthetic attitude would only form a part of the upper-class habitus or strategy which the upper classes use to distinguish themselves from other classes. Thus, Bourdieu emphasises that the clear-cut differentiation of codes is a state of affairs that corresponds to the cultural interests, life style and habitus of the higher social classes. Bürger, on the other hand, thinks that aesthetic experience is a state of mind in which modern social actors can momentarily feel themselves to be harmonious subjects and obtain imaginative compensation for the shortcomings of reality. In this respect, that experience functions as a neutralizer of any critical attitude towards society, and in the last resort it has an affirmative, and not a radical, influence on the rest of society. In this way, Bourdieu and Bürger arrive at questions of societal power relationships, cultural inequality and art’s influences. Luhmann’s art-theoretical investigations largely pass over questions such as these.

Even if Luhmann ignores concrete social actors and their world, his sociology is not entirely void of critical elements. For him, the world as it shows itself to us is contingent by nature. Our picture of this world varies according to the kinds of distinctions and concepts that we apply to it. In his articles “Das Kunstwerk und die Selbstreproduktion der Kunst” (Work of art and the Self-Production of Art, 1986) and “Die Weltkunst” (World Art, 1990), he argues that works of art help us to understand that everything that exists in this our phenomenal world could also exist in another way - in other words, that this world can be constructed in different ways. Hence, it is the function of art to provide people with alternative models of the phenomenal world; works of art realise this function, for example, by producing fictional worlds that differ from our normal phenomenal world. In contrast, critical theory has understood works of art as an implicit or explicit criticism of the instrumental rationality that prevails in modern society. Because Luhmann discarded the realistic epistemological assumptions that underlie the thinking of critical theorists, he could not approve a view like this. He stated that critical theories include no notion of the contingent or constructivist nature of artistic representations and sociological descriptions. Rather, they have simply adopted the position of a “Besserwisser”, that is, they speak about society as if only they would be able to know its true nature.

In his epistemology, Luhmann differentiated between three levels of observation. (1) In the case of first-order observations, the world is divided into separate states of affairs, events and objects. These observations are directed towards reality, but they cannot attain it as such. This impossibility derives, Luhmann continued, from the fact that our minds are autopoietic systems that handle sense perceptions according to their inner principles of operation. Therefore, we can only construct contingent and changing pictures of our phenomenal world by means of different distinctions and concepts. (2) Second-order observations are directed towards the observations produced by the first order; they take the first-order observations as the objects of reflective reasoning. (3) The third order consists of systematically developed theories which try to describe and explain the world. Now, according to Luhmann, critical theorists observe society by means of distinctions such as democratic/non-democratic and authentic/non-authentic, whereas Luhmann himself thinks that sociology can actually only be critical at the levels of second-order and third-order observations; that is, in an epistemologically honest sense sociology can only critically analyse the distinctions, concepts and theories, by means of which sociologists and the laity observe society.

Luhmann and critical theorists do not agree on the use value of the concept of de-differentiation. Luhmann was not fond of this concept, because he thought that the process of functional differentiation is still going on. Critical theorists, in turn, have shared the view that the contemporary societal-cultural reality is characterised by the
process of de-differentiation. At the same time they have been critical of this process which, according to them, is changing the entire society into a market place; a change like this threatens to destroy the wide autonomy of the sphere of art and through this the sphere of art would lose its capability to criticise society’s shortcomings and distortions. By utilising the concept of autopoiesis one could also say that the process of de-differentiation is decreasing the degree of the autopoiesis of social systems, even if Luhmann did not himself understand that concept precisely in this way. According to him, autopoiesis is not at all a matter of degree: a functional sub-system operates either autopoietically or not – and there is not a third possibility.

At the end, the article argues that contemporary societal-cultural reality contains diverse elements. Namely, even if functional sub-systems are nowadays losing their autonomy and autopoiesis, at the same time works of art and cultural products have become increasingly self-reflexive and intertextual, that is, they contain more and more allusions to themselves and to other works of art and cultural products. In this sense, the sphere of art has become more autopoietic, since an autopoietic system is self-referential and self-productive.

2.3 Article II: “Art as an Autopoietic Sub-System of Modern Society. A Critical Analysis of the Concept of Art and Autopoietic Systems in Luhmann’s Late Production”

The second article is concerned with Luhmann’s theory of the system of art which he formulated in the 1990s, in particular, in his books Die Ausdifferenzierung des Kunstsystems (The Differentiation of the System of Art, 1994) and Die Kunst der Gesellschaft (The Art of Society, 1997a, originally published 1995). The theory in question is based on his general theory of autopoietic social systems. His theory of autopoietic social systems, in turn, implies a theory of modernity because he thought that it is just under the conditions of modernity that functional sub-systems can obtain or have obtained an autopoietic way of operation.

When describing modern society, Luhmann gives pride of place to the concept of functional differentiation. In general, he thought that the development of human society can be divided into three main phases, according to what society’s primary form of differentiation has been. Consequently, the history of human society comprises an archaic, a civilized and a modern phase. In all of them, society has been a differentiated formation. Archaic society was primarily differentiated in a segmented way, civilized society was based on a stratified differentiation and modern society is first of all a functionally differentiated formation, although it also contains segmented and stratified differentiation. Segmentated differentiation divided society into parts or sub-systems (families, tribes, clans, villages) which are distinct and equal. Stratified differentiation divided society into sub-systems (estates, status groups) which are distinct and unequal. Finally, functional differentiation divides society into sub-systems that serve different functions. Luhmann regarded functional differentiation as the dominant structural feature of modern society. This society consists of sub-systems (economics, politics, law, science, education, art, religion) each of which has a specific function in society. As for the concept of differentiation, Luhmann defined it by stating that differentiation is nothing more than a recurrence of a system/environment difference inside a system, either in society as a whole or in some of its sub-systems. Thus, in the process of societal development, society is divided into sub-systems which see the rest of society as their environment.
In Luhmann’s theory, functionally differentiated modern sub-systems operate autopoietically, that is, they are operationally closed systems with regard to their environment. This does not mean that they would have no connections to their environment. The environment is for them a source of energy and information, and it imposes some general limitations on their functioning. But an autopoietic system handles this energy and information according to its internal medium and medium code, that is, according to its own principles of operation; and, thus, precisely in this sense, it is an operationally closed formation. Autopoietic formations are also self-referential. Because they themselves produce the elements of which they consist they are able to self-recur and self-regenerate. Those elements are communications; functionally differentiated social sub-systems consist of communications which they themselves produce and which in turn maintain them. Consequently, in modern society functionally differentiated sub-systems are communicative systems, each of which has its own specific medium and medium code. For example, in the sub-systems of economics people communicate with the medium of Money, and they classify or codify acts into payments and non-payments. In the sub-system of science, in turn, the medium is the category of Truth, and by means of the code True/Untrue scientists appraise the truth value of observations, statements and theories.

Besides modern functional sub-systems, society as a whole can be understood as an autopoietic system with regard to its environment. Yet, in his works Luhmann concentrates on considering modern functional sub-systems. It should be noted that autopoiesis is a condition for the state of affairs that the sub-systems can be functional for society in an effective way. From the functional standpoint, the sub-systems are by no means self-sufficient or autotelic formations. Their autopoiesis guarantees that they can serve society well.

Luhmann was quite aware of the fact that his view of functional differentiation and modern society is not in accordance with theories of postmodernity and reflexive modernity. Those theories have, among other things, stated that nowadays functional sub-systems are increasingly interlaced – with the result that there would no longer be clear-cut boundaries between different sub-systems. Likewise, globalisation theorists have pointed out that individual societies or national societal systems have lost a great deal of their economic, political and cultural independence; and thus, societal systems would nowadays also be interlaced.

As for theories of postmodernity and reflexive modernity, Luhmann thought that they are based on untenable presuppositions, because they define functional sub-systems by means of the concept of action. However, Luhmann remarks, human action usually belongs to several sub-systems, so it is difficult to understand the process of differentiation on the basis of the concept of action. Instead, he continues, if we lean on the concept of communication, then we can better understand that the principle of functional differentiation is still the dominant structural feature of our society - or that our society still consists of different and distinct media and medium codes and comparable functional sub-systems. According to Luhmann, globalisation theorists, in turn, have been blind, because they have not understood that there can be no national or regional societal systems under the conditions of modernity; only political administrations and legal systems have clung to regional boundaries, while other functional sub-systems have functioned as a part of world society, at least since the beginning of modernity. That beginning can be placed at the 18th century, for at that time the aristocratic estate society fell into decay and it was replaced by a functionally differentiated society.
In his production, Luhmann did not make a distinction between social and cultural systems, he speaks only about social systems. Yet, by applying this distinction one can say that in his theory of the sub-system of art he concentrates on those things that characterise art as a cultural system. Namely, for Luhmann the sub-system of art was mainly a non-material formation whose chief constituents were its medium and medium code and the stylistic and formal properties of works of art. He focused his attention on non-material or abstract phenomena of this kind. Such being the case, he spoke little about the institutional and organisational side of the sub-system of art. There are museums, galleries, concert halls, publishing houses, artistic journals and artistic associations in the sub-system of art, but Luhmann largely passed over concrete phenomena like these. In the same vein, his studies deal mainly with what separates the sub-system of art from other sub-systems. Only to a minor extent, and occasionally, do they take into account the connections that the sub-system of art has with other sub-systems.

As a differentiated functional sub-system of modern society, the system of art has its own boundaries that separate it from the other sub-systems; furthermore, it has an internal order, and it serves a certain function in society. In addition, if it really is an autopoietic formation, it should, then, have its own medium and medium code by means of which it handles communicative acts concerning works of art. With respect to these themes or alleged properties of the sub-system of art, the article chiefly deals with how Luhmann understood the boundaries of the sub-system of art and how he sought to define its medium and medium code. On the whole, in his studies of the system of art he started from the premise that the system in question can be regarded as an autopoietic formation; yet, in those studies he constantly proved to be uncertain of what actually functions as a medium and as a medium code in the system of art.

Luhmann states that one of the peculiarities of the system of art is that in it works of art make themselves the distinction between art and non-art: they themselves claim that they are art, and this happens with the help of formal solutions. Luhmann thought that certain formal solutions are peculiar to works of art, and for this reason he spoke about the specificity of artistic form. The specific form constitutes the difference between art and non-art and, in this way, makes the identification of works of art for receivers possible. Yet, Luhmann added that nowadays works of art do not necessarily follow these principles; in contemporary art, a great deal of works of art does not simply possess any distinctive marks. Therefore, nowadays people must often know some outer signals or identification marks in order to be able to identify works of art. They must, for example, know whether certain objects have really been placed on display as works of art; that is, they should somehow know the intentions of different cultural producers, performers and distributors.

As a critique on these thoughts, the article claims that in all probability works of art have never possessed clear and unambiguous distinctive marks. Therefore, in searching for alternative ways to reconstruct the boundary between art and non-art, sociology of the art can bring into use the concept of discursive power that has its roots in Michel Foucault’s social theory. Discursive power is a power of definition with two main dimensions: on the one hand, the owners of discursive power are able to impose the normative principles which structure societal-cultural reality. Those principles tell social actors how cultural artifacts should be classified into different types. As far as social actors have internalised these principles, there is a certain normative consensus in society. In this case, they widely agree on what kinds of artifacts belong to the domain of art. On the other hand, the normative principles in question have a rather general nature. They do not necessarily contain all the information that actors need in the classification of the artifacts. To a
certain extent, individual and collective actors have power of consideration when they apply the general principles to practice or to single phenomena. In their operations, art critics, art galleries and art museums classify artifacts into art and non-art, or into good art and bad art, and apply those principles to single phenomena. In doing this, they are interpreting them and sometimes also modifying and transforming them.

The article states that in the past relatively strict rules regulated the boundary between art and non-art. Those rules stated that artifacts must have certain formal or external properties and a certain kind of human content before they can be accepted as art. Rules like these were not, of course, wholly exact and unambiguous, but in the current sphere of culture they have largely lost their credibility. Nowadays, the art world lives in a situation in which there are no longer clear or strict rules marking the boundary between art and non-art. As a consequence, both the experts and, more particularly, the laity are increasingly uncertain of the kinds of formal and substantial properties which artifacts should have in order to be accepted as art. This situation clearly shows how the classification of artifacts into art and non-art is dependent on the use of power and the will of the institutions of art.

Luhmann held that the sub-system of art must have a specific medium and a specific medium code, for, he continued, otherwise it would not be an autopoietic formation. His studies contain many interesting remarks on some possible candidates for a medium and a medium code; all of them have been an object of critical discussion in recent systemic studies of the sphere of art. Thus, it seems that Luhmann could not, in a satisfactory way, define the communicative tools of the system of art. The reason for this lies in the fact that his concept of system is too rigid. The domain of art is not as closed as he presumed it to be. On the contrary, the system of art is open with regard to other social and cultural systems, wherefore its communicative tools are not entirely unique or specific; those tools can, at least in part, be in use also in other social and cultural systems. As a result, Schmidt has proposed that the “specific code” of the sub-system of art might, in fact, be a peculiar combination of several codes.

The article presents that in contemporary societal-cultural reality the system of art has become increasingly open – as theorists of de-differentiation emphasise. However, when describing this process the article chiefly leans on Mayntz’s and, especially, Münch’s investigations, and it takes the concept of action as its point of departure. De-differentiation is understood as a broadening interpenetration in the article. Following Münch, interpenetration, in turn, can be understood as a phenomenon in which there are or there emerge common and overlapping areas between differentiated sub-systems; these areas, or interpenetrating zones, contain elements of different sub-systems. Albeit interpenetration was already an important phenomenon in modern society, in contemporary societal-cultural reality its meaning is clearly increasing. The present process of globalisation, for example, has created new economic, political, technological and cultural interpenetrating zones between national societal systems, and the present media revolution and the aestheticization of everyday life have produced similar zones between the sub-systems of art, mass media, advertising, fashion and design. In these respects, the sphere of art has, due to the process of interpenetration, become less autopoietic, both as a social and a cultural system.
2.4 Article III: “The Art World in Contemporary Western Culture and Society. An Outline of a Theoretical Model Based on Systemic Study”

The third article outlines a theoretical model of contemporary art world or contemporary system of art on the basis of the systemic study of art. In doing this, the article takes into account both the sociological and the philosophical branch of the systemic study. The former is, in particular, represented by the Luhmannian school and critical theorists, besides which the article utilises theories of postmodernity or reflexive modernity and the idea of de-differentiation. The philosophical branch is mainly represented by theorists such as Arthur C. Danto and Donald Kuspit, of whom it is especially Danto who has also inspired the sociological study of the art world since the 1980s.

By the expression "contemporary art world in Western culture and society" the article gestures towards the situation that has characterised art life in Western societies since the 1960s. By proceeding this way, the article follows Danto who has also thought that the 1960s was a crucial decade in the development of art life in Western culture and society. More generally, theorists of postmodernity have often thought that Western societies began to move from the era of modernity to the phase of postmodernity in the 1950s and 1960s. Danto and the other representatives of the philosophical branch do not, however, usually take into account large-scale societal changes and processes, wherefore it is necessary to complete their views of the contemporary art world with macro-sociological theories. A completion like this is carried through at the end of the article.

Theoretical models are abstract constructions that are framed with the intention that they would help us to understand the general structure and operation principles of their objects. Hence, in the study of culture and society, such models usually ignore the differences between single countries or societies. Subsequently, the article mainly pays attention to the similarities that exist between single countries or societies, and only to a lesser extent does it consider the differences between the national art worlds. Likewise, as far as the genre-based sub-systems of the system of art are concerned, the article does not in any detail deal with divergences between them. It does not deny the existence of such divergences, but primarily it elaborates an abstract model or representation that could be applied to single art worlds.

According to the article and systemic study, the central features and operation principles of the contemporary Western art world can be described by means of a list that consists of nine items. Some of those items characterise the social system of the art, while others of them belong to the cultural system of the art. The nine items in question are as follows:

(1) Till the beginning of the 20th century relatively strict rules regulated the boundary between art and non-art. Both theorists and devotees of art shared the view that artifacts must have certain formal or external properties and a certain kind of human content before they can be accepted as art. The original avant-garde movements, however, called these rules into question. When Marcel Duchamp placed or attempted to place on display such artifacts as a urinal, a snow spade, a coat rack and a machine used in the preparation of chocolate, he offered to the art world as works of art objects whose physical or external properties did not separate them from articles of daily use. Albeit Duchamp, dadaists, surrealists, futurists and the rest of the original avant-garde movements represented only a small minority in the Western art world of the early 20th century, now the traditional conception of work of art has been eclipsed by a conception whose origin lies precisely in the original avant-garde movements. According to this dominant new conception, works of art do not necessarily possess physical or external distinctive marks that separate them
from other artifacts or objects. On the contrary, in principle anything can function as a work of art.

In the contemporary art world, artists such as Andy Warhol, John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen as well as new genres such as body art, environmental art, installation art, performance and community art have shown that works of art do not, indeed, need to possess clear-cut external distinctive marks. Yet, it should be noticed that perhaps all of the genre-based, national and local art worlds have not adopted this principle entirely and wholeheartedly. Hence, the accuracy and prevalence of the principles in question needs to be specified by means of empirical studies of genre-based, national and local art worlds.

(2) To a great extent, contemporary art has become estranged from the aesthetic conception of art. That old conception held that works of art are primarily meant to arouse positive aesthetic experiences in their receivers, wherefore it is important that the receivers can experience them as sensuously beautiful and pleasant objects. Contemporary art does not emphasise the sensuous side of works of art. Its central constituents are the ideas, thoughts and values that are transferred to the audience by the sensuous side. A special branch in this de-aesthetized art is the so-called “disturbatory art” which lays stress on artists’ social and political responsibility. Disturbatory art seeks to modify the mentality of its receivers, and often it has been inspired by feminist thinking and feminist criticism of patriarchal society.

Principle (2) is, above all, true of contemporary serious art, whereas popular art genres such as entertainment music, rock music, rap music, film and television series give aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment to people. Thus, at least in this sense aesthetic concepts are still relevant in art theory. In addition, in contemporary culture and society the process of the de-aestheticization of serious art has occurred at almost the same time as the process of the aestheticization of the everyday life. The latter process includes phenomena such as advertising, fashion, design, urban planning, consumption and the omnipresence of the media. These phenomena, that in part also belong to the sphere of art, have made our social environment aesthetically more pleasant, and their significance has clearly increased in contemporary Western life styles.

(3) The auratic charm of works of art is tendentiously decreasing and disappearing. The art-theoretical concept of aura comes, of course, from Walter Benjamin’s writings of the 1930s. Benjamin stated that works of art were originally religious-magical cult objects, and, as such, they were, in part, experienced as sacred, unattainable and unique objects. From those times on, a certain kind of distance between the works of art and their receivers on the one hand, and between the works of art and objects of daily life on the other hand, belonged to the characteristic features of art. However, Benjamin held that this distance began to disappear with the emergence of modern popular art genres. Because the film and recorded music industries manufacture a great number of copies of each work, they dissolve the idea of the uniqueness of a work of art and through this they weaken their own aura as works of art as well.

Likewise, due to recent changes in society’s communication and media structure, ordinary people nowadays have opportunities to receive recorded and concert music, films, television dramas, television series and music videos in their own homes. Thus, the reception of works of art is an integral part of daily life in contemporary Western society, and partly for this reason art is no longer experienced as an unattainable and mysterious thing. In part, phenomena (1) and (2) have also contributed to the weakening of the auratic charm of works of art.

(4) The traditional contrast between art and mass culture or entertainment has lost a great deal of its significance. Before the 1960s, this juxtaposition was a constituent part
of the ideology of high modernism, and also a great majority of intellectuals and cultural politicians in Western countries adopted it. This way of thought or attitude was underlain by the autonomy conception of art which says that genuine or authentic art does not primarily strive for economic profit or popularity; rather, it endeavours to satisfy people’s aesthetic and spiritual needs and to enrich the national culture of the country in which it originates. Thus, mass culture was defined as a commercial phenomenon and as a threat to the authentic values of art and national cultures. Because a great deal of mass culture was of American origin, criticism of it by European intellectuals, cultural politicians and governments was a part of their fight for the right to cultural self-determination. During the last decades, the governments in Western Europe have also actively supported their own native film production and raised the quality of their native television series production, and today they support financially, legislatively and symbolically their native cultural industries – recorded music, films, television series, video programmes, digital products – which they usually treat both as an artistic and an economic phenomenon.

(5) From the 1980s on, the public cultural policy in Western countries has been dominated by an economic paradigm that applies economic terms to the sphere of art and demands straight economic benefits from it. After the decades of the Second World War, the public cultural policy in Western countries strove, among other things, to carry out “a democratization of culture”, but today the significance of egalitarian and paternalistic ideals is decreasing and they have, in part, been replaced by market-based principles of operation.

(6) However, at the same time increasing diversity and pluralism seem to characterise the contemporary Western art world. This art world includes several different stylistic layers, for example, realistic, modernist, avant-gardist and postmodernist works, besides which works of popular art can often be classified as romances or as romantic melodramas. In addition, different regional, ethnic and sexual-political groups are active in the art world.

(7) Today, art is increasingly reflexive by nature, as well. A reflexive work refers to and comments on itself or other works or art-theoretical themes. Implicitly, Duchamp’s works raised theoretical questions such as what makes a certain object a piece of art and what the boundary between art and non-art is based on. Today, questions like these are, in particular, important in visual art genres. Similarly, contemporary novelists use to reflect upon the conventions of the novel genre, and contemporary American popular films are rich with allusions to the film history to which they adopt, for example, a parodying or nostalgic attitude.

(8) The scope of the art world has broadened, and the boundaries between different genres of art have become indefinite. The former feature is due to the fact that from the 1960s on a great number of new genres of cultural production have been accepted as art. These include, among other things, films, photographs, modern dance, happenings, performances, body art, kinetic art, environmental art, earth art, graffiti, installations, rap, video art and community art. In the contemporary art world, these genres often blend with each other.

(9) The external boundaries of the system of art, that is, its relations to other social and cultural systems have become indefinite, as well. These systems are more and more interlaced, and the most extreme theorists of contemporary culture and society state that the system of art is, actually, merging with other systems.

In the philosophical branch of systemic study it is, in particular, Kuspit who thinks that the system of art is dissolving and changing into a commercial entertainment culture. Danto’s thinking lacks the skepticism and pessimism that is characteristic of Kuspit, but also he speaks about the end of art – meaning that at least the visual art genres seem to
be fusing with theoretical discourses and the philosophy of art. At the macro-sociological level, the position and the state of the system of art can be described and interpreted by means of the concepts of reflexive modernisation and de-differentiation. Reflexive modernisation means an awareness of the points of departure of Western modernity. Most of the features and operation principles of the contemporary system of art seem to call into question the modern conception of art, that is, a conception that took shape by the 18th century. In this sense, the contemporary phase of the system of art appears to represent a criticism and a questioning of classical Western modernity. On the other hand, by utilising the concept of de-differentiation one can say that in the contemporary societal-cultural reality the degree of the autonomy and differentiation of the system of art is decreasing. Whilst becoming more open this system has, in an inverse relation, changed into a less system-like formation.

2.5 Article IV: “The Post-National Condition’: On the Relationship Between the State, Nation and Nationalist Policy in the Present-Day Western World”

Article IV uses the concept of system in a slightly different way than articles I-III do. In articles I-III, the concept of system mainly refers to the functional system of art, to the cultural system of art and to societal systems. More or less implicitly and explicitly, the concepts of functional, cultural and societal system are present in the fourth article, but in the first instance, this article deals with modern nationalism as a system of cultural beliefs, ideas, values and symbols, that is, as a certain kind of cultural system. In addition, the article considers the position of nationalism in modern and contemporary culture and society. In particular, it clears up what kind of position nationalism has nowadays in public cultural policy and cultural institutions within the Western world.

Questions concerning nationalism and cultural policy are important from the standpoint of the system of art, since from the late 18th century on national identities and nationalist ideologies were usually constructed by means of traditions, myths, narratives, visual representations and musical compositions as well as by publishing studies of native language, history and folklore and by developing collective and political symbols. For this reason, the systemic study should explicate the relationships between the modern system of art and nationalist policy. Similarly, even if it has been stated that the position and the role of nationalism has weakened in contemporary public cultural policy, systemic study should not give up studying that position and role.

At the end of the third article, I make a brief overview of nationalism’s significance in the contemporary public cultural policy and the system of art. The fourth article can be seen as a more detailed continuation of that overview. Unfortunately, overviews like these are rare in systemic models of the sphere of art. For example, Luhmann and his disciples and successors, as well as critical theorists have almost completely ignored questions that are concerned with the relationships between the system of art and nationalist policy. More generally, it seems that the major theorists and the leading researchers at the international level only have a minor interest in themes and questions like these. In the case of empirical study, the situation looks, however, different. For example, when studying the Finnish system of art Finnish researchers use to take into account nationalist standpoints and nationalist cultural policy – perhaps for the reason that since the early 19th century till the late 20th century the Finnish system of art had a close relationship with the construction of the Finnish national identity and the Finnish national culture.
One can define the concepts "national" and "nationalism" by starting with the idea of nation. Nation can be understood as a community or group whose members believe that they belong together, which provides them with a sense of mutual solidarity and belonging. For this reason, those members share the same kind of collective identity that is called their "national identity". A nation also has a name – for example, "the French", "the Germans", "the Finns", "the Japanese", "the Chinese" – and its members hold that a certain area or place in the world is their home country or fatherland. In general, a nationalist movement and a comparable nationalist policy strive to establish a political unit – a state or an autonomous territory – for a single nation; or, if a nation already has its own political unit, nationalist policy tries to protect this unit and strengthen the collective identity of the nation as a whole. Nationalist ideology is a system of beliefs and values that expresses and legitimizes the aspirations of the comparable nationalist movement and nationalist policy. It should be noted that nationalist ideologies have been relatively coherent systems of beliefs and values, that is, systems created by intellectuals and researchers. In addition, nationalism has had more emotional and non-systematic manifestations that have been quite common among lower social classes. In this connection, that popular or vernacular nationalism must not be considered.

Since the 1960s, social and cultural theorists have seen nation-states and nationalism as products of the process of societal and cultural modernisation. Nation-states and nationalism started to emerge as mass phenomena in the late 18th century. From then on, the nation-state has constituted a norm in state-building, first in the Western world and later also further afield. How can such phenomena be explained? Why have nation-state and nationalism had such a close relationship with modernity?

In part, that close relationship can be explained from a political perspective. After the collapse of feudalism and societies based on aristocratic estates the new brand of rulers could no longer establish their power on a foundation made up of religious or metaphysical principles, or on dynastic traditions. Instead, they had to depend on people; that is, they had to gain the approval of the ordinary people for their right to rule. Otto Dann (1991), a German historian, states that after the French Revolution (1789) an approval like this began to become an obligatory and necessary part of political culture, at least in Western Europe. Thus, nationalism was a tool that helped rulers to develop their relationship with the people. Conversely, it helped the people to identify and to feel solidarity with their rulers who were now seen as members of the same group - or national community – as the common people themselves.

Likewise, it is possible to explain the popularity of the nation-state and nationalism from an economic perspective. Namely, the development of modern capitalism required extensive markets which extended well beyond local and regional boundaries. Modern capitalism built up a structural pressure which required the formation of a national market and a national community to make use of it. Benedict Anderson (1983) has pointed out that the new cultural production system – that is, the modern press and publishing companies - also produced special effects on the development of national communities. Like the uniform school system, this "print capitalism" standardized the written language and helped people to understand each other better. Simultaneously, its products - the news, articles, novels – helped people to identify with their national community, since the products of print capitalism viewed the world mainly from the perspective of a particular national community.

In the above-mentioned senses, the popularity of nation-state and nationalism can be understood as products of the process of societal modernisation. Yet, modern nation-states are not entirely products of the process of modernisation. According to Anthony
Smith, many Western European nation-states derive historically, at least in part, from ethnic communities. An ethnic community is a group whose members believe that they are descended from the same tribe or from the same ancestors, in brief, that they stem from a common origin. The concept of nation was already in use in the Middle Ages; at that time it was closely connected with ethnicity. The medieval concept of nation was also somewhat narrow, since only nobles or elite groups were accepted as true members of a nation or ethnic community. It was thought, for example, that only the English nobility actually belonged to the English nation or English ethnic community, while the common people, or the “mob”, were excluded from the nation. This kind of narrow concept of nation also prevailed in Scotland, France, Spain, Sweden and Poland. In contrast, in modern nation-states, the ordinary people have been accepted as true members of the nation. Roughly speaking, this process has taken place from the late 18th century onwards.

In Western Europe, modern nations and nation-states were usually in the first instance built by the states themselves. Whilst doing this, those states used both political and cultural tools; that is, they developed collective political and national symbols as well as cultural beliefs and values that were internalised by their populations. In particular, the uniform school system, the mass media and the arts proved to be important tools by means of which the symbols, beliefs and values in question were spread amongst the population. In this way, each of those states made its own population a relatively homogenous cultural whole. In Eastern and Southeastern Europe and in various parts of Central Europe, the situation was different. In the 19th century, Eastern and Southeastern Europe was ruled by three large, bureaucratic and multinational states, namely the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). These Empires divided up Eastern and Southeastern Europe between themselves. During the 19th century, a number of national liberation movements emerged within their borders. Because those movements could not get support from the multinational states already mentioned, they had to create their own associations, organisations and cultural institutions. And although they tried to establish their own state or political unit, to begin with they had to act without any state or political unit. For this reason, they built their nation primarily with the help of cultural means, whereas traditional Western European states such as Spain, France and Great Britain could lay stress on the national importance of their political institutions, as well. In a similar way, German and Estonian nationalist movements in Central Europe as well as Finnish and Norwegian nationalist movements in Northern Europe developed their own ideology primarily on a cultural basis, because at that time Germany consisted of several independent small states or principalities, Estonia and Finland were parts of Russia and Norway belonged to Sweden.

Still, in the decades after the Second World War, the public cultural policy in Western European countries contained a clear-cut nationalist dimension. At that time, those countries developed welfare state systems that took care of their citizens’ economic and social security and their physical and mental health. Politicians in those countries also thought that it was, as a last resort, the duty of the state and the local authorities to maintain a web of national cultural institutions and services. In addition, politicians created financial support systems for the arts; they held that systems like these were able to rescue the national cultures of Western European countries from the supranational or American mass culture. Consequently, those systems also functioned as tools in nationalist protection policies, developed by the states.

Since the 1980s, nationalist considerations have gradually lost their previous strong position in the cultural policies practised by Western European states, to be replaced, in
part, by a neo-liberal doctrine which demands that cultural institutions should, as far as possible, be regarded as business activities. Therefore, many cultural institutions in those countries and their cities have been converted into commercial enterprises which have to produce financial profits and tempt tourists to visit the countries and cities in question. With respect to this, the link between nationalist policy and the system of art has weakened in Western Europe.

In the centralized state system of the “socialist bloc”, that is, in Eastern and Southeastern European countries and in certain areas of Central Europe, nationalism’s position was not firm. However, when in the 1980s the multinational states of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began to lose their previous viability, a great number of nationalist movements began to emerge with surprising rapidity in their area. Many of those movements later succeeded to establish their own state, and after that they have strengthened their national orientations, institutions and symbols. Thus, during the last decades their cultural life has included an open and a strong nationalist dimension.
3 MODERN CULTURE AND SOCIETY
IN THE LIGHT OF SYSTEMIC
SOCIOLOGY

3.1 An Overall View of Systemic Theories of Modernity

On the basis of system-theoretical and systemic sociology, it is possible to reconstruct a certain kind of overall view of modern culture and society. A representation like this is, of course, rather abstract, and it largely ignores the incongruities between different representatives of system-theoretical and systemic sociology. Nevertheless, one can say that at a certain level of abstraction those representatives seem to have certain things in common. Almost all of them agree that modern culture and society can be characterised by means of concepts such as “functional differentiation”, “rationalization” and perhaps also “secularization”.

“Functional differentiation” occurred as a systematically elaborated theoretical concept in Parsons’ system-theoretical investigations of the 1950s. Despite this, one can, with good reasons, state that the concept of differentiation in itself had already been used by the classics of sociology. In particular, this generalisation is true of Georg Simmel and Émile Durkheim. In his work, Über soziale Differenzierung, Soziologische und Psychologische Untersuchungen (On Social Differentiation. Sociological and Psychological Investigations, 1890) Simmel considered social changes and processes by means of the concept of differentiation, and Durkheim’s De la division du travail social (The Division of Labour in Society, 1986, originally published 1893), in turn, anticipated the concept of functional differentiation. In the case of Durkheim, “anticipated” means the fact that although the concept of differentiation occurs in several different connections in his work, there he usually speaks about the division of labour as well as about the variety of modern professions and tasks. In system-theoretical sociology, the concept of functional differentiation was generalised from the concept of the division of labour, and at the same time system-theorists began to speak about society’s functional sub-systems.

Besides Simmel and Durkheim, the concept of differentiation was also used by Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx and Max Weber. In fact, Spencer regarded increasing differentiation as an one of the most central features or tendencies in societal evolution, and Marx understood modern capitalist economics as a basically autonomous formation that has become estranged from political, moral and religious regulation and from its “softening influence”. When appraising Marx’ theory of modern capitalist economics Johannes

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27 The sociological concept of functional differentiation is explicated, among other things, in S.N. Eisenstadt’s Social Differentiation and Stratification (1977), Niklas Luhmann’s (ed.) Soziale Differenzierung. Grundris einer allgemeinen Theorie (Social Differentiation. Outline of a General Theory, 1985b), Renate Mayntz’s, Bernd Rosewitz’s, Uwe Schimanck’s und Rudolf Stichweh’s (eds.) Differenzierung und Verselbständigung. Zur Entwicklung gesellschaftlicher Teilsegmente (To Differentiate and to Become Independent. About the Development of Society’s Sub-Systems, 1988), Jeffrey C. Alexander’s and Paul Colomy’s (eds.) Differentiation and Social Change. Comparative and Historical Perspectives, 1990) and in Uwe Schimanck’s Theorien gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung (Theories of Societal Differentiation, 1996). See, also, Stephen Crook’s, Jan Pakulski’s and Malcolm Waters’s Postmodernization. Change in Advanced Societies (1992) and Scott Lash’s Sociology of Postmodernism (1992).
Berger (1992: 242–244) even compares it with Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems. According to Berger, Marx conceived of modern capitalist economics as a self-referential and self-regulative system in which “commodities are produced for the sake of commodities” and “capital is heaped up for the sake of the heaping up of capital”; in this respect, Marx’s theory would be close to Luhmann’s theory. We may add to Berger’s appraisal that Marx’s theory also contains a clear-cut anti-humanist dimension, for he thought that people do not participate in modern capitalist economies as entire human beings but as holders of certain roles or “character masks”; however, unlike Luhmann, Marx was, in a radical way, critical of a state of affairs such as this which, to his mind, enslaves modern people, especially, the working class. Weber, on the other hand, used the concept of differentiation in his own view of modern culture. In Weber’s sociology, societal-cultural rationalization that was realised by the Protestantism led to the differentiation of the “value spheres”. Therefore, in modern culture, science, art and morality are largely independent of each other as well as of their former religious-metaphysical foundations. In one of his key texts, “Wissenschaft als Beruf” (Science as Vocation, 1979, originally published 1919), Weber writes that after Charles Baudelaire’s collection of poems *Les fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil, 1857) and Friedrich Nietzsche’s works one knows that a thing might be beautiful without being good in a moral sense - or that a thing might be beautiful just because it is not good in a moral sense. Modern value spheres or value systems are not only, Weber went on, differentiated from each other; they also compete with each other and they are in contradiction with each other. For this reason, it is difficult for modern civilization to attain cultural integration and to maintain a collective culture that would be shared by all of its members.

From Parsons onward, system-theoretical sociologists have characterised modern society as a functionally differentiated formation in which each functional sub-system has its own specific function. Whilst doing this, they often point to the classics of sociology. Parsons, for example, elaborated his own system-theoretical sociology by adopting ideas from Durkheim and Weber, in particular; and Habermas has appreciated Marx’s, Weber’s and Parsons’ theories of society. How do system-theoretical sociologists, then, define the concept of functional differentiation? Formerly they were inclined to define it by leaning on a whole/parts metaphor. This metaphor is in use, among other things, in Parsons’ works. Consequently, in his *The System of Modern Societies* (1971) he states that “differentiation is the division of a unit or structure in a social system into two or more units or structure that differ in their characteristics and functional significance for the system” (Parsons 1971: 26). Thus, a starting point in the process of differentiation is an undivided whole that will be divided into two or more parts or structures each of which has a specific function in society: a definition like this mainly speaks about structural and functional differentiation. Luhmann (1997c: 707–743), on the other hand, defined the concept of differentiation by means of a system/environment difference. According to him, differentiation can be understood as a recurrence of a system/environment difference inside a system; in this connection, the word “a system” points to society as a whole or to some of its sub-systems. Thus, the Luhmannian definition means that in the course of societal development society is divided into sub-systems which regard the rest of society as their environment.

System-theoretical sociologists do not usually deny that there are also other forms of differentiation in modern society. Luhmann (1974: 124, 142, 148; 1975: 136), especially, claims that in addition to functional differentiation, segmented and stratified differentiation and centre/periphery differentiation belong to modern society. Segmented differentiation prevailed in primitive or archaic society, and it divided society into parts
which are distinct and equal; in archaic society, those parts were families, tribes, clans and villages. Stratified differentiation divides society into sub-systems that are distinct and unequal; in civilized society, those sub-systems were estates and status groups. Finally, centre/periphery differentiation divides society into parts which possess a different quantity of economic, political and cultural resources; for example, the differences between modern capital cities or modern metropolitan cities and small towns is an example of this form of differentiation. Definitions like these show that according to Luhmann societal development has passed from primitive or archaic society to civilized society and from civilized society to modern society.

It should be mentioned that by "primitive" or "archaic societies" Luhmann (1997c: 634–662, 678–706) refers to tribal societies, and by "civilized societies" (hochkulturelle Gesellschaften) he means both ancient democracies and tyrannies and medieval and premodern European societies; all of those civilized societies were aristocratic class societies. Parsons, on the other hand, used a somewhat different vocabulary. When speaking about "primitive societies" he referred to tribe societies, and by the concept "archaic societies" or "intermediate societies" he referred to those societies that Luhmann termed "civilized societies". According to Parsons (1966: 51–52), ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome as well as traditional China, India and Islamic empires represent archaic or intermediate societies. What Parsons and Luhmann have in common with each other is that they structure societal history with the aid of a three-part division. Parsons used the pattern primitive–archaic/intermediate–modern, whereas Luhmann’s pattern has the form primitive/archaic–civilised–modern.

As stated earlier, there are, in modern society, several different forms of differentiation. In his late production, Luhmann wrote that although functional differentiation is the major structural feature of modern society, class inequalities in this society represent stratified differentiation; yet, modern society cannot be grasped sufficiently well by means of the concepts of social class and class inequalities, and the same holds true also for concepts such as “industrial society”, “capitalist society” and “liberal-democratic society”. (Luhmann 1985c: 141–142; 1987: 19–21, 51, 60). To be sure, Marxists sociologists and critical theorists have pointed out that in his view of modern society Luhmann did not pay enough attention to class inequalities and class conflicts. As an answer to remarks like these, Luhmann (1985c: 151–152) claimed that the most serious problems of this society - for example, conflicts between states and environmental problems - cannot be solved just by abolishing the contradiction between work and capital; in his opinion, this impossibility indicates that the basic structure of modern society is not closely connected with its class divisions. As far as segmented differentiation is concerned, for example, different factories and enterprises in the system of economics, different universities in the system of science and different production and mediation institutions in the system of art represent it nowadays.

Even if Luhmann thinks that modern society is a web of functional sub-systems and their mutual relationships, in practice he does not say much about those relationships. On the contrary, he often considers individual sub-systems as if they were Leibnizian monads, that is, almost entirely closed formations or islands. On the other hand, it is, in particular, Parsons and Münch who have emphasised that functional sub-systems are, in many ways, interlaced. There are, between sub-systems, common and overlapping areas which contain elements of different sub-systems; these common and overlapping areas are called “interpenetrating zones” by Münch. For example, modern technology is a common zone between science and economics; these two sub-systems – the natural and technological sciences in universities, the research and experimental departments in factories and enterprises – have participated in the development of modern technology.
which has formed a grounding for modern economic production (Münch 1984: 14, 18, 21; 1988b: 228). Thus, according to Parsons and Münch, the concept of functional differentiation does not alone define modern society sufficiently well, wherefore system-theoretical sociology must also take into account the interpenetration between different or differentiated sub-systems. Parsons (1971: 26; 1985b: 169) wrote that when functional differentiation is "progressive" or successful, the sub-systems are interlaced and the interaction between them takes place in an ordered manner; that is, there is a good co-ordination between them. This is, Parsons underlined, precisely what has happened in modern Western civilization, whereas in certain other or Non-Western civilizations functional differentiation, as far as it has occurred at all, has caused serious problems for the functioning of the whole of society.

"Rationalization" is another important concept in system-theoretical views of modern society. This concept can, for example, be found from Parsons' works in which he states that "progressive differentiation" increases society's abilities to adapt itself to its environment and at the same time a successful differentiation such as this gives more freedom of choice to individuals. On the whole, societies like these are, therefore, more effective and rational than the societies in which functional differentiation is not a central structural feature. These thoughts presented by Parsons seem to be derived from Durkheim's works. Durkheim also had a rather positive and optimistic view of functionally differentiated modern Western society. Like Parsons, he held that successful functional differentiation increases the effectiveness and productivity of functional sub-systems. On the other hand, Durkheim stated that in the course of functional differentiation, society's cultural systems – that is, its "collective consciousness" – have, in an equal manner, become more rationalized. This feature is due to the fact that in a complex and differentiated society collective values and norms cannot usually be detailed and concrete. Instead, in order to be capable of widely regulating the action of individuals those values and norms have to be rather abstract; and it is precisely their abstractness that offers individuals an opportunity to exercise their own discretion in concrete situations. In this sense, the rationalization of cultural systems would have introduced more freedom into society. Later, this view of modern culture and society was also adopted by Parsons.

In addition, in Luhmann's and Habermas' works the idea of societal and cultural rationalization is connected with the idea of functional differentiation. However, they differ from Durkheim and Parsons in that they clearly represent a pluralistic conception of rationality. In this sense, they belong to a wider orientation in modern thinking. As the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (1988: 79–81) remarks, a displacement towards pluralistic thinking and a pluralistic conception of rationality is nowadays common in Western intellectual culture. As for the Anglo-American world, its philosophical roots can be partly found in the late philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Winch’s idea of a social science, T.S. Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions and Paul A. Feyerabend’s works on the theory of science. For example, Wittgenstein's thoughts on the diversity of language games and life forms have clearly inspired pluralistic thinking. The other important source for the contemporary pluralistic train of thought is French post-structuralism, that is, philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard; during the last decades they have perhaps most eagerly criticised the dominant Western conception of rationality. Two central figures in the background of their philosophies are Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger who can be seen as forerunners of the contemporary pluralistic train of thought.

Luhmann already adopted a plural conception of rationality in his early investigations. For example, in the first volume of his Soziologische Aufklärung (Sociological Enlightenment, 1974, originally published 1970) he wrote that in a functionally differentiated society
rationality has lost its unity. Hence, in modern society, rationality is always system-specific rationality and, as such, is also relative. An action that is reasonable or acceptable in one system might be unreasonable or foolish in another system; or we can say that a person who acts in politics or economics according to aesthetic and artistic principles is easily stigmatized by others as a troublemaker. We might, then, conclude that, among other persons, Salvador Dali has been a perfectly acceptable and even an admirable person in the art world, but in the sub-systems of politics and economics he would probably have been a somewhat terrible figure. Luhmann (1991: 7, 10; 1993d: 7, 11) represents a pluralistic and relativistic conception of rationality also in the sense that he thought that it is no longer possible to obtain a horizon from which one would be able to observe the entirety of society correctly. Every horizon is partial and relative, because it is bound to a certain sub-system of society or because it represents the standpoint of a certain sub-system (Luhmann 1985a: 629).

In Habermas' production, both his theory of knowledge interest and his theory of communicative action discard monolithic conceptions of rationality; to be sure, in this connection we have to pass over the former and focus on the latter. In his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Theory of Communicative Action, 1987a and 1987b, originally published 1981), Habermas distinguishes between strategic and communicative action, both of which are types of social action. Strategic action is calculating, goal-orientated and, in the formal sense, consequential, and it strives for success. An action like this follows cognitive-instrumental rationality; a person who is capable of achieving his or her goals in an effective way manifests this type of rationality in his or her action. In contrast, communicative action strives for mutual understanding, and it is based on a type of rationality that is called communicative by Habermas. In this sense, a person is rational insofar as he or she is able to give reasons or to argue for his or her own standpoint. Now, according to Habermas, strategic action is dominant in the modern systems of economics and politics, whereas the spheres of science, art and law, as well as people's daily lives are domains of communicative rationality; in fact, science, art, law and people's daily lives represent different sub-types of communicative rationality.

The difference between cognitive-instrumental rationality and communicative rationality resembles the difference that Weber (1956: 61, 129) made between formal and substantial rationality. However, in Weber's theory of Western modernity, substantial rationality is not as central as communicative rationality is in Habermas' thinking. Weber described an action that is rational in the formal sense as abstract, non-personal, calculating and quantifying, and an action like this is also indifferent with regard to all kinds of substantial value principles. Conversely, substantial or material rationality appraises the world and the action from the standpoint of certain value principles. According to Weber, originally modern Western formal rationality developed in the spheres of economics and politics, but afterwards it also began to spread into other spheres of society. For this reason the most serious problem in modern Western civilization lies in that it is increasingly dominated by an action which is rational only in the formal sense; and, in inverse relation, the meaning and domain of substantial rationality is declining in that civilization. Through this, modern Western civilization threatens to change into a non-personal machinery whose functioning is perfectly rational in the formal sense, but, correspondingly, almost completely irrational in the substantial sense. Even if Habermas has also thought that the modern systems of economics and politics tend to oppress or "colonize" the spheres of communicative action, he has regarded the Weberian theory of Western modernity as too pessimistic. To his mind, the sphere of communicative action has also softened the negative influences that the modern systems of economics and politics have had on the whole of society. For this reason the Weberian picture of modern Western
rationality is, in part, erroneous. In Habermas’ opinion, Weber theorised about Western modernity chiefly from the standpoint of the systems of economics and politics, wherefore he exaggerated the meaning of cognitive-instrumental rationality. Simultaneously, Weber passed over people’s life worlds, that is, the areas in which communicative rationality has had a secure place.

In system-theoretical models of modernity, the concept of “secularization” has been eclipsed by the concepts of “functional differentiation” and “rationalization”. Usually these models seem to imply that the position and meaning of religion is declining in Western modernity in which religious life is only one of the functional sub-systems of society. The Weberian approach to religion hardly bothers at all system-theorists. Weber (1979: 155) thought that the secularization of culture produces serious problems for modern individuals who constantly have to suffer from “the loss of meaning” (Sinnverlust); he held that it is only by means of religion that modern individuals would be able to experience their life and action as deeply meaningful. Due to the processes of rationalization, differentiation and secularization, religious faith is, however, impossible for a great majority of modern individuals. For this reason, Weber emphasised, they cannot avoid existential crisis or the loss of meaning, albeit they try to make sense of the world and their life, among other things, by means of pseudo-religions, eroticism and a hedonistic way of life, as well as by taking an intensive interest in different genres of art. These remarks imply that, to Weber’s mind, in modern Western culture art has, in part, obtained a similar function as religion had in traditional and premodern culture; that, is, art has attempted to give answers to people's existential questions and to satisfy their existential needs. System-theorists do not use the concept of meaning in this way, that is, in an existential way; instead, they use it in a functional way.\(^2\) For example, the system of economics consists of actions which have a similar functional meaning and which can, therefore, be classified as economic activities. Likewise, to the system of science mainly belongs actions which represent methodically controlled and systematic research work; those actions have usually been made under the protection of some university or research institute. It is chiefly these kinds of actions that are labelled as science in modern society. Through this, meaning is a necessary feature of functional sub-systems, even if individuals may feel that those sub-systems are meaningless or even absurd from the standpoint of their own existential needs.

Of system-theorists Parsons and Habermas have also explicitly commented on Weber’s view of secularization. Parsons (1971: 88–91, 98–99, 114, 139) could not share that view; instead, he held that religion is still an influential constituent of modern culture, although he also admitted that, to some extent, it has lost its social significance. Perhaps Parsons' own thinking derived, in this connection, from that he theorised about modernity from the horizon of American society in which religion is a much more important phenomenon than it is in European countries (cf. Münch 1986b: 255). Habermas (1987a: 462–468), in turn, has disapproved of the thought that only religion would be able to satisfy individuals' existential needs. According to him, modern, secularized culture and people's own life worlds can equally function as a source for a meaningful life.

When theorising about modern culture and society most of the system-theorists mean by "society" a national societal system that is governed by a corresponding nation-state. For example, in his The System of Modern Societies (1971) Parsons mentions, among other

things, “Dutch”, “French”, “British”, “American”, “Soviet” and “Japanese” societies as examples of individual modern societies, and Münch’s *Die Kultur der Moderne* (The Culture of the Modernity, 1986a and 1986b) deals with Great Britain, the United States of America, France and Germany as representatives of modern culture and society. The clearest exception in this connection is obviously Luhmann. From the 1970s on, Luhmann (1975: 53-55; 1981: 310–312) stated that modern society is a world society, because almost all of the functional sub-systems have exceeded the limits of the so-called nation-states. In his *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Society’s Society, 1997), he announced more unconditionally that there can be no regional societies under the conditions of modernity; perhaps only political-administrative and legal sub-systems have relatively clear-cut regional boundaries, whereas other functional sub-systems have functioned as parts of world society since the beginning of modernity. (Luhmann 1997b: 30-31, 166. See, also, Luhmann 1995: 117.) However, in another connection, Luhmann (1993c: 27) stated that functionally differentiated society has become true in Europe and in countries that are close to it. A statement like this does not seem to be fully in accordance with his conception of world society. At any rate, one cannot find a concrete analysis of world society from his investigations. The statement in question implies that, in the first instance, he theorised about modern society on the basis of European countries or on the basis of European national societal systems. (See, also, Giddens 2001: 15; Kangas 2006: 17, 21, 293, 299–301, 305–308.)

The other sub-chapters in this chapter explicate how system-theorists conceive of modern culture and society and what kind of position the sphere of art obtains in their models of modernity. The explication starts from Parsons’ sociology that is often ignored by theorists of the system of art. The reasons for this becomes clear in the next subchapter.

### 3.2 Talcott Parsons on Modernity

Parsons held that, up to a certain limit, an increasing structural and functional differentiation is a typical feature of the process of socio-cultural evolution. Such being the case, at the level of general action system, "primitive" civilizations were largely undifferentiated wholes (Parsons 1966: 30–50, 95). A general action system consists of a cultural system, a social system, individuals’ personal systems and their behavioural organisms. In primitive civilizations, these four systems were, in many respects, merged with each other. The boundary between culture and society was undeveloped, which can, for example be seen in that when exploring primitive civilizations cultural anthropologists often replace the concept of society or the concept of community with the concept of culture. In addition, primitive culture was dominated by a religious-magical world view that was naively held as an objective world order; by means of it people also arranged their mutual relationships and their common social life. Furthermore, primitive civilizations did not favour their members’ individuality. A collective religious-magical world view as well as long-term traditions and customs offered to people’s identities a secure and stable basis, which prevented them from developing into highly individual personalities.

In comparison to primitive civilizations, modern Western civilization is, for Parsons, a structurally and a functionally differentiated whole. However, at the same time he thought that a mere differentiation does not guarantee that a civilization would function well; on the contrary, it is important that there is also co-operation and interpenetration between differentiated units. In this respect, modern Western civilization differs, for example, from
traditional Indian civilization that is characterised as “an advanced archaic civilization” by Parsons (1966: 51–53, 69–94). In traditional Indian civilization, the distance between culture and society was “too long”. As India’s major religion, Hinduism taught that in order to be able to reach salvation people should retreat from the world and concentrate on the practice of asceticism and religious mysticism; actually, Buddhism went even further, for it regarded a life in a monks’ community as an ideal way of living. Thus, both of these religions were largely indifferent to mundane affairs. In modern Western civilization, Parsons emphasised, culture and society are differentiated from each other, but there are also several common zones between them. In modern Western societies, certain basic and abstract cultural values function as cornerstones of social systems and institutions, and individuals have internalised those values as constituents of their own personality. In this way, certain values and principles are transferred from culture into society and personalities in modern Western civilization.

It might not be difficult to see that Parsons’ way of speaking about socio-cultural evolution is basically Darwinist or evolutionist. For him, different civilizations and historical periods represented different qualitative levels in socio-cultural evolution, whose most advanced achievement was modern Western civilization, in particular, the United States of America. Alexander (1983: 133–134) points out that in this respect Parsons is not, however, an exceptional figure, for of the classics of sociology Marx and Durkheim were also evolutionists and from time to time even Weber spoke about civilizations in an evolutionist way. To this remark one can, however, add that usually Parsons’ disciples and successors in system-theoretical sociology have given up the evolutionist discourse. Even if Giddens, Habermas and Luhmann are perhaps Europe-centric or Western-centric sociologists, they have discarded the traditional evolutionist thinking.

According to Parsons, at the level of societal system socio-cultural evolution has led to a deeper and wider functional differentiation. This type of differentiation was not an important phenomenon in primitive civilizations, although they ordered their social life and division of labour on the basis of age and sex. Otherwise, those civilizations were dominated by segmented differentiation that divided them into families and alliances of families. Segmented differentiation is a form of horizontal differentiation, because in it the differentiated units are relatively equal. Still, in medieval European civilization, functional differentiation was not a central structural feature, because that civilization was based on stratified differentiation. Speaking generally, stratified differentiation is a form of vertical differentiation, for in it the differentiated units differ from each other with regard to the quantity of power and status.

Parsons held that in the process of socio-cultural modernisation, society or societal system tends to differentiate internally into sub-systems that take care of the four functional necessities (see Parsons & Smelser 1956). This is, he continued, precisely what has happened in modern Western societies. Therefore, modern Western societies can be described with the help of the Table 2 (page 58) that brings up Parsons’ view of functional necessities and their equivalents at the level of a societal system.

In Table 2, the functional necessity of Adaptation (A) is taken care of by the functional sub-system of economics. The sub-system of economics does not consist only of enterprises and production plants or “economics” in the narrow sense, because, for example, families might also produce goods and services; in this sense, they might be a part of the functional sub-system of economics. In modern society, science and technology participate in the production of economic resources extensively, apart from which they regulate the relationship between society and its environment. In part, foreign policy also belongs to the domain of the functional necessity of Adaptation, for it takes care of the
relationships between a certain societal system and other societal systems. This remark shows that in practice Parsons equated modern societies with nation-states or national societal systems.

The functional necessity of Goal Attainment (G) is taken care of by the functional sub-system of polity. In modern Western societies, state and public administration are the most important constituents in this sub-system, but in the widest sense the functional sub-system of polity comprises all of the activities in which resources are utilised for the attainment of collective goals. Thus, in this sense, the political dimension is also included in the action of economic enterprises and production plants, although in modern Western societies collective decision-making and the realization of those decisions are centralized by the states and public administration (Parsons 1971: 16). Institutions such as law, the legal system and the schooling system, as well as different communities produce normative uniformity into society and through this they take care of the functional necessity of Integration (I). Therefore, they are central constituents in the functional sub-system of integration.

Socio-cultural sub-system takes care of the functional necessity of Latency (L) or Pattern Maintenance, wherefore it has a close relationship with culture. Owing to the action of this sub-system, cultural representations, values and meanings do not remain

Table 2. Parsons’ View of Functional Necessities and their Equivalents at the Level of Societal System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Necessity</th>
<th>Its Equivalent at the Level of Societal System</th>
<th>Primary Means of Action in a Functional Sub-System</th>
<th>The Symbolically Generalised Medium in a Functional Sub-System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation to the Environment (A)</td>
<td>Economy’s Functional Sub-System</td>
<td>Economic Resources</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Attainment (G)</td>
<td>Polity’s Functional Sub-System</td>
<td>Political Decisions</td>
<td>Political Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration (I)</td>
<td>Societal Community or Integration’s Functional Sub-System</td>
<td>Norms</td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency or Pattern Maintenance (L)</td>
<td>Socio-Cultural Sub-System</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Value Commitments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

separate from society, for the sub-system at issue transfers them into society’s concrete sub-systems and institutions. This sub-system must always make choices: from the entirety of culture it picks up certain representations, values and meanings and imprints them on society. Individuals internalize these cultural units in the process of socialisation, and the units in question have been institutionalised as the operation principles of social institutions. For Parsons (1991: 57), family, formal education and religious institutions are central actors in the socio-cultural sub-system. The institutions in which different types of experts concentrate on the interpretation and explanation of cultural models also belong to this sub-system. For example, higher education and the institutions of science represent institutions like these. The institutions of art also belong to the socio-cultural sub-system, but they do not participate in an unambiguous way in the production and maintenance of social order.

The socio-cultural sub-system functions as a filter between culture and society. By transferring certain abstract cultural values and models into society it guarantees a sufficient value consensus in society. Each concrete social sub-system and institution emphasises certain sides of those values and models and applies them in its functioning (Parsons 1991: 38–40). Due to this, collectively shared values and models are in practice possible in highly differentiated modern societies.

Symbolically generalised media are tools that people use in social life in order to achieve their goals. Money, Political Power, Influence and Value Commitments are tools such as these. They correspond to the four functional sub-systems, but the societal significance of each medium does not limit itself only to one sub-system. The media in question form a language that makes possible communication between functional sub-systems. By means of the medium of Money social actors do not communicate only in the functional sub-system of economics but in the exchange and interaction between the functional sub-system of economics and the other functional sub-systems, as well.

Parsons distinguished between functional and concrete social sub-systems. The number of functional sub-systems is four, and it is chiefly these sub-systems that he considered in his analytical models of social systems. For this reason, those four functional sub-systems can be termed analytical sub-systems. Parsons believed that his analytical models are able to describe the basic structure of socio-cultural reality adequately. This means that modern Western societies should be differentiated internally into four sub-systems— in the way that Table 2 presents. On the other hand, Parsons held that modern Western society consists of several concrete sub-systems that are more or less clearly differentiated from each other. To concrete sub-systems like these belong, among other things, economics and politics in the narrow sense as well as the social systems of law, science, art, education, mass media, religious life and families. In his investigations, Parsons does not say much about these concrete social sub-systems; he was chiefly interested in how concrete social sub-systems participate in taking care of the four functional necessities. The diversity of concrete social sub-systems cannot be explained by means of the Parsonsian analytical models. If the number of functional sub-systems is really four, why are there several concrete and differentiated sub-systems in modern societies? Parsons’ investigations do not provide us with an answer to this question. Usually his successors have solved these problems simply by renouncing the idea of functional necessity and by concentrating their attention only on concrete social sub-systems.

Parsons held that each functional sub-system can be considered from the standpoint of the AGIL-schema. Each functional sub-system must itself solve how it takes care of the four functional necessities. An analysis like this can also be applied to concrete social sub-systems. Next it will be applied to the concrete social system of art.
It should be remembered that in Parsons’ analytical models the sphere of art belongs both to the cultural and societal system. As a part of cultural system, works of art can be analysed from three standpoints, since they mediate representations and beliefs (cognitive dimension) as well as values and value principles (value dimension) to people; besides this, it is possible to analyse the tools or the sign system by means of which works of art express their contents (expressive dimension). At the level of the AGIL-schema, that is, at the level of the functional sub-systems the institutions of art chiefly belong to the sociocultural sub-system which transfers certain cultural representations, values and meanings from a cultural system into societal system. In addition, perhaps the institutions of art also participate in the maintenance of normative integration in society, wherefore they can, in part, be considered as a constituent of the integration’s functional sub-system. Finally, the concrete social sub-system of art is situated at the level of societal system. By utilising the AGIL-schema we can say that the concrete social sub-system of art must take care of its relationships with the rest of society and acquire material resources for its functioning, which corresponds to the functional necessity of Adaptation (A). In the sub-system of art, social actors make decisions about the use of the resources of this system and about the goals of the action that takes place in this system (G), certain arrangements and “common rules” produces normative uniformity into this sub-system (I), and the actors of this sub-system share certain abstract cultural values (L). In Parsons’ (1991: 38–40) investigations, values are general cultural standards, and as such they are more abstract than, for example, ideologies are. Therefore, even if the actors of the sub-system of art share certain cultural values, they might have political-ideological and art-political disagreements with each other. In this case, their mutual disagreements do not seriously shake the common cultural value foundation of the sub-system of art.

As far as the concrete social sub-system of art itself takes care of all of the four functional necessities, it could be understood as a well-formed sub-system that possesses a high degree of system-likeness. In this case, it would be a highly autonomous sub-system. However, Parsons stated that usually concrete social sub-systems are only relatively autonomous formations; consequently, they have common and overlapping areas, wherefore they are more or less interlaced. For Parsons, a state of affairs such as this was a hallmark of a well-functioning social order.

Thus, we have seen that Parsons did not have much to say about concrete social sub-systems and their mutual relationships. Perhaps this shortcoming explains the fact that in the study of contemporary societal-cultural reality and the sphere of art he has not been a popular figure. Nowadays, several researchers are expressly interested in the relationships between different systems, for example, in the relationships between the system of art and other systems. In the study of relationships like these, they usually have had to borrow their central ideas from outside Parsons’ system-theoretical sociology.28

28 In their joint work, Renate Heydebrand, Dieter Pfau and Jörg Schönert (1988) have applied the Parsonsian system theory to the study of the system of literature. In a recent systemic study of the sphere of art, their investigation is a rather lonely phenomenon, for usually the study in question has ignored Parsons’ thinking.
Like Parsons, Luhmann emphasised that an increasing functional differentiation does not, as such, characterise the process of socio-cultural evolution. Rather the process in question can be understood as a displacement from one form or type of differentiation into another form or type of differentiation. To put it more concretely, primitive or archaic society was primarily differentiated in a segmented way and civilized society in a stratified way, whereas modern society is, in the first instance, based on functional differentiation. In his early period, Luhmann was still inclined to think that in modern society functional differentiation represents vertical differentiation - just as centre/periphery differentiation and stratified differentiation do. Accordingly, modern differentiated functional sub-systems would not be equal but there would be a hierarchy between them. In the 1970s, Luhmann (1974: 142) wrote that it is the economic sub-system that forms the dominant or leading sub-system in modern society. This would perhaps mean that, with justified reasons, modern society could be defined as a “capitalist society”. However, in his late production Luhmann (1987: 19; 1997b: 601, 612–613) adopted a view that modern
functional differentiation is a form of horizontal differentiation. This view implies that there is no primary or dominant functional sub-system in modern society; those sub-systems are simply equal.\textsuperscript{30}

In Luhmann’s late production, communication is a characteristic feature of social systems. The specificity of modern functionally differentiated sub-systems lies in the state of affairs that as communicative systems they have their own media and medium codes; in other words, each of them has its own specific medium and medium code. Following Parsons, Luhmann termed the media used by the modern functional sub-systems “symbolically generalised communication media”. Thus, modern functionally differentiated sub-systems do not communicate only with the help of natural languages, but they also employ their own media – improving in this way their communicative potentialities. Table 3 presents ten modern functional sub-systems and their media and medium codes. That table is based on Luhmann’s investigations, but it is not an exhaustive catalogue of functional sub-systems, since certain sub-systems – among other things, education, entertainment and the army – are missing from it. At any rate, that table indicates that Luhmann endeavoured to apply the concepts of medium and medium code systematically to modern functional sub-systems.

Table 3 does not tell us about the emergence of modern functionally differentiated sub-systems and their media and medium codes; in this sense, it is “historically blind”. Actually, Luhmann thought that when society was differentiated into modern functional sub-systems, those sub-systems began to develop their own media and medium codes. Gradually their media and medium codes became settled, and at the same time functional differentiation became society’s main structural feature. It is just this situation that has made possible the autopoiesis of functional sub-systems. Consequently, at a certain historical moment of societal development, the modern functionally differentiated sub-systems started to work autopoietically. Hence, autopoiesis is something that has emerged in social sub-systems in the course of societal development. Yet, it is not possible to say exactly when a particular sub-system gained its autopoiesis; to this question one can only give approximate answers. Generally speaking, the aristocratic estate society fell into decay by the 18th century and it was replaced by functionally differentiated sub-systems. When considering these sub-systems Luhmann gave up the Parsonsian idea of functional necessity. For him, modern functional sub-systems do not take care of functional necessities; each of them simply has its own task or “function” in society and in the societal division of labour.

As far as social systems are concerned, Luhmann chiefly applied the concept of autopoiesis to the entirety of society and to the modern functional sub-systems. He held

that society as a whole can be seen as an autopoietic system that differs from nature and functions according to its own principles (Luhmann 1985a: 555; 1986: 620–621). Therefore, the concept of autopoiesis is applicable not only to modern society but also to previous societies, that is, to archaic society and to civilized society. In the mid-1980s, Luhmann was not quite sure whether all of the modern functional sub-systems have reached the state of autopoiesis; sometimes he wrote as if it is chiefly sub-systems such as economics, law, science, education, art and religion that were already autopoietic, whereas the rest of modern functional sub-systems would perhaps not yet have reached the state of autopoiesis (Luhmann 1984: 51–52; 1986: 620–623; 1987: 40). However, from the turn of the 1990s on he tended more clearly to see autopoiesis as a hallmark of all of the modern functional sub-systems (see Luhmann 1995: 60; 1997a: 7–11; 1997c: 743–776). Thereby he also conceptualised families and intimate relationships as self-referential, communicative and autopoietic social systems whose justification lies in that “personal systems”, that is, actors regard them as important from the standpoint of their own needs (Luhmann 1987: 145; 1993d: 196–197, 210, 216–217. See, also Luhmann 1982). It should be noted that in Table 3 the hesitation at issue this does not show itself at all, but the table in question is, of course, a simplification of Luhmann’s thinking.

Autopoietic systems are operationally closed formations. This characterisation does not imply that they are not connected with their environment. The environment is for them a source of energy and information, and it imposes some general limitations on their functioning. However, the crucial thing is that each autopoietic system handles this energy and information according to its internal principles of operation, in particular, according to its medium and medium code; thus, precisely in this sense it is an operationally closed formation. In addition, autopoietic systems produce themselves the elements of which they consist, wherefore they are self-referential formations with an ability to self-recruit and self-regenerate (Luhmann 1984: 51; 1997c: 746–749). In the case of social systems, the most constitutive elements are communications. Therefore, modern functionally differentiated social sub-systems consist of communications which they themselves produce and which, in turn, maintain them. Although, this might sound as if those sub-systems were isolated islands in society, Luhmann underlined that they are not some kind of asocial formations. On the contrary, their autopoiesis is a condition for the state of affairs that they can be functional for the society in an effective way. From the functional standpoint, the modern functionally differentiated sub-systems are by no means self-sufficient or autotelic formations. It is just their autopoiesis that guarantees that they can serve the rest of society well.

In Luhmann’s system theory, there is a close connection between autopoiesis, medium, medium code, basic value, basic value distinction and identity of each modern functionally differentiated sub-system. Each modern sub-system such as this is based on a certain value distinction that characterises this whole sub-system. The value distinction at issue manifests itself in the medium code of this sub-system, and the basic value manifests itself in its medium. Together these two communicative tools, a special medium and a special medium code, guarantee that the sub-system is capable of operating autopoietically, according to its own specific principles. Each medium code is divided into a positive (payment, owner of power, legal) and into a negative (non-payment, object of power, illegal) value, each of which is largely amoral (Luhmann 1997c: 751). This means that the basic values and the basic value distinctions of the modern functionally differentiated sub-systems have nothing to do with moral values or with the morally good or bad. For example, when the economic sub-system uses the code Payment/Non-Payment, it does not evaluate the action from a moral standpoint. Instead, it only signifies the action from a functional standpoint; it simply gives the action a functional meaning.
According to Luhmann, to maintain a system is to maintain and control its boundaries. In this respect, it is important that each modern functional sub-system uses a code which has only two values. For this reason it is relatively easy to decide what kind of communicative action belongs to a sub-system. The communicative acts are either one way or the other; we can, in a sensible way, either handle them by means of a system’s code or not (Luhmann 1993c: 310–313). It should also be noticed that in Luhmann’s theory the identity of modern functionally differentiated sub-systems is based on their communicative tools and on their functions. The identity of a sub-system like this is based on that it operates with the help of a specific medium and a specific medium code, apart from which it has a specific function in society. Therefore, the differentiation between them can largely be equated with the state of affairs that they use specific communicative tools for specific purposes or functions.

Table 4. A Luhmannian View of the Function, Medium, Medium Code and Other Relevant Codes of the System of Art. Version I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Function of the System of Art:</th>
<th>Production of World Contingency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Medium of the System of Art:</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Medium Code of the System of Art:</td>
<td>Beautiful/Non-Beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Aesthetic Codes in the System of Art:</td>
<td>Pleasant/Unpleasant, Graceful/Clumsy, Sophisticated/Rustic (or Vulgar), Festive/Banal (or Trivial), Sublime/Low, Tragic/Comic, Grotesque, Lyrical/Dramatic, Melodramatic (or Bathetic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Relevant Codes in the System of Art:</td>
<td>New/Old, Innovative/Traditional, Original/Conventional, Interesting/Boring, Animated/Non-Animated, Stimulating/Non-Stimulating, Exciting/Non-Exciting, Entertaining/Non-Entertaining, Mimetic/Non-Mimetic, Figurative/Non-Figurative, Fictional/Non-Fictional, Real/Possible, Believable/Non-Believable, True/Untrue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 (page 61) regards Beauty as the medium of the system of art and the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful as its medium code. In addition, Table 4 (page 64) mentions other aesthetic and non-aesthetic codes that are relevant in the case of the system of art. We can characterise those codes by saying that receivers of art use to define the nature of works of art by means of them. On the one hand, those codes indicate how the receivers experience works of art; and, on the other hand, they also tell us something about the properties of works of art (Luhmann 1984: 53).

Tables 3 and 4 seem to imply that Luhmann had adopted the traditional aesthetic conception of art. To put it briefly, the traditional aesthetic conception of art was born in the 18th century, and it obtained its first formulation in Charles Batteux’s investigation Les beaux arts réduits un même principe (The Fine Arts as Reduced to the Same Principle, 1746). In his investigation, Batteux presented a clear-cut system of the genres of art; the unity of those genres is, to his mind, based on the state of affairs that all of the genres of art imitate “the beautiful nature”, that is, they describe the reality in an idealized way. For this reason, Batteux continued, works of art arouse aesthetic pleasure in receivers. In these respects, aesthetic values and aesthetic pleasure are essential factors within the sphere of art. Somewhat later, French Enlightenment philosophers, among other persons, J. D’Alembert and Denis Diderot adopted a conception of art like this, and in the German-speaking Europe it was worked on by persons such as Moses Mendelssohn, Johann Sulzer, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe; from Great Britain one can, in particular, mention the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and Edmund Burke. The French “l’art pour l’art” movement in the 19th century and the European aestheticism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries deepened and radicalized the aesthetic conception of art – in the sense that they almost ignored the content of art and concentrated on its formal properties. Into this later phase belong, among other persons, the poets Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, the novelist Gustave Flaubert and impressionist painters, as well as the writer Oscar Wilde and theorists and critics of art such as Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Walter Pater. In the domain of the philosophy of art, Susanne Langer and Monroe C. Beardsley are perhaps the most clear-cut representatives of the aesthetic conception of art in the 20th century.31

Among intellectuals and upper-class social layers, the aesthetic conception of art seems to have been the dominant conception of art from the late-18th century to the early-20th century. During this long period, those groups attempted to control the boundaries of art strictly. In the first instance, they approved as art only the cultural genres whose main function was aesthetic or aesthetic-spiritual. Genres or layers such as literature, theatre, opera, painting, sculpture, architecture, laying out of gardens, dance or ballet and classical concert music filled these demands most clearly, wherefore they were regarded as “genuine” or “pure genres of art”. In comparison with them the status of design, interior decoration and hand work was lower, and they were not always accepted as art. Similarly, media-based genres such as photographs, record music, radio plays, films, television plays and television films produced classification problems for the proponents of the aesthetic conception of art; in fact, it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the status of these genres increased significantly, whereafter they were gradually accepted as art. At the same time the aesthetic conception of art began to lose its position as the dominant conception of art.

Luhmann’s art-theoretical writings and views continued the tradition of the aesthetic conception of art still in the 1980s and early 1990s. Although he later changed his views

31 On the history of the aesthetic conception of art, see Kristeller 1959 and Tatarkiewicz 1989.
of the medium and medium code of the system of art, we can next consider his views of the 1980s and early 1990s, because until that date the aesthetic conception of art had a profound influence on him. In fact, at that time his conception of art was mainly philosophical-aesthetic rather than sociological as we can see by looking at Table 4.

It should be noted that as far as the system of art is concerned Luhmann did not himself present a table like this. I have, in part, derived it from his investigations, but to a certain amount I have also completed his aesthetic conception of art by adding to it certain typical aesthetic and non-aesthetic codes. The other important thing in Table 4 is the fact that even if Luhmann regarded art as aesthetic communication, he did not define the function of art by pointing to aesthetic experiences; usually aesthetic conceptions of art have understood the function of art in that way, that is, they have regarded art as a source of aesthetic experiences. Consequently, aesthetic conceptions of art have often seen the function of art in that it makes profound aesthetic experiences possible. A definition like this would simply have been in contradiction with Luhmann's anti-humanist line of thought. Aesthetic experiences are mental states of mind possessed by individuals or actors, wherefore Luhmann did not understand the function of art on the basis of them. In fact, his investigations of the 1980s largely ignored questions concerning the function of art. To be sure, questions like these arise in his article "Das Kunstwerk und die Selbstreproduktion der Kunst" (The Work of Art and the Self-Production of Art, 1986) in which he states that it is the function of art to produce alternative models of the world: works of art help us to understand that everything that exists in our phenomenal world could also exist in another way – in other words, they teach us that our phenomenal world can be constructed in several different ways (Luhmann 1986: 624–625). In this way, works of art would make us aware of the contingent nature of our phenomenal world.

One can, however, ask whether a function like this really requires that art uses Beauty as its medium and the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful as its medium code. World contingency can obviously be produced in different ways, and all of those ways are not closely connected with Beauty. These remarks indicate that in the 1980s Luhmann's view of art was not sufficiently consistent and well-formulated.

We can explicate the position of aesthetic experiences in Luhmann’s conception of art with the help of a three-part distinction included in Luhmann's system theory. In his general view of social system, he thinks (see Luhmann 1991: 635–637) that social systems have three kinds of relations: (i) they have a certain function in society, that is, they are in relation to the entirety of society, (ii) each of them produces certain concrete offerings to other social systems and (iii) each of them is also able to stand in a reflexive relation to itself and to practice self-consciousness and self-description. Under the circumstances, the system of art makes us aware of the world contingency (the first function), its products are, for example, consumed in the intimate sphere and in the schooling system (the second function) and it is also able to reflect upon itself (the third function). On the basis of this three-part distinction, one could say that aesthetic experiences belong to the offerings that the system of art makes available for individuals and devotees of art. From a standpoint like this, aesthetic experiences are certain kinds of benefits that devotees of art can achieve by receiving works of art.

Even if Luhmann regarded the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful as the medium code of the system of art, he did not think that the system of art would limit itself only to the use of this basic code. The system of art also utilises other aesthetic and non-aesthetic codes; for example, codes such as New/Old, Innovative/Traditional and Original/Conventional are often relevant and important in modern art criticism and in
studies of art. Yet, for two reasons they can not obtain the position of the medium code in the system of art. On the one hand, obviously those codes are not used everywhere in the system of art, for certain genres of art might see them as indifferent. On the other hand, they are used in other modern social systems, as well, which means that they are by no means specific only to the system of art (Luhmann 1993c: 201–202; 1994: 46–47). Remarks like these hold true also for the code True/Untrue and other cognitive codes. According to Luhmann, only the code Beautiful/Non-Beautiful is used systematically in the system of art, whereas in other social systems it seems to be in use only occasionally. Therefore, Luhmann was inclined to conceive of it as the medium code of the system of art.

If we translate Luhmann’s view of the system of art into an actor-theoretical language, we can say that in the system of art social actors practice communication on works of art by means of different codes. If the code Beautiful/Non-Beautiful really functions as the medium code in this system, then this distinction should dominate the communicative acts concerning works of art. In Luhmann’s theory, programmes are more concrete things than media and medium codes are. In the case of the system of art, programmes regulate and define what kinds of works of art obtain the predicate “beautiful” and what kinds of works, in turn, must content themselves with the predicate “non-beautiful” or “ugly”. Thus, albeit social actors would agree on the medium and medium code of the system of art, they might have different programmes; that is, they might disagree on what kinds of works of art could be understood as beautiful and what kinds of works of art as non-beautiful (Luhmann 1981: 246–247, 253). In cases like these, they interpret and apply the medium code in question differently. Generally speaking, in functional social sub-systems programmes are collections of rules that define what kinds of things achieve a positive value and what kinds of things a negative value (Luhmann 1997c: 746, 750–751). Programmes also change more rapidly than media and medium codes use to do. This can, for instance, be seen from the fact that in the modern system of art the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful became central in the late 18th century, and still in the mid-20th century theorists of art were inclined to define “the essence of art” by means of the concept of beauty and other aesthetic concepts. On the other hand, during that long period theorists and critics of art produced several different definitions or programmes on what makes an object or entity beautiful and aesthetically valuable.

In this connection, it is useful to make a difference between the concepts of autonomy and autopoiesis. According to Luhmann (1995: 97), the system of art is autonomic in the sense that it decides itself what functions as its medium and medium code and what kinds of communicative codes it uses; decisions like these are not made outside the system of art, for example, in the political or economic system. In this case, “autonomy” means normative independency. In the case of the system of art, “autopoiesis”, on the other hand, means that this system has its own and specific communicative tools, according to which it handles works of art.

In the same way, the autopoiesis of science implies that science has its own specific medium and medium code. Luhmann regarded Truth as science’s medium and the distinction True/Untrue as its medium code. As an autopoietic system, science handles and evaluates observations, statements and theories by means of the medium and medium code at issue. At the same time the system of science is autonomic, since it decides for itself how the predicates “true” and “untrue” are distributed into observations, statements and theories. Autopoiesis and normative autonomy do not, however, exclude the fact that in other respects science is dependent on its societal environment. For example, the state, business life and non-public associations regulate science’s financing and their influence.
on science can also be seen in the way in which science chooses its research objects and research problems. But, Luhmann (1991: 300–309) added, both in methodical and theoretical questions and in the evaluation of the results, science works in an autopoietic and autonomic way. Likewise, the system of art is, as an autopoietic and autonomic formation, dependent on its societal environment, even if Luhmann did not pay much attention to the relationships that the system of art has with its societal environment.

Luhmann’s views of the function, medium and medium code of the system of art have aroused a lively discussion among his disciples and successors in Germany and in the Netherlands. Some of those disciples and successors share Luhmann’s basic views on these matters, while others have been rather critical of them. Among other persons, Siegfried J. Schimdt is fairly close to Luhmann as far as art-theoretical questions are concerned, but otherwise he has disapproved of Luhmann’s anti-humanism, instead he has based his own view of the system of art on action-theoretical premises. According to him, in the modern system of art social actors follow two “macro conventions”, that is, “Aesthetics Convention” and “Polyvalence Convention”. Aesthetics Convention says that the reception of works of art should, in the first instance, take place on the basis of aesthetic values and interpretation principles - and not on the basis of economic, political, scientific, moral, religious and practical values and interpretation principles. A formulation like this clearly shows that, like Luhmann, Schmidt shares the aesthetic conception of art. Polyvalence Convention, in turn, says that when receiving works of art social actors can freely interpret them and proportion them to their own needs and life situations. Thus, the latter convention announces that in the domain of art social actors can freely realise their subjectivity; an emphasis such as this is missing in Luhmann’s theory of the system of art. However, both Luhmann and Schmidt state that art has important cognitive tasks. For Luhmann, art is able to reveal the contingent nature of our ordinary phenomenal world, and Schmidt also emphasises that works of art construct alternative models of the world. Schmidt adds that in this respect art does not differ crucially from science. Science constructs its models of the world according to certain methodic rules, whereas in art the construction of alternative models is free of methodological rules; artistic constructions are, therefore, more subjective and more creative than scientific models are. Yet, Schmidt states, art deviates from science in that it does not give us “knowledge of facts”, because as a cognitive activity it chiefly operates at a more general level, that is, at the level of the models of the world. In these respects, art has, in an innovative way, constantly produced new views of the world as well as fresh perspectives, ideas and experiences. (Schmidt 1980: 99–106; 1987: 19, 21–22; 1989: 430–431.)

Of Luhmann’s disciples and successors, it is perhaps Gerhard Plumpe and Niels Werber who have been most critical of Luhmann’s views of the function, medium and medium code of the art system. According to them, those views are not at all sociological by nature but philosophical-aesthetic; that is, those views derive the function, medium and medium code of the system of art from philosophical-aesthetic theories and not from societal-cultural reality itself. Plumpe and Werber hold that in the process of societal differentiation work and leisure time have differentiated from each other gradually. A constellation like this created broadening markets for the institutions of art and cultural production, and, they continue, for this reason it has been the function of art to offer reasonable and meaningful activities to social actors during their leisure time. From a functional standpoint, art has, therefore, been entertainment in modern society. Art has entertained actors by producing works that actors find more or less interesting. As a critique on Luhmann’s and Schmidt’s thinking, Plumpe and Werber underline that in artistic communications beautiful as well as ugly works can be interesting; works of
modern and contemporary art are, in fact, usually interesting but not beautiful. On the other hand, the production of world contingency is not a necessary feature of works of art, because this thing can quite well be understood without works of art. Thus, in Plumpe's and Werber's model of the system of art, art is entertainment, the category of Work is its medium and the distinction Interesting/Non-Interesting its medium code. Plumpe and Werber remark that there are different strategies of entertainment in modern and contemporary society. Some people like sports or television series, while others entertain themselves by listening, for example, to John Lennon's popular songs or to John Cage's avant-garde music; and some people read love stories, whereas others enjoy socially critical realistic novels or perhaps fictions that concentrate on philosophical themes. Sports entertains people with the help of matches and competitions, but art does the same thing by means of interesting and stimulating works. (Plumpe 1993b: 294, 297, 300-301; Plumpe 1995: 48–49, 54–56; Plumpe & Werber 1993: 26, 29, 33–34.)

In his last investigations, Luhmann changed his views of the system of art – in a way that makes those views internally more consistent; those changes manifest themselves in Table 5. In Die Kunst der Gesellschaft (The Art of Society. 1997a, originally published 1995), he states that art produces world contingency both by means of its content and form. For him, fictionality or imaginativeness self-evidently belongs to the constitutive features of art; works of art establish their own universes or their own fictional worlds that differ from the ordinary phenomenal world. Through this, receivers of art can compare the level of an ordinary phenomenal world with another ontological level, that is, with the fictional worlds of works of art. In this way, receivers of art achieve an awareness of the contingent nature of the ordinary phenomenal world. Fictional works of art implicitly tell us that this world is not the only possible world: worlds of other kinds are possible, as well. (Luhmann 1997a: 229. See, also, Luhmann 1986: 624; 1990: 38–39.)

In addition, works of art produce world contingency by means of their form or composition. When making his or her unfinished work of art, the artist must again and again decide whether details that he or she intended to add to the work actually fit the work. For this reason, neither the work as a form of wholeness nor its details are based on the principle of necessity; on the contrary, both the completed work and its details are the result of choices made by the artist. The artist's freedom of choice is not, however, unlimited, because the details should not be totally arbitrary. In a successful work, the parts or details are motivated in the sense that they fit the rest of the work. At the same time, a work like this mediates to its receivers an awareness of its own contingent nature; in other words, when receiving the work the receivers realise that at least some of its parts or details could have been chosen or made in another way. (Luhmann 1997a: 315–317, 497–498.)

In his last works, Luhmann still held that the production of world contingency can be understood as the function of art, but after having changed his other views he then thought that the category of Fittingness forms the medium of the system of art and the distinction Fitting/Non-Fitting functions as its medium code (see, nearer, Table 5, page 70). Consequently, he became estranged from the aesthetic conception of art. In a Luhmannian way, we could, therefore, presume that completed works of art and their parts or details are not necessarily beautiful or pleasant by nature. On the contrary, avantgardist and contemporary works of art, among other things, are often ugly or unpleasant; what is fitting in those works of art might be something that has nothing to do with the categories of beautiful and pleasant. Views such as these represent Luhmann's major art-theoretical train of thought in his last investigations.
Table 5. A Luhmannian View of the Function, Medium, Medium Code and Other Relevant Codes of the System of Art. Version II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Function of the System of Art</th>
<th>Production of World Contingency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Medium of the System of Art</td>
<td>Fittingness</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Medium Code of the System of Art</td>
<td>Fitting/Non-Fitting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Codes in the System of Art</td>
<td>Beautiful/Non-Beautiful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pleasant/Unpleasant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graceful/Clumsy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sophisticated/Rustic (or Vulgar)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Festive/Banal (or Trivial)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sublime/Low</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tragic/Comic</td>
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<td>Grotesque</td>
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<td>Lyrical/Dramatic</td>
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<td>Melodramatic (or Bathetic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Relevant Codes in the System of Art</td>
<td>New/Old</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Innovative/Traditional</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Original/Conventional</td>
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<td>Interesting/Boring</td>
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<td>Animated/Non-Animated</td>
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<td>Stimulating/Non-Stimulating</td>
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<td>Exciting/Non-Exciting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Entertaining/Non-Entertaining</td>
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<td>Fictional/Non-Fictional</td>
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<td>Believable/Non-Believable</td>
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<td>True/Untrue</td>
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Unfortunately, in his last investigations Luhmann did not always understand the categories of fitting and beautiful as clearly separate entities. Sometimes he even wrote that the code Fitting/Non-Fitting could perhaps be equated with the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful or Beautiful/Ugly. For example, in Die Kunst der Gesellschaft he writes that

[Die Semantik von schön/hässlich] bringt, wenn man sie überhaupt beibehalten will, nichts anders zum Ausdruck als ein zusammenfassendes Urteil über stimmig/unstimmig unter der Zusatzbedingung hoher Komplexität, also selbsterzeugter Schwierigkeiten. (Luhmann 1997a: 317.)

[If one wants to hold onto the semantics of the beautiful, then it might best be understood as a summarizing judgement about what fits / does not fit under added conditions of high complexity, that is to say, in the face of self-generated difficulties. (Luhmann 2000a: 195. Translated by Eva M. Knodt.)]

Here Luhmann obviously thinks that if a work of art seems to consist of fitting parts, then it could, at a very general level, be received as beautiful (see, also, Luhmann 1997b: 378, 562). In my opinion, a statement like this is simply inaccurate. A work of art can be a meaningful and successful wholeness and its details can fit it well - and yet this whole work might be physically ugly or unpleasant, just as, for instance, avantgardist or feminist art often is. Thus, even in his last works, Luhmann could not always sufficiently clearly detach himself from the aesthetic conception of art, whereby those works are, to a certain extent, also vulnerable to a critical analysis.

In their art-theoretical investigations, Luhmann as well as his disciples and successors have usually attempted to define art’s medium and medium code. Whilst doing this they have presumed that art would possess a single or a simple medium code that contains only one distinction. A presupposition like this does not sound plausible, therefore one has to conclude that the Luhmannian school has not succeeded to define art’s communicative tools sufficiently clearly and well. Luhmann himself, in particular, started from the premise that the sphere of art is an autopoietic system whose medium and medium code separate it from other systems. Again this kind of presupposition seems to contradict the modern sphere of art. The Luhmannian school has nearly forgotten that in the modern system of art social actors have had an opportunity to become acquainted with art’s different historical and stylistic layers, apart from which they might have enjoyed the works of living artists, that is, the works of their contemporaries. If we still add to this that the modern system of art has consisted of several different genres, then we can obviously with justified reasons call Luhmann’s premises into question. I believe that Schimdt (1993b: 259–260) is probably right when he in the early 1990s began to think that perhaps all of the functional sub-systems are not based on a single or simple code. According to him, it might be more plausible to think that, in particular, the “medium code of the system of art” is, in fact, a combination of several different single codes; and in the same vein “the medium of the system” of art could be a peculiar combination of several single mediums.32

32 Luhmann’s views of the system of mass media have also attracted critical attention. Certain system-theorists, for example, Vessela Misheva (2005) and Rudi Laermans (2005) have criticized those views in an elegant and well-formulated way, but they do not give up the presupposition that the system of mass media would be based on a single medium and on a single medium code. At least Laermans revises and improves Luhmann’s model on a basis like this. In these respects, their criticism differs from Schmidt’s critical remarks on Luhmann.

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At the level of societal system, Luhmann regarded modern society as a web of autopoietic sub-systems and their mutual relationships. Because each modern functional sub-system is, in his model, an autopoietic formation, there is a unity in modern society. However, at the same time the principle of autopoiesis separates the sub-systems from each other and makes them such different formations. In this respect, Luhmann constructed a rather paradoxical theoretical model of modern society. His model also largely ignores the relationships between different functional sub-systems. To be sure, he took those relationships chiefly into account in two ways.

Firstly, as we noticed earlier, Luhmann held that social systems have three kinds of relations to the rest of society: (i) each of them has a certain function in society, (ii) each of them produces certain concrete offerings to other social systems and (iii) each of them is able to stand in a reflexive relation to itself and to practice self-consciousness. If, as Luhmann believed, the production of world contingency is the function of the system of art in modern society, so one could ask, whether this is really the reason for the existence of the system of art in modern society. Does a function like this make art a necessary and legitimate domain of modern society? As an answer to these questions I would like to say that Luhmann was incapable of dealing with the function of art in a satisfactory way. Due to this anti-humanism, he did not consider for what kinds of purposes individual and collective actors use works of art; he simply attempted to define the function of the system of art without pointing to social actors and their ways of using and consuming works of art. Nor did he consider systematically what kinds of offerings the system of art makes available for other functional sub-systems.

Secondly, it was, especially, the concept of interpenetration by means of which Parsons spoke about the relationships between different systems. He thought that in modern Western civilization different systems are not differentiated too far from each other but they are, in many ways, interlaced. Luhmann also needed the concept of interpenetration, although he often used the concept of structural coupling as its synonymy. He stated that there is a relationship of interpenetration or structural coupling between two systems if "each of them places its own complexity at a disposal of the structure of the other system" (Luhmann 1985a: 289–292; 1997b: 108). Subsequently, according to Luhmann, modern society does not consist only of autopoietic functional sub-systems but also of structural couplings between those sub-systems. As far as the sub-system of art is concerned, Luhmann thought that it only has a few structural couplings with other sub-systems. In *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* he mentions trade with works of art nearly as an only instance of structural couplings between the sub-system of art and other sub-systems:

> [There are only a few, rather loose structural couplings between the art system and other systems. As before, a specialised art market couples the art system and the economic system. But in this market, artworks are traded as capital investments or as extremely expensive individual goods. On the production side, access to this market depends on an established reputation, and the market takes the active role in developing such reputations. (Luhmann 2000a: 242–243. Translated by Eva M. Knodt.)]
To which system does a structural coupling like this belong? Luhmann did not always speak about structural couplings in a consistent way. Sometimes his works give an impression that structural couplings are not parts of functional sub-systems but they lie outside those sub-systems or between them; however, more often he seemed to think that structural couplings simultaneously belong at least to two different sub-systems (cf. Becker & Reinhardt-Becker 2001: 65–67). The latter interpretation implies that Luhmann was inclined to think that, for instance, trade with works of art as well as art markets simultaneously belong to the sub-system of art and to the sub-system of economics. In this connection, he did not speak at all about study of art or about art administration and art policy; nor did he mention radio and television which became important mediation institutions of radio plays, concerts, films and other works of art by the mid-20th century. At any rate, by using the Luhmannian conceptual vocabulary one can say that study of art is a structural coupling between the sub-system of science and the sub-system of art. This means that study of art is also a part of the sub-system of art; a view like this sounds reasonable and justified, because theories and investigations concerning art have participated in the maintenance of the boundary between art and non-art, for example, by giving definitions of art. Similarly, art administration and art policy would obviously be structural couplings between the sub-system of politics and the sub-system of art. Radio and television, in turn, would be structural couplings between the sub-system of mass media and the sub-system of art. Albeit Luhmann ignores couplings like these, I want to argue for the standpoint that all of the above-mentioned institutions, that is, trade with works of art, art markets, study of art, art administration, art policy; radio and television must, in part, be seen as constituents of the sub-system of art. It is justified to think that each of them simultaneously belongs to two functional sub-systems.

Luhmann’s conception of social systems is rigid and narrow. It is just on the basis of a conception such as this that he can understand the sub-system of art as “a surprisingly isolated” social formation:

Im Vergleich zu anderen Intersystembeziehungen - etwa zwischen Recht und Politik, zwischen Krankensystem und Wirtschaft als Beschäftigungssystem, zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik oder zwischen Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft – fällt am Kunstsystem also eher die Abkopplung auf. Das wiederum könnte erklären, weshalb die moderne Kunst in der Lage ist, eine Symbolisierung von Grundproblemen der modernen Gesellschaft zu entwickeln, die weder auf Imitation ihrer Natur noch auf Kritik ihrer Auswirkungen angewiesen ist. (Luhmann 1997a: 391.)

[Compared to other intersystemic relationships – between law and politics, for example, between the health care system and the economy as an employment system, between the economy and politics or between the economy and science – the art system is surprisingly isolated. This might explain why modern art is capable of developing a symbolization of fundamental social problems of modern society that relies neither on an imitation of society’s “nature” nor a critique of its effects. (Luhmann 2000a: 243. Translated by Eva M. Knodt.)]33

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33 I have added the expression “between the economy and politics” into Eva M. Knodt’s translation, because it - in German, “zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik” - is included in Luhmann’s own original German text, but not in Knodt’s translation.
The modern sub-system of art has not been so isolated as Luhmann presumes. If we take into account here the common domains between the sub-system of art and other sub-systems, then we can, with good reasons, say that this sub-system and the rest of society have been widely interlaced. On the other hand, Luhmann is obviously right in that modern art has been capable of analyzing society’s basic problems and – I would myself like to add – of presenting critical remarks on society’s shortcomings. In this respect, modern art has been more autonomous with regard to the rest of society, for instance, than the system of science and the schooling system have been.

The rigidity and narrowness of Luhmann’s concept of system can be interpreted in different ways. In their study of Luhmann’s system theory, Frank Becker und Elke Reinhardt-Becker present an interesting interpretation on Luhmann’s thinking. According to them, in Luhmann’s theory, the systemic identity of communicative acts solely depends on what kinds of medium and medium codes they primarily use (Becker & Reinhardt-Becker 2001: 50–53, 65–67). This means that the sub-system of art would only consist of the communicative acts which speak about works of art primarily with the medium code Beautiful/Non-Beautiful or Fitting/Non-Fitting – provided that one of these two codes actually functions as the medium code of the system of art. But what about the situation in which critics of art speak about works of art primarily by means of moral, political and economic codes? To which system do communicative acts like these belong? Becker and Reinhardt-Becker would obviously reply that they belong to morals, politics or economics – but not to the sub-system of art. An interpretation like this would not, however, correspond to Luhmann’s own works. Albeit in trade with works of art, “persons” or actors handle works of art with the help of the medium Money and the medium code Payment/Non-Payment, a trading like this is a constituent of the sub-system of art in Luhmann’s theory. Similarly, in the modern art life, different institutions, groups and individuals compete over power, statuses and resources – utilising in competitions like these the medium Power and the medium code Owner of Power vs Object of Power; despite this, those activities are part of the sub-system of art. To be sure, it is justified to criticize Luhmann in that he largely passed over activities like these and chiefly paid his attention to activities which follow the supposed medium and medium code of the sub-system of art.

3.4 Modern Culture and Society from the Standpoint of Actor-Centric Systemic Studies

In his system theory, Luhmann (1985a: 629) states that it is impossible to observe the entirety of society at one and the same time: every single observation is unavoidably partial and it necessarily considers society from a certain standpoint or from the horizon of a certain sub-system. Each single functional sub-system sees the rest of society, that is, its societal environment in its own and peculiar way, and it is not possible to unite those pictures produced by functional sub-systems into a consistent and coherent picture of society (Luhmann 1987: 34–37). It is, in part, for these reasons that sociology cannot avoid epistemological diversity – or the state of affairs that there are a huge number of different theoretical representations or models of modern society in sociology. Perhaps a train of thought like this explains why Luhmann did not concentrate on constructing a general system-theoretical model of modern society. To be sure, at a general level he theorised on modern social systems, in particular, in his investigations Soziale Systeme (Social Systems, 1985a, originally published 1984), Beobachtungen der Moderne (Observations
of Modernity, 1992) und Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft (Society of Society, 1997b and 1997c); in these works, he also worked on his own view of modernity. However, he otherwise concentrated on writing theoretical special studies of modern functional sub-systems. These special studies deal with sub-systems such as economics, science, law, art, mass media, politics and education. When theorising about these sub-systems Luhmann usually endeavours to explicate what is specific to each of them and what distinguishes them from their societal environment. Therefore, his entire production does not pay thorough attention to the relationships between the functional sub-systems.

Simultaneously, Luhmann’s production does not always take into account the differences between functional sub-systems. In his production, both the concept of functional differentiation and the concept of functional sub-system, especially, are rather monolithic. In recent actor-centric system-theoretical sociology, Jürgen Habermas, Renate Mayntz and Vessela Misheva, among other persons, have criticised this feature in his investigations. As far as the phenomenon of functional differentiation is concerned, Mayntz (1988a; 1988b) distinguishes three levels in it: meanings, roles and organisations. The level of meanings is the most fundamental one in functional differentiation. However, insofar as social systems are differentiated from each other only at the level of meanings, they do not necessarily achieve stable and clear-cut boundaries; in a case like this, their degree of system-likeness is usually low. Intimate relationships or the sphere of intimacy is a differentiated phenomenon or system chiefly at the level of meanings, but they do not possess fixed roles and organisations. When there are fixed and differentiated roles in a system, this system is, then, more clearly differentiated from its environment. Finally, functional differentiation has advanced furthest, when a system also has its own organisations and institutions; in this case, its differentiated position has been strongly institutionalised in society.

Insofar as functional differentiation would take place only at the level of meanings, it could hardly develop into a central structural feature of society. It is, therefore, reasonable to presume that modern functional sub-systems are usually differentiated formations also at the levels of roles and organisations. This holds, among other things, true for the sub-systems of economics, politics, law, science, art, education, mass media, sports and health care; in this respect, functional differentiation has undoubtedly has been a central structural feature of modern society. On the other hand, the situation is different in the case of the sphere of intimacy – or in the case of people’s “life worlds”. In his critique on Luhmann, Habermas (1987b) has quite correctly pointed out that Luhmann ignores that people’s life worlds do not constitute a system in the same sense as, in particular, modern economics and politics are systems. For this reason, Habermas has not at all applied the concept of system to people’s life worlds. It is, however, possible to solve this problem in another way, as well. Following Mayntz, we can launch here the idea of system-likeness and compare different social formations with each other with regard to their system-likeness. From this standpoint it might be justified to say that modern economics and politics have had a high degree of system-likeness, whereas the sphere of intimacy or people’s life worlds have obtained only a low degree of system-likeness. In other words: modern economics and politics are systems in a strong sense, but the sphere of intimacy and people’s life worlds are systems in a weak sense.

Where does the modern system of art lie on the scale of system-likeness? Although there have, in the modern system of art, constantly emerged new kinds of institutions and organisations which, in particular, have taken care of the production and mediation of works of art, there are a great number of informal and loose associations and semi-spontaneous activities in this system. In addition, the modern system of art is a voluntary formation in the sense that actors can decide themselves whether they want to participate in it. Representatives of the systemic study of art are, therefore, inclined to say that the modern system of art has not been so formal and fixed as the modern systems of economics, politics, science and health care have been – or that the modern system of art has possessed something like an average degree of system-likeness at the most.\(^\text{35}\)

According to Mayntz, the level of meanings is the most fundamental one in functional differentiation. In Luhmann’s system theory, the boundaries of social systems are based on the functional meanings of communicative acts, apart from which the media and medium codes of the functional sub-systems are close to the level of meanings; they are, in fact, classification tools which actors or persons apply to communicative acts after having first defined the system-identity or functional meaning of those acts. Although Luhmann does not point to roles, institutions and organisations in this connection, he theorizes about functional sub-systems as if they were as stable, fixed, non-personal and non-living as organisational systems usually are. For this reason Misheva (2000: 20–21, 211–217) concludes that Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems is, in fact, a theory of organisations or organisational systems. Albeit she adds that it is just organisations that are “the most essential part of the modern world” (Misheva 2000: 217), one may easily state that Luhmann is rather blind to other aspects and dimensions of modernity. In particular, if modern society has been a dynamic and a constantly changing formation, its functional sub-systems ought to, with all probability, be open and flexible formations. In contrast to the dynamics of modern society, Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems seems to require a stable social order and a fixed societal structure – an implication that Misheva (2000: 223–224) also associates with Luhmann’s theory. The theory in question has, therefore, certain serious weaknesses as a model of modernity.

Thus, even if Luhmann speaks about societal evolution and modernisation in his production, his investigations are not historical enough; that is, because of their abstractness they offer to us rather monolithic and one-dimensional theoretical models. What is needed here is a model of modernity that is more genuinely historical by nature and that pays more attention to the relationships between functional sub-systems. A model elaborated by Münch is close to requirements like these.

Münch understands sociological system theory as a branch of research that elaborates analytical models for the needs and purposes of empirical research work. Like Parsons, he distinguishes between analytical and concrete systems. It is the main task of system theory to develop analytical concepts by means of which empirical research work can outline and analyze societal-cultural reality; yet, it would be a mistake to equate those concepts with the reality itself. In Münch’s opinion, system theory should not attempt to be a mirror of reality but a conceptual frame of reference that makes empirical research work possible. Although it is, at an analytical or conceptual level, possible to distinguish clearly between economics and politics, or between visual art and advertisement, it does not follow from this that the systems of economics and politics, or the systems of art and advertisement, would be clear-cut or sharply differentiated from each other in societal-

\(^\text{35}\) See, for example, Dickie 1974 and 1984.
cultural reality. On the contrary, concrete or real systems are often interlaced. For this reason the analytical models elaborated by system theorists cannot be straightforwardly or mechanically utilised in empirical research work. In analytical models, systems are usually well-formed; in other words, they possess a high degree of system-likeness. On the other hand, concrete or real systems are not necessarily well-formed; their degree of system-likeness might be low. For reasons like these, empirical sociological research work based on system theory should always reflect upon to what extent its objects of research can be regarded as systems.

As a critique on Luhmann, Münch states that the theory of autopoietic social systems confuses analytical models with reality – or, as the constructionists would say, with the phenomenal world. Actually, in his sociological system theory, Luhmann created analytical models, even if he himself believed that those models are capable of grasping the structure of modern society correctly. As far as the concept of autopoiesis itself is concerned, Münch does not discard it, but he wishes to use it in another way than Luhmann used it. Autopoiesis was, for Luhmann (1997a: 300–301), not a matter of degree; he thought that functional sub-systems operate either autopoietically or not – and there is not a third possibility. In contrast to this, Münch (1994: 304; 1995; 27–29) suggests that the concept of autopoiesis can be used to express differences in degree; it is only in this case that it can be applied to modern functional sub-systems. Münch’s suggestion implies that the real functional sub-systems have not operated only according to the principle of autopoiesis; this principle characterises only some features in their operation, whereas the other features connect them with other functional sub-systems. It should also be mentioned that Mayntz (1988a: 35) is willing to use the concept of autopoiesis in this way, that is, as a concept that expresses differences in degree.

In Münch’s investigations, theory of interpenetration forms a mediating level between system theory’s analytical concepts and societal-cultural reality. Because this theory is not a mere analytical tool, it contains statements about the nature of societal-cultural reality. The theory of interpenetration is, in particular, needed in studies concerning modern Western civilization, for, to Münch’s mind, it is just in this civilization that differentiated sub-systems are interlaced in a well-functioning way. On the other hand, Münch holds that traditional and Non-Western civilizations have often suffered from the state of affairs that in those civilizations differentiated sub-systems have not been interlaced enough; that is, there has not been a well-ordered and well-functioning co-ordination and interaction between differentiated sub-systems in those civilizations. These views presented by Münch recall Parsons’ system-theoretical sociology. Like Münch, Parsons also thought that the concept of differentiation or functional differentiation does not alone suffice to characterise modern Western civilization accurately. For this reason Parsons gave the concept of interpenetration a central position in his own view of modern Western civilization.

According to Münch, the starting point in the process of modernisation of Western civilization was the situation in which societal action and interaction began to exceed the boundaries of a local or regional unit (family, clan, village, town). In a situation like this, people lived in small communities in which the degree of functional differentiation was low; but, on the other hand, those communities were clearly differentiated from each other in a segmented way. Another characteristic feature of the traditional way of life was the difference between internal and external morals. Inside a local unit, relationships

between actors or individuals were usually warm and sympathetic; a sense of mutual solidarity and belonging was rather typical to those relationships. Within a community like this, social interaction was based on trust and on shared customs and traditions. However, the members of a local community did not necessarily adopt a similar attitude to people that were from other local communities, that is, outside their own community. The prevailing moral code did not require that foreign people had to be treated in the same way as members of a local community treated their own people.

Münch points out that Max Weber was already aware of the difference between internal and external morals in traditional and Non-Western civilizations. In his comparative sociological studies of religions, Weber (1947) held that in Asian civilizations the difference under consideration was usually sharper than it was in medieval and premodern Europe. Because in China and India moral behaviour was based on ties of kinship, betraying and cheating were common phenomena outside those ties, for instance, in the relationships between different communities. For this reason the relationships between different communities were characterised by a general suspicion and distrust; and for the same reason a rational interaction between different communities, that is, an interaction based on shared rules developed slowly in China and India. In medieval Europe, the difference between internal and external morals was softened by the moral universalism of the Catholic Church; according to it, people are equal in God’s eyes. However, it was only the Protestant sectarian movements that attempted to consistently bring a moral universalism such as this into the domain of mundane life and social interaction. In part, the action of those sectarian movements created a situation in which rational functional action systems could take shape; those functional action systems were rational in the sense that they were based on shared rules, wherefore they could exceed the boundaries of local communities. In this sense, Münch (1990: 447–463) understands functional differentiation as a process that established rational action systems between local communities.

Münch adds that at the same time large-scale political and economic changes contributed to the formation of rational functional action systems. During three centuries, that is, from the 16th century to the 18th century there emerged in Europe a group of politically centralized and territorially wide states that unified and standardized administration of law and taxation, as well as the treatment of people within their territory. The power of those states or political authorities exceeded the power of local authorities, and, in fact, they subordinated local authorities through their power. In the first instance, Portugal, Spain, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Switzerland, Austria and Prussia belonged to those states. In this way, functional action systems could now develop rationally within a single territorial entity ruled by a state. In particular, the development of modern capitalism benefitted from this new situation, since modern capitalism needs and demands large market areas; but, on the other hand, modern capitalism itself also accelerated the formation of territorially wide states, since it created a structural pressure on the formation of states like these. From the 18th century onward, the first modern European nation-states took shape on the basis of the above-mentioned politically centralized and territorially wide states. In this process, the estate privileges were gradually abolished and common people and lower classes were accepted as the members of nations. Münch concludes that through this, social action and interaction were more clearly regulated by the rules and normative expectations that are typical of the functionally differentiated action systems.37

Münch’s thinking is an instance of “methodological nationalism”, that is, he holds that the concept of national society or national societal system is acceptable in theories of modern society. Luhmann was fairly critical of a thinking such as this. He did not, of course, deny the existence of modern nations and states, but he was inclined to think that the significance of nations has been decreasing since the beginning of the 20th century; on the other hand he stated that modern states can be understood as organizational systems that produce peace, stability, prosperity and democracy into their social environment. Thus, as Ole Thyssen (2007: 93, 95–96) remarks, the concepts of nation and state are included in Luhmann’s theory of modern society, even if Luhmann otherwise thought that the theory in question must be constructed on the basis of the concepts of functional sub-system and world society. In contrast to this, Münch underlines that politically centralized and territorially wide states as well as modern nation-states and modern national societal systems created the frames in which functional sub-system could develop and be established. The concept of a national societal system is, therefore, a necessary tool in a system-theoretical sociology. At the same time national societal systems have, of course, been part of a world society or world system. This means that both the concept of a national societal system and the concept of a world society or world system are acceptable in system-theoretical models of modernity or Western modernity. In a dual way like this, classics of the world system theory, in particular, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have often used the concept of system. Braudel (1985a; 1985b) places the first steps of the modern world system in the late 14th century, when a new and wide trading area emerged in the Mediterranean region; and Wallerstein (1995; 2000), in turn, regards the late 15th century as its starting point, since at that time Europeans became increasingly aware of other continents and began to exploit them. Thus, from a standpoint like this, the modern world system was born long before the emergence of modern society, for usually sociologists and system theorists regard the 18th century as the birth date of modern society. At any rate, the interesting thing in this connection is the fact that in Braudel’s and Wallerstein’s models the modern world system contains transnational, national and regional sub-systems. Münch’s (1993; 1998; 2001) own way of using the concept of system is close to Braudel’s and Wallerstein’s thinking.

It is interesting to note that certain disciples of Luhmann have modified his theory in a way that aims at taking into account the internal diversity of world society. Rudolf Stichweh shares with Luhmann the view that modern society and most of its functional sub-systems have been global formations since their birth, which, according to him, means that those global systems are even about 500–600 years old. Thus, this seems to imply that Stichweh does not place the origin of modern society into the 18th century but into the 15th and 16th centuries, although one could add into this that at the beginning the development of modernity was slow and it was not until the 18th century that functional sub-systems were able to displace aristocratic estate systems. Otherwise Stichweh thinks that modern world society does not lead to a homogenization of the world, because there are national, regional and local structures, communities and cultures within this global societal system. Yet, like Luhmann, Stichweh underlines that nowadays world society is the only societal system in the world. (Stichweh 2007: 133–136, 146–147). On the other hand, Jenő Bango (2008) represents a train of thought that there are regional – and also national and local – functional sub-systems as well as other kinds of “region-systems” within modern world society.

Let us return to Münch’s thinking. According to him, the concepts of functional differentiation and interpenetration are necessary in models of Western modernity. In an analytical or ideal functional differentiation, functional sub-systems develop into
normatively autonomous formations. In a case like this, for instance, economic and political action has completely detached itself from moral, communal and religious regulation. In contrast, when a state of functional differentiation is based on society’s normative integration, functional sub-systems limit each other’s autonomy. This is, Münch continues, precisely what has happened in modern Western civilization:

Die Eigenart der modernen okzidentalen Sozialordnung ist im Vergleich zu den ausserokzidentalen Sozialordnungen nicht der höhere Grad der Rationalisierung und Differenzierung von Sphären im Sinne von Auseinanderentwicklung, sondern der höhere Grad der Integration differenziertierer Sphären[...]. Aus Interpenetration folgt normativ integrierte Differenzierung. (Münch 1988a: 545. Münch’s italics.)

[The specificity of modern Western social order, in comparison with Non-Western social orders, does not lie in the higher degree of rationalization and differentiation of spheres in the sense of separate development; instead, it lies in the higher degree of integration of differentiated spheres[...]. From interpenetration follows normatively integrated Differentiation. (Münch 1988a: 545. My translation.)

In interpenetration, two systems reciprocally penetrate each other’s areas. As a result of this, there emerge between them common and overlapping areas that contain elements of both of them. Münch (1984: 14; 1988b: 228) thinks that areas like these are normative by nature, that is, to a certain extent those systems share a common normative culture. However, it is also possible that two systems have common organisations – just as radio and television belong to the system of mass media, but, at the same time, they are important mediation institutions of works of art.

The age of the Protestant Reformation from the 16th century to the 18th century is a classic example of interpenetration. Already Weber thought that in Puritan and Calvinistic countries, especially, a religious-moral value system was capable of regulating economic activities, political attitudes and communal life widely. To be sure, art was mostly left outside a regulation like this. Art was usually seen as a “magical” and “irrational” phenomenon in Puritan and Calvinistic communities, and as such it was in contradiction with their ascetic and rationalistic view of Christianity. In this respect, the Protestant Reformation differentiated sharply between art and religion, whereas at the same time the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church used art, in particular, painting, sculpture and architecture as tools by means of which it propagated or disseminated its own theological doctrine to common people. Weber held that the age of the Protestant Reformation was an ideal phase in the history of Western civilization, because it created a religious-moral value system that functioned widely as a common normative culture in society. Münch (1994: 304; 1995b: 27–29) adds that there has been almost a similar normative culture in modern Western societies. People in those societies agree, for instance, widely on the idea that their state should legislatively guarantee for them certain rights of citizenship. Political rights, private ownership, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, personal or bodily integrity, legal protection and religious liberty might be the most central ones of those rights. The modern functional sub-system must function in a way that is in accordance with these principles; the principles at issue belong to the normative culture shared by the functional sub-systems. In this respect, Münch underlines in a Parsonsian way, there is a normative integration in modern societies. Luhmann, on the other hand, thought that Parsons laid too much stress on common values and norms – or that Parsons erroneously held that it is due to collectively shared values and norms
that modern society is a well-functioning whole. For Luhmann (1997c: 603–604), the integration of modern society is based on the principle that each functional sub-system has to adjust itself to the functions of the other functional sub-systems; in this sense, those sub-systems limit each other’s freedom. One can also say that Luhmann believes that a well-functioning co-ordination between the functional sub-systems explains the integration of modern society.

Due to the interpenetration, Münch argues, modern economics has not been a mere brutal Manchesterian capitalism, for a phase like this, as far as it has existed at all as such, forms only a relatively short period in the history of modern Western societies. In modern Western countries, the system of economics has not usually functioned apart from the rational economic policy practiced by the state; in this economic policy, economic activities have been adjusted to the values and goals of the rest of society. A mere differentiation theory does not suffice either to explain the societal-cultural reality of the United States of America, the leading Western country. Unlike in most of the Western European countries, religion still has a central position in the American agenda and societal-cultural reality; in the American way of life, religion is also closely connected with economics, politics and mass media – to the extent that these four spheres or systems are extremely firmly interlaced. In contrast, Münch (1986a; 1986b) points out, France and Germany have traditionally been state-centric societies in which the state has actively regulated, steered and controlled the rest of society.

The above-mentioned examples indicate that in the first instance Münch considers modern society on the basis of the so-called large or central Western countries; to countries such as these belong, above all, the United States of America, Great Britain, France and Germany. There are also small countries in Europe; among others things, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden can be regarded as such countries. Comparative sociological studies support the view that in these small countries the functional sub-systems have not been differentiated from each other as clearly as in large European countries. For instance, S.N. Eisenstadt (1987) points out that there are plenty of corporate features in the societal life of small European countries. These countries usually have a relatively small area and population, and their material resources are limited. For reasons like these, their economic, political and cultural elite groups have become accustomed to make co-operation, and through this different functional sub-systems have been closely interlaced in them. (See, also, Alapuro 1985.)

Likewise, the position of nationalism has been peculiar in small European countries. In their own studies of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm (1992) and Charles Tilly (1994) claim that since the late 18th century nationalism has in Western Europe, above all, been an ideology and a way of thought maintained by the state. In this respect, it was important that Western European states began to organise popular education and elementary schools for their population at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Ernst Gellner (1983) and Michael Schudson (1994) remark that it was just popular education and elementary schools that have perhaps been the most central social institutions or systems in the spreading of nationalist ideologies and nationalist ways of thought. As far as cultural systems are concerned, it is necessary to bear in mind that different kinds of symbols, myths and narratives as well as visual representations and musical compositions have been useful tools in the production or construction of nationalist ideologies and nationalist sentiments. Myths, narratives and representations on the origin of a nation and on its heroes, enemies, victories and defeats have made of nationalism a way of thought or a mental disposition that has appealed widely to common people (see, nearer,
Bennigton 1994; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1993; Smith 1991). The significance of culture was important, especially, in countries that did not have a long and glorious political history or that did not possess its own state. For example, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Norway and Poland were countries like these in the 19th century and in addition Germany was divided into several independent small states still in the mid-19th century. For this reason, in these countries nationalism was, first and foremost, elaborated upon by means of culture and art. In Finland, for example, public institutions and authorities, political leaders, nationalist movements and artistic groups and institutions developed the Finnish art life in close co-operation. No wonder then that in the 19th century and in the early 20th century Finnish art gave an expression to Finnish-National mentality, on the one hand, and it worked up or even constructed the Finnish-National identity, on the other hand. Likewise, “the Golden Era” of Finnish art places itself into the period at hand. In particular, the poets and writers Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Elias Lönnrot (author of the epos Kalevala), Aleksis Kivi and Zacharias Topelius, the painters Albert Edelfelt, Aksel Gallén-Kallela, Pekka Halonen, Juho Rissanen and Hugo Simberg, the sculptor Wäinö Aallon and the composer Jean Sibelius, who have been important figures in the development and construction of the Finnish-National identity, lived and worked at that time. Under the circumstances, in Finland art was both as a social and a cultural system closely interlaced with other social and cultural systems until the Second World War. Albeit an interpenetration like this has gradually decreased in Finland later, nationalist considerations and goals have, to a certain extent, belonged to the public or official cultural policy in Finland till the present-day.\footnote{On the situation in Finland, see, nearer, Heiskanen, Mitchell & Kangas 2002, Hroch 1985, Häyrynen 2006 and Sevänen 1998.}

In his own theory of modern society, Luhmann presumes that modern functional sub-systems are equal. Similarly, even if Münch is critical of Luhmann’s view of modern society, his interpenetration theory does not usually describe situations in which some of the functional sub-systems are more powerful than the rest of the functional sub-systems. Misheva (2005; 2006) correctly remarks that in real societies the situation is often different from that; as she herself says, the relationships between the functional sub-systems are not necessarily “symmetrical” in real societies. In this connection, she also points to Habermas' theory of the communicative action; in his theory, Habermas (1987a; 1987b) endeavours to show how in the course of the process of modernisation the powerful sub-systems of economics and politics began to penetrate the rest of the functional sub-systems and to undermine the peculiar value ground and rationality of those other sub-systems. In leftist sociology and system theory, the sub-system of economics has usually been regarded as the most important functional sub-system, but one should not forget that in state-centric societies the state has obviously obtained the position of the most important sub-system. Traditionally, Finland, France and Germany, among other things, were societies like these. Likewise, authoritarian societies, for example, during the periods of Nazism in Germany, Mussolini’s Italy and the Soviet Union, represent the extreme cases in which one political party controls the institutions of the state and the entirety of society (cf. Crook, Pakulski & Waters 1992). In authoritarian societies like these, the sub-systems of art and mass media also lost a great deal of their autonomy, and in many respects they became channels by means of which those in power propagated their own ideology.

One may ask whether theories of the modern system of art sufficiently take into account the phenomenon of interpenetration. Luhmann largely ignores this phenomenon, but what about Peter Bürger’s and Pierre Bourdieu’s investigations on the modern system
of art? Do these two leftist theorists give us a plausible representation or model of the modern system of art? As a tentative answer to this question we may say that both of them think that the modern system of art has been closely interlaced with the bourgeois or upper-class way of life and ideology. At least in this respect, they think that there has been a significant interpenetration between the sub-system of art and other sub-systems.

In his *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Theory of the Avant-Garde, 1974), Bürger presents a general model of the “modern” or “bourgeois institution of art”. By the concept “the institution of art” he does not point to the concrete production, mediation and reception institutions of art; rather he means by it the dominant conception of art in society. Traditionally, conceptions of art told social actors what the “essence” of art is, where the boundary between art and non-art lies and what kinds of functions art has (Bürger, Peter 1974: 26–35). Thereby the institution of art is, for Bürger, mainly a normative phenomenon, for he thinks that the dominant conception of art forms a social norm that regulates the production, mediation and reception of works of art. According to him, there has been four main phases in the development of the modern institution of art: (i) the period of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, (ii) the period of the autonomy aesthetics from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, (iii) the avantgarde movements in the early 20th century and (iv) the contemporary or “post-avantgardist” period. In particular, during periods (i) and (ii) the institution of art was closely connected with bourgeois mentality.

In the 18th century, the art life was dominated by the courts and aristocracy. Bürger writes that on the one hand they saw art as a source of aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment, but, on the other hand, art had for them a ceremonial function in the sense that they showed their power by means of it. The formed dimension manifested itself, in particular, in rococo art, whereas the latter function was carried out by magnificent gardens and palaces. At that time bourgeois art or Enlightenment art was eclipsed by the art of the courts and aristocracy. In contrast to the aesthetic-hedonistic dimensions of the art of the ruling class, the Enlightenment art served, first and foremost, pedagogic purposes, for it aimed at the moral-political education of its receivers. Therefore, in Enlightenment art, aesthetic, pedagogic, moral and political purposes were not sharply differentiated from each other. This can, for instance, be seen in that writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire practiced philosophical reasoning, moral-political education and societal criticism in their literary works, and Jacques Louis David’s paintings, whose topics placed themselves into world of antique mythology, expressed republican ideals in a resolute and radical way. However, after the terrorist events of the French Revolution (1789) and the wars of Napoleon Bonaparte and along with the rise of modern capitalism and modern industrial centres and metropolises, intellectuals and the devotees of art gradually adopted a new conception of art. According to this new conception, art should draw away from immediate or concrete pedagogic, moral and political purposes and cherish the ideal of “general humanity”. A relatively autonomous art like this served, in the first instance, aesthetic or aesthetic-spiritual purposes, wherefore its forms and compositions had to be beautiful and organic. Bürger underlines the point that during the period of autonomy aesthetics art stood for qualitative or alternative values for intellectuals and the devotees of art: those circles understood art and its aesthetic worlds as a hidden criticism of the world of “commerce and utility” – in other words, Bürger goes on by using Weber’s and Habermas’ conceptual vocabulary, art functioned for them as a critique on the instrumental or formal rationality prevalent in the modern systems of economics and politics.
In his investigation, Bürger also leans on Marx’s critique on religion. According to him, in the 19th century art began to obtain similar functions as religion had had in traditional society. Consequently, Marx is an important figure in the study of art, since it was him who has understood the double nature of religion. Marx did not conceive of religion as a mere false consciousness or illusion: religion was, for him, simultaneously a symptom of a real societal misery and a protest against that misery. However, because the protest that is included in religion orientates itself to the pursuit of transmundane life, religion does not attempt to abolish the mundane misery but it leaves everything unchanged. “In advanced bourgeois society”, Bürger concludes, art has been institutionalised as an ideology in the same way (Bürger, Peter 1974: 26–30). In the 19th century, the aesthetic worlds and the human values of art formed a utopian counter-reality to modern society that was incapable of realising those values in practice. Those values could live only in art and not in reality; therefore, the experiences and visions offered by works of art functioned as a compensation for the shortcomings of modern society. Like religion, art functioned as a certain kind of surrogate for a better life, and through this it actually helped individuals to stand the imperatives of modern society and also to adjust themselves to modern society. In this respect, the sphere of art has basically had, Bürger concludes, an affirmative function in bourgeois society.

Later the sphere of art differentiated more and more clearly from non-aesthetic functions. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, aestheticism and “art for art’s sake” movement were prominent phenomena in the European art life. Their best-known representatives were perhaps certain British writers, painters and critics: Charles Swinburne and Oscar Wilde in literature, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the other pre-Raphaelites in painting, as well as Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Walter Pater in criticism and theory of art. Broadly speaking, impressionistic painting, music and literature can also be seen as a part of these phenomena. The proponents of these phenomena were often worshippers of beauty, and they thought that art should not bother itself with non-aesthetic tasks; it is just by concentrating on its own aesthetic-spiritual tasks and by cultivating its own aesthetic forms that art makes itself necessary for people. The extreme proponents of a train of thought like this saw art mainly as a source of sensuous pleasure and they regarded the forms of art, instead of its contents, as a cause for aesthetic pleasure aroused by art. In this phase, Bürger states, art became, therefore, more formal. The avant-garde movements of the early 20th century revolted against a state like this in the art life. In Bürger’s interpretation, movements such as Dadaism, surrealism, futurism, experimental art in the Soviet Union, Brecht’s political theatre and Heartfield’s photo montages aimed at returning art back to the “life practice”; that is, they wished to abolish the differentiated sphere of art (Bürger, Peter 1974: 63–75). In this way Bürger understands, for instance, Duchamp’s ready-made works which do not physically differ from the objects of daily life. However, the avant-garde movements did not manage to realise their goals. Because the differentiated state of the sphere of art is the result of a general process of functional differentiation, it cannot be abolished with mere artistic manifests and provocations. The avant-garde movements could have realised their goals only if they had been capable of changing the basic structures of modern societal-cultural reality. In spite of their failure, those movements have enormously influenced the subsequent sphere of art. Bürger points out that “the post-avantgardist” sphere of art is still a differentiated formation, but in it works of art are no longer, in the first instance, beautiful and organic wholes but rather heterogenous and fragmentary things.

Thus, to a certain extent Bürger takes into account the phenomenon of interpenetration. His model of the modern institution of art is, however, rather abstract and general by
nature. Although it raises several interesting aspects concerning the modern sphere of art, as such, it does not manage to describe any concrete or national system of art. As far as Germany is concerned, Bürger’s model ignores Germany’s state-centric traditions, the phenomenon of nationalism and the period of Nazism. In his own investigation, _Les règles de l’art_ (The Rules of Art, 1992) Bourdieu is historically more concrete than Bürger is, for his investigation describes how the French field of art gained its relatively autonomous position. Still, in the mid-19th century, only a small minority in France demanded a wide autonomy for the sphere of art. To a minority like this belonged, in particular, the poets Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire and the novelist Gustave Flaubert: they were afraid of that the bourgeois, that is, the new ruling class will subordinate art to economic and political purposes. In this phase, the claim for autonomy was, therefore, a heroic phenomenon in French society. However, at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the claim for autonomy was prevalent in the French field of art; in this phase, it was no longer necessarily connected with the anti-bourgeois attitude. Along with the claim for autonomy, an aesthetic attitude become common in the field of art. In this respect, Bourdieu (1992: 17–71, 75–164, 175–181, 393–458) states, impressionistic painters were an important group, since they showed that a work of art does not necessarily need to possess a pedagogic, moral or political function – or that it does not necessarily need to include any “message”. Instead, it can correctly be received as an aesthetic composition or as a structural-formal whole.

In the 20th century, the aesthetic attitude has been prevalent in the French field of art. During the same time, this attitude has also been closely connected with an upper-class habitus. By adopting an aesthetic attitude, upper-class devotee groups of art have, in Bourdieu’s distinction theory, unconsciously attempted to distinguish themselves from lower classes that have been unable to draw complicated distinctions between different attitudes or codes. In this sense, an aesthetic attitude would have formed only a part of the upper-class habitus or strategy that the upper-classes use to distinguish themselves from other classes. The lower classes are not particularly interested in art, and when they do indeed happen to deal with works of art their attitude is a mixture of various – moral, aesthetic, cognitive, practical – valuation principles or codes. Similarly, when receiving art, representatives of the lower classes are, above all, interested in its contents and themes and in its relations to reality, whereas upper-class devotee groups use to pay more attention to art’s techniques and to its formal-structural side. In this way, Bourdieu describes different social classes in his _L’amour de l’art_ (The Love of Art, 1969) and _La distinction_ (The Distinction, 1979) of which the former is written by him and Alain Darbel. In Bourdieu’s distinction theory, a clear-cut differentiation of codes is a situation that corresponds to the cultural interest, life style and habitus of the higher social classes. In this sense, the field of art or its dominant sub-field would have been interlaced with the upper-class life style and habitus in France since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Bourdieu 1979: 16–67). To be sure, often or usually Bourdieu writes as if his own observations and generalisations do not hold true only for France but also for other societies, and, in fact, in _L’amour de l’art_ he and Darbel explore museum visitors in France and in certain other European countries (Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain). Yet, it seems that despite this his investigations are firmly rooted in the French soil. It is open to what extent they, in fact, hold true for other societies.

Both Bürger and Bourdieu have stated that besides “high or “pure art” there has been a sub-field of mass culture or commercial art in the modern field of art. However, unlike high or pure art, this sub-field has not been closely connected with the upper-class life style and ideology. Because Bürger and Bourdieu have attempted to de-mystify and de-
naturalize the aesthetic attitude and the upper-class ideology, they have largely ignored the sub-field of mass culture or commercial art. The sub-field of mass culture or commercial art has rather transparent connections with the system of economics, and it seems to be mostly politically conservative by nature. In contrast to this, still in the decades after the Second World War, the dominant conception of art in Western culture and society stated that high or genuine or authentic art is independent of economic, political and ideological purposes – or that it considers the world from the point of view of general humanity, wherefore it is neutral with regard to a particular class or group interests. Bürger and Bourdieu have attempted to show that a conception of art like this does not correspond to societal reality; the conception in question conceals the state of affairs that basically modern aesthetic high culture expresses upper-class intellectuals’ mentality and their ambiguous position in modern society. Their position is ambiguous in the sense that they are close to the ruling class, but at the same time they are critical of its economic and political courses of action.
4 CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE LIGHT OF POSTMODERN THEORIES AND SYSTEMIC SOCIOLOGY

4.1 From the Expansive Welfare State and its Cultural Policy towards a More Market-Based Cultural Policy

Theories of postmodernity hold that, roughly speaking, from the 1960s on Western societies have gradually moved from modern culture and society to postmodern culture and society. These theories state that a change like this began in countries such as the United States, France and Great Britain, and later other Western countries would have undergone a similar structural change as well. Some theorists tend to see postmodernity only as a new phase in the development of modernity, while others do not hesitate to think that it is a qualitative new era in the history of civilization. Often these two groups of theorists are also willing to change the conceptual vocabulary of sociology; that is, they suggest that concepts such as “society”, “system” and “differentiation” do not suit well for the description of contemporary societal-cultural reality.

Let us first take into consideration the concept of differentiation. Several theorists of postmodernity have claimed that during the last decades the societal-cultural developmental process has taken a new course. If, they continue, modern civilization was characterised by the structural principle of functional differentiation, then the contemporary societal-cultural reality has turned into the opposite direction; in other words, the structural principle of de-differentiation is more and more typical of it. According to them, a turn like this is caused by profound changes in economics, information technology and mass media. One may, however, ask why theorists of postmodernity used to ignore here the phenomenon of the expansive or classical welfare state. It seems that in a certain sense already the expansive or classical welfare state represented the process of de-differentiation.

Western countries began to construct their welfare states after the Second World War, and, roughly speaking, by the 1970s and 1980s those welfare states had entered financial crisis, whereafter the countries in question began to de-construct or unburden them. In the United States and Great Britain, this new or “neo-liberalist” phase began in the late 1970s and in the 1980s President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher belonged to its most active spokesmen. On the other hand, in countries such as Finland and Sweden the neo-liberalist turn took place gradually in the 1980s. In his investigation, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990: 3) remarks that the most central thing in different types of welfare states was the idea of social rights. Social rights were seen as the things that let people improve their own standard of living regardless of pure market forces. Consequently, those rights decreased citizens’ status as commodities and at the same time they produced de-commodification into

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39 In this connection, Lash (2002: 207) has also used the concept “indifferentiation”. As far as I can see, it means, roughly speaking the same as the concept “de-differentiation” means.
society. Different models of welfare states also included the idea that as a last resort it was the state or society that had to make sure that its citizens can utilise their social rights and live in socially secure surroundings; usually the state offered to them, therefore, a social security like this from public tax funds. However, the level of social security varied from one country to the other country; in this connection, Esping-Andersen (1990: 26–29, 51–52) distinguishes between three kinds of Western countries. The level of social security was lowest in Anglo-American countries that realised the liberal model of a welfare state. Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States belonged to these countries. In them, the general consensus was that people should get on without the help of the state, so they directed social benefits chiefly to the poorest groups of the population. The conservative model of a welfare state was prevalent in countries such as France, Italy and West-Germany which, on the one hand, favoured traditional families and the motherhood in their social policy, and, on the other hand, did not encourage women to have a paid job. The social democratic model of a welfare state was carried out in Scandinavian countries – that is, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden – and also countries such as Finland and the Netherlands were close to it. In these countries, social benefits were directed towards the whole population, and thus they followed the principle that social security financed by the state must concern every citizen.

Different kinds of welfare states attempted to protect their citizens from the harmful effects of pure market forces. At least in the cases of the conservative and social democratic models, constructors of welfare states shared the idea that it is the state, and not the market forces, that as a last resort must rule and lead the entirety of society. Therefore, an era of expansive or classical welfare state expanded the tasks and duties of the state. In many countries, the state actively regulated labour markets and wage policy and it controlled, financed and guided systems such as health care, education, science, art and mass media. Under these circumstances, it is perfectly justifiable to ask whether the expansive welfare state represented the process of de-differentiation. How could different functional sub-systems preserve their relative autonomy and, as Luhmann believed, their “autopoietic way of functioning” during the era in question? Was Luhmann, in fact, rather blind with respect to the above-described development?

Although the era of the expansive welfare state seems to contradict Luhmann’s general view of modern society, it is not necessarily in sharp contradiction with his view of the modern sub-system of art. It might be undoubtedly true that during the era of the expansive welfare state several functional sub-systems were organisationally, administratively and financially interlaced with the state; at least in these respects the era in question represented the process of de-differentiation. As far as the normative level is concerned, we may justifiably presume that the decades of the expansive welfare state reduced the normative autonomy and independence of functional sub-systems, since during that period Western states actively endeavoured to regulate the whole of society – for example, by giving rules and instructions that functional sub-systems had to follow. However, the important thing here is the fact that the sub-system of art seems to have been a special case during the era of the expansive welfare state. Namely, often the state strove to respect its wide autonomy; at least a generalisation like this holds true for the sub-system of art in Western European countries. Western European states started with the principle that the sphere of art has a special function in culture and society. Oliver Bennett writes that in British public cultural policy that special social function was associated with art’s civilising mission:
I now come to what has been the most important and influential idea behind British cultural policies. I call this “the civilising mission”. It has its roots in the response of artists to the rapid growth of industrialism during the nineteenth century. The arts came to embody essentially human values which the development of industrialised society was seen to be destroying. The arts and culture thus had civilising powers [...] If art and culture were to have a civilising mission, then the question had to be asked of whether or not the market was a suitable vehicle for it. The answer was emphatically “no”. Indeed, the popular culture which thrived on the market was seen to be inferior. It was therefore necessary to use the resources of government to provide alternatives which could further the civilising mission. It was argued that without subsidy only the immediately popular would survive on the market. (Bennett 1995: 22–23.)

Because of its special social function, art had to be a relatively autonomous sphere in society, and it was the duty of the state to protect the autonomy of the sphere of art against pure market forces and instrumental thinking. This is the core of the autonomy doctrine that, according to Bennett, emerged in Great Britain in the 19th century, although the British state took the role of the active initiator in cultural policy just after the Second World War. Let us recall that Peter Bürger termed the doctrine in question “autonomy aesthetics”; according to him, it was still the dominant conception of art in Western society in the early 20th century. This doctrine stated that only as an autonomous sphere is art able to carry out important and long-term social functions; that is, it is just by concentrating on its own aesthetic and aesthetic-spiritual tasks that the sphere of art would be highly functional for the rest of society. As a Finnish public document, Valtion taidekomitean mietintö (The Finnish State's Committee Report on the Arts, 1965), puts it:

Art achieves social functions just by being art: the better it is, the most lively influence it has on people and the biggest significance it has as a factor that arouses creative powers in all kinds of human work. (Valtion taidekomitean mietintö 1965: 50. My translation.)

The committee report in question believed that the arts are capable of offering meaningful activities to people during their leisure time, and through this the arts lessen the alienation and dissatisfaction that the modern industrial wage work and the urban way of life often arouse in people. Bennett (1995: 23) points out that in Great Britain cultural politicians also believed that because art has a cultivating influence on its devotees, it restrains the emergence of political radicalism and participates in the maintenance of a peaceful social order. Generally speaking, the British and the Finnish states thought that it is the task of the arts to take care of the harmful mental side effects that the process of societal-cultural modernisation produces.

On the basis like this, Western European states established networks of museums, galleries, theatres, opera houses, concert stages, libraries and art centres. The underlying idea in a policy like this was the principle that works of art or cultural services ought to be available to every citizen – irrespective of their social class, sex, dwelling place and age. Cultural politicians themselves thought that the networks in question carried out principles of “the democratization of culture”; in other words, those networks made products of art available to the whole population, and in this respect the public cultural policy of the period of the expansive welfare state was based on egalitarian ideals. In
addition, in the 1950s and 1960s, radio and television stations owned by the states developed into important mediation channels of art; those stations also considerably increased people’s opportunities to take an active interest in the arts. To be sure, during those decades, public mediation institutions of art as well as public radio and television channels followed a rather elitist conception of art, for they gave priority to the products of high art or high culture over popular culture or mass culture. In this respect, the public cultural policy of the period at issue was paternalistic by nature, that is, it protected high art against the “pervasive” influence of popular culture or mass culture. However, in the 1970s this public cultural policy adopted a new dimension called “cultural democracy”, by cultural politicians themselves. According to this new dimension, the states and local authorities should also support people’s own and creative cultural activities, even if those activities would not reach the level and quality of professional art. Thereby the states and the local authorities began to support, for instance, groups and associations of the devotees of art as well as art education directed at ordinary people and children.40

Besides egalitarian and paternalistic ideals, the public cultural policy of the expansive welfare state in Western European countries included clear-cut nationalistic dimensions. The constructors and realisers of the public cultural policy did not only wish to protect high art or high culture against popular culture or mass culture. They also strove to protect their own country’s national art and its traditions against the flows of transnational or supranational mass culture that originated mainly from the United States. In particular, a dimension such as this was strong in France in which a separate Ministry of Cultural Affairs was established in 1959 during the era of President Charles de Gaulle. Until the late 1960s, the ministry in question was led by the formerly Marxist novelist André Malraux who sought to carry out a strictly paternalistic and high-cultural course of action (McGuigan 2004: 67). Speaking more generally, from the early 1960s on, Western European states began to financially support their own national film productions and protect those productions against American film producers and film mediators; in part, a policy like this made a flourishing of the European film possible (Beale 2002: 79). At the same time that policy raised the status of film and made of it a recognised genre of art.

As far as the United States themselves are concerned, even in the 1920s and 1930s, the status of art was not high in American society. On the contrary, Andreas Huyssen (1992: 167) points out that during that time the arts were not usually taken seriously in America. Rather they were regarded as mere luxurious things, wherefore only a small minority was interested in them. In addition, public authorities did not take an active role in maintaining the art world; the art world was, therefore, mainly based on markets and private sponsorship in the United States. In these respects, the art world was a differentiated and even isolated formation in American society, but, unlike in Western Europe, its differentiated status did not have a wide legitimacy. After the Second World War the situation changed rapidly, because now American art, in particular, abstract expressionism in painting as well as certain novelists and film makers attracted a lot of international attention; consequently, names such as Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko in painting, William Faulkner, Ernst Hemingway and John Steinbeck in literature and Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, John Huston and Orson Welles in film gained unquestionable international reputations in other continents. Simultaneously,

New York developed into the most important centre of art in the world. Still in the 1920s and 1930s, American artists used to study and work in European metropolises, especially in Paris, but after the Second World War the cultural exchange between Europe and the United States turned into the opposite direction, since now European artists and scientists began to study and work in the United States on a large scale (see Thernborn 1995: 361–362).

Serge Guilbaut (1984) has shown that the above-described development did not take place quite spontaneously. In the years of the Cold War, the CIA financed the activities of the Museum of Modern Art when this museum from New York organised exhibitions of American paintings in different countries; usually abstract expressionism had a pride of place in those exhibitions. Through exhibitions like these, the CIA strove to tell to the world that the United States is a country in which a genuine economic, political and artistic freedom as well as a wide ideological pluralism has come true. This indicates that the art world gained more legitimacy in the United States after the Second World War. According to Dian Crane (1987: 2–5, 137), it was just in those decades that the American art world began to grow, but its growth was especially rapid in the 1960s and 1970s; in 1980, for example, one million people in the United States were artists by profession, and even 67% of the American active museums were founded after the year 1940. In the early 1960s, the states of the USA also began to establish funds and councils in support of the arts, and in the mid-1960s the Federal government in Washington took a more active role in the art world, by establishing the National Endowment for the Arts (1965) that has co-ordinated and organised the public support of the arts in the United States (Martorella 1986: 32–34, 41). Yet, public authorities and institutions were not able to regulate the art world profoundly and widely, since the American art world has largely been based on markets and private activities.

In this respect, Western European and American art worlds clearly differed from each other in the 1960s and 1970s. In Western European countries, the public cultural policy was based on the principle of differentiation; in other words, in those countries, cultural politicians attempted to maintain rather clear boundaries between high and low culture, on the one hand, and between art and non-art, on the other hand. A cultural policy like this was also capable of effectively regulating the art life, whereas in the United States the art life took a different course. At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, Andy Warhol and the other pioneers of pop art made their debut in the American art world; in their works, they attempted to abolish the clear-cut boundaries that distinguished works of art from objects of daily life and from products of commercial mass culture and industry. According to Joni Maya Cherbo (1997: 91–95), the rapid breakthrough and success of pop art was possible, because influential art dealers and art collectors favoured it, despite the fact that certain respected museums and art critics adopted a rather negative attitude to it. Thus, pop art was avant-garde in the sense that it acted against the differentiated position of the sphere of art. Likewise, the avant-garde musician John Cage questioned the established boundaries between music and noise – or between music and relative silence –, and in the domain of dance modern dance groups expanded the scope of the art of dance. All of these artists criticised traditional boundaries between art and non-art. Of them, it was the movement of pop art that had a lot in common with the rock music of the 1960s and the early 1970s. Rock musicians such as Bob Dylan, Frank Zappa, Janis Joplin, Jim Hendrix, Joan Baez, Jefferson Airplane, The Mothers of Invention and Velvet Underground had conscious artistic goals: they, for instance, made important musical experiments and innovations and renewed the lyrics of rock music. In this sense, they, like the representatives of pop art, aimed at refuting the traditional boundary between art and
popular culture or between high art and low art. If we still add that in the 1970s feminist themes and feminist critique on the art world and society also became a significant phenomenon in the American art world, then we may, following Andreas Huyssen (1992: 188, 194–195), conclude that in the 1960s and 1970s the art world was rapidly changing into a postmodern formation.

In the 1980s or by the beginning of the 1990s at the latest, the era of the expansive welfare state and its cultural policy ended in the Western world. In sociological studies, the decades from the 1980s onwards has often been called an era of de-regulation or an era of neo-liberalist policy. Expressions like these attempted to explain that the regulation mechanisms which were built during the era of the expansive welfare state have been lightened or suppressed during the last two or three decades and, conversely, at the same time Western societies have been opened up to market forces on a new scale. Since the 1980s, Western societies have been ruled by a neo-liberalist policy that attempts to treat the whole of society and the rest of the world as markets. Thus, if most of the Western European people formerly lived in a state-centric society, nowadays they live in a market-based society.

To a growing extent, the sub-system of art has also been an object of neo-liberalist policy. As a result of this policy, the public financing of the arts has decreased in Western countries since the 1980s and 1990s. In this way, several art centres, museums, theatres, dance groups, orchestras, film productions and art schools have been privatised in those countries. However, the clearest exception in this respect might be France in which the state has not given up its own institutions of art, even if the rest of French society nowadays largely functions according to neo-liberalist principle41. In the case of culture, authorities and politicians as well as ordinary citizens in France still think that it is the duty of the state and public authorities to protect the sphere of art against pure and brutal market forces (McGuigan 2004: 65–70; Topler & Zimmer 2002: 34–36). Likewise, despite privatisation tendencies, in Nordic countries such as Finland and Sweden the art world is still largely dependent on the financial support of the state.42 In this respect, the situation is clearly different in Anglo-American countries, particularly in the United States. In describing the situation in the United States, Rosanne Martorella (1986: 32–34, 41) writes that in the mid-1980s the financial support that the business world gave to the art world was over three times bigger than the art budget of the Federal government, and it was nearly two times bigger than the common art budgets of the Federal government and the states of the USA. Nowadays Anglo-American countries such as Australia, Great-Britain and New Zealand underline the importance of the markets and private sponsorship, as well, but obviously the state has a more active role in them in the art life than the Federal government and the states have in the USA (see Caust 2003). At any rate, in the Western world, the state’s role as an owner of the institutions of art is decreasing. Furthermore, also the institutions of art that are owned by the state or public sector (provinces, cities, towns, villages) must nowadays more and more function like commercial enterprises.

41 In his last years, Bourdieu (1930–2002), among other persons, directed sharp criticism at neo-liberalist policy. See, for example, his Contre-feux. Propos servir à la résistance contre l’invasion néolibérale (1998) which has been published in English by the name Counterfire. Against the Tyranny of the Market (2002).

In his investigation, *Rethinking Cultural Policy* (2004), Jim McGuigan presents a summary of present-day cultural policy in Western countries. According to him, formerly cultural politicians thought that artistic or cultural values cannot be reduced to economic values: it was thought that it is impossible to explain the meaning, value and function of the sphere of art exhaustively with economic, political or pedagogic terms, because works of art function at the aesthetic-spiritual level (McGuigan 2004: 1–2). We can equally formulate this thought by means of Habermasian language; thus, the demand that art must serve economic or commercial purposes might destroy the specificity of modern art. For Habermas (1982a; 1982b; 1987a: 135–141, 225–366), the specificity of modern art lies in that it is a peculiar form of communicative rationality; that is, it represents aesthetic-expressive rationality. In this sense, Habermas continues, modern works of art deepen our knowledge of our inner self, and they help us to reflect upon the world and upon ourselves and to express ourselves better. Due to modern works of art, modern subjects are, therefore, capable of living more self-consciously and reflectively.

According to McGuigan, cultural policy has been reformulated in a way that it no longer points to art’s specific rationality. However, often these formulations chiefly concern the language and rhetoric of cultural policy, for McGuigan (2004: 59, 65–66) carries on that in practice all of the states belonging to the European Union still realise, to a smaller extent, the principles that were established during the era of the expansive welfare state. In this sense, the former principles of cultural policy have not disappeared altogether, but they have been eclipsed by principles which are more market-based by nature. The existence of the former principles can, for example, be seen in that the states within the European Union finance the art genres and art projects that would not be able to survive in a pure market competition. Likewise, the states in question support their national cultural production, albeit nowadays a support such as this is no longer directed only to national high art but also and to a growing extent to national popular and commercial culture. Moreover, Diana Crane remarks that, in fact, most of the Western states still protect their national high and popular arts from the flows of international or transnational mass culture. For example, in France the public radio stations must dedicate at least 50% of their music programs to French popular music, and comparable restrictions concerning the public supply of music can also be found in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden (Crane 2002: 14–15). Likewise, many Western states demand that at least a certain part of public television broadcasts must be domestic by origin; in practice, in some Western countries about 50% of the television programs are American by origin, whereas in other Western countries less than one third of the programs are from America (Crane 2002: 5–6). At any rate, albeit Western states have not altogether abandoned their old cultural policy, studies of cultural policy give strong support to the generalisation that nowadays the sphere of art has become a more commercialised phenomenon in Western societies. Crane (1987: 141–142) does not hesitate to say that in the United States the art world has, in many respects, become a part of entertainment culture, and obviously her conclusion is applicable also to several other Western countries.\(^{45}\)

4.2 Postmodernity as a Process of De-Differentiation

Thus, in the last decades, the public cultural policy has not treated the sphere of art as a highly differentiated social and cultural system and nor has it always actively defended its relative autonomy against other systems. Large scale changes in societal-cultural reality are, in general, in accordance with these changes in cultural policy. In this connection, it is not possible to get through all of the theories of postmodern or contemporary societal-cultural reality. Instead, it is useful to concentrate on those theories which pay attention to the sphere of art and its position in contemporary societal-cultural reality. Therefore, of the theorists of postmodernity this thesis considers, first, Scott Lash's and John Urry's thinking. Since the late 1980s, Lash and Urry have published several investigations of contemporary societal-cultural reality. In this connection, the most relevant ones of those investigations are their joint works The End of Organised Capitalism (1987) and Economies of Signs and Space (1994) and Lash's Sociology of Postmodernity (1992, originally published 1990) and Critique of Information (2002).

In their The End of Organised Capitalism, Lash and Urry (1987: 13–15) empirically consider the development of capitalism in France, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States, and on the basis of this consideration they make large scale generalisations concerning capitalism and Western societies. The investigation in question structures the development of capitalism into a liberal, organised and disorganised phase. With respect to the liberal phase Lash and Urry have not a lot to say, but private entrepreneurship and a liberal-individualist ideology were typical of it, and in that phase the state did not actively seek to regulate the system of economics. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the liberal phase was replaced by the organised phase. This new phase restricted the autonomy of the functional sub-systems, for during it the state and civil society, on the one hand, and the state and the economics, on the other hand, came closer to each other. In addition, the organised phase included powerful corporate features. During it, the state, political parties, trade union movements and the employers were in a close co-operation with each other. Lash and Urry (1987: 232–236) remark that in several Western countries corporate policy was basically a national project in which central social classes and collective organisations made, with the aid of the state, a compromise. As a result of this compromise, the working class obtained a high standard of living and social security, and for the employers it meant a state of affairs in which class conflicts were pacified and abolished from the domain of production; the state, in turn, developed most various forms of regulation by means of which it steered the rest of society. From a standpoint like this, the era of the expansive welfare state can be conceived of as an end period and as a culmination of the organised phase.

The shift to the disorganised phase has passed gradually and in a non-uniform way. Lash and Urry (1987: 7) write that in the Unites States and Great Britain "the crucial" signs or symptoms of this third phase were already evident in the 1960s, whereas in France comparable signs or symptoms emerged at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s and Germany and Sweden reached a similar state at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. In the disorganised phase, traditional industrial capitalism and the social, political and cultural structures produced by it have fallen into a process of dissolution. As a result of this process, traditional industrial production is losing its central position in society and the absolute and the relative seize of the traditional working class is decreasing, but, on the other hand, the societal significance of education and knowledge is on the increase and the service sector is changing into a central phenomenon in society. Furthermore, in the disorganised phase, industrial, finance and marketing enterprises grow and their marketing areas become international or global. Owing to changes like these, traditional collective
identities, in particular, class identities, political identities and national identities tend to become problematic in the phase of disorganised capitalism (Lash & Urry 1987: 7–8).

Already in the above-mentioned investigation, Lash and Urry (1987: 7–8, 13–14) state that at the cultural level the phenomenon called postmodernism could be understood as the cultural equivalent of the disorganised capitalism. Although a conception such as this seems to draw a mechanical connection between culture and economics, Lash and Urry (1987: 285) specify that there is not “a reductionistic relation” between postmodern culture and the disorganised capitalist economics. Thus, in the investigation under consideration they conceive of postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon, and not as a societal phenomenon. Largely in the same way Lash deals with postmodernity in his work Sociology of Postmodernism, for at the beginning of it he states that postmodernity must be understood as a strictly cultural phenomenon (Lash 1992: 3–4). Despite this, in the same investigation he also remarks that in contemporary societal-cultural reality the difference between the social and the cultural is tendentiously disappearing (Lash 1992: 11, 39–40, 43–45, 252). However, because passages like these do not dominate that investigation, we can perhaps justifiably say that in it Lash regards postmodernity chiefly as a cultural phenomenon. It is just in this sense that he compares modernity with postmodernity. According to him, the structural principle of differentiation was typical of modern culture. In other words, modern culture was based on dichotomies such as science versus art, art versus advertisement, art versus entertainment, art versus popular culture or mass culture, and art versus daily life; the first one and the last one of these dichotomies obviously represent horizontal differentiation, while the rest of those dichotomies represent vertical differentiation or cultural value hierarchies. In modernity, different cultural spheres were, therefore, highly differentiated from each other. Lash (1992: 3–4, 8–11) suggests that in modernity each cultural sphere itself elaborated upon the valuation principles which were used within it. Consequently, those spheres became self-legislating or autonomous at the normative level: they reached the state that was called normative “Eigengesetzlichkeit” by Weber. This means, Lash (1992: 9) continues, that “value within a sphere is dependent on how well a cultural object in the sphere measures up to the norms proper to that sphere itself”.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Lash gives us an overly autonomous picture of modern culture. His picture entirely passes over the interpenetrating zones between different cultural spheres or systems. As we have earlier noted, as a cultural system modern art has not been independent of moral standpoints; on the contrary, modern art has possessed a civilising function, and it has maintained qualitative values or communicative rationality in a society that is increasingly based on instrumental thinking. On the other hand, as a cultural phenomenon modern art has also been interlaced with national-patriotic value and meaning systems, and in many cases it has even actively constituted national-patriotic symbols and myths. At the end of the third chapter of this thesis we saw that Peter Bürger and Bourdieu have laid stress on the view that in an equal manner the modern sphere of art has been interlaced with the societal level. According to them, basically, modern aesthetic high culture has expressed upper-class intellectuals’ mentality or habitus and their ambiguous position in modern society.

In comparison with modern culture, postmodernity means, for Lash (1992: ix–x, 3–4, 11), cultural de-differentiation. In postmodernity, for example, the contrast between art and daily life has been refuted. For the most part, this phenomenon has been the result of changes in society’s media structure. Already since the 1960s, but, in particular, since the 1980s radio, television and other mass media have developed into central mediation institutions of art. Hence, nowadays the reception of works of art or cultural products often takes place in everyday life worlds or in the context of everyday
activities – housework, ways to work – without a real concentration on those products. Therefore, Lash (1992: 153–157) underlines, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) – and not Baudrillard, as some cultural theorists perhaps might have presumed - should be regarded as the paradigmatic theorist of postmodern culture. It was expressly Benjamin (1980) who, as a cultural theorist, first foresaw that the traditional distance between the works of art and their receivers on the one hand, and between the works of art and objects of daily life on the other hand tends to disappear along the development of modern technology and modern popular art genres.\(^4\)

On the vertical dimension, postmodernity means a state of affairs in which traditional dichotomies such as art versus popular culture, high culture versus low culture, art versus entertainment, and serious culture versus light culture are increasingly becoming lower (Lash 1992: 11). Unfortunately, Lash hardly presents any concrete examples of these processes. At any rate, it is interesting to realise that in the mid-1990s Timo Cantell also spoke about those processes in his own investigations on present-day cultural policy. According to him, nowadays the Arts Council in Great Britain, for example, comprehends the concept of art in a very broad way; besides traditional genres such as literature, theatre, opera, painting, sculpture, architecture and classical music, it regards design, fashion and the production of films, radio programs, television programs and tape recordings as art (Cantell 1994: 23–24). This indicates that the Arts Council has attempted to bring the sphere of art and economic life closer to each other. On the other hand, representatives of popular culture have themselves striven to bridge the gap between high art and popular culture. For example, in Great Britain the rise of the public status of rock music is partly explained by rock musicians of the 1960s and 1970s – such as Pink Floyd, Sex Pistols and The Who, who were fostering of art schools, and besides commercial goals they had conscious artistic goals. During the last decades BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) has also become internationally well-known for its good quality television series and documentary programs, and in this respect it has brought television culture closer to high culture. Finally, it should be noticed that during the last decades a new generation has entered into the circles of intellectuals and art critics; this generation has grown up in the atmosphere of popular culture, so it does not automatically, unlike several older intellectuals and art critics, experience popular genres as a cultural decline. Together institutions, actors and factors like these have institutionalising popular genres as art.

As far as works of art are themselves concerned, Lash thinks that postmodernist works of art and cultural products are more concrete and immediate by nature than modernist works of art were. According to him, modernist art favoured an abstract form of language, and in the sub-field of visual arts it included strong non-figurative and non-representative elements. In contrast to this, typical postmodernist works of art signify in a more de-differentiated way; that is, they signify by means of representative pictures, concrete figures and iconic signs (Lash 1992: 194–195). In cases like these, the distance between the sign and its referent is small, for the sign physically or externally resembles its own referent; in semiotics, these kind of signs are, therefore, understood as highly motivated. Because of this motivation, that is, because of the physical or external similarity between the sign and its referent, actors can usually immediately grasp where the sign refers to. In

\(^4\) Benjamin’s view of popular art has also been estimated in the collection of articles *Mapping Benjamin. The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (2003), edited by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Martín. Among other persons, Dirk Baecker, Antoine Hennion, Bruno Latour, Siegfried J. Schmidt and Niels Werber belong to its writers.
addition, Lash (1992: 99–100; 1994: 138–140) writes that, as compared with modernist works of art, postmodernist works of art give more space to desire, libidinous energy and corporeality. In this connection, he points to Peter Brook’s theatrical and dramatic performances which have been heavily influenced by Antonin Artaud’s “theatre of the cruelty”, but in the same way present-day dance art and body art as well as feminist, gay and lesbian art have dealt with the themes of corporeality and sexuality. On the other hand, when speaking about postmodernist works of art Lash almost entirely ignores that nowadays art genres such as novels, theatre, film and visual genres often refer to and comment upon themselves, previous works of art and art-theoretical problems – just as John Fowles’ famous novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) tells a love story from the 19th century’s Great Britain, on the one hand, and reflects upon the narration of the story in question and the conventions of the 19th century’s realistic novel, on the other hand. In contemporary art theory, works like these are usually called “meta-art”, because they deal with art-theoretical questions or because they are art about art. On the whole, nowadays art is more reflective or more conscious of itself; in particular, this holds true for genres such as the novel, theatre, film, performance and visual genres, wherefore they include a lot of features of meta-art. Due to this, the traditional dichotomy between criticism and art, or between critical and artistic discourse, has clearly become lower in contemporary culture. In this respect, meta-art undoubtedly represents the phenomenon of de-differentiation.

Thus, Lash’s and Urry’s *The End of Organised Capitalism* (1987) presents that traditional industrial capitalism and the social, political and cultural structures produced by it have fallen into a process of dissolution. According to the investigation in question and according to Lash’s *Sociology of the Postmodernism* (1990), postmodernity can be understood as the cultural equivalent of disorganised capitalism. Lash’s and Urry’s *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994) uses the concept of postmodernity in a different way; there they apply it to the entirety of present-day societal-cultural reality. Now they state that the whole of life in contemporary society is increasingly “culturally loaded” and, speaking more generally, modern or industrial society is changing into a “cultural society”, which means the perfection of the process of modernisation. A characterisation like this indicates that Lash and Urry regard postmodernity as a new phase of modernity, and not as a radically new societal-cultural formation. Cultural society is, for Lash and Urry, postmodern society. In that society, cultural dimension has obtained a pride of place in the economics and production and at the same time aestheticity has developed into a socially important phenomenon; nowadays aestheticity is not concerned only with art but also with economic production, everyday life worlds, social interaction and the identity formation of subjects (Lash & Urry 1994: 54, 132, 143). Both of these processes are closely connected with the dissolution of traditional economic and social structures and with the substitution of those structures by communication and information structures.

Of those two processes, let us first consider the role of cultural dimension in economics and production. Lash and Urry (1994: 4, 15) remark that nowadays economic enterprises do not produce only physical things and physical commodities but also, and to a growing extent, signs. These kind of signs can be divided into two classes: (i) firstly, they refer to the signs which have, in the first instance, a cognitive content and which are, therefore, post-industrial goods or information goods by nature; (ii) and secondly, they point to the signs whose content has, in the first instance, an aesthetic characteristic.

As for class (i), Lash and Urry emphasise that today the production, transfer and exploitation of information as well as its availability has formed into a central factor in the economic life. In present-day telecommunication and digital communication, it
is possible to transfer information easily from one place to the other place. Moreover, contact and communication between different parts of the globe is rapid with the help of computer networks, satellites and cables. Hence, organised capitalism has been replaced by disorganised capitalism or by a special economics of signs and spaces; this new phase of capitalism consists of de-centered information flows which exist in a global space.

Class (ii) comprises the signs or products which offer aesthetic pleasure, stimulating experiences and entertaining moments to consumers. Among other things, light music, rock music, films, television serials and videos are products such as these. Besides them, class (ii) contains the phenomenon that has been called “the aestheticization of goods” or even “the aestheticization of everyday life” in recent cultural and sociological studies. By “the aestheticization of goods” Lash and Urry mean that in present-day Western life styles the sign value or image value of goods (clothes, shoes, furnitures, household appliances, cars, apartments, houses, services) has been emphasised, and to consumers this value is often a more important thing than the concrete use value of goods is for them. In the same way, the design of goods is nowadays a central factor in the production of goods. At a more general level, one can say that nowadays the production and marketing of goods requires intensive research work, product development and design, whereas purely manual work has lost a great deal of its significance in the present-day economic production and in the value formation of goods.

Due to the above-mentioned two processes, the economic and the cultural have become closer to each other in postmodernity; that is, they are no longer sharply differentiated from each other. In all, economic activities have become more information-intensive in the sense that more and more they consist of the production, interpretation and application of information, knowledge and conceptual symbols. At the same time economic production and economic life have become aestheticized, which means that they are increasingly accentuated by the sign and image value of goods. For reasons like these, sociology ought to change its established view of societal-cultural reality:

The term “reflexive accumulation” looks like a contradiction in terms. Reflexivity is cultural, accumulation is economic. However, we use the term to enable us to capture how economic and symbolic processes are more than ever interlaced and inter-articulated; that is, that the economy is increasingly culturally inflected and that culture is more and more economically inflected. Thus, the boundaries between the two become more and more blurred and the economy and culture no longer function in regard to one another as system and environment. (Lash & Urry 1994: 64.)

The message of this passage seems to be unambiguous; according to it, the sub-system of economics and culture would have merged or they will merge in postmodernity. If this is what Lash and Urry basically try to say in their investigation, then one has to say that obviously they exaggerate the process of de-differentiation between economics and culture. In system-theoretical sociology, culture has been understood as a complex phenomenon. At the horizontal level, it consists of world views, representations, values, norms, languages, sign systems, habits, rituals and traditions; at the vertical level, phenomena such as religion, philosophy, science, art and moral have been its most appreciated manifestations, but equally well people’s lifestyles and their everyday life worlds have been seen as instances of culture. From this standpoint, it would, of course, be erroneous to claim that the sub-systems of economics and the entire complexity of culture have merged or that they will merge; at the most, it would be right to say that the
sub-system of economics has become increasingly cultural by nature. Although it remains unclear what Lash and Urry basically mean by the above-cited passage, their investigation does not adhere to a supposition that economics and culture would form a single system in postmodernity. Rather they simply attempt to avoid the concept of system in their descriptions of contemporary societal-cultural reality, because since the late 1980s they have been inclined to think that this reality is no longer clearly systemic by nature. On the contrary, contemporary societal-cultural reality is, according to them, in the process of dissolution or disorganizing (Lash & Urry 1994: 10).

In their investigation, Lash and Urry also deal with the process of de-differentiation between the cultural and the social, or between the aesthetic and the social. At a general level they think that in postmodernity previous social structures are being replaced by information and communication structures, which, in part, brings the cultural dimension in a new way into the heart of social life. In working life and the labour market, for example, actors nowadays constantly interpret different signs and messages, wherefore they often have to reflect upon their own ways of thinking and their own courses of action. In actors’ way of life, a phenomenon like this represents cognitive reflexivity, that is, a mental state in which actors analyse their own thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions. Likewise, the process of de-differentiation between art and everyday life worlds, the centrality of mass media and cultural industry in contemporary societal-cultural reality, as well as the aestheticization of goods and services have created a situation in which actors live amidst different signs, in particular, amidst visual signs. In a situation like this, they interpret those signs daily, which increases their capability for aesthetic reflexivity, that is, their capability for self-knowledge and self-expression. In these respects, present-day ways of lives are culturally loaded and aestheticized social phenomena. However, in this connection Lash and Urry (1994: 132) underline that they do not claim that the cultural and the social will merge or that the entirety of society will become aestheticized; rather they describe central tendencies in present-day societal-cultural reality. Despite this, the interesting thing here is again the fact that they hardly at all use the concept of system in their descriptions of present-day societal-cultural reality. Instead, they obviously think that clear-cut boundaries between systems are disappearing from that reality.

In their investigations concerning postmodernity, Lash and Urry are willing to apply the concept of “reflexive modernity” to contemporary societal-cultural reality. After all, they believe, postmodernity has released actors from established or rigid societal and cultural structures, and it is partly for this reason that living in this new phase of modernity requires growing capabilities for reflexivity from actors or individuals. By emphasising the new position of actors or individuals in postmodernity Lash and Urry use, therefore, the concept of reflexive modernity in a slightly different way than Ulrich Beck has used it. As it is well-known, the concept of reflexive modernity has, in particular, been elaborated by Beck who, in the first instance, considers the growth of reflexivity from the standpoint of society and its institutions. At the same time, all of these three sociologists share a critical and suspicious view of system-theoretical sociology. As far as Beck is concerned, he has

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45 See Lash & Urry 1994: 51-54. Lash has also considered aesthetic reflexivity in his article “Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community” (1994). Usually the concept of reflexivity means a situation in which a subject analyzes himself or herself, that is, a situation in which a subject is conscious of himself or herself. In Lash’s and Urry’s investigations, the concepts of cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity include a dimension like this, but those investigations do not clearly explicate what is the difference between cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity.

often directed his own criticism of system-theoretical sociology against the Luhmannian school; according to him, Luhmann’s concept of social system is rather rigid and inflexible, therefore it only has a limited use value in descriptions of contemporary or present-day societal-cultural reality (see, nearer, Beck 1994; Beck, Bonss & Lau 2004). However, a criticism like this implies that system-theoretical sociology could also be a useful tool in descriptions of contemporary societal-cultural reality - provided that it will renew its basic concepts. Unfortunately, Beck has not himself attempted to renew those concepts.

In fact, Lash and Urry seem to have adopted a rather similar attitude to system-theoretical sociology. Basically, they are not willing to give up the concept of system altogether; instead they admit that this concept might possess a limited use value in the descriptions of contemporary societal-cultural reality. In his Critique of Information (2002), Lash points out that his and Urry’s The End of Organised Capitalism (1987) speaks about “the dis-integration of institutions and organisations, of structures and systems” (Lash 2002: 207. Italics by Lash). Obviously he means that the process of disintegration and dissolution of traditional industrial-capitalist society has produced the dissolution of modern functional sub-systems, even if the concept of social system is hardly raised in the above-mentioned book by Lash and Urry. To the question of what kind of societal-cultural reality has come after traditional industrial-capitalist society Lash answers as follows:

[– – ] Manufacturing capitalism arises towards the end of a centuries-long (indeed millenia-spanning) process of differentiation: of structural differentiation and functional integration. It is the junction at which this differentiation of structures, systems, organisations and institutions reaches its high point, its summit. With the end of organised capitalism, this process of differentiation goes into reverse. It becomes a process of indifferention, leading to a generalised indifference of the many kinds of increasingly digitalized flows. It describes a process of the highest difference to one of generalised indifference. But at a certain point the indifference of flows starts solidifying in their own new territories, or should I say in their own new “de-territories”. These new (de-)territories are not structures, institutions, organisations and organic-systems. They are instead such entities as platforms, brands, non-places, junkspace and cybernetic, open systems. (Lash 2002: 207. Italics by Lash.)

In this passage, Lash contrasts “organic-systems” with “open systems”. He does not specify what he actually means by these concepts, but obviously the concept of ”organic-system” refers to the kind of system in which the parts are entirely subordinated to the whole; in systems like these, the parts do not possess any independence in relation to the whole. In contrast, open systems would perhaps be loose formations in which the parts are relatively independent of each other and of the whole; in systems like these, the whole does not entirely define the character and function of the parts. If this is what Lash has in mind in this connection, then he also could think that there are loose system-like formations in contemporary societal-cultural reality.

Likewise, it is interesting to note that Lash does not entirely disapprove Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems. In fact, he even thinks that in his theory of autopoietic social systems Luhmann has grasped the essence of contemporary societal-cultural reality quite accurately. Yet, it is not the concept of autopoiesis itself that is, for Lash, of crucial importance in Luhmann’s theory, and nor does Lash utilise Luhmann’s concept of social system in his own investigations. On the contrary, Lash does not regard the Luhmannian concepts of autopoiesis and social system as sociologically illuminating and useful tools.
Instead, Lash believes that it is just by basing his theory of society on the concept of communication that Luhmann succeeds in reaching the true nature of contemporary societal-cultural reality:

The real is a space of communication. And this is what makes Niklas Luhmann the paradigmatic sociologist, and along with Deleuze the paradigmatic thinker of the information age. What Luhmann has understood is that the social bond itself is no longer about exchange in the symbolic but has taken on the proportions of communication. The social bond is here compressed and stretched at the same time. And the communication is the fabric of the real. Information politics take place in conjunction with the communication. The argument of this book is that in the information age the centrality of the means of production are displaced by the means of communication: the centrality of production relations by relations of communication. Communication is here understood in its very broadest sense. The logic of flows is the logic of communications. With the domination of production there is a politics of struggles around accumulation (of capital). With the dominance of communication there is a politics of struggle around not accumulation but circulation. Manufacture capitalism privileges production and accumulation, the network society privileges communication and circulation. (Lash 2002: 111–112. Italics by Lash.)

According to Lash, contemporary societal-cultural reality is largely based on communication and circulation, whereas old industrial-capitalist society gave priority to the production of goods and the accumulation of capital. It is just this thing that Luhmann has understood perfectly well in his late production (Lash 2007: 65–66). Yet, from Lash’s standpoint Luhmann made an error in that he generalised too much on the basis of his observations concerning contemporary societal-cultural reality. Luhmann used the concept of communication as a cornerstone of his entire theory of modern and contemporary society, but – in Lash’s opinion – actually the phenomenon of communication has not become crucially important until contemporary societal-cultural reality.

Here Lash is, in fact, close to Stichweh’s thinking. Namely, when reflecting on the relationship between action theory and communication theory, Stichweh writes that action theory is “an intellectual phenomenon germane to industrial society” and communication theory, in turn, “can be classified as a kind of sociology adequate to information and knowledge societies” (Stichweh 2000: 11). This means that the contemporary phase of modern society and its functional sub-systems must be, in the first instance, understood by means of the concept of communication. Yet, Stichweh (2000: 12) admits that action theory has a limited value in analyses concerning contemporary society and its functional sub-systems, besides which it is a useful tool when one considers previous societies. Thus, largely in this way Lash seems to think in the above-cited passage.

Despite the appreciation that Lash gives to Luhmann’s late production, on the whole he and Urry call the use value of the concept of system into question in their production. To be sure, Lash admits that the concept of an open system has a limited use value in sociological descriptions of contemporary societal-cultural reality, but this does not change his understating overall view of system theory. In this respect, Lash and Urry think nearly in the same way as Bauman and Beck and several other sociologists think. But has the use value of the concept of system really sank as dramatically as these sociologists presume? Could this concept actually possess a wider application extension in sociology than they are ready to admit?
At the beginning of this thesis, I distinguished between social and cultural systems and divided social systems into interactional, organisational, functional and societal systems. Now, we can say that there are interactional and organisational systems in contemporary societal-cultural reality; for example, families, friendship circles and different small communities represent the former ones, whereas enterprises, factories, administrative institutions and states are instances of the latter ones. Probably Lash, Urry, Bauman and Beck do not deny the existence of systems like these. Hence, problematic entities in this connection are functional and societal systems. The concept of a functional system concerns the heart of the theory of modern society in the sense that several sociologists have thought that functional differentiation is the most central or at least an important structural feature of modernity. For this reason, theories of modern society usually pay attention to functional sub-systems and largely ignore interactional and organisational systems. And for the same reason, those theorists tend to think that it is just due to functional sub-systems that the structure of modern societal-cultural reality is systemic by nature; and conversely, if functional sub-systems are in the process of de-differentiation, then societal-cultural reality is basically losing its systemic nature and it is changing into “flows” or “social life”. I would myself, however, claim that fortunately we have other alternatives for the description of this situation.

In this connection, it is useful, for example, to analytically distinguish between simple and complex systems and elaborate the idea of system-likeness. For example, in his investigation General Systems Theory. Ideas and Application (2001) Lars Skyttner works on

### Table 6. Simple and Complex Systems According to Lars Skyttner.

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<th>Simple Systems</th>
<th>Complex Systems</th>
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<td>Number of Elements</td>
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<td>Interaction Between the</td>
<td>Highly Organised</td>
<td>Loosely Organised</td>
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<td>Elements</td>
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<td>Characteristic of Rules</td>
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<td>Characteristic of</td>
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<td>Relation to Environment</td>
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the distinction between simple and complex systems. According to him, simple systems contain few elements, the interaction between these elements is highly organised, clear and explicit rules regulate people’s action in these systems which possess a relative low degree of openness with regard to their environment. It should be borne in mind that a certain kind of openness is always characteristic of social systems, wherefore one must say that simple social systems are more closed than social systems usually are. Besides this, possible sub-systems in a simple system are weakly differentiated from the whole and they do not possess their own goals. In contrast, complex systems contain a lot of elements, the interaction between these elements is loosely organised and the rules that regulate people’s action in these systems are partly explicit and partly implicit, unwritten and informal. Complex systems also contain sub-systems which might, to a certain extent, be differentiated from the whole, which means that they might develop their own goals. With regard to their environment complex systems possess a relative high degree of openness. In addition, complex living systems possess a tendency towards entropy or dissolution; this tendency they strive to restrict and restrain, for example, by regulating their own operations and, as far as it is possible, by controlling their boundaries.

It should be borne in mind that the distinction between simple and complex systems is analytical. It offers to researchers a tool by means of which they can appraise to what extent real social formations and real social phenomena can be defined either as simple or as complex systems; besides this, it is, of course, possible that some social phenomena can not at all be conceptualised as systems. In the same way, researchers can use the concept of system-likeness. In the third chapter of this thesis we saw that Renate Mayntz (1988a; 1988b) has elaborated this concept at a general level – without proportioning it to the discussion on postmodernity and globalisation (see, nearer, chapter 3.4.). Her ideas have been extremely valuable from the standpoint of the argumentation chain of this thesis, but in this particular connection I would like to lean more on the ideas developed by Richard Münch (1991; 1995) as well as by Stephen Crook, Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters (1992). These four theorists speak about system-likeness chiefly in relation to the processes of de-differentiation. They do not, however, define the concept of system-likeness broadly and explicitly; for this reason, in this connection, I have myself worked on this concept by completing their ideas with Skyttner’s views of general systems theory. According to Münch, Crook, Pakulski and Waters, real social formations and phenomena can be more or less system-like. A social formation possesses a high degree of system-likeness, as far as it has its own specific function in society, it possesses a well-organised internal structure, there is a well-functioning co-ordination and division of labour between the elements of this formation and this formation is clearly differentiated from its environment. In addition, a social formation equipped with a high degree of system-likeness defines itself the tasks of its own elements, and it is able to self-regulate; that is, it regulates and controls the operations which take place within it. On the other hand, if a formation possesses a low degree of system-likeness, then its boundaries are vague, it has a loose internal structure and organisation, the co-ordination and division of labour between its elements is informal and only partial, and this formation can only weakly regulate its own operations and the action that takes place within it. In addition, a formation like this is not functionally sharply differentiated from its environment.

On the basis of the above-presented conceptual definitions it is tempting to equate simple systems with the high degree of system-likeness and, correspondingly, complex systems with the low degree of system-likeness. Although an equation such as this might be rather accurate in a broad outline, it is by no means acceptable in all cases. As far as simple systems are concerned, we may here use contemporary public cultural policy as an
example. Contemporary public cultural policy fills several criteria of simple systems, for it is usually a highly organised and strictly limited action which follows rather clear and explicit rules. On the other hand, a social formation with a high degree of system-likeness is clearly differentiated from its environment, wherefore it might possess a high degree of autonomy, as well. However, this feature does not hold true for public cultural policy that must be seen as a part of the political-administrative system or as a sub-system of it; because of a dependence like this, public cultural policy does not fill all of the criteria of the high degree of system-likeness. In addition, certain societies or societal systems can be regarded as complex systems with a relatively high degree of system-likeness. As far as I can see, this is, in particular, true of totalitarian societies such as Benito Mussolini’s Italy, Adolf Hitler’s Germany and Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union which were extremely organised and extremely centralised societies. Similarly, traditional Western nation-states or national societal systems were complex systems which filled several criteria of the high degree of system-likeness, even if they were not equally organised and centralised as the above-mentioned totalitarian societies were. And if Lash and Urry are right, we are justified in saying that during the period that lasted from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries to the 1960s and 1970s Western countries developed into rather highly organised societal systems in which the state actively regulated and led the entirety of society.

It is obviously possible to describe contemporary societal-cultural reality by means of the above-mentioned concepts. As, for example, Crook, Pakulski and Waters (1992), Lash and Urry (1994) and Münch (1991; 2001a; 2001b) have remarked, two large-scale processes are nowadays going on in Western societies. On the one hand, clear-cut boundaries between different functional sub-systems and between different cultural sub-systems are becoming lower and perhaps even disappearing. Crook, Pakulski and Waters (1992: 75) as well as Münch (1991: 23) apply system-theoretical concepts to the description of this process when saying that traditional functional and cultural sub-systems have become less system-like and less differentiated and autonomous. On the other hand, nowadays the activities in economic, political and cultural systems and in mass media constantly exceed the limits of national societal systems. According to Münch (1991: 135), together, these two processes mean a situation in which social systems are increasingly merging in single societies and single societies are increasingly merging on the scale of the world. Münch’s views seem to imply that the partial disintegration or dissolution of national societal systems is necessary, for it makes possible the emergence and development of regional and transnational or global social formations; these formations, in turn, are more or less system-like by nature. Consequently, Münch (see, nearer, 1993; 1995; 1998) points out that today citizens of Western European countries live somewhere between a “nation-state, regional autonomy and world society”.

In his descriptions of the ongoing societal processes, Münch does not relinquish the concept of society. On the contrary, in the 1990s he used to define the contemporary societal-cultural reality as “a communication society” that develops in an intensive and dynamic way (see Münch 1991; 1995). In contrast to this, Bauman, among other persons, has suggested that sociology should abandon the concept of society in studies concerning present-day societal-cultural reality. According to Bauman (1987; 1992), the concept of society refers to something which is fixed and stable – and which does no longer exist. Therefore, he continues, the concept of sociality should replace the concept of society, for it is better capable of expressing the dynamic and unpredictable nature of present-day societal-cultural reality. In this thesis, I have also, in several connections, used the concept of societal-cultural reality instead of the concepts of society and culture. A procedure like this does not, however, mean that I would like to abolish the concept of
society from sociology. I have used the concept of societal-cultural reality simply in order to show that I am aware of the present-day theoretical discussion concerning the concept of society. At the same time I believe that, with certain reservations, we can still speak, for example, about “American”, “British”, “Finnish” or “German” society. When speaking in this way we just ought to bear in mind that albeit those societies have their own territorial boundaries, they are economically, politically and culturally interlaced with the rest of the world.

In the Luhmannian tradition, the above-mentioned processes have been seen rather differently. Karl-Otto Hondrich (1992: 352), for example, writes that the process of globalisation carries on the process of functional differentiation. For him, the former process means that nowadays the power of economic, political and cultural systems exceeds the power of national societal systems, and it is in this sense that the process of functional differentiation is going on on a global scale. In the same vein Luhmann thought that the contemporary process of globalisation carries on the process of functional differentiation, although he at the same time remarked that basically both of these processes have been going on since the birth of modernity. For those reasons mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis, I am not ready to accept these thoughts, as such. Therefore, I would like to repeat that largely Luhmann denies that national societal systems and national functional sub-systems have existed during the era of modernity. This view, in part, makes it understandable as to why he does not recognise the ongoing processes of de-differentiation within contemporary national societies and between single national societies.

The concepts of simple and complex system and system-likeness might also help us to describe the position of the sphere of art in contemporary societal-cultural reality. Several investigations concerning the sphere of art speak convincingly for the view that this sphere has become a more complex system or formation and at the same time its system-likeness is on the decrease. Subsequent empirical studies of the sphere of art have to explicate, to what extent the process of globalisation has become true in the sphere of art; so far this process has not been explored enough. On the other hand, the process of globalisation of the system of mass media has interested researchers much more. In part, researchers like these have also dealt with the system of art, since those two systems are nowadays increasingly overlapping. However, despite this, at present, it is too early to make empirical generalisations concerning the globalisation of the system of art.47

4.3 Views of the End of Art

Lash’s and Urry’s models of postmodernity imply that the sphere of art has lost a great deal of its differentiated and relatively autonomous position in present-day societal-cultural reality. Nevertheless, they do not claim that the sphere of art would have altogether ceased to exist or that it would have completely fused with the rest of societal-cultural reality. In the study of postmodernity, it is Baudrillard’s and Vattimo’s writings that most clearly represent a claim like this, and Featherstone’s writings on consumer culture and the aestheticization of everyday life are close to it. Besides these three theorists of postmodernity and contemporary societal-cultural reality, certain representatives of the philosophy of art have spoken about the end of art. Without doubt, the most well-known

47 On the process of globalisation in the sphere of art see, for example, Crane, Kawashima & Kawasaki 2002 and Quemin 2006.
of those representatives is Arthur C. Danto, but in this connection one cannot ignore art philosophers and art theorists such as Donald Kuspit, Eduard Beaucamp, Jean Clair and Yves Michaud either, since their views of the contemporary sphere of art are interesting from the systemic standpoint.

Baudrillard’s (1983; 1997) and Vattimo’s (1988; 1989) writings often repeat the thought that contemporary Western societies are losing their own internal systemic structure or order. According to those writings, nowadays Western people live in a society that is characterised by the omnipresence of communication and media, as well as by the massive aestheticization of everyday life. Owing to phenomena and processes such as these, the entirety of societal-cultural reality would have changed into a texture of signs, images and pleasurable aesthetic objects - in short, into a certain kind of artificially simulated hyper-reality. Baudrillard points out that as a last resort these changes are caused by the rapid commercialisation of society, the present-day consumerist way of life and the development of information technology and society’s media structure. At any rate, Baudrillard (1983: 147–152) continues, due to its highly artificial and aestheticized nature, the societal-cultural reality is nowadays more and more an art-like construction, since a work of art is a paradigmatic instance of aesthetic human artifacts. In this sense, a peculiar sphere of art would have ceased to exist in contemporary societal-cultural reality. Similarly, Vattimo (1988: 51) states that there is no longer a differentiated sphere of art in societal-cultural reality: the dynamic expansion of mass media and the growing aestheticization of everyday life have suppressed the relatively autonomous sphere of art. Thus, Vattimo seems to think that the sphere of art would have fused with mass media and design.

The above-presented views by Baudrillard and Vattimo must be chiefly understood as conscious exaggerations, albeit they often write as if the sphere of art would already have fused with the rest of societal-cultural reality. One can also infer from their writings that, according to them, the sphere of art has not yet lost its differentiated position altogether. In general, Baudrillard adopted a highly rhetorical and suggestive way of writing whereby he usually expressed his major ideas in a rigid and dramatized form. Under the circumstances, he did not only speak about the end of art but also about the end of the social and about the end of the real; notwithstanding, other passages in his writings indicate that the sphere of art, the social and the real still continue to exist, at least in some sense. Similarly, Vattimo’s writings speak about the end of art, but at the same time they, explicitly or implicitly, admit that at present the sphere of art is still, to some extent, a differentiated formation. For example, at the beginning of his work La fine della modernità (The End of Modernity, 1985) he points out that in the era of the end of art single works of art call their own status as art and the established institutional frames of art into question; in particular, body art, street theatre and earth art should be interpreted as a questioning like this (Vattimo 1988: xxvii). Thereby, Vattimo presumes that at last the social institution of art or the social system of art is still a part of societal-cultural reality, albeit he predicts that the sphere of art will fuse with the rest of societal-cultural reality.

The social system of art and its constituents – in particular, art administration, art policy, museums, galleries, publishing houses, theatres, concert halls, art critics and theorists of art – classify artifacts and cultural products either as art or as non-art. From the standpoint of Baudrillard’s and Vattimo’s writings, a classification like this must more and more often look arbitrary, since those two theorists think that in several cases the products of art, mass media, advertisement and design do not any longer differ from each other and from the objects of every-day life sufficiently clearly; nor do works of art, therefore, form a
clearly differentiated class of artifacts or cultural products. To Baudrillard's and Vattimo's mind, this state of affairs is derived from the constellation that the entire societal-cultural reality is increasingly changing into an art-like and aestheticized construction. In the same way, Featherstone (1991: 270–271; 1993: 27) has spoken about the fusion of the sphere of art, mass media, advertisement, industrial design and people's life worlds. In this thesis, I do not aim at completely denying the existence of the processes in question, but I argue for the claim that Baudrillard, Featherstone and Vattimo have forgotten the other side of the coin. Namely, nowadays a relatively great number of the genres and layers of art have actually become estranged from the traditional art-likeness and the aesthetic conception of art. To put it simply: if the rest of societal-cultural reality has become closer to traditional art-likeness, then a relatively great deal of contemporary professional art has differentiated itself from traditional art-likeness. It is just in this sense that Christa Bürger (1986: 99, 104) speaks about the aestheticization of everyday life and the de-aestheticization of art.\footnote{Already in 1976, Dieter Wellershoff published a book {	extit{Die Auflösung des Kunstbegriffs}} (The Dissolution of the Conception of Art) in which he contrasts the de-aestheticization of art with the aestheticization of mass culture or popular culture. In this book, he is inclined to ignore the fact that certain institutions, genres and layers of art still maintain the aesthetic conception of art.} She does not mention individual genres and layers of art in this connection, but it might be easy to see that nowadays the aesthetic conception of art is often maintained by traditional institutions such as opera houses, symphony orchestras and museums, as well as by popular genres like light music, folk music, television serials, design and fashion. In contrast, the anti-aesthetic conception of art manifests itself, in particular, in modern dance, performances, body art, installations and assemblages. At a more general level the anti-aesthetic layers of contemporary art seem to indicate that the sphere of art is still, to a certain extent, a differentiated cultural formation.

Although Baudrillard's, Featherstone's and Vattimo's views of the end of art contain strong simplifications, their writings concerning the sphere of art raise interesting possibilities. They are certainly right in that the sphere of art is not an eternal thing but a historical phenomenon, and as such it might disappear in the future. Also, in his late production, Baudrillard pointed out that as a special sort of cultural activity art is nowadays disappearing. According to him, this ongoing process can be juxtaposed with the cultural change that took place between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The painters and sculptors of the Renaissance conceived of themselves first as manufacturers of religious objects and after that they found themselves as researchers of nature and human anatomy, but from the 18th century onward, at the latest, their action has been conceptualised as art. As far as contemporary art is concerned, it is not art in the same sense than the concept of art has been used since the 18th century. Baudrillard (1997: 7, 16–17) writes that "contemporary art" largely consists of reflections on the idea and concept of art, besides which it constantly feels an urge to critically comment on the boundaries of art. Thus, in this connection Baudrillard does not relate art to the aestheticization of everyday life and to the omnipresence of mass media and communication; instead, he speaks now about the phenomenon of meta-art. As it is well-known: in meta-art, the object of art is art itself. Because meta-artistic features are rather common in contemporary art, Baudrillard holds that art is nowadays transforming into a special theoretical discourse – and at the same time into a thing that might be called something else than art in the future.

Baudrillard's writings concretely show that cultural products can be classified in different ways. What is nowadays called the art of the Renaissance was originally labelled as religious objects and, through this, as a part of the system of Catholic Christianity; and
somewhat later the paintings and statues of the Renaissance were conceived of as studies of nature and human anatomy, which meant that the manufacturers of those objects were regarded as certain kinds of scientists. As far as cultural products are classified as works of art, a classification like this always takes place on the basis of some sort of conception of art. Traditionally, different conceptions of art aimed at defining what the essence and function of art is and how works of art differ from other cultural products. Usually it was held that cultural products must possess a humanly significant content and certain formal and stylistic properties before they can be accepted as works of art. In addition, it was held that works of art must contain certain external signs or signals by means of which devotees of art can recognise them as works of art. Criteria like these could not, of course, create an exact and unambiguous boundary between art and non-art, but in practice they helped devotees of art to distinguish works of art from other cultural products. On the other hand, if works of art were externally or physically entirely similar to other cultural products or if works of art lacked art’s conventional formal and stylistic characteristics and art’s conventional external signs and signals, devotees of art would become uncertain about what kinds of cultural products actually belong to the domain of art. Nowadays, the situation in cultural life is often like this. Because works of art have entirely or partly lost their distinctive characteristics, devotees of art can often wonder why certain artifacts have, on the whole, been placed on display as works of art. In the sub-system of art, for example, galleries, art museums and theatres function as outer signs or signals which tell social actors that places like these have been meant for the presentation of certain kinds of works of art. The contemporary sub-system of art undoubtedly contains galleries, art museums and theatres, but often these places present art as something that hardly at all differs externally from other human artifacts and activities. Therefore, the receivers of those artifacts and activities might easily wonder what really makes the artifacts and activities in question into works of art. Or alternatively, one could also say that in cases such as these social actors do not necessarily possess such a conception of art whereby they would be capable of identifying those artifacts and activities as works of art.

Conceptions of art also play an important role in Danto’s views of the art world and the end of art. For Danto, the idea of the end of art does not, in the first instance, refer to the process of de-differentiation between different spheres or systems, albeit he often remarks that nowadays works of art do not necessarily differ externally or physically from other objects and cultural products. He speaks about the end of art, among other things, in the sense that contemporary works of art can no longer be grasped as art by means of a single conception of art. In the contemporary art world, every single conception of art would exclude from the art world works which do not fill this conception’s criteria of art, but at the same time those works are defined as art by other conceptions of art. Therefore, the contemporary art world can be understood as a largely “unstructured” social formation that does not possess any unifying principle (Danto 1995: xiii, 4, 12, 48–51, 114). On the other hand, due to its different conceptions of art and due to its internal diversity, the contemporary art world functions “as a model of pluralistic society, in which all disfiguring barriers and boundaries have been thrown down” (Danto 2000: 431). Although Danto seems to outline a rather idealised model of the contemporary art world, his generalisations can relatively easily be translated into the language of system theory. System-theoretically his generalisations quite obviously mean that the art world has become a more complex system and at the same time its internal system-likeness is on the decrease.

What kind of role do conceptions of art possess in the art world? According to Danto, they are of crucial importance, since they participate in the constitution of the boundaries of the art world. Poems, novels, plays, compositions, paintings, pictures, statues, buildings,
installations and performances obtain the status of art only in a theoretical discourse. A certain kind of theoretical discourse produces the definition of art and the distinction between art and non-art; most clearly a discourse like this manifests itself in the academic study of art and art criticism, as well as in the everyday decision-making of art museums, galleries and other institutions of art. To put it simply: the above-mentioned cultural products belong to the sphere of art, because individual and collective social actors have learned to apply a special “art talk” just to them; that is, they speak and write about those products as works of art. Danto (1992: 40–52) defines the concept of art world through this. He understands the art world or the institution of art as an “institutionalised theoretical discourse” that includes a view of art’s basic nature and function and its boundaries. Thus, an institutionalised theoretical discourse like this contains some sort of conception of art. Speaking more generally, Danto presumes that the art world is not able to function properly without a conception of art.

Danto (1995: 47–48, 65, 125) divides the history of Western art into three main phases each of which has understood art’s nature, function and boundaries in its own way. By “art” he means, in this connection, mainly the visual art genres. Drawing on the ideas of the Italian Renaissance figure Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), he terms the first phase a “Vasari-episode”. In fact, this episode lasted from the 14th century to the 19th century, and during it art was largely understood as an imitation of reality; moreover, it was thought that in its progressive development art would be able to give us more and more precise representations of reality. When photograph and film were invented in the 19th century, the first phase was replaced by the second phase or by a “Greenberg-episode”. The second episode is the phase of modernism, and during it artists concentrated on art’s means of expression and on its formal side. The American art critic and the proponent of modernist art Clement Greenberg (1909–1994), who had an influential role in the American art life from the late-1930s to the 1960s, was one of the major theorists of art during that phase. However, Danto gives us a too homogenous picture of the phase in question. Roughly speaking, it might be true that from the mid-19th century to the 1950s the dominant conception of art saw works of art, first and foremost, as highly autonomous formal compositions. However, there were also other conceptions of art during that period. On the basis of Bourdieu’s (1992) and Peter Bürger’s (1974) investigations, we know that in the late 19th century proponents of realistic and naturalistic art laid stress on art’s content and on its social functions, and in the 1920s and 1930s avant-garde movements rebelled against the highly differentiated and autonomous system of art. Thus, these two conceptions of art competed with the dominant conception of art. At any rate, Danto writes that the third phase began in the 1960s, and, in part, this ongoing phase resembles the Middle Ages. Before the Renaissance, there were plays, poems, epic, paintings, statues and songs in European culture, but they were not conceptualised as (fine) art; the concept of (fine) art took shape somewhat later, in fact, in the period between the 16th and 18th centuries (see, nearer, Kristeller 1959). The ongoing phase differs from the Middle Ages in that it possesses the concept of art, but no single conception of art, or no single narrative concerning art, is any longer able to encompass all of the activities that are involved in the “making” of art. Nor is it possible to outline progressive developmental lines in contemporary art:

What has come to an end, rather, is a certain narrative, under the terms of which making art was understood to be carrying forward the history of discovery and making new breakthroughs [...] We face the future without a narrative of the present. We live in an afterwash of a narrative which has come to its end. (Danto 1992: 10.)
In these respects, Danto continues, the art world has nowadays come into a “post-narrative” or “post-historical” phase.

Although the time of “master narratives” seems to be over in the domain of art, Danto has constantly remarked that at least the nature of the visual art genres is nowadays fundamentally changing. For him, the visual art genres have not ceased to exist; that is, they have not died out. Rather, they are changing into a meta-art or into a special philosophy whose object is the art itself (Danto 1992: 217; 1997: 342). In other words, in the ongoing phase the visual art genres are fusing with the philosophy of art, and it is just in this sense that, according to Danto, the process of de-differentiation concerns the visual art genres. Consequently, when theorising about the contemporary visual art genres Danto largely ignores the fact that nowadays the omnipresence of communication and media and the massive aestheticization of everyday life have brought certain visual art genres closer to the world of media culture, advertisements and commodities. Danto has not been ready to take phenomena like these into account in his own conception of contemporary art. For this reason, his investigations do not provide us with a systematic overall picture of the contemporary art world.

In his art-theoretical investigations, Danto often deals with cases which are, from the standpoint of the philosophy of art, especially interesting. This is why Andy Warhol (1928–1987) has obtained a peculiar place in his production. According to Danto, it is, above all, Warhol whose works of the early 1960s, for example, his famous Brillo Box (1963) made traditional conceptions and definitions of art obsolete, and at the same time Warhol transformed objects of everyday life into art radically rejecting in this way the traditional distinction between high and low culture. The other philosophically especially interesting artist, for Danto, is Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) who first brought an art-philosophical reflection into the centre of art. Danto (2000: xi) remarks that from the standpoint of the contemporary art world Duchamp’s works are of paradigmatic importance, since nowadays the entirety of the art world follows his experiments. Likewise, Danto has leant on Hegel’s philosophy of art when elaborating his own conception of contemporary art. In this connection, Hegel is an important philosopher also for the reason that in his lectures on aesthetics he points to the possibility of art’s end. In Hegel’s overall philosophy, art forms a special phase in the development of the Absolute Spirit or Truth. Religion expresses the Absolute Spirit with the help of mental images and experiences and philosophy does the same thing by means of abstract concepts, whereas in works of art concrete figures, pictures and forms manifest the Absolute Spirit (Hegel 1976a: 13–33, 127–142; Hegel 1976b: 11–16). A concrete manifestation like this has come true best in classical art, in particular, in the sculpture of ancient Greece; only in it, the Absolute Spirit has obtained an unforced and successful artistic equivalent. To Hegel’s mind, in its subsequent development art became estranged from this ideal situation. In the Middle Ages and during Hegel’s own life time, there emerged something “disproportional” and “subjective” in the arts, which, was, for Hegel, an indication of the situation that art had carried out its own task in the development of the Absolute Spirit. From that era on, the development of the Absolute Spirit has leant more on religion and philosophy, which are, in comparison with art, “higher forms” of knowing and consciousness. About the end of art Hegel spoke in the sense that he placed art’s bloom into the past. After the classical period, art has still existed as a concept and as single works, but those works do not possess a similar historical significance as the works of the classical period do. Therefore,


religion and philosophy take, in part, care of the historical task that formerly belonged to the art, but, on the other hand, in this process art also comes closer to philosophy and actually Hegel predicted that it might transform into a special kind of philosophy.

Danto and Hegel do not speak about the death of art; instead, by elaborating the idea of the end of art they underline that art’s historical significance is changing in an important way. In his own investigations, Danto also pays attention to different conceptions of art. On the basis of those investigations it is, therefore, possible to comment on Luhmann’s view of art briefly. In his system-theoretical sociology, Luhmann presumed that each modern autopoietic functional sub-systems functions with the aid of a single medium and a single medium code. As far as the sub-system of art is concerned, he first held that in this sub-system the category of Beauty is in the position of medium and the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful is, correspondingly, in the position of medium code. However, later he began to think that those positions belong the category of Fittingness and to the distinction Fitting/Non-Fitting. Obviously, the medium and the medium code of the sub-system of art raise or express the conception of art on which the functioning of the sub-system of art is based. From a standpoint like this, we can conclude that Luhmann was usually inclined to think that there is only one conception of art in this sub-system at a time; that is, he excluded the possibility that several conceptions of art could coexist in this sub-system. We can also formulate this conclusion otherwise by saying that Luhmann did not take into account that a certain kind of art-theoretical pluralism has been characteristic of Western systems of art. A pluralism such as this already occurred in the system of art in the 19th century and in the early 20th century, but an especially important feature it is in the contemporary system of art.

Albeit Danto has worked on the idea of the end of art, he is not a cultural pessimist. His art-philosophical investigations imply that human beings will always write poems, tell stories, sing songs, play music, paint pictures, present dramatic performances and perhaps also reflect upon activities like these, but in different cultures and in different historical eras these things are not necessarily classified in the same way. Nor does Danto claim that nowadays the art world is disappearing or dissolving; instead, he claims that contemporary art forms a cultural phenomenon that concentrates on art-philosophical reflection. And as an art-philosophical reflection, contemporary art differs both from traditional art and philosophy’s conventional discourse; it is just for this reason that contemporary art is a special and a new kind of cultural phenomenon – or, we might say, cultural system. Thus, it is possible to translate Danto’s views into the language of system theory. In Münch’s terms one can perhaps say that in part this new kind of cultural system is situated in the interpenetration zones between art and philosophy, and as such it is not reducible to traditional art-likeness nor to philosophy’s normal discourse.

A more pessimistic tone is included in Donald Kuspit’s art-philosophical investigations in which he utilises general systems theory when formulating his own view of the contemporary art world and contemporary art. In Kuspit’s (2004: 2, 14, 43, 51, 83) opinion, nowadays the art life or the system of art is in a state of entropy or internal dissolution which is caused by the commercialisation of its operation principles. This remark resembles Danto’s view of the “unstructured” nature of the contemporary art world, although systems theorists might add that a tendency to entropy is usually more or less characteristic of all of the complex systems. At any rate, Kuspit writes that as a result of the commercialisation, art is nowadays largely changing into a special kind of entertainment and the institutions of art, correspondingly, tend to function as some sorts of entertainment centres which offer stimulating experiences and different kinds of services to their customers. A rather similar generalization has been made by Diana Crane (1988: 141–142) – but without the pessimistic tone that is typical of Kuspit’s
writings. According to Kuspit, in the contemporary art life economically successful artists such as Warhol and Jeff Koons (born in 1955), who glamorise the banality of the everyday life and commercial publicity, manifest most clearly the operation principles of the commercialised art world. To be sure, Kuspit (1995: 65, 70, 84, 92, 101–102; 2004: 80, 83, 152–153) adds, there have in the contemporary art world also existed figures such as the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), who continued the spirit of the avant-garde movements, but unfortunately he does not represent the art world’s mainstreams. In all, the state of art was entirely different in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when art had a rather similar function as religion had in traditional and premodern society. Traditionally, with the aid of a religious-metaphysical world view people were capable of finding profound meanings for their life and activities, and even for events of reality. Although religion lost a great deal of this function due to the secularisation of Western culture, people were not cast adrift in the modern world. According to Kuspit, in modern culture art has aimed at satisfying people’s existential needs and by means of it they have often been able to give meaning to their life and experiences. Nowadays, art is, however, rapidly losing this existential function. In the present-day commercialised art world, art is changing into a “post-art” that is banal, superficial and spiritually empty. For Kuspit, post-art means the end of genuine or authentic art.

Kuspit’s cultural pessimism might arise from the fact that in the first instance he theorises about the contemporary art world on the basis of the American art life. As we have already noticed in several different connections, in the United States the art life is largely based on markets and private sponsorship, whereas in Western Europe the state still has a relatively active role in maintaining art life; due to a role like this, the states of Western Europe are, in principle, capable of protecting the art life against pure market forces. To be sure, to a considerable extent the process of commercialisation is nowadays also taking place in the countries of Western Europe, but in the United States this process is more expansive and more fundamental than it is in Western Europe. Perhaps a constellation like this explains why Kuspit mourns the shrinking position and the diminishing status of the serious art or high art in the contemporary art world. However, rather similar pessimistic statements have been presented in Western Europe, as well. For example, in the early 1990s Eduard Beaucamp, a German art critic writing in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper, aroused a public discussion on contemporary art. In his opinion, contemporary art is spiritually exhausted and it has stopped developing; one important reason for this state of affairs is the commercialisation of the art life, which has forced artists and leaders of the art institutions to strive for popularity and economic profit. In Germany, some critics defended contemporary art against Beaucamp, but other critics were, like him, worried about the firm position of the economic values in the art life.51 Similarly, in the late 1990s Jean Clair, the director of the Picasso Museum in Paris, questioned the value of contemporary art and its experiences in his book Responsabilité de l’artiste. Les avant-gardes entre terreur et raison (Responsibility of the Artist. The Avant-Gardes Between Terror and Reason, 1997) which attracted a lot of attention and discussion in the French media. Shortly after its publication, Philippe Dagen, a journalist and professor of art history, brought out his own book La Haine de l’art (The Hatred for the Art, 1997) in which he expressed his approval for contemporary art and at the same time he defined Clair’s way of thinking as an instance of hostility towards art. On the other hand, in his investigation Crise de l’art contemporain (Crisis of the Contemporary Art, 1998), Yves Michaud, a well-known philosopher and theorist on art, followed Clair in that he also declared that

51 On this discussion, see Bürger, Peter 2001: 135–137.
contemporary art is in a state of crisis, wherefore it is incapable of satisfying its devotees' deeper spiritual needs.

Thus, theorists who have launched the idea of the end of art use the word “end” in different ways in their writings and investigations. Some of them speak about the end of art in the sense that, as a result of the process of de-differentiation, the sphere of art would fuse with the rest of societal-cultural reality. In particular, Baudrillard, Featherstone and Vattimo have represented a view like this. In the first instance, they have theorised about the cultural system of art, that is, about works of art which have, according to them, lost nearly all of their distinctive marks. Simultaneously, they do not necessarily deny that there still is an action system of art or a functional sub-system of art in society, but they tend to think that the established institutions of art can no longer effectively control the boundary between works of art and other cultural objects. On the other hand, other theorists speak about the end of art in the sense that the content of the concept of art would have changed fundamentally. For instance, Danto and Kuspit belong to theorists such as these. In their opinion, what is now called art differs sharply from the traditional conception of art, which means that nowadays the traditional way of conceiving art has come to its end. Therefore, contemporary works of art are not art in the same sense as traditional works of art were. Secondarily, Danto and Kuspit also refer to the process of de-differentiation when theorising on the contemporary art world. Danto holds that art is nowadays changing into a peculiar philosophy of art, whereas Kuspit emphasises that in contemporary culture and society art largely functions as an entertainment.

4.4 The Contemporary Sphere of Art from the Standpoint of System-Theoretical Sociology

Previous chapters have shown that according to theorists of postmodernity and globalisation two large scale processes are nowadays going on in the Western world and, also more generally, in the whole world. On the one hand, within single societies functional sub-systems are, to a growing extent, merging; and as a result of this process, those sub-systems have lost a considerable deal of their relatively autonomous and differentiated position. A train of thought like this emerges in Lash’s and Urry’s production as well as in Bauman’s and Beck’s investigations, although Beck speaks, in this connection, about reflexive modernity instead of postmodernity. The most radical theorists of postmodernity, in particular Baudrillard and Vattimo, hold that contemporary societal-cultural reality has entirely lost its systemic order or systemic nature. On the other hand, theorists of postmodernity or reflexive modernity have also presented generalisations on the ongoing process of globalisation. Lash, Urry, Bauman and Beck have all stated that nowadays economic, political and cultural activities more and more often exceed the boundaries of national societies and they are increasingly taking place on the scale of world society.

As far as the system of art is concerned, theorists on postmodernity usually hold that in contemporary societal-cultural reality this system has lost a great deal of its previous autonomous and differentiated position. A view like this is, for example, included in Lash’s and Urry’s investigations, whereas Baudrillard, Featherstone and Vattimo have stated that nowadays the sphere of art has merged with the rest of societal-cultural reality. It should be noted that in fact views like these are not necessarily bound to theories of postmodernity. The discussion on postmodernity was at its most active from the 1970s to the early 1990s, thereafter it was partly replaced by the discussion on globalisation; this change in academic intellectual conversation was not, however, sharp, since some theorists have conceived of postmodern society as a truly global world society. In recent
years certain theorists and researchers who did not participate in the elaborating of the idea of postmodernity have also spoken about the state of affairs that in contemporary societal-cultural reality the boundary between art and non-art is tendentiously disappearing. According to Yves Michaud (2003), a disappearance like this is due to the process of “artification” of societal-cultural reality, and, in the same vein, Jeremy Rifkin (2000) and Stefan Weber (1999b; 1999c) have stated that present-day generations are obviously witnessing a process in which the sphere of art is fusing with the rest of societal-cultural reality, in particular, with the spheres of capitalist economics and commercialised media.52

This thesis represent the stand that the process of de-differentiation, the artification of societal environment and the aestheticization of everyday life are actually characteristic of contemporary societal-cultural reality, at least in the Western world. At the same time, I think, however, that the most radical theories of postmodernity and de-differentiation exaggerate the meaning of those processes, which implies that nowadays the sphere of art has not, in fact, fused completely with the rest of societal-cultural reality. Nor do I share the view, presented in particular by Baudrillard and Vattimo, that the concept of social system has become obsolete in studies of contemporary societal-cultural reality. On the other hand, I agree with Bauman, Beck and Lash regarding the view that contemporary societal-cultural reality – or, should we say, observations concerning it – cannot be accurately grasped by means of traditional or rigid system-theoretical concepts; instead of those concepts, nowadays system-theoretical sociology needs more open and dynamic concepts. This thesis attempts to elaborate concepts like these by distinguishing between simple and complex systems and by developing the idea of system-likeness. When distinguishing between simple and complex systems the thesis mainly leans on Skyttner’s view of general systems theory that the thesis sociologically interprets and elaborates upon. The idea of system-likeness, in turn, is here based on Mayntz’s and Münch’s investigations and on Crook’s, Pakulski’s and Water’s views of contemporary Western culture and society; in part, the thesis sociologically develops the idea in question with the help of Skyttner’s distinctions. In all, these ideas and distinctions could be understood as explicit or implicit corrections to Luhmann’s concept of system.

When the idea of system-likeness is applied to the study of contemporary culture and society, this application results in a model in which an increasing interpenetration between functional sub-systems is characteristic of contemporary societal-cultural reality. In the process in question, functional sub-systems have changed into less system-like formations – in a way that is concretely described in Münch’s several topical investigations and in Crook’s, Pakulski’s and Water’s joint study of the postmodernisation of “advanced societies”. In the same way, the process of interpenetration concerns single national societies or single national societal systems. In this process, those societies have become more and more open with regard to each other – with the result that nowadays they form economically, politically and culturally a highly interlaced whole. As Münch53 points out, together, these two processes mean that a partial internal dissolution or disagisation of single societies has been a necessary condition for the concept that there have emerged global social formations which are more or less system-like by nature.

Let us still see how Luhmann replied to these views. Particularly in his last investigations, Luhmann emphasised that his own view of functional sub-systems and system-differentiation is based on the concept of communication, and not on the concept

52 See, also, Levanto, Naukkarinen & Vihma 2005.
of action. To his mind, usually theories of de-differentiation are based on the concept of action rather than on the concepts of medium and medium code. However, if we chose as our starting point the concept of action, we would be incapable of understanding what is actually going on in society:

Wer Handlungen beobachtet, wird typisch Mehrfache Systemzugehörigkeiten feststellen können, allein schon deshalb, weil der Handeldner selbst körperlich und mental als Zurechnungspunkt fungiert und außerdem eine Handlung sich, nach Motiven und Wirkungen, an mehreren Funktionssystemen beteiligen kann. Wer von Handlungen ausgeht, wird daher Mühe haben, die Theorie der Systemdifferenzierung überhaupt zu verstehen. (Luhmann 1997c: 608.)

[When observing actions one can typically notice that they belong to multiple systems, if only for the reason that, physically and mentally, the actor himself functions as a meeting point; in addition, an action can participate in several functional systems for its motives and effects. If one starts from the action, there will, in general, be some difficulty in one's understanding the theory of system-differentiation. (Translated by E.S.]]

Because human action is usually a poly-functional phenomenon, people often utilise several different codes simultaneously in their activities. This is why, in Luhmann’s opinion, it is not easy to understand the idea of system-differentiation by means of the concept of action. Instead, he stated, when we connect this idea to the concepts of medium and medium code, it becomes possible to realise that our society still consists of differentiated media and their corresponding systems. In Luhmann’s system-theoretical sociology, the differentiation of functional sub-systems is thereby, in the last resort, based on the differentiation of media and medium codes. He could, therefore, present and underline the view that functional differentiation is still our society’s dominant structural feature (see, for example, Luhmann 1997c: 612).

Luhmann is doubtless right in that theorists of de-differentiation have often used the concept of action as their starting point. In particular, when those theorists say that the operation principles of the system of economics are nowadays widely applied in society, they seem to point to the values, rules and conventions which people and social institutions follow in their activities. In this sense, for example, cultural politicians and the institutions of art and mass media have adopted economic principles in their action. Yet, the most radical theories of de-differentiation are not based solely on the concept of action. Baudrillard’s, Featherstone’s and Vattimo’s views of postmodernity are, at least in part, based on the thought that nowadays traditional differences between cultural systems or different artifacts have disappeared due to the processes of the artification of society and the aestheticization of everyday life. This means that, in part, they have considered the process of de-differentiation at the level of cultural systems, and not at the level of social action. Luhmann does not himself ignore that in contemporary societal-cultural reality works of art do not always differ externally from other cultural artifacts (see Luhmann 1997a: 482–483). He just claims that similarities like these do not refute the structural phenomenon of system-differentiation, because the differentiation of media and medium codes guarantees the prevalence of that phenomenon in contemporary society.

Nor could Luhmann accept the approach whereby most of the theorists of postmodernity and globalisation have considered the process of globalisation. Usually those theorists have understood the process of globalisation basically in the same way as Paul Bairoch defines it:
Globalisation refers to a situation where industrial and commercial companies as well as financial institutions increasingly operate transnationally, in other words, beyond national borders. (Bairoch 2000: 197.)

Here Bairoch takes into account only the sphere of economics, but in the same vein one could speak about globalisation in the domains of politics, social co-operation, ecological action and co-operation, military action and co-operation, science, communication, cultural production and distribution, sports, tourism and people’s mentality and consciousness. What ways of speaking like these have in common is the thought that in the process of globalisation certain phenomena exceed local and national borders and start to influence and operate on a wider geographical scale – as a last resort, on a transcontinental scale. These ways of speaking are not in accordance with Luhmann’s system-theoretical view of globalisation. As we have already noticed, when pointing to the process of globalisation Luhmann, on the one hand, emphasised that there can be no regional and national societies under the conditions of modernity, because, in his opinion, since its birth modernity has been a global phenomenon; for this reason most of the modern functional sub-systems have functioned in the world society for centuries (see Luhmann 1997b: 166–167). On the other hand, Luhmann (1995: 117) was ready to admit that the contemporary process of globalisation carries on and deepens the process of functional differentiation, wherefore, nowadays, functional sub-systems are more and more clearly parts of the world society.

For reasons such as these, Luhmann did not like the concepts of national society and national societal system. This dislike can be seen, for instance, in the fact that in his late production he hardly wrote any special study on single or national societies and nor did he want to speak about national functional sub-systems. Such being the case, he did not publish any investigations on the German sub-system of science or on the German sub-system of art. Instead, he just conducted investigations on “the science of society” and on “the art of society”, and in both of them he almost completely ignores national dimensions of the modern sub-systems of science and art. In this respect, he differs rather sharply from Münch whose investigation Die Kultur der Moderne (The Culture of Modernity, 1986a and 1986b) deals with modern culture in Great Britain, the United States, France and Germany. In contrast to Luhmann, Münch thinks that the concept of national societal system is a theoretically legitimate tool in studies of modern culture and society, and he also utilises this concept when describing the contemporary process of globalisation. This thesis shares Münch’s procedure in broad outline, for I hold that the concepts which refer to national societal formations are necessary for the study of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality. When utilising concepts like these, sociologists should, however, be aware of the fact that since the beginning of modernity national societal systems and national functional sub-systems have been relatively open formations with regard to other national societies and to other national functional sub-systems. The contemporary process of globalisation has just accelerated their opening up to the rest of the world.

As a whole, Luhmann believed that contemporary theoretical discussions on postmodernity and globalisation are partly based on erroneous views of modernity. Theorists of postmodernity and globalisation have often declared that there has emerged a radical break in societal development. Actually, Luhmann (1992: 42; 1994: 101; 1997c: 1143) points out, nothing like this has happened; regardless of what theorists of postmodernity have claimed, we live still in a functionally differentiated society, and as
for the process of globalisation, it cannot be regarded as a radically new phenomenon in societal development. In addition, theories of postmodernity are basically incompatible with Luhmann’s view of the use value of system theory. Namely, in his Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie (Social Systems. Outline of a General Theory, originally published 1984), he presents his sociological system theory as an “universal theory” that attempts to cover all of the societal and social phenomena (see Luhmann 1985a: 9, 19). Thus, he contrasted universal theories with partial theories; the latter ones are capable of covering only a certain part of the societal and social phenomena. This means that Luhmann was inclined to think that the entirety of the societal world or all of the societal and social phenomena can be conceptualised by means of system-theoretical sociology.

Theorists of postmodernity, de-differentiation and globalisation are hardly ready to accept a statement like this, for most of them have thought that nowadays societal-cultural reality has lost a great deal of its systemic nature. Likewise, I believe that Luhmann overestimated the use value of system theory in sociology. As Hans Joas (1997) has convincingly attempted to show, there usually are, besides system-like formations, also contingent phenomena as well as creative and spontaneous activities in societal-cultural reality; phenomena and activities like these do not follow an established “medium” or “medium code”, although gradually they might gain an institutionalised position in society and become, therefore, more system-like by nature. For example, graffiti and many innovations in rock-music were originally born as some sorts of rebellious phenomena, and it was only later that they were gradually integrated into the system of art. To be sure, a great deal of graffiti are still excluded from both the system of art and other functional sub-systems.

Let us then finally outline a general model of the contemporary system of art. This model is critical of the most radical theories of postmodernity, de-differentiation and globalisation and nor does it accept the Luhmannian system-theoretical approach, as such, although it does utilise both of these influential trains of thought. First, the model in question concentrates on art’s boundaries and on its relations to the rest of societal-cultural reality, it then pays attention to the internal structure of the system of art.

In their own critique on theories of postmodernity, Siegfried J. Schmidt and Brigitte Spiess (1991: 142, 160–162) wrote in the early 1990s that from the standpoint of system theory it is an exaggeration to claim that different spheres or functional systems would have merged nowadays. Albeit there is today, they go on, an increasing interaction between advertisement, mass media and art, these spheres are not one and the same thing. On the other hand, some years later Schmidt (1995b: 38) added that despite this nobody knows any longer exactly what art is and where the boundary between art and non-art goes. Traditional distinctions between different spheres have simply become so low that social actors are often unaware of the criteria by means of which they could recognise works of art in contemporary societal-cultural reality. These remarks are undoubtedly accurate, but at the same time it should be noticed that in all probability works of art have never really possessed entirely clear and unambiguous distinctive marks – although there perhaps existed in society a relatively wide agreement on the criteria of art in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence, it is likely that traditional aesthetic theories have been trying, in vain, to define exactly the distinctive features of works of art. And hence it is no wonder that aesthetes have now usually abandoned attempts of this kind. They have noticed that in the present art world almost everything can function as a work of art. For this reason it is no longer fruitful to ask: “What distinctive features do works of art have in common?” It is more reasonable to investigate when and how an object functions as art; that is, it is more productive to interrogate the ways in which works of art acquire their status or
how certain artefacts become accepted as art. Quite obviously there are, in contemporary societal-cultural reality, still certain institutions that stick to the distinction between art and non-art and attempt to distinguish important art from non-important art and non-art. I will soon also argue for the stand that there really are institutions such as these in contemporary societal-cultural reality.

In part, the artification of societal-cultural reality and the aestheticization of everyday life have contributed to the state of affairs that the boundary between art and non-art as well as the criteria of art have become increasingly ambiguous. The artification of societal-cultural reality and the aestheticization of everyday life seem to be closely connected with the disappearing of manufacture capitalism or traditional industrial-capitalist society whose cities and industrial centres used to constitute ugly and unpleasant social spaces. Because contemporary capitalism is largely based on the production, mediation and processing of information, it has not had equally dramatic and negative influences on societal-cultural reality. To be sure, serious ecological crisis and military conflicts are also possible in contemporary globalised and digitalised capitalism, but on the whole a capitalism like this has laid more stress on cultural matters and after having become general the consumer way of life has formed a productive ground for the two processes under consideration. Certain sociologists, for example, Featherstone (1991: 27, 123; 1993: 268–271) and Lash (1992: 158) have stated that the artification of societal-cultural reality and the aestheticization of everyday life continue the programmes of the avant-garde movements, since all of these phenomena would have bridged the gap between art and non-art. However, as Wolfgang Welsch remarks, it is erroneous to equate these two processes with the goals of the avant-garde movements:

This everyday aestheticization is not, as some theoreticians believe, about an accomplishment - albeit an unsatisfying way one - of the avant-garde programmes to extend and break down the limits of art. On the contrary: when Beuys or Cage pleaded for an extension of the concept of art and a breaking down of its boundaries they were thinking that something which wasn't art should be understood as art – and the conception of art would thereby be altered or extended. In today's aestheticization, however, it is quite the reverse: traditional artistic attributes are being carried over into reality, daily life is being pumped full of artistic character. This corresponds not to the programmes of the avant-garde, but at best to older aestheticization programmes like Schiller, the System-Programme of German idealism, Werkbund, and so on. Admittedly, in the current aestheticization these too seem only to being accomplished as a programme to further the kitsch. (Welsch 1997: 3.)

In contrast to the avant-garde movements, the current aestheticization largely serves economic purposes. In contemporary commercialised society, homo aestheticus is becoming a new role-model; a person like this is, according to Welsch (1997: 5), "sensitive, hedonistic, educated and, above all, of discerning taste" – and he or she knows "that you can't argue about taste". Thus, we may say that a person like this is highly functional from the standpoint of the systems of economics and business. Besides design and the aestheticization of goods, the current aestheticization includes mass culture or mass media whose products – light music, rock music, films, television serials, videos, music videos, advertisements – people can more and more consume in their leisure time. In all, the aesthetic has, therefore, become a central constituent in Western ways of life. Echoing Habermas' theory of the communicative action, Christa Bürger (1986: 99)
writes that nowadays “the aesthetic crosses the boundaries of the institution of art and penetrates into all aspects of social existence” and even, we may add, colonises those aspects. When pointing to this same phenomenon Münch (1991: 139–141, 145–148), on the other hand, speaks about the growing interpenetration between the aesthetic and societal-cultural reality, but to his remark one has to add that an interpenetration like this has not been symmetrical; on the contrary, it has largely taken place according to the conditions of economics and business.

Thus, the artification of societal-cultural reality and the aestheticization of everyday life have brought contemporary culture and society closer to traditional art-likeness, that is, to a period in which art still, first and foremost, served aesthetic purposes and it was usually regarded as a source of aesthetic pleasure. Likewise, nowadays the operation principles of the institutions of art have made the boundary between the sphere of art and the rest of societal-cultural reality lower. In the current neo-liberalist situation, public support for the arts has been decreasing in Western countries. At a more concrete level, the neo-liberalist course of action has manifested itself in two ways: on the one hand, public cultural institutions have been privatised, and, on the other hand, other public cultural institutions and, more generally, other cultural institutions must nowadays, more and more, function like commercial enterprises. For this reason Bourdieu (1998) doubted in the late 1990s whether it is still justified to classify the sphere of cultural production into fields of restricted production and large-scale production. Formerly, Bourdieu (1992) had thought that the latter – that is, the sphere of “commercialised art” and “popular culture” – serves mainly economic purposes, whereas the former or the sphere of “pure” or “genuine” art is largely autonomous with regard to economic, political and other external purposes. As a result of his doubts and reasoning, he stated that the field of restricted production has not entirely lost its relative autonomy, but its independence is seriously threatened by market forces and the neo-liberalist social policy.

Together the artification of society, the aestheticization of everyday life and the new operation principles of the institutions of art represent the process of de-differentiation in societal-cultural reality. Besides them, there are in reality tendencies which point in the opposite direction, that is, to the process of differentiation. Those opposite tendencies maintain the difference between the sphere of art and the rest of societal-cultural reality. Of them one can first mention the de-aestheticization of art. In her own estimation of postmodernity, Christa Bürger (1986) regards the de-aestheticization of art almost as an equally important tendency as the aestheticization of everyday life and the omnipresence of commercial mass culture; obviously she thinks that the de-aestheticization of art concerns, in the first instance, the so-called serious art, although certain popular genres, for example, American horror and action films often contain brutal violence and other aesthetically and morally unpleasant scenes.

Christa Bürger does not present a list of contemporary de-aestheticized art genres, whereas Habermas has been more concrete in this respect. According to Habermas (1973: 118–120; 1982b: 102), art genres such as conceptual art, earth art, happenings, science fiction and multi art are instances of de-aestheticized art; of those genres multi-art consists, in fact, of works which mix different genres up. Likewise, modern or contemporary dance, installations and assemblages are usually incompatible with the aesthetic conception of art, and the most radical representatives of feminist art have aimed at shocking devotees of art, instead of pleasing them. One important layer in contemporary art consists of works which explore human relationships and reveal everyday life’s self-evident social conventions and rules and collectively shared beliefs. For example, Roy Vaara, a Finnish performance artist has presented several performances in public spaces such as streets and
market places. One of his performances took place in the Red Square in Peking; in that performance Vaara wore a black suit and he stood exactly in a visible place at the same time shaking hands with people who were walking in the Red Square - with the result that suspicious Chinese police men paid attention to him and started to ask him questions. In this way, Vaara’s performance brought to the fore the network of control and power that dominates people in China. In his *Ésthetique Relationelle* (Relational Aesthetics, 2001), Nicolas Bourriaud, a well-known French art critic and philosopher of art, applies the concept of relational aesthetics to works like these, but actually the word “aesthetic” does not suit well a description of these works - simply because their primary purposes are not at all aesthetic by nature or because they are not necessarily aesthetically pleasant objects or events.

This remark indicates that it is possible to speak about de-aestheticized art at least in two different senses. First, we may say that art can be de-aestheticized in the sense that it does not please our senses; in other words, works of art like these are physically ugly, repulsive and unpleasant. Secondly, works of art can also be de-aestheticized in the sense that they do not primarily aim at arousing sense impressions in their receivers; instead of impressions like those, they aim at mediating ideas and thoughts to their receivers. For example, contemporary serious theatre plays, dance performances, visual works of art and the most radical feminist works of art are often de-aestheticized in the first-mentioned sense, whereas Duchamp’s ready made works, Marina Abramovic’s performances, Joseph Beuys’ “actions”, Roy Vaara’s performances, and conceptual works of art represent de-aestheticized art in the latter sense (cf. Sederholm 2000: 17). In all, de-aestheticization is a relative strong tendency in contemporary serious art, but as such it is not an entirely new phenomenon. In the Middle Ages, pictures, statues and churches were not built for aesthetic purposes; on the contrary, they embodied religious meanings and the world view of the Church. In fact, it was not until during the Renaissance that the category of beauty became important in art, in particular, in visual art genres. From this standpoint, contemporary art represents a phase in which the aesthetic conception of art is losing its long-term dominant position in culture.

Because de-aestheticization is an important phenomenon in contemporary serious art, it is not justified to presume – as certain representatives of critical theory have done – that the aestheticization of everyday life would automatically destroy art’s critical potentialities. Rather it seems that it is often just by becoming estranged from the aesthetic conception of art that contemporary works of art are clearly capable of presenting a critical attitude towards market forces and their instrumental demands. We can clear up this general remark with the help of the following example.

On the one hand, performances and installations as well as works of earth art, body art and community art are critical of commercialization and capitalist markets in the sense that they do not aim at arousing pleasant aesthetic experiences in receivers; that is, they do not want to be aesthetic entertainment. On the other hand, they are critical also in the sense that it is often impossible to treat them as commodities; that is, they cannot be bought by galleries, art dealers, collectors and museums. Thus, their material way of being resists commercial treatment. Partly in the same vein works of environmental art use to resist commercialization, although most of them probably belong to the domain of the aesthetic conception of art.

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Examples such as these imply that at the level of cultural systems works of art have not entirely melted with other kinds of artifacts or cultural systems, even if their external or physical hallmarks have become increasingly unclear and ambiguous. Consequently, the structural principle of differentiation has not lost all of its validity in contemporary culture. Likewise, certain institutions in societal-cultural reality are interested in the distinction art/non-art, and in their daily activities they maintain it. To institutions such as these belong, among other things, public cultural policy, art administration, art museums, art galleries, art criticism, study of art, schools of applied arts, associations of artists and societies and foundations for the arts (cf. Schmidt 1995b: 40). It is the task of empirical sociological study to clear up what kinds of differences there are between single countries or societies in this respect. Quite obviously public cultural policy and art administration are more important factors in Western European countries than they are in the United States; in Western Europe, in particular, in countries like Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, cultural politicians and art administration are still central actors in the art life, whereas in the United States their meaning and role is rather limited. This means that in Western European countries the state and the public sector are, in principle, more able to protect the art life against pure market forces. And, in fact, the states within the European Union also protect the art life, for example, by financing the art genres and art projects that would fade in a pure market competition. However, at the same time those states have attempted to bring the sphere of art closer to industrial design, cultural industries, mass media and marketing. Albeit they stick to the distinction art/non-art, they have, to a considerable extent, lowered traditional distinctions such as art versus commerce, art versus entertainment and art versus cultural industry.

Hopefully, the above-presented remarks have shown that – as Christa Bürger (1986: 106) puts it – the institution of art or the system of art is still a relatively “vital” social formation despite the fact that it contains certain tendencies to entropy. However, at the same time one must admit that theorists of postmodernity or reflexive modernity are right in that contemporary societal-cultural reality cannot be accurately grasped by means of a rigid concept of system. To my mind, Luhmann’s system theory represents a rigid thinking such as this. In his theory of autopoietic social systems, he mainly attempts to consider the things that separate different functional sub-systems from each other. According to him, an autopoietic system has its own medium and medium code on which its function is based; these two things, that is, a specific medium and a specific medium code would separate it from other functional sub-systems. Such being the case, as Luhmannians we could say that, for instance, the system of science is autopoietic if its own methodological criteria determine the production and estimation of scientific knowledge. Similarly, the system of art would be autopoietic if it possessed a specific medium and a specific medium code by means of which the communication concerning works of art takes place. However, in this thesis I have stated that the systems of science and art are not autopoietic in this strict sense; in other words, they do not use only their own internal criteria but also criteria that they have in common with other functional sub-systems. Following Mayntz (1988a; 1988b) and Münch (1994) I, therefore, propose that the concept of autopoietic social system is acceptable if we express differences in degree with the help of it. According to this train of thought, functional sub-systems can be more or less autopoietic and, as far as contemporary societal-cultural reality is concerned, nowadays their degree of autopoiesis is decreasing. On the other hand, Luhmann did not accept a conceptual procedure like this, since, for him, social systems were simply either autopoietic or non-autopoietic formations.
Similarly, the concept of autonomy can be used for the expression of differences in degree. It is possible to speak about the autonomy of social and cultural systems from several different standpoints. Firstly, a system is normatively autonomic if it imposes on itself the rules on which its function is based on; in a case like this, other systems and external actors do not have a possibility to make decisions about the rules of that system. Secondly, a system is structural-causally autonomic if the events, processes and structures of its environment do not have an influence on it. And thirdly, a system can be said to be functionally autonomic if it has a specific function in societal-cultural reality, that is, if a certain function has been delegated to it. Traditionally, system-theoretical and systemic sociologists have thought that social systems are open formations, wherefore they are

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 7. A List of Contemporary Genres of Art</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional System of the Arts. This System Emerged in the mid–18th Century</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature, especially, Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloquence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>During the Period 1850–1960 New Genres of Cultural Products Were Accepted as Art</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Decorative Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interior Decoration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art of Hand Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial Art</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Since the 1960s, the Concept of Art Has Become More and More Expansive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern Dance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happening</td>
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<td>Performance</td>
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<td>Body Art</td>
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<td>Conceptual Art</td>
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<td>Installations</td>
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<td>Assemblages</td>
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<td>Environmental Art</td>
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<td>Earth Art</td>
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<td>Community Art</td>
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<td>Animation Art</td>
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<td>Children’s Art</td>
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always, at least in part, dependent on their environments. This means that social systems can be autonomic only in a relative sense; whereby the concept of relative autonomy had a firm place in traditional system-theoretical and systemic sociology. By utilising this concept one can say that in contemporary societal-cultural reality the relative autonomy of societal systems and functional sub-systems has been on the decrease.

Perhaps contemporary societal-cultural reality could, in an equal manner, be described with the aid of a distinction between autopoietic and poietic systems. A distinction like this has been made, among other persons, by Misheva, whose investigation Shame and Guilt. Sociology as a Poietic System (2000) contains an appraisal of Luhmann’s system theory and it elaborates the concept of poietic system. Misheva does not discard entirely the concept of autopoietic social system, but she holds that it has a limited use value in sociology. To her mind, the Luhmannian theory of autopoietic social systems, as such, is chiefly applicable to organisational or non-living systems, whereas living systems need a different theory. It is just in this connection that she introduces the concept of poietic system. Poietic systems are producing systems, but they are not self-producing, which means that they have been constructed by external actors and factors. Poietic systems are open formations that do not themselves define their own boundaries, since “their boundaries become defined by the external boundaries of the autopoietic systems” (Misheva 2000: 233). Along these dimensions poietic systems differ from autopoietic systems which are operatively closed and self-producing systems. In addition, Misheva thinks that originally autopoietic systems have developed from poietic systems. But is it possible that societal evolution could also take place in reverse order; in other words, could an autopoietic system change into a poietic system? And if this is possible, are we today witnessing a process in which national societal systems and functional sub-systems are increasingly losing their autopoietic features and becoming closer to the concept of poietic system? Although it would be rather tempting to answer the latter question in the affirmative, at present it might not be reasonable to give hasty answers to questions like these, since, so far, the concept of poietic system is not yet a well-known tool in system-theoretical sociology. In this respect, we will perhaps be wiser after the concept of poietic system has undergone a critical estimation in system-theoretical sociology.

In this sub-chapter, we have mainly considered art’s external boundaries. Now it is time to look at the internal structure or internal order of the sphere of art. Table 7 aims at presenting a list of what kinds of cultural artifacts are nowadays regarded as art. Although the table is, in part, based on empirical studies, it should be noticed that with all probability the concept of art is not understood exactly in the same way in different countries or in different national and regional art worlds. For example, comics have been a recognised genre of art in France for centuries, whereas in some other countries, among others in Finland it – or perhaps, a certain part of it – has only recently obtained the status of art. Unfortunately, in this connection we have to pass over differences like these. For this reason, Table 7 provides us only with a rude overall view of the contemporary genres of art.

At any rate, the table under consideration shows us that since the 1960s the sphere of art has opened up to new layers of cultural production, wherefore the extension of the system of art has expanded enormously. Originally the extension of the system of art was rather narrow. When the modern system of art emerged in the mid-18th century, it consisted of ten genres. Of those ten genres eloquence disappeared already in the 19th century, whereas literature, theatre, opera, painting, sculpture, architecture, laying out of gardens, ballet and classical concert music were regarded as self-evident genres of art. The dominant conception of art held that genuine art deviates essentially from the world of
industry, business, politics and practical life; this meant that the position of decorative art, interior decoration, hand work, industrial art, design, poster art, photograph, circus, pantomime, radio plays and film was obscure for a long time, for they seemed to be too close to those everyday and banal activities. However, by the decades after the Second World War their status approached the status of the so-called pure or self-evident genres of art, whereafter they have been accepted as art without serious reservations.

Table 7 shows that during the last five decades the expansion of the system of art has been connected with the rapid development of information and media technology, for a great number of the new art genres are media-based by nature; in particular, genres such as television plays, television films, television serials, video art, media art, computer music, digital pictures digital animation and multi-media art belong to this connection. On the other hand, several new genres of art are far from the aesthetic conception of art or from the traditional idea of art-likeness, which tells us that the contemporary system of art is based on pluralistic thinking, that is, on several different conceptions of art. For example, modern dance, performances, body art, conceptual art, installations, assemblages, earth art, community art and bio art represent a new kind of conception of art-likeness. In particular, community art can not be grasped by means of the traditional concepts of expression and representation, since in it the artist does not strive to express himself or herself and nor does he or she represent or imitate reality; on the contrary, community art is made in co-operation with social actors or a community, wherefore a common action or interaction like this is often an important thing in it. Joseph Beuys, who used to speak about “societal sculpture” instead of “community art”, has often been regarded as a precursor of community art. For instance, in 1982 he participated in an art exhibition by carrying out a work 7000 oaks in which oak trees were planted in the city of Kassel in Germany. Similarly, in 1994 Minna Heikinheimo, a young Finnish artist, arranged in Helsinki an art exhibition Gratuitous Breakfast in which she offered a free meal to people for a summer; in this way she wanted to explore her own relation to art and social life. These examples show that in many respects community art carries on the spirit of the avant-garde movements; like them, it aims at lowering the gap between the sphere of art and people’s life worlds. This is why it has also been called “participation art” or “social art”.

In addition, there is a great number of hybrid or mixed phenomena in the contemporary system of art. For example, nowadays video is a relatively common auxiliary medium in installations, and the so-called proper video installations utilise both the idea of installation and the genre of video art. Certain artists or institutions of art have also combined single genres of art in a more radical way. Vera L. Zolberg and Joni Maya Cherbo (1997b: 2–3) mention theatre Zingaro, a classical French dressage troupe, as an instance of a combination such as this; in its performances, Zingaro “unites horsemanship, circus acrobatics, ethnic music, and dance into an uncommon theatricality”. A rather similar artistic group is Cirque du Soleil which was founded in Canada in 1984; it combines elements of traditional circus, theatre, pantomime, music, song and dance in its shows or works. Phenomena like these indicate that, to a considerable extent, an internal process of de-differentiation between single genres of art is going on in the contemporary system of art.

Thus, the contemporary sphere or system of art seems to display a high degree of variety and diversity. Unfortunately, Luhmann largely passed over a variety and diversity like this. As Boris Groys (1996: 12) and Niels Werber (1996: 23) point out, Luhmann’s conception of art is rather purist or high-cultural, that is, he did not regard phenomena such as design, pulp fiction and other popular cultural genres as art. At a more general
level one can say that he ignored that an increasing interpenetration between the system of art and other social and cultural systems is typical of the contemporary societal-cultural reality.

It should be noticed that Table 7 does not cover the entirety of the internal structure or internal order of the contemporary art world. In fact, it only attempts to reveal (i) the genre-based structure of the contemporary art world. Besides this, there are other interesting structures in the contemporary art world. One can, for example, speak about art world’s functional, normative and institutional or organizational structure as well as about its power and status structure. The concept (ii) “art world’s functional structure” points to the internal division of labour in the art life, and the structure in question consists of the types of action that appear in the art life. First and foremost, activities such as the production, mediation and reception of art as well as art administration and art policy are central functional constituents in the contemporary art life. The concept (iii) “art world’s normative structure” points to the norms, conventions and operations principles which regulate people’s activities in the art life. The most central units in (iv) the art life’s institutional or organizational structure are the organizations, institutions, associations, foundations and funds which carry out an organized and goal-oriented action in this sub-system of society. When one considers (v) the art life’s power and status structure, the most important questions are, what actors and institutions or organizations control the art life’s economic resources, what kind of group makes the art-political decisions and how much social-cultural status different actors, institutions and genres possess. Thus, the art world’s internal order or structure is a rather complex phenomenon with several different dimensions.

Representatives of the systemic study of art do not always speak about the same thing when they consider the art world’s internal structure. Roughly speaking, one can say that researches such as Baudrillard, Featherstone, Vattimo, Lash and Urry have paid a lot of attention to the art world’s genre-based structure. The genres of art form a cultural system that these five theorists have compared with cultural systems such as advertisement and mass media, besides which they have explored what kind of common properties works of art have with objects of everyday life and industrial production. In contrast to their approach, Luhmann as well as Christa and Peter Bürger have, in the first instance, spoken about the art world’s normative structure. On the other hand, Schmidt’s view of the art world is anchored on its functional structure and Bourdieu and his disciples have studied the art world’s power and status structure. Researchers of cultural policy, in particular, have been interested in the art world’s institutional or organizational structure.

Let us then consider the contemporary art world from the standpoint of works of art. The articles of this thesis propose that the internal state of the system of art could, in part, be conceptualised with the help of Luhmann’s system theory, in particular, by means of the concept of autopoiesis. Actually, Luhmann used the concept of autopoiesis in several different meanings. In his theory, a system is, on the one hand, an autopoietic formation if it handles the information and the energy that it takes from its environment according to its own internal principles of operation or according to its own medium and medium code. On the other hand, Luhmann connected the concept of autopoiesis to the idea of self-production: an autopoietic system itself produces the elements that it consists of, it produces new communications on the basis of its previous communications. In the first sense, the autopoiesis of the system of art is decreasing, since in the process of de-differentiation this system has adopted more media and medium codes from other systems and at the same time other systems have also borrowed communicative means
from the system of art. In the second sense, the autopoiesis of the system of art is, however, increasing, since – as, among other persons, Peter Bürger (1988: 202–204) has pointed out – intertextuality, self-understanding and meta-artistry are typical of contemporary cultural products. “Intertextuality” means a certain kind of relationship between two cultural products; in this relationship, one product refers to the other product; if it also says something about that product or comments on it, it is an instance of meta-art. In general, meta-artistic works comment on themselves or other works or the rules and conventions of art. In meta-art, works of art indicate explicitly or implicitly that they are art, and in this sense they represent art’s self-understanding or its reflective consciousness.

Intertextuality is perhaps most clearly visible in the Hollywood film system in which almost every new fictional film seems, both openly and covertly, to refer to several earlier films and to parody or modify them. Similarly, a number of contemporary novelists have felt an urge to define their stand on the tradition of the novel – as Michel Tournier refers to and comments on Daniel Defoe’s famous novel Robinson Crusoe (1719) in his own novel Vendredi (Friday, 1967). Numerous works within visual art genres can be understood as meta-art, as well. Classical examples of works like these are Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made works which questioned the traditional boundary between art and non-art. Later, questioning such as this continued, for example, in Andy Warhol’s, John Cage’s, Karlheinz Stockhausen’s, Joseph Beuys’s and Marina Abramovic’s works. Intertextuality, artistic self-understanding and meta-artistry represent the principle of autopoiesis in the sense that in them new works of art are made on the basis of previous works of art or by questioning previous artistic conventions.

All this indicates that nowadays the sphere of art forms a dynamic social and cultural system in the Western world. Unlike what most radical theorists of postmodernity and de-differentiation have suggested, this system has not died or fused with the rest of societal-cultural reality. On the contrary, it is a vital and complex system whose boundaries have become more and more open. Due to this, it is closely connected with other cultural and social systems, in particular, with the economics, mass media, design and – in Western Europe – with the state and public section. Although it and most of the other functional sub-systems are nowadays, to a considerable extent, transformed by the system of economics, the neo-liberalist policy and by the operation principles of the markets and business, it has not changed into a sub-system of economics. To be sure, certain sections of it operate like commercial enterprises, but on the other hand it also contains sections that stand in opposition to the economics and the operation principles of the markets and business. At the same time the internal structure of the system of art has become more complex, more flexible and more obscure, wherefore that system has somewhat lost its internal stability and order.
5 CONCLUSIONS

The thesis at hand aims at explicating what kind of position the sphere of art holds in modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality, according to system-theoretical and systemic sociology. The concept "the sphere of art" is used in this thesis in a twofold sense, which means that works of art or the cultural system of art as well as the institutions of art or the social system of art are in an equal manner parts of the sphere of art. Certain representatives of system-theoretical and systemic studies of art, among other persons, Habermas and Schmidt have used the concept of system just in this twofold way, whereas in Luhmann’s investigations "the functional or the social sub-system of art" contains both works of art and the institutions of art. Luhmann’s concept of system is a onefold entity; it does not recognise the existence of cultural systems, since Luhmann thought that the so-called culture is included in social systems.

System-theoretical and systemic sociology is understood here in a loose sense. Originators of system-theoretical sociology such as Parsons, Shils and Smelser belong self-evidently to this branch of sociology, and in the same vein Parsons’ European disciples and successors, in particular, Luhmann, Münch and Touraine are part of it. In addition, system-theoretical and systemic sociology includes sociologists who, on the one hand, have been critical of Parsons’ thinking and research work, and, on the other hand, have utilised and elaborated the concept of system or its kindred concepts. To sociologists like these belong Habermas, Bourdieu and Giddens who represent the spirit of the left-wing “critical theory” in system-theoretical and systemic sociology. Furthermore, Parsons’ American successors Alexander and Colomy are close to this branch as well, even if they have not been especially interested in the elaboration of the concept of system. Of the present-day or younger representatives of system-theoretical sociology, it is Mayntz and Misheva who are important figures from the standpoint of the problematics of this thesis, since they have elaborated upon the concept of social system by critically analysing Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems.

Most of the above-mentioned sociologists have constructed theoretical models of modern society, and some of them have also participated in the discussion on modernity. Usually the above-mentioned sociologists have not published investigations on art, even if three of them, that is, Bourdieu, Habermas and Luhmann have been active in the domain of the study of art. These three sociologists have also had a great number of disciples and successors who have utilised and developed their ideas in the study of art; of disciples and successors such as these, one can, in particular, mention Schmidt as well as Christa and Peter Bürger. In addition, certain researchers within the system-theoretical and systemic study of art have had only a loose connection with the above-mentioned sociologists and their theories. To researchers such as these belong, among other persons, Crane and Zolberg, who have published several empirical investigations on the contemporary American art world; theoretically those investigations are chiefly based on Becker’s and Danto’s conceptions of the art world and on Dickie’s concept of the institution of art.

In principle, the research material of this thesis consists of the investigations on modern and contemporary society and on modern and contemporary sphere of art that the above-mentioned researchers have published. On the one hand, this thesis clears up how those researchers understand modern societal-cultural reality and what kind of position they give to the sphere of art in their own models of modern societal-cultural reality. On the other hand, this thesis also clears up how they, in turn, understand contemporary societal-cultural reality as well as the contemporary sphere of art and its position in that reality. The researchers in question share the view that both in modern
and contemporary societal-cultural reality the sphere of art forms a differentiated and a relatively autonomous social and cultural formation. In contrast to this, theorists of postmodernity or reflexive modernity have claimed that nowadays societal-cultural reality has largely lost its systemic nature, and the most radical of them have even declared that actually the sphere of art has merged with the rest of the societal-cultural reality. Of theorists such as these, this thesis has, in particular, taken into account Lash’s and Urry’s investigations, as well as Baudrillard’s, Featherstone’s and Vattimo’s views. In the same vein this thesis pays attention to the criticism that Beck and Bauman have presented against the traditional and the Luhmannian concept of social system. Although the most radical theories of postmodernity and de-differentiation have clearly exaggerated the process of de-differentiation, theories of postmodernity and de-differentiation have formed a challenge to system-theoretical and systemic sociology and to their ways of conceiving societal-cultural reality. If those theories are, at least in part, right, system-theoretical sociology should elaborate more flexible and dynamic concepts for the description of contemporary societal-cultural reality. This thesis at hand represents the stand that this is exactly the case: system-theoretical and systemic sociology must take into account the theories at issue and, after having analysed them critically, renew its own conceptual vocabulary.

A special position in the research material of this thesis is occupied by Luhmann and, to a minor extent, his critics; into those critics one can, in particular, add Bourdieu and Habermas as well as Mayntz, Misheva and Münch. Luhmann’s special position is derived from the fact that since the turn of the 1970s and 1980s he concentrated on elaborating his theory of autopoietic social systems. During the last decades, this theory has proved to be very influential in sociology and in the study of art, wherefore it has recently also become an object of an international critical discussion and estimation both in the community of system-theorists and in the social sciences and humanities. In part, this thesis participates in this critical discussion and estimation.

Methodologically, this thesis is based on the idea of rational reconstruction. The thesis goes analytically and critically through different models and investigations of modern and contemporary societal cultural-reality, in particular, of the modern and contemporary sphere of art and its position in that reality. When analysing those models and investigations the thesis considers how they understand the general structure and the operation principles of modern society; and as far as the system of art is concerned, this thesis clears up what kind of relation this system has, according to the models and investigations in question, to the rest of societal-cultural reality. Furthermore, this thesis explicates what kinds of methodological instructions and implications those models and investigations include and what kinds of philosophical commitments and presuppositions underlies them. By means of a procedure like this, this thesis endeavours to define their merits and shortcomings and at the same time it strives, from the standpoint of the sphere of art, to outline a more adequate model of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality.

System-theoretical and systemic sociologists do not provide us with an entirely homogenous picture of modern culture and society. To be sure, usually they think that modern culture and society have been characterised by the structural principle of functional differentiation that has divided modern societal-cultural reality into functionally differentiated and relatively autonomous spheres or systems. In addition, system-theorists such as Parsons, Luhmann, Habermas and Münch have regarded societal and cultural rationalisation as an important feature of the process of modernisation, although they have not understood it precisely in the same way. Furthermore, in Luhmann’s and Habermas’
models secularisation belongs to the hallmarks of the process of modernisation, whereas Parsons and Münch tend to think that religion has still an active meaning in modern Western culture and society, in particular, in the United States.

As for the system of art, Parsons was incapable of describing its position in modern societal-cultural reality in a satisfactory way. This shortcoming derived from his idea of functional necessities. In his analytical models, Parsons thought that in the process of societal-cultural modernisation society tends to differentiate internally into sub-systems that take care of the four functional necessities. He thereby termed these four sub-systems economy’s functional sub-system, polity’s functional sub-system, integration’s functional sub-system and a socio-cultural sub-system. However, Parsons’ models do not answer to the question as to why the number of these analytical or functional sub-systems is precisely four, even if there are in modern society a much greater number of concrete or empirical systems. For this reason, in Parsons’ AGIL-model the sphere of art has no special function. On the contrary, on the one hand the institutions of art belong to the socio-cultural sub-system (L) that transfers certain abstract cultural values and meanings into society and guarantees, in this way, a sufficient value consensus in society. On the other hand, the institutions of art also belong to the integration’s functional sub-system (I) that takes care of the maintenance of society’s normative integration. In addition, in Parsons’ models works of art belongs to the cultural system, and as such they contain a cognitive dimension, a value dimension and an expressive dimension. Thus, Parsons’ models provide us with interesting ideas concerning the sphere of art but they largely ignore the special properties of this sphere. Perhaps this is why his models have not been widely used in the systemic study of art.

In Luhmann’s models, modern society consists of functionally differentiated sub-systems which have reached a state of autopoiesis. Autopoietic systems are operationally closed formations. The environment is, for them, a source of energy and information, and it imposes some general limitations on their function. However, an autopoietic system handles this energy and information according to its own internal principles of operation, in particular, according to its medium and medium code. In addition, autopoietic systems are self-referential formations with an ability to self-recur and self-regenerate; in other words, they themselves produce the elements of which they consist of. In the case of social systems, these elements are communications. Consequently, modern functionally differentiated sub-systems consist of communications which they themselves produce and which, in turn, maintain them. Each autopoietic system has in society a specific function that is closely connected with its medium and medium code. In his art-theoretical investigations, Luhmann thought that it is the function of art to show us the contingent nature of our phenomenal world. Till the early 1990s he held that in the sub-system of art the category of Beauty functions as a medium and the distinction Beautiful/Non-Beautiful as a medium code, but it might be easy to realise that these communicative tools are not necessarily connected to the production of world contingency. In his last works, Luhmann, therefore, changed his art-theoretical views; now he was inclined to think that in the sub-system of art the category of Fittingness functions as a medium and the distinction Fitting/Non-Fitting as a medium code. In fact, a change such as this seems to be more in accordance with the idea of world contingency.

In his late production, Luhmann was mainly interested in what separates functional sub-systems from each other. Partly for this reason he spoke about the sub-system of art as if it would be an isolated island in society, even if he was otherwise convinced of the view that art is a functional thing from the standpoint of society and other sub-systems. However, at the same time he thought that the system of art is structurally
loosely connected to the rest of society. In my thesis, I regard a view like this as erroneous. At a general level, I agree with Parsons and Münch in that the structural principle of functional differentiation does not alone characterise modern society, since there have also been common or overlapping areas between modern functionally differentiated sub-systems; those common or overlapping ideas are called “interpenetrating zones” by Münch. This thesis argues for the stand that, contrary to what Luhmann thought, the modern sub-system of art has possessed several interpenetrating zones with other social and cultural sub-systems, for example, with the political-administrative system as well as with the systems of science, mass media and nationalism.

This does not mean that this thesis entirely rejects the concept of autopoiesis. Instead, following Mayntz and Münch, it proposes that the concept of autopoiesis should be used for the expression of differences in degree, even if Luhmann did not himself accept a procedure like this. According to the proposition at issue, social systems can be more or less autopoietic formations. A social system possesses a high degree of autopoiesis, if its operation principles clearly deviate from the operation principles of other systems; but, if its operation principles are rather similar to the operation principles of other systems, its degree of autopoiesis is low. In the same way, sociology could utilise the concept of system-likeness. This concept implies that social formations can be more or less system-like wholes - as Mayntz and Münch as well as Crook, Pakulska and Waters state in their investigations. By means of the concept of system-likeness it is possible to explicate the criticism that Habermas has directed against Luhmann’s thinking and the traditional system theory. As it is well-known, Habermas has stated that people’s life worlds and their intimate spheres can not be systems in the same sense as the economic and political life are systems. This remark is obviously quite accurate, but, contrary to what Habermas has thought, one can apply the concept of system-likeness to people’s life worlds and their intimate spheres. Consequently, one may conclude that, as compared with the systems of economics and politics, people’s life worlds and their intimate spheres possess a low degree of system-likeness.

Luhmann held that modern functionally differentiated sub-systems stand in a symmetrical relation to each other; that is, those systems would be equal, and there would be no dominant or primary system amongst them. In contrast, Marxists sociologists have traditionally regarded economics as the dominant system or level in society, and in the 1970s and 1980s certain theorists of society stated that after the Second World War Western societies had, in fact, been dominated by the political-administrative system, in particular, by the state. Habermas’ and Misheva’s criticism of Luhmann is connected to a train of thought like this. Namely, both of them have presented the view that functional sub-systems have not been equal in modern society; actually, the economics and the political-administrative system have obtained a special position in modern society in which they have, to a growing extent, penetrated other sub-systems and undermined the relative autonomy of those sub-systems. It should be noted that Münch also speaks about interpenetration without clearly taking into account questions of power and domination.

As for theories of postmodernity and globalisation, usually system-theorists have been critical of them. Bourdieu, Habermas and Münch have not denied the existence of the process of de-differentiation, but they have claimed that the so-called postmodernity is not a qualitatively new phase in societal evolution but a part of the developmental dynamics of modern society. In comparison to this, Luhmann has been more critical of theories of postmodernity and globalisation. According to him, those theories ignore that since its birth modern society has been a global societal system or a world society. For this reason,
he continued, there have not been national societies or national societal systems under the conditions of modernity. In the same vein, most of the modern functional sub-systems would have been a part of the world society. Luhmann admitted that the states and the juridic systems have had national or physical boundaries, but, he underlined, other modern functional sub-systems have been global since the 18th century. The thesis regards these thoughts presented by Luhmann as too rigid. In contrast to Luhmann's thinking, this thesis utilises the concepts of national societal systems and national functional sub-systems. However, at the same time the thesis emphasises that modern national societal systems and modern national functional sub-systems can not be understood as closed formations. From the 18th century on they have, in many respects, been interlaced with their societal environment, and in the contemporary phase of the process of globalisation an interpenetration like this has simply deepened and widened enormously.

Theories of postmodernity and de-differentiation have held that since the 1960s the aestheticization of the everyday life, the artification of society and the omnipresence of commercialism, mass media and information technology have gradually produced a situation in which the sphere of art no longer clearly differs from the rest of the societal-cultural reality. This means that the modern differentiated sphere of art would have ceased to exist and the societal-cultural reality itself would have changed into a non-systemic formation – or even into an unstructured social “flow”. The thesis at hand argues for the view that the most radical theories of postmodernity and de-differentiation have exaggerated the process of de-differentiation. Those theories have ignored the fact that actually there are opposite tendencies in the contemporary societal-cultural reality. First of all, it is important to note that the whole sphere of art no longer sticks to the aesthetic conception of art. It is true that the conception at issue is still alive in popular layers of art and in certain layers of serious art. However, partly as a reaction to the processes of the aesthetization and artification, serious genres and layers of art have, to a considerable extent, become estranged from the aesthetic conception of art and from traditional art-likeness. Moreover, institutions like art administration, art policy, art museums, art galleries, art criticism, study of art and societies and foundations for the arts still have an interest in the distinction between art and non-art; although their conception of art has become more and more open and flexible, in their activities they, at any rate, maintain the distinction in question. This thesis admits that since the 1960s the system of art has enlarged in a dynamic way and at the same time there has emerged new interpenetrating zones between the system of art and other social and cultural systems. As a result of a development like this, the sphere of art has changed into a truly complex system that has lost somewhat its internal system-likeness or its internal systemic structure.

All this means that the thesis represents synthetised thinking. When elaborating its own view of the contemporary societal-cultural reality and the contemporary sphere of art it takes system-theoretical and systemic sociology as its point of departure. In particular, it adopts ideas, concepts and views from actor-centric theorists such as Habermas, Bourdieu, Mayntz, Misheva and Münch. In the study of art and cultural policy, Christa and Peter Bürger’s, Crane’s, Danto’s, McGuigan’s, Schmidt’s and Zolberg’s investigations proved to be useful from the standpoint of this thesis. And even if this thesis is rather critical of Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems, it utilises certain concepts and ideas formulated by him; in particular, this holds true for the concepts of autopoiesis, medium and medium code. Similarly, the thesis does not entirely abandon the theories of postmodernity, reflexive modernity and globalisation. Instead, this thesis finds these theories interesting and it takes into account the criticism that they have raised against system-theoretical and systemic sociology; in part, this thesis regards this criticism as
sensible and acceptable. The most important and fruitful conceptual tools in this thesis turned out to be the idea of system-likeness and the distinction between simple and complex systems. The latter distinction originates from general systems theory, for example, from Skyttner’s investigations, and the former tool has been elaborated upon by Mayntz and Münch, as well as by Crook, Pakulski and Waters.

In part overtly and in part covertly, this thesis argues for the stand that modern and, in particular, contemporary societal-cultural reality cannot be grasped accurately with the help of established system-theoretical concepts. In system-theoretical sociology, it is chiefly Parsons’ and Luhmann’s theories that contain certain weaknesses in this respect, although present-day system-theoretical sociology should, of course, also utilise those highly innovative and influential theories when elaborating a well-founded theoretical model of contemporary societal-cultural reality. Unlike Baudrillard and Vattimo have claimed, it is quite possible to analyse that reality by the concept of system and its kindred concepts. In this sense, the thesis partly “saves” system-theoretical sociology from the criticism that theorists of de-differentiation have presented against it. However, in spite of this I tend to think that it might not be reasonable to connect system-theoretical sociology to the premise that societal-cultural reality is always necessarily divided into systems. Traditionally, general systems theory adopted a view like this of reality, and through this it engaged itself to certain ontological presuppositions concerning reality. Perhaps it is wiser to underline the methodological use value of system theory; perhaps it is just better to clear up to what extent societal-cultural reality can be conceptualised by means of concepts such as “system-differentiation”, “system’s boundaries”, “system’s internal order or structure”, “system’s function”, “interpenetration”, “interpenetrating zones between systems”, “colonisation”, “de-differentiation”, “system-likeness”, “different degrees of system-likeness”, “simple systems”, “complex systems”, “normative autonomy”, “functional autonomy”, “autopoiesis”, “system’s medium”, “system’s medium code”, “code” and “system-specific rationality”. Even if the actual research practice might show that societal-cultural reality also contains phenomena that cannot be conceptualised sufficiently well by system-theoretical tools, system theory is a relevant and fruitful approach in the study of modern and contemporary societal-cultural reality.

Most of the above-mentioned concepts are explicitly defined in the articles of this thesis. The concepts “system-likeness”, “simple system” and “complex system” deviate, however, a little from this general rule of explicitness. The concept of system-likeness is defined indirectly in the articles, that is, with the help of the concept of autopoiesis. The articles suggest that the concept of autopoiesis should be used for the expression of differences in degree. Accordingly, social systems can be more or less autopoietic: an entirely autopoietic social system is usually in the operative sense a well-formed whole, which means that it usually possesses a high degree of system-likeness. Thus, the articles imply that autopoiesis means a high degree of system-likeness. Conversely, a social whole with a low degree of autopoiesis is not usually an especially well-formed formation but it possesses a low degree of system-likeness. An example of this phenomenon is medieval art. Medieval art did not possess its own medium and medium code and neither did it form its own system; on the contrary, it was rather a part of the religious-metaphysical cultural systems, and its products were dealt with the codes of that system. I elaborated the idea of system-likeness in my investigation Taide instituutioina ja järjestelmäin. Modernin taide-elämän historiallis-sosiologiset mallit (Art as an Institution and System. The Historical-Sociological Models of Modern Art Life, 1998, pp. 65–68 and 79). My thoughts about the different degrees of the autopoiesis and system-likeness presented in the articles must be understood against this background.
As for the concepts “simple systems” and “complex systems”, the articles point out that
the system of art has expanded and become more complex - partly for the reasons that
since the 1960s a huge number of new genres of cultural products have been approved
as art and at the same time there have emerged more and more interpenetrating zones
between the system of art and other systems. Due to the fact that these thoughts can not
be understood properly without the aid of a general systems theory, the introductory
chapters of this thesis have presented that theory in a general outline.

The articles in this thesis deal chiefly with the contemporary process of de-differentiation
with regard to theories of postmodernity and globalisation. In those connections, these
articles hardly at all utilise the concepts of “neo-liberalist” cultural policy and “neo-
liberalist” social policy, even if they point to the fact that the contemporary societal-cultural
reality is increasingly dominated by market-based principles of operation. Thus, in this
sense the concept of “neo-liberalism” would have deepened the analyses presented by
these articles. On the other hand, the articles in this thesis do not either analyse different
theories of neo-liberalism, since an analysis such as this undoubtedly deserves a study of
its own. For reasons such as these the introductory chapters of this thesis have, at a general
level, paid attention to the principles of neo-liberalist policy.
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