

Paul Stepper

Is Autopoietic Systems Theory Alexithymic? Luhmann and the Socio-Psychology of Emotions¹

Zusammenfassung: Nach einer kritischen Sichtung der Luhmann'schen Überlegungen zum Phänomen der Emotionen wird eine Theorie entwickelt, die emotionale Prozesse in einer Zone der strukturellen Kopplung von organischem, psychischem und sozialem System lokalisiert. Die Theorie lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf einen substantiellen historischen Zusammenhang von (legalen oder moralischen) Rechten und Emotionen. Dieser Zusammenhang wird durch einige Beispiele illustriert, die sich mit spezifischen Emotionen und einem allgemeinen Konzept von Emotionen beschäftigen.

Introduction

›Alexithymia‹ describes a series of psycho-behavioural characteristics that are expressed in the etymology of the word itself: from the Greek *a-* (lack), *lexis-* (word) and *thymos-* (mood, feeling or emotion), alexithymia means literally ›without words for emotions‹. The main characteristics of alexithymia can be summarized ... as: difficulty in identifying and describing feelings; difficulty in distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensations of emotional arousal...; constricted imaginative processes...; and an externally oriented cognitive style (Greco 2001, 471).

The question of the extent to which Luhmann's general systems theory is ›blind‹ to what are called emotions and their effects, has been raised by Luc Ciompi in his paper *Ein blinder Fleck bei Niklas Luhmann?* (2004). Although Ciompi does not go so far as to diagnose the theory as alexithymic, it is interesting to note the extent to which his observations correspond to the main characteristics of this construct, which Taylor et al. (1991) describe as a ›potential paradigm for psychosomatic medicine‹. Hence Ciompi argues that, despite having focussed on topics with evident affective content such as love, trust and conflict, Luhmann conspicuously fails to address the emotional

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aspects involved (»difficulty in identifying and describing feelings«?). He further suggests that the few comments Luhmann does make about emotions are founded upon a scientifically out of date description that significantly underestimates the pivotal role played by affective factors in psychic and in social systems alike. The main identified shortcoming of this dated scientific description is that it presents a false picture of emotions as essentially undifferentiated visceral activation (»difficulty in distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensations of emotional arousal«?). Further, although Luhmann's work can hardly be considered unimaginative, Ciompi strongly implies that it is preoccupied with a description of the externalities of the communication processes of social systems at the expense of a concern with the supposed underlying causal driving force² (»an externally oriented cognitive style«?).

The at once peripheral and flawed role emotions play in Luhmann's theorizing should, to sum up Ciompi's argument, be identified as a fundamental weakness and rectified by use of Ciompi's own autopoietic systems theory of the fractal nature of affect-logic. According to the latter, the emotions are fundamental to social and psychological life. That is to say, emotions serve not only to organise and integrate the psychic and social domains, but also to motivate and energize at both of these levels of autopoietic operation. If Ciompi's account is correct, Luhmann's alleged blind spot regarding the role of emotions in the autopoiesis of consciousness and communication is also his ›Achilles' heel‹. It cannot, in other words, be dismissed as one of those logically inevitable ›unmarked spaces‹ which are the condition of possibility for any point of observation, since to fail to observe a phenomenon whose logic (always-already multiply combined with cognition, memory, social behaviour and so forth) purportedly organises, integrates and motivates psychic and social systems, is to miss the very motor³ of those systems whose operational medium is meaning. Given the serious theoretical implications of a retrospective diagnosis of alexythymia in Luhmann's work, a second opinion is required before any course of treatment (fundamental revisions of core concepts, for instance) is recommended. The following paper offers a second opinion from a point of view structured by the marked and unmarked spaces proper to a British social psychologist with a research specialism in the emotions and an interest in Luhmann's work. A first section will outline and critically assess Luhmann's account of the emotions. This will concentrate only on the relevant sections in *Social Systems*, since Ciompi has already provided an overview of

2 »Die Frage, welche Kräfte hinter den aufgezeigten Veränderungen am Werk sein könnten, bleibt weitgehend ausgespart« (25).

3 »Vielmehr erscheinen affektive Energien als die entscheidenden Motoren, Schalter und Organisatoren – man könnte auch sagen die energetischen Letztelemente – aller Sozio-wie Psychodynamik.« (41-2).

Luhmann's various discussions of emotion. A second section will present an amended general account of emotions that avoids the narrow cognitivism of Luhmann's account, but which remains faithful to his broader theoretical commitments. A final section will offer some suggestions as to what a socio-psychology of emotions informed by Luhmann might look like. The task of assessing Ciompi's fascinating alternative theory of emotions remains for the future.

Is Luhmann's account of the emotions outdated?

The emotions, Luhmann states, represent a »sphere of problems that until now have proved quite difficult for sociology« (1995, 274). For this reason, he suggests, they have typically either been omitted from research, treated using unconventional methods, or studied indirectly in terms of their social stimulation, communication, cooling out, and so on. In *Social Systems* he dedicates a few paragraphs to the problem of emotions *as such* in the chapter on the *individuality of psychic systems*. This chapter is itself peripheral to the main project of a theory of social systems, since its focus is primarily on consciousness rather than communication. Hence it should be recognised that for Luhmann the emotions represent a peripheral aspect of a peripheral theme since, as a sociologist, he is happy to articulate an account according to which the true nature of emotion is psychic.

In this context, emotion is first introduced as »the process of adaptation to fulfilment or disappointment« of claims. The concept of *claim* is elucidated as a sub-category of *expectation*, the latter being the form in which a system exposes itself to its indeterminable environment. By way of expectations, psychic systems and also, as I will discuss later, social systems bring the environment into a form that can be used operatively on a psychic level. That is to say, possibilities are projected which can be confirmed or disconfirmed, fulfilled or disappointed. For psychic systems, expectations thus organise the autopoiesis of consciousness by »probabilising« the improbability of environmental complexity through the pre-structuring of connections between conscious contents. Expectations act as grids that pre-structure given unmanageable complexity into an autopoietically operable form. That is to say, a given expectation yields a simple bifurcation in the face of the world: it is disappointed or it is fulfilled

A *claim* is a condensed form of expectation in which self-commitment is increased, and with it vulnerability. Claims thus presuppose the autopoietic connectivity already organised by expectations, and re-enter it into the consciousness of the psychic system. A claim would hence be an expectation with enhanced salience – an expectation that is *owned*. The ownership of expecta-

tion suggested by the concept of claim also implies the additional complexity of a sense of *right*. If a claim is an expectation we feel a right to, then it must be recognised that we are dealing with a primal notion of right (a ›proto-right‹) prior to its division into moral, legal and epistemic orders. This point will be central to a later part of this paper, since I believe that Luhmann's main contribution to a socio-psychology of emotion results from attention to the structural coupling of communication and consciousness whereby concepts of right organise the shaping of the psychic by the social. For now, it is enough to state that, for Luhmann, the shift from expectation to claim *increases the probability of the experience of emotion*, just as a retreat from claim to mere expectation reduces it.

Having argued the highly cognitive case for emotions being effectively the process of adaptation to the disappointment or fulfilment of claims, Luhmann goes on to develop the more specific and controversial thesis that emotions function as an immune system for psychic life. According to this second argument emotions ›arise and grip body and consciousness when the autopoiesis of consciousness is in danger‹ (1995, 274). This adds a new layer of depth to the account of emotion, since on one level there is no reason to suppose that the disappointment or fulfilment of claims should threaten psychic autopoiesis (not least since this has already been presented as a condition of possibility for psychic autopoiesis). On another level, however, these two arguments can be made to converge. Given the role expectations and claims play in organising the autopoiesis of consciousness, any decline in the capacity of claims to ›probabilise‹ an operable conscious world would constitute a threat to the autopoiesis of consciousness as such. That is to say, given that, like any autopoiesis, the autopoiesis of consciousness occurs only on condition of an improbable reduction in complexity that yields a circular flow of connectible elements, any *interruptions* to this flow caused by irruptions of unexpected complexity and contingency pose a threat to that flow.

In this respect, Luhmann's account can be clarified using the signal/noise terminology of information theory. Such destructive interruptions can be thought of as noise to the signal required by existing autopoiesis (which is not to deny the earlier possibility that an interruption may also be grasped as signal, since all information theory only makes sense in relation to the position of an observer). Such interruptions may assume any form from a physical external danger, or a social *faux pas*, to a revolutionary new piece of information. What matters is only that the relatively predictable stream of consciousness is disrupted. Then, according to Luhmann, emotion will occur, since emotions are nothing but ›the psychic system's self-interpretation with regard to whether its operation can continue‹ (1995, 274). This implies that emotions constitute an alternate observer position from which the autopoiesis-destroying noise of interruption is converted or rectified into a temporary signal.

It is important to emphasise that this line of argument leads to a conception of emotions as radically *internal* to the psychic system. Emotions are not concerned with the environment but with grasping-as-signal the noise that would otherwise disrupt the ongoing operations of the psychic system or, put differently, with the noise that the psychic system would otherwise *become* through disruption. Better the self-generated scream of fear and shutting of eyes than a confrontation with a more primordial and unrecognisable *noise*. On this account, just as lymphocytes absorb foreign bodies in the immune system, emotions ›digest‹ noise, transforming it into a simplified field of consciousness that bridges what would otherwise be a chasm into which consciousness might plunge. When stability is re-established, emotions die away, having fulfilled their order-restoring purpose. In an argument reminiscent of Sartre's (1993) case for the *magic* nature of emotions, Luhmann suggests that they thus secure the continuation of autopoiesis with »unusual means« (such as dispensing with subtle discriminations and the need to decide on the basis of a consideration of consequences). Luhmann is clear in his insistence on this *internal* role: »Emotions are not representations that refer to the environment but *internal* adaptations to *internal* problem situations in the psychic system that concern the ongoing production of the system's elements by the system's elements« (1995, 274).

It is no simple matter to assess the validity of Luhmann's rapidly sketched theory of emotion. For one thing, although many strong claims have been advanced, scientists are still far from a consensual understanding of emotion. George Mandler (2002) sums up a lifetime of authoritative research in the field with the somewhat resigned statement that »even if one believes in the notion of human progress, there is little evidence of a focus or consensus in the psychology of emotion«. Another reason for being wary of claims to the truth of emotion is that the field has also been conspicuously subject to influences of a broadly ideological⁴ nature. Paul Fraisse (1968), for instance, talks of »les deux faces de l'émotion« in referring to a bifurcation in the research tradition between those who view the organic aspects of emotion as effects of psychic events, and those who accord physiological events a primary causal role. Luhmann's theory leans towards the first of these options, following in the broadly Herbartian tradition. On the other hand, another long-standing ›classical/romantic‹ bifurcation separates those, such as Cannon (1929) and Hebb (1946), for whom the emotions are essentially disruptive and irrational

4 Here I use ideology in the sense discussed by Tomkins (1981, 306): »Any organised set of ideas about which human beings are at once both articulate and passionate and about which they are least certain«. The current excitement over the use of scanning technologies such as fMRI to generate real-time images of emotional-brains-in-action should only redouble our concern over the ideologically saturated nature of scientific knowledge of emotion. When rapidly accumulating data awaits an adequate theory, scientific ideology, in Canguilhem's sense, is at a maximum.

(cf. Averill 1974), from those, such as Ekman/Friesen (1971) and Izard (1971), for whom they are the key source of human value (cf. Fridlund/Duchaine, 1996). As we have seen, Luhmann's theory paradoxifies this latter distinction by presenting emotions as effectively an order generating response to disorder.

Caveats aside, it is certainly not the case that Luhmann's theory is without support amongst contemporary students of emotion. Regarding the distinction between expectations and claims, a similar, though greatly simplified, idea is present in Frijda's (2001) currently influential concept of the »law of concern« in relation to emotions. This is the (somewhat tautological) observation that before one can be affected emotionally by an event one must *care* about it. Regarding the immune-system analogy, it should be noted that Mandler's (1999) constructivist theory holds that emotions are constructions the psychic (cognitive) system generates from the physiological states of arousal that follow interruptions to cognitive events and plans and/or organized response sequences. Although Mandler does not go so far as to conceive cognitive events on the model of a fully-fledged self-generating autopoietic system, the resemblance to Luhmann's theory is clear: emotions are internal responses to interruptions to hypothesised cognitive processes. Like Mandler, Luhmann suggests a mediating role for autonomic arousal in this process (1995, 274). Although this remains un-stated in Luhmann's theory, physiological responses could be said to play the role of *amplifiers* of psychic interruptions. The interruption amplified by autonomic arousal thus constitutes a new interruption which, as it were, interrupts the first, thus rendering the psychic system immune. Also like Mandler, he insists that emotions are more than »interpreted biochemistry« since they play this specific intrapsychic role of managing interruption (although Mandler's continued focus on organized response sequences keeps his theory ambiguous as to whether emotions respond to the environment or solely to internal problem situations). In making this case, Luhmann himself draws upon the work of Karl Pribram, which continues to exert a powerful influence today: »these internal adjustments are felt as emotions« (Pribram 1971, 208).

In summary, Luhmann's theory is far from incompatible with some of the currently dominant conceptualisations of emotion, notably those that stress a »cognitive« basis. Nevertheless, to my mind, it shares weaknesses with this cognitive tradition. Emotion is rendered highly vague and typically described generically rather than in terms of specific emotions. This is compounded by a problematic reliance upon a controversial idea promulgated by Schachter/Singer (1962), which supplied a radical departure point for modern cognitive theories. Namely, that all emotions are essentially unitary and homogenous with respect to their physiological grounding in patterns of physiological arousal (cf. Luhmann 1995, 274, note 44). On this blank organic canvas, as it

were, the cognitive system draws the meaningful distinctions that supposedly give rise to or individuate particular emotions in their specificity. This remarkably Cartesian position gives organic systems a crude and passive role compared to the constructive and active part allocated to cognitive processing. The data upon which Schachter and Singer's theory was based is seriously flawed, and far from compelling. Nevertheless, it was not seriously challenged until over 15 years after its publication (Maslach 1978). Since then it has been profoundly criticized on numerous occasions (see especially Tomkins 1981). It has not been successfully replicated, and has been backed up with only marginal empirical support (Reisenzein 1983). Even at time of publication, Schachter and Singer were working with a radically over-simplified conception of arousal (compare with Sprague et al. 1961), the plausibility of which was achieved only by negative ideological contrast with the previously dominant debates within learning theory (Tomkins 1981). There is indeed something ›alexithymic‹ about a theory that insists that experiences as different as joy and rage are in fact identical but for different ›appraisals‹ laid on the same ›arousal‹. As put by Tomkins (1981, 311): »It is as reasonable a possibility as a theory of pain and pleasure which argued that the difference between the pain of a toothache and the pleasure of an orgasm is not in the stimulation of different sensory receptors, but in the fact that since one experience occurs in a bedroom, the other in a dentist's office, one interprets the undifferentiated arousal state differently«.

In the light of the above, Luhmann doubtless gave a hostage to fortune when he discussed Schachter and Singer's findings as »perhaps the most important insight« grounding his theory (1995, 274). The over-stated cognitivism that results leaves Luhmann vulnerable to criticism concerning his ignorance both of a systemic integrity proper to particular emotions at the *organic* level, and of the simultaneously developed realisation of the profoundly *social* aspect of the emotions. This is particularly unfortunate given that both of these positions have acquired forceful plausibility in recent years (see Damasio 1994; LeDoux, 1995 and Greenwood 2000, for the former, and Lutz/Abu-Lughod 1990; Harré & Parrott 1996, and Bendelow/Williams 1998 for the latter).

In the following section I will therefore briefly outline an amended account of the emotions that is faithful to Luhmann's broader theoretical commitments but not subject to the above criticisms. This amendment is based upon an emphasis of the role of emotion in each of the three basic and structurally circular modes of autopoiesis clarified by Luhmann. This should not be mistaken as one more mere affirmation of the existence of different ›levels of analysis‹ (Averill 1982; Keltner/Haidt 1999). In stressing the simultaneously *organic*, *conscious* and *communicative* aspects of emotions it becomes possible to observe the liminal role they play as a parasitical irritant provoking both the differentiation and the coupling of these otherwise radically distinct and

strictly autonomous forms of autopoietic operation. Understanding this role will require overcoming the paradox of having to insist on the distinct nature of these three domains of autopoietic ordering, whilst at the same time stressing that any concrete emotional event must involve the simultaneous, reciprocal and overlapping ordering effects of all three. It is here that the philosophy of Michel Serres can usefully supplement that of Luhmann. If Luhmann emphasises the need to analytically distinguish social, psychic and organic systemic levels, then Serres stresses that any such clear distinction risks missing »where the action is«. Namely, in the threshold activities and spaces of transformation that Serres, in different works, identifies with the figures of Hermes (1992), parasites (1982) and angels (1995).⁵ Emotions, I argue, represent a threshold zone or domain in which the norms of social systems are bundled together with states of consciousness and bodily processes. As such, it is their chief characteristic *not* to be categorisable using such standard dualisms as »innate versus learned« or »natural versus social«. Having outlined this theoretical reorientation I will go on to show that it opens up, via Luhmann's theory of social systems, a powerful way of revising the socio-psychology of emotions.

Emotions as threshold phenomena between the organic, psychic and social

The paradox of the parasite:

General overview of Luhmann's three parallel operative levels

In Luhmann's theory of autopoietic, self-organising systems, the organic, the psychic and the social are to be treated as fully self-referential and self-producing systemic levels. These systems are operatively closed with respect to one another since their autopoiesis operates with different media or materials:

⁵ This difference in emphasis between the two thinkers is evident in their respective stances on *systems*. For Luhmann (1995, 13) »The following considerations assume that there are systems«. For Serres (1982, 73) »Maybe there is or never was a system ... The only instances or systems are black boxes. When we do not understand, when we defer our knowledge to a later date, when the thing is too complex for the means at hand, when we put everything in a temporary black box, we prejudge the existence of a system. When we finally open the box, we see that it works like a space of transformation. The only systems, instances, and substances come from our lack of knowledge. The system is nonknowledge. The other side of nonknowledge is chaos; the other, system. Knowledge forms a bridge between the two banks. Knowledge as such is a space of transformation«. Nevertheless, a systems theoretical affirmation that there are no systems is a thoroughly *Luhmannian* paradox, grounded in the recognition that the operations of any given system are ultimately de-paradoxifying strategies doomed to an eventual return to paradox.

organic processes in the case of biological systems, consciousness (*Gedanken*) in the case of psychic systems, and communication in the case of social systems. The problem of the mutual inter(re)ference between distinct operative levels is cast in the biological terminology of *structural coupling*. Inter(re)ference by structural coupling is necessarily indirect, since each operative level functions only as *environment* to the others. Nevertheless, consciousness, for instance, can *irritate* or otherwise indirectly stimulate the system of communication that is its environment. Likewise organic activity can *irritate* consciousness. To use Serres' (1982) terminology, such irritation is always *parasitical* in the literal sense of *on the side* (para/ site). Such parasitical irritations are constantly occurring at the invisible thresholds between discrete operative levels, and serve to mutually structure these levels through incessant provocation. In any given act of communication, consciousness is already fully present, and so are the organic operations of neurophysiology. Yet, to put it somewhat poetically, they pass each other by like ships in the night, silently altering their mutual courses by way of the waves their movements cause in the shared medium of the ocean. Each operative level is distinct (only consciousness is conscious, only communication communicates), but without consciousness, there can be no communication, and without brain biochemistry, there can be no consciousness.

Evolutionarily speaking, and without forgetting their eventual mutual provocation to higher levels of complexity, organic systems are more basic than systems of consciousness, which in turn are more basic than systems of communication. More basic than all is the primordial *noise* (unstructured or chaotic multiplicity) from which all systems are born (as the reduction of multiplicity and the creation of a *complexity differential* between system and environment, Luhmann 1995) and to which all systems return (Serres 1998). If systems exist on the edge, or on the side, of noise, then it is reasonable, in abstract terms, to label the act of system formation as the act of *parasiting* noise. A system is a parasite that, by digesting noise, renders it operable as material for the ongoing renewal of the system. In ordering noise and transforming it into what passes for signal, emergent systems become fertile ground to be parasited in turn by new systems. As a result of parasiting a parasite, such new systems can afford a higher level of complexity. We hence have an evolutionary principle that takes the form of a parasitical cascade that would resemble the sequence of integrated interlocking entities described by François Jacob (1976), and that would remain consistent with von Foerster's (1960) principle of order from noise.

In this sense, we can abstractly conceive of consciousness as having *parasited* organic life, and of communication as having parasited consciousness. The change in the basic materials made use of by autopoiesis at each level would be a function of the increase of complexity enabled by the adoption of a limi-

nal parasitical position⁶. From this *para* position, the production of order achieved by the parasited system can be taken for granted by its parasite, and transcended. A new system thus emerges parallel to the old. Serres has proposed just such a model in a bold attempt – influenced by Henri Atlan’s biological application of information theory (e.g. 1974) – to explain the origin of language:

Consider any level of an interlocking system. Locally ... it operates like a series of chemical reactions at a certain temperature. Let us forget for the moment their precise equations and the unique elements at work here. Let us consider only the energy conditions at this one level. It mobilizes information and produces background noise. The next level in the interlocking series receives, manipulates, and generally integrates the information-background noise couple that was given off at the preceding level. How does this take place? Several recent studies allow us to elucidate the answer to this question ... Indeed, if one writes the equation expressing the quantity of information exchanged between two stations through a given channel and the equation which provides this quantity for the whole unit (including the two stations and the channel), a change of sign occurs for a certain function entering into the computation. In other words, this function, called ambiguity and resulting from noise, changes when the observer changes his point of observation. Its value depends on whether he is submerged in the first level or whether he examines the entire unit from the next level. In a certain sense, the next level functions as a rectifier, in particular, as a rectifier of noise. What was once an obstacle to all messages is reversed and added to the information. This discovery is all the more important since it is valid for all levels. It is a law of the series which runs through the system of integration (Serres 1992, 77).

In this account, systems both emerge from noise and are perpetually provoked into complexification by noise. A system is a space for the transformation of noise. Here it is relevant that, in French, *parasite* also means what the English call *static* (the *noise* that interferes with a transmitted signal). In this sense, Serres’ concept of the parasite serves as a useful supplement to Luhmann’s fundamental concept of paradox. Luhmann repeatedly stresses that paradox is the generating principle of autopoiesis, to the extent that autopoietic operations must be grasped as essentially de-paradoxifying (Teubner in press). If the improbable circular operations of autopoiesis are to continue, the paralyzing logical perplexity of paradox must be overcome (Clam 2001). Systems, to repeat my theme in Luhmannian terms, are thus born from paradox, provoked

6 »The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he builds a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal« (Serres 1982, 35).

into complexification by paradox, and inevitably return to paradox. It seems plausible that Luhmann's concept of paradox was articulated with systems that operate with meaning in mind. Supplementing it with Serres' concept of the parasite extends that plausibility to organic and physical systems. The basic, grounding paradox is that order emerges from noise and owes its preservation to excluded (digested, rectified) noise. The paradox of the parasite is that it is both the pathological principle of the interruption and destruction of order, and the constructive, consolidating principle of its emergence and evolution. In the final analysis, system is indistinguishable from noise: parasite.⁷

Affects as the organic constitutive outside of consciousness

The above enables a view of emotions as threshold phenomena between Luhmann's three operative levels or domains of ordering. As phenomena of the threshold, they exist neither completely outside nor completely inside social, psychic or organic systems. Indeed, they function as what I will call the *constitutive outside* of each system. Biology, in this sense, is the constitutive outside of consciousness in the precise sense that one (e.g. biology) does not belong *within* the other (e.g. consciousness), yet the other (consciousness) cannot exist *without* it (biology). But, in Luhmannian terms, the emergence of consciousness from organic life is itself a paradoxical solution to the paradox of the impossibility of full biological self-reference (Clam 2001, 52). One could speculate that the evolution of something like consciousness became biologically necessary the moment the complexity of the environment overwhelmed the capacity of an organism to adapt successfully using only genetically encoded ›knowledge‹.

Hence the first argument I wish to make is that emotions form precisely a parasitical coupling between the organic and the conscious (although they were by no means the first of such couplings). Emotions can be thought of as a biological means of generating a distinctly psychological level of functioning that is precisely no longer understandable as an organic process. For the sake of clarity, we might refer to emotions in their organic manifestation as *affects*. On a psychic level, different affects take the form of distinct subjective forms of consciousness (emotions). Whatever Schacter and Singer have claimed, the phenomenological world of fear could not be more distinct from that of joy. It seems reasonable to assume that any motivational role played by affects is mediated by the rewarding or unrewarding nature of their conscious experi-

7 »Theorem: noise gives rise to a new system, an order that is more complex than the simple chain. The parasite interrupts at first glance, consolidates when you look again ... such a parasite is responsible for the growth of the system's complexity, such a parasite stops it ... are we in the pathology of systems or in their emergence and evolution?« (Serres 1982, 14).

ence. This point was most persuasively developed by Silvan Tomkins (1963), who made a detailed comparison between what he called the affect system and the drive system.⁸ Like the so called »drive signals« of thirst, hunger and so on, the affects are part of a biological system which appears to be specifically designed to perform the still poorly understood transmutation from organic operation to conscious report. The affect of distress forms consciousness in a way that is comparable to the signal of so-called physical pain. In both cases the resultant conscious report, provided it enters awareness, is motivational in nature: it feels bad and is to be avoided.

It is evident that drives solve the big evolutionary problem of how to maintain a biological system in equilibrium in the absence of knowledge that can be organically ›built in‹.⁹ Most bodily processes are silent in the sense that they do not require conscious report: the blood ›knows‹ how to clot just as the digestive system ›knows‹ how to process food. But a conscious report like pain or hunger is precisely required when ›built in‹ information is inadequate for the solution of the problem of maintaining equilibrium. In such circumstances a drive signal is put to use which »beats on the door of consciousness until the person is goaded into some activity which will meet the body's needs« (Tomkins 1963, 31). Like drives, the affects generate consciousness by way of stimulations of specific *organic* regions. If the sex drive recruits the highly sensitive flesh of the genitals, nipples, ear-lobes, etc, then an affect like shame recruits the sensitivities of a face engorged with the blood of a blush. The face of the human being, as Darwin (1872) made clear, is a hyper-sensitive and finely muscled surface, developed through evolution and recruited to the task of the experience and expression of affects. Here we see a specific example of the parasitism of the organic by the psychic. The noise of the body is *rectified* into signal for consciousness. Regardless of LeDoux's (1995) efforts to separate the organic from the conscious aspects of affects, the affects are situated at this moment of rectification.

Emotions as the conscious constitutive outside of communication

Evidence for the organic and evolved nature of affects is clear the first moment we come into the world. Each of us, with perhaps one or two exceptions, is lit-

8 My account draws heavily on Silvan Tomkins, since he is one of the few well established psychologists of emotion to have developed a fully fledged systems theoretical perspective. For this reason he is typically poorly understood by colleagues, whose ignorance of the fine details of his work is compounded by the routine misspelling of his name! (for Oatley/Jenkins 1996 and Mandler (in press), he is *Sylvan* Tomkins, whilst for Stearns/Stearns 1988, he is *Silvan Tompkins*).

9 For Tomkins, a key evolutionary function of the affect system is to *amplify* drive signals which might otherwise be too weak. Hence the sex drive can be amplified with the affect of excitement, or enjoyment (or can be dampened with shame).

erally born crying in distress. It stretches plausibility to imagine that the newborn has already *learned* this clearly affective and highly specialised response, or that it is the product of the kind of complex cognitive appraisal mechanism required by Lazarus (1984). Specific affects have also been traced to specific regions of the brain. For instance, using tracer technology, LeDoux (e.g. 1995) was able to show that fear-relevant information from the auditory thalamus is passed on to the lateral amygdala for further processing. However, perhaps the best evidence for the existence of a discrete set of so-called biologically hard-wired affects is that these can be linked to a set of universally recognisable facial displays (Ekman/Friesen 1971; Izard, 1971; but see Ortony/Turner 1990 and Fridlund/Duchaine 1996 for critiques). This leads to my second point. Emotions do not simply constitute a coupling of organic processes to consciousness. They also represent a threshold at which an *organic system-made-conscious is harnessed to the project of social communication*. If the smile of joy, the tears of distress and the blush of shame are potentials that are organically inscribed in the facial musculature, then this is because such affects play a proto-communicative role. This applies also to the vocalizations specific to affects, such as the laughter of joy, the gasp of excitement and the scream of fear. The communicative value of the neonate's unlearned cry of distress is as undeniable as that of their red, distorted, tearful face. More than this, it seems also that even neonates are able to respond in kind to the facial displays and vocalizations of affect of others (Oatley/Jenkins 1996; Meltzoff/Moore 1977). In the form of so-called »emotional contagion« (Hatfield et al. 1994), the emotions thus supply the organic system and its parasitical consciousness with a proto-communicative, pre-linguistic propensity towards sociality.

In sum, just as biology is the constitutive outside of consciousness, so consciousness is the constitutive outside of communication. This also is compatible with the relevant basic Luhmannian paradox. For Luhmann, communication is the solution to the paradox of the impossibility of individual consciousnesses every experiencing one another, despite their fundamental isomorphism. The solution represented by communication is itself paradoxical, since the social system is only able to de-paradoxify the isolation of consciousness at the price of committing the interlocutors to a medium of communication which forever escapes consciousness (see Clam 2000, 71).¹⁰ In summary, communication de-paradoxifies consciousness, and consciousness de-paradoxifies organic life, each the parasite of the other. In each case emotions play the role of the parasitical transformer which refers the organic to consciousness and both to communication.

¹⁰ If Husserl demonstrated the impossibility of getting outside of consciousness once it becomes one's subject matter, then Derrida does the same for language. Consciousness, after all, is a word in language. But language is equally just an experience in consciousness.

Avoidance of reductionism

The above account remains faithful to Luhmann's theoretical corpus but is not subject to the criticism of ignoring the fundamentally organic and social aspects of emotion. Luhmann's insights regarding the relationships between expectations, claims, and emotional life remain intact and open for further elaboration. Furthermore, it is an account that is highly resistant to being coded into »innate *versus* learned« or »natural *versus* social« or »positivistic *versus* constructionist« categories. This gives hope of immunity from the three forms of reductionism that typify the field: biological reductionism (LeDoux 1995); reduction to consciousness (Sartre 1993); and reduction to the social (Edwards 1999). First, if an affect system is part of our inherited organic machinery, then it is a system designed with maximal degrees of freedom for optimal flexibility.¹¹ Even if it is granted that certain innate triggers of affect exist (such as pain and hunger as triggers of distress), affects, due to their biological flexibility, rapidly take on far more complex, learned and meaningful *social* objects which ›trigger‹ them just as effectively (e.g. distress at the loss of esteem that follows a poor performance in a school play, followed by distress at the *memory* of this).

Second, as part of a psychic system, emotions become directly amenable to conscious control, cultivation, manipulation and socialization. Just as a reflex blink can be transformed by conscious control into a deliberate wink, so can an innate startle response or smile be consciously re-traversed to yield a product which, from an early age, can no longer be considered ›pure‹ affect. Indeed, because of their evident motivational nature, individuals rapidly develop an interest in deliberately controlling both their affects and the circumstances that elicit them. All else being equal, the broad aim will be to maximise and sustain positive experiences of joy and excitement, whilst minimising and containing the negative affects of distress, shame, fear, disgust and anger.¹² Further, consciousness will typically be composed of *combinations* of

11 Like drives, the affects reduce dependency on system-internal knowledge. But unlike drives the information they convey is general rather than specific. Hunger and thirst are specific to the deficits they signal and the drives themselves indicate the necessary remedial action: our throat is dry in thirst, and belly rumbles in hunger. The information conveyed by an affect like anger or distress by contrast, is general and free in the sense that one can be angry or distressed at practically anything. This generality makes the affect system highly flexible: »If the infant is hungry, he cries. If there is a diaper pin hurting him, he cries. If he has just finished eating but develops gas pains, he cries. If he is tired and sleepy, he cries« (Tomkins 1963, 42).

12 The common modern practice of watching horror-movies or taking roller-coaster rides is evidence, I think, not of fear-seeking as such, but of a learning process whereby terror can be *contained* and *transformed*, almost at will, into the positive thrill of excitement. Likewise, I venture the hypothesis that the modern love of ›weepee‹ films and novels is less to do with *seeking* distress than with containing and transforming the harsh dysphoria of distress into the relative sweetness of *sadness*. This would fit Tomkins' claim that distress, unlike sadness, is an innate affect.

affects into more complex conscious compounds and sequences with new emergent dynamics irreducible to any organic precursors (Plutchik 1991).¹³ Third, as part of a social system, emotions will take on a communicative role that increasingly frees them from the organic and conscious constraints which nevertheless continue to lend them their proto-communicative potential. The moment emotions are *assumed* into language they become symbolically mediated, irreversibly refined and transformed, and harnessed to normative social projects (Harré 1986; Stenner 1993). Indeed, due to their motivational role with respect to conduct and communication, it is highly probable that the expression of affect will be a direct question for social control and socialisation within the communication circuits of families and wider collectives alike. This explains why it is commonplace to find emotions a prime target, not just of mundane pedagogical protocols, but also of the great moral, ethical and religious discourses from Aristotle's ethics, through the Seven Deadly Sins, to Spinoza's ethics, Hobbes' politics, Smiths ›moral sentiments‹, and so forth (Stenner, in press 1 and 2).

A socio-psychology of emotions informed by Luhmann

Any adequate theory of the organic nature of *affects* hence opens a significant space for the social psychology and sociology of emotions. The organic givens of affect are transformed in and by a consciousness that works back on them. The organic and conscious givens of affect are likewise transformed in and by communication, which in turn works back on them. The above yields a clear implication for any sociology or socio-psychology of emotions concerned with the problem of how a given social system might structure the emotional possibilities of individuals. Namely, following Luhmann, one should attend to the structural coupling of social systems with psychic and organic systems. More

13 Whatever consciousness might or might not be (and I don't pretend an answer to this question), it seems undoubtedly to be a complex emergent drawing upon, combining and recombining the products of many other brain functions including those that sub-serve perception, memory, and the higher-order cognitive feats of thought, language and the imagination. This suggests, irrespective of any discretely identifiable biologically given affective potentials, that any given state of consciousness will be the unification of a hybrid affair of great mixture. It will be composed of perceptions of our encounters and of memories of these. It will be structured by the goals and desires of our imagination. Perceptions, thoughts, memories and images will each in turn be more or less emotionally laden. And these feelings will in turn be converted into concepts and become the object of further thoughts, feelings, perceptions and imaginings, some to be remembered, some not. Any given moment of consciousness might likewise involve combined emotions, each multiply complicated by its history of associations with thoughts, images and memories. In short, what is given by nature by way of emotional equipment does not determine consciousness but merely provides it materials to be processed into the medium of the operations of its own economy. Affects, once their parasitical work is done, are swiftly parasited in turn by the broader psychic system.

specifically, following Luhmann's provocative suggestions regarding the role of expectations and claims in social and emotional life, I propose that a particularly productive point of entry is to examine the relationships between *rights* and emotions.

The emotions/rights complex

It should be clear enough that one need not assume that emotions belong straightforwardly to the psychic domain and rights to the social. Emotions, as I have argued, are threshold phenomena in which the norms of social systems are, as it were, bundled together with states of consciousness and bodily processes. In this sense, they represent the site of an embodiment of conscious human beings into the communications of a social order. Likewise, rights, whether legal or moral, are certainly properties of social systems of communication. But they also play a psychological role. Rights *symbolise institutionalised expectations* (Luhmann 1957). In this sense, a right is a symbolically mediated form of social recognition. Laying claim to rights is a powerful way in which a psychic system can render the environment predictable and operable. The ›possessor‹ of a right can expect others to recognise that right, and can draw upon external social authority should that expectation be violated. Hence as well as symbolising institutionalised expectations, rights, as Luhmann puts it, *mediate* in their actualisation in concrete circumstances. Rights, both legal and moral, thus serve to lend order to the flow of social communication, but in so doing they also play a role in the consciousness of the individual whose desires, claims and expectations are framed and structured. To the extent that rights structure expectations on a psychic level, they also lend form or pattern to emotions. Specifically, rights *probabilise* emotions, which is to say that they make *emotionality* more or less probable, and they make the experience and expression of *specific* emotions more or less probable.

It could be said that if *emotions* are the site of an embodiment of human beings into social order, then *rights* are symbolic vehicles through which the social involves, includes or assumes¹⁴ human beings into its communicative order. Affective conscious life is assumed into the form of rights, whilst rights take the expectations and desires of human beings into account, thereby rendering them into the form of socially *accountable* actors or personae. It is no accident, therefore, that typical enactments of emotions are immanently concerned with issues of rights. Contempt, anger, resentment and disgust, for instance, represent the emotional condemnation of those who violate rights. If it is we ourselves who violate right, then guilt, shame and humiliation target the self for

¹⁴ Here I am using this word in its theological sense. Just as the Virgin was *assumed* from earth to heaven, so biologically given affective potentialities are assumed into the circulation of the social order.

condemnation. When we turn to those whose rights have been violated, sympathy, pity and compassion are the appropriate moral responses to their suffering. These emotions are the *right emotions* to feel (Stenner, in press 1). This does not, of course, mean that we do in fact always feel them. But it does mean that their experience is *probabilised* by a combination of normative social expectations, and expectations experienced by a reflexive consciousness. To experience guilt, contempt and pity is, in this sense, to *embody* rights. They can be envisaged as rights filled out with affective content, or as affect shaped into the pattern of rights.

The identification of this internal connection between emotions and rights is not new. It was central to Aristotle's discussion of the passions¹⁵, and plays a pivotal role in social constructionist theories of emotions (Averill 1982; Sabini/Silver 1982; Harré 1986). Contrary to the proposition that specific emotion words refer to specifiable empirical organic or psychic referents, the social constructionist argument has been advanced to the effect that many emotions are moral and hence social ›all the way down‹. To describe oneself as envious or proud or ashamed, in this account, is to deploy a socially available discursive resource to describe a social response to a social situation that in turn serves social functions (Armon-Jones 1986). This argument is certainly a strong one in the case of complex social emotions such as jealousy and envy. Although such observations remain debatable, a key difference between jealousy and envy hangs on the question of whether a social object is understood to be owned by an actor who fears its loss (jealousy), or whether it is coveted by an actor to whom it does not yet belong (envy). The decisive difference between these ›green‹ emotions is hence to be found in the social domain of (perceived) *rightful propriety* and not in the organic domain of autonomic functioning or neuro-chemistry. But this social ordering has its parallel in an ordering of consciousness that may or may not occur simultaneously. To adapt a famous Freudian formula, if envy secretly thinks ›where *it* is, *I* shall be‹, then jealousy anxiously thinks ›where *I* am, *it* shall be‹.¹⁶

This immanent relationship between rights and emotions is on one level a function of the linguistically mediated nature of consciousness. For Luhmann (1995, 273), the »linguistic forming of consciousness« is one of the main forms of structural coupling between psychic and social systems. But consciousness

15 In his *Rhetoric*, for instance, Aristotle defines anger as »a desire for what appears to be a revenge for what appears to be an insult«.

16 Stenner/Stainton Rogers (1998) have explored some of the many different ways in which jealousy can be moralised. For example, a stark distinction exists (in ordinary understandings amongst UK participants) between jealousy which follows an *actual* infraction (e.g. the jealousy of a wife whose husband has betrayed her) and that which follows the mere suspicion of an infraction. In the first case moral support is typically offered to the jealous individual. In the second case the jealousy is more likely to be subjected to moral condemnation. At issue is clearly the question of the *right* to be jealous.

can also be socially directed by way of the fulfilment and disappointment of expectations and claims. We should therefore expect profound and systematic links to exist between patterns of emotional life and the structure and culture of rights in different societies or within a given society at different historical points. In the remainder of the paper I offer the sketch of just one very general and broad example of such a shift in the *emotions/rights complex*: the so-called shift to modernity. Needless to say, future work will be required to fill out this sketch with appropriate detail. But for present purposes I hope that it suffices to illustrate my theoretical point.

The transformation of rights and emotions in the shift to modernity

In Luhmann's account, society underwent a catastrophic change around the second half of the 18th century. The so-called shift to modernity is a transformation in the nature of the collective. Specifically, for Luhmann, it represents the point at which a predominantly hierarchically differentiated European social order begins to give way to functional differentiation. Instead of differentiation occurring predominantly by way of whole groups or strata of people with fixed roles and status positions, it begins to occur predominantly by way of different *forms of communication*. Indeed, for Luhmann, modernity is the evolutionary point at which discrete social systems such as law, politics, education, economy, science and art each begin to achieve *en masse* the operative closure necessary for autopoiesis. I have argued that the link between rights and emotions concerns the embodiment of human beings into the communicative social order of the collective. If so, then any such massive shift in social order requires a parallel re-distribution or re-patterning of emotional identifications and thereby emotional life. It likewise requires a re-working of the concept and application of rights that might transform psychic expectations through a re-structuring of socially recognised claims.

Regarding the latter, it is fairly standard practice to conveniently date the so-called transition to modernity in the west with a dramatic shift in the concept and use of rights. Specifically, we can point to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789, and the American Bill of Rights of 1791. These great declarations of rights constituted essential components of new forms of political community based upon the Nation-State model. The concept of *natural rights* upon which these declarations were based was also novel. As Luhmann (1957) argues, rights in the pre-modern feudal order did not belong to individuals as such. Rather, rights referred to an objectively given social order, and their source was a balanced judgement concerning existing social relations. Rights were intimately connected with justice, and a just allocation of rights took into account the different standing and contributions of differently located social actors to the social good. Rights were hence

tied to duties, and the legal order reflected the hierarchies of the social order, which were in turn typically justified by way of natural or divine law (e.g. the *lex naturalis* of Aquinas). The modern conception of natural rights, by contrast, holds such rights to be inalienable attributes of human beings irrespective of objective social or legal order. Such an account was first comprehensively articulated by Hobbes, but Luhmann traces it back to a conception of ›subjective rights‹ that was influenced by the Franciscan Nominalists and then refined in the early 17th century by figures such as Suárez and Grotius. After Hobbes, basic rights are no longer seen as an objective thing, but as a fundamental attribute of the human subject (Verschraegen 2002).

In discussing the *function* of *Grundrechte*, Luhmann suggests that a condition of possibility for functional differentiation is precisely that people are *not* pre-defined by an accident of birth that includes them totally in a fixed social group with its own stable heritage and destiny. On the contrary, the citizen of a modern state must first of all be an *individual*. It would defeat the object of *functional* differentiation if each person could belong and live in only one social sub-system. Viewed in this light, the articulation of a new conception of natural rights gives institutional support for the expectation that, before being a member of a social group, a citizen is naturally an individual. If the fragile figure of the individual is born with the modern state, then the juridico-political figure of modern, natural, subjective, basic rights functions to *bolster* and support that individual with the power of state-sanctioned expectation. This means that ›the individual‹ is an essentially empty category. It is precisely the negation of any totalising social definition of human nature. Natural rights thus function to include or assume human beings into the functionally differentiated social system. They are a largely unnoticed pre-condition of participation within modern society (Verschraegen 2002).

The suggestion that the figure of the individual is an essentially empty category should not disguise the fact that the practical *achievement* of such ›emptiness‹ can be an arduous and Sisyphean task. The process of *involvement* or inclusion in increasingly individualised forms of social order requires the simultaneous *detachment* of the individual from the local, personalised and stratified forms of order typical of hierarchically differentiated social systems. Natural rights, I wish to argue, acquire their position at the foundation of modern state constitutions because they both symbolise and potentially enforce precisely this detachment from the old and involvement in the new. Natural rights thus build into modern juridico-political systems the semantic basis for a recurrent critique and sublation of traditional authority. It should be clear that this dynamic of attachment and involvement profoundly concerns the emotions in that it requires a re-organisation of emotional identifications and a redistribution of emotional possibilities. It is significant, therefore, that this transition to modernity was grasped in later self-descriptions (i.e. those

self-descriptions of society offered by sociology) essentially as a move from nature to society and from emotion to reason (*Gemeinschaft* → *Gesellschaft*, mechanical → organic). In such descriptions, ›Enlightenment modernity‹ was associated with reason and society, while ›traditional societies‹ were associated with emotion and nature.

On one level these descriptions of modernity as a move from emotion to reason have some plausibility: Bureaucratic and calculative forms of rationality did indeed come to proliferate (Luhmann 1998; Elias 1994), and to some extent this did involve a push towards ›affective neutrality‹ (Parsons 1951). Likewise, broadly emotional notions such as vengeance, mental suffering, malice, mercy and compassion – which played a comparatively fundamental role in pre-modern European legal systems – largely disappear from modern law as legal recognition is de-coupled from social esteem (Honneth 1996; Jhering 1905). Indeed, the self-referentiality typical of modern functional social sub-systems is gained thanks in part to the evolution of generalised symbolic media specific to each. As soon as such media as power, money and the juridical are available, for instance, autonomous political, economic and legal communication can be performed with great specificity and efficiency in a strictly determined, coded medium. Such medialised communication is effectively immune from any face-to-face emotional communication in its environment, and requires it neither as a motivating prompt nor as a justification for its perpetuation.

But these self-descriptions of modernity tell only half of a paradoxical story. Modernity involved a massive *redistribution* of emotion, rather than its simple exclusion. This is nowhere clearer than in the fact that modern constitutions place a right to individual self-actualisation and happiness at the very centre of the nation-state. In the previous European order, ruled by Christianity in its diverse forms, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that such desires were treated with great caution as the timeless source of evil¹⁷. What is excluded as the ultimate danger for pre-moderns (individual wilful desire for happiness and pleasure) is installed at the very centre of the modern polity.

Likewise, the period during which this shift was in preparation was characterised by an unprecedented intellectual concentration on the question of passions and affects. As I have argued elsewhere, answers to *political* questions were being sought in a *scientific* analysis of human emotions (Stenner, in press 2). Spinoza's *ethics* is based on a *becoming active* made possible through a

¹⁷ It is of course important to note the complexities of Christianity in this respect. For example, the combative relationship to the passions typical of Augustine was considerably less pronounced in Thomist theology, becomes the distinctive feature of puritanism, and fades out completely with Deism. Also, Christianity obviously did not disappear with modernity. Indeed, the doctrine of natural rights has clear foundations in the religious individualism of Grotius and Suárez and the religiously inspired withdrawals of religion from politics of Hobbes, Locke etc.

detailed account of the *affects*. Descartes' philosophy of mastery and domination involves a thorough analysis of *the passions of the soul*. The discussions of passions, appetites and desires in Part I of Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) ground the proposals for the Commonwealth outlined in Part II. In the classics from the late 17th to mid 18th century one can even discern a trend whereby the *psychological* questions concerning emotions are published in a separate work which marginally precedes the publication of the political, legal or economic work. Locke's *Essay concerning human understanding* (1689) appears the year before his *Two treatises of government*. Volume 2 of Hume's *Treatise of human nature* entitled *On the passions* (1739) is swiftly followed by the essays on political economy, morals and ethics. Smith's *Theory of the moral sentiments* (1759) provided the ground for the later *Wealth of nations*. With Rousseau, the psychology of emotion takes place in his novels. *Julie* (1761) precedes the *Social contract* by one year, and *Emile* is published in the same year.

In fact, it was during the course of this intense scientific concern with passions and affects that the very concept of ›emotion‹ was used for the first time as a psychological term (Danziger 1997). As put by Graham Richards (in press): ›strictly speaking, no English speaker before the eighteenth century had any [emotions], what they had were ›passions‹ and ›affections‹«. According to the New Oxford English Dictionary, the term emotion originally had the physical meaning of a ›moving out‹ (*e movere*) before being used figuratively, in its modern sense, to denote an ›agitation or disturbance of mind‹ or ›excited mental state‹. Hume, for instance, writes mostly of passions, but occasionally mentions emotions. Whilst Hume does not appear to work with a consistent and clear distinction between passions and emotions,¹⁸ the same cannot be said for Henry Home (Lord Kames). According to Richards (in press) his *Elements of criticism* (1762) is the first attempt to theoretically elaborate a distinction between emotion and passion. Emotion refers to the pleasant or unpleasant feelings caused – due to the constitution of our nature – by encountered objects or persons. Emotions are antecedent to passions, which may or may not develop from the desire generated in us by emotion. By the 19th century, the term emotion: ›finally replaced ›passion‹ and ›affection‹, restricting these to ›strong emotion‹ and ›fond liking‹ respectively« (Richards, in press). Emotions took over from passions as part of political discourse in which rights became grounded in a scientific argument over the basic nature of human drives, desires and appetites. If natural rights were invented in their modern indi-

18 For instance, in discussing the reflective impressions he says (Hume 1969, 327): ›Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them.« Later (328) he implies a difference in intensity: ›The raptures of poetry and music frequently rise to the greatest height; while those other impressions, properly call'd *passions*, may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible«. Elsewhere (e.g. 462-3) they are used as synonyms: ›When I am angry, I am actually possess'd with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick ...«

vidualistic form by Hobbes, then the modern concept of emotion was no less a modern invention. This double invention is no accident. With the emergence of the modern nation state, politics became, in a certain new sense, emotional while emotions became, symmetrically, political (Arendt 1990; Boltanski, 1999).

It seems clear, in sum, that the self-image of modernity as thoroughly rational conceals a fundamental reorganisation of emotional possibilities and an amplification of the significance of emotional life for politics. There are several other historical themes that testify to this, which I can only briefly indicate here. The most obvious is the emergence of a new discourse of *romanticism* that celebrated the emotions in a manner with no parallel in the history of the west. In romanticism, ethics become grounded in passions and in the celebration of individual and collective freedom. Second, the nation state itself becomes an object of newly intensified emotional identification in the form of the great 19th century waves of nationalism. Third is the well-documented split between the public and private spheres wherein women and children were allocated an emotional role in the private sphere of the family at the price of exclusion from full citizenship as rights-bearing nationals (Benhabib 1987; Young 1990). An examination of this development would illustrate the sense in which we are dealing with a modern *redistribution* of affect, rather than its exclusion. This can be further linked to the construction of a host of »emotional others« whose alleged emotionality warrants their political exclusion (black people, women, children, the working classes, Orientals, slaves). In each case, the redistributions of affect are intimately related to the articulation, application and contestation of rights.

The diachronic transformation of individual emotions

Finally, attention to the emotions/rights complex opens up new possibilities for tracing the changing historical fate of specific emotions (Stearns/Stearns 1988). For example, I have already suggested that the »green« emotions of jealousy and envy can be broadly distinguished with respect to their relationship to rights. To the extent that the shift to modernity entailed a transformation of rights, we should expect distinct changes in the socially available representations, prescriptions and evaluations (»semantics«) pertaining to these emotions. Although more detailed research is needed, there are strong indications that support the hypothesis that jealousy has become less legitimate and acceptable under modernity, whilst envy has become more so. Jealousy, for instance, was once the defining passion of the Judeo Christian God, who announces Himself more than once as a »jealous God« capable of violently defending the well-being and fidelity of His flock. As God's own defining passion, jealousy is given a positive evaluation and features as an indispensable

quality of patriarchal leadership. However, as Stearns (1989), Mullen (1991) and Curt (1994) have shown, jealousy in modern times has come increasingly to signify immaturity and lack of control. In the early 20th century, under the influence of the quasi-medical gaze of scientific psychological discourse, jealousy was increasingly discussed and portrayed as a pathology that should be identified and eliminated as soon as possible (ideally in its early manifestation as ›sibling rivalry‹). Envy, on the other hand, was traditionally identified as one of the more serious of the Seven Deadly Sins. In traditional social systems, great efforts were made to avoid engendering the ›evil eye‹, and the negative consequences of envy were well recognised and rehearsed in many an aphorism. During the modern period, envy comes to be treated more lightly. Indeed, in English at least, the word is typically used as a way of expressing benign admiration rather than malign destructive intent. It seems clear that in today's economic context of rampant consumerism, envy acquires a positive motivational role necessary to projects of self-improvement. In short, today it seems we are inclined to believe that the jealous God of the Old Testament suffered from a serious personality disorder, and that the Deadly Sin of envy is an advertising opportunity for the selling of cars.

My suggestion is that the ground for this double reversal of evaluations is to be found in the transformed claims and expectations that follow from the articulation and increasing influence of modern individualistic rights. To the extent that jealousy involves a will to control and possess the other, it constitutes an intrusion into the rights of individuals. To the extent that envy can be transformed into a positive and competitive consciousness of the right to individual possession, it becomes a resource for the shaping of the desires of a self-contained, freely choosing (and purchasing) individual. Similar transformations for other emotions could be predicted.¹⁹ Stearns/Stearns' (1988), for instance, discuss an early modern (US puritan) shift in emphasis away from describing responses to negative events as evoking *sadness*, and towards self-descriptions that emphasise *anger*. The expression of anger, as discussed earlier, is made more probable when a claim to a right is violated. Although the Stearns' do not discuss this issue, it seems relevant that during the period of transformation they discuss the puritans became key players in the articulation of a modern natural rights based democracy (Stackhouse 1984).

19 Luhmann's (1998) own work on the complicated growth of a modern discourse on *love as passion* should be noted in this context.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that even if the emotions were a ›blind spot‹ for Niklas Luhmann, then this does not alter the fact that his systems theory offers rich resources for a socio-psychology or sociology of emotions. There is no doubt that Luhmann's account of the emotions is too narrowly cognitive and underestimates the organic and social roles they play. Nevertheless, I wish to conclude by emphasising that certain ›alexithymic‹ qualities of the theory are deliberate and strategic choices on the part of the author. One of Luhmann's main concerns was to avoid the mistake of attempting to ground, legitimate, explain and understand social systems by way of psychological arguments about the essence of the human being. For Luhmann, this was the principal mistake of the Enlightenment, which strove to deduce the nature of society from the logic of a supposedly essential human rationality. As I suggested earlier, this essential psychic basis of the polity was often identified with the logic of affect. He argues instead for a *soziologische Aufklärung* capable of understanding the evolution of society in terms of an internal logic proper to social systems themselves, not psychic systems. Any such project would necessarily remain critical of arguments to reinstate a logic of affect as the basis and motor of social systems. Indeed, for Luhmann modernity is understood socially as the evolutionary point at which social sub-systems achieve the operative closure necessary for autopoiesis and hence functional differentiation. As discussed earlier, this development entails a highly medialised form of communication that precisely minimises (but never eliminates) the role of face-to-face emotional encounters.

Nevertheless, the current trend towards stressing the value and importance of emotion to psychic and social life is not surprising, and should itself be analysed socially. It is clear that over the past fifty years or so emotional *communications* have become more and more fundamental to the operations of late modern social systems. The fact that this development is deeply controversial testifies to its existence. Hence legal theorists talk of an unwelcome shift from the jurisdiction of law to the ›jurisdiction of emotions‹ (Garapon 1996). The education system has become ›child centred‹, stressing dialogue and emotional engagement over didactic and rational instruction. Politicians now sport caring and smiling facial expressions where once it was compulsory to look stern and disciplined, and ›spin doctors‹ present ›feel good‹ versions of policies. Economics is said to have shifted its emphasis in the wealthy North Atlantic from production to consumption, and hence concerns itself with the maximisation of positive affect. Debates rage over the concern that the mass media have transformed serious political and social debate into the excitement and enjoyment of entertainment and infotainment. The culture industry and entertainment business now contribute significantly to GNP. Even scientists are striving to present

themselves as humane and engaged observers of the oneness of Gaia, and to avoid the rational stereotypes of Mr Spock and Dr Strangelove. In the context of this new ›affective climate‹ that leaves no sub-system unaffected, it is predictable that social theorists from various traditions should come to identify the essence of humanity with the figure of the emotionally aware and expressive individual. It is predictable that the repressed and rational Victorian should become a favourite negative self-image for emotionally emancipated late-moderns. And it is predictable that new psychological and medical categories such as ›alexithymia‹, ›emotional literacy‹ and ›emotional intelligence‹ should be coined and deployed.

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Paul Stenner PhD
Department of Psychology, University College London
Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, U.K.
P.Stenner@ucl.ac.uk