A Functional Paradigm of the Human Condition*

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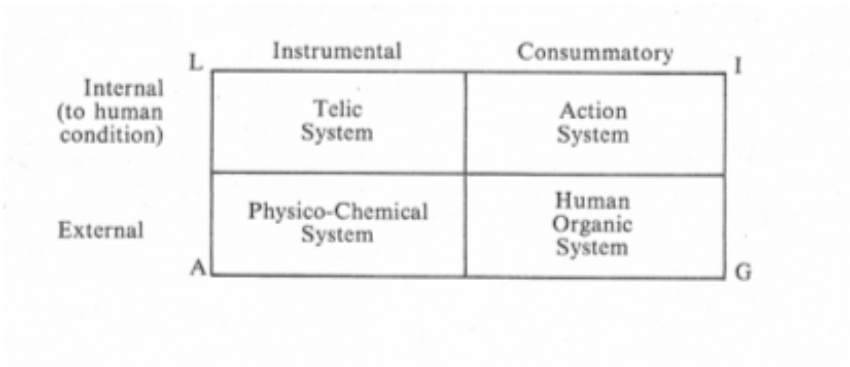
Version 1.3

If Talcott Parsons' paradigm of the human condition (Parsons, 1978, p. 361),



is updated with respect to

(i) Niklas Luhmann's (1995, p. 290) ideas on a nexus of variables, seeming to contradict each other but actually describing the temporal structure of a social system:

> *One can describe what one attains in this way [i.e., while looking at the self-identity and self-diversity of events and structure in social systems, db] as a nexus of several variables that, on the surface, contradict one another, namely, as the unity of (1) the selective linkage of elements, (2) the binding of free energies from other levels of reality through interpenetration, (3) the constant instantaneous dissolution of linkage and binding, (4) the reproduction of elements on the basis of the selectivity of all the linked and bound relations, and (5) the capacity for evolution in the sense of a deviant reproduction that opens up possibilities for a new selection. Such a system has no temporally fixed essence. It is subject to time not merely in the sense that it must adapt and if necessary alter structures. Not even the interchangeability of elements (the*

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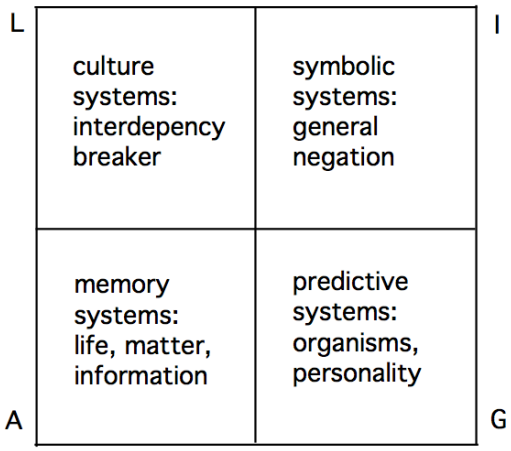
> *theory of autopoiesis began with a consideration of macromolecules or cells) grasps the temporal reference radically enough. Action systems use time to force their continuing self-dissolution and thereby guarantee the selectivity of all self-renewal; and they use this selectivity to enable self-renewal in an environment that makes continuously varying demands.*

(ii) more recent insights into matter, life, and information and their various kinds of (causal, loose, electronic) couplings serving as memory systems with respect to consciousness and communication (Luhmann, 1996), into predictive coding mastered by organisms and their personality function (Frith, 2007; Baecker, 2014), into social systems conceived of as symbolic systems being Wittensteinian *Sprachspiele* of general negation or of true-false sense combined with true *or* false meaning (Wittgenstein, 1961, pp. 93–95), and into culture systems and their "ultimate" values acting as interdependency breaker in consciousness and communication (tbs), as follows,



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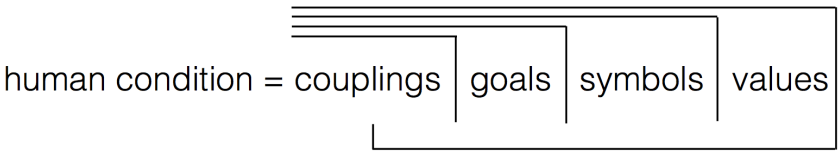
and (iii) an understanding of George Spencer-Brown's (1972, pp. 57f.) imaginary state as a state of indeterminacy in second-order equations able to actually couple, dissolve, and renew functional states of the human condition (von Foerster, 1980, 2003; Luhmann 1997),

then we may be able to come up with an equation describing the minimal functional structure of the human condition:



couplings	-> information (matter, life, energy, techniques, and technology)		
		-> memory	-> A
goals	-> organisms	-> predictive coding	-> G
symbols	-> communication	-> general negation	-> I
values	-> culture	-> latency (interdependency breaker)	-> L

This understanding of the human condition might be regarded a society's algorithm if the symbols it contains are considered to indicate states in matter, organisms, communication and culture which are indeterminately (or orthogonally) related to each other in a way such that links appear and vanish to solve the problem of how to reproduce the human condition.

Note that the appearance of "the digital" means to add electronic designs like registers, protocols, profiles, and platforms to information processing. I understand the form of the human condition as a description of human problem solving related to artificial intelligence but not identical to it–just as artificial intelligence in using algorithms, machine learning and deep neural nets is a way to process information not identical to human consciousness and communication. The most important distinction between human and artificial intelligence may for the moment being consist in human beings' use of general negation as an operation of couplings between principally heterogeneous state of the world, such as states in matter, information, life, communication, and culture.

Since couplings relate to data, X, goals to behaviour, B, symbols to negation, N, values to breaks or positions, P, and the unmarked state to an environment, E, and since change of a variable, Δ, is more important than its state, we may also write for the homeostasis (Cannon, 1929) of human condition, HC:

$$HC = f(\Delta X, \Delta B, \Delta N, \Delta P, E).$$

Note that f is assumed to be given exogenously. It refers as much to the space of earth as to time passing, a brain living, and a language being spoken. It is up to anyone's best guess how co-evolution of bodies, brains, language, society, and culture and their respective homeostatic "fluid matrices" (Cannon) manage to maintain viable or even sustainable states and processes.

Symbols relate to negation because the most general and operational definition of a symbol within a "pragmatic calculus of communication" (Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson, 1967) is that it negates any other symbol (Wittgenstein, 2001, no. 6), thereby referring to it as a possible object of a following move.

Note that *P* usually remains latent. The manifest introduction of it amounts to an "ambiguity failure" (Leifer, 2002; see also Leifer, 1991), risking to take up a position which it becomes difficult to negate.

We may call "society" any calculus of the human condition able to maintain, and cultivate, negation, or, better, "negative objectivity" (Adorno, 1973, p. 20) and "negatability" (Luhmann, 1975), since the calculus computes both reproduction and alternation.

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