# Politics of Deparadoxization

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# Politics of Deparadoxization[1]

 Systems theory is able to explain the complex processes of how undecidability and the paradox of the system are unfolded within an ongoing autopoietic process. Yet, what it fails to provide is a radical theorisation of the moment of undecidability as a moment of the breakthrough of a non-dialectisable negativity. This became most clear in the discussion which highlighted the differences between Laclau's poststructuralist and Luhmann's structuralist notion of contingency. What I want to suggest here are the outlines of a *politics of deparadoxization* in drawing from the conceptual resources which are, however, domesticated in systems theory. The chapter on (non-)meaning (Ch. II) argued that systems theory provides the conceptual position of an 'unmarked state' (in contrast to the 'unmarked space') whose radicalization would explode the horizon of the possible if one avoids theorizing it as the unity of actuality and potentiality. Here, I argue that the paradox, which is created by self-referential systems, indicates not only a smoothly deferred unity, but rather an opening to an Other which is heterogeneous to the logic of the system. The paradox, then, does not leave intact the purity of the medium which guarantees the self-similarity of the autopoietic elements, but posits the medium in a deconstructive manner as opening to an Other because of its undecidability.[2]

Potential sites of the political appear in situations where a system and its programmes can no longer organize the *différance* of the code's paradox. In speaking about *différance* I have already left the Luhmannian conception of the paradox since, as demonstrated before, Luhmann is unable to think gaps in the system's autopoiesis. Still, there can be no deferral of the paradox without the possibility of ruptures and failures. We can attempt to trace the political in these failures. They open the space for new articulations of the code and its programs to handle the paradox. In what follows, several aspects of a political deparadoxization are suggested. This outline is not a sociological description, but a positioning and re-articulation of the political in systems theoretical terms. It prepares the theoretical terrain on which a sociological account of a politics of deparadoxization could be elaborated and marks points where further research may be articulated.

Proceeding from my discussion of the theory of hegemony, this chapter highlights the following dimensions of a politics of deparadoxization. Deparadoxization becomes political if it is articulated as conflict (1). Such an articulation has to account for the paradox as breakthrough of the system's self-referentiality disrupting its working order. The politics of deparadoxization offers a systemic fullness in order to deparadoxize the system. It promises a representation of the system's self-referentiality (2). The politics of deparadoxization is based on a construction of a paradox which it, in turn, deparadoxizes. The undecidability of the paradox re-introduces the impossibility of full meaning by undermining the formalized set-up which made the paradox possible. Thus, it is the construction of the paradox, based upon the closure of the system, which also opens the system to a radical invention breaking with its horizon (3.). Since any system may fail to 'invisibilize' its founding paradox, the politics of deparadoxization is not restricted to a particular system. Still, the articulation of a paradox does not necessarily result in a system of its own. Rather, the politics of deparadoxization is a parasitic over-coding, which does not simply substitute a system's code (4.).

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[1] Denne artikel er tidligere udgivet I en anden version I: Urs Stäheli, 2000: *Sinnzusammenbrüche, Eine dekonstruktive lektüre von Niklas Luhmanns Systemtheorie*, Velbrück Wissenschaft, Göttinge.

[2]  cf. Ch. VI.1.

# 1. Deparadoxization and Conflict

*The politics of deparadoxization is antagonistic and thus uses the form of conflict.* The opening of possible connections, those cracks in the horizon of what is possible, is a potential source of conflicts regarding the continuation of the signifying process. For Laclau it is precisely the dislocation of a system which can be articulated in the form of an antagonism. In *Social Systems* Luhmann developed a systems theoretical understanding of antagonisms (or conflicts as he prefers to call it) in connection with a theory of contradiction. But he has not yet shown the link between the paradoxical code and the emergence of conflicts. On the contrary, for Luhmann deparadoxization is an evolutionary process which happens. Deparadoxization will always already have taken place on the operative level of the system, since it is a second-order observer who constructs the paradox, i.e. it is the relation between second-order and first-order observation which creates the paradox. Second-order observation treats the paradox as if it had existed at the first order level, prior to its observation (Tanaka, 1994). Luhmann describes in historical studies, different forms of deparadoxization[3] and how, at the level of the programme, distinctions are exchanged. Yet, the moment of decision for a particular distinction and indication of one of its sides remains unproblematized. It is here that Laclau's concept of the political stresses the antagonistic character of many (but not all) processes of deparadoxization. Whilst both, discourse and systems theory, emphasise the articulatory character of deparadoxization, Luhmann only conceives of it as a peaceful evolutionary process. It comes as no surprise that Luhmann (1988b: 68) notes this as a major difference between systems theory and discourse theory: while systems theory explains deparadoxization as regulated by evolutionary mechanisms, discourse theory focuses on the power based institution of discourses.

From a discourse theoretical perspectives, deparadoxization becomes political because of the non-realization of certain possibilities which are excluded by antagonistic fights. It was argued that this exclusion refers to the potentialities of the system as well as to the unthinkable within the system. The occurrence of undecidabilities may re-activate the power based institution of hegemonic articulations. Despite the tension between an evolutionary model and a deconstructive account of antagonism, similarities become visible if we consider Luhmann's notion of conflict proposed in *Social Systems*.

The pre-condition for conflict is a contradiction. Every social system presupposes the medium of meaning. Its linguistic usage has an *a priori* capacity for being contradictory since any act of linguistic communication may be negated. The persistence of conflict rests upon the negatory capacity of language. Contradictions do not originate from a totality which is presupposed by each system  there is no such thing as a main contradiction which can be found in different forms in every system. Only autopoietically produced communications of a system effect contradictions. The precondition for the emergence of a contradiction is not only the opposition of two communications, but also an understanding of this communication which negates it. Luhmann argues that in contradictory situations a "secondary indetermination" exists (SS: 493). It is secondary because each of the contradictory communications has to be clearly determined in order to contradict each other. The contradiction only arises because of an encounter between two incompatible communications.

With Derrida, Luhmann stresses that a contradiction requires that the opposing communications are determined. Yet, what systems theory does not theorize is how undecidability affects the contradictory messages. In deconstruction, however, the relation of undecidability is *prior* to the

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[3]  E.g., Luhmann (1988) analysis the deparadoxization of the legal system, and the analysis of self-descriptions of modern society (in Luhmann, 1990e; Ch. 5 in GG).

poles and subverts their pureness.[4] Luhmann's argument on the undecidability of conflictual communication restricts the scope of undecidability since it only means that connective communications are not fixed, and that there is a contingent connectivity. The contradiction questions the very capacity of the system to reduce complexity: "*For an instant they* [contradictions] *destroy the system's total pretension to being ordered, reduced complexity.* For an instant, then, indeterminate complexity is restored, and everything is possible" (SS: 373). Contradictions point to the improbability of systems: "Contradictions signals  and this is their function  that contact could be broken off" (SS: 373), i.e., that autopoiesis could cease. What Laclau theorizes as the moment of the disruption of the systematicity of the system, a symptom of its own impossibility, is transformed by Luhmann into the problem of the improbability of the system. But in systems theory this blink of an undetermined complexity never questions the determination of a single communicative event.

The relationship between system and contradiction is not then destructive. Contradictions work as an immune system, signalling possible danger. The instability produced by a contradiction may even enhance the capacity of adaptation because an autopoietic system always needs new irritations in order to continue. Only new modes of communication protect the autopoiesis from a static repetition: "Disintegration and reintegration, disordering and ordering require each other" (Luhmann, 1990e: 9). This argument may point to a 'deactivation' of contradictions. But if we take this as only one possible way to deal with contradictions, it may sharpen our capacity for seeing how closely a threat, and possible usefulness of contradictions are related to each other. The dangerous aspect consists of its momentary reference to an unorganized complexity which points to the end of the system, the breakdown of the very improbable 'invisibilization' of the system's paradox.[5] Yet, systems theory is sure that contradictions never threaten autopoiesis. This becomes apparent in the second half of the above quote which tries to delimit the scope of contradictions:

> But at the same time contradictions possess enough form to guarantee the connectivity of communicative processing via meaning. The system's reproduction is merely directed into different paths [...] But the system's autopoiesis is not interrupted. It goes on. The honour of being the first to have formulated this goes to Hegel's conception of 'dialectic'. (SS: 373)

Undecidabilities as contradictions, therefore, are always backed up by the certainty that the autopoiesis goes on. They merely re-direct the structures of the system, but they do not break with producing new autopoietic events. Yet, was there not, at the same time, a moment when an "indeterminate complexity" came to the fore? How can we be sure that the next operation will succeed? Luhmann had to introduce meaning as a 'differenceless' notion since it guarantees that, whatever happens, is still meaningful. This may explain why society  the ensemble of all communications  goes on, whatever conflicts occur. Yet, it is more tricky to explain why a particular system can make sure that its autopoiesis goes on. Here, it is not sufficient to rely on meaning, since all other social system do the same, too. Is this moment when contact could break down not also a moment when the system's own noise makes it difficult to organize its basic self-reference, i.e. the connectivity from one event to the other?

Before trying to answer these questions, let me increase the complexity of the problem further. The politics of deparadoxization is not just about the confrontation of two contradictory enunciations, but rather about the occurrence of a paradox. Certainly, every paradox contains a contradiction, but not every contradiction is paradox (Barel, 1979). Only paradoxes produce self-referential loops of levels and confuse commentary with meta-commentary. Contradictions, by contrast, work if the

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[4]  cf. my discussion of the relation between undecidability and indeterminacy in deconstruction (Ch. VII.1).

[5]  Contrary to Schulte (1993), I argue that Luhmann's conception of contradiction and conflict shows at least some possible ways of thinking finitude even in systems theory.

opposing communications are located on the same level. That is why the attribution of a communication to one side of a code could cause a contradiction: a scientific dispute about the truth of a theory may contain contradictory arguments, yet they are not necessarily paradoxical. The paradox only emerges if the contradiction begins to question its own conditions of possibility. In our example, the question may arise whether the code true/false, which is used to judge the disputed theory, is itself true. It is important to keep in mind the self-referential nature of any paradox, in order to avoid a flawed understanding of paradoxes. That is why for Derrida the aporia or paradox is not simply the oscillation between two values, but a contradiction which refers to an entity caused by its 'originary repetition' (Beardsworth, 1996: 32). What is valid for contradiction as well as for the paradox is that both point to the possibility that the 'contact could break off'. While a contradiction allows a possible solution through the introduction of a meta-level, the paradox itself is created by the confrontation of different levels. Since the paradox reveals the precarious 'foundation' of the system, it necessarily refers to its impossible totality.

Considering the 'foundational' status of paradox for a system, a paradoxical contradiction aggravates the 'alarming function' of the non-paradoxical contradiction. What is at stake now, is the very being of the system, the unfolding of its foundational paradox which threatens failure. Yet, for Luhmann paradoxes do not threaten the systemic self-reproduction since they are produced by the self-observation of a system which leaves the autopoietic re-production of the system intact (GG: 91). This explanation, however, tends to ontologize the distinction between operation and observation which Luhmann introduced as a necessary, but relative distinction.[6] Eventually, any observation is an operation, and it is not clear whether there are operations which are not also observations.[7] Referring to the ongoing process of an operative autopoiesis — even if only to deparadoxize the systems theoretical observation of systems — provides a deceptively stable basis unaffected by paradoxical observation. In a way, it takes up the problematic distinction between social structure and semantics discussed above (Ch. VI). Nevertheless, as Luhmann stresses, a paradoxical observation is also an operation, and it is this operativity of the observation which keeps the system going.

But if a paradox is really the stain of a system's end, then this is because the paradoxical observation either excludes any or includes every communication. It thus dispenses with any indicator or rule about how the autopoiesis may proceed, including the possibility that the autopoiesis may not find any connective operation. In this light, the paradox is not a superficial moment still backed by the ongoing autopoietic reproduction, but rather the impossible experience of the end of the system within the system. If however we accept that self-description is constitutive for the system,[8] then a paradox on the 'level' of self-descriptions will always already have affected the autopoietic reproduction of the system. It is Luhmann's separation of basic self-reference from the system's self-reference which safeguards the unity of the system. The occurrence of the paradox means that the system loses, for the blink of an eye, its sense of connectivity.

What does it mean if a paradox becomes a conflict? A conflict is the self-referential organisation of a contradiction by means of communication. Contrary to a widespread understanding of conflicts, they do not imply a breakdown of communication. In *Social Systems* Luhmann states that every conflict triggers a parasitic system of its own that does not have the status of a sub-system (SS: 390). The immanent possibility of negation in every communicative event prevents privileged sites of conflict *a priori*. Criticizing traditional Marxist models, Luhmann theorises the conflictual

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[6]   In Ch. I it was argued that this requires the separation of the S/E1-distinction from its observation by S/E2 and S/E3, thus cutting the circular connection of basic self-reference and the system's self-description.

[7]   A pure operation may correspond to a performativity which is no longer linked to an observation. However, systems theory tries to do without concepts which aim at a theoretical position such as the empty signifier.

[8]   cf. my argument concerning the function of the re-entry (S/E2 and S/E3) in Ch. I.

process independently of any kind of originary structural condition. He focuses on the conflictual mode of functioning premised on a radical reduction of complexity, since every agency is brought under the perspective of antagonism [*Gegnerschaft*] (SS: 389). The antagonism has a strong integrative force by through its ability to connect the most heterogeneous communications. This leads to a 'suction of integration' [*Integrationssog*] using nearly all communicative events to build and continue the antagonistic system.[9]

The formal description of the conflictual system bears resemblance to Laclau's concept of antagonism: conflicts are not explained with pre-existing structural reasons, rather the function of conflict is focused on. A conflict works via the introduction of a code which resembles the friend/enemy coding of antagonisms. This coding leads to the construction of vast chains of equivalences. Yet, this notion of conflict differs from the concept of antagonism. One of the reasons is that conflicts do normally not concern the system as system. Rather, they are parasitic systems within the system, drawing 'topics' and other resources from the host system without dominating the host system itself. The link between host and parasite is established by a semantic model (the system provides topics such as 'ecology') which excludes any rhetoricity of the system thus centred on semantic reference.[10]

A paradox 'processed' as conflict goes far beyond Luhmann's 'thematicism': it is not simply the clash of contradictory enunciations about a particular subject which creates an antagonistic code dividing, for example, 'ecologists' and 'anti-ecologists'. Rather, what is at stake for a politics of deparadoxization is the identity of the system itself since it is concerned with the articulation of the paradoxes which result from the impossible identity of the system. It is only by introducing this distinction between contradictory and paradoxical conflict that one of Luhmann's more recent side remarks on conflicts reveals its full theoretical potential. A system with conflicting communications "reorganizes itself as *conflict* to save its autopoiesis" (1990e: 14). The scope of conflicts is now very much enlarged since they occupy and transform the whole system. The system itself, whose identity the code and the self-description indicate, is now at stake. Thus, the effect of politicizing the process of deparadoxization is an antagonistic *over-coding* of the system's code which uses and extends the form of the conflict, previously restricted to the processing of contradictory communications (cf. VIII.4).

## 2. Deparadoxization and Fullness

The previous argument indicates the need to explain the specific political character of conflict. This leads me to the following assumption: *Deparadoxization is the fight about the filling of the impossible representation of the system.* In my discussion of Laclau's concept of the political the concept of the empty signifier played a crucial role. It is the empty signifier which halts the sliding of the signifier by filling the empty place of representation in the system (Ch. I). The Political, then, is always linked to the filling of this place. It is not only antagonistic, but is an antagonism concerning the impossible fullness of a system. To put it differently, it is a fight about representation which, in turn, becomes possible because of the impossibility of representing the system within the system.

In systems theory the code fulfils an equivalent totalizing function for the constitution of the unity of a system. The politics of deparadoxization concerns the articulation of dislocations which occur

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[9]  Like Zizek's Hegelian description of the loss of a loss, Luhmann also believes that losing an enemy leads to a "curious vacuum", to the loss of the possibility of combining "various occasions into a history because conflict has failed as a line of identification" (SS: 391).

[10]  cf. Luhmann's (1996c) conception of new social movements which he theorizes as organized by a central topic.

when the self-description of the system leads to irresolvable undecidabilities within a system.[11] This presupposes, of course, that the plurality of antagonistically related self-descriptions will not, quasi-automatically, transform themselves into self-descriptions that are conscious of their contingency. The discussion of the empty signifier showed that it is the position of self-representation which is most threatened when the paradox emerges. In fact, the construction of a perturbation of the system as a paradox is already the first step towards a politics of deparadoxization, since it requires a certain 'policing' of the system (Ch. VII.1). Derrida's concept of undecidability is very clear about the relations of force, presupposed for a sufficiently formalized and stabilized system of meaning. Only such a system could produce undecidability undermining the stabilization of meaning, and its own condition of possibility.

If a politics of deparadoxization concerns the construction of an imaginary unity of the system, then the crucial question is how this relates to the supposed stability of the code.[12] For Luhmann the paradoxical effects of the code are limited to the programs and the self-description of the system. The code's function is to name the system, which requires a certain rigidity. It is here that the program and self-descriptions are re-articulated, and perhaps even exchanged.[13] Such an isolation of the code, however, would be unthinkable from a discourse theoretical perspective. The emptied place which represents the system's unity is too unstable and excludes being filled with an invariable code. Paradoxical undecidabilities are *within* the system and, at the same time, undecidabilities *of* the system. It is precisely the self-referential encounter of the code which re-activates the contingency of the system, thus affecting the code itself. Now, the code may be exchanged or transformed. Think, for example, of the substitution of antonyms, i.e. the replacement of the negative value of the code.

Luhmann (1987a) considers this as very unlikely since both sides of the code are too narrowly linked, and programs are fine tuned in order to determine the code. An exchange would become conspicuous; moreover, the processing of information which relies upon the code would be questioned, and would threaten the functional differentiation of modern societies. For Luhmann (1987a: 27) there is a clear alternative: either one accepts the established code of a system, or one shifts to the camp of a "generalised rejection of a coded processing of information". It was precisely this drastic, indeed apocalyptic alternative which we encountered in the discussion of the code of the political system: new social movements, for example, threaten the democratic organisation of the political system since they reject the distinction of government and opposition.[14]

What such theory design excludes is a position maintaining the function of the code as indicator of unity without excluding the code from the play of differences. If the code leaves behind "various attempts at codification" (Luhmann, 1987a: 20), then the code also acquires its meaning through its relation to unsuccessful attempts. A difference theoretical approach to meaning would have to determine the meaning of the code through its position in a system of differences. The paradox of the code then points to these buried attempts at coding, and the visibility of its contingency allows the thinking of new possibilities. No attempt at codification can be re-activated in its original form. Nevertheless, contingency effects the construction of past possibilities as well as an openness towards the new.

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[11] If one understands world-society itself as a social system, it is for logical reasons necessary to assume that it has to establish a self-description since there is no outside observer which could externally produce a hetero-description (Rossbach, 1992: 16).

[12] cf. Stäheli (1996b).

[13] In the legal system, for example, the program of natural law is exchanged for positive law; yet, the code itself remains stable.

[14] Yet, interestingly, the democratic code government/opposition is already an over-coding of the more general code government/governed.

Yet, the differential constitution of the code is not limited to new coding attempts. The code, as an iterated operation of a system, also relates to all other systemic operations, notably the programs which regulate its application. The level of program is where alternative codings can be tested, and where competing articulations of the code are created. As stabilizers of specific articulations of a code, programs are a necessary supplement. It is only through successful programmes of deparadoxization that the code maintains a certain stability. Apart from the above mentioned exchange of code values, a more subtle re-definition of the code announces itself. This does not require that the signifiers of the two values of the code are exchanged; rather, its meaning starts to slide. Codes are not simply the positive and negative values of a pre-logical calculus, but are always already within the process of signification; that is why Luhmann (1987a: 19) speaks about the "semantic career" of a code. What becomes problematic, however, is the semantic identity of the code.

Systems theory is very careful to prevent such as sliding of meaning by theorising signs (the code itself is a sign, too) with a pre-expressive guarantee for a stable meaning. The chapters on language and semantics have shown that Luhmann presupposes a 'pre-semiotic' (thus also a 'pre-poststructuralist') approach excluding the carrier of meaning from the constitution of meaning. This theoretical move guarantees a stable signified which escapes the differential relations of distinctions: "By simply presupposing that an identical notion expresses something identical, Luhmann lands in communication theoretical literality despite its contrary starting position" (de Berg, 1993: 39).[15] This semantic identity originates partially from Luhmann's uncritical adaptation of Husserl's distinction between expression and indication.[16] Borrowing from phenomenology, i.e. externalizing that which expresses meaning, provides the stability of meaning required for the ideal repeatability of the code. If the code could not rely on such a guarantee, then one would have to account for the (in-)stability of the code in terms of its iterability. But the code as posited by systems theory, has to rely on an ideal repeatability, which excludes a 'sliding' of the code's meaning.

Both cases, the substitution of the code and the sliding of its meaning, problematize the institution and iteration of the code is problematized. The function of the code is still considered important, nevertheless the uncontested and stable filling of the values of the code are so improbable that we have to direct our attention to the strategies securing this position. It is here that programs and the code mutually determine each others meaning. Referring explicitly to Derrida, Luhmann (RG: 189) describes the program as the necessary supplement of the code. Yet, he only integrates the 'constructive' dimension of the logic of the supplement: the secondary supplement is constitutive of that from which it is excluded. Derrida (1974: 144) describes this function of the *surplus* as "a plenitude enriching another plenitude".

What Luhmann forgets is, however, the second point Derrida (1974: 145) makes: "Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tenant-lieu*]". It is this aspect of the 'evil' *tenant-lieu* which Luhmann (KG: 314) implicitly rejects in emphasising the invariability of the code.[17] Yet, if we accept that the supplement cannot fulfil its constitutive function by being exteriorized, then the relation between code and programs has to assume mechanisms of feedback which challenge the protected position of the code. It is on the level of the program that alternative attempts at coding are preserved, and side-codes tested.

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[15] This does not imply that I follow the Leidener school (cf. my critique of their contextualism in IV.2 and also Kramaschki [1995])

[16] cf. SS: 145ff. and critically Kramaschki (1995), and Ellrich (1992). Schmid (1997) emphasizes the strong phenomenological legacy in systems theory.

[17] This invariability is also linked to the notion of the medium since the code is always the code of a medium, thus circumscribing the limits of the medium as well.

Moreover, the code itself is differentially constituted: on the one hand, it differs from alternative attempts, on the other, it receives its meaning in the context of its programs and self-descriptions. By defining the application of the code, the code itself is always constituted anew and loses its self-sufficiency or "perfect continence" (Spencer Brown). If one accepts this argument, then the code has to rely on a "pragramatological" (Derrida, 1984) determination of its meaning since its meaning finally depends on the contingency of its 'application'. Thus, it cannot rely on guarantees which are located external to the social and temporal dimensions of meaning. This is why the code has to re-establish its meaning with every repetition. The iteration of the code then implies, like any other iteration, its possible failure. The "law of contamination" (Derrida) also applies to the reproduction of the code. Precisely because the code cannot acquire any meaning without referring to its supplementary programs, its unity is disrupted from the very beginning. This implies that sociological analysis should not take for granted the identity of the code, but rather to examine the filling and the code's *usure*[18] in its reproduction.

Laclau's notion of the empty signifier attempts to grasp the non-topological places where a system has to be supplemented in order to achieve its imaginary fullness. It is here that a second-order observation becomes crucial to re-activating the contingency of the code, indicating the unity of a system.[19] Thus, the impossible representation of unity always adds something to an already existing system, yet the system itself depends on this 'external' addition. The supplement is itself interiorized and demands a new supplement to supplement the previous supplement, since there is no supplement which could eventually fill the lack of the system. No supplement is the final supplement. There is always a supplement supplementing the supplement resulting in an "infinite and indefinite play of repetition and substitution" (Gasché, 1986: 211).[20]

Assuming a supplementary substitution of the code by the programs entails that a program not only decides upon the application of the code, but also thematizes the failure of the code in fulfilling its position as the indicator of unity. Since it is the code which attributes operations to a particular system, an insufficient attribution of the code may jeopardize the autopoiesis of the system as soon as it no longer succeeds in attributing a broad range of elements. Consider, for example, that the code conservative/progressive becomes problematic, since very few communications still refer to that code. In such situations competing codes may be articulated which promise a better performance, a broader horizon. An alternative coding draws from the discursive register of a particular system and tries to empty out certain communications. In more recent papers, Luhmann (1990a) replaces the conservative/progressive-distinction with the code of government/opposition. What I am driving at is that such a substitution is not simply a self-correction of an outdated theoretical account, but a description of transformations of the political system which, is of course, still a construction of systems theory.

What this reveals is that the code itself is a supplement which has been internalized. If one tries to grasp the relation between code and programs in terms of supplementarity, one should not forget that, for Luhmann, both are already part of the system. It is therefore a restricted supplementarity which only opens itself in a mediated way to the exteriority of the system. We have seen that the code stands for the closure of the system which forces Luhmann to emphasize its invariability, whereas the program 're-presents' its openness. Although the program is still subordinated to the operative closure of the system, it is here that observations of the environment are worked into the

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[18]  cf. my discussion of *usure* and catachresis in Ch. V.4.

[19]  To put it in a more deconstructive language: "Yet, if one realized that the supplement is indeed a supplement, and not that originary presence, once again 'the game will be up'" (Harvey, 1986: 219).

[20]  Gasché refers here especially to Dissemination: "As soon as the supplemenatry outside is opened, its structure implies that the supplement itself can be 'typed', replaced by its double, and that a supplement of the supplement, a surrogate for the surrogate, is possible and necessary" (D: 109).

horizon of an existing system. The outside which supplements the code, therefore, is already an internalized outside. Yet, the politics of deparadoxization is always also a politics of the evil supplement. Such a supplement is a selection which is no longer part of the horizon, but is an opening to the *tout autre*, the monstrous (Derrida in Johnson, 1992: 186). Luhmann further restricts the play of supplementarity. It is not only that the supplement is not a 'true' outside of the system, but the limit between supplement and supplemented as internal limit is reduced to an exclusively *constitutive* relation, which leaves the limit intact and saves the system from the evil of the supplement.

In contrast, a politics of deparadoxization cannot restrict the realm of articulation to that of programs. Rather, it suggests understanding the filling of the code as a hegemonic process based upon the failure of previous attempts to deparadoxify the paradox of the system, to erase its arche-violence through procedures of normalisation. It is here that the means mentioned above become crucial: the re-articulation of the meaning of the code, the exchange of antonyms and possibly the transformation of the code. Alternative codings promise to 'invisibilize' more successfully the paradoxes which arise. If, for example, the distinction between conservative and progressive becomes increasingly problematic since the distinction itself proves inefficient, then a new distinction is required. Such dissatisfaction shows itself in self-descriptions of political parties and new social movements which stress that they are neither conservative nor progressive, but rather at the front.[21] This is linked to a problematization of the distinction itself since it cannot account for its status, creating an undecidability about its own progressive or conservative value. The call for a re-articulation is always linked to the promise of a new imaginary unity of the system which 'invisibilizes' the potentially lethal founding paradox of the system.

Before proceeding with my argument, one clarification is necessary in order to avoid reducing the politics of deparadoxization to a concept finally based upon an unproblematised notion of action. Speaking about hegemonic projects and strategies seems to suggest an understanding of the process of signification based on projects pursued by collective actors. Yet such an interpretation would miss the theoretical outline suggested here. It is important to see that the politics of deparadoxization does not assume a transparent project which would fill the lack created by the paradox. The project is constituted through its articulation which means that there is no originary project to be realized. Political projects are "constantly constructed and reconstructed" (NRT: 209). In a Wittgensteinian manner projects are modified with their application which finally excludes thinking the application of a pre-existing ideality. The politics of deparadoxization is governed by the logic of iterability, not by the ideal of realization. This is also why such a politics is embedded within a particular systemic context contaminating the pureness of the project.

This leads me to the second problem of the political actor. One of the most valuable insights of Laclau/Mouffe's concept of the political consists in their attack on objectivist as well as subjectivist models of political action. Neither subjects nor their interests are pre-constituted entities before they enter into an antagonistic relationship. The notion of antagonism stresses that it is the antagonism which creates its own subjects (HSS: 93ff.). Systems theory suggests a very similar argument when it explains collective action as the retroactive attribution of communication to an actor (SS: 198ff.). It is in antagonistic situations that attribution to actors becomes a medium supporting the absorption of communications. Put differently, the 'suction of integration' which characterizes conflicts, aims to simplify the field of communication. The plurality of communications within a system has to be divided into antagonistic discourses. The construction of actors as communicative addresses works like a catalyst for the antagonism. It is only in this sense that the politics of deparadoxization can

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[21] *Weder links, noch rechts, sondern vorne!* This is the leitmotif which is crucial in the self-description *Die Grünen* in Germany.

speak of collective actors. These are always retroactive observations of communications, which are nevertheless an important 'medium' for the conflictual system.

## 3. Politics of Deparadoxization and Openness

We have seen that one of the advantages of systems theory is the clear distinction between the differential constitution of *any* system and the specific antagonistic coding of conflictual systems. This theoretical decision avoids conceptualising every system as antagonistically coded, yet still keeps open the possibility thinking the paradoxical 'grounding' of any system. If one accepts my argument thus far, the politics of deparadoxization presupposes the impossible experience of the paradox which shows itself in a disruption of the horizon of the 'conflictualised' system. This leads me to the assumption that the creative moment of such a politics lies in its impossible relation to this openness. It is this openness which allows us to think conflictual systems as transgressing the boundaries of their host systems. How does this work? The paradox, which *can* be processed as a conflict, shows the limits of a system since it is a situation where the means of a particular system are incapable of providing the semantic resources to resolve the paradox. The paradox points to the abyssal foundation of any system and substitutes this abyss with the formulation of a paradox which, in turn, has to be deparadoxized. Strategies of deparadoxization are inventions which break with an existing horizon as well as constituting a new horizon. My previous discussion of iterability has shown that the production of meaning cannot be reduced to the dimension of ideality. The alteration which goes along with any communication is not simply a change within a particular restricted horizon, but it is rather the contamination of this horizon. The alteration is a process of grafting which depends on the materiality of a communication. It therefore introduces noise into the system and contaminates the system from within, with an unreachable outside.

In the chapter on language (Ch. IV) it was argued that it is precisely this dimension of intertextuality and interdiscursivity which systems theory precludes. It is true that the normal working of a system is successful in normalizing the use of language and in ignoring inept references and noise. The catachretic dimension of any repetition is often subordinated to the system's own horizon, thus constituting an internal catachresis.[22] Yet, it is the encounter with paradox that questions the operative logic of the system, since the latter can never fully 'invisibilize' the paradox. The politics of deparadoxization has to fulfil a difficult task. Confronted with a situation which calls for a radical in(ter)vention in the Derridean sense, such a politics is still contextualized within a particular system. It is precisely the opening provided by the necessary impurity of any repetition, the rhetoricity which is irreducible to the operation of a particular system, in which a politics of deparadoxization finds its 'resources'. In a way, the moment of invention is also the gateway to an overwhelming discursivity, for the use of the 'dysfunctional' moments whose traces the system could not fully dismiss. Thus, the politics of deparadoxization is not simply a *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather a creative articulation of that which does not comply with the operative logic of the system, yet is still required for the reproduction of the system. That is why the politics of deparadoxization is not a modernist politics of the new, but rather an *articulation* always haunted by the tradition it attempts to escape.[23]

The politics of deparadoxization cannot be reduced to a politics which re-activates potentialized options. Such an approach would still remain within the horizon of a certain system, and would fail to account for the disruptive feature of an invention. This is not to say that these potentialities are

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[22] cf. Teubner's (1992) distinction between an interdiscursivity on different levels of a system and interdiscursivity between systems.

[23] cf. Marchart (1997) for the relation between modernism and Laclau's notion of the political.

not a crucial semantic material for re-articulations; yet, the politics of deparadoxization goes beyond re-actualizing potentialities since it takes place in a situation in which an existing horizon is in the course of disintegration. What is important is that the paradox itself does not naturally occur. The construction of the paradox is the first step of a politics of deparadoxization. The reason for this is that the paradox and situations of undecidability have to comply with demanding preconditions, such as the stabilisation of meaning which the construction of undecidability requires. Hence, Derrida highlights the difference between indeterminacy and undecidability (cf. VII.1). The construction of the foundational paradox of the system is always a risk since it cannot be controlled. It breaks with what can be calculated or expected within a system. Moreover, undecidability transforms the meaning of the undecidable poles, because it problematizes the limit constitutive for their meaning. Logically speaking  we should keep in mind that such a conceptual dissection of deparadoxization is itself a deparadoxization  this opens the field to competing re-articulations of the paradox.

   Hence, the politics of deparadoxization is not a mere celebration of the paradox, and does not necessarily demand an experience of paradox as a political program. The politics of deparadoxization lends itself to a plurality of political programs. It is not a politics of opening, nor a politics of a *démocratie-à-venir*, and not a Lyotardian politics of inclusion, although it may be any of these. It is here that an important difference with alternative deconstructive concepts of the political, as suggested by Critchley (1992 and Beardsworth (1996), is located. Laclau puts the problem thus:

> Undecidability should be literally taken as that condition from which no course of action necessarily follows. This means that we should not make it the necessary source of *any* concrete decision in the ethical or political sphere. (E: 78)

It is this restriction of undecidability and, notably, its abstention from ethics which makes Laclau's concept of the political so powerful a tool for social and political theory. In a similar way, the politics of deparadoxization does not subscribe to the politico-ethical program of keeping open the moment of undecidability. It is not necessarily a politics which waits for an impossible invention which will never arrive. In contrast to a celebration of the impossibility of invention, the politics of deparadoxization has, as does any politics, to take a decision. After having taken the decision, it belongs to the order of the system and, of course, can no longer be an invention in the Derridean sense.

   It is in the moment of decision that the only necessary 'subversive' implication of a politics of deparadoxization is found. It follows from the dislocation of the system, which is given with its temporal structure and with its reliance on iterability to construct a paradox. Yet, the paradox itself is a hegemonic strategy to antagonize the system and to re-articulate the identity of the system. The paradox of such a politics is that, by transgressing the horizon of a particular system and referring to its 'marginalised' discursive resources, it promises the fullness of a system  or even of world-society. By using the system's paradox as a gateway towards the articulation of interdiscursivity, something is promised which the system lacks. The suture of the paradox, the promise of its deparadoxization, is founded on an exteriority which is also internal (as the left-over of the 'functionalising' of the system, as rhetoricity or the noise within communication).

   The politics of deparadoxization draws its openness from the articulation of a self-referential paradox revealing the foundationlessness of the system. It thus creates a moment of openness founded on the impossibility of the system ever achieving its systematicity. Yet, nothing prevents this openness vanishing as soon as it appears: the system may strengthen its own immune system, as Luhmann calls it, and re-articulate itself within an existing horizon. Even a counter-hegemonic project may not challenge the horizon of the system. It could re-activate potentials not actualised, yet fully compatible with the system's horizon. Nevertheless, using the strategy of 'paradoxizing'

on the basis of the system's necessary failure of an 'ideal' recursivity, the politics of deparadoxization does not *a priori* succumb to the system's all inclusive economy. This second dimension originates from the moment of radical opening, i.e. the paradoxical moment where the system points to its own finitude. It is this enabling impossibility the impossibility of the system transgressing its own boundaries which creates the possibility of transgressing a 'possibilistic' model of the political.

In contrast to a mere actualization of potentialities, the politics of deparadoxization accounts for a loss which cannot be regained. In my discussion of meaning I have stressed the restricted economy which governs Luhmann's model of meaning. It can neither think excess nor loss without potentializing them. Yet, it is precisely this strategy of preserving the un-realized as potentiality which may legitimate even the most exclusionary regime. This becomes very clear in the work of Willms who has developed a neo-conservative approach to the political as first philosophy. He stresses, in a manner similar to discourse and systems theory, that every order is instituted and contingent: "This means that it excludes a horizon of possibilities, yet exists on condition of that exclusion, i.e. with the principle of the presence of the excluded" (Willms, 1990: 266). Luhmann refers to Willms when stressing that exclusion is politically necessary, yet it potentializes the excluded (KG: 60). Although it is important to acknowledge this process of potentialization, it could become totalitarian if it does not consider the limits of potentialization as such: a loss which can never be regained and an excess which was never a potentiality. A potentialization without expenditure calms all distress with reference to the potential presence of the excluded. Luhmann's conceptual framework precludes an 'unrestricted economy' by reducing *any* exclusion to a movement of negation which could be actualized.[24]

   The deconstructive perspective does not exclude thinking the closure of the system, produced by horizontal potentialization. In this sense, potentialization is a particular form of what Laclau calls *politics as the construction of the unthinkable*: a hegemonic project opens a horizon whose impossible unity is symbolized with the empty signifier. Such a project is only successful if it manages to construct this horizon as a limit beyond which one cannot think. Potentialities are, therefore, always within the horizon. One has to distinguish the exclusion within the horizon and the exclusion constitutive for the horizon itself (Stäheli, 1996). It is only the latter which the system has to 'invisibilize' to maintain its closure. This ineradicable limit marks that which cannot be thought within a certain system; it indicates that the horizon cannot be transgressed. The construction of a field of possibilities depends on making impossible other constructions *not* potentialized. Yet, as shown above, the construction of the unthinkable is a movement towards closure which is interrupted by its own possibility. The construction of the horizon as a limit implies the equivalence of that which is internal to that horizon and which re-enters the 'negativity' of the beyond into the horizon. It is this that accounts for the failure of any system to fully constitute its own horizon, and its openness to dislocation, which may in turn be constructed as paradoxes of the system.

## 4. The Differentiation of Systems and Politics of Deparadoxization

The concept of a politics of deparadoxization aims to supplement Luhmann's narrow concept of the political system. In contrast to a functional system, the politics of deparadoxization is not bound to a

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[24] Systems theory's relation to deconstruction can be formalized as follows (KG: 60): *unmarked space = presence of absence in politics = rejection as potentialization = trace.* By reducing the trace to the marker of an absence, which could be actualised Luhmann conceals its reference to a past that has never happened and will never happen (cf. Ch. II)

particular system; it may emerge wherever paradoxes are constructed and enfolded. This leaves open the relation between such a politics and the system in which it occurs. One possibility is to construct the politics of deparadoxization in a manner analogous to Luhmann's concept of the conflict system, which is a parasitic system within the system. Yet, as I argued, the politics of deparadoxization is not simply a conflict since the identity of the host system is at stake, not only the regulation of conflictual communications within the horizon of a system. That is why I suggest thinking the politics of deparadoxization as a strategy which antagonizes the whole system.

The system which becomes the context for a politics of deparadoxization *has to become antagonized* which implies that one cannot assume that systems are *a priori* constituted as an antagonism. In this sense, antagonism arise "vis-a-vis the system" or between systems (Dyrberg, 1995: 24) since they are not given with the system as such. Yet, here it is still antagonism which is responsible for the systematization of the system. Norval (1996) suggests to radicalising the distinction between antagonism and distinction, resulting in a separation of the differentiation of an identity and the construction of a political frontier.[25] The distinction of the self from an other does not always imply an exclusionary and antagonistic relation. Although it is crucial to distinguish between the system's identity and the antagonistic construction of frontiers, I suggest that all systems are grounded on an exclusion. This, however, also implies that it is *not* the moment of exclusion which marks the distinction between a non-antagonistic and an antagonistic system.

We have seen that systems normally create their environment as the internal exteriority of their exterior. This construction follows the system's own operative logic since it cannot operate in its environment. It is true that the system grasps its environment as that which is not the system and which, paradoxically, becomes, as construct, a constitutive feature of the system. Yet, this does not entail that the system constructs its environment as a *threat* to its identity. This internal systemic construction of the other as an environment 'represents' it in many different forms: the system could construct it as analogous but somehow different to its own logic, the environment may be perceived as something which complements the system, it could be an oddity because one does not understand it, etc. *One* of these possibilities is to view the environment as a threat which hinders the system's full identity. It is only in this case that the system constructs the relation to its environment in antagonistic terms. It becomes apparent that a certain indifference  loosened by some strategic, non-antagonistic structural couplings to the environment  is as likely to persist as an antagonistic articulation. On the level of the autopoiesis (S/E1), the boundary of a system is constituted by its *indifference* to the exterior (cf. Ch. I).[26] To antagonize the system, means therefore to construct a political boundary on the basis of this indifference. I have argued that systems do observe their autopoiesis and conceive their environment as negation (S/E2) and/or signify it by constructing other system/environment-distinctions within their environments (S/E3). An antagonistic articulation of the system, thus, requires a radicalisation of the negation: the outside is that which the system is not, but this negation is only now articulated as threat to the system.

In order to construct the environment as antagonistic, it has to experience inconsistencies in its autopoiesis and the failures to establish self-observations which indicate the system's unity. Contra systems theory, I have argued throughout this study that such a self-observation retro-actively constitutes 'pure' autopoiesis, which precludes an autonomization of the latter. Thus, a disruption of the signifying process cannot be separated from the autopoiesis which, eventually, would be the guarantor of the system's existence. Indeed, the differential constitution of the system leads to many possibilities of 'signifying failures'. Nevertheless, the dislocation of the system does not

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[25] "[I]t is my contention that the general logical argument concerning the individuation of identity should not be conflated with the specific argument concerning the political logic of antagonism" (Norval, 1996: 12).

[26] cf. Scholz (1982) who stresses the importance of indifference for systems theory.

predetermine its articulation. It is important to avoid assuming a latency of antagonism which is not articulated, but already lurking behind the operations of the system. Such a solution would bring us back to a Hegelian Marxism which claims to distinguish between the essence and the appearance of a system. Since systems theory as well as deconstructive discourse theory try to avoid such a framework, we should discard this possibility. Put bluntly, it is only useful to speak about antagonisms if a discourse is articulated as antagonism. The politics of deparadoxization, then, is a conceptual tool which aims to show how a system is antagonized.

Thus, what I suggest is, first, observing failures in the system's process of signification which are then articulated as a paradox for which the system cannot provide any solution. The filling works through an externalization of the causes of the paradox, which is the moment when the paradox achieves an antagonistic coding. The paradox has to be de-activated, otherwise it would become fatal to the system: an endless oscillation between values would destroy complexity. Yet, if the paradox is created by the system itself, then its identity is shaken, and its re-constitution demands externalizing the reasons for the emergence of the paradox. It is only now that the excluded third is re-entered as that which threatens the identity of the system.

There are basically two possibilities for an antagonistic articulation of a system: either to antagonize its code, or to antagonize the system/environment distinction. The first option begins from the necessary asymmetry of the code and designates one side of the code as that which threatens its other side. In the political system, for example, this would mean that the opposition is articulated as that which threatens and disturbs the government. It is the political system, for it already has an 'agonized' code, which lends itself more quickly to an antagonistic re-articulation. But we could also imagine that a traditionalist aesthetic conceives the ugly as something corrupting the true beauty of a work of art. In all of these cases, the system uses the negative side of its code *as if* this side did not belong to the system. Thus, one strategy of deparadoxization consists in performing what for systems theory would be a theoretical mistake: *it externalizes the negative side of the code*. This externalization works by attributing responsibility for the paradox to the negative side. The opposition, for example, may be seen as questioning the very legitimacy of the distinction between government and opposition. In such a situation the foundationlessness of the code may be politically articulated as institution of the very distinction by the privileged side of the code. In the above example, the model of democracy, which rests upon the distinction between government and opposition, may be attacked by the opposition through constructing it as a distinction instituted by the government. To be clear, it is not my intention to complain about the asymmetry of the code, but to widen sociological analysis towards articulations which use the asymmetry of the code in order to arrive at an antagonistic articulation. If such an articulation succeeds, then one of the advantages of the code is endangered: its technisation which allows easy crossover, falls victim to an aggravated crossing  crossing now means changing the camp and deserting to the enemy.

The second possibility concerns the distinction between system and environment. Here the externalisation of the paradox works by attributing the paradoxical disruption of the system to its environment. This comes very close to Laclau's understanding of antagonism. The system partly loses its indifference towards the environment by constructing the environment as something endangering the autonomy of the system. To put it in systems theoretical terms, the system articulates the danger of *Entdifferenzierung* as something which comes from its outside. It is not difficult to find examples. The system of art may articulate its perception of politics and economy as a force which antagonistically undermines its autonomy. In this sense, one could read Adorno/Horkheimer's (1973) analysis of *Kulturindustrie* as the articulation of an antagonistic relation between the dominance of exchange-value produced by the economy and art. Or, one might think of a totalitarian system in which the political system is constructed as subjugating the *Wissenschaftssystem*.

A further example of the second type of a politics of deparadoxization is Luhmann's polemic against new social movements. Many aspects of this description fit well to observations of new social movements from the perspective of the political system. I suggest reading these remarks as a double event articulated in the *Wissenschaftssystem* and the political system. New social movements are, for Luhmann, not part of the political system but belong to its environment. Luhmann's (1996c) uneasiness about new social movements manifests itself in the construction of a chain of equivalences: new social movements produce communications of fear, they are impatient and do not accept the universality of non-knowledge, they do not have any alternatives, etc. In relation to the political system, new social movements are clearly articulated as a threat to the very identity of the system. The political system has to exclude them because they endanger the disciplinary effect of the code; an effect which urges even the opposition to act as if it were the government. New social movements, however, aim not to become the government, allowing them to behave 'badly'.[27]

The politics of deparadoxization necessitates a further step. Establishing an environment as a threat to the system does not suffice. It is also necessary to identify the excluded as external cause for the internal emergence of a paradox. The imbrication of the code's paradox with the system/environment paradox creates a 'two valued' paradox. The paradox of the latter is that the system cannot access its environment, except in the failure of its own operations. Hence, the failure of the paradox is always also a paradox of the system. The paradox of the code, which is initially an internal paradox of the system is, at the same time, a threat to the very form of the system. If the code no longer works, then the system cannot distinguish between itself and the environment. This failure of the code is not only its internal antagonism, but rather its indeterminacy. It is not only that there are no valid criteria for judging what is right or wrong, but it is undecidable as to *what* right and wrong are. In the first case, I may still attribute a value to one side; what is missing is 'only' a rule which legitimizes, in Max Weber's sense, the decision. It may be a short-lived attribution, which could quickly be superseded. Yet, attribution itself is not questioned. In the second case, however, one does not know whether an event can be grasped by either side of the code, since the meaning of the poles is blurred. As was argued before, this indeterminacy may well be an effect of the undecidability of the code since the priority of the relation of undecidability affects the two side's of the pole. For my purposes, it is important to acknowledge that this opens the second strategy of a full exteriorization: the reason for the 'rotten' nature of the system. Now, it is not the political opposition which is constructed as a threat, but, for example, new social movements which have been excluded from the very beginning in the conception of the political system. The paradox of the code is then explained by an external threat which attempts to reject the system's fundamental code.

In both cases the antagonistic articulation of the code and the distinction between system and environment antagonism does not simply replace an existing code, but parasitically over-writes it with the friend/enemy-distinction. If government and opposition become antagonistic, then their 'original' meaning remains visible, but is now differently articulated. Let me re-call that the empty signifier works as a "parasitic attachment to some particular body" (E: 72). Here, one might consider the particularity of the code as such an attachment. Yet, we have to be more precise: it is not only the totalizing function, but its antagonistic articulation which is crucial. We have a two-step process: the emptied code and its parasitic articulation in an antagonistic way. The crossing of the code becomes more difficult; indeed, antagonism erects an efficient blockage by radicalizing the negation which was already implied with the 'original' code. Such a parasitic understanding of

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[27] Thus, an oppositional party such as the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom are not taken seriously because they cannot become the government.

antagonism diverts form Luhmann's notion of the conflict as parasitic system. Luhmann attempted to externalize the conflictual system from its host, by providing the conflict with a 'small' system of its own. The parasite is, as Serres' (1982) analysis has illustrated, always an included excluded third disrupting the functioning of the system, yet which cannot be fully excluded. My point is that the parasite's inclusion in the form of an autopoietic system of its own, is already a specific managing of antagonism. Thus, I do not exclude the possibility that a conflict becomes a closed system of its own. Yet, assuming that this is the 'normal' case quickly delimits the theoretical concept of antagonism, and it prevents thinking antagonism as a parasitic over-coding *ab initio*.

There is a second mode of communication which Luhmann also defined as parasitic and which comes, oddly enough, closer to the model of a politics of deparadoxization. It is the code of moral which may settle in any system. The reason for this is not the ultimate ethical integration of society, but rather that the code of good/bad tends to be indigenously polemical (Luhmann, 1993f: 1004). Because moral does not constitute a system of its own, it parasitically inhibits many systems. It arises whenever conflictual problems of social order occur, which a system cannot solve (Luhmann, 1993f: 1003). Put differently, if "systems cannot resolve the paradoxes of their own codes", then "moral sensitivity" stands in (Luhmann, 1993f: 1006).[28] Such a parasitism is, in the first instance, something which threatens the *Ausdifferenzierung* (out-differentiation) of society. That is why Luhmann categorically excludes an over-coding of the system's code by an other code.[29]

In both cases, the antagonistic coding of the politics of deparadoxization and the polemic code of moral, a secondary code, which is not a defining element in any system, threatens to hegemonize the established codes of functional systems. What is interesting for my argument is that a parasitic code questions the system's own well-established codes and programmes, because they no longer secure systemic order. Luhmann pursues a double strategy: on the one hand, the code of the system cannot be threatened for *conceptual* reasons, on the other hand, he observes morally coded communications which somehow have to be theoretically located. The solution he suggests is to think moral as *normally* absent, but emerging at those *exceptional* moments when the paradox of the system leads to conflict.

But what does the exceptional status of the parasitic code mean for the system? Luhmann does not answer this question, apart from a generalised rejection of anything which could endanger *Ausdifferenzierung*. But why should that which occurs in a state of exception, hold any consequences for the definition of the system? Systems theory attempts to provide an answer here, and I have discussed both strategies before: the paradox is not a 'real' state of exception since it never threatens the system's autopoiesis. This allows Luhmann to 'semanticize' the problem of deparadoxization presupposing the autopoiesis is never essentially touched.[30] Its autopoiesis is located at the operative level, where 'real' autopoiesis happens, and where social structures are juxtaposed to semantics (cf. Ch. VI). These safety precautions defuse the 'state of exception' by presupposing a level which is untouched by it.

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[28] One may locate the reason why moral is not conceived as a system in Luhmann's uneasiness with morality. Instead of such speculation I am interested in the formal argument which the parasitic concept of moral implies.

[29] Luhmann (1993f: 1004) emphasizes: "This order does not permit code values of functions system to be identified with moral values — neither with good/bad nor with good/evil". Yet, the reason for this is a *theoretically* given *a priori* which suggests a moral imperative of its own: you ought not de-differentiate (cf. Rasch, 1995). Luhmann's own moral stance makes him blind towards any articulation of the code in an antagonistic way.

[30] My criticism of Luhmann's semanticism does not follow Barben (1996: 121) who accuses Luhmann of semanticizing classes and derealizing them by doing so. Yet, as Ch. VI has shown, Barben's (1996: 87) fear that semantics becomes the driving force for social processes is unfounded, if one looks carefully at the relation between social structures and semantics. Rather Luhmann is partially caught in traditional oppositions such as structure and superstructure which the radical theory design should exclude.

The politics of deparadoxization, by contrast, draws precisely from the problematization of these strategies of containment. If the paradox points to the finitude of the system and if the paradox cracks the systemic horizon, then it is this moment which is crucial to the articulation of the system and its impossible identity. In contrast to Luhmann, I suggest that the re-articulation, which is made possible by the undecidability of the system, concerns the whole system. At this moment the definition of the code as indicator of the system's unity is at disposal. It emerges not only as the problem of how to fill the system's code, but also as the question of how the two sides of the code relate to each other. It is in these moments that the harmonious and complementary model of the code are turned into an antagonistic relation.

This does not mean that the semantics of the filling is unimportant. Arguing for such a parasitic model of conflict allows one to partially decontextualize a conflict from its systemic context. It is now possible to think conflict as an antagonistic code which is re-iterated in different contexts and 'contexturalities' (Günther). Put differently, the semantics of antagonistic over-coding may be removed from its 'original' context. For example, the distinction male/female is not specific to a particular system. Like any true parasite, this distinction may inhibit many different codes, and change its meaning depending on the systemic context within which it is articulated. This dimension, which I cannot here further elaborate, allows one to go beyond Luhmann's model of conflict. Further research, particularly 'case studies', should show how such an iteration of a parasitic distinction works. One may suggest that a conflict such as that of the gender code, constitutes its own autopoietic system (e.g. Cornell, 1996). Yet, such an approach runs the risk of restraining the model of parasitic iteration since it reduces the conflict to a closed system of its own, which only perturbs other systems without inhibiting them. It tends to obliterate the specific relation between a host and its parasite, which cannot be thought in terms of exteriority.

An intersystemic perspective on parasitic antagonism, by contrast, stresses that the intrusion of the parasite 'uses' the opening of the system to articulate as paradox those places where the system's rhetoricity emerges. This 'state of exception' partly disarticulates the system, and opens it to the articulation of meaning external to the system. It is here that parasitic antagonisms from other systems may intrude the system. Antagonistic communications are particularly *integrative*, although they dislocate the system simultaneously. As with moral communications, antagonistic communication more easily receives attention in a system.[31] It is this implicitly antagonistic and polemogenous character which produces high connectivity, since it reduces complexity in a unique manner. The 'suction of integration' which the parasitic conflict produces is precisely that which a system, disintegrated by the failure of its ability to manage paradox, needs: the promise of the re-constitution of order through a successful working code. Recalling the argument of this chapter, the outline of a politics of deparadoxization becomes visible. It was possible to read the Luhmannian notion of conflict in terms of an antagonistic re-articulation of a system. Whereas in systems theory the process of deparadoxization is governed by the course of evolution, it is here that conflictual unfolding of paradoxes becomes crucial. A politics of deparadoxization is not based on already existing paradoxes. Its major step is to *construct* a paradox which also *deconstructs* the system. It was thus possible to show that construction and deconstruction are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they presuppose each other: the paradox which questions the very construction of the system itself relies on an 'arche-police' providing the necessary formalization of the system. The politics of deparadoxization is foremost a politics of paradoxization, already deparadoxizing the ungraspable dislocations and disturbances of the system. Like any self-referential concept, the politics of deparadoxization produces its own foundation, i.e. the paradox it claims to tackle. Thus

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[31] Luhmann (1993f: 1006) writes: "Morally pointed communications receive attention sooner than others in the competition of information."

the construction of a paradox simultaneously produces the need for a harmonious system, a system which achieves its own imaginary fullness.

Such a politics is parasitic in several senses. It cannot be tied to one specific system, such as the political. It does not confront a system with an externally constructed project, which the system is supposed to follow. Rather, it utilises the material(ity) of meaning, and the excess within the system, which is invisible to hegemonic systemic self-descriptions. In this sense, a politics of deparadoxization is an opening of systems from within. This openness differs from the openness which systems theory speaks of. It is not only the self-referential hetero-reference of the system, but the impurity which is intrinsic to the system. An impurity, to be sure, which cannot be extricated; it is similar to the parasite which cannot be excluded, since it is the movement of exclusion which produces an openness of its own.

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