

# **Radical Modernity and its Casualties**

*are art and religion going to end up “missing in action”?*

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# Introduction

- Speaking about the death of art and religion is undoubtedly something that dates back further than today's commonplace discussion of the death of politics.
- Given that “the death of art” and “the death of religion” are not simply widely-used everyday figures of speech, but are also major parts of the more processed semantics (*gelehrte Semantik*) of both, this fact is crucial – in Luhmann's scheme of things at least. That everything needs to be considered in the relationship between the structure/semantic of society (*gesellschaft Struktur/Semantik*).
- If the structure of society is today radically modernized, then “the death of art” and “the death of religion ” – at least from Luhmann's perspective – must be observed in relation to this fact.
- This presentation is the first step of a more demanding and challenging research programme, called – for the above-mentioned reason: *Radicalized Modernity and its Casualties. Are art and religion going to end up “missing in action”?*

# **Modernization as the primacy of functional differentiation of society over any other social differentiation process**

Just a few words about the expectations of this research project.

- In accordance with Luhmann's theory, we take modernization to be the primacy of functional differentiation of society over any other social differentiation process. Therefore, radicalized modernity is nothing more than the radicalization of such a primacy.
  - We also accept that both art and religion did once work as functionally specialized society subsystems for most of modernity. Both worked by means of a specific, symbolically generated communication medium. Just like any other functionally specialized societal subsystem: politics, economics, the judicial system, science, and so forth.

- For many reasons, the success and autonomy of each nationally specialized societal subsystem can never be taken for granted. Among other things, they depend on the fact that...
  - The extent of the primacy of functional differentiation can vary significantly.
  - Each societal subsystem is constantly harassed by every other social system (starting from other societal subsystems).
  - The capacity of these systems to deal with environmental complexity is constantly changing in order to adjust to it.

- Thus, each functionally specialized and differentiated societal subsystem can succeed – or fail – to a greater or lesser extent in coping with all of this. During modernization, both art and religion underwent very different experiences depending on the particular period and place, and the variants and wings of modernization.
- Theorization of the arts holds a crucial position within the study of social relations. The arts represent that part in the complexity of society which resists rationalization and challenges forms of legitimation in order to affirm various possibilities: to simply affirm otherness, to affirm other kinds of logic than the dominant ones, to open up other ways of embodying the social contract.
- According to Luhmann, the system of art has the function of showing how the many possibilities of sense combination have their own order, despite not being rationally organized.

- Within this framework, both “the death of art” and “the death of religion” assume sociologically relevant meanings as well as being comparable in two ways:
  - Mutually comparable and
  - Comparable with other functionally differentiated societal subsystems.

**additionally**

- Both art and religion can be morally relevant in a sociologically observable way only if they are able to cope with a radically modernized society.

# Specialized communication mediums: functioning and problems

The main part of our project applied the same analytical strategy to both art and religion.

Each demand of this analytical strategy reflected a particular problem which every functional subsystem of society has to solve (in one way or another) in order to survive for the time being and to reproduce its autonomy; i.e.: to maintain a monopoly over its particular problem (*Bezugsproblem*) in respect to the challenge of other functional equivalents.

- How does a functionally specialized communication medium work?
  - How do the specialized organizations which control a specific communication medium work? F.I.: are they successful in tackling the inflation and deflation of the medium in question?
- How does a specific binary code work?
  - F.I.: Is the re-entry successfully realized?
- Is it possible to identify local areas or particular wings of modernization with significantly higher or lower crisis levels?
- Which functional equivalents (if any) most seriously challenge art and religion, respectively?
  - Or, are art and religion (and their relevant problems) simply waning?
- Are both art and religion still able to exercise any influence on morality at a societal level?
  - Do they still play any significant role in the fabric of contemporary society?

- Art consists in endowing human perceptual possibilities on other objects, thus linking them to a particular type of communication.

(Luhmann 2017: 160)

- The function of art is to show that order can be achieved despite the improbability of the variations – in the artistic sense, therefore.

(ivi)

- In a society where there are more and more ways of producing fictitious worlds, both through drugs or other forms of suggestion, and using complex electronic devices,
- the differentiation of an art system can be best recognized in the fact that the references are blocked internally, which means that the *internal* observational operations directed to the work of art *must be comprehensible without external references*.
- In the essence of the fine arts there is instead a lack of desire to be useful. In some ways, beauty is the opposite of the useful. Beauty is therefore produced as useless or as a self-goal devoid of purpose.
- In any case, artists do not produce a work for themselves, they may not want to sell it, but this does not prevent them from letting it be seen.
- Writers do not write for themselves: these issues represent the differentiation of art.
- We can therefore say that a work of art is distinguished by the low probability of its creation.

- How does a functionally specialized communication medium work?
  - For art it is all about style, taste, and forms of communication... What is the state of health of the specialized organizations within each subsystem (art and religion) which should regulate their operation by tackling inflationary or deflationary trends case by case?
  
- a) What is the health status of the specialized binary code and, in particular, how is re-entry managed?
  
- b) Can any local areas of major or minor crisis be found?
  
- c) Which are, respectively, the most dangerous competitors of art and religion, in other words, the fiercest functional equivalents? Or are these two social forms simply waning?

a) The specialized binary code in art is different according to the historical period: beautiful/ugly; by the time of the historic avant-garde movements who applied the binary code of art to other aspects: shock/mannerism; energy/reflexivity; mirroring/innovation; form/function.

b) The lesser crisis in art lies precisely in the fact that, in Luhmann's scheme of things, communication becomes the "purpose" of art.

c) the most dangerous competitor of art could be hypothesized is precisely communication...where, however, communication is not content with primary uselessness and beauty – the differential categories of art are mainly connected with its being not a "useful" system in the traditional way.

# The next steps of the research project

## Main topics

- Religion/society in radicalized modernization.
- Comparative analysis of art / societal relationships and religion / societal relationships in radicalized modernization.

## General perspectives of the research

- Do the crises that art is experiencing from romance and that religion is experiencing with the end of the confessional era have anything in common?
- Are both art (the current art trade) and religion (the current low intensity religion) risking subordination to the economy in a similar way to the assault experienced by today's politics (and more specifically by the State)?

Thank you!

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