The third party plays an important role in human interaction and communication. There can be neither law nor court without the figure of the judge, who decides between two litigants in conflict with one another. The point of communications media is not so much the message but the messenger, who channels information between subjects, the sender and receiver, who are not in direct communication with each other. The mediator has a crucial role in human affairs, cooling off antagonisms: from everyday life among individuals to the diplomatic level among states. Sexual jealousy as a configuration and a human emotion is triggered by the third party of the rival, who troubles the interaction between the two lovers. The impartial spectator, as a neutral observer, observes the relationship between two agents or actors with or without their knowledge.

Can one discover a principle common to these different phenomena? In German social philosophy and sociological theory, in particular, and the humanities, in general, there has been a debate over the last fifteen years as to whether social theory should turn to the analysis of the role of the third party in order to conceptualize human affairs, classically viewed from the


2 Ulrich Bröckling, 'Governing by Triangulation: Mediation', in this volume.

standpoint of 'the Other', from a new perspective. The decisive point in this debate is that the role of the third party, which we will call 'the Third' in this context, is to be understood in a personal sense – as a third agent rather than a third realm of being.

Let us consider three questions: (1) Why is the Third important? For which academic disciplines, and at what level of research, is the Third relevant? (2) What are the arguments for taking the Third into consideration, for focusing on it as a centre of enquiry? (3) What are the consequences for, or benefits to, various academic disciplines in taking the Third into consideration?

We seek to answer these questions as follows: (1) Let us introduce a presupposition: that attention to the role of the Third is important for the humanities and the social sciences because their claim to form a specific group of academic disciplines has historically been based on the notion of the Other. Only if we recognize the impact of the Other on the humanities and the social sciences can we clarify the relevance of the turn to the Third. (2) In order to make the Third an object of systematic enquiry, we shall advance four arguments for the relevance of the Third. (3) We will outline the consequences for the humanities and the social sciences – ontological and methodological – should they take the Third, as well as the Other, into account. The crucial thesis is that by systematic reflection on the role of the Third (the second Other, who makes a difference to the first Other) the humanities and the social sciences can clarify their ontological and methodological autonomy in relation to other groups of academic disciplines, and can arrange their specific research potential more fruitfully.

I. The humanities and social sciences require a social theory

I.5. The humanities and social sciences as a special group of sciences

The appropriate level at which to engage with the first question (Why is the Third important? For which academic disciplines, and at what level
of research, is the Third relevant?) is an approach to the humanities and the social sciences which regards them as a specific group of intellectual disciplines within specific epistemological boundaries and genealogical frames. Historical research, the study of law or jurisprudence, anthropology, ethnology, economics, sociology, linguistics, the study of language and literature, cultural studies, and media studies, to name but a few, all belong to this group.

Ever since the humanities and social sciences emerged as a specific group of academic disciplines in the nineteenth century, they have required a social theory, that is, a theory of inter-subjectivity or of the Other. The need for this theoretical framework arises from both epistemological and ontological considerations. We can gather from basic methodological terms such as 'the operation called understanding,' or from important ontological terms in these disciplines such as 'struggle for recognition,' 'empathy,' 'dialogue,' 'encounter,' 'exchange,' 'reciprocity,' 'intersubjectivity,' 'communication,' 'interact,' 'dialogue,' 'empathy,' 'exchange,' 'reciprocity,' 'intersubjectivity,' 'communication,' 'interaction,' 'communicative action,' 'double contingency' (the mutual opacity of ego and alter ego) and 'identity and alterity,' that a need for a basic social theory differentiates the humanities and the social sciences from other disciplines - from, for example, natural science, philosophy, and theology. Reference to a theory of the Other, or inter-subjectivity - in whatever form - characterizes this methodological and ontological difference.

The natural sciences epistemologically approach their 'object' within a subject-object relationship - a subject observing an object - and conceptualize the internal (ontological) relationships of their object in terms of, for instance, causal connections among the elements. Philosophy in its modern Kantian shape approaches its particular questions (epistemological, ontological, and other) within self-reflecting subjectivity, that is, within a context where the individual reflects upon his own experience of the objective world within a particular rationality - the transcendental human mind. Theology, by contrast, approaches its particular questions within a context of revelation of the supernatural, namely the transcendent Third (God), who created all natural things: including all people and all of their (social) relationships. The humanities and the social sciences, however, are based neither in a theory of subject-object-relation or of the transcendent subject (the relation of self-reflexivity), nor in the revelation of God as


19 A synopsis of the methodology of the Other can be found in Jürgen Habermas, On the Logic of Social Sciences, trans. Shierry Weber Nicolson and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

a transcendent third party. From their very beginnings as disciplines, the humanities and the social sciences, in their approaches to the socio-cultural world, have of necessity required a theory of inter-subjectivity.

I.2. The social theory of the Other

There is, within the rich history of social theory, a theory of world, have of necessity required a theory of inter-subjectivity. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century this has always happened in relation to developments in the humanities and the social sciences, as they now reflected upon their own methodological and ontological basis.

Up to the present, social theory, in response to questions concerning the foundation of this particular group of disciplines, has always offered a theory of the dyad or the Other and the third realm of 'trans-subjectivity': the struggle for recognition, the ego and alter ego, I and Thou, identity and alterity, double contingency, through which the emergence of a third sphere (a higher unity such as language, the Hegelian 'objective spirit', culture, or social system, etc. as structuring agents) can be discerned. This third sphere, which includes the basic perspectives of ego and alter ego, which

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21 The best analysis of this tradition of the theory of inter-subjectivity is Michael Theunissen, Der Andere: Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, provides a continuation of this tradition using Hegelian concepts.


23 The model for the 'struggle of recognition' is the famous master-slave chapter in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit.


26 Martin Buber, I and Thou, who influenced all emphatic theories of dialogue and communication up to Hans Georg Gadamer and Emanuel Lévinas.


29 Habermas, On the Logic of Social Sciences.
are transformed by inter-subjectivity, serves as the starting point of enquiry for the humanities and the social sciences.

I.3. The social theory of the Third

It is from the perspective of this particular group of institutionalized academic disciplines that one can understand the paradigmatic change brought about by the turn to the Third – the immanent Third (rather than the transcendent Third of theology). The importance of the third party is first emphasized by sociologists such as Georg Simmel, who systematically developed the idea that the Third both facilitates and disturbs the relationship between ego and alter ego. Moreover, he articulated different expressions of the Third (the 'arbiter' and the 'mediator', the 'laughing third' or the 'real winner', the ruler by the guideline 'divide et impera') in a basic social theory of 'interaction' ('Wechselwirkung'), thus establishing his sociological theory. In analogy to (and independently of) this, psychiatrists like Freud discovered the same principle. Freud, with his concepts of family constellations as inevitable but dangerous 'œdipal' configurations, and his therapy through discourse, shifted the focus of psychiatry from natural science to the field of the humanities and the social sciences: all erotic desire, for example, arises, in his analysis, from a triangulation in which the amorous rival, exclusion mechanisms, and jealousy play key roles. In the works of Simmel and Freud one can discover the foundation documents of the general theory of triangulation and triadic configurations. In this sense, both Simmel and Freud are major figures within the social sciences and their foundation in social theory – a theory now focused on the importance of the Other to the relevance of the Third.

This gradual process of discovering the Third to be of key importance was later consolidated by social philosophers such as Sartre, by philologists such as Girard, with his concepts of the rival and the scapegoat, by theoreticians of ethics such as Levinas, by media philosophers such as Serres, by cultural critics such as Bhabha, with the concept of hybridity (the personal or cultural existence of 'being between'), by postmodernists such as Bauman, by network-sociologists such as Burt and by legally trained sociologists such as Luhmann, with his concept of the judge as the


observer of the observers (or 'second-order observation'). Thus while the discovery of the Other is clearly an achievement of modernity, so also is the discovery of the immanent Third, and this perhaps due to the role of God as transcendent Third becoming limited through the process of secularization – as a consequence of which the immanent Third was discovered within the world itself.

The turn to the Third has obviously something to do with the extension and consolidation of the cognitive capacity, and the methodological autonomy, of the humanities and the social sciences. To avoid a misunderstanding it is important to emphasize one point: the dependence upon seeing the Third as der Dritte (a third party/person) rather than das Dritte (a third realm of being). The Third in this sense means 'another' whose functions are different from the 'first other' (the simple alter ego) and which is conceived of in such a way that the addition of a fourth or fifth party would not add any greater functionality to any schema involving simply first, other, and Third parties.

II. Four arguments for the relevance of the Third in social theory

Having explained the relevance of social theory (reflection on the Other and the Third) for the foundation of the humanities and the social sciences, we will now concentrate on distinguishing and systematizing four arguments for the relevance of the Third in social theory as the theory essential to those disciplines.

II.1. The argument from formal communication in language

This argument relates to language, and to the importance of language for inter-subjectivity. So this argument can be reformulated linguistically, with reference to the linguistic turn in social and cultural sciences. A core element of every language for the coordination of basic roles of communication is the system of personal pronouns, for example, you or I or we. Much dyadic social theory, as mentioned before, already reflects this key function of personal pronouns, starting its basic reconstruction with ego and alter ego, and transforming the personal pronouns, such as you, I, it, and we, into categories (as Feuerbach and Buber do). The Other here is another expression for the you within the system of personal pronouns, and the thing or matter is another term for it. But there are more formal positions of communication in the core of every language: there is a third personal position over and above you and I (namely he or she) and, as Norbert Elias observed in his social theory of 'figurations', there are more plural positions than we (for example you (plural) and they). The system of personal pronouns, as a core element of every language (for coordinating basic roles of communication, 'personal pronouns as a figurational model'), includes not only I, you, and we, but also an important third position (it, he, or she). Here the system of personal pronouns differs between it (a marker for things or matters) and he/she (a marker for personal entities). That means: I and you can refer to it, an object to be watched or handled. Decisive for the whole system of perspectives, however, is the shift to the third-person position, he/she. This creates a new position at the core of lan-

41 Luhmann, Social Systems. Luhmann's general concept of the constitution of communication by observation can be traced back to the concept of the judge, whose expectations, according to the norms, are already co-expected by ego and alter ego in their dyadic interaction: Niklas Luhmann, *A Sociological Theory of Law* (London: Routledge, 1985).


guage, which places both sides of a dyad — I and you — into a relationship, simultaneously comparing the binary-related positions and separating them. In the system of personal pronouns this triadic effect becomes an open constitutive mechanism. No singular fourth or fifth position is necessary within the system, but further plural positions, over and above we, are now possible. Obviously the logic of all languages requires the personal Third in order to reach the plural positions of you and they. You can only say you (plural) if speaking from the position of a third party. A theory of inter-subjectivity that is based on a dyadic model of interaction (the you as the Other and the it as a third realm) is not able to make accessible the system of personal pronouns as a whole. We need the Third to complete the basic communication formula of language; so, from the viewpoint of formal communication within language, the consideration of the Third is as relevant to social theory as the you or the I.

II.2. The argument from familiarity and triangulation

The Oedipus argument48 claims that human socialization of individuals is, of course, constituted by relation to the Other, but is only completed through triangulation (internalization of a third-party perspective). This argument is of course developed by psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan, etc.) and social psychology. To recognize the gaze of the Other and to encounter the face of the Other is one thing, and stimulates the ambivalent process of self-mirroring in the reference of the ego to the other. But there is a further aspect of inter-subjectivity, a further turn in the constitution of the self, when a relationship between the Other and the Third is perceived, from which the First is excluded. As Paul Stenner and others have shown, this experience of being included/excluded is the source of the emotions of jealous and envy, which are universal affective structures.47 The mechanism of mediated desire is the central affective mechanism of sociogenesis (Girard). There is also another effect of the Third in triangulation. Perceiving the gaze of the Third observing the First and Other is a specific position within inter-subjectivity, because the Third brings an element of indirectness and distancing observance into the play.

The Third acts therefore as an interrupter of emotional escalations, of violence and counter-violence. So the basic experience of being compared to another by the glance of the Third is the affective source of the concepts of neutrality, equality, and justice. For every newcomer in the world, for every child, this process of triangulation is not only a cognitive, but an emotional process, too; the experience of the Other and the Third configures his or her imagination; and it is possible to trace the way in which this complex social imagination (elaborated in fiction, in narratives, and dramas of jealousy, revenge, alliances and mediations) leads to family triangulation.46 From an experiential and imaginative background the 'triangulation' within family points toward the relevance of the Third as a key figure in social theory.49

II.3. The argument from transition from interaction to institution

This argument is developed within the debate about the 'missing link' between micro- and macro-sociology: how do we analyse the transition from interaction among particular participants to institution as an anonymous societal force.48 This argument is brilliantly explored by Peter L.


47 Stenner/Stainton-Rogers, 'Jealousy' and Paul Stenner's contribution in this volume.

48 Koschorke, 'Ein neues Paradigma'.

49 Freud points out that family novels (Familienromane) run through all human social worlds, and in this thesis he not only refers to classic dramatists (e.g. Sophocles) but to the great novels of nineteenth-century bourgeois society. Cf. Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel.

50 The challenge is how to combine the Durkheim-tradition (with 'institution' as key term) with the Tarde-tradition (with 'imitation' as key term).
Berger and Thomas Luckmann, combining the intellectual power of social phenomenology with the concept of emergence. They refer to the well established theory of institution (Durkheim, Gehlen) and attempt to reformulate the process of institutionalization by means of the social phenomenology (Husserl, Schütz) of inter-subjectivity. At the core of the argument they explicitly use Simmel's concept of the Third. They argue that dyadic interaction is necessary to reconstruct 'habitualization' and 'typization', but that social theory needs the Third in order to reconstruct the phenomenon of 'institution'. Two can establish rules and can change them: the rules are attributable to the two-party-relation, but only the observation of these rules by a Third detaches the rules from the actors involved (and their perspectives) and makes the rules 'objective' - becoming now detached and estranged from all participants. Through the effect of a third party the social phenomenon becomes society. Such a Third will often be anonymous. For this reason the Third is the 'missing link' between interaction and institution. One can transfer this argument to bridge the gap between 'dialogue' (Gadamer) and symbolic order (Lacan) / discourse (Foucault), or the gap between 'double contingency' and 'social system'. At the level of dialogue or double contingency the Third is helpful (or, indeed, indispensable) for the reconstruction of the emergence of 'symbolic order' (Lévi-Strauss, Lacan) or 'discourse' (Foucault) or 'social systems' (Luhmann). On account of this function between the levels of interaction and institution the Third should be postulated in social theory.

II.4. The argument from the range of the Third

This argument can be reformulated in the terms of the modern theory of difference (Derrida, Serres). Already 'the Other' 'bundles up' - and conceals by the general concept - different configurations and functions of the dyad (cooperation, exchange, conflict, imitation, intimacy, care, friendship etc.). Alterity is a dubious phenomenon, showing all traces of ambiguity between 'amicus' and 'enemy', of transition from 'co-worker' to 'slave', from hate to indifference or love. But the ambiguous configurations of alterity do not exhaust the complexity of the human world. Every socio-cultural world has already a lot of distinct triadic figures and configurations which can be reduced neither to alterity nor to each other. Think for instance of the roles of the translator, interpreter, messenger between sender and receiver, rival, trickster, mediator, the arbiter or the judge, the third-party adjudication, the stranger, the suffering third or the scapegoat (tertius miserabilis), the ally in a coalition, the real winner (laughing third), the parasite, the agent, the representative, the traitor, the schemer, divide et impera, the hybrid, the configuration of majority/minority (there can be no majority or minority between two, it only has meaning with the appearance of the Third). These figures and configurations cannot be explained by dyadic interaction, but nor do they need a fourth or further party to be postulated in order to be satisfactorily analysed. One needs tertiariness in order to understand the emergence of these complex configurations. The Third moves all the above mentioned triadic configurations together, in order to differentiate the differences. Only by this operation can social theory explain the socio-cultural world in its full complexity. From the viewpoint of the actual range and richness of triadic figurations in the socio-cultural world, the consideration of the Third is as relevant for social theory as the Other.

52 This argument was first developed by Litt, Individuum und Gesellschaft.
53 Special attention to the mediator, the arbiter and the real winner is given by Simmel, 'The Quantitative Aspect of the Group', to the parasite and the messenger by Serres, Pariaat, and to the scapegoat by Girard, Violence and the Sacred.
54 Simmel, 'The Quantitative Aspect of the Group'.
55 I first introduced this term as a concept in social theory in Fischer, 'Der Dritte', 104.
III. The turn to the Third: Ontological and methodological consequences for the humanities and the social sciences

These four arguments alone (and they are arguments which cannot be reduced to one another) make the Third indispensable in the foundation of social theory. The Third is as relevant as ego and alter ego. 'Tertianity' proves as relevant as alterity and identity. The Third, or 'tertiary', is a supplement to alterity and identity; it is one step ahead. At the same time it is a step between alterity and plurality. The Third is another Other, which produces new functions and configurations, while a fourth or further figure only repeats dyadic and triadic constellations in complex formations of plurality. What are the consequences for, or benefits to, the humanities and the social sciences of systematically taking the Third into consideration?

III.1. Ontological transformation

Firstly, there are consequences for the ontological stance of these disciplines: their position on the ontological status of the 'objects' they deal with. The Third allows this particular group of disciplines both to understand institutionalization through the Third, that is, the emergence of society (institution, structure, system, discourse) and also explain institutionalization of special configurations of the Third through the differentiations which this society performs – the development of complex societies.

The potential of the Third helps us solve a crucial problem in handling the socio-cultural world at large. It helps us explain – as already mentioned in argument II. 3 – the inevitable double aspect of interaction and institution, of micro- and macro-level sociology. With the Third as a tool in the analysis, it is no longer necessary to play action-theory off against systems-theory, or dialogue-theory against discourse-theory, or vice versa. In real society, of course, the institution – or the 'trans-subjectivity' of 'discourse' or 'social system' – is structurally antecedent to interaction, for instance in the mother-child-dyad. But this cannot prevent social theory (in order to respond to the intellectual challenge) from reconstructing social order in gradation. So, to answer the key question of the institutionalization of social order: the combination of the self and the other initiates inter-subjectivity, but only with the introduction of the third party does the institution, or the symbolic order, or the discourse, or the social system, come into being. The interaction of two depends on their mutual existence and their presence, but with the appearance of the Third the individuals tend to be replaceable, the relationship becomes continuous, the rules exist principally independently of (or 'alienated' from) the individual wills of those involved: interaction emerges as society.

In this perspective Lacan's 'big' Other shows as the big Third instance, and Mead's 'generalized other' should be renamed as 'generalized third'. Roles are installed, norms are established, the social life gains stability – and subjectivity owes its formation to this anonymous society. But the other way round, one can grasp the paradox: the concrete Third, who acts in the inter-subjectivity only as the transition to the abstract trans-subjectivity, to the realm of the 'objective' institutions and discourses, re-emerges at the micro-level of macro-society, because such a real, anonymous and alienated society needs embodiment of institutions, and third agents on the micro-level emerge as an incarnation of the macro-level – they are the faces of the institutions, with scope for decision in open situations.

Based on the understanding that the Third is a precondition of institutionalization, now the institutionalization of specific dyadic and different triadic configurations can become the object of enquiry. This is an innovation in social theory, because armed only with the notion of the Other the humanities and the social sciences could not fully analyse certain aspects of

the socio-cultural world. Of course configurations of the Other are already a store of social constellations and show a large range of different possibilities, which are used by societies as social operators: to set out division of labour, structures of exchange, care, love, friendship, and conflict — complex configurations which are predicated on the existence of the Other. But the humanities and the social sciences are stymied by the poverty of their basic dyadic theory. Following a purely dyadic model of *ego* and *alter ego* one can grasp that two can love one another or quarrel, can work together or trade, and therefore the humanities and the social sciences, using this dyadic social theory, can get a hold upon such concepts as division of labour or of exchange, or of morality, or of conflict, or of care, within the socio-cultural world; but the purely dyadic model cannot grasp different complex social systems — for instance, the concept of market, or of law and court, or of media institutions, or of political institutions. To explain the market we need the role of the rival (and the triggered competition for customers), to explain the court we need the judge (the conflict-regulating instance of mediation and arbitration), to explain the political system we need the concepts of inclusion/exclusion, of coalition, of majority/minority, interrupting central hierarchy.57 These are all configurations which cannot be explained with exclusive reference to *ego* and *alter ego* and the third realm of culture. In order to explain inter-culturality we need the indispensable translator, to explain the public sphere one needs the listener, the viewer, the audience witnessing — for instance — the drama of jealousy or the public debate, performed by advocates. From the viewpoint of dyadic social theory, which operates only with the relationship of *ego* and *alter ego* and the third realm of culture, language, symbolic order etc., these above mentioned social systems of human life appear as secondary, as abstract or alienated spheres — compared with the authentic dyads of interaction and communication. But if the Third is properly established in the foundation of social theory as is the Other, these spheres can be analysed and investigated as already extant basic elements of the socio-cultural world.

Social phenomena such as family, market, law, state, communication media, inter-culturality demand configurations beyond dyadic relational forms. Establishing the Third as a prerequisite for reciprocity or intersubjectivity, the humanities and the social sciences can observe how society, both in socio-cultural actuality and also in imagination, includes within itself within the configurations of the Other (master-slave, cooperation, exchange, conflict, imitation, intimacy, care etc.) as well as in configurations of the Third (rivals, tricksters, parasites, mediators, arbiters). Societies from the beginning use these dyadic and triadic configurations as social operators, and through this diverse patterning of social systems the hierarchic and polycentric nature of modern societies emerges. By this ontological transformation, caused by the reflection on the Third, the various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences attain a broader basis of social ontology for their research.

There are, however, more ontological innovations made possible by the systematic consideration of the Third, and these concern the socio-cultural constitution of subjectivity — or the *inner* world — and the ‘construction’ of the *outer* world or nature. It belongs to their scientific autonomy that the humanities and the social sciences claim that the socio-cultural world is prior to subjectivity and prior to the existence of the outer world. That is due to the axiom that subjectivity — or the *inner world* — does not create itself, but is constituted and mediated by the Other, that alterity is already within the essence of any identity. By the systematic consideration of the Third, the nature of subjectivity can be observed more accurately. The antinomic structure between the *I* (as undeveloped impulse) and *me* (as the orientating representation of the Other in the subject)58 is supplemented by

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57 Thomas Hobbes develops a crucial argument for the function of the Third (the occupier, the sovereign) in politics: the all-powerful state is legitimated as the interrupter of violence and counter-violence, in order to stop the mutual escalation between ego and alter ego, and is accepted by both in this third role: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

internalizing what we might call, in Helmuth Plessner's terms,59 the 'excentric' viewpoint between 'I' and 'me', a viewpoint from which there can be observed the whole gamut of the roles of the Third (from neutral spectator to parasite to judge) within identity which make for complex subjectivity.

Consideration of the Third can also help us explain our socio-cultural approaches to the outer world in a new way. It can offer an explanation of the existence of various 'world views' (including scientific and narrative world views), each of which can give rise to a wide variety of structures and images characterized by concepts of the 'threefold', 'ternary', 'triads', or 'thirdness'. Returning to the human experience of real or imaginative triangulation (which enables, and gives complexity to, any socialization of human beings) one can see that thirddness and binarity amount together to the minimal degree of experiential complexity necessary for ordinary human socialization, and that the relation between them is therefore both an innate and a productive model for shaping the structure of world views, for cultural semiosis.60 This supposition is supported by Peirce's theory of sign, the matrix of semiosis, which is characterized by sign-relations ('firstness, secondness and thirdness'); sign, object, and 'interpretant'.61 The Third as elaborated by myth, theology, philosophy, literature, or scientific systems may wear many masks and play many roles:62 as an agent who draws a distinction between two sides, as hero of transgression and mediation, as a translator, as a stage in the development of synthesis, as a force breaking down symmetry or polarity, as a joker beyond dualism.63

59 Plessner's term is excentric positionality, see Helmuth Plessner, Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965 [1928]).
60 Reinhard Brandt, D'Artagnan und die Urteilskraft. Über ein Ordnungsprinzip der europäischen Kulturgeschichte (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991).
63 See for the narratology of the Third: Albrecht Koschorke, 'Ein neues Paradigma der Kulturwissenschaften' (2010); Bernhard Malkmus, 'Vom Hoch- und Tiefstapeln. Der

III.2. Methodological transformation

We conclude by sketching out some methodological consequences for the humanities and the social sciences. As explained at the outset, the approach of this group of disciplines to their 'object' (the socio-cultural world) is not the self-reflection of subjectivity (as in transcendental philosophy), nor the subject-object-relation (of the natural sciences), nor the revelation of the transcendent Third (as in theology). This group of disciplines relies upon inter-subjectivity in its epistemological economy. Dyadic social theory, as an important theory of the socio-cultural sciences, proceeds from a methodological approach with 'understanding' as a necessary component. This follows the model of inter-subjectivity, because one subject (the scholar) understands a document or a monument as an 'expression' of the Other, of his manifest or latent 'intention'. The systematic consideration of the Third within social theory now shifts the epistemology from 'understanding' to 'the observer'. The key methodological basis of the humanities and the social sciences is now the observation of an understanding relationship between ego and alter ego.

With the addition of the Third to the tools of analysis, it can be seen that every relation in inter-subjectivity is already observed, or rather that such concepts as 'interaction', 'exchange', 'reciprocity', 'communication', and 'double contingency', work and function only as observed relationships, observed from the viewpoint of the Third. The model now contains the observer of a relationship: the onlooker of an interaction or (with reference to Freud) the voyeur of an intercourse – the observing third person. This seems to be the social origin of the 'impartial spectator'. The Third is simultaneously neutral and involved: it is outside and inside, both observing and interfering. These 'second-order observations'64 constitute an important

64 Luhmann, Social Systems.
and indispensable methodological basis for social theory and an epistemological point of reference for the humanities and the social sciences. It is only through these 'second-order observations' that these disciplines can make legitimate claims to be a self-description of society.

PART II

Philosophy
CULTURAL HISTORY AND LITERARY IMAGINATION
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Dialectic and Paradox
Configurations of the Third in Modernity
Ian Cooper and Bernhard F. Malkmus (eds)
Contents

BERNHARD F. MALKMUS AND IAN COOPER
Triadic Concepts in the Humanities and Social Sciences –
An Introduction 1

PART I Social Theory 23

A CONVERSATION WITH ZYGMUNT BAUMAN
From Ethics to Justice:
The Role of the Triad in Modern Social Imagination 25

ULRICH BRÖCKLING
Governing by Triangulation: On Mediation 37

PAUL STENNER
Foundation by Exclusion: Jealousy and Envy 53

JOACHIM FISCHER
Turn to the Third:
A Systematic Consideration of an Innovation in Social Theory 81

PART II Philosophy 103

ANDREAS DITTRICH
The Absent Third: Negative Dialectics in Adorno’s and Derrida’s
Accounts of Cognition and Language 105
Whatever happened between 1770 and 1800, during the thirty years that the philosopher of history Reinhart Koselleck famously compared to a mountain saddle or col (Sattelzeit), things were not quite the same towards the end of that period as they had been at its beginning. From Windermere in Northern England to the short-lived Mainz Republic in Central Germany and the Greek mercantile diaspora community Filiki Eteria in Odessa, people suddenly found themselves swept up in revolutionary enthusiasm; or they were scared to death by revolutionary terrorism under the Jacobins in Paris, Napoleon’s hegemonic swiftness in restructuring Europe in its entirety, and the ensuing instability after his demise outside Moscow and Waterloo. Not even the wide-ranging political restoration after 1815 in the wake of the Congress of Vienna – one of the most concerted efforts in European history to turn back the clock – returned people’s dreams, nightmares, hopes and fears to the eighteenth century. In frustrating the political and social impetus of those aspirations and anxieties, the project of restoration instead propelled them forward.

One way of talking about this ‘mountain saddle’ or col, and illustrating the emergence of what we have come to call ‘modernity’, is numerical. The eighteenth century thought in twos, modernity thinks in threes. Obviously a stark simplification, this is, however, as we hope to show in this volume, a useful observation. The eighteenth century hearkens back to concepts of cosmic, intellectual, social and political orders that are structured according to binary oppositions: heaven versus earth, res cogitans versus res extensa.