Notes on the Project ‘Poetry and Social Theory’

Niklas Luhmann

Philosophy and Poetry

PHILOSOPHY HAS a primary interest in things, in the world and not so much in language. It attempts to introduce into the world a description of the world and in so doing irritates itself in its encounter with the difficulties involved. The fact that this also entails problems of language is plainly the case, but this is not philosophy’s ‘existential’ problem. Not so with poetry. In contrast to philosophy, it installs itself not in things but in language. Unlike philosophy, which has apparently never experienced moments of embarrassment in its talk, just problems regarding the relevance of the same, poetry is existentially affected by the problem of incommunicaibility. That is why it is this problem of incommunicaibility in particular that makes its presence felt in poetry and lyrical expression. There are, if one can put it in this way, non-linguistic language devices available here for making visible what cannot be formulated.1

Is it a coincidence that at the very moment when poetry wishes to express the problem of incommunicaibility as its own existential problem, when the description of the social system has lost its power to persuade and therefore, as if in ruins, makes material available, that poetry is able to join together into bizarre forms and into persuasive ‘un-persuadedness’ (Unüberzeugtheit)? If one views evolution not as systems planning but as an onward movement via such coincidences, this explanation may suffice. On the other hand, it is no pure coincidence that modern society both enforces the communication problem and is initially in the awkward situation of not being able to describe itself adequately. One could trace both of these to the conversion from stratified to functional differentiation. But in its evolution, this context is only coincidentally effective as a cause.

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How can uniqueness be asserted? If one merely asserts it, then one is acting paradoxically, because one is then presupposing that others are able to share in the meaning that constitutes one's own uniqueness. The same problem becomes more acute when we represent our own 'identity' using symbols that have a cultural meaning and can therefore be used generally. The solution to the problem seems to lie in the telling of stories – whether condensed into a biography or only occasional, of storylike quality. There is apparently sufficient improbability in the mere sequence of events that one can assume that this story cannot have happened to others in the same way.2

This solution to the problem helps us understand why initially it was the novel that concerned itself with this issue and was able to represent uniqueness through storytelling. If we wish to radicalize the problem and resolve even what can be narrated into a culturally typical story or a problem in which everyone has an interest, what then remains? The answer might be: poetry.3

Poetry is a type of communication that speculates more than others do on the possibility that it is perceived in silence. It presupposes the presence of a listener/reader who is silent – not in the sense that he must wait until he himself has the floor, but in the expectation that he is connecting silence. Unlike in novels or plays, one cannot even tell of what one has heard, seen or read afterwards. Silence remains the order of the day.

What follows from this? Perhaps we need to make a digression at this point and consider whether the participation of consciousness in the communication process is not perhaps best conceived as silence. For as soon as consciousness gives out signals which lead it to participate in communication, it makes itself dependent upon the possible course of the communication itself, that is, upon the social system; then it can virtually only say what it is possible to say in a given context. But if consciousness has to be silent, and must remain silent, it remains so much more with itself.

**Ontology, Poetry**

As long as poetry believes itself to be dependent upon a reference to a pre-given 'beingness' (Seienden), the observation of this relationship can operate with a bivalent schema. But in the final analysis this only allows poetry to depict the alternative 'correctly' or 'incorrectly' and to see its own achievement in the difficulties of correct depiction or perhaps in the meaning of what it is depicting. Hence educational functions on the one hand and the constant reproach of lying and over-exaggerating on the other.

If poetry believes itself able to be sufficient unto itself without reference to pre-given objects, then it is rid of this problem. It thus withdraws from the logical/ontological schematism. Perhaps this only happens because this schematism is at an end. In fact, what reasons do we have for assuming that this is a reaction to the problem of incommunicability?

What we analyse as modern poetry seems now demonstratively to use language in such a way that it becomes clear that it (language) does not serve to describe something, or at least not exclusively. In this regard, one could
pursue Gotthard Günther's ideas about a 'negative language'. Having said this, the context in which this idea emerged is certainly a different one and I am unsure whether it can be applied in this instance. After the critique of the symbolic function of language as a defining moment, it also becomes possible to give new meaning to the symbolic structure, which appears to be indisputable. Perhaps one can say that it develops self-reference, it asymmetricizes and is for this reason sensitive to a description of describing.

Novalis
Much of what we mean can already be found in the fragments of Novalis. For example: 'The sensibility for poetry has much in common with the sensibility for mysticisms. It is the sensibility for the peculiar, the personal, the unknown, the mysterious, the revelatory, the necessarily coincidental.' 'It represents the unrepresentable. It sees the invisible, feels the intangible', etc. 'Critique of poetry is a nonsense.'4 For Romanticism, that would probably mean that even observing poetry is a nonsense, and it is at this very point that we go beyond Romanticism. It seeks the infinite in the movement of 'romanticizing' (Novalis again).

Manifest/Latent
The particular uniqueness of the manifest/latent distinction lies in the fact that it relates back to the autopoiesis of the distinguishing system. Thus there are only two different forms in principle: conscious/unconscious and communicable/incommunicable. Here, the one variant can be used to observe the other variant, and vice versa.

The reference back to autopoiesis is only possible once autopoietic systems as such have become differentiated and observable. Apparently it is not until modernity that the semantic form of a distinction is made available, under conditions that have yet to be fully explained. This assumes that autopoietic systems have become observable in precisely the way in which they cannot observe themselves. If we assume, on this basis, that these systems are able to observe themselves, what transpires is a paradox – the paradox of social communication about social incommunicability (in contrast to social communication about incommunicabilities that arise in particular functional contexts or are specific to their milieu, such as in affairs of the heart).

Communication of Silence
I start out from the assumption that every social system, including religious communication, must invisibilize its own paradox in order to prevent communication from ceasing. This is not a norm or a special structuring expectation, but simply an expression of autopoiesis itself – it carries on, or it does not carry on.

In the case of religion, whose social function might be described as aiding the elimination of paradox, a special appreciation of the problem emerges. The invisibilization can also consist in pointing to the paradox,
describing it, even celebrating it, but at the same time not being in a position to draw the relevant consequences and to stop. In actual fact, one ought to be silent, and this in such a way that the silence itself is no longer communication. However, that is not possible in social situations on account of the structure of double contingency: silence becomes the communication of silence and, in addition, the communication of a form of high religion, that is to say, a particularly intensified form of communication. This is an almost experimental proof for the theory of autopoiesis, which maintains that in situations with double contingency, social systems necessarily emerge by means of communication, whether the participants wish this to happen or not. It is only possible to stop by interrupting the double contingency.

Immanence and Transcendence

The immanence/transcendence distinction codes the horizon-bound nature of all meaning. Actual meaning unfolds in horizons, which paradoxically function as a limit, or boundary, as unattainable and impassable (which contradicts the concept of a limit). Whereas the meaning experienced in actuality is constantly changing, the scope for possibilities maintained by horizons is stable but cannot be actualized. That which is actual and thus evident and certain is therefore unstable, whereas the stable can neither be actualized nor can it be certain.

Religious coding suspends this distinction of actuality and possibility by assigning it to immanence (and usually linking it to human mortality) and postulating it for transcendence: that it is certain and stable, actual, evident and has a permanence that penetrates everything. Whereas the distinction of topic and horizon, of actuality and possibility, constructs meaning and meaning would not be possible without this distinction, the assertion of transcendence additionally has an emphatic meaning in the suspension of precisely this meaning-constituting difference – in actual infinity, which simultaneously achieves ultimate certainty in a flood of blinding light.

One could imagine that the unity of this distinction [immanence/transcendence; J.A.] is merely presented as an event in each instance. Since the event disappears, both the unity and the re-establishment of the difference are guaranteed with this form of presentation. The unity of the difference might make sense in the moment, but if one wants to draw any conclusions from it, one has to use the distinction again and make a link either to immanence or to transcendence, depending on which of the two sides is being treated as a positive value.

Translated into more theological language, one might use the linguistic form of the ‘image’ to fill the functional position that is the description of the unity of the difference. But ‘images’ have the fatal characteristic of didactic repetition or, even worse, being fleshed out in formulae. They also suggest the capacity to be perpetuated, something which is not appropriate to the immanence/transcendence code because it already treats the code as a programme. Perhaps the reason why mysticism and theology cannot understand one another lies in the difference of event and image.
Ought we not distinguish between several forms of infinity and link mysticism to one of them? Surely it cannot be a matter of understanding the infinite as a ‘beyond’ of a sequence of finite operations, as that which is greater than the greatest or smaller than the smallest. At odds with this concept of infinity based in iteration is the idea of an actual infinity, one which so far, however, has remained unclear to me. After all, one might think that the concept is meant to describe something that negates the difference of great and small, that is, something that is meant to function as a value of rejection for every greatness. But even that would be inappropriate as one surely cannot associate transcendence with the mere intention of keeping a distance from all things quantitative.

Perhaps we might try to make headway in this tricky question with a more precise analysis of the textual material or on the basis of secondary literature. This might enable us to find a concept of infinity which is addressed precisely to the functional position of the immanentization of transcendence. Another possibility seems to me to be to take the idea of the infinite simply as a verbal reformulation of a ‘re-entry’ procedure and to interpret it thus as a mere self-description of the mystical experience. The ‘re-entry’ would be, on the one hand, the re-entry of the distinction of immanence and transcendence into immanence, and on the other, the re-entry of the distinction of self-reference and other-reference into self-reference; and in the specific case of religious experience, both brought into congruence.

Of course, re-entry is only one form of eliminating paradox from paradox. But with this figure one could allude to a description of mysticism which remains at a distance from the self-description of mysticism and tries to explain the latter’s verbal paradoxes as the de-paradoxicalization of a deeper-lying paradox.

The Interpretation of Transcendence as God

The interpretation of transcendence as God brings about a problem of second-order observation from the start. If transcendence is called God, then one must also bear in mind that it is observing the world and human beings; and this almost inevitably leads to the desire to observe the one who is observing us. If transcendence is called God, it must, because it observes, allow itself to be observed. It may still remain an open question whether one can only observe which distinctions God observes with, or whether one can also observe what becomes information for him in each instance, i.e. what he names. It is banal to answer this question simply with ‘everything’. These are answers which might suffice for a ‘representational’ epistemology. But if we understand knowledge (including and especially in the case of God) as a closed operation, then the cardinal question remains, namely: with what distinction does this operation actually make itself possible? And one cannot answer this question in the style of representational epistemology by saying: in the case of God, everything outside is simultaneously inside and representation achieves optimal identity.
Mystery of the World, Mystery of God

Whenever there is an attempt to compose omniscience into double contingency, paradoxes arise. It is not possible to orient oneself towards an omniscient partner who always already knows how one will orient oneself towards him (Oskar Morgenstern elaborated this in economic theory). Apparently, the doctrine of the inscrutability of the mind of God serves to resolve this paradox and to refer humans to their own conjectures or to the fact that it is just as good to follow the Church. The concept of ‘curiositas’ marks the fact that it is not only immoral but also futile to attempt to scrutinize the inscrutable. Nothing can come of this – nothing, that is, except a paradox. The observer of such efforts therefore suspects a second motive: whosoever gives himself over to curiositas, wants in reality to divert his own attention away from concern about his redemption (an early case of ‘unconscious’ motives?).

Perhaps we ought to distinguish here between an existential and a truth element. If in the Middle Ages one can say that God is a part of everything and all creatures are a part of him, then this itself is already a kind of communicatio, namely a ‘having something in common’. It is no contradiction if one asserts at the same time that humans cannot be a part of God’s truth: ‘incommunicabilis est veritas, quae deus est, alteri’.5 Perhaps this distinction of ‘being’ and ‘truth’ might also help in analysing mysticism.

Why Babel?

What one notices especially about God’s act of punishment is that it is a political measure focused on language. Linguistic communication difficulties are generated. Incommunicabilities as well? And why is this an appropriate reaction to sin, and to which aspect of sin? A tower as a push towards transcendence? Or wanting to make a name for oneself, one that was not foreseen in the created order?

It also bears asking whether the fact that noise is made is a good thing for God’s desire to be heard.

And finally: efforts towards a universal language in the age of Leibniz must be seen in this context as a direct linguistic-political correction to God’s action. Quite courageous, then. And at the same time, incommunicabilities are discovered which are not able to be resolved by wearing down, universalizing or formularizing linguistic means of communication. Apparently God still manages, using an invisible hand, to get his way.

Confessions

We have not yet given any thought to the fact that in confession we have a unique institution which combines talking and silence. On the one hand sins are meant to be disclosed, that is, given over to communication, as a precondition for their forgiveness. The point is that it is not enough merely to regret them. On the other hand, confession is an institution of silence and to this extent the following Italian proverb seems appropriate: peccato celato è mezzo perdonato.6
The Problem of Incommunicability

We could confront the theme of incommunicability with an old philosophical tradition that demonstrated the way predicates perform generalizations. In a sentence structure that uses a generalizing predicate, individuality cannot be formulated appropriately. Such a predicate neither describes the individual completely, nor it is an individual expression itself. It is well known that this tradition has given cause for considering escape routes in the direction of existentialism.

We begin quite differently, namely with the difference of psychic systems and social system with their different ways of operating. The classic problem, according to this approach, is always already a problem of communication with language, and not a problem of the difficulty experienced of what to say about oneself. Nonetheless, one could attempt to formulate the relationship to that tradition more precisely.

We start out from the assumption that consciousness cannot communicate itself because every communication is always already autopoietic components of a social system. Neither is there, therefore, any communication between individual and society (hence the need for the concept of interpenetration).

I am assuming that any monitoring of reality must occur at the level of a second-order cybernetics, at the level of observing observations. From this position, the following representation of the ontological tradition emerges: this tradition deploys a bivalent logic in order to observe observing. It observes ‘I am thinking something’. If there are only two values available for this, the ‘something’ must be marked as positive and the ‘I’ as negative. The ‘I’ is either thinking incorrectly (and therefore negatively) or correctly, that is, utterly in accordance with the situation, in other words negatively.

This is basically a Gotthard Günther analysis, only with an emphasis on the insight that the entire analysis is located at the level of the observation of observations (or as a third-stage analysis, that of observing observations of observations). Thus logic is not understood as an instrument of unmediated thinking, as a kind of instrument for sorting experiences of the world into correct and incorrect. At the same time, however, it is understandable that it must have appeared to be just that to traditional thought. It is only when one analyses logic and ontology in this way that one can reconstruct the fact that and the way in which the monitoring of reality had functioned at the level of the observation of observations and how it is now affected by (1) observation with the help of the manifest/latent schema, and (2) the problematization of intersubjectivity as a multi-perspectival observation, which is dependent upon coordination.

The experience of incommunicabilities may be nothing other than a registering of the resolution of ontological thought presuppositions in the sense sketched above. The kind of monitoring of reality practised up to now, which assumes that thinkers see themselves as standing opposite someone
identical with themselves, has failed and there is no replacement available. One cannot communicate when one observes that the other is observing something that one oneself is not observing, and sees at the same time that this is not simply a question of a mistake on one side or the other.

This theory of the incommunicability of consciousness undermines all traditional concepts of freedom, especially the concept of freedom of choice, and yet it undergirds it at the same time. In communication, one always has to assume that one's partner's consciousness has surplus possibilities, which cannot be grasped in communication, or only depending upon the kind of communication. This assumption of freedom is to be distinguished from that freedom which one traditionally had in mind as the capacity to choose between alternatives. This formulation leads to a resolution of the paradox of, among other things, the pedagogy of idealism: how to teach a person who is always already free to attain freedom. Quite apart from this tangential problematic, however, one could consider more generally whether and how much classical debates about freedom, with their natural and anthropological presuppositions, have distorted our appreciation of the problem of incommunicability.

The problem of incommunicability might have something to do with the fact that language is assumed to have a symbolic function in classical theory. In other words, it describes something linguistic or non-linguistic either positively or negatively, where that which is described must be present in order to be able to be described. In any case, the relationship of equivalence between symbol and object described is positive, that is, functional (if it is not an incorrect description), and both in the case of positive as well as negative expressions. There must therefore be something negative in the environment of language.

Strictly speaking, a paradox exists only when communication, as soon as it is embarked upon, generates the opposite of what it intends as communication. When we communicate, we do not communicate what we wish to communicate, or at least we sabotage it. A part from the problems of paradox affecting incommunicability, one might also remember that in the 19th century it becomes increasingly unlikely that one might be able to influence the development of society at all by means of communication (especially literary communication). Cannot, then, incommunicability simply mean that one no longer sees any prospects for communication with regard to the situation in which modern society finds itself? We shall need to examine whether it is really problems of paradox which lead to the situation in which the topic of incommunicability determines modern poetry, or whether it is not perhaps this kind of hopelessness. If the latter were the case, it would be understandable that the poet should describe society in such a way that one understands at the same time why he is condemned to ineffectualness, silence, intoxication, dandy-like behaviour etc. in this society. This does not necessarily mean that he fails in his task because of the paradox of communication.

In terms of history, it may be interesting to note that the term 'incommunicabilitas' once had a completely different meaning in scholastic circles...
from the one it has today. It used to mean, if my information is correct, the characteristic of not being able to have features in common with other individuals, in other words, rather like being unable to share something. This is not yet about a process of utterance but about characterizing a state of being of things. Accordingly, an individual is ‘incommunicable’ because individuality is a characteristic in which others cannot share. As far back as the 18th century, and perhaps earlier, we find statements based on the opposing position in relation to that which is valued and judged to be positive. For example, if one wants to be honourable, one can only be honourably dis-honourable. One has to create a bad reputation for oneself. The only thing that is communicable is that one cannot communicate, and so on.

The Palo Alto school has elaborated in particular the pathological effects of paradoxical communication. The problem has since been normalized for therapeutic praxis (especially family therapy). Perhaps one can also speak of a creative (morphogenetic) function of the paradoxicalization of communication; for when a paradox arises, and communication has still to be continued, it stimulates the search for solutions to this problem (de-paradoxicalizations). It reminds me of Gregory Bateson’s analysis of therapy for alcoholics. The formula is: ‘drink, hit the bottom’. But why is that a formula and how can one hope to achieve the right goal using the wrong means? (Because the earth is round?)

One ought to analyse the problems of incommunicability in terms of whether failure might not be traced back solely to the expectation of a description’s functioning, which then fails because of the problem of self-description. If this is the case, the problem would not be solved by simply letting go of the assumption that language has a symbolic function and instead using the idea of a medium related to the difference of information, utterance and understanding, which one must presuppose as present in every communication. One does not then need to deny in principle the possibility of using language to describe something; but that is a secondary usage and not typical for language per se; it is not the meaning of language per se, but one amongst several of its forms of use.

**Conscious/Unconscious or Manifest/Latent**

From relativizing the schema conscious/unconscious to a distinction of an observer, it emerges that it is a Freudian illusion to assume that something unconscious existed somewhere and somehow before it was made conscious. The operating consciousness has no unconscious above itself or below itself or within itself, in other words, the unconscious cannot be realized operationally and therefore does not exist. It exists only as an observation schema of the therapist – which by no means rules out the possibility that he may intervene in the consciousness under therapy with the help of this schema and thereby change it.

These ideas might clarify what we mean by ‘incommunicability’. It does not mean that the incommunicable exists alongside ongoing communication like a shadow, but rather that the expectation that certain
communications will be carried out would run up against resistance and impossibilities or self-destructive effects.

**Alienation and Incommunicability**

Since about the mid-18th century, the view has prevailed that the individual, with the help of property, can establish a relationship to his own needs or his own will (Destutt de Tracy). Further, social relations or the actions of others (exchange) can only affect this relationship to the self and cannot directly affect circumstances or an individual's actions. This prising apart of individual and social order shatters the concept of the ‘animale sociale’ and leads in the 19th century to the distinction of individual and collective (‘collective/collectivism’ not until the middle of the century). Built into this distinction is the fact that the individual reflects on his own relationship to society (re-entry) and therefore experiences himself as alienated, especially if he has no property or is only able obtain it for his own needs via work.

What is also built into this distinction is that society has to reflect on its relationship to the individual, though not by means of property but by means of the state. What emerges from this is that society demands of itself that greater equality and greater freedom be achieved, even though this idea is unable to explain its own lack of impact.

If we see this context, we can understand that the concept 'alienation', just like the ideas it stands opposed to, freedom and equality, is tailored to an economic understanding of self-reference of the individual. This is the background to the curious ideological dynamic, which is described and set in motion by the individual/collective distinction, and which at the same time lacks a concept for the unity of this very distinction. The individual as a person is still part of society, but is simultaneously externalized as a subject and in this form takes all the burdens of reflection upon himself – as if the idea were to redeem society from the sin of self-reference. However, these very concepts cannot be used to formulate the fact that this is so. The self-description of society that uses the distinction of individual and collective also obscures the fact that we are dealing with a self-description of the communication system that is society and thus avoids direct experience of the paradoxes and tautologies that arise in every self-description. Perhaps this notion helps to clarify why this cannot be the point of entry chosen by poetry when it takes up the problem of incommunicability. This problem requires a more profound understanding of society, related not to the economy but to communication. At the same time, it requires a more radical kind of questioning of modernity, which no longer permits one to be content with hopes for progress or revolution or any other forms of improvement of property relations. We must try to establish whether the problems of alienation and incommunicability can really be distinguished in this way. It is my supposition that it must have been difficult, in view of the prevailing climate of opinion and its semantics, to develop a conceptual scheme for incommunicability, the more so given that this concept prohibits itself, so to speak. But it is probably sufficient to judge the fact that the issues do not resolve
easily into ideological oppositions as a symptom of this deeper-lying problem.

**The Psychic Irritability of the Social System**

We start out from the premise that consciousness and communication system, psychic system and social system are each recursive, operationally closed, autopoietic systems. It follows from this that none of these systems can specify the structures of the other or guide its operations. What a system can do, however, is ‘irritate’ the other and thereby get it to set in train its own operations.

On the basis of these ideas I form the concept of the psychic irritability of the system and formulate the hypothesis that as the complexity of communication possibilities increases, the psychic irritability of society also increases. The best proof of this is the rebelliousness of youth and the new social movements. Virtually every state of consciousness can find communication possibilities somewhere and somehow. This also means that the autopoiesis of the social system is still adapted to the psychic possibilities of consciousness and that in spite of the increasing improbability of its own complexity it is still able to maintain this adaptedness (‘conservation of adaptation’ in Maturana’s formulation). This must be paid for with increasing problems within the social order, but does not at all mean that social communication might be better able to represent what is going on in the individual’s consciousness. Neither can we speak of the better psychic adaptation of society. Adaptation is not an increasable variable, but a yes or no state. If communication continues, it is also psychically possible; if not, then it is not.

These considerations suggest that one can assume that the problem of incommunicability becomes perceptible and can become a topic for consideration to the extent that society’s psychic irritability increases and people then begin to notice that in spite of this, not everything can be communicated. Perhaps this is a social structural consideration, which enables us to distinguish the modern problematic of incommunicability from the older decrees of silence, which somehow expressed socially every norm or ideal or rule of wisdom.

**Incommunicability of Social Synchronization**

If we want to take greater account of the problem of time, one could point to the fact that communication always already presupposes the synchronization of partners, that is, a common understanding of simultaneity. This is obviously established elementarily through the perception of bodily perception and can then be extended via artificial techniques (clocks, calendars, etc.) into the future and into the past. At the root of these events, however, is not communication but perception. Simultaneous sociality must somehow be already constituted in order for communication to be set in motion. Unlike a character in a Punch and Judy show, one cannot ask the other: ‘Are you there?’. Neither can one reassure oneself through communication of the fact
that the experience of those co-present is happening at exactly the same speed and that none of them can rush off into the future or remain stuck in the past. Somehow, communication is based on a kind of existential certainty that this is the way it is.

It is only to the extent that perception is in play that the synchronization of experience and action of various individuals can be presupposed as normal. This requires interaction amongst those co-present, in other words, classroom situations. However, synchronization does not need to be talked about, it is not an effect of communication; but communication carries it forward by providing synchronization with perceptual materials. This topic should not be confused with the problem of holding on to attention, for digressions from attention are themselves only perceptible on the basis of a synchronization of experience.

If synchronization is to go beyond the realm of immediate and continued perception, it is necessary to establish a common measurement of time in order to fix dates - dates for starting or for ending activities, giving in homework, meeting up again, end of break-time, end of holidays, etc. Dates always have to do with starting or ending activities. They are substitute precautions for natural synchronization in the realm of the increasingly improbable.

Paradoxical Communication Seen from the Point of View of its Temporality

It is generally the case that the observation of a paradox has a peculiar kind of temporal structure; it makes the present shrink to a point to which no reality any longer corresponds. If one sees this, one sees that, and if one sees that, one sees this. If one has reached a certain position, the opposing one is already in view, and vice versa. This kind of oscillation is autopoietically possible, one can have this kind of experience; but the point is only that one is brought to pose the question of an escape (or of an interruption).

If we apply these ideas about the temporality of paradox to communication, the situation alters in one important respect: communication requires more time than experience does. There is of necessity a time difference between utterance and understanding. This requires a certain period of actuality. Within this time period, the paradox can be made to oscillate. In other words, the one doing the uttering foresees that at the moment of understanding the utterance is already incorrect, and this is exactly what he wants to provoke to happen. He wants to convey the fact that he does not mean what he says, although he does not say anything which he does not mean. In paradoxical communication, then, the difference of actuality and non-actuality itself becomes non-actual, even if it does so by renouncing any connective capability. Time itself collaborates in communication - without past and without any present, but with the strong impulse to seek an escape or to call a halt and to do something else.

Can we move towards a phenomenology of paradoxical experiencing and communicating in this way - even though phenomenology actually requires an object capable of being intended, from which time itself, as a
condition of its possibility, is withdrawn in paradoxical observing and communicating?

Translated from German by Kathleen Cross

Notes

Editor's note: The original text is a set of notes written by Luhmann. Each note originally had its own heading indicating the topic of the note. Several of the headings would reappear later in the text as Luhmann returned to the particular subject. In this edited version of Luhmann's notes, the chronological order of the notes has been altered and several notes have been deleted. Several of the notes in the edited version have had their headings deleted and have been joined with other notes dealing with the same topic. There has been no change of the wording. The references have been made into footnotes and have been made more elaborate. The translations of the Italian and Latin quotations are rough translations and solely the responsibility of the editor.

6. Editor's note: can be roughly translated into: 'a hidden sin is a half-forgiven sin'.