Towards a Social Theory of Sequentiality[1]

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Abstract

In the first part of the paper, I delineate what we mean when we talk about social theory and how it relates to language. I will argue that social theory treats language as something that must be understood without assuming that a language is already constituted. On these grounds, I will then outline the ways in which sequences have been treated in some major "Grand Theories" of sociology: Weber, Habermas, Luhmann. This overview makes it possible to highlight in the next part some of the major aspects of sequentiality: It's being built on actions, their interconnectivity by reciprocity, the role of language and its potential to constitute (social) structures and systems over time. Surprisingly, even more recent social theories hardly relate to sequential analysis of the kind initiated by Sacks and formulated in a first concise manner in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. As this sequential analysis will be presented in other contributions of this volume, here it serves as a background for the presentation of these social-theoretical approaches only in order to point out their blind spots and shortcomings, such as the role of objectivations other than language, their role for the reciprocation of actions and the patterns and forms of extended social structures. These shortcomings will be addressed in the next part of this text. As a frame to address these shortcomings I will draw on communicative constructivism. This approach allows for a social theory of sequentiality which can solve the problems raised by the social theories mentioned. By integrating sequential analysis as a method to address temporal aspects of communicative actions, it accounts also for the actor's subjective embodied positionality and spatiality.

Keywords: Sequentiality – Communicative Action – Social Theory – Theory of Language – Communicative Constructivism – Sociology – Objectivations.

German Abstract

Im ersten Teil des Beitrags wird erläutert, was wir meinen, wenn wir von Sozialtheorie sprechen und wie sie sich auf Sprache bezieht. Ich werde argumentieren, dass eine Theorie der Sprache die Sozialtheorie voraussetzt. Auf dieser Grundlage werde ich dann die Art und Weise skizzieren, in der (sprachliche) Sequenzen in einigen großen "Grand Theories" der Soziologie behandelt wurden: Weber, Habermas, Luhmann. Dieser Überblick ermöglicht es, im nächsten Teil einige der wichtigsten Aspekte der Sequenzialität hervorzuheben: Ihr Konstitution in Handlungen, ihre Relationalität durch Reziprozität, die Rolle von Objektivierungen und Sprache sowie ihr Potenzial, (soziale) Strukturen, Institutionen und Systeme über die Zeit zu konstituieren.

Überraschenderweise beziehen sich auch neuere Sozialtheorien kaum auf die Sequenzanalyse, wie sie von Sacks initiiert und in Sacks, Schegloff und Jefferson erstmals prägnant formuliert wurde. Da diese sequentielle Analyse in anderen Bei-

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[1] This contribution is based on earlier texts (Knoblauch 2020; Knoblauch 2020a). For comments and proof reading, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers, to Ricarda Kaiser and to Elisabeth Schmidt.

trägen dieses Bandes vorgestellt wird, dient sie nur als Hintergrund für die Darstellung dieser sozialtheoretischen Ansätze, um auf ihre blinden Flecken und Unzulänglichkeiten hinzuweisen, wie etwa die Rolle anderer Objektivationen als der Sprache, ihre Rolle für die Reziprozität von Handlungen und die Muster und Formen erweiterter sozialer Strukturen.

Als Rahmen für die Behebung dieser Mängel werde ich mich auf den kommunikativen Konstruktivismus stützen. Dieser ermöglicht eine soziale Theorie der Sequenzialität, die die von den genannten sozialen Theorien aufgeworfenen Probleme lösen kann, indem sie die sequenzielle Analyse als eine Methode integriert, die zeitliche Aspekte kommunikativer Handlungen unter Berücksichtigung der subjektiven verkörperten Positionalität und Räumlichkeit des Akteurs berücksichtigt.

Keywords: Sequenzialität – Kommunikatives Handelns – Sozialtheorie – Soziologie – Sprachtheorie – Kommunikativer Konstruktivismus – Objektivationen.

1. Introduction

In the last years, we have witnessed an enormous rise of studies on conversations that are conducted in real life. This line of research has mainly been initiated by researchers in the field of conversation analysis, such as Sack, Schegloff, and Jefferson who have also laid the groundwork for what has come to be called "sequential analysis" in the study of verbal interaction. There are, in addition, many important predecessors and other forms of sequence analysis which cannot be tackled in this context. This kind of sequence analysis has extended to many fields of sociological analysis, such as religious conversations, or shoptalk in scientific laboratories, and, of course, various forms of conversation in everyday life. In German speaking countries, a subfield of linguistics has been developing called "Gesprächsforschung". Internationally, sequential analysis seems to be centered on conversational analysis, which has become an interdisciplinary field with regular international meetings. It has also been established as part of the growing field of qualitative methodology.

Despite the breadth, richness and relevance of empirical studies regarding the analysis of the "structures of social action" (Atkinson/Heritage 1984), sequence analysis is only marginal to sociology. In fact, sociology uses the notion for various different methods, which often have been introduced after the notion had been coined by conversation analysis. Thus, since the 1980s Abbot (1983) and others have started to use "sequence analysis" as a method for analyzing the order of events in historical sociology.[2] In Germany, sequence analysis also became the notion for

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[2] In quantitatively oriented sociology, sequence analysis has become a well-established method which, however, differs methodologically from interpretive sequence analysis we are discussing here (Abbott 1983). As opposed to their definition of the units of sequences by the researchers,

a method of analyzing texts and other documents that are a crucial part of various forms of sociological hermeneutics which have become popular in qualitative social research (Soeffner 1997). In addition, despite the recent revival of ethnomethodology, social theory has so far only taken little notice of the kind of sequence analysis and, even less of the myriad of empirical studies on the sequential organization of conversations and interactions. The gap between social theory and sequential analysis may also be due to the strong empiricist, naturalistic and, with respect to Sacks (Lynch/Boden 1994), the "positivist" orientation of the tradition of sequential analysis. However, as we shall see, social theory also seems to have been ignorant of the theoretical impact and relevance of sequential analysis. One of the reasons for the lacking reflection of sequential analysis has been its strong emphasis on the verbal, para-linguistic and other signs, which are mainly seen in relation to language. It is on these grounds that much of conversation analysis is carried out in linguistics and in research fields that are rather interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. Although this hybrid character contributes to its spread, it makes it more difficult to relate its methodology and its general findings to the kind of abstract discourse that came to be labelled "social theory".

Despite the often unspecific use of "social theory", here it refers to a crucial part of the discourse which is related to an institutional setting in the social sciences labelled sociological theory. Social theory pursues a series of questions and treats a range of problems that constitute it as a discourse basic to the questions posed by the social sciences in general and sociology in particular. Therefore, in the first part of this paper I shall delineate what I mean when I talk about social theory and how it relates to language. I will argue that social theory, although itself using language, needs to start from the assumption that, on the level of the subject matter it refers to, language is constituted by sociality than the other way around. On these grounds, I will then outline the ways in which sequences have been treated by some major sociological theories, such as by Weber, but particularly by Habermas and Luhmann. The overview allows to highlight in the next part some of the major aspects of sequentiality: It is dependent on actions, the actor's reciprocal interrelations, the role of language, and its potential to constitute (social) structures and systems over time. Surprisingly, even more recent social theories hardly relate to sequential analysis of the kind initiated by Sacks and formulated in a concise manner in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978; Ten Have 1999; Schegloff 2007). As the methods of sequential analysis will be presented in other papers to this special volume and as we have ourselves contributed to extending the method of sequential analysis to audiovisual recordings of communicative actions (Knoblauch 2006; Knoblauch et als. 2014), in this paper these methods will provide only the background for the presentation of these social-theoretical approaches. On this background, we can discern their blind spots and shortcomings, such as the role of objectivations other than language, their role for the reciprocation of actions, and the patterns and forms of extended social structures. These shortcomings will be addressed in the next part of this text. As a frame to address these shortcomings I will draw on communicative constructivism. This allows for a social theory of sequentiality which can solve the problems raised by the social theories mentioned by integrating sequential analysis

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interpretive analysis is oriented to the first order constructs, i.e. they ways how actors construct (and construe of) sequences of actions – and devote much analytical work to demonstrate the "adequacy" of their concepts.

as a method to address temporal aspects of communicative actions. In this way it opens a systematic link to an aspect of action often overlooked – the spatiality of action which will be addressed before the conclusion.

2. Social Theory and Language[3]

As previously mentioned, the kind of action sequences which are subject to empirical studies in conversational sequential analysis have, on the one hand, seldom been theorized. On the other hand, social theory has paid little attention to the concepts of sequential analysis and its empirical results. Before we turn to the ways in which sequences are treated in some prominent social theories, we should probably first clarify what is meant by "social theory" (as it is also in the very center of this issue).

Sociality has been, of course, an issue of discussion in social philosophy. Yet social philosophy only cropped up after sociology had already been labeled a scientific discipline by Comte (Simmel 1894). It was due to Comte's positivism that the scientific discourse on sociality remained divided as the classic sociology of Durkheim, Weber or Simmel or the Chicago School created their own social theory. One must note that their use of the category "social" has also been subject to a long debate within academia by which it was analytically distinguished from pro-social intellectual movements. Thus, in the early history of German, French or American Sociology and Social Sciences it became very clear that it is not collectivity which is at the subject matter of sociology (Gamper 2007), and that sociality is not reduced to social welfare, social care or, to use a more general term, solidarity. This way, social science could also address issues such as fights, war or anything that in everyday language would be called "asocial" or "antisocial". The distinction from everyday language is an attempt to avoid morality while opening up an area for empirical research in the fields of sociology, anthropology, history, linguistics etc. It is probably this orientation towards empirical research which created a boundary to social philosophy, yet philosophical discourses and discussions of "sociality" lingered on in the social sciences and have been maintained in at least some fields of sociology, its methodology and "philosophy of science".[4] These issues have been institutionalized under the title of "sociological theory".[5]

The extension of the term social theory may, therefore, be due to the fact that since the 1970s the legitimacy of sociology and sociological theory was waning. One of the reasons had been the declining plausibility of a nation-bound notion of society in the face of globalization. While sociology certainly preferred the study

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[3]   This chapter is concerned neither with the theory of language (cf. Luckmann 1972) nor with the recent developments in theorizing language (Williams 2020), but rather with the systematic role of language in use (as studied in much of conversation analysis) to the theoretical reflections on sociality as a basic category of social theory.

[4]   The Frankfurt school certainly plays an important role in countering the distinction by maintaining a strong link between sociology and philosophy.

[5]   This is the title of the introductory chapter of a book edited by Merton et al. "under the auspices of the American Sociological Society" by Talcott Parsons (1959) which figured as one of two contributions under the heading "Sociological Theory and Methodology" (including Lazarsfeld on "Problems in Methodology").

of societies, this category had become problematic due to its presupposed closedness and the methodological nationalism often implied which became particularly evident in the course of transnationalization since the 20th century. Another reason may have been the neoliberal critique of sociology, most radically formulated e.g., by Margret Thatcher's declaration that "there is no such thing as society". It may therefore not come as a surprise that the notion of social theory gained prominence in the British context in the early 1980s, through the writings of Anthony Giddens who preferred to talk about "social theory" instead of sociological theory (Giddens 1987).[6]

The notion of sociality is one of the conventional basic categories (such as "society") by which we designate an area of research for sociology as well as for the family of disciplines which came to be institutionalized as "social sciences" in a large number of academic faculties worldwide.[7] Whether the social sciences are identical with the faculties named accordingly or if they should include "humanities" is one of the matters dependent on paradigms within the social sciences (and outside), yet there is little doubt that their subject matter is sociality, and, for institutional and historical reasons, primarily human sociality (as biology or ethology are typically located in the natural sciences). Therefore, sociality and consequently social theory became a notion more frequently used, particularly since the second part of the 20th century, in part because it allowed to transcend the boundaries of sociology in general.

How diverse the institutional location of social theory may be and how variegated the paradigms in social theory and in contemporary "multi-paradigmatic" sociological theories (Seidman 2004) may be, their focus seems to differ from theories on language and, consequently, from linguistics in one decisive point. This point was already made clear by Mead who stressed that the social sciences should not "approach language as the philologist does, from the standpoint of the symbol that is used" (Mead 1964:128). Although social theory is mostly expressed in language, it does not define its subject matter, sociality, as something which presupposes language, signs or symbols. Rather social theory assumes that the constitution of signs, symbols and language is a result of social processes. In fact, this assumption is shared by basic linguistic theories, such as Bühler (2011), yet social theory must also address issues not only related to language and signs. The difference between linguistic and social theory becomes clear even in sequence analysis: linguistic research focuses rather on the ways how language (e.g., grammar, prosody etc.) is used in interaction while sociology assumes that interactions follow their own rules exhibiting "structures of social interaction". It results from their "Erkenntnisinteresse", their epistemological interest, that researchers trained in linguistics rather focus on the logic of signs (including non-verbal signs), while researchers in the social and cultural sciences rather tend to look rather through the signs at the "meanings" they refer to.

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[6] "The backdrop to this book is to be found in a series of significant developments which have taken place in the social sciences over the past decade and a half. These have been concentrated in substantial part in social theory, and bear especially upon that most maligned and most provocative of the social sciences, sociology" (Giddens 1984, XIII).

[7] Thus, in introductions to "Social Theory", it is common to find authors such as Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan or Zizek (cf. Elliott 2009).

The difference between the respective epistemological interest has certainly not been categorical, so that we find many overlaps between them, e.g., in the theories of Bühler (in linguistics), of Luckmann (in sociology) and fusions thereof, as in sociolinguistics (e.g., Gumperz 1981). Yet, it is probably one consequence of the decline of sociolinguistics and the demise of the once booming sociology of language, that even in the interdisciplinary field of Conversation Analysis with many researchers sharing the same methods and empirical issues we can discern quite strong divergences particularly between sociology and linguistics.

My claims about the overlapping, yet different epistemology of linguistics is of course quite impressionistic,[8] yet they may be seen as one reason for the divergence between sequential analysis, sociology and social theory. In fact, leaving aside the role of language acknowledged to social theory by Schutz, Winch, Berger, Luckmann or Habermas, language, the use of language, and the sequentiality of turn taking in conversation features even less in recent social theory.[9]

3. Sequentiality in Social Theory

In the following part I want to sketch how prominent sociological theorists conceive of sequentiality: Weber, Habermas and Luhmann. It is telling that even such an author like Habermas who was quite aware of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis did not refer to these studies in this context, and none of these authors even use sequence terminologically. There is no doubt that other authors, such as Garfinkel (1967), Collins (2004) or the late Luckmann (2013), have acknowledged the crucial role of sequences for social theory. While these authors are more or less known to the methodologies of the kind of empirical sequence analyses referred to here, the three authors below have hardly been considered in this context, although they take the sequentiality of action to be basic for their sociological theory and meso and macro aspects of society in general.

The relevance of the sequentiality of actions is already hinted at by *Weber*, who defines social action as the elementary object of sociology. Although he does not use sequentiality as a term, the temporal relation between actions is quite basic to his theory. In his basic categories of sociology, he defines "social relation" by the "chance" that a social action is followed by a subsequent action (Weber 1978). This "chance" is that aspect of social action which goes beyond mere meaningful orientation towards the behavior of others and establishes the meaningful connection between actions. To Weber, the chance that social actions of certain kinds recur is the basic feature of social relations (a definition which quite easily shows how "relational theories" can build on action theory). Doing so, Weber draws attention to the subjective aspect of any sequence, which is often overlooked by both structural and practice theories: Even if sequences are habitualized as "traditional actions" or regulated by norms, they consist of what is called "turn" or "move".

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[8]   The relation between sociology, social theory, linguistics, and linguistic theory should certainly be subject to an empirical study of science which also takes into account the institutional developments of sociolinguistics and the sociology of language after the 1990s (cf. Murray 1998).

[9]   One should mention that discourse analysis, after having substituted the role of linguistic knowledge, recently establishes new bridges between both disciplines, be it with respect to the analysis of large corpora of verbal data, or with respect to membership categorization devices.

This subjective aspect of sequences is implied in the constitutions of new sequences (which is empirically rarely accessible). As Weber considers social relations based only in the "chance" that certain next acts by the other actor can occur (like obeying a command), it becomes relevant when sequences fail. While Weber did not address linguistic action in particular, the role of failures of adequate responses to prior actions by others has been analyzed as "felicity condition" by speech act theory and translated into interaction analysis by Goffman (1983). Goffman underlines the role of knowledge implied in action and presupposed by actors.[10] It was particularly Alfred Schutz (1964) who had stressed the role of meaning and subjective knowledge in social action. Moreover, in his critique of Weber he was one of the first to emphasize and analyze the temporal structure of social action and, consequently, of sequences of action as experiences projected into the future (Fu/Franz 2014). As much as this theory of action as projected into to the future still resonates as a concept in contemporary empirical analysis of sequences (Mondada 2016:239), it was also Schutz who revealed the shortcomings of this kind of action theory which are characteristic not only of Weber, but also of a range of recent theories, e.g., of rational action: by focusing exclusively on the subject, it failed to address the basic problem of social theory, which, in this context, is called the problem of intersubjectivity (Crossley 1996). As we shall see below, Schutz made a very useful suggestion to solve this problem by his concept of reciprocity.

Weber' s theory of action has also been the starting point for *Habermas* and his "Theory of Communicative Action". In this context, he also develops a notion of sequentiality which lies at the very heart of his model of communicative action. To Habermas, social action is, in principle, either instrumental (or "teleological") or "communicative". Communicative action means a form of action which is best exemplified by his interpretation of speech act theory.

By using language, speech acts exhibit three principles (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) which Habermas extends to three "validity claims" on statements about three worlds (social, subjective, objective). What is relevant here is that speech acts, validity claims, and worlds are accessible to speaker and hearer by actions and, thence, that they (a) coordinate the course of action and (b) synchronize the meanings of the consecutive actions, i.e. the sequences.

Habermas' concept of sequence includes a beginning with an utterance by speaker S1; then speaker S2 responds to this utterance. The response takes ideally two forms: speaker 2 accepts or contradicts to S1.

S1: utterance

S2: Yes / No

If speaker 2 contradicts, S1 needs to justify, support or legitimate her utterance in a way Habermas calls "discourse". Therefore, it is no longer a pair sequence (question and answer) but turns into a sequence that has at least three moves before it is considered finished. It is telling for the comparison to sequence analysis that a similar

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[10] The relevance of knowledge has quite serious consequences to sequential analysis for it demands that every turn needs to be "interpreted" not only by the actor but also by the analyst. Sequential analysis therefore is a hermeneutic method and demands a hermeneutic methodology. We have tried to elaborate the role of hermeneutics in Knoblauch/Schnettler (2012).

basic sequence has been identified by Jacobs and Jacobs (1981). In their conversational analysis of natural conversations, they describe the basic sequence of argumentation as follows:

S1: Utterance

S2: Contradiction

S1: Expansion

Jacobs and Jackson stressed the structural role of this sequence for the coordination of action: the contradiction by S1 makes something in the prior utterance relevant; it is this relevance which needs to be accounted for in a third utterance which addresses this problem. (The three turns may constitute a sequence embedded in a course of talk, yet they may also be extended into a longer argument sequence).

The three turns thus constitute a basic sequential pattern for coordinating the actions of S1 and S2 in time. This way, this minimal pattern allows them to produce an order which shows them when to do what. To Habermas, the coordination of their actions in time is linked to and dependent on their synchronization.
With their speech act, they not only perform a turn. By using language, they pursue an intention expressed in the speech act.[11]

> With his 'yes' the speaker accepts a speech-act offer and grounds an agreement; this agreement concerns the content of the utterance, on the one hand and, on the other hand, certain guarantees immanent to the speech acts and certain obligations relevant to the sequel of interaction (Habermas 1984:296, original emphasis)

The contradiction by the speaker means that S2 takes a position on this speech act by saying "yes" or "no". While "yes" would be less consequential, "no" makes not only a new turn relevant, but also a claim made by S1 in her utterance.[12] It is because of the "contradiction" that S1 ("ideally") needs to provide arguments in support of the claim, and it is these arguments which turn the sequences into a discourse.[13]

S: Utterance (claim)

R: Yes / No

S: Justification of claim

"Ideally" means that this discourse only unfolds in a situation in which neither power nor economic differences affect the conversation. Even if Habermas concedes that these restrictions apply empirically in most cases, the sequence unfolds a logic of its own which he calls "communicative rationality". This logic is directly linked to language. To be more exact, it is the use of language in action, i.e. speech

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[11] Sequentiality is essential to the performance of speech acts. In fact, the examples Austin (1962) provides for speech acts (such as menacing) are typically pair sequences.

[12] Even in his latest text Habermas emphatically stresses the role of contraction for discourses in general and for political deliberation in particular, as "only by the right, even the encouragement to reciprocal negation ("Neinsagen") the potential of contested opinions in discourse unfolds" (Habermas 2021:478, my translation).

[13] According to Habermas himself, this justification again takes on a fixed, rational and sequential form in everyday language, which he developed through Toulmin's (1958) theory of argumentation. In an empirical study of informal argumentations I have tried to show that negation results in a much more agonistic logic if not regulated by institutions, such as moderators, judges etc. (cf. Knoblauch 2009).

acts, which allows the speakers to distinguish different validity claims. By the different forms of speech acts, "expressive", "normative-regulating" or "propositional", actors make reference to different "worlds" (subjective, social, objective) and addresses with their claim in the sequence (or its denial) different "validity claims". As any participant in this communication can tell these differences in principle, language-in-use serves to synchronize their action across the sequences: they know what is at stake because of language.

Habermas thus shows how meaning and motives of actors are guided by the "pragmatic semantics" of language in use, so that what actors mean, how they take up the meaning and come to a common understanding is guided by language.

However, Habermas addresses the temporal aspects of communicative action only in bypassing. Therefore one better turns to *Schutz'* analysis of intersubjectivity who is one of the references of Habermas. In fact, Schutz very clearly demonstrates how subjective motives and linguistic exchange produce in his famous analysis of questions and answers (Schutz 1964a:14):

> I ask you a question. The in-order-to motive of my act is not only the expectation that you will understand my question, but also to get your answer; or more precisely, I reckon that you will answer, leaving undecided what the content of your answer may be. (....) The question, so we can say, is the because-motive of the answer, as the answer is the in-order-to motive of the question. (...) I myself had felt on innumerable occasions induced to react to another's act, which I had interpreted as a question addressed to me, with a kind of behavior of which the in-order-to motive was my expectation that the Other, the questioner, might interpret my behavior as an answer.

Although Schutz presupposes the use of language, the particular motives in this sequence are not dependent on their linguistic form. Rather, Schutz stresses the temporal position, and, even more, the temporal orientation of the acting subject: It is the orientation toward the other's next action which defines the in-order-to motive, and it is the orientation to the other's prior action, which defines the "because-motive". Both motives depend on the fact that speakers have different subjective positions in the sequence, but they also depend on the sequence itself. The sequence provides the motives almost independently of whatever they want to say, ask or answer in a way which reverses their temporal orientation: S1 future orientation becomes the (past) reason for S2.

It is quite easy to imagine that the same concatenation of motives also applies to Habermas's discourse, as S1 justifies her claim because S2 negates (or "questions") it. However, in Schutz, the reciprocity of motives expressed in this example is not dependent on certain aspects of language (as its position may suffice for any utterance to be treated like a question independent of their linguistic format). As much as language may add to communicative action, it does not allow to understand and explain the principles of synchronization and coordination of actions to sequences in general.

Before we turn to this general question, we need to consider *Luhmann* and his theory of social systems which contributes indirectly to the analysis of sequences. Although he does not use the notion of sequentiality, it figures quite prominently in his theory of communication which he considers at the basis of "social systems". While conceiving of communication as a selection of a certain meaning, sequenti-

ality comes about in what he calls "follow-up communication". While communication is, to Luhmann, the basic process constituting social systems, it is the "continuation of communication" which maintains it in time. To say it in other words: if there would be no follow up to a communication, there would be no social system. The follow up of communication is the basic process of which social systems are constructed and exist (thence: "autopoeietically") in time.
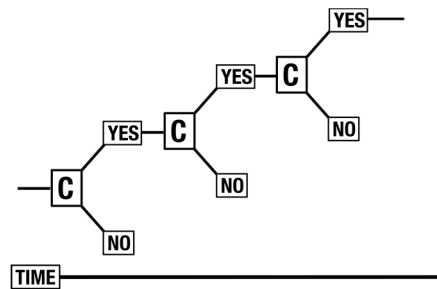

Diagram: Continuation of Communication according to Luhmann

As in Habermas model, "one communication" (C) is followed by another one which either is "yes" or "no". As opposed to Habermas, however, "no" here does not refer to the dissenting actor but to the discontinuation of communication. In this sense, a dissent in terms of Habermas could mean "yes" in this diagram insofar as it takes up what the communication   means the discontinuation of communication. It is the consenting "yes" which does not only mean the acceptance by a subject, but the continuation of the same kind of communication. As opposed to Habermas whose sequence is designed on the pattern of dialogue between two subjects, Luhmann only underlines the fact that a certain kind of communication is continued. As social systems consist of communication, they depend on the continuation of such sequences. The continuation of specific forms of communication are tantamount to (the construction of) specific "systems" of communication. Thus, functional subsystems, such as "economy" or "science" are dependent on the continuation of the specific binary "codes" of communication which are constitutive for them (such as "to pay"/ "not to pay" or "true"/ "false").

Although to Luhmann, actors' motives do not play a decisive role in communication, the model at least indicates how one can link the microsocial concept of sequences with sociological meso structures (such as scientific institutes in which some communication may be bureaucratic, or otherwise scientific) and to the macro-sociological theory of differentiation of functional systems, e.g. scientific, economic, legal etc.[14] Yet, as much as this idea of concatenation opens the sociological perspective to larger structures that are often overlooked in the sequential analysis of interaction, Luhmann's notion of continuation is very reductive in that it assumes that it is only a certain kind of meaning which interlinks communication.

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[14]   A similar idea can be seen in Collins' (2004) Ritual Interaction Chains, which have been taken up by Giddens (1984).

The bodies play just as little a role in coordinating communication as the materiality of media transmitting information and their infrastructures.[15]

4. Pointing and the communicative construction of sequences

The role of materiality and the body for sequentiality in interactions has been highlighted particularly in studies which have extended sequential analysis beyond the scope of (verbal) conversations and dialogues (e.g., Goffman 1981; Heath 1986; Goodwin 1994). As much as this extension has been opposed by rather 'orthodox' representants of Conversation Analysis, it is now widely accepted and elaborated in standard method books in the social sciences and linguistics (especially in the context of gesture studies and the analysis of multimodal interaction). Also, aspects such as the one-sidedness of action, the bias towards language, and the disembodied concept of sequences of meaning, which are criticized above in the aforementioned social theories, obviously play a decisive role in the empirical analysis of sequences. However, these aspects have neither been formulated theoretically nor have the various suggestions by the various theoreticians been integrated into a social theory. In the following part, I shall therefore briefly outline how these various aspects (highlighted in italics) can be integrated into a consistent and coherent theory that allows us to grasp what we mean by sequences and how these considerations can inform the methodology of sequence analysis.

Admittedly, in this context the sketch must be coarse. In order to facilitate understanding, it will draw on what I consider to be a paradigmatic example, finger-pointing.[16] This means that we can illustrate the role of all aspects mentioned, with an example which is not only intuitive for theorizing; moreover, we have studied it empirically in quite some detail (Knoblauch 2013); and finally, one can make a strong claim as to the relevance of this gesture for many (but not all) basic aspects of human communication.

The meaning of pointing with a finger has already been recognized in various theories of communication from Wundt to Mead. In recent research it was particularly Tomasello (2008) who emphasizes the basic role of finger-pointing to human culture. Pointing with the finger contains a clear message: it is oriented to others and directed at something. It is of particular importance for the theory of communicative action because, first, it has a referential significance, and, second, it can be acquired both ontogenetically and phylogenetically before and without language acquisition. Because children can already point before they can speak, even Habermas (2009:45), who lays so much stress on language, conceded the role of the pointing finger.

Based on the freeing of the hand (Leroi-Gourhan 1964), pointing "is one of the critical transition points in the evolution of human communication, already embodying most of the uniquely human forms of social cognition and motivation required for the later creation of conventional languages" (Tomasello 2008:2).[17] But pointing

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[15] The relevance of the materiality of media of communication has been underlined by the Toronto School, e.g., Innis (2007).

[16] A more elaborate version of the theory of sequences can be found in Knoblauch (2020: Chapter IV A).

[17] It is hardly possible to prove its phylogenetic relevance that finger-pointing distinguishes humans from other mammals, following a logic that Haraway (2008) calls "human exceptionalism": if

is also a decisive step in the development of human early childhood which has been called the "nine-month revolution". Finger-pointing is one of several new phenomena in this eventful age phase, because during the same period the ability to understand emotional expressions is formed. Whether parents show fear or joy can, after this period, be understood as a motive to do something or also to stop doing something.[18] At this turning point in the individual genesis of humans, children also seem to develop a notion of their own self (Stern 1985). This is particularly evident by the discovery of their mirror image. This discovery has long been regarded as a phase of ego development.[19] However, it now seems to be clear that understanding the mirror image as ego must be understood on the basis of the communicative unfolding of relations to others. This sociality is quite evident since "without using any words, infants can now communicate something" (Stern 1985:9). Finger-pointing is one of the most vivid, clearest, and easily comprehensible communicative actions even for adults. It characterizes this nine-month revolution.

The stress on the basic character of finger pointing allows us to assume that it does not necessarily presuppose the use of language, so that it provides an example for non-linguistic forms of *sequentiality*. In fact, sequential pointing can assume a similar order as analyzed by Schutz in the case of question and answer. Take, as an example, the case of two subjects, interacting by pointing: S1 stretches the finger to show S2 something, S2 looks at the finger moving and, following the movement, turns in the direction shown by the extended arm. The movements can easily be routinized and become a practice, so that S2 does not need to follow the movement of the hand but immediately turns to the direction indicated from the beginning.

It is important to note that such a routinization means that S2 "knows" the gesture already. The role of *knowledge* is one of the reasons why we will later need to turn to the role of the subject. The same holds for the second implication of routinization, the role of *simultaneity*: routinization implies that several movements are coordinated simultaneously, so that the changing gaze direction caused by the pointing of S1 may already trigger S2 to move towards the direction of view when the finger or the arm starts to point.[20]

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chimpanzees and even dogs can learn to point or to understand pointing, then we are talking less about a *differentia specifica*, but rather about a feature of human communication in which other species can also participate. Therefore, finger-pointing should not be understood within the framework of an exclusive anthropology that reveals the limits of the human. Rather, it suggests the elementary forms of communication in human societies in which non-human actors can also participate.

[18] Stern (1985:132) calls these forms of feelings "interaffectivity".

[19] This is the case for Lacan, who regards the mirror image as an alienation and assumes that intersubjective development only develops at the level of language (see Lacan 1953).

[20] Much empirical research in conversational analysis has been adopting the idea of sequences being "practices" (Schegloff 2007:231ff.). Although most sequences are empirically "recurrent forms" and "structures" habitualized by the actors performing them, the task of social theory lies certainly not in the description of empirical phenomena but in the provision of the analytical instruments by which they can be analyzed, constituted, and explained (including the concept, conceptual relations, and their theoretical contexts). With respect to sequential practices this means that we need to ask how and by what these sequences are constituted. In social theory, the constitution of practices and structures has been a topic of Giddens (1984) famous "structuration theory" which was well informed by ethnomethodology. As to the relation of Giddens' notion of action to communicative action cf. Knoblauch (2020:171ff.).

We shall return to the simultaneity of action later, because we should first account for the role of the *body*. When talking about movements we should emphasize more precisely that we talk about bodily movements, e.g., gaze directions, arm movements, stretching of fingers. These movements obviously need not be signs or emblematic gestures, as Ekman/Friesen (1969) would call them. They are, however, obviously communicative in a way which is covered by the notion of *performance* as suggested by Goffman (1959). Performance indicates that actions are not just meaning but something which is linked to bodies in time.

In the case of finger pointing, one part of the body is certainly focused (first), which is the finger. Often the pointed finger may be a gesture but is not necessarily combined with the stretched extension of the hand; given the anthropological arguments, it may also be constitutive of a gesture. For this reason, I propose to use a more general term for the pointing finger borrowed from Berger and Luckmann (1966), which is *objectivation*. Human expressivity is capable of objectivation, that is, it manifests itself in products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men as elements of a common world. Such objectivations serve as more or less enduring indices of the subjective processes of their producers, allowing their availability to extend beyond the face-to-face situation in which they can be directly apprehended (Berger/Luckmann 1966:49). On the basis of Berger and Luckmann, it is even possible to distinguish between the kind of temporal objectivation like the finger pointing which results from the focus on an embodied performance, and its materialization independent of the body, i.e. objectifications, such as a material sign (e.g. shaped like an arrow) or a technology (a laser pointer). While objectivation thus introduces a very general concept for understanding pointing as a form of communicative action, we should stress its difference to non-relational, subjectivist theories of action. In his classical theory, Bühler (2011) assumes that pointing is defined by "haecceitas", i.e. by the standpoint of the subject he called "origo". For him, "origo" is also the reference point of deixis in general.

This subjectivist model has already been criticized by Hanks (1996) who has developed a relational concept of pointing. He emphasizes that finger-pointing cannot be considered as a solitary act for the simple reason that it only makes sense if a person points to someone else. In so doing, the act is by no means guided solely by the subjective point of view from which the finger points. Rather, the 'art' of pointing consists in the characteristic that it is spatially oriented to someone else: in pointing, we align our body in such a way so that the other can see our finger, and we design our finger and body orientation in such a way that both (i.e., our orientation to the reference as well as the others' bodily standpoint) are taken into account. The one who points anticipates the position of the other and makes their own position visible to the other. The position of the subject is thus a point of reference, but not the only one. In its orientation toward a third, namely the finger and its reference, pointing has in fact two reference points.

Pointing thus exemplifies the *relational character* of communicative action already implied in performance.[21] It is not just performed by a subject, but it is performed in the "face" of another subject. As opposed to current relationist theories

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[21] The notions of performance and objectivation seem to be implied in what Garfinkel calls "accountability": "When I speak of accountable my interests are directed to such matters as the following. I mean observable-and-reportable, i.e. available to members as situated practices of

(White 2008) this does not assume that the relation between subjects is the basic unit of analysis but rather includes the objectivation (be it performative of materialized). This *triadic extension* of relationality can build on Meads' theory of symbolic interaction, which takes the constitution of meaning to be basically sequential. It "arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given organism and the subsequent behaviour of this organism as indicated to another human organism by that gesture. If that gesture does so indicate to another organism the subsequent (or resultant) behaviour of the given organism, then it has meaning" (Mead 1964:163). Thus, the sequence described by Mead has a temporal order in which a threefold relation takes place: "[T]he gesture of one organism to the adjustive response of another organism (also implicated in the given act) and to the completion of the given act" (Mead 1964:164). The "gesture-dialogue" consists of a gesture, the following response and the completion of the act which began with the first move. This sequence represents for Mead the core of communication, because it makes actors reciprocal and thus social beings through the exchange of "indications".[22]

As Schutz has argued, the gesture dialogue implies what he calls *reciprocity*. In fact, it is particularly the analysis of finger-pointing which demonstrates the relevance of a kind of reciprocity specific to (human) communicative action. Thus, in his comparisons of chimpanzees and human infants older than nine months, Tomasello has argued for two different kinds of coordination. Whereas in the former case two actors pursue their egoistic goals when acting together, in the second case they establish what he calls "shared intentionality"; we see "humans' cooperative motives for communicating turn into mutual assumptions and even norms of cooperation" (Tomasello 2008:355). This "shared intentionality" is the prerequisite for understanding finger-pointing as a reference to something else and not as generating attention to one's own finger or person. Only humans from the age of about nine months can produce and understand this reference: They do not see a finger, but a reference to what it points to. "Thus, whereas ape attention-getters rest on the natural tendency of recipients to attend to the source of noises or touches, human pointing rests on the natural tendency of recipients to follow the gaze direction, and so the pointing direction, of others to external targets" (Tomasello 2008:62).[23]

A similar distinction between two types of reciprocity in the sequentiality of interaction has been suggested by neuroscientific research. Thus Creem-Regeh and others (2013) distinguish between an "egocentric frame when it comes to spatial

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looking-and-telling" (Garfinkel 1967:1). "Accountable" obviously implies something that is observable in a very sensual way, as it is accessible through seeing and reporting. This interpretation is supported by Garfinkel's use of the word with respect to his analysis of "transsexuality". Here he makes it clear that "accounts" can also take place in bodily behavior ("conduct"), that is, "by making observable that and how normal sexuality is accomplished through witnessable displays of talk and conduct" (Garfinkel 1967:180).

[22] The relevance of Mead and symbolic interactionism should not cover the difference to communicative constructivism which is basically (and this way following the idea of Berger and Luckmann) materialist: objectivations must not only be "symbolic", "signifying" or just about "meaning", as the quote by Mead suggests; they can be material (i.e. " objectifications"), have a material and technological effect on humans (i.e. sensual), and also affect other objectifications.

[23] The distinction between these two types of action has been formulated most clearly already by Habermas (1984). To sociology, this distinction is quite consequential as it demonstrates the reductionism of most economic, rational choice, and play theories of action which only allow for the former type.

perspective taking and an allocentric frame. In the former frame, an observer determines what another can or cannot see from their standpoint". In the latter, however, "the mere presence of another person may prompt humans to share (implicitly or explicitly) spatial and proprioceptive information with one another" (Creem-Regeh et al. 2013:8). With respect to space, this sharing takes a quite spectacular form, as it allows to identify "where in space a target object is located relative to a viewpoint that is different from the observer's current viewpoint" (ibid.: 5), or to say it in other words, where in space a target object is located relative to a viewpoint that is different from the observers' viewpoint.[24]

For Schutz, reciprocity is also what establishes *intersubjectivity* as the sociality that arises between subjects. To establish this fundamental reciprocity, a number of mechanisms have been identified that we see as being anchored in communicative action. For example, the "looking glass"-effect observed long before neurology by the sociologist Cooley (1902): that we do not perceive our own physical movements visually for the most part, but only through the reaction of the others in which they are reflected. While the assumption of empathic introspection or simple mimetic interpretation turned out to be too metaphorical or too simplistic, the concept of "taking over the role" proposed by Mead (1964) has proven its worth. The core of it is that we anticipate the action of the other individual that he or she will perform in response to our action – and that we design our action already in the anticipation phase in such a way that we receive a corresponding and expected reaction.

The specific *spatial kind of reciprocity* implied in pointing has probably been most clearly identified by Schutz. In analysing the constitution of intersubjectivity as basis for the sociality of the life-world, he suggested, next to the reciprocity of motives, what he calls the "interchangeability of standpoints": "that I and my fellow man would have typically the same experiences of the common world if we changed places, thus transforming my Here into his, and his – now to me a There – into mine" (Schutz 1962:316). Interchangeability of standpoints explicitly refers to the spatial aspects implied in the sequential process of finger-pointing. Pointing is not only spatial in that it refers to something in space, i.e. a spatial deixis. In addition, it implies the ability of human actors not only to point to something in space but also to point in such a relational way which allows to anticipates temporally and spatially the local position of the other subject(s) as if they were able to make perceptions from another person's perspective without changing their position in space. There are many open questions as to how we dispose of the miraculous feature. Nevertheless, it presupposes that subjects are able to integrate the perspective of the other's spatial position. As much as this interchangeability demonstrates that the subject is not the "origo" of pointing, this does not at all mean that subjectivity is irrelevant. In fact, as important as the other's position may be when pointing, pointing does not direct the other from their very position but rather takes an intermediate direction which also accounts for the bodily "standpoint" of the person pointing. This way the reciprocity implied in the interchangeability of standpoints underlines the relationality of this type of communicative action; it also indicates that, at least in terms of the spatiality of pointing, the position of the subject and

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[24] Even if neurology suggests mirror neurons as an explanation for the various forms of reciprocity (Fu/Franz 2014), their empirical description and systematic analysis is still a desideratum – even in the social sciences.

thus *subjectivity* is indispensable, i.e. its positionality. [25] Positionality as the subjective sense of one's location with respect to someone else and something is not only an essential feature of communicative action but also a crucial aspect of sequentiality. If sequentiality consists in the temporal sequence of actions related to one another, the subjective position and thus subjectivity appears to be the crucial feature which distinguishes it from seriality, i.e. the mere temporal sequence of actions (or any items related to one another).[26] We need not conceive of subjectivity as predetermined by mirror neurons[27] in order to see how the (subjectively sensed) standpoint of one's body (in relation to another and something else) serves as a pivot around which the sequentiality revolves. While the mechanism of this pivot can be described by reciprocity, there is another reason why we need subjectivity in order to understand sequentiality: Sequences may not be continued by someone else, e.g. if the listener does not take the turn, the speaker goes on and talk turns turn into speech, a move into a walk, the pointing gesture into a dance not only "ascribed" to an actor but performed by her.

While subjectivity is constitutive of sequences of action, the example already takes up the idea of concatenation as suggested by Luhmann. If sequences are continued, they constitute larger contexts of interaction or, to be more exact, communication. Again, we should emphasize that it is useful to rather talk about communicative actions, as others may not respond or re-act and continue the "interaction chain" (Collins 2004), and single actors may continue their actions and constitute extended forms, such as speeches, walks, action chains. In any case, sequences can constitute larger forms. However, it is quite reductive to assume, as Luhmann does, that only the continuation of meaning (e.g., as "code") would allow to constitute larger forms; rather, the very performance of communicative actions can take a temporal form, such as a conversation, a dance, or an event. Answering the question as to how sequential patterns contribute to the construction of "meso-sociological" institutions (ranging from gossip to the powerpoint presentation in organizations) and macrosociological orders (such as religion or science) has been one major goal of social theory and has triggered and inspired much empirical research, as e.g., on "communicative genres" (Luckmann 1985; Günthner/Knoblauch 1995).

As important as this topic may be to the empirical study of social structures, the sketch of a social theory of sequentiality also demonstrates that we cannot reduce sociality to sequentiality. In this vein, Mondada (2016: 346) is right in stating that "sequentiality is a less linear phenomenon that it appears just on the basis of talk". It is, as Mondada stresses, certainly also characterized by multimodality if one considers the different sensual channels by which we perceive action. Body involvement would also require the acknowledgement of the body's affordances and the

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[25] The fact that macaques and chimpanzees dispose of mirror neurons, as Fu argues, does rather contradict to the claim that mirror neurons explain reciprocity, as far as it is Tomasello (2008) who proves that chimpanzees and thus monkeys in general are obviously not capable of this kind of reciprocity.

[26] One may argue that similarity is another feature designating seriality, but this argument can be tautological as the question what is similar only comes about by the temporal order of things: it may be apples after apples, but also a pear, a pineapple, a plant or anything may constitute a series.

[27] Of course, the body plays an important role which can only be indicated here: The subjective position is related to body ("Leib"), which is (visually) "mirrored" by the other's body performance in different sensual modalities which make it a "subjective body" (*Leib*).

different material media by which action is mediated. While we have taken account of the role of the body in the sketch above, the focus on sequentiality as the temporal unfolding of communicative actions ex negative already indicated that we need to consider (theoretically) the major aspect complementing its sequentiality: *simultaneity*. Be it the body standing next to me or the face on the screen which represents a body from the other side of the globe (or a virtual actor) – sequentiality is always embedded in and defined by a spatial dimension. Also, when considering the temporal coordination of bodies in pointing, we would ignore their simultaneity if we only looked at the temporal process. Particularly with respect to pointing, it becomes clear what simultaneity means, as pointing is not only about the spatial arrangement of the bodies and their spatial movement of the parts and the objectivations they relate (Löw 2008). In fact, as much as finger pointing may be an interactive sequence of bodily moves and possibly turns at speech, it is spatial in that it demands the interchangeability of spatially located standpoints. In being deictic, also its' very focus is spatial: it points to something by pointing somewhere in space.

We should stress simultaneity as the spatial aspect of communicative action not only because it is neglected theoretically as well as empirically. If we consider media as spatial mediations of communicative action, we can also see how the concept of simultaneity helps to understand the current transformation of communicative action, institutions, and society through digital media. Media are the very material forms in which communicative action is "mediated" in space, and therefore changes on media directly affect the spatiality of communication action. Furthermore, the decrease of spatial co-presence, bodily physical interaction and spatial "co-presence" is substituted by a simultaneity of technologically mediatized actions finger-pointing which, like many other gestures, does not work as intuitively when transmitted e.g. in the context of a video conference.

While spatiality is an aspect of sociality as constituted by communicative action which is exemplified by the example of finger-pointing, we should, however, not allow the theoretical issues to be dominated by specific examples or cases. Even if finger-pointing is of quite some relevance to social theory, its specificity lies in being a "proto-sign", as Luckmann (1972) calls it. By indicating something in space, it produces a basic spatial meaning of deixis; yet for that very reason it is not only distant from whatever it indicated, it also does not affect it materially. Focusing on this example should not obscure the fact that any objectivation is material or, as objectivation, materialized, and thus affects human bodies as well as other things sensually. We can only hint at the crucial relevance of the materiality of communicative action for communicative constructivism and its consequences to a social theory of sequentiality extended to transactions.[28] The starting point for an understanding of a materialized sequence of actions as an exchange of things has been provided by Mauss (1966): One subject gives something to another who takes it. As an act, it is the coordinated transmittance of a thing that figures as a third element yet may otherwise be an insignificant objectification – ranging from acts, such as

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[28] It is one of the major arguments of communicative constructivism that communicative actions are not only linked with embodied or "significant" objectivations (such as fingers pointing or letters) but also materialized objectifications and technologies (Pfadenhauer 2015). As to the sequences of objectifications cf. Knoblauch (2020: Chapter IV.a.1).

services, to signs and things. In his analysis Mauss shows that gifts include a recip-rocal relation, namely the mutual obligation to reciprocate a gift as well. Bourdieu (2000) has shown how this analysis of a basic sequence can be used for an under-standing of social and symbolic capital not only of transactions but of social order in general.

5. Conclusion

As important as the consequences of the social theory of sequences may be for an understanding of contemporary society or of material exchanges, the goal of this paper is not a sociological theory of exchange or a theory of contemporary commu-nication society. Much more modest, I tried to show how sequences are treated in social theories. On the background of sequential analysis as carried out in empirical studies on interaction, I have addressed some aspects which have been exposed by these theories and also identified some shortcomings of these theories. With refer-ence to the example of finger-pointing, I have tried to integrate both series of as-pects into a coherent theory of sequence. With respects to the empirical restrictions of the example, I have indicated that sequences must be set in the larger theoretical frame we call communicative constructivism.

Without being able to elaborate this frame in this context, the importance of lan-guage for and its relationship to sequences is one of the subjects we should return to in the end. In this respect, the argument is that linguistic conversations are not the paradigm for an understanding of sequences. However, the emphasis on non-linguistic sequences and communicative action does not mean to neglect language in any way. Language is certainly one of the most important resources for the con-ventionalization of meaning. As important as language is, we should not succumb to the temptation to understand or measure every interaction or action according to the pattern of linguistic or even symbolic action. Social theory in particular must take into account that sociality is the source of language rather than language the source of the social.

Insofar as conversations are primarily of linguistic nature, they are certainly also synchronized by language, its semantics and grammar. But as much as language is a storehouse for meaning, also conversation is driven by a social mechanism that we have described here as sequentiality. Sequentiality refers to the sequence of communicative actions that are physically objectified and can thus be mediated and mediatized in various ways. By its specific form of reciprocity, the sequentiality of communicative action unfolds a kind of social logic which allows to synchronize actors in time and space, and due to the use of objectivations, it allows to coordinate their embodied, mediated or materialized action.

Temporality is a basic dimension of the sequentiality of communicative actions (and thus of society). Admittedly, also consciousness exhibits a temporal structure, as analyzed by Schutz (1964). However, just as we avoid grasping sociality only on the basis of communicative action, we cannot reduce the temporality of action to the accomplishments of subjective consciousness or deduce it form objective time (Luckmann 1984). Rather, we tend to understand the constitution of consciousness, the formation of a meaningful "inner time" and the order in the "stream of con-sciousness" as well as resulting from communicative actions with others, the con-current establishment of social relations and institutions. Also "objective" measures

of time are obviously a communicative construct which could not have come into being without highly presuppositional communication (and technical) construction processes. As societies are realized in communicative actions, sequences provide a basic temporal order to their processual performance in situations, to the subjective orientation of actors in these situations and to the workings of institutions and social structures.

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