

# *LOVE AS PASSION*



*Niklas Luhmann*

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# Love as Passion

## *The Codification of Intimacy*

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NIKLAS LUHMANN

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# Preface to the English Edition

In writing this book I had the German reader and thus a specific social and intellectual context in mind. The English translation places the text in a different setting, adding to the difficulties of trying to understand a highly demanding theoretical argument. Despite the fact that in recent years there has been a more ready interchange of ideas internationally, many notions in the book retain a local colouring, last but not least because, whereas readers in Germany keep up with works published in English without difficulty, the same cannot be said to an equal degree for English-speaking readers. Since the publisher has kindly allowed me to preface the English edition, I would like to take this opportunity to explain a number of the underlying assumptions of the book which are not dealt with in sufficient detail there. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between several different theoretical complexes which all serve to place the present work in the framework of current discussion in the field of the social sciences.

The book can be viewed as a case study that attempts to use theoretical tools to describe, if not actually explain, historical material. General discussions in Germany about the relationship between theory and history have not as yet been particularly fruitful. There are a number of different reasons for this. On the one hand, the wealth of historical facts which historians are able to dig up from their sources never fails to dash all attempts at theoretical treatment, unless one concedes from the outset that any theory has to be selective in approach. Moreover, historians and sociologists customarily have their own different ways of treating empirical data, and thus both professions can justifiably accuse each other of making unwarranted generalizations. Finally, sociological theory - or so it seems

to me, at any rate – is nowhere near complex enough, and above all is not elaborated in sufficiently abstract terms as to be able really to tackle the wealth of historical data. The only possible path one can take in order to uncover the details (or, as in the present case, the boring, old-fashioned pedantry of a body of often mediocre literature) leads via the detour of theoretical abstraction.

As far as the history of ideas is concerned, I have allowed myself to be guided by the project outlined by the editors of the dictionary of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Lexikon zur politischen sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*,<sup>1</sup> and I have adopted their usage of the term ‘semantics’.<sup>2</sup> This project starts from the assumption that the basic semantic terms used to describe either society or time underwent a radical change during the second half of the eighteenth century; even words which remained the same took on new meanings. Historians, however, have not explained the reasons for this transformation, but have merely confirmed that it did indeed occur.

Foucault’s ‘archaeology’ and the concept of discourse it employs are equally unsatisfactory in this respect. Disregarding for the moment the philosophical battle lines Foucault draws up, i.e. his attack on both a linear philosophy of history and the programme of enlightenment centred on reason – a stance he uses to justify his methodology – a sociologist would be likely to go one step further and endeavour to establish what restrictions were imposed by the social structure on possible discourse. Moreover, the concept of power does not provide an adequate explanation for the force exerted by discourse over life, the empirical nature of which is also probably overestimated. It seems to me that historical research needs a stronger theoretical basis with respect both to ‘historical semantics’ and the ‘archaeology of discourse’.

It is most probable that the sociologist would try and draw on the classical writings on the 'sociology of knowledge' when attempting to overcome this weakness. However, on closer examination this too does not provide an adequate theoretical foundation. It seems that, since the 1920s, development has come to a standstill in two areas. First of all, even if we ignore the inherent difficulties involved in any theory of social class, relating facts to social classes allows us to observe at best only partial phenomena. The only way out of this predicament is, or so Karl Mannheim suggested, to resort to generalization. Class is replaced as a concept by all forms of social position, a step which, however, should necessitate a process of respecification, because notions such as 'position' or 'relativity of being' must be regarded as poor substitutes for a theory which has not yet been found.

Secondly, the sociology of knowledge has been stranded in epistemological difficulties that it has not been able to solve by means of the classical theory of cognition. The truth content of its own statements, which are intended to relativize true (or supposedly true) statements, has never been unequivocally established. One might conceive of a sociology of knowledge of the sociology of knowledge - or a sociology of knowledge of the free-floating intellectual; but in the end we would only come up against the paradoxes known to us ever since Antiquity as inherent in a Reason that tries to enlighten itself - a process Foucault has attempted to undermine using the spade of archaeology.

But how are we to extricate ourselves from this embarrassing state of affairs? If none of this works, what can one do 'instead'?

I cannot for many reasons share the faith Jürgen Habermas places in the opportunities afforded by resorting to a paradigm of intersubjective understanding.<sup>3</sup> It is above all difficult to conceive of how a sufficiently complex theory of society resulting from an intersubjective understanding



could be generated by the discourses of everyday life. Instead, it would seem to me to make more sense to utilize certain of the theoretical resources that have already been quite extensively elaborated in the course of interdisciplinary research on a cybernetics of self-referential orders, on general systems theory, on autopoiesis and on information and communication.<sup>4</sup>

In the following study of the semantics of love, the epistemological problems which could not be solved using a sociology of knowledge are dealt with in a new way: they are treated as a problem of observing observations, of describing descriptions, of calculating calculations within self-referential systems. Heinz von Foerster has called this 'second order cybernetics'. In this context the term 'epistemological constructivism' is also used, but a discussion of this would take up so much space that I must instead refer the reader to the literature in question.<sup>5</sup> This approach at the same time allows us to establish premises on which a theory of society could be based. It is possible, using this methodology, to treat society as a social system that consists solely of communications and therefore as a system that can only reproduce communications by means of communications. This also includes communications by the society about itself (in particular: theories of society). All other conditions for the evolution of society and its day to day functioning, including life and human consciousness, belong to the *environment* of this system.

In current debates it has been this unusual design for a theory that has met with the greatest resistance, owing no doubt to the continued presence of a tradition of humanism. But from the standpoint of systems theory, 'environment' is by no means an area to be considered of secondary importance; on the contrary, it is the single most important condition for systems formation. In other words, the theoretical approach used here proposes to abandon such

guiding principles as humankind, the human species, the norms of rational life style, or the telos of intellectual history or of human life, and replace them by a differentiation between system and environment. And this proposal is motivated by the idea that it is much more fruitful and leads to more theoretical constructs if theory is built on a difference, instead of a global unity. This theory begins, as does George Spencer Brown's logic, by obeying the instruction: 'draw a distinction!' [6](#)

What this theoretical model does have in common with Foucault's work is a clearly post-humanistic perspective, which would appear to have become unavoidable, now that humanism has exhausted itself in its exaltation of the subject. And like Foucault, I am not interested in finding some nice, helpful theory oriented towards the 'Good', and much less in basking in indignation at the current state of affairs. But, whereas Foucault would speak in terms of the power of discourse over our suffering bodies, systems theory analyses a relationship between system and environment. The latter approach also allows us to demonstrate that we love and suffer according to cultural imperatives. Indeed, systems theory additionally makes it possible to create a complex theoretical apparatus that can describe the non-random character of variations in social relations, if not actually explain the individual characteristics of the latter of these. In other words, one does not have to leave the genesis of the particular discourses and their subsequent disappearance unexplained. The dominant semantics of a given period becomes plausible only by virtue of its compatibility with the social structure - not in the sense of a mere 'reflection', and by no means in the sense of a relationship of the superstructure. Compatibility is the more elaborate concept. It also embraces the problems of evolutionary, transitional states in which the losses in plausibility experienced by the

old order that is passing have to be compensated for and new figures of meaning tested for their suitability to the changed conditions.

The present work deals with only a minute facet of this enormous theoretical programme and is informed by two hypotheses:

- 1 that the transition from traditional societies to modern society can be conceived of as the transition from a primarily stratified form of differentiation of the social system to one which is primarily functional

- 2 that this transformation occurs primarily by means of the differentiation of various symbolically generalized media of communication.

This change destroyed the traditional order of life, which had been based primarily on stratified family households, religious cosmology and morals, i.e. on multifunctional institutions. These were replaced by a primary orientation towards such systems as the economy, politics, science, intimacy, law, art, etc., which thus all acquired a high degree of systemic autonomy, and yet precisely because of this became all the more interdependent.

This conception can be elaborated by means of both systematic and historical analyses. One could, for example, demonstrate systematically that functional systems are able to combine their autonomy, which is based on specific functions, with having to depend greatly on fulfilling other functions in their environment, and describe the manner in which this occurs. In other words, they operate simultaneously as closed and open systems.<sup>7</sup> Historical research is faced with the problem that all evolutionary theory has to contend with: namely, that this radical transformation is effected in small, barely perceptible steps. The present case study serves to show that, while the stratified order and family systems remained intact, a semantics for love developed to accommodate extra-marital

relationships, and was then transferred back into marriage itself, thus providing a basis for the latter's differentiation - libertinage as a case of evolutionary good fortune, if you will.

The distinction between the theory of social systems and the theory of symbolically generalized media of communication, two areas that should belong together, runs counter to the distinction between a systematic and an historical perspective. In this context 'media' is not meant in the sense of mass media, but rather in the sense of the *symbolically generalized media of interchange*, as defined in the theory Parsons developed. However, Parsons considers the emergence of media to be a *consequence* of the functional differentiation of the action system (and this differentiation is in turn already implied in the concept of action). This is why Parsons speaks of 'media of interchange' and explains them in terms of the necessity of reconnecting the two differentiated systems.

I feel unable to adopt this theoretical model, because I doubt whether a complete functional matrix (the four-function paradigm) and thus a complete theory of symbolically generalized media can be deduced from the concept of action.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, I see the question of the connection between systems theory and media theory not as a fixed link, but as one open to change. It is not predetermined by the conceptual structure of systems theory, but rather remains in essence open to evolution. This makes historico-empirical investigations all the more necessary. I think of symbolic media as codes which offer relatively improbable communicative intentions, nevertheless, some prospect of success; or as codes which exclude fairly effectively the danger of abuse or of illusion or of errors in the use of particular symbols.<sup>9</sup> Media underpin relatively improbable communication. They make trust

possible, if not in fact necessary.<sup>10</sup> In this capacity, media codes can be conceived of as catalysts which necessarily bring about a differentiation of complex social systems, once their use has become sufficiently dependable and constant enough to be foreseeable. In this manner, the differentiation of the economy is a consequence of the use of money; the differentiation of politics a consequence of the use of power; the differentiation of science a consequence of the use of truth - and in each case this takes place once a sufficiently effective semantics has become available by means of which one can distinguish between the use of money and the use of power, etc. (which, for example, was not possible on the basis of land ownership alone).

The following study of the evolution of a special semantics for passionate love thus draws on theoretical sources of a highly diverse nature. And, above all, it is not so ambitious as to attempt to prove that things had to happen the way they did for reasons that can be clearly understood in terms of theory. There are other, methodologically less rigorous, less demanding ways of deploying theoretical concepts in order to select and interpret historical data and texts. If the aim is to link a very complex theory - and how today could a theory of society be otherwise - to a wide, hopefully representative collection of historical material, then one cannot at the same time set one's methodological sights too high. This is why the form of an historical case study has been chosen here, which has meant not only taking a narrow cross section of material, and one selected with great theoretical care, but also making only highly selective use of the manifold possibilities afforded by the theoretical apparatus. This procedure does not by any means exclude the possibility of the theorist learning in the course of completing historical studies and adjusting his theory to the findings. Historical research is one of the reasons why a

theory must be complex, and the aesthetics of the theory suffers if it is dipped into a bath of historical facts. But if a theory is sufficiently complex, it can also itself recognize which of its assumptions it has to change or differentiate if it is to be able to recast those facts in its own theoretical language.

Niklas Luhmann, Bielefeld, August 1985

# Introduction

The following investigations into the 'semantics of love' combine two different theoretical complexes. On the one hand, these studies are to be seen in the context of writings on the sociology of knowledge concerning the transition from traditional to modern forms of society. Other writings on this subject have appeared in a previous publication,<sup>1</sup> and I intend to conduct further research in this area. These investigations rest on the assumption that the social system's transformation from a stratified to a functional mode of differentiation generates profound changes in the conceptual resources that enable a society to ensure the continuity of its reproduction and the adaption of one action to another. In the course of such evolutionary transformations, word forms, set phrases, adages and precepts may very well continue to be handed down over the generations; however, their meaning changes and with it the way in which they pinpoint a specific referent, encapsulate particular experiences and open up new perspectives. A shift occurs in the pivotal point from which complexes of meaning direct actions, so that as long as the conceptual resources are rich enough, they can pave the way for and accompany profound changes in social structures quickly enough for these to seem plausible. Such a shift permits structural transformations to proceed with relative rapidity, indeed often in a revolutionary fashion, without these having to create all the necessary preconditions for change beforehand.

The second framework of this investigation will be provided by a preliminary outline of an overall theory of generalized symbolic media of communication. In other words, love will not be treated here as a feeling (or at least only secondarily so), but rather in terms of its constituting a

symbolic code which shows how to communicate effectively in situations where this would otherwise appear improbable. The code thus encourages one to have the appropriate feelings. Without this, La Rochefoucauld believed, most people would never acquire such feelings. Indeed, Englishwomen who try to emulate characters in pre-Victorian novels have to wait for visible signs of nuptial love before allowing themselves to discover consciously what love is. In other words, we are not dealing with a pure invention of sociological theory, but rather with something that has long been the subject of consideration in studies of the semantics of love. A generalized theory can only contribute abstract insights, but these in turn enable comparisons to be made between love and things of a completely different nature, such as power, money and truth; accordingly, additional knowledge is gained and love is thus shown to be not a mere anomaly, but indeed a quite normal improbability.

Increasing the probability of the improbable – such is the formula that links social theory, evolutionary theory, and a theory of the media of communication. Any normalization of more improbable social structure makes greater demands on the media of communication, is reflected in their semantics; evolution is the concept that will be used to explain how this phenomenon comes about.

The historical studies on the semantics of love are embedded in this theoretical framework. Naturally they cannot, strictly speaking, claim to provide a methodological verification of evolutionary theory, but with regard to methodology, however, they do provide two complementary, pragmatic insights. The one shows that only highly abstract sociological theories of a very complex nature can bring historical material to life: access to the concrete is only reached by treading the path of abstraction. Sociology is thus far too little developed in terms of theory



and abstraction for fruitful historical research to be fully elaborated. The second insight is that temporal sequences possess a unique evidential quality with respect to complex phenomena – a form of proof, however, which has so far not been adequately clarified in methodological terms.

Parsons occasionally toyed with the idea that a differentiated system is only a system because it has arisen from processes of differentiation. Research into historical semantics reinforces such a view. Apparently, evolution experiments with adaptive capacity. When viewed synchronically, highly complex matters clearly appear to be intertwined. This interconnectedness can be deemed contingent, but it is then nearly impossible to exclude other combinations as being less valid or less probable. An historical investigation uncovers such affinities more readily, in that it demonstrates how an existing system or a thoroughly formulated, consistently ordered semantics predetermines its own future (even though it in principle must be thought of as undetermined). This is most evident in the history of science: it can hardly be pure chance that scientific discoveries are triggered off which subsequently prove themselves to be true. Truth becomes manifest within the process.

This maxim could perhaps be generalized to serve as a heuristic tool, as is illustrated by the following example from the historical case studies. Sociological theory postulates abstractly that a relation obtains between the differentiation of generalized symbolic media of communication and the regulation of their 'real assets' (Parsons), i.e. their symbiotic mechanisms. This approach can be demonstrated by comparing the connections between truth and perception, love and sexuality, money and elementary needs as well as between power and force. Employing this hypothesis, historical research shows further that the differences between the *amour passion* complex of the French and the

Puritans' notion of marriage based on 'companionship' created different preconditions for their respective adaptability, specifically in the following context: only the semantics of *amour passion* was sufficiently complex, as we shall show in detail, to absorb the reevaluation of sexuality that occurred in the eighteenth century. Despite having provided a preliminary basis for the integration of love and marriage, and under the same conditions as the French, the English were only able to come up with the Victorian malformation of sexual morality. This historical *sequence* reveals an underlying *factual* connection - particularly in the *diversity* of the reactions it uncovers - to *one and the same problem*. Admittedly (despite what Weber says) this offers only an unsatisfactory methodological explanation.

I shall not go into the circumstances and results of this approach here, because the nature of the connections involved is too complex to be summarized briefly. Their sequential presentation in chapters is thus itself something of a compromise. Since factual complexes, historical changes and regional differences are often interwoven, it was not possible to divide the study in such a manner that each chapter would deal with one specific aspect. The literature I worked with is indicated in the notes. I have drawn in addition on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novels which were at first closely intertwined with aphoristic and discursive literature, only for this link to slowly dissolve. This created certain difficulties in evaluating the material. Although it has been known since the seventeenth century that novels assume the role of providing instruction and orientation in affairs of the heart, it is difficult to break this insight down into individual theses, concepts, theorems and precepts. All that can be determined is that the behaviour of characters in novels is codeoriented, i.e. they tend to animate the code rather than expand upon it. In the case of important works, such as the *Princesse de Clèves* and the

subsequent train of novels on the renunciation of worldly pleasure that followed in its wake, the exceptions to the rule will readily meet the eye. I made a point of looking for second- and third-rate literature, and allowed myself to be guided by a very subjective principle in selecting the quotations, namely, that of stylistic elegance. It may therefore be attributed to a personal love of the material that I could not bring myself to translate quotations from widely spoken European languages.

# 1

## **Society and Individual**

### ***Personal and Impersonal Relationships***

It is most assuredly incorrect to characterize modern society as an impersonal mass society and leave it at that. Such a view arises partly owing to an overly narrow conception of society and partly because of a set of optical illusions. If society is conceived of primarily in terms of economic categories, that is, its economic system, then it necessarily follows that impersonal relationships are the rule, for this is indeed the case within the economic system. But the economy is only one of the various factors determining social life. It is true even for individuals, of course, that only impersonal relationships can be established with most other people. If society is therefore taken to be the sum-total of possible relationships, it will appear, for the most part, to be impersonal. At the same time, however, it is *also* possible for individuals in some cases to intensify personal relationships and to communicate to others much of what they believe to be most intimately theirs and find this affirmed by others. Bearing in mind that everyone can enter into such relationships, and indeed many do, these too must be judged to exist on a massive scale.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in modern society to avail oneself of this option is typically neither subject to any restrictions nor encumbered by the need to make allowances for other relationships.

We shall accordingly assume in the following that modern society is to be distinguished from older social formations by the fact that it has become more elaborate in two ways: it affords more opportunities both for impersonal and for more intensive personal relationships. This double adaptive capacity can be further expanded because present society is, as a whole, more complex, can more effectively regulate interdependencies between different forms of social relations and is better able to filter out potential disturbances.

It is possible to speak in terms of an enhanced capacity for impersonal relationships, in that one can communicate in numerous areas with no risk of misunderstanding, even if one has no personal knowledge whatsoever of the people with whom one is talking, and can only 'size them up' by means of a few hurriedly noted role characteristics (policeman, salesman, switchboard operator). This is the case, moreover, because every individual action depends on innumerable others, the functions of which are not guaranteed by certain personality characteristics that can be known to the person who has to rely on them. Never before has a society exhibited such improbable, contingent dependencies, which can neither be held to be natural, nor interpreted solely on the basis of one's knowledge of other people.

Equally, an enhanced capacity for personal relationships cannot be seen as a simple extension or increase in the number and diversity of effective acts of communication, for such an extension would soon reach a point where it would overwhelm anyone.

The personal element in' social relationships cannot therefore become more extensive, only more intensive. In other words, it is a question of laying the basis for social relations in which more of the individual, unique attributes of each person, or ultimately all their characteristics,

become significant. We shall term such relationships *interpersonal interpenetration*. By the same token, one can speak of *intimate relationships*.

This concept describes a process. It is based on the supposition that the sum total of everything which goes to form an individual, his memories and attitudes, can never be accessible to someone else, if for no other reason than that the individual himself has no access to them (as can be seen from Tristram Shandy's attempt to write his own biography). Of course, one can to a 'greater or lesser' degree know something about the other person and heed this. Above all, at the communicative level, there are rules or codes which prescribe that in certain social situations one must be receptive in principle to everything about another person, must refrain from displaying indifference towards what the other finds of great personal relevance and in turn must leave no question unanswered, even if and especially when this centres on matters of a personal nature. While interpersonal interpenetration can be enhanced *continuously* in factual terms - given sufficient room for manoeuvre in society and disregarding possible disturbances - the capacity for such enhancement must be fixed *discontinuously* at the level of communicative regulations.

A type of system is thus created for intimate relationships which ensures that the personal level has to be included in the communication.

Judging from what we know or assume about the social genesis of individuality,<sup>2</sup> the need for personal individuality and the capacity for stylizing oneself and others as unique can presumably not be adequately explained simply in terms of anthropological constants. Rather, such a need and its possible expression and affirmation in communicative relationships correspond to a specific socio-structural framework, especially to the complexity and particular form

of differentiation adopted by that social system.<sup>3</sup> We shall not treat the sociogenesis of individuality and its attendant semantics *in extenso*, but shall instead confine ourselves to a subordinate question which is nevertheless important to our considerations: namely, the question of the genesis of a generalized symbolic communicative medium assigned specifically to facilitating, cultivating and promoting the communicative treatment of individuality.

It goes without saying that one must assume that individuality in the sense of a self-propelling, psycho-physical unity, and above all in terms of each person's individual death, is something accepted by all societies.

The Christian credo of the indestructibility of the soul and the notion that the salvation of the soul is an individual fate irrespective of stratification, family or even the circumstances surrounding each death, do not essentially add anything to this anthropological fact, nor, for that matter, do the Renaissance view of a pronounced individualism, the individualization of affect-management and natural rationality (e.g. Vives) or the Baroque concept of self-assertive individualism. Such notions serve only to strengthen their social legitimacy in the face of increasing difficulties in anchoring the individual person in the respective social structures. People are still defined according to their social status, i.e. by their positions within a stratified social system. At the same time, however, less claim is made to a specific position within the functional areas of politics, economics, religion and the academic world. This did not, at least not initially, lead to the abandonment of the old concept of the individual, i.e. its definition in terms of indivisibility and separateness, or to its being modified when applied to actual living persons.<sup>4</sup>

The development which leads up to the modern world and which cancelled out the traditional concept of the individual and invested the word with new meaning had a number of

different aspects to it. These must be carefully distinguished from one another because they not only refer to substantially different things, but also to some extent conflict with each other. First of all, the transition from stratified to functional differentiation within society leads to greater differentiation of personal and social systems (or, to be exact, of system/environment distinctions within personal or social systems). This is the case because with the adoption of functional differentiation individual persons can no longer be firmly located in one single subsystem of society, but rather must be regarded a priori as socially displaced.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, not only do individuals now consider themselves unique owing to the supposed greater diversity of individual attributes (which may not at all be true), but also a greater differentiation occurs of system/environment relations, necessary for personal systems to refer to specific systems. Accordingly, if persons now nonetheless share common characteristics, this must be attributed to coincidence (and no longer to a characteristic of the species).

This trend towards differentiation, easily comprehensible from the point of view of systems theory, means that individuals are all the more provoked into interpreting the difference between themselves and the environment (and in the temporal dimension, the history and future of this difference) in terms of their own person, whereby the ego becomes the focal point of all their inner experiences and the environment loses most of its contours. Possessing a name and a place within the social framework in the form of general categories such as age, gender, social status and profession no longer suffices as a means both of knowing that one's organism exists and of self-identification - the basis of one's own life experience and action. Rather, individual persons have to find affirmation at the level of their respective personality *systems*, i.e. in the difference



between themselves and their *environment* and in the manner in which they deal with this difference - as opposed to the way others do. At the same time, society and the possible worlds it can constitute become much more complex and impenetrable. The need for a world that is still understandable, intimate and close (which, incidentally, means approximately the same thing as does the ancient Greek 'philos') stems from this, a world which one can, furthermore, learn to make one's own.

An individualization of the person and the need for a close world are not necessarily parallel processes; indeed, they tend to contradict one another, for the close world leaves the individual less room for development than do the impersonal macromechanisms fixed in terms of legal or monetary, political or scientific principles. Thus, a concept of increasing personal individualization does not adequately pinpoint the problems which individuals have to overcome in the modern world, for they cannot simply fall back on their autonomy and the resulting adaptability this entails. What is more, the individual person needs the *difference* between a close world and a distant, impersonal one, i.e. the *difference* between only personally valid experiences, assessments and reactions and the anonymous, universally accepted world - in order to be shielded from the immense complexity and contingency of all the things which could be deemed possible.

It is by virtue of this difference that individuals can channel the flow of the information they receive. This is only possible if the manner in which one deals with highly personal inner experiences as well as one's inclinations to act in a particular way receive social affirmation and as long as the forms by which such affirmation can be achieved are approved by society. Individuals must be in a position to receive positive feedback not only on what they themselves are, but also on what they themselves see.

These circumstances must be formulated in such a complex manner if we are to comprehend that all communication in areas that have great personal relevance has to do with this double quality of both being oneself and having a personal view of the world, and that the person who takes part in this process of communication as the alter ego is involved in it himself and for others in precisely this double fashion. Thus, in order for a commonly shared private world to become a differentiated entity, each person must be able to lend his support to the world of the other (although his inner experiences are highly individual), because a special role is accorded to him in it: he appears in the other person's world as the one who is loved. Despite all the possible, and indeed already apparent, discrepancies between excessive individualism and the need for a close world (one need think only of the sentiments of both friendship *and* loneliness in the eighteenth century), a common medium of communication has developed to deal with both types of problems - which employs the semantic fields of friendship and love.

Our investigation is concerned with the differentiation of this medium and with assessing the durability of the semantics it created. The differentiation of such a system first assumes a visible shape in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was aided by the fact that both the unique value of individuality and tasks such as self-control and affect-management assigned to the individual as an individual were already socially recognized. But it could not be presumed that individuals oriented themselves towards the difference of personal and impersonal interaction and therefore the medium sought to establish a highly personal form of communication based on intimacy and trust. The need for a close world that could be projected into the world as a whole was entirely absent for such a time as the form of communication was still based on a stratification. How

was it thus nevertheless possible for a special medium of communication for intimacy to develop? And what course did it take? These questions must first be elaborated by means of an overall theory of generalized symbolic media of communication before we proceed to the historical case studies.

## 2

# Love as a Generalized Symbolic Medium of Communication

Generalized symbolic media of communication are primarily semantic devices which enable essentially improbable communications nevertheless to be made successfully.<sup>1</sup> In this context 'successfully' means heightening receptivity to the communication in such a way that it can be attempted, rather than abandoned as hopeless from the outset. This threshold of improbability must be overcome above all as social systems would otherwise not be formed, in that they arise only through the agency of communication. Improbabilities, in other words, amount to thresholds which one is discouraged from crossing, and, with regard to evolution, those at which possible variations will again be eradicated. If the point at which one must tread these thresholds can be deferred, then a social system's capacity for forming subsystems increases. At the same time the number of communicable topics grows, as does both the leeway for potential communication in the system and the external adaptability of the system. This has the cumulative effect of enhancing the probability of evolution.<sup>2</sup>

One can assume of all media of communication that the demands placed on them increase in the course of social evolution. If the social system and its possible environments become more complex, then the selectivity of each

definition also increases. Communicating something in particular involves selection from among a number of different possibilities. The motivation to transmit and receive selected choices thereby becomes more improbable, and it thus becomes more difficult to motivate receptivity by means of the form of selection taken. It is, however, the function of media of communication to achieve precisely this. Taken together, the theory of social evolution and the proposition that changing the type of differentiation adopted by society effects a sudden increase in the complexity of the social system lead one to suppose not only that society's communicative processes indeed follow such a course of development, but that they will attempt to find a different, at once both more general and more specialized level combining selection and motivation. Love, for example, is now declared – in contrast to the traditional demand that it function solely as a form of social solidarity – to be both unfathomable and personal: 'Par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy', as Montaigne's famous epigram would have it.<sup>3</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that the search for new forms will necessarily be successful or that the enhanced complexity in all functional areas of society can be held in check. One must therefore rely on empirical and historical analyses, on analyses of both the social structures and the history of ideas. Each of these is necessary in order not only to clarify the extent to which society can sustain its own evolution and is able to re-form its communications accordingly, but also to specify the degree to which certain functional areas lag behind, as a result of which corresponding deformations have to be taken into account.

The generalized symbolic media which have to solve such problems of combining selection and motivation employ a semantic matrix intimately connected with reality: truth, love, money, power, etc. These terms *designate* particular

properties of sentences, feelings, media of exchange, threats and the like. And the use of the media involves precisely these forms of orientation towards such specific circumstances, whereby the factual circumstances themselves are taken to possess a causality of their own. The communicating parties *mean* this; they have this 'in mind'. But the media of communication themselves *are not to be confused* with the circumstances in question; rather, they are communicative instructions which can be manipulated more or less independently of whether such circumstances indeed exist or not.<sup>4</sup> The functions and effects of the media can thus not be adequately comprehended if studied only at this level of factually localized qualities, feelings and causalities, for they are always already socially mediated: by virtue of the agreement reached on the communicative capacities to be adopted.

Understood in terms of the above, love as a medium is not itself a feeling, but rather a code of communication, according to the rules of which one can express, form and simulate feelings, deny them, impute them to others, and be prepared to face up to all the consequences which enacting such a communication may bring with it. As early as the seventeenth century, people were fully aware of the fact, as we shall show in the coming chapters, that, despite all emphasis on love as passion, they were dealing with a model of behaviour that could be acted out and which one had in full view before embarking on the search for love. In other words, the model provided a point of orientation and a source of knowledge as to the importance of the pursuit before one tried to find a partner, made one notice the absence of a partner and indeed made this absence appear as one's fate.<sup>5</sup> Love thus at first seemed to be like running on the spot<sup>6</sup> and to centre on a generalized search pattern which, while facilitating selection, could obstruct any deep