

Review of Richard Jung¹
Experience and Action:
Selected Items
in Systems Theory
by Bernd Hornung.

van Dijkum, Corvan (Ed.).
Newsletter 22 (May 2009),
RC51 on Sociocybernetics of ISA (International Sociological
Association),
pp. 14-18.

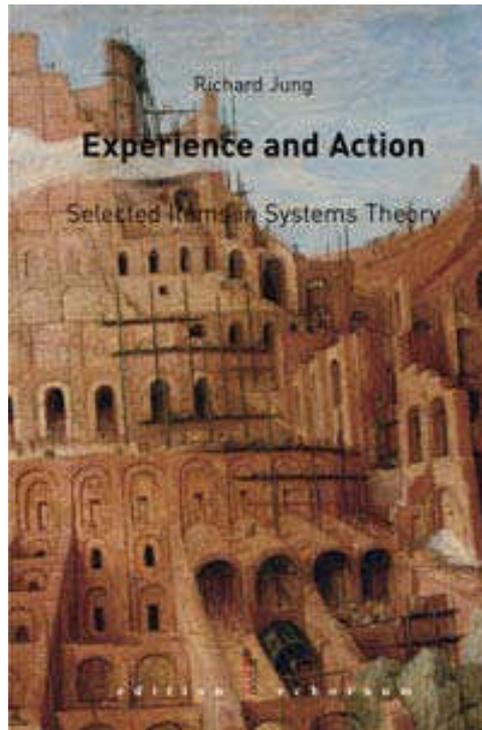
¹ Center for Systems Research,
Kouřimská 24, CZ 84 01 Kutná Hora, Czech Republic;
+420 607 587 627, www.RichardJung.cz , Richard.Jung@post.Harvard.edu

4.2.2 Experience and Action, Selected Items in Systems Theory (2007)

Richard Jung

Published by *Edition Echoraum*

<http://www.echoraum.at/edition/wisdomechoraum4.htm>



1. Summary

The book presents the essence of Richard Jung's thinking about how to conceptualize man and the world he lives in from a systems point of view, looking at the individual as a bio-psycho-socio-cultural being. It is a summary of a long life of international and interdisciplinary research, teaching, and writing, which strongly draws on the heritage of European and classical philosophy.

2. Target Groups

The book is an inspiring and challenging reading for anybody interested in fundamental issues of systems and cybernetics or systems-oriented social

² Original page number in in van Dijkum, Corvan (Ed.). *Newsletter 22 (May 2009)*, RC51 on Sociocybernetics of ISA (International Sociological Association).

sciences, like e.g. sociocybernetics, who already has a background in these fields and, ideally, in philosophy. It cannot be recommended to the curious novice, but it is a treasure for the experienced researcher exploring the limits and foundations of these fields.

3. Contents - Overview

In 13 chapters, divided into two parts of the book, the author presents his effort to develop an integrated and comprehensive universal conceptual and formal systems framework for the behavioral and social sciences, concentrating on action and experience. With his approach Richard Jung wants to overcome the traditional split between the natural sciences and the humanist sciences, the latter including the social sciences, and to present a unified theory of action in the context of a postmodern general system theory.

The main focus, in terms of behavioral and social sciences, is psychology and social psychology, i.e. the psychological system – or the mind, as Jung prefers to call it – embedded in a social context. At the level of systems and cybernetics he focuses on action and experience and on the development of systems in general and psychological systems in a social context in particular. A recurrent central theme throughout the book is, in line with the ambitious aim of developing a unified postmodern  15 systems theory, the split between natural and social sciences and the author's proposal to overcome this split by a constructivist and perspectivist phenomenological approach.

With this intention the first part of the book is mainly devoted to presenting the philosophical, in particular ontological and epistemological, views and foundations of Jung's approach to action and experience and to elaborating in this framework a number of key issues and key concepts. What is a system? What is the role of typologies? Levels and boundaries; communication and control in time and space; First and Second Order Cybernetics; Postmodern Systems Theory; etc. are such key issues. The core of this first part of the book is the chapter dealing with metaphors for the hermeneutics of life. One of them, the metaphor of

mind, is developed in further detail in the second part.

In the second part of the book the author presents his systems theory of action and experience, which is a theory of intentionality. It includes three subsystems and sub-theories, i.e. theories of motivation, decision, and orientation. Orientation refers to the entire cognitive system, not just to normative, ethical or moral orientation.

The book concludes with a short statement on work in progress. This puts the detailed discussion of particular issues back into the overall context of the author's encompassing intellectual endeavour of developing a unified and ontologically monist theory.

4. Contents – The Chapters

In an enthusiastic foreword Ranulph Glanville stresses Richard Jung's broad background of knowledge and his depth of thinking about key issues of systems theory, which culminates in a comprehensive formulation of general system theory to be presented in this book. In an introductory chapter the author himself outlines this ambitious program, based on the idea of continuity between the realms of inanimate and animate beings, although the focus is, after all, on the organism as a psychological and social being.

Richard Jung also sketches the main traits of his dualist epistemology, which leads to the principle of (perspectivist) double description, and to a monist ontology. The latter is based on the idea of indefiniteness, out of which form, and in further steps the world, emerge. A number of other key concepts and principles are explained as well as the difference between things, as concrete entities, and systems, as conceptual (mental) entities.

This wide background sets the scene for an analysis of development and of how to conceptualize development in a systems theoretical framework (Part I, Chapter 1). Here Jung provides a number of valuable distinctions leading to different types and stages of development and to types of education.

Education is the example illustrating his theoretical considerations.

This line of argument drops suddenly and surprisingly from the large vision of philosophy of science and general system theory to quite a different level in Chapter 2. This chapter deals with detailed problems of explanation strategies of psychologists and methodological details of an empirical study, a highly specific topic. Its relevance becomes visible only much later on. The chapter ends with an argument in favor of (non-arbitrary) typologies, which are needed, e.g., to classify types of change, types of development, etc.

The previous considerations about development and classifications are not resumed anymore in the rest of the book, with the exception of an only brief reference in Chapter 8.

Chapter 3 turns to the central theme of the book, action and experience. These terms are used with a rather broad meaning. The chapter provides the basic terminology and definitions to be used in the following theoretical discussions.

The latter begin in Chapter 4 with four metaphors taken from the history of science and philosophy. They give a basic structure to Jung's entire building of systems theory. The idea is to develop these metaphors, which give rise to different systems of discourse  16 (different perspectives), into formal theories. The metaphors are machine, organism, mind, and template, whereby the latter covers more or less what is otherwise called culture. Discussing in the next chapters experience, action, and communication, Jung focuses in particular on the mind, and to a lesser extent on template and organism. Chapter 5 deals with communication, a term used by the author in a very broad sense. According to Jung, communication equals control. He discusses in some detail social control and fundamental mechanisms and techniques of social control. The chapter concludes with an outline of Richard Jung's concept of self, the core of experience and action. In his view the self is an "itinerant self", volatile, unstable, and not to be localized after all.

Chapter 6 switches to a different topic. First and Second Order Cybernetics are discussed under the double perspective of mind/organism or subject/object. This double perspective is proposed by the author as a consequence of his ontological monism and epistemological dualism. In the last chapter of this first part of the book Richard Jung proposes on six pages highly condensed foundations for "Postmodern Systems Theory".

Part II presents an outline of the author's systems theory of action and experience. For lack of space this is more a description than an argument.

In the first chapter of the Part II, Chapter 8, the Richard Jung provides a conceptualization of the psycho-social system which is strongly inspired by the work of Parsons and Shils. Jung extends and adapts their theories to his own theoretical approach. This conceptual scheme is then used to discuss the issue of (psychological) change and development of the individual and to arrive at a classification of different types of change in such a system.

Chapter 9 returns to ontology. It discusses the nature of man which can be seen in four different ways: classically either as a fact of nature or as a special entity of the cosmos, more recently also as an artifact or as a focus of meaning. For Jung, the term "meaning" is practically synonymous with "information". So far the basic split between the world of energy (and explanation) and the world of meaning (and understanding or "Verstehen") remains intact. After a discussion of the problems of explanation and understanding the author suggests as his own solution to combine the four metaphors as jointly providing the program of the life sciences. The latter he concretizes in the following by proposing his Unified Theory of Action, based on what he calls phenomenological systems analysis.

This theory implies as a basic principle that only constraints are to be used as explanations, no goals or purposefulness whatsoever. A second basic principle, on which Richard Jung insists repeatedly along the book, is the use of functional analysis. This means, that in the face of constraints

(independent variables) a set of intervening variables (a subsystem or mechanism) stabilizes an essential variable (dependent variable).

The Unified Theory of Action has as its own essential variable inauthenticity (of an actor, a group or a collectivity) which is to be kept at a minimum by the action system. The action system in its turn is composed of three subsystems, orientation, decision, and motivation which have their own respective essential variables. For all three subsystems sub-theories are presented.

The next chapter, 10, is a reprint from the Festschrift for Felix Geyer [i]. It recapitulates issues from the previous discussions with a somewhat stronger focus on experience. The author conceives the mind as a system, i.e. a set of variables and a set of relations. It is a system of intentions, whereby intentions are characterized by the (epistemological) duality of experience and action. According to the author's ontological monism, experience and action can be seen both as subjective and as objective phenomena, depending on the perspective used. In a similar way a system of intentions can be seen as a system of experiences (input side) or a system of action (output side).

In both perspectives a system of intentions is composed of the three subsystems motivation, decision, and orientation. These are elaborated in Chapters 11, 12, and 13 respectively.

 17

Motivation is discussed as stress and deformation of the surface of a system, which may or may not proliferate internally. The theory of decisions provides links to (micro-) sociology and social psychology and identifies different types of decision processes, decision-makers, and different types of systems of orientation. What is called here system of orientation corresponds roughly to what otherwise might be called cognitive system in a rather broad sense which includes values. According to Jung this subsystem produces a (cognitive) world out of indefiniteness by using different sets of operators in different steps of operations. From this process twelve different systems of discourse may result, which in their turn may give rise to different systems of

judgement, if certain sets of operators produce the corresponding transformations.

The book concludes with a brief outlook on work in progress. This concerns systems and significance and aims at overcoming the gap between the naturalist and the humanist study of man. In an annex finally, a large set of tables documents and summarizes the overall body of theory presented in the book.

5. Observations

The book is a collection of papers written over many years, not a monograph. This necessarily leads to ruptures and gaps in the presentation of a highly complex and sophisticated system of thought and does not always permit the systematic and coherent argument to be expected from such an ambitious project. It also results in a certain redundancy, as independently written articles necessarily imply repetition of certain fundamental statements and suppositions. This redundancy, however, helps to better understand the very complex subject matter and the specific terminology of the author.

More bothersome to the attentive reader, who would like to follow-up on the literature quoted, is that not all literature from the individual chapters is listed in the bibliography at the end of the book. Also that bibliography does not go beyond the 1970ies. Inclusion of some of the more current relevant literature would certainly be desirable. The work draws heavily on a few of the classics, the giants on the shoulders of whom we stand: Freud and C.G. Jung for psychology, Parsons for sociology. In particular for Jung's perspectivist monist arguments, that meaning/information and matter/energy are two sides of the same coin, e.g. the trilogy by Tom Stonier, who considers information as "the internal structure of the universe" would be a very substantial enrichment and support [ii]. Also the theory of distinctions of George Spencer-Brown[iii] Also the statement that only constraints are to be used as explanations, no goals or purposefulness might very well complement and enhance Richard Jung's theory about indefiniteness.

The use of, all historically-empirically derived, metaphors and the request for their formalization is doubtlessly inspiring and heuristically valuable and helpful. However, it raises the question, whether such an approach is adequate for a philosophical foundation of a systems theory which is intended to serve all of the life sciences.

The presentation of the vast theoretical body is highly condensed in the description of numerous categories, classifications, and their combinations. This is certainly very useful to provide a view of the overall structure of the author's thinking. More explanatory argument, however, would be desirable to convince the reader to accept these ideas, instead of referring him to other publications of the author.

It would be desirable, e.g., to get more explanation about how the concept of development, the discussion of which is very useful and inspiring for those who deal with this issue, is related to the neighbouring concepts of change (social change) and evolution.

Also the statement that only constraints are to be used as explanations, no goals or purposefulness [iv], would deserve more argument and elaboration. After all this view is very surprising for an author who is otherwise very close to psychological thinking, where objectives, goals, and values (not to be confounded with a metaphysical teleology!) usually play a very important role. A consistent argument  18 along the line of ontological monism and the perspectivism involved in pluralist epistemology might lead to a different conclusion, if based strictly on the metaphor of mind.

Quite thought provoking, especially in the age of the Internet, is the second part of Chapter 5 dealing with (social) communication and control related to the phenomena of space and time and of being in time. These ideas might be highly interesting and important for organization and management science or also media science.

6. Relevance of the Book and Conclusion

The book is valuable reading for anybody interested in systems and cybernetics who does not want to

see bits and pieces only. In spite of some weaknesses it provides a wide view of Richard Jung's systems theory, ranging from its philosophical foundations to theoretical frameworks applicable for research in the social sciences. Evidently this large body of theory could not be fully elaborated and argued within the limited size of this book.

In addition to its usefulness as a theoretical framework for research (especially Part II and the tables in the annex), and maybe even more important, the discussion of a wide range of fundamental problems of systems theory in particular and the life sciences in general along with Richard Jung's proposals for solutions make it an intellectually stimulating and thought provoking book, which can help to find new and creative answers to some old and difficult questions.

References

- i) SCOTT, Bernard; MISHEVA, Vessela; VAN DIJKUM, Cor (Guest Editors): Festschrift for Felix Geyer, *Kybernetes*, The International Journal of Systems & Cybernetics, vol. 35, no. 3/4, pp. 323-346 2006.
- ii) STONIER, Tom: *Information and the Internal Structure of the Universe, An Exploration into Information Physics*, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1990; STONIER, Tom: *Beyond Information, The Natural History of Intelligence*, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1992; STONIER, Tom: *Information and Meaning, An Evolutionary Perspective*, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1997.
- iii) SPENCER-BROWN, George: *Laws of Form*, 1st Edition, Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1969; on related issues in this context also e.g. HORNUNG, Bernd R.: *Science, Technology, and Innovation in Society*, in: AGUADO, Juan Miguel; SCOTT, Bernard; BUCHINGER, Eva (eds.): *Technology and Social Complexity*, pp. 25-62, Editum - Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia, Murcia, Spain 2009.
- iv) A systems theory of values and orientation was developed by BOSSEL, Hartmut: *Earth at a Crossroads, Paths to a Sustainable Future*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; BOSSEL, Hartmut: *Ecosystems and Society, Implications for Sustainable Development*, in: *World Futures*, vol. 47, pp. 143-213, OPA - Overseas Publishers Association, Amsterdam 1996; BOSSEL, Hartmut: *Indicators for Sustainable Development: Theory, Method, Applications*, A Report to the Balaton Group, IISD - International Institute for Sustainable Development, Winnipeg, Canada 1999.