

Center for Systems Research ¹
Working Papers ²

SYSTEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Prefaces

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Outline S&S 0a1

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PREFACES

PREFACE TO 2ND EXPANDED REVISION

For years now, I have been interested in developing an integrated and comprehensive conceptual and formal framework for the behavioral and social sciences. As I became familiar with the various relevant fields, I attempted to select and modify, in order to formulate a coherent picture.

One day I sat to write it all down, and after several hours this outline emerged. Most of the material included I presented at one time or other to classes, seminars, and professional meetings. Recently, I started to write up various portions of the outline. Occasionally, a single line in the outline required thirty, fifty, or more pages of compact text. The currently completed texts are listed in the attached Bibliography.

In this revision (771008), I have included my own view of the nature of man, and my position with respect to the epistemology of the behavioral and social sciences. The conception of the collective system now has the same degree of formal closure as that of the individual system. The new, revised, or re-numbered entries are identified by a "+" sign.

Mill Woods, 8 October 1977.

PREFACE TO 3RD EXPANDED REVISION

In the 3rd revision (870801) the "+" signs indicating additions, revisions, or reorganization in the previous edition have been dropped. Instead, a "§" indicates new or newly organized material in the 3rd version of the Outline.

The Outline is being revised and expanded to incorporate the changes and additions that I have made during the last ten years. The purpose of the numbering system is to make possible multiple references and cross-references to other items within the outline, as well as to relevant bibliographical material, full texts, and text fragments. The work is being done as a step toward implementing the material outlined as a computer accessible hypertext.

Major portions of the Outline refer to the formulation of the syntax of, and the definitions of terms in, (1) a general systems language, and (2) general languages of individual actions, interactions in groups, transactions in aggregates, and transformations in collectives.

The development of such languages is one of the objectives of the 'Support, Survival and Culture' Research Program at the University of Amsterdam. It is in the context, and with the support, of this program that the 3rd version of the Outline has been produced.

It is also a preliminary step toward the formulation of a socio-technic support language, to be eventually implemented on computer as the conceptual part of a Socio-Technic Support System.

Jordaans, Amsterdam, 1 August 1987.

PREFACE TO 4TH EXPANDED REVISION

Having returned to Edmonton after several stays in Europe, I have again access to the memory of my computer. In this revision, I have included some items that belonged in the “Outline”.

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 1 April 1988.

PREFACE TO 5TH EXPANDED REVISION

A Dutch colleague has kindly asked me to write a chapter for a book he is editing. I tore myself from my worries and daily chores and looked through some of the material that is lying idly in the memory of my computer. I felt overwhelmed by the complexity of the various small publications, unfinished manuscripts, outlines, tables, and notes.

Realizing that the end of my life is nearing rapidly, and that I shall never complete and publish the project that I started some half century ago, I decided at least to attempt to organize it in this major expansion and revision of the “Outline”.

I have started today, 15 January 1995. If the work on the outline is finished, I shall also revise its title.

4.02.95: By now I have not only revised the title to “System and Significance”, but also managed to expand the “Outline” to include all other outlines of my major theoretical projects, e.g., my work on the metaphysical foundations of system theory, on the development of the system idea through the ages, on the metaphors for the hermeneutics of life, on the nature and evolution of communication, on the nature of time, on being in time, and on some of the methodological consequences of all these ideas for the social sciences.

There remains the arduous task of integrating all the partial outlines into one, consistent and minimally redundant outline.

10.02.95: The chore with the mechanics of the “Outline” has finally brought me into the spirit of the whole original enterprise, to which I have not been able to pay any attention for the last live years. Here and then, I am getting new ideas. I have again redone the overall structure of the outline, putting all the formal parts — about general systems analysis — in the beginning, and concluding with the application to the life sciences last.

16.02.95: I have finally settled on a format for the Outline and am ready to print the first draft.

Kutná Hora, Czech Republic, 16 February 1995.

PREFACE TO 6TH EXPANDED REVISION

More than another seven years have elapsed. During that time I have been preoccupied with, or have let myself be derailed by, matters that seemed to need all my attentions and energy. The relationship with my children was foremost. The reconstruction and maintenances of or family farm, devastated during the five years of German occupation and the imprisonment of all members of the family except for my sister in her early teens, but mainly during the more than 40 years of Communist dictatorship left me with a task that I have perceived as a personal mission, but that under the technological and labor conditions that only those who experienced directly post-communism can appreciate, required almost all my determination and resources.

My health, another victim of Nazism, Communism and Post-Communism, was finally restored when I forced my way to the adequate top medical facilities in Prague and underwent several surgeries, including a five-fold coronary by-pass. For almost three years I had my legs almost paralysed and was in considerable pain that did not respond to medication based on incorrect diagnosis. When it was finally determined that it was due to spinal fractures suffered during torture by the Gestapo in 1945, I could take steps that lead to a recovery that now late for a couple of years.

Due to my childhood indoctrination I have also spent much time in attempts, that others regard as significant, to contribute variously to the development of civic society in the region. For several years I published a weekly column in the local paper (that is now going to be published in a book form) and organized monthly discussion and social events with outstanding Czech and foreign personalities.

While in pain, I have made the mistake of letting several self-declared experts perform various operations on my computer. After I began to discover the consequences, I started doing everything myself. It has taken me over half a year of intensive effort to recover somewhat the data I had stored before 1966 (when I had my bypass). Among others, the whole project "System and Significance" had to be re-inputted from damaged computer files, hard copies of notes and manuscripts, and from memory.

I am back at it again, having today reformatted in MS Word this file, and written this, the 6th Preface. Perhaps I shall have some peace, time and energy to continue.

Kutná Hora, Czech Republic, 10 August 2002.