

Convergences of General System Theory, Critical Realism and Theory of Society

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1 Emergentist systemism

	scientific disciplines
aims	objective (praxiological question): to provide knowledge in order to solve problems (to reach a certain goal by a certain operation from a certain starting point)
scope	object of study (ontological question): a segment of reality about which knowledge is wanted
tools	objectivating methodology (epistemological question): means of generating knowledge that can be corroborated

1 Emergentist systemism

	systems sciences (GST)
aims	objective: to provide knowledge to design systems (a new weltanschauung)
scope	object of study: systems, their dynamics and architecture (a new world picture)
tools	objectivating methodology: how to understand systemic dynamics and hierarchies (a new way of thinking)

1 Emergentist systemism

	social systems sciences (GST)
aims	to provide knowledge to design systems – to reduce dysfunctions of social systems by transformations into states of higher order based upon scientific anticipations of sustainable future organisational relations
scope	systems, their dynamics and architecture – social self-organisation: actors giving rise to emergent organisational relations that, in turn, shape the actors' capacity to (inter-)act
tools	how to understand systemic dynamics and hierarchies – applying the perspective of social relationality: putting behavioural observations into the context of the evolution of organisational relations

2 Criticism

	critical social sciences (CR)
aims	objective: to provide knowledge about the „good“ society – a state of human emancipation: concrete utopias for empowering all actors to sublimate antagonistic social relationships that originate from heteronomies
scope	object of study: „mechanisms“ – dialectic of social action and social relations: the mechanisms by which society/structure is produced by, and, in turn, conditioning, individuals/agency
tools	objectivating methodology: how to understand those „mechanisms“ – applying the perspective of historicity and social totality: putting phenomena into the context of the development of societal relations

2.1 Emancipation

overcoming the incongruence between the here-and-now and the vision:

– **the here-and-now:** social reality is

(1) a realisation of certain possibilities and, at the same time,

(2) the basis of certain other possibilities that are not realised but can be realised (for the better or for the worse);

– **the vision:** a wishful future state of society that might (**concrete utopia** – as „not-yet“ foreshadowing in the space of possibilities) or might not (**abstract utopia** – doomed to failure) be rooted in the here-and-now (Ernst Bloch)

2.2 Dialectic of social action and social relations

research into the transition from one state to another:

- with any social action, one possibility is collectively realised that
 - (1) **reproduces** social relations anew as objective reality and/or
 - (2) **transforms** actual social relations into another objective reality that forms a new whole;
- with any establishment of social relations, the objective reality
 - (1) **enables** actors to benefit from collective action in comparison with individual action and/or
 - (2) **constrains** them as parts of the whole so as to impede actions that would hamper the whole

2.3 Historicity and social totality

understanding of the social through connecting the appearing social action to the essential social relationships:

- by ascending from the **abstract** to the **concrete**,
- (1) the **appearance of agency**, the behaviour of the actors, a diversity of isolated single aspects, achieved through analysis of empirical observations, can be knit together
- (2) through the social relations, **the structure, as essence**, achieved through synthesis in the course of theorising

3 Theory of society in the global age: critical social systems theory

3.1 Criticism in the global age

	critical social sciences (CR) in the global age
aims	to provide knowledge about a state of human emancipation – breaking through the enclosure of the commons to avoid the breakdown of civilisation
scope	dialectic of social action and social relations – the produsage of the commons on the global level
tools	applying the perspective of historicity and social totality – theorising the unfolding of relations of commoning in the history of humanity

3.2 Emergentist systemism in the global age

	critical social systems sciences (CSST) in the global age
aims	to provide knowledge to reduce dysfunctions of social systems by transformations into states of higher order – to treat and prevent social frictions through nesting all social systems/actors in a world system of governance: a global sustainable information society
scope	social self-organisation – global commoning: the produsage of commons as social synergy
tools	applying the perspective of social relationality – a systems approach to the global commons: synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

3.2.1 A global sustainable information society

A global sustainable information society is that concrete utopia that is needed. It is the only way to accomplish

- (1) for the first time in history, **on a planetary scale,**
- (2) the **reorganisation of the social relations** such that dangers of anthropogenic breakdown can be promisingly handled
- (3) by conscious and conscientious actors who are capacitated to **create requisite knowledge** because they are not only self-concerned but also community-concerned.

3.2.2 The produsage of commons as social synergy

Any social system is a social system by virtue of organisational relations of production and provision of (the) common(-good)s.

Good society:

in a good society happy individuals perform a function for the system itself while enacting their agency for the sake of good life.

3.2.2 The produsage of commons as social synergy

However, the enclosure of the commons has become ubiquitous:

Private property of means of production has kicked off the enclosure of commons (Karl Marx). Today it is not only material wealth growing masses are deprived of, but **any field of social life has become subject to the enclosure of commons (Slavoj Zizek).**

3.2.3 Synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

The importance of organisational relations:

everything is matter, progressively organised, from

- material systems to
- living material systems to
- social living material systems;

the difference between different manifestations of matter is
different organisation to allow for synergy.

3.2.3 Synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's „relation of organisation“ in living systems

As opposed to the analytical, summative and machine theoretical viewpoints, organismic conceptions¹ have evolved in all branches of modern biology which assert the necessity of investigating not only parts but also relations of organisation resulting from a dynamic interaction and manifesting themselves by the difference in behaviour of parts in isolation and in the whole organism.

– L. v. Bertalanffy: An Outline of General System Theory. In: British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1950, pp. 219-220 –

3.2.3 Synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

	way of thinking lower and higher complexity	way of thinking identity and difference
reductionism	reduces higher complexity to lower complexity	identity without difference (unification)
projectivism	projects higher complexity onto lower complexity	
disjunctivism	disjoins higher complexity from lower complexity	difference without identity (diversification)
emergentist systemism	integrates lower with higher complexity and differentiates between them	unity of identity and difference (unity through diversity)

3.2.3 Synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

Understanding of the social through connecting appearing social actions to **essential types of social relationships:**

- antagonisms
- agonisms
- synergisms

3.2.3 Synergism as sublation of antagonism and agonism

	social relation	dealing with the one and the many	
universalism		contradictoriness: conflict of mutually exclusive positions (contrapositions)	negation of any difference
particularism			antagonism
relativism	agonism	contrariness: co-existence of oppositions	juxtaposition of every difference in their own right
unity- through- diversity perspective	synergism	complementariness: convergence of mutually supporting propositions	composition made up by all differences

Thank you for your attention!

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