



The cold war within a sociological systems perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – To provide a systems explanation of world wars as civilizational phenomena with a special focus on the cold war defined as an interaction war between two parties which cannot communicate with each other.

Design/methodology/approach – As a theoretical framework for this analysis an elaborated version of Luhmann's systems theory is used which discusses the relationship between systems and media. The method is defined as a third-order cybernetics which entails first-order observations, second-order observation of observers, and finally their mutual observations as being observed.

Findings – Identifies the east-west ideological conflict as a conflict within the world system of society by which the system is at war with itself. This "self" is considered as comprising two parts: self and other. The one is identified as an autopoietic system and the other as an allopoietic system, each struggling for the status of system and for the transformation of the other into its medium. The traditional understanding of the history of the European civilization as having one single ancestor is challenged.

Research limitations/implications – It is not an exhaustive analysis but rather an outline of a theory whose purpose is to define the source of international and intranational confrontations.

Practical implications – The approach can be developed further and used for the analysis of the war on terrorism and the relationship between political system and social movements.

Originality/value – The paper offers an innovative systems perspective on world wars with a special focus on the cold war which promises to overcome the difficulties which their analysis with traditional sociological theories at present encounters.

Keywords Sociology, War, Cybernetics, Communication

Paper type Research paper

The cold war: more questions than answers

It is perhaps true that no two wars are alike, but the east/west cold war that began following the end of the hot war in 1945 seemed to be a very distinct species. The cold war was first of all an "ideological contest" that split the world, Europe, and Germany in particular, into antagonistic spheres of influence (Gaddis, 1992, p. 21). In addition to this ideological dimension, the cold war also had a geopolitical dimension as a geopolitical power play in which national, institutional, and even personal psychological considerations also played an important role (Garthoff, 1992, p. 128). What made the cold war especially dangerous was that it was a global struggle between two worlds, each of which viewed the other as committed to a struggle to the end, "until, ultimately, theirs would triumph" (Garthoff, 1992, p. 127). However, a full-scale armed conflict was to be prevented by all means possible, not least of all because of the threat of nuclear war[1]. This was perhaps one of the reasons why the hot confrontations of the two opposed powers took more covert forms through involvement in conflicts outside of their own territories, such as in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Angola, etc.



After the end of the cold war, certain authors suggested that it should be understood as a confrontation between the First and the Third Worlds which was “only indirectly about US-Soviet strategic conflict” insofar as the violence it generated took place primarily in the Third World (Cumings, 1992, p. 98)[2]. Other authors also note the “terrible misery” that was inflicted on the Third World, which was transformed into a “Cold War arena” (Steel, 1992, p. 105). But although it thereby suffered perhaps even more than the two main combatants, this fact does not appear to provide sufficient grounds for dispensing with the view that the cold war was first and foremost an ideological war.

And regardless of certain opinions to the contrary, the cold war was neither a traditional war aimed at gaining control over territories, nor even a geopolitical struggle aimed at gaining control over the world as a whole. If there were in fact contested territories, they were above all those located in Eastern Europe. Indeed, some thirty years ago virtually all writers on the subject viewed “the development of Soviet-American conflict over the political future of Eastern Europe to have been the major cause” of the cold war (Davis, 1974, pp. 3-4). In this respect, understanding both the nature of this war as well as the reasons why the contesting powers became entangled in Third World is contingent upon the reasons why Europe became contested territory in the first place[3]. But not only are the latter still unclear, the end of the cold war opened a host of additional questions that also have not yet been satisfactorily answered. For example, it is not clear why the end of the cold war was not anticipated, why it ended as it did, why it ended at all, who ended it, who won the war, and what was “won.” The cold war is thus a “knot” of interrelated puzzles, and it is difficult to see which of the questions should be answered first so that the others could be tackled as well.

Although the prevailing opinion is that the cold war should be defined as both an ideological and geopolitical struggle, I propose that it should first be examined in respect to what appears to be its most unique feature, namely, the fact that it was an ideological war. While the term “ideological war” seems to be intuitively clear and is now widely used, a serious analysis of what this type of war entails has never been undertaken. For example, an ideological war is not a conflict for control over a particular geographical region or territory. Nor is it a conflict over possession, access to, or control of particular natural or material resources, including human resources. It is rather a war between two different world views or philosophies of life (*Weltanschauung*) for the definition of the world. World views separate people of different language groups, with different social experiences and social histories. Languages in this sense represent different observation positions that define how the world will be perceived and what kind of meaning will be attached to events. In this regard, the cold war as an ideological war was not a war that can be explained by analysis on the level of international relations. What is necessary instead is a theoretical framework that allows for an examination of world society as a world comprised of sub-worlds each of which identifying itself with the whole.

A systems explanation of world wars

World wars are strange social phenomena that have no rational explanation as normal attributes of a world that conceives of itself as civilized and prizes itself for having taken a distance from its barbarian past. In spite of all attempts at explanation, world

wars remain a challenge to the social sciences, which can do no more than indicate their immediate causes while being in no position to identify their profound meaning. The sociological systems theory developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann in the second half of the twentieth century, which is a uniquely complex interdisciplinary theory of society, makes it possible to analyze world wars in a novel way. Luhmann views society as a single autopoietic (self-producing) system of communications that as such comprises world society. In the light of this theory, world wars can be regarded as systems phenomena whose profound causes are primarily connected with communications, or the definition of communication borders, and only secondarily entail the definition of territorial borders.

Luhmann argues that social systems have both *self-reference* and *other-reference*. This means that all their operations and selections are carried out in relation to themselves, or to the inside, while their other-reference is directed towards that which lies beyond their systems borders. From a systems perspective, however, a world war breaks out not as a war of certain nations against others, but, paradoxically, as *a war of the social system against itself*. Stated otherwise, the system finds its enemy within itself, which means that the system has both self-reference and other-reference towards itself. But this is impossible given the present level of development of systems theory insofar as the system is a unity that cannot itself consist of two opposed systems. And even though the social system is differentiated into functional subsystems or "subjects," a world war is never a war of one functional system against another. The point here is that the study of world wars from a systems perspective requires the further development of systems theory itself and necessitates the use of yet another, more humanistic type of methodology whereby social systems are regarded not as indivisible subjects but as social selves that represent a subject/object unity. This type of methodology may be based, for example, on George Herbert Mead's philosophy and theory of social selves, which is at the heart of the distinct theoretical approach known as symbolic interactionism and is related to the Chicago School in social psychology.

The hypothesis underlying the present discussion is that although world wars cannot be explained in terms of the relationships between subjects, be they nation states, political or geographical units, or even social systems, they can be explained within the framework of a systems theory that replaces subjects with social selves. Although Luhmann initiated a revolution in sociology by shifting the center of sociological theory from action to communication, this revolution appears to have not yet been completed. While his theory views systems as subjects, communication remains a type of action that can be attributed only to a single person, not to two people or two interaction parties at the same time. It is necessary to go beyond the level at which action is attributed to one system or another and analyze communication as a process that involves two interaction parties, both of whom contribute to the resulting action or communication. This becomes obvious when we take into account the fact that neither world wars as such, nor particular battles can be attributed to one particular party. The cold war comprises the greatest conundrum for political analysts, and it should be no surprise that the relevant literature contains no clear answers to such questions as who began it and who ended it, who lost and who won.

All observations are carried out from a single observation position. But it is not possible to find one observation position from which to objectively observe a world war as a struggle between two powers, each of whom has its own observation position.

There is no neutral “third” position between the opposing powers from which to conduct an objective observation of their confrontation. Observing a world war requires the construction of a special type of observation position which is more like a *bridge* that links two sides rather than a point in space. The observer thus has no particular location but rather oscillates between the two sides. This gives her the possibility of observing how each of the two sides observes the other, to compare their observations, and to link them together into a meaningful whole. Although there are two observers who are observed instead of one, this still is an observation of observers and thus *second-order cybernetics*. What is important for the observer is how the two observed observers observe each other and what is that which they can and cannot see. Also needed, however, is an analysis of how the two sides observe that they have been observed. This can be called *third-order cybernetics*, a term that Luhmann occasionally used but did not clearly define in his work. But wars are special objects of study in that they are not simply objects but rather interaction wholes. This makes sociology uniquely qualified for their study and understanding. The type of analysis proposed here apparently should go not only beyond an analysis of action. It also should go beyond an analysis of *observation* which involves a shift in attention from macro-sociology to *perception* and social psychology. The difference is essential. Observations is about seeing *differences*. Perception is about seeing *wholes*. What will be interesting for the observer who observes the war is not only what and whether the two parties observe but also what and whether they also perceive.

The advantages of the initiated shift of attention to social psychology become immediately clear. If systems theory views society as one single social system, or world society, which should consequently be understood as one single subject, then the question is how to identify these two sides. Systems theory forbids us to conceive of world wars as wars between two social systems or two “subjects,” both of whom represent the world. The shift in analysis to the level of social psychology, however, makes it possible to conceive of world wars as wars between two different societal “selves,” each of which should be analyzed first and foremost in its own terms, not merely in reference to the other. I term these “selves” civilizational selves, one of which – “individualistic,” struggling to preserve its single status as a subject, while the other – “collectivistic,” struggling to be recognized as a subject with the right to define its own boundaries and acquire a systems form.

But how is it possible for the status of the “system” itself to be contested within society, which is a single system? Who are the “contestants?” According to Luhmann’s theory, what we find within a system is the system itself and its medium. Luhmann argues that a system is an autonomous unity that defines its own boundaries and carries out all its operation in relation to self. In contrast, not only do media not exist, they cannot even be perceived until the system ascribes a form to them. They thus cannot be studied on their own terms and they can be said to exist only to the extent that they are necessary for the operations of the system. From the point of view of the system, media are loosely connected elements that are characterized by a “higher degree of dissolubility together with the receptive capacity for fixation of shape” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 216), are ready to accept any form, ready to be shaped in accord with the subject’s will. But the fact that media in Luhmann’s conception are “no-things” that do not really exist and have no agency, to which no action can be attributed, need not be taken as “reality.” It should rather be taken as a consequence of either the

particular position of the observer or the “bias” of his observational instruments. If we instead assume that it is possible for an observation position to be located in the medium, then we may say that media are not always the “happy recipients of forms” but may also view systems as oppressors or, in Habermas’ (1987) words, “colonizers.”

If we view system and medium against the background of this analysis as two observation positions, each of which possesses agency, then we can begin to examine world wars in a new light. For example, the cold war may then be viewed as a struggle between two powers, each of which perceived itself as the system and struggled to ascribe the subordinate status of “medium” to the other. It thus appear that it is nothing less than a struggle for power whereby “power” becomes identified as systems position. This was then a struggle on the part of a particular world to attain the status of “system” and be recognized as the “subject” who possessed the right to define the communication boundaries of the world and thereby decide what is and is not communication, what should be “inside” and what should be “outside,” what should be “self” and what should be “other.” In this sense, world wars may be understood as wars that are immediately related to tendencies of the socio-cultural centers of European civilization, as has been observed, to shift from one part of the civilized world to another and to bestow a dominant position now of one language or language group now of another.

These considerations translate the problem of world wars and social problems in general into the terms of a subtle conflict between the system and its “other” that may be expressed in systems terms as *a war between system and medium*. This hypothesis has dramatic implications for an understanding of international relations. When world wars are understood as wars between systems and media, it becomes clear that media have agency, that they are not merely the compliant receivers of systems forms but have properties which, when not taken into account, may break forms just as water may burst the bottle in which it is contained when it freezes. The system’s imposition of “unloved” forms upon the medium may lead to the media declaring war on the system that has come to be perceived as “the colonizer.” Luhmann’s theory maintains that neither communications nor social actions can be attributed to the medium. But even if the “actions” of the medium are not social actions or actions in the strict systems sense of the term, even if the system does not view them as rational or conscious, and even if they are not considered to be social they nevertheless are carried out by an agency and may very well be capable of delivering messages to the system. It is tempting to borrow Habermas’s term and define this type of action as “communicative action.”

Luhmann maintains that no system can communicate with its environment but his theory says nothing about the possibility that systems may communicate with their media. It may be assumed, however, that since he saw little difference between “environment” and “medium,” he would also argue no system can communicate with its medium. But if we accept that there are “communicative actions,” as Habermas insists, then it would be possible to maintain that the medium can establish communication with the system in an unusual way. This involves the medium producing actions whose meaning will be understood even though they may not be “social actions” and not have a verbal expression. One example that comes to mind in this regard are terrorist acts, such as suicide bombings, which the civilized world consider to be violent crimes that must be suppressed by all necessary means, even

though it is difficult to determine who should be punished. The system of the mass media, which Luhmann accused of structural coupling with protest movements and generally taking their side, sometimes suggests a different perception of events because it often attempts to analyze even terrorist actions as a message that needs to be decoded and understood[4]. Systems theory may provide an explanation as to why political violence became a means to communicate powerful messages. If Luhmann's claim is correct that no system can communicate with its environment or medium, how else could the medium attract the attention of the system and establish communication with it? Is not any possibility for political negotiation in principle ruled out when system and medium do not speak one and the same language? Taking into account the ability of the mass media to understand their environment and decode messages it is then not surprising that terrorism and the media were seen as being "in a quasi-symbolic relationship" (Nacos, 2002, p. 29).

If one assumes, on the contrary, that such statements are an exaggeration and that communication is always possible insofar as it depends on nothing but the good will of both sides, then world politicians should be asked to explain why the cold war was unavoidable, why they were unable to negotiate any peaceful solution but continued to escalate armaments production and why those who put an end to the war were not the politicians themselves but "the people." If we assume that their failure to place themselves at the forefront of events was not a mistake on the part of the politicians but rather a logical development of events, for which international relations has no theory to offer in explanation, then it appears there is no choice but to begin paying serious attention to Luhmann's systems theory and to system/medium relations. World wars happen precisely because of a type of communication between two poles or two powers, each of which is the reason for the other's existence and yet attempts to deny the other's "subjectivity."

This situation is perhaps once again best explained in Habermas' terms as a "legitimation crisis," or in Arendt's (1958) terms as the disappearance of authority. As it is well known from the history of totalitarian regimes, there can be no legitimacy of power where there is no real power and authority. The fact that the system resorts to violence indicates that the system is incapable of preserving its systems status and of assigning a form to its medium, which is growing in complexity and refuses to submit to the imposition of a form. Insofar as no system has two centers or two subjects, social evolution is a zero-sum game. However, the problem is not that the medium refuses to be shaped at all and should be granted the status of another "master" but rather that the relationship between system and medium has deteriorated over the centuries and that what once was supposed to be mutual love has gradually developed into mutual hatred.

From the perspective of the present discussion, system and medium are two necessary systems positions or roles. The point is not to transform the system into the medium and conversely but rather to emphasize that these two systems positions have an unequal status today. The issue of equality does not involve the emancipation of those who have been "colonized," transforming them in their own turn into new "colonizers" and masters. It rather concerns a new humanistic interpretation of the relationship between the social positions of system and medium which at the beginning of civilization history seems to have been one of mutual love but eventually in the course of European civilization it deteriorated and became its pure opposite – a

relationship of power, oppression and hatred. A more careful reading of Plato's dialogues may reveal that the initial relationship between masters and domestic slaves (known also as *pedagogues*) was not a power relationship but rather a relationship between socializer (slave) and the socialized (master). It is only eventually in the course of civilized history that the social position of the slave came to be associated with a miserable state of existence with which neither honor, power, agency, nor value was associated. At times we can still hear classical scholars wonder how it was possible for Aristotle to claim that slaves and masters should be friends and that slaves should love their masters, just as they also wonder how Socrates could have begged a young boy in an apocryphal Platonic dialogue to allow him to become his slave. But how could we ever hope to understand European history when we have apparently lost the ability to understand the basic relationship through which it came into existence and upon which it was built, namely, the submission of the medium by the system?

These considerations need to be placed into more concrete forms and illustrated with the historical material that is at our disposal. One certainly should begin by analyzing classical examples, such as Aristotle's philosophical and political thought, insofar as the labor of the slave, who should be understood as the medium of the master's actions, is a necessary condition for the action of the master, who is viewed as an independent subject or "system." It is as true today as it was for the world of Aristotle that no system can carry out its operations or exist without a medium, as Luhmann maintained. But, as Aristotle indicates and which Luhmann's systems theory implies, action is attributed to the master while the slave is regarded as no more than a "tool" or means for realizing the master's plan of action. The theoretical discussion concerning the status of labor, which Hannah Arendt argued has always been regarded as inferior to work and never regarded as having an equal status with action, is another pertinent example. Modern feminists' demands that care-taking be recognized as "action" and thus work and that women who refuse to accept their "no-person" and non-autonomous object roles be recognized as "subjects," are also cases in point.

Neither the old-fashioned concept of classes nor the modern concept of gender is sufficiently general to explain a relationship that can be defined in systems terms as a relationship between "system" and "medium." This fact becomes apparent when we move to the field of international relationships and consider not the relationships between nation states but the relationships between nations within a nation state, often pictured in terms of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. This is also the case when we examine world wars as wars that cannot be explained in terms of a power play of national interests that readily translates into purely economic terms. The fact that nations also have "feelings" and "souls," the latter most often being understood as language, makes it both possible and necessary that systems theory and social psychology be used together to construct an explanatory framework for the history of civilization. At first glance it appears that the young and controversial new discipline of psycho-history emerged with the pretension to bridge the gap between these two disciplines, but while systems theory currently lacks social psychology, psycho-history apparently lacks macro-sociology or systems theory. In order to understand the social psychology of a particular society, one should first know what society is.

The civilizational dimension of the cold war

The reductionist perspective concerning the cold war that takes it to be a war between the Soviet Union and the USA or between Russia and the west has, perhaps, obscured the fact that the cold war was not a war between nations. The Soviet Union and the USA did not fight this war for various particular national interests that were imposed upon other nations. It is true that the Soviet Union and the USA were the nations which assumed the leading roles in respect to two opposed political blocs. However, they did this as representatives of two different and internationally shared views concerning the world that arose from millenia-long *interactions between nations* that have shared a common “fate” as interaction parties. The problem is that the political borders which exist at present do not coincide with the real borders that separate people who possess differing patterns of acquiring knowledge through language, experience, and thought. It is apparent that the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union did not unite all those people in the world who entertained Marxist views under one “national roof” nor were all opponents of Marxism and communist ideas of social organization to be found only in the west. Consequently, if one wishes to identify the two powers that confronted each other for almost half a century, one should not focus upon political borders and national interests but rather on the civilizational values they represented. Stated otherwise, the understanding that cold war theorists suggest may well prove to be problematic to the extent that their explanations rely upon irrelevant theories. In light of the existing, albeit suppressed or hidden, theoretical crisis in the fields of international relations and political theory, the discussion concerning the need for a theory of world society, along with the relevance of modern sociological systems theory, must be renewed.

Although world views are unintended products of historical and social development, they serve an important social function that is best described by the term “paradigm.” That is to say that world views are paradigms which determine an individual’s perception, actions, values, and beliefs. The term “paradigm” has entered the scientific lexicon through Thomas Kuhn’s controversial work concerning *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn’s model suggests that scientific development is characterized by scientific revolutions that replace the existing paradigm of science with a new one. Within the framework of this model it is impossible to imagine that, for example, two different paradigms of science may exist simultaneously and not replace each other because of the profound difference between them. This means that if one wishes to discuss the cold war as a struggle between two paradigms or world views, Kuhn’s model is inapplicable. One should rather have in mind conflicts associated with historically defined and unchangeable patterns of perception that can never actually be resolved even if they can be suppressed for certain periods of time. Examples of this type of scientific paradigm are idealism and materialism, each of which may become dominant during a particular historical period only in order to be overturned by its rival when the number of problems that it creates (regardless of how many it resolves) becomes intolerable.

It is interesting to observe that Kuhn’s conception of science, which takes the latter as a single system and self-substituting order, was fashioned in the midst of the cold war, when world science was split into two communities that were guided by incompatible world views or paradigms. Nevertheless, nowhere in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 1970) do we find a discussion of the relationship between

the two different “sciences” rooted in two different cultural and civilizational traditions. Kuhn’s analysis is focused on the internal mechanism of science, on its historical rather than geopolitical development. It does not discuss the apparently political question concerning the way in which science is affected by different dominant social paradigms or world views by virtue of the latter’s cognitive functions, whereby they define the ways in which we sense, experience, and know the world.

Within the context of the present discussion, the term paradigm will be defined as a world view that is a product of socio-cultural evolution and is shared by peoples with similar cultures, histories, linguistic, and social experiences. In this respect, the cold war may be defined as an ideological war between two European world views that were supported by different language groups and different historical and social experiences. But these experiences are not different in the sense that they belong to parallel histories or to societies that are alien to each other. On the contrary, the differences between their incommensurable world views were created in the process of sharing one and the same history that was nevertheless viewed from two opposed observations positions.

An analysis of world wars cannot be separated from an analysis of European civilization. This civilization, contrary to previous interpretations that viewed it as a single entity that sprang from a single root (or nation), should instead be discussed as a *difference relation* that involves two different interaction parties. From this perspective, the origin of European civilization should be sought in the relations of dialogue, mutual influence, and conflict between two different descriptions of the world from two opposed parties that have assumed ever new forms in the course of a long historical development. This interactionist perspective is distinct not only from an analysis of European civilization that presumes it has one particular nation as its sole ancestor, but also from an analysis that acknowledges the influence of many other nations upon the nation-progenitor. What we are proposing here is instead a thoroughly sociological, interactionist perspective that assigns credit for the “origin” to neither the one nor the many. If this perspective is accepted, along with the accompanying argument that all social development requires two actors or two interaction partners, it will become apparent that the history of the European civilization should be rewritten.

From this perspective, the cold war was but another division of the world along the lines of this millennia-old division within civilization. It was not an opposition between Byzantium and Rome, between those who wrote in the Latin alphabet and those who used Cyrillic script, between medieval Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity or between idealistic philosophy and modern materialism. It was instead a form of opposition that synthetically combined all of these. It might perhaps be as legitimate to say that the cold war was an ideological confrontation between different empires as it would be to argue that it was a conflict between different Indo-European language groups, different writing cultures, different branches of Christianity and different branches of philosophy.

In light of these considerations, the initial assumption that the cold war as an ideological war had primarily a political character also needs to be revised. It was not simply a conflict between two ideologies that were rooted in different political systems but rather a conflict between two ideologies that are rooted in two perspectives upon civilization that have as much to do with the present political reality of the modern

world as they do with even the most distant events and historic realities from our civilization's past.

Cold war territorial borders

The two “social systems” of communism and capitalism cannot be understood as nation states writ large and the relations between them cannot be understood as “international relations.” Such concepts as “society of states” or “national ‘state-society complexes’ – which underpin the very notion of ‘international relations’” are inapplicable to the study of such world phenomena as the cold war (Albert, 2004, p. 16). An analysis of the world during the cold war indicates the relevance of Albert’s concern about the problems facing the field of international relations if Luhmann’s systems theory is not taken seriously. Albert explains the fact that “theories of international relations pay only scant attention to theories of society” with “the necessity of preserving disciplinary identity” (Albert, 2004, p. 15). It is apparent, however, that a sociological revolution is knocking on the door of international relations, a field that nevertheless continues to entertain the idea that the existence of a sophisticated theory of society does not necessarily mean that the “largely uncritical adoption of a classical notion of ‘society’ which is intimately linked to the nation state” should be abandoned (Albert, 2004, p. 16). The problem is that this revolution does not merely entail “cosmetic changes” or enrich the existing theoretical arsenal with yet another weapon. It rather demands a change of mind-set in such a way that analyzing global processes will no longer be based on traditional images of transgressing national boundaries and drawing distinctions between social entities on the basis of territorial factors. This latter type of thinking corresponds to a body of theoretical constructions that no longer help us understand the world. If one instead adopts Luhmann’s theory of society, one must think about society in terms of communication borders, not territorial borders, since he views society as comprised of communications, not bodies or actions. Luhmann (1990, p. 6) in fact states that since only communication is necessarily and inherently social while action is not, actions cannot serve as the elementary unit of the basic processes of social systems. Action theory, which dominated not only sociology but also all of the social sciences, blurs our vision instead of helping us to see reality in sharp focus when it is used to explain the complex phenomena of our modern world. Trying to understand history as a chain of actions that were attributed to particular actors resulted in the fact that history itself became no more than a collection of the biographies of famous people. But the “revolution” that sociological systems theory attempted to initiate does not mean that action theory will suddenly be discarded. It only means that action theory’s pretensions to explain the social world in all its complexity should be restricted, with action being granted the subordinate position it deserves in a world that is overwhelmed by communication problems and populated by self-referential autonomous systems that have no concerns about the other. However, these “systems” are not synonymous with nation states.

For example, the wall erected at the Brandenburg Gate was not merely one of the national borders of the German Democratic Republic, a state formed at the beginning of the cold war. It was instead a cold war border that separated the entire communist bloc from what was perceived to be its environment[5]. It was a symbol of east/west division which simultaneously symbolized that all nations throughout the world were

split in two, just like the German nation. It also indicated not only that Europe as a whole was split in two because of the East and West European military forces that waited on either side of the Brandenburg Gate but also that the entire world was split in two because American and Russian soldiers were also there. The Berlin Wall thus cannot be equated with a national border, and any attempt to analyze it as such would hardly increase our comprehension or knowledge.

There are other differences as well. Unlike any nation state's border, the Berlin Wall was not built to protect the population from a dangerous and hostile environment that had to be kept "outside." It had, of course, the function of controlling the flow of people and goods into the country, but it would have demonstrated itself to be extremely inefficient if this had been its only function[6]. Its primary function was rather to deal with a serious internal problem, known as "the Berlin problem." In metaphorical terms, the Berlin Wall was constructed to stem the "hemorrhage" (consisting of people, qualified labor, and economic products) from an important "artery" of the social organism[7]. In this respect it may be termed a self-constructed "anti-border" that was not opposed to letting the outside in but did not permit what was in to go out. Consequently, and regardless of what appeared to be the case in visual perception, it was not so much that West Berlin was besieged, but rather that the communist system enclosed itself in order to protect what was produced within the system from leaving the system. As a territorial border, however, the Berlin Wall failed to separate people with different mind sets. That is why it became notorious for "theatrical" efforts to illegally defect to the west, however tragic they might have been, whose inventiveness eventually transformed them into facets of cold war history worthy of exhibition in cold war museums.

Indeed, all borders of the former communist bloc, with their barbed wire, mine fields, and electric fencing, were meant only in appearance to protect the territory of the communist world from the west. There was in fact no real threat that the enemy might suddenly launch a mass attack. Their function was rather to prevent the population of Eastern Europe from abandoning their "historical mission" and defecting from the system. For this reason, the system was seen as "anti-human" by virtue of its suppressing such "inalienable" and universal rights of the individual as "freedom of movement," among others.

The borders of modern western nation states are, in contrast, of a completely different nature. By virtue of the basic economic principles, democratic traditions and very design of capitalist societies, their borders have been created in order to protect their inhabitants, provide advantages to them and both control and restrict the inward flow of everything produced beyond the territory in question, including labor power, while also facilitating the outward movement in all possible directions of everything that the system has produced. During the cold war, however, this type of border generated a certain "disadvantage" insofar as all products of the system could easily find their way to communist Eastern Europe, with which the western world was involved in deadly serious competition. As a result, any explanation of McCarthyism intended to be plausible must take into account the fact that the national borders of the USA were incapable of serving as cold war borders and were thus incapable of supporting the country's role as the main warrior and leader of the west. Consequently, what has been perceived as a "political mistake," a failure of democratic governance to follow its own policies or a monstrous violation of constitutional rights may

alternatively be described as an effort on the part of the system to adapt to the cold war situation and compensate for an inherent disadvantage of its modern national borders. One reason why other western countries did not have their own “McCarthy” periods can be seen to reside in the fact that this was not perceived to be necessary when the main “strategic secrets” of the western world were guarded in American repositories. In this respect, the appearance of McCarthyism within American society depended on the extent to which the government was oriented towards political success and winning the cold war. To state this in the language of role theory, this depended on the extent to which the USA was involved in and determined to play its civilization role. The criticism eventually directed against McCarthyism clearly indicates the absence of any understanding of the cold war as a world war, not merely a national war. It would otherwise have been clear that one cannot approve of the cold war and the division of the world into two hostile camps and at the same time oppose McCarthyism as an “unnecessary evil,” as cold war interpreters sometimes do.

Regarding the two worlds simply as two social systems comprised of interrelated nation states leads to a grasp neither of twentieth century world political history nor of its continuation today. A further difficulty resides in the fact that being familiar with the general situation on one side of the division does not mean that one is familiar with the other side as well. Even if one understands the social structure of the western capitalist bloc, it is not possible on that basis to understand how the communist bloc was designed and how it functioned unless one becomes familiar with it in detail on the level of daily experience. Stated otherwise, not only is systems analysis necessary if one wishes to understand the nature of the cold war, that analysis requires the support of a systems theory that is capable of distinguishing between at least two types of systems with different types of system borders.

Insofar as no territorial borders could be drawn between those who shared either the one or the other world view, it appears that both systems were equally spread around the world. The difficulty with which both the Soviet-led bloc and the US-led bloc recognized the national autonomy of third world countries and failed to restrict their operations to their own territories is well known. Both opposing powers were world powers, and they both expanded their operations throughout the world such that each of them could claim that their own proper territory was nothing less than the entire world. Indeed, the world views that they supported were rooted in such basic civilizational values that their supporters could be found in any corner of the world. For this reason, if one would nevertheless insist on defining the territorial borders of the two political systems, then it should be said that their “geographical borders” coincided with nothing less than the world as a whole. Indeed, only in this sense may one say that the cold war was a geopolitical power game in which the world as a whole became contested between two powers, both of whom equally felt that it was their right to rule over it and liberate it from unwanted “invaders.”

The iron curtain as systems boundary

It is clear that the territorial borders of the countries united by the similarities of their world views were not meant to designate the outermost boundaries of their “observation positions” or the cold war front lines. The fact that it was impossible to identify a particular location where the one world finished and the other began, coupled with the inability of social theory to offer an appropriate theoretical framework for

describing cold war reality, reveals why an unusual element, a “theater set,” came into political usage. That is to say that the “border” which separated east from west during the cold war was viewed as having particular properties that could best be ascribed to a peculiar type of a theater curtain – an iron curtain. Indeed, the history of civilization had never before taken a more theatrical form than it did in the cold war. It easily reads as a theater play in which there was much more “imitation of action” than real action and which was characterized by a sequence of speeches and an ongoing dialogue between two interaction parties that revealed insurmountable differences and tragic misunderstanding.

Unfortunately, the social sciences only recently developed an appropriate theoretical concept with which they can designate the “curtain” that fell between east and west and separated them for more than 40 years during the cold period of modern political history. It is still difficult even to say what precisely it symbolized if not a territorial border or front line. One possibility that modern systems theory offers is to discuss it in terms of a “systems boundary” that the social system, understood as world society, constructs in order to separate its “inside” from an unmarked space that is its “outside.” Even this theory needs to be further developed, however, insofar as it presently sheds little light on the properties of the system boundary itself. Furthermore, such an unusual case, in which the world system of society suddenly splits into two visible parts, each of which has its own boundaries that coincide with the world as a whole, necessarily demands much more than systems theory can now offer. Nevertheless, the existing theoretical problems can be worked out within the theoretical framework that systems theory provides because of its unusually high level of complexity, whereby it is capable of tackling an unusually complex reality.

Perhaps Berlin was such a special place during the cold war not so much because the wall was located there, but rather because it was the only place where the iron curtain could clearly be located. Even though the main property of the iron curtain, which also made it a good correlate of a systems boundary, was its invisibility, Berlin was the best place to observe the differences between the two worlds. While a particular individual belonged to the one world and knew what was hidden behind the “Curtain” on his own side, something that the incidental observer from the other side could never see, that same individual was necessarily unable to see more than what was exhibited through the window of the other side, being unable to do more than guess at what was hidden behind the “Curtain.”

It is thus possible to investigate the iron curtain as an entity with a particular structure judging only by what one could see through it rather than by examining its real nature. If one looked through the “curtain” from the one side, one would have seen the “window” of western capitalism. While “besieged” West Berlin was unsuitable as a front line, it was transformed into a cultural center that was intended to propagate the western style of life and its cultural, scientific, and technological superiority. The citizens of West Berlin apparently had to cope with the particular psychological problems that such an unusual life-world entailed, but they also enjoyed privileges that other areas in the west, including Germany, did not have (higher salaries, relaxed military duties, etc.). Viewed from the other side, the “curtain” was designed as the “window of socialism,” as it was proudly called in the east, and it was maintained by the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc that included the countries allied in 1955 through the Warsaw Pact. While the “window” in East Berlin obviously exhibited a quite different

style of life, the latter was no less well-supported by the social, cultural, scientific, and technological achievements of the bloc as a whole.

Although these two “windows” were in fact no more than permanent exhibitions for tourists, who were offered a glimpse of the best that could be offered by two incommensurable life styles dominated by completely different values and rules, Berlin was nevertheless the place where one could observe the differences between market and non-market economies, with the different material qualities of life related to each. The primary distinction between the two “windows” was neither the quality of the products, nor even the dramatic differences in prices, which in the countries of the former communist bloc were unimaginably lower than reasonable price levels on western markets. It was rather the lack of a comfortable variety of goods, a “Spartan” attitude towards appearance and packaging, which in the eyes of the average consumer rendered western goods and markets much more attractive, and the disproportionate rate of demand in respect to supply. That is to say that even in East Berlin, where life was much better and more “beautiful” than in many other places in the communist bloc, one could get an impression of the values that the communist system in Eastern Europe stood for and gain a glimpse of a life-world whose “backstage” was much less attractive.

Even this brief discussion provides the basis for certain general comments on the specific character of the “curtain.” For example, the iron curtain did not so much divide the two worlds as draw them to each other. Precisely because it represented a visual barrier that concealed the real hardships of the life worlds on both sides of the stage, it poorly served the purpose of locking out observers from the other side, instead serving to lock them in. It is paradoxical that the function of the iron curtain can thus be seen to reside both in systems integration as well as in systems differentiation.

Neither the peculiar construction which was the Berlin Wall, nor that which was the iron curtain exhibited the properties of any of the external systems borders discussed by sociological systems theory. In addition, the cold war was a particular period in the development of the world system of society in which the latter split into two world systems of completely different types. The border, which divided them was consequently much more complex than any systems border in a case of normal development. It can perhaps best be described by means of Goffman’s dramaturgical model, which explains social reality as a stage on which interaction between two parties takes place. These interaction partners are in competition with each other, and they have no scruples in choosing the means that can lead them to success, including deception and the use of spies and shills to discover the secrets that the other keeps “backstage.” Many sociologists found Goffman’s model to be cynical and morally unacceptable and yet no one could deny that there was some truth in it. They did not grasp, however, that the American sociologist Goffman had not described social reality in general but rather the reality of a social world entangled in a cold war. His model should then not be understood as a model of interaction in general but rather as the model of an *interaction war*.

Berlin during the cold war could be viewed as two shop display windows facing each other, stages as it were. The chance visitor could enter each of these shops and, not knowing anything about the difference between “front stage” and “back stage,” imagine that what she/he saw was everyday life itself. Goffman’s (1990) dramaturgical model, fashioned in the midst of the cold war, suggests that the reality backstage,

where all the sweat and tears connected with preparing the stage performances were hidden from sight, was dramatically different that what could be seen on display. Each party could only observe the actions that were staged by the other, not the real life in which the performance was prepared.

The cold war as an interaction war

One of the most important peculiarities of the cold war as an ideological war is that it was a war of *minds*. That is to say that the essence of its goals, which were not military but political in nature, was to gain control over minds, not over bodies or territories. For this reason, the “front lines” of the cold war had no precise location at any particular place on the globe. As a result, it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to locate a cold war “enemy” on the basis of simple observation. We may say that the two rival systems of western capitalism and eastern communism had territorial borders to the extent that they were comprised of different nations but the real borders that separate different world views and mind sets in an ideological war did not coincide with them. The “interaction enemies” did not wear uniforms. They were rather distinguished by their uniform minds, which had been shaped by two different social realities and in accordance with two different patterns.

Efforts to base the ideological division of the world on firm territorial grounds and to ensure the conjunction between national borders and systems’ borders led to the well-known problems that caused the erection of the Berlin Wall. In this sense, a cold war could not have been a war that first began against an external enemy, spread around the world, and eventually “came home,” if home is understood as a territorial unit or a nation state[8]. The cold war was “at home” in the world as a whole right from the very beginning. It never succeeded in becoming a war in which all the supporters of the one type of world view found themselves on one side of the border, with all their ideological enemies on the other. As a war of minds and over minds, the cold war was an interaction war whereby the “enemy” was located on the other side of interaction “front lines,” which could always be found both “inside” and “outside” each of the two social systems. Indeed, this peculiar structural feature of the two sub-worlds of the world system of society during the cold war could perhaps best be described by the title of a Ranulph Glanville and Francisco Varela article that was taken from a Beatles’ song, namely, “Your inside is out and your outside is in[9].”

If one decides to examine the cold war from a systems perspective, one should abstract from the territorial aspect of the confrontation and instead discuss confrontations along interaction lines. Since, the cold war was an interaction war in which two different types of minds were involved, its actual location was nowhere other than in interaction systems.

From this systems perspective, the cold war may be said to have had a very definite beginning. It started not with actions, but rather with the interactions between the victorious east and west, who met at the end of World War II to discuss the fate of Eastern Europe, whose historical fate for over a thousand years has been associated as much with the east and one branch of civilization as it has been with the west and the other branch. As Luhmann (1995, p. 392) wrote:

If in interactional conflicts (which, it should be noted, are always also societal conflicts) signs of a societal relevance transcending the interaction appear, the probability that the conflict will spread, deepen, and perpetuate itself is greater.

The inability of the two parties to come to an agreement, or even communicate, concerning an issue with civilizational relevance (in this case it was more than “societal”) apparently led to an interaction conflict that spread throughout the entire world. It is interesting to note that both interaction parties defined themselves as social systems and perceived each other as “environments.” Yet one should not draw the hasty conclusion that the two systems were thus of the same type and could be described with one and the same systems model. The theory of autopoiesis that we have at our disposal provides a good observation position from which to describe the one system, but it does not provide a suitable position for describing the other. However, we are fortunate that this theory is sufficiently complex that it can be developed to describe the “other” of the autopoietic system as well. But one point is already clear, namely, the “enemy” that the western capitalism faced in the cold war was not an autopoietic system. As the analysis of its systems boundary suggests it rather should be described as a system of another type, an allopoietic system or simply a poietic system which, by definition, “produces something other than itself” and is characterized by the lack of topological boundary, i.e. “the part of the system’s structure that allows the observer to identify it as a unity” (Zeleny, 1981, p. 6).

Viewing the cold war as an ideological war that necessarily takes the form of an interaction conflict has a number of significant implications. First of all, the cold war was more than a political war because the systems of politics were but one of the systems engaged in the war. An interaction war that takes place within all interaction systems of the world system of society is a world war in the most immediate sense of the term insofar as interaction systems are formed within and are parts of all social organizations and spheres of life. Consequently, not only politics, but all possible social spheres, including science, law, religion, education, the economy, the mass media, and even art, were “soldiers” on the one or the other side of the cold war front lines. Regardless of their efforts to remain neutral or preserve their autonomy, they all were involved in the struggle to impose a world view upon the world and thus preserve and reproduce their corresponding civilizational values. Attempts to speak about “neutral science” or “neutral mass media” during the period of the cold war apparently comprised an effort to present an idealistic image of that reality in which sports and even family interactions had political and ideological dimensions. To the extent to which such “neutrality” as a form of hidden “dissidence” was possible in, for example, art and science, it should be sought as coded in abstract or poetic languages rather than in explicit expression. It goes without saying that when all interaction systems in the societies involved in the cold war became cold war arenas, it was difficult for any of them to remain true to their proclaimed humanistic or democratic ideals. Both systems seem to have had their own “Big Brothers” to watch over all interactions in much the same way that both systems could be said to have had their own forms of “McCarthyism.”

Another interesting implication of considering the cold war as an interaction war concerns the structure of the civilian population. The non-combatants or those who remain behind the front lines in hot wars are typically women, children and all those who are viewed as physically incapable of carrying arms, such as the elderly and the handicapped. But since an interaction war takes place whenever and where ever interaction emerges between people with social minds, the cold war was a *mass war* in which one could say there were no civilians. Women, the elderly, and even the

physically handicapped were all “soldiers” and, just as in any hot war, they were liable to punishment if they “deserted” or became traitors. It is only possible on a socio-psychological basis to speak of civilians in the cold war since the only requirement for being a “soldier on the Cold front” was a more or less sound mature mind. Stated otherwise, it was only the subjects of primary socialization, such as children and all those young minds who had not yet developed the form necessary to participate in interaction “battles,” who were cold war civilians, i.e. passive observers incapable of doing anything to put an end to the war or change its course. In this sense, it is justifiable to argue that, contrary to all existing sociological models, the world during the cold war had two stages and not one, as Goffman’s (1990) model of life as a one stage theater with two interaction parties suggests.

Indeed, it seems at first glance that the further we analyze the cold war the more we realize that our exiting theoretical models are insufficiently complex to accommodate its peculiarities. Not only must we view the single world society as comprised of two independent societies with incompatible social structures and boundary formations, we also have to “construct” an additional theater stage in order to accommodate the presence of those non-participants who are interactionally absent but physically present observers. However, instead of assuming that the world was once simple and that its complexity only recently developed in such a way that our existing theories suddenly became outmoded, as Luhmann did, I assume that it was not the world that changed but rather our perception of it. That is to say that the world with all its complexity has been always “out there,” but that we were unable to see it because our “theoretical glasses” were not sufficiently developed to grasp its complexity. The problem is that the social sciences have never developed theories or tools for observing “anticipated reality” since “observation tools” cannot be developed unless the practical need for them is felt. The conditions for a specific type of observation must exist before theories that explain the observable world in its entirety can emerge. But these “conditions” do not reside in the growing complexity of the social structure. They rather reside in the fact that the differences between front-stage and back-stage vanished when the world as a whole became involved in an interaction war. The world was then illuminated in such a way that it became possible for different social systems to be discussed in respect to a single interaction boundary.

As an interaction war in which the whole world was involved, the cold war provided a unique opportunity to observe certain facets of the world that previously had not been illuminated, nor perceived. That is to say that although the social world always had an interaction structure that was comprised of two interaction parties, the “other” has in general remained unperceived, even treated as an “environment” or shapeless substratum for the imposition of any given systems form, because of the ethnocentric perspective and the self-referential nature of social systems. It is revealing that the interaction or dramaturgical approach towards social life was developed in the midst of the cold war. In terms of the present discussion, it appears that the cold war as a war of minds, which provided the conditions for casting light on certain previously obscure elements of the structure of society and social life, is itself related to the project of Enlightenment in a most immediate way. This conclusion should not be surprising insofar as such a grandiose project, which is concerned with the fate of humanity as a whole, could never be an endeavor in which only certain individuals, certain peoples, certain ethnic groups, certain nations, certain social spheres, certain sciences or

scientific disciplines, and certain continents should be involved. For example, science by itself would never be able to accomplish its humanistic mission without its union with politics and without involving the entire world in a conflict of opposing world views considered in the terms of political and ideological conflict. In this respect, completing the project of the Enlightenment depends not only on the extent to which it has become an interdisciplinary project in which the whole of science is involved, but also on the extent to which, in a most immediate way, it has become a world project.

There is another interesting consequence of the fact that the cold war was not a war of action but a war of interaction. The enthusiasts who endeavored to write the history of the cold war after it came to an end all too soon understood the unusual nature of such a task. While historiography is often regarded as retelling the great deeds of great man and nations and is thoroughly focused on actions, it quickly became obvious that the cold war was unique among wars since there was precious little to recount other than volumes of political speeches. The few dramatic moments of the Cuban missile crisis are among the exceptions. This type of work could be of interest only to a very restricted specialized readership because of the virtual lack of what normally makes a war history suitable to a mass audience, which is precisely *mass action*[10]. The cold war instead seems to have been a “war” that was conducted merely by a hand full of prominent political figures who carried the entire action upon their shoulders, with the people they represented being reduced to spectators. The history of the cold war, more than that of any other world war, can be read much like a classical tragedy, in which the plot brings two interaction parties with incommensurable world views into conflict, neither of which is right and neither of which is wrong, where there is no possibility of a Hegelian progress beyond the confrontation of opposing ideas to a synthesis that is able to provide a perspective on the social world that embraces them both. And just as it is in classical tragedy, such interaction wars have neither obvious resolutions nor winners, and none of the parties on stage is capable of bringing them to an end. The tragedy ends only when the invisibly present chorus enters the stage from the orchestra, dismisses the actors, and puts an end to the play.

Why sociology needs Luhmann’s systems theory

The advantage of accepting the viewpoint of systems theory, which is aimed at considering the cold war within a systems perspective, is that it points the search for an answer to Graebner’s question about the origins of the cold war, quoted above, in a completely different and unusual direction. It enables us to view the cold war as a system phenomenon connected with the articulation of both the system and its medium as opposed “interaction parties” that failed to communicate with each other. Furthermore, it acknowledges the importance of the cognitive and socio-psychological consequences of this aspect of systems development.

Although the main focus of the present discussion concerns the possibility of using sociological systems theory to explain the cold war as a system phenomenon, it is also intended to show that there are serious reasons why the science of international relations should turn to sociological systems theory as the only theory at our disposal capable of leading this discipline to a supranational, anti-regional, or universal theory of international politics that explains the world as something more than a composite of territorial states[11]. The same could also be said of those other social sciences that continue to regard Luhmann’s theory as merely one alternative among others, which

may be chosen by a given scholar according to her/his personal preference. The fact is that the twentieth century with its three world wars, two hot and one cold, continues to be a challenge to reason. And this is the case in spite of the endless efforts of social scientists to rewrite its history with the help of one or another theory from the existing theoretical arsenal of science in the hope that it will finally begin to seem “rational” and acquire a meaning. What is instead necessary is a meta-theory that synthesizes all previous knowledge, thereby achieving a necessary degree of complexity. Luhmann’s theory appears to be the only such theory at present.

Nevertheless, it must also be recognized that Luhmann’s project for sociological Enlightenment is not yet completed. Still missing is an objective observation of modern society as a whole. Luhmann himself was aware of the fact that all his observations, of both the functional systems of society as well as the societal system, were only from the “inside” of the system even though such observations must be complemented with observations from the “outside” in order to know society as a whole. For example, Albert (2004, p. 22) noted that Luhmann’s analysis of the system of politics does not in fact observe the world system of politics from a position located within science but, rather, observes “politics within modern industrialized states.” It thus can be said that what Luhmann observed was only the modern world, while an objective observation of the world system of politics depends on observations of the non-modern world as well. There are, of course, theoretical problems which stand in the way of such objective observations that Luhmann’s (1990) theory itself could not overcome, but it did pave the way for future solutions by formulating the problem in a most intriguing and challenging way as a sophisticated intellectual puzzle. This puzzle has the character of a riddle that reads as follows: the source of social problems can be known and they themselves can be resolved, only if we acquire objective knowledge of society as a whole. But not only are all our existing observations one-sided, there is also a “dark side” of society that has not yet been brought into light. It is thus necessary for us to find a peculiar observation position that is both inside and outside society at one and the same time. How is this position possible and where can it be located?

For this reason, I propose that the vigor evident in the heated debates “for” and “against” systems theory be instead directed to its further elaboration. It will be much more fruitful to complement it with its missing “half” than to persist in what seems to me to be the hopeless endeavor of devising a better alternative from the same observation position. First of all, the social conditions for observing society as a whole are no longer available since the modern world has lost its articulated pure form with the end of the cold war. Those who would like to offer alternatives to systems theory will have to wait for the next grand moment in the on-going attempt of the world system of society to reproduce itself, which may very well take another several thousands of years.

Second, those who are reluctant to “take for granted” Luhmann’s claim that the social world has become very complex and that a highly complex and sophisticated theory is necessary in order to describe it, should consider the fact that the social world was differentiated into three worlds, not merely two, during the cold war. Such a world can be objectively observed as a whole only by means of the production and integration of objective observations from the First World, the Second World, and the Third World. Although sociological systems theory can be seen as one-sided as offering only a theory of the system but lacking any, comparable in complexity, theory

of the medium in its own terms, its universal pretensions are not unfounded. This is the case because Luhmann's theory is based on the theory of autopoiesis which, emerging in the natural sciences in what during the cold war was perceived as "the Third World," is uniquely qualified for mastering the complexity of the social world.

Third, even if one uses the soundest theoretical arguments, it will be difficult to convince those opponents of systems theory who favor the classical understanding of society as comprised of actions unified by collectively shared values and norms that what they perceive as the "disjunction of systems and action theories" has never really existed (Stichweh, 2000). One may or may not believe Luhmann's statement that social systems "exist," and one may doubt that society is a world system or that the social world has become extremely complex. However, no one can doubt that there have been world wars and that the most recent of them all was a most strange species. The cold war makes no sense when the attempt is made to explain it in terms of classical action theory. The problem in this regard is that the "combatants" themselves were engaged in no action other than political diatribes conducted without mass action by prominent political figures on stage. What "action" there was occurred in proxy wars in the Third World. None of this can provide any idea of what the cold war was. Sociology consequently has no choice other than to abandon the effort to understand world phenomena or take Luhmann seriously and work further to resolve the puzzles that he left behind.

Notes

1. As Garthoff (1992, p. 128) put it, nuclear weapons "helped to keep the Cold War cold."
2. Cumings (1992, p. 98) argues that "four million deaths in Korea, nearly an equal number in Vietnam" sufficiently demonstrate the fact that this war was a "core/periphery-conflict" centered at the "intermediate zone that Immanuel Wallerstein terms the semi-periphery."
3. Davis maintains that Norman Graebner formulated one of the most important questions concerning the underlying reasons for the cold war "Why did the United States after 1939 permit the conquest of Eastern Europe by Nazi forces, presumably forever, with scarcely a stir, but refused after 1944 to acknowledge any primary Russian interest or right of hegemony in the same region on the heels of closely-won Russian victory against the German invader?" Graebner added that "When scholars have answered that question fully the historical debate over the Cold War origins will be largely resolved." (Davis, 1974, p. 4).
4. In the literature concerned with the relationship between media and terrorism the centrality of communication for terrorists schemes is often emphasized. There is an understanding that political violence is "an act of communication" (Schmidt and de Graaf) promoted by the desire "to communicate a message to a broader audience" (Richardson) (as quoted in Nacos, 2002, pp. 17-8). Being aware of the slogan "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter" and with the fact that suicide bombers were condemned as terrorist killers by one side and celebrated as martyrs and heroes by the other the mass media often "seem uncertain and confused as to when to describe political violence as terrorism and when to choose other labels" (Nacos, 2002, pp. 16, 86).
5. There is no doubt that Berlin was important cold war "stage scenery" but it was not important in respect to the "action." On the contrary, Berlin was precisely the place where no action was supposed to occur because it was not so much a front line as a "powder keg, and the explosive dimension of a spark lit there would be thermonuclear." Kennedy thus viewed dousing any "nascent spark" in Berlin as "(t)he most important responsibility of world leaders" (Buckley, 2004, p. 34).

6. Control over what entered “the system” was always extremely weak. Indeed, this peculiarity of the systems boundary of the communist system eventually weakened it and even led to its demise. Focused on what seemed to be more important ideological tasks, the communist system apparently overlooked the “dangers” that the outside environment harbored, especially for its young citizens insofar as they observed reality with ideologically “naked” eyes. As the author has suggested elsewhere, the communist system was brought to the point of collapse by the failure of its socialization process. This was caused not so much by western propaganda, but rather by western rock and pop music, which easily penetrated the Iron Curtain in the age of powerful communication technologies (Misheva, 2005).
7. Most important among the problems that motivated the building of such a strange border as the Berlin Wall was the “escalating refugee problem” or the “continuing human drainage” which East Germany and Walter Ulbricht faced (Buckley, 2004, p. 17). In the decade after the war nearly four million people from East Germany found a refuge in the west with more than 10,000 per month in the year before the construction of the wall (Buckley, 2004, p. 23). Solving “The Berlin problem” for East Germany and the Soviet bloc had also a second but perhaps less important dimension, namely to prevent the westerners from buying and “taking home” the scarce “luxury items” produced in East Germany with Soviet subsidies. The Berlin Wall in this sense meant “no more refrigerators, cars, or washing machines for anyone not employed in the East” (Buckley, 2004, p. 40).
8. See, for example, the chapter in Martin Walker’s *The Cold War: A History* entitled “The cold war goes global – and comes home” (Walker, 1994).
9. The article in question addresses the relationship between “the Arithmetic of Closure” and the theory of objects. Glanville relates how, upon Varela’s insistence, the article contained references only to G. Spencer and the Beatles (Glanville, 2002, 71). Also see Luhmann (1992, p. 214), for a reference to this paper.
10. Garthof’s (1994) monumental work on the history of the America-Soviet relations at the end of the cold war is a good example in this respect.
11. Thomas Diaz, for example, claims there are no legitimate grounds for introducing Luhmann’s systems theory into the field of international relations, as certain scholars have attempted to do. However, the level of analysis that will profit from the latter does not concern “the distinction domestic policy/foreign policy,” as Diaz assumes, but rather the distinction between the domestic and foreign policies of the two incommensurable types of “world-politics” that came to define international relations during the cold war (Diaz, 2004, pp. 41-3). It is worth observing that although the cold war came to an end well over a decade ago, understanding the politics of the post-cold war world is necessarily contingent upon an understanding of what brought it into being.

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