



# Readings of Niklas Luhmann's System Theory: The Habermas Luhmann Debate with Gorm Harste and The Making of Meaning with Christian Morgner

A BSA Theory Study Group Event

18 May 2022 (15:00-17:00 BST)  
Online via Zoom

## About the Event

Niklas Luhmann is considered one of the most important social theorists of the 20th century, but his writings are largely unknown in the Anglophone world. More concerning, many misreadings and misinterpretations are common. Therefore, in this session, we will debate two recent publications that shed new light on some of these issues by making important debates as well as alternative readings available to a wider audience. This includes that Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann were in constant debate with each other culminating in a 'jointly' authored book "Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: Was leistet die Systemforschung?" (Theory of Society or Social Technology: What is Attained by System Research?) that has never been translated into English and subsequently progressed throughout their writings. From this debate we can see remarkable similarities in their overall concerns for sociology, as well as important differences. This debate has never really been covered to any great depth in Anglophone sociology until now. Likewise, contemporary readings of Luhmann's world use a narrow reading of system theory that is considered as outdated and therefore not worthy to be taken seriously. However, those who delve on such a biased reading will be surprised to learn that early on Luhmann proposed the term meaning (Sinn) as a basic term of his theory, which became a key concept in interpreting historical sources that informed his more empirical work on the formation of contemporary society.

The recent publications of Gorm Harste's volume on the Habermas Luhmann debate and Christian Morgner's book on the Making of Meaning provide us with a golden opportunity to revisit the contributions of this important sociologist.

Gorm Harste was born 1955. Is a Danish sociologist, political scientist and philosopher. Educated in political science and philosophy from Aarhus University and in European studies from the University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. Employed at the Department of Political Science and Government at Aarhus University and has since 2015 been associated with the research program LUMEN on Lutheran Mentality in Nordic Cultures. His research areas consist of societal theory and political theory of European state formation. The emphasis is on historical sociology and on grand theories from Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel over Émile Durkheim and Max Weber to Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas, Michel

Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Since 1999, he has been compiling a lack of sociological theory of war, which is presented in the main work Critique of the Reason of War - A Perspective on Self-Referential Systems from the 11th-21st Centuries, published in 2016. The focus on grand theories is particularly evident in The Habermas – Luhmann Debate from 2021. Gorm Harste has from 1987 - 1999 been coordinator in interdisciplinary Nordic research networks such as Nordic SummerUniversity and NorFa, and has since 2001 been director of conferences at InterUniversity Center in Dubrovnik, Croatia specializing in the application of Luhmann's systems theory. In 1996-7, Gorm Harste was an adviser to the French-led research group at the UN, which later led to the Paris Agreement.

Christian Morgner is Senior Lecturer in the Management School, University of Sheffield. He is co-convenor of the British Sociological Association's Theory Group. He has co-edited (with Michael King) a book on Niklas Luhmann's writings on Trust and Power published by Polity Press. He has also published on Luhmann's theory of trust, art and the city.

## Registration

This event is free to attend but registration is required.