

Preface

To write a preface is a difficult task. Prefaces are always a balancing act, as they offer insight into the author's personality. For this dissertation thesis, I have read many books, and from time to time the biggest pleasure was to read the prefaces and/or epilogues. Often, I even burst out laughing (or, quite the opposite, put the book aside). Subsequently, the author somehow resonated in the back of my mind, and thus reading the book was a better and, yes, more personal venture.

What was my motivation to write a dissertation, which deals in such depth and width with geomorphological system theory? Probably, the first academic roots for this are in Richard Dikau's working group in Bonn, where there was no way around dealing with theory. This tradition has also been continued by Thomas Glade in Vienna. However, I obviously neglected or forgot to look at the bigger picture—it was pretty comfortable in my world of geomorphology. Suddenly, however, I was pulled out of this comfortable little world by a seminar taught by Heike Egner: I got to know Niklas Luhmann's system approach. And—for whatever reason—I allowed myself to feel irritated and started to ask myself (and others!) uncomfortable questions. And as I subsequently discovered, at some stage I had obviously crossed a *point of no return*: I simply was not able to think as I had done before. This was the starting point of my dissertation and I began to delve into theories far beyond geomorphology. Despite the fact that, in the beginning, I had no notion at all of where this would lead me, I soon figured out that these theories always brought me back to geomorphology (despite some fierce self-doubts during that process). But even more so, and this is the most enriching and fascinating aspect, with each of these theories I have always learned something 'for life'. It was a pleasure.

For this thesis to be a success—as I hope—, I first and foremost owe thanks to my two mentors Thomas Glade and Heike Egner. In some sense, they have created a force field of holding and driving forces in the centre of which (or should I say: equilibrium of which?) this thesis came into existence. I owe thanks to you, Thomas, for giving me the freedom to pursue this thesis; I know that this has not always been easy. And I owe thanks to you, Heike, for bringing the joy of science back to me.

Of course, I also want to sincerely thank several other people, first of all the members of the working group ENGAGE at the department of geography and regional science of Vienna University. But particularly, I want to thank those friends, family members, and colleagues who took time for proofreading: Rainer Bell, Heike Egner, Brigitta von Elverfeldt, Christine Embleton-Hamann, Melanie Kappes, Margreth Keiler, Ronald Pöppl, Peter Weichhart and Eva Zelzer. My dear friend Oliver Löhmer always provided plenty of impulses with our physics discussions, and he also proved that physics can be a very humorous business. Walter Lang helped considerably with the figures. Karen Meehan was an enormous help for the translation of my thesis—thank you! My family and friends have supported, distracted, encouraged, and cheered me up in many ways. I am so happy that you are in my life! My deepest thanks, however, go to my son, who always reminded me that the essential things in life are somewhere else.

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