Introduction to Luhmann's Zettelkastenthinking and its technical implementation

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Outline

Principles of managing notes

Luhmann's principle of organizing his Zettelkasten

■ Technical implementation: the Zettelkasten

Principles of Managing Notes

Categories

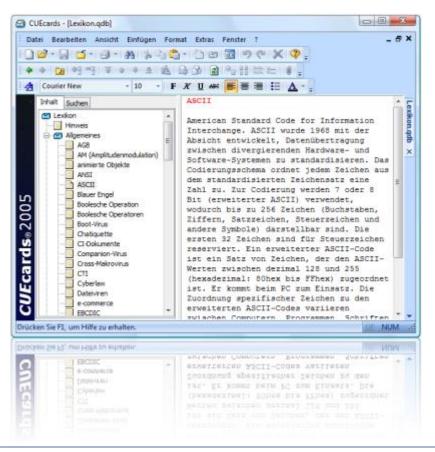
Tagging

Links / references



Principles of Managing Notes: Categories

CUEcards



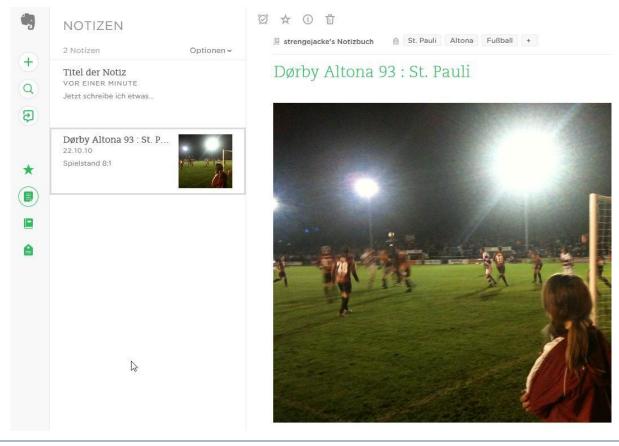
Principles of Managing Notes: Categories

- Advantages
 - Easy structure
 - No need to remember all "categories" when content grows
- Disadvantages
 - No comfortable "multiple storage"
 - Less flexibility when content grows
 - How to decide which category is best for a note?
 - What if older notes would fit better into a new category?



Principles of Managing Notes: Tagging

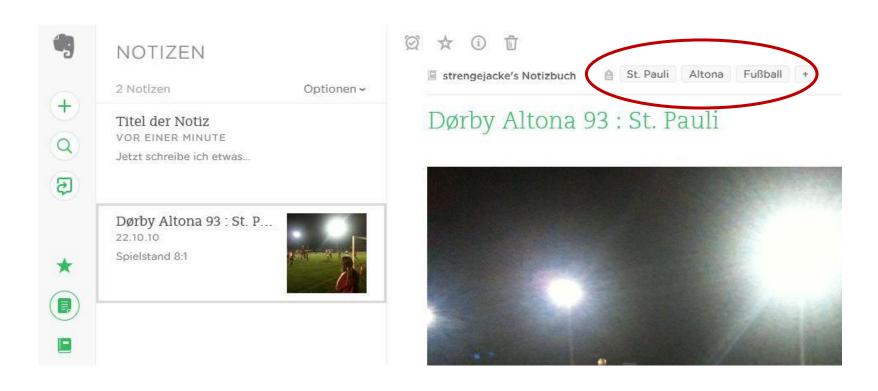
Evernote





Principles of Managing Notes: Tagging

Evernote



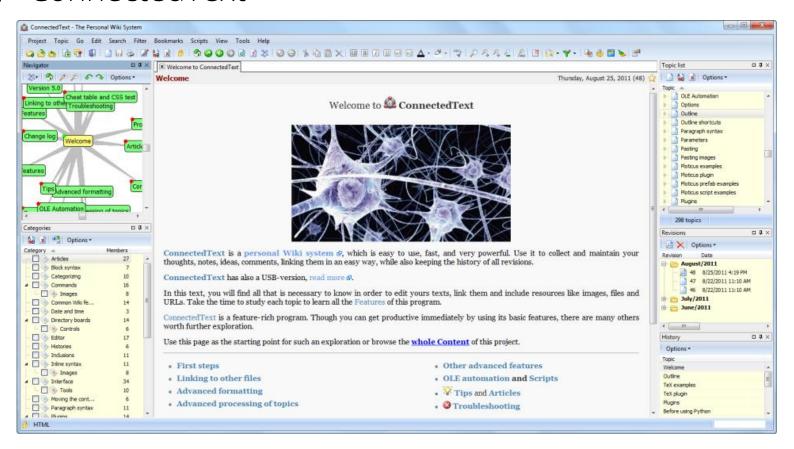
Principles of Managing Notes: Tagging

- Advantages
 - "multiple storage"
 - Flexible assignment of new notes when content grows
- Disadvantages
 - To link notes (via identical tags), need to remember tags even for large data base
 - No unique assignment of notes to categories (where to find a note?)



Principles of Managing Notes: Links / References

ConnectedText



Principles of Managing Notes: Links / References

- Advantages
 - (non-)thematic linkage of notes
 - Explore / find notes that are not directly related via "link path" (navigating from 1st over 2nd to 3rd note)
- Disadvantages
 - Selective or specific retrieval of notes difficult
 - Limited scope of linkage, or at least impractical workflow for "multiple storage" and connections



Luhmann's Principle of Organizing his Zettelkasten

No categories

Linkage / reference

Tagging and register

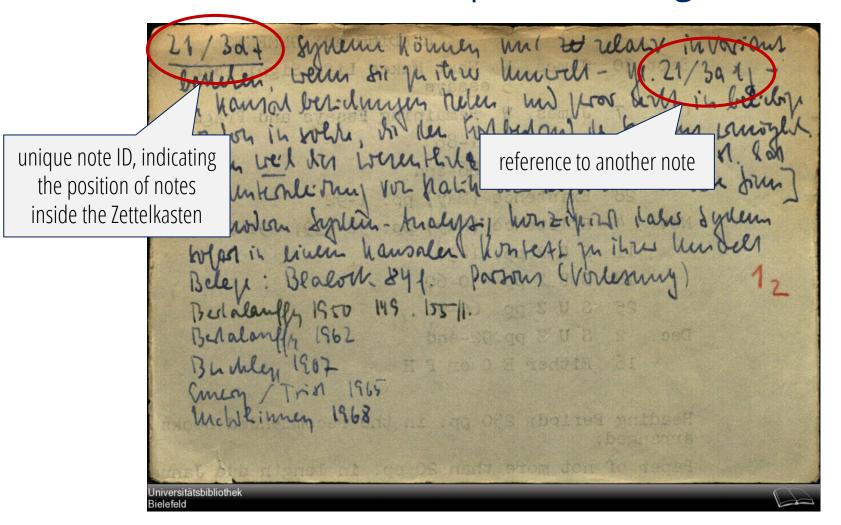
Arbitrary "branching" of note sequences

Luhmann's Principle: No Categories

- Categories mean
 - determination of internal structure
 - less flexibility, especially "in the long run" of knowledge management and storage
- No categories mean
 - requires unique numbering of notes (ID)
 - in combination with fixed position of notes in Zettelkasten (else notes would get lost / cannot be retrieved)



Luhmann's Principle: No Categories



Luhmann's Principle: No Categories

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 - determination of internal structure
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 - unique numbering of notes
 - in combination with fixed position of note in Zettelkasten (else note would get lost / cannot be retrieved)
 - Fixed position resp. specific order of notes not necessary in electronic Zettelkasten!

Luhmann's Principle: Linkage / Reference

- Unique note numbers (ID) allow selective or specific links / references between notes
- Number of links / references in theory unlimited
- Easily solves the problem of "multiple storage": If a note does not fit into a single category, build relations between multiple notes with links / references
- Puts notes into different "relationships" (contexts)



Luhmann's Principle: Linkage / Reference

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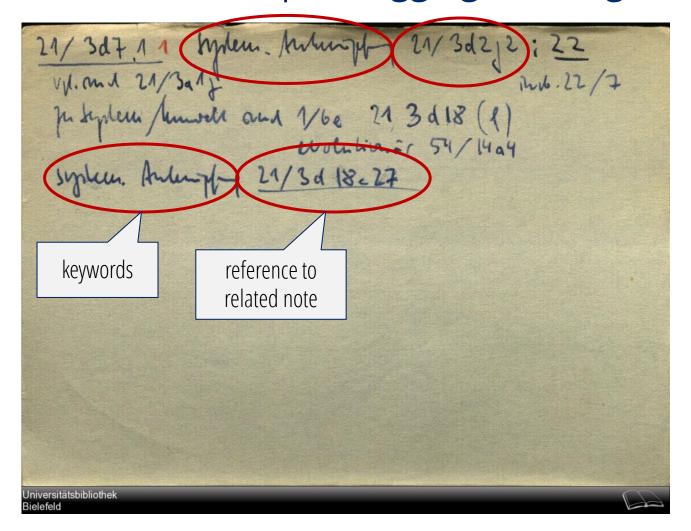
Luhmann's Principle: Tagging and Register

- Separate register with core keywords ("tags"), referencing to selected(!) notes
- Purpose of register was to find an "entrance" (starting point) into the Zettelkasten
- In certain cases, notes also had tags

Tags don't have the primary purpose to create links between notes



Luhmann's Principle: Tagging and Register



- Notes can be "concatenated", resulting in "note sequences"
 - Necessary in physical Zettelkasten due to limited space on paper notes
 - In electronic Zettelkasten, no text limits for notes, however it is also recommended to keep notes short
- New or sub topics can branch off from notes in a sequence, leading to a "tree structure" of noterelations



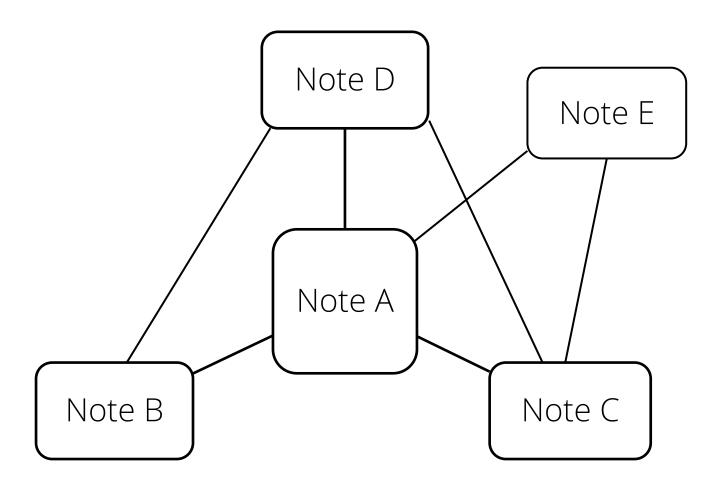
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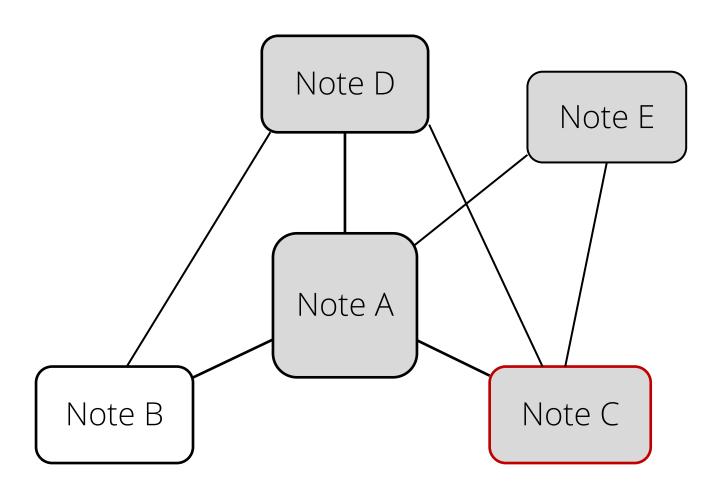
Zettelkasten Luhmann
ZK II - 21/3d System
21/3d7 System/Umwelt-Theorie
21/3d7c Theorie offener Systeme
21/3d7c7 Offene/geschlossene Systeme
21/3d7d Input/Output-Modell
21/3d7d4 Außen-Innen-Determination
21/3d7f System – Kausalität
21/3d7i Austausch mit der Umwelt als Variable
21/3d7m Grundgedanken der System-Umwelt-Theorie
21/3d8 Systemverschachtelung
21/3d8a Reziprozität
21/3d8b Kompatibilität von Systemen
21/3d8c Funktionale Theorie des Konflikts
21/3d8ce8 Soziale Bewegungen
21/3d8ce9i Neue Soziale Bewegungen
21/3d8ce9l Protestbewegungen
21/3d8c5 Spannung als Erwartungsunsicherheit
21/3d8c5i Anomie
21/3d8c8 Thema/Gründe von Konflikten
21/3d8c11 Institutionalisierung von Konflikten
21/3d8c12 Funktionen des offenen Konfliktverhaltens
21/3d8c16 System/Umwelt-Theorie des Konflikts
21/3d8c16c Theorie der Knappheit
21/3d8c18d Knappheit und Geld
21/3d8d Teil/Ganzes-Schema
21/3d8f Theorie koordinierender Generalisierungen
21/3d8g Zum Begriff des Subsystems
21/3d8h Verbindungsrollen
21/3d9 Zum ontologischen Systembegriff

- Branching and note sequences allow "story telling"
- Cum grano salis, branching and note sequences are "developing" or evolving texts on a specific topic (sequence) or side topics (branching)
- Branching allows reduction of complexity concerning tags and register

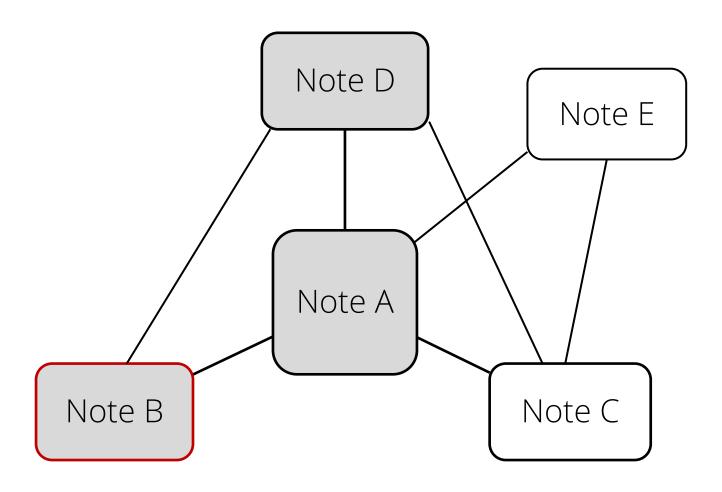
The key is to combine all techniques: Note sequences and branching, in combination with tags / register and links / references



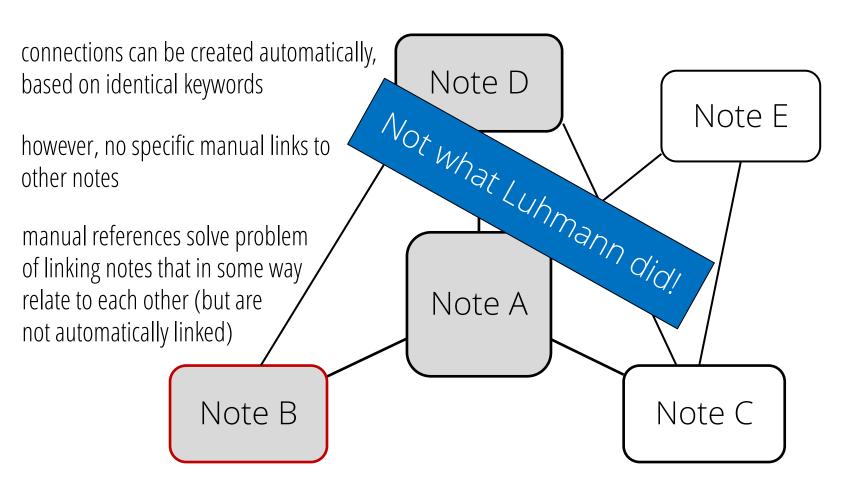








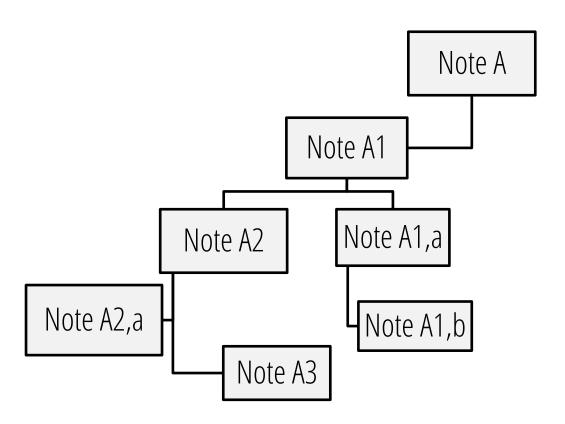




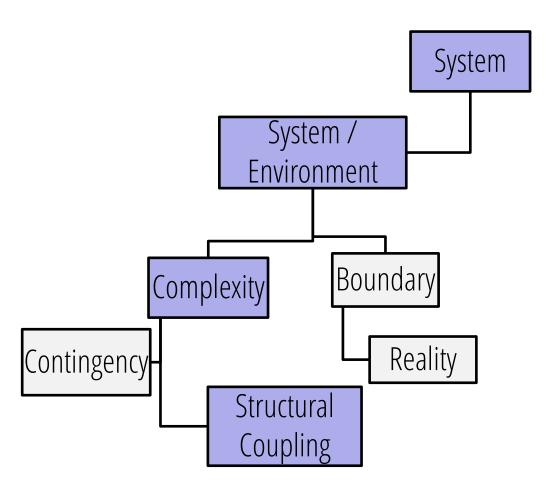


A Network of Tagged or Linked Notes: Not what Luhmann did!

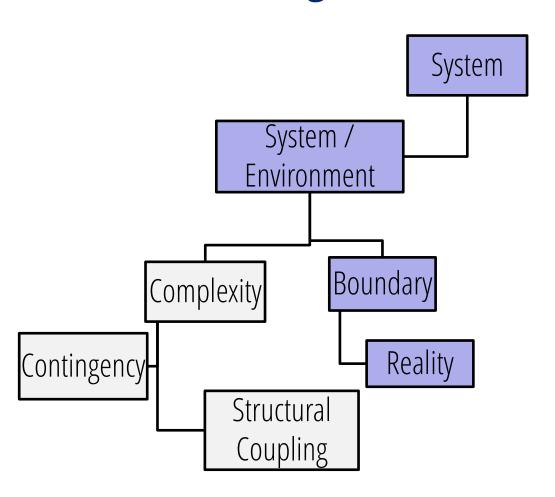
- Networked notes means lose coupling of notes and arbitrary relationships
- No (linear) development of ideas becomes visible
- Due to missing hierarchy, the relationship and context between notes remains unclear



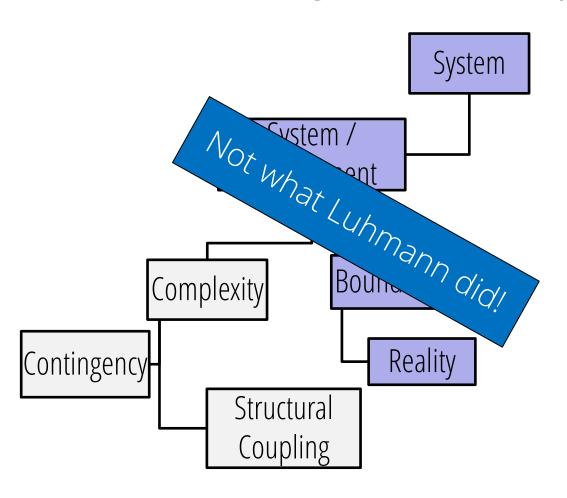












Branching and Note Sequences: Not what Luhmann did!

- Using note sequences and branches only means a kind of "sticking" to one category
- Branching and note sequences allow to explore relationships between notes ...
- ... however, this does not allow for "surprises" (creativity), due to lack of flexibility (once a "path" is chosen, can't leave the trace)



Putting all together (what Luhmann did!)

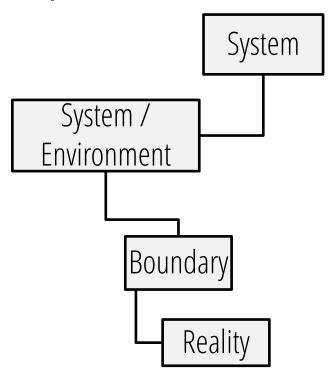
write down an idea

System

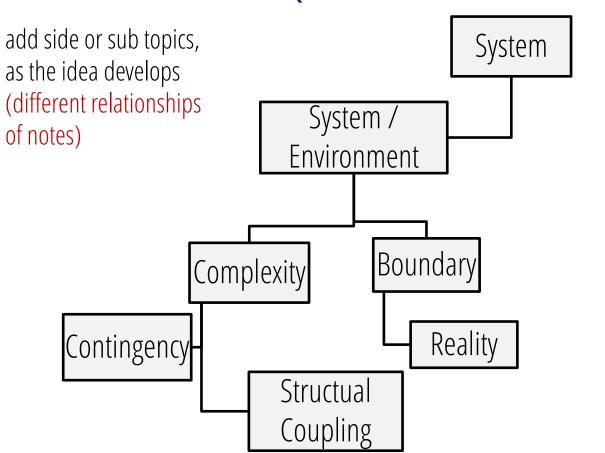


write down and develop an idea (relationship of notes)

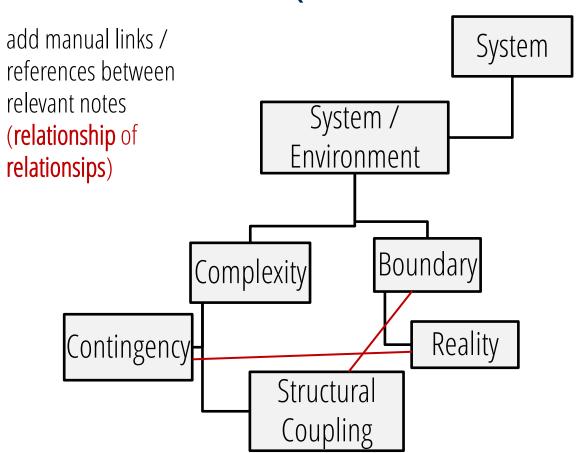
Putting all together (what Luhmann did!)

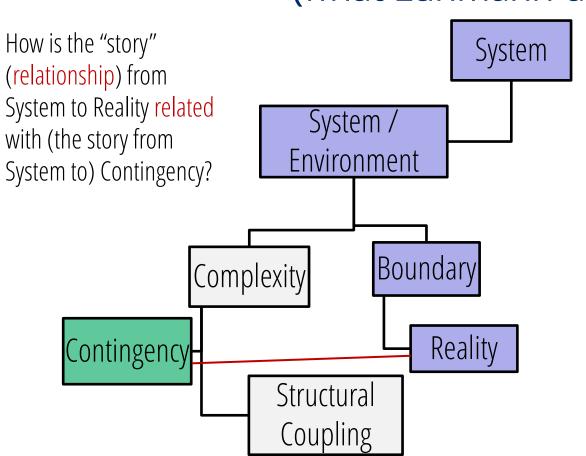


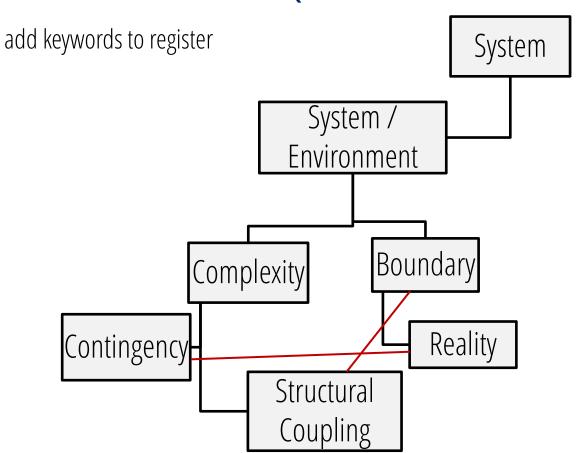
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Putting all together (what Luhmann did!)





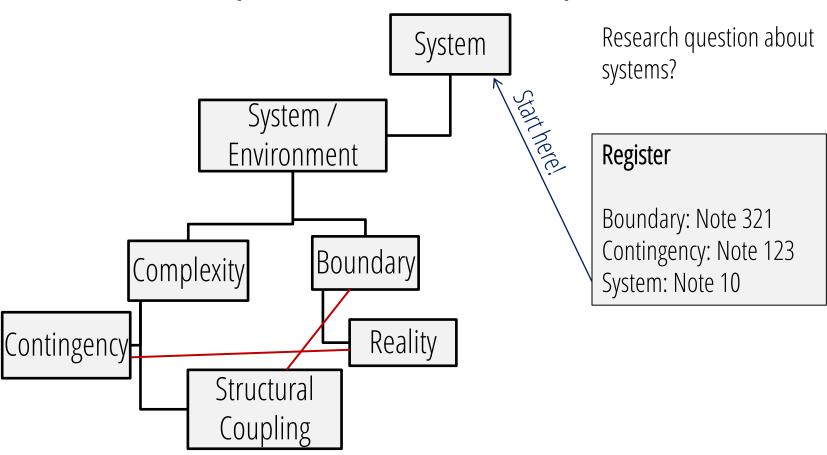


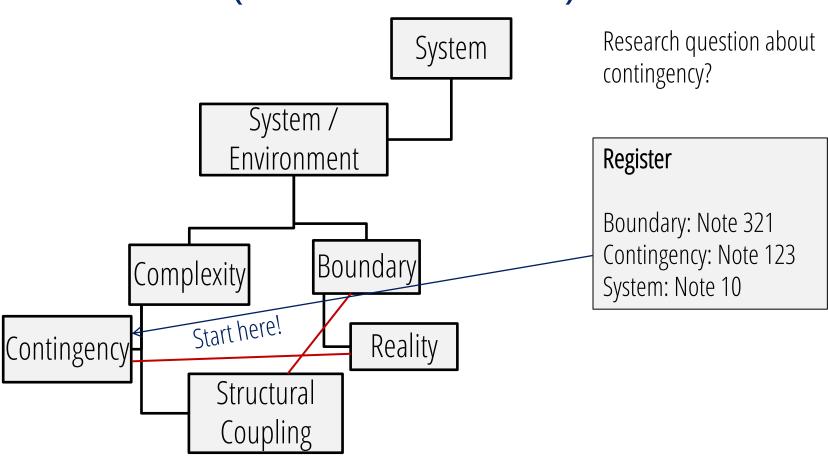
Register

Boundary: Note 321

Contingency: Note 123

System: Note 10





Summary: Key Elements of Luhmann's Zettelkasten-Principle

- Write (small) notes, using note sequences to develop an idea or topic
- Where possible or necessary (i.e., if an idea can be considered as "start" of a new note sequence, but does fit into the current linear argumentation), branch off a new idea-path
- Check if similar topic or "story line" has been written down elsewhere; if yes, add manual links / references
- Identify relevant notes that function as "starting" point and tag these notes

Technical Implementation: The Zettelkasten

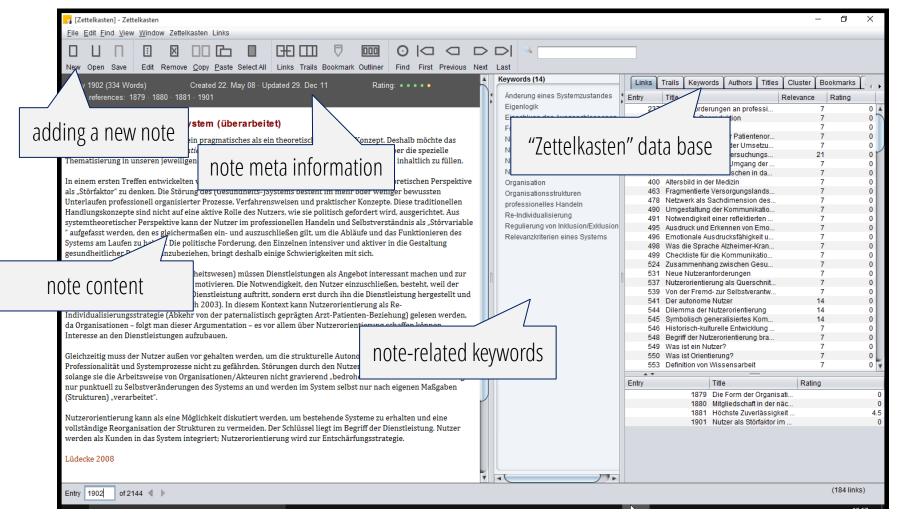


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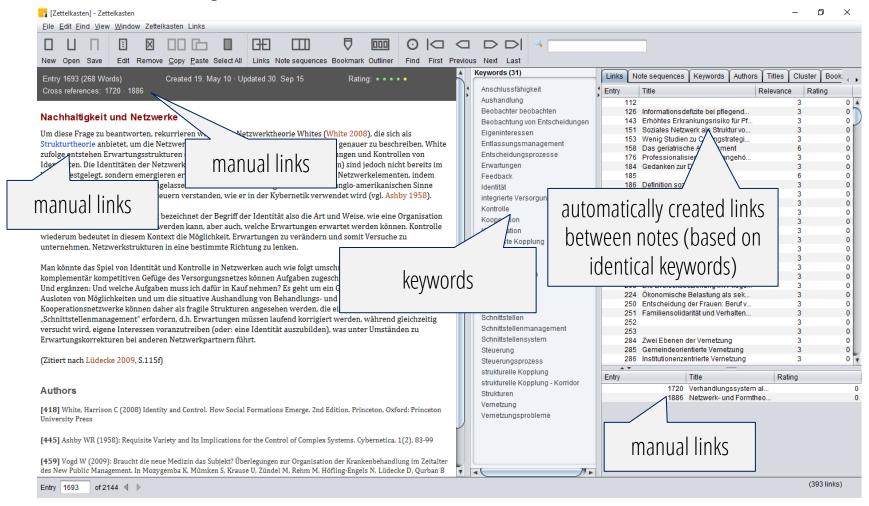


Technical Implementation: The Zettelkasten (Overview)



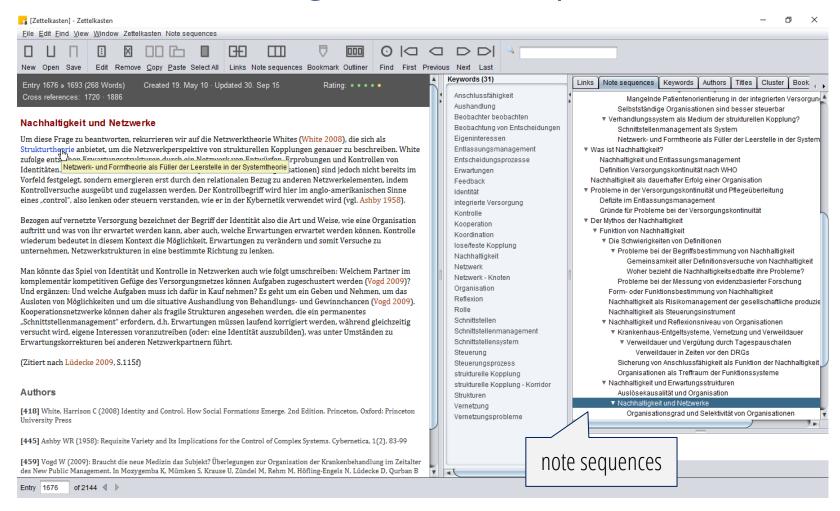


Where to find Luhmann's Key Elements? Keywords and Manual References



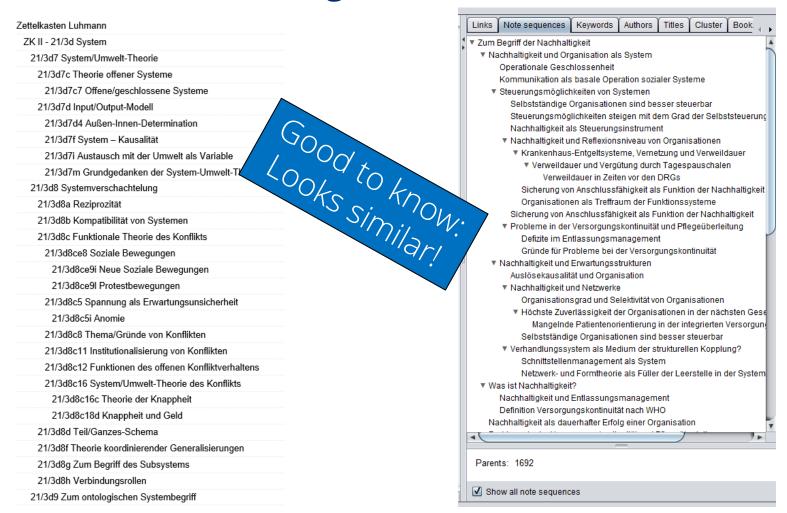


Where to find Luhmann's Key Elements? Branching and Note Sequences



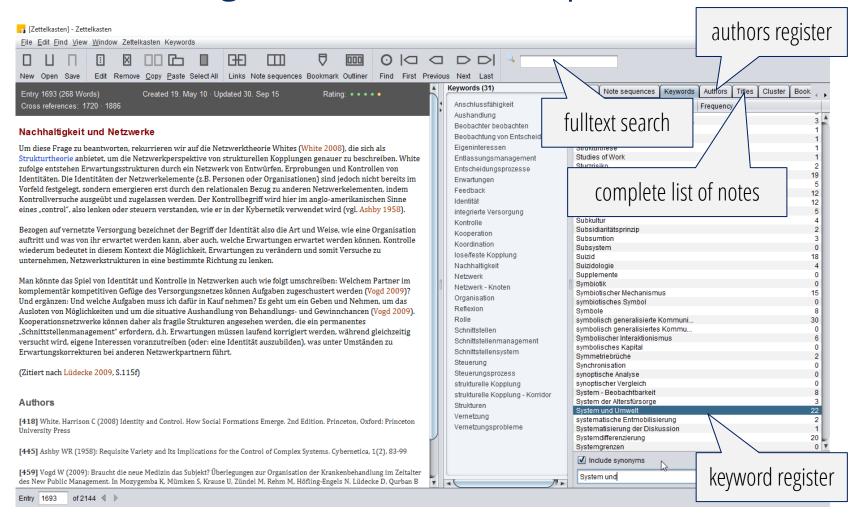


Comparison: Branching and Note Sequences in Luhmann's digitalized Zettelkasten





Where to find Luhmann's Key Elements? Registers and Search Options



- I Think about the topic or subject, where a new note fits into
- Find a starting point in the Zettelkasten related to this topic and start reading / exploring your existing notes (sequences)
- Decide whether the note is
 - the start of a new topic / sequence
 - fits into an existing note sequence (continuing an existing note sequence)
 - fits into an existing note sequence (but branching off a new sub topic)

- Depending on where the note joins or fits into the Zettelkasten, think about tagging your note
- Which (parallel) note sequences are related to this note? Are there relevant notes in other sequences? If yes, add manual links between notes
- Less is beautiful: Better use fewer keywords, e.g. only for notes that start a new note sequence, branch off inside a sequence or very important "key notes"



Always remember:

"The Zettelkasten is much more effort and time consuming than writing books."

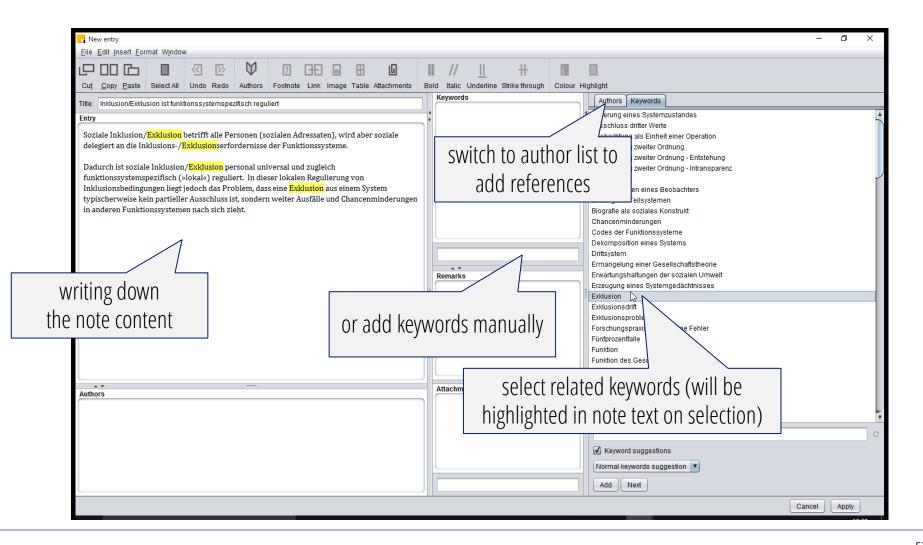


Niklas Luhmann, Shortcuts, p.26

Writing notes and even books ;-)

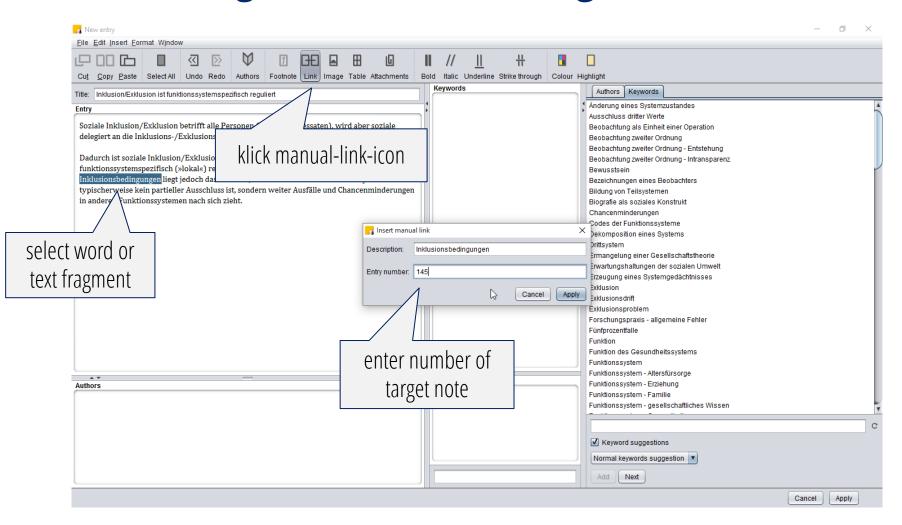


Writing a New Note and Adding Tags / Keywords



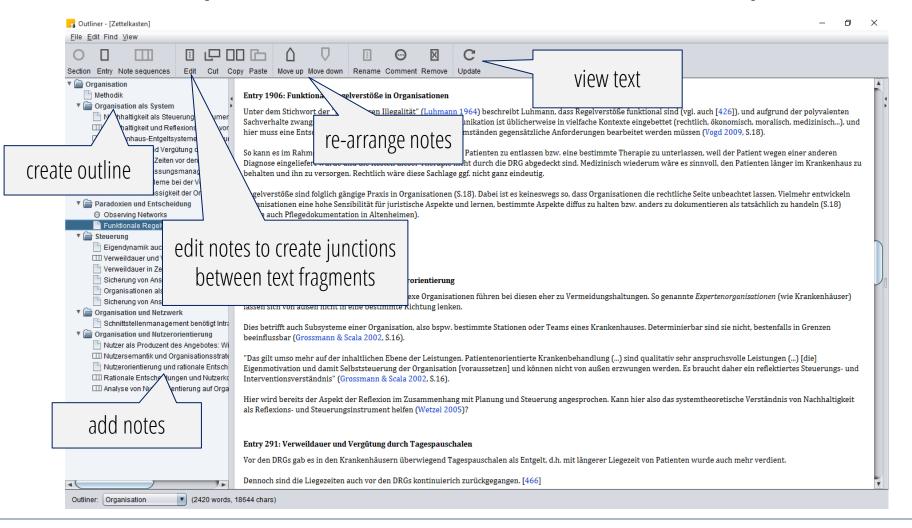


Writing a New Note: Adding Manual Links





"Writing books" (from Notes to Text: The Outliner)



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