

Call for papers

“The Relational Luhmann”

In collaboration with the *Luhmann Conference*

International conference organized by
Chiara Piazzesi, Martin Blais, Diane Laflamme, and Christian Morgner

UQAM, Montreal (QC), May 26-28, 2027

Conference Theme and Aim

The sociological study of relationships draws upon a plurality of theoretical frameworks, but it rarely engages with the conceptual tools provided by Luhmann’s systems theory to analyze the emergence, organization, and functioning of relationships. Even more rarely does the sociological literature mobilize systems-theoretical tools to further develop their conceptual and empirical potential. While Germanophone scholarship on relationships has engaged with Luhmann’s conceptual toolbox and extended his legacy since the 1980s (e.g., Daub 1996; Fuchs 2019; Lenz 2005, 2006; Leupold 1983; Reinhardt-Becker 2005, 2015; Tyrell 1987), systems theory remains virtually absent from Anglophone and Francophone fields. Notable exceptions—which have also led to the creation of research groups, the organization of recurring conferences, and the publication of collective volumes over the last fifteen years—can be found in relational sociology (e.g., Dépelteau & Powell 2013) and in the Montreal-based network of scholars working on the sociology of intimacy (Piazzesi et al. 2020; [ERICA Research Chair](#)). To mark the 100th anniversary of Luhmann’s birth, and to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote engagement with his theory in North America, we will hold a conference in Montreal devoted to a less discussed aspect of his work, namely his reflections on relationships.

Conceived and organized in collaboration with the *Luhmann Conference* scientific committee, ***The Relational Luhmann*** will feature contributions that revisit, reframe, and extend Luhmann’s conceptual tools and methodological approach for the study of relationships in contemporary societies. The conference will serve as a locus for cross-disciplinary and cross-thematic discussions, showcasing systems-theoretical approaches to relationships and interaction systems. These will range from intimate relationships and friendships to family relationships and social networks, while also addressing questions of social isolation and solitude.

We encourage submissions grounded in the social sciences broadly, and addressing topics including, but not limited to:

- The fertility, potential, and limitations of systems-theoretical concepts—such as code, medium, programmes, semantic repertoires, communication, expectations, and self-reference—in the analysis of different types of relationships;

- The theorization, analysis, and empirical study of how relationships emerge, organize themselves, differentiate themselves from their environment, and stabilize their operations as systems, from a systems-theoretical perspective;
- The distinction and similarities among different types of relationships with varying degrees of temporal stability (e.g., temporary vs. long-term), interpersonal interpenetration or intimacy (e.g., personal vs. impersonal relationships), and organization by different sets of expectations (e.g., intimate vs. professional relationships);
- The (historical) study of semantic repertoires and programmes organizing the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of different kinds of relationships;
- How different types of relationships observe other social systems, notably the legal, political, educational, moral, and artistic systems;
- How social systems (e.g., law, politics, economy, religion, education, morality, media, art) observe different types of relationships in contemporary societies;
- Whether and how systems theory can be brought into dialogue with dominant approaches to the study of relationships, including feminist, queer, and critical perspectives more broadly;
- How relationships with machines (and LLMs in particular) are constituted through communication, including processes of expectation formation, attribution of agency or personhood, and the stabilization of interaction; as well as their implications for intimacy, companionship, and social isolation, and the ways in which such relationships observe and are observed by other social systems;
- How the semantics of love and personal commitment have extended to a wide range of caring relationships, from semi-professional and informal caregiving to engagements with non-human entities such as animal companions and nature, thereby reconfiguring the boundaries of intimacy and the coupling between love and interpersonal interpenetration.

Important Dates

Abstract (500-1000 words, in English or French) should be submitted by **September 30th, 2026** to all four organizers:

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Reflecting the international nature of the Luhmann scholarly community, the conference will be held in English. Depending on the number of submissions, a session in French might also be included in the schedule.

Letters of acceptance sent by email: November 30th, 2026.

Deadline for confirmed speakers' registration: January 31st, 2027

Preliminary conference schedule circulated among participants: February 2027

Full papers submission deadline: April 15th, 2027.

Final conference schedule circulated among registered participants: April 30th, 2027

General Information

There will be no conference fees. Participants are required to self-organize for accommodation and travel. As May is a busy time for tourism in Montreal, we recommend that attendees plan ahead for both travel and accommodation.

A link for registration will be circulated in Winter 2027.

Publication opportunities are currently being explored, and further information will be communicated in due course.

For further information, please contact Chiara Piazzesi: piazzesi.chiara@uqam.ca

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