

**THE THEORY OF
COMMUNICATIVE ACTION**

Volume 2

**LIFEWORLD AND SYSTEM:
A CRITIQUE OF FUNCTIONALIST
REASON**

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cally mediated interaction and, then, of linguistically mediated interaction. In the process, natural meanings resulting from the significance of specific items in the functional circuit of animal behavior are transformed into symbolic meanings at the intentional disposition of participants in interactions. The object domain is changed by this process of semanticization, so that the ethological model of a self-regulating system, according to which every event or state is ascribed a meaning on the basis of its functional significance, is gradually replaced by the communication-theoretic model, according to which actors orient their actions by their own interpretations. Of course, this latter model of the lifeworld would be *adequate* for human societies only if that process of semanticization absorbed *all* "natural" meanings—that is, if *all* systemic interconnections in which interactions stand were brought into the horizon of the lifeworld and thereby into the intuitive knowledge of participants. This is a bold assumption, but it is an empirical matter that should not be *predecided* at an analytical level by a conception of society set out in action-theoretical terms.

Every theory of society that is restricted to communication theory is subject to limitations that must be observed. The concept of the lifeworld that emerges from the conceptual perspective of communicative action has only limited analytical and empirical range. I would therefore like to propose (1) that we conceive of societies *simultaneously* as systems and lifeworlds. This concept proves itself in (2) a theory of social evolution that separates the rationalization of the lifeworld from the growing complexity of societal systems so as to make the connection Durkheim envisaged between forms of social integration and stages of system differentiation tangible, that is, susceptible to empirical analysis. In pursuing these aims, I shall develop a concept of forms of mutual understanding [*Verständigungsform*] in analogy to Lukacs's concept of forms of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeitsform*], and then make use of it to reformulate the problematic of reification. With this conceptual apparatus in hand, I shall return in the concluding chapter to Weber's diagnosis of the times and propose a new formulation of the paradox of rationalization.

1. *The Concept of the Lifeworld and the Hermeneutic Idealism of Interpretive Sociology*

I would like to explicate the concept of the lifeworld, and to this end I shall pick up again the threads of our reflection on communication theory. It is not my intention to carry further our formal-pragmatic examination of speech acts and of communicative action, rather, I want to build upon these concepts so far as they have already been analyzed, and take up the question of how the lifeworld—as the horizon within which communicative actions are "always already" moving—is in turn limited and changed by the structural transformation of society as a whole.

I have previously introduced the concept of the lifeworld rather casually and only from a reconstructive research perspective. It is a concept complementary to that of communicative action. Like the phenomenological lifeworld analysis of the late Husserl,¹ or the late Wittgenstein's analysis of forms of life (which were not, to be sure, carried out with a systematic intent),² formal-pragmatic analysis aims at structures that, in contrast to the historical shapes of particular lifeworlds and life-forms, are put forward as invariant. With this first step we are taking into the bargain a separation of form and content. So long as we hold to a formal-pragmatic research perspective, we can take up questions that have previously been dealt with in the framework of transcendental philosophy—in the present context, we can focus our attention on structures of the lifeworld in general.

I should like to begin by (A) making clear how the lifeworld is related to those three worlds on which subjects acting with an orientation to mutual understanding base their common definitions of situations. (B) I will then elaborate upon the concept of the lifeworld present as a concept in communicative action and relate it to Durkheim's concept of the collective consciousness. Certainly, it is not a concept that can be put to empirical use without further ado. (C) The concepts of the lifeworld normally employed in interpretive [*verstehenden*] sociology are linked with everyday concepts that are, to begin with, serviceable only for the narrative presentation of historical events and social circumstances. (D) An investigation of the functions that communicative action takes on in maintaining a structurally differentiated world originates from within this horizon, in connection with these functions, we can clarify the necessary conditions for a rationalization of the lifeworld. (E) This takes us to the limit of theoretical approaches that identify society with the lifeworld. I

definition and redefinition involves correlating contents to worlds—according to what counts in a given instance as a consensually interpreted element of the objective world, as an intersubjectively recognized normative component of the social world, or as a private element of a subjective world to which someone has privileged access. At the same time, the actors demarcate themselves from these three worlds. With every common situation definition they are determining the boundary between external nature, society, and inner nature; at the same time, they are renewing the demarcation between themselves as interpreters, on the one side, and the external world and their own inner worlds, on the other.

So, for instance, the older worker, upon hearing the other's response, might realize that he has to revise his implicit assumption that a nearby shop is open on Mondays. It would be different if the younger worker had answered: "I'm not thirsty." He would then learn from the astonished reaction that beer for the midmorning snack is a norm held to independent of the subjective state of mind of one of the parties involved. Perhaps the newcomer does not understand the normative context in which the older man is giving him an order, and asks whose turn to get the beer it will be tomorrow. Or perhaps he is missing the point because he is from another region where the local work rhythm, that is, the custom of midmorning snack, is not familiar, and thus responds with the question: "Why should I interrupt my work *now*?" We can imagine continuations of this conversation indicating that one or the other of the parties changes his initial definition of the situation and brings it into accord with the situation definitions of the others. In the first two cases described above, there would be a regrouping of the individual elements of the situation, a Gestalt-switch: the presumed fact that a nearby shop is open becomes a subjective belief that turned out to be false; what is presumed to be a desire to have beer with the midmorning snack turns out to be a collectively recognized norm. In the other two cases, the interpretation of the situation gets supplemented with respect to elements of the social world: the low man on the pole gets the beer; in this part of the world one has a midmorning snack at 9:00 A.M. These *redefinitions* are based on suppositions of commonality in respect to the objective, social, and each's own subjective world. With this reference system, participants in communication suppose that the situation definitions forming the background to an actual utterance hold intersubjectively.

Situations do not get "defined" in the sense of being sharply delimited. They always have a horizon that shifts with the theme. A *situation* is a segment of *lifeworld contexts of relevance* [*Verweisungszusammenhänge*] that is thrown into relief by themes and articulated through goals

and plans of action; these contexts of relevance are concentrically ordered and become increasingly anonymous and diffused as the spatiotemporal and social distance grows. Thus, as regards our little scene with the construction workers, the construction site located on a specific street, the specific time—a Monday morning shortly before midmorning snack—and the reference group of co-workers who are at this site constitute the null point of a spatiotemporal and social reference system, of a world that is "within my actual reach." The city around the building site, the region, the country, the continent, and so on, constitute, as regards space, a "world within my potential reach"; corresponding to this, in respect to time, we have the daily routine, the life history, the epoch, and so forth; and in the social dimension, the reference groups from the family through the community, nation, and the like, to the "world society" Alfred Schutz again and again supplied us with illustrations of these spatiotemporal and social organizations of the lifeworld.⁴

The *theme* of an upcoming midmorning snack and the *plan* of fetching some beer, with regard to which the theme is broached, mark off a situation from the lifeworld of those directly involved. This action situation presents itself as a field of actual needs for mutual understanding and of actual options for action: the expectations the workers attach to midmorning snack, the status of a newly arrived younger co-worker, the distance of the store from the construction site, the availability of a car, and the like, belong to the elements of the situation. The facts that a single-family house is going up here, that the newcomer is a foreign "guest worker" with no social security, that another co-worker has three children, and that the new building is subject to Bavarian building codes are circumstances irrelevant to the given situation. There are, of course, shifting boundaries. That becomes evident as soon as the homeowner shows up with a case of beer to keep the workers in a good mood, or the guest worker falls from the ladder as he is getting ready to fetch the beer, or the theme of the new government regulations concerning child subsidies comes up, or the architect shows up with a local official to check the number of stories. In such cases, the theme shifts and with it the horizon of the situation, that is to say, the segment of the lifeworld relevant to the situation for which mutual understanding is required in view of the options for action that have been actualized. Situations have boundaries that can be overstepped at any time—thus Husserl introduced the image of the *horizon* that shifts according to one's position and that can expand and shrink as one moves through the rough countryside.⁵

For those involved, the action situation is the center of their lifeworld; it has a movable horizon because it points to the complexity of the lifeworld. In a certain sense, the lifeworld to which participants in commu-

shall therefore propose that we conceive of society simultaneously as a system and as a lifeworld.

A.—In examining the ontological presuppositions of teleological, normatively regulated, and dramaturgical action in Chapter I, I distinguished three different actor-world relations that a subject can take up to something in a world—to something that either obtains or can be brought about in the one objective world, to something recognized as obligatory in the social world supposedly shared by all the members of a collective, or to something that other actors attribute to the speaker's own subjective world (to which he has privileged access). These actor-world relations turn up again in the pure types of action oriented to mutual understanding. By attending to the modes of language use, we can clarify what it means for a speaker, in performing one of the standard speech acts, to take up a pragmatic relation

- to something in the objective world (as the totality of entities about which true statements are possible); or
- to something in the social world (as the totality of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations); or
- to something in the subjective world (as the totality of experience to which a speaker has privileged access and which he can express before a public);

such that what the speech act refers to appears to the speaker as something objective, normative, or subjective. In introducing the concept of communicative action,³ I pointed out that the pure types of action oriented to mutual understanding are merely limit cases. In fact, communicative utterances are always embedded in various world relations at the same time. Communicative action relies on a cooperative process of interpretation in which participants relate simultaneously to something in the objective, the social, and the subjective worlds, even when they *thematically stress only one* of the three components in their utterances. Speaker and hearer use the reference system of the three worlds as an interpretive framework within which they work out their common, situation definitions. They do not relate point-blank to something in a world but relativize their utterances against the chance that their validity will be contested by another actor. Coming to an understanding [*Verständigung*] means that participants in communication reach an agreement [*Einkünigung*] concerning the validity of an utterance; agreement [*Einkünigung*] is the intersubjective recognition of the validity claim the speaker raises for it. Even when an utterance clearly belongs only to one mode of communication and sharply thematizes one corresponding va-

lidity claim, all three modes of communication and the validity claims corresponding to them are internally related to each other. Thus, it is a rule of communicative action that when a hearer assents to a thematized validity claim, he acknowledges the other two implicitly raised validity claims as well—otherwise, he is supposed to make known his dissent. Consensus does not come about when, for example, a hearer accepts the *truth of an assertion* but at the same time doubts the sincerity of the speaker or the normative appropriateness of his utterance; the same holds for the case in which a speaker accepts the *normative validity of a command* but suspects the seriousness of the intent thereby expressed or has his doubts about the existential presuppositions of the action commanded (and thus about the possibility of carrying it out). The example of a command that the addressee regards as unfeasible reminds us that participants are always expressing themselves in situations that they have to define in common so far as they are acting with an orientation to mutual understanding. An older construction worker who sends a younger and newly arrived co-worker to fetch some beer, telling him to hurry it up and be back in a few minutes, supposes that the situation is clear to everyone involved—here, the younger worker and any other workers within hearing distance. The *theme* is the upcoming midmorning snack; taking care of the drinks is a *goal* related to this theme; one of the older workers comes up with the *plan* to send the “new guy,” who, given his status, cannot easily get around this request. The informal group hierarchy of the workers on the construction site is the *normative framework* in which the one is allowed to tell the other to do something. The action situation is defined *temporally* by the upcoming break and *spatially* by the distance from the site to the nearest store. If the situation were such that the nearest store could not be reached by foot in a few minutes, that is, that the plan of action of the older worker could—at least under the conditions specified—only be carried out with an automobile (or other means of transportation), the person addressed might answer with: “But I don’t have a car.”

The background of a communicative utterance is thus formed by situation definitions that, as measured against the actual need for mutual understanding, have to overlap to a sufficient extent. If this commonality cannot be presupposed, the actors have to draw upon the means of strategic action, with an orientation toward coming to a mutual understanding, so as to bring about a common definition of the situation or to negotiate one directly—which occurs in everyday communicative practice primarily in the form of “repair work.” Even in cases where this is not necessary, every new utterance is a test: the definition of the situation implicitly proposed by the speaker is either confirmed, modified, partly suspended, or generally placed in question. This continual process of

nication belong is always present, but only in such a way that it forms the background for an actual scene. As soon as a *context of relevance* of this sort is brought into a situation, becomes part of a situation, it loses its triviality and unquestioned solidity. If, for instance, the fact that the new worker is not insured against accidental injury suddenly enters the domain of relevance of a thematic field, it can be explicitly mentioned—and in various illocutionary roles: a speaker can state that *p*; he can deplore or conceal that *p*; he can blame someone for the fact that *p*, and so on. When it becomes part of the situation, this state of affairs can be known and problematized as a fact, as the content of a norm or of a feeling, desire, and so forth. Before it becomes relevant to the situation, the same circumstance is given only in the mode of something taken for granted in the lifeworld, something with which those involved are intuitively familiar without anticipating the possibility of its becoming problematic. It is not even "known," in any strict sense, if this entails that it can be justified and contested. Only the limited segments of the lifeworld brought into the horizon of a situation constitute a thematizable context of action oriented to mutual understanding; only they appear under the category of *knowledge*. From a perspective turned toward the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Single elements, specific taken-for-granted, are, however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet problematizable knowledge only when they become relevant to a situation.

If we now relinquish the basic concepts of the philosophy of consciousness in which Husserl dealt with the problem of the lifeworld, we can think of the lifeworld as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns. Then the idea of a "context of relevance" that connects the elements of the situation with one another, and the situation with the lifeworld, need no longer be explained in the framework of a phenomenology and psychology of perception.⁶ Relevance structures can be conceived instead as interconnections of meaning holding between a given communicative utterance, the immediate context, and its connotative horizon of meanings. Contexts of relevance are based on *grammatically regulated* relations among the elements of a *linguistically organized* stock of knowledge.

If, as usual in the tradition stemming from Humboldt,⁷ we assume that there is an internal connection between structures of lifeworlds and structures of linguistic worldviews, language and cultural tradition take on a certain transcendental status in relation to everything that can become an element of a situation. Language and culture neither coincide with the formal world-concepts by means of which participants in communication together define their situations, nor do they appear as some-

thing innerworldly. Language and culture are constitutive for the lifeworld itself. They are neither one of the formal frames, that is, the worlds to which participants assign elements of situations, nor do they appear as something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds. In performing or understanding a speech act, participants are very much moving within their language, so that they cannot bring a present utterance *before themselves* as "something intersubjective," in the way they experience an event as something objective, encounter a pattern of behavior as something normative, experience or ascribe a desire or feeling as something subjective. The very medium of mutual understanding abides in a peculiar *half-transcendence*. So long as participants maintain their performative attitudes, the language actually in use remains *at their backs*. Speakers cannot take up an extramundane position in relation to it. The same is true of culture—of those patterns of interpretation transmitted in language. From a semantic point of view, language does have a peculiar affinity to linguistically articulated worldviews. Natural languages conserve the contents of tradition, which persist only in symbolic forms, for the most part in linguistic embodiment. For the semantic capacity of a language has to be adequate to the complexity of the stored-up cultural contents, the patterns of interpretation, valuation, and expression.

This stock of knowledge supplies members with unproblematic, common, background convictions that are assumed to be guaranteed; it is from these that contexts for processes of reaching understanding get shaped, processes in which those involved use tried and true situation definitions or negotiate new ones. Participants find the relations between the objective, social, and subjective worlds already preinterpreted. When they go beyond the horizon of a given situation, they cannot step into a void; they find themselves right away in another, now actualized, yet *preinterpreted* domain of what is culturally taken for granted. In everyday communicative practice there are no completely unfamiliar situations. Every new situation appears in a lifeworld composed of a cultural stock of knowledge that is "always already" familiar. Communicative actors can no more take up an extramundane position in relation to their lifeworld than they can in relation to language as the medium for the processes of reaching understanding through which their lifeworld maintains itself. In drawing upon a cultural tradition, they also continue it.

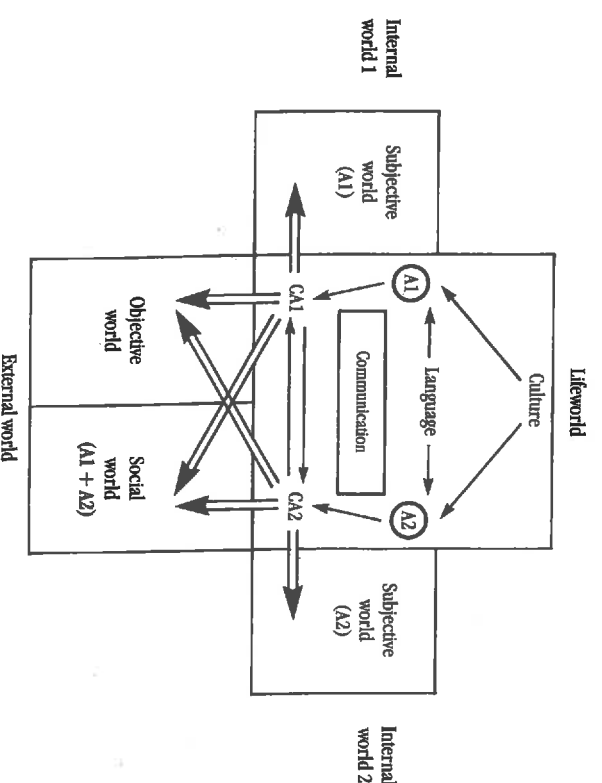
The category of the lifeworld has, then, a different status than the normal world-concepts dealt with above. Together with criticizable validity claims, these latter concepts form the frame or categorial scaffolding that serves to order problematic situations—that is, situations that need to be agreed upon—in a lifeworld that is already substantively interpreted. With the formal world-concepts, speakers and hearers can qualify the possible referents of their speech acts so that they can relate

to something objective, normative, or subjective. The lifeworld, by contrast, does not allow for analogous assignments; speakers and hearers cannot refer by means of it to something as "something intersubjective." Communicative actors are always moving *within* the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it. As interpreters, they themselves belong to the lifeworld, along with their speech acts, but they cannot refer to "something in the lifeworld" in the same way as they can to facts, norms, or experiences. The structures of the lifeworld lay down the forms of the intersubjectivity of possible understanding. It is to them that participants in communication owe their extramundane positions vis-à-vis the innerworldly items about which they can come to an understanding. The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. In a sentence: participants cannot assume *in actu* the same distance in relation to language and culture as in relation to the totality of facts, norms, or experiences concerning which mutual understanding is possible.

The scheme in Figure 20 is meant to illustrate that the lifeworld is constitutive for mutual understanding *as such*, whereas the formal world-concepts constitute a reference system for that *about which* mutual understanding is possible: speakers and hearers come to an understanding from out of their common lifeworld about something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds.

B.—In this case graphic representation is particularly unsatisfactory. So I shall now try to make the communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld more precise by comparing it to the phenomenological concept—the only one hitherto analyzed in any detail. In doing so, I shall be referring to Alfred Schutz's posthumously published manuscripts on *The Structure of the Lifeworld*, edited and reworked by Thomas Luckmann.⁸

Up to now we have conceived of action in terms of dealing with situations. The concept of communicative action singles out above all two aspects of this situation management: the *teleological aspect* of realizing one's aims (or carrying out one's plan of action) and the *communicative aspect* of interpreting a situation and arriving at some agreement. In communicative action participants pursue their plans cooperatively on the basis of a shared definition of the situation. If a shared definition of the situation has first to be negotiated, or if efforts to come to some agreement within the framework of shared situation definitions fail, the attainment of consensus, which is normally a condition for pursuing goals, can itself become an end. In any case, the *success* achieved by teleological



The double arrows indicate the world-relations that actors (A) establish with their utterances (CA).

Figure 20. World-Relations of Communicative Acts (CA)

action and the *consensus* brought about by acts of reaching understanding are the criteria for whether a situation has been dealt with successfully or not. A *situation* represents a segment of the lifeworld delimited in relation to a theme. A *theme* comes up in connection with the interests and aims of at least one participant; it circumscribes a domain of relevance of thematizable elements of the situation, and it is accentuated by the *plans* that participants draw up on the basis of their interpretations of the situation, in order to realize their ends. It is constitutive for communicative action that participants carry out their plans cooperatively in an action situation defined in common. They seek to avoid two risks: the risk of not coming to some understanding, that is, of disagreement or misunderstanding, and the risk of a plan of action miscarrying, that is, of failure. Averting the former risk is a necessary condition for managing the latter. Participants cannot attain their goals if they cannot meet the need for mutual understanding called for by the possibilities of acting in the situation—or at least they can no longer attain their goals by way of communicative action.

Schutz and Luckmann also distinguish these two aspects of interpreting a situation and carrying out a plan of action in a situation: "in the

natural attitude the world is already given to me for my interpretation. I must understand my lifeworld to the degree necessary to be able to act in it and operate upon it." The pragmatically motivated interpretation of the world leads to situation interpretations on the basis of which the actor can develop his plans of action: "Every situation has an infinite inner and outer horizon; it is to be explicated according to its relation to other situations, experiences, etc., with respect to its prior history and its future. At the same time, with respect to the details constituting it, it is divisible and interpretable without limit. This holds good only in principle. Practically, every situation is only *limitedly in need of explication*. The plan-determined interest, which is derived from the hierarchy of plans in the course of life, limits the necessity for the determination of the situation. The situation needs to be determined only insofar as this is necessary for mastering it."¹⁰ The interpretation of the situation relies on a stock of knowledge that "always already" stands at the disposition of the actor in his lifeworld: "The lifeworldly stock of knowledge is related in many ways to the situation of the experiencing subject. It is made up from sedimentations of formerly actually present experiences that are bound to situations. Inversely, every actually present experience is inserted into the flow of lived experience and into a biography, according to the set of types and relevance found in the stock of knowledge. And finally, each situation is defined and mastered with the help of the stock of knowledge."¹¹

Schutz and Luckmann hold the view that the actor constitutes the world from out of which he lives from the basic elements of this stock of knowledge.

In every situation only a certain segment of the world is given to me. Only part of the world is in actual reach. But around this province, other provinces of restorable or attainable reach are differentiated, their spheres of reach exhibiting a temporal as well as a social structure. Further, I can operate only in one segment of the world. Around the actual zone of operation there are graduated zones that are again restorable or attainable, possessing in any case a temporal social structure. My experience of the lifeworld is also temporally arranged: inner duration is a flow of lived experience arising from present, retentive, and protentive phases, as also from memories and expectations. It is intersected by world time, biological time, and social time, and is sedimented in the unique sequence of an articulated biography. And finally, my experience is socially arranged. All experiences have a social dimension, just as the temporal and spatial arrangement of my experiences is also "socialized." As a consequence, my experience of the social world has a specific structure. The other is given to me imme-

diately as a fellow-man in the we-relation, while the mediate experiences of the social world are graduated according to degrees of anonymity and are arranged in experiences of the contemporary world, the world of predecessors, and the world of successors.¹²

The primary aim of the phenomenological analysis of lifeworld structures is to elucidate the spatiotemporal and social organization of the lifeworld; I shall not go into that here. What interests me in the present context is the fact that Schutz and Luckmann hold on to the model of the philosophy of consciousness. Like Husserl, they begin with the ego-logical consciousness for which the general structures of the lifeworld are given as necessary subjective conditions of the experience of a concretely shaped, historically stamped, social lifeworld: "The above does not concern specific, concrete, and variable experiences, but rather the fundamental structures of experience of the lifeworld as such. In contrast to specific experiences, these fundamental structures do not enter into the grip of consciousness in the natural attitude, as a core of experience, but they are a condition of everyday experience of the lifeworld and enter into the horizon of experience."¹³

Schutz and Luckmann give an *action-theoretic* twist to the model of a generative subjectivity that constitutes the lifeworld as the transcendental frame of possible everyday experience—a model developed with an eye to basic *epistemological* questions. There is no doubt that the familiar psychological and sociological models of an isolated actor in a situation, affected by stimuli or acting according to plans,¹⁴ gain a certain depth of focus through being connected with phenomenological analysis of lifeworlds and action situations.¹⁵ And this is in turn the jumping-off point for a phenomenologically informed systems theory.¹⁶ This shows, incidentally, how easy it is for systems theory to become the heir to the philosophy of consciousness. If we interpret the situation of the acting subject as the environment of the personality system, the results of phenomenological lifeworld analysis can be smoothly absorbed into a systems theory of the Luhmannian observance. This even has the advantage that one can ignore a problem on which Husserl shipwrecked in the *Cartesian Meditations*, namely, the problem of monadological production of the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld.¹⁷ This problem does not even come up when subject-object relations are replaced by system-environment relations. On this view, personality systems are environments for one another, just as, at another level, personality systems and social systems are. The problem of intersubjectivity disappears—that is to say, the question of how different subjects can share the same lifeworld—in favor of the problem of interpenetration—that is, the ques-

tion of how certain kinds of systems can form environments for each other that are conditionally contingent and attuned to one another.¹⁸ The price for this reformulation will occupy us further on.

In this field of tension between phenomenological lifeworld analysis and sociological action theory, Schutz takes up an ambivalent position. One the one hand, he sees that Husserl did not solve the problem of intersubjectivity; under the influence of American pragmatism, especially Mead's,¹⁹ Schutz tends to put aside the constitution of the lifeworld and to start directly from an intersubjectively constituted lifeworld. On the other hand, Schutz does not convert, say, to a communication-theoretical approach; he sticks with Husserl's intuitive method and even takes over the architectonic of transcendental phenomenology, conceiving of his own undertaking in this framework as a regional ontology of society. This explains why Schutz and Luckmann do not get at the structures of the lifeworld by grasping the structures of linguistically generated intersubjectivity directly, but rather in the mirror of the isolated actor's subjective experience. In the frame of the philosophy of consciousness, the "experiencing subject" remains the court of last appeal for analysis.

The following excursus is meant to show that the phenomenologically described basic features of the constituted lifeworld can be easily explained if we treat 'lifeworld' as a complementary concept to 'communicative action'. Schutz and Luckmann stress primarily three moments: (a) the naïve familiarity with an unproblematically given background, (b) the validity of an intersubjectively shared world, and (c) the at once total and indeterminate, porous, and yet delimiting character of the lifeworld.

(*ad a*) The lifeworld is given to the experiencing subject as unquestionable. "By the everyday lifeworld is to be understood that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything which we experience as unquestionable; every state of affairs is for us unproblematic until further notice."²⁰ The unproblematic character of the lifeworld has to be understood in a radical sense: qua lifeworld it cannot become problematic, it can at most fall apart. The elements of the lifeworld with which we are naïvely familiar do not have the status of facts or norms or experiences concerning which speakers and hearers could, if necessary, come to some understanding. On the other hand, the elements of an action situation concerning which participants want to reach some consensus by means of their communicative utterances must also be open to question. However, this domain of what can be thematized and problematized is restricted to an action situation that remains *encompassed* within the horizons of a lifeworld, however

blurred these may be. The lifeworld forms the indirect context of what is said, discussed, addressed in a situation; it is, to be sure, in principle accessible, but it does not belong to the action situation's thematically delimited domain of relevance. The lifeworld is the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid or invalid.²¹ The presuppositions relevant to a situation are only a segment of this. As the example of the construction workers illustrated, only the context directly spoken to on a given occasion can fall into the whirl of problematization associated with communicative action; by contrast, *the lifeworld always remains in the background*. It is "the unquestioned ground of everything given in my experience, and the unquestioned frame in which all the problems I have to deal with are located."²² The lifeworld is given in a mode of taken-for-grantedness that can maintain itself only this side of the threshold to basically criticizable convictions.

(*ad b*) The lifeworld owes this certainty to a social a priori built into the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding in language. Although Schutz and Luckmann, operating on the premises of the philosophy of consciousness, play down the importance of language, particularly of the linguistic mediation of social interaction, they stress the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld: "Thus, from the outset, my lifeworld is not my private world but, rather, is intersubjective; the fundamental structure of its reality is shared by us. Just as it is self-evident to me, within the natural attitude, that I can, up to a certain point, obtain knowledge of the lived experience of my fellow-men—for example, the motives of their acts—so, too, I also assume that the same holds reciprocally for them with respect to me."²³ Again the commonality of the lifeworld has to be understood in a radical sense: it is prior to any possible disagreement and cannot become controversial in the way that intersubjectively shared knowledge can; at most it can fall apart. The perspectival character of perception and interpretation, which is linked with the communicative roles of the first, second, and third person, is decisive for the structure of an action situation. The members of a collective count themselves as belonging to the lifeworld in the first-person plural, in a way similar to that in which the individual speaker attributes to himself the subjective world to which he has privileged access in the first-person singular. Commonality rests, to be sure, on consensual knowledge, on a cultural stock of knowledge that members share. But it is only in the light of an actual situation that the relevant segment of the lifeworld acquires the status of a contingent reality that could also be interpreted in another way. Naturally, members live in the consciousness that new situations might arise at any time, that they have constantly to deal with new situations; but

such situations cannot shatter the naïve trust in the lifeworld. Everyday communicative practice is not compatible with the hypothesis that everything could be entirely different:

I trust that the world as it has been known by me up until now will continue further and that consequently the stock of knowledge obtained from my fellow-men and formed from my own experiences will continue to preserve its fundamental validity. We would like to designate this (in accord with Husserl) the "and so forth" idealization. From this assumption follows the further and fundamental one: that I can repeat my past successful acts. So long as the structure of the world can be taken to be constant, as long as my previous experience is valid, my ability to operate upon the world in this and that manner remains in principle preserved. As Husserl has shown, the further the idealization of the "I can always do it again" is developed correlative to the idealization of the "and so forth". Both idealizations, and the assumptions of the constancy of the world's structure which are grounded upon them—the validity of my previous experience and, on the other hand, my ability to operate upon the world—are essential aspects of thinking within the natural attitude.²⁴

(*ad c*) This immunizing of the lifeworld against total revision is connected with the third basic feature that Schutz, following Husserl, stresses: situations change, but the limits of the lifeworld cannot be transcended. The lifeworld forms the setting in which situational horizons shift, expand, or contract. It forms a context that, itself boundless, draws the boundaries. "The stock of knowledge pertaining to thinking within the lifeworld is to be understood not as a context transparent in its totality, but rather as a totality of what is taken for granted, changing from situation to situation, set into relief at any given time against a background of indeterminacy. This totality is not graspable as such but is co-given in the flow of experience as a certain, familiar ground of every situationally determined interpretation."²⁵ The lifeworld circumscribes action situations in the manner of a preunderstood context that, however, is not addressed. The lifeworld screened out of the domain of relevance of an action situation stands undecided as a reality that is at once unquestionable and shadowy. It flows into the actual process of reaching understanding not at all, or only very indirectly, and thus it remains indeterminate. It can, of course, be drawn into the wake of a new theme and thereby into the catchment of a changed situation. We then encounter it as an intuitively familiar, preinterpreted reality. It is only in becoming relevant to a situation that a segment of the lifeworld comes into view as something that is taken for granted culturally, that rests on interpretations, and that, now that it can be thematized, has lost this mode of unquestionable givenness: "Even in the natural attitude, the relative intrans-

parency of the lifeworld can be grasped subjectively at any given time. Any specific process of interpretation can serve as an occasion for this. But only in theoretical reflection does the lived experience of the inadequacy of specific interpretations lead to an insight into the essential limitations of the lifeworldly stock of knowledge in general."²⁶ As long as we do not free ourselves from the naïve, situation-oriented attitude of actors caught up in the communicative practice of everyday life, we cannot grasp the limitations of a lifeworld that is dependent upon, and changes along with, a cultural stock of knowledge that can be expanded at any time. For members, the lifeworld is a context that cannot be gotten behind and cannot in principle be exhausted. Thus every understanding of a situation can rely on a global preunderstanding. Every definition of a situation is an "interpretation within the frame of what has already been interpreted, within a reality that is fundamentally and typically familiar."²⁷

Every step we take beyond the horizon of a given situation opens up access to a further complex of meaning, which, while it calls for explanation, is already intuitively familiar. What was until then "taken for granted," is transformed in the process into cultural knowledge that can be used in defining situations and exposed to tests in communicative action.

It is distinctive of the modern understanding of the world that the cultural tradition can be exposed to testing of this sort across its entire spectrum and in a methodical manner. Centered worldviews that do not yet allow for a radical differentiation of formal world-concepts are, at least in their core domains, immunized against dissonant experiences. This is all the more so, the less there is a chance that "the unquestionable character of my experience explodes."²⁸ In the experiential domain of our cognitive-instrumental dealings with external nature, "explosions" can scarcely be avoided even when absorbent worldviews restrict the scope of perceived contingencies. In the experiential domain of normatively guided interaction, however, a social world of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations detaches itself only gradually from the diffuse background of the lifeworld.

If we understand lifeworld analysis as an attempt to describe reconstructively, from the internal perspective of members, what Durkheim called the *conscience collective*, then the standpoint from which he viewed the structural transformation of collective consciousness could also prove to be instructive for a phenomenological investigation. We could then understand the differentiation processes he observed as follows: the lifeworld loses its prejudgmental power over everyday communicative practice to the degree that actors owe their mutual understanding to *their own* interpretative performances. Durkheim

understands the process of the differentiation of the lifeworld as a separation of culture, society, and personality. We now have to introduce and explain these as structural components of the lifeworld.

Up to this point, borrowing from phenomenological studies, we have limited ourselves to a culturalistic concept of the lifeworld. According to this, cultural patterns of interpretation, evaluation, and expression serve as resources for the achievement of mutual understanding by participants who want to negotiate a common definition of a situation and, within that framework, to arrive at a consensus regarding something in the world. The interpreted action situation circumscribes a thematically opened up range of action alternatives, that is, of conditions and means for carrying out plans. Everything that appears as a restriction on corresponding action initiatives belongs to the situation. Whereas the actor keeps the lifeworld at his back as a resource for action oriented to mutual understanding, the restrictions that circumstances place on the pursuit of his plans appear to him as elements of the situation. And these can be sorted out, within the framework of the three formal world-concepts, into facts, norms, and experiences.

This suggests identifying the lifeworld with culturally transmitted background knowledge, for culture and language do not normally count as elements of a situation. They do not restrict the scope for action and do not fall under one of the formal world-concepts by means of which participants come to some understanding about their situation. They are not in need of any concept under which they might be grasped as elements of an action situation. It is only in those rare moments when culture and language fail as resources that they develop the peculiar resistance we experience in situations of disturbed mutual understanding. Then we need the repair work of translators, interpreters, therapists. They too have at their disposition only the three familiar world-concepts as they try to incorporate elements of the lifeworld that are operating dysfunctionally—incomprehensible utterances, opaque traditions, or at the limit, a not-yet-decoded language—into a common interpretation of the situation. Elements of the lifeworld that fail as resources have to be identified as cultural facts that limit the scope of action.

The situation with institutional orders and personality structures is rather different than with culture; they can indeed restrict the actor's scope for initiative and confront him as elements of a situation. As normative or subjective, they fall by nature, so to speak, under one of the formal world-concepts. This should not mislead us into assuming that norms and experiences (like facts or things and events) can appear *only* as something concerning which participants in interaction reach an understanding. They can occupy a double status—as elements of a social

or subjective world, on the one hand, as structural components of the lifeworld, on the other.

Action, or mastery of situations, presents itself as a circular process in which the actor is at once both the *initiator* of his accountable actions and the *product* of the traditions in which he stands, of the solitary groups to which he belongs, of socialization and learning processes to which he is exposed. Whereas *a fronte* the segment of the lifeworld relevant to a situation presses upon the actor as a problem he has to resolve on his own, *a tergo* he is sustained by the background of a lifeworld that does not consist only of cultural certainties. This background comprises individual skills as well—the intuitive knowledge of *how* one deals with situations—and socially customary practices too—the intuitive knowledge of *what* one can count on in situations—no less than background convictions known in a trivial sense. Society and personality operate not only as restrictions; they also serve as resources. The unquestionable character of the lifeworld from out of which one is acting is also due to the security the actor owes to well-established solidarities and proven competences. Lifeworld knowledge conveys the feeling of absolute certainty only because we do not know *about* it; its paradoxical character is due to the fact that the knowledge of what one can count on and how one does something is still connected with—undifferentiated from—what one prereflectively *knows*. If, then, the solidarities of groups integrated via norms and values and the competences of socialized individuals flow into communicative action *a tergo*, in the way that cultural traditions do, it makes sense for us to correct the culturalistic abridgement of the concept of the lifeworld.

C.—While the communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld we have been discussing gets us away from the philosophy of consciousness, it nevertheless still lies on the same analytical level as the transcendental lifeworld concept of phenomenology. It is obtained by reconstructing the pretheoretical knowledge of competent speakers: from the perspective of participants the lifeworld appears as a horizon-forming context of processes of reaching understanding, in delimiting the domain of relevance for a given situation, this context remains itself withdrawn from thematization within that situation. The communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld developed from the participant's perspective is not directly serviceable for theoretical purposes; it is not suited for demarcating an object domain of social science, that is, the region within the objective world formed by the totality of hermeneutically accessible, in the broadest sense historical or sociocultural facts. The *everyday concept of the lifeworld* is better suited for this purpose; it is by this means

that communicative actors locate and date their utterances in social spaces and historical times. In the communicative practice of everyday life, persons do not only encounter one another in the attitude of participants; they also give narrative presentations of events that take place in the context of their lifeworld. *Narration* is a specialized form of constative speech that serves to describe sociocultural events and objects. Actors base their narrative presentations on a lay concept of the "world," in the sense of the everyday world or lifeworld, which defines the totality of states of affairs that can be reported in true stories.

This everyday concept carves out of the objective world the region of narratable events or historical facts. Narrative practice not only serves trivial needs for mutual understanding among members trying to coordinate their common tasks; it also has a function in the self-understanding of persons. They have to objectivate their belonging to the lifeworld to which, in their actual roles as participants in communication, they do belong. For they can develop personal identities only if they recognize that the sequences of their own actions form narratively presentable life histories; they can develop social identities only if they recognize that they maintain their membership in social groups by way of participating in interactions, and thus that they are caught up in the narratively presentable histories of collectivities. Collectivities maintain their identities only to the extent that the ideas members have of their lifeworld overlap sufficiently and condense into unproblematic background convictions.

The lay concept of the lifeworld refers to the totality of sociocultural facts and thus provides a jumping-off point for social theory. In my view, one methodologically promising way to clarify this concept would be to analyze the form of narrative statements, as Arthur Danto was one of the first to do,²⁹ and to analyze the form of narrative texts. In the grammar of narratives we can see how we identify and *describe* states and events that appear in a lifeworld; how we *intertwine* and *sequentially organize* into complex unities members' interactions in social spaces and historical times; how we explain the actions of individuals and the events that befall them, the acts of collectivities and the fates they meet with, from the perspective of managing situations. In adopting the narrative form, we are choosing a perspective that "grammatically" forces us to base our descriptions on an everyday concept of the lifeworld as a *cognitive reference system*.

This intuitively accessible *concept of the sociocultural lifeworld* can be rendered theoretically fruitful if we can develop from it a reference system for descriptions and explanations relevant to the lifeworld as a whole and not merely to occurrences within it. Whereas narrative presentation refers to what is innerworldly, theoretical presentation is in-

tended to explain the reproduction of the lifeworld itself. Individuals and groups maintain themselves by mastering situations; but how is the lifeworld, of which each situation forms only a segment, maintained? A narrator is already constrained grammatically, through the form of narrative presentation, to take an interest in the identity of the persons acting as well as in the integrity of their life-context. When we tell stories, we cannot avoid also saying indirectly how the subjects involved in them are faring, and what fate the collectivity they belong to is experiencing. Nevertheless, we can make harm to personal identity or threats to social integration visible only indirectly in narratives. While narrative presentations do point to higher-level reproduction processes—to the maintenance imperatives of lifeworlds—they cannot take as their theme the structures of a lifeworld the way they do with what happens in it. The everyday concept of the lifeworld that we bring to narrative presentation as a reference system has to be worked up for theoretical purposes in such a way as to make possible statements about the reproduction or self-maintenance of communicatively structured lifeworlds.

Whereas the lifeworld is given from the *perspective of participants* only as the horizon-forming context of an action situation, the everyday concept of the lifeworld presupposed in the *perspective of narrators* is already being used for cognitive purposes. To make it theoretically fruitful we have to start from those basic functions that, as we learned from Mead, the medium of language fulfills for the reproduction of the lifeworld. In coming to an understanding with one another about their situation, participants in interaction stand in a cultural tradition that they at once use and renew; in coordinating their actions by way of intersubjectively recognizing criticizable validity claims, they are at once relying on membership in social groups and strengthening the integration of those same groups; through participating in interactions with competently acting reference persons, the growing child internalizes the value orientations of his social group and acquires generalized capacities for action.

Under the functional aspect of *mutual understanding*, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of *coordinating action*, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of *socialization*, communicative action serves the formation of personal identities. The symbolic structures of the lifeworld are reproduced by way of the continuation of valid knowledge, stabilization of group solidarity, and socialization of responsible actors. The process of reproduction connects up new situations with the existing conditions of the lifeworld; it does this in the *semantic* dimension of meanings or contents (of the cultural tradition), as well as in the dimensions of *social space* (of socially inte-

grated groups), and *historical time* (of successive generations). Corresponding to these processes of *cultural reproduction*, *social integration*, and *socialization* are the structural components of the lifeworld: culture, society, person.

I use the term *culture* for the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world. I use the term *society* for the legitimate orders through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity. By *personality* I understand the competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity. The dimensions in which communicative action extends comprise the semantic field of symbolic contents, social space, and historical time. The interactions woven into the fabric of every communicative practice constitute the medium through which culture, society, and person get reproduced. These reproduction processes cover the symbolic structures of the lifeworld. We have to distinguish from this the maintenance of the material substratum of the lifeworld.

Material reproduction takes place through the medium of the purposive activity with which sociated individuals intervene in the world to realize their aims. As Weber pointed out, the problems that actors have to deal with in a given situation can be divided into problems of "inner need" and problems of "outer need." To these categories of tasks as viewed from the perspective of action, there correspond, when the matter is viewed from the perspective of lifeworld maintenance, processes of symbolic and material reproduction.

I would like now to examine how different approaches to interpretative sociology conceive of society as a lifeworld. The structural complexity of a lifeworld, as it has revealed itself to our communication-theoretical analysis, does not come into view along this path. Whenever "the lifeworld" has been made a fundamental concept of social theory—whether under this name, as in Husserl and his followers, or under the title of "forms of life," "cultures," "language communities," or whatever—the approach has remained selective; the strategies of concept formation usually connect up with only one of the three structural components of the lifeworld.

Even the communication-theoretical reading I gave to Schutz's analysis suggests a concept of the lifeworld limited to aspects of mutual understanding and abridged in a culturalistic fashion. On this model, participants actualize on any given occasion some of the background convictions drawn from the cultural stock of knowledge; the process of reaching understanding serves the negotiation of common situation def-

initions, and these must in turn meet the critical conditions of an agreement accepted as reasonable. Cultural knowledge, insofar as it flows into situation definitions, is thus exposed to a test: it has to prove itself "against the world," that is, against facts, norms, experiences. Any revisions have an indirect effect on nonthematized elements of knowledge internally connected with the problematic contents. From this view, communicative action presents itself as an interpretive mechanism through which cultural knowledge is reproduced. The reproduction of the lifeworld consists essentially in a continuation and renewal of tradition, which moves between the extremes of a mere reduplication of and a break with tradition. In the phenomenological tradition stemming from Husserl and Schutz, the social theory based on such a culturalistically abridged concept of the lifeworld, when it is consistent, issues in a *sociology of knowledge*. This is the case, for instance, with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who state the thesis of *The Social Construction of Reality* as follows: "The basic contentions of the argument of this book are implicit in its title and subtitle, namely, that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs."³⁰

The one-sidedness of the culturalistic concept of the lifeworld becomes clear when we consider that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding; in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm, and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is "tested against the world"; they are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialization. The lifeworld is "tested" in quite a different manner in these latter dimensions: these tests are not measured directly against criticizable validity claims or standards of rationality, but against standards for the solidarity of members and for the identity of socialized individuals. While participants in interaction, turned "toward the world," reproduce through their accomplishment of mutual understanding the cultural knowledge upon which they draw, they simultaneously reproduce their memberships in collectivities and their identities. When one of these other aspects shifts into the foreground, the concept of the lifeworld is again given a one-sided formulation: it is narrowed down either in an *institutionalistic* or in a *sociopsychological* fashion.

In the tradition stemming from Durkheim, social theory is based on a concept of the lifeworld reduced to the aspect of social integration. Parsons chooses for this expression 'societal community'; he understands by it the lifeworld of a social group. It forms the core of every society,

where 'society' is understood as the structural component that determines the status—the rights and duties—of group members by way of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations. Culture and personality are represented only as functional supplements of the 'societal community'; culture supplies society with values that can be institutionalized, and socialized individuals contribute motivations that are appropriate to normed expectations.

By contrast, in the tradition stemming from Mead, social theory is based on a concept of the lifeworld reduced to the aspect of the socialization of individuals. Representatives of symbolic interactionism, such as Herbert Blumer, A. M. Rose, Anselm Strauss, or R. H. Turner, conceive of the lifeworld as the sociocultural milieu of communicative action represented as role playing, role taking, role defining, and the like. Culture and society enter into consideration only as media for the self-formative processes in which actors are involved their whole lives long. It is only consistent when the theory of society shrinks down then to *social psychology*.³¹

If, by contrast, we take the concept of symbolic interaction that Mead himself made central and work it out in the manner suggested above—as a concept of linguistically mediated, normatively guided interaction—and thereby gain access to phenomenological lifeworld analyses, then we are in a position to get at the complex interconnection of all three reproduction processes.

D.—The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the semantic dimension: it secures a *continuity* of tradition and *coherence* of knowledge sufficient for daily practice. Continuity and coherence are measured by the *rationality* of the knowledge accepted as valid. This can be seen in disturbances of cultural reproduction that get manifested in a loss of meaning and lead to corresponding legitimization and orientation crises. In such cases, the actors' cultural stock of knowledge can no longer cover the need for mutual understanding that arises with new situations. The interpretive schemes accepted as valid fail, and the resource "meaning" becomes scarce.

The social integration of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the dimension of social space: it takes care of coordinating actions by way of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations and stabilizes the identity of groups to an extent sufficient for everyday practice. The coordination of actions and the *stabilization of group identities* are measured by the *solidarity* among members. This can be seen in disturbances of social integration, which manifest themselves in *anomie* and corresponding

conflicts. In such cases, actors can no longer cover the need for coordination that arises with new situations from the inventory of legitimate orders. Legitimately regulated social memberships are no longer sufficient, and the resource "social solidarity" becomes scarce.

Finally the socialization of the members of a lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing situations in the world in the dimension of historical time: it secures for succeeding generations the acquisition of *generalized competences for action* and sees to it that *individual life histories are in harmony with collective forms of life*. Interactive capacities and styles of life are measured by the *responsibility of persons*. This can be seen in disturbances of the socialization process, which are manifested in psychopathologies and corresponding phenomena of alienation. In such cases, actors' competences do not suffice to maintain the intersubjectivity of commonly defined action situations. The personality system can preserve its identity only by means of defensive strategies that are detrimental to participating in social interaction on a realistic basis, so that the resource "ego strength" becomes scarce.

Once one has drawn these distinctions, a question arises concerning the contribution of the individual reproduction processes to maintaining the structural components of the lifeworld. If culture provides sufficient valid knowledge to cover the given need for mutual understanding in a lifeworld, the contributions of cultural reproduction to maintaining the *two other* components consist, on the one hand, in *legitimations* for existing institutions and, on the other hand, in *socialization patterns* for the acquisition of generalized competences for action. If society is sufficiently integrated to cover the given need for coordination in a lifeworld, the contribution of the integration process to maintaining the *two other* components consist, on the one hand, in *legitimately regulated social memberships* of individuals and, on the other, in moral duties or *obligations*: the central stock of cultural values institutionalized in legitimate orders is incorporated into a normative reality that is, if not criticism-proof, at least resistant to criticism and to this extent beyond the reach of continuous testing by action oriented to reaching understanding. If, finally, personality systems have developed such strong identities that they can deal on a realistic basis with the situations that come up in their lifeworld, the contribution of socialization processes to maintaining the *other two* components consists, on the one hand, in *interpretive accomplishments* and, on the other, in *motivations for actions that conform to norms* (see Figure 21).

The individual reproduction processes can be evaluated according to standards of the *rationality of knowledge*, the *solidarity of members*, and the *responsibility of the adult personality*. Naturally, the measure-