

# **The Pragmatic Theory of the Life-World as a Basis for Intercultural Comparisons**

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**Abstract.** *This contribution examines how far the concept of life-form can be used for intercultural understanding and comparisons. It argues that life-forms must be understood as a synthesis of forms of speech, action and thought whose basic structures can be disclosed by the means of Schutzian theory of the life-world. It is shown that the Schutzian approach, stressing the innerworldly transcendence of multiple realities on the one hand and the necessity to bridge that transcendence by semiotic systems and communication on the other, always respects the authentic strangeness of others and of their life-forms without giving up the possibility of understanding and therefore can avoid ethnocentrism and “westernization” of foreign cultures. Therefore it can be used to generate a comparative meta-language which is based in the structures of life-world. In accordance to the Schutzian perspective, the paper develops some basic items of such meta-language and shows that they can be used to synthesize the relevant results of social and cultural sciences and thus to bridge the controversial positions in the present discourse on intercultural comparison.*

## **I. On the Genesis and Definition of the Concept of Life-Forms**

The multiculturalism of the world today which we are vividly confronted with in the form of globalization, calls for closer examination of intercultural understanding and comparisons. The objective of the present paper is, therefore, to examine phenomenologically whether the theoretical concepts of life-forms and the life-world can help elucidate this issue.

Our investigation starts with an inquiry into the concept of life-forms since it has been often preferred to that of life-world because, with respect to the study of culture, the concept of life-forms is considered as more discerning. As a matter of fact, the concept of life-forms implies a plurality of forms that differ from one another. But the word “life” here only hints at what takes shape in these forms and why they differ from one another both requiring more explanation. The concept of life-forms stems from the philosophy of life in the beginning of the twentieth

century. Eduard Spranger (1966), a student of Dilthey's, used this term to describe typical forms of human inner life. Theodor Litt (1919) saw ego as existing in a multitude of life-forms and even Alfred Schutz's first attempt (1981) to analyze the meaning strata of human approaches to reality was titled, *Theorie der Lebensformen*. This concept, thus, originally referred to forms of meaningful understanding of human reality, in the plurality in which subjects experience the world, and the synthesis which constitutes the identity of the individual on the one side, and the individual's life reality on the other. The concept, therefore, addresses how humans meaningfully experience reality in a form that exists before the intervention of science, and thus adopts the "radical empiricism", (Eddie, 1969) which at that time belonged to the innovative philosophical schools such as the philosophy of life, phenomenology and pragmatism. (Eddie, 1969; Srubar, 1988)

Different forms of experience, of course, are not simply conditions immanent to the consciousness but are also generated by action and interaction. Spranger distinguished between theoretical, aesthetic, social and political forms of life. Schutz in his younger years (1981) already saw the connection between forms of thought, action and language and thus his theory not only includes streams of consciousness but also attributes a reality constituting role to the life-form of the acting, the thou-related and the speaking ego from the very beginning. Action, sociality and language are always present as constitutive elements of the subject that exist in life-forms.

In line with the semantics of the concept of "life-form" as used in the philosophy of life, Wittgenstein (1971) used "life-form" to place language—which was his preferred approach to reality—in the context of an individual action and at the same time putting it into a framework of rules given by the social context of everyday life practice. Wittgenstein saw speaking as a language game, as "part of an activity or of a life-form." (1971: 23) He obviously used the term life-form to integrate the paralinguistic components of the language game into his concept; however, he had to leave these components undetermined in the end because they could not be determined by his linguistic holism considering language as the exclusive approach to reality. (Reckwitz, 1999) Thus, despite Wittgenstein's innovative investigations into pragmatically produced language games, that which is genuinely "formed" in life-forms remained also in his thought ambivalent.

Nevertheless, in order to be able to work with the term “life-form” it is necessary to know what exactly is being formed in a life-form (identity) and what the distinguishing mechanisms are that diversify life-forms (difference). To that end, we must compare life-forms and correspondingly need a means and method to do this. If we were to define the identity of a life-form just as experiences of the subject (Litt, Spranger) *or* as the circumstances of practical speech use (Wittgenstein) then we would see that each of these bases is too narrow. Only in their comparative synthesis do these moments hint towards one of the basic generative features common to every life-form, and that is, human acts and the manner of their objectification, whereas the aforementioned linguistic objectification only constitutes one of the many objectifying possibilities. Subsequently, the difference between life-forms results from the generative mechanisms themselves, i.e., from divergent types of experience, action and interaction executed or from various practices of the language game. In this case, too, human acts and objectifications can be identified as the common mechanisms that differentiate life-forms. Via the results of an elementary comparison that simply extracts its reference point from the induction by asking for the common denominator of two types of definitions, we come upon a more significant universal characteristic of life-forms and their reciprocal relationship: *the same mechanisms that constitute life-forms (identity) also effect their differences*. Now let us combine this thesis with another one that is also concerned with the relationship of life-world forms, qua forms of approaching reality, which was familiar to Wittgenstein as well as to the ethnomethodologists who succeeded Schutz. It reads as follows: *The methods used by humans to create a situation/language game are the same methods used to understand the situation/language game*. (Garfinkel, 1967: 33f.) Thus, a combination of the two theses says that *human activities, in which the production and differentiation of life-forms are anchored, are also accompanied by objectified “practices” that, on the one hand, endow meaning to the life-forms and make them understandable on the other*.

## II. Life-World Structures and the Constitution of Life-Forms

The question now is how the structure of life-forms that enables identity and difference, as well as the objectification of meaning and understanding is constituted. If we were to formulate this problem in the sense of a

constitution theory of social reality, it would read as follows: Are there constitutive mechanisms on which the genesis and differentiation of life-forms are founded, and the description of which would also disclose the structure of life-forms revealing a “meta-order” which could provide us with a basis for their comparison and offer us a language to describe the individual cases of life-forms? I would now like to show that this kind of constitutional theoretical approach can benefit from the application of Alfred Schutz’s pragmatic theory of the life-world and be *further developed*. A proposal of this kind, however, must face up to various objections currently at issue. I believe four of the most significant arguments are as follows:

- 1a) Schutz’s approach in principle comes from the point of view of the philosophy of consciousness and does not reach the pragmatic communicative level of the constitution of social reality. (Habermas, 1981, II: 189ff.)
- 1b) Argument 1a has a logical paradoxical subvariant: Schutz attempts to compensate for the deficits of the philosophy of consciousness, and therefore he has to depart from the basis of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and thus loses the legitimacy of his theory with this a prioric transcendental basis. In plain language this means that in order to be valid Schutz’s approach must remain in the realm of the philosophy of consciousness even though it would become invalid because of this. (Welz, 1996)
- 2) The concept of the life-world is based on the idea of a cultural world characterized by homogeneity, identity and integration in which the difference between life-forms cannot be reproduced. (Habermas, 1981, II. 189ff.; Straub, 2000: 71ff.)
- 3) The phenomenological approach must keep arguments concerning the structure of the life-world on a proto-sociological level qua a proto-science and thus does not offer a connection to empirical findings. (compare Luckmann’s warnings concerning this issue: 1979, 1999)
- 4) The structure of the life-world does not have any claims to universal validity, since it is an ethnocentric construction which does not allow for an adequate constitution of “the other.” (Straub/Shimada, 1999; Matthes, 1992, 1999)

I would now like to take a closer look at these arguments and while doing so present the essence of Schutz's theory of the life-world that is relevant to our context. I will present the following points:

- 1) The analysis of the structures of the life-world reveals mechanisms that lead to the genesis and differentiation of individual life-forms. In this way, life-forms can be considered to be culturally determined cases of the life-world structure;
- 2) These mechanisms enable adequate reconstruction of the strangeness (difference) in the life-forms of others thus opening the path to their understanding;
- 3) The formal structure of the life-world is capable of providing us with a language to describe life-forms and to compare cultures in the sense of a *tertium comparationis* that is not necessarily eurocentric.
- 4) This concept is compatible with findings of the empirical sciences.

However, this is not the place to do a philology on Schutz's works. A reconstruction of Schutz's pragmatic concept of the life-world, that emanates from human action and communication, has already been written years ago based on text analysis and the genesis of his works. (Srubar, 1988; Embree, 1988) Therefore, I will only outline the core of the constitutive theory in his approach.

Schutz's constitutive theory of the life-world pursues two convoluted goals:

- 1) To show, based on the theory of action, how the constitution of social reality with its intersubjective meaning structured by typifications and relevances takes place in acts of consciousness, communication and action.
- 2) To describe the structure and the manifold stratification of the life-world that result from constitutive processes included in the first goal. Schutz's theory thus envisages the issue of the unity of the life-world and the difference between life-forms and makes it discernible and operable.

Schutz's theory of action proceeds in three steps which are directed toward questions which every theory that deals with the constitution of social reality has to answer:

- 1) How does meaningful orientation of action originate?
- 2) How can we understand the other?
- 3) How does common knowledge originate, i.e., how is an intersubjective valid stock of knowledge established?

Schutz bases his theory on methodological individualism and begins with the question of the subjectively constructed meaning of action. (Schutz, 1974) At this point, Schutz's theory joins Husserl's and Bergson's analyses of the stream of consciousness, which are also the reason behind the objections based on the philosophy of consciousness. One point that is often overlooked is that the analyses conducted here are connected to steps 2) and 3) mentioned above that inevitably transcend the limits of the philosophy of consciousness. Nevertheless, the meaningful acts of consciousness described by Schutz are of vital importance in our context, because they lead directly to the topic of "identity and difference:" On the one hand, meaningful acts of consciousness, which are phenomenologically revealed, constitute the basis of the human approach to the world par excellence: the intentionality of lived experience, temporality of consciousness, corporeality and embodiment of meaning are characteristics of man-centered reality constitution which are difficult to eliminate, even though Husserl—and after him Schutz—describe them, using a possibly Eurocentric language game. On the other hand, however, these are the acts that help to bring about the difference in people's "worldviews." The plasticity and reflexivity of consciousness, on which the varieties of the life-form are also based, have their foundation in these acts. The variations of the intentional attention to lived experiences that are anchored in their noetic-noematic structure can be regarded as laying the groundwork for how the "perspective" in the perception of the world takes place. (Husserl, 1952, §§ 87ff.; Schutz, 1974: 93ff.) Because acts of lived experience do consist of a noematic core and a noetic "glance" at that core, they bestow to the stream of consciousness both identity and difference in the sense of perspectivity, flexibility and the ability of interpretation. The same applies to temporality: objects of consciousness as the temporal syntheses of experiences are always temporal objects; therefore they are transitory and—depending on where they are temporally localized in the consciousness—also changeable. Reflexivity and plasticity of consciousness as experiencing my actions as an internal and external process are ultimately connected to corporeality. Based on this

experience, subjects can take an “excentric” position to their experiences, (Plessner, 1975: 288ff.) i.e., to experience that it is possible to exist in different parallel running situations. Corporeality does not only function as the vehicle of an experience of an action, but also as the vehicle of reflexivity, dynamics and plasticity of consciousness that are essential to the differentiation of individual and collective life-forms.

We will have to analyze more than just the level of consciousness, however, to clarify the constitutive and differentiating mechanisms of the life-world and its structure. Schutz (1974: 204ff.) transcends this boundary by analyzing the constitution of reality within social action—i.e., in interaction and communication—in addition to analyzing acts of consciousness. Schutz’s answer to the problem of intersubjectivity or the question of understanding the other also lies in these analyses. He proceeds from the assumption that an intersubjective coordination of two streams of living experience is possible—in dialogue form—within social interaction. By this he means a social relation in which the meaning of an action is to evoke a reaction from the other (1974: 162ff.). Thus actions have here a character of signs which, however, does not directly indicate the condition of the other’s consciousness but refers to the context of the situated and temporal realization of the action. This also signifies that the subjective meaning of an action is modified by the re-action of the other person. In this way, the subjective consciousness and its schemes of experience are modified, or differentiated in social inter-action by the plasticity of the acts of consciousness.

Thus, the paradox connected to intersubjective understanding is cleared up, i.e., how can we adequately explicate the other if self-explication results from the interpretation of oneself? Schutz enables us to show that the plasticity of consciousness and the communicative construction of intersubjective knowledge result in self-explication having to revert back to social constructs. Proof that self-explication eventuates on the basis of social, i.e., communicatively generated recognitional schemes, however, can also signify that even the knowledge acquired communicatively in dialogue can only be understood when used in connection with self-explication. This has consequences for the idea that in the dialogue with members of other life-forms/cultures one can disregard the compulsion for self-explication. (Straub/Shimada, 1999) We will address this problem that is significant for the adequacy of the construction of the other at a later point.



The fact that the subjective as well as the collective stock of knowledge depends on action leads Schutz to the supposition that pragmatic relevance, i.e., attention to reality which is guided by everyday action, shapes and differentiates the structures of typifications and relevances which characterize the everyday core of the life-world. (Srubar, 1988: 132ff.) Once more, pragmatic relevance represents here a constitutive mechanism of the life-world that can be regarded as identical for all everyday life-forms, which however, when implemented, always leads to different results, i.e., to constructions of reality which are related to a specific time and group. Since we only encounter the life-world by enactment of the praxis that in effect realizes the life-world as a cultural one, we always encounter the life-world in diverse life-forms. But it does not mean, as can be shown with Schutz's theory, that this diversity is not based on common constitutive mechanisms. On the contrary, the constructiveness, historicity, and thus the variability of life-forms are established therein: intentionality, bound to the action as pragmatic relevance, temporality, corporeality as the basis of spatial relations, communication as the origin of intersubjective sociality, represent those constitutive mechanisms from which the pragmatic, temporal, spatial and social dimensions of the life-world as well as the chance of their cultural differentiation do originate.

Did we, however, just move away from phenomenology's field that Husserl secures transcendently by treating the acts of consciousness of the transcendental ego not in a psychological way but as a condition of the possibility for the constitution of the world's grantedness? How can we estimate the validity of phenomenological propositions if the basis of the conditions immanent to consciousness has been abandoned? (Welz, 1996) If the validity of the *phenomenological propositions* results in the evidence of acts the execution of which is necessary for the constitution of the validity of a phenomenon in the strict sense, (Husserl, 1962, §§ 38ff.) then we can say that Schutz—via his proof of the inalterability of action for the meaningful constitution of the life-world—never departed from phenomenology. He did, however, extend its dimensions significantly and thus also made the findings of phenomenological analysis more compatible with social scientific and cultural studies. It is evident also in our context, that his conception of a pragmatic constitution of the life-world which is based on interaction and communication, can introduce us to mechanisms capable of describing the identity of life-forms and their differences. His solution to the problem of understanding the



other person also moves away from the scope of perceptual phenomenology—endangered by solipsism—and basically resolves the contradiction of understanding the other person via self-explication.

One might, however, ask whether resolving this problem is conditioned by the fact that Schutz seems to consider the life-world as a homogeneous cultural space, where the communicatively socialized Egos fall back on homogenous intersubjective shared knowledge. In this kind of model the strangeness of other seems to be cancelled out within the familiarity of the collective stock of knowledge making it a not very suitable approach for clarifying the relation between one's own life-forms and that of the other's or even between foreign life-forms.

Indeed, for Schutz (and Husserl, 1962, § 34) the temporal, spatial and social dimensions of the structure of the life-world are classified along the axis of familiarity and unfamiliarity into distinct and less distinct areas of knowledge. Schutz (1972) also suggests that familiarity is a characteristic of the stock of knowledge inherent to a group. This particular sociological approach to the life-world concept should not, however, cover up the differentiation of the life-world that is already addressed in the distinction between familiar/unfamiliar which is immanent to the life-world. Since this distinction traverses the entire structure of the life-world, the life-world cannot be represented as a harmless, domestic place, (this is one interpretation that Habermas apparently had in mind 1981; see also: Srubar, 1997) that stands out against the strangeness and the unfamiliarity by means of consensus, homogeneity and freedom from contradiction of its stock of knowledge. On the contrary, it can be shown that "strangeness" belongs to one of the most typical life-world experiences. The constitutive mechanisms discussed above are anchored in two moments from which the differentiation of the various strata of reality and meaning provinces within the life-world originate. On the one hand, the reflexive plasticity of consciousness modifies the pragmatically constituted core of everyday life in the life-world and shapes it into forms of game, fantasy world or theoretical world, which are transcendent to the everyday world, that can occur as subjective life-forms of the ego shaded by the different degrees of reflection. On the other hand, the pragmatic relevance of the worldly reference and the interactive/communicative genesis of the interpretive schemes that generate the different everyday worlds and thus also the different "bases" for their reflexive modification. These mechanisms of subjective and social modification of the life-world's everyday core therefore stand for the

essential stratification or, more precisely, for the necessary realization of the life-world structure in diverse life-forms. The following will illustrate that these various life-forms are in no way “harmoniously” connected to one another but rather that the experience of their difference and reciprocal strangeness is a part of the relatively natural attitude of humans.<sup>1</sup>

The multiplicity of perspectives immanent to the human approach to reality is inseparably connected to the constitutive mechanisms of the life-world from which it originates. The life-world is thus always divided into several areas of reality which transcend each other. This not only concerns the transcendence of reality areas which do not belong to the everyday realm of the life-world, even the core of everyday life is characterized by transcendent relationships. (Schutz/Luckmann, 1984: 139 ff.) My experience of the difference between consciousness and the outside world, of the temporality of my knowledge and biography as well as my knowledge that my stock of knowledge is based on constructs *qua* types that must not “actually” be valid, all this allows for a lived evidence of transcendences and—associated with it—for strangeness that is omnipresent within the life-world. The transcendence of the other and his in principle inaccessibility as well as the transcendence of extra-everyday areas of reality mentioned above represent other omnipresent sources of unfamiliarity/strangeness that are contained in the life-world structure.

Does this, however, not simply signify that otherness occurs within the framework of the life-world as “familiarity,” i.e., as something that is not “actually” strange but that has always already been “naturalized (nostrifiziert)?” (Matthes, 1992) The concept of the life world presented here allows for the differentiation between what I would like to call “comparative strangeness” and “existential strangeness,” which Waldenfels (1997) also has in mind when he speaks of “the strangeness which addresses us.” “Comparative strangeness” denotes the result of “relational” discursive comparisons between a stock of knowledge that is familiar to us and one which is not. This strangeness can evince a series of nuances and gradations that are dependent on the extent of the reciprocity of perspectives with which everyday actors encounter each other as Schutz has shown. (1971b: 12) The hypothesis of the reciprocity of perspectives on which every intersubjective relation is based, aims at a

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl (1955) and Schutz (1974) differentiate between reflexivity of the consciousness—in the sense of a principle of self-reference—and reflexivity in the sense of an intended act of consciousness. (cf. Srubar, 1988)

constitutive process in the life-world which in today's discourse is called the "rule of acceptance of strangeness." (Taylor 1993, Waldenfels 1997, Straub 2000) As a moment of the structure of the life-world, this reciprocity, however, not only has evaluative implications required by today's normative discourse but consequently also has pragmatic structural implications. Following this supposition of reciprocity, the actor in the relative natural attitude assumes that the systems of knowledge belonging to others were created by alter egos with pragmatic intentions within a temporally, spatially and socially structured situation. They thus follow the pragmatic principle of relevance which, however, is expected to differ from that of the observer's. In regard to the other, the supposition holds true of the interchangeability of the position (you would see what I see if you were in my position) and the temporary assumption of the partial congruency of the systems of relevance. We must, however, distinguish between different levels of this congruency, i.e., between the degrees of its expected realization in concrete interactions. The most general form of this expectation that I call "anthropological intersubjectivity" includes the classification of the other as a "fellow-being." This is reflected in the suppositions that are linked to the interchangeability of positions and proceed from the assumption that humans have comparable facilities of sense, language and action. "Social intersubjectivity" represents the second level of expected reciprocity which presupposes an interactive relationship, i.e., typical knowledge that allows me to recognize/expect social relationships and actions in their simplest form (communicative intentions, material exchange, the deixis of gestures, superiority and subordination, etc.), which are manifested in face-to-face relationships. "Cultural intersubjectivity" makes up the third level, that is, the specific deep-reaching interpretive scheme, which includes structures of relevance and typicality and their thematic, interpretive and pragmatic dimensions. The congruency of these three dimensions can only be expected amongst members of "in-groups." And even here these expectations can be interwoven by everyday transcendence. Beyond this congruency, the differentiations immanent to the life-world apply which constitute the "jungle of the life-world"—to borrow a term of Ulf Matthiesen's (1983). We can thin out this jungle via pragmatic or communicative restraints transforming unfamiliarity into familiarity. Nevertheless it also includes the moment of strangeness, that I call "existential." No efforts can erase existential strangeness, the evidence of which goes hand in hand with the lived experience of transcendence,

although efforts in the sense of signs and communication belong to the life-world practices dealing with it. To fall back on Heidegger (1967), Schutz sees the source here in the “fundamental anxiety” generally brought about in us by the transcendence of the world. We can banish this moment of strangeness and of non-identity by efforts of pragmatic action for some time, yet we cannot delete it from our everyday life-worldly horizon of experience. (Schutz, 1971a: 262; Srubar, 1988)

What constitutive role does experience of transcendence play as an experience of strangeness in the structure of the life-world? It remains to be seen whether it can be considered an essential motive for action within the world or whether this idea represents just a *topos* in a semantics to describe the world that is specific to a particular culture. The decisive factor in our context is that the lived experience of transcendence in the context of the life-world concept is linked with a universal human social praxis that is evidently used in various cultures to overcome the transcendence, i.e., with the communication and the generation of sign systems. Expressed schematically, this means that communication bridges the gap between the transcendence of the ego and alter ego via the coordination of two streams of consciousness by means of the constitution of a common sign system. The communication process, too, is founded on phenomenologically describable constitutional mechanisms in the structures of the life-world and its basis in the human approach to the world. There is, on the one side, the temporality of consciousness and its polythetic acts which renders the synthesis of appresentation possible and thereby also constitutes the precondition of forming signs, i.e., they link “signifiant” and “signifié.” On the other side, appresentational structures are subject to social modification by communication and interaction. From a Schutzian point of view, the results constitute objectivated sign systems and especially linguistic ones. Since languages are pragmatically used, their semantic structures originate from the multiple perspectives provided by action of the persons using them. In this respect language quasi reproduces the differentiated multiple realities of the life-world into structures in the form of diverse semantic areas and discourses, which comes quite close to Wittgenstein’s idea of life-forms. Thus, the pragmatic, temporal, spatial and social dimensions of the structure of the life-world are also a constitutive part of language and its inherent semantics.

We have just seen that transcendence/strangeness and its pragmatic and communicative bridging make up an essential part of the structures

of the life-world. We also saw, however, that although this communicative bridging is capable of semantically linking transcendent areas together or of changing something unfamiliar into something familiar, it is not able to remove the moment of existential strangeness from the context of the life-world. In other words, the concept of the life-world does not necessarily smooth out strangeness by “naturalizing” it, i.e., making it more familiar. On the one hand, it enables us to see that even when building a communicative bridge to the other we risk a “naturalization” (in view of the necessary compulsion of self-explication) and shows that communication creates a “third realm”, i.e., a common system of representation that differs from the meanings intended by the single interacting subjects and therefore in no way denotes their “authentic” representation. On the other hand, it also shows us that all this is accompanied by the lived experience of strangeness as a constitutive part of the other.

### **III. The Reconstruction of Life-Forms as a Means of Intercultural Comparisons**

Against this background, we can take the next step in our investigation and ask what means our approach provides us with to reconstruct life-forms, particularly of foreign life-forms. First of all we see that within this framework we come very close to the formulation of the question of the current discourse in the field of intercultural comparisons. The life-world has not in any way manifested itself as a homogenous cultural world, which is predominantly focused on groups, but as a formal structure that is differentiated by its constitutive mechanisms and that generates heterogeneity and contradiction within the diversity of its provinces of meaning. We have also seen how close the theory of the life-world is to the problems of the “dialogic” approaches (trying to reconstruct the otherness adequately in a dialogue) and how sensitive it is to the problem of naturalization. The crucial question about the possibility of intercultural comparisons is, however, not only whether an approach is sensitive enough to allow for the strangeness in its dissimilarity but much more whether the conceptual means of the approach in question can adequately reconstruct the “strangeness” of a life-form in order to make it the object of comparison.

To attain this kind of adequacy, we must first prove that the reconstruction is not “ethnocentric,” i.e., that I am not forcing the order of my

own life-forms and normality on the other. This perquisite is homologous with the classic precondition that Schutz and the interpretive sociologists make on the methodology of the social sciences concerning the relationship between scientific formation of types and the everyday structure of types of the investigative object. According to this precondition, scientific typifications are only adequate when the constructions on which they are based can be performed and understood by everyday actors. When applied to life-forms this would mean that a life-form is adequately reconstructed when a competent actor within the cultural life-form concerned is also able to understand this reconstruction. (Schutz, 1971b: 51)

Taking account of the Schutzian postulates of adequacy should promote the methodological sensibility for the risk of a scientific ethnocentric "naturalization." In our context, the postulate of adequacy can practically be satisfied in three ways. The first possibility lies in the attempt to "go native," as Kurt H. Wolff (1976) describes it in his *Surrender and Catch*. Here we are referring to actively submerging ourselves into a foreign life-form although it is clear that full identification with this life-form can never be achieved. The second possibility is to involve the subjects of investigation in a dialogue to help evaluate, assess and formulate the findings as, for example, in the approach taken by "participatory" researchers. (Eckerle, 1987) Even though these two approaches draw us very near to everyday typifications and thus to the intrinsic understanding of the life-form under investigation they, however, do not solve the problem of the inevitable gap between understanding a foreign life-form attained via interaction and communication and the necessary description of this "data" in a meta-language that would enable us to make a comparison. Even if we were to assume counterfactually that no elements of our everyday knowledge or, in particular, of our own scientific knowledge have snuck into our understanding of the other's life-form, the problem of the difference between *emic* and *etic* processing (Pike, 1967; Goodenough, 1970) of the other's reality will become virulent at the moment when we try to make a connection between the other's reconstructed reality and further different life-forms for a comparison. We could perhaps bypass this problem by doing without comparisons, i.e., by retreating to a radical culturalistic relativistic position (for example by reading Wittgenstein with Lyotard (1994). But this would not solve our comparability problem either because the "operation called 'comparison'," (Matthes 1992) i.e., the act

which relates ego's and alter's life-forms, has always to take place in the two methods described above. Thus, even when intercultural comparisons appear impossible for *theoretical* reasons we are still not exempt from the need for a *methodology* to make controlled comparisons. The need for an extrinsic meta-language therefore still remains in each case.

At this point, the third possibility for satisfying the postulate of adequacy proves to be helpful. Adequacy can also be attained by making sure that when constructing scientific typifications we take the constitutive mechanisms of the life-world into account that, on the one hand, constitute the common frame of life-forms, and, on the other, represent the lines of its differentiation along the structure of the life-world as comprehensible. Since these are the mechanisms that delineate the approach to the world in the relative natural attitude and thus also are constitutive for the everyday understanding, they therefore also fulfill the conditions of the everyday bond of the scientific typification. Moreover, these mechanisms allow for a descriptive language that can be used to describe the various life-forms and their differences and also keeps the chance of a comparative correlation open which preserves the differences and similarities as well. To remain within cultural anthropological terminology, the structure of the concept of the life-world provides us with an *etic* language that, however, formally has been generated in *emic* way.

Of course one could argue that this approach is the result of a particular culture, so that when we apply it to a foreign culture it indeed does amount to ethnocentric naturalization. We can counter this argument with the fact that the life-world concept described here circumvents this risk as far as possible (and it was shown above that self-explication cannot be totally disregarded) because it does not generate any "expectations" with regard to the contents of the other's life-forms but simply formulates their constitutive mechanisms as revealed by analysis on a phenomenological, formal, and philosophical anthropological level. (Luckmann, 1999; Srubar, 1998) Let me present an example: It was shown that the temporality of acts of consciousness and action belongs to the constitution of meaningful reality. This postulates temporality as a dimension of the structure of the life-world that, at the same time, constitutes a condition of the dynamics of social reality and thus also a dimension of all life-forms. It, however, neither anticipates a specific semantic of this dimension, nor does it lead to an evaluation of different temporal semantics. Therefore only the assertion could be ethno-centric



that social reality, qua the life-world, always exhibits a temporal dimension in which on principle the potential of the historicity and thus the capability of change is present. Nevertheless, if we wanted to negate this kind of temporal dimension in foreign life-forms we would have to reject the principle of constructiveness and thus also the potential capacity for development of social systems and at the same time assign the subjective actors in these kinds of systems a construction of reality that would make learning *in* and transcendence *of* a cultural world once constructed in principle impossible.

What elements of the describing language can the concept of the life-world presented here have to offer us? We already described the most essential part of these elements during the previous discussion of the structure of the life-world and its genesis in the acts of consciousness and action of subjects living in the relative natural attitude. Here we are dealing with a “matrix” of the structure of the life-world as Luckmann already proposed. (Luckmann, 1979, 1990) This matrix is generated from intentionality, temporality, corporeality/embodiment and intersubjectivity of the human approach to the world and can be outlined with the pragmatic, temporal, spatial and social dimensions of the structure of the life-world, as they are formulated in the *Structures of the Life-World*. (Schutz/Luckmann, 1975, 1984) As opposed to Luckmann’s concept, our matrix here is not static but rather the constituting mechanisms are seen as the—at least potential—generators of the dynamics, historicity and differentiation of the life-world. (Srubar, 1998) Only in this way can we grasp the stratification of the life-world into the manifold reality areas and meaning provinces systematically enough to disclose the reciprocal transcendence of different spheres of the life-world *and* the bridging of this transcendence by appresentative sign systems and communication as primordial constitutive mechanisms of the reality of the life-world.

We can now clearly see that the structures of the life-world can be used as a “formal” descriptive language and yet that these structures can be generated from mechanisms which have to be understood as constitutive mechanisms of social reality therefore quasi representing the “auto-poesis” of the life-world. The embedding of language and communication in these mechanisms by means of which communicative acts join with acts of consciousness and action as activities that constitute the life-world, now also signifies an expansion of the foundation of the formal matrix of the structure of the life-world. Henceforth, this also includes the implicit connection of the forms of thought, language and action that,

notwithstanding its different realization in different cultures, represents a general mechanism that generates social reality and is immanent to the concept of the life-world. Life-forms can therefore be understood as the variations of this connection brought forth from the practical realization of the three forms.

If we were to follow the proposals put forth above, which presumptions arise in pragmatic research with regard to intercultural comparisons and intercultural understanding? First of all we have the primary ascertainment—which is not very surprising—that strangeness can only be determined via the comparison as a “comparative strangeness,” that, however, the “naturalization tendencies” of the comparison, which are inherent to self-explication as a moment of interpretation, can be relativized by the evidence of the “existential strangeness” also immanent to the life-world. Secondly, it is presupposed that other life-forms are not homogeneous systems of symbols and interpretations but rather that they may include a variety of heterogeneous and incommensurable areas of reality and provinces of meaning that are related to each other through reciprocal transcendence. Furthermore, we can assume that this transcendence can be communicatively bridged and is bridged whereas, however, we have to heed the different shades or degrees of intersubjectivity that are found in the supposition of reciprocity that form the basis for communication. Moreover, the supposition holds true that life-forms as the connection of forms of thought, language and action are shaped in accordance with the matrix of the structure of the life-world. If we were to revert to the gradation of unfamiliarity to illustrate the “operationalization” of these suppositions, then we would find them on the level of “anthropological” intersubjectivity. They would have to be condensed by means of further empirical methods and, in particular, by discursive practices in order to reach the levels of “social” and “cultural” intersubjectivity in regard to the contents, whereby attention must be paid to the postulate of adequacy compliance to which also presupposes discursive processes. The discursivity of the comparison is thus in no way excluded because of the supposition of a universal matrix in the life-world as a *tertium comparationis* but rather is preserved in the phenomenological perspective of the life-world.

The chances of discursive reconstruction of strange life-forms, however, must be critically examined within the framework of the concept presented above. Here we will have to distinguish between the conditions of everyday and scientific discourse, even though—in accordance

with the postulate of adequacy—the “formal properties” of everyday discourse (Garfinkel/Sacks, 1979) are also methodologically binding for its scientific description. On the everyday level we must, above all things, maintain that even though there is a chance of a transcendental bridging in communication, the communication alone cannot guarantee the authenticity of the access to the other’s life-form. This insight has been substantiated from several sides both theoretically and empirically. It is theoretically grounded on the differentiation between the strangeness of the other and the “mutuality” of the “third realm” of meaning generated by communication that quasi “arches over” the otherness of the communicants. This communicative phenomenon has been substantiated by phenomenology, (Schutz, 1974; Waldenfels, 1997) system theory (Luhmann, 1984) as well as by pragmatism. (Mead, 1973) Empirically we can observe time and again that common traits of the reciprocity of perspectives, which appear to be very clear during the interaction, are embedded on the level of social—not to mention—cultural intersubjectivity in very different contexts of meaning, even if the lack of knowledge of these contexts does not threaten the success of the direct (short-term) intercultural interaction/communication. An excellent illustration of this is to be found in Sahlins’s (1986; cf. Renn, 1999) analysis of the meeting between Captain Cook and his crew with the natives: While the intercultural contact on behalf of both sides proceeded successfully within the social form of exchanging goods, this was a more or less economically profane affair for the Europeans while the natives were acting within a sacral framework. The mutual understanding was restricted to the anthropological and rudimentary level of social intersubjectivity. A “working consensus” was nevertheless able to stabilize itself just as obviously, i.e., a “third realm” was established that enabled successful communication in the narrow spatial and temporal frameworks of individual interactions.

The level of this kind of working consensus is hardly ever overstepped even when there are no temporal restrictions of the contact as in Captain Cook’s case, or when there is an intention to reach and to understand the socio-cultural level of the other’s life-form. Studies on communication between priests and natives in the Philippines also illustrate this phenomenon. (Rafael, 1992) Here it is also evident that the communication within the context of the performance of a ritual was successful, however, even when the priests could speak the local language and made efforts to translate the holy texts in order to acculturate the catholic dogmatics, the working consensus on both sides remained firmly anchored

in the mutually misunderstood interpretative and social structures. The natives accepted, for example, the institution of confession as expressing the client-patron relationship familiar to them while the priests understood this as an expression of the native's conversion to Christianity. This illustrates that discursive processes in intercultural situations do not lead to a lucid understanding of the other but rather produce syncretic forms of thought, language and action that can on the one hand serve as bridges for successful interaction and communication yet on the other they cannot be detached from the meaning-constitutive reference to one-self. This signifies that, although it is impossible to access the life-forms of the other without communication and the data obtained by it, communication alone is also unable to reconstruct "pure otherness," but rather creates a "third realm" that encompasses the elements of the other as well as one's own. The interpretive self-explication of the other's life-form that is based on this kind of "third realm" does not just fall back purely on one's own schemes of interpretation but also to elements that "authentically" belong to the other; however, it is unable to remove these from one's own context.

The question, thus, is whether and how we can use the means of scientific reflection to comprehend everyday syncretism which, in our perspective, also constitutes the point of departure for the scientific reconstruction of the other's life-forms, in order to steer the discursive production of otherness into tracks that we are able to "control." First of all, we can proceed from the assumption that the discursive process of intercultural comparison is a kind of translation from one cultural context to another. (Aoki, 1992; Shimada, 1992) As problematic as this might seem from a scientific point of view, especially since the semiotic systems that would have to serve as the "starting point" are difficult to determine, it is however just as evident that this kind of "translation" takes place every day to overcome the transcendence of cultural life-forms in everyday life. Yet these processes have hardly been the subject of empirical studies. An exception to this are studies on "code switching" in bilingual families (Gumperz, 1982) in which the pragmatic dimension of the situated change from one language to the other was more the focus of the investigation than the semantic relation of the different codes. We can certainly expect that more focused studies on the everyday process of translation would produce findings that are also significant for the hypotheses on the constitution of social reality in one's own world. As long as these findings are not yet available, we will have to revert to

findings from the science of translation in order to evaluate the chances of “translation models” in the field of intercultural comparisons. However these findings do not deal with translations pertaining to everyday life but with artificial communicative genres. Generally it is also understood here that the result of a translation is a “third realm of meaning” that constitutes a syncretic intersection of two lingual codes that are not (or not totally) commensurable. From that point of view it is self-evident, too, that a translation is not provided by an assignment of equivalent signs code to code, but that there are semantic gaps to be bridged, in which a competent speaker chooses a different expression instead of the lexical equivalent because this expression contains “psychical and social” conditions and experiences that correspond to those of the expression to be translated. (Kade, 1981; Levy, 1981) In other words, in translation processes it is impossible to translate the other’s meaning context without a partial naturalizing activation of self-explication, and not even then when the translator has a sufficient command of the foreign code and uses it with competence so that a reflexive controlled relation with the code is possible. The adequacy of the translation is, all in all, a result of decisions made by the translator based on this competence. In normal cases of a scientific comparison of cultures, however, we cannot assume the above mentioned conditions because the comparison generally goes here hand in hand with the reconstruction of the foreign “cultural code.” The employment of discursive methods requires linguistic competence; however, this alone does not lead to the solution of the problem of a controlled relation with the communicatively created “third” as we have seen above. This would eventuate in a systematic protocol of the decisions made by the translator, the casuistic of which would then have to lead to the actual basis qua *tertium comparationis* of the comparison in question.

Thus it becomes clear that a controlled relation with the otherness that is produced by discourse is impossible without a meta-language that would allow us to systematically observe the decisions made while reconstructing the other’s life-forms. A possible meta-language, of course, can be provided by any scientific categories whatever their construction may be. In that manner one can simply impose on other cultures constructs derived solely from scientific discourse and search, for example, for “power distance,” “individuality,” “avoidance of insecurity,” etc. (Hofstede, 1997) These kinds of prescriptive categorical languages, however, have often been shown to have an extreme inclination for “natura-

lization” (Matthes, 1992; Straub/Shimada, 1999; Tenbruck, 1992) and stand out because of the instrumental arbitrariness with which the categories are formed. The instrumentality of intercultural comparisons made on this basis, therefore, has more of a commercial value. It is less suitable for offering a reconstruction of other life-forms that is commensurate with the *postulate of adequacy* discussed above. These problems can be avoided if we revert to concepts generated “proto-scientifically,” i.e., concepts that describe the process of the constitution of social reality before there was any scientific intervention and thus strive to avoid “deforming” this reality by the formation of inadequate scientific theories. I hope that I have been able to show that the concept of the life-world and its structure can offer this kind of “control” in the sense of a *tertium comparationis*.

#### **IV. The Structure of the Life-World and Cultural Comparison in the Context of the Empirical Sciences**

The proto-scientific nature of the life-world does not signify that this concept is unrelated to or not compatible with the empirical sciences. On the contrary, the “philosophical anthropological” claim represented here is all about elucidating the intersections between the concept of the life-world and the sciences and keeping these intersections open to fill with the results of empirical research; however, the critique of the sciences inherent to the concept of the life-world must remain effective. (Husserl, 1962; Srubar, 1997) Nonetheless, if we were to apply the concept of the life-world as a frame to bond the sciences of the humanities to the structure of its object then we would see that even “positivistic” inadequate methods cannot entirely evade the implications of their life-world object but also must follow their life-world structure. This insight enables us to allow for the interdisciplinary diversity of heterodox approaches and to observe their findings within their “convergence to the life-world” instead of assessing them on the principles of a “pure doctrine.”

Which intersections of the life-world theory will not only enable us to bridge the gap to empirical research but also promote it? An almost unlimited link to the sciences is represented by the postulation of the connection between forms of thought, language and action inherent to the concept of the life-world which it, of course, also shares with several of

the approaches in the social and cultural sciences.<sup>2</sup> This is not the place to present an overview of the research done in these areas. Therefore, I will only point out a few “classic” positions to illuminate the named connection in our context. I must emphasize that this subject still constitutes an open field of research as can be seen in the diversity of the individual positions. This will involve bringing to light some of the common characteristics of the connection of the three forms mentioned above with the help of examples.

Let us begin with the connection between forms of action and forms of thought. In the field of ethology, this connection has already been accepted and proven as the reciprocal relation of “the sphere of perception” and “the sphere of activity” since Uexküll. (Uexküll/Kriszat, 1970) This connection is also pursued in Piaget’s genetic psychology that is based on concepts of assimilation and accommodation showing the intertwined relations of action and cognitive structures. In a sociological context, it is the interactional pragmatic tradition following Mead on which the context of forms of action and thought, that are characterized by speech gestures, are founded. This connection also seems to be suggested in the recent research on the autopoietic organisation of organisms by Maturana and Varela (1982). It must be emphasized that the approaches mentioned here repeatedly reveal the connection of forms of action and forms of thought as producing dimensions of the life-world in particular the temporal and spatial ones. The pragmatic construction of perception and action space has been shown by Uexküll, Mead, and Piaget as well although the approaches differ immensely. The same applies to the investigations by Piaget and Mead into the genesis of temporal concepts. Maturana and Varela also see temporality and spatiality as essential conditions for the self-constitution of living systems.

The connection of forms of thought and forms of speech has been a classical component of anthropological linguistics since Sapir and Whorf. Studies on the linguistic representation of time and space are

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<sup>2</sup> This connection is at the moment the topic of discussion between the “normativists” and the “naturalists” in the analytical philosophy of language to be found under the catchword of “philosophy of the mind.” However the results of this discussion clearly indicate that productive contributions to solving this problem will most likely come from the sciences themselves, since the decision whether the “normativists” or the “naturalists” are in the right ultimately depends on the empirical findings from linguistics and the social and cognitive sciences. Making philosophy more scientific, which is striven for by the analytics therefore has to pay the price of possibly moving philosophy towards insignificance. (Gluer, 1999; Kim, 1998; Bieri, 1997)



very prominent here. (Whorf, 1963) In Bernstein's studies and those of his successors in the area of the sociology of language, this connection repeatedly emerges but is not elucidated. (Bernstein, 1972; Oevermann, 1972) The connection between forms of thought and speech has been the goal of both sociological and anthropological studies of systems of classification since Durkheim. (Durkheim/Mauss, 1904) When looked at more closely, we should also consider at this point studies on the connection of forms of signs or media and forms of thought that point to categorical differences in the thought of literate and illiterate societies and pursue these differences more closely as a function of alphabetic or ideographic writings. (Goody, 1990; Stetter, 1997; Assmann/Assmann, 1994) Also, a great deal of literature on media effects (Burkart, 1998; Merten, 1999) traces down the connections between forms of media and thought.

The reciprocal relation between forms of speech and forms of action has also been the topic of many theoretical considerations and empirical studies. Elucidating this is Schutz's theory of language as the conveyor of relevance and typology that focuses, in particular, on the thematic, interpretive and pragmatic relevances transported via language (Schutz/Luckmann, 1975) in order to reveal their relation to action. In short, pragmatic relevance is reflected here in that which is specified by language and, at the same time, these names contain an interpretation of that which is specified that, on the other hand, suggests an intention or option of action. Aside from the intuitive examples, (as the difference between relevance structure carried by the words "gentleman" and "guy") this connection is substantiated by Lakoff's works on metaphors and their meaning in the context of action (1980). Also Labov's studies on the connection between social networks and the choice of speech (1980) varieties pragmatically elucidates the connection of forms of action and speech.

This brief presentation of evidence suggests two things: First of all, it becomes clear that the relation between forms of action, thought and language have been interdisciplinarily accepted, discerned and demonstrated as a basic constituting connection of the social and reality. This, too, justifies the suggestion to view life-forms as forms of this connection and thus to analyze and compare them with respect to interdisciplinary findings that should be viewed critically but whose relevance should not be judged primarily by narrow theoretical preferences. Secondly, the investigation of life-forms on the linguistic level may not

remain in an universe of linguistic holism, but rather the interdisciplinary findings call for approaches which link the linguistic level to extralingual areas within the constitution of reality. The linguistic level of life-forms can then be seen as one of the semantics that objectifies the connections of forms of action, thought and language shown above, while the concept of the diversity of the life-world strata suggests that we should always expect a variety of semantics when we approach other "cultural worlds." Semantics in this sense then constitutes an objectivizing selection of schemes of action and interpretation so that they can be understood in their orientating function as "conditioning" of communication, interaction and cognition. For the comparison of life-forms, these semantics offer us the advantage that their study allows for assumptions of forms of action and thought even when the action itself cannot or can no longer be observed, although we must always take into consideration the pragmatic-institutional component of semantics which is revealed either by the reconstruction of sources or by observation.

The study of individual dimensions of the life-world structure, namely, the temporal and spatial dimensions of social reality in different life-forms and cultures presents us with a further possibility of connecting the concept of the life-world to several fields of scientific research. We have just seen that the results of these investigations closely refer to the connection of forms of action, thought and language and are often constitutive for these forms. Therefore we can assume that the comparative study of temporal and spatial semantics constitutes a prominent approach to the understanding of foreign life-forms.

From the argumentation presented up to this point, it should have become clear that the many studies of temporal and spatial concepts in different life-forms or cultures are not just due to intra-scientific discourse, but that they do indeed follow the constitutive mechanisms of the life-world. Thus it is not by chance that the temporal concepts and semantics immanent to different cultures play a significant role in cultural anthropology. They serve there as a key to understanding other cultures or societies, (see for example: Evans-Pritchard, 1968; Whorf, 1963; Geertz, 1987) because the forms of action and thought are made comprehensible by assumed or observably ordering effects common to those semantics. The constitutive effect of spatial semantics, which continues all the way into the structures of kinship and clans and that seems to dominate the life-forms of archaic societies, has been also

substantiated in a number of studies. (Eliade, 1990; Müller, 1987; Levi-Strauss, 1967)

In the following, I would like to take a look at the temporal dimension in order to show how significant investigations of temporal and spatial semantics are for intercultural comparisons, and how they can be implemented with the concept of the life-world. The investigation into the temporal dimension of social reality and its semantics represents a traditional element of comparative studies of cultures.<sup>3</sup> These studies, on the one hand, attempt to reconstruct the temporal semantic or temporal interpretation of the culture under investigation and, on the other, they attempt—by comparing concepts of time and time perception—to answer the question of how capable a culture is of “modernization and evolution.” Granet’s and Needham’s classic research chooses the Weberian question of China’s “non-development” as compared to Western modernization (Weber, 1972) as their point of departure. Needham ultimately did not see rational “deficiencies” of the temporal concept as being the reason for China’s “non-development” but rather postulates that Chinese spatial semantics that connect the cosmic macro-space and the social micro-space to one another had an inhibiting effect on development and social change. (Needham, 1979) In this context we must include the often discussed thesis of evolution and time perception where the linearity of time is said to promote modernization while the circularity of time impedes it. (Wendorff, 1980)

While this kind of study is located on the level of “self-images” and “cultivated semantics,” (Luhmann, 1980: 19) Hallpike’s studies, which are based on Piaget’s genetic psychology, (1974, 1972) focus on the difference in cognitive development in pristine societies as dependent on their interpretation of time. There is also an idea of evolution in the background of this study that—and as Piaget did as well—sees abstract formal scientific thinking of the Western world as a quasi natural end for phylogenesis and ontogenesis. (Hallpike, 1984; Dux, 1989)

The critique of such an evolutionary universalizing of one temporal semantics (namely of a Western one) comes from the authors who point out that the developmental differences revealed in these kinds of comparisons are mostly products of euro-centric schemes of observation. These wrongly believe that global expansion of a temporal concept that is brought on by political and economic circumstances is the proof of its

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<sup>3</sup> Whorf, 1963; Granet, 1985; Needham, 1979; Hallpike, 1979; Shimada, 1994; Fabian, 1983; Hall, 1983; Brislin, 1986; Maletzke, 1996; Wendorff, 1980; Dux, 1989.

epistemological universality. The critical objections to this idea of universal validity of a single cultural temporal semantics are first of all directed against the tendency of naturalization already mentioned above, (Matthes, 1992) that renders an adequate reconstruction of temporal semantics impossible. Secondly, however, they argue also against the resulting order of societies on an imaginary time axis that make many of the currently existing societies appear to be evolutionary forerunners of Western modernity. This kind of criticism prefers a concept of temporality that renounces universals and sticks with the different “everyday” forms of the interpretation of time in societies. (Fabian, 1983) This also subconsciously rejects the use of universals as a comparative basis for intercultural comparisons.

Against this background, the possibilities should now clearly stand out that the concept of the pragmatic life-world theory presented here has to offer to find a way out of the stagnating discourse about cultural comparisons and to move on to more productive forms of collaboration. By means of the concept of the life-world we can show how deep and on which level the social reality and the people who produce it are permeated by temporal structures and semantics. This structuring effect of the temporal dimension of the life-world can be traced from the level of individual biographical identity formation to complex forms of coordination of collective practice. The perspective of the life-world enables the differentiation and comprehension of the necessary variety of everyday and cultivated temporal semantics in which the structuring effects of the temporal dimension are objectivized. In this sense, we can then proceed to show that the temporal dimension of social reality—aside from the others—can be referred to as a universal of the intercultural comparison without a hypostatization of one cultural characterization of this dimension (which is justly criticized) leading to a universal interpretive scheme. Moreover, this concept is open enough to critically involve the interdisciplinary insights on the conditions of the constitution of social reality in its theoretical framework. It provides a way to see the constitutive mechanisms of the life-world also as mechanisms of differentiation and reveals the dynamics of meaning and semantics as an element in the evolution of societies, without forcing us to formulate a goal of these dynamics in order to define the developmental mechanisms, as is the case in modernization theories. Rather, it assumes that the potential for development is constituted in the temporality and reflexivity of the human approach to the world itself. How far this potential is realized

depends on the degree and type of reflexivity of semantics, for example, temporal semantics which can be made subject to empirical investigations, whereby the reflexivity of a particular semantics signifies its capacity to make its ordering effects available for the construction of social order. With the differentiation of "cold" and "hot" societies, Levi-Strauss teaches us that this in no way must correspond to the western idea of progress and development. (Levi-Strauss, 1975: 40ff.)

In this sense, the pragmatic life-world theory can serve us as a universal matrix for a comparison of life-forms and cultures. If the actual objective of the social and cultural sciences is to answer the question of how social order is possible, then the findings of such a comparison could be helpful in broadening our understanding of the constituting processes of human reality in an unprecedented way.

(translated by Allison Wetterlin)

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