

Chapter III: Distance and Alienation of Different Life Worlds ("Lebenswelten")

The title of this chapter does not refer directly to the generation context. Instead, it characterizes a certain relationship among the age groups which will have become apparent to anyone who observes the manner in which they currently coexist in everyday life. Despite empirical findings to the contrary, the impression one gains is of distance, alienation, and membership in mutually exclusive life worlds ("Lebenswelten"); and it is strengthened by public discussions which persistently and with unremitting energy concentrate on divergencies among and conflicts between the age groups.

By using the term life worlds ("Lebenswelten"), A. Schütz already indicates that his focus will be on the experiential space or horizon potentially or actually available to the individual in everyday life. In dynamic Western societies its limits are demarcated by rapid social and technological change. Some of the consequences of this process on the *individual* level have already been pointed out by Dreitzel. In societies characterized by rapid social change, the demands made upon the individual continually alter; their nature is contradictory, requiring the individual to be flexible and stable at one and the same time (Meyer, 1982; Casch, 1979). Likewise, traditional contexts of meaning and knowledge are losing their cohesion at an ever increasing rate (Kade, 1983). In this regard Buchhofer/Friedrichs and Lüdtké speak of a permanent cultural change and acceleration of demands for information and knowledge (1970, 305). This compels the younger age groups to adapt quickly to innovations for which the "cultural memory" (Mitscherlich, 1957), that is, the older generations as vehicles of cultural values, have no answers. The intensity of collective experiences also increases during periods of rapid social transformation, and the more profound this transformation is, the larger the gap becomes between the generations and their forms of consciousness.

On the *social* level, change thus implies a sectorial differentiation of society, its segregation into age-homogeneous groups each of which has its own realm of experiences. This process extends even to spatial and social-spatial life realities (cf. Matthes, 1978).

The process has its parallels in all the different phases of social development. During the modernization and development of bourgeois society the process first manifested itself as a progressive differentiation between age groups. As development went on, differentiation began to take the form of association ("Vergesellschaftung"), until today the stage has been reached of a segregation of age groups accompanied by the formation of age-specific life worlds ("Lebenswelten") and realms of experience.

Segregation can be seen as a direct consequence of the association ("Vergesellschaftung") process, in the course of which the different age groups grew apart and began to live their everyday lives in relative isolation (cf. Preuss-Lausitz et al., 1983 and Attias-Donfut, this chapter). Scientific research helped to define their respective living conditions as specific, and research itself was also subject to fundamental changes in the course of these developments. It expanded tremendously, growing ever more specialized and distinguishing ever finer subdisciplines (e.g., youth and old age sociology). The form this process took in youth sociology, how youth

and/or various adolescent subcultures became a subject for research, and how science, as a consequence of its existence, contributes to the creation of certain youth phenomena — this is the subject of D. Hebdige's contribution to the present chapter.

A glance at the diverse cultures and experiential worlds of the age groups (e.g., the young's discos and bars, subcultural movements like the Teds, Mods, Punks, etc. and the senior citizens' culture and old age homes of the elderly) underscores the impression of effective separation and alienation tendencies. Advertising, marketing, and the manufacture of age-specific consumer goods (from toys and textiles to furniture, food, hobby and sporting goods, music, etc.) encourage these tendencies and contribute to a consolidation of age-specific worlds of experience. And this consolidation in turn implies the formation of age-specific spaces (Matthes, 1978), as, for example, children's playgrounds, which find their counterparts in youth centers for adolescents and leisure centers for the elderly. Due to the relatively monofunctional specialization of these spaces (Preuss-Lausitz et al., 1983) they reinforce the tendency towards age-specific segregation. Thus the conditions are created for such phenomena as speechlessness and estrangement in the interaction between age and generational groups — as Knopf describes in this chapter — especially in view of the fact that increasingly age-homogeneous worlds develop under conditions of an "epochal change of values" (Ingelhart, 1980), which leads to the coexistence and concurrence of diverse age-group value systems.

Admittedly, it is not clear whether this situation must necessarily be accompanied by conflicts between age groups, or whether the causes of existing social conflict are less generation-specific than of a social nature. Anne Foner and Walter Hollstein discuss these questions here.

The problem of age-group alienation outlined above has traditionally been a subject of the political sciences and of youth sociology (cf. Editors' Introduction). Here, it forms the focus of investigations on age-dependent attitudes and orientations and the conflicts these give rise to (e.g., Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Agnello, 1973; Foner, 1983; Riley et al., 1972, etc.), as well as entering into analyses which attempt to pinpoint characteristics of today's youth by asking "What makes these young people different from other 'generations' of adolescents in the past?" (e.g., Allerbeck & Rosenmayr, 1971; Jaide, 1961; Neidhardt, 1967, etc.). Contributions of this kind concern themselves primarily with a *single* age group, relating it to other age groups only from specific points of view. Common to all of these authors is their search for causes of generational and age-group divergencies in social inequalities. Their interest may focus on the significance of these divergencies for social changes and discontinuities and cultural transformation processes (e.g., Hollstein, this chapter). Other authors are more concerned with the factor of social inequality, as is the case with Anne Foner and Claudine Attias-Donfut. Both adhere to the structuralist-functionalist models which predominate in generation research, concentrating either on the relevance of age groups (cohorts) and old age for continuity and change in society (Foner) or on old age considered in relation to social stratum, the production sphere and their social implications (Attias-Donfut).

One of our aims in discussing the topic of intergenerational relationships under the heading, "Distance and Alienation of Life Worlds ('Lebenswelten')," is to bring in other research approaches which might be productively incorporated in genera-

tion studies. One key approach is subculture research — represented here by Dick Hebdige — which employs both structuralist models and hermeneutic, interpretive methods (Brake, 1981; Clarke et al., 1981; Diederichsen et al., 1983). Moreover, issues are being discussed in subcultural research which are central for generation research because they shed light on a number of aspects of the relevance of generation as actuality for cultural and social change. Among these issues are the reality of different subcultures and subgroups; the role of age-homogeneous (and sometimes age-heterogeneous) subgroups in social and cultural change; and the function of these groups as points of cultural orientation (Brake, 1981), as creative potential (Krause et al., 1980), as escape from or alternative to social reality (Brake, 1981), or as social pressure groups (Friebel et al., 1979; Zinnecker, 1981, etc.).

The question is still open, however, as to the relevance of subgroups and subcultures to generation membership. Do they represent diverse streams within a generational unit which “live through a common experience in different ways” (Mannheim, 1964)? Or are we confronted here with phenomena that cut across the generation as actuality? This question is prompted especially by age-heterogeneous subcultures such as those which have lately entered the public eye in the New Social Movement, for example, some feminist groups and homosexual and disabled persons’ groups.

Phenomenological socialization research likewise devotes itself to questions which can provide impulses for generation studies, for example, questions concerning entelechy formation, the significance of youth as a formative phase influencing the life course, and also as regards the relevance of generation-specific experiences for the course of life (which Mannheim treats as a problem of experience layering — *Erlebnisschichtung*; cf. next chapter). This last-named problem points directly to *life course research*, which can help answer questions as to constancy and/or variability of values and political orientations, questions which have long been treated and discussed in the context of political science but which the research of life course and biography (Elder & Rockwell, 1978; Bertaux, 1982; Kohli, 1978) may well turn up promising answers for.

A completely different approach to the subject characterizes “ethno science” and also ethnomethodology. In the context of our present topic, this tradition seems particularly well suited to elucidating the basic question as to what relevance generation membership and old age have in everyday life (cf. e.g., the study by Atkinson, 1980), and how both come to be constituted as social facts at all (e.g., Langehennig, 1983).

Like the first chapter, the present one also obviously has the character of a programmatic outline. Under the leitmotif of “Distance and Alienation of Different Life Worlds (‘Lebenswelten’)” it should therefore be read as a program listing those current directions and research traditions which might help advance generation research.

The first contribution returns to the point of departure of this chapter. Claudine Attias-Donfut discusses the conditions which lead to age-differentiation, investigating the institutionalization of retirement culture in France. She shares the structuralist point of view, attempting, as she says, “to link structural and temporal dimensions, i.e., to clarify that it is the social structure which produces the stages of life.” Accordingly, she gives special attention to the social function performed by

the formation of age-homogeneous worlds. After outlining the relevant theoretical background she shows how the elderly are marginalized as a result of changes in the production sector, increasing division of labor, and the establishment of the social security system. Attias-Donfut illustrates the development, parallel to these structural processes, of "senior citizens' culture" (leisure and education measures) including age-specific worlds (homes and retirement centers). She also shows how the definition of this life stage undergoes a change when seen from the perspective of the entire life course.

The problem of age-group and generation conflicts is the focus of the following two papers. Though of course conflict represents only *one* possible type of inter-generational relationship, actual developments insure that it remains a center of interest both for general and scholarly discussion.

Anne Foner looks at the problem from a structural, functionalist perspective, arguing from the background of the age-stratification concept. She sees potential for age group conflicts — unlike, for example, Dreitzel or Hebdige, this volume — in social inequalities conditioned by the particular type of age-stratification in modern societies (i.e., inequalities in access to power, prestige, material resources, etc.). Other authors also recognize the possibility that age conflicts may increase with unequal distribution of material resources (cf. Marshall, next chapter). Despite existing conflict potential, however, Foner points out that open age-group conflicts are seldom identifiable. She emphasizes the effectiveness of conflict-reducing mechanisms, which she derives from the cohort flow model. According to that model, the members of older cohorts, based on their own earlier experience, practice indulgence with youth who are in process of gaining access to social gratifications. Conversely, the members of younger cohorts, anticipating their opportunity to obtain such resources, practice patience with their elders. Foner explains this mechanism by means of the social security system now developing in the United States.

Walter Hollstein conducts an analysis of age-specific movements. He classifies the various alternative tendencies and movements since the 1950s and describes their development. As the criterion for his classification, Hollstein takes the manner in which discontinuities in social development were recognized, discussed and/or raised to social and political goals by the various movements — an approach that is quite common in youth sociology (cf. Editors' Introduction). Bums, Hippies, Yippies, Beatniks, citizens' initiatives, basis groups and squatters — different as they are, all refused to accept the social *status quo* of the time and the values that underlay it. What distinguishes these groups is the scope of their alternative models for a better world. Hollstein doubts whether the most recent of these trends, the New Social Movement, can be characterized as an age-specific (youth) movement. Its age-heterogeneous composition alone speaks against such a view. Hollstein sees the New Social Movement as a logical continuation of previous alternative streams. He outlines a processual model of counter-cultural movements (cf. also Hollstein, 1981) which illustrates the way in which the various movements succeeded each other. All of them share the character of *social* movements; and Hollstein concludes that only those which aim not only at age-group oriented goals but advance *social* goals can be said to possess lasting potential for political change. He warns against

succumbing to a myth – wishing to identify age or generational conflicts where in reality general social conflicts are involved.

Berger too thinks that generational or age conflicts are pseudo-conflicts which resolve themselves in the course of social development (cf. Berger, next chapter). In his view, they have the function of helping the younger age groups collect experiences in the struggle for social power. Thus Berger places the transformation potential of age and generational conflicts not so much in the political as in the cultural sphere, a view that in the German tradition is shared by many generation theoreticians, not lastly by Karl Mannheim.

How the process of cultural transformation takes place, and what role subcultures play in it vis-à-vis the mainstream culture – this is the subject of Hebdige's investigations (e.g., Hebdige, 1976; 1983, and this chapter). Like many other youth sociologists, Hebdige traces the formation of youth cultures back to structural conditions, or more precisely, to insoluble structural contradictions which are particularly exacerbated by rapid social change. Yet unlike the counter-cultural, alternative movements analyzed by Hollstein, adolescent subcultures do not generally advance social or political aims. Their protest and resistance take the form of fashion, a unique style meant to shock. Like Dreitzel, Hebdige suggests that youth subcultures be seen as a symbol of the collapse of traditional forms of meaning and as a symbol of resistance – symbolism which has recourse to the hermeneutic interpretation of the meaning of style.

On the level of style, Hebdige feels youth subcultures should be understood as a reaction and resistance to, and negation of, mainstream culture. On the other hand, they play the role of a cultural avant-garde: each subculture's specific style is rapidly co-opted by society, and through mass marketing their vanguard symbols become integral parts of general culture. This process may indeed involve conflict, which the media generally interpret as generation-conflict; however, it never fundamentally questions social developments. This is corroborated as well by investigations into the (sub)cultures of the elderly (Langehennig, 1983).

In his contribution to this chapter, Hebdige is concerned to elucidate a more inclusive problem, the production of youth phenomena, or, as he phrases it, "the construction of troublesome adolescence" by society and science. Hebdige gives an overview of youth research tradition and shows how changes in the social status of adolescents associated with general social transformation, bring in their wake changes in the paradigms with which researchers attempt to explain the problems of adolescence. In this contribution, too, special weight is placed on an analysis of subcultural trends.

Detlef Knopf leads us to a concrete problem that besets the interrelationships among the age groups. He asks whether and how the gap between age groups can be overcome through interaction in special contexts and through educational measures. Knopf devotes his discussion particularly to interaction between the elderly and the young, those age groups whose marginalization in age-specific worlds has proceeded farthest. Due to their segregation, opportunities have become more limited to gain insight into the life world of the other group, particularly since both elderly and adolescent groups bear strong subcultural traits. A consequence of this mutual estrangement of different life worlds is that opportunities for judgement and interpretation are minimized and the potential of activity-

structuring measures to maintain interaction between these age groups increasingly reduced (Schaeffer, 1981). Against this background, Knopf describes the difficulties involved in the interaction between these age groups and shows what efforts are demanded of interaction partners if they are to master the extremely sensitive dynamics of such encounters.