Semiosis & sign exchange: design for a subjective situationism, including conceptual grounds of business information modeling

Wisse, P.E.

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Chapter 12 demonstrates where derivations of HABERMAS’s theory of communicative action onto information modeling approaches often fail to reflect its original complexity. It also claims that he himself has contributed to confusion and misappropriation.

What HABERMAS cannot help of course, is that his theory is often studied from secondary sources that lack a necessary critical quality. At least this would explain why his own outspoken reservations do not survive, for example in modeling theories that flaunt communicative action.

However, his own work already has a low threshold for biased interpretation. For HABERMAS does not clearly maintain a distinction that would otherwise prevent much confusion. He starts out by developing his theory of communicative action as a sort of *measuring standard*. So, for him it does not have absolute and general validity. It serves to chart phenomena. Their description, he argues, is made relative to his standard.

Such a bootstrap mechanism is extremely common. Take for example a meter. After it has been declared a standard, measurements are uniformly possible. It is essential to understand, however, that measuring results are always *relative*, that is, relative to the – assumption of the – relevant standard. And results involve a reduction; only what falls within the range of the standard’s dimension(s) gets included.

So far, so good. But next, the impression is inescapable that HABERMAS nevertheless actively *promotes* his standard as the behavioral norm. Now that is really something of a different order. A meter can be applied as a standard, but so can a yard, etcetera.

By making it difficult for his readers to distinguish between communicative action as standard versus norm, description flows over into prescription, vice versa. And it is as a (meta)theory of prescription – regardless of how different
that might be from the originally more balanced view of HABERMAS — that communicative action holds attraction for construction-oriented information modelers. For they consider an information model a prescription of reality, i.e., a reality to be constructed. Given the nature of the digital technology, an unambiguous prescription is required. Then, a normative approach is ideally suited, especially when the norm is subsequently inflated to cover all of reality. It comes down to mistaking a measuring standard for the reality reflected by measurements.

Communicative-action-as-norm is especially attractive for information systems blueprint-thinking because of the emphasis that HABERMAS places on rationality. A concomitant analytical closure is easily welcomed. Conceptual information modeling, however, is not aimed at producing a tool blueprint. That comes later in every iteration. At the conceptual stage of design, what is at stake is an interpretation of reality with all its variety relevant to — interests of — stakeholders. A priori reduction to a particular norm excludes requisite variety.

Chapter 12 ends the series of four critical chapters in Part ii. In Part i, Chapter 5 offers criticism. All other chapters are constructively oriented toward designing the ontology of subjective situationism (Part i) and erecting an anatomy of meaning of those grounds (Part ii).

What remains in this treatise is the final chapter. Chapter 13 indicates some directions for application of subjective situationism and its anatomy of meaning.
It is an essentially modernist view that concepts are often taken, at least initially, as absolute opposites. The scientific disciplines of psychology and sociology provide a clear example. For one way of demonstrating what sociology is boils down to stressing it is not psychology. My view, which is more postmodernist, is that sociology is always psychology, too.

Not only sociologists often elect to avoid a consistent synthesis with psychology. It is my hypothesis that many theorists protect their paradigms from concepts such as subjectivity, skepticism, solipsism, idealism, etcetera. Instead, they assume an objective reality. Such ground is valid enough, admittedly even optimal, when just two out of three possible modes of causation are relevant. I of course refer to causes “in the narrowest sense” and to stimuli, respectively. An antipsychological paradigm breaks down, however, with motivationally induced effects. For how a sign leads to a(n) (re)action requires recognition of the intellect as one of the sign user’s instruments.

When their original paradigms prove untenable, philosophers, linguists, sociologists, et cetera, attempt different theoretical designs. Full integration of individuality usually remains essentially missing, though. In fact, sociological concepts are actively used to stay within the boundaries of what still seems acceptable for so-called analytical philosophy. Austin and Searle both reason from propositions about objective reality. That is, all signs are basically still modeled after the tenets of symbolic logic with truth value at the center. Mead proposes to recognize individual psychology by assuming the capacity of complete identification of the self with the other. As this amounts to elimination of individuality, too, he later makes the distinction between “me” and “I.” He underlines the importance of the “I” but leaves it otherwise unexplained.

Another thinker who attempts to revise the oversimplistic paradigm of
objective reality is JÜRGEN HABERMAS (1929- ). However, as published in Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (1981) the result is in my opinion yet another overly complex theory. It misses the elegant synthesis of SCHOPENHAUER’s conceptual system. As I show in this chapter, HABERMAS’s concept of communicative action is also aimed at keeping radical individuality out of social theory. It therefore fails to offer a compact, encompassing anatomy of meaning such as I have presented in Chapters 7 and 8 of this treatise.

12.1 empathy as a structural concept

Before I enter into a discussion with HABERMAS based on his monumental Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (1981) I briefly compare the attempts SCHOPENHAUER and MEAD make at synthesis of psychological and sociological concepts. Please note that SCHOPENHAUER’s work predates the establishment of both psychology and sociology as scientific disciplines in their own right.

As I have already indicated in the previous chapter, MEAD gives a predominantly sociological explanation of concepts such as mind, consciousness and self. For, as he remarks (1934, p 1),

\[ \text{[t]he point of approach which I wish to suggest is that of dealing with experience from the standpoint of society, at least from the standpoint of communication as essential to social order.} \]

SCHOPENHAUER, on the other hand, is most likely anything but impressed with social order. The Germany he grows up in is not yet a strong political unity. At that particular time it suffers from the Napoleonic wars. He especially experiences disorder, and several times he changes his residence trying to escape from it (SAFRANSKI, 1987). It doesn't mean, of course, he is blind to social relationships. But he starts from the individual, arguing that an individual essentially experiences the duality of will and interpretant about himself. Hence Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung as the title of his major work. At this point I stress that SCHOPENHAUER credits one particular individual with the capacity to assume about other ‘objects’ the same duality, thereby experiencing them as like subjects. It is the individual's capacity for empathy.

The Schopenhauerean concept of empathy concerns the structure of individual objectified reality. This limitation is precisely what makes it a powerful concept. For SCHOPENHAUER doesn’t prescribe the subsequent nature and contents of the individual application of empathy. All he maintains is that an individual will recognize others as individuals, too. Thus social order, of any kind, including disorder, results from interaction between individuals.

Had MEAD considered it, empathy that is ‘only’ a structural concept is prob-
ably too weak for him. For he does not want to explain social order from human interaction. Instead, he assumes something like a neighborly community as the paradigm case of social order. What does it take to work? What underlies its ‘success’? This is how – I suppose – MEAD next arrives at his assumption of complete sympathy. Of course, it leaves him with the problem of explaining events where sympathy between participants is obviously lacking. In his turn, SCHOPENHAUER would have no trouble accounting for cases of social harmony. Such complete sympathy is a particular ‘application’ of the principle of empathy, that is, with wide horizons in time and space. However, any other individual empathic setting of time and space is feasible, too.

Against the bias of taking as absolute what is only a specific setting I maintain that a serious theory should avoid – premature – self-fulfilling prophesy. Actually, especially when a theory also forecasts what in the event might be considered undesirable, it becomes more realistic to do something about it. A utopian theory only obstructs awareness.

The restriction of empathy to the structure of an individual’s objectified reality helps to clarify fears that many theorists obviously entertain about subjectivity, idealism, etcetera. If I may attempt to speak on behalf of SCHOPENHAUER, it is not that he denies the existence of reality. Not at all. What is individual (also read: subjective) about the one-and-only reality is the organization of knowledge. For knowledge is organized separately by individual intellect. Its general mechanism of developing interpretants from signs is indicated by PEIRCE. Though his triadic dynamics may be elaborated into enneadic dynamics (see Chapter 4), the underlying principle remains that interpretants of focus, background and foreground are essentially individualistic. Their theoretical advantage should be obvious. Behavioral differences are explained in a straightforward manner when the “background perspective” is equipped with the requisite variety. And a radical orientation on individuality also puts assumptions about community into question. I believe that too many problems remain unresolved because more fundamental questions are preempted by premature acceptance of sociological concepts.

12.2 two meanings of reason

Depending on both his previous knowledge and his assessment of the situation, a sign user arrives at a particular interpretation of a particular term. It is enlightening to see that many terms contested in philosophy actually have different meanings that can be situated in psychology and sociology, respectively.

A prime example is the term of meaning itself. At the start of § 7.3 I have distinguished between intra- and interpersonal applications of meaning.
Those correspond to psychology and (naive) sociology. Figure 12.2.1 sketches an overview at the inspection level of instances.

It is interesting to reconstruct how for example SEARLE attempts synthesis. An interpersonal meaning is expressed by a proposition. It can be included in the expression of an intrapersonal meaning – i.e., of an intention – by adding the so-called illocutionary force indicator. A classification of such forces, however, serves the purpose of turning them into interpersonal meanings, too. This procedure leaves the paradigmatic case of objective proposition intact. Undoubtedly, that is precisely what it is supposed to achieve. But it still leaves problems unaddressed that can only be resolved through recognition of essential differences between individual sign users.

The attempts of MEAD at synthesis are equally unsatisfying. It is one thing to shift the meaning of mind, self, etcetera, to the social field of experience. What is left – reentered, actually – as strict individuality is the concept of the “I.” It is really not much different from SCHOPENHAUER’s personal objectification of the will, but now devoid of much explanatory power. I certainly don’t find it an improvement.

Traditionally, also the term of reason ‘behaves’ conceptually differently, dependent on whether it occurs in a psychological, or in a sociological situation. As a variation on Figure 12.2.1, this is shown in Figure 12.2.2. In psychology reason is an intellectual faculty. At the social level reason refers to moderation. A person who is reasonable in the company of others is thought to be open to what they might argue with their faculties of reason, too. In some aspects, this social meaning of reason is therefore even the opposite of its psychological meaning.
Acknowledging that there are at least these two uses of reason greatly assists understanding of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, the book by HABERMAS of two volumes with altogether over 1,100 pages. He takes up the social meaning of reason, and of rationality. His further classification yields strategic and communicative as two types of *social* rationality. The dynamics, or dialectics, between applications of these social rationality types are fundamental to his social theory. I limit my discussion of HABERMAS’s wide-ranging book to what is especially relevant for an additional appreciation of my anatomy of meaning and the encompassing ontology of subjective situationism.

### 12.3 Communicative action as idealized construct

The objective HABERMAS states for his work is to provide (1981, volume 1, p 8)¹

> eine Konzeptualisierung des gesellschaftlichen Lebenszusammenhangs, die auf die Paradoxien der Moderne zugeschnitten sind.

> a conceptualization of the social order of life that is oriented at the paradoxes of modernity.

Those paradoxes, HABERMAS argues, appear when society and social developments are studied from the perspective of rationality. I don’t believe such paradoxes exist. They disappear through a proper synthesis of the sociological with the psychological concept of reason. I return to this synthesis several times, later in this chapter. HABERMAS, however, doesn’t opt for synthesis but favors ongoing dialectics between the different types of reason. But there are more ‘reasons’ why his theory does not remove paradoxes.

Suppose somebody presents what he has named a theory of human flying. He first explains what flying is as normally performed by a human being. It is

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1. All translations from HABERMAS’s German text are my own.
been described as the uninhibited movement through air, with the person actually flying only using his ‘natural’ body. This kind of flying is next declared utopian. Actually, man cannot fly by himself, at all. A person often moves about on foot, or by riding a bicycle, driving a car, traveling by train, or boat, etcetera. All those modes of transportation interfere with – the possibility of – natural human flight. And when he does fly, he always uses a machine to do so.

My impression would be that I have been listening to a presentation, not of a theory of natural flying, but of, say, modes of personal transportation. I would understand that the idea of human flight is far from meant as an overall explanation. Rather, it is used as an imaginary construct, an ideal, for the purpose of explaining actual modes of human movement.

In a similar vein, HABERMAS doesn’t offer his theory of communicative action for comprehensive coverage of social phenomena. How he applies his concept of communicative action should instead be considered a theoretical construct for drawing out practical distinctions. For (volume 1, p 22)

das Verständnis rationaler Handlungsorientierungen wird zum Bezugspunkt für das Verständnis aller Handlungsorientierungen.

the understanding of rational approaches to action becomes the point of reference for understanding all approaches to action.

It is confusing that HABERMAS writes of “rational approaches to action.” He uses, after all, different concepts of reason. Regretfully, he doesn’t make those sufficiently explicit. I therefore suggest that some of the difficulties in making sense of Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns disappear when his construct of communicative action is understood as an idealization of “the point of reference.” It is an explanatory device that enables him to compare, to contrast, that is in general to expound his theory of modern society. In summary, according to HABERMAS the modern paradoxes occur through the deviation of actual society from the idealized construct of communicative action (vol 2, p 163):


The utopian design of an idealized communication community entails a construction for boundless and undistorted discourse. As a model, it may be applied to modern societies as we know them in order to show blurred developmental tendencies in distinctive contours.

Indeed (vol 2, p 234),

[der Entwurf einer kollektiv geteilten homogenen Lebenswelt is gewiß eine Idealisierung.

the design of a homogeneous life world that is collectively shared is, of course,
an idealized perspective.

Besides the possible confusion its title causes, an obstacle that a reader of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* must overcome is that HABERMAS first and foremost engages in a discussion with earlier theorists and their theories of society and social development. He hardly touches directly on the paradoxes he claims to clarify. Only at the end of the second volume (of two) he specifies that traditionally three theoretical currents exist in sociology. The first is oriented at social development (vol 2, p 551). The second provides a system's theory of society. And the third concerns itself with the activities of daily social life (vol 2, p 552). Such previously disjunct theories are now integrated and surpassed, HABERMAS proclaims, through the application of the concept of communicative action.

Before I briefly report on his integrative attempt I first sketch HABERMAS's idealized theoretical construct itself. My emphasis, and therefore only partial discussion of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, corresponds to the requirement of comparing my anatomy of meaning with several academically established approaches to meaning and/or communication. It is beyond the scope of this treatise, nor is it ambition, to present a comprehensive alternative to HABERMAS's social theory.

### 12.4 three grounds of agreement

Communicative action is auxiliary. A person engages in communicative action, as the theory of HABERMAS goes, to coordinate some other actions with one or more other persons. It should be clear that communicative action is limited to sign exchange. What the other actions, resulting from sign exchange(s), might be is not specified by HABERMAS. Anyway (vol 1, p 128),

> [d]er Begriff des *kommunikativen* Handelns [...] bezieht sich auf die Interaktion von mindesstens zwei sprach- und handlungsfähigen Subjekten, die (sei es mit verbalen oder extraverbalen Mitteln) eine interpersonal beziehung eingehen. Die Aktoren suchen eine Verständigung über die Handlungssituation, um ihre Handlungspläne und damit ihre Handlungen einvernehmlich zu koordinieren.

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the concept of *communicative* action refers to the interaction between at least two speech- and action-competent subjects who (using verbal or nonverbal means of communication) enter upon an interpersonal relationship. The actors seek understanding of the action situation with the purpose of congenially coordinating their plans for action, and thus their specific actions.

2. I recall that PEIRCE describes semiosis as intellectual processes.

sign action. His emphasis is on intrapersonal,
What is missing in HABERMAS’s analysis is consideration of motives. Why does a person make plans? He simply assumes that a particular “action plan” is already present. MEAD even holds that a precondition for entering upon a relationship is that one person arouses in himself the action plan of the other person. HABERMAS doesn’t go to that extreme but he still believes different reasonable persons will entertain a priori essentially similar plans. And when they do not, their mutual understanding, or agreement, is achieved through communicative action (vol 1, p 114):

Der Begriff der Verständigung verweist auf ein unter Beteiligten erzieltes rational motiviertes Einverständnis, das sich an kritisierbaren Geltungsansprüchen bemüht.

Indeed, HABERMAS now refers to motivation. But it is not in a generally psychological sense, at all. He reduces socially acceptable action to what is coordinated by signs which can be supported by – what count as – convincing claims as to their validity (vol 1, p 29):

Für die Rationalität der Äußerung ist konstitutiv daß der Sprecher für die Aussage ›p‹ einen kritisierbaren Geltungsanspruch erhebt, der vom Hörer akzeptiert oder zurückgewiesen werden kann.

An expression counts as rational when the speaker raises a criticizable validity claim for the utterance ›p‹, a claim that can be either accepted or rejected by the hearer. I completely agree that in mature communication signs must be open to criticism. Actually, the signs opens the sign engineer to it. However, though such behavior is often highly desirable, a requirement to that effect cannot count as a serious theory. For example, this line of reasoning leads to the need for criteria to establish the sincerity of the speaker. And what about the hearer? Is he sincere, at his turn as a speaker, in his acceptance or rejection? A radically individualistic approach, such as underlying the anatomy of meaning I propose, deals with interest-driven behavior right at the axiomatic level. And because the individual is capable of empathy, interest-driven behavior includes social behavior. This point HABERMAS misses, as I demonstrate later.

What I actually find alarming about the reduction to socially accepted behavior is the denial of radical individuality. It also doesn’t fit the conceptual scheme of SCHOPENHAUER. That HABERMAS prefers a social concept of reason is evident from the following quotation (vol 1, p 37):

Wer sich in seinen Einstellungen und Bewertungen so privatistisch verhält, daß sie durch Appelle und Wertstandards nicht erklärt und plausibel gemacht werden können, der verhält sich nicht rational.

A person is not behaving rationally when his attitudes and expressions are so idiosyncratic that appeals and value standards cannot explain them and make them credible. For example, is GALILEO (1564-1642) irrational with his new theory of astron-
omy? As an accepted member of society he apparently is. For his own will, though, he must have applied his reason with great success.

Now the theory of meaning HABERMAS implicitly applies can be reconstructed. He views the meaning of a sign as a function of the underlying claims at its validity. When different persons share both validity claims and function, of necessity they hold the same meaning (vol 1, p 32):

Die Gültigkeitsbedingungen symbolischer Äußerungen verweisen auf ein von der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft intersubjektiv geteiltes Hintergrundwissen.

The validity conditions of symbolic utterances presuppose a background knowledge that is intersubjectively shared by the communication community.

It tastes much like Fregean symbolic logic. This should come as no surprise as HABERMAS leans heavily on the speech act theory especially of AUSTIN and to a lesser extent SEARLE. Likewise he develops (vol 1, p 34)

den Begriff kommunikativer Rationalität am Leitfaden von constative Äußerungen.

the concept of communicative rationality from the model of constative utterances.

But not all communication, HABERMAS states, is about facts and about means-ends relationships (vol 1, p 34):

[E]s gibt offensichtlich andere Typen von Äußerungen, für die gute Gründe bestehen könnten, obgleich sie nicht mit Wahrheits- oder Erfolgsansprüchen verbunden sind.

Evidently, there are different types of utterance that can equally be well-founded. Their validity claims are not related to truth or success.

Please note that HABERMAS introduces the notion of success. Later he gives it a decidedly negative value. At this stage of my discussion it is important to recognize that HABERMAS devides validity claims in three classes (vol 1, p 35):

Auch normenregulierte Handlungen und expressive Selbstdarstellungen haben, ähnlich wie constative Sprechhandlungen, den Charakter sinnvoller, in ihrem Kontext verständlicher Äußerungen, die mit einem kritisierbaren Geltungsanspruch verbunden sind.

Just like constative speech acts, norm-based actions and expressive self-presentations, too, are meaningful utterances, understandable through theirs contexts, which refer to a criticizable validity claim.

The two additional classes of validity claims correspond to characteristic worldviews (Weltbezüge). Overall, three worldviews are typical of the individual living in modern society (vol 1, p 84):

Die objektive Welt wird gemeinsam als die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen unterstellt, wobei Tatsache bedeutet, daß die Aussage über die Existenz eines entsprechenden Sachverhalts sp als wahr gelten darf. Und eine soziale Welt wird gemeinsam als die Gesamtheit aller interpersonalen Beziehungen unterstellt, die von den Angehörigen als legitim anerkannt werden.

Demgegenüber gilt die subjektive Welt als die Gesamtheit der Erlebnisse, zu denen jeweils nur ein Individuum einen privilegierten Zugang hat.

The objective world is usually taken as the totality of facts; a fact is constituted
when a proposition $\phi$ about the existence of a particular state of the world is considered true. And a social world is taken as the totality of interpersonal relationships which participants recognize as legitimate. Contrasted to these, the subjective world is the totality of experiences to which only an individual has a privileged access at any one time.

The objective, social, and subjective world, respectively, can all be 'talked about' in order to coordinate (other) actions. The validity claims with respect to the objective world refer to truth (Wahrheit). Communicative action in the social world is ruled by norms (Normen), and in the subjective world by authenticity (Wahrhaftigkeit). These are the three different grounds of agreement HABERMAS assumes.

Communicative action, as I have already reported at the beginning of this paragraph, is practiced to arrive at agreement on other actions. Characteristic of communicative action is (vol 1, p 37) “the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims:”

> Die dieser Praxis innewohnende Rationalität zeigt sich darin, daß sich ein kommunikativ erzieltes Einverständnis letztlich auf Gründe stützen muß.

For the inherent rationality of this praxis it is characteristic that an agreement reached by communicative action is *ultimately* supported by ground, or fundamental reasons.

However, it may happen that (vol 1, p 38)

> ein Dissens durch Alltagsroutinen nicht mehr aufgefangen werden kann.

the practice of daily life cannot control differences of opinion.

To avoid settlement of the dispute (vol 1, p 38)

> durch den unvermittelten oder den strategischen Einsatz von Gewalt,

by direct violence, or by its strategic application,

HABERMAS includes, in his construct of communicative action,

> die Argumentationspraxis als die Berufungsinstanz.

the practice of (formal) argument as the court of appeal.

HOW HABERMAS puts forward (vol 1, p 47) “a logic of argument” makes it increasingly clear he is not proposing a theory to explain what people really do when they are communicating. In fact, he himself writes that he tries (vol 1, p 47)

> die allgemeinen kommunikativen Voraussetzungen der Argumentation als Bestimmungen einer idealen Sprechsituation anzugeben.

to indicate, in general, as requirements of an ideal speech situation, the communicative preconditions for – the praxis of – argument.

At the process level of communication, this means that (vol 1, p 48)

> Argumentationsteilnehmer müssen allgemein voraussetzen, daß die Struktur ihrer Kommunikation, aufgrund rein formal zu beschreibender Merkmale, jeden […] Zwang – außer dem des besseren Argumentes – ausschließt.

participants in the debate should basically assume that the structure of their communication, and this concluded from properties that can be formally described, excludes force, except for the power of the better argument.
12.5 a psychological ground, after all

But what is the better argument? How is it decided? That an ultimate ground is lacking within semantics\(^3\) is perceived by HABERMAS who writes (vol 1, p 49):

Dafür ist die formalsemantische Beschreibung der in Argumenten verwendeten Sätze zwar notwendig, aber nicht hinreichend.

The formal description of the semantics of the sentences used as arguments, though necessary, is not sufficient.

Quite rightly he also refuses to turn to logical positivism in search of grounds. For (vol 1, p 502)

[Der] Positivismus weigert sich, die von ihm behauptete Identität von Wissenschaft und Wahrheit zu begründen.

positivism refuses to provide grounds for the identity it presupposes to exist between science and truth.

HABERMAS nevertheless remains well inside the tradition of analytical philosophy, especially its branch of language philosophy. What he offers as the ultimate ground of his concept of communicative action is characteristic. He writes (vol 1, p 386) that participants have “intuitive knowledge” informing them on the action type they are engaged in. This points at a contradiction in his conceptual system. As I make clear in the next paragraph, HABERMAS claims to have cleared his theory of radically psychological concepts. But, of course, with personal intuition – whatever that is – as ground, such concepts have reentered his foundation through the back door. Or is he saying that all individuals have identical intuition?

Elsewhere in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* HABERMAS evokes the authority he invests in his language system for support of his classification of worldviews (vol 1, p 413):


Rather, such agreement is simultaneously achieved at three levels [of validity claims]. Intuitively, these levels are easily identified. One only needs to realize that, in communicative action, a speaker chooses a particular utterance in order to reach an understanding with a hearer about something while making himself understood.

This is very similar to how AUSTIN argues for the establishment of, and differ-

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3. In many parts of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* HABERMAS wrestles with the evidently individual nature of behavior. As he stigmatizes it as blind exploitation, radical psychological concepts don’t enter his conceptual system.
ence between, illocution and perlocution (see § 9.5). However, it is not a seri-
ous procedure. It rests on privileged access to knowledge through language
analysis. In this case, the distinction between society (mit), objectivity (über),
and subjectivity (sich selbst) is highlighted. Just as easily I could compose a
sentence that would ‘prove’ the ‘intuition’ of assuming that every sign is a
request for compliance. As GENDLIN remarks (1997, p4):

People recognize that logical arguments can be devised for mutually exclusive positions on
any question. Nothing seems capable of adjudicating between them, except just such argu-
ments again. Arguments are not only various; each ends in contradictions if pursued. There
is no longer any belief in the power of argument to criticize and found itself.

I add having no objection at all against categories such as objective, social and
subjective. But they need to be positioned within the workings of an essential-
ly subjective intellect. For an intellect is instrumental, including the capacity of
empathy, to an individual as a unique objectification of the will.

12.6 strategic action

It is impossible to win the argument for HABERMAS not having consulted other
sources (though, once again, I find SCHOPENHAUER sorely missing). For a
large proportion of his book is even occupied with quotations. He enters into
extended discussions, especially with the pioneers of sociology. With MAX
WEBER (1864-1920) he argues, among other things, over the concept of
strategic action.

WEBER – and I give this sketch from HABERMAS’s account – draws up a theo-
ry of social development, attempting to explain what he considers to be the
modern society of his own days. Like many theorists, WEBER contrasts mod-
ern with primitive society. Then a primitive society is characterized by the uni-
ified, and therefore mostly implicit, worldview of its occupants. The transition
to modern society is marked by differentiation of the magic worldview. Every
fragment of the overall life world becomes increasingly specialized. As
HABERMAS recounts (vol 1, p 243):

Sobald ein Aktor von Traditionsbindungen oder affektiven Steuerungen soweit freigesetzt
ist, daß er sich seiner Präferenzen bewußt werden und aufgrund geklärter Präferenzen (und
Entscheidungsmaximen) seine Ziele wählen kann, läßt sich eine Handlung unter beiden
Aspekten beurteilen: unter dem instrumentellen Aspekt der Wirksamkeit der Mittel und
unter dem Aspekt der Richtigkeit der Ableitung von Zielen bei gegebenen Präferenzen,
Mitteln und Randbedingungen.

As soon as an actor is liberated from tradition or affective control, that is, when
he can become aware of his preferences and, based on such clarified preferences (and deci-
sion methods), can choose his goals, an action may be judged according to both aspects: the
instrumental aspect refers to the effectiveness of means, and the normative aspect refers to the deduction of goals when preferences, means and conditions are set.

The objection HABERMAS makes is that this kind of rationality supports strategic action. In his frame of reference it has a strongly negative value.

The basic action concept is thought to be that of teleological action. It occurs when the actor wants to achieve a specific objective (Zweck) (vol 1, p 127):

Der zentrale Begriff [des teleologischen Handelns] ist die auf die realisierung eines Zwecks gerichtete, von Maximen geleitete und auf eine Situationsdeutung gestützte Entscheidung zwischen Handlungsalternativen.

The important concept [of teleological action] is the decision between action alternatives, a decision that is oriented at achieving an objective, that is made applying methods, and that is tailor-made for a given situation interpretation.

From the subsequent definition of strategic action it becomes clear that teleological action only involves, as a person, the actor himself (vol 1, p 127):

Das teleologische wird zum strategischen Handlungsmodell erweitert, wenn in das Erfolgskalkül des Handelnden die Erwartung von Entscheidungen minderstens eines weiteren zielgerichtet handelnden Akteurs eingehen kann.

The teleological is broadened into a strategic model of action when the actor enters into the calculation of success his expectation about decisions by at least one other goal-oriented actor.

At first glance, strategic action is the natural mode of action by an individual who is capable of empathy. But there is an important difference that can be reconstructed by applying the concept of interest.

The strategic actor of WEBER, that as reported by HABERMAS, lacks empathy. He only takes himself seriously as an objectification of the will. So, he doesn't recognize others as persons, too. They are just so many more objects. In the calculation of strategic action, therefore, the interests of others do not appear. The other is not deserving of respect. He is only used for self-interests.

I admit that, when I started studying Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, I was not prepared for this concept of strategic action. I would rather call it tactical action for it occurs after the objective is already set.

My own idea about strategic action is almost the opposite of how HABERMAS applies his terminology. I find an individual is acting strategically when he does not stay within narrow, preset limits of time and space for empathy. Given his will, he may then also arrive at different particular interests, motives, and objectives.

But then, such is not the concept of strategic action underlying HABERMAS’s critique of WEBER. It causes him to judge a theory of consciousness (Bewußtseinstheorie) unfit for explaining society and social development.
Later in his book, when discussing the Frankfurter Schule, he even proclaims that (vol 1, p 518)

das Programm der frühen Kritischen Theorie […] an der Erschöpfung des Paradigms des Bewußtseinsphilosophie gescheitert ist.

the program of the early critical theory has failed through its exhaustion of the paradigm of consciousness philosophy.

His continuation of critical theory is based on (vol 1, p 518)
ein Paradigmenwechsel zur Kommunikationstheorie.

a paradigm shift toward a theory of communication.

It amounts, and once more I don't agree, to the (vol 1, p 532)
Zäsur, die das Ende der Subjektphilosophie für die Gesellschaftstheorie bedeutet.

break that marks the end of applying subject philosophy to social theory.

I see it differently. When the social theory of HABERMAS is taken seriously, he would mark the end of a philosophy of the subject. But let me continue with his exposition. For this renovated theoretical program HABERMAS takes a point of departure very similar to MEAD. That is, he starts from – his own theoretical preference for – social relationships (vol 1, p 533):

Die kommunikative Vernunft läßt sich nicht, wie die instrumentelle, einer erblindeten Selbstverwirklichung widerstandslos subsumieren. Sie erstreckt sich nicht auf ein selbstverwirklichtes Subjekt, das sich vorstellend und handelnd auf Objekte bezieht oder auf ein bestehendes System, das sich gegen eine Umwelt abgrenzt, sondern auf eine symbolisch strukturierte Lebenswelt, die sich in den Interpretationsleistungen ihrer Angehörigen konstituiert und nur über kommunikatives Handeln reproduziert.

The communicative reason does not yield without resistance, as the instrumental reason does, to blind survival. It does not apply to a surviving subject who orients himself at objects, representing and acting on them. Nor does it apply to the permanence of a system that closes itself from its environment. Communicative reason is instead concerned with a symbolically structured life world that is constituted by the interpretative performances of its occupants and that reproduces itself through communicative action, only.

Certainly, this eliminates the problem of extremely selfish behavior. As HABERMAS writes (vol 1, p 385):

Im kommunikativen Handeln sind die Beteiligten nicht primär am eigenen Erfolg orientiert.

In communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented at their own success.

It is (vol 2, p 15)
eine evolutionär neue Form der Kommunikation.

an evolutionary new form of communication.

And (vol 2, p 23)

[es geht um die Emergenz einer höherstufigen Lebensform. Diese ist durch eine sprachlich konstituierte Form der Intersubjektivität gekennzeichnet, die kommunikatives Handeln ermöglicht.

396
what is at stake is the emergence of a life form at a higher level of which a language-based form of intersubjectivity, made possible by communicative action, is characteristic.

In spite of the rhetoric, it hardly is an improvement. For it leaves all behavior that is purely individualistic but not exploitative, completely unaccounted for.4 The Schopenhauerean perspective,5 on the contrary, includes empathy and therefore covers all behavior. And the anatomy of meaning presented in Chapters 7 and 8 of this treatise covers all communication.

4. Prescriptions for rational conduct in discussion — with rationality as defined or implied by their respective proponents, of course — are legion, with written sources dating at least as far back as the ancient Greeks. Not surprisingly, several modern attempts have been labeled semantics. Of particular interest with respect to subjective situationism is Communication and Argument, elements of applied semantics (1966) by A. NAESS (1912- ).

His procedure to achieve an empirical hold involves a reduction of interpretation to the dimension of expressions. As expressions they may be compared, precizatized, et cetera. However, NAESS does include in his conceptual scheme — and that is where my approach shows some similarities — person, and situation or context. He (still) regards the latter two terms equivalent.

The most comprehensive formulation of his ideas on communication NAESS presents in Interpretation and Preciseness: A Contribution to the Theory of Communication (1953) from which the article-length Toward a theory of interpretation and preciseness (1952) is derived. His assumption for communication essentially differs from my conclusion about the anatomy of meaning. NAESS states that (1953, p 45) “[w]hatever goal [a person] expects to reach by means of the interpretive sentence, his expectation or assumption of means-end relationships should not be taken as a part (or as the whole) of the cognitive meaning of the interpretive sentence. — We may have certain goals in every utterance we make, but if the utterances expressed these goals, communication would indeed be difficult and sometimes rather embarrassing.” However, his inquiry into synonymy proves extremely productive. For NAESS uncovers conditions under which synonymy may be, or may not be, considered valid. Thus, he arrives at a (p 41) “conceptual structure” to which my anatomy of meaning bears some basic resemblance. Insisting on the importance of the unique sign instance (with NAESS: sentence occurrence), his work is as relevant as it ever was.

5. Is the mention by HABERMAS of a subject that is representing objects a hidden rebuttal of SCHOPENHAUER’s Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung? In general, even though any reference is absent, it is difficult to imagine that HABERMAS is unacquainted with SCHOPENHAUER’s work. As far as this particular mention of representation (Vorstellung) is concerned, it would be a misrepresentation of SCHOPENHAUER’s conceptual system. The inclusion of empathy precludes only blind survival. Realistically enough, it doesn’t exclude it either.
The most important parts of his book are what HABERMAS calls intermediary expositions (Zwischenbetrachtungen). Following his example, I include one here myself.

A consequence of my anatomy of meaning is that meanings are not like social resources, existing independently from sign users and available in a repository waiting to be consummated. There is no such thing as identical meaning in different persons. Because every intellect is the private instrument of a particular person, his interpretants are completely subjective.

Of course, a person may very well believe, and usually does, that another person holds an identical 'meaning.' I don't however believe – and why not call it intersubjective? – that such perceived similarity sets the stage for coordinated action. Rather, my hypothesis is that the experience of like meanings is the result of joint activity. Again, education is a prime example. It is an action both the teacher and the student engage in. In simple cases the student learns from the teacher, i.e., the former develops interpretants to exhibit conduct as deemed desirable by the latter.

The removal of the concept of meaning from a fixed interpersonal arena opens the field for many interesting questions. Does coordination of action require identical meaning? No. Through sign exchanges, interest-driven organisms seek compliance with their interests by other organisms. It is the actual compliance that matters; what interpretants the sign observer develops at the impulse of the sign is, if not completely inconsequential, at the most secondary.

The absence of an interpersonal repository of stable meanings also makes room for succinct explanations of interpretation dynamics. PEIRCE draws attention to the possibility, to the opportunity even, that original interpretants may be developed in each and every process of individual sign use. So, change of language systems change is not at all surprising. For every intra- or interpersonal instance of sign exchange can bring innovation.

So, given the potential for instability, a more fruitful question is why languages (read: language systems) are often actually quite stable. Another succinct answer is that many persons stick to their interests. Such is their will. A stable pattern of interests yields a stable pattern of compliance. As a result, the sign system doesn’t change. It always can, however. And it does whenever a sign engineer plays out a different interest and solicits compliance with sufficient force.

6. Reading HABERMAS’S *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* from the perspective of my anatomy of meaning is a particularly contrary experience. I found myself often agree-
12.8 integrating speech act theory

HABERMAS is far removed from such a theoretical track.6 As I said in § 12.5, above, he uses a critique of the Weberian concept of strategic action to relinquish any psychological approach. Instead, he connects with the speech act theory of AUSTIN for he proclaims (vol 1, p 372):

Für eine Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns sind nur diejenigen analytischen Bedeutungstheorien, die an der Struktur des sprachlichen Ausdrucks statt an den Sprecherintentionen ansetzen, instruktiv.

A theory of communicative action can only be fruitfully related to analytical theories of meaning such as oriented at the structure of the utterance, rather than at the intentions of the speaker.

It is abundantly clear that HABERMAS faithfully theorizes according to the tenets of analytical philosophy (vol 1, p 373):

Endgültig wird die Bedeutungstheorie freilich erst mit dem Schritt von der Referenz- zur Wahrheitssemantik als eine formale Wissenschaft etabliert.

The theory of meaning is actually only firmly established as a formal science with the transition from referential semantics to truth semantics.

It is a view I don’t hold. In fact, in the Chapters 9 through to the current one, and not forgetting Chapter 5, I am primarily occupied with deconstructing semantics as the social, stable repository of meaning. I believe a language system is more similar to a tool box. It certainly is not a collection of ready-for-use signs. A particular sign originates through the application, or use, of the language system. And signs, in their turn, can also change language as a system. Therefore, perspectives such as formulated by HABERMAS overestimate the language system, and underestimate the sign user. Another example is (vol 1, p 374):

Die Bedeutung von Sätzen, und das Verstehen der Satzbedeutung, läßt sich von dem der

ing with the positions that HABERMAS reports of theorists he considers his opponents.

At this point I also want to remark on the difficulty that is often attributed to – reading – the texts of HABERMAS. I think I avoided major problems by having first studied, especially, MEAD and AUSTIN. For their ideas reappear prominently in the ground of the concept of communicative action. In advance I also read the synopsis Habermas’ Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (1983) by H. KUNNEMAN. I found it an accessible introduction. However, it lacks the critical attitude that makes fruitful discussion possible. In order to make credible comments, I therefore find I have been proven right to consult and study the primary source, i.e., Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns itself. Another example among many secondary sources is Habermas and the dialectic of reason (1987) by D. INGRAM. With his title he tries to capture a similar essence of HABERMAS’s publication as what I attempt with my title of this chapter.
Sprache innewohnenden Bezug zur Gültigkeit von Aussagen nicht trennen.

The meaning of sentences, and understanding of sentence meaning, is impossible to separate from the reference of the validity of utterances that is inherent to language.

It is evident the sign observer seeks grounds for his interpretation of the sign. And of course the language system he recognizes the sign engineer applying may lead him to some. But then again, it may just lead him away from the desired grounds. Essentially, the requirement of grounds rests within the sign observer himself.

With all interpretants being essentially subjective, my anatomy of meaning does not require differentiations such as locution, illocution and perlocution. HABERMAS integrates their distinction by referring to the different classes of validity claims he proposes for the objective, social, and subjective world, respectively. Even though I don’t agree, I appreciate the elegance of his construction. With him (vol 1, p 375),

die illokutionäre Rolle […] spezifiziert, welchen Geltungsanspruch ein Sprecher mit seiner Äußerung erhebt, wie er ihn erhebt und für was er ihn erhebt.

the illocutionary force determines which validity claim a speaker raises with his utterance, how he raises it, and for what purpose he does so.

And (vol 1, p 426)

[w]ichtig ist nur, daß der illokutionäre Anspruch, den der Sprecher für die Gültigkeit eines Satzes erhebt, grundsätzlich kritisiert werden kann.

the importance lies therein that the illocutionary claims the speaker raises for the validity of a sentence may be fundamentally criticized.

In contrast to WEBER’s approach which is limited to the rationality of strategic action, HABERMAS now claims for his speech act-empowered theory of communicative action that (vol 1, p 384)

Prozesse gesellschaftlicher rationalisierung in ihrer ganzen Breite untersucht werden können.

processes of rational development of society can be studied across the whole spectrum.

As I have already indicated, this must be understood to the extent that his theory of communicative action does not encompass all social phenomena. It is an idealized construct allowing relevant phenomena to be articulated in comparison to it. At the same time, however, HABERMAS attributes a real existence to it. And in thus mixing idealization and reality, I find he really gets carried away when he suggests that (vol 1, p 533)


the utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is layed down in the conditions for communicative socialization of individuals. It is already preconstructed in the linguistic reproduction mechanism of the species.
Though such a perspective appears tempting, I believe it would turn into yet another totality. Anyway, I qualify it as ideology, i.e., as a prescription for behavior, rather than as a – scientific – theory for explaining and describing actual behavior of individuals across the whole range of situations, whether these are considered social or not. The prescriptive nature of Habermas’s concept of communicative action can also be clearly deduced from the following statement (vol 1, p 386):

Mein Ziel ist nicht die empirische Charakterisierung von Verhaltensdispositionen, sondern die Erfassung allgemeiner Strukturen von Verständigungsprozessen, aus denen sich formal zu charakterisierende Teilnahmebedingungen ableiten lassen.

My goal is not the empirical characterization of behavioral inclinations. Instead, I aim to capture general structures of processes of understanding from which formal conditions of participation can be deduced.

12.9 life world against system world

For Habermas the “life world” is where such formally decided conditions for reaching agreement are adhered to. It is the subworld of communicative action that, in its turn, consists of three worlds of, say, the second suborder. Those are the worlds of objectivity, society, and subjectivity, respectively. This classification, of course, neatly corresponds to different kinds of grounds that must be invoked when expressions are criticized. Another correspondence Habermas postulates is that speakers are ‘guided’ to the relevant grounds by their language system. It provides the necessary clues through illocutionary markers. A cornerstone of this theory, as Habermas himself remarks, is that (vol 1, p 388)

...the orientation at understanding is the original mode of language use to which indirect understanding, that is, giving-to-understand, or making-understand, occupy a parasitic relationship. It is precisely this distinction that Austin makes clear by his concepts of illocution and perlocution, respectively.

And he recommends (vol 1, p 431)

die intuitive Evidenz von Einteilungen, die sich an semantische Analysen anschließen und den elementaren Sprachfunktionen (wie der Darstellung von Sachverhalten, der Expression von Erfahrungen und der Herstellung interpersonaler Beziehungen) Rechnung tragen. […] Anderen Klassen fehlt die theoretische Leuchtkraft, die unsere Intuitionen erhellen könnte.

...the intuitive proof of a classification that corresponds to semantic analyses and that accounts for the elementary speech functions (such as representation of world states,
expression of experiences and establishment of interpersonal relationships). Our intuitions throw light on this with a brightness that is missing for […] other classifications.

It is first of all remarkable to meet such recurrent, even exalted, reference to the concept of intuition (see also § 12.5, above). Secondly, I don’t believe the speech functions HABERMAS indicates are elementary, at all. For my critique on such concepts as developed by AUSTIN and SEARLE I refer to Chapters 9 and 10. Different elementary concepts, and I call those axioms, lead to very different conceptual derivations.

In my own conceptual scheme, every sign is a request for compliance. In order to promote compliance by the observer, the engineer can downplay displaying his own interests in favor of recognizing the observer’s interests, or he may try to appear to be neutral. But ultimately, the engineer’s interests are ‘underlying’ every sign he produces, just like the observer’s interests ‘rule’ every process of sign interpretation. It therefore obstructs the proper explanation of social phenomena, too, when such an incomplete ideal, as the concept of communicative action is, is used as the unit of measure. Nevertheless, it is the course of action HABERMAS is set on in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, and I still have not finished my comments on it here. After he fully develops his concept he declares (vol 1, p 449):

Die Aspekte der Handlungs rationalität, die sich am kommunikativen Handeln ablesen lassen, sollen nun erlauben, die Prozesse der gesellschaftlichen Rationalisierung auf ganzer Breite […] zu erfassen.

7. I don’t find it helpful that HABERMAS does not present his concept of intuition explicitly as an ultimate ground. I fully recognize an ultimate ground is by definition irrational. Now, HABERMAS emphasizes communicative action entails that validity claims may be criticized. When a first-order claim is also contested, the participants in the debate must move on to second-order validity claims, etcetera. This progression necessarily stops at (ultimate) grounds, or axioms. Then, but always in their own interest, one or more participants may attempt to reorganize their respective axiomatic systems. They could subsequently undertake a next ‘round’ of claim validation, etcetera. Because most persons shy away from the prospect of investing time and energy, the most likely result will be, under conditions of HABERMAS’s communicative action, that they will agree to disagree. And that, counterintuitive though it may be to HABERMAS, is the normal state of how individual knowledges are maintained in interpersonal relationships.

A clear indication that HABERMAS and I apply quite different axiomatic systems, for our theories anyway, is that he is concerned about (vol 2, p 86) the relationships between individuals on the one hand, and society on the other. I simply deny that there is an ultimate ground for such a relationship (though it might often be practical to assume it as an intermediary concept). Relationships exist between persons, only. And that constitutes an aggregate level of conceptualization. Why not call it social?
The aspects of action rationality which are grounded by communicative action should next enable us to capture processes of social rationalization along the whole range of their occurrence.

I repeat his procedure is not to apply his ‘theory’ to the full spectrum. At first he limits the practice of communicative action to – what he calls – the life world of persons. This way he creates room for another concept that, together with the life world, makes up for the totality of society (vol 2, p 180):

Ich möchte deshalb vorschlagen, Gesellschaften gleichzeitig als System und Lebenswelt zu konzipieren.

So, I would like to propose the conceptualization that societies are simultaneously system and life world.

What does HABERMAS mean by system? It looks he views it as what the life world is not. Anyway, with my training and outlook as an engineer, and being therefore familiar with developing system views, it takes some getting used to that an element of the overall system is (also) called “system” rather than element, or subsystem. From HABERMAS I get a taste of opposition between humanity and technology. Everything to do with technology, functionalism, etcetera, he delegates to the system world. This procedure saves the life world for humanity. Or? Just to assist getting acquainted with HABERMAS’s terminology I write system world instead of, only, system.

As a next step HABERMAS acknowledges persons perform actions in both the life world and the system world. At the risk of giving too simple an account of his scheme I suggest strategic actions occur in the system world, and communicative actions in the life world. Based on the concept of strategic action described in § 12.6, what results is a society that may be modeled through a simplification of the matrix I developed earlier for my discussion of MEAD’s *Mind, Self, & Society* (see Chapter 11). The attitude characteristic of the life world is neighborly. In the system world it is antagonistic. This overview is presented in Figure 12.9.1.

![Figure 12.9.1](image)

The opposition of life world and system world.

Both (sub)worlds of society follow their own type of rationality. The rationality of the system world is applied by individual actors, behaving strategically to promote their very private success (Erfolg). “Have lunch, or be lunch,” might be an appropriate slogan to summarize how HABERMAS pictures the system
world. The rationality characteristic of the life world serves understanding (Verständnis) and agreement (Einverständnis) between actors as members of society. It is where people offer each other arguments, and probably lunch too.

This distinction between rationality types allows HABERMAS to escape from what he suggests that existed before as three disjunct currents in sociology (see § 12.3, above). For once separate, the reason of success, and the reason of understanding/agreement, respectively, are subsequently theorized by him to work on each other. First of all, overall social development may be explained from their dialectics. Secondly, the system-only view of society is enhanced because the system world interacts with the life world. Thirdly, the social action-only view gains perspective as the result of recognizing that also the life world interacts with the system world.

I refrain from elaborating on his lengthy attempts at such theoretical integration for they don’t shed additional light on his concept of communicative action. I do remark upon my frequent experience of contradictions. At his starting point, for example, HABERMAS proposes that participants engage in communicative action for the purpose of coordinating some other types of their action(s). However, where he finds it impossible to remain consistent he doesn’t hesitate to declare the “original mode” of language use the exception to its coordination function (vol 1, p 438):

Ein Interaktionstypus, der in ähnlicher Weise konstanten Sprechhandlungen korrespondierte, findet sich auf den ersten Blick nicht. […] In diesen Fällen löst sich der Prozeß der Verständigung aus der instrumentellen Rolle eines handlungskoordinierten Mechanismus; und die kommunikative Verhandlung von Themen verselbständig sich zum Zweck der Kooperation.

At first sight, there is no interaction type that similarly corresponds to constitutive speech acts. […] Then, the process of mutual understanding is detached from the instrumental role belonging to a mechanism of action coordination; the communicative treatment of themes itself becomes the independent goal of cooperation.

HABERMAS undermines his own concept by introducing, at second thought, a subclass that actually does not fit the concept it is derived from. It therefore requires additional effort to discover consistency in his conceptual scheme. And it regularly dissolves under sufficiently close scrutiny.

The general approach of HABERMAS to enrich theory is valid. Faced with unexplainable variety, the overall system (please note: my idea of system) may be fitted with more elements (also read: variables). Indeed, more elements allow for a larger number of system states. That is, its explanatory power correspondingly grows. Another approach is to increase the number of values any single element (also: variable) may hold. This, too, widens the space of possible system states. Optimally, a theoretical model strikes a balance between the number of variables and their respective values.
only relevant states must be accounted for. A design that also generates irrelevant states is again less than optimal.

I disagree with HABERMAS about the usefulness of two types of rationality. Actually, rationality should not be considered a leading concept, at all. I also believe it misleads to aim social theory too much at developmental issues. I recall the distinction DE SAUSSURE makes between diachronic and synchronic analysis (see Chapter 5). He argues a particular result may occur randomly. It may then spread throughout the system, thereby actually changing it (1916, p 76):

A language is a system which is intrinsically defenseless against the factors which constantly tend to shift relationships between signal and signification. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign.

This is – among many other aspects – what society has in common with language. Precisely because such an original result is not necessarily generated by the system as-a-whole, diachronicity should not be confused with synchronicity (1916, p 80):

For sciences which involve the study of values, this distinction becomes a practical necessity, and in certain cases is an absolute necessity. In this domain, it is impossible for scholars to organise their research in any rigorous fashion without taking account of these two axes. They are obliged to distinguish between the system of values considered in itself, and the same values considered over a period of time.

The notion of value holds, DE SAUSSURE writes, when “we have a system of equivalence between things belonging to different orders.” His example from economy is the relationship between work and wages. In linguistics it is of course the relationship between signification and signal.

In sociology, an equivalence of action and membership might represent a characteristic value. Applied to society a synchronic analysis should concentrate on elements as they are believed to exist at the relevant point/period in time, and not on how they might have come about. This is how DE SAUSSURE puts it for linguistics (1916, p 81):

The first thing which strikes one on studying linguistic facts is that the language user is unaware of their succession in time: he is dealing with a state. Hence the linguist who wishes to understand this state must rule out of consideration everything which brought that state about, and pay no attention to diachrony. Only by surpressing the past can he enter into the state of mind of the language user. […] (p 82) One cannot describe [language] or establish its norms of usage except by taking up a position in relation to a given state.

In fact, HABERMAS presents his concept of communicative action as a method

8. I give a simple, general example. A set of 1,000 states may be explained by a single variable with one thousand values. But then, a system of three variables, with ten values for each variable, yields 1,000 states, too.
of precisely such investigative participation. It is how in his opinion modern sociology should be practiced. But it seems that, as social theory, he also aims at integrating diachrony into his originally synchronic approach. However (DE SAUSSURE, 1916, p 85),

[i]n the diachronic perspective one is dealing with phenomena which have no connexion with linguistic systems, even though the systems are affected by them.

I believe social systems are likewise influenced, constituted even, by individual members. Their contributions (also read: actions) are better understood from a psychological perspective. DE SAUSSURE adds a word of understanding when mixing approaches of study, for (1916, p 92)

[i]t is the rigorous organization of the system which creates the illusion that the diachronic fact is subject to the same conclusions as the synchronic.

How especially planned changes are really effected, and often fail, is clearly described by E.M. ROGERS (1962). His account supports the view that changes have small beginnings. In my account, every change even starts purely individually (and situationally).

Broadly-positioned developmental issues, on the other hand, overestimate the human control of development of the society system as-a-whole. As such it is a typically modern concern. Concentrating on synchronic analysis may therefore also save the theorist from a typically modern embarrassment, i.e., when the assumption of superiority of his own particular society becomes untenable. Starting from the contrast between primitive and modern, as the early sociologists do, is a prime example of mistaken assumptions. More is learned when undeniable differences are respected as much as possible on their own merits.

It is of course perfectly understandable that the theory DARWIN (1809-1882) develops about evolution invites application by all sorts of other disciplines. At the end of the nineteenth century it certainly heralds a scientific revolution. It also seems to have inspired the Weberian concept of strategic action where an individual blindly struggles to survive as the fittest in his society. HABERMAS is right to insist rationality is not only instrumental to such individual survival. It is also put at the service of social practice, he rightly argues. But why not assume different behaviors emerging from one and the same ’source’? With the individual actor as the source of behavior, for the purpose of explanation he must be modeled with the requisite variety. Taking fundamental concepts from SCHOPENHAUER and PEIRCE, I try to do so in this treatise. Then, no two types of rationality enter the picture, at all. Rather, the key concept is that of empathy. It explains why an individual may find it in his own interest to act in the interest of another individual. Because HABERMAS lacks a concept of individual empathy, he feels the need for a radical break with psychological theory. Thus he finds himself committed to apply con-
cepts at the social level, only. It makes his theory unnecessarily elaborate. And he misses much that is relevant, while introducing much that is irrelevant, too.

12.10 against theoretical fragmentation

Earlier in this chapter I have already mentioned some difficulties a reader might experience with *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Another observation I offer is that HABERMAS often proceeds in a circular fashion. That way, he preempts criticism directed at his conclusions. His assumptions should be criticized instead. However, it is often not easy to discover how circularity enters his exposition. I give an example pertaining to the importance he ascribes to the language system. HABERMAS writes (vol 2, p 190) that the language system deserves to be called transcendental: it constitutes the life world. Actually, it is only a reformulation of his earlier statement arguing that (vol 2, p 182) the concept of the life world is complementary to that of communicative action. By his definition it holds that (vol 2, p 191)

> [d]ie Kommunikationsteilnehmer finden den Zusammenhang zwischen objektiver, sozialer und subjektiver Welt […] bereits inhaltlich interpretiert vor.

the participants in communication already find the relationship between objective, social and subjective world preinterpreted.

Again, it is not a result of HABERMAS’s analytical efforts that (vol 2, p 232)

> [d]ie Rationalisierung der Lebenswelt läßt sich als sukzessive Freisetzung des im kommunikativen Handeln angelegten Rationalitätspotential verstehen.

the rationalization of the life world may be understood as the subsequent liberation of the potential for rationality that communicative action has been invested with.

In fact, he starts from the premise that communicative action requires criticism of precisely those three types of grounds that ‘constitute’ an equal number of subworlds, vice versa. So, it is directly from his concept of communicative action that (vol 2, p 192)

> [d]ie Lebenswelt ist […] der transzendentale Ort, an dem sich Sprecher und Hörer begegnen.

the life world is the transcendental location at which the speaker and the hearer meet.

The success of their joint communicative action is, so to speak, preordained because of presuppositions (vol 1, p 444)

> des verständigungsorientierten Sprachgebrauchs.

of language use that is oriented at understanding.

Of course HABERMAS, too, requires an axiomatic system. No theory can do without. He designs his own brand of, say, social transcendentalism in order to avoid what seems to me the both perfectly simple and logical assumption that (vol 2, p 198)
I argue in this treatise that it pays more to revise such a classically Darwinean “philosophy of consciousness,” including the pre-Darwinean concept of Schopenhauerean empathy, rather than rigorously abdicate it in favor of sociologically inspired explanation. From a combined Schopenhauerean-Peircean perspective on the intellect it is nonsense to declare that (vol 2, p 205)

On the contrary, my argument is that the concept of the life world obstructs fundamental respect for the individual person. Essentially human analysis starts and ends with the individual perspective. Of course I recognize that being essentially human means leading an essentially social life. Actually, essentially the explanation of the system of human interaction requires its participants to be modeled with necessary and sufficient variety (E. F. GOFFMAN, 1967; see also note 4 in Chapter 9, above). The traditional philosophy of consciousness HABERMAS rejects is clearly inadequate, but so is his counterproposal based on communicative action.

I proceed, rounding of my discussion of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, to summarize how HABERMAS envisions the dialectics of his two types of reason. He admits (vol 2, p 224) that the life world is fictional. Members of society are confronted with the system world, too (vol 2, pp 225-226):

In fact, their goal-oriented actions are not coordinated merely through processes of understanding. Members of society also find these actions ruled by functional structures which are unintended by them, and which usually remain unobserved within the horizon of their daily lives.

This is another example of a statement where I read a definition couched inside a conclusion. The system world is constituted by functional relationships. Then, what is functional? HABERMAS considers as functional everything that is not communicative. In communicative action a participant is taken as a free agent who, by acting communicatively, completely determines his own fate. For contrast, the system world with its functional influences makes him, say, unfree. The life world is encroached upon, compromised, by media supporting the propagation of the system world. In the capitalistic societies of
the modern western world money is the primary medium of the market place. And power, HABERMAS argues, is the primary medium of government (vol 2, p 275).\(^{10}\)

Entsprachlichte Kommunikationsmedien wie Geld und Macht verknüpfen Interaktionen in Raum und Zeit zu immer komplexeren Netzen, ohne daß diese überschaust und verantwortet werden müßten.

Despeeched means of communication such as money and power result in increasingly complex structures of interactions in space and time without any requirement for their supervision and being accounted for.

First of all, by calling money and power “despeeched” HABERMAS confirms he views communicative action as the original mode of language use. Secondly, the opposition he proposes is far too simple. What matters is how a language system, an amount of money, relative power, etcetera, is applied. It is primarily not an opposition between media, but between users of media. Between sign users in their sign exchanges, actually. Regrettfully, HABERMAS commits himself to conceptualization at the social rather than the psychological level. He continues to assert that the application of such control media, i.e., of all media other than the language system, results in (vol 2, p 271)

Enlastung von Kommunikationsaufwand und Dissensrisiken.

a decrease of communicative effort and lower risk of disagreement.

However, as HABERMAS states (vol 2, p 273),


the transition from language to control media for coordinating action entails that interaction becomes disconnected from contexts of the life world.

9. I assume an unfamiliarity with technology underlies HABERMAS’s concept of the system world. It is a characteristic shared by many philosophers who criticize technology as what they see as an independent force, or ‘system.’ They have probably only observed it, never engineered it. HABERMAS, for example, writes about (vol 2, p 273) “a technologizing of the life world.” Such critics mistake effects for causes, for they overlook that actually everything having social impact may be considered as technology. So, the form and contents of this book are essentially functional, too. And so is HABERMAS’s Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, for that matter.

It, too, is designed, constructed, printed, distributed, etcetera.

To be socially useful criticism needs always to be directed at responsible persons. In fact, stating that functional influences are beyond the control of actors is irresponsible. Just blaming ‘them’ can hardly be considered ‘our’ right example of communicative action.

10. The larger part of the sentence quoted here reappears in volume 2, page 394. However, later on HABERMAS writes more generally of “media control of interactions” (mediengesteuerte Interaktionen).
Or, allowing system world and life world to act on each other, he formulates as his theoretical approach that (vol 2, p 452)

[für die Analyse von Modernisierungsprozesse ergibt sich daraus die globale Annahme, daß eine fortschreitend rationalisierte Lebenswelt von immer komplexer werdenden formal organisierten Handlungsbereichen wie Ökonomie und Staatsverwaltung zugleich entkoppelt und in Abhängigkeit gebracht wird.

—the subsequent assumption for the analysis of processes of modernization is that an increasingly rationalized life world is simultaneously both disengaged and made dependent on formally organized action domains such as the economy and government.

So, the dialectics between his different types of rationality spur complexity of overall society. The conclusion of HABERMAS is that (vol 2, p 447)

[für die Theorie der Gesellschaft verändert sich im Laufe der sozialen Evolution der Gegenstand selber.

— for the theory of society, in the course of society’s evolution, its theme changes.

It follows, he continues, the appropriate social theory must change accordingly. Precisely with this argument HABERMAS claims (vol 1, p22) a metatheoretical position for his theory of communicative action. As a precondition he elevates language systems to a socially transcendental level (see the beginning of this paragraph). 11

I repeat as my belief that HABERMAS presents a one-sided view of the language system, overestimating its idealizing power. Even when his distinction between system world and life world is taken seriously, the language system surely is a control medium, too. When HABERMAS declares it has been invested with the potential for communicative action, I am afraid that it has been equally invested with the potential for control. For language is undeniably also used for so-called strategic action (in his own version of that concept). And by the way, is such potential not always functional? When an intersubjective identity

11. In Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung (1999) HABERMAS presents several essays on his philosophical arguments for (p 7, my translation) “the language pragmatics that I have developed since the early 1970s.” It is curious he hardly mentions Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. Without pretending to offer an authoritative analysis, I have the distinct impression he is trying to answer criticism of his Theorie without actually admitting that improvements are necessary. I confirm that the main drift of his approach remains intact (and so has my disagreement with it). His, say, transcendental shift even becomes more obscure because he attempts to deny the axiomatic nature of … his axioms (1999, p 41, my translation): “The detranscendentalized intersubjectivity of the life world has taken the place of the transcendental subjectivity of consciousness.” Does such denial of the transcendental nature make his position scientifically more respectable? Anyway, from the perspective of HABERMAS’s concept of communicative action I fail to recognize the grounds of his argument.
of meaning occurs, as it seems to be HABERMAS’s ideal, isn’t that very ‘meaning’ a control medium, too? It is precisely such confusion that also makes abuse of the idealized construct of communicative action itself possible. For its label ‘sells.’ Regretfully, it is therefore eminently suited for the kind of action that HABERMAS originally opposes it to, viz., for strategic action. I don’t condone such practices at all. I am here just trying to explain the inescapable fate of such an idealized concept.

Returning to the nature of language systems, from my own theoretical perspective I clearly recognize the paradox HABERMAS engenders (vol 2, p 189):

[Wir können] uns die Lebenswelt durch einen kulturell überlieferten und sprachlich organisierteren Vorrat an Deutingsmustern repräsentiert denken.

We can think of the life world as a repository of interpretation models that is culturally transferred and linguistically organized.

Of course we can imagine such a repository. But primarily a theory should elegantly explain it. One of the contradictions underlying theorie des kommunikativen Handelns is that, given the distinction between the life world and the system world, the medial or system nature of language systems is ignored. On the same count, the completely natural occurrence of, for example, power in daily life is bracketed. The most powerful control medium, of course, is the worldview. Or ontology. It is the system of ultimate grounds invoked to settle communicative action.

A consistently synchronic approach avoids all judgmental advance-labeling. Then it is also useless to distinguish between nature and culture. Relevant is all that is one world. So, for an individual living right now in a western society, money is just as ‘natural,’ or ‘cultural’ for that matter, as the storm on a mountain. The intellect – and the intellect is what especially makes human beings so adaptable – entails a homogeneous collection of interpretants. Practically speaking, it makes an infinite number of infinite patterns for behavior possible.

Summing up, I hold a theoretical view quite opposite to that of HABERMAS. Whatever language systems are used to engineer signs is fundamentally irrelevant. What counts is that signs are always requests for compliance. So, a sign is only produced for the purpose of control. And every action can always be taken as a sign, too. The use of money, of power, of force, etcetera, usually results in motivationally induced effects (even apart from other modes of causation). When produced by the original sign observer, those effects may or they may not be compliant with the interests of the original sign engineer.

Every sign user needs to make sense of his world. I believe there exists only one world for all individuals. How the sign user structures what as a result of his subjective interpretation becomes his world should all be essentially accounted for by a model of his individuality. Such individuality is fundamen-
tally human, regardless of the — type of — society a particular person is a mem-
ber of. Of course, the particular intellect engaged in sign use is at any time to a
large extent the result of socialization. But the nature of — an admittedly large,
and surely consequential, part of — influences should not be confused with
the nature of their recipient. Society is constituted by its members. Though a
social perspective on individual behavior is rewarding, too, the ultimate expla-
nation of society must be from a member perspective. Subjective situationism
including the anatomy of meaning presented in this treatise attempts to pro-
vide such a rigorous individualistic perspective on interaction.