

## CHAPTER VII

## THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS

## I. HOW THE PROBLEM STANDS AT THE MOMENT

## A. THE POSITIVIST FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

THE first task of the sociologist is to review the general state of investigation into his problem. All too often it falls to his lot to deal with stray problems to which all the sciences in turn have made their individual contribution without anyone having ever paid any attention to the continuity of the investigation as a whole. We shall need to do more, however, than give a mere survey of past contributions to the problem of generations. We must try to give a critical evaluation of the present stage of discussion (in Part One); this will help us in our own analysis of the problem (in Part Two).

Two approaches to the problem have been worked out in the past: a 'positivist' and a 'romantic-historical' one. These two schools represent two antagonistic types of attitudes towards reality, and the different ways in which they approach the problem reflect this contrast of basic attitudes. The methodical ideal of the Positivists consisted in reducing their problems to quantitative terms; they sought a quantitative formulation of factors ultimately determining human existence. The second school adopted a qualitative approach, firmly eschewing the clear daylight of mathematics, and introverting the whole problem.

To begin with the former. The Positivist is attracted by the problem of generations because it gives him the feeling that here he has achieved contact with some of the ultimate factors of human existence as such. There is life and death; a definite, measurable span of life; generation follows generation at regular intervals. Here, thinks the Positivist, is the framework of human destiny in comprehensible, even measurable form. All other data are conditioned within the process of life itself: they are only the expression of particular relationships. They can disappear, and their disappearance means only the loss of one of many possible

forms of historical being. But if the ultimate human relationships are changed, the existence of man as we have come to understand it must cease altogether—culture, creativeness, tradition must all disappear, or must at least appear in a totally different light.

Hume actually experimented with the idea of a modification of such ultimate data. Suppose, he said, the type of succession of human generations to be completely altered to resemble that of a butterfly or caterpillar, so that the older generation disappears at one stroke and the new one is born all at once. Further, suppose man to be of such a high degree of mental development as to be capable of choosing rationally the form of government most suitable for himself. (This, of course, was the main problem of Hume's time.) These conditions given, he said, it would be both possible and proper for each generation, without reference to the ways of its ancestors, to choose afresh its own particular form of state. Only because mankind is as it is—generation following generation in a continuous stream, so that whenever one person dies off, another is born to replace him—do we find it necessary to preserve the continuity of our forms of government. Hume thus translates the principle of political continuity into terms of the biological continuity of generations.

Comte<sup>1</sup> too toyed with a similar idea: he tried to elucidate the nature and tempo of progress (the central problem of his time) by assuming a change in the basic data of the succession of generations and of the average length of life. If the average span of life of every individual were either shortened or lengthened, he said, the tempo of progress would also change. To lengthen the life-span of the individual would mean slowing up the tempo of progress, whereas to reduce the present duration of life by half or a quarter would correspondingly accelerate the tempo, because the restrictive, conservative, 'go-slow' influence of the older generation would operate for a longer time, should they live longer, and for a shorter time, should they disappear more quickly.

An excessively retarded pace was harmful, but there was also danger that too great an acceleration might result in shallowness, the potentialities of life never being really exhausted. Without wishing to imply that our world is the best of all possible worlds, Comte nevertheless thought that our span of life and the average generation period of 30 years were necessary correlatives of our organism, and that further, the slow progress of mankind was directly related to this organic limitation. The tempo of progress and the presence of conservative as well as reforming forces in

<sup>1</sup> For these quotations from Hume and Comte, cf. Mentré (19), pp. 179 f. and 66 ff.

society are thus directly attributed to biological factors. This is, indeed, how the problem looks in broad daylight. Everything is almost mathematically clear: everything is capable of analysis into its constituent elements, the constructive imagination of the thinker celebrates its triumph; by freely combining the available data, he has succeeded in grasping the ultimate, constant elements of human existence, and the secret of History lies almost fully revealed before us.

The rationalism of positivism is a direct continuation of classical rationalism, and it shows the French mind at work in its own domain. In fact, the important contributors to the problem are for the most part French. Comte, Cournot, J. Dromel, Mentré, and others outside Germany are positivists or, at any rate, have come under their influence. Ferrari, the Italian, and O. Lorenz, the Austrian historian, all worked at a time when the positivist wave encompassed all Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Their formulations of the problem had something in common. They all were anxious to find a general law to express the rhythm of historical development, based on the biological law of the limited life-span of man and the overlap of new and old generations. The aim was to understand the changing patterns of intellectual and social currents directly in biological terms, to construct the curve of the progress of the human species in terms of its vital substructure. In the process, everything, so far as possible, was simplified: a schematic psychology provided that the parents should always be a conservative force.

Presented in this light, the history of ideas appears reduced to a chronological table. The core of the problem, after this simplification, appears to be to find the average period of time taken for the older generation to be superseded by the new in public life, and principally, to find the natural starting-point in history from which to reckon a new period. The duration of a generation is very variously estimated—many assessing it at 15 years (e.g. Dromel), but most taking it to mean 30 years, on the ground that during the first 30 years of life people are still learning, that individual creativeness on an average begins only at that age, and that at 60 a man quits public life.<sup>2</sup> Even more difficult is it to find the natural

<sup>1</sup> The exact titles of all works referred to in this essay can be found in the bibliography at the end of the book.

<sup>2</sup> Rümelin's attempt seems to be the most scientific; he tried to assess generation periods in various nations, using purely statistical methods and ignoring all problems related to intellectual history. The two decisive factors entering into his calculations were the average age of marriage among men, and half the average period of marital fertility. The generation-period is obtained as the sum of these two quantities (which vary as between both social groups and countries). Germany was computed at 36½, and France at 34½ years.

beginning of the generation series, because birth and death in society as a whole follow continuously one upon the other, and full intervals exist only in the individual family where there is a definite period before children attain marriageable age.

This constitutes the core of this approach to the problem: the rest represents mere applications of the principle to concrete instances found in history. But the analytical mind remains at work all the time, and brings to light many important ramifications of the problem while working on the historical material.

Mentré<sup>1</sup> in particular, who first reviewed the problem historically, placed the whole formulation on a more solid basis.<sup>2</sup> He takes up the analysis of the problem of generations in the human family after a discussion of the same phenomenon among animals, based on the work of Espinas (*Les Sociétés Animales*, Paris, 1877). It is only after having investigated these elementary aspects of the problem that he takes up more complex aspects, such as the question of social and intellectual generations.

We also must take into account a refinement of the problem due to Mentré which flows from the distinction he makes (in common with Lévy-Bruhl) between 'institutions' and '*séries libres*'. A rhythm in the sequence of generations is far more apparent in the realm of the '*séries*'—free human groupings such as salons and literary circles—than in the realm of the institutions which for the most part lay down a lasting pattern of behaviour, either by prescriptions or by the organization of collective undertakings, thus preventing the new generation from showing its originality. An essential part of his work is concerned with the question as to whether there is what he calls a *pre-eminent sphere* in history (for example, politics, science, law, art, economics, etc.) which determines all others. He comes to the conclusion that there is no such dominant sphere imposing its own rhythm of development upon the others, since all alike are embedded in the general stream of history,<sup>3</sup> although the aesthetic sphere is perhaps the most appropriate to reflect overall changes of mental climate. An analysis of the history of this sphere in France since the 16th century led him to the view that essential changes had come about at intervals of 30 years.

Mentré's book is useful as the first comprehensive survey of the problem, although in reality it yields little, considering its volume, and fails to probe deeply enough or to formulate the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. No. 19 in the Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> We shall discuss here in detail only those students of the problem of generations whose contributions appeared after the publication of Mentré's work.

<sup>3</sup> Mentré (19), p. 298.

problem in systematic terms. That the French recently became so interested in the problem of change from one generation to another was largely due to the fact that they witnessed the sudden eclipse of liberal cosmopolitanism as a result of the arrival of a nationalistically-minded young generation. The change of generations appeared as an immediately given datum and also as a problem extending far outside the academic field, a problem whose impact upon real life could be observed in concrete fashion, for example, by issuing questionnaires.<sup>1</sup>

Although Mentré occasionally makes remarks which point beyond a purely quantitative approach, we may consider him as a positivist whose treatment of the problem of generations thus far represents the last word of the school on this subject.

We must now turn our attention to the alternative romantic-historical approach.

#### B. THE ROMANTIC-HISTORICAL FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

We find ourselves in a quite different atmosphere if we turn to Germany and trace the development of the problem there. It would be difficult to find better proof of the thesis that ways of formulating problems and modes of thought differ from country to country and from epoch to epoch, depending on dominant political trends, than the contrasting solutions offered to our problem in the various countries at different times. It is true that Rümelin, who attacked the problem from the statistical viewpoint, and O. Lorenz, who used genealogical research data as his starting-point, both remained faithful to the positivist spirit of their epoch. But the whole problem of generations took on a specifically 'German' character when Dilthey tackled it. All the traditions and impulses which once inspired the romantic-historical school were revived in Dilthey's work; in Dilthey we witness the sudden re-emergence, in revised form, of problems and categories which in their original, romantic-historicist setting helped found the social and historical sciences in Germany.

In Germany and France, the predominating trends of thought in the last epoch emerged closely related with their respective historical and political structures.

In France a positivist type of thought, deriving directly from the tradition of the Enlightenment, prevailed. It tended to dominate not merely the natural but also the cultural sciences. It not only inspired progressive and oppositional groups, but even those professing Conservatism and traditionalism. In Germany,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also the books of Agathon (1), Bainville (3), Ageorges (2), Valois (30), F. R. Curtius (7), and Platz (25), also always take into consideration the factor of generations.

on the other hand, the position was just the reverse—the romantic and historical schools supported by a strong conservative impulse always held sway. Only the natural sciences were able to develop in the positivist tradition: the cultural sciences were based entirely on the romantic-historical attitude, and positivism gained ground only sporadically, in so far as from time to time it was sponsored by oppositional groups.

Although the antithesis must not be exaggerated, it is nevertheless true that it provided rallying points in the struggle which was conducted round practically every logical category; and the problem of generations itself constituted merely one stage in the development of this much wider campaign. Unless we put this antithesis between French positivism and German romanticism into its wider context, we cannot hope to understand it in relation to the narrower problem of generations.

For the liberal positivist type, especially at home, as stated, in France, the problem of generations serves above all as evidence in favour of its unilinear conception of progress.

This type of thought, arising out of modern liberal impulses, from the outset adopted a mechanistic, externalised concept of time, and attempted to use it as an objective measure of unilinear progress by virtue of its expressibility in quantitative terms. Even the succession of generations was considered as something which articulated rather than broke the unilinear continuity of time. The most important thing about generations from this point was that they constituted one of the essential driving forces of progress.

It is this concept of progress, on the other hand, that is challenged by the romantic and historicist German mind which, relying on data furnished by a conservative technique of observation, points to the problem of generations precisely as evidence against the concept of unilinear development in history.<sup>1</sup> The problem of generations is seen here as the problem of the existence of an interior time that cannot be measured but only experienced in purely qualitative terms.

The relative novelty of Dilthey's work consists in just this distinction which he made between the qualitative and quantitative concept of time. Dilthey is interested in the problem of generations primarily because, as he puts it, the adoption of the 'generation' as a temporal unit of the history of intellectual evolution makes it possible to replace such purely external units

<sup>1</sup> For the conservative concept of time, cf. 'Conservative Thought', to be published in a later volume.

For a repudiation of the concept of progress as used to sum up historical development, cf. for example, Pinder (23), p. 138.

as hours, months, years, decades, etc., by a concept of measure operating from within (*eine von innen abmessende Vorstellung*). The use of generations as units makes it possible to appraise intellectual movements by an intuitive process of re-enactment.<sup>1</sup>

The second conclusion to which Dilthey comes in connection with the phenomenon of generations is that not merely is the succession of one after another important, but also that their *co-existence* is of more than mere chronological significance. The same dominant influences deriving from the prevailing intellectual, social, and political circumstances are experienced by contemporary individuals, both in their early, formative, and in their later years. They are contemporaries, they constitute one generation, just because they are subject to common influences. This idea that, from the point of view of the history of ideas, contemporaneity means a state of being subjected to similar influences rather than a mere chronological datum, shifts the discussion from a plane on which it risked degenerating into a kind of arithmetical mysticism to the sphere of interior time which can be grasped by intuitive understanding.

Thus, a problem open to quantitative, mathematical treatment only is replaced by a qualitative one, centred about the notion of something which is not quantifiable, but capable only of being experienced. The time-interval separating generations becomes subjectively experienceable time; and contemporaneity becomes a subjective condition of having been submitted to the same determining influences.

From here it is only one step to the phenomenological position of Heidegger, who gives a very profound interpretation of this qualitative relationship—for him, the very stuff and substance of Fate. 'Fate is not the sum of individual destinies, any more than togetherness can be understood as a mere appearing together of several subjects. Togetherness in the same world, and the consequent preparedness for a distinct set of possibilities, determines the direction of individual destinies in advance. The power of Fate is then unleashed in the peaceful intercourse and the conflict of social life. The inescapable fate of living in and with one's generation completes the full drama of individual human existence.'<sup>2</sup>

The qualitative concept of time upon which, as we have seen, Dilthey's approach was based, also underlies the formulation given the problem by the art historian Pinder.<sup>3</sup> Dilthey with a happy restraint is never led to develop any but genuine

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dilthey (8), pp. 36 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger (12), pp. 384 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Pinder (23), cf. especially Ch. 7.

possibilities opened up by the romantic-qualitative approach. As a matter of fact, he was able to learn also from positivism. Pinder, on the other hand, becomes thoroughly enmeshed in all the confusions of romanticism. He gives many deep insights, but does not know how to avoid the natural excesses of romanticism. '*The non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous*' is what interests Pinder most in relation to generations. Different generations live at the same time. But since experienced time is the only real time, they must all in fact be living in qualitatively quite different subjective eras. 'Everyone lives with people of the same and of different ages, with a variety of possibilities of experience facing them all alike. But for each the "same time" is a different time—that is, it represents a different *period of his self*, which he can only share with people of his own age.'<sup>1</sup>

Every moment of time is therefore in reality more than a point-like event—it is a temporal volume having more than one dimension, because it is always experienced by several generations at various stages of development.<sup>2</sup> To quote a musical simile employed by Pinder: the thinking of each epoch is polyphonus. At any given point in time we must always sort out the individual voices of the various generations, each attaining that point in time in its own way.

A further idea suggested by Pinder is that each generation builds up an 'entelechy' of its own by which means alone it can really become a qualitative unity. Although Dilthey believed the inner unity of a generation to exist in the community of determining influences of an intellectual and social kind, the link of contemporaneity as such did not assume a purely qualitative form in his analysis. Heidegger tried to remedy this with his concept of 'fate' as the primary factor producing unity; Pinder, then, in the tradition of modern art history, suggested the concept of 'entelechy'.

According to him, the entelechy of a generation is the expression of the unity of its 'inner aim'—of its inborn way of experiencing life and the world. Viewed within the tradition of German art history, this concept of 'entelechy' represents the transfer of Riegl's concept of the 'art motive' (*Kunstwollen*)<sup>3</sup> from the phenomenon of unity of artistic styles to that of the unity of generations, in the same way as the concept of the 'art motive' itself resulted from the rejuvenation and fructification, under the influence of positivism, of the morphological tendency already inherent in the historicist concept of the '*Spirit of a people*' (*Volksgeist*).

<sup>1</sup> Pinder (23), p. 21. Pinder's italics.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. K. Mannheim, 'On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*,' pp. 33 ff in this volume.

The concept of a '*spirit of the age*' (*Zeitgeist*) with which one had hitherto principally worked, now turns out to be—to take another of Pinder's favourite<sup>1</sup> musical analogies—an accidental chord, an apparent harmony, produced by the vertical coincidence of notes which in fact owe a primary horizontal allegiance to the different parts (i.e. the generation-entelechies) of a fugue. The generation-entelechies thus serve to destroy the purely temporal concepts of an epoch over-emphasized in the past (e.g. Spirit of the age or epoch). The epoch as a unit has no homogeneous driving impulse, no homogeneous principle of form—no entelechy. Its unity consists at most in the related nature of the means which the period makes available for the fulfilment of the different historical tasks of the generations living in it. Periods have their characteristic colour—'such colours do in fact exist, but somewhat as the colour-tone of a varnish through which one can look at the many colours of the different generations and age-groups'.<sup>2</sup>

Although this denial of the existence of an entelechy peculiar to each epoch means that epochs can no longer serve as units in historical analysis and that the concept of *Zeitgeist* becomes inapplicable and relativized, other terms customarily used as units in the history of ideas are left valid. According to Pinder, in addition to entelechies of generations, there exist entelechies of art, language, and style; entelechies of nations and tribes—even an entelechy of Europe; and finally, entelechies of the individuals themselves.

What then, according to Pinder, constitutes the historical process? The interplay of constant and transient factors. The constant factors are civilization, nation, tribe, family, individuality, and type; the transient factors are the entelechies already mentioned. 'It is maintained that growth is more important than experience ('influences', 'relationships'). It is maintained that the life of art, as seen by the historian, consists in the interactions of *determining* entelechies, *born* of mysterious processes of nature, with the equally essential frictions, influences, and relations *experienced* in the actual development of these entelechies.<sup>3</sup> What is immediately striking here is that the social factor is not even alluded to in this enumeration of determining factors.

This romantic tendency in Germany completely obscured the fact that between the natural or physical and the mental spheres there is a level of existence at which social forces operate. Either a completely spiritualistic attitude is maintained and everything is deduced from entelechies (the existence of which,

<sup>1</sup> Pinder (24), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Pinder, pp. 159 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 154, Pinder's italics.

however, is not to be denied), or there is a feeling of obligation to introduce some element of realism, and then some crude biological data like race and generation (which, again, must be admitted to exist) are counted upon to produce cultural facts by a 'mysterious natural process'. Undoubtedly, there are mysteries in the world in any case, but we should use them as explanatory principles in their proper place, rather than at points where it is still perfectly possible to understand the agglomeration of forces in terms of social processes. Intellectual and cultural history is surely shaped, among other things, by social relations in which men get originally confronted with each other, by groups within which they find mutual stimulus, where concrete struggle produces entelechies and thereby also influences and to a large extent shapes art, religion, and so on. Perhaps it would also be fruitful to ask ourselves whether society in fact can produce nothing more than 'influences' and 'relationships', or whether, on the contrary, social factors also possess a certain creative energy, a formative power, a social entelechy of their own. Is it not perhaps possible that this energy, arising from the interplay of social forces, constitutes the link between the other entelechies of art, style, generation, etc., which would otherwise only accidentally cross paths or come together? If one refuses to look at this matter from this point of view, and assumes a direct relationship between the spiritual and the vital without any sociological and historical factors mediating between them, he will be too easily tempted to conclude that especially productive generations are the 'chance products of nature',<sup>1</sup> and 'the problem of the times of birth will point towards the far more difficult and mysterious one of the times of death'.<sup>2</sup> How much more sober, how much more in tune with the genuine impulses of research, is the following sentence in which Dilthey, so to speak, disposed of such speculations in advance: 'For the time being, the most natural assumption would appear to be that on the whole, both the degree and the distribution of ability are the same for each generation, the level of efficiency within the national society being constant, so that two other groups of conditions<sup>3</sup> would explain both the distribution and the intensity of achievement.'

Valuable, even a stroke of genius, is Pinder's idea of the 'non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous', as well as his concept of entelechies—both the result of the romantic-historical approach and both undoubtedly unattainable by positivism. But

<sup>1</sup> Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> That is, the 'cultural situation' and 'social and political conditions'. Dilthey (8), p. 38.

his procedure becomes dangerously inimical to the scientific spirit where he chooses to make use of the method of analogy. This mode of thought, which actually derives from speculations about the philosophy of nature current during the Renaissance, was revived and blown up to grotesque proportions by the Romantics; it is used currently by Pinder whenever he tries to work out a biological world-rhythm. His ultimate aim also is to establish measurable intervals in history (although somewhat more flexibly than usual), and to use this magical formula of generations in order to discover birth cycles exercising a decisive influence on history. Joel,<sup>1</sup> otherwise an eminent scholar, indulges in even more unwarranted constructions in this field. His latest publication on the secular rhythm in history reminds the reader immediately of the romantic speculations.

It is a complete misconception to suppose, as do most investigators, that a real problem of generations exists only in so far as a rhythm of generations, recurring at unchanging intervals, can be established. Even if it proved impossible to establish such intervals, the problem of generations would nevertheless remain a fruitful and important field of research.

We do not yet know—perhaps there is a secular rhythm at work in history, and perhaps it will one day be discovered. But we must definitely repudiate any attempt to find it through imaginative speculations, particularly when this speculation—whether biological or spiritual in its character—is simply used as a pretext for avoiding research into the nearer and more transparent fabric of social processes and their influence on the phenomenon of generations. Any biological rhythm must work itself out through the medium of social events; and if this important group of formative factors is left unexamined, and everything is derived directly from vital factors, all the fruitful potentialities in the original formulation of the problem<sup>2</sup> are liable to be jettisoned in the manner of its solution.

## II. THE SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS

The problem of generations is important enough to merit serious consideration. It is one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual move-

<sup>1</sup> See (16) in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> O. Lorenz sought to substitute for the century as unit a more rationally deducible unit of three generations; Scherer emphasizes a 600-year rhythm in his *History of Literature*, pp. 18 ff. We shall have to refer to the work of the modern literary historians Kummers and Petersen, as well as L. von Wiese, in the next part of this investigation.

ments. Its practical importance becomes clear as soon as one tries to obtain a more exact understanding of the accelerated pace of social change characteristic of our time. It would be regrettable if extra-scientific methods were permanently to conceal elements of the problem capable of immediate investigation.

It is clear from the foregoing survey of the problem as it stands today that a commonly accepted approach to it does not exist. The social sciences in various countries only sporadically take account of the achievements of their neighbours. In particular, German research into the problem of generations has ignored results obtained abroad. Moreover, the problem has been tackled by specialists in many different sciences in succession; thus, we possess a number of interesting sidelights on the problem as well as contributions to an overall solution, but no consciously directed research on the basis of a clear formulation of the problem as a whole.

The multiplicity of points of view, resulting both from the peculiarities of the intellectual traditions of various nations and from those of the individual sciences, is both attractive and fruitful; and there can be no doubt that such a wide problem can only be solved as a result of co-operation between the most diverse disciplines and nationalities. However, the co-operation must somehow be planned and directed from an organic centre. The present status of the problem of generations thus affords a striking illustration of the anarchy in the social and cultural sciences, where everyone starts out afresh from his own point of view (to a certain extent, of course, this is both necessary and fruitful), never pausing to consider the various aspects as part of a single general problem, so that the contributions of the various disciplines to the collective solution could be planned.

Any attempt at over-organization of the social and cultural sciences is naturally undesirable; but it is at least worth considering whether there is not perhaps one discipline—according to the nature of the problem in question—which could act as the organizing centre for work on it by all the others. As far as generations are concerned, the task of sketching the layout of the problem undoubtedly falls to sociology. It seems to be the task of *Formal Sociology* to work out the simplest, but at the same time the most fundamental facts relating to the phenomenon of generations. Within the sphere of formal sociology, however, the problem lies on the borderline between the static and the dynamic types of investigation. Whereas formal sociology up to now has tended for the most part to study the social existence of man exclusively *statically*, this particular problem seems to be one of those which have to do with the ascertainment of the origin of

social dynamism and of the laws governing the action of the dynamic components of the social process. Accordingly, this is the point where we have to make the transition from the formal static to the formal dynamic and from thence to applied historical sociology—all three together comprising the complete field of sociological research.

In the succeeding pages we shall attempt to work out in formal sociological terms all the most elementary facts regarding the phenomenon of generations, without the elucidation of which historical research into the problem cannot even begin. We shall try to incorporate any results of past investigations, which have proved themselves relevant, ignoring those which do not seem to be sufficiently well founded.

#### A. CONCRETE GROUP—SOCIAL LOCATION (LAGERUNG)

To obtain a clear idea of the basic structure of the phenomenon of generations, we must clarify the specific inter-relations of the individuals comprising a single generation-unit.

The unity of a generation does not consist primarily in a social bond of the kind that leads to the formation of a concrete group, although it may sometimes happen that a feeling for the unity of a generation is consciously developed into a basis for the formation of concrete groups, as in the case of the modern German Youth Movement.<sup>1</sup> But in this case, the groups are most often mere cliques, with the one distinguishing characteristic that group-formation is based upon the consciousness of belonging to one generation, rather than upon definite objectives.

Apart from such a particular case, however, it is possible in general to draw a distinction between generations as mere collective facts on the one hand, and *concrete social groups* on the other.

Organizations for specific purposes, the family, tribe, sect, are all examples of such *concrete groups*. Their common characteristic is that the individuals of which they are composed do actually *in concrete* form a group, whether the entity is based on vital, existential ties of 'proximity' or on the conscious application of the rational will. All 'community' groups (*Gemeinschaftsgebilde*), such as the family and the tribe, come under the former heading, while the latter comprises 'association' groups (*Gesellschaftsgebilde*).

The generation is not a concrete group in the sense of a community, i.e. a group which cannot exist without its members having concrete knowledge of each other, and which ceases to

<sup>1</sup> In this connection it would be desirable to work out the exact differences between modern youth movements and the age-groups of men's societies formed amongst primitive peoples, carefully described by H. Schurtz (27).

exist as a mental and spiritual unit as soon as physical proximity is destroyed. On the other hand, it is in no way comparable to associations such as organizations formed for a specific purpose, for the latter are characterized by a deliberate act of foundation, written statutes, and a machinery for dissolving the organization—features serving to hold the group together, even though it lacks the ties of spatial proximity and of community of life.

By a concrete group, then, we mean the union of a number of individuals through naturally developed or consciously willed ties. Although the members of a generation are undoubtedly bound together in certain ways, the ties between them have not resulted in a concrete group. How, then, can we define and understand the nature of the generation as a social phenomenon?

An answer may perhaps be found if we reflect upon the character of a different sort of social category, materially quite unlike the generation but bearing a certain structural resemblance to it—namely, the class position (*Klassenlage*) of an individual in society.

In its wider sense class-position can be defined as the common 'location' (*Lagerung*) certain individuals hold in the economic and power structure of a given society as their 'lot'. One is proletarian, *entrepreneur*, or *rentier*, and he is what he is because he is constantly aware of the nature of his specific 'location' in the social structure, i.e. of the pressures or possibilities of gain resulting from that position. This place in society does not resemble membership of an organization terminable by a conscious act of will. Nor is it at all binding in the same way as membership of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) which means that a concrete group affects every aspect of an individual's existence.

It is possible to abandon one's class position through an individual or collective rise or fall in the social scale, irrespective for the moment whether this is due to personal merit, personal effort, social upheaval, or mere chance.

Membership of an organization lapses as soon as we give notice of our intention to leave it; the cohesion of the community group *ceases to exist* if the mental and spiritual dispositions on which its existence has been based cease to operate in us or in our partners; and our previous class position loses its relevance for us as soon as we acquire a new position as a result of a change in our economic and power status.

Class position is an objective fact, whether the individual in question knows his class position or not, and whether he acknowledges it or not.

Class-consciousness does not necessarily accompany a class position, although in certain social conditions the latter can give

rise to the former, lending it certain features, and resulting in the formation of a 'conscious class'.<sup>1</sup> At the moment, however, we are only interested in the general phenomenon of social *location* as such. Besides the concrete social group, there is also the phenomenon of similar location of a number of individuals in a social structure—under which heading both classes and generations fall.

We have now taken the first step towards an analysis of the 'location' phenomenon as distinct from the phenomenon 'concrete group', and this much at any rate is clear—*viz.* the unity of generations is constituted essentially by a similarity of location of a number of individuals within a social whole.

#### B. THE BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS

Similarity of location can be defined only by specifying the structure within which and through which location groups emerge in historical-social reality. Class-position was based upon the existence of a changing economic and power structure in society. Generation location is based on the existence of biological rhythm in human existence—the factors of life and death, a limited span of life, and ageing. Individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process.

Now, one might assume that the sociological phenomenon of location can be explained by, and deduced from, these basic biological factors. But this would be to make the mistake of all naturalistic theories which try to deduce sociological phenomena directly from natural facts, or lose sight of the social phenomenon altogether in a mass of primarily anthropological data. Anthropology and biology only help us explain the phenomena of life and death, the limited span of life, and the mental, spiritual, and physical changes accompanying ageing as such; they offer no explanation of the relevance these primary factors have for the shaping of social interrelationships in their historic flux.

The sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death. But to be *based* on a factor does not necessarily mean to be *deducible* from it, or to be

<sup>1</sup> It is a matter for historical and sociological research to discover at what stage in its development, and under what conditions, a class becomes class-conscious, and similarly, when individual members of a generation become conscious of their common situation and make this consciousness the basis of their group solidarity. Why have generations become so conscious of their unity to-day? This is the first question we have to answer in this context.

implied in it. If a phenomenon is *based* on another, it could not exist without the latter; however, it possesses certain characteristics peculiar to itself, characteristics in no way borrowed from the basic phenomenon. Were it not for the existence of social interaction between human beings—were there no definable social structure, no history based on a particular sort of continuity, the generation would not exist as a social location phenomenon; there would merely be birth, ageing, and death. The *sociological* problem of generations therefore begins at that point where the sociological relevance of these biological factors is discovered. Starting with the elementary phenomenon itself, then, we must first of all try to understand the generation as a particular type of social location.

#### C. THE TENDENCY 'INHERENT IN' A SOCIAL LOCATION

The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. Any given location, then, excludes a large number of possible modes of thought, experience, feeling, and action, and restricts the range of self-expression open to the individual to certain circumscribed possibilities. This *negative* delimitation, however, does not exhaust the matter. Inherent in a *positive* sense in every location is a tendency pointing towards certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling, and thought.

We shall therefore speak in this sense of a tendency 'inherent in' every social location; a tendency which can be determined from the particular nature of the location as such.

For any group of individuals sharing the same class position, society always appears under the same aspect, familiarized by constantly repeated experience. It may be said in general that the experiential, intellectual, and emotional data which are available to the members of a certain society are not uniformly 'given' to all of them; the fact is rather that each class has access to only one set of those data, restricted to one particular 'aspect'. Thus, the proletarian most probably appropriates only a fraction of the cultural heritage of his society, and that in the manner of his group. Even a mental climate as rigorously uniform as that of the Catholic Middle Ages presented itself differently according to whether one were a theologizing cleric, a knight, or a monk. But even where the intellectual material is more or less uniform or at



least uniformly accessible to all, the *approach* to the material, the way in which it is assimilated and applied, is determined in its direction by social factors. We usually say in such cases that the approach is determined by the special traditions of the social stratum concerned. But these traditions themselves are explicable and understandable not only in terms of the history of the stratum but above all in terms of the location relationships of its members within the society. Traditions bearing in a particular direction only persist so long as the location relationships of the group acknowledging them remain more or less unchanged. The concrete form of an existing behaviour pattern or of a cultural product does not derive from the history of a particular tradition but ultimately from the history of the location relationships in which it originally arose and hardened itself into a tradition.

#### D. FUNDAMENTAL FACTS IN RELATION TO GENERATIONS

According to what we have said so far, the social phenomenon 'generation' represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related 'age groups' embedded in a historical-social process. While the nature of class location can be explained in terms of economic and social conditions, generation location is determined by the way in which certain patterns of experience and thought tend to be brought into existence by the *natural data* of the transition from one generation to another.

The best way to appreciate which features of social life result from the existence of generations is to make the experiment of imagining what the social life of man would be like if one generation lived on for ever and none followed to replace it. In contrast to such a utopian, imaginary society, our own has the following characteristics:<sup>1</sup>

- (a) new participants in the cultural process are emerging, whilst
- (b) former participants in that process are continually disappearing;
- (c) members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally limited section of the historical process, and
- (d) it is therefore necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage;
- (e) the transition from generation to generation is a continuous process.

These are the basic phenomena implied by the mere fact of

<sup>1</sup> Since actual experiments are precluded by the nature of the social sciences, such a 'mental experiment' can often help to isolate the important factors.

the existence of generations, apart from one specific phenomenon we choose to ignore for the moment, that of physical and mental ageing.<sup>1</sup> With this as a beginning, let us then investigate the bearing of these elementary facts upon formal sociology.

#### (a) *The continuous emergence of new participants in the cultural process*

In contrast to the imaginary society with no generations, our own—in which generation follows generation—is principally characterized by the fact that cultural creation and cultural accumulation are not accomplished by the same individuals—instead, we have the continuous emergence of new age groups.

This means, in the first place, that our culture is developed by individuals who come into contact anew with the accumulated heritage. In the nature of our psychical make-up, a fresh contact (meeting something anew) always means a changed relationship of distance from the object and a novel approach in assimilating, using, and developing the proffered material. The phenomenon of 'fresh contact' is, incidentally, of great significance in many social contexts; the problem of generations is only one among those upon which it has a bearing. Fresh contacts play an important part in the life of the individual when he is forced by events to leave his own social group and enter a new one—when, for example, an adolescent leaves home, or a peasant the countryside for the town, or when an emigrant changes his home, or a social climber his social status or class. It is well known that in all these cases a quite visible and striking transformation of the consciousness of the individual in question takes place: a change, not merely in the content of experience, but in the individual's mental and spiritual adjustment to it. In all these cases, however, the fresh contact is an event in one individual biography, whereas in the case of generations, we may speak of 'fresh contacts' in the sense of the addition of new psycho-physical units who are in the literal sense beginning a 'new life'. Whereas the adolescent, peasant, emigrant, and social climber can only in a more or less restricted sense be said to begin a 'new life', in the case of generations, the 'fresh contact' with the social and cultural heritage is determined not by mere social change, but by fundamental biological factors. We can accordingly differentiate between two types of 'fresh contact': one based on a shift in social relations,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spranger (28) on 'being young' and 'becoming old', and the intellectual and spiritual significance of these phenomena. (He also gives references to other literature on the psychology of the adolescent—whereon see also Honigsheim (19)). Further, see A. E. Brinckmann (4) (who proceeds by way of interpretive analysis of works of art), Jacob Grimm (15), F. Ball (5), Giese (14a). Literature relating to the youth movement, which constitutes a problem in itself, is not included in the biography at the end of this book.

and the other on vital factors (the change from one generation to another). The latter type is *potentially* much more radical, since with the advent of the new participant in the process of culture, the change of attitude takes place in a different individual whose attitude towards the heritage handed down by his predecessors is a novel one.

Were there no change of generation, there would be no 'fresh contact' of this biological type. If the cultural process were always carried on and developed by the same individuals, then, to be sure, 'fresh contacts' might still result from shifts in social relationships, but the more radical form of 'fresh contact' would be missing. Once established, any fundamental social pattern (attitude or intellectual trend) would probably be perpetuated—in itself an advantage, but not if we consider the dangers resulting from one-sidedness. There might be a certain compensation for the loss of fresh generations in such a utopian society only if the people living in it were possessed, as befits the denizens of a Utopia, of perfectly universal minds—minds capable of experiencing all that there was to experience and of knowing all there was to know, and enjoying an elasticity such as to make it possible at any time to start afresh. 'Fresh contacts' resulting from shifts in the historical and social situation could suffice to bring about the changes in thought and practice necessitated by changed conditions only if the individuals experiencing these fresh contacts had such a perfect 'elasticity of mind'. Thus the continuous emergence of new human beings in our own society acts as compensation for the restricted and partial nature of the individual consciousness. The continuous emergence of new human beings certainly results in some loss of accumulated cultural possessions; but, on the other hand, it alone makes a fresh selection possible when it becomes necessary; it facilitates re-evaluation of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won.

(b) *The continuous withdrawal of previous participants in the process of culture*

The function of this second factor is implied in what has already been said. It serves the necessary social purpose of enabling us to forget. If society is to continue, social remembering is just as important as forgetting and action starting from scratch.

At this point we must make clear in what social form remembering manifests itself and how the cultural heritage is actually accumulated. All psychic and cultural data only really exist in so far as they are produced and reproduced in the present: hence

past experience is only relevant when it exists concretely incorporated in the present. In our present context, we have to consider two ways in which past experience can be incorporated in the present:

(i) as consciously recognized models<sup>1</sup> on which men pattern their behaviour (for example, the majority of subsequent revolutions tended to model themselves more or less consciously on the French Revolution); or

(ii) as unconsciously 'condensed', merely 'implicit' or 'virtual' patterns; consider, for instance, how past experiences are 'virtually' contained in such specific manifestations as that of sentimentality. Every present performance operates a certain selection among handed-down data, for the most part unconsciously. That is, the traditional material is transformed to fit a prevailing new situation, or hitherto unnoticed or neglected potentialities inherent in that material are discovered in the course of developing new patterns of action.<sup>2</sup>

At the more primitive levels of social life, we mostly encounter unconscious selection. There the past tends to be present in a 'condensed', 'implicit', and 'virtual' form only. Even at the present level of social reality, we see this unconscious selection at work in the deeper regions of our intellectual and spiritual lives, where the tempo of transformation is of less significance. A conscious and reflective selection becomes necessary only when a semi-conscious transformation, such as can be effected by the traditionalist mind, is no longer sufficient. In general, rational elucidation and reflectiveness invade only those realms of experience which become problematic as a result of a change in the historical and social situation; where that is the case, the necessary transformation can no longer be effected without conscious reflection and its technique of de-stabilization.

We are directly aware primarily of those aspects of our culture which have become subject to reflection; and these contain only

<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to enumerate all the many forms of social memory. We will therefore deliberately simplify the matter by limiting ourselves to two extreme alternatives. 'Consciously recognized models' include, in the wider sense, also the body of global knowledge, stored in libraries. But this sort of knowledge is only effective in so far as it is continually actualized. This can happen in two ways—either intellectually, when it is used as a pattern or guide for action, or spontaneously, when it is 'virtually present' as condensed experience.

Instinct, as well as repressed and unconscious knowledge, as dealt with in particular by Freud, would need separate treatment.

<sup>2</sup> This process of discovery of hidden possibilities inherent in transmitted material alone makes it clear why it is that so many revolutionary and reformist movements are able to graft their new truths on to old ones.

those elements which in the course of development have somehow, at some point, become problematical. This is not to say, however, that once having become conscious and reflective, they cannot again sink back into the a-problematical, untouched region of vegetative life. In any case, that form of memory which contains the past in the form of reflection is much less significant—e.g. it extends over a much more restricted range of experience—than that in which the past is only 'implicitly', 'virtually' present; and reflective elements are more often dependent on unreflective elements than *vice versa*.

Here we must make a fundamental distinction between *appropriated* memories and *personally acquired* memories (a distinction applicable both to reflective and unreflective elements). It makes a great difference whether I acquire memories for myself in the process of personal development, or whether I simply take them over from someone else. I only really possess those 'memories' which I have created directly for myself, only that 'knowledge' I have personally gained in real situations. This is the only sort of knowledge which really 'sticks' and it alone has real binding power. Hence, although it would appear desirable that man's spiritual and intellectual possessions should consist of nothing but individually acquired memories, this would also involve the danger that the earlier ways of possession and acquisition will inhibit the new acquisition of knowledge. That experience goes with age is in many ways an advantage. That, on the other hand, youth lacks experience means a lightening of the ballast for the young; it facilitates their living on in a changing world. One is old primarily in so far as<sup>1</sup> he comes to live within a specific, individually acquired, framework of useable past experience, so that every new experience has its form and its place largely marked out for it in advance. In youth, on the other hand, where life is new, formative forces are just coming into being, and basic attitudes in the process of development can take advantage of the moulding power of new situations. Thus a human race living on for ever would have to learn to forget to compensate for the lack of new generations.

(c) *Members of any one generation can only participate in a temporally limited section of the historical process.*

The implications of this basic fact can also be worked out in the light of what has been said so far. The first two factors, (a) and (b), were only concerned with the aspects of constant 'rejuvenation' of society. To be able to start afresh with a new life,

<sup>1</sup> That is, if we ignore—as we said we would—the biological factors of physical and psychological ageing.

to build a new destiny, a new framework of anticipations, upon a new set of experiences, are things which can come into the world only through the fact of new birth. All this is implied by the factor of social rejuvenation. The factor we are dealing with now, however, can be adequately analysed only in terms of the category of 'similarity of location' which we have mentioned but not discussed in detail above.<sup>1</sup>

Members of a generation are 'similarly located', first of all, in so far as they all are exposed to the same phase of the collective process. This, however, is a merely mechanical and external criterion of the phenomenon of 'similar location'. For a deeper understanding, we must turn to the phenomenon of the 'stratification' of experience (*Erlebnisschichtung*), just as before we turned to 'memory'. The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of location; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data, etc., and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly 'stratified' consciousness. It is not difficult to see why mere chronological contemporaneity cannot of itself produce a common generation location. No one, for example, would assert

<sup>1</sup> It must be emphasized that this 'ability to start afresh' of which we are speaking has nothing to do with 'conservative' and 'progressive' in the usual sense of these terms. Nothing is more false than the usual assumption uncritically shared by most students of generations, that the younger generation is 'progressive' and the older generation *eo ipso* conservative. Recent experiences have shown well enough that the old liberal generation tends to be more politically progressive than certain sections of the youth (e.g. the German Students' Associations—*Burschenschaften*—etc.). 'Conservative' and 'progressive' are categories of historical sociology, designed to deal with the descriptive contents of the dynamism of a historical period of history, whereas 'old' and 'young' and the concept of the 'fresh contact' of a generation are categories belonging to formal sociology. Whether youth will be conservative, reactionary, or progressive, depends (if not entirely, at least primarily) on whether or not the existing social structure and the position they occupy in it provide opportunities for the promotion of their own social and intellectual ends. Their 'being young', the 'freshness' of their contact with the world, manifest themselves in the fact that they are able to re-orient any movement they embrace, to adopt it to the total situation. (Thus, for instance, they must seek within Conservatism the particular form of this political and intellectual current best suited to the requirements of the modern situation: or within Socialism, in the same way, an up-to-date formulation.) This lends considerable support to the fundamental thesis of this essay, which will have to be further substantiated later—that biological factors (such as youth and age) do not of themselves involve a definite intellectual or practical orientation (youth cannot be automatically correlated with a progressive attitude and so on); they merely *initiate* certain formal tendencies, the actual manifestations of which will ultimately depend on the prevailing social and cultural context. Any attempt to establish a direct identity or correlation between biological and cultural data leads to a *quid pro quo* which can only confuse the issue.

that there was community of location between the young people of China and Germany about 1800. Only where contemporaries definitely are in a position to participate as an integrated group in certain common experiences can we rightly speak of community of location of a generation. Mere contemporaneity becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances. Further, we have to take into consideration at this point the phenomenon of 'stratification', mentioned above. Some older generation groups experience certain historical processes together with the young generation and yet we cannot say that they have the same generation location. The fact that their location is a different one, however, can be explained primarily by the different 'stratification' of their lives. The human consciousness, structurally speaking, is characterized by a particular inner 'dialectic'. It is of considerable importance for the formation of the consciousness which experiences happen to make those all-important 'first impressions', 'childhood experiences'—and which follow to form the second, third, and other 'strata'. Conversely, in estimating the biographical significance of a particular experience, it is important to know whether it is undergone by an individual as a decisive childhood experience, or later in life, superimposed upon other basic and early impressions. Early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis. Experiences are not accumulated in the course of a lifetime through a process of summation or agglomeration, but are 'dialectically' articulated in the way described. We cannot here analyse the specific forms of this dialectical articulation, which is potentially present whenever we act, think, or feel, in more detail (the relationship of 'antithesis' is only one way in which new experiences may graft themselves upon old ones). This much, however, is certain, that even if the rest of one's life consisted in one long process of negation and destruction of the natural world view acquired in youth, the determining influence of these early impressions would still be predominant. For even in negation our orientation is fundamentally centred upon that which is being negated, and we are thus still unwittingly determined by it. If we bear in mind that every concrete experience acquires its particular face and form from its relation to this primary stratum of experiences from which all others receive their meaning, we can appreciate its importance for the further development of the human consciousness. Another fact, closely related to the phenomenon just described, is that any two generations following

one another always fight different opponents, both within and without. While the older people may still be combating something in themselves or in the external world in such fashion that all their feelings and efforts and even their concepts and categories of thought are determined by that adversary, for the younger people this adversary may be simply non-existent: their primary orientation is an entirely different one. That historical development does not proceed in a straight line—a feature frequently observed particularly in the cultural sphere—is largely attributed to this shifting of the 'polar' components of life, that is, to the fact that internal or external adversaries constantly disappear and are replaced by others. Now this particular dialectic, of changing generations, would be absent from our imaginary society. The only dialectical features of such a society would be those which would arise from social polarities—provided such polarities were present. The primary experiential stratum of the members of this imaginary society would simply consist of the earliest experiences of mankind; all later experience would receive its meaning from that stratum.

(d) *The necessity for constant transmission of the cultural heritage*

Some structural facts which follow from this must at least be indicated here. To mention one problem only: a utopian, immortal society would not have to face this necessity of cultural transmission, the most important aspect of which is the automatic passing on to the new generations of the traditional ways of life, feelings, and attitudes. The data transmitted by conscious teaching are of more limited importance, both quantitatively and qualitatively. All those attitudes and ideas which go on functioning satisfactorily in the new situation and serve as the basic inventory of group life are unconsciously and unwittingly handed on and transmitted: they seep in without either the teacher or pupil knowing anything about it. What is consciously learned or inculcated belongs to those things which in the course of time have somehow, somewhere, become problematic and therefore invited conscious reflection. This is why that inventory of experience which is absorbed by infiltration from the environment in early youth often becomes the historically oldest stratum of consciousness, which tends to stabilize itself as the natural view of the world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to decide just at what point this process is complete in an individual—at what point this unconscious vital inventory (which also contains the national and provincial peculiarities out of which national and provincial entelechies can develop) is stabilized. The process seems to stop once the inventory of a-problematical experience has virtually acquired its final form. The child or adolescent is always open to new influences if placed in a new

But in early childhood even many reflective elements are assimilated in the same 'a-problematical' fashion as those elements of the basic inventory had been. The new germ of an original intellectual and spiritual life which is latent in the new human being has by no means as yet come into its own. The possibility of really questioning and reflecting on things only emerges at the point where personal experimentation with life begins—round about the age of 17, sometimes a little earlier and sometimes a little later.<sup>1</sup> It is only then that life's problems begin to be located in a 'present' and are experienced as such. That level of data and attitudes which social change has rendered problematical, and which therefore requires reflection, has now been reached; for the first time, one lives 'in the present'. Combative juvenile groups struggle to clarify these issues, but never realise that, however radical they are, they are merely out to transform the uppermost stratum of consciousness which is open to conscious reflection. For it seems that the deeper strata are not easily de-stabilized<sup>2</sup> and that when this becomes necessary, the process must start out from the level of reflection and work down to the stratum of habits.<sup>3</sup> The 'up-to-dateness' of youth therefore consists

*milieu*. They readily assimilate new unconscious mental attitudes and habits, and change their language or dialect. The adult, transferred into a new environment, consciously transforms certain aspects of his modes of thought and behaviour, but never acclimatizes himself in so radical and thoroughgoing a fashion. His fundamental attitudes, his vital inventory, and, among external manifestations, his language and dialect, remain for the most part on an earlier level. It appears that language and accent offer an indirect indication as to how far the foundations of a person's consciousness are laid, his basic view of the world stabilized. If the point can be determined at which a man's language and dialect cease to change, there is at least an external criterion for the determination also of the point at which his unconscious inventory of experience ceases to accumulate. According to A. Meillet, the spoken language and dialect does not change in an individual after the age of 25 years. (A. Meillet: *Méthode dans les sciences*, Paris, Alcan, 1911; also his *Introduction à l'étude comparative des langues indo-européennes* 1903, as quoted in Mentré (19), p. 306 ff.)

<sup>1</sup> Spranger (28) also assumes an important turning point about the age of 17 or so (p. 145).

<sup>2</sup> This throws some light on the way in which 'ideas' appear to precede real social transformation. 'Ideas' are understood here in the French rather than in the Platonic sense. This 'modern Idea' has a tendency to de-stabilize and set in motion the social structure. It does not exist in static social units—for example, in self-contained peasant communities—which tend to draw on an unconscious, traditional way of life. In such societies, we do not find the younger generation, associated with ideas of this kind, rising against their elders. 'Being young' here is a question of biological differentiation. More on this matter later.

<sup>3</sup> The following seems to be the sequence in which this process unfolds: first the 'conditions' change. Then concrete behaviour begins unconsciously to

in their being closer to the 'present' problems (as a result of their 'potentially fresh contact' discussed above, pp. 293 ff.), and in the fact that they are dramatically aware of a process of de-stabilization and take sides in it. All this while, the older generation cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of *their* youth.

From this angle, we can see that an adequate education or instruction of the young (in the sense of the complete transmission of all experiential stimuli which underlie pragmatic knowledge) would encounter a formidable difficulty in the fact that the experiential problems of the young are defined by a different set of adversaries from those of their teachers. Thus (apart from the exact sciences), the teacher-pupil relationship is not as between one representative of 'consciousness in general' and another, but as between one possible subjective centre of vital orientation and another subsequent one. This tension<sup>1</sup> appears incapable of solution except for one compensating factor: not only does the teacher educate his pupil, but the pupil educates his teacher too. Generations are in a state of constant interaction.

This leads us to our next point:

(e) *The uninterrupted generation series.*

The fact that the transition from one generation to another takes place continuously tends to render this interaction smoother; in the process of this interaction, it is not the oldest who meet the youngest at once; the first contacts are made by other 'intermediary' generations, less removed from each other.

Fortunately, it is not as most students of the generation problem suggest—the thirty-year interval is not solely decisive. Actually, all intermediary groups play their part; although they cannot wipe out the biological difference between generations, they can at

transform itself in the new situation. The individual seeks to react to the new situation, by instinctive, unconscious adjustment. (Even the most fanatical adherent of an orthodoxy constantly indulges in an adaptive change of his behaviour in respects which are not open to conscious observation.) If the dynamic of the situation results in too quick cultural change and the upheaval is too great, if unconscious adjustment proves inadequate and behaviour adaptations fail to 'function' in the sudden new situation, so that an aspect of reality becomes problematic, then that aspect of reality will be made conscious—on the level of either mythology, philosophy, or science, according to the stage of cultural evolution reached. From this point on, the unravelling of the deeper layers proceeds, as required by the situation.

<sup>1</sup> L. von Wiese (31), gives a vivid description of this father-son antagonism. Of considerable importance is the suggestion that the father is more or less forced into the role of representing 'Society' to his son (p. 196).

least mitigate its consequences. The extent to which the problems of younger generations are reflected back upon the older one becomes greater in the measure that the dynamism of society increases. Static conditions make for attitudes of piety—the younger generation tends to adapt itself to the older, even to the point of making itself appear older. With the strengthening of the social dynamic, however, the older generation becomes increasingly receptive to influences from the younger.<sup>1</sup> This process can be so intensified that, with an elasticity of mind won in the course of experience, the older generation may even achieve greater adaptability in certain spheres than the intermediary generations, who may not yet be in a position to relinquish their original approach.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the continuous shift in objective conditions has its counterpart in a continuous shift in the oncoming new generations which are first to incorporate the changes in their behaviour system. As the tempo of change becomes faster, smaller and smaller modifications are experienced by young people as significant ones, and more and more intermediary shades of novel impulses become interpolated between the oldest and newest re-orientation systems. The underlying inventory of vital responses, which remains unaffected by the change, acts in itself as a unifying factor; constant interaction, on the other hand, mitigates the differences in the top layer where the change takes place, while the continuous nature of the transition in normal times lessens the frictions involved. To sum up: if the social process involved no change of generations, the new impulses that can originate only in new organisms could not be reflected back upon the representatives of the tradition; and if the transition between generations were not continuous, this reciprocal action could not take place without friction.

#### E. GENERATION STATUS, GENERATION AS ACTUALITY, GENERATION UNIT

This, then, broadly constitutes those aspects of generation phenomena which can be deduced by formal analysis. They would completely determine the effects resulting from the existence of generations if they could unfold themselves in a purely biological context, or if the generation phenomenon could be

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, on the other hand, as L. von Wiese (*op. cit.*, p. 197) points out, that with the modern trend towards individualism, every individual claims more than before the right to 'live his own life'.

<sup>2</sup> This is a further proof that natural biological factors characteristic of old age can be invalidated by social forces, and that biological data can almost be turned into their opposites by social forces.

understood as a mere location phenomenon. However, a generation in the sense of a location phenomenon falls short of encompassing the generation phenomenon in its full actuality.<sup>1</sup> The latter is something more than the former, in the same way as the mere fact of class position does not yet involve the existence of a consciously constituted class. The location as such only contains potentialities which may materialize, or be suppressed, or become embedded in other social forces and manifest themselves in modified form. When we pointed out that mere co-existence in time did not even suffice to bring about community of generation location, we came very near to making the distinction which is now claiming our attention. In order to share the same generation location, i.e. in order to be able passively to undergo or actively to use the handicaps and privileges inherent in a generation location, one must be born within the same historical and cultural region. Generation as an actuality, however, involves even more than mere co-presence in such a historical and social region. A further concrete nexus is needed to constitute generation as an actuality. This additional nexus may be described as *participation in the common destiny* of this historical and social unit.<sup>2</sup> This is the phenomenon we have to examine next.

We said above that, for example, young people in Prussia about 1800 did not share a common generation location with young people in China at the same period. Membership in the same historical community, then, is the widest criterion of community of generation location. But what is its narrowest criterion? Do we put the peasants, scattered as they are in remote districts and almost untouched by current upheavals, in a common actual generation group with the urban youth of the same period? Certainly not!—and precisely because they remain unaffected by the events which move the youth of the towns. We shall therefore speak of a *generation as an actuality* only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic de-stabilization. Thus, the young peasants we mentioned above only share the same generation location, without, however, being members of the same generation as an actuality, with the youth of the town. They are similarly located, in so far as they are *potentially* capable of being sucked into the vortex of social change, and, in fact, this is what happened in the wars against Napoleon, which stirred up all German classes. For these peasants' sons, a

<sup>1</sup> Up till now we have not differentiated between generation location, generation as actuality, etc. These distinctions will now be made.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the quotation from Heidegger, p. 282, above.

mere generation location was transformed into membership of a generation as an actuality. Individuals of the same age, they were and are, however, only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation. At the time of the wars against Napoleon, nearly all social strata were engaged in such a process of give and take, first in a wave of war enthusiasm, and later in a movement of religious revivalism. Here, however, a new question arises. Suppose we disregard all groups which do *not* actively participate in the process of social transformation—does this mean that all those groups which *do* so participate, constitute one generation? From 1800 on, for instance, we see two contrasting groups—one which became more and more conservative as time went on, as against a youth group tending to become rationalistic and liberal. It cannot be said that these two groups were unified by the *same* modern mentality. Can we then speak, in this case, of the same actual generation? We can, it seems, if we make a further terminological distinction. Both the romantic-conservative and the liberal-rationalist youth belonged to the same actual generation, romantic-conservatism and liberal-rationalism were merely two *polar forms* of the intellectual and social response to an historical stimulus experienced by all in common. Romantic-conservative youth, and liberal-rationalist group, belong to the same actual generation but form separate 'generation units' within it. The *generation unit* represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. *Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units.*

#### F. THE ORIGIN OF GENERATION UNITS

The question now arises, what produces a generation unit? In what does the greater intensity of the bond consist in this case? The first thing that strikes one on considering any particular generation unit is the great similarity in the data making up the consciousness of its members. Mental data are of sociological importance not only because of their actual content, but also because they cause the individuals sharing them to form one group—they have a socializing effect. The concept of Freedom, for example, was important for the Liberal generation-unit, not merely because of the material demands implied by it, but also because in and through it it was possible to unite individuals

scattered spatially and otherwise.<sup>1</sup> The data as such, however, are not the primary factor producing a group—this function belongs to a far greater extent to those formative forces which shape the data and give them character and direction. From the casual slogan to a reasoned system of thought, from the apparently isolated gesture to the finished work of art, the same formative tendency is often at work—the social importance of which lies in its power to bind individuals socially together. The profound emotional significance of a slogan, of an expressive gesture, or of a work of art lies in the fact that we not merely absorb them as objective data, but also as vehicles of formative tendencies and fundamental integrative attitudes, thus identifying ourselves with a set of collective strivings.

Fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles are all-important also in the handing down of every tradition, firstly because they alone can bind groups together, secondly, and, what is perhaps even more important, they alone are really capable of becoming the basis of continuing practice. A mere statement of fact has a minimum capacity of initiating a continuing practice. Potentialities of a continued thought process, on the other hand, are contained in every thesis that has real group-forming potency; intuitions, feelings, and works of art which create a spiritual community among men also contain in themselves the potentially new manner in which the intuition, feeling, or work of art in question can be re-created, rejuvenated and re-interpreted in novel situations. That is why unambiguousness, too great clarity is not an unqualified social value; productive misunderstanding is often a condition of continuing life. Fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles are the primary socializing forces in the history of society, and it is necessary to live them fully in order really to participate in collective life.

Modern psychology provides more and more conclusive evidence in favour of the *Gestalt* theory of human perception: even in our most elementary perceptions of objects, we do not behave as the old atomistic psychology would have us believe; that is, we do not proceed towards a global impression by the gradual summation of a number of elementary sense data, but on the contrary, we start off with a global impression of the object as a

<sup>1</sup> Mental data can both bind and differentiate socially. The same concept of Freedom, for example, had totally different meanings for the liberal and the conservative generation-unit. Thus, it is possible to obtain an indication of the extent to which a generation is divided into generation-units by analysing the different meanings given to a current idea. Cf. 'Conservative Thought' (to follow in a later volume), where the conservative concept of Freedom is analysed in contrast to the liberal concept current at the same time.

whole. Now if even sense perception is governed by the *Gestalt* principle, the same applies, to an even greater extent, to the process of intellectual interpretation. There may be a number of reasons why the functioning of human consciousness should be based on the *Gestalt* principle, but a likely factor is the relatively limited capacity of the human consciousness when confronted with the infinity of elementary data which can be dealt with only by means of the simplifying and summarizing *gestalt* approach. Seeing things in terms of *Gestalt*, however, also has its social roots with which we must deal here. Perceptions and their linguistic expressions never exist exclusively for the isolated individual who happens to entertain them, but also for the social group which stands behind the individual. Thus, the way in which seeing in terms of *Gestalt* modifies the datum as such—partly simplifying and abbreviating it, partly elaborating and filling it out—always corresponds to the meaning which the object in question has for the social groups as a whole. We always see things already formed in a special way; we think concepts defined in terms of a specific context. Form and context depend, in any case, on the group to which we belong. To become really assimilated into a group involves more than the mere acceptance of its characteristic values—it involves the ability to see things from its particular 'aspect', to endow concepts with its particular shade of meaning, and to experience psychological and intellectual impulses in the configuration characteristic of the group. It means, further, to absorb those interpretive formative principles which enable the individual to deal with new impressions and events in a fashion broadly pre-determined by the group.

The social importance of these formative and interpretive principles is that they form a link between spatially separated individuals who may never come into personal contact at all. Whereas mere common 'location' in a generation is of only potential significance, a generation as an actuality is constituted when similarly 'located' contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding. Within this community of people with a common destiny there can then arise particular *generation-units*. These are characterized by the fact that they do not merely involve a loose participation by a number of individuals in a pattern of events shared by all alike though interpreted by the different individuals differently, but an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences.

Thus within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation-units. Together they

constitute an 'actual' generation precisely because they are oriented toward each other, even though only in the sense of fighting one another. Those who were young about 1810 in Germany constituted one actual generation whether they adhered to the then current version of liberal or conservative ideas. But in so far as they were conservative or liberal, they belonged to different units of that actual generation.

The generation-unit tends to impose a much more concrete and binding tie on its members because of the parallelism of responses it involves. As a matter of fact, such new, overtly created, partisan integrative attitudes characterizing generation-units do not come into being spontaneously, without a personal contact among individuals, but within *concrete groups* where mutual stimulation in a close-knit vital unit inflames the participants and enables them to develop integrative attitudes which do justice to the requirements inherent in their common 'location'. Once developed in this way, however, these attitudes and formative tendencies are capable of being detached from the concrete groups of their origin and of exercising an appeal and binding force over a much wider area.

The generation-unit as we have described it is not, as such, a concrete group, although it does have as its nucleus a concrete group which has developed the most essential new conceptions which are subsequently developed by the unit. Thus, for example, the set of basic ideas which became prevalent in the development of modern German Conservatism had its origin in the concrete association '*Christlich-deutsche Tischgesellschaft*'. This association was first to take up and reformulate all the irrational tendencies corresponding to the overall situation prevailing at that time, and to the particular 'location', in terms of generation, shared by the young Conservatives. Ideas which later were to have recruiting power in far wider circles originated in this particular concrete group.

The reason for the influence exercised beyond the limits of the original concrete group by such integrative attitudes originally evolved within the group is primarily that they provide a more or less adequate expression of the particular 'location' of a generation as a whole. Hence, individuals outside the narrow group but nevertheless similarly located find in them the satisfying expression of their location in the prevailing *historical configuration*. Class ideology, for example, originates in more closely knit concrete groups and can gain ground only to the extent that other individuals see in it a more or less adequate expression and interpretation of the experiences peculiar to their particular *social location*. Similarly, the basic integrative attitudes and formative



principles represented by a generation-unit, which are originally evolved within such a concrete group, are only really effective and capable of expansion into wider spheres when they formulate the typical experiences of the individuals sharing a generation location. Concrete groups can become influential in this sense if they succeed in evolving a 'fresh contact' in terms of a 'stratification of experience', such as we have described above. There is, in this respect, a further analogy between the phenomenon of class and that of generation. Just as a class ideology may, in epochs favourable to it, exercise an appeal beyond the 'location' which is its proper habitat,<sup>1</sup> certain impulses particular to a generation may, if the trend of the times is favourable to them, also attract individual members of earlier or later age-groups.

But this is not all; it occurs very frequently that the nucleus of attitudes particular to a new generation is first evolved and practised by older people who are isolated in their own generation (forerunners),<sup>2</sup> just as it is often the case that the forerunners in the development of a particular class ideology belong to a quite alien class.

All this, however, does not invalidate our thesis that there are new basic impulses attributable to a particular generation location which, then, may call forth generation units. The main thing in this respect is that the proper vehicle of these new impulses is always a collectivity. The real seat of the class ideology remains the class itself, with its own typical opportunities and handicaps—even when the author of the ideology, as it may happen, belongs to a different class, or when the ideology expands and becomes influential beyond the limits of the class location. Similarly, the real seat of new impulses remains the generation location (which will selectively encourage one form of experience and eliminate

<sup>1</sup> In the 40s in Germany, for example, when oppositional ideas were in vogue, young men of the nobility also shared them. Cf. Karl Marx: 'Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany'. (German edition, Stuttgart, 1913, pp. 20 f. and 25).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Nietzsche may be considered the forerunner of the present neo-romanticism. An eminent example of the same thing in France is Taine, who under the influence of the events of 1870-71 turned towards patriotism, and so became the forerunner of a nationalistic generation. (Cf. Platz (25), pp. 43 ff.) In such cases involving forerunners, it would be advisable to make individual case-analyses and establish in what respect the basic structure of experience in the forerunner differs from that of the new generation which actually starts at the point where the forerunner leaves off. In this connection, the history of German Conservatism contains an interesting example, i.e. that of the jurist Hugo, whom we may consider as the founder of the 'historical school'. Nevertheless, he never thought in *irrationalistic* terms as did the members of the school (e.g. Savigny) in the next generation which lived through the Napoleonic wars.

others), even when they may have been fostered by other age-groups.

The most important point we have to notice is the following: not every generation location—not even every age-group—creates new collective impulses and formative principles original to itself and adequate to its particular situation. Where this does happen, we shall speak of a *realization of potentialities inherent in the location*, and it appears probable that the frequency of such realizations is closely connected with the tempo of social change.<sup>1</sup> When as a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation basic attitudes must change so quickly that the latent, continuous adaptation and modification of traditional patterns of experience, thought, and expression is no longer possible, then the various new phases of experience are consolidated somewhere, forming a clearly distinguishable new impulse, and a new centre of configuration. We speak in such cases of the formation of a new generation style, or of a new *generation entelechy*.

Here too, we may distinguish two possibilities. On the one hand, the generation unit may produce its work and deeds unconsciously out of the new impulse evolved by itself, having an intuitive awareness of its existence as a group but failing to realize the group's character as a generation unit. On the other hand, groups may consciously experience and emphasize their character as generation units—as is the case with the contemporary German youth movement, or even to a certain extent with its forerunner, the Student's Association (*Burschenschaft*) Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century, which already manifested many of the characteristics of the modern youth movement.

The importance of the acceleration of social change for the realization of the potentialities inherent in a generation location is clearly demonstrated by the fact that largely static or very slowly changing communities like the peasantry display no such phenomenon as new generation units sharply set off from their predecessors by virtue of an individual entelechy proper to them; in such communities, the tempo of change is so gradual that new generations evolve away from their predecessors without any visible break, and all we can see is the purely biological differentiation and affinity based upon difference or identity of age. Such biological factors are effective, of course, in modern society too, youth being attracted to youth and age to age. The generation unit as we have described it, however, could not arise solely on

<sup>1</sup> The speed of social change, for its part, is never influenced by the speed of the succession of generations, since this remains constant.

the basis of this simple factor of attraction between members of the same age-group.

The quicker the tempo of social and cultural change is, then, the greater are the chances that particular generation location groups will react to changed situations by producing their own entelechy. On the other hand, it is conceivable that too greatly accelerated a tempo might lead to mutual destruction of the embryo entelechies. As contemporaries, we can observe, if we look closely, various finely graded patterns of response of age groups closely following upon each other and living side by side; these age groups, however, are so closely packed together that they do not succeed in achieving a fruitful new formulation of distinct generation entelechies and formative principles. Such generations, frustrated in the production of an individual entelechy, tend to attach themselves, where possible, to an earlier generation which may have achieved a satisfactory form, or to a younger generation which is capable of evolving a newer form. Crucial group experiences can act in this way as 'crystallizing agents', and it is characteristic of cultural life that unattached elements are always attracted to perfected configurations, even when the unformed, groping impulse differs in many respects from the configuration to which it is attracted. In this way the impulses and trends peculiar to a generation may remain concealed because of the existence of the clear-cut form of another generation to which they have become attached.

From all this emerges the fact that each generation need not evolve its own, distinctive pattern of interpreting and influencing the world; the rhythm of successive generation locations, which is largely based upon biological factors, need not necessarily involve a parallel rhythm of successive motivation patterns and formative principles. Most generation theories, however, have this in common, that they try to establish a direct correlation between waves of decisive year classes of birth—set at intervals of thirty years, and conceived in a purely naturalistic, quantifying spirit—on the one hand, and waves of cultural changes on the other. Thus they ignore the important fact that the realization of hidden potentialities inherent in the generation location is governed by extra-biological factors, principally, as we have seen, by the prevailing tempo and impact of social change.

Whether a new *generation style* emerges every year, every thirty, every hundred years, or whether it emerges rhythmically at all, depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural process. One may ask, in this connection, whether the social dynamic operates predominantly through the agency of the economic or of one or the other 'ideological' spheres: but this is a

problem which has to be examined separately. It is immaterial in our context how this question is answered; all we have to bear in mind is that it depends on this group of social and cultural factors whether the impulses of a generation shall achieve a distinctive unity of style, or whether they shall remain latent. The biological fact of the existence of generations merely provides the *possibility* that generation entelechies may emerge at all—if there were no different generations succeeding each other, we should never encounter the phenomenon of generation styles. But the question which generation locations will realize the potentialities inherent in them, finds its answer at the level of the social and cultural structure—a level regularly skipped by the usual kind of theory which starts from naturalism and then abruptly lands in the most extreme kind of spiritualism.

A formal sociological clarification of the distinction between the categories 'generation location', 'generation as actuality', and 'generation unit', is important and indeed indispensable for any deeper analysis, since we can never grasp the dominant factors in this field without making that distinction. If we speak simply of 'generations' without any further differentiation, we risk jumbling together purely biological phenomena and others which are the product of social and cultural forces: thus we arrive at a sort of sociology of chronological tables (*Geschichtstabellensoziologie*), which uses its bird's-eye perspective to 'discover' fictitious generation movements to correspond to the crucial turning-points in historical chronology.

It must be admitted that biological data constitute the most basic stratum of factors determining generation phenomena; but for this very reason, we cannot observe the effect of biological factors directly; we must, instead, see how they are reflected through the medium of social and cultural forces.

As a matter of fact, the most striking feature of the historical process seems to be that the most basic biological factors operate in the most latent form, and can only be grasped in the medium of the social and historical phenomena which constitute a secondary sphere above them. In practice this means that the student of the generation problem cannot try to specify the effects attributable to the factor of generations before he has separated all the effects due to the specific dynamism of the historical and social sphere. If this intermediary sphere is skipped, one will be tempted to resort immediately to naturalistic principles, such as generation, race, or geographical situation, in explaining phenomena due to environmental or temporal influences.

The fault of this naturalistic approach lies not so much in the fact that it emphasizes the role of natural factors in human life,

as in its attempt to explain *dynamic* phenomena directly by something *constant*, thus ignoring and distorting precisely that intermediate sphere in which dynamism really originates. Dynamic factors operate on the basis of constant factors—on the basis of anthropological, geographical, etc., data—but on each occasion the dynamic factors seize upon different potentialities inherent in the constant factors. If we want to understand the primary, constant factors, we must observe them in the framework of the historical and social system of forces from which they receive their shape. Natural factors, including the succession of generations, provide the basic range of potentialities for the historical and social process. *But precisely because they are constant and therefore always present in any situation, the particular features of a given process of modification cannot be explained by reference to them.*

Their varying relevance (the particular way in which they can manifest themselves in this or that situation) can be clearly seen only if we pay proper attention to the formative layer of social and cultural forces.

#### G. THE GENERATION IN RELATION TO OTHER FORMATIVE FACTORS IN HISTORY

It has been the merit of past theorizing about generations that it has kept alive scientific interest in this undoubtedly important factor in the history of mankind. Its one-sidedness, however—this may now be said in the light of the foregoing analysis—lay in the attempt to explain the whole dynamic of history from this one factor—an excusable one-sidedness easily explained by the fact that discoverers often tend to be over-enthusiastic about phenomena they are the first to see. The innumerable theories of history which have sprung up so luxuriantly recently all manifest this one-sidedness: they all single out just one factor as the sole determinant in historical development. Theories of race, generation, 'national spirit', economic determinism, etc., suffer from this one-sidedness, but it may be said to their credit that they bring at least one partial factor into sharp focus and also direct attention to the general problem of the structural factors shaping history. In this they are definitely superior to that brand of historiography which limits itself to the ascertainment of causal connections between individual events and to the description of individual characters, and repudiates all interest in structural factors in history, an attitude which eventually had to result in the conclusion that nothing after all can be learned from history, since all of its manifestations are unique and incomparable. That this cannot be so, must be realized by anyone who takes the liberty to think about history rather than merely to collect data, and also observe

in everyday life how every new departure or outstanding personality has to operate in a given field which, although in constant process of change, is capable of description in structural terms.

If in our attempts to visualize the structure of the historical dynamic we refuse to deduce everything from a single factor, the next question is whether it is not perhaps possible to fix some sort of definite order of importance in the structural factors involved, either for a particular period or in general—for of course it cannot be assumed *a priori* that the relative importance of the various social or other factors (economy, power, race, etc.), must always be the same. We cannot here attempt to solve the whole problem: all that can be done is to examine more closely our own problem of generation in relation to the other formative factors in history.

Petersen (22) had the merit of breaking away from that historical monism which characterized most earlier theories of generations. In dealing with the concrete case of romanticism, he tried to treat the problem of generations in conjunction with other historical determinants such as the ethnic unit, the region, the national character, the spirit of the epoch, the social structure, etc.

But however welcome this break with monistic theory is, we cannot agree with a mere juxtaposition of these factors (apparently this is only a provisional feature of the theory); the sociologist, moreover, cannot yet feel satisfied with the treatment of the social factor, at least in its present form.

If we are speaking of the 'spirit of an epoch', for example, we must realize, as in the case of other factors, too, that this *Zeitgeist*, the mentality of a period, does not pervade the whole society at a given time. The mentality which is commonly attributed to an epoch has its proper seat in one (homogeneous or heterogeneous) social group which acquires special significance at a particular time, and is thus able to put its own intellectual stamp on all the other groups without either destroying or absorbing them.

We must try to break up the category of *Zeitgeist* in another fashion than Pinder did. With Pinder, the *Zeitgeist* as a fictitious unit was dissolved, so as to make the real units, i.e. for Pinder, the generation entelechies, visible. According to him, the *Zeitgeist* is not one organic individuality, since there is no real, organic entelechy corresponding to it. It would seem to us, too, that there is no such *Zeitgeist* entelechy which would confer organic unity on the spirit of an epoch; but in our view the real units which have to be substituted for the fictitious unit of *Zeitgeist* are entelechies of social currents giving polar tension to each temporal segment of history.

Thus the nineteenth century has no unitary *Zeitgeist*, but a composite mentality made up (if we consider its political manifestations)<sup>1</sup> of the mutually antagonistic conservative-traditional and liberal impulses, to which was later added the proletarian-socialistic one.

We would, however, not go quite as far as Pinder does in his denial of any temporal unity, and in his determination to attribute any homogeneity found in the manifestations of an epoch to a quite accidental crossing of various otherwise separate entelechies (accidental chords). The *Zeitgeist* is a unitary entity (otherwise, it would be meaningless to speak of it), in so far as we are able to view it in a dynamic-antinomical light.

The dynamic-antinomical unity of an epoch consists in the fact that polar opposites in an epoch always interpret their world in terms of one another, and that the various and opposing political orientations only become really comprehensible if viewed as so many different attempts to master the same destiny and solve the same social and intellectual problems that go with it.<sup>2</sup> Thus from this point of view the spirit of an age is no accidental coincidence of contemporary entelechies (as with Pinder); nor does it constitute itself an entelechy (a unified centre of volition—or formative principle, as with Petersen) on a par with other entelechies. We conceive it, rather, as a dynamic relationship of tension which we may well scrutinize in terms of its specific character but which should never be taken as a substantial 'thing'.

Genuine entelechies are primarily displayed by the social and intellectual trends or currents of which we spoke above. Each of these trends or currents (which may well be explained in terms

<sup>1</sup> We draw on examples deliberately from the history of political ideas, partly to counterbalance the tendency (especially evident in Germany) to study the problem of generations exclusively in the context of the history of literature or art; and partly to show that we believe that *the structural situation of decisive social impulses and also the differentiation between generations is clearest at this point*. The other entelechies and changes of style must of course be studied for their own sake independently, and cannot be derived in any way from political factors, but their reciprocal relations and affinities can best be understood and made clear from this angle. The artist certainly lives in the first instance in his artistic world with its particular traditions, but as a human being he is always linked with the driving forces of his generation even when politically indifferent, and this influence must always transform even purely artistic relations and entelechies. As a point of orientation for a survey of the whole structure, the history of political ideas seems to us to be most important. This matter will be further dealt with below.

<sup>2</sup> From our point of view, the 'spirit of an age' is thus the outcome of the dynamic interaction of actual generations succeeding one another in a continuous series.

of the social structure) evolves certain basic attitudes which exist over and above the change of generations as enduring (though nevertheless constantly changing) formative principles underlying social and historical development. Successively emerging new generations, then, superimpose their own generation entelechies upon the more comprehensive, stable entelechies of the various polar trends; this is how entelechies of the liberal, conservative, or socialist trends come to be transformed from generation to generation. We may conclude from this: generation units are no mere constructs, since they have their own entelechies; but these entelechies cannot be grasped in and for themselves: they must be viewed within the wider framework of the trend entelechies. It follows, furthermore, that it is quite impossible either to delimit or to count intellectual generations (generation units) except as articulations of certain overall trends. The trend entelechy is prior to the generation entelechy, and the latter can only become effective and distinguishable within the former—but this does not mean to say that every one of the conflicting trends at a given point of time will necessarily cause new generation-entelechies to arise.

It is quite wrong to assume, for example, that in the first decades of the nineteenth century there existed in Germany only one romantic-conservative generation,<sup>1</sup> which was succeeded later by a liberal-rationalistic one. We should say, more precisely, that in the first decades of the nineteenth century the situation was such that only that section of the younger generation which had its roots in the romantic-conservative tradition was able to develop new generation-entelechies. This section alone was able to leave its own mark on the prevailing tone of the age. What happened in the thirties, then, was not that a 'new generation' emerged which somehow happened to be liberal and rationalistic—but the situation changed, and it now became possible for the first time for the other section of the younger generation to reconstitute the tradition from which it derived in such a way as to produce its own generation-entelechy. The fundamental differentiation and polarization were undoubtedly always there, and each current had its own younger generation: but the opportunity for creative development of its basic impulse was granted first to the romantic conservatives, and only later to the liberal-rationalists.

We may say in this sense, that Petersen's<sup>2</sup> distinction between a *leading*, a *diverted*, and a *suppressed* type of generation is both correct and important, but it is not yet expressed in a sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> Romanticism and Conservatism did not always go together. Romanticism was originally a revolutionary movement in Germany, the same as in France.

<sup>2</sup> Petersen (22), pp. 146 ff.

precise form, because Petersen failed to analyse the corresponding sociological differentiation.

Petersen assumes a direct interaction between supra-temporal character types on the one hand, and the *Zeitgeist* (which he considers as an unambiguously ascertainable datum) on the other, as if the historic process consisted in these two factors struggling with each other, and the fate of the single individuals were actually determined by their reciprocal interpenetration. Let us take, as an illustration of Petersen's method, an individual of an emotional type; he would be what Petersen would call a 'romantically inclined' character. If we further suppose that this man lives in an age the spirit of which is essentially romantic, this coincidence may well result in a heightening of his romantic inclinations, so that he will belong to the 'leading type' of his generation. Another individual, however, in whom emotional and rational inclinations tended more or less to balance one another, could in similar circumstances be drawn over into the romantic camp. Thus he would represent Petersen's *diverted* type. If we take finally, a third individual who by nature was rationalistically inclined but living in a romantic epoch, he would represent the *suppressed* type. Only two alternatives would be open to him: either he could swim with the tide and, against his own inclinations, follow the romantic tendencies of his time—a course which would lead to stultification—or, alternatively, if he insisted on maintaining his ground, he could remain isolated in his time, an epigone of a past, or the forerunner of a future generation.

Apart from the somewhat cursory way in which 'emotional' and 'romantically inclined' are taken as synonymous, there is something essentially correct in this classification of generation types into *leading*, *diverted*, and *suppressed*. But what occurs is no clash between supra-temporal individual dispositions existing in a supra-social realm on the one hand, and an undifferentiated unitary *Zeitgeist* (because no such thing really exists) on the other. The individual is primarily moulded by those contemporary intellectual influences and currents which are indigenous to the particular social group to which he belongs. That is to say, he is in the first instance in no way affected or attracted by the *Zeitgeist* as a whole, but only by those currents and trends of the time which are a living tradition in his particular social environment. But that just these particular trends and not others should have taken root and maintained themselves in his world is ultimately due to the fact that they afford the typical 'chances' of his life situation their most adequate expression. There is therefore no question of an undifferentiated 'spirit of the age' promoting or inhibiting the potentialities inherent in individual characters: *in concreto* the

individual is always exposed to differentiated, polarized trends or currents within the 'global spirit of the age', and in particular to that trend which had found its home in his immediate environment. The individual's personality structure will be confronted, in the first place, with this particular trend.

The reason why literary historians tend to overlook the fact that most people are confined to an existence within the limits of one of the trends of their time, and that the 'spirit of the age' is always split up into a number of tendencies rather than being now exclusively romantic, now exclusively rationalistic, is that their material consists primarily of biographies of *hommes de lettres*, a social group of a very particular character.

In our society only the *hommes de lettres* exist as a relatively unattached (*freischwebend*) group (this being, of course, a sociological determinant of their situation); hence, they alone can vacillate, joining now one trend, now another. In the first half of the nineteenth century, they tended to embrace trends supported by a young generation which, favoured by circumstances of the time, had just achieved an intellectually dominant position—i.e. trends which permitted the formation of entelechies. The period of the Restoration and the social and political weakness of the German bourgeoisie at the beginning of the nineteenth century favoured the development of entelechies at the romantic-conservative pole of the younger generation, which also attracted a large part of the socially unattached *litterati*. From the thirties on, the July revolution and the growing industrialization of the country favoured the development of new liberal rationalist entelechies among the younger generation; and many of the *litterati* promptly joined this camp.

The behaviour of these *hommes de lettres*, then, gives the impression that at one moment the 'spirit of the age' is entirely romantic, and at the next entirely liberal-rationalist, and further that whether the spirit of the age is to be romantic or rationalist is exclusively determined by these *litterati*—poets and thinkers. In actual fact, however, the decisive impulses which determine the direction of social evolution do not originate with them at all, but with the much more compact, mutually antagonistic social groups which stand behind them, polarized into antagonistic trends. This wave-like rhythm in the change of the *Zeitgeist* is merely due to the fact that—according to the prevailing conditions—now one, and then the other pole succeeds in rallying an active youth which, then, carries the 'intermediary' generations and in particular the socially unattached individuals along. We do not wish to underrate the enormous importance of these literary strata (a social group to which many of the greatest thinkers and poets

belong), for indeed they alone endow the entelechies radiating from the social sphere with real depth and form. But if we pay exclusive attention to them, we shall not be able really to account for this vector structure of intellectual currents. Taking the whole historical and social process into consideration, we can say that there has never been an epoch *entirely* romantic, or *entirely* rationalist in character; at least since the nineteenth century, we clearly have to deal with a culture polarized in this respect. It may very well be asserted, however, that it is now the one, now the other of these two trends that takes the upper hand and becomes *dominant*. In sociological terms, to sum up once more, this means simply that the circumstances of the time favour the formation of a new generation-entelechy at one or the other pole, and that this new entelechy always attracts the vacillating middle strata, primarily the literary people of the time. Thus the socially attached individual (to whatever psychological 'type' he may belong) allies himself with that current which happens to prevail in his particular social circle; the socially unattached *homme de lettres* of whatever psychological type, on the other hand, generally must clarify his position with regard to the *dominant* trend of his time. The outcome for the individual of this battle between his own natural disposition, the mental attitude most appropriate to his social situation, and the dominant trend of his time, undoubtedly differs from case to case; but only a very strong personality will be in a position to maintain his individual disposition in face of the antagonistic mental attitude of the social circle of his origin, especially if his group happens to be in process of rising in the social scale. An irrationally inclined 'bourgeois' would find it as difficult to come into his own in the forties of the nineteenth century as a young aristocrat with rational inclinations to preserve his rationalism in face of the rise of romanticism and religious revivalism in his social circle. We find for the most part that the opponents of a new generation-entelechy consist mainly of people who, because of their 'location' in an older generation; are unable or unwilling to assimilate themselves into the new entelechy growing up in their midst.

The generation location always exists as a potentiality seeking realization—the medium of such realization, however, is not a unitary *Zeitgeist* but rather one or the other of the concrete trends prevailing at a given time.<sup>1</sup> Whether new generation-entelechies

<sup>1</sup> This can also be observed in the modern youth movement, which is constantly in process of social and political polarization. Purely as a social phenomenon, it represents a coherent actual generation entity, but it can only be understood concretely in terms of the 'generation units' into which it is socially and intellectually differentiated.

will be formed at one pole in the social vector space or another depends, as we have seen, on historical group destinies.

There remains one further factor which we have not yet considered and which must be added to the others, complicated enough as they are.

We have not yet considered the fact that a newly rising generation-entelechy has not equal possibilities of asserting itself in every field of intellectual pursuit. Some of these fields tend to promote the emergence of new entelechies; others, to hinder it. And we can grade the different fields according to the degree to which they evidence the existence of generation entelechies.

Thus, for example, the natural sciences in which factors of total orientation (*Weltanschauung*) play a less important part than in other fields, definitely tend to conceal generation-entelechies.

The sphere of 'civilization'<sup>1</sup> in general, by virtue of the unilinear nature of developments falling within it, tends to conceal experiential and volitional transformations to a far greater extent than does the sphere of 'culture'. And within the sphere of 'culture' itself, Pinder is certainly right in ascribing to linguistic manifestations (religion, philosophy, poetry, and letters) a role different from that played by the plastic arts and music.<sup>2</sup>

In this field, however, we need a finer differentiation. It will have to be shown how far the various social and generation impulses and formative principles have peculiar affinities to this or that art form, and also whether they do not in certain cases bring new art forms into existence.

We must also consider the degree to which *forms of social intercourse* show stratification according to generations. Here, too, we find that certain forms of intercourse are more adequate to one particular set of social and generation trends than others. Mentré (19) has already shown that an association deliberately organized on the basis of written statutes is much less capable of being moulded by new generation impulses than are less formal groupings (such as literary *salons* for example). Thus, it appears that in the same way as factors in the social and historical realm exercise either a restrictive or encouraging influence on the emergence of generation-entelechies, the degree to which various cultural 'fields' lend themselves to serving as sounding-boards for a new generation cannot be exactly determined in advance. All this indicates from yet another point of view that the generation factor—which at the biological level operates with the uniformity of a natural law—becomes the most elusive one at the social and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Weber: 'Prinzipielles zur Kultursoziologie' (*Archiv für Soz. Wiss. u. Soz. Politik*, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> Pinder (23), p. 156.

cultural level, where its effects can be ascertained only with great difficulty and by indirect methods.

The phenomenon of generations is one of the basic factors contributing to the genesis of the dynamic of historical development. The analysis of the interaction of forces in this connection is a large task in itself, without which the nature of historical development cannot be properly understood. The problem can only be solved on the basis of a strict and careful analysis of all its component elements.

The *formal sociological* analysis of the generation phenomenon can be of help in so far as we may possibly learn from it what can and what cannot be attributed to the generation factor as one of the factors impinging upon the social process.

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