Hilt, Annette

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Postfach 1146 | 54461 Bernkastel-Kues | www.cusanus-hochschule.de

Between Constitution and Interpretation

On narrating Identities*

Annette Hilt

Institute of Philosophy
Cusanus Hochschule fuer Gesellschaftsgestaltung

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Abstract

Identity is rooted in a shared reality, where we also experience limits of this (social) reality. The shared reality is right the reality where our specific experiences gain their typical orientating strength. The heuristic point of an approach starting from limits of shared experiences (i.e. 'finite provinces of meaning' that define common grounds and rules of our understanding) is the insight in those structures of our capacity to deal with ambiguous and even failing understanding. This topic will be explored through a dialogue between Alfred Schutz's phenomenological categories of constituting and understanding meaning and Imre Kertész' literary expression of a life lived at the edge of the social sphere and a mutually recognized identity.

Keywords: Phenomenology of the social world, Alfred Schutz, Thomas Luckmann, Hermeneutics, Narrative Identity, Concepts of Self and Identity

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> *"In Auschwitz the intellect was nothing more than itself and there was no chance to apply it to a social structure, no matter how insufficient, no matter how concealed it may have been. Thus the intellectual was alone with his intellect, which was nothing other than pure content of consciousness, and there was no social reality that could support and confirm it.§* (Améry 1980, 6)

1 Introduction

Between constitution and interpretation, encircling a certain phenomenological perspective and a hermeneutical attitude towards our living in a world, there is a field which certainly could also be glanced at in a phenomenological or hermeneutical manner alone: may it be the socio-historical genesis or the exhibition of the variety of possible understandings of this field for our knowledge of and our dealing with narrating identities. Thus, definition, description, analysis, construction and interpretation all belong to this phenomenological-hermeneutic field, as all of these issues capture different aspects of our lived and shared experience, which is not reducable to the 'principle of all principles' that reality is given to me as *one*-self.

Identity is rooted in a shared reality, where we experience limits of our shared social reality. The shared reality is right the reality where our specific experience gains its typical imprint – to speak with Alfred Schutz whose theory of social understanding guides this essay in some ways: gains its typicality –, its orientating strength. The heuristic point of the approach from the limits of shared experiences – i.e. those 'finite provinces of meaning' that define the common grounds and rules of our understanding – is the insight in the structure of the possibility to deal with ambiguous and even failing understanding between one and the other, or the one, solitary ego and a group she is excluded from or is denied recognition by.

Where closed areas of meaning no longer offer possibilities for the development of meaningful modes of understanding, and where openness loses its position as intersubjective action-space (*Wirkwelt*), a phenomenological-hermeneutic problem arises between the solitary Ego and its socially constituted meaning in which horizon this Ego both develops a self and actively as well as passively experiences this self-constitution. The solitary ego – appreciated as intimate person (Scheler) which yet has to transcend her immanence to express her self-sufficiency– no longer finds an outerworld suitable to prove her own reality to herself; also she lacks a world to transcend the ambiguously irreal reality of her solitariness in order to perspectivize, to understand and reflect on it. This problem will be explored through a dialogue between Alfred Schutz's phenomenological categories of constituting and understanding meaning and Imre Kertész' literary - narrative – expression of a life lived at the edge of the social sphere and his regaining of identity by experimenting with narrative interpretation of a lived life.

The Hungarian writer Kertész, as an adolescent survivor of the Nazi concentration-camps, tries to 'relive' his past; given that his 'own' history is inaccessible to others, however, he places his story within the explanatory frames of the political fate of European Jews and others who opposed fascism, yet Kertész doesn't feel like he 'belongs' to either group. He lives this past life anew by fictionalizing an alter ego who experiences internment and the constant threat of elimination, since after liberation the irreducible uniqueness of experiencing this struggle was neglected: For the collective record of memory the Hungarian communist regime stratified the individual experience into collective and typological narrations of the resistance fighters' righteous political commitment, giving them a fate understood as the necessity to endure and survive while ignoring the cases of all the other victims as though they were anonymous**.**

The very act of making yourself into someone else creates ideas "that 'really' are 'more real' than reality," in that they create reality (Kertész 1998, 121f.). The fictionalization becomes, therefore, a *change in the perception of reality* which, like the fictionalization of personal experience, transcends the everyday horizon – and tries to re-establish intersections with an everyday life in order to emphasize the conflicting realizations of reality (cf. Waldenfels 1978). The usefulness of the transcendences of life-world(s), or the 'transcendences of the everyday' ('*Transzendenzen des Alltags*') as Schutz and Luckmann have defined it, must first be recognized for its potential as a subjective expression of the realities of experience and of a pathological deviance, and further in those extreme situations where understanding fails in the face of a social reality, and where failure itself becomes a reality on the edge of experience in the sense of meaningful configuration and not only as pathological delusion.

With his poetological account of solitariness and the fateless, Kertész not only exemplifies Schutz's solitary Self as constitutive ground for a lifeworld which provides irreducibly real (and finite) provinces of meaning, but also challenges Schutz's implicit ethical notion of constituting meaning by transcending one's solitary experience – not to a common horizon of pragmatic knowledge, but to ways of understanding the non-typified. Narration proves itself to be an attempt to win the upper hand; it becomes a refugee's backwards glance, disdainful and lucid. (cf. Kertész 1996, 15)

Highlighting possibilities for the transcendence of the social life-world in favor of an individual, rational life with its subjective meaning and its relevance is not only a task for comprehensive analysis with adequately constructed frameworks,[1] but also for a phenomenology of experience that searches not just for the essence of meaning in consciousness, but also in the whole of life, in its affective qualities of unfathomable happiness and suffering, and for the threshold between meaning and meaninglessness.

1 As Schutz requires by his methodological postulates of relevance, logical consistency, subjective interpretation, adequacy and rationality (cf. Schutz 1971a and 1972b).

Imre Kertész ends his novel *Fateless* with the perspective:

> „I am here, and I know full well that I have to accept the prize of being allowed to live. I have to continue my uncontinuable life. […] There is no impossibility that cannot be overcome, naturally, and further down the road, I now know, happiness lies in wait for me like an inevitable trap. Even back there, in the shadow of the chimneys, in the breaks, between pains, there was something resembling happiness. Everybody will ask me about the deprivations, the 'terrors of the camps', but for me, the happiness there will always be the most memorable experience, perhaps. Yes, that's what I'll tell them the next time they ask me: about the happiness in those camps. If they ever do ask. And if I don't forget." (Kertész 1996, 190f.)

This subjectivity, which has been reduced to the memory of a singular solitary self, puts Schultz' categories to the test, if, that is, the demand for an inter-subjective objectivity is part of an anomic fabric of social understanding and if the banal closes itself off from the extraordinary in favor of totality. I will begin with a refinement of Schutz' theory of foreign understanding and experience, in that I will apply it to the experience of limitations between personal and foreign experience, where the problem of foreign experience shows itself to be one of time, or more specifically, a question of the constitution of personal and foreign time-consciousness. This will then be expanded through Kertész' process of memory and autobiographical expression to questions of workable hermeneutics, guidelines for a practice of interpretation. Finally, Schutz' analysis of the transcendence of boundaries in the 'middle' and 'great transcendences' in everyday life, he circumspectively tied to biographical categories of a constitution process of meaning, might offer a *theoretical* starting point for the handling of the fundamental differences within the field of social inter-subjectivity. In the end, this reconstruction aims at a practical extension of the Schutzian theory of the constitution of meaning towards a narrative solution of intertwining social reality with recognizing troublesome formation of identity.

2 Experiencing Limitations: The conflict between personal and foreign Meaning

Schutz' departure from the 'inner experience' of the solitary ego enjoys a certain amount of plausibility in those exceptional situations where the paramount reality and actual intersubjective constitution of meaning break down, when one finds oneself and can only realize oneself as solitary. The *absolute* inaccessibility of personal experience through a 'you' (or a 'you all'), the situation of a man "who can no longer say 'we'" (Améry), and the exclusion of self from foreign experience (collective experience) can be restated as a *constructive* difference between ego and alter. This difference points to possibilities of transcending closures of meaning and acquiring 'actual foreign understanding.' One can glean at least the pathologies of an objectifying, typologizing and anonymous horizon of social meaning from this difference by means of a progressive analysis of the origins of the layers of foreign and personal meaning.

Such personal and foreign constructions cannot, however, follow a 'natural attitude' along with the certainty that accompanies the everyday horizons of meaning, in which the anomic 'naturally' folds itself into the order of the normal. Waldenfels writes that the "constructive phenomenology of a natural attitude" forgoes an extramundane standpoint from which one can derive the ultimate criteria for a critique of concrete daily worlds. For Schutz, therefore, the everyday remains a labyrinth without exit or window. There are systems, but no 'court of appeals.'" (Waldenfels 1978, 26). This tension of an extreme constellation must be resolved along those exemplary ways, subjective and solitary reality is displayed and expressed in such situations. 'Intended meaning' is essentially subjective and principally tied to the self-interpretation of experience. "Even the fact that I become aware of the meaning of an experience presupposes that I notice it and 'select it out' from all my other experiences." (Schutz 1972a, 41)

Neither foreign nor personal experience is directly accessible; it can only be indirectly, through signs or signals of the experience. The fulfilment of experience is therefore inaccessible to a 'you' outside of a reclusive, reflexive intentionality which is no longer a part of an inter-subjective *Wirkwelt*. This 'reclusive intentionality' can better be described as the refusal of *direct* expression. In *The Phenomenology of the Social World,* Schutz points out that the patterns for the interpretation of experience are only useful for self-interpretation when the unknown cannot lead back to the known:

> "The picture of self-explication […] seems to be at variance with the fact that there are lived experiences which are unique and *sui generis*. […] there are lived experiences which because of the degree of their intimacy cannot be comprehended by the glance of attention. […] This presupposes a reference back to the schemes we have on hand, followed by a 'failure to connect'. This in turn throws the validity of the scheme into question. Whenever a phenomenon turns out to be unexplainable, it means that something is wrong with our scheme." (Schutz 1972a, 84)

And, concerning the criteria by which one seeks out and selects the patterns of meaning for a personal interpretation of an experience, he continues:

> "Paradoxically it could be said that the lived experience itself decides the scheme into which it is to be ordered, and thus the problem chosen proposes its own solution." (ibid, 85) – and this scheme is constituted in negative experience, in a failure to meet or constitute meaning within the schemes of the natural attitude characteristic of the pragmatic working world, and without relevant types of experience of its own."[2]

Lived experience (*Erlebnis*) retroacts to the schemes that have to interpret it, it constitutes the normative structures and functions of these schemes in a seminal way. This constitution happens latently – as I emphasize, whereas Schutz only touches this aspect of latency. This latency means that as experience gains expression and shapes its own style to become heard and understood, it articulates the frames it only can be recognized by themselves. Subjective meaning must first give rise to its own cohesion and context of meaning (cf. ibid, 188) – in the process

2 With Gadamer such negative experience is a constitutive motif for the process of experience, where new experiences are not subsumed under typical schemes, but rather become de-typified in order to become an exemplary experience (cf. Gadamer 1975, 335)

of its constitution. This happens through a "change of *attention à la vie,*" through which "something that is taken for granted (is) transform(ed) into something [problematic]," (ibid, 74) and – one has to add – finds particular expression, is testified to, in ways and in schemes that overrule those which characterise the interpretative attitudes towards what we take for granted. "Essentially actual experiences" that are bound to a certain temporal point in inner consciousness are, occurring to Schutz, deprived of even reflective access (Schutz 1972a, 52).[3] Such experiences[4] distance themselves from the contextualizing actions of memory and re-membrance.[5]

Extraordinary experience as a consequence of the social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion is only briefly broached in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*; however, Schutz treats it as a special case[6] in his two 1944/45 works, the reconstructed *Structures of the Life-World* and the detailed descriptive-phenomenological studies in *The Stranger* and the *The Homecomer*.[7] A good example of the Schutzian theory of foreign understanding in the framework of his comprehensive sociology is the following section of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*: The grasping of something unknown, of something outside myself as present, is

> "a perception which is signitive, for [...] I apprehend the lived experiences of another only through signitive-symbolic representation, regarding either his body or some cultural artefact he has produced as a 'field of expression' for those experiences" (Schutz 1972a, 100).

For Schutz, a sign of the Other's intended meaning is to be seen, above all else, in the movements of a foreign body, for the body is an open field for expression, but also the voice, a pictorial or a narrative style are part of such embodiment of expression.

The duration of my foreign and personal experiences differs, but such experiences are in a certain sense simultaneous, insofar as I experience my own actions not only in relation to but in unity with the foreign experience. The duration of the experience of the Other synchronizes, so to speak, the duration of my own

3 I would read 'experiences' here as 'lived experience' (*Erleben*) in contrast to experience taken for granted and symbolized in concepts (*Erfahrung*).
4 Exemplary for Schutz are here moments of embodiment, pain and passion, moods, feelings and affects.
5 Kertész illustrates this as he tries to find equivalent sensual experiences to those he realized and typologized in his immediate surroundings in the camp without the context of a self-supporting working space - for example, he tries to recall the smell of the leather-glove he was beaten with.
6 See Schutz' short remarks on the constraints of collective experience (life-world): "Furthermore, as just a marginal note, a breaking off, or even just a radical restriction, of the continual confirmation of this character of the world has grave consequences for the normal development of its intersubjectivity. The component of self-evidences which is the underpinning for the lifeworld to which we are accustomed is, for instance, endangered in solitary confinement, even often demolished. The technique of brainwashing appears very probably to turn this circumstance to good account." (Schutz/Luckmann 1974, 68).
7 The boundaries of foreign-understanding are denoted in the following characterizations: "the homecomer is not the same man who left. He is neither the same for himself nor for those who await his return." (Schutz 1945, 375). As a homecomer he finds himself within a world he no longer belongs to.

experience with his; we are in a world of time, we *age* together, we experience change and alienation in time, a perspectivation of an experience whose interrelationship is anything but self explanatory.

However, it is in Schutz**' '**unity of a synchronously consummated event of meaning**'** that the difference between expression and its ways to a fulfilment of meaning in interpretatively transcending it is lost; and with this, the enrichment, redefinition and change of meaning. As such, constitution of meaning itself is schematized, particularly the individual differences that protect and ultimately ensure the safety of the 'intimate personality' from being misinterpreted by the world, others and socially constructed foreign meaning. Schutz' definition of expressive acts highlights this difficulty:

> "By an 'expressive' action we mean one in which the actor seeks to project outward the contents of his consciousness, whether to *retain* the latter for his own use later on (as in the case of an entry in a diary) or to communicate them to others." (Schutz 1972a, 116; my italics, A.H.)

For me, it comes down to the '*retaining*' that Schutz lays out in all its varying subjective forms. He writes: "Expressive acts are always genuine communicative acts which have as their goal their own interpretation, be that through the self or the Other" (ibid, 117). In light of this "explanatory communication", one must take something or other as given; but if one no longer needs to question it, why is a personal analysis of singular experience even necessary? This is the very problem inherent in trying to understand testimonies that deprive themselves of the synchronized unity of a mutual horizon. Schutz himself did not attempt to define this more precisely.

Schutz takes as his starting point the simultaneity of a genuinely foreign understanding of a continuously existent space-time in which concepts of action are possible; the possibility of foreign understanding is based on a strong concept of activity, where intention and its realization follow each other immediately without any instances of 'inner passivity', without an epoché of retraction where individual expressions and their individual projections in a possible future activity are shaped. Yet, it is right in the latter, that the subjective act of remembering the past – a past no longer to be enacted in uninterrupted constancy and in immediate reactions – intervenes in the unreal and fictive mood that attempts the impossible: "Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone" (Améry 1980, 68).

3 The 'Foreign Understanding of the Self' – Kertész' Fictionalization of subjective Reality

Kertész gives voice to the interpretation of foreign experiences through the life of György Köves, the alter ego of Kertész' own memories. It is his *alter Ego* – not himself – that can no longer confirm his identity, which first finds expression through differing strategies of comprehensive interpretation. "I could" he writes, "imagine such a character's language, being and world of ideas as fiction, but [I] was no longer identical with it" (Kertész 2006, 78f.)

Who is Kertész writing for? First and foremost he is writing for himself: having lived through the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the beginning of the communist Kadar-system, having taken the decision to become a writer, only for his novel *Fateless* to be rejected by the censors and he himself denounced for a defeatist representation of historic incidents and denounced for mental instability. For a person who had endured all this, writing meant to live, to not collaborate and lose yourself (oneself) in a language that is defined by social types. It meant to withdraw from society as a 'private man,' to become invisible and forgotten, to be without public life. The 'returned stranger' (no longer a 'homecomer') from Buchenwald and Birkenau in 1945 was not just a stranger, an Other; he was *no one*! Neither Jew nor communist resistance fighter, he was a survivor, or merely that which his social world saw. He, however, wrote: "in order to not appear to be what I am" (Kertész 1999b, 77).[8] Kertész' typologies run counter to the pragmatic conclusions of daily life, in that his reflections on the experienced life exist within their own reality of individual experience. This, in turn, stems from his own bracketing of the 'natural attitude' in the construction of narrative meaning.

Kertész speaks of the "feeling of the untenable life," the feeling of foreignness" that

> "has its roots in our reality, in the reality of our human situation […] that life suddenly assumes the picture, the form, or more precisely, the formlessness of the most complete uncertainty, so that I can am no longer sure of its reality. I am gripped by a total mistrust of the experiences that portray themselves through my senses as reality, especially of my own 'real' existence, and the existence of my surroundings, an existence […] that is bound to my life and that of my surrounds by only the thinnest of threads, and this thread is my mind, and nothing else. (Kertész 1999b, 82ff.)

Kertész's aim is to understand not only how one can appropriate and assimilate reality, but how one can form reality through determination? This is fatelessness, the non-tragic without the illusion of a 'teleological plan of freedom' which, in the end, will strike back on the integrity of suffering a fate in gaining an exemplary experience from it (cf. Kertész 1999a, 77). To own a fate would mean, first of all, to

8 All citations from Kertész – except his novel *Fateless* – are direct translations from the German edition of his works.

have freedom of choice and to believe, even in failure, in that tragic situation where freedom holds no promise of success, but where everything seems possible in a positive sense because even death and the end have substance and meaning, that freedom is ultimately possible. The functional system and the 'functional man'[9], a consequence of social 'typologizing,' however, stand in opposition to this, as they functionalize this very freedom of displaying what this "experience of reality as self-imposed determination" means for my own subjective experience.

The loneliness that arises from *suffering* the world leads, together with the *fear* of personal loss and the *doubt* that accompanies it, to a break with apparent reality. Kertész himself takes his fateless man out of an inter-subjective world, with its illusions of individuality and progressive development; he is, as a consequence, a functional element in the totalitarian closure of reality, his own object of description, separate from the first person perspective capable of of intentional projection. Writing and imagination create – unlike pure autobiographical memories of the finished past – a piece of the world that transcends this (our) piece of the world in the involuntarily memorized flow of time.

The fateless man is a self-propelled, changing perspective, not an active hero. He loses the fixed point of his own perspective in the world, a fact that shows itself in his ongoing identification with foreign experiences. In the beginning this seems to be embodied naively in the figure of György Köves, but it develops, in the course of the tale, a dynamic of understanding, of the flow of his inner, reflexive personal time, in which the reciprocity of a lack of understanding culminates in doubting the goal of a meaningful and understandable end of the experienced event. Yet this perspective of the 'other than myself' wins symbols for his experience of doubting reality; doubt of the authenticity of experience becomes the basis for a possible reality, of a reality in absurdity that shows its resistance in that very absurdity.

The possibility for a 'normal world,' whose experience could somehow be valid in the cosmos of the camps, is negated with every new step into the functionality of the machinery of selection and annihilation. Adapting the ego to the world is no exchange between the ego and the world, just the breaking of the ego by the world. György Köves experiences as naively as the child that he is, as a man with trust in the world who, until the moment of his deportation, could not believe in the camps. And every one of his explanations for an ever increasing improbable normality fails, deceives him or is a foreign meaning that assumes the perspective of the selection officers and affects his own personal, objective view of itself.[10]

9 "[T]he hero of a tragedy is the creator and cause of his own downfall. The man today only conforms. […] The reality of a functional man is a pseudo-reality, a life-replacing life […]. Indeed, his life is mostly a tragic process or error, but without the necessary tragic consequences, or a tragic consequence without the necessary tragic 'back story' since the consequences were not inflicted through the personal lawfulness of character and action, but rather through the desire for balance in the social order. This is absurd for the individual. […] No one lives his own reality that way, only his function without the existential experience of his life, without his own fate. This could mean the subject of work for him." (ibid, 8f.)

10 "I was incredibly surprised because I saw for the first time in my life – at least from close – real prisoners, in striped suits … the round hats of the guards. I immediately backed off to get by. […]

Two things happen within the techniques of narrative construction, or in Kertész' case, narrative composition which gives raise to various readings of the shattered reality: the first person 'narrating ego' recalls the memories of himself as alter ego, and he reflects the experience of his alter ego, always pending between different levels of perspectives: both an observer bracketing any previous knowledge (as György Köves does not have any common knowledge of what is awaiting him), as participating observer and as observing participant. He does not subjectify the objective self on the level of experience, but introduces modes of distancing on the narrative level and indicates these break lines in a growing awareness of the possibilities fictionalizing opens towards a grasp on reality. The narrator or the narration do not portray the ego himself, but rather the automatism – the only portrayable thing to be objectified – in which the self is lost, and from which it must withdraw (cf. Kertész 1999a, 139).

This narrative perspective remembering a view taken in a personal diary forces the reader, as a kind of alter ego himself, to participate in this chronological successiveness, forces him to participate in experiencing this mechanism of the totalitarian world. It is not possible to enjoy a play at a distance where one does not know one's role, in which one loses one's fate as a hero in a tragedy, a fate that gives life meaning. One must go through and experience the cluelessness of immediacy again. Yet once this is experienced, time fully and successively unfolds, so that the tale does not shatter with the singularity of the experience.

What does this mean for the act of remembering? Kertész writes in *Dossier K.* that „the experience of the death camps becomes a general human experience where I come across the universality of experience" (Kertész 2006, 78). He comes across the universality, but not the standardization, he comes across the *universality of possibility* as an exceptional and anomalous existence (cf. ibid 80). The ambiguity of the reality of writing, of the reality in writing, is whether or not only facts and the possibility horizon are an objective reality for the imaginary. The imperative of facts becomes contingent, for they are arbitrary. "It could be different," they say and produce, at least in thought, the form of possibility, an objection as subjective resistance of thought and fantasy, but without pathos as it is to be dealt with: in acting, yet foremost in remembering, writing and for us: in reading.

The reality of writing becomes that worldly reality in which subjective and solitary (re)experience, and finally life, become possible: Life gains the possibility of transcending closed provinces of reality and meaning. The perspective of subjective reality constitutes remembered experience from the beginning into a linear path of knowledge, a perspective that refrains from cutting down opinions and morally classifying the world, especially into the categories of victim and perpetrator. György Köves is no victim – the recounted "atrocities" do not befall

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Their faces were also not inspiring confidence: pulled back ears, lunging noses, deep set, tiny eyes that craftily glared. Actually, they looked like Jews in every respect. I found them suspicious and completely outlandish" (Kertész 1998, 89).

him, he does not provoke them in contact and confrontations with others, he creates them, rather, by simply being there, by taking part.

Yet, the meaning of this individual existence resists not only foreign interpretation, but also operational understanding, for

> "understanding means in reality something like: 'to take possession of' (otherwise it wouldn't be important). Is there a kind of understanding I don't want to possess, with which I don't want to empower myself? For example: when I give myself up to a narrative and stumble into an ambush and am taken prisoner [...] Isn't my life that kind of story? How could I put this kind of story into words?" (Kertész 1999a, 71)

As a narrative reality, individual experience becomes the trigger for the constitution of meaning and a motif for the doubting of meanings taken for granted by the social world, of the momentum of a self-maintaining rationality.

Returning to Schutz, I would like to address the ‚border regions' or 'thresholds' (*Grenzbereiche*) of his theory of *lifeworld*,[11] to not only experience, but to express and put into words the transcendences of lifeworld in order to expand the theory, to show the fulfilment of a transformative understanding of the lifeworld(s) in *hermeneutics of transcendence*.

4 Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Social World

The transcendence of subjective meaning, its embeddedness in social categories of meaning and their limitations is neither the outflow of transcendental constitution of meaning, nor is it inevitably the 'functioning' of trans-individual, pragmatic and mundane structures of typologized meaning typologies. In fact, it opens a structure of foreign understanding: this is the structure of a private, completely subjective stratification of meaning construction and the processes of communication in its *symbolic*, fragmentary expression. As such, the transcendence of symbols as a medium withdraws from the dichotomies of outward-inward, physical-psychic and personal-foreign (cf. Schutz/Luckmann 2003, 593); symbols open the distance of space and time for transcendences.

Schutz writes in the *Structures of the Life-World* that "self-explanatory assumptions about the conditions of experience, (but also) the limits of action and the borders of life constitute every piece of background information that one might call 'knowledge of transcendence'." (Schutz/Luckmann 2003, 593) Yet, this 'knowledge of transcendence' is not 'simply' given. It expresses itself, rather, in the forms of transcendence that must be attained, held tightly and conveyed as a plurality and difference in the structures and coherence of life, and transformed through the appropriation of symbols into a personal context of expression.

11 Unfortunately, this last chapter – *Grenzen der Erfahrung und Grenüberschreitungen: Verständigung in der Lebenswelt* – is not contained in the English edition of *Structures of the Lifeworld*. Thus, I will cite and refer to these texts from the German edition of *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Schutz/Luckmann 2003).

These symbols receive their potency, as we saw in Kertész' works, when they do not refer to an experience in synchronicity, but when the time dimension of experience and remembering – which first must be constituted in a subjective space of experience – define the distance between any intended meaning and a world. Symbolic difference first makes movement possible between finite provinces of meaning, but it also allows for the transfer of memory and translation processes between them. Provinces of meaning are not born solely through sociality and the social mechanisms of a dictated, outer *lifeworld*, they are also initiated spontaneously through *subjective acts*. They are not just the products of acting in accordance with the underlying precepts of public action, but also, according to Schutz, through memory, the area of insurmountable subjectivity where the restraints of memory and closed lifeworlds become porous and passable.

In *Structures of the Life-World*, Schutz distinguishes between the 'small everyday transcendences,' the 'middle transcendences in the encounters with others' and the 'large transcendences between the everyday and other realities.' Knowing the edges of a lifeworld, knowing the borderlines of transcending its closedness in favor of a broader, more open horizon of perspective, is not simply a given, but it is fulfilled in experience in its transcendences. The middle and large transcendences stand, in my opinion, in a reciprocal exchange: especially in cases where 'reality' is more strongly bound to the subjective alignment and analysis of meaning than Schutz articulates it. In this sense, I see both of these areas not as separate, but rather as being united in a mutual dynamic of meaning constitution.

The limits of lived – immediate – experience are set with experiencing the passing of time: that I once did not exist and that I will no longer be, that my fellow men age with me, that they will die before me, that I have *memories* of the past and a view of the future – even of a time after my life: I recall my memories, experience myself in changing perspectives and have to find ways to express these as mine, giving rise to fulfilled transcendences in action and expression out of the finiteness of these experiences.

Finiteness and its references to transcendences *connect* and *isolate* me from others. For Schutz, the experience of transcendence is the basis for a distinction between ego and alter; it can be attributed to the achievements of consciousness, in which the ego's sphere of authenticity, which classifies ego and alter ego, builds and stratifies meaning and constructions of meaning (cf. Schutz/Luckmann 2003, 594). Everything that appears as a given leads to something else, to memory, expectations, fantasy, and can be see as a shift in attention. No experience is self-contained, for it can become questionable with distance; there is no evidence of other dimensions of experience or reality, yet it can become alien nevertheless. This is how the limits we meet in life appear to us, "as moveable and misplaceable" (Schütz/Luckmann 2003, 591), as constraints and limitations from outside that only unlock negative knowledge. They are, however, transcendable limitations that border on other possible positive experiences.

They must open themselves in a prospective time and prove themselves to be a reality of experience. This experience must first constitute itself in the **'**hermeneutical mood**'** of ambiguous symbols, which mood is transcendence itself in its own right and logic. The transcendence of limits happens over time, through a dimension of expression in and through which we agree on these limits, or still better, where we arrange them into a horizon of meaning that gives movement to space and time, through memory, narrative and writing **–** regaining an experience that no longer can be simply taken for granted now as it provokes a contrast with an everyday experience as a commodity of the working world.

With this realignment of the Schutzian stratification of transcendences the question is no longer 'how does my experience show itself,' rather it becomes: '*who* expresses himself in the experience, who changes within it and constructs himself into a self, both new and different?' How do forms of expression develop out of the intimate personality that discovers and finds a world of understanding through self-expression, instead of being silenced and concealed through social interaction? The 'who' in question here, is György Köves in his narrated reality. It is in the narrative reconstruction of Kertész' other, recounted self, his recounted ego, that past experiences become meaningful symbols embedded in an individual, and therefore social story, which is itself embedded in the experienced reality of an individual's biography. A comprehensive understanding must answer this expression, accept it and transform it, along with understanding itself. In narrating, constitution and interpretation – understood as interpretation of meaning while narrating – nearly fall into one. Thus, narrating might count as a practice of understanding, though as the structure of narration can get more and more complex, also the reflexivity of interpretation.

For this narrative, yet also biographic issue, Schutz and Luckmann only managed to come to a narrow and perhaps insufficiently nuanced definition of the subjective processes of the exchange of historical world-time and individual life-time.[12] They argue that the categories of biographical expression are not actually categories of inner continuity; they are inter-subjectively defined (Schutz/Luckmann 1974, 56). Yet, they also state that "my situation consists of a story of *my* experience" (ibid, 58). The most important and unique autobiographical aspect, as standardized as it may be, is the progression of the experience of my inner continuity (cf., ibid, 197). This bias might illustrate the hardships of autobiographical memory, trying to testify its meaning in front of and against the passage of time, in front of and against its own experiences neither shared nor for sharing with others, in front of and against those provinces of meaning which exclude this memory.

The biographical articulation of meaning structures constitutes a superordinate experience of time over against the everyday, or everyday life (cf. Schutz/Luckmann 2003, 95). They are not yet in an interchange of objective historical time, collectively-remembered time and the uniqueness of experience

12 Cf. Srubar (1988, 271). For a life-historical meaning of apresentative relationships see Schutz/Luckmann (2003, 639).

processes; they do not yet provide interconnectedness of experience, which can neither be articulated in intersubjective-typological, nor in scientific-objective terms. For Schutz and Luckmann, the main focus remains on the social categories of biographical expression, which are particular and predetermined as a part of a relative-natural worldview, and they belong to the typological system that opens into the social structure "in the form of a typical biography" (ibid, 95).

There is, however, a point where biographical 'categories of the self' become important – in the movement away from a comprehensive and cohesive social meaning.

> "The historicity of the situation is imposed; it is an ontological, general prerequisite of being there. The relative-natural worldview, the social categories of biographical expression that unfold within it, are, in contrast, experienced by the individual as something that must be coped with in the lifeworld. Categories of biographical expression are, therefore, not a fundamental prerequisite of the life situation, but rather the possibility for leading a life in the situation itself" (ibid, 94).

This possibility allows for the (re)interpretation and change of the situation's contours; lifeworldly structures are put at a distance, creating new room for action, and above all else, room for reflection, wider fields of transcendences.'

It is here that once again one can gain access to a world shared with others: through memory and its mediatisation in the narrative – if effective action is not possible.

> "I can coordinate the past phases of the conscious life of these Others with past phases of my own conscious life. This means, above all, that in hindsight I can follow along in its inner duration the step-by-step construction of the subjective meaning-contexts under my attention" (ibid., 88).

Indeed, world is in the consciousness of a solitary ego, or more precisely, 'the concept of the world' is bracketed off for use in the future; yet at the same time, it contains the ground and the space on and in which we can experience and recognize one another in our biographical testimony as an 'I,' always in a doubtful distance as another. This would mean a comprehensive and attainable transformation of understanding, of ways back and forward into mutual lifeworlds, into worlds of action and interaction.

The fragility of this world is expressed in *Fateless* where we read "that certain statements only achieve meaning in their immanence [in the novel]" and that

> "values are immanent in novels. Hate, happiness, certain words lose their usual meaning in a novel, in much the same way that one needs bricks to build a cathedral and we, at the end, marvel at the towers and the structure that took shape through them" (Kertész 2006, 96f.).

Kertész' poetology of the fictionalization of reality searches for, above all else, *a frame of expression* for the survivor's experience which insists on the uniqueness of his memory in the face of the public interpretation of events – as a testimony which objects to being typologized. Kertész tries, through his fictionalization of memory, to express the survivors' 'twisted and insane' sense of time "for it desires two

impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened" into a single expression for these experiences (Améry 1986, 68). Here we are dealing with the vexing problem of how subjective meaning can be expressed, and of how the foreign interpretations of the everyday make the excluded the object of comprehensive acquisition.

Such a subjective experience never becomes an easily shared collective one, but in transcending the everyday, on the outer reaches of understanding and communication, it shows the Other(s)' worlds in all their intimacy. These worlds should perhaps only be known under the heading of 'strategies which subvert reality' for they must remain the testimonies of individuals in order to refer to that which can only appear as an anomic order of everyday life. In their transcendence of a historical and social scientific definition of understanding and explanation, these worlds testify something that can never become a synchroneous present. They remain erratic in the narrative's borrowed horizon of meaning, which almost demands its own limits so that the memory can live on. It demands free passage so that it can perhaps win the freedom of its own (and then also shared) social lifeworld(s) on the borders of a meaning-horizon's experience of inner freedom. We must further define our categories of meaning, the processes of meaning constitution and our understanding of it along with its limitations and in its transcendences by focussing on individual testimonies, their construction in and with time, and a hermeneutic of forms of expression within its character of transcending reality.

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