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## Doomed to Misapprehension, Aren't We? Schützian Reflection on Shared Knowledge, Intersubjectivity and Embodied Experience\*

**Abstract:** This paper develops a phenomenologically informed account of how different modes of lived experience – labelled here as *outlooker*, *dweller*, and *veteran* – shape concept formation and intersubjective understanding in modern, heterogeneous societies. Building on Alfred Schütz's phenomenological sociology, the paper argues that inherited typifications provide the foundation for communication and social coordination; yet, embodied, first-hand experiences continually transform these shared meanings. The typology offered by the author explains when and why shared meanings may fragment, producing misunderstandings and failures of recognition, and which roles society, companions and contemporaries, and individuals themselves play in the co-creation of mutual understanding.

**Keywords:** lifeworld, embodied experience, intersubjectivity, shared knowledge, mutual understanding

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## Introduction

*Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, is one of phenomenology's central notions. Introduced by Edmund Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), it was later reinterpreted and expanded by Alfred Schütz, Jan Patočka, Jürgen Habermas, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Each emphasized different aspects – social, practical, historical, embodied – yet agreed that the lifeworld is given to us in pre-scientific form as lived experience. E. Husserl insisted that objective knowledge must ultimately be traced back to this immediate domain of lived experience<sup>1</sup>. A. Schütz translated Husserlian phenomenology into a sociological idiom, highlighting the intersubjective meaning-making and showing how typifications and shared stocks of knowledge enable coordination and communication in everyday life. However, the same structures that facilitate our communication also generate recurring misapprehensions. Being socially inherited, typifications are not once and for all fixed; individual experiences can transform them in such a way that remains opaque to others.

The paper focuses tightly on one problem that emerges from A. Schütz's framework: how does first-hand, embodied experience reshape inherited meanings, thereby producing both conceptual innovation and intersubjective misunderstanding? To address this, I introduce a threefold typology of experiential modes: the *outlooker*, the *dweller*, and the *veteran*. Each mode captures a different way in which subjects engage with the world, form concepts, and negotiate meaning with others, explaining when and why shared connotations break down, ultimately leading to failures of recognition. By analyzing these modes, I show how contemporary theories of embodied cognition complement Schützian insights and argue that the bodily, situated character of experience is central to understanding conceptual change and social (mis)-comprehension. The aim is to offer both a refinement of A. Schütz's approach and an analytic toolbox for diagnosing persistent failures of understanding

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<sup>1</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 226.

in contemporary social life. Yet first, let us clarify three basic assumptions in Schützian phenomenological reflections:

### 1. The meaning of experience

Professor Nathalie Barbosa de la Cadena argues that the idea of Lifeworld can be found in E. Husserl's early texts under the names of "Umwelt", which can be translated as a "Surrounding World", and "Erfahrungswelt", which literally means the "World of Experience" (see Barbosa, 2021). Both of these notions show the important characteristics of the lifeworld: it is the experienced world that surrounds us. No matter which perspective phenomenologists choose, they all agree that the lifeworld is given to us in pre-scientific form as a lived experience that we receive via our body and which we can reduce to our own individual consciousness in a psychophysical unity, creating a feeling of its possession by us. We see the colors, hear sounds, smell aromas, feel the heat, and then combine them into a beautiful, warm, reddish soup boiling on the stove. Obviously, to get this picture, we must have a specific conceptual basis in our stock of knowledge. In other words, we must know what soup and stove are, for instance. However, once these concepts are incorporated into our knowledge base, we can utilize them whenever needed.

E. Husserl claimed that this pre-reflective intake of the lifeworld forms the foundation of all objective knowledge<sup>2</sup>. He asserted that all objective knowledge must ultimately be traced back to this immediate, pre-theoretical domain of lived experience, which precedes and supports reflective thought. It is the space of self-evidence, of a world given to us in its pure original form, as the universe of things, that we pack into categories, types and classes of the given language. Furthermore, it is the role of epoché to reduce the experienced world to the pure life of consciousness, where the Ego directly engages with objects and other subjects without mediating scientific abstractions and abbreviations.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

A. Schütz, in his turn, saw this experiential interaction with Others as a zone for meaning construction. Unlike his teacher, who was preoccupied with the universal structures of the lifeworld, he was concerned with how people make sense of their experiences in daily intercommunication. His interest was in discovering how the individual pure stream of consciousness meets the common sense of shared understanding. On the individual level, he insisted that such an experience requires a state of “wide-awakeness” of the subject, where one’s self is fully oriented toward life and actively attentive to its unfolding before them. When the self is passive – uninterested and inattentive – experience loses its meaningfulness<sup>3</sup>. This “attention to life” is directed by the relevance at hand that, in its turn, depends on the accessibility of the world and the presence or absence of interest<sup>4</sup>.

However, it is not only the world that affects us, giving us diverse experiences; we also affect the world, operating within it as well as upon it. As A. Schütz stressed, it is a pragmatic motive to modify the world to meet our needs, which govern our natural attitude toward the lifeworld<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, I propose to divide our experience into two different kinds: (a) the one that is *put on us* and which we accept either passively absorbing or actively responding to and (b) the one that is *put by us*, that we are the initiators of and that we try to meditate and actively control. This differentiation is important for further understanding the knowledge we get from them.

## 2. The meaning of intersubjectivity

The term intersubjectivity refers to the communal realm of experience that enables human beings to understand and relate to one another. In *Cartesian Meditations*, E. Husserl emphasizes that the lifeworld is not entirely a private experience, but a communal space, since all our experiences of the

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Schütz, “On Multiple Realities”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 5 (1945): 538.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 112.

<sup>5</sup> See Alfred Schütz, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, Collected Papers I, *Phaenomenologica*, vol. 11 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1962), 534.

world include Others and their experiences that are in contact with ours<sup>6</sup>. He pointed out that we ourselves are also objects among objects<sup>7</sup> merely because the Other subjects perceive us as objects of their thoughts, as well as we perceive them, but also our own Ego, as objects of reflection and examination for ourselves, that is to say, human beings have an ambiguous nature, being able to share both subjective and objective features at once.

For A. Schütz, intersubjectivity is rooted in everyday interactions, creating a communal zone of shared knowledge where people assume a degree of mutual understanding to coordinate their actions<sup>8</sup>. Such intersubjective understanding is facilitated by symbolic communication, ready-made answers and schemes, tested receipts of interpretations and shared contexts of the same temporal and spatial localization or, as A. Schütz called it, biographically determined situations. In other words, all inherited and taught meanings of one's socio-cultural location form the foundation of intersubjective exchange.

Intersubjectivity, for Schütz, rests on the tension between the We-relation, that presupposes direct, face-to-face interaction, characterized by mutual attention, and the They-relation, anonymized relations to absent or generalized Other, not as subjects but merely in the roles they play in society. As A. Schütz indicated in They-relation, one's orientation is not directed toward the existence of the Other but his own abstracted thoughts<sup>9</sup>. With the development of new technologies, the scope of space has expanded. Today, we can have a face-to-face conversation while physically staying in different hemispheres, living in different surroundings and going through different experiences, which contradicts the main idea of the A. Schütz<sup>10</sup>. Does this temporal lack of common ground prevent us from having the same level of intimacy, reciprocity, and attention? Do we lose some meaningful layer of that vividness of the present because of the absence of physical proximity? We will return to this question later in the paper.

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<sup>6</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Seventh impression (The Hague–Boston–London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Schütz, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, 553.

<sup>9</sup> Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 225.

<sup>10</sup> Schütz, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, 544.

### 3. The meaning of interpretation

Interpretation plays a significant role in E. Husserl's works by literally being the core of the phenomenological method. His transcendental phenomenology develops the idea of "bracketing" the natural attitude, the aforementioned epoché, as a stage of interpretation to uncover the essential structures of experience as they are given in their pre-reflective form, namely, the lived experience. Only through epoché can one's Ego be excluded from the realm of objects, distancing itself from them to see them in pure light, in their actual form as phenomena<sup>11</sup>.

In contrast, A. Schütz builds his view on Husserl's ideas by shifting the focus from abstract, universal features of experience to socially shared aspects in common daily life. He insisted that we inherit the lifeworld from our predecessors, meaning that they laid the basis of how we see, interpret, and understand it. He introduces the concept of typification – created general categories that people use to navigate the complexity of social life – saying that the factual world of our experience has its outset in the typical one. In other words, all our experiences rely on previous experiences, no matter whether they belong individually to us or to our collectively inherited culture. Working by association, we recall similar situations, objects, and subjects that we have formerly perceived or known as types. Knowing these typical ways of things, one can comprehend, control, and predict one's surroundings<sup>12</sup>.

A. Schütz insists that for successful cooperation with Others, one should be able to correctly interpret the "in order to" and "because" motives. By figuring out Others' "in order to" motives, one can comprehend the intentions behind their words and actions and predict the results they aim to achieve. In other words, based on this type of motive, one interprets the acts of the Others regarding the future tense: how they orient toward the future and what they possibly expect. While the "because" motives can reveal Others' previous experience and help interpret the reasons or influences behind their actions. Which experience of the past made them do this?<sup>13</sup> We will see further

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<sup>11</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 75–81.

<sup>12</sup> Schütz, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, 117–118.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 126–127.

that the “because” motive is especially important when people are at different levels of understanding the same phenomenon.

To quickly sum up, in this paper, we will understand lifeworld not only as our own experiential field and a sphere of universal apparent things that we share with Others, our companions and contemporaries, but also as a world of culture, which is artificially constructed to share the common meanings and frames in society that we inherited from our predecessors and that we ourselves will handle to our successors. It is a world based on our intersubjective functions through (co-)interpretations, and it does not lack misunderstanding when ignoring the differences and richness of one’s embodied lived experience.

### ISSUE: Types of experience and their impact on understanding

A. Schütz insisted that the majority of knowledge is socially derived and only a small amount originates from personal experience<sup>14</sup>, which is disputable. Professor Mark Johnson argues that the body plays a significant role in conceptual understanding, providing different kinds of experiences that not only serve as processing material for the mind, but also influence the conceptualization process<sup>15</sup>. The majority of notions (both material and abstract) can be understood theoretically by consulting a dictionary or by inheriting them through one’s native language and culture. However, it is the embodied experience, the encounter with the phenomenon, phenomenologically speaking, that makes one’s understanding of the concept not only physically tangible but also deeper and richer on a conceptual level. In other words, when practically dealt with, the concepts, just like Gregor Samsa, undergo metamorphosis.

In this section, we will not discuss the origin of the concepts, but rather their formation, specifically how one’s understanding evolves over time from the moment they first acquire some knowledge to the moment they solidify

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 96.

<sup>15</sup> M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

their understanding in their mind. A. Schütz emphasized the intersubjective characteristic of the interpretation. I agree that interactions with Others play a huge role in the formation of one's understanding, since humans are indeed social creatures who depend on pre-existing connotations and symbols. However, we should separate this inherited wisdom from the proper individual experiential understanding that can be formed independently and then align with or contradict the common one. Therefore, I propose the following threefold typology:

### 1. The world of an outlooker

The *outlooker* is an *inexperienced person* who has a typical understanding of things that have been handed down to them by Others – family, teachers, companions, their culture, and language – as a social heritage. Schütz's words, or those learned by him from dictionaries, manuals, and other theoretical sources, exclude the direct encounter with the thing in question. It is not the authentic knowledge by first-person experience but an undoubted, taken-for-granted and unproblematic second-hand understanding of “know-that” and “know-how” that people keep on using without thinking as long as it works or until they finally meet that thing in real life and, thus, must adapt – enlarge, correct, or even sometimes entirely change – their understanding.

The outlooker's stance is shaped before any first-hand encounter by social sedimentations, roles, and metaphors that make the world as if it is “already understood”. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann described how everyday sense is constituted as an unexamined backdrop, by emphasizing that to describe the reality of common sense one must refer to the [individual] interpretations just as much as take into account its [shared] taken-for-granted character<sup>16</sup>. They insisted that common-sense knowledge is the knowledge a person shares with Others in the normal circumstances and self-evident routines of an ordinary, everyday life<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 37.

Some things always remain on this non-experienced self-evident level for all our lives. For example, when we talk about aliens, we share an abstract view of extraterrestrial creatures based on books and movies, since none of us has ever met them in real life.

The same applies to historical phenomena. One can study every existing paper and book on gladiators' lifestyle, routines and customs, cosplay them for Halloween or historical reconstruction, play one on the screen or the stage; still, they will never get a complete understanding of "being a gladiator". However, unlike the alien encounter, which seems implausible but not impossible in our vast expanding galaxy, this kind of lived experience is completely lost in the historical past. Any attempt to reconstruct the life of a gladiator is doomed to failure because "being a gladiator" presupposes the existence of a society where this role exists. A society whose ordinary members share the common knowledge of what "being a gladiator" means.

On the contrary, other things can shift from the non-experienced realm to the experienced. The distinction between theoretical and experiential knowledge becomes clear when considering something as simple as tasting durian. Reading about its taste conveys only a general idea. Only through direct encounter does one develop a personal understanding. Nevertheless, even then, the experience will create different images for different people, because no identical experiences are possible. They depend on context and what A. Schütz called one's biographical situation. In other words, durian will not taste identically good or bad to everyone. Co-understanding can only be found in the common traits and the desire to achieve it.

The situation is even worse when we have to deal with abstract concepts that are hard to define. What is good? What is bad? What is evil? Social constructivism posits that our knowledge is not only received but even constructed through interaction with Others, co-interpretation and mutual understanding<sup>18</sup>, which coincides with A. Schütz's position, described in his book *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*. This intersubjective aspect of knowledge creation and transmission presupposes that abstract concepts should also be shaped by cultural and societal norms and structures, and learned through

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<sup>18</sup> Lev S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962).

communication. However, it is undeniable that in one society, the world of companions and compatriots, and even within one family with whom one has the most intimate relationships, people may have different understandings of what love, trust, loyalty, courage, freedom, and so on mean. This difference is mainly caused by personal unique experiences and face-to-face interactions with the manifestations of the concept, meaning the situations that are typically labelled by such or such term.

Let us take an example of evil. For a child raised in a loving family and a friendly, safe environment, seeing scary monsters only in movies can limit their understanding of evil to those illustrated villains. They would know that a wicked witch is evil because she is doing bad things and trying to harm the princess; someone who resembles the witch can also be labelled with this characteristic. Meanwhile, another child, who is raised in the same conditions with the only difference of being a part of a highly religious family, can associate evil with the devil figure, as the most morally flawed being. Neither of these children has faced anything so horrendous and terrifying in their lives that it can overcome these literary connotations of the concept. A completely different understanding would have those kids who are abused and unhappy at home, who do not have families, who are raised in an aggressive environment or in a country in a state of war. We will study these examples in the following sections.

## 2. The world of a dweller

The *dweller* is a *person who*, at this specific time period, *is experiencing*, in the sense of living through the encounter with a phenomenon. I chose this term because of the dual meaning of the verb “dwell” from which it comes. On the one hand, “dwell” means to “think about” or “meditate on” something, which always happens when we meet something new or unusual. On the other hand, it can also be used as a synonym for the verbs “be” or “live”, which, in my opinion, can emphasize this state of being in the stream of conscious experiencing and living through it. In other words, the dweller is a person who tries to understand their experience while they are still in the process of liv-

ing through it, by mentally remembering the most impressive features of it or making mental notes to adjust the knowledge they have so that it is adequate to their new experience.

Where the outlooker stands back, the dweller is immersed. Meaning here primarily appears in practical dealings, in what Martin Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand world, where significance is grasped in use rather than contemplated from a distance (see Heidegger, 2019). Of course, M. Heidegger's ready-to-hand things presuppose a previously known meaning, as evident in his famous example of the hammer. We must have an understanding that it is a piece of equipment designed for a specific type of task. Otherwise, we can end up in a situation like the little mermaid, when she used a fork as a comb. Nevertheless, seeing a picture of a hammer or reading a description in the dictionary and taking it in hand and smash against the nail will give you two different kinds of experiences and understanding of the "hammer", and the body plays a crucial role in it, by anchoring us in the world of our experience and, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlighted it, being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein<sup>19</sup>.

The shift from theoretical to embodied understanding is also evident in commonplace situations. In *The Body in the Mind*, M. Johnson gives an example of the abstract concept of force. By being formulated in explicative propositional terms, everyone can create some understanding of what it is when looking into the dictionary. However, it is through our embodied experience of force that our meaning of the concept of force becomes apparent<sup>20</sup>. Recall your first experience of eating sushi. You could have come to the Asian buffet with the theoretical knowledge that sushi is a traditional Japanese dish that consists of boiled white rice and raw fish, but before you tried at least one piece, your knowledge would have been incomplete. It is the act of tasting that shapes the fullness of the apprehension in ways no description can.

Returning to the concept of evil. Contemporary armed conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine or in the Middle East, reveal its embodiment in daily life. A child taking shelter from shelling internalizes evil not as an abstract villain,

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<sup>19</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 84.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, 96.

but as a tangible threat associated with destruction and fear. The kid who has seen the damage the invaders bring with their missiles is not scared of the wicked witch. In their nightmares, they hear air alarms and explosions. If they were unlucky enough to see people hurt or even be harmed in such an attack, their understanding of evil would be supplemented with that embodied pain and pictures of Other suffering or even dead people. Living through these manifestations of evil, it has a direct physical and/or psychological impact on the body<sup>21</sup>.

At this stage, one's knowledge is in the process of passing from non-experienced to experienced, from inherited (or absent if it is an entirely new and previously unknown thing or phenomenon) to personal. This transformation is not yet "real", in the sense that it is not fully graspable, for the person who experiences it. Despite its embodied immediacy, it mostly seems to be happening in the background of the mind. Although our attention and interest are not aimed at the experience at hand, our brain reacts to new stimuli and continuously records the changes. In other words, when the individual is undergoing experience, its conceptual integration still remains incomplete, occurring beneath conscious awareness. Applying a dual process theory, we can say that our brain prepares the material by recording the most significant moments, associating them with similar ones in our memory, and storing them until we are ready to analyze them thoughtfully. However, this step can only be taken after some time has passed, when the experience is over and a person is ready to critically reflect on it, since, as A. Schütz stated in his paper "On Multiple Realities", the experience can be understood only in retrospect<sup>22</sup>. Just like with PTSD, one cannot fully understand its effect while remaining under constant stress.

### 3. The world of a veteran

The term *veteran* is used in this paper in a non-common sense to highlight that the *person is experienced*. Thus, the veteran should be understood not as

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<sup>21</sup> Nataliia Reva, "A Journey Towards a New Embodied Problem of Evil", *Análisis Filosófico* 45(2) (2025): 419–446, DOI: 10.36446/af.e1163.

<sup>22</sup> Schütz, "On Multiple Realities": 545.

a retired soldier, but as a person who has lived through an experience in the past and has already had time to make sense of it. As mentioned above, one must distance oneself from the experience to fully grasp it. A. Schütz explained it in the following way: while a person is dwelling in the experienced situation in the present tense, they cannot separate themselves from it and from everything that surrounds them, realizing all in unity; yet, when they return to their experience after some time, they dive into a reflective state, they are already capable of dividing it into pieces, analyzing and classifying<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, the veteran's understanding is not merely a mute remainder of an experience, but a laboriously articulated new knowledge. Returning to the sushi example, once you have tried it and come to an opinion about it, the next time someone invites you to a Japanese restaurant, you already have a vivid picture full of sensorial data, and not only atypical generalized idea, so you know if you would like to eat it again.

The situation is more complicated with the abstract concepts, such as evil. Sometimes, the repetition or avoidance of the experience does not depend on you alone. Moreover, if such an experience has caused a traumatic psychological or physical reaction, any more or less similar situation can work as a trigger and renew it. Let us imagine that the family of the kid from the previous example decided to move to a safer place until the war was over. At first, sudden sounds that might remind the child of the explosions heard from the bomb shelter can scare the child. Of course, sooner or later, they will learn to distinguish these non-threatening loud noises from the threatening ones in their memory. Then, they will be able to rethink their experience with a clear mind. If, for any reason, they choose to reevaluate the concept of evil they had, it will be tied to the invader's hand as the bringer of evil, and the enemy himself will be seen as its embodiment, not merely with its harbinger – the sound.

Let us take another example and consider the case of a woman experiencing pregnancy for the first time. Initially, her knowledge is theoretical, drawn from books, parental classes, and second-hand stories. Before getting pregnant, she was on the same level as any other outlooker. Once pregnant, she becomes a dweller, navigating emotional, physical, and psychological chang-

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<sup>23</sup> Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 70.

es. For nine months, she lives through these discoveries. Finally, when she gives birth to her child, the experiencing stage is over, and she can start the process of conscious rediscovery of the meaning of the concept of “being pregnant”. In other words, only after childbirth does she become a veteran, ready to enter a reflective stage, allowing her to reinterpret and solidify her understanding of the experience.

In contrast to voluntary experiences like trying sushi or pregnancy, particular events, such as cancer or war, are imposed upon the individual and often are out of one’s control. These involuntary experiences force a confrontation with reality that transforms theoretical knowledge into embodied understanding, often under distressing circumstances. That is what we have with the example of evil. Children in the bomb shelter did not choose this experience. They would have preferred to have a normal childhood and never reevaluate their understanding of evil, war, death, and so on. Still, whether they choose to or not, individuals throughout life cyclically pass through these three stages. Some experiences prompt repeated transitions between the stages, allowing continual refinement of understanding. Other experiences can pass unnoticed if ignored (when a person is not interested in changing their knowledge, meaning they deliberately choose to remain at the level of the outlooker on some matter and feel good about it).

The problem may arise when dwellers split into two groups: those who want to avoid adjusting their knowledge in the face of changes, stuck with an outdated theoretical understanding that does not correspond to historical reality, and those who have undergone intellectual transformation. It often happens with prejudices, like chauvinism, racism, sexism, antisemitism, islamophobia, etc. They can be passed down by the previous generation, flawed education, political or religious ideologies, and remain even when they are proven wrong. The last two are specifically challenging to escape from and require individual readiness to overcome them. Good news, they can be changed with the revised knowledge and personal experience of We-relation with the other group, which can benefit and accelerate this metamorphosis.

## RESPONSE: In search of (co-)understanding

A. Schütz insisted that understanding correlates to meaning<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, to correctly interpret the words of the interlocutor, one should be either sure that they speak the same language, namely that all the words they use have the same meanings, or keep in mind that the words could have additional hidden meanings that they need to deduce by paying more attention to the context and (un)verbal hints. A. Schütz claimed that people of one societal and cultural background do not have (or at least have fewer) problems understanding each other because they share the stratum of shared meanings. However, as I showed above, regardless of the socio-cultural environment, this stratum can undergo changes on the individual level. These changes might be insignificant, like with material concepts: knowing or not knowing the taste of durian will not irreversibly change your life. However, when experience concerns abstract concepts, especially moral ones, it can lead to significant changes, affecting related concepts as well.

For instance, imagine a person whom a partner or a parent has abused. The violence they suffered from the person who was supposed to love and protect them may make them rethink the whole concept of love, trust, merit, obedience and even their own self, and invent a series of unhealthy assumptions, such as “he beats me because he cares about me”, “I gave her a reason to be aggressive to me”, “I deserved to be punished”, etc. Others who do not have such a traumatic lived experience may not understand what this person is going/went through. These persons themselves may not fully apprehend it until they end the cycle of abuse and examine the damage it has caused. This leads us to the central question: *if individuals within the same cultural and temporal context assign divergent meanings to shared concepts, how can genuine understanding be achieved?* In search of a response, we will review the roles that society, companions, and individuals themselves play in this process.

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<sup>24</sup> Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 168.

## 1. The role of society

Europe, including Austria, A. Schütz's homeland, has undergone significant changes since his time. It has become much more multicultural and diverse. Today, people living in one society can have completely different cultural environments. Some may argue that it has always been the case of Jews in Europe; as Hannah Arendt described, the "pariah people" who remained distinct (sometimes chosen, often enforced) within European societies<sup>25</sup>. However, in our times of mass migration (for better work opportunities or studies, and still, unfortunately, because of wars), it is no longer the case of Jews alone; these unique communities within communities are more varied and widespread now. There are Asian neighborhoods, Turkish and Middle Eastern communities, African and Indian societies all over Europe. Because of the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU (and not only) opened their borders for many Ukrainian refugees who organized their own communities.

Within their own communities, immigrants can preserve their origin and transmit their language, customs, religion, and cultural heritage to their children. Of course, to fit a society, foreign or their own, people must know how it works and be ready to accept its rules and laws. Still, it may remain mentally foreign to them if they keep comparing the things they have taken for granted in their own country with the ones they have encountered in their new home. The case may be even harder for forced war migration, since war can change the fundamental need of its victims that host communities unknowingly leave unanswered<sup>26</sup>. However, if we talk about the second generation, the children of the immigrants, raised at home in their parents' native language and at school in their country's mother tongue, do they become people of two cultures which are equally relevant for them, or does society, as a major factor, win over local influence (or vice versa)?

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<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 66–68.

<sup>26</sup> Natalia Reva, "From Assimilation to Hospitality: Rethinking The Case of Education for Displaced War Children and the Necessity of Care", Special Issue "Humanitarian international law: A youth perspective", *Youth Voice Journal* 16(1) (2025): 70–71.

Society furnishes the outlooker's shared "starting grid" of meanings, those taken-for-granted typifications that make coordination possible. As Berger and Luckmann put it in a lapidary triad: Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product<sup>27</sup>. This circular co-constitution explains why outlooker-level concepts feel both obvious and compulsory. The higher the influence of society and the trust in its unquestioned codes, values, and modes of action, the easier it is for people to find common ground. Ideally, society should foster plurality as the primary condition of human action<sup>28</sup>, a supportive environment that accommodates diverse experiences while providing common ground for understanding and growth, remembering that acculturation strategies should involve balancing heritage culture with dominant norms (see Berry, 1997).

Nevertheless, society should be prepared to adapt to meet the changing times. Often, social questions such as same-sex marriage, abortions, gender equality, political powers, the vision of the future course of the country, etc., become the stumbling blocks and reasons for miscomprehensions and disputes. When shared typifications lag behind lived change, misrecognition becomes socially patterned rather than merely individual, and whenever people feel that they are not heard or understood by their society, they become ready for radical actions, because plurality is also a condition of all political life<sup>29</sup>. When this happens, it means that society, as a homogeneous stabilizing force, fails its mission.

## 2. The role of companions and contemporaries

Companions (co-present in time and space) and contemporaries (co-present only in time) stage the interactive phase of intersubjectivity by being the catalysts that move people from outlooker to dweller. As acknowledged earlier in the text, modern technologies have expanded the idea of face-to-face

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<sup>27</sup> Berger, Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition, Second edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

communication. Now, we can communicate directly with anyone anywhere on Earth without leaving our flat, meaning that we are no longer limited to the people in our communities. This communication can help us step out of our social bubble and learn more about the Others. Curiosity and openness of the mind are the fertile ground where shared understanding blooms. These new theoretical insights, so different from what we have, can further encourage them to explore new experiences: travelling to another country, learning a new language, trying a foreign cuisine, and so on.

A. Schütz emphasized the immediacy and intimacy of interactions with physically co-present companions<sup>30</sup>. I will insist that the level of intimacy and immediacy depends less on physical co-presence and more on the same values, shared experiences and meanings created by them. Let us imagine a person whose gender does not coincide with the sex they were born or whose sexual preferences are people of the same sex as they are. Let us say that this person's family and society do not accept them as they are, so they cannot share their true nature, which makes them feel as if they do not belong there. However, thanks to social media, they could find Others with the same views and experience of discrepancy between their own self-identity and body. In this case, the intimacy in their interactions and mutual understanding will be higher than with the people of their own socio-cultural environment.

Technologies have also enabled our ability to interact with contemporaries who are personally unknown to us. We follow the world news, celebrities, bloggers, podcasters, politicians, and scientists on social media. Sometimes, our own posts can be shared and re-shared by many people, causing debates on the internet. We can create communities and have relations with people we have never met in real life, sharing, in this way, the vivid present with them. Do they deserve to be called companions, or are they still contemporaries whose role is limited to a pen-friend from a creative writing website or an admirer of your photographs on Instagram? The limit between these two categories lies not only in the presence or absence of a direct connection, but also in the level of intimacy of communication and how much of the personal

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<sup>30</sup> Schütz, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, 544.

experience has been shared between both sides, meaning how much understanding was created based on shared meanings.

### 3. The role of individuals

Society, companions, and contemporaries set the stage, but individuals still need to do the indispensable integrative work. In other words, if the society provides us with codes and recipes needed for the outlookers, companions, and contemporaries to help us open our eyes, so to speak, and move to the level of the dweller, only we and no one else can make veterans out of ourselves. Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a precise name for this hermeneutic labor one should undertake: understanding involves a fusion of horizons<sup>31</sup>. We can discuss different horizons in this context, referring to the varying perspectives of individuals based on their distinct biographical points and experiences that clash in an encounter, as seen in the example from the previous subsection or in different horizons within one person when their personal experiences contradict or diverge from the “know codex”. The fusion of horizons does not mean an unconditional adoption of the other’s perspective, but rather the creation of something new, although sometimes replacement may occur.

A. Schütz wrote that common-sense thinking overcomes the differences in individual perspectives. That can happen only when people are willing to see the situation from the Other’s point of view, and a We-relation is put before separate I and You, and our biographical differences<sup>32</sup>. In any interaction, we simultaneously act as the subject and the object. We study our interlocutors and are studied by them. Moreover, we can also study ourselves in the interaction with the Other: how we feel about them, whether we should trust them, whether their words resonate with us, and so on. Thus, just as we remain aware of our subjectivity, we must extend the same recognition to others. We should keep in mind that we deal with the subject through their own stream of consciousness, which, even though it functions in the same manner,

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<sup>31</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method, Second, revised edition*; translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London; New York: Continuum, 1989), 305.

<sup>32</sup> Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 183–184.

can lead them astray. Seeing a living Self behind the person will improve communication.

When disagreement arises, it is more effective to first investigate the “because” motive, the experiential context behind the Other’s perspective, before engaging in argumentation. We should first try to understand how the other person thinks. To do so, we must put ourselves in their place and identify our experience with theirs, remembering their subjectivity<sup>33</sup>. As Simone Weil reminds us, attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity<sup>34</sup>. Individual attention is what allows an outlooker to notice when their typifications are failing, a dweller to stay with difficult experience without defensiveness, and a veteran to render their hard-won meanings communicable. Therefore, sharing your lived experiences is the best way to lay the background for a better (co-)understanding. Only when both sides build a solid foundation of shared meanings and values will small misapprehensions not cause global misunderstandings and result in miscommunications.

## Conclusion

As A. Schütz observed, the knowledge we possess is largely inherited from our social world, yet it is far from static. Every new experience is a challenge to it. Experience constantly reshapes this inherited stock, challenging its adequacy and coherence. Some experiences enrich existing knowledge, while others shake the ground, forcing people to reevaluate their ready-made judgments and beliefs. Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to revise them. Therefore, as A. Schütz mentioned, the knowledge one has can be incoherent, not free from contradiction and not always clear<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, misunderstandings can arise not only from pre-given biographical differences but from divergent experiential paths that alter the meaning of shared concepts.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, 176.

<sup>34</sup> Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, transl. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 75–76.

Even within the same socio-cultural context, individuals may interpret key ideas, such as trust, freedom, or love, in drastically different ways.

Society supplies the outlooker with a stabilizing background of typifications, recipes, and public meanings that make possible the coordination with it. When lived experiences outpace inherited types, society begins to mishear its own members. Recognizing this link explains why some conflicts are not “private disagreements” but patterned misrecognitions: an outlooker public applies yesterday’s types to tomorrow’s lives. Thus, for society to function cohesively, it must remain responsive to these shifts. Institutions, discourse, and collective narratives must adapt to reflect emerging realities. At the same time, individuals themselves should be willing to reconsider the knowledge they have with the newly presented data and try to co-create a new, meaningful ground when the old one is lost. To do so, they must recognize the subjectivity of Others, engage empathetically, and remain open to revising their own assumptions. Companions and contemporaries become the crucible in which shared meaning is enacted. Bringing the different world horizons forth together in joint activity, the outlooker’s second-hand grasp thickens into first-hand uptake.

Veteran understanding is not merely surviving the event; it is the achievement of telling it (to oneself and others) in a way that can revise shared meanings. This is where concept repair occurs, and where testimony requires audiences and institutions that are ready to listen. Mutual understanding is not a given tool but a co-created mechanism, continuously negotiated through shared experiences and reflective dialogue. When inherited meanings fail, the remedy lies not in retreating into old dogmas but in forging new meanings together. This process requires not only attentiveness and imagination but also the willingness to prioritize the We-relation over individual certainty. In doing so, we preserve the possibility of genuine communication in our increasingly complex and ever-evolving world.

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