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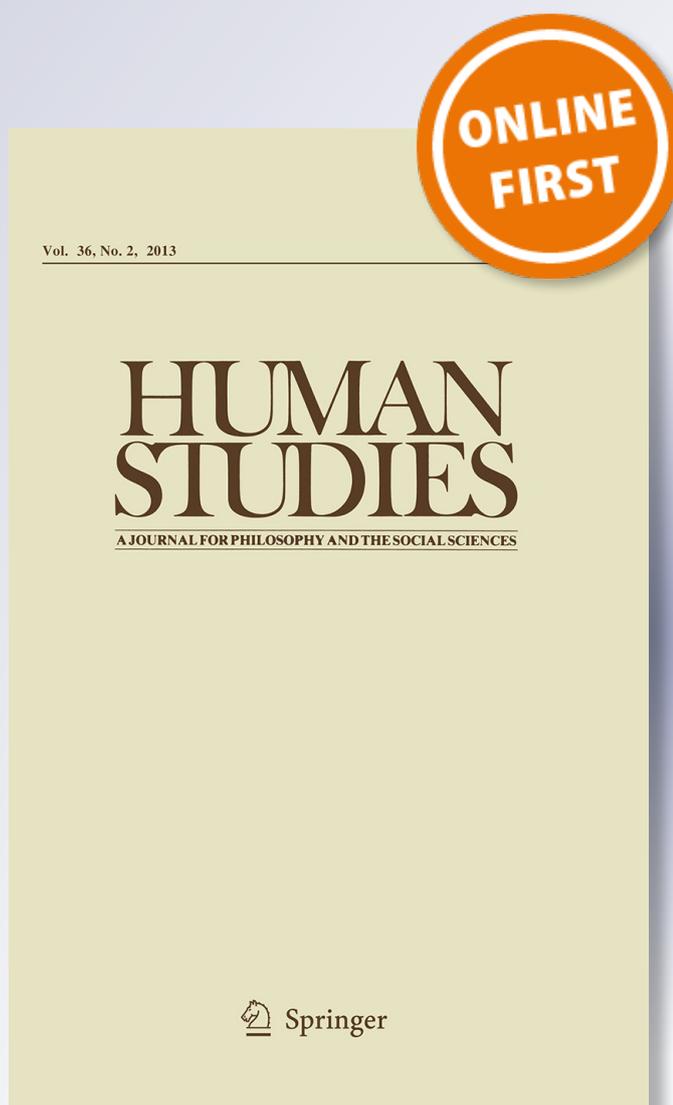
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Alfred Schutz' Theory of Communicative Action

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Abstract This paper addresses the notion of communicative action on the basis of Alfred Schutz' writings. In Schutz' work, communication is of particular significance and its importance is often neglected by phenomenologists. Communication plays a crucial role in his first major work, the *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* from 1932, yet communication is also a major feature in his unfinished works which were later completed posthumously by Thomas Luckmann: *The Structures of the Life World* (1973, 1989). In these texts, Schutz sometimes refers to "communicative action," and he comes to ascribe a crucial role to communication within the domain of the life world he calls everyday life. Based on Schutz' texts, I shall first attempt to critically reconstruct the defining features of his notion of communication and communicative action. As a result, it emerges that Schutz' notion of communication, particularly in its early incarnation, seems to be, at first glance, characterized by a dichotomy between virtual communication, that is communicative action in a narrow sense, and non-virtual communication. As I want to show with respect to the seemingly established dichotomous distinction between "mediated" and "immediate social action," Schutz himself started to overcome this dichotomy. Based on this thesis, I will try to sketch a basic outline of a theory of communicative action, a theory less formulated by Schutz' than built on Schutz' writings. As the idea of communicative action, and particularly the transgression of the distinction between mediated and immediate action, affects the very structures of the life-world described by Schutz and Luckmann, I will ultimately demonstrate that any mundane phenomenology of the life-world requires a triangulatory method.

Keywords Phenomenology · Sociology of knowledge · Communication theory · Mediatization · Constructivism

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Introduction¹

Although communication has already been addressed by Husserl, it is regularly of minor importance to most phenomenologists. Alfred Schutz is one of the exceptions, a phenomenologist who addresses communication even in his earliest writings. Whereas those manuscripts which were inspired by Bergson (Schütz 1981/1924–1928) only address communication in terms of symbols, in his first “Husserlian” monograph, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* from 1932 (2004/1974/1932), he tackles the problem of communication in some detail. Later, Schutz also incorporated the American pragmatist analyses of communication as a basic social process, particularly the work of Cooley (1909) and Mead (1934), into his phenomenological perspective. Communication still figures importantly in his “Notes” (“Notizbücher”²), written in the late 1950s: the rough draft of what should have become his major work had Schutz not died in 1959. This work was finished and complemented posthumously by Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life World* (1973).

In this paper I want to build on the fact that Schutz did not just talk about communication in general, but also the more specific term “communicative action”. The notion of communicative action was famously coined and first systematically used by Jürgen Habermas in his theoretical masterwork *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1985/1981). Although Habermas often refers in this book to the “structures of the life-world,” he is not referring to any use of the term by Schutz.

Schutz, in fact, uses “communicative action” only in passing. Nevertheless, “communicative action” (*kommunikatives Handeln*) is already mentioned explicitly in his *Sinnhafter Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (2004/1932: 259).³ By way of this reference, it is quite obvious that the crucial category of “Kundgabe” (2004/1932: §22) can be considered strongly related to “communicative action”. Schutz also uses the word in the first chapters on the “Structures of the Life-World”, which he formulated himself (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 25f.).⁴ It is therefore quite reasonable that Luckmann should use the term in his rendering of the “Structures of the Life-World” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 109). Whereas Höflich (1996), in his excellent analysis of the use of media technology in the life world, takes this to constitute a “theory of communicative action,” one should, however, concede that the words “communicative action” are used only in passing and without the indication of them as scientific *terminus technicus*.

¹ I am grateful to René Wilke and two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

² The notes were written before his death between 1957 and 1958. They include several hundred pages of text which have been published as “Notizbücher” as appendix in the German version of *The Structures of the Life World* (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 215–404), yet not in the English version (Schutz and Luckmann 1989); in referring to the notes, therefore the German version will be quoted.

³ In his Bergsonian manuscript on the theory of the life-forms from 1925f., Schutz addresses issues of communication. Thus, he takes “speech” as “language kat exochen” (1981/1924–1928: 178), yet he does not make use of the word “communication”.

⁴ Schütz formulated the “Notes” in German; wherever I am referring to his publications in German language, I shall use his German spelling (“Schütz”).

Although Habermas has demonstrated the usefulness of communicative action as a basic category for the social sciences, his concept explicitly deviates from what he calls the “hermeneutic idealism” of the Schutzian “structures of the life-world” (Habermas 1985/1981). In particular, the contrast between “teleological,” instrumental action, and communicative action does not conform to the theoretical frame of Schutz’ theory. In this paper, however, I do not attempt to criticize Habermas’ theory of communicative action or compare Habermas’ theory to Schutz.⁵ Rather, I want to demonstrate that Schutz provides a very helpful analytical scheme for the formulation of such a theory. To be more exact, I will not try to exegetically reconstruct a theory of communicative action which can be found in Schutz only in a rudimentary form. Instead, I want to try what may be called a “constructive reading” of Schutz, constructive reading meaning an attempt to critically build on his analysis. In the next part of this paper I shall indicate the relevance of communication to Schutz. As a preliminary outline of the most important aspects of what Schutz considers relevant to communication, one can identify a dichotomous concept of communication, as I want to show with respect to the seemingly established dichotomous distinction between “mediated” and “immediate social action” which Schutz himself started to overcome. Based on this core problem of mediated communication, the third part of paper attempts to identify key features of a theory of communicative action which may avoid these problems. In conclusion, it will be argued that the problems are not accidental. In particular the fundamental distinction between immediate and mediated action is due to a distinction between face-to-face communication and mass media communication: a distinction that proves formative of the life-world of Schutz and his contemporaries. Given that contemporary forms of communicative action are no longer separated between “mediacy” and “immediacy,” the mundane analysis of the structure of life forms (of which “communicative actions” form part) requires triangulation with the analysis of the analysts’ sociohistorical apriori.

The Importance of Communication

Although Schutz stressed the importance of Husserl’s phenomenology throughout his career, he quite explicitly differed from Husserl in two important respects. First, he quickly came to oppose Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity (Schutz 1966). While Husserl held the view that the other is constituted transcendently by consciousness, Schutz considered the other as *empirically* given or even as preceding ego (at least in a genetical view). Phenomenology, thus, cannot start with the subject but rather with intersubjectivity. “For in the natural attitude our being is being with others from scratch. As long as human beings are born of mothers (...), the experience of other ego will precede the experience of one’s own ego genetically and constitutionally” (Schütz 2003/1943: 115; transl. by author).

The empirical relevance of the other is related to another deviation from Husserl. In his “notes” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 318f.), Schutz indicates this difference

⁵ As one attempt, see Knoblauch 2011.

by asking in an explicit confrontation of Husserl, “why should ... language, and the communicating alter ego not belong to the social life world?”⁶ When considering the importance of communication, one has to qualify the notion of life world. As is generally known, Schutz’ concept of the life world, introduced in his later work, is dominated by the role of everyday life. While the life world as the world of our various experiences can be subdivided into “multiple realities,” defined by their different “epistemic styles,” the reality of everyday life is highlighted because of its “paramount” character.⁷ As Srubar (1988) clearly stated, the paramount status of everyday life is, among other aspects, mainly due to the importance of the “pragma” and its peculiar form of spontaneity. In fact, Schutz had already stressed the importance of pragma, in his manuscript on “personality” (2003/1943), as the distinctive kind of relation to the world of the “natural attitude” of everyday life. As important as “pragma” may be, it is often forgotten that Schutz also defines the life-world of everyday life by communication. To Schutz, it seems, communication is tightly connected to the other most distinctive feature of the natural attitude: its sociality. Thus, in his notes for example (“Notizbücher”), Schutz makes the claim that the paramount character of the world of daily life is due to the fact that it is “only here that we can communicate with our fellow beings” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 306, transl. by author). Also, in his essay on symbols, he states: “*communication can occur only within the reality of the outer world*, and this is the main reason why this world (...) has the character of *paramount reality*” (1962b: 322; italics in the original).

The importance Schutz ascribes to communication allows us to understand the emphasis he placed on the analysis of signs, language, and symbols. Although he explicitly draws on Mead with respect to his ideas about the “manipulative sphere” (as we shall see below), he did not explicitly adapt Mead’s concept of communication, which would have such a great impact on the social sciences (e.g., in “Symbolic Interactionism,” “Social Constructivism,” and Habermas’ Theory of Communicative Action). He also discards the behavioristic identification of “the vehicle of communication, namely the working act, with the communicated meaning itself” (1974: 205) and did not adopt the various technical communication models which became popular during the 1950s.⁸ It seems, therefore, that he conceived of communication as something that could indeed be defined in his own terms.

⁶ One has to add that Husserl, in his own manuscripts on intersubjectivity published later, also adopted a quite mundane stance towards communication. See Knoblauch 1985.

⁷ Schutz himself indicated that the dominance of the paramount reality of everyday life “may itself be a result of cultural transformations, such as the secularization of consciousness and the rationalization of the ‘attention a’ la vie’” (2003/1943: 71).

⁸ In the Konstanz archive I found a letter by Arno Huth to Alfred Schutz (5.11.1956) including a range of quotes and diagrams of communication theorists, such as Lasswell, Weaver, etc.

The Dichotomous Concept of Communication

As mentioned above, Schutz uses the word communication and communicative act at various points in his work. There are some aspects which he considers essential to communication. Firstly, there is a dichotomous model of communication which predominates, particularly in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*.

Instead of making a rare reference to “communicative action,” in his *Sinnhafter Aufbau der sozialen Welt* Schutz seems to prefer another expression which can also be found in Husserl (Knoblauch 1985) “Kundgabe”. “Kundgabe” is translated into English as “announcement,” yet this translation is misleading. While the English ‘announcement’ underlines the publicity and formality of the act, the German notion emphasises the *intentionality* of the act. A closer translation may, therefore, be “communicative act”. Along these lines, Schutz also seeks to stress that communicative acts are not just any “expressive movements” but, rather, intentional “expressive acts”. While expressive movements do “not aim at any communication or are the expression of any thoughts for one’s own use or that of others” (Schutz 1974: 178), expressive acts are those “whose in-order-to-motive is that someone takes cognizance of something”. Therefore, “expressive acts are always genuine communicative acts (*Kundgabehandlungen*) which have as a goal their own interpretation” (1974: 179) or which want to “project the contents of one’s consciousness into the outer world” (Schütz 2004/1932: 259, transl. by author).

It is quite obvious that Schutz draws a rather sharp distinction between “expressive movements” and “expressive acts” which is paralleled by and underlines the peculiarity of communicative acts (as opposed to any “communication”). Indeed, this dichotomy is also expressed in his theory of signs in which Schutz suggests a distinction between signs and symptoms. While the former are significant, the latter are “only” indicative of something. The same pattern occurs in the distinction between testimony (*Zeugnis*) and product (*Erzeugnis*): where the latter is but the product of an action, the former is a product which manifests certain intentions. Finally, the dichotomy also affects the recipient. Thus, in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (2004/1932: 264), Schutz argues that every “communicative act” (*Kundgabe*) is motivated not only by something but also by the addressee; the communicative act needs to be oriented to the addressee “in the manner of the in-order-to” in such a way as to be motivated by the reception of an addressee (2004/1932: 264). This motivation does not remain one-sided but is reciprocated in what Schutz calls “*eigentliches Fremdverstehen*”, or “virtual understanding of others”. While virtual “communicative acts” refer only to those who exclusively address the other’s intention and require a full, focused understanding of the actor, virtual understanding of others “consists of us projecting the goal of the other’s action in our phantasy as our action” (Schütz 2004/1932: 241, transl. by author).

The German notion “*eigentlich*” he uses in this context is quite significant as “*eigentlich*” and its substantive “*Eigentlichkeit*” plays a decisive role in Heidegger’s early ontology. In his *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger 1972: §38), Heidegger relates to the essential aspects of being as opposed to the non-essential forms associated with “Man” and “everyday life”. These are considered not to be “*eigentlich*” and are evaluated as deficient (Heidegger 1972: §

38).⁹ Although Schutz does not agree with Heidegger's ontological interpretation of "Eigentlichkeit", his argument is clearly built on a dichotomous scheme.

"Kundgabe"	"Communication"
Expressive act	Expressive movement
Intentional	Non-intentional
Sign	Symptom
Testimonial	Product
Virtual ("eigentliches") Verstehen	Non virtual ("uneigentliches") Verstehen

This dichotomous scheme, which encompasses the various categories of Schutz' notion of communication as sketched above, clearly indicates that there are two different forms of communication which are mutually exclusive in a similar manner to the opposition between "eigentlich" and "uneigentlich".

The Problem of Mediated Communication

As crucial as this dichotomy may be to Schutz' concept of communication, it is quite obvious that it obstructs Schutz' idea of a mundane phenomenology. Schutz argues that everyday life, rather than being a deficient form of being (as Heidegger would have it), is at the very core of the social world. Nevertheless, this dichotomy dominates Schutz' early work, and it still lingers in his discussions of communication in his later works.

Although the dichotomy seems to lose its distinction in later works, Schutz and Luckmann in particular extended it to another aspect of social and communicative action: mediated action.¹⁰ In *The Structures of the Life-World* Schutz and Luckmann propose a distinction between "immediate" and "mediated action". This distinction is not just of a subordinated order—it is treated as one of the two basic distinctions in their theory of social action (the other distinction concerns the reciprocity of social action and is drawn between "one-sided social action" and "reciprocal social action").¹¹

The dichotomy may appear at first sight very plausible. In fact, it seems to be the basis for the assumption of the primacy of the face-to-face situation since it argues that immediate social action is the basis of all "real communication" as it alone allows for the "fullness of symptoms". It is, therefore, the "prototype" of all social interaction, as Berger and Luckmann suggest.

The plausibility of the paradigmatic character of the face-to-face situation has been questioned by a number of theorists. For example, Derrida (1967) questions the

⁹ This distinction has been criticized by Adorno (1964) as profoundly ideological.

¹⁰ Schutz himself uses the notion of "mediated communication" only in the sense of "indirect communication" of experiences from different provinces of meaning in the world of everyday life. See Schutz 1962, 1962a.

¹¹ Schutz and Luckmann elaborate on these distinctions in chapter E of *The Structures of the Life-World* which is on "social action". The importance of these forms of action for Luckmann is stressed in his theory of social action (1992a).

priority of presence (or “co-presence”) as a metaphysical assumption. Derrida’s question is echoed by media theorists (Meyrowitz 1994) who rightly challenge the assumption that an experience, e.g., of something mediated audiovisually, must necessarily be “less” of an experience than an experience of something “present”. Is a house we see in front of us really so different to a house we see on a mobile phone?

As difficult as this question may appear from the point of view of the structures of the life-world, it seems that the rigid distinction between mediated and non-mediated forms of action can be attributed more to Luckmann’s interpretation of Schutz than to Schutz himself. While Luckmann restates the rigid distinction suggested by *The Structures of the Life-World* in his theory of social action (1992), Schutz himself does not mention anything like this distinction in the notes (“Notizbücher”). Indeed, there are reasons to believe that Schutz would have cast doubt on the relevance of this distinction. Support for this belief may be found in his analysis of the primary and secondary “manipulatory zones” proposed by Mead (1964): the primary manipulatory zone is the field of our unmediated actions, i.e., actions which are mediated by the body only; the secondary manipulatory zone is accessed by means of instruments and technology. However, while the distinction between these two zones provides the basis for Schutz’ and Luckmann’s dichotomy between immediate and mediated social action, in the notes (“Notizbücher”) Schutz criticizes the idea that the dichotomy between the two spheres is based on “Mead’s behavioristic basic attitude” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 378, transl. by author) and should be “rethought” (i.e., reworked in what was to become his book), particularly with respect to the reach of different senses and their corresponding forms of communication. In his “The Well-Informed Citizen” (1964c) he describes his near prophetic vision: “no spot of this globe is more distant from the place where we live than sixty airplane hours; electric waves carry messages in a fraction of a second from one end of the earth to the other ...”. However, this is not due to the substitution of immediate by mediated action, but rather the changing degrees of anonymization: “[w]e are less and less determined in our social situation by relationships with individual partners within our immediate or mediate reach, and more and more by highly anonymous types which have no fixed place in the social cosmos” (Schutz 1964c: 129). Thus, if there is a difference between the face-to-face situation and mediated action, it is more gradual than categorical. In the words of Schutz: “In the face-to-face situation, the conscious life of my fellow man becomes accessible to me by a maximum of vivid indications. Since he is confronting me in person, the range of symptoms by which I apprehend his consciousness includes much more than what he is communicating to me purposefully. I observe his movements, gestures and facial expressions, I hear the intonation and the rhythm of his utterances. Each phase of my consciousness is co-ordinated with a phase of my partner’s conscious life” (1964b: 29).

Aspects of a Theory of Communicative Action

As we have seen, Schutz casts serious doubts on the relevance of the dichotomy between mediated and immediate “face-to-face” social or communicative action.

This theme is also explored in his earlier analysis of communication which carries the traces of a dichotomy rather foreign to his later notion of life-world. We see here at least two good reasons to argue for a notion of communicative action which should avoid this dichotomy. Therefore, in this part of the paper, I shall summarize the dominant features or aspects of such a non-discriminative and non-essentialist notion of communicative action. By “aspects” I mean the semantic elements which are more or less explicitly involved in Schutz’ discussion of communication. These aspects can be found not by focusing on the dichotomies themselves, but rather on the dimensions by which Schutz identifies these dichotomies.

While Schutz cannot use the word “Kundgabe” in his English texts any more, in his final “notes” (“Notizbücher”) he still makes reference to the German notion “Kundgabe” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 325). This word not only expresses the fact that communication is a form of action, hence our use of the notion of communicative action, but, as indicated above, “Kundgabe” stresses the intentionality of communication as action. In this sense, communication shares the features of the actions and social actions Schutz analysed in so much detail in the work preceding *The Structures of the Life-World* (Schutz and Luckmann 1989: chapter V).

Although Schutz has also been working on the idea of typification of actions, the frequent misinterpretation of “intentionality” as referring only to actions projected in a state of wide awakesness requires some qualifications. Therefore, one must ask if communicative action is only valid if we perform it wide awake and with explicit purpose. In Schutz’ writings, this question has already been answered negatively in the 1930s. In particular, his paper on “personality” explicitly allowed for the possibility of a form of pragma which does not necessitate intention and projection (2003/1943: 133). His theory later indicates how actions can be “sedimented” and turned into part of a routine as described in his concept of typification. This routine, one has to stress, is not simply a subordinated element of his theory. Rather, it constitutes one of the basic features of everyday life, thus making it analytically possible to conceive of communicative action, not only as a highly intentional form of action guided by the communicative rationality of “validity claims” (as Habermas 1981 argues), but as action that can be routinized and performed in an almost “automatic” way, described by Luckmann (1992b) as communicative genres.

The fact that typification not only concerns objective meaning but also actions, their courses, and their projects, hints at the role of knowledge in any kind of action, including communicative action. As meaning is the one decisive *definiendum* of action, Schutz gradually came to see that most meaning, which is the guiding force behind action, has been constituted before and is, as he defines it, “derived from the social stock of knowledge” (1964a). This definition becomes the subject of the sociology of knowledge. *Knowledge*, therefore, is not limited to the “content” of communicative action, such as typifications or “schemes of interpretation” for signs and relevance structures, and cannot be separated from action. Moreover, knowledge also relates to the courses of action. A most insightful example of the role of knowledge in the courses of action is exemplified in Schutz’ detailed analysis of chopping wood in his *Sinnhafter Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (2004/1932: §21) which considers the different schemata or “frames” by which we interpret this course of action as either a mere event in the outer world or as action intentionally planned by the actor observed.

It is in this example that Schutz marks the difference between communicative action and a form of action which is only intentionally oriented towards someone else. Whereas we can find the latter in “speech act theory,” but also in Schutz and Luckmann’s (1989) concept of “one-sided social action,” the former is characterized by reciprocity. *Reciprocity* is the form of intersubjectivity which allows for the possibility of understanding. Reciprocity cannot be reduced to reciprocating in the sense of exchange theories of action. It must, instead, be considered as a basic principle implied in more specific forms of interaction; such as exchange, transaction, and reciprocation, without being reduced to these forms. Rather, it is already implied in communicative action. Instead of being only “oriented” towards someone else, communicative action also implies some kind of anticipation of the other’s understanding of one’s action. It is the interpretation of the course of action by another actor (who is or may be oneself¹²) which lies at the root of Schutz’ notion of reciprocity. It is on this basis that the actor may understand the other better than him or herself, since, due to the multitude of symptoms, “my partner is given to me more vividly and, in a sense, more ‘directly’ than I apprehend myself” (Schutz 1964b: 29).

Reciprocity seems to be a crucial notion to Schutz since it provides the basis for his solution to the problem of intersubjectivity. This solution includes two “idealizations”: the interchangeability of standpoints and the congruency of the systems of relevancies. Both kinds of idealizations, which form part of the life-world of everyday life, have been detailed by him in various writings (see, for example, Schutz 1962b: 316). As important as these “idealizations” may be, one may doubt that they can be regarded as processes only in the context of subjective consciousness. If one agrees with Schutz that everyday life is basically social, its sociality could only be explained by the idealizations of reciprocity.¹³ This is confirmed in Schutz’ later work which stresses that the sociality of the life-world is not constituted by consciousness but by an encounter with empirical others. It is this encounter with the empirical other which engenders reciprocity.

Reciprocity, in Schutz’ terms, forms a part of communicative action which is characterized by the fact that the goal of action lies outside of the action itself in the understanding of the other as expressed in his or her motives. At this point, communicative action can no longer be reduced to “Kundgabe” as if it was a one-sided “speech act”. Instead, communicative action implies what Schutz in his later works designates as “transcendence” of the other (or “mediate transcendence”). As opposed to theories of double contingency, the other is not in principle inaccessible (Luhmann 1996), nor is the other representing an “absolute other,” as Lévinas (1987) suggested. The transcendence also goes beyond Habermas’ (1985) assumption that the pragmatic use of language provides something like a common ground for both ego and alter, who are implicitly (or “contrafactually”) assuming their equality in discourse. As intersubjectivity is based on an empirical encounter with

¹² In the “notes” Schütz uses the notion of “Mich” (which appears to be a translation of Mead’s [1934] “me”) to indicate the socially reflexive self.

¹³ It is in accordance with this understanding that Schutz’ mundane phenomenology is then a reconstruction of the life-world from the perspective of the subject, as Gurwitsch (1974: 115) states: Schutz (2003/1943: 115) himself conceded explicitly that he assumes sociality to genetically precede subjective consciousness the same way as mothers precede their babies.

others, the major principle of intersubjectivity is reciprocity: a principle which is proving “successful” or “unsuccessful” empirically in communicative action.¹⁴ Schutz illustrates this with the famous analysis of questions and answers: „I ask you a question. The in-order-to motive of my act is only the expectation that you will understand my question, but also to get your answer; or more precisely, I reckon *that* you will answer, leaving undecided what the content of your answer may be. (...) The question, so we can say, is the because-motive of the answer, as the answer is the in-order-to motive of the question. (...) I myself had felt on innumerable occasions induced to react to another’s act, which I had interpreted as a question addressed to me, with a kind of behaviour of which the in-order-to motive was my expectation that the Other, the questioner, might interpret my behaviour as an answer“ (1964a: 14).

This example both demonstrates that, and indicates how, reciprocity transforms an actor’s motive into a different motive which is, so to say, mirrored on the basis of idealizations and on the basis of the working acts performed in time. Thus, intersubjectivity is solved by a sequential concatenation of actions which, due to reciprocity, allows for the synchronization of motives and the coordination of actions. This type of reciprocity forms the basis for the empirical analyses of the “structures of social action” by conversational analysts (Atkinson and Heritage 1984).

The empirical nature, accounted for by the focus on the actual performance of communicative actions by, e.g., conversation analysis, must not be considered as escaping theoretical reflection (Garfinkel 1967). Rather, its empirical character is an important aspect of Schutz’ notion of communicative action which relates to various dimensions of his dichotomy, expression, signification, and products/testimonials. The empirical nature of communicative action is due to the assumption that communication can only occur in the reality of the outer world on which it depends, as Schutz emphasizes at various points in his writings. As early as his “Worlds of Work” from 1943 he stressed that “social actions presuppose communication and communication is necessarily grounded upon working acts” (2003/1943: 39).¹⁵ Therefore, communicative actions not only presuppose the anticipation of the other’s understanding of one’s action, they also imply that these understandings become empirically objectified as “events or objects in the outer world that are produced by the communicator and, on the other hand, events and objects in the outer world as perceived and apprehended by the interpreter” (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 326). The empirical relation between the actor and the outer world, including the interpreter as the other actor, is mainly due to what Schutz calls “working” (*Wirken*).¹⁶

Next to founding its empirical nature, the notion of working has several other implications for our understanding of communicative action. Thus, it connects communicative action intimately to instrumentality in a way which evades

¹⁴ Schutz uses the pragmatic idea of “successful communication” explicitly (1962b: 321ff).

¹⁵ Here he also mentions the notion of “communicative work”.

¹⁶ Objectivation is here used in the sense of Berger and Luckmann (1966: 49) as “products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men as elements of a common world”.

Habermas' basic opposition between communicative and instrumental rationality. Thus, the possibility for considering woodchopping as a communicative act results from Schutz' decision to consider the act of working as one essential aspect of the communicative act. Working relates to the fact that action affects the outer world in such a way as to be reciprocally perceivable and experienceable by others in the communicative environment.

This already indicates the third consequence: Schutz' notion of communicative action implies the body which is either executing the action or transmitting it.¹⁷ The body, however, is not only the "executor" but also expresses communicative action, i.e., it figures as a field of expression—a phenomenon Schutz analyses with respect to the face-to-face interaction already introduced in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*.

The role of the body is not only reduced to expression as a form of meaning. In his "notes," Schutz considers it as a process of action in time. In fact, he explicitly refers to the notion of "performance," in his own German translation "Verrichtung" (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 369). While performance underlines the temporal aspects of communicative actions, Schutz also stresses the role of the body. In fact, "bodily movements" (*leibliche Bewegungen*) are not just expressions, they are part of "working acts" (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 369). This way, he allows for the possibility of integrating what Habermas (1985) calls instrumental acts into a concept of communicative action which escapes Habermas reduction of communication to language use and, therefore, allows for the integration of bodily communication and the body in general.¹⁸ As any communicative action involves movements of the body and effects on the outer world, it seems misleading to separate communicative action and instrumental action. Again, we may illustrate this with respect to his case of woodchopping in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*. Although woodchopping may, according to one "schema of interpretation," be considered a "mere" instrumental act, there is no doubt that the working act can always be considered as oriented to others, i.e., as communicative action.¹⁹ Woodchopping, for example, may be enacted with the intent of showing that one is only acting with things, to show that one is working, or to show one is exercising.²⁰

The consideration of working also has effects on Schutz' notion of signs, products, and testimonials. However, as he distinguished "significant" signs from "mere" symbols, he stuck to the idea that various levels of meaning can be distinguished by types of signs. Indications, signs, and symbols appear to him as

¹⁷ Schutz mostly uses the notion of "*Leib*" which stresses the subjective perspective on the body (i.e., "Körper").

¹⁸ I should add that Habermas' stress on the three references of communicative action (expression, proposition, and appeal), adapted from Bühler's organ model, would need to be taken into consideration for a theory of communicative action—a task which cannot be pursued here.

¹⁹ The use of the axe may be a way of expression, it may also be a way how to show off (being masculine, being tough, being dangerous), it may also mean just "chopping wood," a case in which the instrumental meaning is identical with the objective meaning.

²⁰ Let me repeat that, also for Schutz, the other to which these actions may be addressed can always be "one's-self" in the sense of a socialized self (see Footnote 13). In one of the most daring interpretations, Luckmann (1970) argued that the other can be, in principle, everything the actor is oriented to intentionally.

systematically related to different forms of transcendence (Schutz and Luckmann 1989).

With respect to signs, Schutz obviously maintained his rather essentialist distinction (substituting “indication” for “symptom” and adding a distinction between “symbols” and “signs”) as already suggested in his dichotomous model. Yet it seem to me rather doubtful to assume that “symptoms” of bodily expression are essentially different from “signs,” the former being indicative only of something else in space and time (corresponding to his “minor transcendencies”), the second significative for the meaning of other actors (corresponding to “mediate transcendency”).²¹ In addition, Schutz’ stress on the theory of signs led him to ignore another insight he shared: as important as signification may be as a “carrier” of meaning, there is a logical necessity for this carrier.²² Any sign is not only presenting something, it is, first and foremost, a form of objectivation. Notoriously, the notion of objectivation plays an important role in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckmann 1966). However, Schutz also mentions the role of objectivations as a means of understanding the other. Objectivations, in his sense, include movements, gestures, or action results as well as objects, instruments, or monuments (2004/1932: 268). They form an essential part of what he calls the “communicative environment” (Schütz and Luckmann 1989: 319).

If the notion of objectivation implies that instrumentality is, first and foremost, only one socially constructed type of objectified meaning, neither the distinction between signs and objects nor the distinction between types of objects (such as “testimonials” and “products” as Schutz indicated in his dichotomy) can be considered as basic. The transgression of this distinction is expressed in an interesting manner in Schutz and Luckmann’s theory of instruments.²³ To them, instruments, as objects and as technologies, are objectivations of meaning.

The argument that objectivations are more basic than signs does not question the latter’s relevance to communicative action; however, rather than assuming a substantial difference between kinds of signs, the purpose of objectivation is to explain that signs differ with respect to the way they are materially performed (as spoken sounds or objectivated “products”). In this way, objectivation corresponds analytically to the role of working, the body and empiricity in communicative action.

Performance and objectivations are not only relevant categories for the theory of communicative action, they also represent the missing link between intentionality of the subject, materiality, and sociality. Instead of elaborating this argument (see

²¹ It is quite obvious that Schutz considers the theory of signs as one of the major ways to guarantee “real” communication for symptoms do not allow to indicate subjective intentions. We know that Schutz drew this distinction in order to distance himself from behaviorism (which took every expressive act as movement). This distinction downplays, however, the relevance of symptoms which, one should be reminded, account for the primacy of the face-to-face relation over any other kind of situation.

²² This can be done without denying that the “relative directness of social relations,” he stressed, is one of the problems of “basic significance for the understanding of the constitution of social reality” (1964b: 29).

²³ They consider instruments as objectivations of links within in-order-to contexts, particularly those which are routinized. More specifically, their instrumentality resembles routinized actions whose sense is not any more conscious. Still objectivations, their meaning is, so to say, hidden in practice.

Knoblauch 2011) and receding further from Schutz, I would rather turn back to Schutz and ask how the critique mentioned here may affect his general approach.

Conclusion

As announced in the beginning, this paper tries to reconstruct the theory of communicative action inherent in Schutz writings. Although Schutz used the notion communicative action neither frequently nor systematically, I have tried to show that the systematic development of his writings implies such a notion. Particularly, his gradual separation from the essentialist assumptions of the dichotomy suggested in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, which was inspired by Heidegger, indicate that Schutz tended towards a notion of communicative action which would encompass Weber's idea of social action (Weber 1922), his thesis of the intersubjectivity of everyday life-world as well as his strong emphasis on "pragma" in terms of performativity and working.

Although Schutz retained some aspects of the dichotomy until his later works, it is particularly interesting to note that he seemed to distance himself from that distinction which was not only considered basic by his most fierce critics (reducing him to a "microsociologist") but also by his closest students: the distinction between mediated and non-mediated action. This distinction, however, causes problems on the analytical level as well as on the empirical level, where mediation is increasingly challenging forms of immediate, direct social action.

The distinction is not only questioned on theoretical grounds by Schutz. In recent years, it is also questioned by the revolutionary changes in communication. Digital technologies of communication allow for forms of action which are highly individual and specific and which are characterized by a "secondary sensualization" (Krotz 2007). This means that the use of audiovisual technologies, which may be complemented by other sensory technologies such as kinaesthetics, are able to reproduce the "multimodality" of symptoms known from face-to-face-interaction on the level of technically mediated social action. Famously, all these changes result in the possibility of new forms of what are called communities, networks, and social relations.

Although Schutz hinted at a critique of the separation between the two manipulatory zones and, consequently, between mediated and immediate social action, he did not elaborate on this critique. Moreover, his notions do not encompass the forms of communicative action brought about by the new technologies. The reason for this is quite obvious. For as far sighted as Schutz has been in anticipating the extension of the manipulatory zone and "mediated communication," he took mediated communication mainly as a form of mass-media communication, e.g., newspaper.²⁴ Therefore he considered an increasing anonymization of social typifications as their major results (Schütz and Luckmann 1984: 312).

One cannot, of course, criticize Schutz for not anticipating the modern combination of communication technologies and digitalization and the resultant

²⁴ As far as I remember, he did not consider the telephone.

transformation of the “medial structures of the life-world” (Ayass 2010). One must, however, concede that the need for a reformulation of the concept of social action, the de-centering of the face-to-face situation as the paradigm for every social action and the reconsideration of mediatization as a basic category of action theory²⁵ casts some doubt on the claims of “universality” embodied in the structures of the life-world (Luckmann 1973). Even if one appeals to the “strict” phenomenological method, the question remains: how can a singular person, in her sociohistorical situation, claim the universality of his or her experiences? This criticism, however, does not mean that phenomenologists have to discard the idea of the life world *in toto*. Instead, if we retrospectively admit that any description of the life world is imbued by the sociohistorical conditions in which they are written we must also infer that Schutz’ description is dependent on some historically specific features. The focal role of the face-to-face situation is certainly one of them and telephone seems still to be too Schutz. A universal theory of the life-world, therefore, needs triangulation to facilitate verification, correction, and, possibly, falsification of particular features. This triangulation must consider different cultures and different times. It is probably a consolation to many that whatever is happening at this point in time may again be corrected by later findings (of the *scientia perennis*) so that we may take comfort and hope that, in the future, some other forms of communication may prevail.

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²⁵ A more elaborate discussion of mediatization and communicative action can be found in Knoblauch (in print).

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