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The Interrelation of Phenomenology, Social Sciences and the Arts
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how the one fictively and the other seriously refer, as seen above, to past events and their causes that have already happened and cannot be influenced but can be interpreted and reinterpreted. And while the addressees of history as well as the novel are Schutzian contemporaries, there is reference to the life-worldly consocial situation in this passage about historical research, to which one can readily also add a comparison with reading a novel.

The procedure of historical research is the same as interpreting the words of someone who is speaking to me. In the latter case I gain through communication an indirect experience of what the speaker has experienced directly. In the same way, when I am reading a historical document, I can imagine myself face to face with its author and learning from him about his contemporaries. (Embree 1998, p. 62)

5 Conclusion

In summary, the three types of literature analyzed by Schutz in his talk before the Alumni Association of the Graduate Faculty of the New School in 1955 can be reinterpreted to shed light on the three types of cultural science addressed implicitly and explicitly in his Wissenschafellehre. There is more to this in my construction than I have space here to render and there may be more to this effect in the Schutz Nachlaß, but the deeper lesson is that there is no doubt more to be learned for science theory beyond his letter but in his spirit from further reflection on those types of literature themselves.

References


Projection, Imagination, and Novelty: Towards a Theory of Creative Action Based on Schutz

Hubert Knoblauch

And I first taught them what dreams needs must prove True
vision, Aeschylus, Prometheous Bound, pp. 327f.

1 Introduction

Within the last decades Schutz has become a classical author in sociology as well as in the broader range of the social sciences. As part of his analysis of the life-world (which has been elaborated by Schutz and Luckmann 1973), he devised a theory of action that has moved into the centre of attention. Action is indeed not only a major category for economy – a field in which Schutz can claim some expertise – but particularly for sociology. In fact, in his opus magnum, the Phenomenology of the Social World (Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt, Vienna 1932), he specifically addresses action as a basic issue in sociology. Here, he explicitly refers to Weber’s classical approach to define sociology as the science of social action. It is widely known that Weber (1922, 2003) defined social action as a form of action meaningfully oriented towards others, the category of action being defined as conduct guided by meaning. It is, as Schutz contended, the definitio, "meaning," that lacks clarity in the definition by Weber. To Schutz, phenomenology seemed particularly well equipped to clarify the terminus meaning. In drawing mainly on Husserl’s phenomenology (and altering this approach later in his The Structures of the Life-World), he developed a notion of action defined by intentionality and the time structure of human experience as the basis for its meaning.

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For although Schutz acknowledges the role of fantasy and imagination as activities of consciousness, he dismisses the role of imagination in action in favour of a more rational concept. In doing so, he cuts off an important part of his theory and gets into contradictions: On the one hand, imagination and fantasy form part of action, on the other hand, they are cut off from action in a distinct "province of meaning." I want to solve this problem by suggesting to include imagination into action and projection and creativity, in order to, then, show which aspects of imagination contribute to creative action. In order to clarify this notion, I shall draw comparisons to Joas' theory of creative action (Joas 1996). In the conclusion I shall address the societal dimensions which provide the social background for the transformation in the concept of action analysed theoretically. It will be argued the increasing importance of creativity and imagination is due to general changes in contemporary society. In this context, creativity is not any longer limited to the arts but extends into the fields of science, technology, and economy. From this point of view, the theory of creative action has to be considered as a part of a theory of action that is open to societal changes, including the transgression of art and creativity.

The argument I want to put forward is essentially based on the thinking of Alfred Schutz. Instead, however, of relating to Schutz in a exegetical manner only, I will try to build on Schutz in a constructivist manner (as Merton in his On the Shoulders of Giants (1965) suggested): The theoretical problem that is identified in Schutz's thinking will not be understood as refuting Schutz's theory but it will be taken as resulting from prevailing viewpoints pertinent to the society of Schutz's time (Barber 2004). Therefore, the argument should be understood as building on, refining, and reformulating the theory of Alfred Schutz which, to my mind, forms one lasting basis for the practice of doing sociology.

2 Everyday Prophets or: Action as Anticipated Future

If whatever is new may be difficult to assess "objectively," i.e., in a way to be verified intersubjectively, from the perspective of the actor it can be simply conceived of as opposed to the old, i.e., something that is already known. Therefore it seems promising to start the inquiry about the creative action by looking at those aspects in Schutz's theory of action which are related to the future. Indeed, in his famous essay on Teiresias, Schutz (1964) posed the question explicitly: If and how we can have knowledge about the future. Teiresias was the seer in Greek mythology who was able to see the future but unable to interfere in events. In order to answer the question, Schutz takes an explicit mundane attitude: He is neither interested in the transcendental presuppositions of action, nor interested in the transcendent experience in itself that is linked to the "seer" as a religious figure. His main intention is neither to reconstruct the charismatic state of consciousness of the seer as an extraordinary individual nor to take account of the tragic inability to act with respect to his anticipation of the future. Instead Schutz takes the mythic figure as an extraordinary case that allows him to address the ordinary, common-sense thinking of an ordinary human actor who lives among fellowmen and women and anticipates what may happen when acting. On the basis of the extraordinary example Schutz wants "to prepare the ground for the description of certain features of the manner in which the common-sense thinking of ordinary men, leading their everyday life among their fellow-men, anticipates things to come." (Schutz 1964, p. 281)

The possibility to conceive of (or imagine) future actions is based on the notion of the future as it is given to our experience. Among the experiences that are oriented towards the future, action plays an exceptionally important role. Most other experiences are defined by their relation to prior experiences. Indeed, this temporal relation is constitutive of what Schutz calls experiences: Activities of consciousness bring previously acquired typifications to bear on present experience. Action, as a special kind of experience, differs from these kinds of activities significantly. This difference, he argues, is particularly due to its time structure — to be more exact: to its relation to the future. For in Schutz's view, every action is defined by the state projected into the future, i.e., "modo futuro exacti." To say it in Schutz's words, "I have to place myself in my fantasy at a future time when this action will already have been accomplished, when the resulting act will already have been materialized" (Schutz 1964, p. 290) Note that Schutz here already refers to the central role of "fantasy." For it is by means of fantasy that the project is placed in the future.

But what, then, is considered as the project by Schutz? In answering this question, one must, first, repeat that the project is defined in the particular temporal structure of the "past future," i.e., "modo futuro exacti." In English this corresponds grammatically to saying that the action is imagined as "having been performed." Since action depends on the capacity to imagine something that has been finished in time, it necessarily builds on past action. This view results also in what I would call a "historicism" view on action. To say it in the words of Schutz (1964, p. 290): "I base my projecting of the forthcoming act in the future perfect tense on my experiences of previously performed acts typically similar to the projected one." Therefore one could say that, according to Schutz, actions are guided by the past, for "man in everyday life interprets his past, present, and future in terms of the pre-organised stock of knowledge he has at hand at any moment." However, Schutz goes much further than only arguing that the past plays a role amongst others in conceiving the future. The historicist tendency is due to the consequence that future

5 Although this is very basic to Schutz's understanding of the difference between act ("Handeln") and action ("Handlung") and suggests a universal capacity of humans, there is, as far as I can see, so far no comparative analysis if this quite difficult grammatical form is to be constructed in all languages. As opposed to relativist arguments that stress the differences of languages in structuring time (Wohlf 1956), there are strong arguments to assume that even those languages that do not dispose of similar grammatical structures are capable of producing similar meanings. Cf. Malotki (1983).

6 Quite frequently, Schutz adds that certain rules must apply for such actions: Very often he mentions the "ceteris paribus" rule by which we assume that in general the same conditions are assumed that held for our projected actions, and the "ex grano salis" rule, by which we assume that certain restrictions to the prior typification may apply.
is built on the past: "... in common-sense thinking our knowledge of future events consists in subjective anticipations that are founded in our experiences of past events as organized in our stock of knowledge at hand." (Schutz 1964, p. 292) The future, Schutz claims, is not only guided by the past; it is like a transposal of what has passed in the stream of consciousness into another time mode.

The future as anticipated past – this seems to be the formula of Schutz’s notion of action: Action draws on prior knowledge that “according to my present knowledge the projected action, at least to its type, would have been feasible, its means and ends, at least as to their types, would have been available if the action had occurred in the past.” (Schutz 1962b, p. 73) For Schutz’s theory of action, this formula appeared quite productive since it allowed first to link action to knowledge in terms of typified experiences (and thus to the sociology of knowledge because they can be “handed on”). On these grounds, knowledge provides the basic background for action. Knowledge in this sense always includes what is called “memory” in diverse cultural approaches of “collective memory” yet it cannot be reduced to memory. Albeit in this view all actions may depend on the past, only those are guided by historical knowledge which explicitly reflect the past as past (Tota 2005).

As strong as the historicist argument may be, for a theory of creative action, however, it is quite disappointing. If actions are essentially anticipations of the past, there seems to be no chance for the new and unexpected arising from action itself. Action, it seems, transfers or transposes what has been learned in the past into the future. Similarly to Schumpeter, it would be only the sheer destruction of the old which would allow for the new.

3 Imagination and the Problem of the Provinces of Meaning

Admittedly, this reconstruction of Schutz’s theory of action conceals a decisive detail. In fact, Schutz himself gives two indications as to how the new may enter into action. On the one hand, he makes a hint at where the new may come in; and on the other, he elaborates on one possible resource of the new, that is, fantasy, without, however, allowing for this option. Let us first have a closer look at the latter option since it is a prerequisite for a theory of creative action. We will turn to the former when we sketch the outline of such a theory.

As already mentioned, action is a spontaneous activity oriented towards the future. Future, in turn, is addressed by the capacity of projecting prior experiences. These prior experiences depend, first, on the possibility to typify, for it is typified experiences that are transposed into the future. There is, however, a second resource of the future that is involved: projections. Schutz conceives of projecting as

"Handeln ist zunächst einmal jede auf Zukünftiges gerichtete spontane Aktivität" (Schutz 1974, p. 75).

fantasying action, i.e., “the fantasy of spontaneous activity itself.” Fantasy (or imagination, as he also calls it) seems to be the mechanism or the medium by which what has been typified is being transposed into the future tense modo futuri exacti. In this sense, fantasy and imagination are essential to any action. Let us, therefore, consider how Schutz conceives of fantasy or imagination.

Fantasy or imagination is, in the first place, not always and not essentially linked to action. To the contrary, Schutz considers fantasy or imagination to be what he calls a “province of meaning.” To be more exact, to Schutz, imagination is the title for “worlds of phantasms.” These include “fancies or imageries” (Schutz 1962a, p. 234) as well as “innumerable provinces of meaning,” such as “the realms of day-dreams, of play, of fiction, of fairy-tales, of myths, of jokes.”

The notion of province of meaning is adapted from William James’s notion of “subuniverse.” According to James (1981, pp. 921ff), the reality to which we posit ourselves in action is divided into disparate spheres, such as the reality of science or the world of mythology and religion. Schutz (1971, p. 392) relates to this concept, yet he prefers the notion of province of meaning in order to stress that it is not the ontological structure of the outer reality but the meaning of experience that draws the lines between these “provinces” (or “universes”). Provinces of meaning are constituted subjectively. The concept resembles also the notion of forms of world-making (such as art, science, and everyday life) coined by Nelson Goodman (1978, 1984). As opposed, however, to Goodman (who considers all worlds made by the various forms as equivalent), Schutz assumes that there is one “paramount” reality that dominates in consciousness. He shares this view of a “paramount reality” with William James, which differs however with respect to the reasons for the dominance of certain realities. Whereas James considers sensual perception as the major reason for the domination of one world, Schutz adds action and “pragmas” and sociality to this “primacy of perception” (Schutz and Gurwitsch 1985, p. 364): The paramount reality is the “reality of everyday life.” This world of everyday life is characterized by perception and the sociality of perception (as intersubjectivity), by action and the sociality of action (as social action), and, as one may add, by communication via bodies, an aspect highlighted by Schutz but often overlooked in Schutz’s reception (cf. Knoblauch et al. 2003).

Although the reality of everyday life is, thus, defined as an intersubjective reality, it depends also, as all meaning (and their provinces) on a kind of subjective

8 Jeder Entwurf ist vielmehr ein Phantasieren von Handeln, d.h. ein Phantasieren von spontaner Aktivität, nicht aber die spontane Aktivität selbst” (Schutz 1974/1932, p. 77).

9 One should underline the particularity of this insight. In the French tradition there is long record on “Imaginaire,” the imaginary may be sometimes linked to institutions, yet hardly ever to action. Cf. the systematic and historical overview in Legros et al. (2006).

10 Still in his “notebooks” for The Structures of the Life-World (Schutz and Luckmann 1984) Schutz uses “province of meaning” synonymously with “sub-universes,” “meaning fields,” (“Stützbezirke”) and “meaning areas” (“Stimmgebiete”).

11 Originally Schutz had planned to use “imageries” as a title but then he favoured “fantasy,” Cf. Schutz (1996 [1945]).
“attitude,” i.e., a “cognitive style.” Provinces are separated from other areas in that they are constituted by experiences of a similar kind that are consonant with one another (and form a system) to such a degree that leaving a province of meaning is experienced like a shock (as when waking up). Schutz identified five aspects of the cognitive style of any province or meaning, such as (a) the specific tension of consciousness; (b) the distinctive epoché; (c) the prevailing form of spontaneity; (d) the form of self-experience, (e) the form of sociality and (f) the time-perspective. Thus, the cognitive style of everyday life is characterised by wide awakeness (a), the natural attitude (b), action and working (c), identity (d), intersubjectivity (e), and the “specious present” between subjective time and world time (f).

In his analyses of the structures of the life-world, Schutz focuses very much on the “paramount reality” of everyday life. In addition, he also analyses dreams, theoretical thinking, and religious experiences as provinces of meaning. Finally, he also addresses imagination and fantasy: Imageries and imaginations constitute, to him, a province of meaning on its own: “The compatibilities which belong to the world of working in everyday life do not subsist within the realm of imagery; however, the logical structure of consistency (...) remains valid.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 238) The distinctness of this province of meaning is due to the fact that “.... the imagining self can, in his phantasies, eliminate all the features of standard time except its irreversibility.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 239) Furthermore, Schutz applies all the criteria for a cognitive style and finds that imagination or fantasy should be considered one distinct province of meaning.

As lucid as his analysis is, it is the distinctness of the province of meaning to which I want to draw attention, for it concerns our question as to how we account for the possibility of creative action. Schutz’s thesis that imagination is a province of meaning in its own right establishes a categorical distance to the world of everyday life as well as to action. My argument is that this distance causes problems within Schutz’s own theory. In fact, Schutz suggests “to distinguish sharply between imagining as a manifestation of our spontaneous life and the imageries imagined.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 235) However, imagination, then, is not defined by the images or

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the activities of imagination but rather by its difference from the world of everyday life, i.e., the distinction to action. Imagining is a world in “quotations marks,” that is, those actions imagined remain merely as actions and performances. In imagination, we are “free from the pragmatic motive” and must not be preoccupied with the common environment and its reality. The particular feature is that “imagine as such always lacks the intention of realizing the phantasm”: “the imagining self neither works nor performs.” (ibid)

Schutz separates imagination as a province of meaning not only from the praxis of everyday life (Srubar 1988), but also from other provinces of meaning, such as the sciences, the arts, and religion. This separation often leads to substantialist interpretation of the provinces of meaning as being “essentially” different from one another. And the separation results also in a logical problem. For if the world of fantasy and imagination are so clearly separated from action, how, then, can it be explained that fantasy and imagination have to be considered constitutive of any action? We are obviously faced with a blatant contradiction.

Schutz seems to have been aware of this problem, and he offers two solutions. On the one hand, he gives an essentialist answer: In between the world of imagination and the world of everyday life, he claims, there are intermediary provinces that compare to “enclaves”: “this is, of regions belonging to one province of meaning, enclosed by another, a problem which, important as it is, cannot be handled within the frame of the present paper.” (Schutz 1962a, 233 n. 19.) The example he gives in this footnote is exactly the one that concerns us: “Any projecting within the world of working is itself, as we have seen, a fantasying, and involves in addition
a kind of theoretical contemplation, although not necessarily that of scientific attitude.” (Schutz 1962a) The solution of “enclaves” is not really satisfying since it would exclude imagination from any sphere of action and interaction, as e.g., from playful elements within everyday action. It would mean that we need to implant a continuous “enclave” into the world of everyday life – which would question the very distinction between these two spheres. Even if Schutz’s historicist argument would be true, this solution would not be convincing. For in this case, imagination would not be necessary with respect to what is being projected since all projects are built on prior typifications: “What we preconceive in the projection of our action is an anticipated state of affairs that we imagine as having materialized in the past.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 292) Thus, ideally the whole action is imagined as having occurred. In this case, imagination would only be necessary as a capacity that transposes from the past mode into a mode different from the past. That is, imagination would be identical with a transposition from what has been experienced to something that has not been experienced but is an experience in potentia. One may ask if and how this mode in potential can take on the “future” form, as Schutz suggests when he even assumes that “I have to place myself in my fantasy at a future time when this action will have been accomplished, when the resulting act will already have been materialized.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 290) Leaving aside the problem if a projection has by definition a future aspect, the solution is unsatisfying for imagination cannot just be an enclave to projection. It cannot categorically be separated from action.

Therefore Schutz offers another solution to the problem of the distinction between imagination and the pragmatic sphere of everyday action. This solution may be called gradual. Instead of keeping the boundaries of both provinces, he identifies grades between action and imagination. The most open grade is similar to the grammatical form of the “optative.” Here, options are only considered as pure possibilities without any desire and will for realisation. This form he contrasts to the projections “in potentialis;” that is, if the possibilities between which I choose lie “in my actual and potential reach.” (Schutz 1962a, p. 261) Thus the accessibility of options is differentiated when he distinguishes the fantasy “in potentialis” from its “optative” form: “This potentiality,” he stresses,


17With respect to the world of fiction and play, this critique had been formulated by Goffman (1986) who suggests instead that various “frames” be distinguished by means of conventional signs and rituals.

18As Michael Barber suggests here rightly, Schutz indeed discusses the fact that we are moving between provinces of meaning; the observation, however, already presupposes a “bounded unit” and indicates simultaneously the problems of this presupposition.

19Phenomenologically, the future itself is not available in experience directly; it is only by way of pretentions and of memories of future events that had been expected in the past that future is accessible to consciousness. The assumption that the transposition is identical with the future aspect becomes even more problematic if we consider that imagination does not have a time index (according to Husserl) and is not clearly related to the standard time of action according to Schutz.

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...this possibility of executing the project requires, for instance, that only ends and means believed by me to be within my actual or potential reach may be taken into account by my projecting in fancy; that I am not allowed to vary fictitiously in my fantasizing those elements of the situation which are beyond my control; that all chances and risks have to be weighed in accordance with my present knowledge of possible occurrences of this kind.... (Schutz 1962b, pp. 67-98, 73)

In another text he specifies the ways how the options are reduced with a notion from Roman law. The “conditio potestatis” designates those circumstances that are controlled by the party that decides if they be realised or not (Schutz 1962b). For whatever one may understand by “control,” it refers to something that is known and typified. Action, then, is only realised on the basis of what is known.

The graduation of fantasizing in action into two modes, “optative” and “potentiatis” highlights three features that were not explicit in the “historician” argument: Projections of actions have to be (a) realistic in that I have to know the ends and means in my reach; (b) they must be rational in that I can weigh the options. It is necessary to stress a third aspect which has been overlooked so far: (c) that the fictitious variation and fantasizing of elements “be not allowed” and only those elements permitted which are in my control (of course the control) only is exerted on those aspects subjectively accessible to the actors. At this point Schutz includes a normative element that is essentially linked to the structure of society: For what is under my control not only depends on the knowledge that I have of the situation – and that the knowledge may be sufficiently clear, distinct, familiar, and at in reach. He also has to assume that there is a clear cut division of labour. In this sense they build on a certain social structure, division of labour, and social distribution of knowledge (Schutz and Parsons 1977, p. 45). Before we want to consider the importance of social structure to the theory of action, I want to indicate how Schutz can be understood as laying the grounds for a theory of action.

4 Creative Imagination and Situated Creativity

In the introduction I have mentioned Schutz’s hint at a notion of creativity. This hint is found in his discussion of the sophistic distinction between the téchnē poieitikē (τέχνη ποιητική) and téchnē kēritikē (τέχνη κηριτική), where the former refers to the art of creating something and the latter the art of acquisition (or mimicking, as Plato suggested). Since Schutz relates this distinction to aspects of his theory of action, we can hope for some inferences on the notion of creativity. In his “Choosing among Projects of Action” the distinction between the former, creative aspect of action, and the latter, mimetic aspect of action, is paralleled by his distinction between the “optative” and the “potentiatis” mode of action. Whereas mimicking builds on pre-constituted options of actions, the creative aspect of action is due to the fact that the actors can “probe” the problematic options in their own fantasy, so that these options are embedded in and distinguished by the subjective flow of time. Although Schutz does not elaborate the “creativity” of action any further, the
reference to the role of fantasy in action by Schutz may be considered as a basis to infer how and what other aspects of fantasy play into action.

(a) As already mentioned, the very capacity to transpose a past project of action into another mode (that may be understood as future) is definitely one accomplishment of imagination. Schutz has to presuppose this, for without it projection of something past could not be possible. One may, of course, doubt that this already involves imagination.

(b) Imagination is definitely involved in the case of visualising one’s action. Indeed, Schutz does explicitly refer to this case. Visualisation is by no way restricted to the charismatic capacities of the seer (as “Teiresias”). Rather, also as an actor in everyday life, “I have to visualise the state of affairs to be brought about by my future action before I can draft the single steps of my future acting from which the state of affairs will result” (Schutz 1964, p. 289). Although the sentence reads as if visualisation was necessary for any projected action, the fact that this is one of the few references to visualisation may cast some doubt at this generalization.

(c) Imagination is not only involved in visualisation. One may dare to say that some kind of imagination is already required in the capacity of typification. If typification consists in the selection of certain aspects on the basis of relevance, one may assume that the constitution of types by means of these aspects be an act of imagination, even more so in the case of action. For although Schutz seems to suggest that actions projected build on past actions, he cannot really be claiming that actions projected are the very same. Everyday experience leads rather to assume that the elements of which future actions are built depend on prior actions but that we may combine them in new forms. Thus, if I plan to climb on a certain mountain (that is known to me only under dry conditions) while it is raining, I would possibly need to combine the journey with other situations at other places where it was raining.

(d) Although Schutz’s historicist argument does not mention this case of imagination, also the combination of elements of typified past experiences into a new action requires imagination. (We will come back to this case in the next paragraph).

As combination in general is a form of variation, variation may be considered to be one of the most important imaginary techniques. Husserl gives an example of what is meant by variation: “Imagine an individual house that is painted yellow at the moment. We can easily imagine it to be blue or its roof to be made of slate instead of tile, and also its shape may be different” (Husserl 1972, p. 416). This example is telling since it (1) shows that the provinces must not be distinguished (it may be a real house); moreover, (2) fantasy is varying features of the house, and finally, (3) this variation must not remain in the frame of the eidos, i.e., we may leave the typifications which Schutz anchored in the past. In addition to visualisation, combination (variation), also idealisation and generalisation are accomplishments of imagination that contribute to action projection. This point has been stressed by Gurwitsch (1974), p. 63). In looking for the phenomenological fundamentals of scientific practice, Gurwitsch argues that our basic assumptions on bodily behaviour are based on idealisations and generalisations. “Reflecting on his de facto mobility, the perceiving subject can readily imagine being endowed with a greater freedom of movement than he actually enjoys.” (1974, p. 63) The generalisation from “accessibility in fact” to “accessibility in principle” is an “operation of the imagination” by which mobility is generated. Generalizations extrapolate individual experiences into something that is not given itself but only imagined by induction.21

One could certainly add more forms of activities of imagination contributing to action. Here it should suffice to indicate that there are a number of such imaginary activities involved or implied in the phenomenological analysis of action. This is not to say that any form of fantasy or imagination is already part of action. But instead of considering imagination a province of meaning distinct of action, it would be obviously much more plausible to consider the “pure form” of fantasy and imagination as an idealisation of the imaginary elements of action: Because we imagine something that is not (yet) present in action, we can also imagine something that is not present in action at all.22 By linking action and imagination, we do not only avoid the contradictions Schutz has to cope with, we would also have one way to explain how the new gets into action. To say it in the words of Gurwitsch (1974, p. 106): “Imagination proves to be the necessary condition of every attempt to bring about changes in the real world.”

Imagination is a first element we need for a theory of creative action so that we could argue that creative action is a form of action that exploits the potentials of imagination. This is, however, only half the story, for it requires that imagination be related to projects of action. Whereas Schutz tried to solve this relatedness to action with the sharp and utterly problematic distinction between imagination and action, he gives another indication exactly at one of the few points where he addresses the creation of the new in action. In “Choosing among Projects of Actions” (Schutz 1962b) he explicitly refers to the ways in which “new” projects may be made. He underlines the assumption that prior actions are being projected according to their type. It is not necessary, he writes, that the same projected action be known in its “individual singularity,” with its “singular ends” and “singular means” and corresponds to the singular situation of action (Schutz 1962b, p. 84). Schutz does not elaborate on this idea, so we have to make inferences as to what this could mean.

21 In this sense one would even be able to consider abduction as one of the basic imaginary techniques to create the new, as Reichertz (2003, p. 60) stresses, for by way of abduction we may infer from one known element to two unknown.
22This idea is also to be found in Husserl’s Ideas (§74a) where he stresses the move from the "single fantasy and the content of the fantasy" to the fiction, i.e., the reality "as if."
Quite obviously, he underlines the singularity of subjective knowledge on the one hand and of the situation of action on the other. Singularity here means that the very moment and the specificity of the action and the situation differ from the way how we anticipate it typically. This singularity is a strange argument for Schutz since he seems to assume that we always grasp the world by means of typifications and that the subjects act on the basis of typifications. Indeed, one may argue that phenomenology aims at what has been called “generalised subjectivity,” i.e., at the search for the generalizable feature of subjectivity (cf. Knoblauch 2008). So even if he can argue that the singularity adds something, one has to admit, first, that this would be the case in any kind of action, including “non-creative” ones, and, second, that the singularity evades any analysis that focuses on typifications. Thus, singularity does not explain the possibility of the new.

Given the singularity argument, there are two other options for Schutz. One source of the new lies in the subjectivity of knowledge and motives. As should have become clear above, it is imagination that can be identified as the subjective source for changing knowledge and motives. The second option, the situation, has not yet been analyzed systematically by Schutz himself. Although he does not use situation as a key term in his theory of action (it is rather derived from Parsons), it may be used as a link to one of the few theories that explicitly focuses on creative action by Hans Joas (1996). Joas defines creativity as the “ability to cope with situations.” Situations he takes to be any relation people have to other humans and objects of which these persons are aware and to which they orient in their action. Situations pose problems to actors that are being solved by a procedure Joas calls situated creativity. Situations are not only guided by our goals and projects but also by our perception of situations and thus by our habitualized dispositions and by our bodily ability to act (again we can compare them to typification and knowledge). These forms of perception of the situation enter into our action plans and realizations and lead to transformations and adoptions that can be defined as situated creativity. Creativity, hence, consists of solving problems and adapting to situations. This way, the actions are no longer defined by projects and goals but by the ways how these goals are adapted to reality.

This notion of situated creativity by Joas does not differ strongly from a phenomenon Schutz has been describing. Indeed, in order to adapt to situations, we do not only draw on elements of actions that we have acquired before but we may also need to recombine these elements by way of imagination. Whereas the recombination is based on imagination, it is “triggered” by what Joas calls the situation. Situation, however, is not understood in a realistic sense of something “objectively” given (as was assumed by Parsons). Rather (and much more in accordance with a constructivist approach), it is the subjective perception of the situation that “causes” actors to readapt the elements of their inventory. At this point one could now introduce again the “singularity” of the situation and put forward the argument that every situation is different. Yet there is also a possibility within Schutz’s analytical scheme in order to explain this “adaptation” to the situation. For Schutz frequently draws on Leibniz’s gradation of knowledge: Typifications may vary in clarity, distinctness, familiarity, and consistency (cf. Schutz and Luckmann 1973). This is to say that we may project actions on the basis of vague, unclear, unfamiliar, and inconsistent knowledge. The situation in which we act must not only be regarded as contingent. Rather, it is also typified while acting, i.e., in situ. Adaptation to the situation then means that the typifications given to prior experiences are clarified by, assimilated to, or substituted by typifications made in situ. Creativity in this sense consists in the continuous deviation from projected courses of action – as vague or as clear these courses may have been projected.

5 Outlook

The situated creativity highlighted by Joas has also been addressed by Suchman (1987). She identifies it as a situational flexibility of actors in “situated action,” i.e., the adaption of actions to the situation. Thus, situative adaption, she argues, is an omnipresent feature of “primitive” non-Western forms of action, e.g., in Melanesian navigation methods. Moreover, situated action of situated creativity can also be found in contemporary Western society. Wagner-Pacifici (1998), for example, supports the idea that actors today are open for contingencies in their action that is also caught in the interest in improvisation (an aspect also hinted at by Schutz’s analysis of music playing). And Rosa (2005, p. 454) stresses that to the degree that the pace of society is accelerating, the importance of situatedness is increased. As a result, actors cannot rely any more on the stability of their past experience in order to project their actions.

The increased importance of situations, therefore, increases the need for creativity. This has been empirically demonstrated, for example, with respect to work in high technology settings. On the basis of empirical analysis of the work in complex organizations, Heath et al. (2000) argue that the work with information and communication technology necessarily demands actors to adapt to the indexicality of each situation and, thus, to be “creative.” This necessity for “creativity” has also been identified as an essential requirement to highly qualified work also in other sectors of modern society. Bröckling (2007), for example, argues that the need for creativity is one of the most important resources that neoliberal economy demands of the new kind of “knowledge workers.” Fantasy and imagination have become instruments of a modern heuristics of action, and this is explicitly so, be it in the psychology of creativity, in the human potential movement, or in management by vision. Indeed, the “creative industry” has been acknowledged as one of the rising industrial sectors promising continuous wealth to the most advanced regions of late capitalist societies (Florida 2004). Quite obviously, we cannot talk about creativity without accounting for its role in society.

23 Bröckling (2007, pp. 157f) distinguishes between six semantic aspects of creativity: artistic action (expressivity); production; problem-solving action; revolution (similar to Schumpeter’s entrepreneur); life; and game.
Of course, the role of society is also acknowledged by Schutz who, in his foundation of the sociology of knowledge, stressed that most knowledge guiding actors in real life is, as he calls it, “derived” from the social stock of knowledge. Linguistic typifications as well as other forms of objectifications transmitted socially provide individuals with pre-fabricated typifications. As such they enter into the subjective stock as knowledge by which actions are guided. On these grounds one must not only concede that large parts of subjective knowledge depend on the social distribution of knowledge within a society; one should, rather, recall that this is the reason why Schutz considered his analysis as contributing to the sociology of knowledge as its major area. For the analysis of creative action, this means also that the question as to what is considered as “new” has to be seen as depending on the current state of knowledge and the social distribution of knowledge. Not only can the “new” vary according to different social groups, types of actors, and traditions of actions, as the rising role of the “creative class” shows, but also the very motive to orient towards the new may be differentiated in a society.

In addition to the “knowledge of” and “orientation towards” the new, the functional differentiation and institutional specialisation of knowledge also affects action particularly in the sense of Schutz. One must recall at this point how important it is for Schutz’s notion of action that the actor be in “control” of one’s means and ends of action — and that this is one of the reasons for the distinction between the “fantasy” part of projections from the realistic part. Under conditions of a complex division of labour as it prevails in contemporary society, however, the “control” over one’s means and ends of action is difficult to maintain — even if Schutz only means the subjective disposal of the meanings of things on fantasy. Remember that the loss of control had been already been complained about by Marx, and Weber as well as Durkheim confirmed that this is a feature of modern society: Modern actors have to act in situations that depend with respect to their ends as well as their means on other actors as well as technologies and media which are, at best, controlled by organisations (which again depend on actors who observe them). On these grounds, it seems utterly unrealistic to assume that the control of the means and ends remains a basic condition for action, and innovation studies show that this also holds for Schumpeter’s entrepreneur who is bound into bureaucratic and “systemic” regulations.

However, the situation does not leave us in the “iron cage” of modern bureaucracy, as Weber (2003, p. 536) feared. On the basis of Schutz’s theory of action, we cannot only understand that the loss of control of action opens the way to include imagination as an essential resource for action. One may dare to claim that this is exactly one of the major societal changes affecting action: That the boundaries to imagination became permeable, that the “reality theory” has changed and everyday life opened its gates towards imaginary concepts and theories that are open to various symbolisms (from the symbolism of dream interpretation to the multitude of self-fantasies that have been labelled identities), symbolisms that, rather than being social utopias, remain bound to the individual actor and her imagination.

Admittedly, the role of imagination has been acknowledged quite often. Thus, Murphy et al. (2010) celebrate the necessity of imagination for the modern knowledge economy, and, with respect to general sociological theory, imagination has been an important topic since the times of Santre and Castoriadis which diverted from France to the Anglo-Saxon discussion. Yet the use of the same words does not mean that they have the same meaning. “Imagination” in the French tradition (Legros et al. 2006) overlaps with the “idealistic” aspects of what in the German of Husserl, Weber, and Schutz would be called “meaning.” Imagination, in the sense of Schutz, however, refers to a specific faculty of human consciousness, i.e., to activities by the subject. And it seems that it is exactly this kind of subjectivity to which modern societies, and, consequently, contemporary social theories seem to respond when they look for one of the major resources for “innovation” in society. It is not any more the individual entrepreneur but the subject and the difference of its meaning from socialized knowledge which is the resource for novelty. With respect to general sociological theory this means that Schutz (and in his tradition particularly Berger and Luckmann) joins in the post-structuralist thesis that most parts of subjective (typified) experiences are “derived from” society and thus are social in origin. The phenomenological approach at the same time shows that we cannot reduce the subject to something that is totally constructed by society. Even if the contents of imagination are an “imaginative collective,” (Legros et al. 2006) or, to use Schutz terms, even if the typifications used in imaginations are “derived” from the social stock of knowledge, the analysis of creativity does not get around the essential subjectivity of imagination — as basic as this subjectivity may ever be (cf. Knoblauch 2008).

References


24 At this point, the role of communication enters into phenomenological theory. Cf. Knoblauch 1985.
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