

***The Man Without Qualities* and the Problem of Multiple Realities: Alfred Schutz and Robert Musil Revisited**

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1 Introduction

It has recently been stated that “Musil’s works contain some of the most profound reflections on the state of modern society and modern consciousness ever written” (Harrington 2002b, p. 59). Harrington seems to be quite right in this assumption, and one also can agree with his further statement that, Musil “exploits the literary devices of irony, ambivalence and aesthetic distance in order to communicate a particular style of thinking about the social conditions, movements, ideologies and contradictory identities of modernity” (Harrington 2002b, p. 60). While through the voice of Ulrich, the central protagonist of his novel, Musil “*ironizes* our frequent perception of modernity as dominated by the evils of alienation, anonymity, fragmentation and occupational specialization,” he “introduces a dimension of critical reflexivity into the leading discourses of modernism, long before anyone ever heard of such movements as deconstruction, post-structuralism or genealogical criticism” (Harrington 2002b, p. 61).

This “dimension of critical reflexivity,” this potential of reflection has not found much consideration in former sociological analyses of Musil’s works presented from a phenomenological point of view. And this especially is true for those about his main work *The Man Without Qualities*. This applies no less to Peter Berger’s most prominent interpretation of Musil’s novel through Alfred Schutz’s concept of multiple realities. But it is not the present purpose to introduce Schutz as a postmodern social theorist here. Harrington himself does not refer to Schutz in his argumentation. Nevertheless, in the following I will try to point out, that particularly the theoretical approach Peter Berger chooses in interpreting Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*, i.e., Schutz’s analysis of multiple realities is suitable for

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a methodological analysis and presents further options of interpretation of Musil's novel even though Berger himself does not focus on this theoretical potential (see Endress 2005, 2006).

Peter Berger wrote two fine studies on Musil and his great novel *The Man without Qualities* by using Schutzian categories for his interpretation. While the first of these studies is devoted to Schutz's concept of multiple realities (Berger 1978), the second is concerned with the problem of identity (Berger 1988). Berger's interest especially in his first contribution is a mutual illumination and illustration of certain Schutzian concepts and Musil's novel (Berger 1978, p. 344). And this interest in Musil's novel is related to his overall thesis, that it was Musil's intention in his *The Man without Qualities* to bring out "certain key features of any society, that is, with the intention of delineating the essential structure of everyday reality" (Berger 1978, p. 346).¹ Ulrich himself in a clear-sighted moment has an idea that refers to the sense of a prototheoretical examination of the structures of life, because he feels that, as Musil puts it, "right down at their roots the diversities there are in life lie very close together" (Musil 1954, pp. 416f.) ("*Die Unterschiede des Lebens liegen an den Wurzeln sehr nahe beisammen*" (Musil 1978a, p. 644.)). In the following remarks, I share this intention, but I want to use it for an analytical purpose in a somewhat different direction. I was always somehow unsatisfied with Berger's analysis, even though it hits an important dimension of Musil's work as well as illuminating aspects of the similarities between Schutz and Musil. In what follows, I will try to give this feeling an analytical expression.

Berger's general interest in using Schutz's conception of multiple realities to explore certain aspects of Musil's novel is to argue that "the other condition" ("*der andere Zustand*") Ulrich is searching for, in order to share it with Agathe, can be described as a multiple reality in the Schutzian sense. We should remind ourselves that it is Berger's aim to just demonstrate the usefulness of sociological conceptions to shed some light on a literary work. He does not intend to contradict or to correct other interpretations of this novel, that is, to engage in literary criticism, nor does he pretend to provide an analysis of its structure as a whole.² The following remarks will be guided by the thesis that the descriptions Berger uses to some extent do not fit with Schutz's idea and with Schutz's employment of the concept of "multiple realities" Berger introduces in his interpretation of Musil, which includes two possibilities: The cause of this could either be a result of Berger's exposition or of Schutz's introduction.

In order to give consideration to both alternatives I will (Sect. 2) start my analysis with a very short summary of the story Musil's novel tells us. This will be followed

¹See also Berger 1978, p. 343: "there are dimensions of the novel's world that have nothing to do with [its] location in space and time."

²For my actual purpose I will leave aside the question whether Musil here attempted to provide "a solution of the problem of reality from the perspective of modern consciousness" (Berger 1978, p. 343). For other studies on Musil's novel from a sociological point of view see: (Harrington 2002a, 2002b), Kuzmics and Mozetic (2003), and Wicke (1997).

(Sect. 3) by an analysis of Berger's study, by pointing out some of its aspects which I think to be of special relevance for my current purpose. I will then (Sect. 4) go back to Schutz's introduction of the concept of multiple realities in order to ask if Berger's analysis stands its test. The result of this analysis will give us the chance (Sect. 5) to leave the concept of multiple realities aside and try to give an analysis of the structure of the argument presented by Musil without reference to Schutz's concept. After having done so I will finally (Sect. 6) again return to Schutz and try to ask whether we – in a maybe revised form – can still use the concept of multiple realities in order to analyze some of the most important aspects of Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*.

For this approach also applies what Berger already conceded for his own works: No claim can be raised for the following thoughts to submit an over-all construction of the opus or even competently interfere in literary criticism about the interpretation of the works or the arrangement of Musil's literary estate. Beyond a literary interest in the narrower sense, the interest of a social-theoretical interpretation is to provide additional explanations about the conceptual structure of Musil's novel. To quote slightly varying, Arnheim, Ulrich's great opponent, at this point: "[...] the pattern of reality [of the novel] is always richer than those mere outlines which we call principles [of interpretation]" (Musil 1954, p. 411; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 640).

2 Musil's Novel

Before starting with the actual analysis it will be helpful to shortly summarize the plot of Musil's novel.³

The novel *The Man without Qualities* depicts a labyrinthine structure of events, actions, and relationships during the course of a single year between August 1913 and August 1914, which is right before the beginning of World War I. It is mainly set in Vienna, the slowly decaying Emperor's city of the Kingdom of Austria-Hungary. Concerning the objective time covered by the novel, book one narrates the events between August 1913 and Winter 1913/1914, while the second one concentrates on the months up to summer 1914. The protagonist of the novel is Ulrich, a young man in his early thirties who decides to interrupt his quite successful university career abroad to return to the capital of the dual monarchy for 1 year. The said year is documented by the novel. That is the frame story presented by Musil.

The novel is not only formally split into two parts, marked by the separation into two books, the first one completed, the second one remaining unfinished. The

³All subsequent numbers, unless otherwise stated, refer to the pagination of the German Edition of *The Man without Qualities* prepared by Adolf Frisé which first had been published in 1952 (Musil 1978a, b). The following English quotes of Musil's novel refer to: *The Man Without Qualities: A Sort of Introduction*, translated from the German by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike, 1995 (Vol. I), *The Like of It Now Happens* (1954, Vol. II), and *Into the Millenium* (Vol. III, 1960), translated from the German by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser.

separation is also maintained contentual across the novel, whose two parts are separated by the death of Ulrich's father, resulting in a distinctive mark concerning the structure of the novel. His death, of which Ulrich learns through a cable in the last chapter of book one (Musil 1978a, chap. 123, p. 654; cf. Musil 1954, p. 429), marks a turning point in the life of the novel's main protagonist. The departure for his hometown symbolically announces Ulrich's following transformation (Musil 1978a, p. 665; cf. Musil 1954, p. 441).

In the *first part* of the novel (consisting of book I with its two halves), the plot develops along two public events of entirely different characters, which Ulrich is either a part of or drawn into. There is the large-scale preparation for the celebration of the 70th year jubilee of the old Emperor Franz-Joseph on December 2nd, 1918. This event is referred to as a "parallel action," because it is planned as an opposing event to the German celebration planned for the 30th year jubilee of the German Emperor Wilhelm II. As a part of this project, the world-historical prominence of the Austrian Empire, even a "Universal" Austria ("*Weltösterreich*"), (Musil 1978a, p. 423; cf. Musil 1954, p. 148)), is said to be emphasized and celebrated. The second event of importance is the murder of Moosbrugger.

The *second part* of the novel (consisting of book II with its unfinished third half) is structured by Ulrich's relationship to his sister Agathe, whom he meets again after years, on the occasion of his returning to their hometown because of their father's death and the distribution of the father's inheritance. Afterwards, Agathe follows Ulrich to Vienna where both share a household for the purpose of discovering what they call "the other condition" ("*den anderen Zustand*") together. This is, expressed by Musil, "a journey to the furthest limits of the possible," (Musil 1960, p. 121) ("*eine Reise an den Rand des Möglichen*", (Musil 1978a, p. 761)) which is the measurement of the historically grown and therefore the objectively possible horizon of multiple realities.

Since the following analysis deals with the problem of dimensions of reflexivity in Musil's novel, both parts of *The Man without Qualities* introduces different perspectives: The *first part* tells us of "the state that we live in," ("*der Zustand, in dem wir leben*") which "is full of cracks, through which, so to speak, another state, an impossible one, peers out at us," (Musil 1954, p. 449) ("*Risse hat, aus denen ein unmöglicher Zustand hervorschaüt*") as Clarisse puts it, remembering one of Ulrich's sayings (Musil 1978a, p. 659; cf. Musil 1954, p. 435). At the end of this first part (which is also the end of book one), Ulrich's "state of sensation in his [Ulrich's] body [...] now passed over into a softer and larger condition" (Musil 1954, p. 449) ("*Gesamtgefühl seines Körpers . . . in einen weicheren und weiteren Zustand über*", (Musil 1978a, p. 663)) – a premonition to the *second part* of the novel concerned with "the other condition." Ulrich himself realizes this process of passing into an "other condition," after his father's funeral, when he ponders, over how "this last fortnight had rendered all the past invalid, and had tied up the threads of inner movement in one strong knot" (Musil 1960, p. 148) ("*Die letzten vierzehn Tage hatten alles Frühere außer Kraft gesetzt und die Linien der inneren Bewegung mit einem kräftigen Knoten zusammengefasst*", (Musil 1978a, p. 784)). After the days he spent with Agathe, he is now in a "restive state" (Musil 1960,

p. 190) (“*unruhigen Zustand*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 821)). According to the composition of the story this state becomes plainly visible by Ulrich’s transition in the second half of the first part of the novel. The transition starts with the chapter “A touch with reality,” (“*Berührung der Wirklichkeit*”, (Musil 1995, chap. 20)) which can be seen as a reference to Ulrich and the parallel action, and ends with the chapter “The turning point” (“*Die Umkehrung*”, (Musil 1995, chap. 123)). This phrase is an allusion not only to Ulrich’s ongoing transformation but also foreshadows his time with Agathe.

Keeping in mind the shaping social relationships for each narrative thread, these constellations result in the following: *Part one* can mainly be seen as a description of the more or less erotically charged relationships between the characters, who are involved in the parallel action, the case of Moosbrugger, or both. They are between Diotima and Arnheim, Diotima and Ulrich, Ulrich and Gerda, Rachel and Soliman, Walter and Clarisse, and Ulrich and Clarisse. The constellation between Arnheim and Ulrich is the kernel, i.e., the forming social relationship in this part of the novel: Ulrich, a man of possibilities, the “traveller”, who “often imagined [. . .] the truly experimental life” (Musil 1960, p. 196) (“*das wahrhaft experimentelle Leben vorstellt*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 826)) in contrast to Arnheim, the man of realities, a standard-person, who says about Ulrich: “[. . .] an activist with a head full of ideas how things could be done differently and better [. . .].” (Musil 1995, p. 292) (“*Ein Aktivist, der immer den Kopf voll davon hat, wie die Dinge anders und besser zu machen wären*,” (Musil 1978a, p. 270)). To Arnheim Ulrich is a “phantom of the man” (Musil 1995, p. 598; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 548): “[. . .] a dangerous man, with his infantile moral exoticism and his highly developed intelligence that is always on the lookout for some adventure without knowing what, exactly, is egging him on” (Musil 1995, p. 351) (“*Ein gefährlicher Mensch, mit seiner infantilen moralischen Exotik und seinem ausgebildeten Verstand, der immer ein Abenteuer sucht, ohne zu wissen, was ihn eigentlich dazu treibt*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 324)).

Part two mainly consists of the interactive dynamics and multiple constellations between Walter and Clarisse on the one hand, and between Ulrich and Agathe on the other hand, as well as their being intertwined with each other.

At this point the brief reminder of the course of action in Musil’s novel can be closed. I will now turn to Berger’s analysis by pointing out some of its aspects which I think to be of special relevance for my current purpose.

3 Berger’s Study

It is Berger’s aim to apply Schutz’s (1945) concept of multiple realities to Musil’s description of the “other condition” in the second part of *The Man without Qualities*. According to Berger a “relativization of everyday reality” is the presupposition for entering the “other condition” (Berger 1978, p. 354). This seems to be a typically Schutzian strategy to analyze the shock taking place by moving from one multiple reality to another.

In doing so, Berger first argues that the paramount reality of everyday life “persists in its massive facticity even after various breakdowns in the fabric of ‘normality’” (Berger 1978, p. 345). Furthermore, everyday life while “experienced as a totality” is divided into “different social worlds,” (Berger 1978, p. 345) “the transition from one of its sectors to another can be experienced as a shock.” (Berger 1978, p. 346). In addition to this “differentiation within everyday reality” Berger also identifies a world “beyond the domain of everyday reality,” the transition to which causes an even greater shock (Berger 1978, pp. 346–348).⁴ I agree with Berger that it is Ulrich’s insight into the social construction of everyday reality through which this reality to him “becomes problematic as a whole,” (Berger 1978, p. 348) while he reveals it “as a tenuous balancing act between a multiplicity of forces.” (ibid.)

But while Berger tries to focus on “the other condition” (“*anderer Zustand*”) as “Ulrich’s central concern,” (Berger 1978, p. 348) reading it as being in opposition to everyday life, he analyses Musil’s novel under the premise that “all these transition points [i.e. all “possible transfer stations to the ‘other conditions’”] have in common a violent breakdown of the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life.” (Berger 1978, p. 348). According to this phenomenon Berger (1978, p. 348) also speaks of an “abolition,” (“*Abschaffung*”, see Musil 1978a, p. 365) an “absurdity” (Berger 1978, p. 349) of reality, of a distancing from the “*theatrum mundi*,” (Berger 1978, pp. 348, 350) of “breakdowns of the fabric of normality,” (Berger 1978, p. 345) of “violent” interruptions, and he argues that in the state of the “other condition” “no experiencing of the world” takes place (Berger 1978, p. 355) and that this “reality . . . haunts the reality of everyday life.” (Berger 1978, pp. 343f.) Berger’s descriptions here imply several ontological connotations, which also become obvious when he argues that “the ‘other condition’ lies on the other side of this abolished reality” as a “novel and strange mode of being” (Berger 1978, p. 348).

Furthermore, Ulrich, who, as we learn in the beginning of the novel, “had returned from abroad sometime before,” has now settled in Vienna and “for a certain exuberance” rented a “little *château*,” (Musil 1995, p. 8; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 13) because, as he “could not conceal from himself that in all those years [. . .] he had merely been living against his grain. He wished something unforeseen would happen to him, for when he took what he somewhat wryly called his ‘holiday from life’ he had nothing [. . .], that gave him peace” (Musil 1995, p. 276; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 256) (“*jahrelang bloß gegen sich selbst gelebt habe, und er wünschte, daß etwas Unvorhergesehenes mit ihm geschehen möge, denn als er das tat, was er etwas spöttisch seinen ‘Urlaub vom Leben, nannte, besaß er . . . nichts, was ihm Frieden gab*” (Musil 1978a, p. 256)). In contrast to Berger’s interpretation, in my opinion, the novel is therefore from the start permeated with ambivalence. Instead of calling Ulrich’s developing life in Vienna his everyday reality, it could also be said,

⁴According to Berger (1978, p. 347) the shocks within everyday life “are both quantitatively and qualitatively more moderate,” because they “still take place within the same ontological coordinates.”

that the world described in the course of the story is not his everyday reality, as his return from abroad heralds the start of a new phase, in which he claims, although in ironical distance, to take a “holiday from life” – indeed, for he even intends to “kill himself, if the year he was ‘taking off’ from his life were to pass without results.” (Musil 1995, p. 654; Musil 1954, pp. 427f., 438f., 128f.) (“*er werde sich töten, wenn das Jahr seines Lebensurlaubs ohne Ergebnis verstreiche*” (Musil 1978a, p. 599; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 653, 662, 767) – at the beginning of his living together with Agathe, “Ulrich realized that this experiment [to live together with Agathe] necessarily meant the end of his experiment in ‘living on vacation’” (Musil 1960, p. 168) (“*Urlaub vom Leben*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 801)). This beginning Ulrich marks by giving the hint to Agathe that they would now be “entering the millennium” (“*in das tausendjährige Reich einziehen*” (Musil 1978a, p. 801; cf. Musil 1995, p. 168)).

What strikes me here in the *first place* is the question whether one can use Schutz’s conception of multiple realities for describing the ontological difference of realities Berger primarily seems to be concerned with. In the *second place* I would like to question whether, for example, the “absurdity” Ulrich experiences according to Berger (1978, p. 348) fits with Schutz’s description of the modulation of states of consciousness in different multiple realities. Can these be adequately described as, for example, “pushing back the package of real world?” (Berger 1978, p. 350). In the *third place* Berger sometimes seems to use the concept of multiple realities in a twofold sense: on the one hand as a description of what can be called the functional differentiation of society, and on the other hand by referring to different types of subjective constitution of meaning. In the *fourth place* I have the impression that Berger does not take into account that there is a difference between the life-world and everyday life. This becomes obvious in his distinction between the worlds “within everyday reality” on the one hand, and the world “beyond the domain of everyday reality” on the other hand (Berger 1978, pp. 346–348). Both belong to the life-world, which according to Schutz is more encompassing than everyday life. And this distinction seems to be crucial for the argument Schutz has in mind when differentiating multiple realities.

Moreover, it is also Musil who clearly points to the difference in question by arguing, on the one hand, that even “[...] an evening at the theater, a concert, a church service, all such manifestations of the inner life today are similar, quickly dissolving islands of a second state of consciousness that is sometimes interpolated into the ordinary one” (Musil 1995, p. 119, cf. p. 131) (“*auch ein Theaterabend, ein Konzert, ein Gottesdienst, alle Äußerungen des Inneren ... rasch wieder aufgelöste Inseln eines zweiten Bewusstseinszustands [sein], der in den gewöhnlichen zeitweilig eingeschoben wird*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 115; cf. p. 125). On the other hand, Berger insists that “the ‘other condition’ constitute a ‘finite province of meaning’,” (Berger 1978, p. 355) while at the same time stating that this condition implies an “abolition of reality” and that it “lies on the other side of this abolished reality” (Berger 1978, p. 348). Finally, it is conspicuous that Berger very rarely uses the term “interruption” (Berger 1978, pp. 349, 351) to characterize the phenomenon in question. In my understanding this term seems to be the most precise one to give an account of the transitions between multiple realities according to Schutz, but it

also definitely does not fit with Berger's original remarks. Moreover, the German translation of his essay (Berger 1983) eliminates the variety of concepts Berger uses in this connection by unifying them to the German term "*Unterbrechung*." ("interruption"). A decision not only implying a certain tension with Berger's other descriptions, but which also seems to eliminate the overall relevance of Musil's concept of the "other condition."

4 Berger's Analysis of Schutz's Concept of Multiple Realities

But before going into more detail, first of all, we have to ask, (1) whether the "other condition" can be described as a multiple reality according to Schutz's understanding of the concept and, secondly, (2) whether the "other condition" for systematic reasons can be understood as another multiple reality compared with the other multiple realities described in *The Man Without Qualities*?

1. I would like to start with a reminder of Schutz's criteria for analyzing the styles of meaning constitution in different multiple realities. Following Bergson, Schutz (1945, p. 537) combines the differentiation of "degrees of consciousness" with human beings' "varying interest in life," that is, their "attention *à la vie*" which we can describe as degrees of pragmatic involvement (or as degrees of relevancy). Because of this twofold reference to the constitution of meaning in everyday life, Schutz, instead of following William James' notion of "sub-universes," prefers to speak of a variety of "finite provinces of meaning" each of which showing "a specific cognitive style" or a different "accent of reality" (1945, pp. 551, 552). Let me briefly summarize the "basic characteristics" Schutz identifies accordingly to describe these multiple realities (Schutz 1945, p. 552). They are characterized by:

1. A specific tension of consciousness;
2. A specific *epoché*;
3. A prevalent form of spontaneity;
4. A specific form of experiencing one's self;
5. A specific form of sociality; and, finally,
6. A specific time-perspective.

Due to these characteristics, Schutz provides us with a working hypothesis for comparing different finite provinces of meaning: "A typology of the different finite provinces of meaning could start from an analysis of those factors of the world of daily life from which the accent of reality has been withdrawn because they do not stand any longer within the focus of our attentional interest in life" (Schutz 1945, p. 554). Following this advice (see also: Kersten 1998; Nasu 1999), Schutz in his classical study analyzes the "worlds of phantasms," (Schutz 1945, pp. 555–560)⁵ the

⁵Exemplified by a short analysis of Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* (see Endress 1998) analyzing Schutz 1964/1953.

“world of dreams,” (Schutz 1945, pp. 560–563) and the “world of scientific theory” (Schutz 1945, pp. 563–575) as those finite provinces of meaning characterized by a more or less modified pragmatic interest.⁶ Having this exposition of the concept of multiple realities in mind, I think, the first question can be affirmed that Musil’s concept of “the other condition” can be described with reference to these criteria provided by Schutz in order to analyze different finite provinces of meaning. But this is just a question of how to use the analytical framework Schutz offers for different scientific purposes and in a variety of fields of research.

2. Moreover, this leads to the second question mentioned above: Is the “other condition” just another multiple reality compared with the other multiple realities described in *The Man without Qualities*? To put it differently: Is it just the same to talk about “the quality of mathematics as an interruption of everyday reality” (Berger 1978, p. 351) and to analyze the “other condition” Ulrich is longing for as a different state of consciousness? Does the possibility of a mere description of “the other condition” as a multiple reality in the Schutzian sense meet the systematic interest Musil haunts for?

I would doubt this. As far as multiple realities can be entered, because they are placed within the life-world, the other condition cannot be entered, since, for Musil, it is beyond the life-world Ulrich is striving for – which is the reason why this project fails. According to Schutz, the life-world includes several multiple realities, each of which describes a certain type of meaning constitution. Thus, in my understanding, the descriptions Berger himself, for example, uses for characterizing of what happens while entering the spheres of sexuality or aesthetic experience as “violence” (Berger 1978, pp. 348, 349) are better used to describe what happens while entering the “other condition.” With reference to this process Berger also uses the terms “abolition” (Berger 1978, p. 348) and “absurdity,” (Berger 1978, p. 349) as mentioned before. At this point again my foregoing remarks come into play, pointing to the ontological connotations of Berger’s analysis.

But there are some additional aspects to be mentioned. Comparing Schutz’s conception of the worlds of phantasms with Musil’s “the other condition”, the latter is not “free from the pragmatic motive,” it does not lack “the purposive ‘fiat’,” and living within “the other condition” is not “necessarily inefficient.” (Schutz 1945, pp. 555f.) Agathe and Ulrich will not share “the other condition” with “merely a part of their total personality” (Schutz 1945, pp. 559, 567). Just as neither Ulrich nor Agathe will be “essentially lonely” in “the other condition” as Schutz states for the world of dreams as well as for the world of scientific theory (Schutz 1945, pp. 563, 571). Moreover, referring to two further aspects of Schutz’s description of the world of scientific theory, entering “the other condition” does not mean to take up the “attitude of the ‘disinterested observer’” or to “‘put in brackets’ one’s physical existence” (Schutz 1945, pp. 565, 566f).

⁶A peculiar problem which arises in this context is the “problem of indirect communication,” that is, the “paradox of communication” (Schutz 1945, pp. 573–575). See also Endress (2003).

Consequently, we are confronted with an ambivalent result of our analysis: While the question whether “the other condition” can be described by the criteria Schutz indicates for describing the cognitive style typical for multiple realities can be affirmed, it conversely looks like that “the other condition” cannot be put in line with the realities of theater, dream, or sciences, because it moves beyond the entire life-world.

For this reason, at this point a further question comes up, namely, is an interpretation of Musil’s novel by using the concept of multiple realities adequate in order to analyze the complexity Musil’s novel consists of in this very reference? To make this clear, we might argue that according to Schutz Musil’s novel as a piece of literary art belongs to a multiple reality, i.e., “the various worlds of phantasms” Schutz exemplifies by referring to Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*. But such an answer clearly would ignore Berger’s unique perspective looking at Musil’s novel as a whole social world, which confronts us with different multiple realities. I will share this perspective here.

5 The Structure of Musil’s Argument

In the following section I will try to plead for, what might be called, an extension of the concept of multiple realities.

One possible consequence we could draw from the foregoing ambivalent result would be arguing that we should use the concept of multiple realities *strictu sensu* in the Schutzian sense, i.e., as differentiating different provinces of meaning. But I do not think such a solution really would solve the problem we are faced with. And that is because Schutz’s notion of the cognitive style which he thinks to be specific for these finite provinces of meaning should be reread in order to include levels of reflexivity in a somewhat more proper sense. I will try to illustrate this with reference to Musil’s novel. Referring to the overall stream of action in *The Man without Qualities*, in my understanding, we can differentiate three levels of reflexivity, or let us say three levels of reference to multiple realities: The first one I would like to call the *descriptive level*, talking about the concrete social situating of the characters involved. On a second level, which I would suggest to call a *primary level of reflexivity*, we find the characters themselves talking about and analyzing their positioning, i.e., their social situating within the novel. Finally, on a third level, which might be called a *level of meta-reflexivity*, those reflections themselves are analyzed once again from a very different viewpoint as possibilities of literary art forms.⁷

⁷This differentiation of levels of reflexivity to some extent might be comparable to Paul Ricoeur’s differentiation between three models of mimesis, a prefigured, a figured, and a reflexive one. Here narration gets enacted again on a reflexive level.

To cut things short, I would like to suggest to differentiate first order multiple realities (*descriptive level*), second order multiple realities (*primary level of reflexivity*), and, finally, third order multiple realities (*level of meta-reflexivity*). Having this in mind, I would like to ask, in which of these levels “the other condition” (“*der andere Zustand*”) is involved or situated. And my thesis will be, that we have to think of it as referring to the type of third order multiple realities (functioning as a somewhat regulative idea (in a Kantian sense) for the life-world as such). In what follows I will try to present at least some hints for illustrating this differentiation with reference to Musil’s novel in order to demonstrate its potential of critical reflexivity.⁸

5.1 *The Descriptive Level Presenting Some First Order Multiple Realities*

On this descriptive level Musil presents several social settings and constellations focusing on the concrete positioning and situations of different characters. Such “finite provinces of meaning” described within Musil’s novel are, for example,

- Diotima’s “gathering of great minds (Musil 1995, pp. 289, 292) (“*Versammlung großer Geister*”, (Musil 1978a, pp. 268, 271; chapters I.71 and I.80)): Diotima’s salon is characterized as having “a reputation as a place where ‘society and intellect’ met” (Musil 1995, p. 100) (“*dass ‘Gesellschaft und Geist’ dort einander begegneten*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 98)). For this reason it is described by Musil as a counter-institutionalization to Graf Leinsdorf’s *palais* (Musil 1995, pp. 357f.; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 347).
- Tuzzi is the head of the section leading “his life in a [to his wife’s world] separate but friendly adjoining world.” (Musil 1995, p. 362, cf. pp. 445, 447) (“*abgeschlossenen freundlichen Nachbarswelt*”, (Musil 1978a, pp. 334, 410, 411f.)), since the beginning of the “parallel action”.
- Quite another outstanding example for the first descriptive level of first order multiple realities is the interlocking of spheres of meaning on the level of a person, taking on different roles throughout the novel (Musil 1995, p. 466; cf. p. 428).⁹

⁸Therefore, mere description on the level of geographical and functional differentiation are excluded here, as for example Kakanien (see Musil 1995, pp. 392, 560 ff., 575 f.; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 361, 514 f., 528 f. and chap. I.8, I.98), the “*Parallelaktion*” as such (chap. I.19, 21–23, 26, 36, 40, 42–44, 71, 81 and so on; see also chap. II. 34), various aspects according to which the “*Parallelaktion*” is differentiated in analogy to state affairs and societal strata (Musil 1995, pp. 421, 246; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 224, 229), or the realm of sports (Musil 1995, pp. 436, 442, 459, 560; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 402, 407, 422, 513).

⁹Possibly also the world of commemoration (i.e. with Agathe chapter II.13) might be mentioned. Here, memory (past) and expectation (future) fuse to a peculiar suffering in or from the present (Musil 1960, p. 120f.; cf. Musil 1978, pp. 759 f.). See also Musil’s descriptions of the world of morals (Musil 1995, pp. 271 326, 351, 396, 442, 444, 485, 525, 552, 555, 616, 620, 624, 646,

5.2 *The Primary Level of Reflexivity as Describing Second Order Multiple Realities*

Here the characters themselves are talking about and analyzing their positioning. They are focusing on certain aspects of the social constellations they are involved in. Thus typically on this level the relationship between two multiple realities itself is discussed. Just to give some examples again:

- Diotima’s affection for Arnheim carries her “from dreaming to waking,” (Musil 1995, pp. 359f.) (“*vom Traum zum Wachen*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 332)) and Arnheim as well, who in his daydreams, is searching for a solution, realizes that “the closer he approaches reality, the more troublesome the increase of inhibitions” (Musil 1995, p. 547) became (“*je mehr [er] ... sich der Wirklichkeit näherte, desto unangenehmer wüchsen die Widerstände*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 501)). As to put it in philosophical terms: clearly a kind of a pragmatic experience of an antagonism.
- Arnheim reflects on “living in a kind of dream, a condition abhorred by every thinker” (Musil 1995, p. 552) (“*einfach träumen; ein Zustand, den jeder Denker verabscheut*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 506)).
- Ulrich is reflecting about the relationship between several states of mind, for example, dream and reality (Musil 1978a, pp. 581f.); and Musil describes it: “But this erotic transformation of the consciousness seemed only a special instance of something much more general: an evening at the theater, a concert, a church service, all such manifestations of the inner life today are similar, quickly dissolving islands of a second state of consciousness that is sometimes interpolated into the ordinary one” (Musil 1995, p. 119, cf. p. 131) (“*Es kam ihm [Ulrich] aber vor, daß diese Liebesverwandlung des Bewußtseins nur ein besonderer Fall von etwas weit Allgemeinerem sei; denn auch ein Theaterabend, ein Konzert, ein Gottesdienst, alle Äußerungen des Inneren sind heute solche rasch wieder aufgelöste Inseln eines zweiten Bewußtseinszustands, der in den gewöhnlichen zeitweilig eingeschoben wird*” (Musil 1978a, p. 115)).
- Another example is Ulrich’s experience of the “spatial inversion” (“*räumliche Inversion*”) during the demonstration in front of Leinsdorf’s palace (Musil 1995, p. 689; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 632).
- It is rather sudden that Ulrich begins to read the mystics, reads them to Agathe, and then discusses them with her (Musil 1978a, chapter II., pp. 11, 12). Via this input the transition to “a condition different from the original one” is finally established (Musil 1960, pp. 115, 122, 129; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 755,

648, 697; Musil 1960, p. 91f; cf. Musil 1978a, pp. 251, 302, 324, 365, 408, 410, 446, 481, 506 f., 509, 564, 568, 572, 592–594, 639, 734f., referring here to Nietzsche’s and Descartes’ pleas for a provisional moral (Musil 1960, pp. 3, 97, 104ff., 123, 131f., 190ff., 246, 249, 251, 342, 347ff., 426f., 430f., 440) (“*provisorische Moral*”, (Musil 1978a, pp. 739f., 746ff., 762, 769f., 821ff., 869, 871f., 873f., 952, 957ff., 1024f., 1027f., 1036).

761, 767). Consequently Ulrich thinks about the world as split “into these two components [...]: mathematics and mysticism” (Musil 1995, p. 133; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 770).¹⁰

5.3 *The Level of Meta-Reflexivity, i.e., Third Order Multiple Realities*

Here the aforementioned reflections of the characters themselves are analyzed again from a clearly different viewpoint. In Musil’s novel the process of thinking itself is described. To put it differently, Musil tries to integrate the process of thinking in the form of literary art. Therefore, thinking itself becomes an object of literary art. In this respect we can remember the finite provinces of meaning which themselves are objects of Musil’s novel: literary art and science (philosophy). That is, finite provinces of meaning which themselves are functioning as descriptions and analyses of finite provinces of meaning. Therefore, this meta-level involves reflecting multiple realities as well as thematizing the very notion of multiple realities itself. Here Ulrich takes the position Schutz is getting at in his essay on multiple realities. For example:

- At the sight of a demonstration in front of Leinsdorf’s palace, Ulrich feels: “I can’t go on with this life, and I can’t keep on rebelling against it any longer [...]” (Musil 1995, p. 689) (“*Ich kann dieses Leben nicht mehr mitmachen, und ich kann mich nicht mehr dagegen auflehnen!*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 631)). He in this way phrases a general resignation from the pragmatic motive, and its suppression (“*Ausschaltung*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 762)) he describes likewise.
- Ulrich’s reflections about the “two fundamental attitudes [in human history] [...]: metaphor and unequivocality” (Musil 1954, p. 353) (“*Eindeutigkeit und Gleichnis*”, pp. 593f.) as well as his analysis of the difference between acting or thinking on the one hand and dreaming on the other hand are also characteristic for this type of meta-reflexivity.
- And here we also have to refer to “the other condition,” as described before. Ulrich and Agathe enter “the other condition” just as “children of this world.” (Musil 1960, p. 122) (“*als Menschen dieser Welt*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 761)). Just to give some of Ulrich’s statements here: the “other condition” to him is such a one, in which “one slips out of non-essential life” (Musil 1995, p. 123) (“*man dem unwesentlichen Leben entschlüpft*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 762)): “[...]”

¹⁰See also the description in transition (“*Beschreibungen am Übergang*”): Ulrich imagines the “truly experimental life” (Musil 1960, p. 196) (“*das wahrhaft experimentelle Leben*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 826)); Musil states that “every intense excitement alters one’s picture of reality,” (Musil 1995, p. 310) (“*jede heftige Erregung ändert das Bild der Wirklichkeit in ihrem Sinne*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 924) and Ulrich reflects about the difference between sanity and insanity (Musil 1995, p. 423; cf. Musil 1978a, p. 1021).

we can assume the existence of a characteristic second, extraordinary condition, a highly important condition, that man is capable of entering into and which has deeper origins than the religions” (Musil 1995, p. 127) (“*Wir dürfen ... einen bestimmten zweiten und ungewöhnlichen Zustand von großer Wichtigkeit voraussetzen, dessen der Mensch fähig ist und der ursprünglicher ist als die Religionen*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 766)). Therefore Ulrich, the man of possibilities, will start his “journey to the furthest limits of the possible,” (Musil 1995, p. 121) (“*eine Reise an den Rand des Möglichen*”, (Musil 1978a, p. 761)) through his meeting with Agathe.

Now, one possibly might ask, why these examples do not motivate to just speak of or refer to the difference between everyday life and the world of scientific thinking? The answer is: Because Ulrich clearly is looking for transcending the world of everyday-life and the world of scientific thinking as well as the life-world as such. To put things differently: “The other condition” seeks to overcome the human condition or the very idea of existence. We therefore also might say that “The man without qualities” is the man searching for the possibility of the impossibilities. Maybe that can be called the hidden ground for his self-description as a “man of possibilities” (“*Möglichkeitsmensch*”) – maybe a possible man.

6 Conclusion

What are the consequences of this insight? Can we integrate or re-integrate the aforementioned idea of the conceptual framework of Musil’s novel in Schutz’s conception of the multiple realities? And one might also ask: Does this analysis of the internal structure of reflexivity within Musil’s novel provide some insights which might give us certain evidence for slightly revising Schutz’s concept of multiple realities itself? I will conclude my considerations at least with some preliminary answers to these questions.

Peter Berger provides a great idea of how a sociologist can look at Musil’s novel (also: Kuzmics and Mozetic 2003). Nonetheless, his interpretation leads to several questions concerning the concept of multiple realities as well as the broader setting of Musil’s novel which I tried to develop in the foregoing analysis. These can be summarized as follows:

1. While using Schutz’s conception of the multiple realities Berger evens out or levels the difference between the world of everyday life and the life-world. The variety of multiple realities including everyday life on the one hand and the assumed realities of the life-world on the other hand should be distinguished according to Musil. The latter are not the worlds of dreams and mere phantasma because of Musil’s underlying reflexive account.
2. Berger’s analysis restricts itself to a one-level-analysis while using the multiple realities conception in a descriptive way. Therefore, he is not able to take into account the various levels of reflections described in Musil’s novel, which I tried to differentiate in my foregoing considerations.

3. Because in its kernel Schutz's idea of differentiating multiple realities focuses on different "cognitive styles," in my view, it seems reasonable to extend its analysis according to various levels of reflexivity. This, I tried to argue, hopefully opens the path for a somewhat different mutual illumination of Schutz's concept and Musil's novel.

In summing up, one can say, that Schutz and Musil within their works offer different ideas of social reality. While Schutz focuses on the dimension of pragmatic motivation and consciousness (in German: *Bewusstsein*), Musil tries to overcome this primary human condition by reaching the dimension of awareness (in German: *Bewusstheit*). Surely, one might ignore this difference and restrict a comparison of both approaches to a mere mutual description. But realizing the theoretical potential of Musil's novel opens the chance to slightly revise Schutz's original contribution.

Therefore, a type of sociological reflexivity, a "dimension of critical reflexivity" as Harrington said (Harrington 2002b, p. 61), lies at the heart of Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*. And Musil himself in his later years seems to be aware of this. In his diaries the following reflection about his novel can be found, approximately phrased around 1940: "My mental equipping for this novel was poetical, psychological and partially philosophical. My present situation requires the sociological" ("*Meine geistige Zurüstung für den Roman war dichterisch, psychologisch, u. z. T. philosophisch. In meiner jetzigen Lage bedarf es aber des Soziologischen [. . .]*", (Musil 1983, pp. 963f.)).

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