

Crossing the Finite Provinces of Meaning: Experience and Metaphorizing of Literature and Arts

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Alfred Schutz's theoretical work is not replete with references to literature or the arts, but there are enough of them to examine some relations between literature, social theory, and the life-world. Schutz uses literature as a quarry for examples and ideal types, as in "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality," and he shows his erudition and "*Bildung*" through a wealth of citations. And there is another kind of referring to literature and the arts: Metaphorizing it, using it, as may be said with Lakoff and Johnson, to understand and to experience one kind of thing in terms of another. According to Schutz's theory literature and the arts are certain kinds of "finite provinces of meaning," that means they are not easily accessible from the paramount reality of everyday life. Metaphorizing then is a specific kind of border-crossing across different provinces of meaning. The following considerations take up one of Schutz's metaphorical border crossings between the provinces of theory and literature, and using it as guideline to examine the theoretical status and the borders of these provinces of meaning, especially that of literature without going into the specific characteristics of this province.

In a first step the example is presented together with some elucidations concerning the concept of metaphor. After that, the development of Schutz's concept of the finite provinces of meaning is outlined. In a third step the phenomenological concept of experience on a prepredicative level is discussed in order to clarify the status of the borders of finite provinces. This process of constitution of meaning is further advanced in the discussions of explicating experiences in language and in

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writing and printing, the latter with reference to Husserl's fragment "The Origin of Geometry." In a conclusion the outcomes for a theory of constitution of the finite provinces of meaning are summarized.

1 The Example

The example is taken from a rather peripheral text, a letter to Felix Kaufmann regarding Schutz's first visit of Edmund Husserl, first published in the recent volume III.1 of the *Alfred Schutz-Werkausgabe*:

Personally, I feel like Wilhelm Meister at the end of his apprenticeship: He arrives at the Tower Society and is given a scroll which records and solves all that weighs him down.¹

What is happening here? An experience is made and described with a metaphor from literature. So far so good and so commonplace. In what sense is this example metaphoric, and not just a comparison? Metaphor is used here in a wider sense than just rhetorical (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Ricoeur 1996, 2003), as a connection between at least two different things, where one is used to illustrate, exemplify, and explicate the other.

Schutz is reporting his impressions of his first meeting with Husserl to his close friend Felix Kaufmann. The experience he had there was indeed exciting. Though he was first rather unmoved by Husserl's Phenomenology, he reacted enthusiastically to the "Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time" in 1928. Encouraged by Kaufmann he sent his first book, the *Sinnhafter Aufbau* (translated as *Phenomenology of the Social World*) to Husserl in 1932 and was immediately invited to Freiburg. There he got a glimpse into the life-world and the unpublished work of Husserl, for instance he read in a few days the manuscript then called *Logische Studien* (*Logical Studies*), a draft, that was published only after Husserl's death as *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Husserl 1973). Therein Husserl developed a very detailed description of experience and typification, both problems were of high relevance for Schutz all through his work until his last text "Type and Eidos in Husserl's Late Philosophy," (1959) where he developed a thorough critique of the concept of type.

But what does it mean, using Wilhelm Meister to describe his experience? What does that involve? According to Schutz's later theory the metaphor used to describe his emotional state at that first meeting with Husserl could be characterized as a crossing between different provinces of meaning, between the paramount reality of

¹Translation by the author. The German original: "Mir persönlich geht es wie Wilhelm Meister am Ende der Lehrjahre: Er kommt zur Gesellschaft vom Turm und man überreicht ihm eine Schrift, in der alles aufgezeichnet und gelöst ist, was ihn bedrückt" (Letter from Schutz to Kaufmann, June 20th, 1932).

everyday life there in Freiburg and the finite province of literature. Therefore, in the next step the development of Schutz's theory of the finite provinces of meaning is outlined.

2 Schutz's Theory of the Provinces of Meaning

A first trace of the theory of the provinces of meaning is found in the text "Meaning structures of literary art forms" ("Goethe: Novelle"):

Of course, the possibility of confusing the unity of action with the continuity of motivation in the conceptual-linguistic sense exists because 'motivation' is a specific category of the literary symbol function. Yet, it has nothing to do with the conceptual-logical motivation of daily life. If both are identified with one another, it is on the basis of the impossible notion that the relations between literary creations can be exchanged with the relations of our external life, and this without any adaptation. (Schutz 1982, p. 173)

A border is established between daily life and literary creations. The meaning of symbols and concepts is different on both sites of the border. When the border is crossed, adaptation of relations is necessary. This is the first hint to concept, that is, which later called finite provinces of meaning.²

Schutz developed this theory of the finite provinces of meaning in the thirties, while working on the problem of personality. In starting from the "world of working" (*Wirkwelt*) as the paramount reality, Schutz delimits various "worlds" as different and finite provinces of meaning ("*geschlossene Sinngebiete*"). The unity of one of those provinces is formed through a specific "style of being." (*Seinsstil*) The elements of meaning belonging to one province are compatible with each other and ordered. A province then is constituted by an integrative principle of regulation. All these provinces are not reducible to one another, that means, that there is no simple rule of transformation, and movement from one to another is only possible with a shock (see Schutz 1937, pp. 144ff).

This first draft locates these provinces of meaning within the sphere of personality: The shock brings another part of the personality, of the I, into play. Some of these provinces are completely solipsistic, for instance, that of dreams, but others are pre-constituted by others, like the province of theoretical contemplation. Later on Schutz uses the term "universe of discourse" (Schutz 1962, p. 250) to characterize that specific province. But of what kind is that preconstitution? A "world of theoretical contemplation" (Schutz 1962, p. 245) is constituted of findings made by others, of problems found by others and of solutions to these problems provided by others. How does one enter this preconstituted world? One has to start in the paramount reality, read a book, or talk about a scientific problem. These actions, communications, etc., remain a part of the everyday life, but they constitute

²Maybe it is developed in following Max Weber's concept of spheres of value ("*Wertsphären*") or Husserl's ontological regions ("*Seinsregionen*").

specific time-objects, objects of meaning, that are elements which do not fit into the meaning structure of the paramount reality and which are used intentionally to create a scaffolding of literary, theoretical, etc., concepts. All actions that are necessary to share the results of such contemplations with others take place again back in the paramount reality, whether one writes thoughts down, types it, or talks about it.

In the text “On Multiple Realities,” it is this very conception of the finite provinces of meaning that is outlined, however with a slight change: For the new scientific public the reference to James’ subuniversa is added, which should “free this important insight from its psychologistic setting” (Schutz 1962, pp. 229f). There is also an explicit grounding of those provinces in the meaning of our experiences and not in an ontological structure of objects, as is perhaps the case with Husserl’s ontological regions (see *Ideas I*).

What seems to be clarified in the discussion of the phenomenological paradoxes is the “location” of these provinces: They do not exist objectively beyond an individual stream of consciousness, but are forms of intersubjective experience, which allow a common “stay” inside those fields: e.g., talking to someone about a painting or social and literary theory or attending a performance in the theater together. The participants are at the same time both in the “world of working” and in the particular province of meaning (Schutz 1962, p. 258), one leg in the world of working and one in the world of literature. Could one then suggest using a metaphor by Matthiesen (1994), a constant change between the supporting and the kicking leg? Are then the activities of reading and writing theory or literature also two-legged in this sense?

Ten years later, in “Symbol, Reality and Society,” an important extension is made to the theory of provinces by introducing symbols as relations of appresentation, in which the appresented part transcends the experience of everyday life. This implies that a symbolic transgression of the borders of meaning is now possible. A symbolic appresentation is a relation between at least two finite provinces of meaning, whereas the appresenting symbol is part of the paramount reality of everyday life.

In symbolic as in all other appresentative relations [...] something immediately given refers to something absent, which is however copresentiated in experience by means of this reference. [...] The symbolic meanings attached to particular vehicles of meaning [Bedeutungsträger] are thus memories of experiences outside the everyday sphere, that have been brought back from other states to the normal everyday state. (Schutz and Luckmann 1973, pp. 144ff)

So symbols involve a transgression of borders. The metaphoric phrase “bring back” insinuates the closing of borders after that transfer of meaning. Meaning as a temporal object, however, sustains its own past constitution at least for a certain time. Thus, symbolic appresentation establishes a more or less permanent relation between finite provinces of meaning.

To summarize, according to Schutz there are three modes of crossing the borders of a province of meaning:

1. The shock-like transgression in changing the mode of experience, in falling asleep, opening a book or word processor, etc.;
2. The simultaneous stay in two of those provinces in communicating about a specific context of meaning;
3. Symbolic appresentation.

Metaphors belong to the third category. They appresent a particular province of meaning in everyday life. But they do more: They link meanings of two different provinces permanently. If we know Wilhelm Meister, we can understand Schutz's theoretical enthusiasm at his first encounter with Husserl. The moment of the metaphor implies a new form of transgression that involves a new combination of already constituted elements of meaning. What this mode of transgression shows then, is that the finiteness of these provinces of meaning is not formed by sharply drawn, nearly insurmountable borders (as Husserl has built them around the consciousness and, accordingly, Luhmann around his autopoietic systems of meaning).

What has become clear is that the ground these provinces of meaning are built on is experience. So the next step is to take a look at that ground, the experiences, to clarify the state of these borders a little bit more, especially on behalf of sociality.

3 Experience

Experience is the performance in which for me, the experiencer, experienced being 'is there', and it is there *as what* it is, with the whole content and the mode of being that experience itself, by the performance going on in its intentionality, attributes to it. (Husserl 1969, §94, p. 233)

According to Husserl experiences are constituted in passive *and* active operations of the consciousness. Experiences take place against a horizon of typified experiences made before. If a new experience is made, it is explicated with elements of that horizon. These types are used as explicates in a way of association when "this recalls that" (Husserl 1973, §16, p. 75). It is association according to similarity. The ground for any association between constituted objects is the common time within a stream of consciousness. What is separated is united on this ground of time (Husserl 1973, §42b, p. 177):

But beyond this function of unification within a presence, association has a broader one, namely, that of uniting what is separated, insofar as this was ever at all constituted within a single stream of consciousness, thus, of uniting the present with the non-present, the presently perceived with remote memories separated from it, and even with imaginary objects: the like here recalls what is like there, the similar recalls the similar.

That is constituted in pre-predicative processing of experience is a unit of meaning, “actual and submerged intuitions” (Husserl 1973, §42b, p. 179).³ That means: Some typified remnants of past experiences are connected to explicate a present and new experience. A specific relation between homogeneous or heterogeneous types is constituted. So to explicate one thing in the types of another is a usual processing of experiences. And this is, on pre-predicative level, what Lakoff and Johnson define as metaphor.⁴

Thus, constituting an experience seems to be (or: could be read as) a structured and rather stable form of processing objects of meaning. Husserl himself reserves the term “spontaneity” for the predicative level:

Hence a unique reciprocal relationship takes place, though to be sure, in this sphere of passivity and in the sphere of receptivity which is constructed on this, it is not yet a relation in the logical sense of a spontaneous, creative consciousness in which a relation as such is constituted. (Husserl 1973, §42b, p. 177)

But this does not mean that experience itself is completely structured by a fixed past. Such a structuralist reading of Husserl (and following him, of Schutz) is misleading, as each experience has three horizons of constitution: the past, the present situation, and the future.

That such “awakening,” radiating out from the present and directed toward the vivifying of the past, is possible must have its ground in the fact that between the like and the similar a “sensuous” unit is already passively constituted in advance [...] To be sure, this vivifying does bring in something new, in that now a new intention, radiating from the awakening situation, goes to what is awakened, an intention which this irradiance, changes its state to neutrality and thus to a phenomenal persistence. (Husserl 1973, §42b, p. 179)

Experience takes place on a structured ground of past experiences. But according to Husserl in the actual constitution of meaning a situational moment interferes. With Schutz it could be added, that there is even a future element in meaning, when future acts are anticipated “in the future perfect tense, *modo futuri exacti*.” (e.g., Schutz 1962, p. 20) Instead of being closed and pre-structured, experience involves a complex interaction across different horizons of time.⁵ And additionally it involves connections to other experiences: Both awakening and anticipating connect actual experiences with similar ones. Furthermore, this similarity does not stop short before the borders of the provinces of meaning.

So, experience, even on a prepredicative level, is rooted in metaphorizing as a basic mode of generating meaning. If this is true, the provinces of meaning inside one stream of consciousness have no clear-cut borders; instead James’ metaphor of the fringes seems to be a more commensurate description.

³A processing which involves a lot of failures, of detypifying etc. as Gadamer (1990, p. 359) emphasizes.

⁴Lacan too, starting from completely different paradigms, has identified metaphor and metonymy as the two modes of the unconscious, see Lacan 1991, pp. 40ff.

⁵Many thanks to Hubert Knoblauch, who helped to make this point clearer.

4 Intersubjective Provinces

The next step in the constitution of meaning is to explicate the experience in translating it into language, making it explicit. To express a meaning linguistically is by no means just a representation or an identical copy of a *constitutum*. It is a transfer into a different system of relations. Instead of a meaning constituted in typified explication, there is a system of preconstituted inter- or trans-subjective meanings tied to sequentially organized phonemes, into which it has to be translated (for more on that process, see Renn 2006, pp. 221ff). This translation uses the closely bond relationship of action and language (Srubar 2003, pp. 95ff) as necessary common ground. The crucial role of metaphors in this relationship is shown by Lakoff and Johnson (2003). A metaphorical association according to an assumed analogy seems to be quite common, especially in the explication of implicit knowledge. The resulting explicit types are therefore again composed across the different provinces of meaning. So these relations easily cross the borders of the provinces of meaning and establish another set of more or less permanent associations in the unit of a single experience.

But talking about an experience opens up the option of intersubjective understanding. In the reciprocal actions of communication, including not only speaking itself, but also mimics, gestures, etc., according to Schutz, a common ground of time and meaning is built and becomes an essential part of the world of everyday life. And it opens up the option of externalization of those hitherto egological provinces of meaning. In constituting common meanings, or at least meanings *considered* as common and *referred to* as common, systems of relevances, attitudes, and cognitive styles are built on an intersubjective level, and thus emerge intersubjective provinces of meaning.

The borders of the subjective provinces of meaning become still more fringed in this process. Now they seem to have a quite homogeneous kernel and a rather ambiguous periphery, with a plethora of relations into other provinces. But in our example Schutz is not just talking to Kaufmann in a face-to-face interaction.

He is in fact writing a letter. So he has to translate his experience once more into written language. This involves another step of objectivation: The thought or spoken language is transferred into lines of ink; it loses the accompanying facial expressions, the prosodic elements, and the gestures, which are present in a face-to-face discussion. Therefore, it loses its common ground of time (fortunately for us, as we can establish a new one again and again in reading).

The experiences Schutz underwent in his first encounter with Husserl and his world of working are unique and new to him, and he grasps for similarities and invokes his typified interpretation of Wilhelm Meister. Thus, using the Meister-metaphor allows both partners of the communication to simultaneously inhabit the provinces of everyday life and of literature, each one in his own time. But that poses some additional questions on behalf of the provinces of meaning: What is the relation between the preconstituted intersubjective province and the individual consciousness? It seems that the stream of consciousness is the only uniting location

of these provinces, otherwise there would emerge the problem of the integration of scientific and everyday perspectives on the life-world. I want to suggest the solution of intersubjective communicative practices that *refer to* language and/or other media.

5 Writing and Printing

But is this province of literature really constituted by Schutz and Kaufmann? Didn't it exist before their birth and doesn't it still exist? It is indeed the "universe of discourse" that Schutz writes about in "On multiple realities." Husserl also describes the constitution of such a transsubjective universe of discourse in a famous manuscript, which was published by Fink as "The Origin of Geometry" and is now available as Supplement VI of the *Crisis*.

Husserl describes an "open chain of generations" (Husserl 1970, p. 356) inventing geometry in "spiritual accomplishments," that exist not psychically but as objective being-there for "everybody." Mathematics for instance then has "the manner of being of a lively forward movement from acquisitions as premises to new acquisitions, in whose ontic meaning that of the premises is included (the process continuing in this manner)" (Husserl 1970, p. 356). There seems to emerge an auto-logical dynamic of meaning. The basic element is "'ideal' objectivity. It is proper to a whole class of spiritual products of the cultural world, to which not only all scientific constructions [Gebilde] and the sciences themselves belong but also, for example, the constructions of fine literature" (Husserl 1970, pp. 356f).

This ideal objectivity is constituted in the face-to-face communication between geometricians, but this is not enough. It has to be separated from intentionality and fill in space actual intersubjectivity:

What is lacking is the *persisting existence* of the "ideal objects" even during periods in which the inventor and his fellows are no longer wakefully so related or even are no longer alive. What is lacking is their continuing-to-be even when no one has realized them in self-evidence. The important function of written, documenting linguistic expression is that it makes communications possible without immediate or mediate personal address; it is, so to speak, communication [*Mitteilung*] become virtual (Husserl 1970, pp. 360f).

But what is writing? Is it just embodied intentionality? And what happens to the meaning when it is translated into writing, written down, and, in a certain way, stripped off subjectivity?

Written signs are, when considered from a purely corporeal point of view, straightforwardly, sensibly experienceable; and it is always possible that they be intersubjectively experienceable in common. But as a linguistic signs they awaken, as do linguistic sounds, their familiar significations. The awakening is something passive. (Husserl 1970, p. 361)

In writing a description down, the "original mode of being" (Husserl 1970, p. 361) is changed, the meaning "becomes sedimented," and comes to rest together with other related meanings. The problem in Husserl's analysis is that he assumes or

claims an univocal retrieval of the sedimented meaning, as Derrida (1978) criticizes in perhaps the only phenomenological text of his “Edmund Husserl’s ‘Origin of Geometry’: An Introduction.”

That suggests another insight into the constitution of the provinces of meaning: These provinces can be constituted in resting upon the persistent “materiality” of signs, that means in connecting those remnants of former connections to actual constitutional processes of meaning. Again, meaning is constituted in processes of awakening and association, but this time with an intersubjective recurrence to persistent and perceivable parts of signs.⁶ So the possibility is opened to build up social institutions around that practice of writing and reading: Schools, libraries, and so on, creating isles of discourse within a society, where the referential schemes of interpretation are sufficiently co-ordinated.

The written meaning is transformed once more when it is printed, as we did with Schutz’s letter in volume III.1 of the *Alfred Schutz-Werkausgabe*. With this mass re-production of signs that are perceptible and referable as being alike, the formations of meaning are open to a widespread anonymous public and this way makes them part of a universe of discourse spreading across society. The meaning formations are differentiated within themselves into provinces of discourse according to, as it seems, “autological” mechanisms or better: The rules of formation of meaning formations can no longer be ascribed to one individual or even a small group of individuals.

6 The Constitution of Provinces of Meaning

To summarize: What does that mean for the concept of finite provinces of meaning, and furthermore, if that is possible, for a theory of society based on Schutz’s and Husserl’s considerations?

1. Metaphors are a fundamental mechanism of experience, either on prepredicative or predicative level. They involve border crossings across different provinces of meaning. Maybe it could be said with Ricoeur (2004, p. 98), that the metaphor is the semantic kernel of a symbol. It therefore is able to link these provinces and constitute new sense. It achieves this with a transfer of meaning, a transfer, which affects both of the original contexts.
2. That means, these provinces of meaning are closed in a certain sense and at the same time they are interconnected and connectable in a certain sense. The borders are not as strictly closed as those of Luhmann’s autopoietic systems, but they have got a certain auto-logical performance.

⁶That does not state an objective reality, but just a kind of shared reference, sufficient enough for the hermeneutic purposes at hand.

3. All provinces of meaning other than the strictly individual have an inter- or trans-subjective character. They are founded in “material” objects of reference, a kind of medial substrate that is open for interpretation on the one hand and has the ability to stabilize meaning over time as semantics on the other hand. This way, writing and printing form specific temporal objects with transsubjective character.
4. These temporal objects then can be used for supporting intersubjective understanding. A finite province of meaning is then in a certain sense a universe of meaning but is rooted strongly in interactions, communications, and subjective processes of meaning constitution, as it is only valid in actualization. And it has to rely on available technical media and social institutions for its persistence.

These characteristics hold true for all provinces of meaning which are not exclusively individual. What can be said then on the specific province of literature? It has its own cognitive style, in accepting in temporally to a fictitious reality (see “Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality”), its own types of They-Relations, its own personal types (authors, readers, and publishers), its specific symbol relations, its own types of genres, and its own social institutions (book trade). But this is another question beyond the scope of the present article.

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