



# The phenomenology of joint agency: the implicit structures of the shared life-world

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## Abstract

We do lots of things together in a shared manner. From the phenomenological point of view, does joint or shared agency need a conscious *sense* of shared agency? Yet there are many processes where we seem to just go along with the group without conscious intent. Building on the classic phenomenological accounts of Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schutz, Martin Heidegger (and the synthetic account of Berger & Luckmann), I want to emphasize the thick horizon of the life-world as a fundamental condition for intentional shared agency. Joint agency has divergent forms with their own peculiar intentionality, attentivity, anticipations and expectations, and embeddedness in a pre-predicative tacit knowledge in the overall live-world. Phenomenology recognizes that even ego-centered activities that appear to be fully ‘agential’ can be carried out in an anonymous un-owned manner, in the manner which Heidegger calls ‘*das Man*’, or ‘the one’. This suggests that tacit belonging to the collective ‘we’ undergirds individual agency. Husserl, Heidegger, and Schutz all have accounts of this ‘anonymous’, pre-predicative kind of group participation. Phenomenology has rich accounts of anonymous, voluntary, shared, social participation that demand a new concept of agency, one neglected in the current literature in philosophy of action.

**Keywords** Intentionality · Agency · Life-world · Anonymity · Tacit knowledge

*In Memory of Raimo Tuomela (1940–2020).*

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## 1 Embeddedness in a social world

Phenomenology maintains that human beings live embedded in an encompassing, largely taken-for-granted, *intrinsically social, temporal, and historical world*.<sup>1</sup> Our individual lives, self-conceptions, and agencies, are pervaded and saturated by others. How the individual consciousness intermeshes with the collective, intersubjective domain has been a major theme of classical phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Schutz, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty). The larger group is the enabling condition for an individual agent (whether the agent is acting with or against the consensus).<sup>2</sup> Social norms, moreover, are largely *passively* inherited, without acknowledgement, or even awareness, from our mostly anonymous ‘predecessors’ (Schutz, 1967, 8)<sup>3</sup> and from our ‘significant others’ (i.e. those involved in our care and nurture) in the first stages of acculturation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).<sup>4</sup> There is a largely *passive* reception of communal norms, values, and, more generally, what has been called ‘knowledge’ in a broad sense (i.e., implicit rather than explicit *propositional* knowledge, Polanyi, 1966).<sup>5</sup> These formative social forces, moreover, are not just all encompassing (even stifling) and *conservative*, they leave little room for creative appropriation or modification by individuals, except along already prescribed pathways (e.g. a professional association licensing an individual). Such shared, contextualizing social ‘knowledge’ is, I shall maintain, a necessary condition for the possibility of joint action; and this social knowledge, in turn, is embedded in our

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that animals are not social (Husserl already allows that animals are egoic with ‘conscious lives’ and ‘enviroming worlds’ (*Umwelten*, Husserl, 1973c 177), but human sociality is mediated by highly complex symbolic forms, and involves personhood and mutual recognition. Heidegger thought of animals as ‘world-poor’ (*weltarm*) since they are in relatively closed relationships to their environment. A major influence on both Husserl and Heidegger was the work of von Uexküll (2013). There is now a large and burgeoning literature on human-animal interactions and a growing literature on the social worlds of non-human primates. Animal ethology is an enormous field; zoo-sociology is a relatively new field. See Peggs, 2012. It would be fascinating, but beyond the scope of this paper, to include animal-human relations in joint agency, e.g. horse and rider in showjumping. Merleau-Ponty coined the terms ‘intercorporeality’ and ‘interanimality’ for these complex interactions between humans and animals.

<sup>2</sup> The analytical approaches of Bratman (2014) and Gilbert (2006), on the other hand, assume that concepts (e.g. intention, planning) involved in individual agency – or small groups – can largely be mapped without alteration onto the larger social domain. Thus, Bratman states: “My guiding conjecture is that such individual planning agency brings with it sufficiently rich structures-conceptual, metaphysical, and normative-that the further step to basic forms of sociality, while significant and demanding, need not involve fundamentally new elements” (2014, 8). Gilbert similarly states: “A good reason for starting small is that it allows one to look closely at a situation that is relatively simple. If the crucial details of the membership relationship do indeed lie there one can expect most easily to discover it by this means” (2006, 97). Continental philosophy since Hegel, on the other hand, considers group dynamics to require new concepts not found at the individual level.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper I shall refer to the Austrian born Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) as ‘Schutz’. He wrote his first book in 1932 under the name ‘Schütz’ but once he emigrated to the USA, he dropped the *Umlaut*.

<sup>4</sup> We are involved, furthermore, not just with immediate, significant others in my present zone of one-to-one, *face-to-face* relations (Zahavi, 2014), but also with anonymized, unknown others (e.g. my ‘generation’, Schmid, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Polanyi drew on Gestalt psychology’s holism (Polanyi, 1958), and was familiar with Gilbert Ryle’s concept of ‘knowing how’ (Polanyi, 1966, 7).

‘being-in-the-world’ (*In-der-Welt-sein*) with others (*Mitsein*).<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, my first language is absorbed from others in my surroundings, no word which I invent, although I may mispronounce or misconstrue. Every new sentence I intentionally articulate is already embedded and packaged in the words of unknown others (‘the said’), although my iterations (‘sayings’) are individual, unique, and may compress or distort what is received. From birth, I am inserted into a conversation that has already started and is running on its own rules.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, despite employing this anonymous collective vehicle of language with its inherent language games, I have the sense of speaking *my* language and accessing *my* own thoughts, albeit using the public vehicles of *jointly shared* natural language. Speaking one’s own native language is a paradigm for participation in a larger collective activity.

This collective context is what Husserl terms the ‘life-world’ (*Lebenswelt*). The life-world is, admittedly, not the usual focus of discussions of joint agency (which usually emphasize individuals’ awareness of others’ intentions and commitments), but I believe it offers a healthy corrective to accounts that explicate joint agency in terms of individual intentions, commitments by individuals, or as individuals intervening on the intentions of others (see Roth, 2004).<sup>8</sup> The phenomenological tradition particularly recognizes pre-predicative, unthematized forms of embodied and embedded intentionality that may not be consciously apprehended by the intending subjects (Moran, 2018) and provide the enabling backdrop for more explicit forms of intentionality both singular and collective.

As I shall document, classical phenomenology developed several strong accounts of the intentional subject’s involvement with unknown other subjects, with the ‘other’, alterity. While their overall approaches differ, there is a great deal of convergence in their views. For Husserl, there is a deep, embodied sense of ‘I’ (the zone of ‘mineness’) and ‘not-I’, zones of familiarity and unfamiliarity. Heidegger (1927), in particular, developed a sense of ‘the one’ or ‘the they’ (*das Man*), where I do *as others do*; I fall in with the crowd; I ‘go with the flow’ or ‘live along with’ others (*Dahinleben*, Heidegger, 1927, 396). One can be *lost* in the crowd or feel *one* with the crowd, with different degrees of being absorbed and varying degrees of ego-investment in our actions. But there must be a background sense of familiarity, of shared horizon, of mutual comprehension, in order to act at all and especially to act jointly with others. For Heidegger, our most self-consciously deliberate actions, i.e., authentic actions, in Heidegger’s sense, deliberately authored by me, emerge out of this general, undifferentiated, average ‘going-with-the-flow’ (*Dahinleben*). Inauthenticity is a condition for the possibility of authenticity. Heidegger writes:

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger makes clear in *Being and Time* that ‘being-in-the-world’ is a ‘unitary phenomenon’ (Heidegger, 1927, 78). Dwelling in a world is not being placed in a spatio-temporal world. In fact existing spatially is only possible because of Dasein’s prior being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927, 82). By contrast, John Searle has a static and reified concept of ‘world’ as the extant, external world, independently of our conceptions of it (Searle, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> The German popular philosopher Peter Sloterdijk likens being born to entering a conversation that started before one and one has the sense of trying to catch up.

<sup>8</sup> Some accounts of joint agency want to reduce it to a set of diplomatically cooperating individual agencies (so called ‘individualism’).

The Others who are thus ‘encountered’ in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such ‘Things’ are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others—a world which is always mine too in advance. (Heidegger, 1927, 154)

Indeed, phenomenologists point out that it is when one is accused by others that often one comes to awareness of one’s responsibility as an agent (Zahavi, 2020, 161). As Paul Ricoeur attests:

I form the consciousness of being the author of my acts in the world and, more generally, the author of my acts of thought, principally on the occasion of my contacts with an other, in a social context (Ricoeur, 1966, 56–7).

Individuals are always involved in communal groups, whether they consciously know it or not, and whether they specifically agree to it or not (I belong unchoosingly to the native speakers of English, or to those born in the twentieth century). Groups can form spontaneously, e.g. a bus queue; passengers delayed on a plane are constituted as a specific group with implicit assumptions and expectations. Alfred Schutz developed the useful term ‘consociates’ (Schutz, 1967, 8), i.e. those in my present horizon, sharing my space, with whom I am accidentally involved (Embree, 2004).

Group-being is often ‘mindless’. I simply *accompany* my friend on a trip to the store.<sup>9</sup> She has a specific goal in mind (an item to buy), but I share no such intention of buying anything myself, nor do I have to acknowledge or approve her intention of buying that item. What then is shared in such a collective or joint action? What is shared is the generally *unspoken* willingness to be *in company with another for a certain length of time*. I fall into the role of being a *willing companion* on the trip. *Being a companion* is a temporary, shared (but perhaps slightly secondary) social role with its own distinctive set of demands and expectations (and others imposed by the nature of the relation between the two strollers).<sup>10</sup> It might, for example, be entirely acceptable for me to say nothing during the trip to the store, perhaps even to wait outside, go for a coffee while my friend is in buying. A short hiatus can intervene without disrupting the sense of a shared walk but then we *walk back together*. Walking together offers *companionable support* to the other and, of course, must be voluntarily acceded to or concurred to by both (as opposed to being stalked by a

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Gilbert discusses going for a walk in some detail – including the idea that the participants follow ‘private conventions’, e.g. the tacit assumption that one can choose to decide when one has walked enough (2006, 110).

<sup>10</sup> In going for a walk to the store, I defer to the one who has the intention to buy something. I am alongside but also a follower (similar to a dance partner). Margaret Gilbert’s discussion of a joint walk includes notions like rights and correlative obligations of the participants to one another, grounded in the activity itself (Gilbert, 2006, 105–6). She does acknowledge that there are ‘pertinent background understandings involved’ but she does not elaborate. Gilbert’s discussion, while recognizing the contribution of Simmel and other social psychologists, frames the problem in terms of social contract theory and ‘concurrence conditions’ rather than a more implicit and tacit belonging to a social world that enables certain normatively constrained practices.

stranger, or simply walking in a procession of people unknown to each other).<sup>11</sup> It is different from acting as guardian or as a scout. Social roles continually mutate into other roles.

Furthermore, in contemporary society, objective institutions emerge to consolidate such roles: *being-a-companion* can become codified as a professional role (carer), e.g., professional *dog walker*, for instance. These roles emerge from (long before they are explicitly named) and are embedded in the cultural, historical life world.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, this thick, enveloping life-world is not static; rather, it is a dynamic and essentially temporal, historical cultural form, as Husserl and Heidegger emphasize. Being-in-the-world is essentially historical.<sup>13</sup> The life-world passes through the lives of individuals (e.g. becoming an 'influencer') who revivify it just as a language remains living because speakers use it. Teenagers (in cultures that support such a life-form) inhabit a world different from adults.

Furthermore, being in the world is perspectively parsed; how the situation presents itself is different depending on whether one is participant or observer. As Schutz clarifies:

... the social world is given to us in a complex system of perspectives: my partner and I, for instance, have intimate and rich experience of each other as we talk together, whereas we both appear to a detached observer in an aura of "flatness" and "anonymity." (Schutz, 1967, 8)

The life-world is primarily both subjective and intersubjective; it is not an 'object' as such, unless seen from the outside. The life-world, moreover, is both enabling and stultifying or limiting. Every culture may impede or restrict the development of a person or group (e.g. women excluded from formal education; language users excluded from the dominant linguistic group; non-residents excluded from the local park). In a strong sense, individuality emerges from transmitting, interpreting, or challenging the boundaries of the inherited communal life-world. However, this largely requires finding solidarity in new groups (acts of 'resistance' to the dominant culture), e.g., Heidegger sees poetry as offering an authentic challenge to everyday, public language that degenerates into 'idle talk' (*Gerede*). But a poet never writes as if completely alone; rather each mediates or channels the tradition to which

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert (2006) also notes the difference between participant and observer (although she does not invoke Schutz). Thus one of the walkers may feel the other is walking too fast and can indicate (perhaps by stopping) that the partner should slow down; but it would not be socially appropriate for an observer who notices this to intervene to ask the person to slow down. Of course, there is currently a social push for bystanders to intervene in certain situations, so the codes governing public behavior may change and be modified over time.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Garfinkel (1967) developed an interesting account of this embeddedness in social roles, influenced by phenomenology, especially Schutz (whom Garfinkel met through Aron Gurwitsch). Gilbert talks of 'background understandings' without the presence of explicit agreements (2006, 112) but tends to see these as conventions. I think this way of setting up the problem is reading back explicit 'agreements' into the tacit social situation.

<sup>13</sup> Even taken-for-granted social forms such as 'going for a walk together' are historical cultural forms (one finds accounts of such social forms in Plato's dialogues or in Rousseau). There are differences between a leisurely stroll, a trip to the shops, a brisk walk for exercise, a *reconnoitre* of a new neighborhood, and so on. Each social form has its own implicit regimen and normative structure.

they belong (and each always has in mind a kind of ‘tradition’, perhaps what they encountered in school).<sup>14</sup> This is what Husserl calls ‘the poeticizing of history’ (*die Dichtung der Geschichte*, Husserl, 1954, 513). By doing philosophy, similarly, we maintain and replenish the tradition of philosophy.

All social objectivities (families, groups, institutions, social roles) are integrated in nested boxes into a unified, total and essentially temporal and historical subjective and intersubjective *world* that Husserl calls the ‘world of spirit’ (*Geisteswelt*, Husserl, 1989, 196), imbued with ‘communal spirit’ (*Gemeingeist*, Husserl, 1973a, b, c).<sup>15</sup> For Husserl, furthermore, this spiritual world is revealed and traversed through a uniquely ‘personalistic attitude’ (*die personalistische Einstellung*, Husserl, 1989, 183) whereby we recognize each other as persons: “the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another. Shake hands with one another in greeting, or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion (Husserl, 1989, 192). Each person has a consciousness of belonging to the world of other ‘co-persons’ (*Mitpersonen*, Husserl, 1973c, 178), living in an open horizon of others in society (*Mitgemeinschaft*, Husserl, 1973c, 176).

According to Husserl, furthermore, following Dilthey, *motivation* is the law governing the world of spirit. There is a ‘motivational nexus’ (*motivationaler Zusammenhang*) of interlocking intentionalities that is experienced as basic, natural, and intrinsically social.<sup>16</sup> One is not determined causally in this interpersonal world (it is a realm of freedom). There is an inherent ‘ambiguity’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 95) in conscious responses. I can *feel* the need to open the window because the room is stuffy, but I *decide* not to, because of the noise in the street outside. Indeed, *anyone* in the room may freely *open* the window (although in some instance permission may be required or expected, depending on local norms). In the motivational nexus (*Motivationszusammenhang*), there are certain pathways or possibilities available that allow one action to proceed to the next. In this regard, Husserl observes that motivation is closely connected with habit and association (Moran, 2011). I can follow blindly or I can also take a decisive stand, or I can drift somewhere in between these poles. I have a *desire* to smoke but I *resist* because it is harmful to my health; but in the end I may smoke anyway. All this can take place at an intuitive, implicit, pre-verbal level. Moreover, these motivational pathways that appear as possibilities for action all cohere together to give the enduring *sense* of the shared public world.

Once one recognizes that shared social roles and their motivational pathways may be spontaneous or premeditated, temporary or permanent, may be simply befall one,

<sup>14</sup> Even the act of translating a poet (e.g. Amanda Gorman) has recently drawn attention to certain presumptions about *who* can translate. Must the translator and poet share not just life experiences but also gender or skin color? The acts of writing and translating involve collective agency and a communal context.

<sup>15</sup> Current Anglophone discussions of collective agency in Gilbert (2006), Bratman (2014), and others, tend to ignore this communal world of spirit (or ‘group mind’). Indeed, John Searle (1995) simply mocks the very idea of any kind of Hegelian collective spirit.

<sup>16</sup> For Husserl, following Wilhelm Dilthey, interpersonal experiences are to be understood not in terms of strict causality but in terms of what he calls *motivation* (Husserl, 1989, 231–59), which is a network of supportive significance or motivating reasons, within a complex of intentions and fulfillments. Motivations prompt actions.

or assigned to one, or may be entered into voluntarily, one has to recognize that the intrinsic forms of cooperative *agency* involved – with different distributions of *engagement*, *responsibility*, *recognition* and *reciprocity* – are also extremely varied and can range from the fully implicit (e.g. one's relationships in a family) to the highly explicit and articulated (e.g. a legal contract).<sup>17</sup>

There cannot be a single conceptual account of joint agency. Different forms need to be identified and sub-divided into their constituent elements.<sup>18</sup> Joint actions, such as a duet singing together, an orchestra playing, line dancing, a rave, a team rowing, a boxing match, a war, are structured in different ways with different forms of participation, recognition, reciprocity and horizontality.<sup>19</sup> The orchestra members may be primarily following the music itself (perceptually tracking the external situation), or the conductor, and be at most marginally aware of one another (unless one goes off rhythm). There may be little explicit attention to the others in the group, although there may be an underlying expectation of tacit cooperation and skillful contribution.<sup>20</sup> Other forms of social cooperation demand different forms of reciprocity.<sup>21</sup> For example, the *parent-child* relation imposes different sets of expectations on each side of the social dialectic (being a mother, being a daughter). Similarly, there are many different degrees of 'joint' or shared agency with different levels of *agential involvement*, different degrees of *responsibility*, and so on. Joint agency, then, has its own peculiar and extremely varied forms of intentionality, with its own attentional focus, anticipations, expectations, and fulfilments, within defined temporal frames (and the temporality is crucial –it is not always synchronous). Each type of joint agency has its own peculiar and very complex *phenomenology* that needs to be investigated concretely using the phenomenological method. There may not be a single underlying formula. There is a difference, for example, between two

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Gilbert's discussion of groups does recognize the differences between different types of groups: "Clubs, trade unions, and army units are likely to have a set of explicit rules of procedure and explicit goals. Families are less likely to have such rules and goals" (Gilbert, 2006, 94). She recognizes that larger groups may have members who are unknown to each other but her approach is to begin with small transient groups, e.g. two people going for a walk. Phenomenologists, on the other hand, like to understand how smaller groups belong to a larger social world.

<sup>18</sup> The entry 'Shared Agency', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, focuses on recent accounts (e.g. Searle, Bratman, Gilbert, Tuomela) that cluster around interrelatedness of the participants' intentions. As Roth writes: 'Most of the views canvassed here emphasize as a condition for shared activity fairly robust forms of integration between participants' (Roth, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Pacherie (2012, 343–44) recognizes that there are different forms in which groups vary. She lists six: size, hierarchy, division of labor among members, types of interaction among agents, transience or permanence of the group, dependence on institutions. However, her overall account involves agents representing their actions to themselves and phenomenology generally does not favor a representationalist account.

<sup>20</sup> Bratman (1992) identifies mutual responsiveness, commitment to joint activity, commitment to mutual support, and common knowledge of these commitments. He speaks of mutually interlocking plans whereas I am suggesting that there need be no explicit knowledge or commitment and one may be daydreaming along or living in the music.

<sup>21</sup> Pacherie (2012, 350) acknowledges that "philosophers have tended to focus on the latter kind of collective actions, joint actions for short. ... their paradigmatic examples of joint actions tend to be small-scale, egalitarian joint actions, such as two people painting a house together, moving heavy furniture together, preparing a sauce together, or walking together".



people casually entering together into a perhaps unspoken voluntary relationship (e.g. ‘friends with benefits’), where either partner can withdraw from the arrangement at any time without expectation of conditions being violated, and people are who are mutually committed to a more permanent partnership in a monogamous relationship (e.g. traditional, legal marriage), with written expectations enforceable by legal sanction.

There is not one formula for joint action and, in each case, there is, besides the explicit rule-book (if any) also operative an assumed collective background of practices, motivational possibilities, normative assumptions and expectations that are not yet explicitly codified (e.g. the current debate over the meaning of ‘consent’) but which set the stage for the kind of group agency involved. Joint agency emerges from this presumed world of implicit normative ‘sense’ (*Sinn*) that contextualizes the action and endows it with significance. This is the communal life-world. In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on implicit and implied forms of collective shared action in relation to the context of the life-world.

## 2 Group being: from seriality to fused groups

Classical phenomenology has prioritized the face-to-face binary relation as the paradigm of the ‘we’ (Buber, Levinas, even Schutz). Belonging to a larger group introduces added complexities. In his insightful but much neglected *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre, 1960) Sartre examines different levels of group membership and group agency. How can a group come together to storm the Bastille? Or have the shared consciousness of belonging to the ‘proletariat’ or the ‘workers of the world’?<sup>22</sup> He begins with haphazardly formed, temporary ‘serial groups’, which are united in a goal but not necessarily in mutual involvement,<sup>23</sup> and extending to what he called ‘groups in fusion’ (*groupes en fusion*) that are melded together not just by *shared goals* but also by *shared values and commitments*.

Sartre distinguishes between different kinds of groups.<sup>24</sup> There are broadly speaking larger ‘collectives’ that specific groups emerge from and may

<sup>22</sup> Since the time of the Stoics there has been an attempt to have each of us think of ourselves as ‘citizens of the world’. Socrates is said to have used this phrase *cosmou polites* – I am not an Athenian or a Greek but a citizen of the world. This is a very peculiar form of self-identification according to which I identify myself with all humanity, all possible human beings. The early Marx speaks of ‘species being’. Environmentalists today encourage us to think of ourselves as travelers on ‘spaceship Earth’ (Buckminster Fuller, 1969). Humans can identify not just with specific groups but with *the whole human race* (commonly expressed in religions). Husserl writes: “I fit myself into the family of man, or, rather, I create the constitutive possibility for the unity of this ‘family.’ It is only now that I am, in the proper sense, an Ego over against an other and can then say ‘we’” (Husserl, 1989, 254).

<sup>23</sup> John Searle has a similar example of people in a park running for shelter in a cloudburst (Searle, 1990, 402).

<sup>24</sup> Sartre conducts his analysis in terms of an overarching dialectic between human ‘praxis’ and the ‘practico-inert’, (the practico-inert field is everything that does not belong to human agency). The practico-inert is what is deposited by human action, it is both the ground and limit of action, is marked by scarcity, and is “the field of our servitude” (Sartre, 1960, 332). Free human action (*praxis*) always has to interact with the limiting practico-inert.



disintegrate back into (Sartre, 1960, 254). Sartre speaks of the group as negating the collective and vice-versa. For Sartre, the group is defined by its ‘constant movement of integration’. In his analysis of groups, Sartre begins with loosely affiliated series of people, such as a bus queue (Sartre, 1960, 256), which is a ‘seriality’, the basic type of sociality (Sartre, 1960, 348). Serial groups are a “plurality of isolations: these people do not care about or speak to each other and, in general, they do not look at one another; they exist side by side alongside a bus stop” (Sartre, 1960, 256). This isolation of each from the other is not just haphazard and accidental but deliberately willed, e.g. each may turn her back on the other. Sartre writes: “This plurality of separations can, therefore, in a way, be expressed as the negative side of individual integration into separate groups” (Sartre, 1960, 257). In this serial group, individuals are ‘massified’ and “isolation is a project” (reinforced by buying the paper to read on the bus, daydreaming, etc.). Indeed, this *isolation* is the socially constructed condition of being in the city, for Sartre, as a way of coping with being in a mass.

For Sartre, diffuse serial groups are united by a common purpose: “These individuals form a group to the extent that they have a common interest” (Sartre, 1960, 258). The bus itself constitutes each person queuing as an *interchangeable* passenger (a ‘fare’). The external situation (the bus to be boarded) treats *each as identical to the other* in an ‘abstract’ way: “Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself. And identity as alterity is exterior separation” (Sartre, 1960, 260). This means, as Sartre puts it, that the ‘unit-being’ or being unified (*être-unique*) of the group lies outside itself, in a future object or state of affairs (Sartre, 1960, 259), in the bus they are waiting for (Sartre, 1960, 262). But the serial group also imposes conditions on each in regard to the other: “A series is a mode of being for individuals both in relation to one another and in relation to their common being” (Sartre, 1960, 266).

There are many varying kinds of membership of a serial unity. There are different conditions of presence or absence of the members, e.g., Sartre discusses the audience for a radio broadcast: “the mere fact of listening to the radio, that is to say, of listening to a particular broadcast at a particular time, establishes a serial relation of absence between the different listeners” (Sartre, 1960, 271). The radio voice constitutes its virtual ‘audience’ by addressing it: “Dear listeners” (Sartre, 1960, 272), thereby constituting the audience *as an audience*. The listener is constituted as ‘abstract’, hence one can speak of ‘the average listener’. One can switch off but by so doing one has not cancelled the collective. It has an indefinite seriality that others can leave or join (Sartre, 1960, 273). There are ways in which each member identifies himself or herself with this serial ‘other’: “I discover myself as Other (an identity determined in seriality)” (Sartre, 1960, 303). One identifies oneself as just *another member* of this group. One identifies with one’s otherness, as Sartre will say. I experience the ‘other-being’ of myself and of others (Sartre, 1960, 338) in the everyday world. Moreover, seriality has a certain kind of absorption into anonymity and conformity, as Sartre writes:

Thus, as we have seen, there is a sort of common mode of behaviour amongst the white minority in a city where the majority are black: quite simply this

behaviour is common in that it is imitated by everyone but never adopted by anyone (not counting the creation of organisations). (Sartre, 1960, 311)

Here, Sartre invokes Hegel's notion of the 'the atomised crowd' (Sartre, 1960, 285).

In contrast to this kind of anonymous membership and participation, Sartre develops the notion of the more tightly knit 'group-in-fusion', a group that is more closely and intrinsically unified into an *organic* whole. For Sartre, this is people identifying *as members of the proletariat* or as a political party. Sartre is aware of the multiple dynamics in which groups divide or unite into larger groups. In the fused group, each member identifies with the goals of the group; and they also recognize each other as *members sharing those goals*. There is *mutual recognition*<sup>25</sup> of each other's freedom and the common intentionality of their action create a social relation that is without a fixed hierarchy. Sartre has interesting descriptions of groups (e.g. of soldiers) who are set in flight, become scattered, but who then, more or less spontaneously, regroup. There are different dynamics in play. But overall, membership of a fused group promotes a kind of solidarity *within* and a separation or distinctness from those not in the group.<sup>26</sup> A *leader* can emerge (someone shouts 'charge' in the mob of protesters) whose individual praxis is affirmed as the praxis of the group—this is what Sartre calls the 'third' (Sartre, 1960, 374). Each person sees himself not just as an individual but as a member of a group that also has existence *without* them. Each identifies with the goal of the group.

I introduce Sartre's distinctions here merely to show that there has been a long debate about collective agency within the phenomenological tradition, almost completely ignored by current Anglophone discussions. The individual emerges from out of a group. As Axel Honneth has stressed, the process of individuation is essentially intertwined with that of socialization (Honneth, 1995).

### 3 Embeddedness (*Einbettung*) in the life-world

Classical phenomenology emphasizes that joint agency of any meaningful kind presupposes embeddedness in what Husserl called the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*).<sup>27</sup> All action (singular or plural) takes place against the backdrop of a communally shared, pregiven, everyday life-world that acts as the meaningful temporal 'horizon' for all action. The primary phenomenon is our 'embeddedness' (*Einbettung*), in the historical, social world.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Alfred Schutz shrewdly commented that Husserl's original contribution in social philosophy was not in intersubjectivity or empathy but in his analysis of the life-world (Schutz, 1962, 149). Summarizing Schutz's contribution, Maurice Natanson writes:

<sup>25</sup> Sartre found this concept in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as mediated through the lectures of Alexandre Kojève. For a useful survey of different concepts of recognition see Iser, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Sartre is anticipating the in-group/out-group discussion of social psychology in the 1970s (see Tajfel et al., 1971).

<sup>27</sup> See Moran, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> The term 'embeddedness' (*Einbettung*) was first used by Husserl's student Gerda Walther (1923).

Whatever other allegiances an individual has, he is first of all a citizen of the republic of daily life. Each one of us is part of an on-going world of everyday affairs which is, for the most part, taken for granted in its essential being. ... The taken for granted everyday world of living and working is the nuclear presupposition of all other strata of man's reality ... The central and most cunning feature of the taken for granted everyday world is that it is taken for granted. As common-sense men living in the mundane world, we tacitly assume that, of course, there is this world all of us share as the public domain within which we communicate, work, and live our lives. ... we simply assume, presuppose, take it for granted that the daily world in which all of these activities go on is there; it is only on special occasions, if at all, that a serious doubt arises as to the veridical character or philosophical signification of our everyday world. (Schutz, 1962, xxvi)

I shall now develop the elements of this tacitly lived-through life-world that shape joint action by giving it a ground and 'horizon'.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4 The social construction of the 'sense' (*Sinn*) of reality

To develop this classical phenomenological account of social reality and action, I now turn to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967).<sup>30</sup> It provides a synoptic phenomenological account, deeply influenced by Husserl and Schutz and by the German anthropological tradition (Plessner, Gehlen).<sup>31</sup> Classical phenomenology can be taken as converging towards this canonical account. I choose it as my exemplar, while profoundly aware that

<sup>29</sup> *Horizon-consciousness*, for Husserl is indefinite and empty but it has a particular character relative to the theme. There is always what is relevant or irrelevant, interesting or uninteresting, wrapped up in the experience. Every experience has specifically and lawfully determined but also essentially unlimited horizons of intentional implication, including not just what is actually given but also available potentialities and possibilities in which such intentional objects are apprehended and made meaningful. In Husserl's terms, we have tacit knowledge of the overall horizon or context of a problem.

<sup>30</sup> The German phenomenological sociologist Helmuth Plessner wrote in his Preface to the 1969 German translation of *The Social Construction of Reality*: "The two authors call the present book 'The Social Construction of Reality' and not 'The Construction of Social Reality,' which is by no means the same, because in the latter version the social world would have been taken for granted and one would be confronted with one of its many theoretical attempts of coming to terms with it. The book doesn't want to be read like that" (Plessner, 1969: ix; transl. Martin Endress in Endress, 2016, 129). This is important given that John Searle entitled his book *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995).

<sup>31</sup> Peter Berger, born in Austria, was student of Schutz at the New School in 1950s, but he also studied Weber. Thomas Luckmann was also Austrian, trained in German philosophy, and was influenced by Husserl and Durkheim. Luckmann wrote: "Through Schutz I encountered phenomenology. I hadn't read Husserl before I met Schutz. I would say that I am or was a trained phenomenologist, which few people who describe themselves as phenomenologists are, if I may add this bitter note. Dorion Cairns was one of my teachers in phenomenology, so I think I had decent training in the field" (Dreher & Göttlich, 2016). Luckmann read Plessner's *Conditio Humana* in 1963 and met him in the New School. Plessner's wife translated Berger and Luckmann into German and Plessner wrote the Preface to the German Edition.

phenomenologists diverged in terms of their ontologies and methodological approaches.<sup>32</sup> Berger & Luckmann acknowledge the human ‘predisposition toward sociality’: “In the life of every individual, therefore, there *is* a temporal sequence, in the course of which he is inducted into participation in the social dialectic. The beginning point of this process is internalization” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 129). *Internalization* is construed here as the immediate apprehension of something as an expressed meaning: “internalization ... is the basis for an understanding of one’s fellowmen and, secondly, for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful social reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 130).<sup>33</sup>

Berger & Luckmann’s concern is how the *sense of reality* is introduced, i.e. how *the sense* of the persisting external reality as well as *the sense* of the enduring internal reality (the self) is established. Human beings have an overpowering need to experience their world *as real* and *themselves* as real in it.<sup>34</sup> One gains a stable concept of oneself by comparing oneself with others, by experiencing being judged by significant others as to how one performs one’s roles. For George Herbert Mead, self-awareness occurs when a person internalizes the attitudes of others towards one. The self is built by reflection on those internalizations. All of this may occur unconsciously. I simply stand taller when I am talking to a tall man; I adjust my voice and my vocabulary in talking with a child.

Berger & Luckmann borrow heavily from Mead for their overall account of *socialization*,<sup>35</sup> a dynamic process that involves differing degrees of *internalization* of external viewpoints and norms. For Mead, a sense of self and external reality is achieved in this checking oneself against the other. Berger & Luckmann, following Mead, distinguish between *primary* (childhood) and *secondary* socialization (the internalization of institutions; acquisition of role specific knowledge; ‘tacit understandings, Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 138). According to Mead, the self emerges in a process of communication with one’s ‘significant others’ (a term Berger & Luckmann credit to Mead). The person takes the attitude of others towards herself thereby constituting the self (Malhotra, 1987, 361). For Berger & Luckmann, the self is socially produced:

Man’s self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. ... Man’s specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. *Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 51)

<sup>32</sup> Phenomenology is best understood as an *approach* rather than a strict *method* (Moran, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Berger & Luckmann here refer to Weber and Schutz.

<sup>34</sup> For the paramount status of everyday reality, Berger and Luckmann draw on Schutz’s paper, “On Multiple Realities” (Schutz, 1962, 207–259). Berger & Luckmann’s inspiration for the notion of internalization is the American philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead (1863–1931).

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that another New School phenomenologist and student of Schutz, Maurice Natanson, published a book on Mead, *The Social Dynamics of George H. Mead* (Natanson, 1956) that is referenced by Berger and Luckmann (1967, 195 n. 6).

The social order produced by human beings is experienced as *always already there* (*immer schon da*). It is, as Merleau-Ponty says, the past that was never present (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 282).

According to Mead, in early childhood, significant others (immediate carers, family members) are crucial to the emerging of one's *self-concept*.<sup>36</sup> Mead stresses the importance of 'taking the attitude of the other toward the self'. For Mead, self-consciousness is a reflected entity' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 132), "reflecting the attitudes first taken by significant others toward it" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 132). "The individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others" (ibid).

In internalization, I understand not just the other but *the world* in which they live. As Berger & Luckmann put it: "a nexus of motivations is established between us and extends into the future ... we participate in each other's being" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 130). This taking over of the other's world is a complex process. Each generation absorbs and mediates what is received, mostly without conscious awareness of their role in sedimenting *tradition* (understood as a large, vaguely defined, temporally dispersed, and anonymous group).<sup>37</sup>

For Berger & Luckmann, the function of *internalization* is to generate a sense of both *external* and *internal* reality. External reality is apprehended as stable and enduring: "primary socialization internalizes a reality apprehended as inevitable" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 147). The individual absorbs and affirms the routines and traditions inherent in the taken-for-granted world. The taken-for-granted reality of everyday life has an enormous hold and indeed is the anchor for our being-in-the-world (Heidegger's 'everydayness', *Alltäglichkeit*). Primary socialization is particularly stable and endures through life, although it may be disrupted in marginal situations (e.g. dreams), or experiences of conflicting possibilities can challenge this reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 147).<sup>38</sup> Even in the face of marginal situations and challenges, primary internalizations mostly persist, constituting one's grounded sense of their *subjective reality*: "maintenance of

<sup>36</sup> The term 'significant other' that has now entered the common parlance was first used by George Herbert Mead in 1934 in his *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 195, n. 6) but others credit the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan (1892–1949), in his *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (Sullivan, 1953). Berger & Luckmann do not limit primary socialization solely to the activities of significant others. The social process distinguishes between significant others and less important ones (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 149), but "less significant others function as a sort of chorus" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 151), reinforcing and solidifying our sense of reality in the crowd.

<sup>37</sup> Husserl writes in the *Crisis of European Sciences* of the 'poeticizing of history' (*die Dichtung der Geschichte der Philosophie*). Each person responds to their own perceived version of the tradition, what motivates and inspires is "in part made by himself, and in part taken over" (Husserl, 1970, 395). Just as a poet reactivates and revivifies the *tradition of poetry* by writing poems, perhaps consciously or unconsciously influenced by the poet's selective reading of earlier poets, similarly, the philosopher inserts herself selectively and creatively into the philosophical tradition and how they allow themselves to be oriented by it. Everyone belongs to a tradition and, in that respect, shares its *telos* and its horizons.

<sup>38</sup> For Berger & Luckmann, drawing on Freud and Schutz, everyday life is transcended in jokes, dreams, theatre, philosophy, and so on. But everyday life flows on as the base line or default attitude.

primary internalizations in the face of marginal situations is a fair measure of their subjective reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 148). External reality reinforces internal reality and vice versa. One’s group-being secures one’s *sense of reality* and inner psychic stability.

As phenomenologists have emphasized, there is a degree of comfort in the anonymity of the crowd and the sense that ‘we are all in this together’ (although this can lead to dangerous consequences also, on masses, see, on herd mentality, Scheler, 1916; on mass psychology, Reich, 1970).

The process of *primary socialization* ends when the rudiments of the *generalized other* have been installed in the consciousness of the individual: “The formation within consciousness of the generalized other marks a decisive phase in socialization” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 133). The formation of the collective anonymous ‘other’ is crucial for confirming one’s sense of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 150). The emergence of the ‘generalized other’ is the major step by which the individual self comes to view herself *as part of a larger group*. This concept of the ‘generalized other’ is borrowed from George Herbert Mead (but similar to Sartre’s concept of the ‘third’)<sup>39</sup> and is deployed by Berger & Luckmann to describe the way in which the individual is socialized by internalizing the views of others, not just significant others (*my mother* doesn’t like it when I spill the soup) but the general other (i.e. the recognition that *no one likes it when you spill soup*). This capacity to view oneself *as the same as the other* (as one of the others) leads to formulating a *general set of expectations and assumptions of others, without being in direct contact with them*. One begins to think of oneself as a *member of a complex social system* and in that sense similar to others (“we are all in the same boat”).

The formation of the generalized other, furthermore, Berger & Luckmann maintain, is made possible by *language*. Following Mead and Husserl, they regard language as the vehicle for the general other: “language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 153). Schutz, likewise, speaks of a “communicative common environment” (Schutz, 1966, 29). Husserl, similarly, emphasizes the centrality of communication in what he calls ‘acts of social mutual relation’ (*Akte von sozialen Wechselbeziehung*, Husserl, 1952, 194):

Sociality is constituted by *specifically social, communicative acts* [*durch die spezifisch sozialen, kommunikativen Akte*], acts in which the ego turns to others and in which the ego is conscious of these others as ones toward which it is turning, and ones which, furthermore, understand the turning, perhaps adjust their behavior to it and reciprocate by turning toward that ego in acts of agreement or disagreement, etc. (Husserl, 1989, 204; Husserl, 1952, 194).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Sartre writes: Even when men are face to face, the reciprocity of their relation is actualised through the mediation of this third party and at once closes itself off from it (Sartre, 1960, 106).

<sup>40</sup> Husserl sees these communicative acts as based on one person addressing another in greeting, etc.

For Husserl, one belongs to a ‘communicative community’ (*Mitteilungsgemeinschaft*, Husserl, 1973b, 216; Husserl, 1973c 461ff.) which is also a ‘speech community’ (*Sprachgemeinschaft*). As Berger & Luckmann put it: “The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation” (1967, 152). Furthermore, Berger & Luckmann stress that “the greater part of reality-maintenance in conversation is implicit, not explicit” (1967, 152), taking place against the background of an already given world that is taken for granted. Social, communicative acts not only establish mutual relations between subjects but also constitute the sense of a single, shared, common surrounding world. For a *circle of friends*, Husserl says, the external world is simply *the rest of the world* (Husserl, 1989, 205; Husserl, 1952, 195). Different zones of familiarity and unfamiliarity are established; what Husserl terms ‘home-world’ (*Heimwelt*) and ‘alien-world’ (*Fremdwelt*). Husserl speaks of the ‘we-world’ (*Wir-Welt*) or ‘we-community’ (*Wir-Gemeinschaft*, Husserl, 1954, 416; Husserl, 1973b, 223), or ‘those around me’ *Mitwelt* (Husserl, 1954, 482—in relation to animals—it probably just means something like ‘togetherness’ in this context). This is the world of ‘we-humans’ (*Wir-Menschen*, Husserl, 1968, 339, 342), ‘co-subjectivity’ (*Mitsubjektivität*, Husserl, 1954, 258). We live, Husserl says, in the ‘horizon of the we’ (*im Horizont des Wir*, Husserl, 1973b, 223). In an interesting text from 1921/22 Husserl writes:

I am and everyone is in the horizon of the we [*im Horizont des Wir*], and this horizon is at the same time the horizon for many communities and for all those to which I in particular belong and to which each person belongs in his or her own right. And over and above this, a further extension to inauthentic communities [*von uneigentlichen Gemeinschaften*] as common possession, and to the remote effects of persons on persons, community on community, etc. Effects extending out. (Husserl, 1973b, 223, my translation)

Similarly Husserl attests in the *Crisis* § 69:

But each soul also stands in community [*Vergemeinschaftung*] with others which are intentionally interrelated, that is, in a purely intentional, internally and essentially closed nexus [*Zusammenhang*], that of intersubjectivity. (Husserl, 1970, 238)

Husserl does not explicitly discuss the *process* of ‘socialization’ as such, but he does acknowledge the already dyadic relation between mother and child as a primary form of socialization. As Husserl writes in a 1932 reflection:

I grow up in my family and the bond [*Verbindung*] with my mother is the most original of all bonds. Later there grow within me some further bonds with brothers and sisters, with comrades, with friends. However, I grow into traditional communities, into that of my family in the historical sense (my “clan” [*Geschlecht*]), into that of my nation with its customs, its language, and so on. In this growing into, in the taking over of tradition, too, there is a co-founding [*Mitstiftung*] through modes of willing. (Husserl, 1973c, 511, my translation).



The phenomenological tradition very early recognized that the child-mother bond is a face-to-face relation that sets a standard for other later bonds.<sup>41</sup>

Primary socialization persists even as secondary socialization becomes active. Thus, in Berger & Luckmann's example, 'home' remains more influential than 'school'. Secondary socialization, furthermore, does not require same *degree of identification* between the individual and the group members. One does not have to *identify* with a teacher in order to learn.<sup>42</sup> The process of secondary socialization is never complete (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 147). Secondary socialization, on the other hand, is more vulnerable to challenge than primary institution. There is, therefore, need for intensification and reinforcement of the process through routines, habits, and institutions.<sup>43</sup> Many societies, indeed, incorporate initiation rites to mark the passage from primary to secondary (e.g. first day at school).

The process of socialization demands the assumed *horizon of the shared world* as a backdrop for planning. Berger & Luckmann (here following Husserl and Gurwitsch, see Moran, 2019), describe understanding others takes place against *horizon (Horizont)* of their world.<sup>44</sup> This horizon is not just the openness of a community's space and time but also the experience of the indefinite *openness* of our social worlds (a stranger can knock at the door) and yet its strict classification into same/other, human/non-human, member/non-member, and so on. Our entire sense of external and internal reality comes from being embedded in this *world-horizon* (that includes a sense of past, future, and different possibilities). We have to have a sense that it is time for us to complete an action, for instance. *We know* when it is time to study for the impending examination.

I experience myself as 'belonging to a world, as 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-Sein*). Human *action* – 'doing and suffering' (Husserl's *Tun und Leiden*) – furthermore, is only possible on the basis of this abiding, ongoing, surrounding, collective life-world. This embedded being-in-the-world is an essential pre-condition for all agency, including joint agency. All agency emerges out of this shared world-background. One could say that all agency is joint agency in so far as it needs this network of significance in which to operate. To repeat Maurice Natanson, we are all citizens of the republic of daily life.

<sup>41</sup> Thus, in a time when behaviorism dominated psychology, Merleau-Ponty could write in 1942: "It is a known fact that infantile perception attaches itself first of all to faces and gestures, in particular those of the mother." (Merleau-Ponty, 1983, 166). The pregnant mother is already a duality of interwoven consciousnesses.

<sup>42</sup> Contrary to the current popular dictum that 'one can only be what one sees' (i.e. one has to see role models similar to oneself), in fact one can learn from others quite different from and even alien to one, e.g. a harsh, distant teacher might still be influential. One might learn mathematics, if not manners, from such a teacher.

<sup>43</sup> Husserl gives an extensive account of habit and habituation, see Moran, 2011. Berger & Luckmann write: "All human activity is subject to habitualization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 53).

<sup>44</sup> The concept of horizon comes from Husserl (Geniusas, 2012). For Husserl, objects are not perceived in isolation but against a *background (Hintergrund)* and in the midst of a 'surrounding world' (*Umwelt*) of other objects and also of other living bodies which are also other persons, animals, and so on (*Ideas II* § 51, Husserl, 1989). The 'horizon of all horizons' is the world (*Ideas I* § 27, Husserl, 1913).

We are *socialized* into the communal social world (Heidegger's and Schutz's *Mitwelt*), with differing *degrees of participative involvement* including different senses of agency. Mostly this conscious sense is not-articulated in predicative judgments but operates at the prepredicative level as an embodied, practical intuitive comportment. Belonging to a football team allocates specific roles and duties to each member (and each member is supposed to know the other). But belonging to the *Gaelic-speaking group* does not distribute a set of roles in the same way and most of the members are not known to each other. Yet certain expectations arise when members meet each other, e.g. to converse in Gaelic. Indeed, Gaelic speakers often wear a pin to indicate to others this willingness to converse in Gaelic. One is already open to the 'unknown other'. This is what Husserl calls *Sprachgemeinschaft*.

## 5 *Mitsein* and *Miteinandersein*: the primacy of 'we'

In the life-world subjective lives are 'intertwined' (*Ineinandersein*).<sup>45</sup> As Schutz puts it:

The world of the We is not private to either of us, but is our world, the one common intersubjective world which is right there in front of us (Schutz, 1967, 171)

For Heidegger (1927), a key 'existential' characteristic of human 'existence' (*Dasein*) is 'being-with' (*Mitsein*).<sup>46</sup> As Heidegger puts it, "a bare subject without a world never 'is' proximally, nor is it ever given" (Heidegger, 1927, 152). My social existence is already intrinsically 'being-with-one-another' (*Miteinandersein*). Human existence has the character of 'being-with', even if there are no others in one's immediate vicinity. Even in solitude one hears the voice of the other, the absent friend, the dead mother, and so on. More generally, the other is encountered everywhere: *someone* has parked a car over there; that field has been tilled by *someone*. The door handle is there 'for everyone'. As Heidegger puts it: "the environing world [*Umwelt*] ... is not only mine, but also that of others" (Heidegger, 1985, 237). Indeed, we often speak of this anonymous collective 'other' as 'they' – 'they are digging up the street'. People can think of themselves in the anonymous mode of the 'they' or 'the one' or 'everyone'. Thus, a child can say: "*everyone else* is allowed play that game". Heidegger's *das Man* incorporates what Mead calls the generalized other.

In the social network, Schutz sees the *we-relationship* as basic:

The basic We-relationship is already given to me by the mere fact that I am born into the world of directly experienced social reality. From this basic relationship is derived the original validity of all my direct experiences of particu-

<sup>45</sup> Husserl speaks of *Verflechtung*, *Ineinandersein*, *Miteinandersein* (Moran, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> In everyday German, *Mitsein* simply means 'togetherness' or 'companionship', but Heidegger gives the term the particular philosophical inflection: human existence is always already structurally related to others (even when one is alone and others are actually absent).

lar fellow men and also my knowledge that there is a larger world of my contemporaries whom I am not now experiencing directly. In this sense Scheler is right when he says that the experience of the We in the world of immediate social reality is the basis of the Ego's experience of the world in general. (Schutz, 1967, 165)<sup>47</sup>

Here Schutz is following Scheler in putting the we-sense before the I. In his *Formalism in Ethics* (Scheler, 1916), Scheler asserts that even the fictional Robinson Crusoe was never completely alone; he brought with him into solitude all the language, ideas, skills, clothing, of his seventeenth-century world:

An imaginary Robinson Crusoe endowed with cognitive-theoretical faculties would also co-experience his being a member of a social unit in his experiencing the lack of fulfillment of acts of act-types constituting a person in general. (Scheler, 1916, 521)

In the *Nature of Sympathy* (1924), Scheler elaborates:

Robinson Crusoe would never think: 'There is no community and I belong to none: I am alone in the world'. He would not only possess the notion and idea of community, but would also think: 'I know that there is a community, and that I belong to one (or several such); but I am unacquainted with the individuals comprising them, and with the empirical groups of such individuals which constitute the community as it actually exists.' (Scheler, 1924, 234)

Everyone is not only inserted into a social world but that world is always already given, stamped with the character of 'normality', 'regularity', 'everydayness', or just 'reality' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) stress that human beings primarily experience this social world in which they find themselves primarily as 'normal' (see Heinämaa & Taipale, 2018).<sup>48</sup> As Husserl, points out, sailors on a boat accept the rocking as normal.

There is no individual before society, but there is also no society without individuals acting in consort. We have therefore to be careful how we understand how the *we-relationship* is formed, how *Ineinandersein* is constituted (Zahavi, 2019). In one sense, only an "I" can say "we", as the linguist Émile Benveniste famously said. But, as in language, in social encounters the we-relationship is prior (not just for Heidegger, who explicitly prioritizes *Mitsein*, but, I argue here, for Husserl and Schutz). In terms of the gradation of social being-with-others, Schutz, for instance, stresses the *face-to-face* encounter as the paradigmatic social relation precisely because of

<sup>47</sup> Schutz is invoking Max Scheler's essay, *Cognition and Work* (Scheler, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Of course, for Husserl, some version of the distinction between normal and anormal is operative in all societies. It can mean that *normally* people do not stand on their heads to greet each other. The extent to which the normality structures of the life-world can be repressive is discussed by Jürgen Habermas (1987), who criticizes phenomenologists for ignoring the structures of domination inherent in the life-world. There is, of course, the capacity for revision of normal/anormal structures, but not their total elimination.

each's immediate presence to the other. Schutz writes (limiting the face-to-face situation to spatial proximity):

... spatial and temporal immediacy is essential to the face-to-face situation. All acts of Other-orientation and of affecting-the-other, and therefore all orientations and relationships within the face-to-face situation, derive their own specific flavor and style from this immediacy. (Schutz, 1967, 163)

This 'I-Thou' mode of relating,<sup>49</sup> however, is 'pre-predicative', that is it is beneath the level of articulate mental judgements (Schutz, 1967, 164). Schutz realizes that we apprehend the existence of the other person as a person in the face-to-face relation, but this may be one-sided or reciprocal. If it is reciprocal then both sides are aware of and constituting each other as respondents (as Husserl had also noted)—although this is not always the case:

The face-to-face relationship in which the partners are aware of each other and sympathetically participate in each other's lives for however short a time we shall call the "pure We-relationship." But the "pure We-relationship" is likewise only a limiting concept. The directly experienced social relationship of real life is the pure We-relationship concretized and actualized to a greater or lesser degree and filled with content. (Schutz, 1967, 164)

The *we-relationship*, for Schutz, then, is the basis for the *I-thou* relation. Moreover, the-relationship can occur with varying degrees of concreteness (Schutz, 1967, 176). There are varying degrees from direct to indirect (from participant to observer status). Schutz writes:

... imagine a face-to-face conversation, followed by a telephone call, followed by an exchange of letters, and finally messages exchanged through a third party. Here too we have a gradual progression from the world of immediately experienced social reality to the world of contemporaries (Schutz, 1967, 177)<sup>50</sup>

In this sense, Schutz maintains there are concentric circles moving from the immediate to the highly mediated and that interpersonal encounters involve a complex network:

Far from being homogeneous, the social world is structured in a complex way, and the other subject is given to the social agent (and each of them to an external observer) in different degrees of anonymity, experiential immediacy and fulfillment (Schütz 1967, 8).

<sup>49</sup> The concept of the 'I-thou relation' (*Ich-Du Beziehung*), normally associated with Martin Buber (2013), is found not just in Husserl (1973b, 170) and Schutz (who speaks of *Du-Einstellung*) but also earlier in Hermann Lotze.

<sup>50</sup> 'World of contemporaries' is Schutz's own translation of the term *Mitwelt* as opposed to the world of predecessors (*Vorwelt*) and the world of successors (*Folgewelt*). These represent zones in my human world (Schutz, 1967).

I can only relate to you (either *understanding* or *misunderstanding* you) *on the basis of a deeper set of shared assumptions* that belong to the background of the relevant group or community. The ‘we-relationship’ is the “very form of the relationship” with other people:

However, we must remember that the pure We-relationship, which is the very form of every encounter with another person, is not itself grasped reflectively within the face-to-face situation. Instead of being observed, it is lived through. The many different mirror images of Self within Self are not therefore caught sight of one by one but are experienced as a continuum within a single experience. (Schutz, 1967, 170)

This paragraph is very condensed. While the *face-to-face* situation is the paradigmatic social encounter (the most fulfilled) and founds high levels of mutual recognition, it itself is grounded on the deeper communal sociality that is not experienced consciously but is *lived through* habitually. For Schutz, the we-relationship is *lived through* and cannot be objectified without stepping outside it (Schutz, 1967, 168). Belonging to the collective ‘we’ on this account is a very specific and deep pre-edicative intentional act that takes place prior to and founds the individual I-thou encounter.

## 6 Typification and the stock of tacit social knowledge

For Berger & Luckmann, our everyday natural language *typifies* and *anonymizes* our experiences (1967, 39).<sup>51</sup> I encounter others with a “typificatory scheme” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 31): seeing someone *as a man*, a *European*, a *friend*, an *irritating person*, and so on. Generally speaking, each member of a sociality encounters others *under an aspect* (as Searle puts it), that is, falling under a concept based on a presumed *typology*. I see a *dog*, perhaps in the poor light, and later realize it is a *fox*. For me, coyotes and dingos are *dog-like*.<sup>52</sup> Schutz, building on Weber and Husserl, speaks of ‘types’.<sup>53</sup> As Schutz writes: “The pre-scientific vernacular can be interpreted as a treasure-house of ready-made pre-constituted types and characteristics” (Schutz, 1962, 14). When I ask a waiter to ‘bring me a *glass*’, I may be presented

<sup>51</sup> Psychology often refers to these ‘types’ as ‘stereotypes’. The much discussed concept of ‘unconscious bias’ in fact assumes these schemes of typification and is focused on the bringing to manifest consciousness and the corrigibility of the initial typifications. Everyday natural language provides a vast grid of types, e.g. shrub, bush, tree, or flowers, weed. These inform our perception and thinking although corrigible by science.

<sup>52</sup> A recent article in *Australian Geographic* (April 152,014) reported that dingoes are no longer classified as dogs but are recognized as a separate species. A coyote is closer to a wolf. But as a non-expert, I can classify them loosely as dog-like. The power of everyday language lies in its looseness and imprecision.

<sup>53</sup> Typification is developed from Max Weber’s concept of ideal types as well as Husserl’s concept of morphological essences (Psathas, 2005). For Weber, ideal types are heuristic tools, social scientific constructs, he does not consider types as social phenomena. For Schutz, on the other hand, following Husserl, typification functions within the life-world.

with a range of different shaped glasses. Even if I specify ‘wine glass’, again a large range of types may be included. As Husserl puts it, concepts having an ‘and so on’ (*und so weiter*) character. Bring me a (whatever is appropriate) ‘glass’. This inexactitude is actually a strength of ordinary language. This typification mediates all our experiences, including our perception of humans, animals, plants, and the natural world. Schutz writes (commenting on Husserl’s description of the natural attitude):

Husserl has shown that, from the outset, the prepredicative experience of the life-world is fundamentally articulated according to types. We do not experience the world as a sum of sense data, nor as an aggregate of individual things standing in no relations to one another. We do not see colored spots and contours, but rather mountains, trees, animals, in particular birds, fish, dogs, etc. (Schutz, 1966, 125)

Typification is characterized by a degree of anonymity, looseness and ambiguity. Its usefulness lies precisely in its flexible generality and malleability. As Schutz explains:

It must suffice to point out that all knowledge taken for granted has a highly socialized structure, that is, it is assumed to be taken for granted not only by me but by us, by “everyone” (meaning “everyone who belongs to us”). This socialized structure gives this kind of knowledge an objective and anonymous character: it is conceived as being independent of my personal biographical circumstances. (Schutz, 1962, 75)

One negotiates the social world with an inherent, everyday working ‘knowledge’ of these typifications, e.g. differentiating between professional work meetings and family gatherings. Joint action is impossible without this vast sea of presumed, non-articulated, unquestioned shared background of implicit knowledge. There is a common stock of everyday knowledge that social agents simply take for granted until it is challenged (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 44). Deliberate disruption of everyday typifications, such as a high-tech company (Google) installing bean bags as chairs for staff, only generates a new typification, e.g. ‘the hipster office’.<sup>54</sup> Berger & Luckmann, furthermore, following Schutz, see the application of a type as corrigible on becoming more familiar. I think he is Italian, and assume he loves wine but he turns out to be a ‘teetotaler’ (another typification). Mostly, typifications are progressively replaced with more appropriate ones. This social stock of knowledge (aphorisms, practical procedures, ‘know how’, stereotypes, what Kant calls ‘maxims’) is not all of one piece. It is not usually codified in the form of a handbook (but there are guides to social etiquette, etc.). This ‘knowledge’ is mostly *implicit, pre-predicative* (i.e. it is not explicitly formulated or available in the form of judgments), but also *pervasive* across a group. There is always a presumed ‘stock of knowledge’,

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre portrays, in his novel *Nausea*, how the professional class (bourgeoisie) objectifies itself in terms of these typifications, e.g. surrounding oneself with the ‘anonymous’ but clearly signifying trappings of bourgeois life as a doctor or lawyer (wearing a suit, driving a certain car, belonging to a certain club).

borrowing a term from Schutz. This working knowledge reveals *the world*, but only *partially*, as does not illuminate ‘being in the world’ as a whole. Berger & Luckmann write:

Although the social stock of knowledge appresents the everyday world in an integrated manner, differentiated according to zones of familiarity and remoteness, it leaves the totality of that world opaque. Put differently, the reality of everyday life always appears as a zone of lucidity behind which there is a background of darkness. As some zones of reality are illuminated, others are adumbrated. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 44)

This kind of presumed knowledge has been termed ‘tacit’.<sup>55</sup> Berger & Luckmann in 1967 employ a different term: ‘recipe knowledge’:

Since everyday life is dominated by the pragmatic motive recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances, occupies a prominent place in the social stock of knowledge. For example, I use the telephone every day for specific pragmatic purposes of my own. I know how to do this. ... I am not interested in why the telephone works in this way (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 42)

This social stock of ‘pragmatic’ knowledge (implicit knowledge that informs actions) differentiates reality by degrees of familiarity (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 43). Furthermore, Berger & Luckmann make the important point that this everyday knowledge is socially distributed (1967, 46) and is maintained by and accessed by different people to different degrees depending on their place in the society (power, educational level, access to information). Knowledge of how this social knowledge is itself a very powerful tool (knowing whom to consult).<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, again borrowing from Schutz, Berger & Luckmann see everyday life as structured in layered ‘relevances’ according to which my relevance structure meshes with those of others (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 45). I *intuitively* know better than to discuss my ulcer with my accountant or my taxes with my doctor. Lacking such knowledge makes one an outsider who cannot engage in a joint action.

Most contemporary accounts of joint action under-emphasize the degree to which this collective and anonymous worldly scheme of practical knowledge sets the parameters for action. This worldly context (termed the ‘life-world’) is most emphatically not just a set of *beliefs*, whether implicit or explicit. Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl calls it an *Urdoxa*. It is a prepredicative world with temporal horizons of past and future, a storehouse of possibilities and affordances. As Heidegger points out, moreover, this worldhood-belonging is apprehended first and foremost through *mood*. Moods are world-disclosing. They

<sup>55</sup> In a 2016 interview Luckmann says that, at the time of writing *The Social Construction of Reality*, he was vaguely familiar with Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge (“we can know more than we can tell,” (Polanyi, 1966, 4).

<sup>56</sup> This is an indication that phenomenologists agree with Michel Foucault that knowledge-power (*savoir-pouvoir*) relations are pervasive in the life-world. But not all relations are relations of power.



simply *befall* us. One is always in a mood. Even casual everyday normality is a mood although it is usually noticed only when it is disturbed by another ‘counter-mood’ (Heidegger, 1927, 175). Moods disclose the world as significant. Furthermore, Husserl, Scheler, and others believe we apprehend our basic values in our emotional states that are oriented to values, values are first and foremost experienced emotionally and sensually (e.g. a musical work of art might flow over us and appeal to and awaken or nourish our abiding sense of calm joyfulness). This enmooded worldliness is a fundamental ingredient for joint action but it rarely features in the current discussions. Yet without this ‘canopy’ joint action is impossible.

## 7 The priority of Intersubjectivity

Classical phenomenological approaches (even Husserl admits that his egoic approach or egology is an abstraction from the overall account of intersubjectivity) all begin with the priority of the social and communal and recognizes a kind of we-consciousness that supports the individual beyond his or her I-centeredness and provides the possibility of encountering the other as another ‘I’. Husserl speaks of a ‘mutual relation’ (*Wechselbeziehung*) between subjects. As Husserl writes in *Crisis of the European Sciences* § 50:

Now everything becomes complicated as soon as we consider that subjectivity is what it is—an ego functioning constitutively—only within intersubjectivity. From the “ego” perspective this means that there are new themes, those of the synthesis applying specifically to ego and other-ego (each taken purely as ego): the I-you-synthesis and, also, the more complicated we-synthesis. (Husserl, 1970, 172)

Husserl even speaks of a ‘universal sociality’ (the whole of humankind), that makes up the ‘space’ of all ego-subjects (Husserl, 1970, 172), a communal space to which everyone is oriented.

This mutual recognition cannot be created by one subject casting a net over the other and drawing them into communicate responsiveness. Rather each subject becomes aware of the other within the already existing network of what Husserl calls *Ineinandersein*. Clearly individual intentionalities exist and intermingle and intersect with others, but there is a way in which they arise out of an assumed communal backdrop of the life-world. One must be careful not to project a kind of collective unconscious of the Jungian kind (there are glimpses of this in Scheler, Eugen Fink, and in the late Merleau-Ponty). Rather the collectivity acts more like the way language is a unified assembly of meanings inherited from long past and now forgotten acts of naming. We simply belong to a world of mutual significance. Belonging to a ‘we’ also requires the capacity to think of oneself as part of the ‘they’. I am one of ‘them’, e.g. an elderly person, a white male.

## 8 Conclusion: rethinking the concept of agency embedded in the enveloping life-world

In order to develop a richer phenomenology of joint agency, embeddedness in the all-encompassing horizon of the life-world has to be factored in. There is a very large hierarchy of acts, from very basic responses to stimuli to highly egoic acts of deliberate choosing based on rational motives. Most daily actions are not based on explicit rationality but are more customary – the social world with the “alter egos” in it is arranged around the self as a center in various degrees of intimacy and anonymity (Schutz, 1964, 70). Schutz, for example, recognizes spontaneous action as something that is not yet fully willed or deliberative. Schutz thinks the concept of rational action in sociology has confused the participant stance with the observer (the city dweller versus the cartographer of the city). He writes that we are oriented largely by our ‘situation’:

But if social science, with few exceptions, has failed to consider this kind of rationalization of its conceptual framework, each of us human beings, in “just living along,” has already performed this task, and this without planning to do so and without any effort in the performance of his job. In doing so, we are guided neither by methodological considerations nor by any conceptual scheme of means-end relations, nor by any idea of values we have to realize. Our practical interest alone, as it arises in a certain situation of our life, and as it will be modified by the change in the situation which is just on the point of occurring, is the only relevant principle in the building up of the perspective structure in which our social world appears to us in daily life. (Schutz, 1964, 71–72)

The pragmatic life-world context has an implicitly plural structure. Human action takes place inside a large network of mostly anonymous, hidden, communal frameworks of unarticulated, practical and habitual meanings (so called ‘knowledge’). As Schutz puts it:

Clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures; suppositions and prejudices cross well-proven evidences; motives, means and ends, as well as causes and effects, are strung together without clear understanding of their real connections. There are everywhere gaps, intermissions, discontinuities. Apparently there is a kind of organization by habits, rules, and principles which we regularly apply with success. But the origin of our habits is almost beyond our control; the rules we apply are rules of thumb and their validity has never been verified. (Schutz, 1964, 72–73).

Schutz terms it “cook-book knowledge” (1964, 73); Berger & Luckmann: “recipe knowledge”. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss terms it *bricolage*; but it is the basis for all actions and especially joint actions. For phenomenologists, the life-world is not just the present actuality but also includes retention of the past and projection toward the future, as well as openness to possibilities. These possibilities are grounded in the human body and its social context, e.g. the range of moving one’s

arms or the distance one might comfortably walk. These possibilities frame action but are rarely consciously articulated. Schutz emphasizes how we imaginatively rehearse how things might turn out (he calls this “thinking in the future perfect sense”, Schutz, 1964, 77). Human action, furthermore, is guided by primarily feeling and emotion, as well as reason. Although we do occasionally break every step down in a purely rational analysis, mostly, as Schutz says, one relies on emotion:

Undoubtedly there are situations in which each of us sits down and thinks over his problems. In general he will do so at critical points in his life when his chief interest is to master a situation. But even then he will accept his emotions as guides in finding the most suitable solution as well as rational deliberation, and he is right in doing so, because these emotions also have their roots in his practical interest. (Schutz, 1964, 78)

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