

On the unity of the person. Reflections on the center of the multiple realities

At the end of his *Phenomenology of the Social World*, Alfred Schütz names three “groups of problems” (Schutz 1972, 249). The first of these problems centers around the “sociological person”: “We have by no means clarified to a sufficient degree the questions [...] of the physically present alter ego and the personal idealtype. [...] If we recall what we said about the relation of the individual to the ideal type, we shall find that even here the boundaries are fluid throughout.” (Schutz 1972, 249). These problems are outlined in the manuscripts titled “The problem of personality in the social world”, which served as a quarry for his article *On Multiple Realities*.

Niklas Luhmann also lamented the problem that it is self-evident that “people are subjects, subjects are individuals and individuals are persons” (Luhmann 2008, 137). However, his social theory and corresponding construction of the form person radically separates psychological systems from social systems. This leaves the person as a communicative construct on the social side, with the rest being structurally linked to it.

In the following few minutes, I would like to take a look at the problem of the person or personhood from Schütz’s perspective and derive from it a for the conceptualization of persons and put it up for discussion.

1 Personality manuscripts

For Schütz, the basic problem in the personality manuscripts is how to explain the unity of the person as the “unitary” basis of the ego that underlies all social divisions of the ego (Schutz 2013 [1936], 207). He thus searches for a foundation for the “multiplicity of social persons”, which for him then “‘revolves’ around a ‘nucleus of the self’” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 210). The social persons are to be equated with the different roles; Schütz cites the family man, the citizen and the philosopher as examples. But he only deals with these in passing. In line with his primarily methodological-individualistic approach, his

interest is first and foremost directed at the subjective side, not so much at the social forms. In the *Structures of the Lifeworld*, the social role is described as a type of sequence that is constructed through a series of ascribed motives: “This set [of course-of-action types] is itself a construct of typical expectations of the Other’s behavior of the other and is generally studied by sociologists [...] under the title ‘social role’” (Schutz and Luckmann 1989, 227). However, he certainly assumes that “being in the social world” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 237) entails additional modifications for all layers of the person.

For Schütz, the basis for the unity of the person is, firstly, the body, which on the one hand guarantees a pragmatic-perceptive uniqueness of experience and on the other hand enables differentiation from other people. Secondly, this is the inner unity of the experiences of consciousness in self-consciousness, that is, the classification of perceptions, experiences, feelings and movements as each one’s own. In this way, the different social and subjective persons are integrated. This unity of the self-conscious ego is described by Schütz as a general thesis, as an ideal-typical self-typification as a unity of the manifold partial personalities. The unity of the Consciousness, however, is repeatedly interrupted by the enclaves, the closed provinces of meaning of sleep, dreams, fantasy, play and also the world of jokes (Schutz 2013 [1936], 204).

On the one hand, partial personalities of the self arise through the modification of attention *à la vie*, when the finite province of meaning changes (Schutz 2013 [1937], 288). On the other hand, the partial personalities arise as a combination of social and subjective elements, in particular expectations, and self-perceptions, especially in one’s own consciousness from past (action) experiences:

“only *actio* creates unity of relations, *acta* are not to be ascribed to the unitary ego ipse, but instead to the partial social persons; in fact, we may say right away that such ascribed *acta* constitute partial persons precisely in their sedimentation.” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 221)

Accordingly, it is only the memory-based reflection of past “own”

actions that constitutes the social sub-person, while the present action creates “the semblance of an unfragmented unity” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 217). The complex construct of the person is thus further specified by the temporalization that is characteristic of Schütz’s theoretizations.

For him, temporality lies at the heart of the person: the ego, founded in subjective duration, acts in world time. Schütz distinguishes between the role of the body for one’s own localization and as a “gate into world temporality” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 212), as a spatial experience and as a “growing older” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 213). According to Schütz, this division of temporality between inner time and world time is the first original experience of the ego. However, this is followed by the question and the paradox of memorability: are the various subjective and social persons simultaneously present or is it “a succession, in part, of retained, in part of reproduced ‘mnemonic data’ belonging to this [social] person” (Schutz 2013 [1936], 211). At this point, Schütz refers to his concept of essentially actual experiences and also to Leibniz’s non-rememberable small perceptions. This would mean that these situationally present but not memorable aspects of the person distinguish the different reconstructions from one another. This changeability is also emphasized when typification in the social world with increasing social distance is also described as “depersonalization”.

In summary, it can be said that Schütz conceptualizes the person as a multiplicity of partial persons and social persons. The integrative unity arises through the reference to one’s own body as an organ of movement and perception and the resulting differentiation from other corporealities as well as through the ideal-typical general thesis of the unity of self-conscious experiences, which is based not least on self-typification. The social persons, i. e. the social roles, are explicitly described as course of action"-types, i.e. not as fixed and stable, but as dynamic and changeable.

Schütz himself never came back on the concept of the person. In the *Multiple Realities* he refers to these considerations with the concepts of ego agens and the (working) self and parallelizes the partial self with James’ and Meads Me (Schutz 1962 [1945], 216). In the course of

action the self is experienced in unity, only in reflection on past acts the self is experienced as partial.

2 Luhmann, Descola and Renn

Niklas Luhmann conceptualizes the ego as a psychological system which, due to the internal//external difference, Luhmannian: self/foreign reference. Its unity is established through the demarcation of one's own operations from the outside. He very strictly distinguishes the social form person from this, which "as an individually attributed restriction of behavioral possibilities" (Luhmann 1991, 142). Accordingly, persons are a condensate of situations of double contingency. The mental system identifies itself with its own body, but not the person. Only the communicative referencing of the body is relevant for the person. The form person or personhood "arises wherever the behavior of others is presented as chosen and can be communicatively influenced by one's own behavior." (Luhmann 1997, 643). His concept of person therefore also cannot do without inwardness, or at least an ascribed inwardness. However, in contrast to Schütz, he emphasizes the communicative-medial personal forms that also exert effects on the psychological systems via structural couplings.

In his anthropological study, Philippe Descola (2013) also works out the significance of the attribution of interiority, including intentionality, which, in combination with physicality, is central to the identification of an existent as an Other, as another person. However, this mode of identification must be accompanied by specific modes of relationship in order to become an independent form of structuring experience. The person form thus becomes a practical way of "ensuring the integration of the self and the other into a given environment." (Descola 2013, 175)

In contrast to Luhmann, Joachim Renn (2014) also emphasizes the intentionality and importance of milieu-specific socialized actors for social selection processes beyond superordinate programmes or codes. Previous experiences, habitualized schemata, routines, in short the implicit knowledge available in memory, play no small role here.

Persons are thus by no means individuals who arrange themselves freely, but rather a specific form of coordination of action alongside others (for example: organizations, systems).

3 Persons as a serial reconstructions

What conclusions can now be drawn from what has been developed so far?

1. Persons are not fixed entities, but temporalized procedures, processes, courses of action. That is why it is perhaps more accurate to speak of personalization. This process can also be reversed, in which case it would be impersonalization or depersonalization, as in processes of anonymization (mentioned by Schutz) or in total institutions, as described by Goffman.
2. Persons are series of constructions, serial reconstructions. Previous constructions are memorized in a typified way and remembered for current personalisations under specific situational circumstances (including Schütz' essentially actual experiences). In this respect, we can speak of series of personal constructions, each of which takes place differently, intertwining constructs of different layers of the social and the subject. Different elements, types and patterns, with different relevances are used. So, every reconstruction includes more or less small changes.
3. The construction of a person or a personalization is very complex, even if it can take place monothetically under one of many possible typifications, as is often the case with self-typifications. Specific somatic, emotional, cognitive, social and media elements are combined and hypostatized into a single unit. This is done from different perspectives, one's own and others, in quite different ways. Even if an integration of all personal constructions is unlikely, multiple feedback loops between one's own intentional inner world and the social environment are very common in the processes of personalization.

5. The boundary between interiority/exteriority only plays a limited role here, only in the difference between self-typification and external typification, of self-perception and ascription. For the latter in particular, the serial reconstruction works with an extensive set of diagnostic attribution patterns, so that multiple inner aspects, from motives to character traits and emotional processes, also play a role in all forms of personalizations.
6. Physicality, at this point I would contradict Schütz, does not play the role of a stable foundation for these constructions. The body is by no means constantly and also not completely intentionally represented, but fragmentary and partial. Thus, bodily aspects only enter into personalizations as partial bodies. During a somatic illness, for example, the part of the body, that is ill, plays a central role, while the irrelevant rest is forgotten. The impression of a uniform body is based on an ideal-typical assumption, that is interpolated from the physical parts of the series.
7. As Renn has pointed out, personal constructions of the self are “virtually imposed” on individuals under conditions of multiple and highly differentiated societies (Renn 2014, 256). This is ensured not only by legal and economic patterns, but also by a multitude of biographical forms that demand and promote a personal identity over time. However, this does not mean a simple internalization of social expectations, as intentionality certainly has tendencies towards stubborn development in its own logic.

I therefore assume personalization as a series, a succession of remembered social and partial persons, who are reconstructed in the present and situationally, from the respective bodily sensations, from the attributed past actions and above all from the preceding ideal-typical self and other typifications, in accordance or in reaction to the ideal-typical attributions and expectations from the social environment. In this respect, the processes of personalization or depersonalization are a series of changing reconstructions, serial reconstructions. However, these socio-psycho-material constructions are always precarious, especially under conditions of crisis.

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