Foundations of a Theory of Intersubjective Understanding

19. The General Thesis of the Alter Ego in Natural Perception

As we proceed to our study of the social world, we abandon the strictly phenomenological method. We shall start out by simply accepting the existence of the social world as it is always accepted in the attitude of the natural standpoint, whether in everyday life or in sociological observation. In so doing, we shall avoid any attempt to deal with the problem from the point of view of transcendental phenomenology. We shall, therefore, be bypassing a whole nest of problems whose significance and difficulty were pointed out by Husserl in his Formal and Transcendental Logic, although he did not there deal with these problems specifically. The question of the “meaning” of the “Thou” can only be answered by carrying out the analysis which he posited in that work. Even now, however, it can be stated with certainty that the concept of the world in general must be based on the concept of “everyone” and therefore also of “the other.”

The same idea was expressed by Max Scheler in his “Erkenntnis und Arbeit”:

The reality of the world of contemporaries and community are taken for granted as Thou-spheres and We-spheres, first of all of the whole of nature both living and inorganic. Furthermore, the reality of the “Thou” and of a community is taken for granted before the reality of the “I” in the sense of one’s own Ego and its personal private experiences.

1. See our Appended Note at the end of Chap. 1, p. 43, above.
2. In the Cartesian Meditations, especially in Meditation V, Husserl has given us a profound analysis of the general significance of these questions and has also given us the essential starting point from which they must be solved.
3. This follows from Husserl’s method of dealing with the problem. Cf. Logik, p. 212.
We must, then, leave unsolved the notoriously difficult problems which surround the constitution of the Thou within the subjectivity of private experience. We are not going to be asking, therefore, how the Thou is constituted in an Ego, whether the concept "human being" presupposes a transcendental ego in which the transcendental alter ego is already constituted, or how universally valid intersubjective knowledge is possible. As important as these questions may be for epistemology and, therefore, for the social sciences, we may safely leave them aside in the present work. 5

The object we shall be studying, therefore, is the human being who is looking at the world from within the natural attitude. Born into a social world, he comes upon his fellow men and takes their existence for granted without question, just as he takes for granted the existence of the natural objects he encounters. The essence of his assumption about his fellow men may be put in this short formula: The Thou (or other person) is conscious, and his stream of consciousness is temporal in character, exhibiting the same basic form as mine. But of course this has implications. It means that the Thou knows its experiences only through reflective Acts of attention. And it means that the Acts of attention themselves will vary in character from one moment to the next and will undergo change as time goes on. In short, it means that the other person also experiences his own aging.

So, then, all that we said in Chapter 2 about the consciousness of the solitary Ego will apply quite as much to the Thou. Since the Thou also performs intentional Acts, it also bestows meaning. It also selects certain items from its stream of consciousness and interprets these items by placing them within one or another context of meaning. It also pictures as whole units intentional Acts that took place step by step. It also lays down meaning-contexts in layers, building up its own world of experience, which, like my own, always bears upon it the mark of the particular moment from which it is viewed. Finally, since the Thou interprets its lived experiences, it gives meaning to them, and this meaning is intended meaning.

In Chapter 1 we already saw the difficulties standing in the way of comprehending the intended meaning of the other self. 6 We found, in fact, that such comprehension could never be achieved and that the concept of the other person’s intended meaning remains at best a limiting concept. Our temporal analysis has for the first time made clear the real reason why the postulate of comprehending the other person’s intended meaning could never be carried out. For the postu-

5. [This paragraph is an adaptation.]
6. See pp. 38 f. and the APPENDED NOTE, pp. 43 f.
late means that I am to explicate the other person’s lived experiences in the same way that he does. Now we have seen that self-explication is carried out in a series of highly complex Acts of consciousness. These intentional Acts are structured in layers and are in turn the objects of additional Acts of attention on the part of the Ego. Naturally, the latter are dependent upon the particular Here and Now within which they occur. The postulate, therefore, that I can observe the subjective experience of another person precisely as he does is absurd. For it presupposes that I myself have lived through all the conscious states and intentional Acts wherein this experience has been constituted. But this could only happen within my own experience and in my own Acts of attention to my experience. And this experience of mine would then have to duplicate his experience down to the smallest details, including impressions, their surrounding areas of protention and retention, reflective Acts, phantasies, etc. But there is more to come: I should have to be able to remember all his experiences and therefore should have had to live through these experiences in the same order that he did; and finally I should have had to give them exactly the same degree of attention that he did. In short, my stream of consciousness would have to coincide with the other person’s, which is the same as saying that I should have to be the other person. This point was made by Bergson in his *Time and Free Will.*

"Intended meaning" is therefore essentially subjective and is in principle confined to the self-interpretation of the person who lives through the experience to be interpreted. Constituted as it is within the unique stream of consciousness of each individual, it is essentially inaccessible to every other individual.

It might seem that these conclusions would lead to the denial of the possibility of an interpretive sociology and even more to the denial that one can ever understand another person’s experience. But this is by no means the case. We are asserting neither that your lived experiences remain in principle inaccessible to me nor that they are meaningless to me. Rather, the point is that the meaning I give to your experiences cannot be precisely the same as the meaning you give to them when you proceed to interpret them.

To clarify the distinction between the two types of meaning in-

7. Cf. also Husserl’s *Ideen,* p. 167 [E.T., p. 241]: “Closer inspection would further show that two streams of experience (spheres of consciousness for two pure Egos) cannot be conceived as having an essential content that is identically the same; moreover, . . . no fully-determinate experience of the one could ever belong to the other; only experiences of identically the same specification can be common to them both (although not common in the sense of being individually identical), but never two experiences which in addition have absolutely the same ‘setting.’”
volved, that is, between self-explication and interpretation of another person's experience, let us call in the aid of a well-known distinction of Husserl's:

Under *acts immanently directed*, or, to put it more generally, under *intentional experiences immanently related*, we include those acts which are essentially so constituted that their intentional objects, when these exist at all, belong to the same stream of experiences as themselves. . . . Intentional experiences for which this does not hold good are *transcendentally directed*, as, for instance, all acts directed . . . towards the intentional experiences of other Egos with other experience-streams.  

It goes without saying that, not only are intentional Acts directed upon another person's stream of consciousness transcendent, but my experiences of another person's body, or of my own body, or of myself as a psychophysical unity fall into the same class. So we are immediately faced with the question of the specific characteristics of that subclass of transcendent Acts which are directed toward the lived experiences of another person. We could say that we "perceive" the other's experiences if we did not imply that we directly intuited them in the strict sense but meant rather that we grasped them with that same perceptual intention (*anschauliches Vermeinen*) with which we grasp a thing or event as present to us. It is in this sense that Husserl uses the word "perception" to mean "taking notice of": "The listener notices that the speaker is expressing certain subjective experiences of his and in that sense may be said to notice them; but he himself does not live through these experiences—his perception is 'external' rather than 'internal.'"  

This kind of perception which is signitive in character should not be confused with that in which an object directly appears to us. I apprehend the lived experiences of another only through signitive-symbolic representation, regarding either his body or some cultural artifact he has produced as a "field of expression" for those experiences.

Let us explain further this concept of signitive apprehension of another's subjective knowledge. The whole stock of my experience (Erfahrungsvorrat) of another from within the natural attitude consists of my own lived experiences (Erlebnisse) of his body, of his behavior, of the course of his actions, and of the artifacts he has produced. For the time being let us speak simply of the interpretation

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8. Ideen, p. 68 [E.T., p. 124].
9. Logische Untersuchungen, II., i, 34.
10. ["The term 'signification' is the same as 'meaning' for Husserl. Similarly, he often speaks of significative or signitive acts instead of acts of meaning-intention, of meaning, and the like. Signitive is also good as expressing opposition to intuitive. A synonym for signitive is symbolic" (Farber, Foundation of Phenomenology, p. 402, n.).]
11. [Cf. above, sec. 3.]
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of the other person's course of action without further clarification. My lived experiences of another's acts consist in my perceptions of his body in motion. However, as I am always interpreting these perceptions as "body of another," I am always interpreting them as something having an implicit reference to "consciousness of another." Thus the bodily movements are perceived not only as physical events but also as a sign that the other person is having certain lived experiences which he is expressing through those movements. My intentional gaze is directed right through my perceptions of his bodily movements to his lived experiences lying behind them and signified by them. The signitive relation is essential to this mode of apprehending another's lived experiences. Of course he himself may be aware of these experiences, single them out, and give them his own intended meaning. His observed bodily movements become then for me not only a sign of his lived experiences as such, but of those to which he attaches an intended meaning. How interpretation of this kind is carried out is something which we shall study in detail later on. It is enough to say at this point that the signitive experience (Erfahrung) of the world, like all other experience in the Here and Now, is coherently organized and is thus "ready at hand." 12

Here it could be objected that the concept of lived experience excludes by definition everything but my own experience, since the very term "lived experience" is equivalent to "object of immanent awareness." A transcendent apprehension of someone else's lived experience would therefore be ruled out as absurd. For, the argument runs, it is only the indications of someone else's lived experience that I apprehend transcendently; having apprehended such indications, I infer from them the existence and character of the experiences of which they are indications. Against this point of view we should maintain emphatically that signitive apprehension of the other's body as an expressive field does not involve inference or judgment in the usual sense. Rather what is involved is a certain intentional Act which utilizes an already established code of interpretation directing us through the bodily movement to the underlying lived experience. 13

12. Cf. sec. 15.
13. Cf. Husserl's Méditations cartésiennes, p. 97: "The organism of another person keeps demonstrating that it is a living organism solely by its changing but always consistent behavior. And it does that in the following way: the physical side of the behavior is the index of the psychic side. It is upon this 'behavior' appearing in our experience and verifying and confirming itself in the ordered succession of its phases... it is in this indirect but genuine accessibility of that which is not in itself directly accessible that the existence of the other is, for us, founded." [The English rendering here is our own. Cf. Cairns' translation (from the German), Cartesian Meditations, p. 114.]
In the everyday world in which both the I and the Thou turn up, not as transcendental but as psychophysical subjects, there corresponds to each stream of lived experience of the I a stream of subjective experience of the Thou. This, to be sure, refers back to my own stream of lived experience, just as does the body of the other person to my body. During this process, the peculiar reference of my own ego to the other's ego holds, in the sense that my stream of lived experience is for you that of another person, just as my body is another's body for you.\(^{14}\)

20. The Other's Stream of Consciousness as Simultaneous with My Own

If I wish to observe one of my own lived experiences, I must perform a reflective Act of attention. But in this case, what I will behold is a past experience, not one presently occurring. Since this holds true for all my Acts of attention to my own experiences, I know it holds true for the other person as well. You are in the same position as I am: you can observe only your past, already-lived-through experiences. Now, whenever I have an experience of you, this is still my own experience.\(^{15}\) However, this experience, while uniquely my own, still has, as its signitively grasped intentional object, a lived experience of yours which you are having at this very moment. In order to observe a lived experience of my own, I must attend to it reflectively. By no means, however, need I attend reflectively to my lived experience of you in order to observe your lived experience. On the contrary, by merely "looking" I can grasp even those of your lived experiences which you have not yet noticed and which are for you still prephe-nomenal and undifferentiated. This means that, whereas I can observe my own lived experiences only after they are over and done with, I can observe yours as they actually take place. This in turn implies that you and I are in a specific sense "simultaneous," that we "coexist," that our respective streams of consciousness intersect. To be sure, these are merely images and are inadequate since they are spatial. However, recourse to spatial imagery at this point is deeply rooted. We are concerned with the synchronism of two streams of consciousness here, my own and yours. In trying to understand this synchronism we can

15. [Or, literally, "all my experiences of the other self's experiences are still my own experiences" ("nun sind auch meine Erlebnisse von Fremden Erlebnissen noch immer je-meinige Erlebnisse.")]
hardly ignore the fact that when you and I are in the natural attitude we perceive ourselves and each other as psychophysical unities.

This synchronism or "simultaneity" is understood here in Bergson's sense:

I call simultaneous two streams which from the standpoint of my consciousness are indifferently one or two. My consciousness perceives these streams as a single one whenever it pleases to give them an undivided act of attention; on the other hand it distinguishes them whenever it chooses to divide its attention between them. Again, it can make them both one and yet distinct from one another, if it decides to divide its attention while still not splitting them into two separate entities.16

I see, then, my own stream of consciousness and yours in a single intentional Act which embraces them both. The simultaneity involved here is not that of physical time, which is quantifiable, divisible, and spatial. For us the term "simultaneity" is rather an expression for the basic and necessary assumption which I make that your stream of consciousness has a structure analogous to mine. It endures in a sense that a physical thing does not: it subjectively experiences its own aging, and this experience is determinative of all its other experiences. While the duration of physical objects is no durée at all, but its exact opposite, persisting over a period of objective time,17 you and I, on the other hand, have a genuine durée which experiences itself, which is continuous, which is manifold, and which is irreversible. Not only does each of us subjectively experience his own durée as an absolute reality in the Bergsonian sense, but the durée of each of us is given to the other as absolute reality. What we mean, then, by the simultaneity of two durations or streams of consciousness is simply this: the phenomenon of growing older together. Any other criterion of simultaneity presupposes the transformation of both durations into a spatio-temporal complex and the transformation of the real durée into a merely constructed time. This is what Bergson means by the time which is not experienced by you, nor by me, nor by anyone at all.18 But in reality you and I can each subjectively experience and live through

17. ["... ein Beharren im Ablauf der objektiven Zeit." The words here are reminiscent of Kant. Cf. the Critique of Pure Reason B 183: "The schema of substance is the permanence of the real in time" ("die Beharrlichkeit des Realen in der Zeit").]
his own respective duration, each other's duration, and everyone's duration. 19

I can therefore say without hesitation that the Thou is that consciousness whose intentional Acts I can see occurring as other than, yet simultaneous with, my own. Also I can say that I may become aware of experiences of the Thou which the latter never gets to notice: its prephenomenal subjective experiences. If, for instance, someone is talking to me, I am aware not only of his words but his voice. To be sure, I interpret these in the same way that I always interpret my own lived experiences. But my gaze goes right through these outward symptoms to the inner man of the person who is speaking to me. Whatever context of meaning I light upon when I am experiencing these outward indications draws its validity from a corresponding context of meaning in the mind of the other person. The latter context must be the very one within which his own present lived experience is being constructed step by step. 20

What we have just described is the comprehension, at the very moment they occur, of the other person's intentional Acts, Acts which take place step by step and which result in syntheses of a higher order. Now, this is precisely what Weber means by observational as opposed to motivational understanding. But the essential thing about the simultaneity involved here is not bodily coexistence. It is not as if I could observationally understand only those whom I directly experience. Not at all. I can imaginatively place the minds of people of past ages in a quasisimultaneity with my own, observationally understanding them through their writings, their music, their art. We have yet to deal with the different forms taken on by this understanding in the different spheres of the social world.

The simultaneity of our two streams of consciousness, however,  

19. Cf. Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, p. 97: "From the phenomenological point of view, the other person is a modification of 'my' self."

20. Husserl comes to the same conclusion from an entirely different starting point: "It (the experience of the other person) establishes a connection between, on the one hand, the uninterrupted, unimpeded living experience which the concrete ego has of itself, in other words, the ego's primordial sphere, and on the other hand the alien sphere which appears within the latter by appresentation. It establishes this connection by means of a synthesis which identifies the primordially given animate body of the other person with his body as appresented under another mode of appearance. From there it reaches out to a synthesis of the same Nature, given and verified at once primordially (with pure sensuous originality) and in the mode of appresentation. Thus is definitely instituted for the first time the coexistence of my 'I' (as well as my concrete ego in general) and the 'I' of the other person, the coexistence of my intentional life and his, of my 'realities' and his; in short what we have here is the creation of a common time-form (Méditations cartésiennes, § 55, p. 108. [See also E.T., Cairns, p. 128. Cf. the next footnote for an explanation of what Husserl means by "a synthesis of the same Nature." ]
does not mean that the same experiences are given to each of us. My lived experience of you, as well as the environment I ascribe to you, bears the mark of my own subjective Here and Now and not the mark of yours. Also, I ascribe to you an environment which has already been interpreted from my subjective standpoint. I thus presuppose that at any given time we are both referring to the same objects, which transcend the subjective experience of either of us. This is so at least in the world of the natural attitude, the world of everyday life in which one has direct experience of one's fellow men, the world in which I assume that you are seeing the same table I am seeing. We shall also see, at a later point, the modifications this assumption undergoes in the different regions of the social world, namely, the world of contemporaries, the world of predecessors, and the world of successors.

In what follows we shall be seeking confirmation for this general thesis of the other self in the concrete problems of understanding other people. However, even at this early point we can draw a few fundamental conclusions.

The self-explication of my own lived experiences takes place within the total pattern of my experience. This total pattern is made up of meaning-contexts developed out of my previous lived experiences. In these meaning-contexts all my past lived experiences are at least potentially present to me. They stand to a certain extent at my disposal, whether I see them once again in recognition or reproduction or whether, from the point of view of the already constituted meaning-context, I can potentially observe the lived experiences which they have built up. Furthermore, I can repeat my lived experiences in free reproduction (at least insofar as they have originated in spontaneous activities). We say "in free reproduction" because I can leave unnoticed any phases whatsoever and turn my attention to any other

21. Husserl arrives at similar conclusions. He formulates the concept of the "intersubjective Nature" corresponding to the ordinary concept of environment, and he draws the profound distinction between apperception in the mode of the "hic" and of the "illic." "It (the other's body as it appears to me) appresents, first of all, the activity of the other person as controlling his body (illic) as the latter appears to me. But also, and as a result of this, it appresents his action through that body on the Nature which he perceives. This Nature is the same Nature to which that body (illic) belongs, my own primordial Nature. It is the same Nature but it is given to me in the mode of 'If I were over there looking out through his eyes.' . . . Furthermore, my whole Nature is the same as his. It is constituted in my primordial sphere as an identical unity of my multiple modes of givenness, identical in all its changing orientations from the point of view of my body, which is the zero point, the absolute here (hic)" (Méditations cartésiennes, p. 104). [Cf. also E.T., Cairns, p. 123.]

22. See Chap. 4, secs. 33-41.

23. For the sake of simplicity we are here leaving essentially actual lived experiences out of account.
phases previously unnoticed. In principle, however, the continuum which is my total stream of lived experience remains open in its abundance at all times to my self-explication.

Still, your whole stream of lived experience is not open to me. To be sure, your stream of lived experience is also a continuum, but I can catch sight of only disconnected segments of it. We have already made this point. If I could be aware of your whole experience, you and I would be the same person. But we must go beyond this. You and I differ from each other not merely with respect to how much of each other's lived experiences we can observe. We also differ in this: When I become aware of a segment of your lived experience, I arrange what I see within my own meaning-context. But meanwhile you have arranged it in yours. Thus I am always interpreting your lived experiences from my own standpoint. Even if I had ideal knowledge of all your meaning-contexts at a given moment and so were able to arrange your whole supply of experience, I should still not be able to determine whether the particular meaning-contexts of yours in which I arranged your lived experiences were the same as those which you were using. This is because your manner of attending to your experiences would be different from my manner of attending to them. However, if I look at my whole stock of knowledge of your lived experiences and ask about the structure of this knowledge, one thing becomes clear: This is that everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences. My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. It is only because of this that, when I look backward, I am able to synchronize my past experiences of you with your past experiences.

It might be objected that another person's stream of consciousness could still be constructed, without contradictions, as so synchronized with my own that they corresponded moment for moment. Furthermore, an ideal model might be constructed in which, at every moment, the Ego has lived experiences of the other self and is thereby simultaneously encountering the other's lived experiences. In other words, I might be able to keep track of your lived experiences in their continuity all through your lifetime. Yes, but only in their continuity, not in their completeness. For what I call the series of your lived experiences is merely one possible meaning-context which I have constructed out of a few of your lived experiences. I always fall far short of grasping the totality of your lived experience, which at this very moment is being transformed into a unique present moment for you. And, of course, what holds true of the series holds true of the single moment: comprehension falls short of fullness, even in simultaneity. In sum-
mary it can be said that my own stream of consciousness is given to me continuously and in all its fullness but that yours is given to me in discontinuous segments, never in its fullness, and only in "interpretive perspectives."

But this also means that our knowledge of the consciousness of other people is always in principle open to doubt, whereas our knowledge of our own consciousness, based as it is on immanent Acts, is always in principle indubitable.24

The above considerations will prove to be of great importance for the theory of the other self's action, which will be a predominant concern of ours in the pages to follow. It is in principle doubtful whether your experiences, as I comprehend them, are seized upon by your reflective glance at all, whether they spring from your spontaneous Acts and are therefore really "behavior" in the sense we have defined, and consequently whether they are really action, since the latter is behavior oriented to a goal. And so, in the concept of the other self's action, we come up against a profound theoretical problem. The very postulate of the comprehension of the intended meaning of the other person's lived experiences becomes unfulfillable. Not only this, but it becomes in principle doubtful whether the other person attends to and confers meaning upon those of his lived experiences which I comprehend.

21. The Ambiguities in the Ordinary Notion of Understanding the Other Person

Before we proceed further, it would be well to note that there are ambiguities in the ordinary notion of understanding another person. Sometimes what is meant is intentional Acts directed toward the other self; in other words, my lived experiences of you. At other times what is in question is your subjective experiences. Then, the arrangements of all such experiences into meaning-contexts (Weber's comprehension of intended meaning) is sometimes called "understanding of the other self," as is the classification of others' behavior into motivation contexts. The number of ambiguities associated with the notion of "understanding another person" becomes even greater when we bring in the question of understanding the signs he is using. On the one hand, what is understood is the sign itself, then again what the other person means by using this sign, and finally the significance of the fact that he is using the sign, here, now, and in this particular context.

In order to sort out these different levels in the meaning of the term, let us first give it a generic definition. Let us say that understanding (Verstehen) as such is correlative to meaning, for all understanding is directed toward that which has meaning (auf ein Sinnhaftes) and only something understood is meaningful (sinnvoll). In Chapter 2 we saw the implications for the sphere of the solitary Ego of this concept of that which has meaning (des Sinnhaften). In this sense, all intentional Acts which are interpretations of one’s own subjective experiences would be called Acts of understanding (verstehende Akte). We should also designate as “understanding” all the lower strata of meaning-comprehension on which such self-explication is based.

The man in the natural attitude, then, understands the world by interpreting his own lived experiences of it, whether these experiences be of inanimate things, of animals, or of his fellow human beings. And so our initial concept of the understanding of the other self is simply the concept “our explication of our lived experiences of our fellow human beings as such.” The fact that the Thou who confronts me is a fellow man and not a shadow on a movie screen—in other words, that he has duration and consciousness—is something I discover by explicating my own lived experiences of him.

Furthermore, the man in the natural attitude perceives changes in that external object which is known to him as the other’s body. He interprets these changes just as he interprets changes in inanimate objects, namely, by interpretation of his own lived experiences of the events and processes in question. Even this second phase does not go beyond the bestowing of meaning within the sphere of the solitary consciousness.

The transcending of this sphere becomes possible only when the perceived processes come to be regarded as lived experiences belonging to another consciousness, which, in accordance with the general thesis of the other self, exhibits the same structure as my own. The perceived bodily movements of the other will then be grasped not merely as my lived experience of these movements within my stream of consciousness. Rather it will be understood that, simultaneous with my lived experience of you, there is your lived experience which belongs to you and is part of your stream of consciousness. Meanwhile, the specific nature of your experience is quite unknown to me, that is, I do not know the meaning-contexts you are using to classify those lived experiences of yours, provided, indeed, you are even aware of the movements of your body.

However, I can know the meaning-context into which I classify my own lived experiences of you. We have already seen that this is not
your intended meaning in the true sense of the term. What can be comprehended is always only an “approximate value” of the limiting concept “the other’s intended meaning.”

However, talk about the meaning-context into which the Thou orders its lived experience is again very vague. The very question of whether a bodily movement is purposive or merely reactive is a question which can only be answered in terms of the other person’s own context of meaning. And then if one considers the further questions that can be asked about the other person’s schemes of experience, for instance about his motivational contexts, one can get a good idea of how complex is the theory of understanding the other self. It is of great importance to penetrate into the structure of this understanding far enough to show that we can only interpret lived experiences belonging to other people in terms of our own lived experiences of them.

In the above discussion we have limited our analysis exclusively to cases where other people are present bodily to us in the domain of directly experienced social reality. In so doing, we have proceeded as if the understanding of the other self were based on the interpretation of the movements of his body. A little reflection shows, however, that this kind of interpretation is good for only one of the many regions of the social world; for even in the natural standpoint, a man experiences his neighbors even when the latter are not at all present in the bodily sense. He has knowledge not only of his directly experienced consociates but also about his more distant contemporaries. He has, in addition, empirical information about his historical predecessors. He finds himself surrounded by objects which tell him plainly that they were produced by other people; these are not only material objects but all kinds of linguistic and other sign systems, in short, artifacts in the broadest sense. He interprets these first of all by arranging them within his own contexts of experience. However, he can at any time ask further questions about the lived experiences and meaning-contexts of their creators, that is, about why they were made.

We must now carefully analyze all these complex processes. We shall do so, however, only to the extent required by our theme, namely, “the understanding of the other person within the social world.” For this purpose we must begin with the lowest level and clarify those Acts of self-explication which are present and available for use in interpreting the behavior of other people. For the sake of simplicity, let us

25. [Schutz used the English term “consociates” (among others) to mean those whom we directly experience. We shall be using it in this technical sense to translate references to people in our Umwelt (domain of directly experienced social reality).]
assume that the other person is present bodily. We shall select our examples from various regions of human behavior by analyzing first an action without any communicative intent and then one whose meaning is declared through signs.

As an example of the “understanding of a human act” without any communicative intent, let us look at the activity of a woodcutter.

Understanding that wood is being cut can mean:

1. That we are noticing only the “external event,” the ax slicing the tree and the wood splitting into bits, which ensues. If this is all we see, we are hardly dealing with what is going on in another person’s mind. Indeed, we need hardly bring in the other person at all, for woodcutting is woodcutting, whether done by man, by machine, or even by some natural force. Of course, meaning is bestowed on the observed event by the observer, in the sense that he understands it as “woodcutting.” In other words, he inserts it into his own context of experience. However, this “understanding” is merely the explication of his own lived experiences, which we discussed in Chapter 2. The observer perceives the event and orders his perceptions into polythetic syntheses, upon which he then looks back with a monothetic glance, and arranges these syntheses into the total context of his experience, giving them at the same time a name. However, the observer in our case does not as yet perceive the woodcutter but only that the wood is being cut, and he “understands” the perceived sequence of events as “woodcutting.” It is essential to note that even this interpretation of the event is determined by the total context of knowledge available to the observer at the moment of observation. Whoever does not know how paper is manufactured will not be in a position to classify the component processes because he lacks the requisite interpretive scheme. Nor will he be in a position to formulate the judgment “This is a place where paper is manufactured.” And this holds true, as we have established, for all arrangements of lived experiences into the context of knowledge.

But understanding that wood is being cut can also mean:

2. That changes in another person’s body are perceived, which changes are interpreted as indications that he is alive and conscious. Meanwhile, no further assumption is made that an action is involved. But this, too, is merely an explication of the observer’s own perceptual experiences. All he is doing is identifying the body as that of a living human being and then noting the fact and manner of its changes.

Understanding that someone is cutting wood can, however, mean:

3. That the center of attention is the woodcutter’s own lived experiences as actor. The question is not one about external events but one about lived experiences: “Is this man acting spontaneously accord-
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In order to a project he had previously formulated? If so, what is this project? What is his in-order-to motive? In what meaning-context does this action stand for him?” And so forth. These questions are concerned with neither the facticity of the situation as such nor the bodily movements as such. Rather, the outward facts and bodily movements are understood as indications (Anzeichen) of the lived experiences of the person being observed. The attention of the observer is focused not on the indications but on what lies behind them. This is genuine understanding of the other person.

Now, let us turn our attention to a case where signs are being used and select as our example the case of a person talking German. The observer can direct his attention:

1. Upon the bodily movements of the speaker. In this case he interprets his own lived experience on the basis of the context of experience of the present moment. First the observer makes sure he is seeing a real person and not an image, as in a motion-picture film. He then determines whether the person’s movements are actions. All this is, of course, self-interpretation.

2. Upon the perception of the sound alone. The observer may go on to discover whether he is hearing a real person or a tape recorder. This, too, is only an interpretation of his own experiences.

3. Upon the specific pattern of the sounds being produced. That is, he identifies the sounds first as words, not shrieks, and then as German words. They are thus ordered within a certain scheme, in which they are signs with definite meanings. This ordering within the scheme of a particular language can even take place without knowledge of the meanings of the words, provided the listener has some definite criterion in mind. If I am traveling in a foreign country, I know when two people are talking to each other, and I also know that they are talking the language of the country in question without having the slightest idea as to the subject of their conversation.

In making any of these inferences, I am merely interpreting my own experiences, and nothing is implied as to a single lived experience of any of the people being observed.

The observer “understands,” in addition:

4. The word as the sign of its own word meaning. Even then he merely interprets his own experiences by coordinating the sign to a previously experienced sign system or interpretive scheme, say the German language. As the result of his knowledge of the German language, the observer connects with the word Tisch the idea of a definite piece of furniture, which he can picture with approximate accuracy. It matters not at all whether the word has been uttered by another person, a phonograph, or even a parrot. Nor does it matter
whether the word is spoken or written, or, if the latter, whether it is traced out in letters of wood or iron. It does not matter when or where it is uttered or in what context. As long, therefore, as the observer leaves out of account all questions as to why and how the word is being used on the occasion of observation, his interpretation remains self-interpretation. He is concerned with the meaning of the word, not the meaning of the user of the word. When we identify these interpretations as self-interpretations, we should not overlook the fact that all previous knowledge of the other person belongs to the interpreter’s total configuration of experience, which is the context from whose point of view the interpretation is being made.

The observer can, however, proceed to the genuine understanding of the other person if he:

5. Regards the meaning of the word as an indication (Anzeichen) of the speaker’s subjective experiences—regards the meaning, in short, as what the speaker meant. For instance, he can try to discover what the speaker intended to say and what he meant by saying it on this occasion. These questions are obviously aimed at conscious experiences. The first question tries to establish the context of meaning within which the speaker understands the words he is uttering, while the second seeks to establish the motive for the utterance. It is obvious that the genuine understanding of the other person involved in answering such questions can only be attained if the objective meaning of the words is first established by the observer’s explication of his own experiences.

All these, of course, are only examples. Later we shall have repeated opportunity to refer to the essential point which they illustrate. Let us now state in summary which of our interpretive acts referring to another self are interpretations of our own experience. There is first the interpretation that the observed person is really a human being and not an image of some kind. The observer establishes this solely by interpretation of his own perceptions of the other’s body. Second, there is the interpretation of all the external phases of action, that is, of all bodily movements and their effects. Here, as well, the observer is engaging in interpretation of his own perceptions, just as when he is watching the flight of a bird or the stirring of a branch in the wind. In order to understand what is occurring, he is appealing solely to his own past experience, not to what is going on in the mind of the observed person. Finally, the same thing may be said of the percep-

27. Of course, all such interpretations presume acceptance of the General Thesis of the Alter Ego, according to which the external object is understood to be animated, that is, to be the body of another self.
tion of all the other person's expressive movements and all the signs which he uses, provided that one is here referring to the general and objective meaning of such manifestations and not their occasional and subjective meaning.

But, of course, by "understanding the other person" much more is meant, as a rule. This additional something, which is really the only strict meaning of the term, involves grasping what is really going on in the other person's mind, grasping those things of which the external manifestations are mere indications. To be sure, interpretation of such external indications and signs in terms of interpretation of one's own experiences must come first. But the interpreter will not be satisfied with this. He knows perfectly well from the total context of his own experience that, corresponding to the outer objective and public meaning which he has just deciphered, there is this other, inner, subjective meaning. He asks, then, "What is that woodcutter really thinking about? What is he up to? What does all this chopping mean to him?" Or, in another case, "What does this person mean by speaking to me in this manner, at this particular moment? For the sake of what does he do this (what is his in-order-to motive)? What circumstance does he give as the reason for it (that is, what is his genuine because-motive)? What does the choice of these words indicate?" Questions like these point to the other person's own meaning-contexts, to the complex ways in which his own lived experiences have been constituted polytheically and also to the monothetic glance with which he attends to them.

22. The Nature of Genuine Intersubjective Understanding

Having established that all genuine understanding of the other person must start out from Acts of explication performed by the observer on his own lived experience, we must now proceed to a precise analysis of this genuine understanding itself. From the examples we have already given, it is clear that our inquiry must take two different directions. First we must study the genuine understanding of actions which are performed without any communicative intent. The action of the woodcutter would be a good example. Second we would examine cases where such communicative intent was present. The latter type of action involves a whole new dimension, the using and interpreting of signs.

Let us first take actions performed without any communicative intent. We are watching a man in the act of cutting wood and wonder-

28. [Setzung; literally, "positing" or "establishing."
What is going on in his mind. Questioning him is ruled out, because that would require entering into a social relationship with him, which in turn would involve the use of signs.

Let us further suppose that we know nothing about our woodcutter except what we see before our eyes. By subjecting our own perceptions to interpretation, we know that we are in the presence of a fellow human being and that his bodily movements indicate he is engaged in an action which we recognize as that of cutting wood.

Now how do we know what is going on in the woodcutter's mind? Taking this interpretation of our own perceptual data as a starting point, we can plot out in our mind's eye exactly how we would carry out the action in question. Then we can actually imagine ourselves doing so. In cases like this, then, we project the other person's goal as if it were our own and fancy ourselves carrying it out. Observe also that we here project the action in the future perfect tense as completed and that our imagined execution of the action is accompanied by the usual retentions and reproductions of the project, although, of course, only in fancy. Further, let us note that the imagined execution may fulfill or fail to fulfill the imagined project.

Or, instead of imagining for ourselves an action wherein we carry out the other person's goal, we may recall in concrete detail how we once carried out a similar action ourselves. Such a procedure would be merely a variation on the same principle.

In both these cases, we put ourselves in the place of the actor and identify our lived experiences with his. It might seem that we are here repeating the error of the well-known "projective" theory of empathy. For here we are reading our own lived experiences into the other person's mind and are therefore only discovering our own experiences. But, if we look more closely, we will see that our theory has nothing in common with the empathy theory except for one point. This is the general thesis of the Thou as the "other I," the one whose experiences are constituted in the same fashion as mine. But even this similarity is only apparent, for we start out from the general thesis of the other person's flow of duration, while the projective theory of empathy jumps from the mere fact of empathy to the belief in other minds by an act of blind faith. Our theory only brings out the implications of what is already present in the self-explicative judgment "I am experiencing a fellow human being." We know with certainty that the other person's subjective experience of his own action is in principle different from our own imagined picture of what we would do in the same

29. The term "social relationship" is here being used in Weber's vague colloquial sense. Later, in sec. 31, we expect to subject it to detailed analysis.
situation. The reason, as we have already pointed out, is that the intended meaning of an action is always in principle subjective and accessible only to the actor. The error in the empathy theory is two-fold. First, it naively tries to trace back the constitution of the other self within the ego's consciousness to empathy, so that the latter becomes the direct source of knowledge of the other. Actually, such a task of discovering the constitution of the other self can only be carried out in a transcendentally phenomenological manner. Second, it pretends to a knowledge of the other person's mind that goes far beyond the establishment of a structural parallelism between that mind and my own. In fact, however, when we are dealing with actions having no communicative intent, all that we can assert about their meaning is already contained in the general thesis of the alter ego.

It is clear, then, that we imaginatively project the in-order-to motive of the other person as if it were our own and then use the fancied carrying-out of such an action as a scheme in which to interpret his lived experiences. However, to prevent misunderstanding, it should be added that what is involved here is only a reflective analysis of another person's completed act. It is an interpretation carried out after the fact. When an observer is directly watching someone else to whom he is attuned in simultaneity, the situation is different. Then the observer's living intentionality carries him along without having to make constant playbacks of his own past or imaginary experiences. The other person's action unfolds step by step before his eyes. In such a situation, the identification of the observer with the observed person is not carried out by starting with the goal of the act as already given and then proceeding to reconstruct the lived experiences which must have accompanied it. Instead, the observer keeps pace, as it were, with each step of the observed person's action, identifying himself with the latter's experiences within a common "we-relationship." We shall have much more to say about this later.

So far we have assumed the other person's bodily movement as the only datum given to the observer. It must be emphasized that, if the bodily movement is taken by itself in this way, it is necessarily isolated from its place within the stream of the observed person's living experience. And this context is important not only to the observed person but to the observer as well. He can, of course, if he lacks other data, take a mental snapshot of the observed bodily movement and then try to fit it into a phantasied filmstrip in accordance with the way he thinks he would act and feel in a similar situation. However, the observer can

30. For a critique of the empathy theory see Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, pp. 277 ff. [E.T., Heath, p. 241].
31. See below, Chap. 4, sec. 33.
draw much more reliable conclusions about his subject if he knows something about his past and something about the over-all plan into which this action fits. To come back to Max Weber's example, it would be important for the observer to know whether the woodcutter was at his regular job or just chopping wood for physical exercise. An adequate model of the observed person's subjective experiences calls for just this wider context. We have already seen, indeed, that the unity of the action is a function of the project's span. From the observed bodily movement, all the observer can infer is the single course of action which has directly led to it. If, however, I as the observer wish to avoid an inadequate interpretation of what I see another person doing, I must "make my own" all those meaning-contexts which make sense of this action on the basis of my past knowledge of this particular person. We shall come back later on to this concept of "inadequacy" and show its significance for the theory of the understanding of the other person.

23. Expressive Movement and Expressive Act

So far we have studied only cases where the actor seeks merely to bring about changes in the external world. He does not seek to "express" his subjective experiences. By an "expressive" action we mean one in which the actor seeks to project outward (nach aussen zu projizieren) the contents of his consciousness, whether to retain the latter for his own use later on (as in the case of an entry in a diary) or to communicate them to others. In each of these two examples we have a genuinely planned or projected action (Handeln nach Entwurf) whose in-order-to motive is that someone take cognizance of something. In the first case this someone is the other person in the social world. In the second it is oneself in the world of the solitary Ego. Both of these are expressive acts. We must clearly distinguish the "expressive act" (Ausdruckshandlung) from what psychologists call the "expressive movement" (Ausdrucksbewegung). The latter does not aim at any communication or at the expression of any thoughts for one's own use or that of others. Here there is no genuine action in our sense, but only behavior: there is neither project nor in-order-to motive. Examples of such expressive movements are the gestures and facial expressions which, without any explicit intention, enter into every conversation.

32. [It is perhaps needless to caution the reader against any confusion of this concept with Schutz's "to project" (entwerfen), which means "to plan" or "design" an act.]


34. Ibid.
From my point of view as observer, your body is presented to me as a field of expression on which I can "watch" the flow of your lived experiences. I do this "watching" simply by treating both your expressive movements and your expressive acts as indications of your lived experiences.\(^{35}\) But we must look at this point in greater detail.

If I understand, as Weber says, certain facial expressions, verbal interjections, and irrational movements as an outbreak of anger, this understanding itself can be interpreted in several different ways. It can mean, for instance, nothing more than self-elucidation, namely my arrangement and classification of my own experiences of your body. It is only when I perform a further Act of attention involving myself intimately with you, regarding your subjective experiences as flowing simultaneously with my subjective experiences of you, that I really grasp or "get with" your anger. This turning to the genuine understanding of the other person is possible for me only because I have previously had experiences similar to yours even if only in phantasy, or if I have encountered it before in external manifestations.\(^ {36}\) The expressive movement does, then, enter into a meaning-context, but only for the observer, for whom it is an indication of the lived experiences of the person he is observing. The latter is barred from giving meaning to his own expressive movements as they occur, due to the fact that they are inaccessible to his attention, or prephenomenal.

Expressive movements, then, have meaning only for the observer, not for the person observed. It is precisely this that distinguishes them from expressive acts. The latter always have meaning for the actor. Expressive acts are always genuine communicative acts (Kundgabe-handlungen) which have as a goal their own interpretation.

The mere occurrence of a piece of external behavior, therefore, gives the interpreter no basis for knowing whether he is dealing with an expressive movement or an expressive act. He will be able to determine this only by appealing to a different context of experience. For instance, the play of a man's features and gestures in everyday life may be no different from those of an actor on the stage. Now we look upon the facial expressions and gestures of the latter as set signs that the stage actor is utilizing to express certain subjective experiences. In everyday life, on the other hand, we never quite know whether another person is "acting" in this sense or not unless we pay attention to factors other than his immediate movements. For instance, he may be imitating someone else for our benefit, or he may be playing a

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35. Cf. sec. 3, above.
36. For an adequate discussion of this point, we must await our analysis of the "world of contemporaries" in sec. 37.
joke on us, or he may be hypocritically feigning certain feelings in order to take advantage of us.

It is quite immaterial to the understanding of expressive acts whether they consist of gestures, words, or artifacts. Every such act involves the use of signs. We must, then, turn next to the problem of the nature of signs.

24. Sign and Sign System

We must first distinguish the concept of “sign” or “symbol” from the general concept of “indication” or “symptom.” In so doing we will be following Husserl’s First Logical Investigation. By an “indication” Husserl means an object or state of affairs whose existence indicates the existence of a certain other object or state of affairs, in the sense that belief in the existence of the former is a nonrational (or “opaque”) motive for belief in the existence of the latter. For our purposes the important thing here is that the relation between the two exists solely in the mind of the interpreter.

Now, it is obvious that Husserl’s “motive of belief” has nothing to do with our “motive of action.” Husserl’s so-called “motive” is, like ours, a complex of meaning or meaning-context. But it is a complex consisting of at least two interpretive schemes. However, when we interpret an indication, we do not attend to this causal relation, hence the motive is not “rational.” The connection between the indication and what it indicates is therefore a purely formal and general one; there is nothing logical about it. There is no doubt that Husserl would agree with this point. Both animate and inanimate objects can serve as indications. For the geologist, a certain formation in the earth’s surface is an indication of the presence of certain minerals. For the mathematician, the fact that an algebraic equation is of an odd degree is an indication that at least it has a real root. All these are relations—or correlations—within the mind of the interpreter and as such may be called contexts of meaning for him. In this sense, the perceived movements of the other person’s body are indications for the observer of what is going on in the mind of the person he is observing.

“Signifying signs,” “expressions,” or “symbols” are to be contrasted with “indications.”

First of all, let us see how a sign gets constituted in the mind of the interpreter. We say that there exists between the sign and that which it signifies the relation of representation. When we look at a symbol,
which is always in a broad sense an external object, we do not look upon it as object but as representative of something else. When we “understand” a sign, our attention is focused not on the sign itself but upon that for which it stands. Husserl repeatedly points out that it belongs to the essence of the signitive relation that “the sign and what it stands for have nothing to do with each other.” 39 The signitive relation is, therefore, obviously a particular relation between the interpretive schemes which are applied to those external objects here called “signs.” When we understand a sign, we do not interpret the latter through the scheme adequate to it as an external object but through the schemes adequate to whatever it signifies. We are saying that an interpretive scheme is adequate to an experienced object if the scheme has been constituted out of polythetically lived-through experiences of this same object as a self-existent thing. For example, the following three black lines, A, can be interpreted (1) adequately, as the diagram of a certain black and white visual Gestalt, or (2) non-adequately, as a sign for the corresponding vocal sound. The adequate interpretive scheme for the vocal sound is, of course, constituted not out of visual but out of auditory experiences.

However, confusion is likely to arise out of the fact that the interpretation of signs in terms of what they signify is based on previous experience and is therefore itself the function of a scheme. 40 What we have said holds true of all interpretation of signs, whether the individual is interpreting his own signs or those of others. There is, however, an ambiguity in the common saying “a sign is always a sign for something.” The sign is indeed the “sign for” what it means or signifies, the so-called “sign meaning” or “sign function.” But the sign is also the “sign for” what it expresses, namely, the subjective experiences of the person using the sign. In the world of nature there are no signs (Zeichen) but only indications (Anzeichen). A sign is by its very nature something used by a person to express a subjective experience. Since, therefore, the sign always refers back to an act of choice on the part of a rational being—a choice of this particular sign—the sign is also an indication of an event in the mind of the sign-user. Let us call this the “expressive function” of the sign. 41

A sign is, therefore, always either an artifact or a constituted

39. Ibid., II, ii, 55 [or II, 527 in the 1901 edition].
40. In effect, what we have here is a kind of metascheme connecting two others. This corresponds to Felix Kaufmann’s so-called “coordinating scheme” (Das Unendliche in der Mathematik und seine Ausschaltung [Leipzig and Vienna, 1930], p. 42).
41. Our usage here diverges from the terminology of Husserl’s Logical Investigations, I and VI.
act-object. The boundary between the two is absolutely fluid. Every act-object which functions as a sign-object (for instance, my finger pointing in a certain direction) is the end result of an action. But I might just as well have constructed a signpost, which would, of course, be classified as an artifact. In principle it makes no difference whether the action culminates in an act-object or in an artifact.

It should be noted that in interpreting a sign it is not necessary to refer to the fact that someone made the sign or that someone used it. The interpreter need only "know the meaning" of the sign. In other words, it is necessary only that a connection be established in his mind between the interpretive scheme proper to the object which is the sign and the interpretive scheme proper to the object which it signifies. Thus when he sees a road sign, he will say to himself, "Intersection to the left!" and not "Look at the wooden sign!" or "Who put that sign there?"

We can, therefore, define signs as follows: Signs are artifacts or act-objects which are interpreted not according to those interpretive schemes which are adequate to them as objects of the external world but according to schemes not adequate to them and belonging rather to other objects. Furthermore, it should be said that the connection between the sign and its corresponding non-adequate scheme depends on the past experience of the interpreter. As we have already said, the applicability of the scheme of that which is signified to the sign is itself an interpretive scheme based on experience. Let us call this last-named scheme the "sign system." A sign system is a meaning-context which is a configuration formed by interpretive schemes; the sign-user or the sign-interpreter places the sign within this context of meaning.

Now there is something ambiguous in this idea of a sign context. Surely no one will maintain that the connection in question exists independently of the actual establishment, use, or interpretation of the signs. For the connection is itself an example of meaning and therefore a matter of either prescription or interpretation. In a strict sense, therefore, meaning-connections hold, not between signs as such, but between their meanings, which is just another way of saying between the experiences of the knowing self establishing, using, or interpreting

42. [The words here translated "act-object" and "sign-object" are, respectively, *Handlungsgegenständlichkeit* and *Zeichengegenständlichkeit*. They refer to the act and sign considered as repeatable objects rather than as unique events.]

43. I cannot, therefore, admit as fundamental Hans Freyer's distinction between the physiognomic side of an action and its objectification in the material world. (See his *Theorie des objectiven Geistes* [Leipzig, 1923], pp. 29 ff.)
the signs. However, since these “meanings” are understood only in and through the signs, there holds between the latter the connection we call the “sign system.”

The sign system is present to him who understands it as a meaning-context of a higher order between previously experienced signs. To him the German language is the meaning-context of each of its component words; the sign system of a map is the meaning-context of every symbol on that map; the system of musical notation is the meaning-context of every written note; and so forth.

Knowing that a sign belongs to a certain sign system is not the same thing as knowing what that sign means and for what subjective experience of its user it is the expressive vehicle. Even though I do not know shorthand, still I know shorthand when I see it. Even though I may not know how to play a card game, still I can recognize the cards as playing cards, etc. The placing of a sign within its sign system is something I do by placing it within the total context of my experience. In doing this, all that is necessary is that I find within the store of my experience such a sign system together with the rules on the basis of which it is constituted. I do not have to understand the meaning of the individual signs or be fully conversant with the sign system. For instance, I can see that certain characters are Chinese without understanding their meaning.

As an established sign every sign is meaningful and therefore in principle intelligible. In general it is absurd to speak of a meaningless sign. A sign can properly be called meaningless only with respect to one or more established sign systems. However, to say that a sign is alien to one such system only means that it belongs to another. For instance, the meaninglessness per se of a definite auditory-visual symbol can never be determined but only its meaninglessness within a definite “language,” in the broadest sense of that term. A letter combination which is quite unpronounceable can have a code meaning. It can be put together by one person according to the rules of the code and can then be interpreted by another person who knows those same rules. More than that, however, the audio-visual symbol “Bamalip” seems at first quite meaningless so far as the European languages are concerned. But the person who knows that “Bamalip” is the scholastic term for an entity of formal logic, namely, the first mood of the fourth figure of the syllogism, will be able to place it quite precisely within the structure of his own native language.

From this it follows that the sign meaning within a certain sign system must have been experienced previously. It is a question just what this phrase, “have been experienced,” means. If we ask ourselves
in what circumstances we have experienced the connection between the term "Bamalip" and the first mood of the fourth figure, we will find that we have learned it from a teacher or from a book. To have experienced the connection, however, means that we must on that occasion have established in our minds the term "Bamalip" as the sign of the first mood of the fourth figure. Therefore, the understanding of a sign (to be more precise, the possibility of its interpretation within a given system) points back to a previous decision on our part to accept and use this sign as an expression for a certain content of our consciousness.

Every sign system is therefore a scheme of our experience. This is true in two different senses. First, it is an expressive scheme; in other words, I have at least once used the sign for that which it designates, used it either in spontaneous activity or in imagination. Second, it is an interpretive scheme; in other words, I have already in the past interpreted the sign as the sign of that which it designates. This distinction is important, since, as already shown, I can recognize the sign system as an interpretive scheme, but only know that others do so. In the world of the solitary Ego the expressive scheme of a sign and its corresponding interpretive scheme necessarily coincide. If, for instance, I invent a private script, the characters of that code are established by me while I am inventing the script or using it to make notes. It is for me at such moments an expressive scheme. But the same scheme functions as an interpretive one for me when I later read what I have written or use it to make further notes.

To master fully a sign system such as a language, it is necessary to have a clear knowledge of the meaning of the individual signs within the system. This is possible only if the sign system and its component individual signs are known both as expressive schemes and as interpretive schemes for previous experiences of the knower. In both functions, as interpretive scheme and as expressive scheme, every sign points back to the experiences which preceded its constituting. As expressive scheme and as interpretive scheme a sign is only intelligible in terms of those lived experiences constituting it which it designates. Its meaning consists in its translatibility, that is, its ability to lead us back to something known in a different way. This may be either that scheme of experience in which the thing designated is understood, or another sign system. The philologist Meillet explains this point clearly as far as languages are concerned:

We cannot apprehend the sense of an unknown language intuitively. If we are to succeed in understanding the text of a language whose tradition has been lost, we must either have a faithful translation into a known language, that is, we must be closely related to one or more
languages with which we are familiar. In other words, we must already know it.\(^4\)

This property of "being already known" amounts to this: the meaning of the sign must be discoverable somewhere in the past experience of the person making use of the sign. To be fully conversant with a language, or in fact with any sign system, involves familiarity with given interpretive schemes on the basis of one's preceding experiences—even though this familiarity may be somewhat confused as to the implications of the schemes. It also involves the ability to transform these constituted objects into active experience of one's own,\(^5\) that is, in the ability to use expressively a sign system that one knows how to interpret.

We are now getting close to an answer to the question of what is meant by "connecting a meaning with a sign." Surely this involves something more than connecting words with behavior, which, as we pointed out in our Introduction,\(^6\) is a mere figure of speech. A meaning is connected with a sign, insofar as the latter's significance within a given sign system is understood both for the person using the sign and for the person interpreting it. Now we must be quite clear as to what we mean by speaking of the established membership of a sign in a given sign system. A sign has an "objective meaning" within its sign system when it can be intelligibly coordinated to what it designates independently of whoever is using the sign or interpreting it. This is merely to say that he who "masters" the sign system will interpret the sign in its meaning-function to refer to that which it designates, regardless of who is using it or in what connection. The indispensable reference of the sign to previous experience makes it possible for the interpreter to repeat the syntheses that have constituted this interpretive or expressive scheme. Within the sign system, therefore, the sign has the ideality of the "I can do it again."\(^7\)

However, this is not to say that the signs within the previously known sign system cannot be understood without an Act of attention to those lived experiences out of which the knowledge of the sign was constituted. On the contrary: as a genuine interpretive scheme for previous lived experiences, it is invariant with respect to the lived experiences of the I in which it was constituted.


\(^5\) See above, sec. 14.

\(^6\) See above, sec. 6.

\(^7\) Cf. Husserl, *Logik*, p. 167; see also above, sec. 14.
What we have been considering is the objective meaning of the sign. The objective meaning is grasped by the sign-interpreter as a part of his interpretation of his own experience to himself. With this objective meaning of the sign we must contrast the sign's expressive function. The latter is its function as an indication of what actually went on in the mind of the communicator, the person who used the sign; in other words, of what was the communicator's own meaning-context.

If I want to understand the meaning of a word in a foreign language, I make use of a dictionary, which is simply an index in which I can see the signs arranged according to their objective meaning in two different sign systems or languages. However, the total of all the words in the dictionary is hardly the language. The dictionary is concerned only with the objective meanings of the words, that is, the meanings which do not depend on the users of the words or the circumstances in which they use them. In referring to subjective meanings, we do not here have in mind Husserl's "essentially subjective and occasional expressions," which we mentioned earlier.48 Such essentially subjective expressions as "left," "right," "here," "there," "this," and "I" can, of course, be found in the dictionary and are in principle translatable; however, they also have an objective meaning insofar as they designate a certain relation to the person who uses them. Once I have spatially located this person, then I can say that these subjective occasional expressions have objective meaning. However, all expressions, whether essentially subjective in Husserl's sense or not, have for both user and interpreter, over and above their objective meaning, a meaning which is both subjective and occasional. Let us first consider the subjective component. Everyone using or interpreting a sign associates with the sign a certain meaning having its origin in the unique quality of the experiences in which he once learned to use the sign. This added meaning is a kind of aura surrounding the nucleus of the objective meaning.49 Exactly what Goethe means by "demonic"50 can only be deduced from a study of his works as a whole. Only a careful study of the history of French culture aided by linguistic tools can permit us to understand the subjective meaning.

48. Sec. 5, p. 33.

49. In fact, we can even say that the understanding of the objective meaning is an unrealizable ideal, which means merely that the subjective and occasional component in the sign's meaning should be explained with the utmost clarity by means of rational concepts. That language is "precise" in which all occasional subjective meanings are adequately explained according to their circumstances.

50. It was Jaspers who first called attention to the central importance of this concept in Goethe's image of the world. See his Psychologie der Weltanschauung, 3d ed. (Berlin, 1925).
of the word "civilization" in the mouth of a Frenchman. Vossler applies this thesis to the whole history of language in the following way: "We study the development of a word; and we find that the mental life of all who have used it has been precipitated and crystallized in it." However, in order to be able to "study" the word, we must be able to bring to bear from our previous experience a knowledge of the mental structure of all those who have used it. The particular quality of the experiences of the user of the sign at the time he connected the sign and the signatum is something which the interpreter must take into account, over and above the objective meaning, if he wishes to achieve true understanding.

We have said that the added meaning is not only subjective but occasional. In other words, the added meaning always has in it something of the context in which it is used. In understanding someone who is speaking, I interpret not only his individual words but his total articulated sequence of syntactically connected words—in short, "what he is saying." In this sequence every word retains its own individual meaning in the midst of the surrounding words and throughout the total context of what is being said. Still, I cannot really say that I understand the word until I have grasped the meaning of the whole statement. In short, what I need at the moment of interpretation is the total context of my experience. As the statement proceeds, a synthesis is built up step by step, from the point of view of which one can see the individual acts of meaning-interpretation and meaning-establishment. Discourse is, therefore, itself a kind of meaning-context. For both the speaker and the interpreter, the structure of the discourse emerges gradually. The German language expresses the point we are making precisely in its distinction between Wörter ("unconnected words") and Worte ("discourse"). We can, in fact, say that when unconnected words receive occasional meaning, they constitute a meaningful whole and become discourse.

But what is that synthesis, what is that superimposed meaning-context which serves as an interpretive scheme for the understanding of a sign's occasional meaning? The answer is this: discourse is a sign-using act. The unity of a given speaker's discourse is, from his point of view, simply the unity that belongs essentially to every act. We have already seen in what this unity consists. It arises from the sign-user's own project or plan of action. It follows that the interpreter cannot grasp that unity until the act itself is completed. All he can do is arrive at an approximation based on his previous knowledge. This

51. Curtius, Frankreich (Stuttgart, 1930), I, 2 ff.
52. Vossler, Geist und Kultur in der Sprache, p. 117 [E.T., p. 106].
53. See sec. 9, p. 62.
limitation, in fact, applies to the interpretation of objective as well as occasional meaning. One always has to wait until the last word has been said if one expects to make an effective interpretation. And it always remains a question of fact what the unit is whose end has to be awaited: whether it is a sentence, a book, the complete works of an author, or a whole literary movement.

The problem of the subjective and occasional meaning of signs is only one aspect of the larger problem of the distinction between objective and subjective meaning. It is to this dichotomy that we must now turn our attention.

25. Meaning-Establishment and Meaning-Interpretation

We have now seen that the sign has two different functions. First it has a significative function. By this we mean that it can be ordered by an interpreter within a previously learned sign system of his own. What he is doing here is interpreting the sign as an item of his own experience. His act is just another example of what we call self-interpretation. But there is a second kind of interpretation in which he can engage. He can inquire into the subjective and occasional meaning of the sign, in short, the expressive function which it acquires within the context of discourse. This subjective meaning can be his own, in which case he must go back in memory to the experiences he had at the moment of using the sign and establishing its meaning. Or it can be someone else's, in which case he must try to find out about the other person's subjective experiences when he used the sign. But in any case, when interpreting signs used by others, we will find two components involved, the objective and the subjective. Objective meaning is the meaning of the sign as such, the kernel, so to speak; whereas subjective meaning is the fringe or aura emanating from the subjective context in the mind of the sign-user.

Let us take a conversation between two people as an example. As one person speaks, thoughts are building up in his mind, and his listener is following him every step of the way just as the thoughts occur. In other words, none of the thoughts come out as prefabricated units. They are constructed gradually, and they are interpreted gradually. Both speaker and listener live through the conversation in such a manner that on each side Acts of meaning-establishment or meaning-interpretation are filled in and shaded with memories of what has been said and anticipations of what is yet to be said. Each of these Acts can in turn be focused upon introspectively and analyzed as a unit in itself. The meaning of the speaker's discourse consists for him and for his listener in his individual sentences and these, in turn, in their
component words as they come, one after another. The sentences for both of them serve as the meaning-contexts of the words, and the whole discourse as the meaning-context of the separate sentences.

Understanding the conscious Acts of another person who is communicating by means of signs does not differ in principle from understanding his other Acts (sec. 22). Like the latter, it occurs in the mode of simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity. The interpreter puts himself in the place of the other person and imagines that he himself is selecting and using the signs. He interprets the other person's subjective meaning as if it were his own. In the process he draws upon his whole personal knowledge of the speaker, especially the latter's ways and habits of expressing himself. Such personal knowledge continues to build itself up in the course of a conversation.

The same process goes on in the mind of the speaker. His words will be selected with a view to being understood by his listener. And the meaning he seeks to get across will not only be objective meaning, for he will seek to communicate his personal attitude as well. He will sketch out his communicative aim in the future perfect tense, just as he does the project of any other act. His choice of words will depend on the habits he has built up in interpreting the words of others, but it will, of course, also be influenced by his knowledge of his listener.

However, if the speaker is focused on what is going on in the mind of his listener, his knowledge of the latter is still quite uncertain. He can only estimate how much he is actually getting across. Any such estimate is necessarily vague, especially considering the fact that the listener's interpretation is always subsequent to the choice of words and fulfills or fails to fulfill the speaker's project in making that choice.

The listener is in a different position. For him the actual establishment of the meaning of the words has already occurred. He can start out with the objective meaning of the words he has heard and from there try to discover the subjective meaning of the speaker. In order to arrive at that subjective meaning, he imagines the project which the speaker must have had in mind. However, this picturing of the project starts out from the speaker's already spoken words. Contrary to the case of the speaker who is picturing something future on the basis of something present, the listener is picturing something pluperfect on the basis of something past. Another difference is that he is starting from words which have either succeeded or failed in fulfilling the speaker's project, and he is trying to uncover that project. The speaker, on the other hand, starts out with his own project as datum and tries to estimate whether it is going to be fulfilled by the listener's future interpretation.
Now since the words chosen by the speaker may or may not express his meaning, the listener can always doubt whether he is understanding the speaker adequately. The project of the speaker is always a matter of imaginative reconstruction for his interpreter and so is attended by a certain vagueness and uncertainty.

To illustrate what we mean, consider the fact that, in a conversation, thoughts like the following may run through the heads of the participants. The person about to speak will say to himself, “Assuming that this fellow speaks my kind of language, I must use such and such words.” A moment later his listener will be saying to himself, “If this other fellow is using words the way I understand them, then he must be telling me such and such.” The first statement shows how the speaker always chooses his words with the listener’s interpretation in mind. The second statement shows how the listener always interprets with the speaker’s subjective meaning in mind. In either case an intentional reference to the other person’s scheme is involved, regardless of whether the scheme is interpretive or expressive.

As the speaker chooses his words, he uses, of course, his own interpretive scheme. This depends partly upon the way he himself usually interprets words and partly upon his knowledge of his listener’s interpretive habits. When I read over a letter I have written to someone, I tend to interpret it just as if I were the receiver and not the sender. Now, my purpose in writing the letter was not merely to communicate an objective meaning to the reader but my subjective meaning as well. To put it in another way, I want him to rethink my thoughts. It may very well be, therefore, that when I read over my letter I shall decide that it falls short of this purpose. Knowing the person to whom I am writing and knowing his customary reactions to certain words and phrases, I may decide that this or that expression is open to misinterpretation or that he will not really be in a position to understand this or that thought of mine. Or I may fear that he will, as he reads, miss the point I am trying to make due to some subjective bias or some failure of attention on his part.

On the other hand, the recipient of the letter can carry out the opposite process. He can take a sentence and imagine that he himself wrote it. He can try to reconstruct the intention of the writer by guessing at some possible intentions and then comparing them with the actual propositional content of the sentence. He may conclude, “I see what he was trying to say, but he really missed his mark and said something else. If I had been he, I should have put it in such and such a way.” Or the reader may say to himself instead, “My friend always uses that term in an odd way, but I see what he means, since I know the way he thinks. It’s lucky that I am the one reading the letter. A
third party would have been thrown off the track entirely at this point." In the last case, the reader really carries out a threefold interpretation. First, he interprets the sentence objectively on the basis of his ordinary habits of interpretation. Second, from his knowledge of the writer, he reconstructs what must be the latter's real meaning. Third, he imagines how the ordinary reader would understand the sentence in question.

These considerations hold true quite generally for all cases in which signs are either used or interpreted. This being the case, it ought to be clear that in interpreting the subjective meaning of the signs used by someone else, or in anticipating someone else's interpretation of the subjective meaning of our own signs, we must be guided by our knowledge of that person. Naturally, therefore, the degree of intimacy or anonymity in which the person stands to us will have a great deal to do with the matter. The examples we have just used were all cases where knowledge of the other person was derived from direct contact; they belong to what we call the domain of directly experienced social reality. However, the use and interpretation of signs are to be found in the other areas of social life as well, such as the worlds of contemporaries and of predecessors, where direct knowledge of the people with whom we are dealing is minimal or even absent. Our theory of the establishment and interpretation of the meaning of signs will naturally undergo various modifications as it is applied to these areas. We shall see what these modifications are when we come to Chapter 4.

Even in the direct social relations we have used as examples, it was obviously impossible for the participants to "carry out the postulate of grasping each other's intended meaning," a point that we discussed in section 19. The subjective meaning that the interpreter does grasp is at best an approximation to the sign-user's intended meaning, but never that meaning itself, for one's knowledge of another person's perspective is always necessarily limited. For exactly the same reason, the person who expresses himself in signs is never quite sure of how he is being understood.

What we have been discussing is the content of communication. But we must remember that the actual communicating is itself a meaningful act and that we must interpret that act and the way it is done as things in their own right.


Recapitulation

Once the interpreter has determined both the objective and subjective meanings of the content of any communication, he
may proceed to ask why the communication was made in the first place. He is then seeking the in-order-to motive of the person communicating. For it is essential to every act of communication that it have an extrinsic goal. When I say something to you, I do so for a reason, whether to evoke a particular attitude on your part or simply to explain something to you. Every act of communication has, therefore, as its in-order-to motive the aim that the person being addressed take cognizance of it in one way or another.

The person who is the object or recipient of the communication is frequently the one who makes this kind of interpretation. Having settled what are the objective and subjective meanings of the content of the communication by finding the corresponding interpretive or expressive schemes, he proceeds to inquire into the reason why the other person said this in the first place. In short, he seeks the “plan” behind the communication.

However, the seeker of the in-order-to motive need not be the person addressed at all. A nonparticipant observer may proceed to the same kind of interpretation. I can, indeed I must, seek the in-order-to motive of the communication if I am ever to know the goal toward which the communication is leading. Furthermore, it is self-evident that one can seek the in-order-to motives even of those acts of other people which have no communicative intent. We have already seen this in section 22. What an actor’s subjective experience actually is we can only grasp if we find his in-order-to motive. We must first light upon his project and then engage in a play-by-play phantasy of the action which would fulfill it. In the case of action without communicative intent, the completed act itself is properly interpreted as the fulfillment of the in-order-to motive. However, if I happen to know that the completed act is only a link in a chain of means leading to a further end, then what I must do is interpret the subjective experiences the other person has of that further goal itself.

Now, we have already seen that we can go beyond the in-order-to motive and seek out the because-motive. Of course, knowledge of the latter presupposes in every case knowledge of the former. The subjective meaning-context which is the in-order-to motive must first be seen and taken for granted as an already constituted object in itself before any venture into deeper levels is undertaken. To speak of such deeper levels as existing by no means implies that the actor actually experiences them subjectively as meaning-contexts of his action. Nor does it mean that he can become aware even retrospectively of those polythetic Acts which, according to my interpretation, have constituted the in-order-to motive. On the contrary, there is no evidence to support the view that the actor ever has any awareness of the because-motive of
his action. This applies to one who is establishing a meaning as well as to any other actor. To be sure, he lives through the subjective experiences and intentional Acts which I have interpreted as his because-motive. However, he is not as a rule aware of them, and, when he is, it is no longer as actor. Such awareness, when it occurs, is a separate intentional Act independent of and detached from the action it is interpreting. It is then that a man can be said to understand himself. Such self-understanding is essentially the same as understanding others, with this difference—that usually, but not always, we have at our disposal a much richer array of information about ourselves and our past than others do.

Later on we shall describe the relation of the in-order-to motive to the because-motives in the various regions of the social world. At this point we shall merely try to recapitulate the complex structures involved in understanding another person insofar as these bear on communication and the use of signs. For to say, as we do, that for the user of the sign the sign stands in a meaning-context involves a number of separate facts which must be disentangled.

First of all, whenever I make use of a sign, those lived experiences signified by that sign stand for me in a meaning-context. For they have already been constituted into a synthesis, and I look upon them as a unit.

In the second place, for me the sign must already be part of a sign system. Otherwise I would not be able to use it. A sign must already have been interpreted before it can be used. But the understanding of a sign is a complicated synthesis of lived experiences resulting in a special kind of meaning-context. This meaning-context is a configuration involving two elements: the sign as object in itself and the signatum, each of which, of course, involves separate meaning-contexts in its own right. The total new meaning-context embracing them both we have called the “coordinating scheme” of the sign.

Third, the Act of selecting and using the sign is a special meaning-context for the sign-user to the extent that each use of a sign is an expressive action. Since every action comprises a meaning-context by virtue of the fact that the actor visualizes all the successive lived experiences of that action as one unified act, it follows that every expressive action is therefore a meaning-context. This does not mean that every case of sign-using is ipso facto a case of communication. A person may, talking to himself for instance, use a sign purely as an act of self-expression without any intention of communication.

Fourth, the meaning-context “sign-using as act” can serve as the
basis for a superimposed meaning-context "sign-using as communica­
tive act" without in any way taking into account the particular person
addressed.

Fifth, however, this superimposed meaning-context can enter into
a still higher and wider meaning-context in which the addressee is
taken into account. In this case the communicating act has as its goal
not merely that someone take cognizance of it but that its message
should motivate the person cognizing to a particular attitude or piece
of behavior.

Sixth, the fact that this particular addressee is communicated with
here, now, and in this way can be placed within a still broader context
of meaning by finding the in-order-to motive of that communicative
act.

All these meaning-contexts are in principle open to the interpreter
and can be uncovered systematically by him. Just which ones he does
seek to inquire into will depend upon the kind of interest he has in the
sign.

However, the statement that all these meaning-contexts in prin­
iple lie open to interpretation requires some modification. As we have
said repeatedly, the structure of the social world is by no means
homogeneous. Our fellow men and the signs they use can be given to
us in different ways. There are different approaches to the sign and to
the subjective experience it expresses. Indeed, we do not even need a
sign in order to gain access to another person's mind; a mere indica­
tion can offer us the opening. This is what happens, for instance,
when we draw inferences from artifacts concerning the experiences of
people who lived in the past.

27. Subjective and Objective Meaning. Product
and Evidence

We have now seen the different approaches to the genu­
ine understanding of the other self. The interpreter starts with his
own experience of the animate body of the other person or of the
artifacts which the latter has produced. In either case he is interpret­
ing Objectivations in which the other's subjective experiences mani­
fest themselves. If it is the body of the other that is in question, he
concerns himself with act-objectivations, i.e., movements, gestures,
or the results of action. If it is artifacts that are in question, these may
be either signs in the narrower sense or manufactured external objects

55. We have previously noted how, in such cases, the selection of questions to
be answered actually occurs. See above, sec. 16, p. 85, and sec. 18, p. 95.
such as tools, monuments, etc. All that these Objectivations have in common is that they exist only as the result of the action of rational beings. Because they are products of action, they are ipso facto evidence of what went on in the minds of the actors who made them. It should be noted that not all evidences are signs, but all signs are evidences. For an evidence to be a sign, it must be capable of becoming an element in a sign system with the status of coordinating scheme. This qualification is lacking in some evidence. A tool, for instance, although it is an evidence of what went on in the mind of its maker, is surely no sign. However, under “evidences” we mean to include not only equipment \(^{56}\) that has been produced by a manufacturing process, but judgment that has been produced by thought, or the message content which has been produced by an act of communication.

The problematic of subjective and objective meaning includes evidences of all sorts. That is to say, anyone who encounters a given product can proceed to interpret it in two different ways. First, he can focus his attention on its status as an object, either real or ideal, but at any rate independent of its maker. Second, he can look upon it as evidence for what went on in the mind of its makers at the moment it was being made. In the former case the interpreter is subsuming his own experiences (erfahrende Akte) of the object under the interpretive schemes which he has at hand. In the latter case, however, his attention directs itself to the constituting Acts of consciousness of the producer (these might be his own as well as those of another person).

This relation between objective and subjective meaning will be examined in a more detailed way at a later point. We speak, then, of the subjective meaning of the product if we have in view the meaning-context within which the product stands or stood in the mind of the producer. To know the subjective meaning of the product means that we are able to run over in our own minds in simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity the polythetic Acts which constituted the experience of the producer.

We keep in view, then, the other person’s lived experiences as they are occurring; we observe them being constituted step by step. For us, the other person’s products are indications of those lived experiences. The lived experiences stand for him, in turn, within a meaning context. We know this by means of a particular evidence, and we can in an act of genuine understanding be aware of the constituting process in his mind.

Objective meaning, on the contrary, we can predicate only of the

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56. Zeug. This is the term used by Heidegger for those objects of the external world which are “ready to hand.” Cf. Sein und Zeit, p. 102 [E.T., Being and Time, Macquarrie and Robinson, p. 135].
product as such, that is, of the already constituted meaning-context of the thing produced, whose actual production we meanwhile disregard. The product is, then, in the fullest sense the end result of the process of production, something that is finished and complete. It is no longer part of the process but merely points back to it as an event in the past. The product itself is, however, not an event but an entity (ein Seiendes) which is the sediment of past events within the mind of the producer. To be sure, even the interpretation of the objective meaning of the product occurs in step-by-step polythetic Acts. Nevertheless, it is exhausted in the ordering of the interpreter's experiences of the product within the total meaning-context of the interpretive act. And, as we have said, the interpreter leaves the original step-by-step creation of the product quite out of account. It is not that he is unaware that it has occurred; it is just that he pays no attention to it. Objective meaning therefore consists only in a meaning-context within the mind of the interpreter, whereas subjective meaning refers beyond it to a meaning-context in the mind of the producer.

A subjective meaning-context, then, is present if what is given in an objective meaning-context was created as a meaning-context by a Thou on its own part. Nothing, however, is thereby implied either about the particular kind of meaning-context into which the Thou orders its lived experiences or about the quality of those experiences themselves.

We have already noted that the interpreter grasps the other person's conscious experiences in the mode of simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity. Genuine simultaneity is the more frequent, even though it is a special case of the process. It is tied to the world of directly experienced social reality and presupposes that the interpreter witnesses the actual bringing-forth of the product. An example would be a conversation, where the listener is actually present as the speaker performs Acts that bring forth meaningful discourse and where the listener performs these Acts with and after the speaker. A case of quasi-simultaneous interpretation would be the reading of a book. Here the reader relives the author's choice of words as if the choice were made before his very eyes. The same would hold for a person inspecting some artifacts, such as tools, and imagining to himself how they were made. However, in saying that we can observe such subjective experiences on the part of the producer, we only meant that we can grasp the fact that they occur. We have said nothing about how we understand what experiences occur, nor how we understand the way in which they are formed. We shall deal with these problems when we analyze the world of contemporaries, the world of direct social experience, and the world of the genuine We-relationship. Still, it can be said
even at this point that what is essential to this further knowledge is a knowledge of the person being interpreted. When we ask what the subjective meaning of a product is, and therefore what conscious experiences another person has, we are asking what particular polythetically constructed lived experiences are occurring or have occurred in a particular other person. This other person, this Thou, has his own unique experiences and meaning-contexts. No other person, not even he himself at another moment, can stand in his shoes at this moment.

The objective meaning of a product that we have before us is, on the other hand, by no means interpreted as evidence for the particular lived experience of a particular Thou. Rather, it is interpreted as already constituted and established, abstracted from every subjective flow of experience and every subjective meaning-context that could exist in such a flow. It is grasped as an objectification endowed with "universal meaning." Even though we implicitly refer to its author when we call it a "product," still we leave this author and everything personal about him out of account when we are interpreting objective meaning. He is hidden behind the impersonal "one" (someone, someone or other). This anonymous "one" is merely the linguistic term for the fact that a Thou exists, or has once existed, of whose particularity we take no account. I myself or you or some ideal type or Everyman could step into its shoes without in any way altering the subjective meaning of the product. We can say nothing about the subjective processes of this anonymous "one," for the latter has no duration, and the temporal dimension we ascribe to it, being a logical fiction, is in principle incapable of being experienced. But precisely for this reason the objective meaning remains, from the point of view of the interpreter, invariant for all possible creators of the meaningful object. Insofar as that object contains within its very meaning the ideality of the "and so forth" and of the "I can do it again," to that extent is that meaning independent of its maker and the circumstances of its origination. The product is abstracted from every individual consciousness and indeed from every consciousness as such. Objective meaning is merely the interpreter's ordering of his experiences of a product into the total context of his experience.

It follows from all we have said that every interpretation of subjective meaning involves a reference to a particular person. Furthermore, it must be a person of whom the interpreter has some kind of experience (Erfahrung) and whose subjective states he can run through in simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity, whereas objective meaning is abstracted from and independent of particular persons. Later we shall study this antithesis in greater detail, treating it as a case of polar opposition. Between the understanding of subjective meaning and the
understanding of pure objective meaning there is a whole series of intermediate steps based on the fact that the social world has its own unique structure derived, as it is, from the worlds of direct social experience, of contemporaries, of predecessors, and of successors. We shall devote Chapter 4 to the study of these different worlds, meanwhile paying special attention to the process of anonymization in each. We shall explain the polar opposition between subjective and objective meaning as an ideal-typical formulation of heuristic principles of meaning-interpretation.

28. Excursus: A Few Applications of the Theory of Objective and Subjective Meaning in the Field of the Cultural Sciences

The theory of the two different types of meaning-interpretation of products which we have just developed is of great significance for the cultural sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) and not for these only. First of all, let us consider what are called “cultural objects,” in other words, such ideal objectivities as “state,” “art,” “language,” and so forth. These are all products according to our theory, for they bear upon them the mark of their production by our fellow men and are evidences of what went on in the minds of our fellow men. All cultural Objectivations can, therefore, be interpreted in a twofold manner. One interpretation treats them as completely constituted objectifications as they exist for us the interpreters, either now, as contemporaries in the present, or as coming later in history. These objectifications can be described quite simply or can be subjected to theoretical elaboration as objects of essential knowledge; that is, one can study the state as such, art as such, language as such.

All these products can, however, be treated as evidences for what went on in the minds of those who created them. Here highly complex cultural objects lend themselves to the most detailed investigation. The state can be interpreted as the totality of the acts of those who are oriented to the political order, that is, of its citizens; or it can be interpreted as the end result of certain historical acts and therefore itself as a historical object; or it can be treated as the concretization of a certain public-mindedness on the part of its rulers, and so forth. The art of a particular era can be interpreted as the expression of a particular artistic tendency of the time or as the expression of a particular interpretation of the world preceding and determining all artistic expression, in other words, as an expression of a particular way of “seeing.” However, it can further be interpreted as a historical
development which comes about in the form of a variation on the known style of an earlier epoch, whether due to the succession of schools or simply of generations. These are mere samples of the numerous possibilities of interpretation, and to each of them corresponds a special interpretive scheme and way of giving meaning to the object of interpretation.

We have already noted that the meaning-content of a product is more or less independent of what went on in the mind of the person creating it, according to whether the latter is understood by his interpreter in greater or lesser anonymity. In order to grasp a certain objectification in the ideality of the “I can do it again,” one must conceive the author of that objectification simply as “one.” Let us see how this works out in the field of economic theory. The so-called “principles of catallactics” certainly have as their subject matter human acts considered as finished products, not actions in progress. The meaning-content of these principles is exhausted in the subsumption of such acts under the interpretive schemes of economic theory. To be sure, no economic act is conceivable without some reference to an economic actor, but the latter is absolutely anonymous; it is not you, nor I, nor an entrepreneur, nor even an “economic man” as such, but a pure universal “one.” This is the reason why the propositions of theoretical economics have just that “universal validity” which gives them the ideality of the “and so forth” and the “I can do it again.” However, one can study the economic actor as such and try to find out what is going on in his mind; of course, one is not then engaged in theoretical economics but in economic history or economic sociology, of which Weber has furnished us an unparalleled example in the first book of his Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. However, the statements of these sciences can claim no universal validity, for they deal either with the economic sentiments of particular historical individuals or with types of economic activity for which the economic acts in question are evidence.

To give examples from other fields of the significance of this question, we need only point out the importance of drawing a sharp

57. [The theory of exchange. This term, originated by Whately, plays a major part in the economic thought of Ludwig von Mises, to which Schutz often refers. See Mises’ Human Action (New Haven, 1966), esp. Part IV. Catallactics for Mises is part of a pure a priori theory of action considered as abstracted from its psychological and historical circumstances; Mises’ concept is therefore especially useful as an example at this point. For a very recent major economic treatise based on the same concept see Murray N. Rothbard, Man, Economy and the State (Princeton, 1962).]

58. See the discussion of the anonymity of the world of contemporaries, sec. 39, below, for a further analysis of this concept of “one.”
distinction between subjective and objective meaning in those sciences which are interpretive in the narrow sense, namely, philology and jurisprudence. In philology it is always a basic question whether what is being studied is the objective meaning of a word at a definite time within a definite language area or, second, the subjective meaning which the word takes on in the usage of a particular author or of a particular circle of speakers or, third, the occasional meaning which it takes on in the context of discourse. Again, every student of law is familiar with the distinction between considering a point of law as a proposition within the legal system in accordance with philological and juridical canons of interpretation, on the one hand, and asking, on the other hand, what "the intention of the legislator" was. All these differences come down to the distinction between the objective and subjective meaning of the product, with which we have just been dealing.

One more point before we conclude this chapter. The tendency to look for a subjective meaning for everything in existence is so deeply rooted in the human mind, the search for the meaning of every object is so tied up with the idea that that object was once given meaning by some mind, that everything in the world can be interpreted as a product and therefore as evidence for what went on in the mind of God. Indeed, the whole universe can be regarded as the product of God, to whose creative act it bears witness. This is only to make a passing reference, of course, to a whole area of problems that lie outside the strict sciences. In any case, the problem of subjective and objective meaning is the open door to every theology and metaphysics.