

# Strangeness and Irrelevance

-Relevance in post-human society

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## 1. “Schutz, a Nihilist?”

Professor Michel Barber asked so in his brilliant book *The Participating Citizen -A Biography of Alfred Schutz*.<sup>1</sup> His work was to produce counterevidence against such a question. His argument was to point out a conception of ‘participation’ in Schutzean social theory.

In 1943 an article of “The Stranger -An Essays in Social Psychology” by Alfred Schutz was published on *The American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>2</sup> But, very interestingly, one of his best friend Aron Gurwitsch writes a very critical review on this article in his letter to Schutz on July 16 in 1944. Richard Grathoff entitled “When it was no longer possible to live in Europe as a European, we had to leave in order to save our bare lives” to this letter.<sup>3</sup> As we know, this article title of ‘The Stranger’ meant not any other people’s affairs but their own serious experiences in everyday life.

Gurwitsch sent a very critical comment to Schutz.

»According to you, the stranger is every person who changes his surrounding world for certain reasons. Certainly, the immigrant of the old style, who for certain reasons moves to another country and now takes his bearings. If things don’t work out, he can go back, just as the city person who moves to the country can if need be return to the city. But the situation of the immigrant of the last ten years is different. He had no choice, he was confronted with the question of bare survival, and that no longer merely individually but nationally. If already the *réfugié* in general cannot be brought under the formal concept of the *stranger*, as it seems to me, then it is all the more clear in the case of the *réfugié* of today,

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<sup>1</sup> Michel, D. Barber, *The Participating Citizen -A Biography of Alfred Schutz*, New York State University Press 2004, pp.117-30

<sup>2</sup> Published in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLIX, No.6, May 1944, pp.499-507. Now, Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II -Studies in Social Theory*, pp.91-105.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Grathoff, *Philosophers in Exile -The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch, 1939-1959* (translated by J. Claude Evans), Indiana University Press, 1989, p.69.

1 who in one sense comes out of the void, in another sense out of a 3000-year past. «<sup>4</sup>

2 This Gurwitsch's very critical argument comes from his article "On Contemporary  
3 Nihilism."<sup>5</sup> He deplores that 'episteme' had driven out by 'doxa' under animal rationalism,  
4 and the whereabouts of 'truth' or 'justice' had disappeared away. He would try to find out  
5 this cause in the humanism of psychology and sociology which would easily use some  
6 conceptions of affection, sentiment, desire, opinion and so on.

7 We can find such a philosophical argument and his diagnostics on those days in his  
8 article.

9 »The present war is being fought in order to prevent the re-establishment of the institution  
10 of slavery: it is being fought, that is, in the name of the principle of the *equality of all men*  
11 *and all nations*. But what, precisely, is the nature of this principle? Does it represent a  
12 simple statement of fact? If we stick to the facts, we must admit the existence of both  
13 similarities and dissimilarities among men. On what ground, then, may we accentuate  
14 similarities and hence insist on the principle of equality rather than emphasize the  
15 dissimilarities, and deduce therefrom the principle of inequality? The one conclusion  
16 appears no more justifiable, no less arbitrary than the other. «<sup>6</sup>

17 Therefore, Gurwitsch asked, "Dear Schutz, can this crisis be described with the  
18 categories 'scheme of orientation,' 'pattern of behavior,' 'way of life'?"<sup>7</sup>

19 Indeed, sociological formalistic categorization like adaptation or integration by a certain  
20 cultural pattern may be criticized. However, on the other hand, what could the philosophers  
21 do at that time?

22 Professor Barber turns his attention to a debate in the correspondence between Schutz  
23 and Eric Voegelin. Their theme at that time was the practice of philosopher and the position  
24 of transcendental philosophy in Husserl's *The Crisis*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Grathoff 1989, p.70.

<sup>5</sup> Aron Gurwitsch, "On Contemporary Nihilism" in: *Review of Politics* 7, 1945, pp.170-198.

<sup>6</sup> Gurwitsch 1945, p.189.

<sup>7</sup> Grathoff 1989, p.71.

<sup>8</sup> "We have also become aware in the most general way [through the foregoing reflections] that human philosophizing and its results in the whole of man's existence mean anything but merely private or otherwise

1 Voegelin criticized Husserl and the position as philosopher very strictly in his letter to  
2 Schutz on September 17, 1943.

3 »By thus confining humanity to the community of those who, in Husserl's sense, can  
4 philosophize with one another, the philosophical telos comes close to the particular,  
5 intramundane collectivities of the type of the Marxian proletariat, Hitler's German Volk, or  
6 Mussolini's Italianita. «<sup>9</sup>

7 Voegelin denied very emphatically Husserl's position and vocation as philosopher.  
8 Schutz responded to Voegelin in a little different tone. I assume that he would try to seek  
9 another position of phenomenology.

10 »I readily admit that I cannot assume the role of the defender of transcendental philosophy  
11 because I fear that it has failed at decisive points. For example, in my opinion, it has not  
12 succeeded in escaping transcendental solipsism, or even in overcoming the gap [Bruch]  
13 in the concept of the 'constitution of the world through the transcendental ego,' which  
14 begins with the construction of the world of experience through consciousness and ends  
15 with the creation of the world by the ego that has become God. «<sup>10</sup>

16 It is well-known that Schutz would not require the achievement of a transcendental  
17 knowledge but analyze the phenomenon of meaning in ordinary (*mudanen*) social life.<sup>11</sup>  
18 However, it will be a more important problem how different the constitutional theory of social  
19 worlds is from the formalistic concepts which classical American sociologists like Sumner  
20 or Parsons use. If we could not accept Husserlian vocation of philosopher and any  
21 transcendental philosophy, which possibility would be left behind in philosophy in future?  
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limited cultural goals. In our philosophizing, then -how can we avoid it? – we are *functionaries of mankind*," (Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press / Evanston 1970, p.17).

<sup>9</sup> Gerhart Wagner, Gilbert Weiss (edited), *A Friendship That Lasted a Lifetime -The Correspondence Between Alfred Schutz and Eric Voegelin*, Volume 1 (trans. William Petropulos), University of Missouri 2011, p.35.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, Weiss 2011, p.51.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (translated by George Walsh and Frederike Lehnert), Northwestern University Press, 1967, p.44; Alfred Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt - Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (Hrsg. Martin Endreß und Joachim Renn), UVK Verlagsgesellschaft / Konstanz 2004.

## 2. Possibility of Irrelevant Strangeness

The unfinished work *The Structures of Life-World*, which had already published as Thomas Luckman's edition in 1979 (Band I) and in 1984 (Band II).<sup>12</sup> This work has just been newly edited and published by Martin Endreß and Sebastian Klimasch.<sup>13</sup>

The most important theme in this work is the transcendence of everyday life, which Schutz had already taken up in his article "Symbol, Reality, and Society."<sup>14</sup> This is not any other than the problem of practice in his social theory. This work must be understood as a sincerely theoretical reply to a very critical argument which Gurwitsch showed him in 1944.

For instance, if we take up the concept of 'equality' as an example of the transcendence of the world taken for granted, it may be treated only as problem of adaptation to 'inequality' in case of formalistic sociological theories. However, it is a main theme in phenomenological sociology how a stranger, who lacks relevance there, could participate in an already established situation. This will be a main problem which Professor Barber argues in his book *The Participating Citizen*.

It is true that a possible condition for participation is a necessary difference of relevance. It means that we could not so easily free from relevantly divided universes, as far as we live in the human world. As we know, Schutz presents four different levels of relevance:

- 1) The self-interpretation of the world taken for granted by the in-group,
- 2) The out-group's interpretation of the world taken for granted by the in-group,
- 3) Interpretation of the order of relevances by the social scientist,
- 4) Interpretation of the order of relevances from a philosophical, mythical, or theological basic position.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Schutz, Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, Northwestern University Press / Evanston, Volume 1 (translated by Richard M. Zaner, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr), 1973, Volume 2 (translated by Richard M. Zaner, David J. Parent), 1983,

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Schütz, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt, Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe* Band IX (herausgegeben von Martin Endreß, Sebastian Klimasch), Herbert von Halem Verlag – Köln 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Schutz, "Symbol, Reality, and Society", in: *Collected Papers I -The Problem of Social Reality*, Kluwer Academic Publishers / Boston 1962, pp.287-356.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Schutz, "Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World", in: *Collected Papers II -Studies in Social Theory*, Martinus Nijhoff / The Hague 1964, pp.226-273.

1           Such the relevant levels may be shown, for instance, as a difference between a reality,  
2 which sociologists would describe with formalistic categories, and another reality, which  
3 Gurwitsch had emphasized as *réfugié*. Or, as differences among Husserlian vocation of  
4 philosopher, Voegelin's new science of politics and Schutz's socio-phenomenology.

5           Indeed, we could experience an irrelevant strangeness with a participation in an actual  
6 scene. We could happen to transcend the everyday life taken for granted. A leap from a  
7 theoretical reality of academic university life to a practical one of protest movement is  
8 sometimes unintentionally possible. But the formalistic sociological categories will be still  
9 alive.

10           Therefore, Schutz presents his following analytical distinction.

11  
12           » (・・・) it might be better to call all objects, facts, events, persons, traits, falling in the same  
13 type and so pertaining to the same domain of relevance, *homogeneous*. Elements,  
14 however, pertaining to different domains of relevances will be called *heterogeneous*. We  
15 propose to reserve the terms equality and inequality for the relationship of elements  
16 pertaining to the same domain of relevance. «<sup>16</sup>

17  
18           »Equality and inequality in this sense refer to various degrees of excellence in performance,  
19 achievement, and status – but only of homogeneous elements, that is, only elements  
20 belonging to the same domain of relevances are comparable in this respect. The  
21 discussion of problems of equality and inequality is frequently obscured by the fact that  
22 these terms are applied to relationships between heterogeneous elements. «<sup>17</sup>

23  
24           For instance, the equal rights for both sexes might have been enlarged more and more.  
25 Very interestingly its reality may be universalistic. However, an American reality is different  
26 from that in Japan. Japan is an inner-group for me, but an outer-group for Professor Barber.

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<sup>16</sup> Schutz 1964, p.239.

<sup>17</sup> Schutz 1964, p.239 f.

1 The idea of equality by the philosophical Humanity should be homogeneous apart from  
2 each own culture. We could not arrive at such a universalistic position without  
3 transcendental reduction by Husserl. However, how could be the transcendentalism  
4 universalistic?

5 Does such a referential point which makes differentiations possible belongs to the inner-  
6 group, or the outer-group? It may be understood as a paradoxical relation of identity and  
7 not-identity. Not only each own culture itself but also the transcendental universalism may  
8 have been changed itself. The homogeneous elements themselves have been changing  
9 with time and society.

10 In other words, the referential point on which we could accept our everyday life taken  
11 for granted as real is dependent upon our lived space and time. Because we could not  
12 work out a certain solution if we could not stand on a position apart from our socialization  
13 and formation process of Humanity.

### 14 15 **3. Relevance and Matrix -Post-human reality?**

16 If the days of Singularity will have begun in 2049, the coming post-human world may  
17 appear as the world of matrix without sameness nor difference of relevances?

18 Slavoj Žižek writes, "The 'Real' is a purely virtual (and in this sense fictitious) point of  
19 reference around which we construct different versions of reality."<sup>18</sup>

20 According to Alenka Zupančič, "The Real is not some realm or substance to be talked  
21 about, it is the inherent contradiction of speech, twisting its tongue, so to speak."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Hegel in a Wired Brain*, Bloomsbury Academic / London 2020, p.70. He explains more in detail, "The Real is a purely virtual (and in this sense fictitious) point of reference around which we construct different versions of reality. Once we fully endorse this notion of the real, we no longer need the cynical recourse to the cobweb of illusions to sustain our desire: the tension that defines desire is already operative in the 'pure' real which is not a pure chaos outside the Symbolic but the immanent impossibility of the Symbolic. This is why Lacan's notion of the Borromean knot that inextricably links the three dimensions of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary cannot be the ultimate answer to the question of how reality is structured: the Symbolic and the Imaginary are not parts of the ultimate ontological reality. The question to be addressed here is: how the pre-human Real in itself has to be structured so that the Symbolic and the Imaginary can arise in it."

<sup>19</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, p.69.

1           Following Max Weber's distinction of subjective and objective meaning, Schutz shows  
2 us the above-mentioned four levels of relevancies.<sup>20</sup> If we inquire where the virtual or  
3 fictitious point of reference could be attributed, it means a virtual point without belonging to  
4 inner- nor outer-group.

- 5           ● Today, if you search for a book in Amazon.com, for example Alfred Schutz,  
6           *Phenomenology of the Social World*, you will come across Alfred Schutz,  
7           *Structures of the Life-World*, Vol. 1 and *The Structures of the Life-World*, Vol. 2 as  
8           'Frequently bought together.'
- 9           ● And you will have to see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, and Maurice Merleau-  
10          Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* as 'Customers who viewed this item also  
11          viewed.'
- 12          ● Moreover, we will see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*  
13          as inspired by your browsing history.'
- 14          ● Lastly you will arrive to Amazon Basics Teflon Soleplate Steam Iron, 1200-Watt as  
15          'Deals and Promotions,' and you would love to put Steam Iron, in your cart.

16           Is such a choice your subjective decision? I suppose that you should be made chosen  
17 it through the Artificial Intelligence, which could read and calculate your own and other  
18 public tastes? Such a relation comes originally from the conception of *simulacra* and  
19 *simulation* by Jean Baudrillard. However, in the days of *Wired Brain* by Žižek anyone could  
20 not draw a sharp line between my subjectivity and AI-responses.

21           If an AI would create a new AI, or if a new AI would be born from an old AI, would our  
22 brain be still a part of our bodies? Is the Hotel-California effect not any other than the  
23 residues of our subjectivities? Even these residues also may be produced by AI?

24           The subjectivity of human being may be 'real' only as contextual relation of original  
25 matrix. I believe that there will be some levels of relevances, as Schutz pointed out, in the  
26 post-human world of Wired Brains.

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<sup>20</sup> Above mentioned footnote 18.

1           Some big Wired Brain complexes like GAFA may be controlled by some elite persons  
2 like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Elon Musk or the elite AI.

3           In other words, if the post human world will not come, the difference between inner-  
4 group and outer-group will never disappear. The serious problem of equality and inequality  
5 will be dependent upon the relation of We-perspective and They-perspective, which will  
6 distinct between homogenous elements and heterogeneous elements. If it were so, the  
7 human unhappiness will remain even under the age of Singularity.

8           'A purely virtual (and in this sense fictious) point of reference' by Žižek means a point  
9 which can distinct between homogeneous elements and heterogeneous elements. It will  
10 be, in other words, a point to which the articulation of We-perspective and They-  
11 perspective attributes.

12           This theoretical configuration comes from the sameness and difference between  
13 simultaneity and quasi-simultaneity in the chapter 2 of Schutz's first book *Phenomenology*  
14 *of Social World* (original: *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*).<sup>21</sup>

15           Further, it comes originally from the difference of Richard Wagner and Wolfgang  
16 Amadeus Mozart in Schutz's early manuscript "The Meaning Content of the Opera."

17           "The world of Mozart, which actually seems to unravel reality, is nothing else but the  
18 elementary and innermost experience of our surrounding's. It seizes the Thou to a degree  
19 which Wagner never strove to reach and which he never reached. (···) Concerning  
20 Mozart, we can assert that he derived his dramatic inspiration, and formed it musically, out  
21 of the actual existence of two persons in space and time. Thus, he reached his greatest  
22 achievements in the ensemble, in the simultaneous singing and acting of several persons  
23 who express their different attitudes toward the same situation."<sup>22</sup>

24           To create a situation means the transcendence of take-for-grantedness in everyday life

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 11.!

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers VI. Literary Reality and Relationships*, (edited by Michael Barber), Springer / New York 2013, p.194; Alfred Schütz, *Schriften zur Musik, Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe* (Hrsg. Gerd Sebald und Andreas Georg Stascheit, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft Konstanz 2016, S.68-9; Alfred Schütz, *Theorie der Lebensformen*, Suhrkamp / Frankfurt am Main, S.307-9.

1 in his last unfinished book *Structures of Life-World*.

2 You know a very beautiful scene in an American movie *The Shawshank Redemption*.<sup>23</sup>  
3 Through a loudspeaker the famous 'Letter Duet' in the *Marriage of Figaro*, Act 3 is suddenly  
4 coming to play. Many prisoners, prison-guards and doctors, who are working, doing  
5 something etc. each other, all people look up toward that loudspeaker, thinking what  
6 happens. It means an actualization of simultaneity by a beautiful singing through the  
7 stereophonic apparatus, namely a close encounter with strangeness and irrelevance.

8 Žižek or Zupančič may point out the patriarchy in this Opera, or sexual passion which  
9 introduces a violent cut into the flow of everyday life.<sup>24</sup> However, I would like to emphasize  
10 an instantaneous and spontaneous attention of strangeness and irrelevance.

11 Such a sudden moment can change people and world. Any reform and any discovery  
12 will not be realized without this moment. I would like to overcome any nihilistic stagnations  
13 with this irrelevant strangeness.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://youtu.be/qzuM2XTnpSA?t=12>

<sup>24</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed absolute*, Bloomsbury Academic / London 2020, p.70.