

# Reading Schutz:

## notes on ethnomethodology and interpretive sociology

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### 1. Introduction

There are two kinds of misconceptions commonly held about ethnomethodology (M) (1): first, it is often believed to be *merely* another "method" (i.e. technique) for generating sociological descriptions, and second, it is frequently portrayed as *another* of those "micro" approaches to social reality which insists on the significance of "meanings"/"rules"/"actors" definition of the situation in describing human behaviour and social settings. When this paper is addressed to this latter issue, it is recognized that in the past both of these misconceptions have served as the very reasons for dismissing EM as an alternative mode for describing social reality. For adherents of the first view that dismissal has been justified by the claim the EM failed to demonstrate (the adequacy of) its methods (and hence the question "what *are* the methods of EM" is often posed with irony) (2), while proponents of the second view have suggested that there is nothing "new" about EM, it is merely another version of small group research, participant observation, or symbolic interactionism (3). Nevertheless, some students of sociology remained seriously interested in, but utterly confused about EM, and to these is this paper addressed when it takes up the issue of "what is ethnomethodology" once again and argues for its radical difference from modes of descriptions it has been often identified with as one of their variants, namely phenomenology and symbolic interactionism.

The discussion that follows differs from tradition in that it does not consist in authoritative statements *about* EM. Instead, it intends to answer to the problem of "what it is" by being itself an exercise in the practice of ethnomethodological

attitude. By taking up various theoretical issues and responding to these *from the platform* of EM, we hope that platform will show itself and its difference will shine through from other versions of theorizing.

These concrete issues, theoretical propositions, to which then ethnomethodological responses and alternatives are drafted, are taken from A. Schutz *Phenomenology of the Social* (4). This particular work was selected for two reasons: Schutz has been declared by ethnomethodologist themselves as their "predecessor" and thus an "ethnomethodological reading" of his work may show how "seriously" we should take that relationship. Secondly, this particular work raises issues (about the nature of the social and the observer's position within, or rather, responsibility for it) that can serve as devices in describing EM *while* showing its radical difference from other, so called related attempts of reproducing the practical activities of societal members.

It is important to stress however, that in accomplishing that task we do not intend to speak *about* Schutz. And while the discussion may deal with his work in great detail, the paper does not intend to offer a comprehensive account of his interpretive sociology. Instead, we intend to speak about EM by offering an ethnomethodological reading of Schutzian propositions. Thus, whether we are "faithful" to Schutz or not is not important (for in accomplishing our task we have to remain faithful only to EM). We use Schutz and his *Phenomenology* *not* to describe/compare/evaluate Schutz, but to illuminate the platform of EM. And in serving us as a practical device - the Wittgensteinian ladder - once our task is accomplished, the device becomes superfluous, and like that famous ladder, it can be thrown away.

## 2. Subjective vs. objective meaning

For Schutz, who accepts with Weber that the "whatness" of the social world can be reduced to the meanings individual actors attach to their actions in and experiences of the social, and that all

kinds of relationships and structures originate in the most elementary forms of human behaviour, the central issue to be tackled by science is how the individual constitutes the meaning of his experiences and by what processes does he design his social actions. And as he proposes that the meaning structure of the social world can only be deduced from the "most primitive and general characteristics of the consciousness" (5) he begins his analysis by inquiring into these characteristics (of the stream of internal consciousness). Yet, as the result of his inquiries, he finds that because (subjective) meaning is the internal constitution of the ego, it is accessible only for the actor himself and is essentially unavailable for (direct) observation.

Hence, the Schutzian inquiry into the processes of meaning constitution by the solitary ego explicates, or rather recovers, the old dilemma of social science: the duality of objective vs. subjective (meanings), observable vs. unobservable events and thus the fact that what it needs to describe cannot be observed. Hence, while Schutz proposes that the "whatness" of the social world somehow finds its origin in the meanings individual actors attach to their experiences and takes as the task of social science the description of meaning structures within the social, he also recognizes that these structures originate "within" and thus are essentially unavailable for direct observation. Faced with the realization that the observed - objective meanings merely approximate subjective - intended meanings, Schutz asks how is social science to proceed *without* abandoning its concern with the phenomenon of meaning.

If the premise that what is observed is always at variance with what is intended is the premise on which the Schutzian analysis rests and represents the dilemma his interpretive sociology (IS) seeks to resolve, then from the platform of EM this fundamental problem of subjective meaning is essentially a non-problem. It does not make an analytical distinction between observable and unobservable events (or rather, refuses to recognize unobservable events). Thus, instead of

treating it as a sociological issue, something to be resolved by science, EM (could) reformulate the possible discrepancy between subjective and objective as a problem for *members* and as such treat it as a *topic* for EM inquiries. Thus, while Schutz asks how do we (as *analysts*) proceed given that what we observe can merely approximate what is actually experienced or intended by the actor; EM may ask how do we (as *members*) take note of and proceed when facing such troubles. That is, how (by what methods) members render the unobservability of what is subjective observable, how do they recognize and locate discrepancies between what is intended and what is seen, and once located, what do they do about these troubles in their daily lives.

The reason for this ethnomethodological indifference may be located in EM's refusal to re-introduce that traditional duality between observable and unobservable events, or to distinguish *in analysis* between "private" (subjective) and "public" (objective) occurrences. For EM takes as its beginning that the "stuff" social life is made of is necessarily "public" (observable-reportable) - otherwise how could we take note of it - and from its platform "subjective" and "objective" meanings and ultimately the notion of the conscious cannot be seen as entities with an ontological existence, but only as members' methods/devices that recognize them *as* events/entities and make their public or private character *publicly* available and observable.

It is important to note, however, that when EM treats the naive theorizing of societal members as an essentially public and observable matter, something which is made available for Self and Others, it is not a "compromise". It takes as its beginning the account-able character of the social *not* because the "inner processes" Schutz talks about are not available for observation and analysis. But rather, because members themselves in *doing* their practical activities have no other platform, arena than the social and only what is (made) public can provide them with the resources, topics and evidence they need for the concerted and ongoing production of their practical

reasoning/activities.

The most immediate consequence of EM's refusal to be concerned with events that take place "behind the skull" is that when it turns to Schutz' analysis of the social as a resource, it may adopt its key concepts and some of its fundamental premises only by transferring the phenomena they describe from the realm of "private" to the realm of "public" and thus abolishing the duality of subjective-objective they implicitly contain and introduce. Thus, the concept of "taken for granted", which for Schutz is essentially an act of reflection as it is the actor's reflexive glance which tells what level of experience is to be taken for granted and what is in need of further analysis; does not correspond with "inner" processes when used in EM analysis (6). The taken for granted features of every day life are not individually but socially produced and sustained. Hence, it is not "I" (the solitary ego" who takes it for granted, for I cannot take anything for granted unless you are taking it for granted with me. It is "We" (members) who are doing and by doing showing what we take for granted in producing our activities in a concerted fashion. By the same token the notion of Here and Now in its EM version refers to a socially produced and sustained sense of relevance, purpose at hand. Thus, the Here and Now is not mine alone, for it is *our* purpose at hand we have to make reference to when producing our activities in a concerted fashion. And this purpose is shown, sustained and re-affirmed by doing the things the way we do them, together.

A similar shift from private to public takes place when EM adopts the most fundamental premise of Schutzian analysis, that is, the theoricity of the actor and thus the constructed nature of social reality. Within both versions of theorizing/analysis the actor is depicted as a theoretic one, one who engages in interpretive work, designs his social actions and constitutes the meaning of his experiences. Yet, there remains a significant difference in what realm the two approaches find the evidence for this theoricity. For Schutz such evidence is to be sought in the realm of the conscious, and it is the method of transcendental



reduction which discloses the structure of consciousness and provides the evidence for the processes of action construction/meaning constitution. For EM, this evidence is to be found in the realm of the social, in members' concerted activities. Taking as its axiom the essential reflexivity and accountability of members' practical activities, and taking that reflexivity and accountability as members' contingent, practical accomplishment, EM cannot make the analytical distinction Schutz makes between the ways members produce their organized everyday affairs and the ways they account for these affairs as rational/planful/etc. practices. As activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members procedures for making those settings "accountable" (7), EM analysis cannot look at action construction/meaning constitution as something "within", and something other than what is made available for actors and observers alike, as instances of recognizedly rational practices.

This underlying difference concerning the duality of subjective-objective/observable-unobservable will run through our "reading" of Schutz, for it is the source of the dilemma his analysis seeks to resolve and to which his interpretive sociology (IS) seeks to be an answer for; and it is that duality which EM seeks to abolish and whose sensibility it refuses to recognize in its program.

Before we turn to our next topic let us take a quick glance how the relevant premises of symbolic interactionism compare with those of Schutz (8). As symbolic interactionism too assigns a great analytical significance to the concept of meaning and recognizes both the constructed character of social action and the interpretive work of the actor in constituting the meanings of (social) objects, on the whole it is not incompatible with Schutz' phenomenological analysis. And as far as the analytical formulation of the actor is concerned, EM, IS and symbolic interactionism share a common beginning, for whether they speak of "members", "acting units" or the "solitary ego", they all portray a theorizing Self, who plans, designs and executes his actions and makes sense of his

social environment by performing interpretive work. And while from the platform of "mathematical descriptions" the idea of a theoretic actor may appear as the single and most important feature that unites these approaches under the heading of "micro sociology", there remain some significant differences which can be located in the different consequences the actor's theoricity has for these versions of analysis.

We have already noted that for Schutz the theorizing Self is a source of *analytical* trouble, for the locus of his interpretive work is the conscious and thus is inaccessible for analysis. We have also seen that for EM analysis the Schutzian dilemma is a non-problem, for EM transfers the events/processes of meaning establishment from the realm of "private" to the realm of "public". In contrast with these solutions, the symbolic interactionist interest remains with what is "within", or the private world of the actor throughout. As Blumer argues, analysis requires the "seeing (of) the situation as it is seen by the actor" and the "tracing (of) the formation of the action in the way in which it was actually formed" (9). Thus, the symbolic interactionist solution to the problem of accessibility/observability, is to treat it as a *practical* but not as an analytical problem. And while the former requires an analytical solution (such as the Schutzian shift from a concern with "real" events to a concern with ideal-typical constructs), the latter needs only practical-technical solutions, such as the refinement of research techniques, methods of observation, so that they would enable the analyst to see the situation "as much as possible" as it is seen by the actor. When symbolic interaction proposes this latter alternative, it also proposes to live with the dilemma both Schutz and EM seeks to eliminate, although in very different ways.

### 3. Intersubjective understanding

Schutz accepts intersubjectivity as the "datum" of the social: it is a taken for granted feature of everyday life and people proceed with understanding and interpreting others without doubting its

possibility. Yet, while members assume a possible parallel between *contents* of experiences (You and I will see the same event the same way), for analytical purposes Schutz postulates a *structural* parallel (experiences of the ego are constituted in the same fashion as those of the Other), on the grounds that to propose that "I can observe the subjective experiences of another is absurd" (10).

This analytical distinction between mundane and scientific understanding points to the analytical problem concerning the status of mundane understanding: what do the processes and interpretive schemes both I and Thou have and share accomplish in daily life; fancy, fantasy, illusion or tacit agreement? While Schutz seems to propose that mundane understanding is not a "true" understanding, for it cannot be accomplished, he remains uncommitted as to the rationality, sensibility and adequacy of understanding members do in daily life. In fact, it is that underlying ambiguity which allows us to read his account of naive intersubjectivity as a resource for diverse modes of theorizing. These different readings consist in postulating the analytical status of naive understanding and then taking/adopting the interpretive processes Schutz explicates as the apparatus that generates *that* understanding. Our ethnomethodological reading will consist in showing how EM's formulation of mundane understanding (as members' situated, practical accomplishment) may be seen to originate in Schutz' analysis of the processes of that understanding.

Let us begin with the issue of intersubjectivity. For Schutz it is the datum of the social that need not be explored. For EM, however, it is precisely such data of the social which need to be inquired into through analysis. Intersubjectivity, as all other "objective" and taken for granted features of everyday life, is of possible interest as a topic for EM, because its analysis may show how such objective and factual features are produced and sustained in and through member's concerted activities. Viewing intersubjectivity as accomplished rather than given implies, that the mundane understanding it makes possible is seen as



reflexively tied to that accomplishment. Thus, while the idea of intersubjectivity provides for the possibility and sensibility of *doing* understanding, that understanding, in turn, will reaffirm the sensibility of the idea of intersubjectivity itself.

Consequently, understanding in everyday life is construed by EM neither as an approximation of "real" or intended, nor as the observer's fancy or fantasy, but as the hearer-speaker's practical and situated accomplishment. For what EM takes note of is that members not only go about their everyday affairs as if they understood one another, but that *it is* their going about their everyday affairs that renders that understanding visible and its adequacy accountable. And for members, that adequacy for "all practical purposes", that is something to be shown and seen "in the light of the situation", the purpose and task at hand.

Let us see how the EM formulation of understanding as a *practical* and *situated* accomplishment compares with Schutz's analysis of the processes/methods of naive understanding. In describing the different versions of understanding, Schutz proposes to distinguish between three levels/methods and illustrates these through an example of wood cutting. His level 1 refers to the "perception" of "wood being cut", thus the observer makes reference only to what happens to the wood and the ax. In level 2 he perceives "wood cutting" making reference to the movements of the individual whom he sees as a human being. In doing level 3, the observer sees wood being cut by an individual who has a purpose in mind and thus makes reference to the actor's meaning context, in-order-to-motive (11).

From the point of view of EM the problem with classifications of this kind is that they describe an observer who is standing "nowhere", is "without" a situational context as if he had no pragmatic interest in doing understanding. Thus the classification suggests that he is free to *elect* the level at which he treats the events he encounters, and it is not the encounter itself which dictates the level of treatment its competent understanding requires. Yet, when we do

provide a pragmatic motive, it becomes evident that doing one level or another is not a matter of choice but of competence, for in doing one instead of the other he may not be doing understanding at all.

Let us illustrate this point through the wood cutting example Schutz uses. Suppose we walk in a forest and hear some noises. Walking a little further we see that it is "wood being cut". According to Schutz we may treat that "perception" as an understanding for we know now what the noise was all about and thus resolved a "puzzle". We have produced and can account for that understanding by making reference to what we (and assume everybody else) know about forests and wood being cut in forests. In order to see what is going on as "wood being cut", however, we do not have to know or find out about the particular reasons why that particular person in that particular forest is cutting that particular wood. Although we could, and then, according to Schutz, we would do a different level of understanding.

At the first glance the example appears to support what we are trying to dispute, that it is sensible to speak of levels of understanding as a matter of choice rather than competence. Yet, if we focus *not* on the example, but on the *mode* of its telling, it becomes evident that in showing "wood being cut" as a possible understanding we do make reference to a pragmatic motive (of an uninterested passer by) and do instruct the reader that it is by making reference to *that* motive that "wood being cut" may be re-collected as an understanding. Furthermore, if we replace that motive by that of a worried owner whose firewood is kept being stolen by his neighbor, we can see/show that the simple observation of "wood being cut" (instead of "my firewood is being stolen again") will not do as an understanding at all. (Rather, it can serve as evidence for the observer's incompetence to resolve the simplest "what is happening" kind of puzzles.) The altered situational context requires that he makes reference to the individual whose action he observes and to his in-order-to-motive.

Whithin the EM framework people do not do different

"levels" of understanding, for by doing what Schutz calls a "level" they may not do understanding at all. Instead of showing a concern with typologies, EM describes members' understanding as a practical and situated accomplishment and proposes that it is accomplished and *is shown to be accomplished* by members making reference to what they know to be relevant in doing that understanding. And what is relevant, what is to be taken into account is the function of their Here and Now, their pragmatic interest, purpose at hand. Thus what the situational features of our particular position as uninterested passers by allow (or maybe require) us to ignore in the first case, are the very features our Here and Now requires us to take into account when we act as concerned owners in the second case.

Consequently, the possible relevance of Schutz' classification for EM resides not in its content but in its possibility: what the possibility of doing such classification shows (its producer knows) about mundane understanding. And this is, in fact, that for members, understanding is not an ideal, but a practical matter. In order to do/show an understanding they do not have to understand "everything". They may take an interpretation based on rather "limited" knowledge as adequate, provided that they can see/they are shown that the interpreter's position allows for this, in light of the situation this is all he needs to know. Thus, the interpreter's position and its relevance for doing understanding are issues that are tied to the problem of doing (an adequate) understanding and are to be settled by members in and through their situated activities. Consequently, mundane understanding, because of its indexical nature, accounts not only for what is being understood, but makes reference to the common sense knowledge that was required for its assembly *and* shows how such knowledge is adequate, sufficient in light of the interpreter's pragmatic interest in the matter.

If Schutz treats intersubjective understanding as the datum of the social, then EM formulates it as members' work, their ongoing, situated accomplishment. In contrast to both, symbolic

interactionism does not thematize the issue and takes the implicit assumption that *in principle*, understanding of another is problematic neither for acting units, nor for the scientific observer (12). It takes for granted, together with members, the possibility for intersubjective understanding and while for the observer, the taking of the role of another/actor may pose some practical difficulties and technical problems, the grasping of another's world is not treated as a problem to be resolved by analysis. Naturally, these analytical differences result in similar differences in how analysis is to proceed with (a scientific) understanding of (members') understanding. For Schutz, the next step is to explore the different "levels" in order to construct second order (scientific) constructs of these first order (naive) constructs. For EM the analytical task is to explicate members' methods and procedures whereby they accomplish, and account for what they accomplish, *as* an understanding. Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, proceeds with the task of *doing* the understanding: discovering how objects/actions/experiences are seen from the position of the actor (13).

#### 4. The structure of the social world

In Schutz' version of the social, in everyday life we live within and move among different domains, in each of which we experience social objects with different degrees of concreteness, immediacy, directness and anonymity. In face-to-face situations we experience our "contemporaries" directly, our common reality is right in front of us to see, to share and to point to. In contrast to this "We-relationship", the "They-relationship" is without that social/spatial proximity that in our world is assumedly common.

We can apprehend the subjective experiences of others only as anonymous processes and must infer, on the basis of indirect evidence, the typical subjective experiences "They" must be having. Yet, this differentiated world also has continuity and unity. The person who has been a "Thou" in a "We-relationship" just a moment ago is now our "contemporary" and the one who up



till now has been our "contemporary" appears in a face-to-face encounter and thus becomes a "Thou", only to disappear to the world of "They" again. The analytical significance of these different spheres is, that according to Schutz, as we move from one sphere to another it is not only the immediacy and concreteness of the objects we encounter changes, but the methods whereby we interpret these objects as well. Thus the different domains of the social correspond with different tools of meaning establishment, schemes of interpretation (14).

The sphere we find ourselves in, the methods of interpretation we employ, however, is not merely the function of what objects we encounter. Schutz argues that the actor does not merely encounter objects, but orients himself towards them and that his orientation is only partly determined by the objective circumstances that make objects available to him. He illustrates this possibility of the observer electing the sphere within which an object is interpreted and the scheme of interpretation he employs by an example of "men playing cards": when we watch a group of men playing cards we can pay a special attention to any one of them, and as we do so we are aware of him as a "Thou", as a person. But we can also suspend this vivid "We-relationship" and shift our mode of observation transporting the players into our world of "contemporaries" and seeing them as "card players". Then we understand them in terms of a "They-relationship", thus in terms of action types or as typical poker players (15).

When looked at from the platform of EM the Schutzian scheme has two troublesome features. First, in describing the different modes of understanding applied within the different spheres, Schutz ties the *methods* of understanding to *what* is being understood, to the features of social objects encountered, and thus fails to make reference to the setting within which the work of understanding takes place. Thus, we encounter again the solitary observer who is without a socially organized and managed occasion within which social objects are encountered, topicalized, interpreted, explained, etc. Hence, EM finds the Schutzian model defective

in that it divorces practical reasoning from the socially organized setting which calls for its doing and ignores the problem of how that "doing" is taken as the showing of adequate understanding. And as that "showing" is accomplished by making reference to the circumstances, purposes and tasks at hand, the Schutzian observer who is without these circumstances lacks both the resources and the practical devices to account for what he does as an understanding.

The second problem with the possible society Schutz envisages is, that it rests on the conceptualization of "I" as analytically different from "Thou" or the "Other". It is "I", the solitary observer, who alone is responsible for the production of the different domains as well as for the constitution of "Thou"-s and "They"-s who inhabit these domains. It is the "I" who does "doings" in and observations of the different spheres and it is one of his doings that he reproduces Others as Thou-s or They-s. These Others not only do not participate in the work of constitution, but as the example of "men playing cards" shows, they need not even have evidence of it. They cannot tell by simply looking. But what is more important, it is the I *alone* who constitutes *himself* as a (solitary) observer. And as he is without the setting he describes he need not have the "co-operation" of those described. He is the "beginning" of the world he *and Schutz* portrays.

In order to show the possible society EM envisages when it abolishes the duality of I and Thou and portrays the observer as analytically interchangeable with those observed, let us do an EM version of the example of "men playing cards". The most immediate difference concerns the status of the observer. For that status is seen to be produced not by I's intentional act of orientation, but as co-produced and sustained through the concerted activities of "We" (I and They). Whatever the I does in doing observation, it is there for I *and* They to see *as* doing observation. And it is the fact that They see I doing observation and *not* spooking, prying, interfering, etc. that allows I to go on seeing himself as someone observing men playing cards and not these other things. In doing

observing and playing cards I and They share the common location, occasion of "We": constitute themselves as observers and participants who are being observed and can do that because they have a (common) idea of what participation and observation consists in, can do it and recognize others doing it, know that games can be both played and observed, etc. Thus, while the doing of observing and of playing requires I and They to engage in concretely different practical activities, in doing these practical activities they share the Here and Now of "We" and the analytical identity of a "member"; share a common platform and the analytical devices to provide for the sense of what they witness from that platform.

Although EM does not explicitly speak of the different spheres of the social, in describing social reality as the product of members concerted activities, it implicitly proposes that members always live in and never leave the world of We. The very notion of membership presupposes the *analytical* presence of another, the hearer, or the community, who together with the speaker create and sustain the Here and Now in the world of We. "They" exist only when We account for, make reference to, or make available for looking and telling another world while and when We do and account for our practical activities. "They" come into being only through *our* organized practices and They *are* what these organized practices show them to be.

Thus, while EM treats the world of We as the arena for members practical activities, the situational location which shows and is shown by the practices it accomodates, the world of They is (re)formulated as an interpretive scheme, as an analytical device for members' practical theorizing. It represents our common sense knowledge of the social world, its patterned, reoccurring character, its stable features, etc. And as such it is constantly evoked, made reference to and relied on in the production of our practical activities in daily life, in the world of We.

Consequently, what *exists* for Schutz, the different domains of the social, it is construed by EM as

our common sense knowledge of the social which serves as a scheme of interpretation and as a practical device in generating practical action in the Here and Now of the world of We. Then we compare the possible society envisaged by Schutz with that of symbolic interactionism the difference we find is one of analytical concerns. As for symbolic interactionism the domains Schutz seeks to "discover" via analysis are already given, their existence in terms of groups and communities is taken for granted together with naive members; the analytical problem is not how these various phenomena are rendered meaningful, but how interaction with these "entities" instead of concrete individuals is possible. This problem is resolved by suggesting that groups and institutions may be conceived as representing a "common response", "generalized social attitudes", or "established ways of acting" under situations, and thus, human beings can interact with these "generalized others" in the same fashion as they interact with concrete individuals. Thus, similarly to self-understanding which is analytically undifferentiated from understanding an Other, within the symbolic interactionist scheme social interaction receives the same analytical status whether it is between individuals or between larger groups and an individual.

Despite the apparent similarities between the concept of "generalized others" and the Schutzian notion of "ideal typical persons" there are significant differences these concepts make reference to. When we use Schutz' conceptualization of social structures and look at the symbolic interactionist version of the social, this world appears homogeneous, with no spheres or domains at all. For the Schutzian distinction between the various domains makes sense only when these are seen to correspond with and to be produced by different schemes of interpretation. Thus, the analytical similarity symbolic interactionism postulates between interaction with groups, institutions and particular individuals renders the social world homogeneous.

Thus in some sense, both symbolic interactionism and EM proposes that members live in the world of



We. Yet, while the concept of "generalized other" eradicates the difference Schutz proposes between We- and They-relationships, EM preserves that difference when proposes that the world of They derives its social and sociological possibility from members' organized practices in a Here and Now, which practices re-produce and sustain that world while using it as a resource (for the doing of the Here and Now).

## 5. Interpretive sociology

Interpretive sociology is Schutz' answer to the dilemma he has uncovered at the beginning of his inquiries: the essential unavailability of the "subjective" processes of meaning establishment for observation. His solution consists in the proposition that social science restrict its inquiries to the world of They and thus understand man in everyday life *not* as a living individual with a unique consciousness, but as an "ideal type", in terms of typical rather than actual subjective processes. The social scientist should remain absent from face-to-face encounters in describing social order and should use the interpretive scheme of formal logic to apprehend general, subjective meaning contexts in objectivating and anonymizing constructions. In contrast to observers in everyday life who test the adequacy of their typifying constructs by referring them back to face-to-face encounters, comparing them with past experiences, the scientific constructs should be tested against the (scientific) criteria of "causal" and "meaning adequacy" (16).

From the platform of EM, IS is merely another version of what Farfinkel calls "constructive analysis" in that it uses member' practical reasoning *both* as a topic and as a resource, and is engaged in the task members are constantly engaged in - describing the social as an orderly phenomenon - except, that it seeks to replace members' accounts with the objective, contextfree descriptions of science (17). The fact that IS finds its beginning in members' practices needs no further elaboration as Schutz explicitly states that the reason for inquiring into these practices is to see how the

limited adequacy of members' understanding can be repaired and transformed into a scientific understanding that has universal validity. What needs to be commented on is the proposition that IS relies on members' practical reasoning both as a resource and as a topic, that in repairing members' accounts of the social the analyst makes use of his (common-sense) understanding of that social, the knowledge he has as a member.

This duality of topic and unexplicated resource is best exemplified by the notions of causal and meaning adequacy as the criteria that distinguish between mundane and scientific constructs. First of all both concepts originate in mundane reasoning. They are grounded on the idea that certain kind of people act in certain ways, certain motives go together with certain courses of action. They exemplify how *members* conceptualize rational actions and rational actors and thus, for EM, represent members' methods for constructing/recognizing rational actors. Yet, they are portrayed by IS as analytical devices that represent the very standards (of adequacy) that set scientific and mundane accounts apart. Secondly, when faced with the actual task of building/evaluating ideal typical constructs the analyst has to decide what concrete experiences are called for by what particular motives, what concrete courses of action are required by the particular motives formally postulated. In doing these he has to refer back *not* to the schemes of formal logic, but to his common-sense understanding of the social as a competent member. Thus, in describing the social world as an analyst, he has to rely on what he already knows about the world as a member.

Despite differences in the concrete procedures they employ, scientific and mundane constructs are both exercises in accounting for, and thus re-producing the social world as an orderly, stable, patterned and structured phenomenon. As such they report *not* on *that* world, but on a society in which the production of such descriptions is taken as a sensible and rational practice. They are reflexively tied to the socially organized settings in which they are produced and which they describe, whether the former is the scientific community or a setting

in everyday life.

As IS takes up what is essentially members' concern, the task of accounting for social order, it proposes a program for sociology which rests on theoretical assumptions that are disputed and rejected by EM. One of these is the assumption that the analyst is different from "acting" members, for in the world of science expressive and interpretive schemes - mode of propositions and interpretations - are governed by the rules of formal logic and thus do not depend on for their sensibility and adequacy, the socially organized occasions of their use. Another is the assumption that the world of They exists on its own right, thus it is possible to do observations on the re-occurring patterns that make that world *without* making reference to the practice of observation itself, its social location and the world (of We) that calls for it and renders it sensible. As these assumptions sever the reflexive tie that EM postulates exists between accounts and what they account for, they open the way for a program that consists in the production of constructs that repair the essential indexicality of members' constructs and thus replace members' version of social order with that of social science.

EM, however, cannot take part in that program. Not only because it rejects the possibility of remedying the practical nature of *all* inquiries and the indexical character of *all* accounts, but because within its framework constructs, ideal types "exist" as members' procedures for making social order accountable and *not* as re-occurring patterns of behaviour that somehow make up social order. Thus, if EM inquired into ideal types, it would encounter "real" people in concrete situations doing practical activities and would ask that in doing what they do how, do they rely on and make reference to what they know as "typical" people and "typical" courses of actions.

What remains to be discussed is how symbolic interactionism compares with the Schutzian version of analysis. As the primary interest of symbolic interactionism concerns the *actual* formation of social action/processes of meaning establishment, it is

essentially concerned, like EM, with "real" people as they go about their everyday affairs in actual, concrete situations. As Schutz proposes to produce logical constructs that do not correspond with the actions/experiences of any one individual, it is fair to assume that his "recept" for analysis has little to offer to practitioners of symbolic interactionism.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this paper was to offer an account of what EM is, the possible society it pictures and the kind of analysis that society requires. As EM is often thought to be "related" to symbolic interactionism, and to "originate" from phenomenology, we have taken Schutz' "Phenomenology of the Social World" as an occasion to re-examine these proposed relationships and to offer an account of EM by explicating its difference from these versions of theorizing.

As accounts of this kind are always made "within" a particular platform and themselves exemplify a particular version of analysis, this paper has raised issues that are issues *for* EM, and thus represent concrete examples for ethnomethodological analysis. This implies that the paper was not meant to serve as a corrective for the mis-conceptualization of EM as a version of phenomenology of symbolic interactionism, for such conceptualization may be a question of platform, point of observation, rather than the misreading of the program of EM. Hence, what this paper proposes is that *when looked at from the platform of EM*, neither symbolic interactionism, nor IS shares the fundamental theoretical assumptions EM takes concerning the essentially public (accountable) character of all phenomena which is of interest for sociology and the analytical identity/interchangeability of members and analysts. Consequently, while EM may share with symbolic interactionism a concern with actual/concrete instances of practical activities and may adopt many Schutzian concepts that describe common-sense understanding and features of members' practical theorizing, in the course of analysis these underlying differences cannot be bridged over.



## NOTES

1. For the sake of simplifying the reading and writing of the paper, whenever possible ethnomethodology will be referred to in its abbreviated form "EM", and interpretive sociology as "IS".
2. The issue of EM and its attitude towards the positivistic idea of method is discussed by the author in "Notes on the methods of ethnomethodology", unpublished manuscript 1977. In this paper it is proposed that ethnomethodology's reliance on membership as the grounds for rational practice/speech may very well render the traditional need for method superfluous.
3. Symbolic interactionists themselves often promote this idea of a "relationship" between EM and symbolic interactionism. A good example for this is Denzin, "Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology" in Douglas, J. (ed.), *Understanding of Everyday Life*, Aldine Publishing Chicago, 1970.
4. Schutz, A., *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1972. All subsequent quotations and references are from this edition.
5. Schutz, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
6. Ibid., p. 74.
7. Garfinkel, H., *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967, p. 1.
8. In discussing symbolic interactionism, the paper relies on Blumer, H., *Symbolic Interactionism*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1969 as a resource. Quotations and references come from Blumer's work.
9. Blumer, op. cit., p. 56.
10. Schutz, op. cit., p. 99.
11. Ibid., pp. 110-111.
12. Without going into detail, we may use the concept of "self-interaction" to substantiate this proposition, as it is an analytically undifferentiated concept from interaction with an Other. Both forms of interaction consist in making indications and meeting these by making further indications. The meanings of objects and experiences arise from interaction with *both* Self and Others, implying that self-understanding is analytically identical with understanding an Other. Similarly, the proposition that meaning establishment is the product of interaction out of which common objects emerge, "objects which have the same meaning for a given set of people" (Blumer, p. 17) seems to indicate that the task of grasping those meanings poses no problem for that given set of people,

or for the observer of those people.

13. "Since action is forged by the actor out of what he perceives, interprets, and judges, one would have to see the operating situation as the actor sees it, perceive objects as the actor perceives them, ascertain their meaning in terms of the meaning they have for the actor, and follow the actor's line of conduct as the actor organizes it - in short, one would have to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint" (Blumer, pp. 73-74).
14. In a We-relationship I am aware of you as a person and you are aware of me as a person. The world is our world, the common intersubjective world which is right there in front of us. In contrast, the subjective experiences within the They-relationship can only be known as types. In the world of contemporaries both They and We relationships are possible.
15. Schutz, op. cit., p. 185.
16. Causal adequacy implies that the action described in the ideal type will probably take place and is repeatable. Also, the postulate of repeatability should not be inconsistent with the whole body of scientific knowledge. This, according to Schutz means that in a type construct of ordinary, purposive action the means must be appropriate to the goal. Meaning adequacy requires that for a given action the corresponding subjective meaning context can be ascribed to the actor in question without contradicting what else we know about him.
17. The term was introduced by Garfinkel, H. and Sacks, H. in their joint article "On formal structures of practical actions", in Mckinney, C, E.A. Tiryakian (eds.), *Theoretical Sociology*, New York, Appleton, 1970. When they suggest that this unending desire to generate context-free descriptions cannot be fulfilled. Scientific accounts, just as their lay counterparts, rely for their sense and adequacy on the standards of the community and more importantly, on the practical circumstances of their production.