

Chung-Chi Yu

Life-World and Cultural Difference: Husserl, Schutz and Waldenfels
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Chung-Chi Yu's book is divided into 14 Chapters, centred on the thoughts of the authors whose names appear in the title (the last one, Bernhard Waldenfels, still an active German philosopher), but with several references to other authors belonging to the phenomenological tradition, such as Jean -Paul Sartre and Aron Gurwitsch, and important authors in the field of the social sciences such as Max Weber. Most of the Chapters are devoted to a discussion of various aspects of Alfred Schutz's thought (Chapters 6 to 12); Chapters 1 to 4 are especially devoted to the thought of Edmund Husserl and the last two, 13 and 14, focus on Bernhard Waldenfels. However, Husserl is present in all of them, thanks, above all, to Chung-Chi Yu's use of the concept of "Life-World". This is probably the most popular Husserlian concept – despite the difficulties in defining it accurately, which has already given rise to several interpretations of its meaning –, especially because of the possibilities it offers of application in areas outside philosophy, namely, but not exclusively, in the social sciences.

Life-World, however, is not the only phenomenological concept that is addressed and discussed in this book by Chung-Chi Yu. We could, among some others, mention the concept of "phenomenological reduction", particularly important if we want to establish the scientificity, in the Husserlian meaning of this term, of the concept of Life-World; that of "intersubjectivity", especially in the version of it presented by Husserl in the famous 5th Cartesian Meditation, where he

seeks to ground phenomenologically an intersubjective community of transcendental subjects (a possibility that Schutz, in a famous lecture given in C erisy-la-Salle, in 1956, came to doubt); that of “subjective and objective meanings”, essential for the project of constitution of a comprehensive sociology, as Schutz will try to carry out in the wake of Max Weber; and finally, the concepts of “home-world and alien world”, whose origin goes back to Husserl’s own thought and which is fundamental for the elaboration of a theory of cultural difference and for addressing the problems of cultural relativism, as Waldenfels, namely, will do. After this quick presentation of the themes covered in Yu’s book, we will move on to a more detailed presentation of the content of each of its Chapters.

Chapter 1, “Husserl’s Life-World and Experiential World” (pp. 1-15) presents the main difficulties inherent to the Husserlian concepts that will be used in most investigations in the following Chapters of the book. The author begins by addressing the *vexata quaestio* of the oblivion of the natural experience of the world by the physical-mathematical sciences that developed after the Renaissance. In specifying the meaning of this oblivion, Yu states that it is, actually, the oblivion of subjectivity (p. 4), that is, of the subjective activities whose outcome is the constitution of a common world, an oblivion that entailed the progressive objectivization and technicalisation of modern science. However, this “way back” to subjectivity is not an analysis of the empirical-psychological operations carried out by the scientists’ minds. From a psychological point of view, men of science resort to the same faculties that all human beings have: visual acuity, attention to the things observed, capacity for analysis and synthesis, etc. This “way back” to subjectivity means trying to understand how the subject and the world are correlated, universally and *a priori*, before the substructions that the positive sciences operate in the Life-World, with their specific methodological procedures.

Thus, as the author underlines, Husserl’s task is the constitution of an ontology of the Life-World, a task which in itself entails two problems: 1) that of the method that such discipline will use; 2) that of its status regarding the overall phenomenological project. The author proposes an approach to these problems through an analysis

of Husserl's *Lessons on Phenomenological Psychology* (pp. 6 ff.), which date back to 1925 and are accessible in the volume IX of *Husserliana*. The choice of this text is justified by the fact that an approach to the Life-World presupposes, as Yu, notes, the achievement of the psychological-phenomenological reduction, but not of the transcendental reduction. What does this new attitude entail? Not only that the phenomenologist should place himself in the position of the "disinterested observer", without direct participation in the phenomena he describes – which in this case are the intentionalities that constitute the experiential world –, but, at the same time, that he must take them as they appear and not as an outcome of theoretical constructions, namely, those that are characteristic of the empirical psychology or the moral sciences

These methodological bases allow us to understand the nature of the investigations carried out in the following three Chapters: Chapter 2, "Husserl on Ethical Rationality and Philosophical Rationality" (pp. 17-26), Chapter 3, "Husserl and the Difference between Europe and Non-Europe" (pp. 27-39) and Chapter 4, "Husserl on China and Cultural Centrism" (pp. 41-52). The starting point for Chapter 2 is the set of articles that Husserl wrote, between 1922 and 1924, for the Japanese magazine *Kaizo*. If, on the one hand, these articles reveal a facet of Husserlian thought that until then few people knew about (and that some will continue to ignore in the following years) – anticipating some themes of the *Crisis* book –, on the other hand, they pose certain problems to today's reader more sensitive than its author to such topics as cultural diversity and cultural difference. The articles are written under the sign of "renewal", as a task for humanity as a whole, for each form of humanity in particular (for example, Western Europe in the 20th century), but also for each individual human being. Only a life conducted under renewal, says Husserl, deserves to be fully lived (p. 20), since it alone is an authentically human life, guided by fundamental ethical requirements. The question arises, however, whether this lifestyle, considered preferential, was born only in Europe and characterizes only European humanity (pp. 23 ff.), or whether each form of humanity will not also be characterized by the fact it shares the same ideal of renewal, even under a different content. In this regard,

Chung-Chi Yu will ask (in the wake of Anthony Steinbock, namely) whether the Husserlian ideal of constituting a common world was not a mere extension, to the entire planet, of European based cultural ideals. The author's response may not be considered entirely satisfactory. It seems to consist in proposing a distinction between what Europe means from a transcendental point of view – i.e., that Europe is the bearer of cultural patterns that can claim universality – and what it means from an empirical or factual point of view (p. 25). From this last point of view, Europe has the same empirical character as any other form of culture, including the absorption of cultural traits from other peoples.

In Chapter 3 Yu resumes the above analysis, highlighting the way in which, for Husserl, Europe constitutes an ideal of reason (p. 28); that is, not just a fact that all other cultures must imitate, but a task (the one the *Kaizo* articles called “renewal”), never fully attainable. The interesting question, however, is introduced by Yu on p. 30. If we go back, from the transcendental level where that ideal of reason gets its meaning, to the level of the Life-World, how will we assess the cultural differences that characterize it? In this regard, Yu proposes – without much novelty, actually – a distinction between two dimensions of the Life-World (we will leave aside a third, less important for this issue), namely, the Life-World as the foundation of all meaning achievements and the Life-World as a perceptual world (p. 31). Let's begin with the second dimension. It refers to the spatio-temporal extension of the world and the natural objects that are part of it; it is the world that everyone can perceive and recognize as common to all, regardless of the differences between their respective cultures. The first dimension, on the other hand, refers to the world of culture, or rather, cultures, as it is on the basis of that common world that cultures diversify. Correspondingly each man lives in his home-world (*Heimwelt*) – in which he recognizes the actions of the other fellow men and the meaning those actions carry – and faces an alien world (*Fremdwelt*), that is, the world of others, where actions, are certainly performed by human beings like him, but can be endowed with a meaning that is unknown or which, at least, is not *prima facie* evident (p. 33). Of course, the tricky question arises when we ask whether anyone can actually

understand a *Fremdwelt*. Is there a possible common ground between a civilized European, namely, who lives in a world characterized by the prevalence of the scientific and technical rationality, and someone who lives in a primitive society, still subject to the magical and mythical practices? In Husserl's view the answer is yes. The reason is that any *Heimwelt* is a construction grounded on that common Life-World, to which, ultimately, everyone can refer to compare their respective experiences and beliefs (pp. 34-35). The only problem here seems to lie in the fact that such a common world can only be perceived theoretically, since it is the outcome of an abstractive mental operation. In other words, it can only be understood by someone who is an heir of European culture, and the way of thinking historically Europe gave rise to. In this sense, it would not be an exaggeration to say, for example, that a Chinese can only become aware of the sameness of value between his culture and European culture if, beforehand, he has already become a European.

Chapter 4 takes up this theme, but now addressing Husserl's interpretation of Chinese civilization and its difference from European civilization. As seems obvious, China represents, for Husserl, more than the country and cultural tradition that we acknowledge by that name; above all, it represents the mythical-magical tradition that developed outside Europe, that is, that cultural environment marked by the heritage of Greek culture, where philosophy and rational thought had their origin. As Yu clearly shows, in approaching China Husserl is aware that cultural difference raises a problem. However, Husserl argues that a correct appreciation of these difference can only be made on the basis of the recognition that different cultures are just possible modulations of the only true world, i.e., the Life-World (p. 46). But despite this recognition new problems arise, as recognition seem only possible if one has previously understood what the concept of Life-World means. However, this understanding is the outcome, not of a mythical-magical attitude, but of a theoretical attitude (p. 48). Now, for attaining this new attitude – and for the broadening of horizons that it means, including the recognition of cultural differences – what is first required is the kind of change that is represented by the awakening of rational thought in Greece.

In Chapter 5, “Husserl and Schutz on Cultural Objects” (pp. 53-68), Chung-Chi Yu begins to address Schutz’s thought more directly. After recalling the Husserlian definition of cultural objects and revisiting the well-known distinction between “home-world” and “alien world” (see Chapter 4), Yu introduces us to Schutz’s thinking on these matters. A cultural object is defined, according to Schutz, on the basis of the concept of appresentation. (This is Yu’s translation into English of the German word *Vergegenwärtigung*.) In other words, in every cultural object it is necessary to take into account what is presented and what is made present. For example, in a painting, the frame, the canvas, the set of coloured stains and similar material characteristics can be presented. But what gives it the character of a cultural object, or, if you like, what gives it a spiritual meaning (p. 63), is not this. In a painting, something makes itself present in a peculiar way, which is not reducible to what is presented. This is an appresentation; but it may happen in such a way that, in an object that is culturally foreign to us, we can sometimes only notice what it presents – that is, its material characteristics – but not the spiritual meaning that the latter convey. In relation to the problem of the difference between “home-world” and “alien world” Yu notes some divergences between Schutz and Husserl (p. 66). On the one hand, both seem to admit the existence of a common basis for the two worlds, which Husserl coined with the expression “Life-World”. But while Husserl always defended that one of the basic dimensions of the Life-World was the common world of perceptive experience, since all human beings can perceive the same objects in the same way and identify them in the same way; Schutz, for his part, argued that every perceptive act is always culturally embedded. In the brief Chapter 6, “Phenomenological Exploration of Cultural Difference” (pp. 69-76), Chung-Chi Yu takes up this last problem from the perspective of an understanding of the meaning of cultural difference. Acknowledging that a universalist point of view dominates Husserl’s and Schutz’s conceptions of culture, Yu nonetheless recognizes the need to admit a shared common world, which he designates as shared commonality (p. 73). After all, only inside a shared commonality the notion of cultural difference can make sense.

In Chapter 7, “Schutz on Transcendence and the Variety of Life-World Experience” (pp. 77-89) the author discusses an important notion for understanding Schutz’s theory of culture, namely, the notion of transcendence. Schutz had mentioned it, in the first place, in his discussions on the nature of the symbol (p. 80), but he returns to it in order to understand how the appresentation of cultural objects can happen. In fact, the phenomenon of appresentation, addressed, as we mentioned, in Chapter 5 of this book, is not understandable without resorting to the notion of transcendence. The relationship with a cultural object presupposes that the materiality of what is presented is transcended towards the spiritual meaning it conveys. (Just like, in the relationship with a symbol, its material character is transcended in order to access to what is symbolized by it.) Equally important for Schutz is the concept of order. What is presented and what is appresented belong to different orders. Yu points out the case of a flag. In a flag, there is a certain amount of colored cloth (or any other type of material), which belongs to the order of “objects of the physical world”; on the other hand, the country that the flag appresents belongs to the order of the cultural objects (p. 81). These two are orders closely intertwined and the second is based on the first.

Chapter 8, “Schutz on Life-World and Culture” (pp. 91-99) assesses the importance of three fundamental concepts in Schutz’s thought: the social world, the world of action, and the world of culture. As Yu notes, the first of these three concepts was particularly important in the first phase of Schutz’s work, whose most representative text is *Die Sinnhafte Aufbau der Sozialen Welt*. (The English translation is titled *The Phenomenology of the Social World*.) The social world is the world in which everyone’s expectations match the expectations of others and where the systems of relevance are identical for everyone. The interactions between social agents (p. 93), not the theoretical speculations, guarantee understanding of the world and mutual agreement. The world of action is the scope of behaviours carried out according to pragmatic ends; in this sense, it is also a world of labour. But it is also a familiar world, in which the acquaintance with the material characteristics of objects determines the expectations that one can have as to the outcome of our action upon them. However, the world of culture

is not characterized by the same kind of familiarity; as noted before (namely in Chapter 5), for those who belong to an alien cultural milieu, an object may be deprived of its specific cultural value.

The question immediately arises as to whether the Life-World is identical to any of these three worlds, or, eventually, with all of them. Yu defends (p. 95) that the Life-World is based on the worlds of action and labour, although it is not fully identified with them. The Life-World is characterized by the fact of being constituted by a multiplicity of *finite provinces of meaning*, such as, for example, the world of religion, the world of science, the world of imagination, etc. In this context, the author takes up a problem that he had previously addressed, concerning the differences that separate Schutz's conception of the Life-World from the Husserlian conception. The Life-World, for Schutz, with the multiplicity of its finite provinces of meaning, is always a world of culture and never the world of sheer perceptive experience (p. 97).

Chapter 9, "Reduction and the Ambiguity of Natural Attitude" (pp. 101-111), if compared with the previous ones, shows an excessively technical character. But Yu addresses a central issue for those who want to understand the kind of phenomenology that Schutz puts into practice. Actually, it is the question of investigating the possibility of a constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude. Phenomenological reduction, one might ask, suspending or bracketing the thesis of the world, has the function of putting it at a distance. Wasn't this, Yu asks, the lesson we can learn after reading *Ideas I* from 1913? It turns out, however, that the suspension of our interests in mundane events does not mean a lack of interest in an analysis on how those interests originated. This seems to be precisely the task that according to Husserl in his "Nachwort zu meinen Ideen", from 1930, phenomenology – or, more precisely, phenomenological psychology – must carry out. The type of reduction that underlies this enterprise (p. 102) may be called an "incomplete reduction"; the phenomenologist does not completely immerse himself in the transcendental field, since, in order to carry out the aforementioned analysis, he still remains, in Husserl's own words, a "son of the world" (p. 108).

The accomplishment of this program is elucidated in Chapter 10, "Mutual Tuning-in Relationships and Phenomenological Psychology"

(pp. 113-129). Chung-Chi Yu shows how a constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude assumes that its analysis focuses not only on the life of the Ego that carried out the phenomenological reduction, but also on that Ego's relationship with all other Egos, with whom he underwent an intersubjective relationship. Therefore, phenomenological psychology, as an eidetic and at the same time mundane science, turns out to be a foundational project for the social sciences, as Schutz already pointed out in 1932, in *Der Sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (p. 119). Indeed, social relations presuppose a community of Egos living in a common world, in which mutual expectations obtain, in normal conditions, the expected fulfilment, thanks to an identical system of relevances. This can be exemplified in an analysis of the musical phenomenon, as Schutz will try to do in the essay entitled "Making Music Together" (p. 120). In the performance of a symphony by an orchestra, the intentional acts of each musician (to say it in the language of Husserl) are not monothetic, but polythetic (p. 121). In other words, each musician must concentrate, not only on his own performance (the piece of music corresponding to the musical sheet in front of him), but on the performance of all the other musicians, on which his own performance depends.

Chapter 11, "Objective meaning and subjective meaning in Schutz" (pp. 131-141), addresses two of the most complex and difficult concepts of Schutz thought. Unfortunately, as Yu reckons, Schutz never was able to give a full-fledged definition of both. Anyway, we can try to offer a clarification of their meaning. To begin with, we must make the following essential distinction (p. 131): social sciences have to deal, on the one hand, with institutional rules and norms of behaviour, and, on the other hand, with concrete individual actions and interactions between social agents. This raises two different problems. The problem of understanding the actions of other human beings (what they mean be their actions and what they intend to achieve); and the problem of the incorporation of a specific action in its social context (p. 134). Since the meaning of an action for the agent may be different from the meaning it has for the social scientist, we are entitled to label the first the "subjective meaning" and the second the "objective meaning". But we can look at this difference from a slightly different viewpoint. Once

an action is fulfilled and is successful it becomes a pattern for someone who wants to obtain the same effects; it becomes a kind of recipe that one follows without knowing exactly the kind of intentional activities that were at its origin. From then on, only the success it allows the agents to obtain matters. In those cases, as Yu notes (p. 136), Schutz, following what Husserl says in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, says that they have an objective meaning characterized by the fact that they can be retrieved any time or anywhere; the subjective meaning, i.e., the intentional achievements that originated it, that have now fallen in anonymity, will only be recovered by phenomenological analysis.

Chapter 12, “Schutz and Sartre on Situation” (pp. 143-156) addresses the unexpected relation between the two philosophers, regardless of the fact that they both claim to heirs of Husserl’s phenomenology. Schutz speaks directly of Sartre only once in a paper he wrote about the French philosopher in 1948 and makes only scarce mentions to his thought along his work. Yu shows that the Sartrean concept of “situation”, despite the importance of the closely connected notion of “project”, hardly manages to describe man’s real situation in the Life-World, except, perhaps, in very few situations suited for heroic acts, like the resistance to a foreign occupant of one’s own country or an escape from prison (p. 148). Instead, Schutz’ concept of relevance and, above all, the concept of interest (p. 151), seem more appropriate to describe real situations, where men are confronted with natural and cultural environment and live with other fellow men. Besides, as Yu stresses, Schutz is especially ware of the importance of time-flow in any man’s projects of action, a dimension of human behaviour that Sartre seems to have neglected. Yu even goes on to show that apparent similarities between Schutz’s and existential terminology (in the case of such concept as “leap” and “anxiety”) mean no more than that: Schutz main concern is to spell out man’s relation to the Life-World as it really is (p. 155).

The last two Chapters, Chapter 13, “Life-World, Cultural Difference and the Idea of Grounding” (pp. 157-164) and Chapter 14, “Between «Homeworld» and «AlienWorld»: Waldenfels on Interculturality” (pp. 165-175), don’t address new issues. In fact, they resume some of the issues that were discussed in the previous Chapters of the book,

in the light of the more recent contributions of Bernhard Waldenfels to a phenomenology of cultural difference. So, Chapter 13 tries to overcome the difficulties inherent to Husserl's theory of a common Life-World putting forward a new concept of "grounding" (p. 164). Following Waldenfels, Yu denies the claim of any specific culture (for instance, the European) of having create *the* universal order. Universality must always remain contextual, since it can only be the outcome of a process of universalization, which must comply with particular cultures. Chapter 14, still following Waldenfels, questions the pertinence, of such questions as "what is the other?", or "how can I get access to the other?", favouring questions like "how does the other present itself?" While Husserl stressed the fact that the other cannot be fully present, but only appresented, Waldenfels says that the other is somewhat present in a lively absence; this means that he is not just someone who stays elsewhere (so to speak, in an *illic* where I cannot be at the same time), instead, he is closely related to me by way of a withdrawal (p. 167). The otherness of the other is no less alien to me as the otherness of my own birth, and, just like birth, no less present; or like there is never a "left side" for to self without a "right side" (p. 168). This also means that we encounter otherness in ourselves as in other persons or in other cultures. Otherness needs not to be deduced. Otherness exists always I draw a line and put myself in one of the sides of the line.

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