

# To Wait and Let Wait. Reflections on the Social Imposition of Time

Andreas Göttlich

*University of Konstanz*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper presents an attempt to conceptualize in a phenomenological way a specific form of social interaction which is familiar to us all from everyday life: the interaction in which one person lets another person wait. Special emphasis is hereby laid on the aspect of power. To keep somebody waiting means to impose one's time on him/her, and so the study of the waiting-interaction promises some insight into the basic mechanisms of social imposition and thus of exercising power. The concepts used for this analysis are primarily adopted from Alfred Schutz's classic opus *The Phenomenology of the Social World*.

**Keywords:** Waiting, Social Imposition, Power, Time, Relevance

## *Introduction*

The topic of waiting, which is covered in this paper, might appear at first glance to be of only marginal relevance for philosophical reflection or scientific investigation. About forty years ago, Thomas Luckmann stated that waiting would be "largely overlooked in philosophy, psychology and social sciences" (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 47). By now things have changed at least a little, given the fact that a number of pertinent writings have since been published. Nevertheless there's still a lot to uncover about this phenomenon which is significant for a number of reasons. Waiting is omnipresent in our everyday lives and also plays a large role in other spheres of reality, for example within Christian religion during Advent. Waiting refers to anthropological fundamentals and has implications for action theory. It is important with regard to developmental or social psychology and to theories of modernity. It provides illustrative material for reflections on social order as well as on power.

It is this latter aspect that stands in the focus of the following reflections. In his pioneering book on *Queuing and Waiting* Barry Schwartz writes: “Waiting presupposes and occurs within an established context of power relations and is to be understood in terms of these relations” (Schwartz 1975: 31). My aim is to analyze this connection between waiting and power, which has also been highlighted by thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu (2000: 227ff.), Rainer Paris (2001), Javier Auyero (2012), and Robert Levine (1997: ch. V), by focusing on the question of imposition, which is central to waiting. “Both my organism and my society impose upon me, and upon my inner time, certain sequences of events that involve waiting,” runs the definition by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967: 27). As I am interested in power as a social phenomenon, my main concern is with the second issue mentioned in the definition: the imposition of social time. For its analysis I will take the Schutzian perspective of mundane phenomenology and try to describe the acts of consciousness both of a person who waits and of a person who lets others wait.

Beyond the somewhat specific scope of waiting-interactions one might reasonably expect that, in a wider context, an analysis of this kind may cast some light on the phenomenon of social imposition in general and therewith on the principal ability of phenomenology to give account of phenomena of power. This ability has been questioned by various thinkers (e.g. Bourdieu 1990, 1992).<sup>1</sup> Actually, I will try to draw some general conclusions on this matter at the end of the paper. However, my main intention is not to take a stand in this ambitious debate by pondering theoretical arguments in favor of or against the phenomenological approach. I want less to talk about phenomenology; I want to do it.

The paper is sectioned into three parts:

1. I will begin by attempting a phenomenological definition of waiting, which starts from the perspective of the waiting individual, or as he<sup>2</sup> may be called in the literal sense of the term: the waiter<sup>3</sup>.
2. The subsequent introduction of the perspective of the person who lets others wait allows a combined consideration of both perspectives, thereby narrowing the focus to imposition and therewith of power.
3. In summing up what can be learned from an analysis of the waiting-interaction, I will finally dare some general remarks on the problem of power from a phenomenological viewpoint.

<sup>1</sup> See for an elaborated discussion of the controversy Dreher and López (2015).

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of gender sensitive language, I will alternate between female and male pronouns throughout the paper, rather than using the awkward coupling he/she.

<sup>3</sup> I am aware that this use of the word may irritate at the first moment. And yet it is absolutely adequate if one brings to mind its etymological origin, the waiter being an attendant at a meal or someone who waits at tables. Compared with other languages like French, German or Spanish, the English word “waiter” has the advantage of preserving this original meaning.

## 1. *Waiting – a question of time*

When one delves into the pertinent literature on the topic of waiting, one of the first issues to become apparent is the difficulty to distinctly define the phenomenon – a difficulty clearly illustrated by the existence of rather varied and even contradictory definitions. While some authors classify it as action, others regard it as mere behavior. This diverging classification has to do with apparently controversial features of waiting: do we attach meaning to it or not, is it to be described as active or passive, as overt or covert? Take as an example the following definition by Pierre Janet, a French philosopher and psychologist, for whom “waiting is an *active* regulation of *action*, separating two stimulations, a preliminary and a releasing one, and maintaining the *action* between them until the phase of preparation or execution” (Janet 1928: 141; transl. and italics by A. G.).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, waiting is defined by other thinkers as passive behavior (Husserl 1969: 206) or even as idleness (Ehn/Löfgren 2010).

On the level of empirical observation one can easily find evidence in favor of diverging notions: the active dimension of waiting is aptly illustrated by the queue-jumper who tries to improve her position in the waiting line, maybe even by applying physical strength; on the contrary waiting appears as purely passive conduct when we think at the person on the deathbed waiting for his last breath to come. Waiting is overt and easily discernible when we imagine participants in a race who are waiting for the starting shot, in a posture that allows them to take off as quickly as possible; on the contrary it is covert when we think of the television viewer who sits in her armchair and watches the commercials – a case in which we cannot tell without further information whether this person enjoys the commercials or if she is just waiting for the subsequent program. In light of this apparent diversity of waiting one might come to the conclusion that the phenomenon defies any clear-cut categorization in terms of the typifications of action theory and thus cannot be distinctly defined. I think, however, that the method of phenomenological analysis offers a way to provide such a definition. The crucial task is to find a common circumstance to which all the seemingly contradictory features of waiting refer, and this circumstance can be found by describing the fundamental acts of consciousness of the waiting individual.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In the French original: “L’attente est donc une régulation active de l’action, qui sépare les deux stimulations, l’une préparante et l’autre déchainante, et qui maintient l’action entre les deux, à la phase de préparation ou à la phase d’érection.”

<sup>5</sup> By referring primarily to the work of Alfred Schutz, the following attempt is located within the Husserlian tradition. To my knowledge it is – apart from a treatise by Gerhart Husserl (1969), the second son of Edmund – the first ever in this tradition. Therefore it must be seen as provisional; further inquiries are necessary in order to grasp the complex phenomenon in a comprehensive way. Furthermore it must be conceded that the focus on acts of consciousness

From a phenomenological point of view, the key concept for an analysis of waiting must be time. Waiting, like any human conduct, is not only a process *in* time, it is peculiar insofar as the attention of the waiting individual is directed *towards* time in a special way, as the German sociologist Rainer Paris aptly points out:

The collateral character of time, its status of co-givenness, dissolves and makes place for a new scaling of relevance. Time becomes over-present. It is not any longer merely the unquestioned quality of acting and experiencing, a continuous sinking of the actual presence into a continuum of pasts, but beyond that it becomes an explicit issue of the situation. The first and most important characteristic of waiting is the distinct consciousness of time-flow and duration (Paris 2001: 706; transl. A. G.).<sup>6</sup>

Paris's description – which echoes the famous passage in Bergson (1998: ch. 1) where the French philosopher mentions the time one must wait for sugar to dissolve in a glass of water as a paradigmatic illustration of inner time or *durée* – brings into play the second essential aspect of waiting: relevance. Luckmann points out that “all experiences and all acts are grounded on relevance structures” (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 183) – hence the experience and act of waiting as well. In this regard we can state that waiting is principally characterized by a mode of as-well-as or of in-betweenness.<sup>7</sup> The more comprehensive among the theoreticians of waiting have integrated this insight into their definition of the phenomenon. Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott for example, who mention Schutz's work as “the most influential on our thinking”

ignores the bodily experience of waiting, which is surely an important part of the phenomenon.

Beginning from the fundamental acts of consciousness, as Husserl and Schutz did, seems to be advantageous for an analysis of waiting because this method is appropriate for avoiding the cultural bias of many of the existing inquiries (see Paris 2001: 712, footnote 14; Schwartz 1975: 108). The idea is to provide a phenomenological description in terms of what Thomas Luckmann (1973) called “mathesis universalis”.

<sup>6</sup> In the German original: “Der Begleitcharakter der Zeit, ihr Status der Mitgegebenheit, löst sich auf und weicht einer neuen Relevanzstaffelung. Die Zeit wird überpräsent. Sie ist nicht mehr nur unbefragte Qualität des Handelns und Erlebens, ein beständiges Herabsinken der Jetztpunkte in ein Kontinuum von Vergangenheiten, sondern wird darüber hinaus explizites Thema der Situation. Das erste und wichtigste Charakteristikum des Wartens ist die scharfe Bewusstheit von Zeitfluss und Dauer.”

What Paris couches in terms of phenomenology has also been observed by other thinkers (see e.g. Fraisse 1963: ch. VII,1; Schwartz 1975: 168).

<sup>7</sup> For example: I want to drink a coffee but first have to wait until the water is boiling, and so I decide to do some washing up in the meantime. A given relevance (i.e.: the appetite for coffee) is thus put in brackets and gives way to another one (i.e.: clean dishes). It then continues to exist in the background until the time is ripe, when it comes to the fore again: as soon as the coffee is brewed my interest in clean dishes loses significance in the presence of the aromatic beverage.

(Lyman/Scott 1970: 190, footnote), have classified waiting as a form of side-tracking, that is, as a period “between the entering and terminating of time tracks” (loc. cit.: 201). Thus, waiting presupposes the existence of two different time tracks: an initial one that is set by a primary relevance and a subsequent one which constitutes a secondary relevance that temporarily superposes the primary. It is this second time track to which the term “waiting” apparently refers, yet the reference to an initial track which frames the second is essential.<sup>8</sup> Take as an example the passenger who reads a newspaper while waiting for the arrival of his train. His reading the newspaper is the evident waiting action; for the time being his mind is engaged in following the chain of thought of, let’s say the editorial article. Yet this time track refers to another, namely his act of traveling, which will continue as soon as the awaited train arrives. Then his attention will turn away from the newspaper and towards issues that are relevant for his traveling: Have I got my ticket? From which track does the train leave? And so on.

Phenomenology provides adequate concepts for an in-depth description of this basic pattern. According to Schutz, the interplay of a prevailing and a subordinate theme is a general feature of the human mind. He introduces the “schizophrenic-ego hypothesis”, meant to depict cases where

two different levels of our personality (a superficial and a deeper one) are simultaneously involved, the theme of the activities of one of them being reciprocally the horizon of the other. Because of this, the “actualized” theme received a specific tinge from the other, the temporarily covert one, which remains so to speak the hidden ground determining the occurrences in the clearly discernible voices founded upon it. (Schutz 2011: 99)

This description of an interplay between thematic kernel and horizon makes use of a spatial imagery. As human beings we are principally able to turn our attention away from the topic we are currently engaged with towards another standing at the thematic horizon, thereby shifting the first to a marginal position and the latter to the focus. This has to do with the horizonedness of objects of thought themselves, which are divided into main- and sub-themes which the mind may follow. Furthermore, our attention is determined by the hierarchy of our system of relevances, so that every single interest refers to a more extensive one, up to the point of a life-plan. Yet, whereas the common rule of “first things first” suggests executing relevances one by one, it is crucial for waiting that two relevances coexist in our mind *at the same time*. This is more conveniently expressed by a time-related metaphor Schutz borrows from

<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, if such a reference is missing, that is, if the intention of one’s waiting is to wait, then it is not genuine waiting. This is an important insight for investigators who undertake self-ethnographies of waiting.

musicology when he speaks of the counterpointal structure of our personality, taking place “between two independent themes simultaneously going on in the same flux or flow of music .... The listener’s mind may pursue one or the other, take one as the main theme and the other as the subordinate one, or vice versa” (Schutz 2011: 99).

Phenomenological theory has drawn a distinct borderline between two states of mind: the one is when we live in our relevances and the other is when we observe them (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 219). With regard to the case of waiting the two analytically separated states intermingle. The marginal system of relevances “is neutralized, put in brackets, inactive, dormant but nevertheless still in my grip” (Schutz 2011: 159), thus establishing a sort of ambiguous state of mind. Let’s have a look again at our traveler at the train station: reading the newspaper editorial he may be engaged in a political consideration, adopting the system of relevances and the *attention à la vie* that are connected with this particular reality sphere (see Schutz 1962b). At the same time in the back of his head lurks the paramount reality, that is the reality of traveling, which is ready to reassume control at any time, evoked for example by an announcement over the loud speakers. His absorption in the relevance of newspaper-reading is particularly fragile and will end the very moment the relevance of traveling returns.<sup>9</sup> It is this hierarchical structure, this disequilibrium splitting of attention that characterizes the interplay of kernel and horizon when waiting. The system of relevance that is attached to the event one is waiting for is the initial one as well as the superordinate one, and it continues to be throughout the whole process of waiting.<sup>10</sup> The side-track is just interspersed; its existence depends on the interruption of the main track to which we switch back as soon as possible.

By now we have learned that waiting has first to do with the consciousness of time and second with the hierarchic timing of different relevances, yet we have also seen that the co-existence of two themes refers to a general facility of the human mind. Therefore we have to render our description more precisely. In the case of waiting, the switching between focus and horizon, between one theme and the other, does not happen voluntarily, but rather by force. “Waiting is the expression for a system of relevances imposed upon us,” defines Schutz (2011: 199).<sup>11</sup> This becomes clear when we compare it to

<sup>9</sup> This seems to be the underlying reason for Barry Schwartz’s observation that there is “no fully efficient way to cope with the distress of waiting” (1975: 170).

<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, when this primary relevance is downgraded to an inferior position, waiting is regularly abandoned. This can be of importance for the waiting-interaction in terms of power (see paragraph 2 of this paper).

<sup>11</sup> Schutz’s definition seems to ignore another phenomenon called “waiting”, namely when we decide to delay the execution of our action in order to gain higher benefits. Take as an example the winemaker who lets the wine ripen for another year before drinking or selling it.



another type of side-tracking described by Lyman and Scott: the time out (or pause). Imagine a situation when you are sitting in front of your computer and typing a paper for presentation at a forthcoming conference. Eventually your flow of ideas gets stuck and you decide to take a break for some minutes and to surf the internet. Like a person who is waiting you perform a shifting of attention, but here the shift is voluntary, you decide freely to interrupt your work and to recreate for a certain span of time. As a contrast, imagine the same situation with the difference that your ideas are flowing easily and then your computer suddenly demands a reboot because it has to install some urgent updates. The resulting interruption of work is involuntary and therefore experienced as imposed.

At this point we may attempt a first, provisional definition of waiting from the standpoint of phenomenology: waiting is the simultaneous living-in-the-relevances of two courses of action which is caused by an enforced interruption of a previous stream of consciousness.<sup>12</sup> The relevances of this previous stream are just bracketed temporarily, but not scratched out. The initial, overarching system of relevance stays present at the thematic horizon and will be moved over to the thematic kernel as soon as the interruption ends. This definition is able to bring together the supposed ambiguities mentioned in the beginning. Waiting has an essential active element with regard to the living-in-the-relevance of the side track, whereas it appears as principally passive regarding the main track on which the significant events happen without the assistance of the waiting individual – otherwise no waiting would be necessary.<sup>13</sup> Wait-

Waiting in this sense is often discussed within economical (Böhm-Bawerk 1970; Mises 1966) and psychological respectively pedagogical literature (Logue 1994; Mischel/Shoda/Rodriguez 1992; Partnoy 2012; Tobin/Graziano 2009). This form of waiting might be regarded as a voluntary act – a viewpoint which would contradict the definition provided by Schutz. I think, however, that we may subsume such cases under the term “self-imposed waiting” and thus hold onto Schutz’s proposal. The fact that children cannot wait, but rather have to learn how to bear waiting time in the course of their education (with varying success, for sure), shows that, even in cases of an allegedly voluntary delaying of the satisfaction of needs, a moment of social constraint is involved.

<sup>12</sup> *Nota bene*: “enforced” does not necessarily mean “unforeseen”. From our experience we may predict enforced interruptions and thus be able to avoid them in certain situations, and yet often we run into them knowingly.

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between processes that we can influence and those we cannot is surely not a simple matter of black and white. There are cases in which we cannot change the final result, but we can at least accelerate its incidence. Take the already mentioned example introduced by Bergson: before I can still my thirst by drinking a glass of sugar water, I first have to wait until the sugar has dissolved in the water. And yet I may accelerate the process of sugar-dissolving by stirring the water, provided I have the according knowledge and the necessary items, e.g. a spoon. Thus, instead of waiting for the incidence of the desired occurrence, I rather work towards it. The conclusion must be that the imposition of time does not generally cause waiting. Waiting only occurs, first, if the process taking place in outer time is significant in

ing may be overt when the individual engages in some kind of outwardly discernible conduct that evidently points to the existence of a second system of relevances which is ulterior to the one the individual currently lives in; in contrast waiting remains covert when such a reference does not become evident to the observer. Not at least, our definition of waiting supports Schutz's argument against Max Weber that the difference between action and behavior does not refer to the opposition of meaningfulness and meaninglessness, but rather to the way we reflect on the conduct in question (Schutz 1967: § 12). Thus, following Schutz, waiting appears as action when we take into consideration the initial in-order-to-motive, that is, the main track, whereas it appears as mere behavior when we reflect on the spontaneous activity only, that is, the side track on which the individual is currently engaged.

In the light of this provisional definition we now have to ask: what is it that is imposed on us when waiting? The answer was already implied in above considerations and is explicitly pronounced in the *Structures of the Life-World*: "in waiting we encounter a time structure that is imposed on us" (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 48). This statement is based on the distinguishing of three dimensions of time: subjective time, biological time, and social time (see also Schutz 2011). The first refers to what has been called "inner time consciousness" by Edmund Husserl (1964) or "durée" by Henri Bergson (2008), it is experienced subjectively and therefore differently by each individual. The second means the time of nature, including our natural surrounding as well as our body, which can be investigated in terms of natural science and thus objectified. The third is the intersubjective time of society which is the effect of various processes of synchronization of subjective times (Luckmann 1983). According to Schutz and Luckmann, it is the incongruence of these three dimensions which causes waiting. As the incongruence is imposed on us, waiting is so too.

In this way, and this is important to point out, phenomenology defines *durée* as belonging to some kind of primordial sphere which is experienced with a maximum of intimacy and evidence. Seen from this perspective, natural and social time are just additive, they supervene, whereas inner time is, so to speak, always there. Perceived as the fundamental phenomenon of human time experience, inner time thus becomes the benchmark when Luckmann, following Schutz, characterizes waiting as a result of the imposition of time dimensions.<sup>14</sup>

the face of my current system of relevance and, second, if this process cannot be abolished by my own acting. Both aspects may differ substantially between individuals, especially with regard to social processes.

<sup>14</sup> In certain contexts, this phenomenological approach may also be attractive for sociological conceptions, e.g. when broaching the issue of an alienation of time (Nowotny 1994;



## 2. *Letting wait – a matter of power*

My reflections so far mainly referred to the perspective of the waiter who is powerless in the face of a time dimension imposed on him, be it of natural or social origin. At this point it is appropriate to add the perspective of the one who lets others wait, which means that from now on I will focus particularly on the social imposition of time. To make sure, this proceeding is not identical with the transition from solitary contexts to social contexts, since social contexts may also exist when waiting is due to the imposition of natural time, e.g. when a group of astronomers wait for an eclipse of the sun. My interest, on the contrary, is in situations where waiting is caused by the social world, whereby the social world may occur as a corporeal person in a face-to-face-situation or as an anonymous voice at the other end of a telephone line. Alter ego comes into play specifically as the one who lets ego wait. In order to think about the phenomenon of waiting in terms of power we have to reflect on the perspective of this second person and how it is interrelated to that of the waiter, thus including both sides of the waiting-interaction.

We can describe the social imposition of waiting time by using the distinction between main and side track introduced before. The one who lets wait, let's call him Peter, is generally in possession of a resource which the waiter, let's call him Paul, needs to accomplish his aims on the main track.<sup>15</sup> For example, student Paul needs advice from his professor Peter and therefore waits in front of Peter's office during the consultation-hour. Thus Paul depends on Peter and his system of relevances, yet this dependence ends at the very point where Paul's own system of relevances changes in a way that his interest in the resource Peter possesses ends (e.g. when Paul changes his field of study). So Peter's influence on Paul refers not so much to the imposition of a system of relevance which

Rosa 2010). However, it is doubtful whether sociology would be well-advised to simply adopt the phenomenological conceptualization. After all, the clear-cut opposition of inner time and social time, which is legitimate for analytical purposes, seems to imply an ontological as well as temporal hierarchization that will soon become problematic when one uses it for the purpose of empirical reconstruction (for a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of an empirical use of phenomenological concepts see Göttlich 2008): is the experiencing of inner time indeed a sphere free of social influences, as the phenomenological position suggests, or is our perception of time socially determined from the beginning?

<sup>15</sup> This definition implies a narrowing of the thematic focus on what one may call "instrumental waiting" (Schweizer 2008: 11). This type conceives of waiting time as a resource one invests in order to gain something more valuable. It involves such diverse cases as the lover waiting for his or her beloved, the passenger waiting at the airport, or the customer queuing at the supermarket checkout. Other forms of waiting are thus excluded, yet for the present purpose (i.e. the analysis of the waiting-interaction in terms of power) instrumental waiting seems to be the paradigmatic case. Nevertheless, a comprehensive typology of different forms of waiting appears to be one of the most urgent tasks for a general theory of waiting.

is alien to Paul, but rather to the interruption of a course of action that rests on relevances Paul already had. It is this interruption that forces Paul onto the side track. Even if he's free to spend his waiting time the way he wants to, Paul's action still happens within a framework of imposition, since otherwise he would not switch to the side track at all. It is Paul's intrinsic hierarchy of relevances, rather than their content, that is disturbed by Peter's influence.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of an analytical distinction we may distinguish between two main types of the waiting-interaction between Peter and Paul: To begin with, there is (1) the possibility that Paul waits *for* Peter; a case which consists of two sub-types:

a) In the first case, letting Paul wait is the actual in-order-to-motive of Peter's action. Relevant examples can be found in politics where to keep one's counterpart waiting is a popular means of power demonstration. Here, waiting time is overtly meant to symbolize subordination by letting no doubt arise that the time of the waiter is less valuable than one's own time. Letting someone wait both refers to pre-existing power hierarchies and is instrumental in their enforcement and perpetuation.

b) In the second case, letting Paul wait is not the actual in-order-to-motive of Peter's action but rather its incidental consequence. Examples can be generally found within server/client-relations, e.g. at the doctor's office. The doctor's intention is not to let the patients wait for her, their waiting is the consequence of an action that is guided by ulterior motives, like the efficient use of working time. To be sure, the supposition of her own superiority may well be part of the doctor's interpretational relevances, but it is not her motivational relevance to demonstrate her alleged superordination. For her the power hierarchy remains an implicit aspect of the definition of the situation.

The second case (2) is the one in which Paul waits *because* of Peter, which is principally different from the situation where Paul waits *for* Peter. For example, when Paul lines up in a queue behind Peter, he waits *because* of Peter, but not *for* him. Here, letting wait is neither the in-order-to-motive of Peter, nor is such a motive insinuated by Paul. Peter's conduct in the waiting line has consequences for Paul, but neither does he orientate his action towards Paul, nor does he affect him in the sense of what Schutz (1967: § 30) calls "affecting-the-Other" (in German: *Fremdwirken*). It is mere coincidence that Peter and Paul find themselves in the same situation, where they share the

<sup>16</sup> *Nota bene*: Pauls' system of relevances that frames his definition of the waiting situation in question may be imposed on him as well, maybe even by Peter. For the purpose of the current analysis, however, the focus is solely on the actual situation.

typically same motive with everyone else standing in the queue. Although this situation of waiting together is principally prone to discourses of guilt and to mutual accusations, insofar as the mere presence of the others prolongs everybody's waiting time (see Paris 2001), there is no apparent superordination or subordination among the waiters.

When we look at this classification overall, it seems clear that the case of waiting *because* of others does not have an intrinsic power structure; power only comes into play with regard to waiting *for* others (which may well be the common element of the waiting group anyway). For an analysis of both subtypes of this latter case in terms of power we have to include the possible reactions of Paul, thereby considering the relation of Peter's and Paul's motives.

So, in the first case (1a), in which Peter actually intends to keep Paul waiting, we may distinguish between five possible reactions on the side of Paul, depending on whether Paul is aware of Peter's motive (cases I-IV) or not (case V):

I. The "simplest" case, seen from a theoretical point of view, is the one in which Peter's in-order-to-motive is obvious to Paul and where Paul acknowledges the inferiority of his own time and thus his subordinate status as insinuated by Peter. In other words, Paul accepts the legitimacy of Peter's intention and accordingly turns the in-order-to-motive of the latter into his own because-of-motive, thereby constituting a real concatenation of motives (in German: *Motivationszusammenhang*) in the sense of Schutz (1967: §§ 17-18). Since Paul's compliance rests on the general acceptance of the superiority of Peter's time, it is likely that he will also comply in similar situations in the future.

II. In a second case Paul will also act according to Peter's intentions, although he does not accept Peter's in-order-to-motive as legitimate. If Peter offers a particular resource which, from Paul's subjective point of view, compensates Paul for his degradation, the latter will also wait. For the sake of a superior benefit, Paul will bite the bullet of being debased by Peter. Here we do not find a real concatenation of motives. Waiting is for Paul rather a means to the end of pursuing his own in-order-to-motive; he favors means-end-rationality over value-rationality.

III. On the other hand, Paul may regard his self-esteem as more valuable than the resource he demands from Peter, in which case he will reject waiting. It is peculiar that we also find a concatenation of motives between Peter and Paul here, although with reversed signs: Paul refuses to wait because

Peter wants him to wait.<sup>17</sup> This decision dismisses means-end-rationality in favor of value-rationality, for example a particular notion of social equality.

IV. We can imagine the situation where Paul has an alternative way of obtaining the resource he demands from Peter, a way that does not imply degradation. Paul can now afford to reject the subordination that accompanies his waiting and so he will not wait, thereby refusing the concatenation of motives suggested by Peter. Again, this decision is grounded on means-end-rationality rather than value-rationality.

V. Finally, we must consider the case in which Paul is unaware of Peter's motive. Peter may simply fail to overtly express his motive, or he may deliberately hide it behind some excuse (since we presupposed that Peter intends to demonstrate his power over Paul this excuse is indeed meant to be deciphered by Paul as merely rhetorical, yet Paul may fail to do so). Accordingly Paul does not recognize Peter's power demonstration as such; he rather assumes that both are subject to the same dictate of time. He will then comply with his waiting in the actual situation, but his behavior may change in future situations, depending on his actual knowledge of Peter's motives and his estimation of their legitimacy.

Even these rather broad-brush considerations suffice to make clear one point: the objective chance that Paul will wait for Peter, or in other words, using the famous phrasing of Max Weber, whether Peter "can carry out his own will" (Weber 1968: 53), depends strongly on the way in which Paul interprets Peter's motives (interpretation meaning recognition as well as evaluation). Obviously, Paul's interpretation in turn depends on the evidence Peter provides by his acting. *Ceteris paribus*, Paul's conviction that Peter intends to exercise power over him will influence his decision to wait as will his ignorance of Peter's motive. In the former case, an additional thematic aspect of the situation comes into play which longs for interpretation by Paul. Whether he interprets Peter's motive as an insult or as a legitimate claim has to do with his current psychological disposition and the socio-cultural norms he has been raised to – in Schutzian terms: it has to do with the interpretational relevances of his stock of knowledge. Their reconstruction is a matter of empirical research, yet another important aspect can be realized *a priori*. Knowing Paul's interpretation of Peter's motivation not only allows a reckoning of the chances concerning Paul's compliance in the concrete situation, but also with regard to future situations. This is crucial for the conceptual difference between

<sup>17</sup> Here an interesting behavior may occur: Paul turns the tables on Peter and lets him wait. In terms of structure, however, this is not an additional case; the game simply continues with exchanged roles.

power and domination. The standpoint of mundane phenomenology also allows identification of a further fundamental factor which may influence Paul's behavior: the presence of third persons in the situation. His degradation while being kept waiting is even harder to accept for Paul if there are significant others witnessing his humiliation. Accordingly, Peter seems to be well advised to disguise his real motive in a way that potential observers cannot discover it: he should maintain common decencies. Vice versa, there is the possibility that Paul himself is unaware of Peter's motive while beholders recognize it. They may then share their insight with Paul, in which case Paul's knowledge of Peter's in-order-to-motive is accompanied by the realization that he, Paul, has been made a fool in front of others – an insight which will most probably lessen his willingness to comply with Peter's will.

To put it in a nutshell, the waiting-interaction depends in terms of power on the mutual interpretations of the actors as well as on the interpretations of possible beholders of the scene, or to be more precise, on the perceptions the acting individuals have of the way in which significant others interpret their conduct. Schutz's theory of understanding confirms what we know from our own experience, namely that these interpretations are principally problematic and fragile: subjective and objective interpretation frequently fall apart.

In an even higher degree this also applies to the second subtype (1b), where Peter's motivation is not to let Paul wait. Here, Paul's waiting is merely an incidental consequence of Peter's conduct; their waiting-interaction principally lacks a concatenation of motives. Peter's affecting-the-Other, that is, his acting according to the in-order-to-motive of bringing about a certain conscious experience in Paul (see Schutz 1967: 147), is not directed towards the issue of letting him wait. Nevertheless Paul's waiting is an "action affected by another" (Schutz 1967: 149) (in German: *fremdbewirktes Handeln*). It is this peculiar asymmetry of Peter's and Paul's conduct that dispels the power relation into latency, and this fact complicates Paul's interpretations of Peter's behavior which in turn determines his possible reactions.

As a matter of fact, the actual absence of the motive of letting him wait from Peter's perspective does not mean that Paul could not, by mistake, insinuate such a motive. We can use this insight for itemizing the second subtype:

I. Again the theoretically "simplest" case is the one in which it is obvious to Paul that Peter has actually no in-order-to-motive of letting him wait. *Ceteris paribus*, this knowledge will probably increase Paul's readiness to wait for Peter, assuming that they are both subject to the same constraints in terms of time, imposed by some higher and maybe anonymous power beyond the influence of both of them.

II. In the second variant Paul erroneously insinuates that Peter keeps him waiting intentionally. Although ill-founded, this subjective definition of



the situation determines what is real for Paul and as a consequence his behavior. Thus we can refer back to the cases depicted above as a-d, yet with two significant differences: first, as has already been said, there can be no real concatenation of motives, although Paul may subjectively believe to comply by his waiting with Peter's will. Second, Peter may be irritated by Paul's interpretation of his, Peter's, motivation. This, in turn, may influence Peter's behavior, up to the point where he stops letting Paul wait at all since he does not want to be believed to regard himself in a superior position.

With the latter consideration we are already on the verge of performing a further reflexive loop by including Peter's assumptions concerning Paul's interpretation of his, Peter's, motivation. At this point, things get even more complicated, yet the reflections so far should suffice to illustrate some significant findings. When we look at the phenomenon of waiting from a power perspective, we can state that the implementation of power, which here consists of the imposition of time, depends on the mutual interpretive acts of the waiter and of the person who keeps him waiting. It depends moreover on the perceptions each of them has of possible beholders of the waiting scene. The probability of capturing the actual perspective of the other, i.e. his/her motivational and interpretive relevances, depends in turn on the concrete situation, whereby appropriate interpretations may support existing power hierarchies or challenge them. The same applies to misinterpretations which are particularly probable in waiting situations where the actor cannot be sure whether his counterpart orientates his action towards him/her at all. As a consequence, Paul may be doubtful in which scenario he actually participates: does Peter want him to wait? The answer to this question refers to a matter of fact, so this is the point where phenomenological reflection ends and empirical reconstruction starts. I therefore proceed to the conclusions.

### 3. *Conclusions*

What can we learn from the above analysis of the waiting-interaction with regard to a theory of power and the contribution of phenomenology to it? Taking the concept of social imposition as the key concept, we find that what is imposed in the case of waiting is an alien time structure: the waiter is forced to act in accordance with temporal requirements that are not his own.<sup>18</sup> Thus he is forced to perform a weighing up of contradictory relevances: on the one hand the objective he intends to reach by his waiting, on the other hand the

<sup>18</sup> Compared to acts of concrete violence, we may conceive of the imposition of time as a relatively subtle form of power, which does not necessarily mean that its consequences are less severe. Auyero (2012) vividly describes the interaction of time-imposition with other forms of power with regard to the case of welfare recipients in contemporary Argentina.

suppression of his intrinsic time and the social subordination that perhaps goes along with his waiting.<sup>19</sup> These relevances cannot possibly be understood without going back to the interpretive acts of the individual. Thus the interpretive standpoint of phenomenology teaches us that what from the outside, from a behavioristic point of view, appears as a homogeneous social phenomenon, looks rather diverse when regarded from the inside.<sup>20</sup> It turns out to be a conglomerate of diverse variations that change according to the interpretations of the actors, their motives and the concatenations of these motives. Along with these interpretations, the chances that a power constellation will be preserved or modified also change. This means, in reverse, that the consistency of power structures does not simply depend on objective patterns which operate behind the back of the actors but to a great extent on their conscious interpretations. These interpretations are founded on their interpretational relevances that determine which aspects of the situation are focused and which elements of the stock of knowledge are applied. As these relevances vary according to empirical factors that change in the process of time, their consideration provides an appropriate approach if one seeks to explain the dynamics of power structures.

On the other hand it is also clear that power structures are not subject to arbitrary interpretation, they cannot be reinterpreted or ignored at will. They rather refer to ulterior elements, which determine whether the individual is able to implement his interpretation in concrete action or not. However, these elements can absolutely be connected with phenomenological considerations. When we stick to the example of waiting, the imposition of time may be combined with authoritative power, e.g. when the student waits for the professor from whom he seeks acceptance. It may be combined with threats, e.g. by the doorman who controls the guests queuing in front of a night club. Or it may be combined with physical power, e.g. when the mother draws back the baby from her breast, thus forcing it to wait for the next mouthful of mother's milk.

In my opinion, an integrative approach like this is to be favored over the repetitive lamentations that phenomenology lacks the ability to criticize power structures or would even ignore them altogether. It is correct that the phenomenological approach conceives so-called objective structures via their representations within the subjective mind. It does so because it is convinced that only as such can they become significant for action. One may well criticize this philosophical presupposition, but, either way, it is wrong to conclude

<sup>19</sup> The outcome of this process of weighing up depends in large parts on the evaluation of one's time which typically differs between historical epochs (Arendt 1998) or cultures (Levine 1997).

<sup>20</sup> In this context, let me indicate the terminological proposition by Lester Embree (2015) who suggests to replace the opposition of objective and subjective meaning by the one of outsider and insider interpretation.

that phenomenology would altogether ignore objective structures. It is also correct that the phenomenological approach puts forward the natural attitude in which power hierarchies often remain implicit. It does so because this is the attitude in which we live most of our everyday lives.<sup>21</sup> But it is wrong to conclude that phenomenology would not take account of the possibility that implicit structures can come to the fore, that, in terms of Schutz, they may become a topical relevance and as a consequence be reinterpreted or criticized. Thus, the interpretive approach can give a quite simple and therefore striking response to the well-known amazement of David Hume about “the easiness with which the many are governed by the few” (Hume 2002: 29). The answer is that the many are often not aware of their being governed. Exponents of the objective paradigm may well recognize the task of sociology in telling them that they are – yet this appeal will only fall on fertile soil if it finds its counterpart in the subjective interpretations of the actors on the social scene itself.<sup>22</sup>

**Andreas Göttlich**

University of Konstanz  
andreas.goettlich@uni-konstanz.de

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<sup>21</sup> This is exactly the reason why power structures frequently seem to lack alternatives and therefore to be “objective”.

<sup>22</sup> See Schutz’s Postulate of adequacy (Schutz 1962a: 44).

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