

# FLORIAN ZNANIECKI COLLOQUIUM

## GUEST LECTURE BY HUBERT KNOBLAUCH: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

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“There is no way out of culture” – this statement comes from Florian Znaniecki’s work *Cultural Reality*, which was published in 1919 by Chicago University Press and constituted a basis for this scholar’s later works, as well as for the program of development of cultural sciences. It has been selected as the motto for the Florian Znaniecki Colloquium, organized by the Chair of Sociology of Culture at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw. Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) is a unique role model for discussions about the processes of change in modernity. A typical feature of these processes is the acceleration of cultural transformations which occur in the orders of meanings and the patterns of activities or in the practices which have hitherto supported those patterns.

Professor Hubert Knoblauch’s lecture of January 12, 2016, entitled *From the Social to the Communicative Construction of Reality*, along with the subsequent discussion about the arguments he posed, could be described as a conversational form of transmission of knowledge and was focused on the category of “construction”, characteristic for postmodern discourse.

Hubert Knoblauch was a pupil of Thomas Luckmann (1927–2016). Like Luckmann, he took up fundamental problems of the ontology of the social world, associated with the relations between culture, social systems and human agency: issues which had once been tackled in a pioneering fashion from the perspective of culturalism by Florian Znaniecki. Half a century ago, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann published a short work which was subsequently hailed by many as the most meaningful and

influential book in 20<sup>th</sup>-century sociology. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* is a small book which has been translated into many languages. Its Polish translation was published in 1983. On the one hand, this contributed to the revitalization of humanistic sociology; on the other hand, it hastened the turn towards the interpretive paradigm and its new orientations. Professor Hubert Knoblauch draws upon Berger and Luckmann's theory of social constructivism, in which processes of symbolic objectification of meaning play a particularly important role. He also defends this theory against misleading interpretations, and above all he restores the original meaning of the concept of "construction" introduced by Berger and Luckmann, subsequently obscured by various variants of constructivism, which completely rejected ontological realism and the objectivity of cognition. He also takes into account the voices of the critics of the theory of social constructivism created by Berger and Luckmann, and develops it in a new direction, thus creating the theory of communicative constructivism. Hubert Knoblauch's communicative constructivism is formulated in opposition to the "strong" postmodern constructivisms that reduce reality to relative systems of representation and either downplay or completely eliminate the role of human subjectivity and agency, essentially dehumanizing social and cultural studies. Hubert Knoblauch has introduced the material character of utilized objects and the embodiment of communication processes into the theory of communication, in which the theory of speech acts has dominated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To grasp the unique character of the transformations of modern communicative culture, he analyzes giving meaning to social life through communicative actions. By communicative culture he understands the forms, patterns, and genres of communicative actions. He tracks their transformations in the modern era of new technologies of information and communication. The theory of communicative constructivism is rooted in anthropological studies of the ontogenesis and phylogenesis of human communication, beginning with the most basic forms of gestures such as pointing. The PowerPoint presentation, which is now in use all over the world, is a novel communicative genre with standardized qualities. Treating the PowerPoint presentation as a paradigmatic example of social communication, Hubert Knoblauch has analyzed the characteristic features of the processes of social construction of information and knowledge. In the book *PowerPoint. Communication, and the Knowledge Society*, published in New York in 2013 by Cambridge University Press, he comprehensively characterizes the modern knowledge society in the light of communicative constructivism. Hubert

Knoblauch's lecture describes the key assumptions and topics present in this and other works, in which social communication (understood as not being limited to verbal communication) occupies a central place. At this point, it is worth recalling the pioneering works of Thomas Luckmann in the field of sociology of communication, published in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those pertaining to communicative genres, as well as Hubert Knoblauch's later cooperation with Luckmann, which consisted in improving the methods of analyzing those genres.

Hubert Knoblauch defended his doctoral dissertation under Luckmann's supervision at the University of Konstanz. He was a Heisenberg Scholar, and in 1997 he received the Christa Hoffmann-Riem Award for Qualitative Research for his methodological achievements. He is now a Professor of General Sociology at the Institute of Sociology of the Technical University of Berlin. He has lectured at various universities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, in the United Kingdom, and in the United States. He is actively involved in the work of the European Sociological Association and is the Chair of the Research Network Sociology of Culture.

The outstanding achievements of Hubert Knoblauch are not limited to sociology of knowledge, sociology of social communication and sociology of culture. Like Thomas Luckmann, he is also an excellent sociologist of religion. In the book *Populäre Religion*, published in 2009 in Frankfurt am Main by the publishing house Campus, he has astutely diagnosed the new forms in which religion manifests itself in the era of the development of new media and popular culture. The works of Hubert Knoblauch enrich general sociological theory, extending our knowledge about the cultural transformations of modernity, as well as about relationships between the media, knowledge, and innovation in society. Furthermore, they also contribute to the constant advancement of the methodology of qualitative studies, as exemplified by the book co-authored with René Tuma and Bernt Schnettler: *Videography: Introduction to Interpretive Videoanalysis of Social Situations*, published in Frankfurt am Main in 2014 by Peter Lang.

The Florian Znaniecki Colloquium in 2016 is one of a series of scientific discussions that follow this formula. Last year the Institute of Sociology invited professor Wendy Griswold from Northwestern University, USA, as a guest lecturer. Professor Griswold has developed her own methodological concept for pursuing sociology of culture, based on the concept of the cultural object, which also played a significant role in the thought of Florian Znaniecki. It is worth recalling that the Florian Znaniecki Colloquium was first organized in 2008 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Znaniecki's death,

as a joint effort of the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw and the Science of Science Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The conference was entitled “Cultural Reality: Cognition and Action”, and the post-conference articles, co-edited by Janusz Goćkowski (1935–2009) and Elżbieta Halas, were published in the quarterly “Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa” in 2009.

Each time, the aim of the Florian Znaniecki Colloquium has been to highlight the lasting contribution to cultural and social sciences made by this eminent Polish, American and international scholar, who worked at the University of Chicago, Poznań University, Columbia University and University of Illinois. He studied at Sorbonne and in Geneva, ultimately achieving his PhD at the Jagiellonian University in 1910. He pioneered many ideas on social and cultural becoming, including the emergence of the world culture society. He emphasized the importance of cultural sciences for the understanding and explanation of these processes of changing cultures of knowledge. In the construction of social and cultural systems in terms of encompassing cultural reality, phenomena of communication were of primary relevance for this scholar. Significantly, he studied conditions for intercultural communication in order to contribute to peaceful relations and international cooperation.

The contemporary social and cultural dynamics influenced by new media of communication can now be better understood thanks to Hubert Knoblauch’s studies and the development of the theory of communicative construction of reality. Marta Kołodziejska and Sławomir Mandes from the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, who conduct research on the processes of communication and in the field of sociology of religion, have commented upon the theses formulated by Hubert Knoblauch, initiating further discussion moderated by Stanisław Krawczyk, who studies the texts and discourses of popular culture.

As the organizer of the Florian Znaniecki Colloquium, I would like to thank the Director of the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw for supporting this initiative. My thanks also go to Ms. Justyna Motrenko for preparing the graphic layout of information about the event, and to the editor-in-chief of the journal “Stan Rzeczy” for enabling us to publish a written record of the colloquium.