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Foreword: Past, Present, and Future of Phenomenological, Interpretative, and Hermeneutic Sociology

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The following papers will serve as a presentation of the symposium titled “Past, present and future of phenomenological, interpretative, and hermeneutic sociology” that took place on November 9th, 2019 at the Mita Campus of Keio University with three invited colleagues from the University of Vienna: professor Michaela Pfadenhauer, PhD, professor Roswitha Breckner, PhD, and Christopher Schlemmbach, PhD. This symposium was organized to seek and find possibilities for collaboration between the two universities, concerning research and education in sociology in both the Japanese and the German-speaking world. The head of the team was professor Pfadenhauer who held the guest professorship in the fall semester of 2019 at Keio University. She represents the contemporary generation of the so-called Konstanz School and serves as its leading figure in the German-speaking countries as well as Hubert Knoblauch (TU Berlin).

There are many similarities between sociology in Keio and Vienna. A tradition of Keio sociology lies in orientation toward this “subjective” sociology: it is open not only to attempts to ground sociology philosophically but also to culture and aesthetics in life world with a keen sensibility to thoughts and feelings of ordinary people’s lives. After its introduction into Japan, this tradition has been maintained in our university, especially by professors Ken Yamagishi and Hideo Hama.

Both Tokyo and Vienna are large and prosperous metropolitan cities. There are numerous sociological publications on cities, from Max Weber and Georg Simmel to the Chicago School, and there is no room here for a discussion what cities are. I suggest, however, that cities are marked with an intensified and increased degree of complexity in relation to their circumstances. This may be defined as central place in the sense of Swiss geographer, Walter Christaller (1968 [1933]). Without an intensified and increased degree of complexity in modernity and urban life, sociology would have not hit upon categories like subjectivity and meaning. The very concepts of meaning and action as the selection of subjects (actors)

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would not have come into question because they are nothing more than forms of reduction of an increased degree of complexity, i.e. possibilities.

The tradition of the Konstanz School is traced back to Alfred Schütz. Maybe it was not coincidental that a tradition among sociological theories, stressing the importance of subjectivity and meaning in human action against other theoretical traditions, has its roots in Vienna, a European *fin-de-siècle* metropolis. I mean the tradition of phenomenological and hermeneutic sociology that has evolved since Alfred Schütz. The theory of Schütz was not born from nothing, as the ancient Goddess Venus from of the sea. When I say here *fin-de-siècle* Vienna I am not referring to it in a chronological sense but to *the long 19th century* that began with the French Revolution in 1789 and ended with the First World War and the collapse of three empires in Europe, including that of the Habsburgs. Alfred Schütz was born in Vienna in 1899, grew up, and lived his youth in the last phase of the long 19th century and the Habsburg monarchy. Vienna, in the southeastern region of central Europe, was a metropolis, a center of important ideas, sciences, and arts. A metropolis enables the encounter of people of different origins and status groups where they exchange ideas and accelerate their evolution. The *fin-de-siècle* Vienna was a melting pot of ideas, with various—often contrary—schools that included reactionary, romantic, and metaphysical ones.

“[...] the early 20th century Viennese architecture and art, journalism and jurisprudence, philosophy and poetry, music, drama and sculpture as so many parallel and independent activities, which just happened to be going on in the same place and the same time [...] Was it an absolute coincidence that the beginnings of 12-tone music, ‘modern’ architecture, legal and logical positivism, non-representational painting, and psychoanalysis—not to mention the revival of interest in Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard—were all taking place simultaneously and were so largely concentrated in Vienna?” (Janik & Toulmin, 1973, p. 18).

Janik and Toulmin argued the significance of Vienna further:

“In all of the Habsburg lands, Vienna was unique in one important respect. Here was at least partially achieved that the supranational, cosmopolitan consciousness, which was the dynasty’s only hope for survival [...] Yet, on the entire continent of Europe, Francis Joseph’s Vienna as a city could only be compared to Paris. This was the physical setting of a Vienna that rapidly became not just a city, but the symbol of a way of life” (Janik & Toulmin, 1973, pp. 41–42).

As is generally known Schütz tried to provide a philosophical foundation for the understanding and interpretative sociology of Max Weber with phenomenology by Edmund Husserl of the middle working phase. Subjective meanings are formed in consciousness over time and they are externalized as action patterns, regularities, and, at last, institutions by human action. According to the tradition of this School, the unique sociological mission lies in the understanding of subjective and externalized (objective)

meanings.

Schütz, after escaping the Nazi regime and migrating to the United States of America in 1939, made an acquaintance with two young scholars originating from the Habsburgian Empire at the New School for Social Research in New York later. They were Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Inspired by Schütz and the German philosophical anthropology, represented by Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner, as well as by classical sociological works like those by Karl Marx, Emil Durkheim, Max Weber, and George H. Mead, they sketched out the dialectic processes between individuals and society. Oriented towards Weber's and Schütz's methodological individualism they assumed that reality consists of individual actions and the consequent institutions. What reality means is assigned by what is recognized as knowledge and conveyed by language. Human actions, however, are not possible in the social construction of reality without individual consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Meaningful actions are objects of phenomenological constitution analysis, namely, the constitution of knowledge in individual consciousness that guides human actions and societal institutionalization of such knowledge. Therefore, social order is based on the order of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge is now reformulated as a general social theory. *The Social Construction of Reality* has become one of the most cited and renowned sociological books.¹⁾ After returning to Europe, Luckmann began to work as a professor at the University of Frankfurt in 1965, and then, at the University of Konstanz in 1970, which was founded as a reform university (Reformuniversität) after the student uprising in 1968. The Konstanz School is named after the University where Luckmann worked, organized academic activities with other scholars, and supervised a number of young students until his retirement in 1994.

Luckmann and his successor in the chair, Hans-Georg Soeffner, founded the section for the sociology of language in the German Sociological Association in 1979. This section has expanded to be the sociology of knowledge since then, established as the main arena for the Konstanz School. Let me point out a few defining features of this school: 1) A strong orientation to the *phenomenologically grounded general theory*, which includes the theory of life-world (Lebenswelt). This theoretical tradition searches for universal pre-conditions or foundations of human action and experience of social and societal institutions. It is connected to the task to also clarify pre-conditions for empirical social research. In this sense, this meta-theory is occasionally referred to as proto-sociology. This tradition continues to the present and can be reflected in the newest book *Communicative Construction of Reality* by Hubert Knoblauch (2020). 2) The interaction between theory and empirical research in sociology, especially through qualitative research. Academics of Konstanz School are not only interested in investigation in sociological theory with universal validity strongly, but also all of them have involved in empirical subjects. For the latter, they developed various methods of qualitative social research, like social-scientific hermeneutics, genre analysis, sequence analysis, documentary methods, picture hermeneutics, structural-analytical field research, studies on symbols and rituals. 3) Language and communication, as a result of the strong influence of Luckmann's projects. Verbal activity and linguistic competence are pre-conditions of the construction of social order and, in the communicative process, reality is socially defined and redefined, consolidated and changed. The constitution analysis is applied to analyze processes of communication

and understanding. At that time research on the communicative process was enabled thanks to the development of new auditory and audiovisual recording technology.

The paper presented by Michaela Pfadenhauer is about the heritage and the development of the new *interpretive paradigm* in the Sociology Department in the University of Vienna. It is there where researchers develop methods and methodology as well as contributes, from a perspective of the sociology of knowledge, to topics like professional competence and inter-professional collaboration, as well as inclusion and integration in Austria. The empirical objects of research in this new sociology of knowledge are, thus, reality-producing interactions and negotiations but also products of human activity, forms of socialization, and reproduction of groups, milieus, societies, and cultures, and their interpretation patterns and worldviews. The empirical implementation of this research program by the Viennese sociology has yielded a methodology for the controlled reconstruction of objectified constructions and a canon of methods, not simply part of qualitative research but rather of interpretative research.

Takaaki Chikamori discusses the aestheticization of the city and the power poles as part of the cityscape in Japan. This is a unique characteristic that can be interpreted symbolically, historically, and sociologically. A colorful space in a metropolis leads to an increase and intensification of visual meanings and visual communication in modern life. The aestheticization of the city is one of the main concerns of a global city that attempts to attract tourists from all over the world. In the case of Tokyo, power poles constitute an alleged concern, spoiling the beauty of the cityscape. Japanese cities can be described as 'wired cities' since there are myriads of electric cables running overhead and countless poles lining the streets and lanes. In retrospect, power poles have had a historical role as an important mediator of the infrastructure in Japanese cities, having supported the rapid spread of new technologies, such as telephone, electricity, cable radio, cable TV, and optical fiber Internet. In his paper, the historical relationships between power poles and the cityscape in Japan are investigated to propose a new way to understand the multiple dimensions of urban aesthetics.

The Konstanz School has developed specific concepts of visual sociology, especially in the last 15 years. They emphasize the growing relevance of images in almost all social areas in contemporary societies, concerning everyday life communication on social media platforms, popular culture, processes of social differentiation, political communication and advertisement, and so on. In the paper by Roswitha Breckner, the recently developed methods of visual analysis that are rooted in the sociology of knowledge and hermeneutics are presented. These novelty methods aim at further developing the branch of interpretive sociology, which was initially based on linguistic theories and methods of interpreting language and text. In addition to this, she introduced the concept of visual segment analysis as one version of hermeneutic image analysis with an insight into a concrete analysis of a photo. Because Chikamori's contribution lacks the methodological foundation of the interpretative approach, the methodology of visual analysis becomes more interesting, as a well-developed and elaborated method by the Konstanz School. This constitutes a fruitful opportunity for future collaboration.

The discovery of the unconsciousness by Sigmund Freud and his theory of psychoanalysis belong to the unforgettable Viennese intellectual heritages, too. The paper by professor Kitanaka focuses on this

point, namely modernity, urbanization, and mental health. In Japan, until recently, mental health issues have been carefully kept as personal secrets or within the family. In 2014, however, the government passed a revision of the Labor Safety and Hygiene Law and institutionalized “stress checks” for all employees across the country. These changes, however, have given rise to a newly initiated web of corporate surveillance practices, pressuring employees to self-disclose, turning their mental state into a new object of rehabilitation and resilience training. At the same time, there are signs of emergent therapeutic spaces, where psychiatrists and employees explore protective forms of sharing secrets while regaining a sense of the private self. By investigating the emerging forms of psychiatric screening and self-monitoring as a new “care of the self,” she asks what happens to people’s subjectivities when their minds and bodies become repositories of valuable secrets.

On this subject, the paper of Christopher Schlembach follows. He analyzes anxiety disorders as a specific kind of individuals’ systems of relevance in the Schützian theoretical framework, to which he refers as ‘derailment,’ a term proposed by Karl Jasper. According to Schütz, systems of relevance are grounded in the primordial anticipation of the fear of death (fundamental anxiety), where many interrelated systems of hopes and fears, chances and risks originate. Systems of relevance have the potential to overcome fundamental anxiety via mastering the world, that is, by composing projects and realizing them. Under conditions of pathological anxiety, trust in the ability to overcome fundamental anxiety gets lost; insecurity and uncertainty prevail as an effect of the derailment of systems of relevance. Alarming signs at the margins of awareness are put in the spotlight (topical relevance) and harmless situations are defined as dangerous (interpretive relevance). This paper intends to develop a theoretical argument as part of the framework used in the research project *Phobility Aktiv*. In this project, technical solutions are developed that aim to assist people with anxiety disorders to participate in the traffic system by using smartphone app technology and wearables. Schlembach’s paper demonstrates how useful the interpretative and hermeneutic approaches remain to sociology in the Schützian tradition, but also for modern phenomena like anxiety. Here also, converting point in research is to be seen between Vienna and Keio University.

A historical and theoretical analysis of Schütz’s social theory is the subject of the recent research project by Professor Michaela Pfadenhauer and her team, composed of Tilo Grenz and Christopher Schlembach. Their project defined new theoretical and methodological instruments of communicative constructionism. Modern social theory and methodology are deeply influenced by central European social thought at the turn to the 20th century. Next to Heidelberg, Berlin, and Cologne, Vienna was one of the most vibrant intellectual centers of that time. In Vienna, scholars dealt with unique structural problems, the most important of which were the dense concentration of scientists caused by the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, the growing political tension between conservative and liberal wings, and the systematic academic marginalization of Jewish and women intellectuals in the university. Discussion circles that flourished outside or at the margins of the university grew significantly in importance. Being a prototypic figure of that time, Alfred Schütz joined different circles in parallel. He actively participated in the private seminar of the political economist Ludwig von Mises, and also attended the *Geistkreis*

founded by Herbert Furth and Friedrich August von Hayek, as well as the private seminar of the legal philosopher Hans Kelsen. Written in 1932, his book *“Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt”* provided a theoretical argumentation that combined positions of philosophical and social sciences, deemed to be incompatible back then. This influential work does not result exclusively from Schütz’s remarkable creativity. Its conception is rather rooted in the ‘thought style’ (Flek 1981), shaped by the discussions within the above-mentioned circles. Outside of the university, a space for discussion emerged, where political economy, legal sciences, philosophy, psychology, and history formed part of intensive exchange and were related in different, unorthodox ways.

The last paper by Shingo Torigoe investigates “waiting” from the Schützian point of view. Waiting is an omnipresent phenomenon in modern, everyday life, but sociologists have not sufficiently studied it. In modern urban life, social interactions are so coordinated that we eliminate waiting time as much as possible because it is considered to be a “loss.” According to him, previous sociological discussions on waiting face two obstacles. First, they do not necessarily discuss how the experience of waiting is treated as merely “empty time.” Second, only one of the dimensions of the phenomenon of waiting has been investigated, in which some sociologists tend to approach it from the viewpoint of “power,” for instance, relationships between the powerful and the less powerful. Torigoe argues that it is necessary to access waiting: 1) from a subjective point of view, and 2) by considering a wider extension of waiting. The Schützian perspective of emphasizing the subjective point of view and this insight into waiting and transcendence are suitable to resolve the aforementioned problems.

The readers of the following papers will surely notice that there is a number of convergence points in the research interests, arguments, and the theoretical framework between the sociology of Keio University and that of Vienna. This forms a stable foundation so that a prolific and productive collaboration between the two universities and the two continents develops in the future. It will also contribute to the widening of the global network of sociology.

Notes

- 1) Receptions of *The Social Construction of Reality*, see Knoblauch & Wilke (2016) and Steets (2016).

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