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Abstract	<p>The "new" sociology of knowledge takes as its starting point experience and action. However, it is not a microsociology limited to everyday action orientation. For human activity does not take place only in an already ordered world, it also produces a "world of things" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967 [1966], p. 18). A sociology of this kind examines the realization of social action—also in relation to its enabling conditions and unrealized alternatives. And, with the help of contrastively constructed ideal types, it observes and analyzes the resulting socio- historical realities in their respective interrelatedness and ambivalence. The empirical objects of research in this "new" sociology of knowledge are thus, on the one hand, reality-producing interactions and negotiations and, on the other hand, 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 sociological research program has yielded a methodology for the controlled reconstruction of objectivated constructions.</p> <p>On its way from Europe to the US and back again, the spread of the phenomenologically based theory for the sociology of knowledge formulated by Berger and Luckman has contributed significantly to the recognition of the interpretive paradigm in sociology. And in the course of empirical research within this paradigm, a canon of methods not simply of "qualitative" research but rather of "interpretive" research has been developed. Despite differences in approaches to data collection and analysis, there is a characteristic style of research, of knowledge acquisition, and of methodology that has been shaped, in particular, by the proximity to phenomenology.</p> <p>The Sociology Department at the University of Vienna cares for the heritage of the so called "interpretive paradigm." However, parts of the faculty as represented here at the symposium, are also interested in further developing methods and methodology as well as contributing with a sociology of knowledge perspective to topics like professional competence and interprofessional collaboration as well as inclusion and integration in Austria.</p>
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The Sociology of Knowledge in Vienna

Gentle adjustment of the legacy of Schütz, Berger & Luckmann¹⁾

*Michaela Pfadenhauer**

The “new” sociology of knowledge takes as its starting point experience and action. However, it is not a microsociology limited to everyday action orientation. For human activity does not take place only in an already ordered world, it also produces a “world of things” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967 [1966], p. 18). A sociology of this kind examines the realization of social action—also in relation to its enabling conditions and unrealized alternatives. And, with the help of contrastively constructed ideal types, it observes and analyzes the resulting socio- historical realities in their respective interrelatedness and ambivalence. The empirical objects of research in this “new” sociology of knowledge are thus, on the one hand, reality-producing interactions and negotiations and, on the other hand, 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 sociological research program has yielded a methodology for the controlled reconstruction of objectivated constructions.

On its way from Europe to the US and back again, the spread of the phenomenologically based theory for the sociology of knowledge formulated by Berger and Luckman has contributed significantly to the recognition of the interpretive paradigm in sociology. And in the course of empirical research within this paradigm, a canon of methods not simply of “qualitative” research but rather of “interpretive” research has been developed. Despite differences in approaches to data collection and analysis, there is a characteristic style of research, of knowledge acquisition, and of methodology that has been shaped, in particular, by the proximity to phenomenology.

The Sociology Department at the University of Vienna cares for the heritage of the so called “interpretive paradigm.” However, parts of the faculty as represented here at the symposium, are also interested in further developing methods and methodology as well as contributing with a sociology of knowledge perspective to topics like professional competence and interprofessional collaboration as well as inclusion and integration in Austria.

Key words : new sociology of knowledge, interpretive sociology, objectivation, social constructivism

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The Department of Sociology at the University of Vienna looks after the heritage of the Interpretive paradigm (Pfadenhauer & Scheibelhofer, 2020). Members of the faculty are also interested in further developing methods and methodology as well as contributing with a sociology of knowledge perspective to topics like professional competence and interprofessional collaboration as well as inclusion and integration in Austria. At heart of the “new sociology of knowledge” (Pfadenhauer & Berger, 2013) is what have become known as Social Constructivism.

The research area Knowledge and Culture at the Viennese Department of Sociology is part of the movement in which this paradigm forming approach currently is due to critics further developed to the so-called *Communicative Constructivism*. One serious criticism of Berger and Luckmann’s approach is the problem of a subjectivistic justification of social theory. Taking up this criticism, the representatives of Communicative Constructivism develop the theory of “social construction” further into a relational theory that does not bracket out the subject, but rather treats processes of consciousness as part of a relational process. This process can by no means be reduced to language but includes also bodily activity, i.e. objectification and objectivation (Pfadenhauer & Grenz, 2017). In most cases, social action needs therefore be seen as communicative action (Pfadenhauer, 2019b).

1. Viennese Roots of Social Constructivism

The roots of social constructivism extend back to the time when sociology of knowledge was beginning to take shape. As Rosenmayr (1965) noted, the academic discipline “sociology of knowledge” had its origins in a scholarly dialogue between sociologists from three European universities: Vienna, Paris, and Cologne. In 1909, the Viennese philosopher Wilhelm Jerusalem published an essay entitled “Soziologie des Erkennens” (Sociology of Cognition).²⁾ This essay prompted Emile Durkheim, the Paris-based founder of French sociology, to introduce a new column entitled “Les conditions sociologiques de la connaissance” in the journal *Année sociologique*, of which he was founder and editor. The first contribution to this column was Durkheim’s critique of Jerusalem’s article, which in turn inspired Max Scheler in Cologne to develop the sociology of knowledge into a discipline. To this end, Scheler edited an anthology entitled *Versuche zu einer Soziologie des Wissens*, to which Wilhelm Jerusalem contributed a chapter.

Like this classical sociology of knowledge, the origins of contemporary sociology of knowledge are also to be found in Vienna. This is not meant primarily in the biographical sense, although Peter L. Berger was born in Vienna in 1929 and spent the first years of his childhood there, and Thomas Luckmann, who was born in 1927 in Jesenice in the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia, obtained his *Matura* (university entrance qualification) in Vienna as a mature student after World War II. Above all, however, until his emigration in 1932, Vienna-born Alfred Schutz worked there as a “banker by day and a philosopher by night” (Husserl) in an intellectual climate that was particularly stimulating for the emerging social sciences (Pfadenhauer & Grenz, 2019).

Schutz’s orientation toward Max Weber’s oeuvre can be seen as the starting point for his major early work *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932; translated as *The Phenomenology of the Social*

World), which provided a methodological foundation for the social sciences by reconciling Weber's inductive and von Mises' deductive approach. Alfred Schutz was an active participant in the private seminars founded by the legal philosopher Hans Kelsen on the one hand, the economist and social philosopher Ludwig von Mises on the other as well as in the "Mind Circle" (*Geist-Kreis*), an informal seminar founded by Friedrich Hayek and Herbert Furth in the early 1920s.³⁾ Thus, for Schutz, the so-called Austrian School of Economics was the most important intellectual benchmark in the social sciences. It was Ludwig von Mises who drew Schutz's attention to Weber's oeuvre. In 1918, Max Weber had spent the spring term as a lecturer at the University of Vienna. In the course of his stay, he proved to be a "sensation of the university" (Theodor Heuss): The lecture hall in the main building where his lectures took place was filled to overflowing, and even after relocation to the biggest hall, the atmosphere was said to have been like Grand Central Station. Contrary to his plans, Weber did not spend his time in Vienna finishing his almost completed sociological opus *Economy and Society*. Rather, he engaged in intensive studies in the sociology of religion, focusing especially on Confucianism and Taoism in China, topics to which Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the authors of the Sociology of Knowledge classic *The Social Construction of Reality* devoted particular attention throughout their academic lives.

In the period of upheaval after World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the ideas of Austrofascism and National Socialism fell on fertile ground in Vienna: In the 1920s and 1930s, the University of Vienna facilitated the institutionalization of anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, and totalitarian ideas and policies. Like many other disciplines, empirically oriented national economy, and thus also the social sciences, were successively marginalized (see Ehs, 2010, p. 229). Therefore, the innovative potential of the social sciences did not emerge from the university but rather from the "extramural exile" of Vienna's independent research institutions and private seminars, which we in our research in Vienna address as *communicative knowledge cultures* (Grenz et al., 2020).

Like many of his consociates, Alfred Schutz was forced to emigrate. His journey into exile ended in New York, as did Berger's. Berger and Luckmann met as students at the New School for Social Research in New York, where Schutz taught sociology and philosophy, and where they were introduced to the classical sociology of knowledge. Schutz's thinking had a strong influence on the thesis of *The Social Construction of Reality*, which Berger and Luckmann sketched out as early as 1963 in a co-authored article on the sociology of religion, the field in which they had both done empirical research. Although the concept for the book was developed jointly with Hansfried Kellner, Stanley Pullberg, and Maurice Natanson, it was finally written by Berger and Luckmann and published in 1966.

Both authors continued to work on the subject of the book for several years, focusing on the sociology of religion. Luckmann published *Invisible Religion* in 1967, which became a classic not only in the sociology of religion but also in religious studies and the theory of religion. In 1967, Berger, too, wrote a landmark work in the sociology of religion, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, in which he also adopted a social constructivist viewpoint. However, these two books differ profoundly in their notion of religion, as Berger (1974) noted in an article entitled "Some Second

Thoughts on Substantive Versus Functional Definitions of Religion,” in which he contrasted his own substantive definition (postulating that religion has peculiar and universal features) with the functional definition espoused, for example, by Luckmann. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the authors did not jointly publish again until after they retired (Berger & Luckmann, 1995)—and then without mentioning *The Social Construction of Reality*.⁴⁾

While Berger continued his work in the sociology of religion and elaborated various aspects of the theory of modern society (see Pfadenhauer, 2018), Luckmann turned to the basic theoretical foundations of the social construction of reality. On the one hand, he continued working on the phenomenological foundation alluded to in the first chapter of *The Social Construction of Reality*. The most obvious result of this was his work on Schutz’s unfinished manuscript of his projected book *The Structures of the Life-World*. Schutz had passed away in 1959, and Luckmann took on the task of completing and editing his former teacher’s magnum opus. The first volume was published first in English translation in 1973 (the original German-language version was not published until 1975); the second volume was published first in the German original in 1984 and then in English translation in 1989. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, language was considered to be the most essential kind of objectivation. It is therefore not surprising that Luckmann turned his attention to the sociology of language, and later to empirical studies on language in use—that is, communication. With reference to research in ethnomethodology, linguistics, and anthropology, he gradually became involved in the newly developing “interpretive turn” and “qualitative methods.” Due to this empirical research, particularly in what came to be known as the “Konstanz School,” Luckmann and his fellow researchers started to use the word “construction” once again, this time in the context of “communicative construction” (Knoblauch, 1995, 2013; Bergmann & Luckmann, 1999; Pfadenhauer & Grenz, 2017).

Despite their lingering interest in various topics mentioned in *The Social Construction of Reality*, neither author worked any further on the subject of the book for decades. In fact, even by the time the reception of *The Social Construction of Reality* started to take off, both Berger and Luckmann seemed to have lost interest in it. They did not even attempt to lay claim to the concept as used by others. One of the reasons for this detachment can be seen in the context of the book’s reception. Its reference to “dialectics” entered into the political discourse of the 1960s student movement, so that Berger (2011, p. 92) complained that it “was taken as a license for an orgy of ideology and utopianism.” Neither Berger nor Luckmann elaborated on the theory itself, and they turned only retrospectively to the book at the occasion of its anniversaries. Luckmann hardly ever used the book in his seminars, and both Berger and Luckmann distanced themselves from its reception (see e.g. Berger, 2011).

However, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967 [1966]) still enjoys wide recognition. It forms part of many introductions to, and overviews and systematic presentations of, sociology, the social sciences, and other disciplines (Cisneros-Puebla, 2019). In fact, it has been referred to as one of the most popular sociological works, along with classics such as Erving Goffman’s *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Like Weber’s seminal work, the book received a wide reception, not only in Anglo-Saxon countries but also worldwide, thanks

also to the fact that it was translated into many languages.

2. Reasons for the unloved label Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is inextricably linked with Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967 [1966]), which was first published just over 50 years ago. That work is, in turn, inextricably linked with the sociology of knowledge. And, as elaborated above, these connecting lines extend back to Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, however, social constructivism(s) may have sources other than Berger and Luckmann's seminal work. This is the case, for example, with the social construction of technology and related developments in science and technology studies that Knorr Cetina (1989) subsumed under the label "empirical constructivism" (see Collins, 2019; Pinch, 2019). Conversely, there are approaches that have taken Berger and Luckmann (1967 [1966]) as their starting point but have neither been formed within sociology (much less in the sociology of knowledge), nor can they be described as social constructivism. This is the case with the confusingly similar-sounding social constructionism in social psychology (see Gergen, 2019).

The authors of *The Social Construction of Reality* steadfastly rejected the labeling of their approach as "social constructivism" until the end of their lives. In both Berger's and Luckmann's case, this has to do with the fact that they had a pronounced horror of ideologization and a distaste for the notion of founding schools of scientific thought. However, they also rejected the term social constructivism on substantive grounds. In their view, the modifier in *social* constructivism did not protect their approach from being classified as a subdiscipline of constructivism.⁵⁾ For them, constructivism was, on the one hand, synonymous with a mindset of postmodern arbitrariness; on the other hand, they associated it with a particular *type* of constructivism that even its founders understood as radical (see Eberle, 2019). In German-language sociology, this "radical constructivism," which has its origins in cognitive science and biology, was elaborated into a so-called systems theory by Niklas Luhmann (see Brosziewski, 2019; Srubar, 2019).

Berger's and Luckmann's self-distancing from constructivism was due also to the fact they did not regard themselves as systems theory, which was developed and quickly rose to prominence in the 1970s, as an inadequate version of constructivism against which their own approach should be brought into position (and consistently elaborated) as a more qualified theory. As Luhmann's systems theory also had a starting point in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, this option would not have been completely far-fetched, although Berger and Luckmann (1967 [1966], p. 13) explicitly bracketed epistemological questions out of their treatise. The authors' terminological decision in favor of "construction" in *The Social Construction of Reality* was intended to mark the difference between "construction" and "constitution"—that is, (howsoever understood) mental processes. Hence, *social* constructivism is decidedly a counter-concept to all subjectivistic constructivisms (see Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2009).

I share Berger's and Luckmann's view that there are maximal differences between social and radical (or methodological) constructivism. However, unlike Berger and Luckmann, we do not conclude from

this that the label “social constructivism” should be avoided. This is by no means due only to the fact that epistemological constructivisms emerged at a later date. In our view, Berger and Luckmann presented an approach that was groundbreaking for sociological theory and that is correctly labeled “social constructivist” in the sense that (a) it emphasizes the constructed nature not only of social reality but also of reality per se (i.e., also what is regarded as natural); b) it understands construction as a never-ending process; (c) the authors conceive of this ongoing construction process as sociohistorical—that is, not as solitary but rather as interactive, in other words, carried out by entities with action problems (see Pfadenhauer, 2019b). This implies (d) a rejection of any claim to totality in the sense that reality is exclusively a construction, and (e) a refusal to abandon the truth claim of science (on the latter, see Reichertz, 2017).

Hence, the question “Social construction of what?” (Hacking 1999) arises especially when this foundation of social constructivism is largely ignored. This is not to deny that the thesis that reality is a construction is “interpretatively flexible” and so widespread that it has almost degenerated into a truism.⁶⁾ However, the high degree of diffusion of this formula in many disciplines and beyond academia points to its paradigmatic power (see Knoblauch, 2018a). Taking as a starting point the characterization of social constructivism proposed in points (a) to (e) above, the proximity and distance of this approach from other approaches that explicitly refer to social construction (e.g., the social construction of technology and social constructionism) can be determined. On the other hand, approaches that are designated differently but are substantively similar, at least in part, can be examined to determine the extent of their affinity with the social constructivism that has its origins in Berger and Luckmann (1967 [1966]). This is the case with interactive constructivism (see Reich, 2018) and practice theory (see Bongaerts, 2018; Dreher, 2018).⁷⁾

3. Social Constructivism as a Paradigm

The paradigm concept is as controversial as it is ubiquitous—at least in the social sciences. This is due not so much to its inflationary use but to its ambiguity. Thomas S. Kuhn, for whom the emergence of a dominant paradigm was the key to the scientific progress of a discipline, was criticized by Masterman (1970, cited in Morgan, 2007, p. 50) for the fact that he used the word *paradigm* in more than 20 different ways in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Morgan (2007, p. 50 ff.) identified four basic versions of the paradigm concept in that work: paradigms as worldviews, paradigms as epistemological stances, paradigms as shared beliefs in a research field, and paradigms as model examples of how research is done in a particular field. What is even more problematic is the fact that Kuhn further cemented an understanding of the nature of “normal science” that was based on that prevailing in the natural sciences, where “normal science” allowed neither for multiple paradigms nor for theories that diverge from the dominant paradigm. Hence, from Kuhn’s perspective, a paradigm shift is a rare occurrence with a revolutionary impact. Walker (2010) warned of “the perils of paradigm mentalities” and equated “Kuhnian paradigms” with scientific stagnation and the preservation of the status quo. He argued that scientists with a “paradigm mentality” tended to make theories and

positions into belief systems instead of regarding them—with Popper—as tentative and endeavoring to contradict and refute them.

The paradigm concept used here is not Kuhnian: It does not have connotations of consensus and the preservation of the status quo, nor does it imply the espousal of Kuhn's (1970 [1962]) arguments, which are questionable, even for the natural sciences. My ideal of highlighting the paradigmatic character of Social Constructivism is not to build a cozy nest in which people can make themselves at home, but rather to identify affinities between specific theoretical developments in the social sciences that have hitherto been overlooked, or at least not explained. This calls for a critical examination of categorizations in which possibly artificial trenches have been dug (e.g. Knorr-Cetina, 1989). And finally, note must be taken of the paradigmatic consequences of the further development of concepts, for example the aforementioned development of social constructivism into communicative constructivism.

Current developments such as these show that the social constructivism that has its roots in Berger and Luckmann's groundbreaking work is by no means trapped, or immobilized, in a paradigm. Rather, it is extremely mobile, as evidenced by the fact that it has been (re)formulated in different ways, not only in the German-speaking area (see Keller, 2019; Knoblauch, 2019b; and Reichertz, 2019; see also Couldry & Hepp, 2017). As Andrew Abbott argued in *Chaos of Disciplines* (2001; cited in Adloff & Büttner, 2013), sociology is not characterized by stagnation but rather by progression. However, in his view, "sociology is progressive, but not cumulative" (ibid.p. 231, cited in Adloff & Büttner, 2013). Hence, social scientific innovations do not, as Kuhn presumed, come about because new knowledge is simply piled on top of an existing stock of knowledge that has been recognized as valid. Rather, in sociology, paradigms are continually being formulated and reformulated in the course of theoretical and methodological disputes between rival camps. Metaphorically speaking, because of sociology's "interstitial character—that is, because sociology is situated between the natural sciences and the humanities (Abbott, 2013, p. 5; cited in Adloff & Büttner, 2013)—it swings back and forth between extremes. Following Abbott's "fractal logic," scientific progress comes about when dichotomies are broken up and novel combinations are formed: "Interesting social science can always be produced by trying a combination hitherto unknown" (ibid, p. 29 cited in Adloff & Büttner, 2013).

Seen from the content of *The Social Construction of Reality*, its paradigmatic character arises from the specific new idea that demands to sharply distinguish social constructivism from what came to be known as constructivism in the sciences and humanities. Social constructivism has been adapted also in a formulaic way that has transcended the boundaries of academic discourses and institutions and influences public discourse to this day. The paradigmatic character of theoretical approaches should not be reduced to the field or system of science. In fact, one of the major contributions of *The Social Construction of Reality* has been that it considered knowledge as something that is not restricted to the "higher forms" (Scheler) but rather is an essential part of any social action. In this vein, social constructivism may be assumed to constitute a paradigm not only of academic thinking but also of the current episteme or worldview (see Knoblauch, 2019b).

Hence, one can say that *The Social Construction of Reality* constituted, and still constitutes, a paradigm

(see, once again, Knoblauch, 2019a). For, by rejecting structural functionalism, which was the dominant theory in the United States at the time, and by synthesizing two strands of theory hitherto considered irreconcilable (i.e., the Weberian and the Durkheimian approaches), Berger und Luckmann (1967 [1966]) opened up a fundamentally new perspective, whose impact extended far beyond the boundaries of sociology. Therefore, the question whether Social Constructivism forms a paradigm volume is compelling precisely because the diffusion of Berger and Luckmann's new perspective often occurred without reference to the source and without recognizing the specificities of social constructivism. According to Antony (2016), many of the authors of the volume "Social constructivism as a paradigm?" came to the conclusion that social constructivism should indeed be regarded as a paradigm (albeit not necessarily in the Kuhnian sense) or at least as an independent "thought collective" in Ludwig Fleck's sense of the term (cf. Fleck 1981).⁸⁾

Notes

- 1) Parts of this chapter already are published in Pfadenhauer (2019a).
- 2) According to Knoll et al. (1981), this was the first ever sign of life of Viennese sociology.
- 3) These three circles are subject to our research project "Schütz in Vienna" founded by the Thyssen foundation 2017–2019.
- 4) For a more extensive overview on both authors, see Schnettler (2006), and Pfadenhauer (2010).
- 5) As works such as Pörksen's *Schlüsselwerke des Konstruktivismus* (2015) confirm, this fear cannot simply be dismissed.
- 6) In a discussion paper entitled "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts" (1984), Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker developed the concept of "interpretative flexibility" to demonstrate the different meanings attributed to the bicycle in the early stages of its development.
- 7) This applies also to neo-institutionalism.
- 8) Thomas Luckmann could not make the journey to Vienna due to ill health; he died shortly afterwards, on May 10, 2016. Peter L. Berger, who passed away in June 2017, was able to attend, and he followed the debate with great interest. During his stay, he delivered the Patocka Memorial Lecture, in which he presented his deliberations on a "paradigm for religion in a pluralist age," set forth in his last book *Many Altars of Modernity* (2014).

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