

## ON FASHIONABLE, NECESSARY AND MARGINALISED CONCEPTS

### Panel discussion held on the occasion of Professor Marek Czyżewski's jubilee

**Moderator Katarzyna Waniek:** I would like Lena (Inowlocki) to speak first, then Gerhard (Riemann), then Fritz (Schütze), and last but not least, Marek (Czyżewski) as the last speaker.

**Lena Inowlocki:** Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this celebration and also to express my gratitude and appreciation to Marek. On my way to Łódź a few days ago, I took the train from Frankfurt to Berlin, and the train was shorter than it should have been, so a lot of seats were missing. And then there was a voice over the loudspeaker which said, if we all stick together, it should become a relaxed trip. And I noticed this because, as a matter of fact, for a while I have been noticing that there is a very general appeal to sticking together.

In German the word is *Zusammenhalt*, which I translated as cohesion. I am very curious to hear the associations you will have in Polish. I will give a few examples to show you that there are clusters of meanings attached to the word *Zusammenhalt*.

Our policy on community is focused on the core tasks of modern social policy: strengthening pluralist democracy, enabling equivalent living conditions and improving social cohesion and integration.

We are committed to promoting social cohesion and social consensus, and to understanding and integrating individuals and all societal groups and institutions, such as the churches and religious communities, the Jewish community, national and German minorities, as well as immigrants of every nationality and country of origin.

For this to succeed everywhere, our policy to promote equivalent living conditions takes into account people throughout Germany, particularly communities in rural and peripheral areas, and initiates improvements. We also identify demographic changes in the structure of the population and develop measures to address these changes.

Our democracy is strong when people are actively involved in shaping it and stand up for their values. Extremism, antisemitism and hostility towards democracy are attacks on our

open society and our free and democratic constitutional system. We are taking decisive action to repel these attacks. We are working with civil society to develop strategies and measures to prevent every form of extremism. We are also taking comprehensive and robust action to fight the threat posed by disinformation. We counter lies and fake news with facts and strengthen the resilience of society as a whole, for example, through more civic education.<sup>1</sup>

This is an extract from the website of the German Ministry of the Interior – it is a programmatic statement in which community, cohesion, and democracy are all wrapped up into one, and seen as interrelated and interdependent for promoting pluralism or equality in living conditions, integration, non-discrimination, among other things. Then, this is the image that goes with it.

FIG. 1 Visual representation of the extract above



Source: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/community-and-integration/community-and-integration-node.html> [access: 20.04.2025].

What is wrong with this picture? We get an idea of young women, flowers, nature. They are uncomfortably sitting next to each other, holding the wrist of the one in front of them to shape a closed circle. They are certainly sticking together, but nothing about this picture, as far as I am concerned, suggests any kind of openness and plurality specific to democracy. It is not only in politics but also in research that cohesion has become a big word.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/community-and-integration/community-and-integration-node.html> [access: 20.04.2025].

This is a quote from the website of one of the major German research foundations – Bosch Stiftung:

Social cohesion describes the feeling of connectedness, solidarity and support within a society. People who feel social cohesion feel that they belong to society and trust their fellow citizens. But what is the state of cohesion in Germany? The think tank More in Common 2023 conducted quantitative and qualitative surveys on this question. They show that the community is increasingly drifting apart. When asked whether everyone in Germany looks after themselves or we look after each other, 79% agree with the statement: “Everyone looks after themselves”. This is a problem for social cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

In this image (fig. 2), which goes with the extract, there is a team which seems to be fighting against another one.

FIG. 2 Visual representation of the extract above



Source: <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/storys/zusammenhalt> [access: 20.04.2025].

In my view, the message is “pull stronger, hold on, bear your teeth, face the enemy, and be the winning team”. The women look similar to the group sitting on the grass we saw earlier, except here there is a hint of diversity in the very back of the picture. The quote says: “Social cohesion, what makes our society strong?”

Is it a team fighting against one another? Or perhaps an idea of social glue? I think this refers to the same underlying substance in German as well as in

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/storys/zusammenhalt> [access: 20.04.2025].

English, maybe also in Polish. Both images (fig. 1 and fig. 2) imply the association of sticking together, in fact – of being stuck together, or else of baring your teeth and fighting the adversary. There is an inherent appeal to be strong, and even stronger, to win against the adversary. Similarity and sameness are emphasized. Diversity recedes into the distant background. Divergent interests, social inequalities: their consequences for a lack of social and political participation do not seem to matter. Marginality and exclusion are glossed over. There is also a problematic implication of an organic imagery of society, *Gemeinschaft*, with an imminent danger of *Spaltung*, which means dividing, splitting up, as in nuclear fission, as if society was a clump to begin with. And if we consider another example from the program for EU research, we will also find the same use of the term *gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt*, societal cohesion. And finally, an example from the website of the largest research network in Germany called *Forschungsinstitut Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt* (Eng. Research Institute on Social Cohesion). It consists of about 200 research sites and institutes.

What is “cohesion”? Our debates to date have shown that the concept of social cohesion is often analytically blurred and normatively ambivalent. We draw a double conclusion from this: We examine cohesion in its combination of attitudes, practices, and social relations, as well as institutional structures and, finally, the discourses in which societies thematize themselves. Our concept of cohesion is thus both open and broad. It captures the diversity of empirically available discourses and structures of cohesion and it reflects different scientific approaches in an interdisciplinary way.

It is an urgent task to develop a normatively sound concept of social cohesion. It must take into account the plurality and conflictual nature of democratic societies. The FGZ should serve as a forum for such a critical discussion. This concerns both the scientific connectivity and the practical transferability of such a concept.<sup>3</sup>

To conclude, I would like to propose a critique of both the uncritical and the critical use of this concept, because inherently, there is an appeal to stick together, and because of the naturalistic imagery of this term. The term also suggests a pre-given unity and shared interests that need to be protected against adversaries. There is no reference to the ethics of human dignity, of human lives, that are equally valuable. It does not imply or refer to the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and interests, as well as to a concept of a culture of debate. In contrast, dispute, disagreement, arguments, and conflicts about issues, which are conducted without hatred may lead towards further understanding and insight. I would argue that the term “inclusion” is important, in the sense of taking into

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<sup>3</sup> Speaker’s translation of the text from: <https://fgz-risc.de/forschung-transfer/forschungsprogramm> [20.04.2025].

account specific individual situations of disenablement. And certainly, there are alternative and much better terms, such as: critical solidarities, democratic culture of debate, common good orientation, or living together in society.

**Moderator Katarzyna Waniek:** Thank you very much. I would like to invite our next speaker, Professor Gerhard Riemann.

**Gerhard Riemann:** Thanks a lot for the invitation to participate in today's event in honour of Marek. I always enjoy being in Lodz and seeing colleagues again who have been friends for a long time. I have fond memories of my first visit to Lodz back in 1988 – together with Fritz and another colleague – Christian Tkocz – when we did a research workshop together with Marek, Andrzej (Piotrowski), Kaja (Kaźmierska), Alicja (Rokuszewska-Pawełek) and others. I also remember wondering about many young people in the streets who wore sunglasses and somehow resembled Wojciech Jaruzelski. And I learned from Marek that this was a happening of the “Orange Alternative”<sup>4</sup>.

After I received the invitation to participate in this panel discussion, I was a little ambivalent though when reading the title of this event: “On fashionable, necessary, and marginalized concepts”. “Fashionable concepts”: this struck a chord with me. While reading current sociological literature, I sometimes ask myself: Is this jargon necessary in order “to succeed in the social sciences”<sup>5</sup>? Wasn't something similar written a long time ago – but in a clearer and more accessible language? But then I also wonder whether such terms, which I tend to dismiss as just fashionable, might not have a deeper and mysterious meaning that I have failed to grasp – perhaps because I have not been sufficiently interested in the intellectual currents in which they originated. No doubt – shame on me. My internal dialogue then starts all over again.

In any case, it is instructive to reconstruct the origins, history, usage, functions and potentially problematic consequences of certain sociological terms – including the processes by which they fell out of fashion or became marginalized. I would like to focus on a particular powerful concept which is still around, and which has been significant in my own academic environments (departments of social work) and my own work. I also turn to this topic since I profited from fertile discussions with Marek in this context. (I am not quite sure though if my following

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<sup>4</sup> The Orange Alternative was an anti-communist underground movement established in Wrocław in the 1980s to offer Poles under the authoritarian regime an alternative way of acting and thinking based on a sophisticated sense of humour and witty, intelligent acts of protest. See, for example, [www.culture.pl](http://www.culture.pl)

<sup>5</sup> Billig Michael. 2013. *Learn to Write Badly. How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

short discussion makes sense in the Polish context. It might also be something like carrying owls to Athens or coals to Newcastle or Katowice).

My preference is to focus on a concept which I regard as necessary, but also to focus on how this concept can be used and what problematic real-world consequences can be involved in this usage. In this case, to put it simply: the consequences of being entangled in and legitimising hierarchical social relations, taking the side of the established against the outsiders<sup>6</sup>, and assisting the former to keep the latter “on their place”. I would like to focus on the concept of profession, a folk concept, as Howard Becker<sup>7</sup> called it, and a social scientific concept as well. It has a long history with religious roots in the Middle Ages: Think of the “profession of vows” of new monks or nuns. Everett Hughes, a sociologist of the second Chicago generation to whom I will return somewhat later, often alluded to these roots in his writings on professions<sup>8</sup>. I will skip the long history of this term and its changing meanings and will restrict myself to a shorter time span (from 1915 till today) and to the application of this concept to the field of social work. And, of course, given the limited time available, I can only do that in very broad strokes.

I will start with a famous speech, which a very important reformer of medical education in the United States, Abraham Flexner, the later founder of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, gave in 1915 when he was invited to the National Conference of Social Workers and was asked to speak about the topic “Is social work a profession?”<sup>9</sup>. And he used the example of medicine to specify or, rather, to determine the characteristics of a “real” profession, so to speak. Furthermore, he used these features as a yardstick to inform the social workers, who had invited him and who had hoped that he would certify that they were a “real” profession, that he was sorry to say, but: “Their occupation did not correspond to the characteristics of a genuine profession.”

Flexner’s authoritative assessment very much shook and confused the American social workers, and it encouraged the trend of throwing out professional achievements and (bottom-up generated) insights and to adopting practices and theories instead that appeared more promising with regard to achieving more

<sup>6</sup> Elias Norbert, John L. Scotson. 1965. *The established and the outsiders. A sociological enquiry into community problems*. London: Frank Cass & Co.

<sup>7</sup> Becker Howard. 1970. The nature of a profession. In: *Sociological work. Method and substance*. H. Becker. 87–103. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes Everett. 1984. *The sociological eye. Selected papers*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books.

<sup>9</sup> Flexner Abraham. 1915. “Is social work a profession?”. *School and Society* 1(26): 901–911.



respectability and better prospects of getting closer to the coveted title of a full profession. This development is clearly illustrated by the example of the gradual marginalization of the very important work of Mary Richmond in the 1920s and 1930s. Richmond's work<sup>10</sup> was actually a creative early social scientific attempt to reconstruct the real work processes of social workers, their inferences, their experiential knowledge and the recurring obstinate problems of their practice in order to discover procedures of an empirically grounded case analysis<sup>11</sup>. For many social workers, it appeared much more attractive to turn to different forms of psychoanalysis in order to orient and legitimise their work<sup>12</sup>. The "Flexner myth"<sup>13</sup> had problematic consequences for American social work – and social work in other countries as well – which I cannot explicate here. Generally speaking, Abraham Flexner's speech set the tone for how many sociologists have tended to think and write about social work – often by declaring certain traits as indispensable for "real" professions and then discovering that social work failed the test. The term "semi-profession" for occupations such as nursing, teaching and social work was popularized by Etzioni<sup>14</sup> and others and stuck in academic and professional discourse – not just in the United States but in many other countries as well. In West German sociological circles, it became quite common in the 1970s and 1980s to refer to a "failed professionalisation" of social work or to call it condescendingly a "wannabe profession". Since then the discussion has become more differentiated, I don't want to lump these quite diverse approaches together, but what they share is a kind of aristocratic thinking about professions. Marek suggested this expression in our discussions when I prepared myself for the defence of my postdoctoral thesis<sup>15</sup>.

I am far from ignoring or glossing over the weaknesses of social work and social work practice. My criticism is directed at the fact that (a) many sociolo-

<sup>10</sup> e.g., Richmond Mary. 1922. *What is social case work? An introductory description*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Riemann Gerhard, Fritz Schütze. 2011. Die soziologische Komplexität der Fallanalyse von Mary Richmond. In: *Forschungstraditionen der sozialen Arbeit. Materialien, Zugänge, Methoden*. K. Bromberg, W. Hoff and I. Mieth (eds.). 131–201. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

<sup>12</sup> see Lubove Roy. 1969. *The professional altruist. The emergence of social work as a career 1880-1930*. New York: Atheneum.

<sup>13</sup> Austin David M. . 1983. "The Flexner myth and the history of social work". *Social Service Review* 57(3): 357–377.

<sup>14</sup> Etzioni Amitai (ed). 1969. *The semi-professions and their organizations. Teachers, nurses, social workers*. New York and London: The Free Press.

<sup>15</sup> Riemann Gerhard. 2000. *Die Arbeit in der sozialpädagogischen Familienberatung. Interaktionsprozesse in einem Handlungsfeld der sozialen Arbeit*. Weinheim, München: Juventa.

gists have participated in the distribution or withholding of the honorary title “profession” without self-critically reflecting on their entanglement in such consequential processes and that (b) they do so without openly and unreservedly examining social work practice in a differentiated and case-analytical manner. They often limit themselves to very general ascriptions of deficits, without paying attention to the specific characteristics and problems of social work practice in different fields, or to the experiential knowledge, theory formation and creativity of practitioners, as this can be revealed by careful reconstructive research. Such authoritative attributions of deficits left their mark on the collective identity of social work practitioners.

In my own academic environments in Germany, I learned that this kind of thinking has been very much alive among professors instructing students of social work, but so have attempts to battle such ascriptions and to prove them wrong. In Germany, this has taken the form of many social work academics participating in a project to develop a respectable and independent social work science – based on the assumption that an autonomous profession always requires one (1) scientific discipline (an assumption that Fritz Schütze<sup>16</sup> disputes with good arguments with regard to the multidisciplinary foundation of the medical profession). On the other hand, there are the claims to dominance made by representatives of the university-based established discipline of educational science (with its powerful sub-division of social pedagogy). For outsiders, such German disputes are difficult to understand, and they are often quite far removed from what social workers deal with in their practice – far removed from their systems of relevance. And I doubt that many students of social work find all of this very inspiring when they are expected to demonstrate their knowledge about these things in their exams.

I would like to conclude my short presentation by turning to another sociological tradition, a more egalitarian or non-aristocratic tradition of thinking about professional work, which developed in Chicago interactionism. And for us, I also think of Fritz and Lena and others, Everett Hughes has been very important in this regard: a Chicago sociologist of the second generation, Erving Goffman’s and Howard Becker’s teacher and a mentor of Anselm Strauss. He wrote:

I have studied a number of professions and of occupations seeking professional standing. We looked at them with a sociological eye, working out a set of dimensions for comparing them. A first principle of such study is to respect all occupations, but to bow down to none.

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<sup>16</sup> Schütze Fritz. 2021. *Professionalität und Professionalisierung in pädagogischen Handlungsfeldern: Soziale Arbeit*. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.



One learns that something that happens in one of them probably occurs in some measure and in some form in most or all.<sup>17</sup>

For me the most important remark in this little quote is the principle “to respect all occupations but to bow down to none”. I am sure that Hughes formulated this principle in implicit contrast to many other ways of aristocratic thinking about professions which were prevalent in sociology at that time, and which are still prevalent now.

This more egalitarian tradition of thinking about professions has a lot of relevance for social work. It helps to discover features and recurring problems – “professional paradoxes”, the term used by Fritz, which may be discovered in professions in general<sup>18</sup>. One can detect that obstinate and unavoidable problems, which are present in, e.g., medical work, also appear in the work of nurses, social workers, teachers and others. When I think of this tradition, I have in mind the work of Everett Hughes<sup>19</sup>, but also Anselm Strauss’s publications<sup>20</sup> on medical work, nursing work and the work of patients and their family members themselves. Strauss worked in a School of Nursing (at the University of California in San Francisco), and he often encouraged nursing students to become his co-researchers. This kind of a more egalitarian thinking (in the tradition of Chicago interactionism) about professional work does not mean to uncritically accept or celebrate what, e.g., social workers are doing, but to look more closely at the unfolding “social drama of work”<sup>21</sup>: how, for example, social workers cope with recurring paradoxes of their work, how they reflect or fail to reflect on their practice and sometimes do so in ways which create unforeseen trouble. When they listen to their clients and try to arrive at a deeper understanding of difficult and often confusing life histories and problem constellations (that clients often cannot understand or cope with themselves), they necessarily carry out practical case analyses by drawing on their experiential knowledge. This happens under considerable time pressure. Such practical case analyses often demonstrate the

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<sup>17</sup> Hughes Everett. 1973. Preface. In: *Education for the professions of medicine, law, theology, and social welfare. A report prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education*. E. Hughes, B. Thorne, A.M. DeBaggis, A. Gurin, D. Williams. p. XVI. New York: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>18</sup> Schütze Fritz. Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes Everett. 1984. *The sociological eye. Selected papers*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books.

<sup>20</sup> e.g., Strauss Anselm, Shizuko Fagerhaugh, Barbara Sucek, Carolyn Wiener (eds.). 1985. *Social organization of medical work*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>21</sup> Hughes Everett. 1984. Op. cit.: 342.

skills which they have acquired during their years of practice, but they can also go terribly wrong.

Considering that social workers must conduct complex professional case analyses if they take their work seriously, it seems obvious that interpretative or reconstructive sociological (and also anthropological) approaches, which are particularly strong when it comes to analysing individual and collective cases – “social processes with a unique historical form”<sup>22</sup> – can be useful in promoting case analysis skills in the professional socialisation of social workers. I am thinking of sociological case analyses which symbolic interactionists (with their roots in early Chicago sociology) and ethnomethodologists conducted and especially new approaches that have emerged from a productive combination of elements in these and other (e.g. sociolinguistic) traditions, such as biographical research on the basis of narrative interviews. In order to acquire a sound foundation for practical case analyses, it makes a lot of sense that students and practitioners of social work familiarise themselves with different ways of doing social scientific case analyses and the basic theoretical insights that have emerged in this kind of work, e.g., insights into different processual structures of the life course (trajectories of suffering, biographical action schemes etc.) which could be discovered in the sociolinguistically based analysis of autobiographical narratives<sup>23</sup>. Such a process of familiarisation should not consist in merely reading the literature or “learning a terminology” (suitable for examinations) – reverently absorbing something that others have discovered or conceptualised. The primary goal should be to acquire research skills (in biographical research, ethnography and interaction analyses) by engaging in qualitative field research – e.g., case studies focusing on professional practice (my own or that of others) or on biographical processes in the lives of people, many of whom are marginalised or labelled as difficult to understand, as different and alien. By taking the time to conduct their own qualitative case studies with patience and intellectual curiosity, social work students and practitioners can acquire a foundation for their own practical professional case analyses, which are always carried out under considerable time pressure and are marked by the pressure to make consequential decisions.

This is why we (Fritz, Lena, Thomas Reim<sup>24</sup>, I and others) started to encourage and supervise students of social work to become, so to speak, qualitative or

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<sup>22</sup> Schütze Fritz. Op. cit.: 30.

<sup>23</sup> Schütze Fritz. Op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Reim (1952–2024) was a German sociologist who specialised in the autobiographical narrative interview method. For many years, he co-hosted research workshops and tutored students in qualitative and work analysis in Magdeburg alongside Fritz Schütze.

reconstructive researchers of their own affairs, by using a variety of procedures and approaches that emerged in different interpretive traditions. And thereby new ways of doing reconstructive research have emerged<sup>25</sup> that could also provide interesting impetus “from the margins” for the further development of, e.g., biographical research and ethnography. Our ways of doing biographical research on the basis of narrative interviews, which are part of an approach which we have referred to as “a sociolinguistically based analysis of social processes”, have also developed in close collaboration with students of social work, especially in the context of research workshops. By doing such things together, social work students and practitioners have been our colleagues; they are not “junior sociologists” but social work researchers “from below” and in their own affairs.

I hope it has become clear that our sociological interest in professional work differs somewhat from the aristocratic style that has become influential in thinking about professions in the social sciences, especially sociology. Sociologists in the field of interpretative or qualitative social research can make themselves useful by working together with (prospective) professional practitioners of social work to take a closer look at biographical and other social processes that are of particular relevance for their practice. Of course, such an approach also makes sense for working with (future) members of other professions, e.g., in teacher education, counselling, nursing, different therapeutic professions etc., and in doing so, something new emerges that can also be of interest for the further development of reconstructive social research as a whole.

**Moderator Katarzyna Waniek:** Thank you very much. And Fritz, the floor is yours.

**Fritz Schütze<sup>26</sup>:** It is a great honour for me to be here today. I met Marek the first time, if I remember correctly, in Kassel in Germany in 1981. When Marek came over to Poznań in 1985 or 1986, our cooperation started, and we have worked together every year since. In the last few years, we have not cooperated so often because of private matters in my life, so it is the first time after six years when we can work together again.

Today I would like to talk about the origins and epistemic danger of social concepts that are used in social media discourses and, of course, then translated into sociology. Many of the concepts in the social sciences and the social media

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<sup>25</sup> Riemann Gerhard. 2011. “Self-reflective ethnographies of practice and their relevance for professional socialization in social work”. *International Journal of Action Research* 7(3): 263–295.

<sup>26</sup> This panel discussion inspired Fritz Schütze to write a full-length article which will be published in the issue 2/2026 of *Przegląd Socjologiczny*.

discourse did not originate in social media discourse, but in various types of academic sources, and I would just enumerate them here in order to tease Marek a little bit. Some come from medieval academic sources, especially from medieval theology and medieval law, for example: patrimonial rule, charismatic authority, secularization and disenchantment, re-enchantment; interpretament, status (Ger. *Stand*), stratum in German (Ger. *Schicht*). Others come from technical sciences, for example: the currently very popular concept of resilience. I can remember when we tried to prepare an application to the European Research Foundation, we used this term in 2011 and nobody knew what it meant, and today if you listen to a radio broadcast, everybody uses this concept. Other examples derive from psychology, psychotherapy and medicine: vulnerability, flexibility, traumatisation and probably the term of agency. I can remember that in 2008 or 2009 I would use the term “vulnerability”, and it was totally uncommon to use it both in general discourse and even within sociology. Today, however, it has become widely used and recognized. It is now a particularly important concept in fields like social work. Yet another set of such concepts originates from philosophy and its utilization and refinement of common-sense reasoning and everyday language use, for example: disenchantment, life world, world of everyday life, man on the street, idealization, alienation (Ger. *Entfremdung*), empty formula (Ger. *Leerformel*), essence formula (Ger. *Essenzbegriff*). Then, of course, some of these concepts emerge from culture criticism in conjunction with psychology, for example: well-known bohemian character, philistine character, creative character, and of course terms like individualism and social masses. These are just a few examples; there are many more.

Quite often the academic sources of these interesting social science concepts were forgotten. Later on, they regained the power of social imagination and analytical categorization. To recover this imaginative and analytical capacity, the once nearly forgotten concepts had to re-enter modern everyday language – where they could engage with current, mundane affairs as a first step toward developing their potential to become creative tools within social science itself. The reason for this is that everyday language allows for the expression of original and authentic experiences within the existential world of daily life. This retranslation into the mundane situations of youth should not be criticized – though perhaps Marek might disagree. In fact, this retranslation is a way of grounding social science concepts in empirical experience. → Concepts which recently originated in media discourses have the tendency to show the weakest capacity for leading to creative scientific insights. Just think about the concepts very similar to the ones Lena mentioned earlier, or about the concept of “the middle of society”

(Ger. *die Mitte der Gesellschaft*). Public discourses today often understand the *Mitte der Gesellschaft* as led by the US, with its stable democratic institutions, its commitment to international mindedness, and its promotion of the virtues of humanity, the rule of law, and strong democratic institutions. To put it simply, if you think about it, during the MAGA era, these ideals almost completely lost their former meaning. What can be considered the middle of society when voters in East Germany support the far-right party AfD (Ger. *Alternative für Deutschland*) with nearly 40% of the vote? The concepts of the West and the middle of society have almost become empty formulas – layered terms, as I mentioned at the beginning – using the analytical language of Ernst Topitsch and Hans Albert. Their social function is misleading; this is performed in political and even social science discourse by conveying the assumption that there exists a clearly defined citizen sphere – somehow representing a large centre of society. Such a critique of misguided thinking is similar to the famous criticism by linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, regarding the misleading concept of the safety of empty oil barrels, which overlooks the danger posed by oil gases. Whorf, who was a technician, discovered that most accidents occurred with empty oil containers, which led him to reflect on the concept of “emptiness.”

Some other concepts that originated in the stratum of social media discourses are always in danger of becoming battle terms, for example: wokeness or gendering. In these cases, social scientists must do a sociolinguistic pragmatical analysis of the contextual use and positioning of such battle concepts. For example, the concept “woke” was, in the beginning of its social media use, a positive concept of liberal left journalists; only later did it become a swear word of right-wing orientation which would be used to ridicule exactly the social milieu of those liberal left journalists. Journals like the *New Yorker* are full of these new linguistic inventions of critical battle words, which later in the right-wing US media would become trigger words.

In addition, we can find battle words which stem from former academic traditions, for example: church versus sect, and secularisation versus enchantment. One quite tricky example is the proliferated use of the term “narrative”. At first glance it seems to stem entirely from social media discourse. If you look more closely, then you detect that it is mostly used in contexts, in which the term “ideology” was used 100 years ago. Of course, straight-forwardly formulated “grand ideologies” cannot be utilized today, because they became totally obsolete after the deeds of Hitler and Stalin and their regimes. On the other hand, there is still the need for some smaller, but still powerful explanatory concepts for mechanisms that would shape social and historical developments and events, and for this need the

category of “narrative” came into use. It is a substitute for the formerly claimed explanatory power of ideologies. Of course, it is not the product of real narration at all, but some sort of utilisation of a hidden type of essentialist argumentation, which legitimates its user’s abstention from a serious empirical analysis of some questionable or hidden social process with its enigmatic sequence of events.

There are additional retranslations of former academic concepts and words into the social sciences that would not be totally felicitous. Let’s take the seemingly harmless concept of “mapping” as it was used by the classical Chicago sociologists as shown in the monographs of Ruth Shonle Cavan *Suicide*<sup>27</sup>, Harvey Warren Zorbaugh *The gold coast and the slum*<sup>28</sup>, and of course Robert Park and Ernest Burgess *The city*<sup>29</sup>. Then, 100 years ago, it was a tool and concept of city ecology; and in this use it was very creative for dense description and deep explanation. 100 years later it is used as an analytical concept for detecting phenomena in the mental spaces of scientific and professional social worlds – for example, in the Adele Clarke’s famous book *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*<sup>30</sup>.

In the course of translating the concept of “mapping” from social ecology into the task of exploring and describing the mental space of scientific and professional social worlds, it lost some of its original explanatory power. Of course, it is important to find out about hidden and yet to be heard voices of people living in non-analysed or non-treated problem situations.

By the method of mapping, you could come up quite quickly with finding out the “geography” of (the mapping of) positions for activation and of positions for extended suffering, and therefore mapping became a frequently used strategy for studying social worlds. But there would not be a real progress of analytically reconstructing the basic process mechanisms of social worlds; this would have required conducting time consuming process analyses of single cases and their comparisons, and this has not really been done yet. The researcher would have to focus on establishing different perspectives of significant others within a professional social world (e.g., of the actors, the referees or the several types of positions of producers criticising, etc.); she or he would have to focus on how to deal with the collective processes of changing the landscape of a social world

<sup>27</sup> Cavan Ruth Shonle. 1928. *Suicide*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Zorbaugh Harvey Warren. 1929. *The Gold Coast and the slum*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Park Robert and Ernest Burgess. 1925. *The city*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Adele Clarke. 2005. *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.



in terms of authenticating and legitimizing, in terms of the splitting of a social world or in terms of overlaps of various social worlds, and she or he would have to focus on questions of how cognitive objects of a social world would be established and worked on.

My very close friend, Marek, was always very circumspect and critical in handling social categorisations in the course of doing qualitative social research. He was very aware of the ambivalence of the close relationship between the language of social research and the language of everyday life. Starting with mundane experiences and everyday language expressions can bring vivid experiential images into social science research activities. On the other hand, there is always the risk of being misled by the very mundaneness of such wording and thinking. The latter would happen in the form of wrong conceptualizations and in the form of preferring fast track research with their typical lack of processual analyses – like in the form of the modern use of the strategy of mapping.

In his habilitation thesis, unfortunately written in German and unfortunately not published in German scientific book series, Marek developed a very differentiated, analytical and categorical grammar of studying public discourses. Even 20 years later I still think that this habilitation thesis is one of the most important books for analysing public discourse.

Of course, during the last 20 years lots of new phenomena has appeared through the “electronisation” of public discourse. Hence, it might be a good idea to add a chapter on these new electronic discourse phenomena and mechanisms. However, in any case the question could arise as to whether or not the relationship between the sphere of social science categorization and of everyday language would become essentially different due to the “electronisation” of public discourse. But I am quite sure that Marek’s beloved activity of criticising would basically remain the same in this new world of electronic public discourse. For Marek’s attitude of perennial criticising, the very new book of the German sociology antipodes Theodor W. Adorno and Arnold Gehlen might be a good new turf for criticism. In the 1950s, the two sociologists would write lots of letters to each other; and in these letters Adorno would criticise Gehlen quite a lot. I am sure that Marek would analyse the criticisms of the two sociological antipodes in a very critical way. I would love to read about it.

**Moderator Katarzyna Waniek:** Thank you, Fritz so much for this teasing presentation. Marek, the floor is yours. Expectations are high.

**Marek Czyżewski:** And my stress is even higher. [In Polish]: *Przed wszystkim chciałbym, najpierw po polsku podziękować Państwu i organizatorom, oczywiście też panelistom, to jest dla mnie pewno stresująca, ale jednocześnie*

*sytuacja nadzwyczajnego uprzywilejowania, za które jestem bardzo wdzięczny.* I will now switch into English. I would like to thank you for coming, and for your presentations. Actually, so much was already said that I would like to propose that we close the meeting and have a glass of wine instead of listening to my awkward confabulations, but the program is strict, and I think I have to continue. Well, as was already suggested by Alicja and by Kaja, and also by you, especially by Fritz, I used to put some of my discussants under pressure, and this time it will probably be no different. I used to take advantage of occasions like this to bring out heavy guns and so beware. This is a kind of swan song for me, so I will try to continue my pattern.

Let me start with a quote from Billy Wilder, one of the most outstanding figures in the history of popular filmmaking, and, on account of his birthplace, our man in Hollywood. Now, one of Billy Wilder's ten basic rules for good filmmaking goes as follows: "Let the audience add up two plus two. They'll love you forever." Billy Wilder surely was a true master of popular comedy film. However, what is splendid for popular entertainment does not have to be splendid enough for sociological analysis, especially if the basic task of the latter is not always to give the audience what it wants. However, I am afraid that this is exactly what happens in many spheres of sociological practice and discourse. Evidence of this tendency is the meteoric rise and seemingly unstoppable career of concepts such as trust, agency, creativity, resilience, entrepreneurship, social capital, teamwork, empowerment, security, as well as the perennial sequence that includes social order, social disorder, and reestablishment of social order, and the like. There are several explanations for these phenomena. The simplest suggests that uncritically adhering to this kind of analytical framework guarantees a success measured by the criteria of institutional recognition, although not necessarily by the substantive quality of scientific work. But the matter does not come down to psychological inclinations towards life, comfort, and status *arrivisme*, as these inclinations would be of no use if not for two powerful cultural factors, namely neoliberal ideology and common sense, or rather the extremely seductive intertwining form of neoliberal common sense, working to the effect which seems to match Billy Wilder's dictum.

The equivalent of Billy Wilder's "two plus two" in much of contemporary sociology, as well as psychology, education, political science, management science, and many other disciplines is the following message: if you see a problem, do not look for its sources in circumstances that are seemingly not able to be changed, and do not waste time formulating criticism of them. This would amount to succumbing to useless frustration. It is better to focus on what can and should

be done, that is, on how to find one's way out of a difficult situation. In other words, becoming the chief virtue of a citizen, employee or a private person is resourcefulness, even if they do not have the means (resources) at their disposal to change external circumstances, or rather *because* they do not have such means. In this way, neoliberal common sense meets pop-stoicism. In addition, the abstruse sociological jargon, usually completely incomprehensible to a lay person, at the level of linguistic formulation, conceals the overwhelming simplicity of the thought underlying it.

This mindset can have a detrimental effect on strands of sociology which are otherwise distant from each other. Thus, so-called conventional sociology that is a type of sociology that uses commonly accepted theoretical approaches and research methods, often engages in the reproduction of trivial truth and maxims of practical wisdom hidden under the guise of sociological jargon. Neoliberal common sense is doing quite well here, despite – paradoxically – the increasing interest in the issues of social inequality, poverty, and exclusion. This type of sociological practice could be called “reproductive sociology”.

A “reconstructive sociology”, in turn, being in many ways an alternative to “reproductive sociology,” offers a valuable reconstruction of patterns and rules of everyday experience. Still, (and similar to “reproductive” sociology) it often proceeds without a clear macro-critical edge. One of the pillars of “reconstructive sociology” is the postulate of adequacy formulated by Alfred Schutz. I quote “Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the life world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct would be, [it is important – MCz], understandable, for the actor himself, as well as for his fellow men in terms of common sense interpretation of everyday life”. One could ask whether the postulate of adequacy possibly requires some corrections or a qualification, as it hinders or even precludes critical reflection on macro-cultural, macro-political, and also macro-social aspects of everyday experience.

So, the very different trends of sociology, such as, let's say, reproductive and reconstructive sociology, seem to share quite a range of common features: these are not only the dominance of neoliberal common sense, but also the lack of willingness to break one's entrenched thought patterns, and especially to think dialectically, (thank you, Fritz, for mentioning Adorno, because I like to quote him), which would require a “self-reflection of thinking”, including “a thinking

against itself”, (as Adorno put it<sup>31</sup>), and consequently opening up new horizons of understanding.

A lack of willingness to think dialectically or even a clear reluctance towards dialectical thinking deprives individuals and communities of potentially accessible knowledge, that is, it accelerates the process, as Bernard Stiegler would say, the process of proletarianization, or to put it more bluntly: it accelerates the process of the self-proletarianization of social sciences.

This observation leads to a more general issue of the, let us say, “amplifiability” of elements of sociological discourse, that is, the degree to which they lend themselves to being foregrounded or backgrounded (or even brushed aside).

First, the content components of sociological discourse (such as topics, concepts, and theses) differ in terms of “amplifiability”. Of course, not all non-amplifiable topics, concepts, and theses are cognitively attractive and socially needed. However, an important piece of information about the state of social sciences in a given period is the knowledge of which topics, concepts, and theses are marginalized, and which are promoted on the basis of their apparent obviousness. This also applies to ways of expressing oneself in social sciences – that is, to the differences in the field of marginalization and dissemination of specific ways of using concepts and theses and patterns of organizing scientific texts.

And second, differences in the field of amplifiability are not accidental, and importantly, not all of them are associated with the advantage of simplicity over complexity of messages, which is determined by the previously mentioned macro-cultural factors. Social mechanisms also come into play, such as the influence of “thought collectives” on the reinforcement of the thought inertia (or “tenacity”, to use the term by Ludwig Fleck) of the participants of a thought collective. These mechanisms undergo a kind of “turbocharging” under the conditions of modern organization of research financing and the publication of research outcomes – here the categories of “epistemic bandwagons” and “turnkey problematics” proposed by Loïc Wacquant are useful. Thank you very much. In the discussion, I would be happy to refer to these points and also to your speeches more broadly.

## DISCUSSION

**Moderator Sylwia Męcfal:** Thank you very much. We would like to propose to open the floor for everyone, but if our guests would like to comment on each other’s speeches first, please do so.

<sup>31</sup> Adorno Theodor W. 1966. *Negative dialectics*. London, New York: Routledge: 365.

**Fritz Schütze:** I would like to just ask Marek if you could draw a little bit more about this beautiful term of “amplifiability”. If you could say a few additional words about, explain it a bit more. I think it is very important.

**Marek Czyżewski:** I have chosen this term because I was not able to find a better English word for the thought which is behind this idea. Actually, I almost started with thinking and investigating this phenomena together with Andrzej [Piotrowski – red.], who is here, and many other colleagues, and it was this book on the relevance of the irrelevant, which was published almost in the year of the system transformation in Poland, when the plurality of public discourse had been opened, and many milieus, many social groups, and lobbies were fighting for a position in this field of political debate, and we tried to think against, let us say, this movement and to ask which kind of topics, which kind of positions in political discourse are still silenced or in a way named as irrelevant. And I think this is the background. There is no time to, I think, to focus on this very point, but I still think that it is very important, and I have also found, together with my younger colleagues, the link to Foucault on this matter because Foucault was mainly focused on reglementation of discourse and claimed that what is important in discourse is really this phenomenon, what is not said at all or what is treated as irrelevant. What are the rules – external and internal rules of “the order of discourse” – as the title of his inauguration lecture at the Collège de France puts it. Well, I could talk about this issue till the morning, so I think I will leave it at that.

**Moderator Sylwia Męćfal:** We have no doubt about this. Any other comments, Gerhard?

**Gerhard Riemann:** Could you exemplify this contrast set between reproductive sociology and reconstructive sociology by giving some examples?

**Marek Czyżewski:** Well, maybe it is too polemical, but this is the way I am. The standard research on poverty is very socially engaged in the problem of inequalities, but I still think, probably not all varieties of such research, but some of them end up in this position of helping people to find their way out of the difficult situation without contesting the objective structures which are defined as such, which cannot be changed as such, which should be accepted in terms of the free market development of the economy. So, this would be for me one image, and I think in the domain of interpretive sociology you can easily find this approach of focusing on making people empowered. Or trying to investigate the way they make do themselves in order to find a better way of functioning in society. I think it is a very common perspective.

**Moderator Sylwia Męcfal:** Lena, would you like to add anything?

**Lena Inowlocki:** Maybe some clarification on what you just said. What is the alternative of looking at the ways of empowerment?

**Marek Czyżewski:** Empowerment?

**Lena Inowlocki:** Empowerment itself, yes.

**Marek Czyżewski:** Well, I think that the way this idea of empowerment or agency is functioning in sociology is, in my understanding, a sort of temporary solution which can be transferred to the people in this way, but still, I think it is a halfway solution. And still, in the sociological discourse itself, I miss such an approach which would question the assumption of this very way of thinking. I think too many ideas, too many topics became self-evident, apparently self-evident. There are already fixed rules and routine ways of thinking, of writing applications, as Fritz has said.

**Moderator Sylwia Męcfal:** Marek, would you like to ask our guest about anything?

**Marek Czyżewski:** I have plenty of questions. I will just limit myself to a short comment on what Lena has said. I think that the other side of this coin, of the problem of *Zusammenhalt* – I really do not know a good translation into Polish. I suppose social cohesion might not be exactly right in English. It is more, it is “sticking together” as you said. “Trzymanie się razem” in Polish. Even physically getting together, not just cohesion, which in Polish is “spójność”. I think “cohesion” does not transfer the image of bodily and mental contact between people. But returning to the point I would like to make. I think that the other side of the coin of this trend, especially in German sociology and administration language (Ger. *Verwaltungssprache*) is what my favourite German sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer used to...

**Lena Inowlocki:** It is his institute.

**Marek Czyżewski:** Yes.

**Gerhard Riemann:** It is Marek’s favourite sociologist (ironically).

**Marek Czyżewski:** Well, I do think he has significantly contributed to the devastation of sociological thought. In his early investigations on right-wing extremism, still in the 80s, he claimed that due to the system transformation that was underway, many young people lose the feeling of certainty. There is this word – famous in Germany – *Verunsicherung*, a term which is for me really problematic. And it is *Verunsicherung*, the loss of feeling of certainty, that is supposed to lead young men to physically attack the immigrants – as if it was a logical sequence. So, this is the other side of the coin. On the appealing surface we have *Zusammenhalt*, we should stick together, we should be very nice to each



other, but please do not try to break this bond because some very unpleasant things may happen. So, please be careful with diversity in many respects, or with the various criteria by which people differ from one another. That was just my first association with what you said, Lena.

**Fritz Schütze:** I just would like to get permission to ask Marek a question, can I? Marek, the task we have to do today for me was somewhat connected with thinking about the use of everyday language, and, of course, I mentioned it in my little talk, and I was forced to look back a little about my own way of starting to do sociology and to continue with it, and I was very much intrigued by the way Alfred Schütz would do it, for example, when he would put in the term of “stranger”, of course Simmel had done it before too, and, or concept like “shock experience” if you go into a final province of meaning, so, when I had to translate American sociological words into German sociological words, I always tried to not use Anglicism, but to put it back into German words, and I always had the feeling that there would come this experiential and analytical power which Alfred Schütz would use as some sort of self-ethnographer: an ethnographer of his own life situation. Now these topics, these words, these concepts coming in from public discourse, of course, much controlled by the electronic of this discourse, it feels quite different. There was a quote in what Katarzyna wrote to us – these things are also self-evident and unquestionable. And then you used the term – I have to look it up again – “amplifiability.” It’s beautiful. Would you say that there is a difference between the basic ways of wording that Alfred Schütz and others like him would use, and those that now emerge from electronic public discourse?

**Marek Czyżewski:** I think there is a major difference between these two contexts. The first one is, I would say, highly disciplined academic discourse, and on the other side is what Heidegger called *das Gerede*. Tomek Krakowiak is not here, I think he brought up this notion at a different conference<sup>32</sup>, and it was very helpful. I am not sure how to put it in English, *das Gerede*, *gadanina* in Polish (Eng. idle talk). So I think there is this difference, but still, there is, I think, another problem with this academic approach. We have discussed it recently, Fritz, and maybe we can share this view: I am not sure if you would agree that research which was made in a “reconstructive” manner, e.g. major parts of current conversation analysis, is very important, but it still makes for the

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<sup>32</sup> This is a reference to: “2nd National Conference of the Section for Social Communication Research of the Polish Sociological Association “Communication in a state of intensification” (Pol. “Komunikacja w stanie wzmożenia”), Warsaw, Collegium Civitas, September 23–24, 2024.

first step of a more comprehensible research procedure. The first step is opening your eyes as a researcher when you realize that you can reconstruct how people talk, how people categorize the world in their own categories, how people use their own, practical reasoning. At this stage you are, let us say, a “reconstructor”. Just for reasons of clarity, let me just note that ethnomethodologically oriented conversation analysis as well as ethnomethodology itself reject the idea that they would engage in any “reconstruction” since they claim that social order is being produced and not “constructed” whatsoever. Anyhow, this research is definitely a great achievement. But still, I miss the second step which would reach out to the dimensions which are not accessible for the participants. And you have plenty of conceptual frameworks you can use in order to make the second step. There is Karl Marx and “false consciousness”, Karl Mannheim and ideology, there are many other proponents. So I would say that the pure salt of sociology as a task or even as a mission, is not only to make the first step but also try to make the second one. Of course, you should not start with the second step, because you will lose the first one. The difficulty with the first step is that it is not easy to forget your own readings, forget that there was Durkheim, or Weber, or Marx, just forget it and try to reconstruct, to go the way people are talking, reading or writing. But then there are options. Anyhow, as a sociologist in the full sense of the word, I would say, you need this second step.