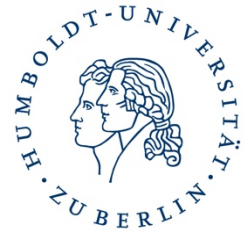Marc Ortmann
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Socio-Narratives: World-Making Between Collectives and Selves

This talk revisits the question of how societies imagine themselves—an issue central to Cornelius Castoriadis's and Charles Taylor's conceptualizations of the *social imaginary*. While these frameworks have profoundly shaped contemporary social theory, they have often been criticized for lacking operational clarity for empirical research. I begin by situating this problem within broader sociological debates on how social actors and collectives envision society: from "spontaneous sociology" and „folk theories" to images of the social world (*Gesellschaftsbilder and Weltbild).*

Following this, I introduce *Socio-Narratives* as a methodological and conceptual approach for researching world-making processes between collectives and selves. Developed within the Princeton–Humboldt interdisciplinary project *Socio-Narratology*, this approach examines how societies narrate themselves across levels of scale. Building on Aleida Assmann's distinction between *story* and *narrative* — with narratives understood as open, future-oriented meaning structures — I argue that Socio-Narratives can both address and mobilize groups and individuals. In doing so, they exhibit what Pierre Bourdieu described as the "theory effect": the capacity of classificatory schemes to shape social reality.

The second part of the talk explores a series of border cases that illuminate the analytical scope of Socio-Narratives. These include micro–macro entanglements observable in large-scale mobilizing narratives (e.g., the MAGA movement), apocalyptic or end-time imaginaries, and the futurist narratives embedded in contemporary state policies. I illustrate this last dimension through a comparative reading of Japan's *Society 5.0* and Germany's *Industry 4.0,* showing how contrasting socio-technical imaginaries articulate different visions of collective futures.

By integrating narrative theory with sociological analyses of the imaginary, the talk proposes Socio-Narratives as a pathway for empirically grounded research on how societies generate, circulate, and inhabit world-making forms.