**The George Washington University**

***University Seminar on Reflexive Systems***

**Wednesday, February 13, 2019, 10 a.m. to noon**

**Funger Hall 420**

**2201 G Street NW**

**Reflexivity without Systems? Philosophical Notes on Reflection**

Ulrich Koch

In this talk I distinguish between different forms of reflexivity in the sciences and the humanities. Both much of modern language philosophy and research standing in the tradition of cybernetics and systems theory, I argue, can be read as attempts to capture the reflexive character of knowledge. Working out the differences between these two general approaches will help me to better situate what reflective practices in philosophy (and the humanities more broadly) are and why they should be distinguished from those found in the sciences. I will then discuss the reluctance of philosophers to conceive of reflexivity as a property of systems. One reason is that in the history of philosophy the discussion of reflexivity had long been centered on the possibility of reflexive thought (Descartes, Kant). Moreover, in the wake of the linguistic turn of the 20th century, several philosophers (Wittgenstein, Austin, Derrida), perhaps paradoxically, moved away from the idea that language constituted a system. I will highlight another possibility in my talk: As a reflective *practice*that is both *evaluative* and open-ended,  philosophy has little use for the notion of systems, which has its place in the explanatory sciences.

**Ulrich Koch** is a psychologist as well as a historian and philosopher of the medical sciences. He received his doctorate in philosophy from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland, in 2012 and, in 2006, a master’s degree in psychology from the University of Zurich. Before joining the George Washington University (GW) as fulltime faculty in 2016, he was a Swiss National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Scholar at the Humanities Center of the Johns Hopkins University (from 2013-2015). In Summer 2018, he was a Visiting Research Fellow at University College London’s (UK) Health Humanities Centre. At GW’s School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Dr. Koch teaches a broad range of courses that offer humanities and social science perspectives on health, illness, and clinical care. Besides holding academic positions, he has worked several years as a clinical psychologist in the field of addiction treatment. Dr. Koch’s research interrogates the history and epistemology of the health professions and their interdisciplinary entanglements. His first book recounts the shifting characterizations of mental shock in the medical, psychological, and philosophical discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries, retracing the interdisciplinary exchanges that shaped contemporary notions of psychic vulnerability and traumatic stress (*Schockeffekte: Eine historische Epistemologie des Traumas* [Shock Effects: A Historical Epistemology of Trauma], diaphanes, Zurich/Berlin, 2014). Currently he is working on his latest book project, a political history of methadone maintenance therapy in the United States.