Chapter 18

The Discursive Construction of Realities

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> Although my interest is not historical, I feel obliged to explain why and in what way my conception of the relation between sociology of knowledge and discourse differs from how it has hitherto been generally understood in earlier periods of 'social construction'. At the end, I will make some concluding remarks to indicate what I consider the 'pay off' of this enterprise for sociology of knowledge in general and for certain areas of empirical research. (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 7-8, slightly modified by the author of this text)

Overture

A conference such as the one held in Vienna celebrating 50 years of social construction requires a great deal of work in order to take place at all. I am aware that about two years ago, a group of people (some of whom would later become the organizers) met somewhere, sharing thoughts, food and wine. Someone then pointed out the upcoming 50th anniversary of Berger and Luckmann's book on *Social Construction*. An instant discussion evolved: Shall we celebrate? How? Where? And most importantly: Who will pay for it? After an intense period of deliberation, decisions were made. Letters of invitation were sent out. Replies were sent back. A webpage was created, posters and flyers designed. Future talks written, reservations made, tickets bought, talks given. What is more (as Howard Becker is tireless in pointing out): A venue was chosen, childcare organized, catering ordered. There can be no conference without meals and drinks. Such activities are not specific to a sociological symposium. You might insert any event you like into this very general description of 'doing a symposium'.

But there definitely was *something* specific about this gathering: its thematic reference. There are two authors who wrote the book *The Social Construction of Reality* more than 50 years ago. At least this is what the book cover claims and some sociologists say. As can easily be checked, on the very first pages the authors point to the summer of 1962 as the starting point for their reflections. In this book, they assembled a comprehensive account of earlier sociological (and to a lesser degree philosophical and anthropological) work: Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Alfred Schütz, Arnold Gehlen, George Herbert Mead and others; more than one hundred names are referred to. The two young sociologists, then aged 34 and 33, added and combined ideas, concepts, arguments and examples to form a new and fresh story to tell about society: How it historically emerges as 'objective reality' via interaction, typification,

objectification and the institutionalization of meaning/knowledge, and how it is internalized to become the subjective world of people. The book slowly gathered momentum, became influential and sold copies around the world. In 1998, it was number five in the International Sociological Association's world ranking of the 'books of the century' in sociology.

As time went by, other authors commented on it, other books referred to it. There were some celebrations of its 25th anniversary. At this time John Meyer explained how he had developed neo-institutionalism out of the book's second chapter on *Society as Objective Reality*. German sociologist Stephan Wolff stated that the arguments put forward in the book offered the most comprehensive theory of 'society as an effect of communication'. In the recent special issue of *Human Studies* on 'social construction', its subliminal influence has been traced further along the road up to today's sociology.

The book travelled, via translation, and via personal moves, e.g. Thomas Luckmann return to Germany in the 1960s. As the two authors subsequently turned to other things, such as religion or 'the homeless mind' in industrializing countries, there was no immediate consolidation of this work as a 'new paradigm'. The so-called linguistic turn or even a 'sociology of knowledge and meaning' turn, as both Roland Robertson and Clifford Geertz suggested, were very much in the air at the time. The book therefore participated in a developing 'constructivist mood' with a range of different manifestations. Such manifestations included the emergence of the second Chicago school (scholars such as Howard S. Becker, Anselm Strauss and their colleagues, who were more or less inspired by the former Chicago school of sociology), and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, which built on the work of Alfred Schütz. Many of the developments in the US were opposed to grand abstract theory as presented by the work of Talcott Parsons, as well as to quantified statistical analysis, which seemed not to correspond to 'what really happens' out there. Such 'moods', according to Thomas Kuhn, might be part of, or the expression of paradigm shifts, due to new generations of scholars trying to find their place in academia and trying to make a difference. They exist in shifts in (sociological) statement production – indeed, they are those shifts. Or they might just be an effect of very selective ex-post observations by interested observers and sociological textbooks, which create the theory shifts they are talking about by presenting selected works.

Andrew Abbott (2001: 90) considered the Berger and Luckmann book "the last elegant statement of the old dilemma of ideologies. It was an end rather than a beginning." I strongly object to this misjudgment. I would rather relate the ambivalent 'non-present presence' of *Social Construction* in the English-speaking academic communities to two reasons: Firstly, the

sociology of knowledge was already prominently conceived of as the sociology of scientific and technological issues (such as establishing scientific facts), and on its way to becoming the field of STS and the 'social construction of science and technology'. Secondly, Berger and Luckmann were not part of the 'Chicago school crowd', consisting of sociologists like Howard Becker, Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strauss, in some ways even Harold Garfinkel, and many others who were working on symbolic interactionism, the interaction order and ethnomethodology. This meant that Berger and Luckmann were at the margins and could not enter with full force an emerging academic space interested in meaning-making within an already established canon. Core ideas and concepts of this tradition, especially the idea of the actors' 'definition of the situation' as a key to understanding action and its effects, had been established as early as 1918, as well as a cultural theory of reality and reflections on meaning-making inspired by German Weberian sociology.[1]

This was different in other countries and languages. In France, the emerging Bourdieusian theory of social fields strongly opposed the work of Alfred Schütz and social phenomenology, as well as what Bourdieu called the 'naive' and 'spontaneous' sociology of everyday life and people. Not by chance, the first French translation of *Social Construction* in 1986 was promoted by Michel Maffesoli, the leader of an opposing sociological tribe in France, interested in the sociology of everyday life. And once again it was not by chance, after a long-term shift in French sociology, away from Bourdieu and towards symbolic interactionist author Howard S. Becker and others from the Chicago tradition, that the second translation and presentation of the book, published a decade later and now promoted by more mainstream French sociologists, did not even mention the first one. The case of Germany was very different again. With its substantial references to past German thinkers and the presence of Thomas Luckmann, as well as the absence of symbolic interactionist work in the late 1960s in Germany, the book succeeded in occupying an 'empty space' in the world of sociological paradigms, beyond critical theory or positivist research, and became the core reference for a group of young scholars around Luckmann in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is not our concern to trace this here, however. In summary, via continual permutations of action, the book travelled through time and space, in contexts of consent or dispute, critique, attack and ignorance. As with the symposium, much of this kind of action is not specific to sociological work; some is even not specific to academic or scientific writing (for example, the process of reading, writing, producing paper, printing, selling). Text production and documentation is always important throughout all such fields of work: for organizing symposiums, for sending out messages, including text messages and

messages in bottles. But some of it is specific. And here we are right now, memorizing, celebrating, discussing.

Universes of discourse

In 1992 Peter Berger reflected upon the marginality of the book in US sociology in the 1960s. In the American Sociological Association theory section newsletter he stated that "it is not possible to play chamber music at a rock festival." He referred to the book's melody, to its style and content. This brings us to some of the details. It was a book on sociology. It did not refer to astrology, brain research, neo-classical economics or diet recipes to establish its story. So it was sociological (whatever that means). But it deviated from the then-dominant orders and even counter-orders of sociological discourse, that is, from the predominant ways of "telling about society" (Becker 2007). This was not a complete deviation, just a small variation and recombination. Just enough to constitute an event. And just enough to mark a small space for discretion, which allows for the argument that universes of discourse guide their speakers: They increase the likelihood that certain utterances, statements and action patterns will be produced instead of others, but they do not determine the outcome of such a guidance. Those who perform communication and statements are acting upon a basic human capacity for freedom to interpret and 'define the situation', to play a particular interpretation of a song or piece, and possibly add new elements to it, or replace the instruments.

In 1945 Alfred Schütz published his article on *Multiple Realities*. He explained the existence and effects of the world of scientific reasoning by using the pragmatist term 'universe of discourse', pointing to restrictions on what can be said, thought about and done, for example in mathematics, once someone has entered such a field:

> All this, however, does not mean that the decision of the scientist in stating the problem is an arbitrary one or that he has the same 'freedom of discretion' in choosing and solving his problems which the phantasying self has in filling out its anticipations. This is by no means the case. Of course, the theoretical thinker may choose at his discretion, only determined by an inclination rooted in his intimate personality, the scientific field in which he wants to take interest and possibly also the level (in general) upon which he wants to carry on his investigation. But as soon as he has made up his mind in this respect, the scientist enters a pre-constituted world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science. Henceforth, he will participate in a universe of discourse embracing the results obtained by others, methods worked out by others. This theoretical universe of the special science is itself a finite province of meaning, having its peculiar cognitive style with peculiar implications and horizons to be explicated. The regulative principle of constitution of such a

> province of meaning, called a special branch of science, can be formulated as follows: Any problem emerging within the scientific field has to partake of the universal style of this field and has to be compatible with the pre-constituted problems and their solution by either accepting or refuting them. Thus the latitude for the discretion of the scientist in stating the problem is in fact a very small one. [...] Theorizing [...] is, first, possible only within a universe of discourse that is pregiven to the scientist as the outcome of other people's theorizing acts. (Schütz 1973a [1945]: 250-256)

We might consider chamber music and rock music as distinct universes of musical discourse, with rules of their own for instruments, arrangements, melodies, timing, setting, etc. A particular scientific (sub-)discipline also creates its own rules for content and argumentation. It establishes conventions for topics, conflict and consent, as well as the differences and hierarchies between sociological chamber music (fine and sophisticated, requiring a high level of literacy) and sociological rock music (loud and brutal). To be clear: it is not the *discipline itself* that does these things. There is a history of embodied interactions, of doings, sayings, writings and of all kinds of material objectifications (such as books, salaries, software, etc.). There are familiar and new actors, institutional devices, personal and material resources, enacted routines, stocks of knowledge and sets of communication practices, which, in their particular way, closely correspond to what Schütz and Luckmann describe for society as a whole. We just have to replace 'social structure' with 'established universe of discourse':

> First, a particular historical social structure has governed a particular chain of typical communication processes: by stabilizing and changing elements already on hand, these processes produced a particular language structure and stratification. But second, a given social structure governs more or less bindingly, and in a more or less functional manner, the typical uses of existing means of communication in typical situations, starting from early phases of language acquisition (…) up to the institutional establishment of semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical elements of communication. (...) Furthermore, the actual present use of the means of communication is, in concrete situations, socially regulated. The regulations can consist of strictly or loosely enforced negative and positive rules of selection. Among these rules are prohibitions and word taboos, the forbidding of certain stylistic variants in certain situations or toward certain types of person, commands for the use of certain forms of language or of entire strata of language, as in the binding (symmetrical or asymmetrical) use of status-conditioned formulas of address, stylistic variants, etc. (…) The use of means of communication is thus determined both by the historically available structure of the means of communication and by the concrete social regulation of communicative processes. (...) The actual use of the means of communication is, in any case, composed of rule-following, routine, and action in the we-

> relation, however limited. Structural preservation and structural change result from this. (Schütz & Luckmann 1989: 155-156)

Schütz used the term 'universe of discourse' again in the above quoted text in the late 1950s (Schütz & Luckmann 1989: 261). Universes of discourse take place around their particular orders of discourse. Such orders imply related adjustments of actors: "The greater the differences between their system of relevances, the fewer the chances for the success of the communication. Complete disparity of the system of relevances makes the establishment of a universe of discourse entirely impossible" (Schütz 1973b [1955]: 323). Much of this ordering is brought about by producing and circulating oral or written communications. When we use language, signs and symbols to write this text we do not intend to reproduce English as a language system. But in fact this is also what we do when arguing a case. In the same way, we do not always explicitly intend to produce or reproduce a particular sociological universe of discourse. We simply argue a case in a given language game, maybe without even reflecting on its basic rules. Given all our tribal, epistemic, conceptual and empirical differences, we could stay up all night wondering what exactly it is that makes us a part of the sociologists' tribe (or different sub-tribes). As a faster solution I suggest we all go and listen to the psychologists' or dentists' symposium next door. Then we will know or/and at least feel the answer. Entering a particular universe of discourse is like entering a pre-established space of communication; becoming familiar with it is the condition for entering its conversations:

> Where does the drama get its materials? From the 'unending conversation' that is going on at the point in history when we are born. Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. It is from this 'unending conversation' (the vision at the basis of Mead's work) that the materials of your drama arise. (Burke 1941: 110-111)

What Schütz was referring to in the 'universe of discourse' quote are 'rules' or 'orders of discourse' which shape such a 'parlor'. In his discussion of signs, symbols and reality he argued in the same direction. A sign becomes a sign in relation to a particular and conventional set of

signs. A straight white line on a dark background could be anything: a trace of drug use; a trace of pigeon droppings. Or a mathematical symbol when contextualized by the latter's universe of discourse. Signs and symbols do not show up as isolated objects, but as 'objects within a network of relations' to other signs, symbols, practices, objects, sense-making structurations. A similar idea was expressed twenty years earlier by Robert Park and Ernest Burghes, commenting on John Dewey:

> Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. (Dewey 1916, cited in Park & Burgess 1924 [1921]: 36)

And they continue:

> Not only does communication involve the creation, out of experiences that are individual and private, of an experience that is common and public but such a common experience becomes the basis for a common and public existence in which every individual, to greater or lesser extent, participates and is himself a part. [...] The characteristic product of a group of individuals, in their efforts to communicate is, on the other hand, something objective and understood, that is, a gesture, a sign, a symbol, a word, or a concept in which an experience or purpose that was private becomes public. This gesture, sign, symbol, concept or representation in which a common object is not merely indicated, but in a sense created, Durkheim calls a ‚collective representation'. Dewey's description of what takes place in communication may be taken as a description of the process by which these collective representations come into existence. (Park & Burgess 1924 [1921]: 37-38)

Therefore, the "expression 'different universes of discourse' indicates how communication separates as well as unites persons and groups" (Park & Burgess 1924 [1921]: 423). The pragmatist concept 'universe of discourse' refers then, according to George Herbert Mead and in parallel to Alfred Schütz, to a set of collectively shared meanings produced, reproduced and transformed by a set of practices called communication:

> The significant gesture or symbol always presupposes for its significance the social process of experience and behavior in which it arises; or, as the logicians say, a universe of discourse is always implied as the context in terms of which, or as the field within which, significant gestures or symbols do in fact have significance. This universe of discourse is constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process of experience and behavior, within which these gestures or symbols have the same or common meanings for all members of that group, whether they make them or address them to other individuals, or whether

> they overtly respond to them as made or addressed to them by other individuals. A universe of discourse is simply a system of common or social meanings. (Mead 1963 [1934]: 89-90)

Later, in the same series of lectures, Mead wrote:

> There has to be some such field as religion or economics in which there is something to communicate, in which there is a cooperative process, in which what is communicated can be socially utilized. One must assume that sort of a cooperative situation in order to reach what is called the 'universe of discourse.' Such a universe of discourse is the medium for all these different social processes, and in that sense it is more universal than they; but it is not a process that, so to speak, runs by itself. (Mead 1963 [1934]: 259-260)

From the late 1930s Charles Morris (1946) built on the work of Mead, discussing processes of differentiation within such a general or basic universe of discourse. He describes how particular 'types of discourse', as he called them, have come into existence historically, such as poetry, religion or economics.

Discursive formations and discursive battles

I assume that I have to beg your pardon for the numerous and extensive quotes in the last section. I choose not to reformulate them in my own words for a simple reason: I want to give you some evidence of the usage of 'discourse' in pragmatist and social-phenomenological thinking in sociology. Referring to universes or orders of discourse in a 'beyond linguistics' sense can be traced far back in the history of the social sciences. It is not just the effect of a new 'jargon' established in the 1960s. But the term discourse refers to very different things in and between languages. When celebrating an anniversary like that of *Social Construction*, the French would cry out: 'Un discours! Un discours!', and they would expect someone from the core group to stand up and start a celebratory, hopefully humorous and preferably brief ad-hoc speech. Or they would invite a professor from the Collège de France to present her or his hottest ideas about life, the universe and everything. Maybe, like the good old René Descartes, they would simply write a 'discourse on method'. Germans, at least those trained in political science or philosophy, and nowadays also journalists and politicians, would start thinking of Jürgen Habermas and his practical ethics of discourse, which refers to particular settings and rules for deliberation, discussion and argumentation in case of disagreement. Finally, colleagues from English-speaking countries might simply refer to situated communication between people in everyday life. Maybe they would add 'public', and then discuss contested issues in mass media and the public sphere. This points to the legacy of the symbolic interactionists whose

sociological research on public discourses, frames and contested issues became very prominent in US research on social problems and movements from the late 1970s.

One of the most interesting works here is Joseph Gusfield's study on what he called the *Culture of Public Problems*. It differs enormously from the usual media content research based on frame analysis. The subtitle of this 1981 book is *Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*. It is about something we are all concerned with: drinking alcohol and then driving a car. What he is interested in is how this problem was conceived of and regulated in different institutional spheres, including religious world views, law, medicine, insurance companies, politics and car manufacturers:

> The people whom I talked with (...) presented a fairly uniform view of the problem. Alcohol leads to impaired driving and increases the risk of accident, injury and death. Since drinking coupled with driving 'causes' auto accidents, solutions lie in strategies which diminish either drinking or driving after drinking. The available strategy is to persuade the drinker not to get behind the wheel of the car. Law enforcement and punishment perhaps supplemented by education are the most useful and acceptable means to diminish auto accidents due to drinking. (...) This homogenous consciousness of alcohol and automobile use appears to the sociologist as a salient form of social control. It eliminates conflict or divergence by rendering alternative definitions and solutions unthinkable. This subtle, unseen implication of cultural ideas is perhaps the most powerful form of constraint. Unlike the conflict of power it goes unrecognized. What we cannot imagine, we cannot desire. (...) The absence of alternative modes of transportation is logically as much a cause of drinking-driving as is the use of alcohol. (Gusfield 1981: 11)

In Gusfield's view, the problematization and institutional regulation of drunk-driving produced a particular structuring of this problem of action, including laws, disciplinary control and texts:

> At any moment the 'structure' itself may be fought over as groups attempt to effect the definitions of problems and authority to affect them. (...) Structure is process frozen in time as orderliness. It is a conceptual tool with which we try to make that process understandable. What is important to my thought here is that all is not situational; ideas and events are contained in an imprecise and changing container. (Gusfield 1981: 5-7)

This reference to Gusfield is not an arbitrary one. As he states very early in his book, and as others have stated about their own work (e.g. more recently Adele Clarke [2005], writing about situational analysis), the influences of Berger and Luckmann's book lie at the very heart of his reflection. In his 2001 discussion of the *Chaos of Disciplines*, American sociologist Andrew Abbott (2001) reflected upon the success story of the *Social Construction* text and the high impact of a more general and often less precise usage of the words 'social construction' in

academic texts, and this was not a reference to engineering. Ian Hacking's famous 1999 treatise *The Social Construction of What?* gives an account of this generalized and 'free-floating' references to 'social constructedness (SC)', not the one in Berger and Luckmann's book, but the one in the broad and rather loose, often arbitrary use of this 'bestselling branding'. Hacking assembled all kind of works referring to 'social construction', not only from the point of view of sociology, but even more from the broader field of humanities. Such work led to some confusion about the rather loose use of 'social construction' and 'discourse' as more or less equivalent terms. Abbott (2001: 18) considered Berger and Luckmann as protagonists of the "third wave of constructionists" and stated that meanwhile, during the 1990s, the ('fourth generation' Foucauldian) term 'discourse' had replaced Berger and Luckmann's reference to 'symbolic universes' as the core concept used to approach processes of social construction – though he also argued that the concepts were closely aligned and covered the same ideas.

This is something I do not agree with. To be more precise, I do not agree that the concept of discourse covers the same comprehensive range with the same precision as the book *The Social Construction of Reality*. The theoretical arguments made in the book present a very fundamental theorization of how objective and subjective realities come into being and refer to each other. This is something the term 'discourse' as used in more recent academic work does not do. I strongly oppose the arguments made by some colleagues in discourse theory work that all is discourse, or that there is nothing outside of discourse. Instead I consider discourses to be particular processes or forms of knowledge-making and un-making, of objectifying and de-objectifying realities. Remember Gusfield's book: It is about discourses, about discursive constructions of realities. The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD, cf. Keller 2001, 2012a, 2010, 2018a, 2018b) that I am arguing for is about social relations of knowledge and knowing,[2] about politics of knowledge and knowing, about the making and un-making of realities in institutional and organizational contexts, in public arenas and special social fields, and in between. It is about the discursive construction of realities as covering a particular field of communicative construction and social construction. Discursive construction is performed via 'serious speech acts' (in the Foucauldian sense).[3] Communicative construction, according to my usage, is a more general term covering rather disparate communicative events, including small-scale everyday 'text and talk' or explicit practices of language use or sign use.[4] Social construction, according to this approach, is also a more general concept, including non-verbal interaction as well as the instrumental activities of human actors collaborating for a purpose at hand (including daily routines of work). Discursive construction is what this book is performing

here and now, and it is what made Berger and Luckmann's celebrated book travel from the 1960s up to the present moment.

In Germany the concept of the 'discursive construction of reality' was first used by Angelika Poferl (2004) in her study of the 'cosmopolitics of everyday life'. It then became the title of a 2005 book edited by Werner Schneider, Willy Viehöver, Andreas Hirseland and myself, subtitled 'On relations between sociology of knowledge and discourse research.' Given the diffuse usage of the word 'discourse', and the particular research questions linked to it in different disciplines (such as linguistics, political science, education, cultural studies, sociology or history), I will have to clarify my usage. And here is my confession: I have tried to introduce Michel Foucault as late as possible. As you will remember, it is difficult to play rock music at a chamber music concert. These are two separate social worlds. For a long time, both tribes tried to maintain firm boundaries. But now we can no longer avoid crossing them.

Foucault's work is, as his friend Paul Veyne wrote, a planet in itself. I do not intend to cover it here and now. I will simply offer a very brief explanation of my reading (cf. Keller 2017). Given the background of the linguistic turn, speech act theory, the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge and classification, and the Weberian sociology of meaning, one can suggest that Michel Foucault might have been inspired by pragmatist thinking when he established his ideas about the archeology of discursive formations in the late 1960s (Foucault 2001, 2010 [1969]). There is some new evidence that he was reading Dewey and pragmatist philosophy at the time (Auxier 2000).

Inspired by Nietzsche, Foucault transformed ahistorical philosophy into historical sociology of knowledge, institutions and fields of practice. This was stated as early as 1960 by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, and later by several sociologists in the Anglo-American world. Consider his work on the sane/insane divide, on the medical gaze, the order of things or on discipline and punishment. Sometimes, very rarely, he referred to himself as a sociologist interested in the history of systems of thought (an almost Durkheimian concept close to the latter's sociology of knowledge concerned with historical systems of representation and classification; cf. Durkheim 1915), in historical institutions, organizations and role playing, and in the effects of all these things. This is very like Joseph Gusfield.

In his famous book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2010 [1969]) introduced discourses not as ideas or linguistic objects, but as regulated social *practices*, which constitute objects of experience, knowledge and action by using signs in particular ways. He pointed to several dimensions of the institutionalization of discourses (such as academic grades, a

particular vocabulary, etc.). And he called 'knowledge' the outcome of such communicative activities. Foucault's *Archeology* does not propose a theory of discourse. It merely tries to establish an idea of this object and a corresponding heuristic toolbox for analysis. Foucault considered himself not a theorist but an experimenter, working through precise empirical analysis. He therefore used historical methods, such as close readings of a wide range of documents.

Foucault later saw *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as a failure. He seldom returned to it, and did not use the concepts he had advocated in it. Despite some claims to the contrary, then, there is no particular 'Foucauldian discourse analysis'. Foucault kept on using the concept of discourse not letting himself be encumbered by any previous conceptual baggage. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, he talked about the 'order of discourse': Who is allowed to speak and to be heard? What objects can be talked about? What is to be avoided?[5] What role do comments play? What happens when 'truth' becomes the point of reference for texts and talks? A few years later, in the *Pierre Rivière* book (Foucault 1982), he stated his interest in discursive struggles and conflicts where discourses meet and a highly consequential social event of competing 'definitions of the situation' unfolds.

Rivière was a young man in Normandy, France, in the early 19th century. He murdered his mother, sister and brother in order to re-establish the lost honor of his father. At least this is what he wrote in a long confession where he explained his deeds (you see parallels to the Norwegian Breivik case). Rivière wanted to be held responsible and sentenced to death. But this was not what happened. During the trial, different experts – or, as Foucault says, discourses – intervened, performed by the speakers present: experts from opposing psychological schools gave differing statements about Rivière's sanity, his state of mind. For example, he was seen reading books in his younger days – an obvious sign of insanity because book reading implies withdrawal from social life. (Please take a minute to reflect on your own reading list at this time). Medical, police and juridical discourses were added to the mix. According to Foucault, there was a battle between discourses, performed by actors, over the correct 'definition of the situation'. Foucault stated that his interest here (similar to his interest in discursive conflicts) was in investigating problematizations: He suggested that the analytics of power/knowledge should look for situations where established ways of doing and thinking become a matter of dispute and transformation, and where a 'new' reality might replace the former one. Foucault, probably influenced by in-depth readings of John Dewey's work, was moving from structuralism to pragmatism. This is the focus of some of the current discussions of his work.

Many things are missing in Foucault's work: There is no argument on signs, on the actors' competence in and their practice of sign usage and their anthropological requirements. But without sign use there is no discourse. Without socially shaped and interacting consciousnesses constituting reality through typification and sign usage, there is no process of construction. Nor does Foucault offer any argument on concrete methodology and on the work of interpretation. How do we ground our sociological interpretation and our account of the processes we identify as objects of our research, which is in itself the result of interpretation and meaning-making? How do we conceive the discursive construction we, the researchers, do of the observed discursive constructions 'out there in our field of inquiry'? Foucault presents no argument on the relationship between objective and subjective reality – but this is necessary to conceive of the effects of discourses. I therefore consider Berger and Luckmann's book and its legacy to be much more fundamental: It offers an anthropological account of humans, not as stimulus-response machines, but as interpreting animals. It uses arguments from social phenomenology and pragmatist sociology to address basic questions of human sign use, interaction and relations between consciousness, objective reality and institutions, socialization and subjective reality. Hans-Georg Soeffner later added a particular methodology of social science hermeneutics, and Ronald Hitzler, Hubert Knoblauch, Jo Reichertz and Norbert Schröer established what is now known as the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge. But this legacy was in need of a concept of discourse in order to address some of the most prominent issues in contemporary knowledge society – the discursive construction of realities in, across and between different social worlds and arenas. The leading theorist of cultural studies, Stuart Hall, stated in 1997:

> Recent commentators have begun to recognize not only the real breaks and paradigm-shifts, but also the affinities and continuities between older and newer traditions of work; for example, between Weber's classical interpretative 'sociology of meaning' and Foucault's emphasis on the role of the 'discursive'. (Hall 1997: 224)

After all, if we look closely, can we not say that Max Weber's work on the 'Protestant ethic' (Weber 1992) originally published in 1904/1908, is an example of sociology of knowledge and discourse research *avant la lettre*? Just consider the data he was referring to, and the arguments he made. What if even Peter Berger, in his work on religious movements and economic transformation, or on South Africa, was actually also conducting discourse research (Berger & Godsell 1988)?

By analyzing origins, events, dimensions, processes and effects of discursive construction, the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) now broadly in use in Germany and beyond therefore adds to the legacy of the new sociology of knowledge. This is a serious

methodology for research into the ongoing production and transformation of reality within and between particular social arenas. It acknowledges that social studies of science and technology have been very helpful, but it argues that the sociological interest in knowledge cannot be reduced to this. Knowledge, in the broad sense used by Berger and Luckmann, and also by Foucault, is produced and circulates between heterogeneous social spheres. It is not about positive or factual knowledge, but about the interconnections between scientific theories and facts, religious belief systems, political ideologies and other discursive formations. It is about the overwhelming experience that we are "awash in seas of discourses" (Clarke 2005: 145).

Crossover

There are two final questions I would like to address here and now:

Firstly, do we need to decide between chamber music and rock music? During the 1990s a new musical style emerged that is called crossover. It tries to avoid the former modes of discipline and punishment in music. Could this not be a promising path for research on the sociology of knowledge?

Secondly, given the context of the early 1960s, could it not be said that the book I have been writing about here was in itself, at the time, a practical exercise in crossover (mixing Marx and Durkheim and Weber and Mead and Schütz ... and ...and ?). Just take a look at all the references that were quoted and (potentially) used by Berger and Luckmann.

As it happens, it seems that yesterday's crossover easily becomes today's purified tradition, and will be challenged by other crossovers to come. For better or for worse, this is the way transformations happen. This observation could even be seen as summarizing the history of sociology.

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[1] Please note that several early pragmatist sociologists used to travel to Germany (cf. Thomas & Znaniecki 1958 [1918-1920], Znaniecki 1919; Park & Burgess 1924 [1921]; Thomas & Thomas 1928; Mead 1963; Keller 2012b).

[2] By analogy with Karl Marx's use of the term 'relations of production'. The corresponding German terms are *Produktionsverhältnisse* and *Wissensverhältnisse*.

[3] This includes media texts as well as institutional text production, speeches during demonstrations, scientific reports, etc.

[4] Here I am unable to enter into a broader discussion about the different theories of communicative construction recently elaborated by Jo Reichertz and Hubert Knoblauch.

[5] Please consider here the above-cited quote by Schütz and Luckmann on the structuring of communication.