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Narrative, discourse, and sociology of knowledge

Applying the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) for analyzing (counter-)narratives

Reiner Keller

Introduction

The present contribution introduces the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) as a perspective for analyzing competing narratives (including counter-narratives) in and across highly diverse social arenas. The (intended) benefits of such a discursive perspective on narratives and counter-narratives to (counter-)narrative analysis have to be presented in empirical work. They might be the outcome of a shift towards discursive contexts and structuration, different conceptual heuristics, and a general interest in the role of power/knowledge in social meaning-making. The chapter begins with a short account of narrative inquiry in German sociology. It then turns to a consideration of sociology of knowledge and the interpretive paradigm. It finally discusses basic tenets of SKAD analysis, that is the theory, concepts and methodology of an approach to discursive meaning-making interested in social relations of knowledge and knowing, and in the occurring politics of knowledge and knowing. It argues for a perspective following Foucault's footsteps of analyzing power/knowledge regimes, but informed by and grounded in the interpretive paradigm of sociology. In this, "discourse" provides a general contextualization for the analysis of narratives and counter-narratives.

Beyond the linguistic turn

The terms "narrative", "narrative inquiry", "narrative analysis" and so on cover heterogeneous research fields in the social sciences and humanities. A common focus is the reference to different kinds of texts as research data, and to textual analysis as procedure. Such texts could be the outcome of semi-structured or "narrative" interviewing, group discussion and other procedures for generating "story-telling". Or they might be "documents of the field", produced by individuals in their personal life, around a given concern in mass media and social media, for organizational purposes, law-making, campaigning of social movements and similar sources (Prior, 2003).

For quite a while now, “narrative inquiry” has been on the agenda (e.g. Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Hyvärinen, 2017; Reed, 1989). Arguments for a “narrative perspective” sometimes refer to the Chicago School tradition (Maines, 1993). Other authors point towards semiotics and linguistic approaches (Franzosi, 1998), social psychology and identity building (Bamberg, 2012), or theories of communication and cognitive linguistics (Kuhn, 2017).

In German-speaking contexts, “narrative” or its translation “Erzählung” is not a widespread concept in social analysis. Of course, there is a well-established scene of qualitative or interpretive research, (re-)starting after World War II, with group discussion and loosely structured interviewing as data, and developing a broad range of analytical procedures (Keller & Pöferl, 2020). An influential concept of the “narrative interview” was established in the early 1980s by the sociologist Fritz Schütze (1983) and was soon directed towards generating autobiographical narratives in order to come “as close as possible” to the individual subject’s lived experiences and to questions of identity work (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004; Köster, 2009). Following such arguments, narrative approaches have found their place in the German field of qualitative research. But biographical research questioned the “authentic records of individual experience” and started to examine relations between public discourses and personal narratives. Today narrative interview data is widely used without paying, as it seems, particular attention to narrative (or counter-narrative) as a concept. Rather, different perspectives of sequential analysis of fixed oral and visual data or collected texts prevail. We might attribute such a situation to the hermeneutic traditions of German “Geisteswissenschaften” (Wilhelm Dilthey). They lead to a particular focus on interpretation and meaning-making as a basic human condition, and to different procedures used by social scientists, the “interpreters of interpretations”, in order to account for their work as analytically valuable “social sciences hermeneutics” (Hitzler & Honer, 1997). This bias partially accounts for the small impact of structuralist linguistics and semiotics in German sociology.

A similar transformation occurred for the linguistic turn, which was influential in German sociology in the 1970s and 1980s. It stimulated inquiry into concrete language usage as an effect of social structure, conversational analysis of the micro-structures of verbal interaction, a general interest in the relations between linguistics and sociology (Luckmann, 1979; Schütze, 1975), and Jürgen Habermas’s (1984) comprehensive theory of communicative action. Hubert Knoblauch (2000) then observed “the end of the linguistic turn” in German sociology and a general move from language and interests in language and society towards the sociology of knowledge.

Sociology of knowledge, the interpretive paradigm, and discourse

SKAD is about the discursive construction of reality. It does not use a linguistic concept of discourse, but rather defines discourses as regulated patterns of statement production, as stakes in power/knowledge regimes and the politics of knowledge – as particular forms and processes in the historically ongoing social construction of reality. It reads Foucault as a historical sociologist of knowledge (Keller, 2018), and it refers to the sociology of knowledge and the pragmatist school of sociology (Chicago School and beyond) to establish a theoretical and methodological background for a sociological approach to discourse (Keller, 2005, 2011, 2012a, 2013; Keller, Hornidge & Schünemann, 2018).

In German-speaking contexts, “sociology of knowledge” refers mainly to the work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). This is compatible with much of symbolic interactionist work and “old Chicago School” sociology. Anglo-American perspectives in the sociology of knowledge are most often interested only in scientific knowledge. A rapid overview therefore will indicate the range of sociology of knowledge and the interpretive paradigm as perspectives on “cultural reality” (Znaniecki, 1919).

French philosopher and sociologist Auguste Comte started his analysis of social transformations with a comprehensive diagnosis of three historical stages of power/knowledge regimes. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argued that the prevailing worldview, ideology, religion, law, and other ideas, are produced by the dominant social class of capitalists and serve its interest in domination. They presented a comprehensive and consequential historical counter-narrative to such dominance. Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss were interested in classifications as social phenomena, in the historical genealogy of what they called “collective representations” and “collective consciousness”, and in the multiple ways in which social structure shapes “socio-cognitive” structures (symbolic systems or universes). Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim then laid the grounds for a more explicit sociology of knowledge framework. Mannheim, for instance, was interested in competing and conflicting ideologies and utopias, and their anchorage in particular social milieus, or in the emergence of situated, standpoint-related experiences and worldviews in particular positions in social structure – ideas which later became influential in feminist standpoint theories. Ludwik Fleck demonstrated the intersection between culture and the production of scientific knowledge in and between competing thought-styles and collectivities. Max Weber’s historical analysis of the Protestant Ethic delivers an almost discourse-analytical approach to a historical counter-discourse, which became, according to his analysis, a main catalyst for the unfolding of European capitalism (Weber, 1992).

Weber’s analysis provides a case in point for a most famous conceptual statement in classic pragmatist sociology. William I. Thomas and Dorothy S. Thomas (1928, pp. 571–572) wrote: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”. This was and still is an important account of the core role of human meaning attribution to experiential chaos – about ordering, establishing and organizing situations, the work culture does. It is about the basic condition of the human “animal symbolicum” (Ernst Cassirer). What does such a statement imply? First, there is no “real” or “pure real situation” for action and interaction. The situations we confront and act upon are a result of an interpretive process of sense-making. Second, if multiple actors are involved in a situation, their definitions of “what the situation is”, or “what is going on”, might vary considerably. Social groups and larger collectivities invest a lot in disciplining humans towards corresponding, related, if not similar definitions, by establishing behavioral norms and cognitive consensus. Third, all “real elements” present in a situation, that is other people, animals, plants, objects, physical materiality, ghosts and spirits, or whatever, the relations they are engaged in, and the interactions they perform, are accessible only via such definitions. This is not to ignore the agency, resistances or obstacles, such elements present for the wiggle room of human actors’ meaning-making. You might believe you can fly, but open the window and try it. So fourth, from the point of view of others (and from the actor), given the “proper” conditions of a situation, such an act of defining can be “wrong”, that is fail, and lead to fatal consequences. This argument does not affect Thomas & Thomas’s statement, for here too a definition proves to be highly consequential.

William I. Thomas had introduced the concept “definition of the situation” before. In the Chicago School of Sociology context, he stated that sociologists should leave aside official norms and moral regimes, and inquire into common people’s definitions of situations, in order to understand their action and interaction: institutional powers never have full thought control. A case in point was his research about “The unadjusted girl” (Thomas, 1923). Here he used, analyzed and commented on narrative interview data in order to account for women’s perception of their situation, conditions and possibilities of action in daily life and struggle for survival in Chicago. These women presented many “counter-narratives” to the official puritan moral regimes and their established role for women in society, as stated by public authorities.

Thomas was well aware that most often a multiplicity of actors is involved in defining a situation. The means or resources for establishing a then predominant and consequential definition are unequally distributed, for example, in a court trial, or by public authorities, law and police. Some resources are available by (and for) established institutional powers (like the threats of legal physical violence, or prisons), others by socially established “vocabularies of motives”. A “satisfactory or adequate motive” accounts, in the eyes of the “members of a situation”, in an acceptable way for an involved actor’s conduct in that situation (Mills, 1940, pp. 906–907).

“Communication” is the basic social process, which allows the establishing of common realities and symbolic universes. It implies a relation between at least two entities (the one addressed by an act of communication does not have to be present in the situation, and might even be “imagined”), the usage of a sign system, and a reference to a content or (whatever) “object”. Communication is a permanent and ongoing performance, which “realizes” worlds. According to John Dewey, “Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication”. Communication establishes the commonality of things and worlds, “aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge [...], ‘like-mindedness’ as the sociologists say” (Dewey, 1916, pp. 7–8). Robert Park and Ernest Burgess commented on Dewey:

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 and Burgess, 1924, pp. 37–38)

George Herbert Mead and other pragmatists added ideas about the life of signs and symbols, and the trajectories which transform newborn babies into competent symbol users and members of society (or newcomers in an organization into effective fellow members). They introduced the concept of the “universe of discourse” as a precondition for such processes. A “universe of discourse” is a set of shared social meanings, produced, reproduced and transformed by the ensemble of collective practices called “communication”. It is both the precondition and result of such communication (Mead, 1963, pp. 89–90). Charles W. Morris (1946) described how particular “types of discourse” have come into existence, such as poetry, religion or economics – social “sub-worlds” organized around some ongoing concern. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1991) presented an elaborated version of such a perspective. This includes institutions, organizations and social processes, all considered as the situated outcome or crystallization of “continual permutations of action” (Strauss, 1993) in social worlds. The interest in competing and maybe conflictual definitions of situations and their communication via narratives about “what is going on”, – counter-narratives being only one possibility amongst others –, the powers and resources implied, the socio-material effects or consequences of such competitions, became and has remained a core interest of associated work ever since (Keller, 2012a). Cases in point are studies on moral entrepreneurship, the careers of social problems, social movement research, or inquiry into public discourses and the “culture of public problems” (Gusfield, 1981).

In 1966, Berger and Luckmann established a systematic account of the dialectics between an historically established and objectified common social reality, and the “subjective realities”, experiences, worldviews and practices of individuals. The authors never conceived of it as a “constructivist statement”, but as “pure realism” (Pfadenhauer & Knoblauch, 2019). Their main ambition was to bring the sociology of knowledge down to earth, that is no-longer to direct its attention to the history of ideas, scientific knowledge or the *Weltanschauung* of large social

groups, but to “concern itself with everything that passes for ‘knowledge’ in society” (Berger & Luckmann, 1971, p. 26). This is about “what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. [...] It is precisely this ‘knowledge’ that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist” (ibid., p. 27). German sociologist Stephan Wolff stated that the book offers the most comprehensive and important theory of society as an effect of communication (Wolff, 1997, p. 50). Recently, it was re-interpreted as “communicative construction of reality” (e.g. Keller, Knoblauch & Reichertz, 2013; Knoblauch, 2019).

Berger and Luckmann accounted for the socio-historical processes of institutionalization of “objective reality” in social collectivities. They discussed modes of legitimation, such as “proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings [...] [or] symbolic universes” (ibid., pp. 112–113). And they pointed to the social-structural base for competition and conflict, including the resources of physical power to impose a particular definition of reality (ibid., p. 127), or the position of the “intellectual” as “the counter-expert in the business of defining reality” (ibid., p. 143). They then discussed how newcomers internalize “objective reality” via socialization and identity building and transform it into their personal “subjective reality”. They insist on the dialectics between those two faces of reality. Internalization is important in order to reproduce the “objective order of reality” by permanent action and interaction, including communication:

The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. [...] Thus an exchange such as. “Well, it’s time for me to get to the station”, and “Fine, darling, have a good day at the office”, implies an entire world *within which* these apparently simple propositions make sense. By virtue of this implication the exchange confirms the subjective reality of this world. [...] At the same time, that the conversational apparatus ongoingly maintains reality, it ongoingly modifies it. Items are dropped and added, weakening some sectors of what is still being taken for granted and reinforcing others. [...] We have seen how language objectifies the world, transforming the *panta rhei* of experience into a cohesive order. In the establishment of this order language *realizes* a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it. Conversation is the actualizing of this realizing efficacy of language in the face-to-face situations of individual existence.

(ibid., pp. 172–173)

Please note that “language” refers to signs and symbols, that is to shared meaning in a universe of discourse. Berger and Luckmann added an important argument to the Chicago tradition by referring to the social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz. He was interested in the transformation of embodied sensual experimentation into reflected, actual experience in the embodied consciousness. How come that you identify these black and white contrasts you are reading first as distinct from the chair you sit on, the tea cup next to you, then as black and white, as signs on paper or electronic devices, as signs of a language, this language as US-English, the meaning of words and sentences and so on. Mead explained how a newborn baby becomes a competent symbol user. But how is this competence at work in the present situation, here and now? Schütz called this capacity and process the “constitution of meaning” in the individual’s consciousness. It is not an arbitrary creation *ex nihilo*. He suggests that embodied minds use typified schemes of interpretation, to create order out of the chaos of sensual experience. Here he meets Mead: the individual embodied consciousness and human agency is a social given or effect of social structuration. Such schemes are available via social stocks of knowledge, which provide “objective realities”. They are situated historical crystallizations of problem-oriented interaction and interpretation. Individuals might add to the stock of knowledge by creating words and schemes, ways of doing, procedures and techniques, in order to name as yet uncommon experiences, new things like a

machine, a discovery, or new solutions to a problem they confront and so on. History, power, communication and other interactions will decide if they, or a group of actors, will be able to establish a new element, a new norm, a new interpretive scheme, a new motive for action, a new object, a new institutional device, a new narrative in the social stocks of knowledge. Occasions for competition between and conflict of interpretations abound. Unexpected problems of action, material or social objects that become obstacles, social norms that are “disregarded”, clashes of interest, uneasiness with attributed roles and social identities, confrontation with unfamiliar conditions or social worlds – all such “events” can become anchors and catalysts for interpretive struggle.

“Social construction” is about forms, processes and content of world making, which all imply large registers of regulation and instruction. Schütz and Luckmann pointed to the *economies of communication* of a historically situated social structuration, e.g. “a particular language structure and stratification”, or “the social regulation of” the “actual present use of the means of communication” in concrete situations (Schütz & Luckmann, 1989, pp. 155–156). Schütz even used the concept of “universe of discourse” in order to point, in an almost “Foucauldian” way, to such regulations for a newcomer in the field of mathematics:

[T]he scientist enters a pre-constituted world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science. [...] 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. [...]

(Schütz, 1973a, pp. 250–256)

Luckmann later showed a strong interest in communicative genres as elements of economies of communication. Communicative genres provide instructions for issues of communication. One example is the well-explored genre of narratives about religious conversion (Ulmer, 1988); another one is so-called conspiracy theory (Anton & Schetsche, 2014), a main genre for popular counter-narratives (“Armstrong never landed on the moon”; “Germany never became a republic”; “The elites and experts are the enemies of the good people”, etc.). There are structural features of populist narratives (right to left) as well as of narratives of emancipation and acknowledgement, of historical and national decline and so on. There are rhetorical forms like irony or drama and tragedy, there are the master-narratives of modernity identified by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), and a multiplicity of “minor” patterns for stories and scripts. These are all part of the social stocks of knowledge.

Andrew Abbott (1991) stated that “discourse” had replaced “social construction” as a key concept in the social sciences and humanities. This is mostly due to the influential contributions of Michel Foucault (Keller, 2019). In his book on methodology, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 2010), he defined scientific discourses as regulated practices of statement production, which constitute their objects as particular epistemic phenomena (cf. Foucault, 2001). *L'ordre du discours* (“The order of discourse”, translated into English under the inaccurate title “The discourse on language”; Foucault, 2010) presented elements of external and internal discourse regulation. The *Rivière Case* (Foucault, 1982) pointed to discourses as weapons or stakes in discursive struggles for the definition of situations, and thereby joins core interests of pragmatist sociology. Rivière, a young man, had lengthily confessed to killing his mother, sister and brother. A trial took place, involving different experts. Given his confession, was he “really” responsible for what he had done? Should he be considered sane, or insane? This question became the major concern between competing expert definitions of the situation. Rivière himself, and most medical, psychological and police experts confirmed his sanity. Yet one psychologist stated in his report that there were

obvious signs of insanity in Rivière's behavior. His expertise determined the outcome and proved to be highly consequential: Rivière was declared insane, and then sent to an asylum.

This case is not just about individual actors. Rather it is about performed expert systems, their established ways of knowing, rules of proof and evidence, that is *discourses*, realized in the confrontation by discursive performances. According to Foucault, even Rivière himself referred to a common public vocabulary of motives about (ruined) honor and its consequences.

Both symbolic interactionism as well as (critical) linguistics added to concepts and interests in such "meso-level" empirical discourse research. This is very different from the particular paradigm of "discourse analysis" rooted in pragmatist linguistics and conversation analysis, interested in the analysis of verbal interaction or talk in a given situation. Instead, such discourse research, which in itself is very multi-paradigmatic, is concerned with broader socio-historical contexts and struggles for definition in and between diverse social arenas (see Keller, 2013). Whatever theoretical and conceptual apparatus is used, whatever research questions are at stake, all such approaches are somehow interested in discursive struggles, the trajectories, competition and interplay between discourses (and counter-discourses), the means and the social effects of such constellations. A few approaches, inspired by the structural semiotics of Alexandre J. Greimas, argue for an elaborated approach of narrative (Viehöver, 2010, 2011; Arnold, Dressel & Viehöver, 2012). Others use a looser idea of "story lines" in order to point to storytelling and narrative in discourses (cf. Hajer, 1997; Keller, 1998). SKAD elaborates an observation by Stuart Hall (1997, p. 224) about the "affinities and continuities" between "Weber's classical interpretative 'sociology of meaning' and Foucault's emphasis on the role of the 'discursive'".

The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD)

SKAD's theoretical ground, concepts, methodology and methods build upon the pragmatist, interpretive and sociology of knowledge (including Foucault) traditions discussed above. Its main arguments have been presented in more detail in several books and articles (cf. the work of Keller and co-authors in the reference list). Only a few basic features can be elaborated in what follows. SKAD research is interested in relations of knowledge and knowing, and the politics of knowledge and knowing – that is in the ways "reality is made real", how the reality of reality is questioned and contested, and how new realities come into existence. It uses "knowledge" in the broad sense discussed above, and not only for the realm of science and technology studies. SKAD conceives of discourses as particular forms, levels and sets of processes of the social construction of reality. Discursive construction is performed by communicating social actors and their "serious" signifying acts, which they apply in emerging and ongoing concerns. This includes scientific, religious and political discourses in special arenas of society, as well as hybrid mixtures in public discourses in the media sphere, the patterns of discursive structuration being quite different.

Societies, organizations and social worlds discursively establish asymmetrical hierarchies of truth and (un-)certainty, belief systems, ideologies, religions, technical norms, moral orders and institutionalized claims defining reality "as it is", and what has to be done (next). Discursive construction happens in and in between religious, economic, scientific, political, special interest and public spheres. "Knowledge" here is the general term indicating that discursive meaning-making combines statements about the factuality of the world and the concrete issues, events and action problems at hand, with modes of knowing this by proof, evidence or belief, with legitimation, evaluation, moral and esthetic judgments, material effects and concrete devices to ground such claims. "Discursive" construction, or "discourse", refers to the idea that, despite the need for concrete actors to define a situation and to perform communication, such activities are not to

be attributed to individual capacities and agency, but rather to discursive structuration and discursive situational contexts. In the same way as langue is pre-existent to parole, but is performed, reproduced and transformed by parole, discourses are “pre-existent” to concrete speakers, their concerns and situations. But without them, they would not emerge, becoming established, real and consequential, or enter into competition and conflict.

A (particular) discourse then is a regulated, relational and serial practice of statement production, which constitutes its referential phenomena in particular ways and with particular means. A single (textual) document, even a speech, is not a discourse here. It is just a discursive event or set of singular utterances. Such a document establishes fragments of a discourse or a small arena of discursive competition in itself, like in media talk shows. Discourse research therefore is an art of deconstruction and reconstruction – *interpretive analytics*. Empirically, discourses are manifest in series of concrete utterances, ongoing communicative interventions such as speeches, lectures, leaflets, reports, TV shows, newspaper articles, blogs, all bound together by a particular set of instructions. Each discursive structuration has a proper historical, spatial and social trajectory. A single narrative account of “what is wrong here and now”, might well be its starting point. But only if it is picked up, performed in similar ways again and again (with variation and elaboration), does it become a manifest discursive form. Much like institutions, discourses come into the world as effects of social actors’ interactions, and the permutations of such interactions, by processes of institutionalization of particular modes of defining situations. SKAD grounds discourse theory and research in human performances of sign usage and discursive practice. Competent, skilled actors are seriously needed to perform discursive practices and thereby to make discourses real and manifest. They have to define a particular situation as an occasion for the performance of a particular discursive practice. They are not discursive marionettes, but actively engage in adapting and updating discursive instructions for statement production to the situation here and now. Consider discourses and counter-discourses about climate change and climate skepticism and the (non-) need for action, or the above-mentioned Rivière case. The basic condition is always the presence of performing actors, that is speakers of discourses. Such ongoing discursive meaning-making nourishes the collective stocks of knowledge, the interpretive schemes, values and grounds for action that people use in their everyday life, identity work and sense-making. It may successfully establish institutional resources or devices, a proper infrastructure or “dispositive” of statement production (as in scientific disciplines or religions). It may identify some urgencies, problems for action and (moral) concern, and then establish devices for intervention, such as taxes, objects, tests, actors and practices – a dispositive of world intervention. SKAD research interested in such dispositive structures uses ethnography.

The levels of discursive structuration might be less formal too. A small group of actors with a common concern can successfully establish a particular discourse or counter-discourse, by intervention into informal settings and local public spheres, by organizing bigger events (like manifestations) and creating public awareness, and by using social media. Social movements are cases in point here.

SKAD discourse research starts with an informed interest in a case, and with questions about a concrete discursive struggle, process, a conflictual event and so on (see Keller, Hornidge & Schünemann, 2018, for examples). How many discourses can then be identified, how and by what means they perform, how they relate (in ignorance, indifference, competition, coalition by effect or intent, or confrontation) and with what effects? These are empirical/analytical questions (and issues of the sociological imagination). There might be only one (hegemonic) discourse or several competing discourses, some marginalized, excluded or silenced ones, and some that are, for better or worse, in a relation of conflict as counter-discourses. They draw upon different resources for meaning-making, and generate different outcomes or “power effects”.

SKAD research (like other research) performs a discourse about discourses, a second order observation of “discursive reality” which in itself has to be understood by the very basic acts of defining a situation (for inquiry), by making use of available interpretive tools. Discourse research is interpretation – there is no way out. Such interpretation is guided by methodological reflection and transparency, especially by sequential analysis, a device designed to inform data analysis in particular ways. SKAD then uses further methods of interpretive research, such as theoretical sampling in corpus building, document analysis and category building. It thereby fills the methodological black box in Foucault’s work.

SKAD proposes a set of heuristic tools for concrete research. First, the human factor: individual or organized (collective) *social actors* can be involved in a discursive conflict or structuration as *speakers* and performers of particular statement practices. Around a discursive arena, there might also be *potential speakers* or *excluded and silent actors* who do not show up despite their having stakes in an ongoing concern. Discourses often imply different *subject positions*. They may include processes of *othering* (who are the others) and “*selfing*” (who are we), templates for *model subjects* (the good environmental citizen) and *implied subjects* (“in the name of women”), which, following a discursive articulation, may organize and become real speakers. *Subjectification* refers to the particular forms and ways social actors interpret the model subjects in question. We should not confuse discursive articulation with concrete effects in a field of concern.

Discourses then are material, performed in concrete *discursive practices* of statement production, with a little help from *non-discursive practices* and other resources related to them (like collecting waste). And they might articulate some *model practices* or *templates for action* (e.g., how to govern a company in heavy waters).

Forms or modes of knowledge and *justification* are further elements: How is a speaker authorized? What kind of knowledge comes into play? How do different forms of evaluation and judgment (by “factual” data, moral values, esthetic reflection, religious beliefs) intervene and combine? Several *mappings* or *cartographies* of *actors*, *arenas*, *discourse coalitions*, and *discourse trajectories* account for the discursive structuration analyzed.

Utterances are the concrete singular data “givens” of discourse. SKAD’s interpretive analytics uses concepts from sociology of knowledge in order to analyze the “*statement*” or “*pattern*” part in such data, which allows us to identify different utterances (single data) as being performances of the very same discursive structuration, despite their obvious different and singular concrete Gestalt. One such concept is the *interpretive scheme*, which organizes meaning, norms and action in a typical way (e.g. “technological risk”, usable for very different technologies and situations). *Classifications* are consequential devices, which constitute and order experiences into categories. *Phenomenal structure(s)* refers to the way in which a discourse constitutes its core phenomenon, its dimensions and the articulation of these dimensions at a given moment, including, for example, references to causes, responsibility, model subjects, values, othering. According to SKAD, *narratives* (story lines) organize the different means of interpretation into a story to be told: of what happened or what is to come, of responsibility and irresponsibility, of urgency and need for action, of common concern or unacceptable particular interest, and so on. Interpretive schemes, classifications and phenomenal structures are not just loosely assembled elements of discursive structuration. They are composed into comprehensive, competing stories to be told, into competing narratives (and maybe counter-narratives) accounting for what is at stake. This implies that narrative and story-telling is part of discursive construction. Addressing this narrative dimension via “discourse” relates to power/knowledge, to repetition and structuration of such “*mises en intrigue*” (Paul Ricoeur), to the field of actors and symbolic-material resources involved, to the disciplining mechanisms of discursive structuration, to the complexities and trajectories of a given discursive-situational process and constellation.

A particular study will use only some elements of SKAD heuristics, according to its concrete research design and interests. SKAD has to be articulated towards concrete concerns for the research cases at hand. It encourages researchers to consider what a given process of discursive meaning-making “is a case of”. Analysis does not stop with a descriptive account of “what happened”, but should offer a more general, theoretical reflection on the implications, mechanisms and dynamics observed.

SKAD and narrative

SKAD has been applied across disciplines and to a broad range of topics (see Keller, Hornidge & Schünemann, 2018; Bosančić & Keller, 2016; Keller & Truschkat, 2012). Studies most often use textual data, sometimes audiovisual or visual data, or ethnography (Keller, 2016). Recent work addresses issues of critique (Keller, 2017) or the challenges created by new materialism (Keller, 2019). Questions of narrative and counter-narrative have been analyzed in SKAD research under the terms of discourses and counter-discourses. The main SKAD theory book (Keller, 2005, Chapter 5.2) discusses at length the role of competing narrations of control and danger in risk society. Further examples can be found in the literature referred to. My own comparative work on waste discourses, for example, identified a situation of hegemonic public discursive structuration in France, including a marginalized counter-discourse, and a highly equal public presence of two opposing discourses in Germany, each of them telling a particular story about the present situation of waste, and about what has to be done or not done, in order to save the future (Keller, 2018). For Germany, I established a distinction between a “structural-conservative” discourse, insisting on the established capitalist market economy as a core principle, and a counter-discourse of “cultural critique”, struggling for new social structuration on the basis of a different cultural setting of needs and consumption. Whilst German discourses focused on the pros and cons of an announced catastrophic collapse, the hegemonic French discourse performed the ritual of regularly repeating the state’s civilizational mastery over nature, waste and risk. Then, Wolf Schünemann and I discussed narrative nationalism from a SKAD perspective (Keller & Schünemann, 2016). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. XII) strongly emphasized the role of relations of knowledge for social transformation in post- and de-colonial times. Inquiry into discourses and the politics of knowledge and meaning-making is a good point of entry in such a claim, and one way of addressing questions of “narrative” and “counter-narrative” on local and global levels.

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