3   The symbolic construction of spaces

Perspectives from a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse

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Introduction

Spatial and urban research have for some time now been using the concept of discourse, in the sense of contemporary discourse research. A keyword investigation of the specialist journal *Urban Studies* shows that, in older numbers, the term "discourse" was indeed being used, but more in the context of book discussions, or to characterize a speech, a position, or a single thematic discussion. In 1993, however, a rather different focus emerged. In a text on urban marketing there is mention of discourses, and the increasing understanding that cities must, and do, also live from their symbolic construction and their image. Then, in 1999, *Urban Studies* devoted an entire special issue to the significance of discourses for urban and spatial research. Since then, very many studies have appeared that deal with discourses on the city in general or on individual cities in particular, or which also focus on particular urban districts.

The fact that "natural" and "human" spaces are *also* always symbolic constructions and orders has, of course, long been known to social science spatial and urban research. Here it has no need of the visions of urban planners or architects, or of political projects concerned with spatial ordering. In sociology this was most emphatically stated by the Chicago School in the first third of the 20th century: "The city is a state of mind" was an early dictum of Robert E. Park, the principal advocate of this position. This is not only reminiscent of Georg Simmel's article on "Die Großstadt und das Geistesleben" (The metropolis and mental life), in which Simmel analyses how the increase in the density and speed of human encounters in the everyday life of cities leads to a particularly "blasé" state of mind; it also suggests that the city, its neighborhoods, buildings, streets, and squares, are always involved in relations of meaning. In the 1960s, for example, Anselm Strauss, a member of the second generation of Chicago sociologists, made a number of attempts to put the imaginary of cities and the urban environment on the sociological agenda. "The city, then", he writes in 1961, "sets problems of meaning. The streets, the people, the buildings, and the changing scenes do not come already labelled. They require explanation and interpretation" (Strauss 1961, 12). And some pages later he says: "The city, I am suggesting, can be viewed as a complex related set of symbolized areas"

(Strauss 1961, 59). In *Images of the American City* (Strauss 1961) and *The American City: A Sourcebook of Urban Imagery* (Strauss 1968), he discusses and illustrates the meaning of the symbolic orders in the urban setting, in the pictures, myths, and imagination that link people with places.

The reference to the symbolic orders of spaces in no way means that we dispense with analyzing interests and their role in the construction of spaces. For instance, the variety of urban research with a Marxist provenance following the ideas of Henri Lefebvre has emphasized this repeatedly. Nor does this reference imply that we forget the analysis of the materialities that we encounter in the form of "natural" or "artificial" spaces. To see this, we have no need of the more recent actor-network theory. Indeed, it is rather the case that Michel Foucault, with his concept of *dispositif*, already made available for us the appropriate conceptual tools for dealing with the symbolic and the material in spatial analysis; for example, where he investigates the panoptic organization and rationale of prison buildings or hospitals. The fact that spaces are symbolic locations is perhaps nowhere made clearer than in his references to "other spaces", social heterotopias and the anxieties, hopes, and desires that arise there (Foucault 1984/1982, 1986; Keller 2018).

In this chapter, however, I wish to make a plea for the use of the term "discourse" for the investigation of the symbolic order of space (and thereby also of the urban setting). To my mind, the essential advantages of this are in treating symbolic order not just as a pure (hyper)textual practice of sign usage, but in providing an analytical vocabulary that is able to make use of the concept of *dispositif* (often translated as "apparatus") and thereby to address and examine the concrete materiality of symbolic orders as well. Of course it must also be made clear what application of the term "discourse" is being used. Indeed, today it is less possible than ever before to assume that with the terms "discourse" and "discourse research", we are dealing with an unambiguous object and a clear research perspective. If we leave aside Habermas' normative discourse ethics or "discourse analysis" as a type of conversation analysis that concentrates on the sequence and the coordination of linguistic interaction, then both internationally and in the German social science context, there are still several very differently focused perspectives in the form of *Kritische Diskursanalyse/critical discourse analysis*, discourse analysis based on hegemony theory, discursive institutionalism, and the approaches that derive, to a greater or lesser extent, from Foucault. And here we are not including the very complex situation that prevails in discourse linguistics. In the present context, we shall not consider any of these approaches. This chapter represents, rather, a genuine sociology of knowledge perspective on discourse research (a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, SKAD), developed by the author in the German-speaking sphere at the end of the 1990s and since adopted in sociology as well as many related disciplines (Keller 2010; Keller and Truschkat 2012; Keller 2011; Keller, Hornidge, and Schünemann 2018).

The research program of SKAD embeds the discourse perspective in the social constructivism founded in the 1960s by Peter L. Berger and Thomas

Luckmann (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This facilitates the avoidance of a variety of bottlenecks and problems that are found in the other perspectives mentioned above: *Kritische Diskursanalyse* and critical discourse analysis have both developed ideologically critical projects that focus predominantly on language use. They pursue a gesture of exposure, which draws attention, from the position of observer that they adopt, to places where a concealed interest in domination (e.g. by capitalism, fascism, racism) lurks in the spoken word. Perspectives from hegemony theory in discourse research employ a relatively narrow conceptual repertoire to reconstruct the genesis and structuring of symbolic orders with a claim to hegemony; that is, with a claim to represent the general good. This very severely limits the perspective of discourse research to the analysis of antagonistic constellations, where all parties claim to represent the whole. Discursive institutionalism, in turn, is inclined to overemphasize the significance and role of individual actors in the discourse process, or else to restrict the question of change in political processes to the discursive power of individuals. And research based on Foucault remains, as a rule, very vague and opaque in respect of its actual empirical procedure.

The sociology of knowledge approach presented below hopefully avoids these limitations. It introduces a theoretical and conceptual framework for social science discourse research that does not imply any strongly discourse-theoretical determination, but rather offers a heuristic of analysis that remains receptive to the empirically very different mechanisms, dynamics, and sequencing of discourse processes. The embedding we shall undertake of the discourse perspective into social constructivism brings discourse research back to Foucault's questions about the social functioning of power/knowledge regimes, or alternatively it places the analyses of knowledge processes in a central position. It allows one, in addition, to relate to the methodological developments of interpretive and qualitative social research, which on the one hand reflect the position of the investigator and on the other hand maintain transparency in the processing of empirical databases. There now follows a brief clarification of the starting point in social constructivism, and this in turn is followed by a short discussion of Foucault's understanding of discourse and the main concepts and procedures of SKAD. Finally, there is a brief consideration of how the suggested perspective might be used to investigate the discursive order of the spatial dimension.

Social constructivism

The classic sociological study *The Social Construction of Reality*, authored by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966, brought together several sociological and philosophical traditions (elements of sociology of knowledge in Durkheim, Mannheim, Marx, and Weber, the philosophical anthropology of Plessner and Gehlen, Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, and arguments from symbolic interactionism) in a fundamental theory of the sociology of knowledge, which views society from two perspectives: as objective reality and

as subjective reality. It stresses the interactive production and establishment of knowledge and symbolic orders and their typification, stabilization, routinization, habitualization, and institutionalization. At the same time, institutional orders are symbolic orders accompanied by the most varied kinds of legitimization theory that explain why reality is the way it is. Every social order, every institutional order, every symbolic order of materialities is the result of complex historical production processes where, in particular, communicative elements of action and interaction play a central role. They may be understood as a complex socio-historically consolidated and changeable structure of collective knowledge that is always more or less stabilized, contested, and undergoing change. The high significance of the communicative elements – and recently there has also been reference to "communicative constructivism" (Keller, Knoblauch, and Reichertz 2013) – is essentially derived from the meaning of the sign-based appresentation of knowledge and symbolic orders. Signs, which we use for orientation in realities and to exchange with others, are socially crystallized and typified carriers of meaning. They are viewed here as typified forms that we again use to relate to or access the reality of the world. They come from complex social interaction processes and are temporarily stabilized in social universes of discourse so that human actors can use them to transform their personal lived experience (*Erleben*) into reflexively accessible experience (*Erfahrung*), to forge action plans, to interpret situations in which they find themselves, and to produce interactive integration of actions. The concept of knowledge, in turn, relates to everything that is accepted as "existing". This includes beliefs as much as natural laws or the orientation patterns that we use in our everyday lives. "Knowledge", therefore, refers to what humans use for orientation in the world, and in no sense to what has established itself in complex social processes as tested, "true", or "proven". Knowledge also includes routinized physical skills, social institutions such as marriage, ideas such as freedom, political ideologies, or large-scale (especially social-science-based) theoretical constructions to explain the world. It materializes in the form of texts, rituals, objects: a law, a funeral service, a ring, an underground network, and so on. The social construction of reality is a lasting and ongoing process of constant performative production; it is not at all a question of the intentional result of individual efforts, but much more of a byproduct of collective life.

We may beat our heads against symbolic orders just as much as against the materiality of a wall. For "newcomers", the socially produced institutions and reality orders seem to be something that confronts them with claims to validity and conformity – although, from a historical point of view, it is a question of constructs produced by humans. With objects, this is probably clearer in the first instance. The pot that someone has designed, and someone else has made, can be used by me as long as I orient myself to what the pot provides me with in terms of its form, size, and material properties – although these do not "force" me to use it in a particular way (I can, for example, misuse it as a musical instrument, or I can warm up milk, peas, or socks in it). But if I want to cook with it, I have to include its properties in my orientation and action plans (Keller

2019). What is true of objects and artefacts is equally true of institutions and the knowledge that they manifest:

> This acquired objectivity of man's cultural products pertains both to the material and the non-material ones. It can readily be understood in the case of the former. Man manufactures a tool and by that action enriches the totality of physical objects present in the world. Once produced, the tool has a being of its own that cannot be readily changed by those who employ it. Indeed, the tool (say, an agricultural implement) may even enforce the logic of its being upon its users, sometimes in a way that may not be particularly agreeable to them. For instance, a plow, though obviously a human product, is an external object not only in the sense that its users may fall over it and hurt themselves as a result, just as they may be falling over a rock or a stump or any natural object. More interestingly, the plow may compel its users to arrange their agricultural activity, and perhaps also other aspects of their lives, in a way that conforms to *its* own logic and that may have been neither intended nor foreseen by those who originally devised it. The same objectivity, however, characterizes the non-material elements of culture as well.
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> (Berger 1967, 9)

Via socialization processes and permanent communication, societies or social collectives provide their members – especially newcomers – with the "correct" knowledge of the world; that is to say, with the main elements of a reality order that is then acquired as existing in one (and only one!) particular way rather than any other. This world knowledge also incorporates the relevant self-perception of having a particular "self", of belonging here or somewhere else, of being able and obliged to act in this or that way, of being able to justify something in one way or another, of being able to desire one person or another, and so on. Of course, the elements and levels of this world of knowledge, or social stock of knowledge, differ according to their degree of freedom, and much is admitted or hindered by the quality of the world that we characterize today as physical. You cannot fly without assistance. You rarely doubt that trains or roads exist. You see that in politics, totally different and conflicting claims are made about the state of our society. Your neighbor believes in UFOs, whereas you only believe the earth is flat. But all of these are specifications within a more or less common "universe of discourse" – a term from pragmatic sociology and philosophy – a meaning horizon of shared and differentiated significances, within which there may well be irreconcilable niches but all depend on the same world of signs.

One essential advantage of the co-constitutional position developed by Berger and Luckmann is that they do not simply divide the origin and effect of processes of social structuring into action and emergent effects but, rather, against the accepted dualisms of the Durkheim tradition on the one hand and the Weber tradition on the other, and in agreement with Karl Marx, they emphasize active human behavior in social production. And they do not

deny emergent effects that have to be consolidated in institutions and role relationships, embodied in action and "carried out", in order to be effective in reality. In addition, one invaluable advantage of this foundation for the sociology of knowledge is that it orients sociology of knowledge research according to the methodology and methods of qualitative or interpretative social research. Where the world appears to us to be a meaningful order which must be interpreted and which can be changed by interpretation, a social science hermeneutics (Hitzler and Honer 1997) is needed to underpin the foundations of its own interpretive procedures.

Berger and Luckmann, however, in their basic work, proposed an unnecessary and far-reaching strategy when they required that sociology of knowledge should address first and foremost the paramount everyday reality of humans; that is, the ways in which social reality is experienced, lived, produced, and changed in their everyday lives. This had far-reaching consequences, because the ensuing research (with the exception of Berger and Luckmann themselves and sociological neo-institutionalism) was indeed interested primarily in knowledge phenomena at the micro level (e.g. in interactions, small groups, life-world arrangements). This positioning was unnecessary because it seriously restricted the investigative horizon that had been opened up by these authors, even though, at the same time, the importance of meso- and macrostructural levels of knowledge production (for instance, in the shape of scientific or religious knowledge) could not and cannot be denied for actors in everyday life (see Christmann 2016, 2022; Christmann, Knoblauch, and Löw 2022).

Discourses

The work of Michel Foucault is, without doubt, the primary source of inspiration for present-day social science discourse research. For example, his history of science study *Les Mots et les Choses* (*The Order of Things*) published in 1966 (Foucault 1991/1966), together with *L'Archéologie du savoir* (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*) from 1969 (Foucault 2010/1969), provide the governing idea for a type of discourse research that analyses the historical rules of knowledge production, with the support of archives or textual materials or corpora. Foucault's essential achievement here is to define discourses as practices that produce the things about which they speak. With this a further variety of social constructivism is launched that establishes the construction of the world in the practice of making statements about the world. In his *Archaeology* (Foucault 2010/1969), a number of conceptual suggestions are developed for this purpose (e.g. discursive formation, statement) that Foucault himself does not in fact subsequently use. Where he does use the term "discourse" again, this is on the one hand to emphasize more strongly the connection between knowledge and power in the structuring of what can be said (*L'ordre du discours* [the order of discourse]; this book has been translated as *The Discourse on Language*, Foucault 2010/1972) and on the other hand to treat discourses as contributions to social conflicts of meaning-making. It is just this latter perspective, present in *I, Pierre*

Rivière (Foucault 1982/1973), that is often omitted in discussions of Foucault's work. Here, together with a group of collaborators, Foucault analyses a spectacular murder case from the early 19th century. In this collection of historical documents, the murderer's own account and confession is contrasted with various police, psychiatric, and court reports, and these come to very different assessments of the mental capabilities of the accused. It is therefore a matter of competing definitions of the situation and a conflict of interpretations, the outcome of which has many consequences. This characterization of discourses as fighting parties in "games of truth" (Michel Foucault) is important in that it brings the term close to sociological interest in social conflicts and problem definitions, thereby giving the participating actors and their statements a higher value than it seemed likely to be the case with *The Archaeology of Knowledge* a few years earlier.

However, the immensely rich work of Foucault does lack a number of elements that are important for an empirical approach to discourse analysis. It does not develop any theory of the sign or the use of signs, even though statements, which he defines as the core elements of discourses – all take the form of signs. In addition there is no methodology for data assessment – that is, for the reconstruction of statements and discourses; in this case more recent social science hermeneutics and the ideas formulated there on the theory of interpretation can give helpful pointers. Finally, the role of social actors in the processes of problematization that interested him is not really discussed to any depth.

The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse

Integrating a discourse perspective derived from Foucault into social-constructivist sociology of knowledge allows one, on the one hand, to overcome the above-mentioned gaps in Foucault's program and, on the other hand, to make a contribution to compensating for the social-constructivist neglect of knowledge processes at the social meso and macro levels. SKAD refers to a social science research program for the analysis of social relations of knowledge and all kinds of politics of knowledge and meaning-making (Keller 2010/2005, 2011; Keller, Hornidge, and Schünemann 2018). In and by means of discourses, the sociocultural meaning and facticity of physical and social realities are constituted by social actors through the use of language or symbols. In SKAD, the main focus is on the investigation of these processes of the social construction of interpretive and action structures (knowledge regimes, knowledge policies) at the level of institutions, organizations, or collective actors, and on investigating the social effects of these processes (e.g. Keller 1998). Discourses may be understood as structured and structuring attempts to create and stabilize meanings, or in general terms as more or less far-reaching symbolic orders, that thereby attempt to institutionalize a fixed meaning relation, an order of knowledge, for specific fields of practice in social collectives. The discursive construction of reality constitutes an (eminently important) extract from what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) called the "social construction of

reality". SKAD's location of discourse analysis in Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge aims to analyze discourses not in isolation as a semiotic processing system, but as social practice. Competing definitions of reality and the derivative institutional orders or social infrastructures (such as *dispositifs*, speaker positions, practices, subject positions, and objects) may count as social "engagement" of discourses or as an example of discursive combats around meaning-making and world-making. The speaker positions that occur and perform discursive events and practices in such conflicts and the corresponding discourse arenas are not "masters of the universe of discourse", but are (co-)constituted by the existing structures of discursive orders or formations. And yet in no sense do they behave as discourse marionettes, but rather as intelligently interested bearers of statements, as articulators with more or less strong potential in terms of resources and creativity. The symbolic orders that are thereby produced and transformed constitute the aggregated effects of their action; clear and temporary dominances or hegemonies are rare constellations that cannot be empirically excluded.

The concept of "social relations of knowledge" was reinvented with regard to Ulrich Beck's concept of "relations of definition", a term that was formulated with regard to risk conflicts and risk discourses, and alluded to Karl Marx's "relations of production". Social relations of knowledge are the socially produced and historically situated configurations of claims of reality, or facticity and normativity, that span the local, national, transnational, and global horizon of what is seen as "social reality". This also includes, apart from the factual, the true, and the correct, definitions of what is beautiful, possible, good, bad, supernatural, transcendental, and so on. These kinds of relations of knowledge all occur as "objective reality". But like relations of production, they are an externalized product of human and socialized activity. They structure interpretations and modes of action, insofar as they are "realized" by social actors in appropriate acts of translation. And they can be changed by human, social practice, by events and problematizations. The concept of social relations of knowledge, therefore, incorporates what Michel Foucault understood as power-knowledge regimes. Concerning politics of knowledge, there is talk of sticking to two ideas: first, the process-and-change character of knowledge relations (it is always a matter of only temporary and only relatively stable constellations), and second, the active role of social actors who are concerned, in the context of problem areas and the processing of events, with production and change of relations of knowledge. Politics of knowledge, therefore, are not limited to the usually suspicious area of the political, nor are they reduced to conflicts about risky (technological) developments. Politics of knowledge policies take place, rather, in the most varied social fields of action, such as when some neighborhood community engages in collecting data about traffic, pollution, or gentrification, in order to make cases against the city's officials. They are an expression of the conflict-ridden and controversial nature of the social construction of reality. Objects of SKAD are, in Foucault's understanding, both general-public and special-interest discourses. They are investigated with regard to their speakers and agencies,

their means, strategies, or patterns for meaning-making and establishing claims, and the effects of these. The analysis of special-interest discourses and the analysis of public discourses are both based on "rules" and resources; that is to say, on discourse structures that underlie the individual discursive events. Public discourses also consist of statement events that occur in widely differing places and times. They display typifiable regularities and may be understood – even if not as immediate interactions under conditions of co-presence – as processes of negotiation about the definition of the situation (Thomas and Thomas 1928). Here, we are not suggesting a process of argumentative consensus formation in the sense of Habermas' discourse ethics. "Negotiation" means, rather, conflictual constellations, a fight about the "reality of reality" which – using the most varied resources – is conducted as a symbolic battle. In this process, specific discourse coalitions and actors may gain the advantage over others. But the discursive formations that are found here cannot be understood (or if so, only in borderline cases) as the intended and controlled effect of individual actors. Both types of discourse – special-interest discourses and general-public discourses – are regarded by SKAD as discursive formations. Their "rules" and resources of meaning-making, their socio-historically situated protagonists, the knowledge that is codified in them, and its effects are all investigated.

Heuristics of analysis

SKAD proposes a number of terms to investigate the assumed existence of an actual formation of statements for the analyzable content of a discourse. The term *discourse* itself characterizes a structuring relationship that underlies scattered discursive events. It is precisely this that the concept of discourse is aiming for: providing a term for typifying disparate empirical and – if viewed as events – singular statements. The unity of the structuring relationship (i.e. the discourse) is a basic assumption in discourse observation, an indispensable research hypothesis. In the numerous but finite sequence of actual utterances (communications) discourse structures are reproduced and transformed by social actors through the contingency of the historical-situational conditions and concrete actions, while such actors pursue their particular everyday business in a more or less enthusiastic way and more or less in agreement. Discursive orders are the results of a *permanent communicative production* in singular speech and action events which form a series of discourse acts of a particular kind. These, however, are not understood as spontaneous and chaotic phenomena, but as interrelated, co-referencing, and structured practices. With this definition, discourses are interpreted as instances of factual, manifest, observable, and describable social practice in social arenas that is present in the most varied natural documents, in oral and written uses of language, in images, and – more generally – in signs. The realization of discourses takes place to a great extent in the communicative action of social actors. They underlie this action as orientation, and in this way become "real" as a structural and signification relationship. A leaflet, a newspaper article, or a speech in the context of a demonstration

may exemplify a discourse of city politics in various concrete forms and with differing empirical range, but with the same statement value. Qualitatively important transformations of discourses may, in very rare cases, be related to a single event of this sort. Much more frequently, they arise from the sum total of discrepancies in a kind of change from the quantitative to the qualitative effect. Discursive events, actors, practices, *dispositifs*, and patterns of meaning-making thus constitute the components in the materiality of discourses. For that reason, they are briefly discussed here.[1]

(a) *Discursive events* (statement events): These constitute the typifiable material form of statements in which a discourse takes shape. An *utterance* (*énonciation*), in Foucault's sense, is the concrete semiotic or communicative event, and in itself it is unique and unrepeatable. In contrast to this, *statement* (*énoncé*) refers to the level of the typical and typifiable: The same statement can be found in quite different utterances and situationally unique forms. Singular linguistic utterances contain discourse fragments. Without statement events, there are no discourses; without discourses, statement events cannot be understood, typified, and interpreted and so cannot constitute any collective reality. Peter Wagner (1990), following Anthony Giddens, talks of "discourse structuring" when the empirical typifiable form of this kind of structural relationship gradually emerges from the scattered statement events. This type of structure is therefore both structured, as a result of past processes of structure formation, and structuring, in respect of the scope of future discursive events. What actually happens is not a direct consequence of structural patterns and rules, but the result of the actively interpretive behavior of social actors using these orientation patterns. The rules guarantee the common ground, the connection between interactive and communicative processes. Their realization depends on a (comparatively) creative and performative act on the part of the social actors who depend on resources, and use, interpret, and further develop them for their practical purposes, strategies, tactics, and contexts in order to carry out their "moves". We may therefore summarize discourses as follows: They make available normative rules for the (formal) mode of statement production (e.g. legitimate communicative genres); they provide rules of signification for the discursive constitution of the meaning of phenomena; and they mobilize action resources and material resources (*dispositifs*) for the creation and dissemination of meanings.

(b) *Social actors*: in their discursive practice, social actors *make use of* the rules and resources for the production of interpretations that are available in the form of discourses or they react to them as *addressees*. Only then does it become clear how we arrive at a more or less creative execution of such practices. SKAD does not focus on the (social) phenomenological reconstruction of typifiable acts of conscious performance. Nor does it target "actual" motivations or the (inner) subjectivity of the producers of statements. Instead it remains on the surface of what is stated. But it is not overly hasty to confuse the discourse level as a constraint on the possibilities and limitations of utterances with the actual interpretive and action practices of social actors. Social actors are addressees of stocks of knowledge and the embodied values, but they are also, in accordance with

the social-historical and situated conditions, *self-reflective subjects* who – in their everyday sense-making and meaningful behavior – interpret social stocks of knowledge as sets of rules in a more or less independent way (Hitzler, Reichertz, and Schröer 1999, 11 ff.). Social actors (whether individual or collective) are related to discourses in several ways: As those who adopt *speaker positions* (i.e. *statement producers*) and speak within a discourse, as *addressees of the statement practice*, and finally as implicit "talked about" actors, (re)presented and positioned in and by the discourse at hand. The distinction between social actors, who exist, in the first instance, independently of or outside discourses, and their "discourse-specific" configuration, which is effected in the form of adopting speaker positions that were prepared or "conquered" in discourses, is helpful to social science discourse research. Only in this way can we be aware that speakers in a discourse do not turn up out of nowhere, that they are never involved in it in their "entirety", or that not every social actor can adopt a concrete speaker position. The sociological vocabulary of institutions, organizations, roles, and strategies of individual or collective *but always social actors* may be used for the relevant analysis of the structuring of speaker positions in discourses. They may also bring about a transformation of the structural conditions through their reflexive and practical interpretations.

With reference to the *addressing of human actors* that is undertaken in discourses at the level of their structuring of knowledge, one may speak of different *subject positions*. Here social actors are "called upon" in different ways – for example, as instigators of problems, problem figures, objects of essential intervention, or potential customers in need of specific services. The different possibilities of participation that can be formulated in the context of urban spatial politics constitute, in this sense, subject positions for involvement. Another example of this might be the talk of tourists or investors who find one or the other feature attractive in a particular city and who ought to be appropriately attracted or encouraged in their wishes. The manner in which addressees who are spoken to like this adopt appropriate subject positions, or "subjectify" themselves in terms of their elements and rationalities, is therefore not preordained, but merits targeted investigations. Between the discursively constituted or implicit self and the actual empirical modes of subjectification there is an important difference. In this, *dispositifs* play a major role; that is to say, the institutional and organizational infrastructures offering concrete situative settings for relevant types of programming in the shape of buildings, trainers, round tables, demonstrations, seminars, technologies of the self, practical guides, laws, participants, and so on.

As role players in or addressees of discourses, social actors then pursue institutional (discursive) interests as well as personal "projects" and "needs". In this, they use both legitimate and illegitimate strategies, tactics, and resources for action. But what is pursued as an interest, motive, need, or goal is equally the result of collective bodies of knowledge and discursive configurations, in the same way as the perception and assessment of the ways and means that are used. This should in no way be confused with the control of sequences of action or discourse production by actors and their intentions. Of course, habitually or

deliberately completed actions take place under structural conditions, or rely on them, even though these were not produced or controlled by the actors themselves. And of course, equally obviously, action has both intended and unintended, or foreseen and unforeseen, consequences, and as structural effects these become preconditions for subsequent actions.

SKAD therefore suggests the following basic conceptual distinctions for the "human factor" in doing discourses:

- (individual or collective) *social actors*, who are socially constituted and who function (temporarily) as *speakers or addressees* in discourses;
- the *speaker positions* that are made available in discourses;
- the additional *personnel of discourse production* and *world intervention* that is related to the *dispositifs* of a discourse;
- the *subject positions* that are made available in discourses;
- the concrete *modes of subjectification*, with which social actors as addressees adopt such subject positions in (maybe rather selective) "ways of their own".

(c) *Practices*: The term *practices* is used to characterize generally conventionalized action patterns that are made available in collective stocks of knowledge as an action repertoire; that is, a more or less explicitly conscious and frequently incorporated knowledge of prescriptions or scripts about the "appropriate" manner for performing actions. This knowledge may arise, on the one hand, in areas of social practice – that is to say, with reference to specific action problems or causes – by means of experimental or scrutinizing actions. And it may then establish itself there and develop further. Under modern conditions of social de-traditionalizing as well as extended observation and the reform of social practice based on expert systems, this is also guided, in certain essential elements, by the elaboration of theoretical models of action (Giddens 1991). For the purposes of SKAD research, it is helpful to distinguish the following forms of practices.

Discursive practices refer to performed patterns of communication that are involved in a discourse context. In discourse research, unlike in linguistic genre research, these are not only of interest in respect to their formal sequential structure but also very much on account of the formation rules distinguished by Foucault, their use by social actors, and their function in discourse production. Discursive practices are observable and describable typical modes of action in statement production (communication), the execution of which, as a concrete action, requires the interpretive competence of social actors, and which is actively formed by social actors. This is similar to the relationship between a statement (as the "type" dimension) and a singular concrete utterance ("the token"). In the context of the orders and orderings of space (what Martina Löw calls "spacing", cf. Löw 2001) that we are interested in here, we may cite as examples the production of media reports or pamphlets, but also draft legislation in provincial parliaments, the formulation of questions at public hearings, or the different textual genres on the web which present visions and experiences of a

concrete city.² While such discursive performances are more or less part of the public sphere, more special-interest discourses occur in "closed arenas" such as a city's development department or in academic urban sociology, smart city promotion hubs, etc.

SKAD makes a conceptual distinction between these practices and so-called *discourse-generated model practices*; that is, sample patterns for actions that are constituted in discourses for their addressees. These include, for example – if we stick to the example given above – recommendations for good or even "best practice" in citizens' participation in political and administrative decision-making and regulations for "correct use of space" (where it is or is not permitted to organize a barbecue or drink alcohol, where nudity is or is not permitted, what the correct way to ride a bicycle is, how one behaves appropriately in a public space, what type of participation is or is not acceptable, and so on). As with the subject positions mentioned above, one should not be overly hasty here in proceeding from a model practice to its actual realization.

Finally, a third type of practice is sometimes important, and this – in relation to whatever discourse is of interest – may be described as practices which exist before a given discursive concern in a variety of social fields. To clarify this with a further example: If assemblies of people (lectures or discussions) are an important form of discursive practice in local politics, they only work if people can be present. This assumes, for example, that comprehensive technologies of mobility and associated practices are also in place (flying, taking the train, buying tickets, and so on), but it is difficult to describe these as practices of a local-political discourse (in fact, they might be the result of discursive meaning-making performed long ago about future traffic infrastructures). But since such forms of practice may, in particular cases, be important for questions of discourse research (for instance, in the transition of modes of communication to Internet culture) they are also kept in mind by SKAD.

(d) *Dispositifs*: Discourses react to (more or less) self-constituted problems of meaning and action. In the context of their own processing, or prompted by discourse-external "problems", they produce "definitions of the situation" and thereby bring together concepts of action. The social actors who are carriers of a discourse create an appropriate infrastructure of discourse production and problem-solving that may be characterized by the term *dispositif* (I prefer this term instead of "apparatus"). *Dispositifs* are the real means through which a discourse exerts power. *Dispositifs*, as "instances" of discourse, mediate between discourses and fields of practice. A *dispositif* is either the institutional totality of the material, action-practical, personal, cognitive, and normative *infrastructure* of the production of a discourse or the *implementation* of "problem-solving" devices which it offers in a specific field of practice. This includes, for example, the legal determination of responsibilities, formalized modes of procedure, specific objects (e.g. religious objects), technologies, instances of sanctions, training courses, and so on. These complexes of measures are, on the one hand, both solid ground for and components of a discourse and, on the other hand, the ways and means by which a discourse intervenes in the world. For example,

the dual system of waste separation is part of the *dispositif* of a specific discourse of waste (Keller 1998). In connection with the implementation of the *models of practice* generated in the discourse, we may include web brochures, the statistical and process-related logistics of the description and collection of waste, large containers, directions for waste separation, or contracts with the local authorities. We also include the relevant legal ordinances, the employees of Duales System Deutschland (DSD) (the leading German private household waste recycling company), the countless green dots (as part of the Grüne Punkt scheme – the signs on products indicating collection by DSD), and finally also the practices of waste cleaning and separation that people subject themselves to. With reference to the level of discourse (re)production we might mention the discursive interventions of the various agencies of leadership, spokespersons, and press contacts as well as the research units, all of which disseminate and legitimize a particular construction of the waste problem in their expert opinions, brochures, and so on. The consideration of *dispositifs*, in particular, indicates that SKAD is not only communication, textual, or image research, but that it also takes into account, in the sense of new developments in actor-network theory and similar positions, the heterogeneous materialities that underlie discourse production as well as those that emerge as effects of their occurrence. For this reason, it can also be realized as case study, observation, even focused ethnography, taking account of the interrelation of statement events, practices, actors, organizational arrangements, and objects as historical and social-spatial processes with a greater or narrower outreach. *Dispositifs* are produced by social actors to the extent that they institutionalize a discourse. In this we are concerned with *orders of practice* or appropriate *ordering processes and efforts*, the actual scope of which probably matches the discursively projected model only rarely and which are all of a more or less transitory nature. It is only in conjunction with the investigation of discursive construction and the mediation of knowledge that questions concerning the relationship of subjective reception or acquisition and societal knowledge are appropriate. The processing of relevant questions can, therefore, also be conducted in the form of an *ethnography of discourse*.

Methodology

SKAD insists that discourse research is an interpretive activity, a discourse about discourses (Keller and Clarke 2018). Like all discourse research, it needs hermeneutics; that is, a theory of interpretation. Data have nothing to say in themselves, but provide answers to the questions that one asks of them. In addition, SKAD follows basic theories of the understanding of meaning and the human use of symbols. "Hermeneutics" is in no sense an enterprise that is reduced to the understanding of subjectively intended meaning. Of course, such positions do exist. But since the mid-1990s the term *social science hermeneutics* (Hitzler and Honer 1997) has been used quite generally to refer to the goal of reflecting on scientific processes of data interpretation and clarifying this as a task of

interpretation and construction. This is also true of forms of data analysis that focus on the surface of what is stated, including programs of analysis which indeed are not at all interested in the investigation of "intended meaning" or "intention".

If one understands SKAD, in the tradition of Foucault, as an investigative undertaking that targets the historical development, stabilization, and modification of discourses and their power effects, then this kind of undertaking inevitably contains a strong element of *reconstruction* – for how else could one describe the attempt to analyze how something became what we perceive it to be today? For this reason every genealogical perspective proceeds reconstructively. Of course, instances of deconstruction are also built in: Data are split up, relations are "destroyed" and re-established, the obvious is stripped of its obviousness and embedded in new concepts and perspectives. A reconstructive type of discourse analysis corresponds absolutely to what Foucault had characterized as his ethos and the task of criticism – the analysis of the historical contingency of so-called "objective" and "inevitable" constructions of reality. This is "enlightenment" in its very traditional sense – pursued in order to expand the action repertoire of societies. Deconstruction and reconstruction are analytical processes that go hand in hand within SKAD.

SKAD makes a plea for a link between discourse research and various analytical strategies of the interpretive paradigm and interpretive methods. The analytical moves may, on the one hand, be directed at the *materiality of discourses* expressed in practices, actors, and *dispositifs* and, on the other hand, at the various aspects of content of the *knowledge-related (symbolic) structuring* of statements and the order of the world. I speak of *interpretive analytics* to stress that discourse research may relate together a variety of data formats and analytical steps, and so, for example, it may combine comparatively classical sociological strategies of single-case analysis or case study with detailed close analysis of textual data. Another reason why I talk of interpretive analytics is that, unlike other approaches in qualitative social research, SKAD is not interested per se in a single document (such as a text) as a coherent unit of meaning-making in itself, but proceeds on the basis that a document of this type is only articulating fragments of one or more discourses. This is why it breaks down the material surface unity of the texts and utterances and sometimes attributes the results of its analytical fragmentation and detailed analysis to different discourses. From this emerges, step by step, the mosaic of the investigated discourse(s) – and this is undoubtedly one of the most important modifications to the routine processes of qualitative social research.

With reference to the analysis of content-symbolic structuring of discourses, we may distinguish interpretive schemes, classifications, phenomenal structures, and narrative patterns, and these may be understood as components of interpretive repertoires. Here we are concerned with general concepts which derive from the sociology of knowledge tradition or may be adjusted to fit. Furthermore, they are particularly suitable as bridging concepts for research

interested in investigating the adaptation of discursively created knowledge of social (e.g. professional) practices and everyday life.

- Interpretive schemes are patterns for meaning-making in reference to phenomena, situations, events, and actions in the world. The human body, for instance, may be interpreted as a robust machine or as a fragile organic assembly. "Mother's love" may come about between protective, emotional care and places of refuge or from the obligation to develop the acquisition of competence in early childhood (to mention only two different patterns). Technologies may be interpreted as safe or as (fundamentally) risky. Urban neighborhoods may be seen as ghettoes or as bohemian; an infrastructure project may be viewed as an expression of gigantism or as a responsible investment in the future. Interpretive schemes link the factual with the normative, or arguments with examples and moral conclusions. The "pattern" element points to the aspect of what is typical not only in factual data but also, for example, in subject positions that are used in concrete interpretive action. Such types are manifest in a variety of tokens; that is, symbolic-material forms – as a cartoon, as a sentence or related group of sentences, as a photograph, or as a linked set of practices. Meanings occur in discourses not as loose and isolated semiotic particles, but in the form of such interpretive types. And interpretive schemes can be seen as collective products, as for instance discursive condensation of historical processes that have become elements in the social stock of knowledge. Discourses frequently use a number of interconnected patterns; they offer, simultaneously, locations for the generation of new schemes/frames or for the transformation of existing ones.
- A second approach to discourses is found in the investigation of the *classifications* (and then of the qualifications) of phenomena that are undertaken in and through them. Classifications are more or less developed, formalized, and institutionally stabilized forms and processes of social typification. They do not order "given" reality into the "right" categories, but rather create the experience of this reality. The normal course of everyday routines consists of an uninterrupted process of classification using appropriate elements of our collective stock of knowledge. Like all types of language use, the use of language in discourses classifies the world, dividing it into specific categories that underlie its experience, interpretation, and action. Between discourses there are competitions about such classifications; for example, about how urban districts are to be interpreted with regard to preservation orders, what counts as a green area, what degree of air pollution is tolerable, what counts as correct or reprehensible behavior, what kind of waste separation should be undertaken, and so on. Specific consequences in terms of action practice are bound up with this. Their effect ultimately depends on whether they are institutionalized in the form of appropriate *dispositifs* and thereby give guidance in terms of action

practice. The analysis of discursively processed classifications has so far only been realized in a rudimentary way in discourse research.

- In addition, the concept of *phenomenal structure* addresses a third complementary heuristic tool at the level of the content structure of discourses. It refers to the fact that discourses, in the constitution of their referential relations (their topic), designate different elements or dimensions of their subject and relate them to a specific form or constellation of phenomena. This is in no way about the essential qualities of a discourse object, but rather about the "relevant" discursive attributes. The analytical reconstruction of phenomenal structures focuses on two aspects: The *dimensional reconstruction* is related to the general composition of the phenomenon. The dimensions of which the phenomenon is discursively constituted may, in a particular discursive field, at a given moment in time and sociocultural space, resemble or differ from other competing discourses. The *content* of the dimensions reconstructed in the first step may vary considerably according to the situational-contextual cause of a discursive event and also between discourses. In this respect, SKAD aims to examine the rules and principles of what is possible or legitimate content and how these are formed. It does not aim to provide a simple summary of everything that is said in original citations, although these may well be used for purposes of presentation or illustration. Phenomenal structures change over the course of time. Appropriate search strategies, therefore, cannot focus merely on the "freezing" of a specific phenomenal structure at a given point in time, but they make the development, change, and comparison of phenomenal structures their research object. This means that phenomenal structures make it possible to represent the *statements* of a discourse, and from this many additional questions (about its genesis, constellation of antagonists, *dispositif* consequences) can be addressed.
- One final instance of the content form of discourses should be mentioned here: We may characterize as *narrative structures* those structuring devices of statements and discourses by means of which different patterns (frames), classifications, and dimensions of phenomenal structure are related to each other in specific ways. The discovery of narrative structures (plots, storylines, central themes) in discourses may look at principle or subsidiary stories, general or generalizing narrations, from illustrative documentary or evidential stories. Narrative structures are not just simple techniques for linking linguistic elements together, but must be considered as a "*mise en intrigue*" (Paul Ricœur), as a configurative act of linking disparate signs and statements in the form of narratives, a basic mode of the human ordering of world experience. They constitute (debatable) "ways of the world as it is" by organizing stories with performing actors and agents, events, challenges, successes and defeats, good and evil, and so on.

Finally, in connection with the setting up and "processing" of a data corpus in the context of empirical discourse research, we may consider analytical

strategies such as theoretical sampling, minimal and maximal contrast, coding, and many others, as useful guidance. These concepts are relevant both to the selection of data for detailed analysis and the analytical combination of results (cf. Strauss 1987; Keller 2013).

The discursive construction of spaces

Space, knowledge, and power are interconnected in many different ways. Foucault, in an interview, refers to the specific modern reflection that began in the 18th century on the construction of cities, in which questions of architecture are linked with those of the government:

> One begins to see a form of political literature that addresses what the order of a society should be, what a city should be, given the requirements of the maintenance of order; given that one should avoid epidemics, avoid revolts, permit a decent and moral family life, and so on. In terms of these objectives, how is one to conceive of both the organization of a city and the construction of a collective infrastructure? And how should houses be built?
>
> (Foucault 1984/1982, 239)

Symbolic and material orders of the spatial occur largely via discourses. Such a discursive construction of spaces does not exclude taking into account the material (*dispositif*) dimensions, consequences, or effects of such constructions in analysis. For example, if a city council decides to position its town "better" in a ranking for ecotourism or the knowledge industries, this is certainly a discursive event and practice which generates material effects, as, for example, squares have to be laid out, rivers "naturalized", or "industrial estates" developed. Politico-economic discourses concerning the competition for economic investors may lead to rotten infrastructures, because industrial taxes will have to be abolished. From a worldwide political discussion concerning sustainable development and citizens' participation arise meeting and voting *dispositifs* for a Local Agenda 21, that perhaps have impacts on urban infrastructures. In the name of Christian values and Western cultural heritage, citizens are mobilized against the building of mosques. City districts are protected against gentrification or are "developed" by investors. With regard to the spatial, be it "nature" or "culture", there is a merging of symbolic orders and materialities of the most diverse kinds. The *discursive productions of the imaginary of a place* are undoubtedly one of the principle subjects of discourse-analytical investigations. This area of phenomena includes politico-administrative initiatives in city marketing as well as policies of the symbolic upgrading and downgrading of city districts or struggles over the siting of industries, buildings or infrastructures. Spaces, locations, and cities therefore are an expression of *relations of knowledge* and *politics of knowledge*. "Natural" and "built" spaces, for example, are shaped in multiple ways by the multiple knowledges of experts and citizens. The former might, for example, use scenario techniques and

prognostics to produce the future of a city's infrastructures along "the demands of tomorrow", while the latter inquire into a neighborhood's local histories in a struggle for the maintenance of the "traditional" shape of a local place, etc. Such politics of knowledge include politics of knowing; that is, *dispositifs* which allow one to establish legitimate statements (like citizen research, big data research, etc.) as well as regimes of justification, which allow, for instance, for the ordering of evaluations of "best practices", "what has to be done", what should be considered "cultural heritage", what is not allowed to be touched. Whether it is a matter of the restoration of landscapes, architectural ideas for good family life, designs for traffic or lighting in public areas, or restrictions in the budgetary situation of cities and other communities, this all relates to relations of knowledge and politics of knowledge, in which meaning-making, "factual" knowledge, imaginations, justifications, and other elements of knowledge coincide. The potential of discourse-analytical approaches to the investigation of relevant processes and phenomena of spacing is far from being exhausted.

Notes

1 For further theoretical rationale, analytical ideas, and methodological implementation, cf. Keller (2010/2005, 2011, 2012, 2013) and Keller, Hornidge, and Schünemann (2018).
2 Other forms of spacing include producing (Lefebvre 1994/1974) and walking the city (De Certeau 1984/1980), everyday practices of symbolic ordering (Segaud 2010), or sensual experiences of a city's atmosphere (cf. Sansot 1973).

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