

Discourses, Conventions, and Critique - Perspectives of the Institutional Approach of the Economics of Convention

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Discourses, Conventions, and Critique – Perspectives of the Institutional Approach of the Economics of Convention

Rainer Diaz-Bone *

Abstract: »Diskurse, Konventionen und Kritik – Perspektiven des institutionalistischen Ansatzes des *Economie des conventions*«. The institutionalist approach of economics of conventions (EC) was developed in France in the last decades and recombines pragmatist and structuralist concepts. In EC, conventions are not regarded as institutions, but are conceived as interpretative frames how to interpret the meaning of institutions and situations, and how to handle institutions in situations of coordination. The difference between institutions and conventions offers space for "critical movements" and can implement a tension as well as an infrastructure for critique. The article introduces main concepts of EC, which could be applied to the analysis of social critique. In fact, the pragmatist analysis of critical moments and practices of justification was one of the birth moments of EC and EC has developed strategies to analyze and explain social change. The article presents some newer reflections of EC on power and dispositive. Furthermore, the article relates the Foucaultian notions of discourse and power to EC's analysis of critique and social change. Finally, a current strand of EC research is discussed, which is the study and critique of neoliberalism and the role of the state.

Keywords: Economics of convention, power, dispositive, institutional analysis, Foucault, discourse.

1. Introduction

Structuralism and pragmatism are the two mega-paradigms of theories in the social sciences for many decades now. Today, the (post)structuralist sociologies of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault are main approaches not only in the German-speaking sociologies, but worldwide. French structuralism (and its developments as "neostucturalism" or "neopragmatism") and US-American pragmatism have been the bases for the French development of the so-called

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new French social sciences (Nachi 2006; Corcuff 2011; Diaz-Bone 2015).¹ Mainly influenced by pragmatism, but also prolonging structuralist concerns, the so-called economics of convention (in short EC) can be regarded as one main part of the new French social sciences (Salais and Thévenot 1986; Storper and Salais 1997; Orléan 2004; Boltanski and Chiapello 2006; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Eymard-Duvernay 2006a, 2006b; Batifoulier et al. 2016). EC has developed within the last three decades in France but is spreading out in the German speaking social sciences since some years now (Diaz-Bone 2011, 2015; Knoll 2015).² EC has strongly focused on situations of coordination in which actors have to share common frames of evaluation and valuation. Also EC has emphasized the existence of tensions and the role of critique in economic fields, economic organizations, and – more generally – in economic situations of coordination as the basic element of economies. For a long time EC has *not* included strong concepts of discourse. The discourse theory and the dispositive theory of Michel Foucault is one of the main modern contributions to critical theory. In this contribution, perspectives for the combination of Foucault's theory of discourse and of dispositive as new elements of EC's theorizing of economic knowledge and economic critique will be discussed. Foucault's social theory comprises a frame for the critical analysis of neoliberalism which was picked up by conventionalists recently (Davies 2014, 2015; Desrosières 2015; Thévenot 2015). The combination (or extension) of EC and a discourse analytic perspective enhances the scope of EC as an institutionalist approach, to integrate also the analysis of cultural structures and discursively constructed concepts.³ Also the discourse theory of Michel Foucault brings in its own notions and contribution to the analysis of change and power.

In this article, it will be argued that the difference between economic institutions and conventions offers space for critical movements and – as distinction – can implement a tension and an infrastructure for critique (Diaz-Bone 2012).

¹ See for classical American pragmatism Diaz-Bone and Schubert (1996), Kuklick (2001), and for neopragmatism Margolis (2002). In fact, the notion of poststructuralism may be established in the US, but it is not an established one in France (see Dosse 1998a, 1998b, 1999). Most representatives of structuralism were identified in the US as representatives of poststructuralism also. But in fact, poststructuralism can be considered as a radicalization and (re)pragmatization of structuralism. And this movement (from "structuralism to poststructuralism") was made possible by structuralism itself, and not by its overcoming, as the term "poststructuralism" as some emerging "after-structuralism" wrongly suggests. And the German philosopher Manfred Frank therefore uses the term neostructuralism (Frank 1989).

² See for contributions of EC in English Favereau and Lazega (2002) and the series of special issues of Historical Social Research (Diaz-Bone and Salais 2011, 2012; Diaz-Bone et al. 2015; Diaz-Bone and Didier 2016) and the interviews with representatives of EC as Thévenot (2004), Salais (2008), Favereau (2012a), Orléan (2013), Bessy (2013), and Didry (2013).

³ The aim of this contribution is not to compare EC and discourse analysis. Also a full introduction into the approach of EC is not possible. See for an introduction into this approach contributions in Diaz-Bone and Salais (2011, 2012).

The discussion of neoliberalism and the role of the state is a main research area of the later EC (Salais 2013; Desrosières 2014a, 2014b, 2015). Here, new developments as privatization bring in new tensions in society and will result in new forms of critique and conceptions of state (Diaz-Bone 2017).

2. Conventions and Critique

The analysis of critical situations and critique was an initial moment of EC.⁴ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot studied employees at the French national statistical institute who were in charge of coding survey data (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983). They identified the “grammar” of disputes between coders, when coders disagreed about the correct classification of persons to professional categories. The grammar of these disputes was based on basing one’s argument on a more general principle. Boltanski and Thévenot labeled these grammars as “orders of justification” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Actors are regarded as being competent in exercising critique and justification, whereby actors rely on these orders of justification. Actors have a sense for correctness and justice which they deduce from their cultural knowledge of orders of justification. The latter are normative principles which structure the social construction of values and evaluations in situation, when actors coordinate to achieve a common good. In fact, these orders of justification are one form of what is called a convention in EC.⁵ Michael Storper and Robert Salais have characterized the notion of convention starting from actors in situations of coordination:

[T]his coordination can only come about when their interpretations lead to a sort of “agreement” about what is to be done [...]. Such agreement – specific to the pragmatic situation at hand – is required between buyers and sellers of a commodity, between input-supplier and purchaser, between one worker and another on the shop floor, between manager and worker; [...] of course, this is not an “agreement” in the sense of a formal contract or explicit rule, but rather in the sense of a common context: a set of points of reference which goes beyond the actors as individuals but which they nonetheless build and understand in the course of their actions. These points of reference for evaluating a situation and coordinating with other actors are essentially established by conventions between persons. Conventions emerge both as responses to and as

⁴ For EC, situations are not restricted to the co-presence of persons and objects. Situations can extend their scope in time and space. Robert Salais, Nicolas Baverez, and Bénédicte Reynaud studied the invention of the statistical category of unemployment in France during a time span of approximately 90 years in France (Salais, Baverez and Reynaud 1999). Here, the notion of “situation” has a historical and national scope.

⁵ The consequence is that the concept of conventions in the tradition of EC is not to be confused with customs, traditions, or standards. Also the semantic core and the semantic structure of EC’s notion of convention is an issue to be worked out; see for an attempt Diaz-Bone (2017).

definitions of uncertainty [...]. Conventions resemble “hypotheses” formulated by persons with respect to the relationship between their actions and the actions of those on whom they must depend to realize a goal. When interactions are reproduced again and again in similar situations, and when particular courses of action have proved successful, they become incorporated in routines and we then tend to forget their initially hypothetical character. Conventions thus become an intimate part of the history incorporated in behaviors. (Storper and Salais 1997, 16)

Storper and Salais (1997) also presented a model of conventions (which they named “worlds of production”). Meanwhile, one can find about a dozen of different conventions introduced by researchers of the scientific movement of EC. Today the works of Boltanski and Thévenot has been recognized in the social sciences worldwide (especially the books Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, and Boltanski and Chiapello 2006), so a selection of the most important conventions will be sufficient here. Table 1 presents five conventions which are considered as most important (cf. applications of the theory of conventions Kusche 2017; Wallmeier 2017; Münnich 2017; Sachweh 2017, all in this volume).

Table 1: Five Important Conventions

	industrial	market	domestic	civic	green
mode of evaluation	productivity, efficiency	price	esteem, reputation	collective interest	integrity of environment
cognitive format of relevant information	numerical measures, certificates	monetary	oral, exemplary, anecdotal	formal, official	narrative
elementary relation	functional link	exchange	trust	solidarity	responsibility
human qualification	professional competency, expertise	desire, purchase	authority	equality	knowledge about and respect for ecology

See: Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 368; Diaz-Bone 2015, 152-3.

It is important to emphasize EC’s claim for the existence of a plurality of these conventions. In both models – the one of Boltanski and Thévenot and the other one of Storper and Salais – real situations are characterized by this radical pluralism of logics of coordination. Here, EC is truly situated in the tradition of pragmatism – namely the pragmatist philosophy of William James, who insisted on the coexistence of a plurality of metaphysical principles (James 1908). This pluralism is not to be confused with an equal status and equal influence of these conventions. Coordination, valuation, and evaluation in most situations are structured by the dominance of a combination of a few conventions. Boltanski and Thévenot called many of these combinations “compromises” worked out by actors in critical situations. Convention-based coordination is backed up and stabilized by objects (“intermediaries” and “dispositives”).

Objects are essentially important in cases when worth and value are questioned or criticized. Then the worth or value of the person, action, or object in question is tested by relating it to (other) objects. Also coordination has its related cognitive formats. In a comparable manner to enterprises, which have to invest in machines and qualifications of employees, investment in cognitive forms is necessary to stabilize and to simplify the formatting of information relevant for coordination, valuation, and evaluation (Thévenot 1984).

However, established ways of coordination, valuation, and evaluation are always “threatened” by the possibility of a reorganization of the arrangement of conventions, objects, and cognitive formats. The critical impact is brought into situations by actors questioning qualities, values, and ways of coordination. Actors as “practical metaphysicians” can suggest the relevance of alternative ways of coordination. They are able to switch between situations and conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Formerly marginalized conventions therefore are always possible as well as virtual alternatives of established forms of coordination and the initial bases for critical interventions. This fact, the radical co-existence of conventions, brings permanent tensions into real situations. The result is a relativistic perspective on critique and justification. There is no superior convention for critique, no meta-order of justification and no final procedure that could be applied to settle disputes as the procedure of discursive deliberation (which is thought to be unbiased by power and violence), proposed by Jürgen Habermas (1984a, 1984b). Critique and its radical pluralist character are unavoidable and an ongoing everyday phenomenon.

3. Conventions and Power

To ask how an approach models critique is closely linked to the question of how it models power and the relation between power and critique. EC is said to include critique but not to include questions of power. But in fact there are some arguments related to the exertion of power. An early argument was delivered by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006) who explained that orders of justification exert an impact on actors to justify their worth and their actions. Objects and cognitive forms can become “dispositives” of power and exert impact on their own also. In the French context the notion of “dispositive” (*dispositif*) is widely used and has no clear meaning until it is related to a specific theoretical position and usage.

One of the problems we have in translating French terms [...] is with the concept *dispositifs*. It is very difficult to translate. Of course, it was already used by Foucault. For us it is a very central category. *Dispositifs* are very interesting in French because it contains *disposé* that has the same root as disposition. Disposition is the main category for Bourdieu because disposition is the habitus. So, in French you are *disposé à faire quelque chose* (disposed to do something). Let us begin with that. Bourdieu worked from the assumption that the

disposition is rooted within the person, incorporated and rooted for all his life. This means that the disposition is the same in all situations, which is not very dynamical. It is a very good assumption to have for a theory of reproduction of course, but otherwise you have a rather poor idea of human beings because they are just developing the same schema all their life in all situations. Actually, we considered the antagonistic assumption, which is that many dispositions are within the *dispositifs*, which means within the arrangement of the situation. (Thévenot 2004, 10; emphasis in original)

The long citation demonstrates also the convention theorist reoriented themselves to foregoing French structuralism to bring in some notion which could be applied to the analysis of power. Thévenot (2016, 205-6) distinguishes three ways power is addressed by EC: (1) conventions are powerful as forms of governance of coordination, (2) cognitive forms (for example numbers) are forceful on the level of symbols and (3) equipped actors (as managers, shareholders, consumers, etc.) can exert power by valorization of human beings, actions, or objects. The last point was developed by François Eymard-Duvernay, thereby referring to the notion of dispositive as it was introduced by Michel Foucault (Eymard-Duvernay 2012a).⁶ Together, these forms of power endow human beings, actions, and objects with different worth. This way, they bring in a hierarchy between them. Also legitimation is transmitted by these powerful processes. Legitimacy is the result of powerful practices and sustains them. But the main bases for this are conventions that are considered by actors as adequate and just in a given situation. EC emphasizes the analytical need not to study single elements that could be powerful, but to study constellations of conventions, cognitive forms, objects, and valorizations. Power, therefore, is conceived as an effect and not as a resource or a potential tied to a person, a social group, or a position. Power has no center. Power effects – again – can be increased by intermediaries (objects or persons) and dispositives that enhance the scope in time and space of these effects possible (Eymard-Duvernay 2012a; Favereau 2012b). All in all, the condition to execute power is as stable or unstable (and certain or uncertain) as the constellation in which power is mobilized. But constellations and their elements can contribute to the permanence of power effects and resist their changes, when they can exert inertia as property. An example is given: the different studies in social categorizations and classifications (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002; Salais, Baverez and Reynaud 1999) have identified the inertia of “old” categories in classifications. After decades these categories, and the groups these categories represent, can lose their embeddedness to the institutional and cultural context. In this case, they should vanish but sometimes they last for years (and bring in incoherence into the

⁶ See also the appendix in the article of Favereau (2012b) in which Foucault's notion of “dispositive” is presented for the application in research in the tradition of convention theory.

practices of classifying in institutions).⁷ The wide-spread idea of “critique” is a form of resistance against power. But for EC critique can be exerted when actors in situations governed by a powerful constellation of conventions, cognitive forms, and objects are criticized and forced to justify, to adapt, and to fit to this constellation in power. So critique can be thought of as an element of oppression, control, and governance.

Critique in opposition to powerful constellations is more recognized by the social sciences, as the huge research on social movements certifies. Laurent Thévenot and Michèle Lamont have edited a comparative study of ecological movements in France and in the US (Lamont and Thévenot 2000). The study offers a typical case in which social groups resist the constellation in power by applying critique to undermine the legitimation of projects such as the construction of an energy plant or a tunnel for cars. The study is also untypical because it depicts the emergence of a new convention (the green convention, which bases its concept of worth on the ecological integrity and respect for nature) as a new resource to question the conventions in power (as the industrial convention). But also the dispositives and cognitive formats can be questioned as adequate or just. Alain Desrosières (2015) has given the example of social movements that protest against the negative impact of statistics, produced by a national statistical institute, on professional groups.⁸ Desrosières coined the notion of *retroaction* which is the critical and de-legitimizing action against these statistics and its effects. The opposing forms of critique undermine the coherence of the constellation of conventions, cognitive forms, and dispositives. This form of critique erodes the power of the dominant constellation mainly by questioning its legitimacy.

4. Conventions and Social Change

Until now, mainly the stability of constellations of conventions, cognitive formats, objects and ways of coordination was discussed. But for EC, social dynamics are also an important question and a phenomenon to explain. Before explaining social dynamics it should be clear what the issue at stake is. One answer from the standpoint of EC is to point to the change of institutions and the way they are interpreted in situations. Robert Salais has argued that the meaning of institutions is incomplete for actors in situations, so actors rely on convention to know how to interpret the meaning of institutions in situations. Law (as the corpus of legitimized and written state regulations) is a good example for this, because the interpretation of law and the application of law are

⁷ An example for such a category is the category “isolés” in the French official classification of professions (see Salais, Baverez and Reynaud 1999).

⁸ See also the contributions in Diaz-Bone and Didier (2016).

open to different practices. Different conventions can be applied to law in real situations (Bessy 2013; Didry 2013).⁹ When institutions and conventions are different, then their relationship can be considered. Different constellations of conventions and institutions can be compared regarding how they block or enable social change. Table 2 presents two oppositions: (1) is the functioning of institutions judged as critical or not, and (2) is the relation between institutions and conventions coherent or not?¹⁰ The table shows that there is another source for critique and social change. That is the evaluation of institutions and the evaluation of the match or mismatch between conventions and institutions.

Table 2: Situations and Social Change

relation of institution and convention(s) is:	functioning of institution is judged as:	
	"not critical"	"critical"
coherent	(1) stable situation, no need for social change	(2) situation is burdened with tensions, but actors will have problems to induce social change
not coherent	(3) few tensions in an unstable situation, it is open to social change	(4) critique will enforce social change more easily

Modified version of table in Diaz-Bone (2012).

The four different situations can be characterized by the different potential to initiate social change. This potential is rising from situation (1) to situation (4).¹¹ From this perspective, social change can be conceived differently. It can be a rearrangement of conventions to existing institutions or it can be conceived as an abandonment of existing institutions (preparing for the adoption of other institutions or the invention of new ones). "Institutional change" can have these two different forms (and also a combination of them).

⁹ See the contributions in Diaz-Bone, Didry and Salais (2015).

¹⁰ Basically every convention has a critical stance towards the other conventions – as Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) have demonstrated. Therefore coherence in the relation of institutions and convention should be expected, when only one convention is engaged or a compromise between different conventions is achieved which "hampers" and "controls" conflict between conventions as different logics of coordination. An example: the strategy to implement certifications for product quality is part of the industrial convention, but is applied also in the production processes of craftsmen, which is normally governed by the domestic convention. The combination is coherent if the integration of certifying strategies fills a gap in the production processes of craftsmen and (!) does not undermine the quality perception of the product as "hand-made and unique specimen." See for a matrix of compromises Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

¹¹ See for a more elaborate discussion of these situations Diaz-Bone (2012).

Social change can also be conceived in another way: in the reorganization of chains of coordination. EC focuses on situations and their scope instead of applying multi-level models (Thévenot 2001; Diaz-Bone 2015). Social change can result in the interruption of established links between coordination and the reorganization of these links.¹²

5. Foucault's Discourse Theory

There are many scientific fields in which discourse theory has become more and more important – not only in linguistics but also more and more in the social sciences. The reason for this is that discourses are also regarded as social practices and as social structures, which process the social construction of knowledge orders, concepts, categories, evaluations.¹³ But without any doubt it has been the work of the French social scientist Michel Foucault whose theory of discourse (and whose later developed theory of dispositives) has achieved an epochal impact in the social sciences (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; Eribon 1992).¹⁴ His concept of discourse is different from concepts which relate discourse to speech acts or to interaction in language use. Also for Foucault, discourse is not a textual structure. Instead, it is a collective social knowledge practice. The special feature of Foucault's notion of discourse is its own system of rules. Therefore, the unity of discourse is not given by topics, themes, or authors.

We sought the unity of discourse in the objects themselves, in their distribution, in the interplay of their differences, in their proximity or – distance – in short, in what is given to the speaking subject; and, in the end, we are sent back to a setting-up of relations that characterizes discursive practice itself; and what we discover is neither a configuration, nor a form, but a group of rules that are immanent in a practice, and define it in its specificity. [...] I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. 'Words and things' is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its

¹² This perspective on social change is relevant for the research on global value chains and global quality chains, see Daviron and Ponte (2005), Ponte and Daviron (2005), and Diaz-Bone (2015).

¹³ Teun A. van Dijk is the most important researcher in the international and interdisciplinary field of discourse studies. He edited influential books (van Dijk 1997a, 1997b), published important monographs (van Dijk 2008, 2009, 2014) and founded major journals (as *Discourse and Society*).

¹⁴ See for the German field of discourse analysis in the tradition of Michael Foucault Bühmann et al. (2008), Keller et al. (2010, 2011), Jäger (2015), and Marttila (2016).

own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe. (Foucault 1989a, 51-4)

The mentioned quality of “the more” in the last citation refers to discourses proper to super-individual reality. The rules residing in discursive practices determine the way in which “objects,” “words,” “speakers,” and “strategies” can “appear” in discourses. This way objects, words, speakers, and strategies are constructed by discursive practices itself as elements of knowledge (Foucault 1989a). Foucault’s work also offers a concept for the deep order of discourses. He introduced this concept by presenting a strange Chinese classification he found in a book written by the poet Luis Borges.

This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.’ In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*. [...] When we establish a considered classification, when we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do, even if both are tame or embalmed, even if both are frenzied, even if both have just broken the water pitcher, what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what ‘table,’ according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? (Foucault 1989b, xvi/xxi; original emphasis)

The problem with the classification is its missing deep order, its general principle on which the architecture of the classification is constructed. There is no deep principle explaining or justifying the establishment of categories and the relationships between the categories. Foucault argues that in our culture there are deep structures in knowledge present, which equip our cognition, and evaluation with a sense of an ordered world and with a more profound meaning. He has called these deep structure “episteme.”

[...] what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise

to the diverse forms of empirical science. (Foucault 1989b, xxiii-xxiv; original emphasis)

An episteme can be understood as a “configuration,” a specific pattern or structure. Its reality is that of a latent structure, existing in discourses – not visible on its surface but as its deeper organization.¹⁵

6. Relating Discourse Theory and Convention Theory

Foucault worked out the concept of episteme in his book “The order of things” (1989b), its French title being “Les mots et les choses” (Foucault 1966). The two conventionalists Alain Desrosières and Laurent Thévenot referred to Foucault early in their article “Les mots et les chiffres” (Desrosières and Thévenot 1979). They argued that classifications can neither be built out of “naturally given” categories nor be built out of “logical” categories. In society “naturally given” categories are the results of socio-historical processes. Social groups work for the establishment of their categories as an evident social fact (which it was not before). “Logical” categories will not work in empirical reality when these categories are not part of situational and institutional practices. In this case they will not achieve validity and acceptance.¹⁶ It was Alain Desrosières who proposed to invent the notion of “principle of equivalence” or “convention of equivalence” to describe the deep principle that is applied (mostly implicitly) to build up a classification, to define the boundaries of categories, to organize different levels of categories (more general main categories or more specific subcategories) and to be the foundation for the interrelations of the categories in a classification (Desrosières 2001, 2011). It is obvious that this concept of convention of equivalence is closely related to Foucault’s notion of episteme.¹⁷ Later, the conventionalist Christian Bessy in collaboration with Francis Chateauraynaud applied the notion of convention in a very similar way to how Foucault applied his notion of episteme. More than Desrosières they emphasized the cognitive impact of conventions (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 2014). One can see here a minor but existing tradition of EC, which relates Foucault’s work to the analysis of deep structures of knowledge.

¹⁵ Foucault related the concept of episteme to the interdisciplinary organization of sciences (namely economics, biology, and linguistics) and he used this concept to characterize whole epochs, not single discourses (1989b). But the notion of episteme has also proven to be a fruitful analytical tool for the characterization of the deeper organization of discourses (Diaz-Bone 2010).

¹⁶ For the analysis and discussion of this problem see also Guibert et al. (1971) and Desrosières and Thévenot (2002).

¹⁷ But an important difference is the missing relation (in Foucault’s works) of the notion of “episteme” to objects (instruments) in the process of collective cognition.

What about the introduction and application of concepts of discourse in EC? At first glance, one can interpret the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) also as a kind of discourse analysis (a term that is not used by the authors): the authors identify conventions as deep structures in discourses.¹⁸ The reason for this is that the authors present orders of justification as embodied in cultural knowledge. And one can infer that conventions here work as a kind of episteme (in the sense of Foucault). These orders are identified in classical publications which entail systems of thinking, arguing, and evaluation and these systems are an established part of the cultural knowledge of western societies. For example, the economic theory of Adam Smith or the theological writings of Augustine represent ways of thinking that are part of the established cultural knowledge. Boltanski and Thévenot use a small selection of important and influential books or books that manifest (past) influential cultural strands in western civilization. These books are used to identify the deeper organization of these discursive orders, the books manifest. At first glance, the methodological perspective Boltanski and Thévenot apply, seems to be similar to the methodological standpoint of the analysis of discourse structures and the epistemes, developed by Michel Foucault (1989a, 1989b). Here, EC shows its closeness to the structuralist tradition that also applied concepts of deep grammar – initiated by Noam Chomsky (1957) in the field of linguistics – to the analysis of cultural orders. But Boltanski and Thévenot and EC in general refuse the reduction of its approach to a kind of discourse analysis only. The reason EC is reluctant to be related to discourse analysis is its insistence on the coordination between actors, format, and objects. Processes of social construction from this standpoint will not be reducible to knowledge practices only.

If EC is to be compared with and related to the work of Michel Foucault this will be possible only if Foucault's notion of discourse and dispositive are applied both in conjunction. A dispositive is a "tool" or an "arrangement" which is strategically mobilized for the purpose of exerting and rising power effects (Foucault 1995). It can be a technology, an architecture, or a practice. Foucault's notion of dispositive covers the material world (objects, bodies) and completes the notion of discourse. Foucault has clearly worked out the relationship between discourses and power. Power relations stimulate the generation of discourses (knowledge) and – vice versa – discourses contribute to the "formatting and disciplining" of human beings and force up the power exerted on them (Foucault 1995). But power is unavoidably linked to resistance and critique, as Foucault clearly stated: "As soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance." (Foucault 1989c, 153) In relations of power there is an enduring inner tension between power and resistance – similar to the tension brought into situations by the coexistence of conventions mentioned above.

¹⁸ See the contributions in Eymard-Duvernay (2012b) for a discourse analysis of labor market related knowledge.

Also resistance against power (as domination or governance) is closely linked to critique in Foucault's thinking: "I would therefore propose, as a very first definition of critique, this general characterization: the art of not being governed quite so much." (Foucault 2007, 45) Again Foucault offers a similar position to EC, because for him critique is the moment of resistance that surges for a readjustment of constellations of conventions, objects, cognitive formats, and discourses. It would be a worthy perspective for EC to include more the methodological perspectives of Michel Foucault. He labeled his approach "archaeology" because his methodological project has been to identify the meaning pattern in historical practices which he labelled discourses and which cannot be reduced to signs, words, or texts. So, there is an implicit reality which is structured by an implicit set of rules but also pragmatically situated. EC is interested in identifying the meaning pattern in situations of coordination between human beings, objects, cognitive formats, and concept. The logic of this coordination is also structured by an implicit grammar. Identifying conventions as structures of practices needs a structuralist hermeneutics – a future perspective for EC could be the inspection of Michel Foucault's program of an archaeology of knowledge. A second future perspective for EC would be to inspect Foucault's analysis of power and power-related dispositives.

7. Critical Perspectives on Neoliberalism

A temporary field for developments and developments as sketched above is the critical analysis of neoliberalism. Alain Desrosières (2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) and Robert Salais (2013) have worked out critical perspectives on the neoliberal epoch, thereby applying a conventional perspective. The British sociologist William Davies has published a study on the discourses and rational of neoliberalism. He has grounded his analysis of convention theory. In his book "The Limits of Neoliberalism" Davies (2014) starts referring to Foucault's lectures about neoliberalism (Foucault 2008) and Davies includes the writing of liberal and neoliberal economists (Davies 2014; see also Davies 2010, 2015).¹⁹ He delineates the contradiction between liberalism and neoliberalism. Liberalism favors working markets and the mechanism of competition. Neoliberalism contradicts rules of free markets and competition by undermining both. Also neoliberal actors attack the state as an "inefficient institution" but misuse state administrations and state dispositives for strategic interests such as privatization and gaining profit out of former state domains. In the neoliberal epoch, its economic theories have become "blue prints" for the con-

¹⁹ See for a more elaborate discussion of Davies book from the standpoint of convention theory Diaz-Bone (2016).

struction not only of economic institutions but of social institutions in more and more social domains. The neoliberal economization of the social results in economic actors (think tanks, economic scientists, neoliberal societies) installing economic theory as the new authority for public and political deliberation. But neoliberalism seeks to obscure the relationship between economic policies and their relation to the coexisting plurality of quality conventions and orders of justification. Social realities are implicitly related by neoliberal discourses to the market convention in a way as if they were market-like. Davies argues that neoliberalism immunizes its practices by inventing a “positivistic” evidence, consisting of economic measures and quantitative indicators. The plurality and the tensions between conventions are made invisible.²⁰ This way, neoliberalism disenchant alternative forms of politics.

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²⁰ See also Diaz-Bone (forthcoming).

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