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A Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Ethnography

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Beitrag geht in drei Schritten der Frage nach, wie die Untersuchung lokaler Settings für die Analyse von Prozessen und Strukturen auf der sogenannten Makroebene fruchtbar gemacht werden kann. Erstens wird aus der Perspektive einer (radikalen) Situationsorientierung gezeigt, dass Interaktionen *auch* durch *externe* Bedingungen strukturiert werden (auf der Bedeutungs- und Sinnebene) und dass zweitens Mikrosettings auf eigenständige Art und Weise die konkreten Auswirkungen makrostruktureller Prozesse mitbestimmen. Drittens wird gezeigt, wie die theoretische Rahmung der wissenssoziologischen Diskursethnographie (WDE) es erlaubt, Diskurse gleichzeitig als situative *und* externe Bedeutungskontexte lokalen Handelns zu konzeptualisieren. Der Aufsatz stellt verschiedene Analysezwecke einer WDE vor.
Schlagwörter: Diskursanalyse, Diskursforschung, Analyseebenen, Situationsanalyse, Ethnographie, lokaler Kontext, wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse, Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Ethnography

Summary: In this conceptual paper, I discuss in three stages how the study of local settings can contribute to an investigation of phenomena and processes on the so-called macro-level of analysis. I first argue, from a (radical) situational perspective, that the *externality* of any interaction constraints is established through meaning contexts and that – secondly – micro-settings are centrally implicated in shaping *how* macro-level processes produce *specific* social outcomes. Thirdly, I introduce the different analytical purposes of a Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Ethnography (SKADE), whose theoretical framework makes it possible to conceive of discourses as both situational *and* external meaning contexts of local action.
Keywords: discourse analysis, discourse research, levels of analysis, situational analysis, ethnography, local context

1 Introduction

Qualitative social research, and particularly sociological ethnography, has traditionally focused on studying local settings: organizations, scenes, group cultures, interaction, networks, etc. – social domains that would conventionally be considered as belonging to a micro- or meso-level of analysis. Seeing and studying the world through a local lens (Fine 2010) does not mean, however, that a more general perspective is necessarily neglected: research in this tradition may aim at contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how interaction on the micro-level is structured (e.g. research in the tradition of ethnomethodology or conversation analysis). Other strands of research implicitly or explicitly claim that the object of study stands *pars pro toto* for a larger phenomenon, process, condition or structure (e.g. much of the research in the grounded theory tradition). However, the empirical sensibilities developed in the corresponding networks of qualitative

research practitioners tend to focus on the local, raising the question of to what extent larger social structures remain conceptually and theoretically present.

In what follows, I aim at further developing a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse ethnography (SKADE), drawing on earlier work that dealt with distinguishing discourses from local contexts (Elliker/Coetzee/Kotze 2013). I depart from the notion that the theoretical infrastructures of micro- and macro-sociological approaches mutually depend on each other (Fine 1991) and suggest that the sociology of knowledge in the tradition of Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Alfred Schütz[1] provides an adequate epistemological framework to theoretically integrate a macro-sociological outlook with a qualitative research strategy focused on local settings. I draw in particular on the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD; Keller 1997, 2011b), developed with the aim of reintroducing and strengthening the analytical concern with macro-level structure in a research environment shaped by the interpretive paradigm that has increasingly focused on local settings. Yet, as I further argue, it is precisely through an ethnographic in-depth study of local settings through which we gain a differentiated insight into how discourses as macro-level structures operate in everyday life. Such a perspective takes into account the potential resilience of local environments and the differing degrees of agency and autonomy of actors (a concern in Foucault's later work, see Keller 2011b), avoiding the overly generalizing assumption that everything is (structured by) discourse. Actors and local settings alike are shaped by multiple meso- and macro-level forces. An ethnographic, close encounter with everyday realities allows us to study which discourses and other social forces lead – in cooperation and competition – to certain ›social outcomes‹.

The argument that follows is based on a narrow focus on and close engagement with two recent contributions to the discussion on how micro- and macro-level forces are linked (Clarke 2005; Jepperson and Meyer 2011). Both inform my perspective on a discourse ethnographic approach and the corresponding methodological questions. Firstly, in section 2, I highlight that from the perspective of an observer participating in the everyday life of the actors under study, the latter's life-worlds are shaped by the participation in manifold interaction rituals (Collins 2004), some of them highly routinized and standardized, some of them spontaneous and less structured. In such interaction situations, however, the question arises as to how elements in the situation can be considered ›external‹, as elements that are relevant for interaction become manifest to the participants and are hence no longer external. Based on a notion put forward by Clarke (2005), I present an argument (developed more extensively in Elliker 2016) aimed at differentiating and developing the idea of how conditions, constraints, or structures can be considered to be simultaneously an element of a given interaction situation and yet external to it.

If, secondly, discourses are conceived as macro-level structures (Keller 2011b), the question arises as to the extent to which an analysis of local settings is warranted or needed. In section 3, I present a relatively recent (re)conceptualization of the reciprocal

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1   See Schütz (1967), Schütz and Luckmann (1974, 1989), and Berger and Luckmann (1966).

links between multiple levels of analysis. Jepperson and Meyer (2011) argue that while all macro- and meso-level structures must eventually be reproduced by and hence be founded on individual action, causality does not need to be conceived on the micro-level. They argue, rather, that macro-level structures are reproduced due to a higher degree of complexity of social organization. The ›causal pathway‹ by which macro-level processes lead to macro-level social outcomes is a ›direct‹ link on the macro-level. A study of such pathways does not likely need to consider an analysis of the micro-instantiations, implying that macro-level forces are ›somehow‹ reproduced ›through‹ micro-level action. Departing from their conceptualization of these levels, I argue that such macro-level structures must manifest themselves *as* macro-level structures on the micro-level, partially drawing on the notion of »introjected constraints« (Fine 1991). By differentiating the concept of the micro-level, I argue that micro-settings are potentially resilient everyday infrastructures that are shaped by manifold macro- and meso-level forces, their effectiveness and power being negotiated on the micro-level. Local settings, thus, are not simply ›empty‹ vessels through which macro-level forces are reproduced, but are centrally implied in how these social forces are maintained and transformed, and how they lead to social outcomes.

In the fourth section, I argue that a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse ethnography allows us to theoretically resolve the aforementioned theoretical ambiguities in terms of how the macro-level is to be considered from a situational perspective and vice versa. A sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2011b) conceives discourses as macro-level structures, grounded, however, in what is broadly referred to as the interpretive paradigm (Keller 2012) and situated within the phenomenological tradition of social-constructivist theorizing.[2] The fourth section starts by introducing the main epistemological framework of a phenomenological sociology of knowledge; I then discuss the corresponding approach to discourses, considering both the concerns of the macro-level and situational perspective. I further aim to demonstrate that a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse provides the necessary conceptual apparatus to enable a differentiated study of how discourses relate to local settings. This section concludes with a demonstration of how an ethnographic research strategy is particularly well suited to considering and studying these differentiated relations between discourses and local settings. Finally, the fifth and concluding section provides a summary of the strengths of studying discourses ethnographically – based on a sociology of knowledge approach – as well as a tentative outlook on the theoretical and methodological work to be done.

2 On the external contexts of social situations

In the context of her continuous efforts to further develop grounded theory, Clarke (Clarke 2005) suggests not using the notion of a ›context‹ of social actions anymore, and speaks instead of conditions – those aspects »we can bet with relative assuredness will re-

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2   See Schütz (1967), Schütz and Luckmann (1974, 1989), and Berger and Luckmann (1966).

main basically stable, ›in place‹ and predictable for some time« (ibid., S.65). Anselm Strauss initially distinguished between a »broader structural context and a narrower and more immediate negotiation context« (ibid., S.66); later on, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin distinguished »among causal, intervening, and contextual conditions« (ibid.). In the corresponding conditional matrices, these conditions are ordered in concentric circles or a spiral form, where one moves from the inner micro-level of interaction across several layers or movements on the spiral towards the outer regional, national, or international macro-level. These conditions form a layered context of the local production of action.

Adele Clarke suggests, firstly, not distinguishing among different types of conditions a priori in a fixed manner but rather observing empirically what distinctions are relevant from the actors' perspectives. Secondly, she questions the helpfulness of the notion of ›context‹:

> »*The conditions of the situation are **in** the situation.* There is no such thing as ›context‹. The conditional elements of the situation need to be specified in the analysis of the situation itself as *they are constitutive of it*, not merely surrounding it or framing it or contributing to it. They *are* it.« (Clarke 2005, S.71)

The fundamental question must hence be: »*How do these conditions appear – make themselves felt as consequential – inside the empirical situation under examination?*« [emphasis in the original] (ibid., S.72). Conditions that are manifest as elements in a given situation may not only influence and affect other elements present in that situation, i.e. be »mutually consequential«, but anything present may play a part in constituting everything else in that situation. Clarke (2005, S.73) suggests a range of elements that may be potentially relevant for action in a given situation, *inter alia* sociocultural and symbolic as well as organizational and institutional elements, but also discourses.

In principle, all of these elements may influence and be contingent upon each other – everything (perceived as) present may produce significant effects. The analytical focus thus shifts from distinguishing between the macro-, meso-, and micro-level of analysis to the question of presence or absence of conditional elements. However, some of the conditions suggested by Clarke refer to realms beyond the spatial and temporal immediacy of the situation. This raises the question of how an action element may be tied to a realm outside the interaction situation, as there is ›no external context‹ to such situation.

Although situated within the grounded theory tradition, the notion of what may become relevant in a situation as put forward by Clarke resembles the corresponding notions in the ethnomethodological and conversation-analytic approaches. Interested in interaction, these traditions define all those aspects as socially relevant that the actors make perceptible to each other. Implicit in such a definition is a restriction to particular senses – those senses that register impressions from outside any given actor's body, particularly (but not only) the visual, auditory, and tactile sense. Elements of the situation may thus consist of natural objects and phenomena, cultural artefacts, the built environment, animals, other human beings and their movements, utterances, actions, etc. A social situation in this sense refers to an interaction situation, a situation in which at least two actors

are co-present, their actions intertwined through the reciprocal perception of each other. With regard to the sensorial perceptions directed at the world outside one's body, situations may be extended through the mediated appresentation of elements that are not physically present, particularly through technological devices such as mobile phones. Such an appresentation may be based on any device that enables the mediated presence of actors as well as parallel social action through technologies such as voice calls, video calls, text messaging, communication in social networks, etc., but also life broadcasting in any type of mass media. These elements are relevant insofar as they are co-present and, through being directly perceptible, may co-structure the situation, for example by the local actors interacting with those actors technically appresented and, more generally, by constituting a potential point of reference for the present actors. This is the first type of ›external‹ elements that may potentially co-structure a local social situation. They are, however, not external in a strict sense of the above definition of a situation, as they are – through the devices and objects that are used for their appresentation – directly perceptible to the senses of the actors. They are, evidently, not fully present, as no technological device can appresent external objects and persons to the full material extent of their existence. To the extent, however, that they are perceptible, they are present, and as such may co-structure the situation in an ethnomethodological or conversation-analytic sense; recent re-conceptualizations of co-presence consider it as a variable instead of a binary that is given or not given through corporeal presence (see Campos-Castillo/Hitlin 2013).[3] In such a perspective, there is indeed nothing external to the situation that may structure it[4]; if external elements are considered to be relevant they must be manifest in the articulation of the actors and be linked to the formal structure of the situation. Internal corporeal processes of the actors (the diverse range of bodily feelings and sensations) are *socially* relevant *only* to the extent that they are externalized – that is to say, made perceptible to the other actors.

To account for external conditioning, constraining, or structuring effects, I propose to locate them on the meaning level (see for the extended argument Elliker 2016), analytically distinguishing between the level of *manifest action and interaction* that is formally structured by ›ethnomethods‹, and the level of meaningful-sensory ›inner‹ experience. However, from a social-constructivist view in the tradition of Berger, Luckmann, and Schütz[5], this can only be an analytical distinction, as acting and interacting are always intertwined with processes of meaning constitution.

I conceive this meaning level based on a social-constructivist sociology of knowledge approach: experiences, actions, and interactions are intertwined with corporeal processes as well as with processes of meaning constitution in the subjective consciousness. These

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3   In principle, all culturally shaped artefacts and objects refer to a realm outside the situation in at least one way: they have been produced in the past and have been carried into the situation (or are present where the situation is constituted). Here, I am concerned with what is physically not directly present. Conceived thus, social situations are situated within what Schütz and Luckmann (1974) have called the actors' world in actual reach and the zone of manipulation.

4   Emanuel Schegloff's (1991, 1992) so-called orthodox position.

5   See Schütz (1967), Schütz and Luckmann (1974, 1989), and Berger and Luckmann (1966)

experiences sediment over time into socially derived, subjective stocks of knowledge of the actors. These stocks of knowledge structure the actors' experiences in a comprehensive way, both those not externalized and those made perceptible to others. This conception has at least three implications, the first one being that the meaning level may become socially relevant without being externalized: it may directly motivate an actor's behaviour without the actor revealing the motive. While the motivation remains hidden to the other actors, the manifest action based on that motivation becomes relevant for interaction. Secondly, taking such experiences into account enables us to consider that actions may be motivated by the generation of particular ›inner‹ experiences – i.e. corporeal feelings and sensations embedded in specific meaning contexts. Thirdly and importantly, it is on the meaning level that ›external‹ conditions become relevant. ›External‹ refers to both all those material tangible objects, persons, and processes that lie beyond the world in actual reach, and those elements of knowledge that have been temporally generated before the given interaction situation in the ›here‹ and ›now‹. Concerning their externality, these elements are made relevant on the meaning level in at least two ways:

The first way concerns the establishment of a transsituational connection: processes and situations may be perceived as being typical for an external context based on the participants' knowledge thereof, without the necessity of this *attribution* manifesting itself in the formal structure of the situation or being made explicit. This knowledge constitutes a meaning context that frames local action as typical for something not present.

Secondly, the structuring effect of external constraints or conditions becomes relevant through knowledge elements that form the basis for organizing internal experiences as well as manifest action but whose typical way of structuring action and experience has been established outside, namely before the given interaction situation. This does not only concern *the level of manifest action and interaction*: *on the level of meaningful sensory experience*, external meaning contexts have an effect if they shape the inner experience of the actors who participate in a given interaction situation. There are at least two ways in which the relevance of external conditions is produced. It may, firstly, provide knowledge that *effectively* structures (parts of) the interaction of the participants, be that in routinized ways that do not warrant the explicit attention of the actors' consciousness anymore, or in a more reflexive manner where the participants evoke and use that knowledge to act and interact. Secondly, the participants may establish links to the external elements to frame and contextualize the current action, serving their situational purposes and needs in the interaction. While the ›same‹ practice may in one situation be regarded as independent of any given context, it may – in another situation – be conceived as belonging to this very context.

In other words, the external contexts of interaction situations operate through constraining the comprehension of actors, as ›introjected constraints‹. External realities must, however, »be mediated through perception of conduct options and external forces. This mediation occurs through the internalization of constraints and the exterior reality of institutions« (Fine 1991, S.172). This interpretive mediation is based on an »obdurate reality of images« (ibid.) – i.e. obdurate images of both the ›world‹ and the forces which operate in this world. We perceive external realities through these images, and the accept-

ance of these images shapes our action. Often, this is linked to a reification of macro-concepts in everyday thinking – thinking which is shaped by categories, but frequently not categories of processes and social interaction but rather actors, groups, and collective units. »Our reading of situations involves creating typifications of macro-structures that serve as the basis for addressing future interactions« (ibid., S.165). In this perspective, »macrosociology is a form of folk belief« (ibid.) which underpins how people organize their experiences.

The argument presented so far is concerned with the question of how conditions in the situation can be conceived of as *external* conditions. The relevance of *external conditions* in any given situation is primarily produced through *meaning contexts* (German »*Sinnzusammenhang*«). The term context does indeed seem adequate, as it may not only be understood as referring to the embeddedness of present experiences in an interlinked conglomerate of past experiences, but also to the notion that the meaning level does indeed provide a context for present interaction, a context that may or may not be perceptible through those senses directed at the realms outside of the body.

Thus, any condition considered to be structuring an interaction situation and considered to be external to the situation is – *viewed from the given interaction situation* – primarily to be conceived as a meaning context in terms of its externality (but not necessarily in terms of its physical manifestation). Discourses, idiocultures of groups, organizations, etc. are (again, viewed from any given social interaction) meaning contexts. This does not imply that these conditions consist only of ›meaning‹ or that they may not also be physically present; on the contrary, they may be manifest in actions and objects and may be reproduced through large-scale material infrastructures and institutions, and the link to other elements that are physically not present may be made in explicit ways. However, in addition to and in the absence of such explicit references to external conditions, the externality of conditions is established on the meaning level.

3 Multiple levels of analysis

If situated action is assumed to be constrained and shaped by various elements whose structuring effects have been established outside a given interaction situation, we can consider processes and phenomena as relevant that are conventionally situated on the so-called macro- and meso-levels of analysis. If, however, we approach the question from a macro-level perspective, the corollary question arises as to whether processes on the micro-level are relevant if one is interested in studying macro- and meso-level phenomena. To further inform the theoretical framework of a Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Ethnography that is concerned with an analysis and study of these levels, I draw on and critically engage with the conceptual reflections put forward by Jepperson and Meyer (2011) on how these multiple levels of analysis are interrelated.

3.1 Multiple levels of analysis – and how they are interrelated

Jepperson and Meyer (2011) depart from the question of through what type of pathways social facts manifest themselves in specific social outcomes. Expanding the Boudon–Coleman diagram (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S. 66), they distinguish three levels of causal explanation: an institutional level (macro-level), a social-organizational level (meso-level), and an individual level (micro-level). Following Herbert Simon (1962, in Jepperson/Meyer 2011), they assume that societies are shaped by an »architecture of complexity« consisting of a hierarchical continuum of levels of complexity. Each of the three levels consists of a set of causal processes that are characterized by a certain degree of organizational complexity, and each level of explanation is characterized by a specific way in which »causal pathways« operate. The levels may not necessarily be clearly distinguishable, and each level may constitute a context for another level – i.e. processes on the individual level may be reciprocally related to processes on the social-organizational and institutional level.

All collective processes on these higher levels »are produced and reproduced by persons' behaviours« (ibid., S.68) on the individual level. How this happens is an empirical question (e.g. through which socialization processes and other processes of knowledge inculcation). Conceiving macro- and meso-level phenomena as reproduced on the micro-level, however, must not be conflated with conceiving causality on the individual level:

> »The ›microfoundations‹ of social-organizational and institutional causal pathways are not equivalent to causal arguments at the level of individuals conceived as actors.« (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S.67)

Structural effects on these higher levels are linked to higher degrees of organizational complexity (e.g. on the social-organizational level) due to »relatively durably organized networks of social roles, or group cultural and religious commitments« (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S.68). It is in this sense that they argue for a direct macro-to-macro causal pathway.

Consequently, Ronald Jepperson and John Meyer suggest – if one is interested in phenomena on the meso- and macro-level – only using the micro-level if analytically meaningful. Evidently, reciprocal relationships between these levels of analysis need to be considered, as they often may (and effectively do) constitute contexts for each other. Which level of analysis to consider should not be an a-priori decision, but an empirical one: »[T]he causally operative levels must be decided via substantive and empirical adjudication, not dictated by theoretical precommitments« (ibid., S.61).

Similar to how a consistent situational perspective raises the question of how external constraints can be conceived as external, this distinction of levels of analysis as introduced above poses ambiguities with regard to how the micro-level of analysis is relevant to the study of macro-level processes. In the following, I consider four aspects of Meyer and Jepperson's framework and demonstrate in what regard they are in need of further differentiation if they are to be used to inform a discourse ethnographic approach.

(1) Organizational complexity: the basic difference between the different levels of analysis and the ways in which they ›cause‹ stability and change rests, according to Jepperson and Meyer, in the different degrees of complexity: they »focus on levels of causal processes differentiated by complexity« (ibid., S.60). As the conventional terms macro-, meso-, and micro-level of analysis might lead to a conflation of scale or size with complexity, they talk of »individual-level explanations«, »explanations in terms of social-organizational processes«, and »institutional processes« (ibid., S.61). Although Jepperson and Meyer also consider ›elementary social behaviour‹ or ›rudimentary exchange relations‹ as part of the individual level, the term ›individual-level‹ does not reflect the fact that many micro-sociological approaches do not primarily consider the individual as the most relevant unit (although some justifiably do so, such as biographical and narrative research approaches). Rather, it is »interaction in social situations« that is regarded thus (Knorr-Cetina 1981, S. 8), a trend reflected in reconceptualizations of existing approaches such grounded theory with situated interaction in mind (e.g. Clarke 2005 on »situational analysis« in the context of grounded theory).

Such approaches conceive of social action as arising from interacting, co-present individuals whose attention and systems of relevance are for any given moment of interaction to some extent mutually intertwined and entrained. Research traditions such as ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have shown that the social organization of interaction on the micro-level is of considerable complexity, a complexity that grows substantially with the increase in technologically mediated appresentations of social processes and actors that are not physically co-present.[6]

Complexity, thus, is not necessarily linked to what Jepperson and Meyer call the institutional or social-organizational level. Complexity depends on the ›analytical resolution‹: virtually any social phenomenon can be dissolved in ever smaller ›units‹ that are embedded in processes of generating, maintaining, and changing that very phenomenon. Thus, the terms ›institutional‹ and ›social-organizational‹ level – even if chosen not to be conflated with scale – do imply a difference concerning the number and size of organizational units, institutional processes, actors, etc. If a micro-perspective with a ›finer-grained‹ analytical level of resolution is applied to a larger number of units involved, then levels of complexity are indeed likely to rise, as more micro-settings – considered in their ›micro-complexity‹ – increase the manifold ways in which micro-settings are interlocked. This may not simply ›add‹ separate realms of complexity, but constitute a different ›type‹ of complexity.

(2) If institutional- and social-organizational-level processes are considered to be micro-founded (what Jepperson and Meyer call an »ontological truism«), then they are, by definition, not only ›present‹ in micro-level action, they *(co-)structure* this action at least in a minimal sense. Assuming otherwise, i.e. them to be manifest as phenomena without

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6   While there has always been a concern with how circumstances that transcend the immediate situation or phenomenon and are not physically present become relevant nonetheless (Knorr-Cetina 1981, S.11), recent theorizations of ›co-presence‹ (Campos-Castillo/Hitlin 2013), as noted above, conceive it as a variable phenomenon and not as a binary state (that would imply either being *physically* co-present *or* not co-present).

consequences for action on the micro-level, would imply not only that a given micro-setting is without effect for the reproduction of the macro-level causality, but that *all* micro-settings that are considered to reproduce a specific macro-process are without effect for its causality. Macro-level causality depends, according to Jepperson and Meyer, on the higher complexity of social organization; this complexity, however, must manifest itself in the various linkages between micro-instantiations of these macro-level processes. These linkages must to some extent be relevant in these micro-settings for them to be considered to be part of this complex social organization that constitutes macro-level causality.

Thus, taking up the metaphor of the »film-strip« that Jepperson and Meyer borrow from Collins (1981, 1988) to express the notion of capturing micro-instantiations (›film-strips‹) of large-scale processes (›films‹), a film-strip would indeed not capture an *entire* institutional-level process, as Jepperson and Meyer point out (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S. 67), but importantly, *a small segment* of that process. If that were not the case, the talk of micro-foundations would be obsolete. To capture the entire process (or at least get an ›impression‹ of the entire process) such film-strips would have to be taken from a broad range of settings that constitute in their connectedness and reciprocal relatedness the macro-level process of interest. As individual and social action in each micro-setting must to some extent be structured by the macro-level phenomena, the ›causality‹ cannot *only* be attributed to higher levels of complexity, but to a structuring effect on the individual level. Evidently, some of these micro-settings are more centrally implied in the reproduction of the macro-level causality than others.

(3) If macro-level social facts are conceived to produce a specific social outcome, then their reproduction on the individual level must happen in such a way that individual-level action contributes (partially) to an outcome that can be linked to that very macro-level process. Otherwise, that macro-level phenomenon would not be *reproduced* (but something else, if anything), and that macro-level social fact could not be said to have a causal effect on the outcome (to use Jepperson and Meyer's example, the ›outcome‹ (capitalism) could not be attributed to the purported ›social fact‹ (Protestantism)).

Even if micro-processes are diverse and not direct reproductions of organizational and institutional arrangements, for causal pathways on the social-organizational and institutional level to be effective there must be some structuring effect on the micro-level. While not every macro-level process must be traceable in every micro-setting, it must be traceable in some, and it is the study of these settings that allows us to analyse how and why macro-level processes lead to specific outcomes on the micro-level. These outcomes are not evident, as micro-level settings in most cases are shaped by multiple macro- and meso-level processes. This further implies that macro- und meso-level processes are based on *some* uniformity of individual action and interaction concerning the typicality of form and ›substance‹. The degree of this uniformity is, to be sure, empirically variable and – with regard to a given macro- or meso-level process – likely to concern only one segment of local action and interaction.

(4) According to Jepperson and Meyer, each level of explanation is characterized by a specific way in which ›causal pathways‹ operate; on the individual level, they mention,

among others, »personality formation« or »simple forms of strategic interaction (such as those captured by game theory)« (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S. 61). These analytical lenses refer to more abstract or formal ›rules‹, ›patterns‹, etc. – concepts whose structuring effect or ways in which they generate causal effects is conceived as ›generic‹ and applicable to other corresponding micro-settings. The individual-level analysis should, however, not be reduced to such an analytical focus. Conceived like this, micro-level settings appear as ›empirically non-autonomous‹, their structuring effect consisting of stabilizing and reproducing any particular empirical phenomena constituted through the linkage to meso- and macro-level processes. Rather, micro-level processes may additionally be empirically studied with regard to their historical formation and concrete manifestations that set them apart from other micro-settings, thus (partially) constituting particular ›realities sui generis‹. In other words, the ›source‹ or ›location‹ of specific empirical manifestations of experience and action is not only to be found on the meso- and macro-level; micro-settings may to some extent form ›idiosyncratic‹ domains that are at the same time shaped by macro- and meso-level forces yet partially resilient in the face of these forces.

3.2 Analytical and methodological implications: studying how the micro-level co-structures macro-level phenomena

Analytically and methodologically, the arguments put forward above imply to study macro-level processes through the lens of local action. However, seeing micro-level settings as constituted through the interlocking of micro-level structuring concepts and empirical ›content‹ – the latter derived from macro-, meso- and micro-level processes and phenomena – and as potentially resilient does not imply that processes on this level are only idiosyncratic, singular, unstructured phenomena (as already noted above). Instead, studying everyday phenomena would entail reconstructing and analysing the typical ways in which certain institutional-level and meso-level processes enfold structuring effects in situations on the individual level.

Such an analysis could firstly trace which of the potentially many macro- and meso-level processes come to be more salient and dominant in structuring action than others. Such an analysis would secondly also allow us to attribute specific outcomes to one or several macro- and meso-level processes. Evidently, social outcomes of macro-level processes must not necessarily manifest themselves only in a given micro-setting; rather, these outcomes are likely to be long-term processes whose effects are to be analysed in a historical perspective and which are, overall, generated through the continued or intermittent interlocking of micro-settings. However, as noted above, if micro-settings in general do not facilitate the empirical study of the links between processes and their outcome, outcomes cannot be attributed to a specific macro- or meso-level process. Thirdly, individual action (and thus the ensuing interaction) is always based on subjective stocks of knowledge that have been socially derived in a range of diverse social domains, generating creative individual action that is seemingly idiosyncratic, manifest in the complex ways in which individuals use and combine phenomena stemming from all levels of

causation. Considering the micro-level thus potentially enables the study of the transformation of macro-level phenomena, or how specific *combinations* of them result in specific outcomes.

To sum up, I argue that the micro-level of explanation may, on the one hand, serve to analyse relatively generic ›basic social behaviour‹ and contribute to a better understanding and theorizing of it, with the aim of reconstructing rules, patterns, etc. that are not just found in a particular context. On the other hand, however, I suggest understanding the micro-level of explanation as an analytical lens focused on social situations that create (through the interlocking of, analytically speaking, micro-level concepts and the typification of their repeated ›empirical content‹) micro-contexts on their own, partially unorganized and diverse *and* simultaneously *partially* organized and uniform. Furthermore, I submit that micro-level processes do not only refer to causal pathways that »capture effects produced by relatively unorganized people« (Jepperson/Meyer 2011, S. 68). To participants and observers alike, it might seem evident by which meso- and macro-level contexts certain interactions are shaped. However, as argued above, from a radical situational perspective, linkages to anything physically absent or temporally lying in the past must be treated cautiously. As Jepperson and Meyer also call for, the adequate level of analysis should not be a theoretical a-priori decision, but should consist of a »substantive and empirical adjudication [and] not [be] dictated by theoretical precommitments« (ibid., S.61).

Evidently, such a distinction between different levels of analysis does not consider any of these levels as analytically more significant than the others: analytically speaking, these levels rather constitute theoretical infrastructures that mutually depend on each other (Fine 1991). In the following section, I suggest that a sociology of knowledge approach provides an epistemological framework for adequately considering and also studying the macro- and meso-level of analysis in research that is empirically focused on micro-level settings.

4 A sociology of knowledge approach to discourse ethnography

Particularly within the German interpretive tradition of sociology, empirical studies employing qualitative methodologies have predominantly focused on micro-settings, studying small life-worlds (e.g., Honer 1993), scenes (e.g., Hitzler/Pfadenhauer 1998), and biographies (e.g., Rosenthal 1995), among many other domains (for an overview, see Keller 1997). Situated within this interpretive-qualitative research tradition, the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) (Keller 1997, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) has been developed to broaden the focus of qualitative research to include wider societal structures. Consistent with this perspective that conceives discourses as analytical units belonging to the macro-level of analysis, empirical research in this tradition has focused on realms that are conventionally considered to be influential in shaping processes of wider societal significance. It studies the development and formation of discourses based predominantly on ›naturally occurring‹ empirical data from social domains such as the political field, mass media, the legal system, large organizations, and state institutions. Research has

traced and reconstructed the development of discourses and the processes through which discourses construct social realities in specific ways and thus not only shape public and political debate, but intervene in everyday life through becoming embedded in institutional regulations and producing discourse-specific infrastructures that intervene on their behalf.

Given this analytical concern with the macro-level, the endeavour of a discourse ethnography constitutes to some extent a return to a focus on the ›local‹ – aimed at combining the detailed study of local settings with a macro- and meso-perspective in mind. As argued above, such a research strategy may help to better understand what kind of macro- and meso-level processes structure everyday interaction and how they do so. It allows us to trace and investigate the complex ways in which macro-level processes and phenomena become part of everyday interactions; how they are related to and interwoven with other micro-, meso-, and macro-level phenomena; how they are contested and negotiated; how they lead to specific ›social outcomes‹ in daily interaction; and how macro- and meso-level phenomena are stabilized and transformed in everyday life settings. Of particular analytical value is, furthermore, the potential to study how micro-level actions are reciprocally linked to and embedded in other meso- and macro-level contexts, enabling us to better understand how meso-level phenomena such as groups maintain their resilience or change in the face of macro-level forces and other meso-level forces ›entering‹ their domain.

4.1 Phenomenological sociology of knowledge as an epistemological framework

A sociology of knowledge approach in the tradition of Berger and Luckmann (1966) as well as Schütz and Luckmann (1967, 1974, 1989) is particularly well suited to serving as an epistemological and theoretical framework not only for discourse analysis, but also for discourse ethnography, as it allows us to conceive social reality at the same time as processual and constructed, as obdurate and fixed, without this being an empirical or theoretical contradiction (Eberle 2000). In what follows, I briefly introduce this approach by focusing on some of the basic premises and analytical insights of Schütz (1967) as well as Schütz and Luckmann (1974, 1989) in order to better understand how it could be linked to both: the micro-macro model discussed above as well as the ethnographic extension of discourse analysis. In the tradition of Luckmann, I understand this analysis as a »proto-sociological«, philosophical framework (see Eberle 2000), developed to serve as a basis for sociological theorizing.

Meaning is constituted in the subjective consciousness of an individual, always situated in the spatial ›here‹ and temporal ›now‹: based on perceptual impressions, actors experience reality as a continuous flow in time. Some of these experiences (*Erlebnisse*) sediment into personal memory, constituting over time a subjective stock of knowledge. *Erlebnisse* are turned into *Erfahrungen* in a reflexive act, in which the individual relates a present experience to past experiences. This is how the meaning of present experiences is

constituted: through relating current to past experiences. This implies a process of typification, i.e. the creation and use of definitional relations that allow the recognition of particular reality elements as typical elements which are related to other elements in typical ways. The typification implied in meaning constitution is thus not bound to sign systems. However, sign systems and especially language are of particular relevance in the processes of creating intersubjectivity, a fleeting and fluid process of interpreting and understanding the meaning of the other actors' actions and experiences. This process is based on signs whose meanings have been typified and objectified in ways that enable mutual understanding.

Sociality, however, is generated not only through the fleeting process of establishing intersubjectivity, but through the social derivation of much of the knowledge that the actors *construct* by observing, interacting, enacting, and experiencing: while actors are conceived as corporeally individuated (their inner experiences constituting transcendental realms for others), they are simultaneously and fundamentally socialized through the social derivation of their subjective stocks of knowledge. Schütz and Luckmann (1974, 1989) further analyse how different systems of relevance shape what type of themes are constituted in perceiving and experiencing, how they are interpreted, and how action is motivated. In this perspective, perception, experience, interpretation, and (social) action are always inextricably intertwined with both processes of meaning constitution and corporeal flows of feelings and sensory impressions. Every life is an embodied and material experience invested with meaning.

Partially based on these analyses, Berger and Luckmann (1966) develop a sociological theory aimed at explaining how the fluid and processual character of everyday meaning constitution, intersubjectivity, and interaction creates forms of knowledge that are objectified and reified. In processes of habitualization, routinization, institutionalization, and legitimation, actors continuously stabilize and justify the corresponding arrangements of social organization. Through processes of learning and socialization, the corresponding objectified realities become part of the actors' subjective realities and their self-understandings, maintained continuously through interaction with relevant others. It is through these processes that large realms of social reality, although continuously produced through human action, come to be seen – by the very actors that (re)produce them – as an obdurate reality.

Thus, a major structuring component of everyday reality is those knowledge elements that underpin routinized, habitualized, and institutionalized processes. In other words: everyday perception, experience, action, and interpretation are partially shaped and structured by knowledge that may be routinized and objectified to such an extent that the actors do not (need to) reflectively thematize it – it remains ›hidden‹, yet it is part of what is conventionally called the emic perspective of the actors, and could at any stage be thematized again and brought into focus. Introjected constraints, then, conceived of as knowledge elements structuring social interaction, unfold their effect on a continuum of routine and reflexivity, being embedded in non-thematized routine processes as well as in processes of creative, innovative, and strategic use of knowledge in action and interaction. Any research strategy interested in how social realities are structured must thus con-

sider, on the one hand, knowledge that is at the centre of the actors' attention, and on the other hand knowledge that structures the routine part of perception, experience, action, and interpretation and to which the actors pay no or very little attention.

As outlined in the first section, I argued that from a radical situational perspective, elements whose structural or conditional qualities have been routinized, objectified, and institutionalized temporally and spatially outside any given interaction situation become relevant mainly on the meaning level, i.e. through the socially derived stocks of knowledge of the participants who remember and appresent – in the present – conditional elements that were generated in the past. Thus, in any given situation, a substantial part of what is external yet conditions the situation is located on the meaning level, for both meso- and macro-level phenomena alike. This is not to say that these meso- and macro-level phenomena consist only of meaning structures; on the contrary, they are based on manifold material manifestations and tangible practices. They are, in other words, always micro-founded through mundane action and interpretation and all the material objects that flow from or are embedded in them. This argument, however, refers only to the externality of structures« in a given situation viewed from that very situation; in such instances, the externality of implicit or explicit elements conditioning and constraining the action is to be found on the meaning level. Through their enactment in the situation, the corresponding macro- and meso-level structures get (re)produced, lead to specific social outcomes, and are maintained as well as transformed.

4.2 Discourses: an interpretive conceptualization of macro-level phenomena

Macro- and meso-level concepts can be conceived of in a broad range of ways. I suggest that a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2011b) seems particularly well suited to conceptualizing the macro-level of analysis with the aim of studying macro-phenomena through a local lens, since the concepts of meaning and typicality are central to many qualitative research approaches studying local settings. Discourses produce »statements in which claims and assertions about phenomena are perpetuated and accompanied by more or less strong claims about their validity« (ibid., S.235).[7] They are »complex[es] of statement events and the therein embedded practices, which are linked through a structural connection [...] and which process specific knowledge orders of reality« (ibid.). The structural connection »encompasses the rules and resources that are common to the events« (ibid.). This notion of discourse builds centrally on

»discourses as practices that constitute phenomena and objects, practices that are based on a common structure; on the reciprocal relation between discourse structure and any single discursive event; and the corresponding ›macro-perspective‹ and empirical orientation of discourse analysis.« (Keller 2011b, S.141)

7   All citations from Keller (2011b) are my translations.

Reiner Keller suggests two ways in which discourses can be identified and distinguished: (1) by the main »institutional-organizational setting(s)« in which they are reproduced, or (2) by their »thematic reference« (Keller 2011b, S.228). Both the typical ways in which a discourse constructs social reality in a given institutional-organizational setting and the thematic structure that informs reality construction in multiple settings manifest themselves in typical aspects of discourse-related statements. Typicality is, according to Schütz and Luckmann (Schütz/Luckmann 1974) as noted above, a definitional relation through which perceptional elements become recognizable. As such, the types and processes of typification are a central part of the process of meaning constitution and the associated processes of perceiving, experiencing, interpreting, and acting. In a very general way, the discourse-related character of these processes is based on the discourse-specific construction and ›derivation‹ of the subjective stock of knowledge of the involved actors. This discourse-specific character is manifest in the typicality of the systems of relevance as well as the knowledge elements, in the interlinkages between these knowledge elements as well as in the degree of ›boundedness‹ to which these knowledge elements appear as knowledge ›conglomerates‹. In other words, discourses become relevant by constituting the typicality of the »introjected constraints« (Fine 1991) used by the involved actors.[8] These constraints, as discourse-related knowledge elements, may have a structuring effect in two ways: (1) by underpinning and shaping processes of perception, experience, interpretation, and action; and (2) by constituting the relevant reference in the process of meaning-constitution. This may not necessarily be coherent, i.e. the meaning of discourse-shaped action may not necessarily be constituted in the context of that very same discourse, and the meaning of action that is otherwise non-related to a specific discourse may be constituted in the light of a specific discourse. In principle, the structuring effect of such constraints may differ with regard to the implicit and explicit character of the enactment as well as the degree of routine and reflexivity with which these constraints are enacted.

As I will further argue below, this ›minimal‹ definition of discourse is analytically fruitful in at least three ways. Firstly, it provides an epistemological framework to integrate discourse as a macro-level concept with other meso-level concepts – such as the notion of groups as bounded and spatially situated interaction scenes with their own idiocultures (Fine 2010) – that are both a concern to discourse analysis and ›classic‹ ethnographic research. Secondly, it does not restrict discourse to a specific form of intervention and reality construction, but allows for this to be conceived of with a broad range of different analytical concepts as suggested by Keller (see Keller 2011b, S. 233 ff.), warranting a theoretical and empirical sensitivity with regard to which analytical concepts are *meaningfully adequate* when studying how specific settings are shaped by discourses (Eberle 1999a, 1999b). Thirdly, this conceptualization of discourse implies two analytical distinctions: between discursive- and non-discursive on the one hand, and between discourse-related and non-discourse-related on the other (Keller 2013, S.71). Concerning

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8   As Wundrak (in this issue) demonstrates in studying the interaction in a refugee's shelter and the corresponding references to collective meaning contexts.

the former distinction, a social-constructivist epistemological and theoretical framework regards experience, social action, and interpretation not only as fundamentally invested with meaning, but always as corporeal and material sensory experience. While corporeality refers to the experiential dimension of sensing one's body *from within* that corporeal boundary that constitutes one's body, materiality refers to sensing anything – including one's body – through the senses directed at the environment, whereby materiality may be manifest in various forms of ›tangible‹ crystallizations. Conventionally, those objects are considered material objects that are more or less permanently tangible to the tactile and visual sense, while the materiality status of e.g. sound waves would be considered much more ambivalent – a discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper.

As noted above, typification – according to Schütz – is not limited to the domain of signs and symbols, but may be the result of ›basic‹ corporeal perceptions. However, in everyday life much of what socialized actors do is embedded in and shaped by sign systems. Based on the *analytical* distinction of corporeal experiences and sign-based processes of meaning constitution, there is a *continuum* of degrees to which corporeal experiences and materiality may be relevant. There are modes of action and experience which primarily centre around the body and material objects, and modes of action and experience at the centre of which are primarily sign-based processes (the latter mode does not imply, however, that these processes are disembodied or non-material). While the former is referred to as ›non-discursive‹, the latter is referred to as ›discursive‹. Discourses thus may be reproduced through practices that are primarily discursive (such as face-to-face verbal communication, email correspondence, posts on social media platforms, articles in the mass media and academic journals, etc.) or they may be reproduced through practices that are primarily non-discursive (such as sports practices, protest marches, the different handling of bodies in interactions (e.g. being seated or standing upright), etc.).

As noted above, the distinction between discursive and non-discursive does not correspond exactly to the distinction between discourse-related and non-discourse-related elements of social reality. The latter refers to the notion that not necessarily all aspects of everyday perception, experience, interpretation, and action are shaped by discourses. As the processes of meaning constitution and action always bear the index of the spatial ›here‹ and ›temporal‹ now, the relevance of discourses may analytically not be taken for granted: the use of discourses is context- and situation-specific and must be investigated empirically. This is based on the premise that any actor's socially derived stock of knowledge is not only shaped by discourse-specific typicalities but by typicalities originating from socialization and learning processes in other social realms, whereby ›other‹ refers to domains which are analytically and empirically conceived of in different ways than discourses. This distinction is a concern of Foucault's later work. Discussing this work, Keller highlights the separation of »discourses from discourse-external practices or fields of practice and the study of the relations between the two« (Keller 2011b, S.141). A study of discourses hence needs to be concerned with, or at least be aware of,

> »practices established in institutional settings or social fields of practices that have a specific routinized meaning for the involved actors, a meaning that is often precisely not in line with expectations set by discourses.« (Keller 2011b, S.138)

This implies not only the study of statements and of »practices through which discourses form subjects«, but »the observation of practices as a relatively autonomous layer of reality with its own dynamics« (ibid., S.138). Indeed, if the notion of discourse implies the study of how – within any given discourse – subjects are positioned, how they are allocated differential rights to speak, and how some actors are effectively silenced and deprived of a sense of agency (see ibid.), then these latter subjectivities are likely articulated outside the given discourses, either in opposition to them or in a manner that is relatively independent from them. Such an articulation ›outside‹ of discourse is based on the premise that actors are socialized in various social domains that cannot be reduced to a single discourse or multiple discourses. Rather, any individual action is based on a socially derived subjective stock of knowledge in which various complementary and contradictory conglomerates of typical knowledge elements and systems of relevance are available to be drawn upon in the production of social reality.

It is through relating these diverse knowledge conglomerates to each other that actors become endowed with at least a minimal (sense of) agency and that a reflective, distancing, or creative use of discourses as well as resistance to discourses becomes possible. How plausible such a sense of agency is, how well it is maintained, and how effective it is in everyday life depends on the availability of reality maintenance processes and structures as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966) with regard to the maintenance of subjective realities. Not conceiving all social reality construction as ›discourse-related‹ provides the analytical opportunity to conceptualize such alternative reality maintenance structures and to study how discourses become entangled with them, but also to understand them as more or less resilient contexts in which »struggles, strategies, and tactics in and between discourses« (Keller 2011b, S.141) are played out. Importantly, this conceptual distinction allows us to empirically study the growing as well as diminishing influence of discourses in any given particular social setting.

Within a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, as noted above, it is the ›structural connection‹ that constitutes the core of any discourse. While geared towards a macro-level of analysis, such a structural connection may principally also refer to meso-level structures. Taking up Jepperson and Meyer's argument that different levels of explanations – each consisting of a set of causal processes operating in specific ways – are distinguished by different degrees of organizational complexity, a conception of discourses as macro-level structures must distinguish them from micro-level and meso-level contexts in terms of complexity. As argued above, the complexity of social organization depends on the level of ›analytical resolution‹, and is thus to some extent a ›function‹ of the observer's perspective. It is also noted, however, that complexity levels do rise when additional micro- and meso-level settings are taken into consideration, as all of these settings are micro-founded and hence display – in their micro-instantiations – the very complexity of micro-level social situations. Thus, discourses are set apart from any given micro-level phenomenon by constituting structural connections that link several such micro-settings – i.e. they establish transsituational links through being enacted in these micro-settings. Moreover, they structure any given situation in *typical* ways in which they have shaped past situations, thus creating at least a minimal degree of uniformity of the

situations they condition throughout time. This structuring effect may pertain to anything within the situation: it may pertain only to specific aspects of the interaction situation, or may be constitutive of the entire situation.

The distinction of discourses from meso-level contexts is less obvious. Considering the criterion of organizational complexity, discourses are distinguished from meso-level contexts in the same way that they are distinguished from micro-level settings, reaching beyond any given meso-level setting to other micro- and meso-level settings and shaping the meso-level settings in specific ways. The distinction rests upon how the meso-level context of interest is conceptualized, which in turn depends on the empirical phenomena of interest as well as the theoretical framework. For example, if an empirical setting suggests that local practices are organized in a rather autonomous way and seem resilient in the face of ›external‹ influences, then a meso-level analysis seems adequate that implies a bounded realm, i.e. a socially shared domain that includes several types of units and actors and that is to some extent socially bounded by processes of social closure. The term Jepperson and Meyer use for this, the ›social-organizational level‹, implicates to some extent this notion of temporarily stabilized and bounded ›fields of practice‹. As with macro-level concepts, however, the conceptualization of meso-level contexts should not be an a-priori theoretical decision but should consist of an adjudication based on the empirical setting of interest.

The degree to which discourses shape and impact social reality is a continuum, ranging from relatively banal, everyday actualization of discourses, to contexts in which discourses are systematically produced. Meso- and micro-level contexts may predominantly serve to actualize, reproduce, or produce a given *single* discourse, or they may provide opportunities for a more or less diverse range of discourses to be enacted (for such an example, see Wundrak's analysis in this issue). Both meso- and micro-level contexts in which specific discourses are used become part of a discourse-specific dispositif, an institutional-organizational infrastructure of discourse production and reproduction. Discourses may produce an entire range of meso-level contexts geared towards reproducing them. Yet, in any type of meso-level context – be it centrally or marginally implied in the (re)production of discourses – the relevance of discourses may increase or decrease. New discourses may enter such contexts and not only challenge other discourse-related practices but appropriate local practices for their own way of intervening in the world and eventually constructing social reality in their own, discourse-specific way.

4.3 An ethnographic approach to analysing discourses

a. The ethnographic research endeavour

Ethnography has become a widespread and highly diversified research strategy, a field of methodologies and methods that in itself is hardly surveyable anymore.[9] There are two

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9   For overviews and introductions, see e.g. van Maanen (1988), Adler and Adler (2008), Atkinson (2001), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), and Gobo and Melie (2017).

characteristic features, however, that remain central to many ethnographic approaches and render an ethnography research strategy adequate for the analysis of discourses within a sociology of knowledge approach.

One of the major methods employed in many ethnographic research strategies remains participant observation in one form or another, »grounded in a commitment to […] first-hand experience and exploration« (Atkinson et al. 2001, S. 4). Such an experience is likely to be shaped by being present, observing, and (in varying degrees) participating in a more or less diverse range of social situations and interaction rituals, the researcher assuming different membership roles depending on the analytical purpose and the empirical field (Adler/Adler 1987). Some of these situations might, at times, just be constituted by the researcher and a research participant, e.g. when ›going along‹ (Kusenbach 2003) or during ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979). Much ethnographic research, however, focuses on social situations and interactions which are typically ›naturally occurring‹. The status of the data constructed through ethnographic experiences and encounters, the range of possible analytical insights, the stories that can be told from the field, the range of purposes appropriate for an ethnographic research endeavour, and indeed what ethnographers actually do when they collect and analyse data, are questions continuously debated within the field (see for a recent overview Adler/Adler 2008). The choice of the epistemological framework is, however, not an a-priori theoretical decision, but one made with regard to the empirical field of interest (Hirschauer 2001).

Another key feature of many ethnographic approaches is the reconstruction and study of the explicit and implicit (cultural) knowledge that shapes and structures how participants generate action and interpret their experience.[10] While the analytical concepts which are used to study such knowledge as well as the analytical purposes differ considerably in kind and combination, many approaches share the sensibility of a phenomenologically founded sociology of knowledge that social reality is simultaneously produced by human action in social processes and situations that are fleeting and evanescent, yet that there are patterns, rules, or regularities with which such reality construction occurs. The degree to which social realities appear objictified to the actors and the degree to which they are institutionalized is an empirical matter. Notwithstanding whether such a reality appears to be obdurate to the actors – the institutional order granting them little creative space for action – or whether the actors move with a great sense of and effective agency in the respective situations, what they do is either mediated by or fundamentally intertwined with a world of images (Fine 1991), a symbolic realm in which actors are continuously engaged in processes of meaning constitution and construction. Thus, many ethnographic approaches share with a sociology of knowledge approach the notion that processes of interpretation and meaning constitution are central to the experience and creation of social reality, and that these processes are in manifold ways intertwined with embodied practices and material objects.

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10 See e.g. Spradley (1979), Frake (1980), Quinn/Holland (1987), Geertz (1973).

An ethnographer is – depending on their rapport with the participants and their field role (Hirschauer 2001; Adler/Adler 1987) – well positioned to experience, i.e. to get an initial ›feeling‹ for and eventually to articulate those meaning contexts that remain largely implicit in certain interaction situations but nonetheless structure these situations. Ethnographers experience in relatively direct ways what kind of possibilities and restrictions these meaning contexts generate in the everyday life interactions of the setting they are studying. As Stefan Hirschauer points out, the main advantage (in light of the ever-increasing ease and ubiquitousness of technological means of recording) of an ethnographic research strategy lies not so much in simply recording local action, but in building a social rapport with the actors in the field over a longer period of time. It is through the »inscription« (Hirschauer 2001) of the resilient meaning contexts into the experience of the ethnographer (an experience that is embodied and invested with meaning) that the ethnographer is able to not only reconstruct the emic perspectives of the actors but also those processes that remain unnoticed in terms of routine structuring. In other words, the ethnographer is positioned to not just duplicate articulations by local actors but to contribute an additional perspective that to some extent may appear as a distortion to some of the local actors (ibid.).

b. Analysing discourses ethnographically

Engaging in participant observation presents any ethnographer with the experiential limits of the social situation, and the way the ethnographer and the participants ›transcend‹ this situation is by establishing transsituational links to meso- and macro-level phenomena and by routinely or reflexively acting and interacting on the basis of knowledge that is structured by macro- and meso-level processes and phenomena. The ethnographer is thus well positioned to study not only situated interaction, but also the situational relevance of conditional elements whose structuring effects have been established ›outside‹, i.e. mostly temporally before that interaction situation. In conjunction with other analytical concepts, an ethnographer can thus infer to what contexts outside any given social situation knowledge elements structuring that very situation pertain to: e.g. to a specific discourse or to a specific meso-level context such as the idiocultures and interactional grammars of groups or organizations (Fine 2012). The settings on which a discourse ethnography is focused depends on the analytical and empirical aim of such a project, which may in principle take the following two forms.

(1) A discourse ethnography may be interested in understanding and analysing specific (types of) local settings in their complexity. Such an approach would view these settings as shaped by a more or less diverse range of discourses and thus engage, on the one hand, in reconstructing local cultural practices and, on the other hand, studying how discourses are used and intervene within that setting. In terms of theorizing, this warrants a more specific conceptualization of that local setting (e.g. as social world, group, or organization) based on an empirical adjudication, since, as noted above, from the perspective of any ethnographic experience of social situations, such local settings must be regarded as external contexts as well (see Rixta Wundrak in this issue on how the Foucauldian no-

tion of heterotopias (Foucault 1986) may serve as conceptual framework to identify such settings). For the reconstruction of discourses, such an approach cannot rely on only one (or one type of) setting and must thus use other than ethnographically constructed data: the sort of natural data that is conventionally used in discourse analyses such as legal texts, mass media reporting, or transcripts of political debates, representing the influence of discourses in other social domains than the one ethnographically under study.

(2) The second form of discourse ethnography is less focused on how a particular type of setting is structured by discourses and more on reconstructing a particular discourse. Such a research strategy warrants a methodological reflection on how to sample the ›film-strips‹ (to use Collins' metaphor) needed to reconstruct the discourse-specific structure by comparing a diverse range of situations. The analytical focus of each of these ethnographic ›miniature‹ studies is likely to be narrower, geared towards establishing the discourse-related typicalities in contrast to the specifics of each of the chosen settings. As an ethnographic research strategy is resource-intensive and thus limits the number of settings that can be analysed, it is, as with the first strategy, also in need of other data sources.

Both forms would allow us to reconstruct ›other‹ – i.e. local – knowledge systems and how they relate to any given discourse in everyday action. This permits, on the one hand, the study of how and to what extent such settings are resilient with regard to specific discourses. How do discourses ›enter‹ such a setting? How do they lead to specific outcomes? How do they transform the local setting and take on specific local meanings, and how are they themselves transformed through this setting? Through participant observation of situated interaction, ethnographers are well positioned to study these phenomena. On the other hand, they are able to study the discourse-related construction of subjectivities and the related ›allocation‹ and resulting ›distribution‹ (both ongoing processes) of speaking and interaction rights, studying how ›silenced‹ voices cope with being marginalized, e.g. by conceiving of themselves using other contextual references than the discourse-related ones. In short, an ethnographer is well positioned to study how and to what extent social action is structured by (specific) discourses – and to what extent it is *not* structured by discourses (conceived as macro-level phenomena) but by other knowledge elements bound up with other meso- or macro-level forces.

An ethnographic approach is furthermore able to distinguish between different modes of how spatially and temporally situated action is structured, i.e. to identify to what extent introjected constraints (discourse-related and non-discourse-related) operate in terms of reflexivity and routine, and of the tacit or explicit nature of the knowledge underpinning and shaping action, but also with regard to the degree to which these constraints appear as objectified to the actors in the given setting. Discourses are not only studied in their reproduction through discursive articulations, but also as being reproduced through non-discursive practices. These are all dimensions that are less well captured with the conventional data employed for discourse analyses. Such a strategy furthermore avoids subsuming all perception, experience, interpretation, and (social) action a priori as discourse-related. An ethnographer is well positioned to analyse in what situations discourses structure action and how they do so, being capable of demonstrating *to what extent* local action is discourse-related. Importantly, this allows us to consider (the-

oretically and empirically) that discourses may become more or less relevant in any given setting, and to study how an increase or decrease in relevance takes place. This is an analytical endeavour that seems particularly necessary in situations and settings in which both researcher and participants alike are likely to assume an ›omnipresent‹ relevance of particular discourses due their highly objectified and taken-for-granted presence. Finally, the ethnographer is positioned to study not only how local meso-level contexts are related to discourses, but also how actors are situated with regard to specific discourses: to what extent they remain resilient or adapt to discourses; to what extent they are endowed with a sense of (autonomous) agency with regard to both; discourse use and being subjected to discourses; and to what ends and purposes actors employ discourses in the local setting, as well as how they use the local settings as opportunity structures and resources to (re)produce or resist discourses.[11]

Participating in everyday interaction, particularly (but by no means only) in interaction situated within meso-level contexts with routine participants and shared cultural ways of doing things, brings along an additional strength with regard to analysing discourses. Discourses are studied as embodied perception, experience, interpretation, and (social) action, both in terms of being used in interaction among human actors and in how they shape the relations to all other material objects as well as the natural and built environment involved in these everyday life-worlds. Put more broadly, such a research strategy studies discourses as material, embodied reality, as discursive *and* non-discursive construction of social realities. Such realities are, as noted above, in one way or another ›resilient‹ to changes and simultaneously enable and constrain action. What the actors consider (more or less) feasible courses of action and what they implicitly or explicitly consider as constraints is, however, often not evident. Participating directly in the everyday discourse-related construction of reality enables the ethnographer to have these more or less implicit options and constraints ›written‹ into their stock of experiences, thus making them available for an in-depth study and analysis – an undertaking particularly well reflected in ethnographies that aim at a phenomenological analysis of life-worlds.[12]

5 Conclusion

Discourse analysts and ethnographers usually form relatively distinct research communities. In each of these communities, scholars who advocate the complementary use of approaches from the other community have been the exception. Recent attempts at combining both raise the question of how the macro-level focus of discourse analysis can be fruitfully combined with a focus on the micro- and meso-levels often found in ethnographic research. As I argued above and as Rixta Wundrak and Christoph Maeder also argue (in this issue), a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse is particularly well

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11 See Akbaba in this issue on how teachers are entangled with and use discourses in an educational setting.
12 See e.g. Honer (1993) and Hitzler and Eberle (2004).

suited to being used as an epistemological framework to join the two, in particular for the following six reasons. It firstly provides a notion of discourse (at the core of which is a structural connection) that is compatible with those ethnographic traditions concerned with reconstructing and analysing the manifold ›webs of meaning‹ and cultural knowledge of the social settings they study. Ethnographic first-hand encounters allow a differentiated study of how the structuring effects of discourse-related knowledge play out in terms of routine and reflexive as well as tacit and explicit use. Secondly, it provides a basis for conceiving the externality of conditions that shape action in social situations, the latter constituting a major focus of ethnographic data collection: embedded in the actors' knowledge, conditions become relevant as *external* conditions on the meaning level. Thirdly, the phenomenological sociology of knowledge tradition has always treated social action as material, embodied action in which sensory experience is fundamentally intertwined with processes of meaning constitution. This provides an epistemological basis to ethnographically study discourse (re)production as situated, material, and embodied actions, of both a discursive and non-discursive nature. Fourthly, in addition to the distinction between discursive and non-discursive, this allows us to empirically distinguish between discourse-related and non-discourse-related action, experience, and interpretation. This distinction generates the possibility of studying how discourses are entangled with other structural elements (e.g. resilient local group cultures), to demonstrate how this entanglement leads to specific social outcomes locally, and to allow for the empirical expectation that the structuring effect of discourses may become stronger or weaker in a given setting of interest. Fifthly, conceiving actors as partially endowed with a sense of agency and resilience shaped through various other situations and contexts, a discourse ethnography can study on what resources actors draw other than those of the dominant discourses to pursue and articulate their interests and self-understandings. This is of particular interest with regard to those actors who are marginalized or silenced by discourses. And sixthly, the observation of the usage of discourses in social situations permits us not only to study and analyse *how* they shape actions, but also *how* actors establish transsituational links to other social situations and domains.

There are further theoretical and methodological challenges to be addressed in conceptualizing an ethnographic perspective on the local enactment and production of discourses. If discourses as macro-level structures are, as argued above, defined by a relatively higher degree of organizational complexity than meso- and micro-level structures, then a further discussion is warranted on both the empirical manifestations and the theoretical ›nature‹ of the complexity of discourses, taking the ›minimal‹ definition of a discourse as a typified structural connection further by elaborating the specific organizational complexity of discourses (in contrast to other macro-level structures). In advancing such a discussion, a discourse ethnographic approach is thus well suited to pursuing the two-fold analytical aim that Keller et al. (2005) suggest for an interpretive discourse analysis, based upon the conventional distinction between explanation (*erklären*) and understanding/interpreting (*verstehen*). While *understanding* aims at studying the typical introjected, discourse-specific constraints of social action, *explanation* involves developing hypotheses with regard to the social conditions that gave rise to any specific dis-

courses and the developments through which discourse-related reality construction processes became embedded in a more or less diverse range of contexts and situations. Based on the arguments in this article, this would entail studying the organizational complexity with which these situations and contexts are interlinked.

The methodological challenges to be addressed partially differ with regard to the two basic analytical purposes of a discourse ethnography: (1) reconstructing and analysing a specific discourse in various settings, or (2) examining a specific setting with regard to the various discourses that co-structure that setting. The basic challenge for both research purposes remains the same: the reconstruction of the macro-level ›structural connection‹ that is at the core of any discourse and that is linked to the local situated action. Such a reconstruction must be based on material that demonstrates the higher organizational complexity that in turn warrants a demonstration of how discourses structure other contexts than the local micro- or meso-level context the researcher is ethnographically studying. In principle, this can and should ideally be done by ethnographically examining additional local settings, reconstructing through comparison what typical elements structure *and* link all these local settings; but such a reconstruction will have to use, as noted above, additional naturally occurring data in which the use and structuring influence of discourses in other social domains are manifest. This warrants more methodological work to be done with regard to the various strategies that can be pursued to demonstrate this structural connection. Elsewhere, I tentatively suggest three strategies: (1) tracing discourse-related references of actors to other contexts, (2) identifying common knowledge sources, and (3) tracing the historical formation of the discourse-related references used by actors (Elliker forthcoming). While the decisions with regard to which fields additional data should be collected from are largely substantive and empirical adjudications based on the discourses and settings of interests, they are likely to be drawn from fields that are conventionally considered to be centrally implied in shaping macro-level forces, such as mass media or the political field. This, in turn, warrants further conceptualization of the different ways in which these fields operate and thus shape how discourses unfold their structuring influence in various settings in typical yet different ways.

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