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Relations, Discourses and Subjectivities: The Social Construction of Reality and beyond

The Sociology of Knowledge and the Interpretive Paradigm of Sociology, as it was outlined in Berger's and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality* is often misunderstood as a cognitivist approach that essentializes subjects as powerful sources of meaning. In contrast, this article argues that this interpretive approach is grounded in the perspective of the *decentered subject* and that it takes the materiality of meaning making processes into account. Therefore, three modifications of Berger's and Luckmann's interpretive sociology are outlined in this paper: first, the theoretical transition from a interactionist to a *relational* perspective; second, the specification of symbolic orders as universes of *discourses* and, thirdly, the conceptualization of identity as ongoing *self-positioning* processes. The article aims to show that these developments broaden the perspective the Social Construction by clarifying the methodological standpoint in order to enrich empirical research in the fields of discourse and subjectivation studies as well as in the classical research fields of the interpretive sociology that focus on interactions in the life-world.

Key words: Social Construction, Sociology of Knowledge, Interpretive Paradigm, Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, Interpretive Subjectivation Analysis, Discourse, Subjectification

Односи, дискурси и субјективитети: После Друштвене конструкције стварности

Социологија знања, те интерпретативна парадигма у социологији, као што је наглашено у Бергеровој и Лукмановој књизи *Друштвена конструкција стварности*, често је погрешно схваћена као когнитивистички приступ који есенцијализује субјекте као снажне изворе значења. Насупрот томе, у овом чланку се предлаже да је такав интерпретативистички приступ заснован у перспективи *децентрираног субјекта* и да у обзир узима материјалност процеса стварања значења. Стога се у овом чланку наглашавају три измене Бергерове и Лукманове интерпретативне социологије: прво, теоријски прелаз од интеракционистичке ка *релационој* перспективи; друго, спецификација симболичких поредака као универзума *дискурса* и, треће, концептуализација идентитета као трајног процеса *самопозиционирања*. Овај чланак има за циљ да укаже како ове промене проширују перспективу *Друштвене конструкције* путем разјашњавања методолошког полазишта, те обогати емпиријска истраживања у пољу студија дискурса и субјективације, као и она у класичним истраживачким областима интерпретативне социологије које се усмеравају на интеракције у домену света–живота.

Кључне речи: Друштвена конструкција, социологија знања, интерпретативна парадигма, социолошка анализа дискурса (СКАД), интерпретативна субјективативна анализа, дискурс, субјектификација

Introduction

Peter L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" (1991/1966) is undoubtedly one of the most influential works in the history of sociology, which has enabled many productive theoretical developments and guided many empirical studies in various disciplines. At the same time, their work has provoked numerous critiques, some of which are justified and some of which are based on misunderstandings. Both the positive and the critical voices often refer to the concept of action and the concept of the subject which Berger and Luckmann have developed in response to the classical sociological question on how social order and structures emerge.

„The most general answer to this question is that social order is a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production. It is produced by man in the course of his ongoing externalization. Social order is not biologically given or derived from any biological data in its empirical manifestations. Social order, needless to add, is also not given in man's natural environment, though particular features of this may be factors in determining certain features of a social order (...). Social order is not part of the 'nature of things', and it cannot be derived from the 'law of nature'. Social order exists only as a product of human activity. No other ontological status may be ascribed to it without hopelessly obfuscating its empirical manifestations. Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and in so far as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product.” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 69-70)

While at the time of publication in 1966 the theories of the decentered subject have been pushed forward by the French (post-)structuralist theories and the 'death of the subject' was proclaimed, Berger and Luckmann presented an integrative theory that focuses on the human being and human interaction. The assumption that society is a social construction is accompanied by an initial misunderstanding that Hacking (1999) criticized early on because, independently of Berger and Luckmann, many constructivist approaches assume that social phenomena are not 'real', since they are merely human products that have arisen in contingent historical processes and which should therefore be criticized and changed. Berger and Luckmann, however, did not have this kind of constructivism in mind when they spoke of society as a constant human production. On the contrary, the authors wanted their theory to be understood in Karl Marx's materialistic sense as dealing with 'hard' and 'realistic' constructions, as they emphasize in later works (Berger 2011, 95; Luckmann 1999). Even though realities are socially constructed, they represent a reality *sui generis* which has its own powerful effects by forming subjectivities and materialities. Socially constructed realities are legitimized and objectified; they constitute a reality "independent of our own volition (we cannot 'wish them

away')” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 13); it is a product “that acts back upon the producer” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 78).

In addition to this classical critique based on misunderstandings, however, there is also criticism of Berger’s and Luckmann’s focus on interactions in the everyday life-world and their concept of the relationship between structures and subjects, which led to various modifications. In this paper, these modifications of the work of Berger and Luckmann will be discussed with a focus on the newer perspectives on the Sociology of Knowledge (Pfadenhauer and Knoblauch 2019) and the perspective of the communicative construction (Keller, Knoblauch and Reichertz 2013). The first step in modifying *Social Construction* was to question Berger’s and Luckmann’s concept of the subject in order to transform their dialectical starting point into a relational social theory. After discussing this move from interactions to relations in the second chapter, the next chapter will show, how Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse was used to problematize Berger’s and Luckmann’s programmatic demand to focus on interactions in the everyday life-world. Finally, in the fourth chapter, Berger’s and Luckmann’s distinction between objective and subjective realities will be modified with a reference to the concept of subjectivation. With these three theoretical developments, this article aims to outline that the Sociology of Knowledge and the theories of the Interpretive Paradigm of Sociology are based on the assumption of a *decentered subject* and therefore they are preceding the theoretical perspectives of the post-structural theories. The modifications of Berger’s and Luckmann’s *Social Construction* therefore are not major revisions that needed to be made because of the validity of the post-structural critique. On the contrary, this article will argue that these further theoretical developments can be understood as clarifications of the approach, which are based on the fruitful and broad empirical research tradition in this methodological framework.

From interactions to relations

Alfred Schütz’s phenomenological approach is the main point of reference for Berger and Luckmann’s conception of subjects and sociality (Schütz and Luckmann 1973). One problem with Schütz’s conception of the subject is that the subject is ultimately conceived as a lonely ego that remains ‘trapped’ in its mind and subjectivity. Schütz tries to solve this classical philosophic problem of solipsistic subject with his thesis of the *intersubjectivity of the life-world*. However, the idea that we perceive the other as a variation of our own self ultimately means that in understanding the other, we always only understand ourselves, and so the ego and its mind stay solipsistic. Schütz, therefore, reformulates the problem of intersubjectivity with the concepts of the *natural attitude* in the everyday life-world (Schütz and Luckmann, 3 pp.) and the *general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives* (Schütz and Luckmann, 61). Thus, Schütz conceives the understanding of others more or less as unproblematic, since the other is undoubtedly present in the natural attitude and our consciousness idealizes the reciprocity of perspectives. The life-world thus consists of non-reflected automatisms and self-evidences that form the background of the perception of world and the perception of ourselves. Schütz also assumes that these ways of perceiving the life-world have universal structures,

which means there is an unchangeable framework or horizon that all people share, e.g., the time structures or spatial structures of the subjectivity. As Knoblauch (2017, 39-41) criticizes, there are fundamental social changes, e.g., through technological developments, that constitute a new concept of the *here and now* of presence, which was regarded as universal. Comparative studies on culture also show that time and space structures in particular are by no means universal; and postcolonial approaches point to the fact that universal assumptions are situated socially and historically. Knoblauch (2017, 41) therefore concludes that the assumptions of a pre-social subjectivity that constitutes sociality cannot be generalized and that the life-world is not only the correlate of subjective experiences, but *per se* social.

In order to re-think the relations between the subjective and the social, however, Berger and Luckmann's starting point must be modified. It is therefore necessary to no longer conceive the social as the result of a dialectical subject-subject relation, i.e., the assumption that the social construction of reality takes place through interactions between two subjects and is concluded by passing it on to third parties as objectivation. Objectivations and meaning, however, are not only the *result* of the interactive processes; on the contrary, the meaning making processes already includes objectivations, e.g., materiality or bodies. This modification into a triadic *subject-subject-object relation* (Knoblauch 2019) is not a critique of Berger and Luckmann's approach, but merely an elaboration of the perspective of objectivations that Berger and Luckmann primarily understand as linguistic objectivations. In the triadic and relational model of subject-subject-object perspective, Knoblauch emphasizes:

„Objectivation is what makes sense in the relation of subjects. It is, however, not only ‘meaning’ but something that is part of the related subject's environment. Even more, it is the third that represents any material thing (even if it is the other's body or part of it) focused reciprocally by the subjects in the environment. Objectivations are the reason why the social reality is really beyond the mere relation of the subjects.” (Knoblauch 2019, 287)

With this theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the newer Sociology of Knowledge takes into account the significance of materialities and bodies, as, e.g., Bruno Latour's (2010) Actor-Network-Theory or the approaches of the New Materialism (Barad 2007) demand. The main critique of these approaches, according to which constructivism is ‘cognitivist’ and ultimately only takes into account what ‘takes place in people's minds’, may apply to certain varieties of constructivism (Burr 2003): In many cases, this critique refers more to approaches from psychology and social psychology, like Kenneth Gergen's (1985) or Rom Harré's (1986) theories. In contrast, the concept of the triadic subject-subject-object relation makes it clear that Berger and Luckmann's objectivations are not only products of the individual interacting subjects and exist only in their consciousness, but they co-construct consciousness and reality in the sense of *intra-actions* (Barad 2007).

From the everyday life-world to the universe of discourse

There is another reason, why social reality is beyond the mere relation of the subjects and their interactions. This modification of the *Social Construction* starts with a critique of Berger and Luckmann's focus on interactions in the everyday life-world:

“The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is ‘real’ for the members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, common-sense ‘knowledge’ rather than ‘ideas’ must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this ‘knowledge’ that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist.” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 27)

Berger and Luckmann formulate a critique of the philosophical and scientific interpretations of the world that claim the legitimate production of knowledge for themselves and assign a subordinate status to the production of knowledge in the everyday life-world. In contrast to these traditions, they emphasize that the everyday life-world is the basis for the specialized knowledge; therefore, it is the structures of this knowledge that should first be taken into account. At the same time, they point out the importance of specialized “definers of reality”, experts who “devote themselves full-time to the subjects of their expertise” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 134). These experts are in conflict with other experts or with lay people and “practioners” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 137) in order to establish their definition of reality as truth. Power also plays an important role in this symbolic struggles (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 127) as they write: “He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality.” They also mention that the control over socializations processes means “the power to produce reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 137).

Berger and Luckmann are also already suggesting that expert knowledge can have effects on the subjects in the everyday life-world. They assume, for example, that the theoretical concepts of psychology not only depict the ‘psychological reality’ of patients, but that this subjective reality is generated in a dialectical process by the theories, as the show in an example:

“The rural Haitian who internalizes Voudun psychology will become possessed as soon as he discovers certain well-defined signs. Similarly, the New York intellectual who internalizes Freudian psychology will become neurotic as soon as he diagnoses certain well-known symptoms.” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 199)

Scientific truths, theories, or ‘ideas’, differentiate themselves from the everyday life-world, but as soon as they are institutionalized and professionally produced by experts and organizations, they can have a strong impact on the everyday life-world and the subjectivities. Berger and Luckmann thus make it clear that the construction of reality also takes place through specialized knowledge, but they fail to systematize the effects of this knowledge production on the everyday life-world.

The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (Keller 2018, 2019) takes these shortcomings as the starting point for a modification and further development of the approach. This approach combines Michel Foucault's discourse theory with the pragmatic tradition in Berger and Luckmann's thinking. The pragmatist philosophers have a basic understanding of social communication processes taking place in *universes of discourse*:

“This universe of discourse is constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process of experience and behavior, within which these gestures or symbols have the same or common meanings for all members of that group, whether they make or address them to other individuals, or whether they overtly respond to them as made or addressed to them by other individuals.” (Mead 1963, 89-90)

Schütz (1973) takes up this pragmatic concept of the *universe of discourse* to describe the production of knowledge in scientific communities. The concept of discourse is also used in a similar way in the Symbolic Interactionist approach of *public discourses*, which is focused on the analysis of conflicts over definitions of social problems in public arenas (Gusfield 1981, Gamson 1988). The fundamental perspective shared by Symbolic Interactionism and the Sociology of Knowledge can be illustrated by the classical formula of William I. Thomas (1978): “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Public debates, for example, focus on how certain situations or phenomena are defined by whom and how, and which definitions prevail and what effects these definitions have. This perspective is close to Foucault's (1990b) understanding of the ‘games of truth’. In his genealogical analyses of historical discourses, Foucault (1995) asks how truths are produced in certain scientific communities and by experts in institutions or organizations. He shows that every society controls the production of truth by controlling the production of statements; there are mechanisms and rules that define, how statements are to be formulated; it is regulated who is allowed to speak, who is considered as a legitimate expert and this is controlled by ‘rituals of qualification’, e.g., by academic degrees, reputation, networks and so on. In medicine, psychology, pedagogy or social science, for example, statements about normal and deviant sexuality (Foucault 1990a) are formulated and different actors struggle about the legitimacy of these statements. These processes of knowledge production are linked to power relations, which is why Foucault ultimately always speaks of *power/knowledge-regimes* that produce knowledge in the course of the ‘games of truth’. Foucault thus develops a specific understanding of power according to which power is not understood as being possessed by a particular group that suppresses another group, as in traditional conceptions of power where the bourgeoisie rules over the working class for instance; nor does power have a hierarchical effect from a central point on all subordinate levels by means of prohibitions, laws and other coercive measures, but is interwoven in a network of relationships of discourses, practices, institutions, disciplines, authors, administrative apparatuses, etc. Power, therefore, is not only repressive, but also productive in the sense that the ‘games of truth’ influence materialities, practices and self-relations. Thus, Foucault no longer understands the constitution of truth as the effect of the structures of discursive for-

mations, but as the result of complex power relations. In this conception of power, actors are the central entities for understanding the genesis and transformation of symbolic orders. However, these actors are not essentialist subjects outside power relations, but co-constituted by them.

The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (Keller 2018) takes up these assumptions in order to expand the focus on the interactive construction of reality in the everyday life-world. Instead, the approach focuses on the production of knowledge at the level of institutions and social actors:

„Discourses become real through the actions of social actors, who supply specific knowledge claims and contribute to the reproduction, liquefaction and dissolution of the institutionalised interpretations and apparent unavailabilities. Discourses crystallise and constitute themes in a particular form as social interpretation and action issues.” (Keller 2018, 19)

This concept of discourse aims to analyze the “politics of knowledge” (Keller 2018, 19) as one form of the social construction of reality. Therefore, it proposes some conceptual tools to examine the discursive construction of reality and the power effects empirically. On the level of the subject, it differentiates between speakers, subject positions and subjectivation in order to examine the power relations between social actors and discourses. In this frame of reference, *speakers* are the “producers of discourse” (Keller 2018, 35), they “draw upon different resources in order to authorise their contribution” (Keller 2018, 35); becoming a speaker might happen by acquiring qualifications in scientific field (like psychology or economy) or by engaging in social movements or organizations that are concerned with public issues (like climate change activists). Speakers take part in the ‘games of truth’ and one element of their knowledge productions is the construction of *subject positions*; they “refer to identity and action templates for subjects or role models constituted in discursive meaning making” (Keller 2018, 35). One well-known subject position that Foucault already reconstructed and that was taken up by the governmentality studies is the ‘entrepreneurial self’ (Rose 1999). According to the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, subject positions such as the ‘entrepreneurial self’ address people to form their self in a certain way, for instance they call upon them to be flexible or the self-optimize the ‘human capital’ according to the needs of labor markets. Or the ‘eco-citizen’, a subject position as a role model that acts environment friendly, which means that one should not produce too much waste and use plastic bags, use the bike instead of a car and so on. These subject positions have power effects in the sense of *interpellations* (Althusser), but one has to keep in mind that they are not determining what happens on the level of the speaking, living and embodied subject:

“Subject positions can be core instances of the interpellation processes that discourses perform. But we should not confuse discursive templates with occurring processes of *subjectification*, for example in organisations or in everyday life. If we are addressed as entrepreneurial subjects or ecologically friendly subjects, we have a capacity for maneuvering such interpellations, ignoring them, refusing them or giving them a most personal shape” (Keller 2018, 36)

But the questions how subjectifications take place on an empirical level, cannot be answered by the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, because this research program focusses on social actors as „definers of reality“ (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 134), that means producers of discourses, and their products like subject positions or legitimizations. In order to conceptualize the relations between subjectivities and human self-relations on the one hand and the objectives realities and subject positions on the other hand, a third modification is necessary, as will be outlined in the next section.

From identities to self-positioning processes

Berger and Luckmann’s first reflections on the theories of identity in the *Social Construction* have similarities to the concept of subjectivation:

“Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality and, like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. (...) Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society. Identity types, on the other hand, are social products *tout court*, relatively stable elements of objective social reality (the degree of stability being, of course, socially determined in its turn).” (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 194-195)

They make it clear that subjective realities are formed in a dialectical process in such a way that an identity is created. This process of formation is guided by “identity types” ((Berger and Luckmann 1991, 194-195) that are situated in the objective realities. This perspective on human self-relations is also found in Foucault’s concept of subjectivation:

“What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives of himself as a living, speaking, laboring being; when he judges and punishes himself as a criminal?” (Foucault 1990b, 7)

Interpretive Subjectivation Analysis (Bosančić 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b) takes both perspectives into account and understands subjectivation as a process in which people are addressed by discursive ‘games of truth’ and subject positions; they are addressed to shape their own being and their self-relations in a certain way (e.g., as an ‘entrepreneurial self’). However, in Foucault’s concept of subjectivation, in Berger and Luckmann’s reflections on identity and in the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (Chapter 2), it remains unclear what happens at the level of the actually living and embodied subjects when they are addressed by subject positions. Interpretive Subjectivation Analysis (ISA) develops the concept of *self-positioning* in order to gain an insight into this level. Self-positioning is a tentative, precarious and changeable process of dealing with subject positions and discourses. This sensitizing concept (Blumer 1954) is developed based on Mead’s (1963), Strauss’ (1959) and Goffman’s (1974) concepts of the self and of identity.

Following Goffman, for instance, it is clear, that individuals are constantly confronted with normative identity expectations in social situations, in institutional and organizational contexts; as members of groups individuals are always being identified with social constructed markers like race, class or gender and personal characteristics like their looks. This social and personal identity 'facts' are entangled around the individuals like "candy floss" (Goffman 1986, 57) and they always have to struggle with these kinds of identification processes as Goffman shows with his concepts of *role distance* (2013) and *secondary adjustment* (1961). Thus, self-positioning is to be understood as a process that inevitably runs along due to the nature of the social contexts and situations, without requiring a reflected attention to the subject position one is addressed with. For example, it is possible for people to consciously challenge the demands of the subject position of a capitalist society as a 'consumer'. People can try alternative ways of self-positioning in relatively self-sufficient communities and perhaps even generate new subject positions through collective activities in internet blogs or political organizations. The confrontation with subject positions can also take place completely unreflected, e.g., when students at universities are trained for the 'New Spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) by having to work in teams and in projects.

Self-positioning thus means more or less creative engagement with subject positions, which can take place reflexively or non-reflexively. As already mentioned with Goffman, self-positioning is always accompanied by processes of distance-making and deviation. These deviations inevitably unfold due to the structure of subject positions: they function only as instructions, which must necessarily be specified in historically unique situations. Moreover, subject positions are mostly complex, overstraining, ambivalent and very often even contradictory, so it is impossible that a full adoption can take place. The interpellations by subject positions are also dependent on interpretations, so even attempts to adopt the subject position fully will usually produce something different from what is prescribed in the subject positions. Moreover, the subject positions are merely scientific ideal types in Max Weber's sense, so it cannot be expected that these reconstructions of the researchers can be completely adapted by individuals. And as Berger and Luckmann (1991) as well as Schütz and Luckmann (1973) have already emphasized, people are also confronted with complex *stocks of knowledge*; they are located in different positions in the social structure; they have different biographical experiences, situational relevancies and they position themselves and are constantly positioned in different and changing institutional and organizational settings. For this reason, creative deviation processes are not a special, but rather the regular form of self-positioning. However, this does not mean that these processes inevitably result in transformations of subject positions or social change. Even though self-positioning means more or less deviation and distance, not every deviation results in shifts of meaning at the level of the symbolic order. Ultimately, it is always an empirical question of concrete power relations, if and how people are no longer only addressed by discursive subject positions and when they turn to collective subversive practices and enter the arena of the 'games of truth' in order to create alternative or new subject positions.

Conclusion

In the Sociology of Knowledge and in particular in the German-language tradition of *hermeneutic sociology of knowledge* (Reichertz 2013), some essential modifications of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* have been made. This was necessary because, on the one hand, continuous empirical work on the basis of *Social Construction* resulted in new theoretical insights; on the other hand, more recent theoretical developments (such as post-structuralism, new materialism, etc.) stimulated a further development of the concepts in *Social Construction*, which was published more than 50 years ago. A central aspect traced in this article is Berger and Luckmann's focus on the actors and their interactions. This focus is made clear as *hermeneutic sociology of knowledge* examines the question,

„of how subjects of action – situated and socialised within historically and socially developed routines and interpretations of the given field of action – on the one hand encounter and (are compelled to) appropriate these routines and interpretations, and on the other (are compelled to) reinterpret, and in this way invent, them. These interpretations and routines are available to the members of a field of action in the form of knowledge, and new interpretations and routines are similarly fed back as knowledge into the field of action.“ (Reichertz 2013, 4)

Following Alfred Schütz' phenomenological approach to sociology and George Herbert Mead's socialization theory, Berger and Luckmann have developed the concept of an actor who is produced by symbolic orders. These socially and historically situated actors, however, are not determined by objectified symbolic orders, but are able to transform them in a co-constructive process through more or less creative actions within these symbolic orders. These minimal anthropological assumptions of a human being who is more or less free in a not freely created environment on the one hand, and the theories of the human capacity to use symbols on the other hand, is the methodological starting point for a rich empirical research tradition.

However, following Berger and Luckmann's programmatic demand to focus not on 'ideas', this research has concentrated very strongly on face-to-face-interactions in the process of the social constructions of reality in the everyday life-worlds. By reconstructing these subjective and interactive realities, essentialist subject conceptions have often been introduced unintentionally; this is partially due to the phenomenological foundation that Berger and Luckmann inherited from Alfred Schütz. As I have shown in the second chapter, Schütz' thesis of the intersubjectivity of the life-world and the general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives are unable to completely leave the 'cage' of the solipsitic ego. This creates a significant subsequent problem for Berger and Luckmann. They cannot theoretically explain the genesis of sociality, since in their model actors must already be socialized in order for the dialectical process of constructing reality to get under way. Hubert Knoblauch's triadic model of subject-subject-object relations (Chapter 2) breaks up this problematic conflation, since the emergence of sociality is now understood as a

process in which two subjects act in relation to objects in the environment. Thus, the construction of meaning and the social construction of reality is again more strongly linked to the pragmatist traditions as formulated by George Herbert Mead and others.

In addition to the solipsistic ego, there is another problem for the Sociology of Knowledge due to the focus on the actor. There is a danger that the decentered subject will be taken as a basis in theory, but will then be resurrected in empirical as an essentialist subject with “unique ‘voices’ waiting to be set free by emancipatory researchers” (Adams St. Pierre 2014, 10). One reaction to this partly justified criticism was the reference to Michel Foucault in the *Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse* (Reiner Keller) and *Interpretive Subjectivation Analysis* (Saša Bosančić), as shown in chapter three and four. Foucault’s genealogical and historical-empirical analyses of the modern subject make it clear that on the one hand the subject is decentered by being constituted through mechanisms of power in symbolic orders. On the other hand, the decentered subject is empirically formed as an ‘autonomous subject’ by the ‘games of truth’ and the subject positions. The empirical research in the Sociology of Knowledge perspective is, therefore, not based on essentialist subject concepts, but they merely *reconstruct empirically* how the decentered subject is essentialized by the “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1990b).

What are the future challenges for the Sociology of Knowledge in the tradition of Berger and Luckmann considering these theoretical modifications? From my perspective, Sociology of Knowledge as well as the Interpretive Paradigm of Sociology must investigate and ask empirically, how power relations in a society are structured: what are the restrictions and constraints this entails for the living and embodies subjects in concrete situations? How much agency do they have to act subversively and which resources are necessary? Thus, Sociology of Knowledge, as a critical analysis of society, can again increasingly turn to questions of social disintegration, social inequality, discrimination and stigmatization. This is especially necessary in times of social crises, in which, for example, economic, gender, ethnic and other inequalities increase again. A critical perspective is also necessary because the constructivist approaches are suspected of being responsible for the ‘post-truth era’, that is why Sociology of Knowledge should again increasingly emphasize the productivity of its own ideology-critical tradition following Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim. This perspective of critique should not, however, be satisfied with showing that social realities and phenomena are the results of contingent historical processes of social constructions. This form of critique could „run out of steam“, as Latour (2004) puts forward in his criticism of social constructivism. Even if I do not agree with Latour and I still consider the empirical inquiry of the historical contingency of the genesis of social realities as a necessary form of critique, the critique practiced by Sociology of Knowledge should not stop there; nor is it enough to simply reconstruct the critique of social actors empirically, as Boltanski (2011) suggests. Rather, a critical Sociology of Knowledge must take different levels of critique into account. This includes both the perspective of critique proposed by Boltanski, but also the critique of power relations and structures in a capitalist society with global markets; epistemological critique of the scientific knowledge pro-

duction must also be systematically included, as in Foucault's approach or the approaches of Science and Technology Studies. And finally, an emancipatory critique should be possible, which has *external* critique as its object, that means such forms of critique as the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory proposes, which criticizes the 'totality' of social conditions; or *internal* emancipatory critique, which criticizes power relations according to normative standards formulated and codified in the respective society.

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