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Toward a Constructivist Theory of Discourse:
Rethinking the Boundaries of Discourse Philosophy

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Introduction

In what follows, we will outline the main traits of the constructivist theory of discourse developed in recent years at the University of Cologne. We intend to introduce this model as an invitation to rethink the conditions and limits of discourse philosophy in the context of the postmodern situation. First, we want to indicate some preconditions of discourse theory considered from the perspective of constructivist critique of knowledge. We here in particular focus our attention on an attempt to critically outline the boundaries of existing discourse philosophies, e.g. in Habermas. Secondly, we will introduce the formal structure of our own constructivist model. This model will, thirdly, be substantialized by describing four outstanding types of discursive formation. Power, knowledge, relationships and the unconscious will be discussed in some detail as relevant constructivist observer positions with regard to the analysis of postmodern discourses. Forthly, we will conclude the essay by briefly summarizing some ethical implications of our discussion, indicating some connections between constructivism and the ethics of radical democracy.

1. Preconditions of constructivist discourses

„Discourse" is a concept used in different contexts of meaning. Let us first briefly consider some important kinds of usage and thereby indicate the way in which we will employ the term in the following account of the interactive-constructivist theory of discourse.[1] Essentially, there are three levels of meaning to be distinguished:

First, in the narrower etymological sense, „discourse" simply means „speech" and/or „battle of words". This double sense expresses a dialogic relationship that already in Greek thinking was held to be the basis of every deliberate philosophical access of man to the world he lives in. Related concepts like „discussion" and „treatise" or „conversation" and „exchange of ideas" respectively may be added here.

Secondly, on a larger and more transferred semantic level, „discourse" is commonly used in the sense of a comprehensive body of scientific theory or discussion that is representative of, say, a particular school or epoch. For example, one speaks of the „discourse of psychoanalysis" or the „philosophical discourse of modernity"

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[1] Interactive constructivism is a socially and culturally orientated form of constructivism, articulated within the philosophical discourses of postmodernity. For the foundation of the approach and a comprehensive presentation and discussion of theoretical perspectives see Reich (1998). For further educational and philosophical applications see also Reich (2000a,b, 2002) and Neubert (1998, 2002).

in order to designate a more or less precisely distinguishable field of more or less closely connected symbolic events and productions of meaning.

Thirdly, in a still larger and more comprehensive way, we may understand „discourse"as a term to designate every kind of symbolic order of intentional processes of communication and understanding. „Discourse" in this broad sense on principle refers to the context of an „interpretive community"[2] as frame of its existence. Since it changes with time as that interpretive community changes, its specific manifestations can be stabilized but temporarily. This third semantic level is more comprehensive than the first in that the concept of symbolic order invokes a sphere of discursive rules that represents a kind of deep structure or profundity as compared to the plainly visible or audible discursive surface of „speech" or „battle of words".[3] The third level is also more comprehensive than the second, since the concept of „discourse" is not restricted to some specific formation of knowledge, but remains open for a greater diversity of perspectives, including life-worldly applications as well.[4] It is in this third and most comprehensive sense that we will talk about discourses in the following text.

We may, then, go on by stating that in interactive constructivism we conceive of discourses, on the one hand, as symbolic formations which show recurrent patterns of *rules, allocations, and arrangements*. That is to say, a characteristic trait of every discourse is that it strives for recurrence in order to inscribe itself and become a model for other discourses. On the other hand, however, we also conceive of discourses as events, i.e. as movements inside of such inscriptions. Thereby *contingencies, shifts, and displacements* come to play that time and again undermine the security of ordered recurrence. In other words, we argue for a tensional relationship to be taken into consideration when talking about discourses: they are seen as moveable orders that exist temporarily in contexts of social unterstanding and, in their very moment of articulation, often already turn out to be transitions toward other discourses. There is no discourse being complete in the sense of a self-contained or self-enclosed form that is totally present. Rather, there is always something missing and absent, a lack that refers to something the discourse is *not* – the work of discourse is infinite.[5]

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[2] We borrow this phrase from Stanley Fish (1998, 419). The German term is *Verständigungsgemeinschaft*. The literal translation would be „community of understanding", which, however, sounds somewhat awkward and does not seem to be customary in English.

[3] The question of whether these rules operate on a conscious or unconscious level may be left open for the moment.

[4] As we will discuss later on, discourses of knowledge respresent in our view just *one* type of discourse amongst others.

[5] There are of course close affinities between this constructivist concept of discourse and the ones launched by poststructuralist authors such as Foucault or Derrida. See also Laclau / Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1990). As we will discuss later, constructivist theories of discourse moreover emphasize that discourses (as a rule) are constructed, reconstructed, and also deconstructed by self-observers and distant-observers according to the viabilities of their aims, interests, and possibilities to act..

It is the aim of this essay to argue for a topological model as frame of observation for the description of this infinite work of discourses.[6] We call upon the reader to take part in a language game about discourses, conceived of in a decidedly broad and extensive fashion. This broadness is chosen deliberately and programmatically. On the basis of constructivist theories and critiques of knowledge (see Reich 1998, vol. 1) and in contrast to many other approaches to discourse theory, we do not take discourse exclusively as a theme on the traditional field of knowledge and its reconstructable forms – i.e. as inquiry into the validity claims of specific bodies of knowledge and historically changeable forms of truth. As we will show in detail in the course of this essay, we moreover intend to situate and reflect this struggle for recognition of knowledge and truth claims within the contexts of other kinds of discursive formations, depending on the alternations of observers and the changes of places they take and intentions they are engaged in.

Our constructivist approach rests on three methodological considerations that we regard as indispensible prerequisites for a postmodern discourse theory (see also Reich 2000b):

1.1 Construction and the dependence upon observer positions

We take all understandings concerning the contents and relationships of human intercourse to be constructs acted upon by interactive participants and perceived by observers. Here the actor never is an actor alone. S/he always and simultaneously is a participant and an observer as well. It is precisely the coordination of acting, participating and observing positions that is indispensible for any reflection on discourses (see Reich 1998, vol. 1, C. I). Because discourses are seen as symbolic orders and as the generation of rules, patterns, allocations and arrangements, we always have to ask about their contexts of understanding and legitimation. Following Wittgenstein, discourses can never be considered as mere private concerns. Even on their linguistic basis they imply use and socio-cultural participation (in this regard we employ the constructivist term „cultural viability") and agreement (in this regard we talk about temporarily constructed conventions of an interpretive community).

In contrast to objectivist or universalist approaches, however, we assume that such actions, participations, and observations originate in culture. And this culturality implies – such is our conclusion from the observations and reflections of quite diverse ethnical and sociocultural observers – that the objectivity and universality of discourses has become so fragile in the process of modernity that it

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[6] For more comprehensive theoretical foundations see REICH (1998, vol. 2, 288-382). Originally, the impluse to the formulation of the constructivist theory of discourse proposed here in part arose from discussing the discourse theory of Jacques Lacan. In some viewpoints, the theory still resembles the Lacanian model. However, the observer perspectives and the theoretical strains of argumentation have been modified and extended largely. In particular, the theory has completely abandoned the ontological implications in Lacan and exceeded his restrictedly psychoanalytic view of discourses.

disintegrates into a succession and juxtaposition of approaches in postmodern turn. All of these approaches or positions may fixate claims and validities *for themselves*. But in view of their plurality, they can no longer enforce their claims against each other argumentatively by means of higher or last reasons. That is to say, they cannot *in the long run* be sure to maintain universalist plausibility *in themselves* for all men and all respective constellations of human interests. This deconstructivist insight should not even by itself be seen as a universalist doctrine or a universalist claim to truth. It is stated here only as one claim amongst others (see Bauman 1999, Mouffe 1996).

At this point we are perhaps offended by critics who insinuate that constructivists entangle themselves in a performative self-contradiction: a not recognized universal truth claim appears in order to declare just such truth claims to be impossible. But this objection from the outset rests upon an assumption whose validity constructivists are just contesting: the universalization of truth claims. In other words, the constructivist assertion is valid only for those who consider it to be viable as a maxim concerning knowledge criticism – and only as long as they do so. However, we intend to show in this essay that there are good reasons for maintaining this viability.

1.2 Practice and the bearings of life-world

Discourses are not mere language games occuring outside of practices, routines and institutions. They are situated in cultural contexts. Thus, the practice of discursive communication does not merely involve the quest for scientifically well-founded, i.e. objectively viable solutions attained by scientific communities. Nor can it be reduced to that. It clearly implies contexts of relationships and life-world that evade scientific objectification.

At this point, Jürgen Habermas offers an interpretation that combines rationalism, universalism, and modern democracy while at the same time relativizing their claims by referring to life-world (see Habermas 1987, esp. Ch. XI). In doing so, Habermas clearly idealizes the practice of modern democracy in terms of communicative reason. Constitutional democracy, for him, marks a certain moment in the development of reason and understanding critically to be reconstructed. As the result of a condensation of language philosophy, he tries to establish a universalist foundation of morality understood in terms of the model of liberal democracy.

By showing the advantages of democracy to be dependent on the essentials of reason, this view builds upon a paradigm of progress. As Chantal Mouffe has pointed out, it implies „presenting the institutions of liberal Western societies as offering the rational solution to the problem of human coexistence; as the solution that other people will necessarily adopt when they cease being ‚irrational'.“ (Mouffe 1996, 4) Mouffe here adopts the criticism launched by Richard Rorty, who counters the over-generalization of rationality by maintaining that what are claimed as universal perspectives are in the end only the shared convictions of an interpretive community.

This is an issue under dispute between Habermas and other „universalist" approaches on the one hand and poststructuralist, deconstructivist, postmodern, pragmatist and constructivist theories on the other. However, as Mouffe herself stresses, the dissent is more of a theoretical nature than a political one (i.e., it does not so much concern the defence of political rights connected with the project of Enlightenment). Against Habermas, his opponents argue that a democratic politics does not need philosophical foundations in the sense that we should (or could) always be able to reconstruct with rational unambiguousness (or completion or universality) why we are preferring a certain political model.

The point in Rorty's criticism is to maintain that even in philosophy there is no longer that overall viewpoint „standing above politics from which one could guarantee the superiority of democracy" (ibid.). The claim ultimately implied in most universalist concepts of democracy is to put forward politically neutral premises. For critics like Mouffe and Rorty, this appears to be a hopeless enterprise. On the contrary, it seems to be more appropiate – so in particular Mouffe's and Laclau's argument – to conceive of the political task as being directly involved in the practices of (radical) democracy. In this view, the democratic project first of all consists in strategies of critically analysing hegemonic legitimations and delimiting hegemony in all.

As Mouffe further points out, there is ultimately a convergence of opinions between both Habermas and Rorty on questions of politics and democracy, their philosophical controversies notwithstanding (see ibid., 7). Both philosophers build upon consensual understanding within the contextual frame of liberal democracy. Habermas wants to produce progress by rational argumentation and transcultural value premises, manifesting the priority of Western liberalism, even if he starts from the critical concept of an asymptotical approximation to a regulatory ideal of free and unhindered communication. Rorty's neopragmatic approach, on the other hand, bets on hopes based on common convictions and economical progress. He thereby particularly emphasizes tolerance and friendly dealings between men. From his perspective, this can be brought to success only if people develop common convictions and wishes based on care for security and survival, thus bridgeing though never dissolving the split between private self-realization in all its forms and public efforts made for common life.

Against both positions stand Mouffe, Laclau, and Derrida, i.e. deconstructive attempts laying more emphasis on dissent. Following these theories, a democratic politics cannot be ultimately founded on comprehensive consensus. Consent and dissent are seen in new dimensions. Conflicts, social contradictions, and the clash of interests are conceded and even expected on every level, private or public. „Indeed, the specificity of liberal democracy as a new political form of society consists in the legitimation of conflict and the refusal to eliminate it through the imposition of an authoritarian order. A liberal democracy is above all a *pluralist* democracy." (Mouffe 1996, 8; Italics in Orig.) In order to support liberal democracy, political institutions must allow for a dynamism between consent and dissent. Dissent is not a state of lack, but required. Thus the claim to hegemonic consensus should be

limited to the very institutions that are constitutive of the democratic project. All attempts at rational universalization, however, or even the restricted preference of particular solutions manifesting hegemony in the name of universal reason, risk to miss the very challenge of democracy itself. „A pluralist democracy needs (...) to make room for the expression of dissent and for conflicting interests and values. And those should not be seen as temporary obstacles on the road to consensus since in their absence democracy would cease to be pluralistic. This is why democratic politics cannot aim towards harmony and reconciliation. To believe that a final resolution of conflict is eventually possible, even when it is envisaged as asymptotic approaching to the regulative idea of a free unconstrained communication, as in Habermas, is to put the pluralist democratic project at risk." (Ibid.) Habermas, vice versa, vehemently opposes postmodernity because it seems to him to give up the project of Enlightenment, negligently playing into the the hands of first of all conservative or even anti-democratic powers.

From our constructivist perspective, we agree with Mouffe (and others) in criticizing the theoretical boundaries of Habermas' theory at this point. We, too, take the view that it is no longer fruitful and viable for discourse theories to look for ultimate standards whatsoever in order to establish the democratic project theoretically in terms of an ultimate, comprehensive consensus. On the other hand, however, this is for the most part but a theoretical discussion of issues that, in the first place, are being decided upon in the practices, routines, and institutions of life-world. Here, indeed, different and contradictory practices have been subverting the theoretical expectations and hopes – and ultimately Habermas, too, does not fail to recognize this. Either we take this recognition as an opportunity to change our theories (so in particular Laclau/Mouffe), or we all the more persistently devise a ‚contrafactual‘ theory expressing our hopes and wishes (so Habermas). From our constructivist perspective, it seems that this theoretical dispute does not necessarily lead to fundamental differences with regard to practice. Any universalism remains a fictitious projection toward desired conditions, while no theory enhancing the status of dissent and intending to delimit hegemonic practices can get by without the hope of agreement of those who are to (and want to) carry out such democratic action. With regard to politics it should be sensible, then, that the contesting parties in all their disagreement try to achieve a remaining consensus, since the political differences are rather small: Habermas as well as the deconstructivist authors aim at the protection and extension of liberal democracy as the condition of possibility for the very dispute itself, as well as for the critical re/deconstruction of social injustices and hegemonic practices. Such a temporary consensus would offer an opportunity more persistently to take into account ‚practicity‘ and thereby at least politically unite positions, even if this is impossible on theoretical terms.

However, with regard to theoretical perspectives, constructivism, once again, stands on the side of those theories that reject all forms of rational universalism. If we take the challenge of ‚practicity‘ seriously, we should not primarily try to superimpose regularities or principles upon practice, concretely to be filled with content in actual situations. Rather should we start from practices and try to re/deconstruct

certain regularities or principles within them. In this connection, the power of recognition appears as enforcement of certain norms, values, and systems of order already discursively established. They define the claims and validities, i.e. the temporarily valid viable solutions of an interpretive community, opposing them against others. With regard to practices, the talk about comprehensive consensus (with respect to the pre-understandings of argumentation) in present time increasingly loses its force, since one might just as well start from a claim to dissent. Discursively more interesting than the quest for consensus or dissent often one-sidedly stressed is the legitimation of both claims in the contexts of power and interests. Legitimation has to be carried through within power relations, if these claims are to be generalized and brought to relative constancy of interpretation in their day. Here constructivism is much more modest than ontological, universalist, or transcendentalist positions.[7] However, this modesty is not to be confused with arbitrariness or political indecisiveness. It reflects the recognition of the relativity of knowledge. It expresses the concession that despite its own claims to viability, the constructivist position, too, cannot represent anything else but the specifically legitimated and objectivized interests of an interpretive community. In the postmodern contexts of plural knowledge, this concession seems to us to be the only sensible and viable procedure.

1.3 Methods and the delimitation of arbitrariness

Habermas' theory of communicative action *(Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns)* (see Habermas 1981) is first of all marked by a methodical orientation, deliberating on and offering solutions for the problem of communicatively shared interests that are required if people get involved in reason. We have suggested that by its universalistic orientation, this theory makes too one-sided an approach to discourse. Our counter thesis is that even rational persons who build upon common interests in their interpretive communities in order to achieve viable solutions, are not prevented by this very fact alone from excluding other people from the same community of interests or even denying that others are using relevant arguments at all. Auschwitz took place in the context of a barbarian reason, but as Levinas accurately observes, this barbarity was after all in line with the discourse of the occident and its claims to reason aiming at selfhood and being oblivious to the otherness of the Other. This negation in particular is to be found whenever ultimate reasons are claimed – and be it only in a formal way. In a pluralist and contradictory society, the very *practice* of argumentation deconstructs such formal concepts of last reasons and renders them ideal-typical assumptions. It is the dogmatic argumentation of the know-it-all that puts us off the idealizing propositions of every such attempt at universalization – even if after all we may frankly share many of the political implications in Habermas. Indeed, we, too, may stand up for the observance of the rules for argumentation practice stated by Habermas. But these statements are ideal-typical and always have

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[7] In this respect, there is a close affinity between constructivism and pragmatism (see Neubert 1998).

to be reflected (and relativated) against the background of inherent claims to power. The assertion of ultimate reasons – and be it only in formal principles – basically seems to us to be the wrong way, because it even tends to hinder the concrete political struggle for plurality. Overstressing the rational expectations of consensus, it blocks recognition of the otherness of the Other, the different viablties of different interpretive communities in their struggles for recognition, and the admission of dissent. After all, every theory of discourse in our view turns out to be questionable that does not reflect its own discourse with respect to claims to power.

Vice versa, there seems to be an arbitrariness in constructivism that invites criticism. Does not this position, like other familiar positions of post-structuralism, deconstructivism, or ironic pragmatism, have to face the problem that by over-stressing difference, plurality, and tolerance in the end all is left to fall back possibly even upon conservatism? Do not these so called postmodern approaches simply *manifest* what postmodernity *is*, anyway? We deny the totalizing assumptions about postmodernity implicit in criticisms like these. Or at least we think we can relativize them in terms of cultural theory:[8]

In the context of means-end-relations, contructivism, too, is capable of carrying out unambiguous methodological reconstructions. In particular, the position of Methodical Constructivism (and its new offspring Methodical Culturalism) does such reconstruction work, intending to make comprehensible the respective constructions, methods and practices involved in scientific languages and propositions (see Janich 1996, Hartmann/Janich 1996, 1998). Positions of cognitive constructivism succeeding Piaget often follow a similar course as well, a fact that by the way moderates the subjectivism of even Radical Constructivism (see Glasersfeld 1996). Interactive constructivism endorses such analyses, provided they concede the reduction of contexts they impose (restriction to means-end-relations) and reflect their own cultural starting-points. Ultimately, these theories are strongly committed to discourses of modernity, while, to our mind, they do not sufficiently face the problems of „Postmodernity and its Discontents" (Bauman 1999).

There are, in our view, further implications of culturalism. Interactive Constructivism argues for a much broader re/deconstruction of cultural constructions, methods, and practices. These are seen as manifestations of (pre-)understandings that by far exceed mere statements about means-end-relations. The fields of observation and action in discourses have to be expanded beyond scientific languages and scientific attempts at objectification. They have to embrace issues of the intermingling of knowledge and power, of human relationships, and of life-world where discursive practices, legitimations, and observations take place as well. By this we mean to expand the concept of discourse even as compared to Habermas who after all gives considerable space to the reflection of life-world.

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[8] Of course, even in doing so we articulate our own ethnical and cultural pre-assumptions and prejudices about others.

Given these pre-conditions [9], we have developed a discourse theory as an auxiliary construction for analytical work oriented toward both consensus and dissent in discourses (in the frame of communities of understanding). In this connection, a formalized meta theory is useful that may serve as a model that provides fruitful observer perspectives for the analysis of discourses. However, this model does not represent an universalized pattern, but only a viable one (with respect to certain claims of understanding as constructivists). It is not arbitrary (we share convictions with others), but, once again, nor is it universal (it is not expected to be shared in the convictions of all). The more we look beyond restricted means-end-operations and scientific objectifications and turn to the realities of human relationships or life-world, the more we have to reckon with phases of indeterminacy of knowledge. The problem of methods of reconstruction has to be connected with critically considering these indeterminate phases. Here the criterion of practicity leads to the challenge to carry through this thought to the level of concrete discourse analyses: not to establish a detached language game, but to make cross-references between discourses and the contextual practices, routines, and institutions they are related with. It is from this very contextuality that the respectively determinate or indeterminate methodology of discourses gains meaning.

2. Observers, places, and fillings in discourses

2.1 Observers

From a constructivist point of view, in order to talk sensibly about discourses it is at first necessary to reflect upon the positions of observers who operate inside and outside of discourses and make statements about them. According to interactive constructivism, these observers are on principle to be situated within the context of interpretive communities: they are subjects who from the outset participate in the discursive construction of realities on the basis of cultural pre-understandings and in interaction with other subjects. Furthermore, we distinguish between self-observers and distant-observers.[10] As self-observers we act *inside* of discourses by taking

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[9] As to a detailed analysis of these and other pre-conditions see Reichs (1998, vol. 1) critical reconstruction of three important „movements of offended reason" *(„Kränkungsbewegungen der Vernunft")* that mark transitions between modernity/postmodernity. In this analysis Reich in particular reflects the offences to knowledge claims implicated in post-metaphysical thinking (Habermas), psychoanalysis (Lacan), post-structuralism, constructivism, and deconstructivism.

[10] At this point it is not easy to find a proper English translation for the terminology of interactive constructivism. The original German distinction is between what we call *Selbstbeobachter* and *Fremdbeobachter*. The literal translation would be „self-observers" and „alien-observers". What we want to indicate by this distinction is the need to differentiate levels of observation in the sense of

places and positions, pursuing intentions, claiming truths etc., thereby observing ourselfs in mutual mirror experiences (*Spiegelungen*) with others in our discourses. As distant-observers we look at discourses *from the outside*, be it by temporal or spatial detachment or from the distance of reflection. The distant-observers are often capable of looking further and recognizing other things than the self-observers in their immediate entanglement with their discourses. Transitions, though, are fluid here. As every distant-observer is at the same time an self-observer within *her/his own* discourse, so every self-observer may try to project her/himself at a given moment into an (imagined) distant-observer's position in order to reflect her/his discourse *from a detached position*. Thus what we have is a tensional field whose different positions should always be distinguished and considered in discourse analyses.

2.2 Places

Furthermore, we propose to introduce places for the description of discourses. We thus provide ourselfes with a first kind of order, made visible as allocation in space. These places may be taken, claimed, and occupied, i.e. they may be *filled* in order to maintain positions. At the same time, they represent places of observation that can be used by self- and distant-observers in order to look at discourses from different and respectively limited perspectives. Moreover, the spatial arrangement and allocation of these places is accompanied by movements between them, conceived of as circulation. Thus the stasis of placements is made fluid by a circular dynamism of dislocations and references. We suggest the following places (compare the diagram on the following page):
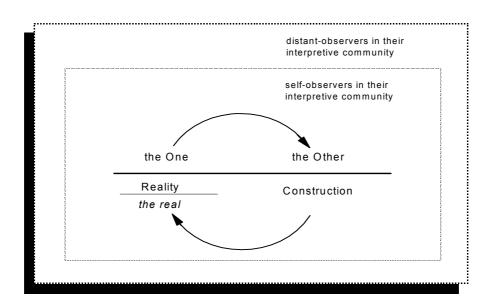
2.2.1 The Place of the One

Discourses live on the symbolic interaction between proposition and opposition, they gain their dynamics from the difference of positions making possible differentiations and producing further differences. On the *Place of the One* something appears, is maintained, claimed or acted upon. This position is to be observed in every discourse; it often seems to be its starting-point and driving force, the phase that bestowes the discourse with dynamic.

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first-order and second-order observation. However, the term „alien-observer" tends to underestimate the close interdependency that informs the relation between these levels which can only be differentiated but never entirely separated from each other. Thus we have preferred the term „distant-observer" although it does not adequately transport the dialetic of self-and-other implied in the German terms. The distant-observer is a self-observer who observes other self-observers *from a distance*. Maybe „remote observer" would be an alternative choice.

2.2.2 The Place of the Other

The One refers to its opposition on the *Place of the Other*, looking for correspondence and reply. In encountering this *Other* it gets differentiated and multiplied, because in discourses *the One* can never simply remain self-identical, but has to prove itself by confronting its Other. This movement between *the One* and *the Other* is essential for every discourse, and in most cases it appears to be what is most readily observed on the surface: an interplay of force and counter-force, as it were, that moves us on in so far as we always come across something *Other* in our discourses that is not readily and totally to be captured on the Place of the One.

2.2.3 The Place of Construction

From the movement between *the One* and *the Other* originates a third place in discourses, a place on which something is produced that can be maintained as a symbolic result or gain. For interactive constructivism, this is the *Place of Construction*. What is constructed here and who in particular appear as constructors can be quite different as the case may be. However, it is decisive for every discourse that something emerges from the difference of *the One* and *the Other* that can be stabilized and returned to the discourse and its participants as a symbolic production. The order of discourse would be unthinkable without such a place of production or construction. And, what is more, from a constructivist point of view it is important to note that besides constructions the order of discourse always requires *reconstructions* on this place: the recurrence, taking over, handing down and passing on of existing constructions bestowing the discourse with stability.[11] Reconstructive

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[11] In this text, we use the word „reconstruction" in a more specific and restricted sense than it is

strategies, like the procedures of „exclusion“, „limitation“ and „rarefaction of the speaking subjects“ described by Foucault (see Foucault 1981), are brought into action on this place in order to control and restrict the possibilities of free construction in discourses. But here one also has to reckon with the possibility of *deconstructions*: it is primarily on the Place of Construction that we – as distant-observers – at times come to recognize that discourses in the long run do not lend themselves to complete symbolic control. Although deconstructions are often hotly contested and heavily fought for, they time and again appear on this place as shifts of perspective, disturbances of well established routines and practices, uncoverings of passed on norms and rules.

2.2.4 The Place of Reality/the real

The interplay of constructions, reconstructions, and deconstructions then leads us on to the *Place of Reality*. Here the re/de/constructed has to prove viable in the sense of being recognized and affirmed *as* reality of the discourse by the self-observers in their interpretive community. However, as against the constructed realities we always have to reckon with what we call the intrusions of *the real (das Reale)*, too. For interactive constructivism, *the real* denotes the obstinate eventfulness of discourses that can never be completely captured. Making itself felt unexpectedly, *the real* time and again subverts the *Place of Reality*. It appears as tear or discontinuity, as lack or failure or gap. It is the contingency of the not yet discursively registered lurking behind each construction of reality, time and again marking the boundaries of our symbolic quest for order. To the self-observers, *the real* in most cases appears simply to be the unimaginable and nonsensical. They tend to avert its intrusions into their discourse and remain speechless where such defence fails. The distant-observers' view may be more sober here. They try to achieve an interpretation from a distance, bestowing the intrusions of *the real* with symbolic meaning after the event, allocating it to a place in the discourse they are observing.

From the Place of Reality/*the real* we return to the Place of the One, the starting-point of our considerations that no longer appears to be without preconditions now. Every new start on the Place of the One builds upon fillings already having an effect on the Places of Construction and Reality. That is to say, discourses are circular courses of events wherein a new beginning is only possible because they have already begun, because discourses, put simply, always originate from the reality of discourses. In so far the Place of the One designates not so much the starting-point of this process, but rather the irreducible impossibility of its conclusion, the perpetu-

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commonly understood in English. „Reconstruction“ in this sense refers to the *re*-production of previously established constructions. This may be an act of discovery that is highly constructive in nature. However, the emphasis in „reconstruction“ is on the aspect of reiteration (whether consciously undertaken or not) and not, or at least not so much, on the aspect of renewal (which is always implied, however slightly it may be). We always use the word „reconstruction“ in connection with „construction“ and „deconstruction“, the three concepts actually forming one set of observer positions to be distinguished but not separated.

ally recurring demand to make new investments and engagements so that the discourse may not come to a stillstand.

If for a moment we survey these four places in their spatial arrangement, we may say that the upper half of our discursive tableau (the Places of the One and the Other) represents, as it were, the immediate spectacle of the discourse, that what's directly being observed on its surface – its staging as an ordered interactive occurence. The lower half, on the other hand (the Places of Construction and Reality/*the real*), rather corresponds to the inconspicuous machinery behind the scene, frequently remaining hidden but always undergirding the staging of the spectacle.

2.3 Fillings

With whom or what shall we begin to fill the places of our discursive tableau? At first we maybe tend to think of such fillings as largely personified figures, attempting to fill all places with subjects or groups of subjects or with certain characteristics of subjects or groups of subjects respectively. This attempt, however, would not sufficiently bear attention to the fact that discourses primarily are symbolic structures in which in addition to the participating subjects there are always rather objectified claims at stake. From our constructivist view, we therefore suggest the following four fillings: Truth and knowledge, on the one hand, as symbolic components appearing in every discourse, and, on the other hand, subjects in their interactions as self and others, these interactions always coming to play on a symbolic *and* on an imaginary level.

2.3.1 Truth (= T)

In our constructivist view of discourses, truth does not represent a place but a filling. We conceive of truth as temporary construction attained by observers in the contexts of their interpretive communities. This means, at first, that truth has lost its universal location for all observers and has become set in motion. As a filling, it circulates and changes according to the type of discursive formation. Appearing on different places, truth gets multiplied on the way through different discourses. Thus we speak of plural truths. Nevertheless we are ready to concede that *inside* of each particular discourse, truth primarily appears as unified and absolute, claiming validity for all observers. As self-observers we often may imagine to be quite certain about such truth claims, because they seem to us to be indispensable and generally applicable in our discourse. As distant-observers, however, we note that by observing the alternations and successions of different discourses, by making shifts of observer positions and juxtapositions of discursive formations, supposedly absolute validities undergo relativization, i.e. the one truth appears not to be identical and unlimitedly transferable for all discourses.

2.3.2 Knowledge (= K)

Knowledge is closely connected to truth. However, meanwhile truth on principle is orientated toward the one beyond the many, knowledge always in itself includes diversity. In modern times, knowledge increasingly gets a centrifugal impact. It tends to multiply and to spread beyond all boundaries. In postmodernity, this process of diversification increases and accelerates even further. Knowledge has become plural and public, being accessible to all (according to its own professed claims). But given the abundance and variety of the stored up bodies of symbolic supply, these accessibilities since long cannot possibly be surveyed by any single observer or even interpretive community. Thus, in discourses, it is always but a restricted knowledge of participants that is maintained as true knowledge. The self-observers readily insist on the relevancy and appropriateness of this knowledge, taking it to be the only just and sufficient knowledge for the conduct of their discourse. As distant-observers, however, we more clearly see the rejections and exclusions adhering to such insistence. We note the „other knowledge" forming on the margins of the discourse and sooner or later trying to nest upon its places. Thus the hope and quest for conclusiveness turns out to be an illusion of self-observers which in discourses time and again undergoes deconstruction by the diversity and infinity of knowledge itself.

2.3.3 Others (= o/O)

From our interactive-constructivist view of discourses, relationships and interactions between self and others play a decisive role. For discourses are not to be seen as mere objectified systems, but always represent interpersonal events as well. As a filling of discursive places, then, the other appears in a twofold way (o/O). We use the small letter *o* to denote processes of mutual imaginary mirror experiences, i.e. the interaction on the imaginary level where the subject of desire encounters the imaginary other. In other words, *o* symbolizes the imaginary desire of the subject as feeded back or „mirrored" by the imagination of the other. In contrast, we use the capital letter *O* to designate Others as symbolic beings that are never fully absorbed into the imagination of *o,* but interfere in the discourse by taking places and articulating symbolic claims of their own.[12]

2.3.4 The Subject (= S)

Everyone who enters a discourse, making investments and taking places to act upon, oppose, construct or claim something as reality, thereby observes her/himself as a subject. As such, s/he always finds her/himself connected in a variety of imaginary and symbolic ways with other subjects. Thus, the fillings S (subject) and o/O (o/Others) can be seen as mutually related, complementing and delimiting each others positions. In this interaction, S symbolizes that every subject must reflectively

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[12] For a more detailled discussion see Reich (1998, vol. 1, 424ff., 435ff.; vol. 2, 327f.).

return to her/himself from the encounter with o/Others in order to maintain and experience her/his self as identity and differentiate her/his view from that of others. In this process, prevailing discursive claims to truth (T) and knowledge (K) enter in, oftentimes largely fixating the limiting conditions of the latitudes the subject may make use of. Depending on the given type of discursive formation and corresponding to the fillings at stake on the different places of the discourse, they come to play upon the subjects interactions with o/Others in quite different ways.

3. Four selected types of discursive formations

Let us now begin to work with these places and fillings. For this purpose, we will introduce four selected types of discursive formations which, in our work, time and again have proven to provide useful points of reference for the analysis of discourses. We call them (a) „the discourse of the master" (i.e. „the discourse of power"), (b) „the discourse of knowledge", (c) „the discourse of lived relationships", and (d) „the discourse of the unconscious". While they are introduced here one after the other, they are not to be conceived of as fixed formations or classes to be analysed seperately and independently of each other. They rather form an ensemble of background perspectives that can be used, combined, shifted against and superimposed upon each other in any particular discourse analysis, working together in generating a structured space of observation. They provide us with a diversity of possibilities to look at discourses and at the same time help us to delimit this diversity by reducing it to combinations and recombinations of four central perspectives. Of course, the selection of these types of discursive formation is in the end as little final a decision as is the definition of places and fillings in discourses. We introduce them as propositions that in our view reflect crucial developments in the history of thought concerning theories of discourse. Yet in principle they might as well have been conceived of in quite different ways. No theory of discourses will get by without such reductive propositions, although the broadness or confinement of the employed reductions may well be contested. Let us, then, consider the types of discursive formations proposed in the following text as components of a language game we wish to perform, fixing the rules so that other observers may take them over or change and expand them.

3.1 The discourse of the master

In the discourse of the master, the *Place of the One* is occupied by truth (T). It is often a powerful and impressively eloquent truth that seems to be the starting point of everything else in this discourse.[13] On the *Place of the Other,* the truth of the

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[13] Especially in the case of more archaic systems of domination, it is striking that truth is immediately connected to power. In these systems, there seems to be an unambiguous center of power, a middle of the political space and time being accessible to localization and symbolic representation. The ‚true' word is the word that stems from this middle, the king's word that is spoken with devine

master refers to a body of knowledge (K), which is essentially knowledge of domination, in this case. You have to know about the powerful descents, the supernatural or at least extraordinary origins of domination – a good, a king, a priest, a shaman – to recognize the excellence of the lords and understand the world and its inner order. To generate such knowledge of domination is a necessary component in every discourse of the master. It has to be handed down in religious or secular manifestations, continually transmitted and enlarged. It has to be made heard to all who can listen, sustained in myths of origin, heroic legends, faith in the grace of gods or some doctrine of reincarnation. Songs, stories and ritual spectacle serve to pronounce who are the masters, what distinguishes them, where they come from, and where they will lead to. Whoever wants to enter this discourse as a master and face other masters has to prove himself in terms of this knowledge that is always confronting him on the Place of the Other. He has to fight and show his excellence as one who has gained access to the center of truth and power, being ready to reign over the true discourse from there.

On the *Place of Construction,* several things happen in this discourse. From the perspective of the self-observers – i.e. the masters –, there is at first their desiring and imaginary view of slaves as subjugated others (o) appearing on this place.[14]

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authority.

[14] One of the most influential classical formulations of the discourse of the master is the *Dialektik von Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* developed by Hegel, translated into English as „master-slave

These others participate in the discourse (and truth) of the masters only *as subordinates*. They are dependent beings, having to work for their masters by whom they are employed. Producing their masters' living, they at the same time reproduce their own bondage. The perception of their subjugation will at first be decisive not only for the masters, but for the slaves, too. They can maintain their existence as servants only at the mercy of their masters to whom they are entirely bound.

However, it is by their very being forced to work that for the slaves there may arise the chance to work their way through servitude, step by step. In contrast to their masters, they are tied to the things they have to work on and produce, while the masters only consume them. Handling this world of things, though, the slaves by themselves may gradually achieve new steps of potency and independence, limiting the power of their masters in that behind the masters' displayed autonomy there now increasingly comes to light their dependence upon the skills and competences of their servants. This may even lead to a reversal of the conditions of domination, a coup in which the old masters, having lost contact to reality and become sluggish in their imagined superiority, helplessly have to witness their former servants imposing themselves as the masters of a new time and order.
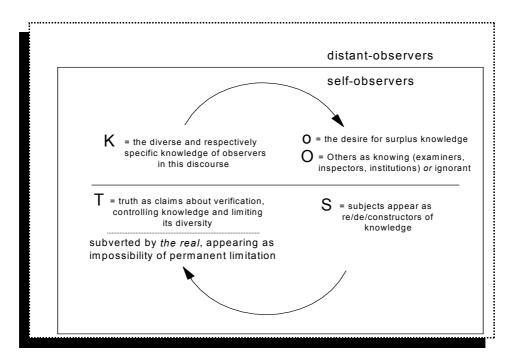
For in their imaginary fantasies of power, the masters often tend to underestimate just the productive aspect of their subordinates as Others (O) on the Place of Construction. They tend to look at their servants correspondingly to their own masterful desire (o): the way servants (in relationship to their masters) have always been supposed to be and shall be any time. They insist on traditions, on vested rights and loyalties established long since. They do not recognize the gradual shift of the balance of forces that is beginning to undermine their position as masters. As distant-observers – i.e. from a detached place or after the event – we may look more soberly here and recognize a dialectical relationship between mastery and slavery, like the one described in Hegels *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (in the aftermath of the French revolution). We then notice a certain instability in this discourse – an inherent contradiction the masters have to conceal carefully from themselves and others in order to be able to maintain their imagination of power. But this is just what may lead them to disaster, when the restriction of their imaginary view makes them blind to the changes occuring on the Place of Construction.

This has consequences for the *Place of Reality*, too. From the view of the masters, this place is apparently determined by their own autonomy as independent subjects (S) of their discourse of power. If *real events* occur that reveal even the masters' impotency and lack of control (such as natural catastrophe, war, or economic colapse), these events can often easily be attributed to even higher powers, e.g. the supernatural world, the nation, or history. But whenever other, rival powers set themselves up against the present masters (be it that other masters compete for dominance or that the subordinates establish new powers for themselves which their masters in their own interest cannot permanently ignore), *real* dependencies come to

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dialectic" (see Bhabha 1994, 32). We employ these terms in the following text as metaphors standing for any form of social or political domination/subjugation.

light that show the impossibility of securing a certain form of domination once and for all. The intrusions of *the real* are what moves this discourse on and time and again requires that new solutions be looked for. This is another aspect that is easier accessible to the distant-observer who comes after the event than for the self-observers in their immediate entanglement of power and desire.

3.2 The discourse of knowledge

distant-observers

self-observers

K = the diverse and respectively specific knowledge of observers in this discourse

O = the desire for surplus knowledge
O = Others as knowing (examiners, inspectors, institutions) *or* ignorant

T = truth as claims about verification, controlling knowledge and limiting its diversity
subverted by *the real*, appearing as impossibility of permanent limitation

S = subjects appear as re/de/constructors of knowledge

In the discourse of the master having been situated on the Place of the One, truth (T) retreats to the *Place of Reality* in the discourse of knowledge. Thereby its appearance changes. In contrast to that truth being celebrated as a powerful sign on the Place of the One and being legitimized by this very intimacy with the splendour of power, we now seem to be concerned with a more sober truth. Instead of being set up as the starting-point of the discourse, truth now has yet to be found in the discourse *as its reality*. It has to be shown and proven in order to count as real truth. Such a shift can already be made out in classical antiquity in the transition from myth to metaphysics. Foucault is worth quoting at length on this for his accurate description: „For the Greek poets of the sixth century BC, the true discourse (in the strong and valorised sense of the word), the discourse which inspired respect and terror, and to which one had to submit because it ruled, was the one pronounced by men who spoke as of right and according to the required ritual; the discourse which dispensed justice and gave everyone his share; the discourse which in prophesying the future not only announced what was going to happen but helped to make it happen, carrying men's minds along with it and thus weaving itself into the fabric of destiny. Yet already a

century later the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was or did, but in what it said: a day came when truth was displaced from the ritualised, efficacious and just act of enunciation, towards the utterance itself, its meaning, its form, its object, its relation to its reference. Between Hesiod and Plato a certain division was established, separating true discourse from false discourse: a new division because henceforth the true discourse is no longer precious and desirable, since it is no longer the one linked to the exercise of power. The sophist is banished." (Foucault 1981, 54)

Thus, while in the discourse of the master truth (T) was essentially connected to the *act of making a statement* – „acting" in the name of one truth on the Place of the One –, this powerful act now recedes into the background as against the *contents of the statement*: knowledge (K) being accessible to judgements about truth and falsity. This knowledge, then, is situated on the *Place of the One*: it represents the starting-point in that it appears as the one, delimited and specific knowledge calling for verification or falsification in the discourse. We may regard the shift from the discourse of power to the discourse of knowledge as a movement of rationalization that repeatedly can be observed in Western history. In particular, it seems to be characteristic of the age of Enlightenment and the development of modernity with its scientific, technological, social and political processes of rationalization.

Now let us have a look at what happens on the other places of our discursive tableau if we have knowledge occupy the Place of the One. On the *Place of the Other*, then, knowledge stands facing a desire for surplus knowledge (o). At first, this seems to be a purely objectified desire, being completely absorbed in the symbolical and cognitive contents dominating this discourse: findings and statements, propositions and theorems, books and reflections, theories and applications which enlarge the existing and available knowledge (K) and continue its development by adding more knowledge. However, we hold that behind such claims for objectivity there always lurks an imaginary desire for mirror experiences and recognition by others. To produce and to reproduce knowledge, to collect and to preserve it, to develop it and to put it into practice, to multiply and to disseminate it: all of these activities offer space for mirrorings and opportunities for recognition in the form of reputation and prestige. As symbolic capital, recognition frequently finds expression by way of certificates, degrees, honourings, awards etc. To make this possible, (big) Others (O) who already possess knowledge (examiners, institutions etc.) are required for estimating, evaluating, and controlling the growth of knowledge on the *Place of the Other*. For example, they appear as experts who to a large extent decide what kind of new knowledge shall find access to the discourse in order to be judged true or false. They restrict and eliminate the irrelevant knowledge.

However, they are seldom wholly uncontested in doing this. Their knowledge is often confronted with „ignorant" (big) Others (O), too, who either do not yet know or else have a different knowledge. They frequently meet the supposed ‚knowing-it-all' of the experts with distrust. If we look at the (social) sciences and humanities, such „ignorant" Others are e.g. fringe groups whose knowledge is marginalized and dismissed as irrelevant by the dominating discourses: ethnical strangers, socially,

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politically or racially excluded groups, women, jouth, homosexuals, prisoners etc. In the Western democracies of the past decades, they increasingly have been appearing as (big) Others in the form of protest movements that contest the dominance of the supposedly „better" knowledge. They attempt to deconstruct its claims to be the sole legitimate representative knowledge by maintaining discourses of counter-knowledge „from the bottom". Science, on its part, often enough reacts to this with lack of understanding and a tendency to seal its discourses off from life-world: it tightens the standardized requirements of its „big O" which function as conditions of access to its discourses and specializes its knowledge to the extent that it can be sufficiently draughtproofed against the discourses of everyday life.

Next to the Place of the Other, we reach the *Place of Construction*, occupied by subjects as re/de/constructors of knowledge. Access to this place is limited, though; whoever wants to get here must, as a rule, have provided proof of acquired knowledge first (on the Place of the One); s/he must have passed the examinations and controls of big Others (on the Place of the Other); s/he must have reached access and admission to a specific discipline in order to make her/himself sufficiently heard on this Place. For these reasons, the *Place of Construction* is a quite ambiguous place in this discourse, too: On the one hand it is about the construction of knowledge, but on the other hand it is about the production of the knowing subject as well, which is a disciplined subject in that s/he must have internalized the rules, standards and assessments of her/his discipline as compulsive attitudes of self-control (*Selbstzwänge*), before s/he can effectively participate in the work of re/de/construction.

This relates to the *Place of Reality*. As we have seen, in the discourse of knowledge this place is occupied by truth (T), i.e. the claim to possible verification of the re/de/constructed knowledge. By separating the true from the false discourse and prescribing obligatory criteria for the judgement of true statements for all (self)observers, truth controls knowledge and delimits its diversity. Quite different criteria of truth are conceivable here according to the disciplines of knowledge and their respective contexts in the history of thought: with regard to heuristics there are e.g. principles and rules of deductive and inductive logics, criteria of empirical justification (*empirisches Sinnkriterium*), technical procedures, claims and methods of intersubjective examination and consensus etc.; with regard to hermeneutics we find changing paradigms of interpretation and analysis operating with respectively different concepts and core assumptions. Such principles and paradigms represent standards of scientific warrant of true assertions that achieve and maintain relevancy in their time and interpretive community. They have in common that each of them is concerned with the definition of criteria for rendering the distinction between true and false statements unambiguous, i.e. for stabilizing this distinction as a cognitive achievement of self-observers in their discourses of knowledge.

In postmodern critique of knowledge, however, this very search for unambiguousness becomes more and more questionable wherever it manifests itself in terms of absolute or universal standards. From the view of an observer who makes comparisons between different discourses of knowledge, the quest for truth seems to be reconstructable only within a tensional field where absolute propositions are stated

only to be „worked off" by subsequent relativizations. In the juxtaposition of approaches, plural knowledge gets relativized and deconstructed by itself, since discourses of knowledge have multiplied and differentiated to an extent that the *one* obligatory truth for all observers can only be seen as the fantasy of a long lost unity of science. The end of the „great projects" and „meta-narratives" is accompanied by a pluralization of possible truths on the *Place of Reality*. Nevertheless, science at the same time cannot help but fight such plurality *inside* of its endemic discourses in order to secure a sufficient clarity of its statements. Today, science generally finds itself in this dilemma. From the view of the self-observer, it necessarily has to proceed restrictingly and reductively on the *Place of Reality*. From the view of the distant-observer, however, this procedure can always be considered in view of the deconstructive juxtaposition of different discourses of knowledge. Thus, a constant readiness to change perspectives between self- and distant-observers in this type of discursive formation more and more turns out to be a minimum requirement for postmodern knowledge.

Truth (T) on the *Place of Reality* yet by another reason seems problematic in this discourse; its bearings time and again are being delimited in yet another way. *The real* enters the discourse as a sudden and unexpected event, subverting its seemingly secure and rational order. For example, the talk about the „risk society" represents a metaphor for experiences through which we increasingly become aware of the risks of contemporary processes of societal modernization. It reminds us of the limitedness of modern discourses of knowledge – in particular the ones which are concerned with a rather narrow construct of technological feasibility. The processes of technological rationalization often have consequences that cannot sufficiently be calculated and surveyed in advance from inside the discourse. Some of these consequences return to us as *real* risks, disturbing the supposedly secure order of discourse. Thus „true knowledge" sometimes turns out to be a double-edged affair: knowledge that seemed to promise security, wellfare, and progress may appear to us as ignorance, after the event, e.g. if we think of some of the ecological, social, and economic consequences of modern industrialism. Those consequences were not taken into consideration until they came into experience as *real* crises and could no longer be left out of account. This does not necessarily have to happen in such dramatic ways as associated with politically highly connotated catch-phrases like the „hole in the ozon layer", the „greenhouse effect" or the „trap of globalization". More important here is the claim that with respect to *the real* we should reckon with such omissions and gaps in every discourse of knowledge.We should on principle reckon with the impossibility to tighten the discourse against *real* events, because every true knowledge is contingent as a symbolic order of reality and limited as a horizon of expectations of future events. *The real* often confronts us with the incompleteness of our knowledge; it catches us unawares and makes us realize our incompetency as knowers. This usually seems most painful and is most unwillingly accepted in fields where we had prided ourselfes on accurately having understood everything well. Such disappointments are necessary, though, in that they can prevent us (as self-observers) from the illusion to conceive of knowledge as a perfect symbolic system

to which we can retreat from the adversities and predicaments of uncertain decisions in human life-world.

What, then, is the relationship between our first two types of discursive formation, the „discourse of the master“ and the „discourse of knowledge“? If we have another look at our two discursive tableaus, we recognize that we have passed from the first to the second by a simple shift of the fillings (one step to the left). This suggests a certain proximity or affinity between power and knowledge. To be sure, it is a crucial characteristic of discourses of knowledge that they do not have power but, indeed, knowledge as their main object and standard. Human relations seemingly being of secondary importance in this type of discursive formation anyway, power retreats behind the scenes in behalf of more objectified references and standards. After all, knowledge *as* knowledge claims validity likewise for all knowers independently of ranks or names. However, there are effects of power involved in this very process of objectification, even though they come to play in more anonymous and hidden ways in comparison with the discourse of the master. Such effects of power have been examined in detail by Foucault in his analysis of strategies to control the discourse. For Foucault, the crucial point in this connection is what he calls „the will to truth, that prodigious machinery designed to exclude.“ (Foucault 1981, 56).

Relating Foucault's argument to our discursive tableau, we may say that in discourses of knowledge these procedures of exclusion[15] have their impact particularly on the *Place of the Other*: they delimit who or what can enter the discourse as (big) *O* in that they e.g. ban certain contents (according to Foucault in connection with sexuality and politics, among other things), exclude madness, and separate the true from the false discourse. However, the very fact that in this type of discursive formation truth (T) is not immediately acted upon and displayed on the *Place of the One*, but has yet to be found on the *Place of Reality,* necessarily obscures the connections of truth to power and desire. The discourse of knowledge tends to hide the power that penetrates it, because any will or desire seems to be neutralized by true knowledge's supposed freedom from subjective interests and imaginations of power. In Foucaults own words: „It is as if, for us, the will to truth and its vicissitudes were masked by truth itself in its necessary unfolding. The reason is perhaps this: although since the Greeks ‚true‘ discourse is no longer the discourse that answers to the demands of desire, or the discourse which exercises power, what is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this ‚true‘ discourse, if not desire and power? ‚True‘ discourse, freed from desire and power by the necessity of its form, cannot recognise the will to truth which pervades it; and the will to truth, having imposed itself on us for a very long time, is such that the truth it wants cannot fail to mask it.“ (Ibid.)

In our view, a constructivist theory of discourse should take this deconstructivist argument seriously. As to our discursive tableau, we may at any given moment „shift

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[15] The strategies described by Foucault include procedures of „exclusion“, „limitation“ and „rarefaction of the speaking subjects“. We in particular deal here with the first group, although all three groups might be taken together under the head of „exclusion“ in a wider sense.
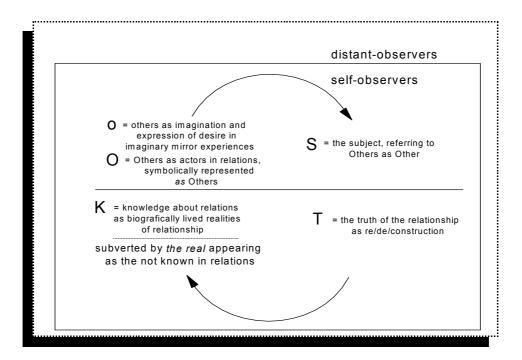
back" the fillings positioned to describe a discourse of knowledge into the con-stellation of a power discourse. For example, what happens when some truth (T) found and acknowledged as a supposedly neutral result on the *Place of Reality* (in a discourse of knowledge) is put on the *Place of the One* and acted upon against o/Others (thus expressing a discourse of power)? What happens when, say, the scientifically stated truth of the distinction between „normal" and „insane" is em-ployed as a starting-point to classify and describe o/Others (e.g. patients in a psych-iatric institution) who from the outset are excluded *as* Others from the medical discourse of knowledge? What effects of power can be observed here? How is knowledge connected to power? What kind of discursive formation (discourse of master or knowledge) serves to legitimate the power of this and other institutions?

Moreover, in our constructivist theory of discourse, we draw yet another con-clusion from the dilemmata of power/knowledge. Further possibilities to deconstruct discourses shall be opened. Thus our proposed set of basic types of discursive formations contains two further types which for the most part are rather neglected in many other theories of discourse as compared to the prevailing interest in power and knowledge. From the view of interactive constructivism, however, the discourse of lived relationships and the discourse of the unconscious represent equally important fields of observation.

3.3 The discourse of lived relationships

In the discourse of the master and in the discourse of knowledge, the upper places of our discursive tableau were largely dominated by symbolic objectifications, while the subjects appeared in a rather secondary or even subordinated position. In the discourse of lived relationships, they directly sit on the *Places of the One* and *the Other*: the encounter of subjects as self and o/Others becomes our starting point in this discourse. It is not at all accidental, then, that we should begin with the *other* subject (o/O) occupying the *Place of the One*. It is crucial for the discourse of lived relationships that every subject (S) primarily open and relate to the o/Other, allowing her/him to act and occupy the *Place of the One*. That is to say, the primary events in this type of discursive formation are the very mirror experiences that no subject can self-sufficiently find in her/himself alone, but always receives from o/Others in whose actions s/he finds her/himself mirrored.

As we have already seen, this encounter comprehends an imaginary and a symbo-lic phase. The small letter *o* denotes the other as my mirrored imagination, the image of her/him that I make for myself, expressing my desire and imaginary view. As big Other (O), on the other hand, s/he confronts me as an actor with symbolically dis-played agency of her/his own, delimiting my mirror experiences in that the Other who speaks and symbolically articulates her/himself stands outside of my imaginary reach. In discourses of lived relationships, a lot depends on to what extent the inter-active partners are prepared to admit each other's access to this place as big Others, thereby possibly getting involved with the need to revise their previous imaginary view of others or even an offence to their present imaginary desires.

distant-observers

self-observers

O = others as imagination and
expression of desire in
imaginary mirror experiences

O = Others as actors in relations,
symbolically represented
as Others

S = the subject, referring to
Others as Other

K = knowledge about relations
as biografically lived realities
of relationship

subverted by *the real* appearing
as the not known in relations

T = the truth of the relationship
as re/de/construction

Success or failure in this discourse largely depends on what happens on the *Place of Construction*, which is occupied by truth (T). This is a place of necessary constriction and reduction on which sufficiently accessible and reliable definitions of truth-in-relationships[16] must be constructed. Otherwise, the overwhelming diversity of possible interactions between self and others could not sufficiently be predicted and controlled. Without such definitions of truth-in-relationships, no relationship could last long. They secure community and form the basis of any trust in reliability. At best, they are solutions agreed upon temporarily, meeting with the approval of all who participate: consented arrangements, mutual commitments etc.

In communicating about such definitions of truth-in-relationships, however, the interactive partners are seldom entirely free, as if they were simply acting on their own behalf. This is because the *Place of Construction* is also a place of very powerful reconstructive cultural patterns, too. Strong definitions of truth have been inscribed here for a long time in the form of social conventions and institutions. Defining the scope of what counts as permitted, legitimate, or appropriate in relationships and what does not, these conventions and institutions restrict the constructive freedom of the interactive partners according to the social situation. As to examples of reconstructive patterns that may have an effect on this place, we may only think of socially sanctioned concepts about marriage, family relations, gender norms, conditions of work, legal commitments and dependencies, moral claims concerning the

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[16] We use this artificial and perhaps somewhat awkward word in order to indicate the specific type of truth construction characteristic of this discourse. The German term is *Beziehungswahrheiten* (literally: relationship truths).

relations between parent and child, pedagogical standards regarding the interactions between teacher and student, therapeutical settings etc.

Now (post-)modern societies are marked by an increasing tendency to weaken formerly rigid standards and definitions of truth in many fields of human relations. This goes with a larger openness and plurality of life-styles and relationship patterns. Thus the constructive freedom of observers on the *Place of Construction* is enlarged: passed on norms of human relations being subject to extended examination and deconstruction, there increasingly open up new spaces for more individual and situational solutions of relationship issues. This is the very point why the discourse of lived relationships in our time receives intensified attention, shown in the contemporary bulk of advice literature as well as in film productions or talk shows on TV. However, these endless discourses *about* relationships often also indicate or express a felt insecurity, ambivalence or even discontent *in* relationships.[17] The increasing openness on the *Place of Construction* can easily turn out to be demanding too much, if sufficiently reliable definitions of truth-in-relationships no longer seem accessible as a common basis through changes and transformations in time. At least the widespread talk about „relationship work" („*Beziehungsarbeit*") seems to indicate an intensified feeling that this basis is no longer experienced as a matter of course but time and again has to be negotiated and reestablished by the relationship partners themselves.

The *Place of Reality*, finally, is occupied for every observer in this discourse by some knowledge about relations (K), expressing her/his biographically lived relationship realities. This is a decidedly individually and oftentimes ideosyncratically shaped knowledge; personal experiences, conclusions, decisions, and realizations have been inscribed on it as well as important Others (parents, relatives, friends, partners, teachers etc.) and basic social patterns of human relations. And, what is more, it is always and for every observer but an incomplete knowledge. Since human relationships are never wholly calculable and predictable, we are touching on the limits of the not known time and again in so far as we let them keep on surprising us with *real* events.

Because of this specific allocation of fillings on the discursive places, discourses of lived relationships are often particularly prone to disturbances. First of all, this depends on what happens on the two „lower" places of our discursive tableau (i.e. the *Places of Construction* and *Reality*). Such disturbances have been described in detail by systemic (family-)therapists who have developed different approaches toward resource- and solution-orientated therapeutic work with relationship systems.[18] By simplification, we will only distinguish two extreme cases here, both primarily having to do with the *Place of Construction*. They symbolize possible „relationship traps" („*Beziehungsfallen*") frequently encountered in this discourse. They have in common that in both cases meta-communication – the process of

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[17] As to forms of discontent in postmodern relationships see also Bauman (1999).

[18] For an introduction see Stierlin (1994).

communicating about the relationship, i.e. about the construction of truth and knowledge in the relationship – is blocked to a considerable extent. Instead, the temptation is often to fall back upon one of the two preceding types of discursive formation (power or knowledge).

(1) Firstly, there are those self-observers who strongly over-emphasize their own subjective view on the *Place of Construction* and try to prescribe their own relationship definitions (T) as obligatory for all other self-observers. They imagine themselves to be in possession of a strong truth-in-relationships, legitimated e.g. by traditions, conventions, achieved success, personal accomplishments, accounts of debts and merits, loyalty commitments. They insist on having their view be carried through exclusively against all deviating perspectives. Following Helm Stierlin, we may speak of an overmuch „hard" relationship reality being generated by such insistence on the *one* and exclusive truth-in-relationships (see Stierlin 1994).

This position yields further consequences. On the *Place of Construction,* the emphasis is on the necessity of irrefutable reconstructions (T) that must not be deconstructed, questioned, or even expanded and supplemented by new constructions. On the *Place of Reality,* this is often accompanied by claims to superior or better knowledge about relationships (K), judging everything in terms of one's own experiences and patterns of explanation and tending to belittle any deviating knowledge as inferior. On the *Place of the One,* this position tends to marginalize the role of the big Other (O) in that the subject can only accept her/his own desiring imagination of others (o) on this place. In so far as this is the case, we might even say that the subject supposedly situated on the *Place of the Other* actually tends to nist upon the *Place of Reality.* Directly acting out her/his claim to truth and superiority (T) on the *Place of the One*, then, s/he actually moves towards a „discourse of the master". Or s/he occupies the *Place of Construction*, intending to manage relationships completely on the model of a „discourse of knowledge". S/he may try to distinguish true and false viewpoints (K) by means of some allegedly objective criteria and reduce the indeterminacy of lived relationships to an unambiguous logical algorithm,one way or another. (This in particular is characteristic of the so called type of the „rationalizer").
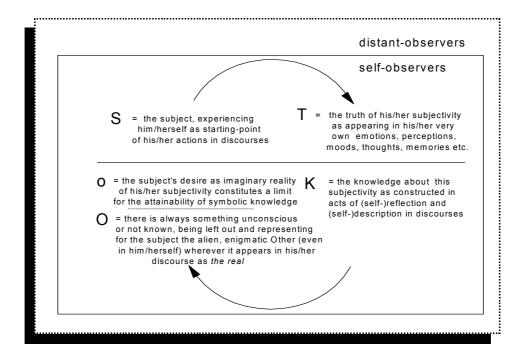
From the viewpoint of a distant-observer, this „hardening" of relationship reality often seems problematic because, among other reasons, it frequently gets in the way of necessary developments and changes in every relationship system. Especially in the case of conflicts, these „hard" relationships realities often turn out to be too rigid and inflexible. This is because on the *Place of Construction* they leave too little space for finding new solutions by taking the perspectives and resources of all participants into account.

(2) Once again following Stierlin and speaking from the perspective of a distant-observer, we may describe the opposite extreme as manifestation of an overmuch „soft" relationship reality. In this case, the relationship system does not succeed at all in attaining sufficiently strong and stable defintions of truth-in-relationships (T) on the *Place of Construction.* Thus it becomes a place of arbitrary propositions where there are neither negotiations nor even confrontations of claimed definitions of truth-

in-relationships. Limits are not sufficiently set and observed. Differences, oppositions, and contradictions are not fought out nor even thematizes as they appear, but remain in diffuse juxtaposition. Without any sufficient clarification on the *Place of Construction*, however, it is almost impossible for the subject to transform such „softened" relationship reality into significant knowledge of relationships (on the *Place of Reality*) that might serve as starting-point for further and extended approaches to new relationships (on the *Places of the One* and *the Other*). Thus distant-observers (e.g. therapists) frequently describe relationship systems marked by this kind of overmuch „softening" as strangely unreal: they sense *the real,* appearing as lack of relatedness, because truth (T) on the *Place of Construction* is always missing the point. The very search for common constructions on this place seems to have lost meaning and obligation for the self-observers in this discourse.

Between these extremes of overmuch „hardening" and „softening" of relationship reality, discourses of lived relationships are often like a balancing act that at any given moment can only partly be stabilized and time and again has to be negotiated anew. Below the surface, a shift towards some discourse of knowledge or power easily comes to play – sometimes more readily recognizable for a distant-observer who looks from a detached position than for the persons directly involved. From the viewpoint of interactive constructivism, there are in particular three pre-conditions to be observed if we participate as self-observers in discourses of lived relationships and want to reflect on our discourses theoretically. We should always make an effort, then, to

• take the Other *as* (big) Other seriously, allowing her/him to act on the *Place of the One,* even if this may at times profoundly go against our imaginary expectations of (small) *o* and undermine our imaginary certainties about ourselfes and others;

• conceive of truth on the *Place of Construction* as a necessarily reductive clarification of relationship reality and *at the same time* remain open for further possibilities of re/de/constructions, because this seems to be the only way to realize definitions of truth-in-relationships as temporary and changeable arrangements and agreements based on as comprehensive a participation of equal relationship partners as is possible;

• always consider our knowledge of relationships on the *Place of Reality* to be imcomplete and sometimes in need of supplementation with regard to future relationships, thus manifesting a lack of knowledge because relationships keep on confronting us with *real* events which no observer's symbolic knowledge can ever represent once and for all.

3.4 The discourse of the unconscious

distant-observers

self-observers

S = the subject, experiencing him/herself as starting-point of his/her actions in discourses

T = the truth of his/her subjectivity as appearing in his/her very own emotions, perceptions, moods, thoughts, memories etc.

o = the subject's desire as imaginary reality of his/her subjectivity constitutes a limit for the attainability of symbolic knowledge

K = the knowledge about this subjectivity as constructed in acts of (self-)reflection and (self-)description in discourses

O = there is always something unconscious or not known, being left out and representing for the subject the alien, enigmatic Other (even in him/herself) wherever it appears in his/her discourse as *the real*

Finally, we want to introduce a forth type of discursive formation: the „discourse of the unconscious". But how can the unconscious possibly be the name and determinative characteristic of a discourse? Are not discourses always symbolic formations that have to do with *conscious* statements (about truth and knowledge) in the interactions of subjects and o/Others? Certainly, something unconscious can only indirectly come to play here: as a limiting condition of discourses that is reflected upon by observers who endeavor to produce knowledge about such limitations. That is what this type of discursive formation is about.

In the discourse of the unconscious, the *Place of the One* is occupied by the subject (S) who experiences her/himself as starting-point of her/his actions and engagements in discourses. That is to say, in this type of discursive formation everything at first seems to proceed from the subject reflecting upon her/himself. In some way or another (sometimes even in a quite indirect or disguised manner), this subject meets with the enigmatic problem of the truth of her/his own subjectivity (T) on the *Place of the Other*.

For example, one has come to experience something unusual about himself, some unexpected or even strange emotions, perceptions, moods, thoughts, memories etc., that are nevertheless very much one's ownes. In this experience, he has himself become a question to himself, as it were. Or he has had a dream in which there were alien and frightening, but at the same time fascinating images arising inside of him. He has been confronted with something enigmatic and incomprehensible that nevertheless in some peculiar way seemed to belong to himself. This enigmatic image is

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now opposing him on the *Place of the Other* as part of the truth of his own subjectivity. This is what the subject wants to clarify.

Thus, on the *Place of Construction*, he tries to transform this problematic „self-experience" into some form of knowledge (K): he speculates and looks for explanations of something he does not (yet) know about himself. In so far as this knowledge is his own construction, we may say that this is the place where he may (re-)invent himself as a subject: he constructs descriptions of himself and clothes events into narrations, images into sequences of memory. He begins to relate his story (or we might even say: relate himself *as* a story) to himself or to others. For example, he starts to write down his dreams and looks for an interpretation. Maybe he even consults a psychoanalyst or some other professional interpreter of dreams hoping to come to know more about himself.

As in the others types of discursive formation discussed above, the *Place of Construction* can be occupied not only by the subject (as self-observer) himself. A distant-observer may listen to him. She may have him relate a dream, a memory, an experience, a chain of thoughts and associations in order to construct a knowledge about him from her view. She, too, speculates about something she does not know and indeed cannot really know in so far as she cannot directly penetrate into the inner dream world and fantasy of the Other. Maybe she begins to reconstruct some of her own stored up stories, experiences, memories, images, and inner occurences, which is often the best way for her to start empathizing with the other. She may try to deconstruct some of the self-descriptions of the self-observer, because she thinks she can recognize more clearly the omissions, gaps, or inconsistencies they imply. She may interpret these inconsistencies as signs of some repressed, disavowed, projected, or otherwise averted unconscious. Finally, she may attempt the construction of an interpretation of the unconscious by means of which she intends to improve her understanding of the discourse of the subject. Psychoanalysts think they can help their patients in that they offer them such interpretations as expanded ways to re/de/construct self-descriptions. Analysing unconscious occurences, connections, and meanings, their therapeutic skill and knowledge comes to play. If they do their job well, however, they know they cannot achieve this goal by means of a superior discourse of knowledge alone. It is crucial that they first of all be capable of sensing, observing, reflecting, and articulating what is going on between themselves and their patients in the discourse of lived relationships. Here imaginary processes of transferrence and counter-transference between self and o/Other come to play that have an important impact on in how far (and whether at all) an interpretation reaches the (unconscious) desire of the other.

This corresponds to the fact that in the discourse of the unconscious, the Place of Construction is never occupied by the unconscious itself, but by a body of knowledge which at best is knowledge about the border of the unconscious. Since the unconscious as such cannot be the content of a discourse, knowledge on the *Place of Construction*, comprehensive as it may be, is always restricted with regard to the reality of the unconscious. That is why in this discourse the *Place of Reality* is occupied by desire (*o*), i.e. the imaginary reality of the subject. Because this desire cannot com-

pletely be captured by symbolic knowledge, but persistently evades the words and explanations, stories and biographical interpretations in so far as it remains a *real* desire, there is always something unconscious or not (yet) known about this imaginary reality. Thus, for the subject as self-observer, there are always traces of the alien, enigmatic and Other (*O*) in her/himself in so far as the unconscious time and again appears as *the real* in her/his life. For the distant-observer, what remains is the impossibility to conclude this discourse – not even by psychoanalytic treatment –, because no interpretation can ever fully capture or cover the unconscious.

So we may sum up the argumentation by condensing it to the following line of thought briefly delineating the characteristics of this type of discursive formation: Whenever the subject (S) takes her/his stand on the *Place of the One*, in order to confront her/himself with the truth (T) of her/his subjectivity on the *Place of the Other*, and to generate for her/himself a knowledge (K), an interpretation, a story in biographical self-description on the *Place of Construction*, there remains at the base of her/his discourse a desire (o/O) resisting any discursive attempt to conclude or fully embrace it on the *Place of Reality*.

In the discourse of the unconscious, desire exhibits something alien, uncomprehended, and undescribable, since human subjects are imaginary beings that cannot ever be fully captured in discourses. Ultimately, then, this type of discourse is nothing else but the manifestation of a reflection or speculation carried out by observers who become aware of the limits, fissures, gaps, and fractures of their subjectivity. If these limits are noticed and recognized in the discourse of the unconscious, this discourse may become a critical perspective for deconstructing subjective claims and certainties in other discursive formations as well.

4. Some ethical bearings of the interactive-constructivist theory of discourse

The ethical bearings of the constructivist approach introduced here consist, first of all, in the claim to carry out discourse analyses as broadly as possible and to escape both the exclusiveness of the surface dimension of discourse analyses (the upper part of our discursive tableau) and the equally exclusive preoccupation with discourses of power and knowledge. The proposed places, fillings, and types of discursive formation are a theoretical construct that is frankly introduced as such. The propositions made are not undergirded by any profound claim to universality; they will have to prove their viability in the practice of specific discourse analyses performed by groups of observers on behalf of shared interests in understanding and practice.

Thus, the ethical claim of the interactive-constructivist theory of discourse has in advance shed any strong pretensions to universal validity. Nevertheless it is being stated here. We think that every ethics of discourse should at least be prepared to get involved in discourse analyses in the suggested broadness, lest the split between the practice of philosophical argumentation on the one hand and the relationships and life-world of people on the other hand should be widened even further. Otherwise ethical theory all to often ends up in fruitless formalism. Here the interactive-con-

structivist theory of discourse offers but a minimum demand of perspectives. The proposed discursive dimensions (power, knowledge, relationships, the unconscious) are always open to extension. In response to the conceded constructedness of the model, the reader may feel invited to deconstruct and expand it or maybe even build a new one for her/himself.

However, this is not a plea for arbitrariness. The model presented here takes up the cultural accomplishments of other models and attempts to grasp them in a comprehensive view. We do not deny that we, too, perform a discourse of knowledge trying to convince others to agree with us on a certain view of discourses. We, too, make truth claims about the viability of the proposed model. In so far we, too, intend to generalize a certain discourse model. This is, however, a weak and pragmatic form of generalization that has little to do with the strong, foundational universalism critized above. It does not imply in advance that the validity of its claims presupposes that they on principle have to be shared by all because of rational necessity. As constructivists, what we claim is that in the development of discourses, as far as we can see, certain constructions of human values, interpretations, perspectives, and interests have been emerging and that we can fruitfully further our perception of and participation in discourses by observing their complex interrelationships. Thus the aim of generalization is pragmatic use. While for the self-observers this generalization may easily appear as a claim to universality, it is equally possible to relativize this claim from a distant-observer position by referring to cultural and historical contexts. For constructivists, then, even the pragmatic use of ‚universality‘ is but a form of generalization of cultural viabilities. It is always stated for the time being and open to further revisions.

This implies, e.g., that constructivists can – and should, indeed – take a firm stand in defending democratic claims and rights against the hegemonial effects of political power. The very tenets and aims of constructivism depend on the furtherance of democracy as the political project that is best suited to its theoretical and practical visions.[19] In terms of discourse theory, that is to say that constructivists should decidedly struggle for the concrete possibilities to deconstruct the „discourse of the master" from the varied discursive perspectives emerging in the hegemonial struggles of the present. The discourses of knowledge, lived relationships, and the unconscious, such at least is our impression, are three main fields in which these struggles can fruitfully be reflected.

Our constructivist position, then, is commited to the project of radical democracy which, to be sure, bets its hope on the pragmatic generalization of the democratic imaginary. We consent to John Deweys credo that „Imagination is the chief instrument of the good" (Dewey 1989, 350). Like him and other radical pragmatists, we think it is wiser to try to expand the democratic project not so much by rational

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[19] The implications of this claim for the practice of intercultural discourse are developed in some detail in Neubert / Reich (2001). See also Neubert (2002).

certainty but by the imaginary inspiration of a democratic *ethos*.[20] This has to do, above all, with „the mobilization of passions and sentiments, the multiplication of practices, institutions and language games that provide the conditions of possibility for democratic subjects and democratic forms of willing." (Mouffe 1996, 5)

In contrast, foundational universalism rests on the assumption of something prior to discursive practice that can be stated with certainty and used as the rightly known and recognized basis of discourse. What we oppose to this procedure is, first of all, that it inevitably tends to give primacy to the (philosophical) discourse of knowledge over other types of discursive formation. This claim to rational superiority, however, increasingly loses credibility given the postmodern diversification of discursive formations. It rather tends to hinder the perception of the democratic possibilities and challenges involved in this very diversification. On this we agree with Ernesto Laclau who criticizes Habermas on his aversive reaction against postmodernity: „An initial reaction to this new intellectual climate has been to become entrenched in the defence of ‚reason' and attempt to relaunch the project of ‚modernity' in opposition to those tendencies considered ‚nihilistic'. The work of Habermas is perhaps the most representative of this attitude. Our position, however, is exactly the opposite: far from perceiving in the ‚crisis of reason' a nihilism which leads to the abandonment of any emancipatory project, we see the former as opening unprecedented opportunities for a radical critique of all forms of domination, as well as for the formulation of liberation projects hitherto restrained by the rationalist ‚dictatorship' of the Enlightenment." (Laclau 1990, 3-4)

With respect to ethical legitimation, then, constructivists may have lost the strength of absolute argumentation; but we have won the prospect of an intensified struggle for recognition. The constructors of realities and truths, discursively recognizing and realizing each other's claims and identities, should considerate the broadness of discourses. They may critically examine or deny the model proposed here. They may even completely choose to ignore it. This seems to us to be a characteristic of discourses in the present time, anyway. Although the particular theoretical schools in their proper interests hardly ever concede it: they operate in succession and juxtaposition, and ultimately it is largely a matter of chance for each of them to succeed in reaching broader life-worldly applications.

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[20] For a detailed examination of the connections between interactive constructivism and Deweyan Pragmatism see Neubert (1998).

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