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Rethinking ORDER

Idioms of Stability and
Destabilization

From:

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Doris Schweitzer, Kacper Szulecki (eds.)*

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Stability is at the core of every discussion of order, organization or institutionalization. From an »inside« perspective, the stability of each order-constituting element is assumed. In contrast, in critical discourses instability (e.g. through ambiguity or non-control) is located at the outside of the social order as its negative. By treating this argumentative symmetrical structure as »idioms of stability and destabilization«, the articles try to rethink order: How can we describe structures from a perspective in which instability, non-control and irrationality are not contrary to ordering systems, but contribute to their stability? How might the notions of identity, knowledge and institutions in social and cultural studies be contested by this change of perspective?

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Idioms of Stability and Destabilization

Introducing the Concept of ›Idiom‹ to the Epistemology of Social Analysis

*Nicole Falkenhayner, Andreas Langenohl, Johannes Scheu,
Doris Schweitzer, Kacper Szulecki*

The ›problem of order‹ is certainly among the fundamental issues that social and cultural theory have been trying to tackle since their inception. From a historical perspective, Niklas Luhmann positioned the ›problem of order‹ as the catalyst that led to the crystallization of sociology as an independent academic discipline (Luhmann 1981; Luhmann 1996, 21). In his account, it was only when scholars in the 19th century shifted their attention from the origin and explanation of social order towards investigating its very possibility that a field of inquiry emerged from which sociology could develop. Yet it goes without saying that questions concerning the feasibility, shape and change of forms of social order are still central for contemporary social and cultural analysis. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of theoretical paradigms, research is routinely aimed at identifying repeatable schemes, rules and regularities, as well as rendering patterns and structures visible, be it in an affirmative or a critical manner (Bröckling et al. 2014b, 4).

Simultaneously, social, political and cultural models of order are increasingly being problematized in the face of contemporary developments. Situations of crisis, such as the Arab Spring and its aftermath, financial crises, or climate change reveal the threats to superannuated ideals of order (cf. Langenohl/Schraten 2011, Frie/Meier 2014). On another plane, it is phenomena such as globalization, increasing mobility and mass (trans-)migration that reveal how categories of order developed in national or international contexts fail to contain these global changes (cf. Brenner 1999, Faist 2000). If social analysis aims beyond describing these phenomena as symptoms of the deterioration of old orders, and even as these descriptions drive the process of conceptual innovation in the social sciences and other modes of social analysis, we suggest that there is a need to rethink social, political and cultural orders from an epistemological perspective.

1. ORDER, STABILITY AND DESTABILIZATION

In discourses of modernity and their transformation in the globalized world, social, political and epistemic re-evaluations highlight the centrality of the notion of stability. Even as modernization theory has shifted its focus from core structures to processual patterns of modern societies, their multiplicity, and their challenges as their core characteristic, it is still preoccupied with the emergence of stable (if temporarily) societal structures that allow, in Eisenstadt's terms, the ›crystallization‹ of ›cultural programs‹ of modernity (Eisenstadt 2001, 28). Vice versa, change is envisioned rather as a mode of recuperating stability and not so much as an instance of radical transformation that – again in Eisenstadt's terms – would rather amount to a ›breakdown of modernization‹ (Eisenstadt 1964). Stability of order and the threat of its destabilization thus lie at the heart of every discussion of order, organization and institutionalization. We therefore propose that it is the analytical pre-figurations of what constitutes the stability and destabilization of orders that can open up venues into rethinking order.¹

Arguments about the stability of order are often structured in a double way, as can be seen in many social theories of a functionalist inclination. From their point of view, the possibility of society itself depends on a certain order of its elements, as when functional differentiation leads to a constellation in which social institutions mutually interlock in a division of labor, as in Durkheim (1893 [1997]); when the increasing differentiation of the social system leads to an increasing independence of society from the unpredictability of processes deemed natural, as in Parsons (1951); or when subsystems emerge that ever radically develop procedural mechanisms to cope with the vagaries of their environment, as in Luhmann (1984). At first glance, thus, ambiguity, non-control, insecurity – in short, destabilizing tendencies – would be located outside of order. Yet a closer look reveals that the possibility of destabilization haunts the very conceptualization of stability, most famously in Durkheim's and Luhmann's work, where social structure is threatened by an ›over-differentiation‹ that makes societal normative cohesion ever more unlikely and sends the social subsystems on auto-pilot.

This argumentative structure can not only be discovered in functionalist conceptions of social order. Instead, the very criticism of these conceptions seems to reproduce (or even, in some cases, to discursively produce in the first place) the same argumentative movement that it wishes to criticize. In Marxist criticism, contradictions are seen as the force of social evolution. Their true capacity, however, is to be the destabilizing factor overcoming the capitalist structure. Similarly,

1 | Currently, there is an increase in the development of notions that propose to rethink order, or at least to change our methods to research order e.g. as the ›open order‹ of situational analysis or the detailed observation of Tia DeNora's concept of ›slow sociology‹ (Ziemann 2013, Clarke 2005, DeNora 2014), or by a change of perspective in focusing on ›the other of order‹ (Bröckling et al. 2014a).

the relegation of ambiguity and instability to the outside of social order is a prominent trait of post-structural theories. The presumption that order in the modern world is attained by controlling every element of the ordering structure has been confronted by criticism pointing to the ambiguities, gaps, lacunae, contingencies and paradoxes that are thought to have the potential to expose the logic of stability (cf. Reckwitz 2008; van Dyk 2012). This critique might be formulated on an epistemological level, as prominently in the following example by Jacques Derrida who refers to chaos as the constitutive *outside* of every order, but also of politics:

»Now, this chaos and instability, which is fundamental, founding and irreducible, is at once naturally the worst against which we struggle with laws, rules, conventions, politics and provisional hegemony, but at the same time it is a chance, a chance to change, to destabilize« (Derrida 1996, 83).

Likewise, hegemony theory, presenting itself as a critique of classical Marxist theorizations of the conflict structure of modern capitalist societies, maintains that order and potentially disordering tendencies are linked together, namely in the ›discursive articulation‹ of elements or social practices whose hegemonic ordering is contingent upon their relation to each other and thus, in principle, open to change (Laclau/Mouffe 2001). Finally, recent reflections on micrological developments commonly associated with Actor-Network-Theory fashion a very similar argumentative stance: Bruno Latour famously pointed at the increase of hybrids in order to mark the pitfall of modern order (Latour 1991 [2000]). These critiques keep to the very structure they want to dismantle: even if they expose the temporary nature, the unlikelihood, or the fleeting substance of stability through resorting to moments of destabilization, they thrive on the juxtaposition of stability and destabilization in order to create an epistemological, theoretical or empirical point of entry for their own arguments.

Following this observation, it seems that argumentation with respect to modern Western ideas concerning stability of order, as well as their criticism, are built in a symmetrical manner.² Stability and destabilization appear as flip sides of the same coin: They seem to be caught up in a moment of mutual contradiction, yet also mutual constitution, dynamizing and driving the discourse of social analyses. In this light, one might also think of Bourdieu's theory of the stabilization of social hierarchies which has been challenged for underemphasizing social change (cf. Miller 1989), or Luhmann's systems theory which has been reproached

2 | This observation – represented here in a truncated manner for the needs of this introduction – refers to ›mainstream‹ discussions of social orders. In the areas of the sociology of organizations (e.g. Seibel 1994; Baecker 1994), science studies (e.g. Löwy 1992; Moles 1995) and political sociology (e.g. Weir 1996; O'Malley 1996; Galloway 2004), respectively, an eminent number of case studies that aim at overcoming this narrow concentration have been available for a long time. We propose to move these insights to a more general discussion concerning social orders (e.g. Anter 2007).

for over-engaging in the theoretical analysis of systems equilibrium, thus turning a blind eye to processes of system change (Stäheli 2000). Therefore, positions and strategies in social analyses, while engaging in debates about whether to privilege the aspect of stability or that of destabilization, may be suspected to actually operate according to one and the same set of underlying gestures.

To grasp these dynamics that underlie social analyses of order, we propose an epistemological approach that is based on the concept of ›idiom‹. Its fundamental idea is to question the stickiness of conceptions of stability and destabilization with respect to the vistas it generates for social analyses. In other words, we maintain that the analytical focus on the nexus of stability and destabilization has an epistemologically productive function, generating a positionality for social analyses *vis-à-vis* their objects of study.

2. THE CONCEPT OF THE IDIOM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVICE

Although the concept of the idiom as an epistemological tool is still largely unexplored, the different references to it in linguistics, epistemology, literary theory, and phenomenology provide inferences about its potential value for an epistemological reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of social analyses. To start with, Jacques Derrida and his interpreter Bernhard Waldenfels argue that the access to language, which they see as the most generic device at the disposal of humankind to bring about a relation to reality, is given only through the particularity inherent in any language. Applied to the production of knowledge about the world, this argument says that all ›idioms of thought‹ (*Idiome des Denkens*, Waldenfels 2005) are rooted in an act of a lingual relating to the world that cannot be but particular, specific, and, seen from within, incomparable to other such acts (cf. Derrida 1967 [1976]; Waldenfels 2005). A similar use of the concept of idiom can be found in Michael Oakshott's argument that each scientific discipline is an ›idiom of inquiry: Disciplines crystallize themselves only if the restless searchlight of reflection and meta-reflection is arrested, because only then categories can emerge and scientific terms can be developed, which, in turn, are capable of providing generic accounts of the world (cf. Oakshott 1975, 14ff.). In other words, the precondition for the generalizing and analytical gesture of science is a particular, if not arbitrary, point where reflection is halted. Thus, the concept of the idiom may be aligned with that of the gesture in a literal sense: just like a bodily gesture, before communicating anything, circumscribes a space, creates a positionality, and co-constitutes itself together with the points of reference it indexes, the idiomatic moment of social analyses manifests itself as the emergence of a locale for their materialization and referentiality to the object of study prior to any analytic articulation.

Another similar characterization of the idiom as an epistemological device can be inferred from the ways in which the concept is used in linguistics. From the

viewpoint of semantics, idioms lie at the heart of figurative speech. They enable or produce speech-figures by fixing the syntagmatic and paradigmatic variability of lexemes in a speech act. But rather than letting this fixedness rest, the surplus-meaning of an idiomatic expression enables its further use via creativity. The creativity of a fixed expression is based on an extension of the metaphoric reach of an idiom: the idiom has started to travel (Langlotz 2006). The idiom as an epistemological concept thus focuses ›liminality‹ on any social analysis (Turner 1969), that is to say, a state of formation of an analytical positionality that cannot be grasped in terms of the analysis itself, generating a perspective that leads established discourses back to their pre-foundational phase.

Seen from this angle, the preoccupation of social analyses with stability and destabilization would need to be questioned with respect to the figurative surplus it creates *for* social analysis, that is, the surplus of an analytical positionality *vis-à-vis* an object of study that is stabilized precisely through figurating order and disorder into seemingly self-evident matters *of* social analysis. Taking the idea of liminality seriously, regarding the idioms with which and in which social analysis speaks projects already established ways of ordering knowledge back to a pre-foundational phase of liminality in order to investigate how they managed to stabilize themselves. However, this does not mean that an idiomatic analysis necessarily restricts itself to the institutional formation of scientific disciplines; rather, it helps to investigate how the foundational gestures of disciplines are continuously reiterated, giving continuity to analytical idioms through a constant work of re-crystallization and re-figuralization. For instance, the constant return to the ›classics‹ that is so typical of sociological analyses – crucially including the constant reiteration of the question of ›how social order is possible‹ – resembles an ever repeated invocation of the foundational (yet, in actuality, liminal and thus pre-foundational) phase of the discipline. The concept of idiom thus enables a perspective that both focuses on actual analytical discourses as well as on the mechanisms by which discourses emerge, stabilize themselves and become figuralized on a perpetual, yet constantly renewed basis.

The concept of idiom relates to the pre-foundational moment of each analysis that is normally left unaccounted for, namely the creation and (re-)production of a tacit relation between the analytical device or practice and the realm of objects it sets out to analyze. It thus focuses on a certain pre-established continuity, which is yet open to reiteration, between the practices of analyzing the social on the one hand, and that very object of analysis – the social order – on the other. This continuity arguably escapes perspectives known from the sociology of knowledge or from discourse analysis, as it addresses not only the social conditions of epistemic practices or the self-constitution of orders of knowledge in discourses, but, at an earlier stage, a fundamental co-constitutiveness of analytical practice and the object of analysis. While such a perspective revalues the object of analysis, it differs from Actor-Network-Theory approaches, as it is not the objects' capability to act

that is focused, but rather the specific entanglement between object and analytical practice. An idiomatic perspective is thus less interested in the quality of objects as it is foregrounded by ›new materialism‹ through reference to concepts such as hybrids, actants or ›epistemic things‹. Rather, it is the co-constitution of object and practice of analysis which is of interest here. By dint of this focus, an idiomatic perspective also differs from a historiography of ideas or conceptual history. It is not the evolvment and institutionalization of ideas, theories and concepts which is traced, but the moment of their crystallization: the always already entangled entry-point that opens up between what is perceived and ways of perception in the emergence of such ideas and concepts.³

Finally, the concept of idiom also radicalizes the often heard epistemological critique that the modernist scientific ideal of objectivity is in need of revision. If the ambition of objectivity, as Bourdieu has stressed (Bourdieu 2000), is based on the mirage of an ›analytical distance‹ between analysis and that which it analyzes, an idiomatic approach highlights the ultimate proximity of analysis and its object, a proximity that is the precondition for the co-crystallization of the idiom of analysis and its object of study.

We thus arrive at the following characterization of idiom as an epistemological device:

a. The concept of idiom refers to a foundational moment in social analysis that is owed to its liminality, that is, a formational phase in which a relation between a mode of analysis and an object of study is forged, thus epistemologically constituting both, prior to any analytical ›message‹. That moment equals rather a bodily gesture than a verbal statement, circumscribing a space for analysis through indexing and indeed performing relations between analysis and that what is to be analyzed. The idiomatic moment is thus the point of entry as well as the condition of possibility of analytical modes before any analytical content, and consists of creating a continuity and proximity between object of study and mode of analysis.

b. This relation between a mode of analysis and an object of study, which co-constitutes both, is figurized in a linguistic sense: it works and creates analytical surplus value through effacing some of the meta-reflection that conceptually preceded it, yet which can never be terminally banned from re-intruding into the analytical routines. The work of effacement is never finalized, but remains open to conjectures of questioning and modification, as when new modes of social analysis form, when two such modes fuse into one, or when analytical schisms appear.

3 | Among the epistemological approaches currently on offer, the concept of idiom is probably closest to that of the ›foundational scene‹ recently deployed in the reconstruction of sociological theory (Farzin/Laux 2014). Yet at the same time, it has deeper implications for the relation between analytical practice and the constitution of the object of study, and in particular fashions more detailed understandings regarding the role of the proximity between analysis and object of study (s. below).

c. Such developments are a logical consequence of the processual nature of idiomatic formation: instead of remaining fixed for all time, analytical idioms become re-constituted (and, as just mentioned, modified) through an ongoing return to the pre-foundational, or liminal, moment of the co-constitution of mode of analysis and object of study in mutual proximity. This testifies, again, to the liminal significance of the foundational moment: far from creating fixed analytical positionalities, it remains the inescapable point of reference for ›existing‹ analytical idioms and at the same time always threatens to force them into the open through resuming to the process of meta-analytical reflection.

From an idiomatic perspective, the preoccupation of social analyses with social order's stability and destabilization points to a pre-foundational, pre-analytical moment that is as vital as it is threatening for social analyses. Having thus exposed the fundamental and still utterly precarious significance of the idiomatic moment, we invite to zoom in on those processes that contribute to the rectification as well as the challenging of idioms of stability and destabilization. Within the confines of this introductory chapter, we can do little more than provide some examples for the idiomatic logic that those processes follow; however, they might serve to highlight the epistemological perspective that emerges from the category of idiom, especially with a view to the question of how the stability and destabilization of social orders figuratively co-emerged with the analytical routines that set out to investigate them, and also to give an outlook on the chapters that follow.

3. IDIOMS OF STABILITY AND DESTABILIZATION

If the idiomatic moment consists in the creation of a continuity and proximity of analytical mode and object of study, we would firstly, for exemplifying purposes, like to draw the attention to two rivalling attempts in sociological theory to establish such proximity. Both Émile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde, which are usually attributed with proposing diametrically differing sociological perspectives (cf. Terry Clark's introduction to Tarde 1969 and Latour 2005), are united in the attempt to create a proximity between sociological analysis and its object.

Tarde maintains that a sociological perspective is a particularly apt way to understand society because society is constituted through signification processes of imitation and innovation that materialize in the ›brains‹ of people, thus opening up an inside perspective on those processes much more radically than any biological or physical analysis (which Tarde takes as the sources for his theorization) could claim for itself (Tarde 1890 [1903], 1–36). The idiomatic moment of his analysis thus rests in a proximity that is vouched for by the analyst's mind which metonymically stands for anybody's mind's capacity to function as an intersection of streams of social imitation and the emergence of social innovation (ibid., 74–88). On the occasion of the phenomenon of somnambulism widely discussed toward

the end of the 19th century, Tarde maintains that it is only through a constant flow of imitation, »[t]erraces of consecutive and connected magnetisations« (ibid., 84), that social stability becomes possible: »If every society stands forth as a hierarchy, it is because every society reveals the terracing [...] to which, *in order to be stable*, its hierarchy must correspond« (ibid., 85, emphasis in the original). This foundational gesture of constituting sociology as a science which engages in an outspokenly physical continuity with its object of study has been returned to by Bruno Latour, who argues that sociological analysis must ›follow the actors themselves‹ (Latour 2005, 12). While this ›following‹ is usually read as a methodological recommendation to engage in empirical reconstructions of how human beings and objects co-constitute social order and disorder, we wish to stress that it is, first of all, the recuperation of an analytical gesture that claims for itself verisimilitude with respect to its objects of investigations. ›Follow the actors‹, as it were, heralds the discovery of sociology's analytical categories in the actors themselves. The constant circulation of actors points to a ›flow‹ (Knorr Cetina/Preda 2007) in which stability and destabilization are questions of rather nuanced changes in the actors' trajectories. It is therefore not surprising that Latour theorizes stability with a view to the inertia of objects which help stabilize situations and delineate them from each other (Latour 1996). The proximity between social analysis and object of study thus takes the form of a rescuing of sociological categories and theorems from the physical and processual features of bodies.

Durkheim, on the contrary, demands that a genuinely sociological perspective is to be based on the demonstration of the facticity, or rather fact-ness, of social phenomena: if it can be shown that there are facts in the world of humans not accounted for by any of the existing human sciences, then a case is made for the science of sociology (Durkheim 1895 [1982]). While this argumentation has been interpreted as a claim for a scienticized sociology that creates an objectifying distance between observer and society and at the same times reifies the latter (Adorno 1976, 12f.), from an idiomatic point of view the truly stunning claim is that of a proximity created between a scienticized analysis and those social objects that, as Durkheim argues, must be *treated* as facts, that is, *made* into a representation that can lock into a scientific gesture. Accordingly, Durkheim is at pains to generate the ›social facts‹ that can then be sociologically analyzed, alternatively using written documents (Durkheim 1893 [1997]), statistics (1897 [2002]), or ethnographic accounts (Durkheim 1912 [1915]) that come to represent such facts. This is the birth of sociological methodology, understood as the production of social facts. Unlike Tarde, who trusts in the givenness of the social (which he compares to the givenness of the physical and the biological) as a stream of processes, Durkheim insists on the creation of the social world as a world of facts where processes are frozen, thus privileging stability over fluidity. While Tarde, and Latour following him, propose to find sociological categories in the objects they study and in their

modes of circulation, Durkheim suggests to model both concordantly. His sociology approximates its object like a casting mold approximates the thing it produces.⁴

Our aim is not to stick to sociological theory alone, as if there were no other idioms of social analysis. Therefore we wish to give some more examples that might be useful for imagining how the continuity between the analysis and the analyzed presents itself from an idiomatic viewpoint, and furthermore, how it might be assembled into different categories of constellations between analysis and its objects.

Firstly, there is a continuity between analysis and the analyzed brought about by their mutual *contiguity*. Analysis and its object are, so to speak, neighbors to and for each other. Such is the case, for instance, with political analysis as idiom and politics as the former's claimed object of analysis. Contiguity, in this case, can be understood quite literally, as political analysts often reside in the proximity of those political actors and institutions that they analyze and that often are at the same time their clients. This is perhaps most visible in the relationship between foreign policy as practiced by diplomats and military leaders and international relations as the disciplinary and idiomatic reflection. Following Guzzini's (2013) account, the contiguity can also be traced at a meta-level, where the practice-oriented theory of political Realism mirrors and constitutes the mental space for *Realpolitik*. Thus, continuity-as-contiguity indicates a certain analytical register that tends to replicate the categories that the epistemic objects itself uses. Political analysis, unlike political philosophy or theory, must operate with the in-vivo-codes of politics in order to unfold its analytical potential. We may find more examples for contiguity in certain branches of literary discourse, for instance, in the 19th century realist novel which based its analytical claims not on the not on the truthfulness of its depictions (after all, the novel is a fictional genre) but on their verisimilitude (Lepenes 1985, Assmann 1980, Poovey 2008). This example also demonstrates that contiguity does not imply concordance or coevalness between the analysis and the analyzed. For even if the categories, figures, and representations of the object find their way into the analysis, the latter does not exhaust itself with being a mere replica of ›reality‹. Rather, the idiomaticity of the analysis resides in the interplay between the seeming sameness of the categories linking it to its analytical object, and the analytical gesture whose legitimacy cannot reside in its identity with reality but must be based on a positionality *vis-à-vis* that reality.

Another case of continuity between analysis and the analyzed can be termed *similarity* or *imitation*. Such is the case in analytical strategies that seek to repeat a certain analytical moment that they see as residing in their very research objects. For instance, postcolonial literary studies have taken the position that the theoretical hints and strategies necessary to rescue a critical understanding of colonial and postcolonial works of art are given by these works themselves – for example,

4 | For a different interpretation of the relationship between Tarde and Durkheim from an idiomatic perspective, see the contribution of Robert Seyfert in this volume.

when a piece of literary writing can be demonstrated to imply the analytical categories that help to decipher its critical meaning at a certain historical conjuncture (cf. Ashcroft et al. 1989, 117–153; Langenohl 2007, 126–130). Thus, the object of analysis holds the keys for being analyzed, and the analysis must conceptually closely follow the course and the historicity in which the object unfolds. A similar strategy to gain from the object the concepts for its analysis, and thus to imitate its trajectory, can be seen in Actor-Network-Theory. Bruno Latour, referring to his empirical studies about physics laboratories, formulates the following agenda: »We want to learn our sociology from the scientists and we want to teach the scientists their science from our own sociology« (Latour 1988, 175) – a clear call for an idiom of similarity or imitation.

Finally, idiomatic continuity between analytical practice and object of analysis can be found in relations of *performativity* between epistemic practice and epistemic object. The notorious example in these crisis-ridden days is, of course, the performative relation between economics as an idiom of analysis and the economy as that which economics claims merely to study. It has been repeatedly shown that economic and econometric models become applied in economic practices and institutions (Callon 1998). The predictable effect has been that the models became all the more accurate the more they were used to orient action – economic reality adapted to model economics (MacKenzie/Millo 2003). It stands to reason that analogous, if less prominent, examples of performativity are to be found in other idioms of social analysis for instance, in the sociological genre of the »analysis of the contemporary« (*Zeitdiagnose*). From this perspective, the significance of contemporary diagnoses like Ulrich Beck's *Risikogesellschaft* (1986) might not only reside in capturing the sense of exposedness to risk in contemporary societies, but also in the articulation of this sense in the first place. Other examples of the same type of continuity between epistemic practice and object include public analyses of what are then identified as »pressing issues«, as it is these analyses that often put those »issues« on the agenda and thus constitute them as issues in the first place. The performativity of idioms of social analysis thus might be seen in the circumstance that social-scientific theorizing, as Charles Taylor (2002) suggests, informs the »imaginary« of modern western societies to a high degree. If it is true that idioms of analysis often imitate that what they analyze, it is also true that the object of analysis gets constituted by an idiomatic logic.

In many cases, such continuities are historically specific and can be explained with contingent reasons of certain periods or political circumstances. But these continuities between the analysis and its object pre-shape and often determine *how* certain phenomena can be described, blocking alternative routes and entry-points into inquiry once certain idioms of analysis have become productive and start to travel between different fields of social analysis. An object in the social world, once it has been moved to become an object of analysis, is not »innocent« of the history

and the implications of the idiom of inquiry in which it has been analyzed – and the extra-scientific reasons for which it is inquired in the first place.

4. THE VOLUME

We have argued that the specific interdependence of arguments about stability and destabilization in social analyses can be traced back to the specific entry-points through which those analyses co-crystallize in proximity to their object of study. This constitutes a foundational moment that pre-shapes the object of analysis, but also creates a lasting tension between the stability and the destabilizing factors of the orders of knowledge in which the object and its analysis are embedded. From this starting point, the volume at hand suggests rethinking the meaning of order for social analysis on three levels.

First, it directs the attention to the question of the function and functioning of idioms of stability and destabilization regarding the architecture of theory as well as (pre-)forming the object of inquiry. How does this double-bind pre-shape thought, but also the objects to be analyzed? What are the strategic foundations and politics of idioms of stability and destabilization? With which historical challenges are they entangled?

Second, this raises the question of the idiomaticity of stability and destabilization itself. What is ›order‹ when, for example, systems theories understand paradoxes as fundamental to processes of the production of meaning; when the sociology of organizations perceives perturbances as a mode of self-preservation of the organization (Baecker/Kluge 2003), or when Simmel understands conflict as a factor of integration (Simmel 1908 [2010], Dubiel 1999)? What if the stability of order is not only reached by excluding moments of uncertainty, but also by integrating moments of non-knowledge, ambiguity, contingency and contradiction? How might a closer look at the object of inquiry challenge the idiomatic presuppositions about stability and destabilizing phenomena?

Third, a change in the assumption about stability in modern social, epistemological and/or political orders reframes thinking about modernity. What exactly happens to descriptive and analytical practices when stability and destabilization are exposed as being an effect of pre-analytical idiomaticity? Does this necessitate to newly scrutinize the continuities and discontinuities attributed to the history of modernity? Which possibilities to rethink order are offered by the use of analytical entry-points that are reflective about their idiomatic structuring? Which new conceptual ideas about orders of stability and their destabilization are emerging when we pursue an ›idiomatic analysis‹?

Against this background the present book intends to focus on the question of the relationship between stability and processes of destabilization as being enabled, but also harking back on the idiomaticity of social analysis.

The contributors to this edited volume explore the perspective proposed by the focus on idioms of stability and destabilization in their various fields of expertise: political science, political and social theory, sociology, cultural and media studies. While the contributions address a heterogeneity of topics such as Twitter communities, the Arab Spring, Social Work Studies, or the figure of the law in deconstruction, the analytical frame of any contribution is aligned with one of the three questions outlined above.

4.1 The Function and Functioning of Idioms of Stability and Destabilization

The contributions by *Johannes Scheu*, *Bernhard Kleeberg* und *Andreas Langenohl* stress the functions and functioning of idioms of stability especially in the field of social sciences. Both *Scheu's* and *Kleeberg's* contributions turn to the foundation of knowledge orders in the 19th century social sciences. *Johannes Scheu* explores the development of statistical facts and objectivity as forming the basis for providing sociology with its own object: the ›society‹ in a truly positivistic sense. In his reading of Adolphe Quetelet's *Physique sociale*, *Scheu* points to the statistical discovery of ›social laws‹ that promised the possibility of gaining a comprehensive knowledge of society in contrast to (but also in mutual dependency with) the sphere of individual action. In view of the 19th century danger of pauperism, *Scheu* goes on to investigate how the statistical notion of social laws and numerical stability eventually evoked its destabilizing opposite. Especially vagrants and prostitutes, by their literal *unaccountability*, were seen not only as a threat to social order, but also as a threat to the ideal of scientific objectivity itself. In other words: The epistemology of 19th century statistical science rests upon idioms of stability that inevitably bring forth the figures of their own destabilization.

Bernhard Kleeberg, in his historical reconstruction of the debate on the ›bad habits‹ of the lower classes in the 19th century, argues that that debate laid some of the foundations for the birth of sociology as a discipline which is based on the understanding that social aggregates follow their own dynamics. It was thereby in particular analogies drawn between the collective behavior of disprivileged social groups and psychophysical processes that allowed framing that behavior as dependent upon the social environment, which thus came to the fore as an epistemic object. According to *Kleeberg*, this discursive development, which transcended the liberal moralizing appeals upon the poor to improve their virtues, opened up a vista upon the social which, following functionalist explanations in biology and physiology, was able to distinguish between social entities and social functions. Thus, the possibility of the functionalist methodology of modern sociology was opened up through an intervention that was based on the sincere belief in social engineering, and thus followed, not least, political rationalities.

Andreas Langenohl turns the view to actual debates in social sciences which position themselves in a ›knowledge society‹. He shows that the category of the ›case‹ as it is prominently used in Social Work Studies can serve as an example to highlight general features of the idiomatic character of the social sciences in thoroughly scienticized societies. Continuity between object of analysis and the epistemic procedure is visible in the way a ›case‹ is constructed as an entry point for the scientific analysis. The seemingly common sense category of a ›case‹ is in *Langenohl's* account deconstructed as at the same time a systematized attempt on the part of the academic discourse to gain knowledge about individual observations from the social reality, and a way in which the epistemic procedure of social analysis (here: social work studies) structures that reality *for* its own theoretical purposes. The distinction between social practice and social theory, which initially seems clear and straightforward, becomes blurred and the idiomatic character of the ›case‹ thus apparent.

4.2 Questioning Orders

Isabell Otto, *Kacper Szulecki* and *Pawel Marczewski* challenge the idiomatic presuppositions about the stability and destabilizing phenomena of social orders in three different fields of inquiry. The common denominator of these contributions is that they show how concepts that are usually seen as signifying destabilizing forces in society – such as multiple times, the figures of the dissident, or the multitude – themselves are constitutive elements of the constructions of order and stability.

Isabell Otto's chapter analyses the construction of time as one of the central dimensions of the construction of collective sense, and therefore, social order. She observes how *The flexibility of Internet time* destabilizes the presupposition of unified time as a mechanism of social organisation. In order to center her analysis, she first discusses various historical attempts to create unified world time, from the 19th century until the attempt of the Swiss watch company *Swatch* to establish a unified Internet time. These historical observations are reflexively counterpointed by her inclusions of the dreams and visions that thinkers such as Manuel Castells and Pierre Lévy connected with a propounded change of time-dimensions in the networked societies. Instead of continuing the dichotomy of stabilizing, tidying, spatialized or sequential time on the one hand and its destabilization by a ›wild multiplicity‹ of time on the other hand, Otto observes a negotiation of commonly shared and in this sense social times in internet communications, especially in *Twitter* feeds. In this context, the ›time zone‹ shows to be not a geographically based way of fixing time. Rather, it turns out to be an expandable area that can enclose a community defining its common ›being in time‹ as a provisional and flexible stabilization, which may correspond to the constant transformations of a digital sociotechnical collective.

Kacper Szulecki focuses upon the explanations of political change in the light of the underlying assumptions of social and political order. In order to describe the changes of post-totalitarian socialist regimes of Central Europe, *Szulecki* goes beyond common socio-historical analysis that start from the idea of fixed identities to all actors of the process, or perceive the socialist system as either inherently instable (anti-Communist analysis) or petrified, surmounted by forms of revolutionary disorder (liberal and left-wing analysis). He shows how the system's stability of these regimes required an everyday contradiction between order and disorder, which was built upon a balancing element of instability as reference point for its own stabilization. That element was provided internally by the figure of the ›dissident‹ – a troublemaker, a defect in the system which became a reference point for its normal functioning. But paradoxically, this figure did not only serve as stabilizing factor for the system's order, but also created the potential for overturning it: The dissidents used the imposed multi-faceted identity of destabilizers, re-worked it, and thus challenged the ›powers that be‹. In a back-and-forth movement from stability to destabilization and instability to restabilization, they destabilized the entire post-totalitarian system by restabilizing it with the legal and moral order of human rights – a process which also affected the Cold War international politics by re-ordering the division of Europe on a geopolitical level.

Pawel Marczewski uses reactions to the events of the Arab Spring as an entry-point for challenging the assumptions of political theory concerning democratic order. He argues that many commentators of Egyptian Revolution, both sympathetic and skeptical, followed in the footsteps of Hobbes. From this perspective, democratic political order can be sustained only by *the people* – and this implies an orderly formed collective. At least since Hobbes, the figure of the multitude has symbolized the danger of chaos as the *Other* of the figure of the people. This condemns political analysts of the Arab Spring to choose between paternalism and wishful thinking. One either has to advocate imposition of some kind of political order before people's rule can be successfully implemented, or look for symptoms of such an order in events that are disorderly by definition. To avoid this unpromising alternative, *Marczewski* draws on Spinoza's rehabilitation of the multitude. In adopting Spinoza's perspective, he regards the multitude not as an instance of dissolution of single political will, but rather as a natural condition of fallible individuals living together and negotiating their particular goals and desires. The events of the Arab spring do not necessarily point at an instance of revolution descending into chaos, but rather show contours of order. What from a Hobbesian standpoint looks like a threat to political order, becomes in Spinoza's terms a (first step) toward its stability.

4.3 Rethinking Order

Finally, the perspective of idioms of stability and destabilization offers the opportunity to rethink order. Pointing at the pre-conceptual and pre-theoretical assumptions of stable order and its destabilization serve as common strategies for *Robert Seyfert*, *Doris Schweitzer*, *Nicole Falkenhayner* and *Tatiana Weiser* to develop new theoretical and historical perspectives for social and cultural analysis.

Robert Seyfert's chapter focuses on the tendency of contemporary social and sociological theory to define social order through the problem of order, which is in turn formulated in terms of different kinds of contestations. The question of order itself calls forth the very demand for order's preservation: the idioms of stability are about staging the ›specter of chaos‹. In analyzing the concepts of contestation and competition in social theory, *Seyfert* shows how these approaches omit the playful forms of social relationships from conceptions of social life in general and from tropes of contest in particular. Therefore, they ignore the creative and inventive aspects of social life. In order to surmount these restrictions, *Seyfert* draws on Gabriel Tarde's concept of imitation which is able to equally conceptualize playful relationships as inventive mechanism. Combined with the ›theory of affects‹ suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, he describes the role of playful and intensive affects to create and stabilize social order. He thus points at the need for social theory to develop an idiomatics of social inventions which is not haunted by the ›specter of chaos‹, but open for inventive mechanisms of social order.

With respect to the question of order and indeterminacy, *Doris Schweitzer* focuses on the central role which is devoted to law as the primary mechanism for securing and stabilizing normative and thus social order. By offering a topological reading of Derrida's legal theory, *Schweitzer* shows how indeterminacy is supposed to be the precarious locus of the modern law and thus the modern order par excellence. This is regarded as a topological problem by deconstruction, which applies the topological figure of the ›outside within‹ to the problem of indeterminacy in order to subvert and destabilize the law. In contrast to this perspective, *Schweitzer* shows how the legal technique of ›indefinite legal concepts‹ in the German legal system uses indeterminacy to stabilize the legal order. This reveals a point within Derrida's theoretical architecture that arguably needs to be the focus of critical scrutiny: a point where the idiomatic topology of order/disorder, stability/destabilization is reproduced in the framework of the inside/outside-distinction and pre-shapes any approach to law. To avoid this pitfall, *Schweitzer* paradoxically suggests to return to structuralism – namely in the version of Michel Serres. In contrast to deconstruction Serres develops a notion of the ›topological structure‹ which is capable of conceptualizing the logic of order that integrates moments of indeterminacy.

Nicole Falkenhayner's approach to rethinking order focuses on the *idiom of the ruin* as a central – and highly ambiguous – feature of 19th century Victorian aes-

thetics. On the basis of three literary examples (Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem *The Burden of Nineveh*, Charles Dickens' novel *Little Dorrit* and John Ruskin's writings on the architecture of *High Victorian Gothic*), *Falkenhayner* argues that the *idiom of the ruin* points to a simultaneity of cultural stability and destabilization – namely, to the glorified rise of the Victorian empire and to its feared decline. On the one hand, the achievements of Victorianism were imagined as marvelous ruins to be discovered by future generations. On the other hand, however, it was the economic and colonial impact of Victorianism itself that threatened to undermine this hoped-for legacy. According to *Falkenhayner*, the *idiom of the ruin* must be understood not only in terms of a relation between England's past and future, but also in terms of a relation between the Victorian empire and its colonized *Other*. In the light of cultural Otherness, the ambiguity of the ruin as being an idiom of both the rise and fall of Victorian civilization becomes all the more evident – and it is against this background that *Falkenhayner's* approach to rethinking order implies a rethinking of the possibilities of postcolonial criticism as well.

Addressing the realm of political theory and philosophy, *Tatiana Weiser* discusses arguments proposed in the 20th century that demand an introduction of conceptual elements into political and social theory signifying seemingly destabilizing societal and political forces. The lens through which she puts into perspective this emergence of the ›heterogeneous‹ in political and social theory is a comparative reading of Georges Bataille and Jürgen Habermas. The significance of both thinkers for the question of the idiomatic genesis of the confrontation of stability and destabilization in political and social theory lies in the commonality that both, albeit in rather different ways, have taken a perspective on political orders that critiqued concepts of order that were classically based on the confrontation between stability and destabilization. Bataille and Habermas thus demonstrate and concretize a conceptual shift that was to become quite influential in political and social theory in the 20th century and since, namely, a de-legitimization of idioms of stability in social and political analysis in which stability was one-sidedly affirmed. According to *Weiser's* conceptual reconstruction, contemporary political and social theory of democratic societies has absorbed important elements of this de-legitimization of idioms of stability, revolving around three critiques that all put the notion of stability into twilight: the ›critique of the principle of a dominant majority‹; the ›critique of the principle of discursive homogenization‹; and the ›critique of the principle of imposed, or fixed, identity‹.

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The selection of the contributions in this edited volume, which make for a very heterogeneous set both on the methodological as well as on the thematic level, does of course not try to present (or perform) key solutions to the entanglement of order, stability and destabilization. Rather, the aim of this volume is to demon-

strate the heuristic potential of the epistemological perspective of idioms of stability and destabilization, pointing at this perspective's possible usefulness in rethinking order in the face of unprecedented challenges and changes that mark the present. It is our hope that this perspective can stimulate and encourage further debate about how social analyses relate, and might be related, to their objects of investigation.

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