How to become an academic philosopher. Academic discourse as a multileveled positioning practice

Johannes Angermuller

University of Warwick / École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales[*]

ABSTRACT

In my contribution, I will present the power-knowledge approach to academic discourse. Drawing from poststructuralist and pragmatic developments in social theory, this model the practical challenge academic researchers have to meet in academic discourse: to secure a place in the social world of researchers. The researchers who participate in academic discourse typically need to straddle two types of positions: on the one hand they need to find their place among the many scientific communities, i.e. in the world of specialised knowledge. On the other hand, they need to be placed in a higher education institution with its status groups, hierarchies and bureaucratic rules, i.e. in the world of institutional power. If researchers want to occupy the most desirable positions in the academic field, they need to succeed in both worlds at the same time. While careers and strategies can differ widely between researchers, researchers engage in academic discourse as an ongoing, publication-based positioning practice in which symbolic positions need to be gradually turned into institutional positions.

KEY WORDS: Higher education organisations, scientific communities, speech act theory, academic discourse, construction of academic excellence

What is it that makes researchers succeed as researchers? According to some accounts, researchers deal with symbolic problems, i.e. concepts and theories[1]. This is the avowed or unavowed position of many intellectual historians: "good" researchers produce well-argued and well-crafted ideas. In other accounts, researchers deal with social problems, i.e. power and inequality. This is the position of sociologists who insist on the role of scarce resources such as time, money etc. which allow certain researchers to stick out from the mass.

In this contribution, I will make the case for a discursive approach that goes beyond this distinction. In this view, research turns out to be a discursive practice by means of which researchers try to find their place among the many already established positions in the world of research. Researchers are under a positioning imperative: in order to exist and to succeed, they need to carve out "their" positions among the many other positions already existing. They may be motivated by their curiosity to discover the secrets of the world, the pleasure of reading and writing, the quest for answers to complex problems or political ambitions. However, academic research will not "work" as long as researchers do not consolidate their place in a network of relationships with others. Yet if researchers rise to the top, it is not because of the inherent quality of their research products; research is not driven by good reasoning and proper thinking, at least not primarily. Nor can the practice of research be reduced to the simple transformation of social into symbolic goods. Rather, research is a discursive practice which allows researchers to position themselves and others and also to produce what they consider as "excellent" research.

It is not exactly a new idea to point out the role of the researchers in research. Institutionalist sociologists of science (in the line of Merton) as well as the laboratory studies (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Knorr Cetina, 1981; Lynch, Livingston and Garfinkel, 1984) have pointed out the social forces in academic knowledge production. Yet, existing investigations of academic research tend to focus on either of these two domains: the world of knowledge on the one hand, where researchers are grouped into specialised scientific communities, and power on the other hand, where researchers are placed in status hierarchies.

With respect to knowledge, the sociology of scientific groups and communities (Hagstrom, 1965; Crane, 1972; Abbott, 2001), social and historical

---

epistemologies (Bachelard, 1971; Kuhn, 1968) as well as historians and sociologists of science (Collins, 2000; Weingart, 2003) have pointed out the social dynamics in communities of specialised knowledge. With a growing number of researchers (Price, 1965), the latter need to carve out ever more specialised niches in ever more differentiated communities. Here research is seen as driven by the social dynamics of specialised knowledge.

On the other hand, with respect to the power dimension in academic research, a number of studies have concentrated on how higher education systems are structured (Clark, 1983), how academics participate in decision-making processes at universities (Musselin, 2005) and research organisations (Lamont, 2009), how organisational models circulate worldwide (Meyer, 1980), how higher education becomes a capitalist business (Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997; Münch, 2011; Jessop and Sum, 2013), what the impact on entrepreneurialism on education is (Masschelein, et al., 2006) and how structural power relationships are played out between researchers (Bourdieu, 1988). This power-oriented strand of research on research often accounts for the positions and resources that researchers obtain through institutional decision-making processes. Here the driving force for researchers are power structures in academic organisations and markets.

If existing research has tended to equate the practice of academic research with one *or* the other: either the production of specialised knowledge *or* the exercise of power, many academic researchers, especially those at the top, usually have to play some role in both spheres. Thus, an attempt at delineating how the two worlds are linked in the practice of research has been made, for instance, by Bourdieu, who investigates how researchers mediate between symbolic positions (their ideas, cultural practices, tastes…) and their socioeconomic positions (which reflect mainly economic and political resources). Yet insofar as Bourdieu postulates a homology of the positions researchers occupy in these worlds, he neglects the conflicting social logics and rationalities with which researchers need to cope in their everyday life. As an alternative, more recent approaches have been put forth which emphasise the practical skills, the creative intelligence and the tacit knowledges of researchers (Camic, Lamont and Gross, 2011).

In the following, researchers are seen as agents of a power-knowledge-complex who engage in a multitude of practices. If the primary challenge of researchers is to straddle the two worlds of knowledge and power, the positioning dilemmas that they encounter at every step of their careers push them to prove their

practical creativity in articulating ever new solutions – in direct face-to-face encounters in departments and at conferences, in the peer networks of their academic system as well as in their global disciplinary fields.

To present the discursive approach to research as knowledge-power, we will follow John, a fictitious philosopher, through the different stages of his hypothetical academic career (see for a more structural account Lamont, 1987). From the very first day, he is torn between at least two social logics: in the world of knowledge he needs to be recognised as a member of a specialised community and *at the same time* in the world of power he needs to act as a member of academic organisations with a certain status. Starting out as a PhD student, he gradually consolidates his position in on-going discursive practices. As a result, his visibility achieved through his positioning work grows and extends over time and space. At first constructed in the interactions with his local supervisor, his position increasingly relates to positions of the national peer group as well as to a global disciplinary community. The story ends with his position wrapped into and supported by a thick web of ties and bonds with many other participants of academic discourse who confirm him as a "big shot" through their own discursive practices. While trying to shore up their positions and build up their academic career, they cannot exist without ratifying John's position in academic discourse.

John's case reminds us of the social constraints that all researchers need to respond to whether they eventually succeed in maintaining their symbolic position (reputation) and their institutional position (job) or not. If John is cited as an example of an academic "success story", he testifies to the inequalities and exclusions researchers need to deal with in their everyday practices as researchers. While researchers usually claim to be in pursuit of more or less universal true knowledge, they are involved in relationships of power which make some academic careers possible and many others impossible. Against this background, the following contribution outlines a research programme for the analysis of academic discourse as knowledge-power.

DISCOURSE AS A POSITIONING PRACTICE

To account for research as a discursive practice, we will start with a few remarks on the underlying discourse theory. Two broad currents of discourse research can roughly be distinguished: while more semantic, content-related approaches typically look into what it is that large communities commonly communicate about, pragmatic approaches study how utterances ("texts") are used in (social)

contexts. My approach argues for a bottom-up approach, grounded in a pragmatic notion of discourse as a polyphonic positioning practice (Angermüller, 2007; Angermüller, 2011; Angermüller, 2012). This pragmatic approach to discourse as a positioning practice mediates between three discourse theoretical traditions: a) the French discourse analytical tradition which conceives of a subject as a discursive effect of the use of language (Benveniste, 1974; Lacan, 1978; Foucault, 1972; Pêcheux, 1975), b) praxeological approaches to discourse from the Anglo-American world such as the analysis of turn-taking roles and membership categorization in conversation analysis (Sacks, 1986), the theory of speaking instances in situated talk (Goffman, 1981; Strauss, 1959), the study of discursive identities in sociolinguistics (Eckert, 2000) and constructivist identity theory in social psychology (Billig, 1982; Edwards and Potter, 1992, Harré / Davies 1990) and c), approaches in linguistic pragmatics such as functional (Halliday, 1978; Ehlich, 2007), enunciative-pragmatic (Maingueneau, 1993, Angermuller 2013) and metapragmatic approaches (Hyland, 2005; Flowerdew, 2001). For my discursive approach, positions can neither be reduced to some underlying grammatical depth structures nor are they the ephemeral products of a situated activity only. They are realised by means of utterances, which are the smallest communicative units of a discourse in which everybody struggles to find, keep or strengthen a position on a social terrain where many others already have secured their positions.

Let's have a look at how John engages in this discursive practice, which allows him to mark and occupy his discursive place vis-à-vis others.

It was on an evening during a dinner with his parents when John expresses his wish to go to university:

(1) "I want to become a philosopher,"

he says and his parents agree to send him to the University of Lower Stratford. A few months later John attends a class on German idealism where the teacher asks him to prepare an assignment on Kant's political philosophy.

(2) "Kant is a philosopher of the Enlightenment,"

his essay starts. As John moves on as a student in philosophy, he processes many such utterances, which he reads while writing or writes while reading, and one can ask how they allow him to build up his position in a network of positions.

While the two utterances (1) and (2) can hardly be seen as an example of academic discourse since they do not place him as a researcher in the philosophical field, we can register the positioning effects that the utterances can produce in their contexts. In so far as utterances are the linguistic realisations of speech acts, they are the material linguistic side of speech acts as elementary discursive practices (Searle, 1992: 18). Thus speech acts not only convey the (propositional) content p such as "to become a philosopher" in (1) or a description of Kant's philosophy in (2) but they also refer to somebody producing the speech act: the locutor L as the source of p. In both cases we easily recognise the locutor of the utterances as "John", whom one will distinguish from the parents, Kant or other speaking beings that are referred to in the example. Just as there is no speech act which is not produced by somebody, there is no utterance which does not reflect the position of the locutor. Therefore, one cannot perform any discourse without pointing to those speaking in discourse. Nor can one communicate without attributing some content (p) to the locutor and to other speaking beings in discourse. To enter a discourse, in other words, one cannot not occupy certain discursive positions.

We can now ask what the subject positions are which are constructed as John engages in a discursive positioning practice with others. By pointing to John's position in the discussion over his academic future, utterance (1) confirms his position in his family as a son vis-à-vis his parents. By pointing to John's position in the philosophy class, utterance (2) places him as a student vis-à-vis his teacher. Some of the positions that John occupies in his everyday social life are local and ephemeral (such as the position of a young gentleman offering his help to an elderly person crossing the street). Yet other positions become durable through repetition, reciprocal ratification and can finally be laid down in a legal-administrative code such as a son in the family or as student in the school. Thus, through the positions activated in utterances (1) and (2), John is placed in such structured relationships, some of which allow for more discursive agency (e.g. when John plays out a cashier–customer relationship in a supermarket situation), others for less agency (e.g. when John is reminded by the City Council to fulfil his duty as a resident and pay his tax).

By entering discourse, John is entangled in a heterogeneous plurality of such positioning practices. Indeed, John's subject positions start to be constructed

before he is born (e.g. in the discourse of his parents projecting a future for expected offspring). A crucial event is the act of being named ("I name you John."), which makes him existent in a legal-institutional structure with certain discursive and legal rights. As he learns to speak, he begins to actively participate in the positioning practices. In his family, he develops a sense of identity vis-à-vis others and starts to act in a way that helps him attain certain coveted positions (e.g. as an in-group member among his friends, a certain position in the football team etc.). Then, he enters the educational system and passes through a system of exams and grades, which attributes certain positions in an institutional performance hierarchy. Later, he founds a family and develops his professional expertise in a certain area and tries to move up the status ladder in the academic organisation. At every step, he participates in ongoing discursive positioning processes in which the positions of those involved are constructed in discursive struggles over who becomes visible in what way. Thus he has to prove a great deal of practical skill in many different situations in which he positions himself and is positioned by others. Some of his positions require little skill and energy (being a gentleman helping the grandmother to cross the street); some are more demanding (passing the sailing exam); some prescribe precise procedures and roles to be followed (joining the automobile club); some pose new unexpected challenges every day (acting as the father of his growing kids). And once he begins to build up his position in the space of academic research he deals with a panoply of situations each requiring different responses and solutions. Thus, his life turns out to revolve around the existential question of finding his place in the social through constructing a bundle of positions – a process which he never fully controls (and will go after his biological death if the obituary mentions his death in the local newspaper or friends evoke "what John would say" in their conversations).

If the positions he occupies in everyday life (e.g. as a member of sexual, ethnic, political… communities) are constituted in discursive practices, the same applies to the positions of academic philosophers (e.g. as a member of disciplinary communities and universities) who are under the pressure to establish their place in the philosophical field. Their philosophical work is to make individuals visible as recognized players of the philosophical game. In an ontological sense, therefore, one never *is* a philosopher. Instead, those who participate in philosophical discourse are invested in a discursive practice in which some succeed in making his positions more coherent and identifiable, more secure and prestigious. As John decides to enter the philosophical game, he is subjected to certain dynamics which we will now look at in greater detail.

THE EARLY CAREER OF AN ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHER

It is difficult to say at what point John starts to engage in a philosophical discourse and becomes a "real" academic philosopher as this is precisely the question all participants of philosophical discourse negotiate in the philosophical field. The difficulty is that there is no straightforward procedure for applying for membership in the scientific community of philosophers (like for instance in the automobile club which John joined when he got his driving license). There is not such a thing as a homogeneous community of academic researchers following a given set of rules (like the members of the local sailing association, who have all proved they can maneuver a sailing boat in the sailing exam). There is not even an exam testing John's research capacity and conferring the status of "established researcher" on him (like exams do in the secondary system). Indeed, the task for John would be much easier if there was one straightforward way of becoming an academic philosopher. That's why his challenge is a profoundly practical one: to establish a new position among the many other positions already existing in the world of research.

If nobody can exist in this world without engaging in a subtle play of differences and demarcations, researchers like John need to respond to dilemmas which cannot be solved by reeling off a given recipe. One strategy which seems to have worked for one researcher cannot be simply applied by another researcher without producing something new (by copying Bourdieu one does not become Bourdieu but a disciple of Bourdieu's, which is an entirely different position in the research space). Researchers need to find a balance between incommensurable imperatives: they need to create innovative positions (or they will be conflated with others), relevant positions (or they will not be noticed) and coherent positions (or they will not be identified as a distinct entity).

Let's observe the many activities John is involved in as he builds up his position in a network of positions. When John has finished his BA and Master and wants to start his PhD, he sets out to create relationships with different people with their specific backgrounds, expectations and know-how as representatives of both worlds of power and knowledge. In order to get admission at the University of Lower Stratford, he needs to talk to possible supervisors and discuss with them how he can relate to their work. In order to organise funding for his PhD, he needs to deal with funding agencies and find out about who may evaluate his funding proposal. In order to write the proposal, he needs to know about "leading" figures and relate to problems and ideas of the scientific

community he wants to address. In order to know more about the members of his community, he will attend conferences and workshops etc. An academic foundation recognises his past academic achievements and pays him the student fees for three years. And one of his abstracts is accepted for a conference on Enlightenment and postmodernism in which we find the following utterance (many more of which are produced in his PhD thesis, which is beginning to take shape):

(3) As Sullivan (2003) rightly points out, Derrida never criticised the Enlightenment project, which is epitomised in Kant's philosophical project.

Unlike the simple utterances (1) and (2), pointing to one speech act each, (3) is a complex polyphonic utterance whose nested speech acts refer to various positions in the philosophical field. Given its polyphonic character, this utterance indicates not only the position of the locutor (i.e. John) but also a few other speakers and their perspectives (Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004). If the utterances as a whole can be attributed to the locutor, the utterance that "Derrida never criticised the Enlightenment project." implies the position of somebody else saying that Derrida did criticise the Enlightenment project. This complex utterance therefore evokes a complex dialogical spectacle in which various speakers are orchestrated in a certain way:

L_1 (Sullivan, 2003): "Derrida never criticises the Enlightenment project"

A_2 (an anonymous other): "Derrida criticises the Enlightenment project"

L_3 (John): No, A_2 is wrong.

L_4 (John): L_1 is right.

X_5 (could be Sullivan, Derrida or John): "The Enlightenment project is epitomised in Kant's philosophical project."

In the formal presentation, we see that (3) not only conveys the point of view of the locutor. It is composed of five nested speech acts each pointing to a certain speaking being, whose positions the locutor either ratifies (L_1, L_3, L_4) or keeps at a distance (A_2). In some cases like (X_5), it is not entirely clear what is the relation

of the position to the locutor (even though my guess would be that X_5 is accepted by L) but the reader still learns that there is a position X_5.

Through written utterances like this one, "John" takes sides with certain colleagues in the field (like Sullivan) while rejecting other anonymous colleagues who claim that Derrida criticises the Enlightenment project. Indeed, his discourse operates with a great deal of virtual, fictitious and nameless others, which do not have to be made explicit because every member of the community understands who is meant (here probably the "humanist traditionalists", some of which denounce Derrida for his "nihilism"). It is by playing with the knowledge his readers have about the various camps and currents that he shores up his own position as an ally of Sullivan's and thus very likely also of Derrida's and deconstructivism more generally.

With every utterance he brings on paper in his PhD, John produces implicit and explicit references to others in the field. As he writes and talks he is not necessarily aware of the complex network of subtle distinctions he is creating as his primary motivation is to produce ideas. When his first publications circulate in the field, John starts to become visible as "somebody" for people who do not have to have met him personally. The problem is that the positions he defines for himself by filling page after page remain merely claims as long as they are not ratified by others. He therefore needs to get others to produce utterances which refer to and reinforce the "postidealist" position which he is about to be known for. Indeed, by reading and writing academic texts, researchers bombard each other with utterances every day, as a result of which some are recognised as important members of the academic community while others remain invisible.

At this point, John is becoming increasingly aware of the split between John as somebody existing for people he knows, and the position that is constructed of him in academic discourse, i.e. "John". Indeed, while John, at this early stage of his career, is alive and kicking in a biological sense, "John", the symbolic position he occupies on the map of academic knowledge, has not been born yet. At the same time, the philosophical figures which are symbolically most alive in his discipline (such as "Kant" and "Derrida"), could not be more dead, biologically speaking. Even though John and "John" are discursively constructed (the first as a person, the latter as a reference), they never coincide. Johns always interact with "Johns" (i.e. positions, places, perspectives) rather than with Johns (i.e. the practical beings) even though both are inextricably tied together (which can confront John with the difficult challenge of performing "John" at situated events like talks or conferences). If John has no greater ambition than to

eternalise himself through "John", this is what has driven generations of researchers to spend their time and energy on reading and writing books and articles in their study: to become a recognised and legitimate being in the world of knowledge. And if some "Johns" later turn out to be a fraud like "Bakhtin", who was not Bakhtin but somebody else, this reminds us of the discursive dynamics that exceeds the conscious, intentional efforts of the discourse participants to control the discourse which makes them exist.

Beginning with his PhD thesis, John enters a discursive struggle to establish his position as "John" among other specialised knowledge producers. From the very first day on, he juggles with both the most local (supervisors, colleagues, friends etc.) and the most global positions ("Kant"). What needs to happen if John wants to succeed as a researcher is that "John" relates to a larger and larger number of other positions. As he tries to impose himself in the community, he is subject to a twofold pressure, i.e. on the one hand, specialisation, which is a consequence of the rapidly growing number of researchers worldwide (i.e. Johns), who all need a symbolic niche of their own ("Johns"). Since everybody needs to be different from everybody else, no researcher can easily live with the perception that another researcher has produced the same ideas already no matter in what language, field or university. Therefore, on the other hand, the researchers are subject to a universalising pressure since to shore up their position claims, they have recourse to the community as a whole, whose horizon is inevitably global. As a consequence, in the discursive game of disciplinary philosophy everybody is torn between specialisation and universalisation.

In his first academic products, John weaves together locals and globals in order to insert his own position in the academic community. While he may or may not have to cite his local supervisor, who is more interested in "Kant" than in "Derrida", he needs to relate to her in some way so as to place himself in the local hierarchies of his university with his PhD project. At the same time, John gets familiar with the classics of his field, who represent the questions and problems of researchers in philosophy departments of many other universities and countries. When he finishes his dissertation, his PhD is the material product of the positioning work John has done from local to global levels: a) locally, he has related to his supervisor and the other colleagues and friends working at his university (many of them are interested in "Kant") and b) globally, he has related to the canonical references of the discipline as a whole (where "Derrida" has recently been established as a canonical reference).

As he finishes his PhD, John begins to worry about his professional future since neither the locals nor the globals he has integrated into his discursive project can promise him any jobs. The locals are under a certain pressure to recruit outside (at least in departments where the research orientation is stronger than the teaching orientation). And the globals are dead or have their own students to place somewhere. As a result, John becomes aware of those sociosymbolic relevant in between the local and global level: on the national philosophical job market. John is dimly aware of the possibility that unlike the global references pointing to researchers that mostly died away long ago, the positions of the "national" philosophical debate are tied to potential reviewers of his journal articles and project proposals and to professors who may become relevant for his professorial appointment someday. Thus, in his publications he starts to deal with positions important in his academic system (and less with positions of other academic systems where he can aim at no position whatsoever). As a consequence, he extends the network of relationships with other researchers to those who play some role in the national academic community. By integrating their positions, through explicit and implicit references, into his publications, he bonds with other researchers in the national field, whom he has not yet met in person and sometimes will never meet.

As a result, John consolidates his position as a legitimate member of his scientific peer group (the "Continental philosophers") with a new, specialised expertise ("deconstructive transcendentalism", "postidealism"). His discursive practice straddles local, national and global horizons all the time: every week he meets colleagues at the Department of Southwhich, where he just started as a lecturer. In the official meetings, informal encounters in the hallway and in the gossip in the cafeteria, there are many occasions to classify him as somebody for his new colleagues. Soon, he is known to be responsible for certain teaching programmes (the one in Continental philosophy), to hang out with certain colleagues (but not with others), for how to organise money for conferences (he knows that international conferences are funded by a special budget from the Vice Chancellor) and how to speak to the secretaries (Marc has a child and is sometimes late in the morning) etc. In these manifold personal encounters, John needs to prove his practical know-how in negotiating his (and their) positions in ever new situations. If he did not participate in the local positioning work with his colleagues, John would risk having no voice in the decisions taken in the department and someday he may be charged with less prestigious obligations such as teaching. Even though John likes teaching a lot, he does not want to be classified as a teacher. As a teacher he could no longer invest as much in

building up his position in the research scene. Obviously, this would put an end to his academic ambitions: no way to become a professor as a teacher!

Therefore, John begins to do things which, even though giving no immediate material recompense, promise to increase "John's" weight on the national and perhaps international scene such as spending his weekends evaluating the new MA on Continental Philosophy his colleagues have set up at the University of Westumbria, acting as external examiner for PhDs for friends of his, becoming vice-treasurer of the section on Continental Philosophy of the British Philosophical Association, organising workshops and congresses, peer reviewing journal articles and book proposals, joining the scientific council of the Berlusconi Foundation of Governance (which awards one PhD scholarship every year in political philosophy) and giving interviews to the Bromswich Herald (because he thinks it's good for "impact"). While he engages in frenzied activities in the world of power, he works on his position in the world of knowledge, i.e. among the wider community of specialised experts. The best way to create an impact is books, at least in his field, where journals do not count as much and where third-party funding is exceptional. He turns his thesis into a book by slimming down the mapping parts exemplified by utterances such as (3). In a crucial passage in the introduction, he sums up the question of this book:

(4) If the transcendental ego is the basis of all knowledge, how can there be a knowledge of the other?

Even though the utterance (4) contains no explicit reference to any other representatives of the field, we can still point out its complex dialogical organisation by means of which other researchers as well as John himself are positioned in a certain way. The utterance (4) combines two speech acts which mobilise the doxic knowledge the members of his community have about the authors of certain positions, notably Kant as the implicit authority stating that "the transcendental ego is the basis of all knowledge". Under the condition that the Kant statement is correct (if-clause), the locutor ("John") formulates "his" speech act, namely the question: "How can there be a knowledge of the other." Since the sources of both speech acts are not explicitly identified, the readers will try to fill the slots by contextualising "John" and his interlocutors in the philosophical field. In the first part of (4), "John" not only engages in an exchange with Kant but with all those in the field who subscribe to the first part of the utterance: the "Kant disciples", who form the implicit audience to which

he addresses the question of the second part. The second part, in turn, may refer to tendencies outside the Kant community. Thus, *other* may evoke phenomenological or pragmatist orientations as well as the more political discussions in feminism and postcolonialism, which the locutor presents as *legitimate* problems for the community of Kant scholars. In this way, the locutor takes a position at the crossroads of Kantianism and other, more postmodernist tendencies in the field of Continental philosophy.

Through its indexical references to individual and collective discursive beings, utterances like this one instruct the discourse participants about who relates how to whom in the field. It is these indexical ties with the positions of others that make his question an important one, worthy of philosophical reflection. Conceptual problems and social positions in the field, therefore, need to go hand in hand if his research is to leave a trace.

BECOMING A PROFESSOR

After another book on deconstructive transcendentalism, an edited reader of key texts in Continental philosophy and two dozens articles in various philosophical journals and volumes, there is a nagging doubt in John over to what degree he has finally managed to leave a trace. A few, rather favourable reviews about his two books have come out. He has been invited to give plenary talks at a few conferences. Some of his colleagues, above all his ex-doctoral students have started to cite John's work which is branded as "deconstructive transcendentalism". It would be an exaggeration to say that everybody in the field knows him and his work even though many have heard of his concepts and he is reasonably cited in the works of others. In fact, the position he seems now to occupy in the circle of UK Continental philosophers remains a rather fuzzy and fragile one. When others cite him, he is not always sure they have really read him.

In fact, the feeling of uncertainty is widespread among all his colleagues. Nobody is totally assured about his or her position in the scientific community because this community is based on the ephemeral play of voices and references in academic publications. John's community by and large exists as the result of circulating texts which are read by the peers. It is true that there is a professional organisation of UK philosophers whose section of Continental philosophy John chairs by now. Yet everybody knows that their membership cards do not make anybody a true philosopher and the most recognised philosophers, the most "universal" ones representing the entire discipline, are usually not active in these

organisations. John's position in the scientific community rests on the circulation of his texts, i.e. on his peers producing and reproducing utterances and references by means of which his position is consolidated in the community. Some of the ties and bonds among the researchers have turned into structured relationships such as journals or organisations which offer a range of honorary places (such as journal editor, peer reviewer, section chair and conference organiser). Yet if these positions give some (illusion of) stability in the opaque and shifting space of academic discourse, the scientific community will never pay anything but symbolic recognition to him.

In the long run, John cannot live off the symbolic position (i.e. his reputation as an expert of an area) he has established in the world of knowledge. His place still needs to be made real and objective in the world of power. He needs, in other words, the institutional security as well as the regular salary, maybe also an office and other resources of a full senior position at a university, for which he is now ready to apply. His colleagues tell him about many contradictory things he is supposed to do and there is hardly any job committee without major rifts and clashes. Most decisions appear to be unpredictable and political. To some degree, this had been the case for his applications for more junior positions. Yet the appointment of a professor, who will no longer report to the Head of Department, gives rise for even more heated discussions among many more parties concerned of the university.

He then discovers this job ad in a mailing list of academic jobs for a professorial position at the University of North London:

(5) Full Professor of Philosophy

Through the designation *philosophy*, the ad refers to his position as a legitimate and recognised member of the philosophical community in the world of specialised knowledge production. However, the utterance not only activates the position that John has tried to secure over a long time in in the community. It also refers to a speech act referring to somebody L inviting candidates to apply. Given the circumstances (the University's logo, signed by the Head of Department, job description…), John recognises this word sequence as an utterance inviting him to apply: "(Candidates can apply for the position of) Full Professor of Philosophy." Therefore, as with the utterances John processes in the world of knowledge, the speech act succeeds because L is in the legitimate

position to produce the action it describes in the world of power. It points to an individual or collective (such as Head of Department or Pro-Vice Chancellor and the university committees) who is in the position to create positions in the university. Such a person, who is in most cases also a knowledge producer, had taken a long time to create the social capital he or she needs to occupy his academic power position. More than specialised knowledge producers, however, academic decision-makers rely on formal positions and organisational rules. Yet especially for the most important positions in the world of power, the non-formal resources (such as social capital within the university) as well as the practical knowhow (their social skills) of the power wielders are important (and it was a long and complicated process for the Head of the Department of Philosophy to get his Pro Vice Chancellor and other senior management to transform a vacant professorship in the Department of Education into a Chair of Philosophy).

Thus, when John turns in his application, he enters a matching process between position making processes in the scientific communities and in the universities, which had started on both sides long before John thought of turning in his application. In order to fill positions in universities, the specialised knowledge producers in his field had been working on their positions and turned them into CVs with "marketable" profiles whereas the decision-makers of the university had been mustering the necessary support for the positions they want to fill in countless meetings, conversations and long procedures. Since matchmaking processes between the worlds of spcialised knowledge and organised power precede the formal application procedure (the formal application just being the last step of much longer discursive processes), the actual decision-making situations can appear sometimes either banal or "irrational". To recruit somebody for junior as well as senior positions, there is a long preparation on both sides which can confirm "obvious" candidates whose application is sometimes just passed on in the formal procedure. But a consensus may just as well not arise since the new position is embedded in a complex network of links with many others within the university who have their own agenda. John learns e.g. that some in the department prefer somebody with a solid grounding in German idealism who can lead a large lecture class on the topic; others are in favour of somebody with a more analytical orientation. And of course some want to push their personal acquaintances. If John is finally chosen for the position, the bundle of positions, relationships and ties he can offer to the department after many years of academic experience turns out to fit in a certain

way with the specific configuration of positions the job entails at the University of North London.
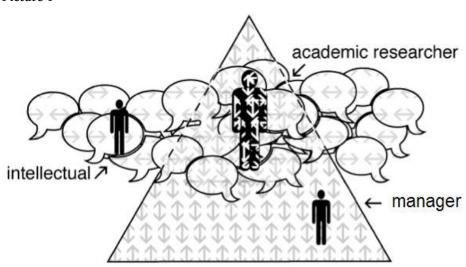
No other act can objectify John's symbolic positions better than his recruitment as a professor. He may be a well-respected colleague among his peers but as long as this respect is not turned into a permanent position at a university, he will neither be fully recognised as a researcher nor will his research enjoy the attention they deserve among his peers. To be recruited at a university is part and parcel of what he needs to achieve in order to succeed as a researcher. As consequential as it may be for the researchers, the recruitment usually is a decision which does more than just institutionalise John's position in the world of specialised knowledge. In recruitment, the bundle of ties and bonds he has come to accumulate in the scientific community is integrated into the organisational structure of a university. This translation can hardly follow a set of ("professional") rules which are applied to identify the "best" candidate. Indeed, the participants need to cope with many different constraints, expectations and norms in order to come up with a decision that can never be automatic even in the presence of a strong consensus of shared professional values. The candidates with the most citations are not always recruited, nor those with the most third-party funding, nor the ones with the best personal contacts. In fact, the decision cannot but be contingent to the degree that there is not one gold standard of how to achieve academic excellence. Candidates are therefore not only evaluated in terms of the symbolic capital (like books and articles) they have accumulated over time, to use Bourdieu's terminology. The recruitment procedure takes stock of the whole bundle of John's formal and informal, achieved and potential positions, his entire discursive capital as it were, which needs to match with the potential network of relationships of the position to be filled.

FROM SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE TO ORGANISED POWER

If recruitment is a delicate practice, this is not only due to the plurality of practices within the scientific communities, which is partly reflected by the composition of the appointment committee, but also due to the different social logics at work in specialised knowledge and organised power. From day one of his academic career, John had had to establish a position in both worlds *at the*

same time. In the recruitment procedure, the participants therefore need to cope with the different social logics which position researchers as legitimate members with a specialised expertise in a discipline *and* as members of a status group with certain decision-making rights in a university. If John failed to secure his position in either world, he would either become an administrator, policy maker or manager with no recognised specialised expertise or he would turn into a free-floating intellectual, an erudite or man of letters with no institutional backing. The fundamental problem for all researchers, therefore, is to consolidate their academic position by straddling both worlds of knowledge and power over time.

Picture 1

By no means has John reached some sort of end point in his career when he becomes a professor. Even though his institutional position gives him security, the academic game of making his position stronger and more stable just goes on. In the world of knowledge, he attempts to expand his impact and presence to new audiences. If in order to become a professor he had to address national networks of peers relevant for the professorial job market, he now gets attention for being the originator of "post-idealism" - a new theoretical current which is noticed in other countries (it helps to write in English nowadays) and neighbouring fields (e.g. as in cultural, literary and social theory). Other

researchers now begin to build their careers on "post-idealism", which they cannot do without positioning themselves vis-à-vis John's work. In this process, John's symbolic position as a post-idealist is more and more detached from the person John. John's position-building is now almost entirely out of his hands. As many other researchers try to assert themselves on the research scene by referring to John's work, his symbolic position is now universal enough that in the later stages of his career his name comes to stand in for the entire new current that has been developing under the label of "post-idealism". And when he dies, John's post-idealist position stays on the map of following generations of academic knowledge producers.

It is of course highly unlikely that his symbolic position is canonised and I leave it to the curious reader to turn to the biographical, historical and sociological work on "great thinkers" that has been done on those individuals who have finally entered the halls of fame of the philosophical community. The more likely scenario is that after his appointment as a professor, John gets more and more absorbed in the world of institutional power. He discovers the university as an administrative organisation whose agents are in competition to secure their positions, yet in practices which are distinctly different from those he has seen in the scientific communities. Whereas his challenge in the world of knowledge is to realise his position as a legitimate, visible and recognised member of a field, current or group, in the world of power he engages in a struggle over who is in a position to make decisions over scarce resources, coveted positions and the careers of others. Just like the positioning practice in the world of knowledge, the practice through which his position is defined in the world of power takes place on local, national and global levels at once. On the departmental level, he continues to be involved in all kinds of committees (e.g. as a member of the departmental council he decides on which conference trips are funded), administrative tasks (such as deciding on which new students to admit) and he contributes to selecting new staff in the hiring committees. Not every position he occupies in this world of institutional decision-making is formal. He is part of the departmental kitchen cabinet before becoming Head of Department himself.

In the world of power, status hierarchies are created in order to facilitate decision-making processes. The status groups existing in most universities are students, junior academic staff (lecturers, assistants and assistant professors, who usually have to report to members of the senior level and usually haven't finished their academic qualifications), senior academic staff (i.e. mostly full professors, who enjoy full institutional rights, can supervise all types of students and can sit in on all committees) as well as administrative staff (from secretaries

all the way up to the senior management, who occupy in many cases professorial positions). Members of higher status groups (e.g. Heads of Department) are typically given more decision-making power than members of lower status groups (e.g. lecturers and students). This status hierarchy can be considered as part of a "universal" academic culture to the degree that few universities can decide *not* to project this institutional nomenclature onto its members. Embedded and reproduced in everyday decision-making practices, the four status positions of professor, assistant professor, student and administrative personnel constitutes an institutional response, confirmed in countless practices, to the problem that in the world of academic power not everybody can decide on everything, not everybody can have the same rights and not everybody can be a member of the academic institution. Therefore, if higher education institutions, at least those with the ambition to be recognised as full universities, are under pressure to adopt such "universal" institutional models (institutions with no professors are usually seen as just as deficient as institutions with no students), the tiered system of academic status positions in the world of power can be considered as the equivalence to the differentiated system of disciplinary specialisation in the world of knowledge (institutions which do not cover the entire disciplinary spectrum are usually seen as deficient institutions). Therefore, to establish their place among the full universities of the world, higher education institutions need to reflect the full range of status positions as well as the full range of disciplinary fields.

Let's return, however, to how John consolidates his position in the world of organised power. Just as his positions in the world of knowledge, some of his positions are informal and spontaneous; they emerge between the actors as they engage in daily interactions (e.g. who is or is not in the departmental kitchen cabinet). Others are officially defined and laid down in the university's statutory framework. Yet his positions in the world of power are not limited to the informal and formal relationships he has established with the most immediate and local colleagues in his university. On a national level, his university is embedded in a system of academic governance which coordinates large academic populations across university organisations. The classical device of national academic governance is the academic job market, whose recruitment practices are typically regulated by national policy makers and administrators (who have created certain filters for who can or cannot apply for certain academic status positions or who have implemented a system of incentives, programs and schemes). Thus, the recruitment of academic staff is embedded in a complex

arrangement of organisational rules, practices and procedures which is highly specific and path-dependent of the national academic system.

Unlike the UK, where the model of entrepreneurial governance predominates today, the French academic system for instance is more likely to operate with national exams (*concours*) and centralised academic qualification committees (CNU), which makes it almost impossible for John to be recruited in France despite the considerable international prestige he has gained by now. If he started to study German and to mingle with German academics, he could consider applying in the German system even though he would have to develop a skill in building up an academic court of assistants, secretaries and a network of useful contacts without which his chair position would not develop. As a product of the UK system, John has become a cog in the UK's recruitment machine (e.g. by writing recommendations and reports on other candidates and his participation in appointment committees at other universities).

John is also involved in regular evaluation schemes like the UK Research Evaluation Framework (REF, formerly RAE). REF monitors the research output of research-active academics in the UK by subjecting their activity to sophisticated ranking procedures. Evaluation schemes like REF in the UK, the AERES in France or the *Wissenschaftsrat* in Germany testify to new more 'depersonalised' practices of exercising academic power. Where the more classical recruitment-centred system of academic governance subjected researchers like John to one-time evaluations (such as the procedure for getting a lifetime job), these governmental technologies subject researchers to a system of continuing surveillance and control by comparing and objectifying the performance of large academic populations. Today, the indicators and benchmarks of governmental technologies may camouflage the relationships the participants of academic discourse constantly negotiate among themselves (John now pretends to publish for four stars in the REF). Yet the exercise of academic power remains a highly practical matter and decision-making at times a contingent process. What changes is that academic power extends to ever larger academic populations which are put in hierarchical order on increasingly global levels. Rankings, benchmarks, and comparisons are the devices that constitute new hierarchies on global levels (e.g. the role the Times Higher Education and the Shanghai university rankings plays in the decisions of future PhD students). Thus, academic power is increasingly exercised in an organisational field which reaches beyond the nation state (e.g. the growth of research funding from the European Union). While the globalisation of academic power has just started,

the decision-making activities of a philosopher like John mainly extend to the local level of his university and to the national level of his academic system.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by summing up the theory of academic discourse as power-knowledge which I have outlined with the help of our fictitious philosopher John. While inequalities among researchers are commonly justified by the quality of their research products, John's story reminds us of the social constraints that allow certain researchers to succeed more than others. As a UK philosopher, his academic practices are embedded in a specific academic culture. More than in other disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, (Continental) philosophers like John usually go to great lengths to position themselves with respect to certain canonical figures, address not only academic but more intellectual questions, are especially indebted to national philosophical schools and traditions and are subject to rather fuzzy publication formats. More than in other academic systems, UK academics like John are subject to a sophisticated regime of bureaucratic rules, surveillance and evaluation; they need to deal with a strong, centralised and strategically acting management and an academic market environment where departments and universities need to compete for students and funding.

Yet the special challenge all researchers face in all disciplinary fields and all academic systems is that in order to exist they need to engage in academic discourse as a multileveled positioning practice throughout their career. Their research, it turns out therefore, is considered as "excellent" to the degree that they make their positions visible, important and real for other researchers by weaving a network of ties, bonds and relationships with others in academic discourse. To claim, secure and stabilise their positions among the many other, already well-established positions, they need to mobilise their resources and prove their practical skills in coping with incommensurable rules, norms and expectations. That's why they can never just carry out a professional recipe, a grammar or a structure that lays out how to act as a good researcher. Their challenge is a practical one as they move through an uneven, opaque, rocky terrain. While establishing their place in this universe, they deal with conflicting rules, contradictory rationalities and incompatible logics: they have to occupy a position among the countless specialised fields and communities (i.e. in the world of specialised knowledge) *and* they need to be placed into the hierarchical system of status positions of a university and an academic system

(i.e. in the world of institutional power). The horizons of their discursive practice are not restricted to a national field; they reach from local to global levels: in the world of knowledge they need to relate to others through networks of personal friends as well as through the canonical references of global disciplinary communities. Similarly, in the world of power they need to address the immediate colleagues in their department and university as well as to defend their positions in the national academic systems and the global academic space. In academic discourse, therefore, it is existential for researchers to straddle the social logics of specialised knowledge and institutional power. At the same time, they are often involved in other worlds as well such as teaching and the mass media, whose specific social logics need to be elaborated somewhere else.

While all these worlds testify to profoundly social dynamics, it is necessary to overcome the split between symbolic and social, between conceptual and material logics of explanation, which has characterised knowledge-oriented (e.g. the focus on concepts in intellectual history) as well as power-oriented approaches (e.g. the focus on resources in the sociology of higher education and of intellectuals). From a discursive point of view, we have conceived of research as an activity aiming at the construction of positions which are both social and symbolic. In this view, researchers cannot process ideas without participating in a discursive play of positions. However much they concentrate on expressing and conveying a certain idea, they cannot help but negotiate their own place among the other positions already existing in the space of research.

More generally speaking, we can now understand social order as an emergent, unintended effect of a plurality of on-going discursive practices. In this view, discourse does not represent the social. Instead, by representing ideas, discourse (i.e. the utterances that the participants process) constitutes the social. Social order, therefore, cannot be seen as a constituted structure, which can be read off from the textual surface of a discourse; it needs to be constituted as a practical achievement by the discourse participants. At the same time, discourse participants can exist only in discourse as they try to make themselves visible with their positions whose making they never entirely control.

After all, it is a challenge for any discourse participant to find his or her place in the social where the problem is precisely that order is *not* fully constituted and where subjects do *not* exist as constituted entities. Not everybody is equally successful in surviving this game. If some are more successful in research, it is not their capacity of discovering abstract truths but their concrete skills as well

as the resources they can mobilise to define their place among the many other researchers.

REFERENCES

ABBOTT, A. (2001): *Chaos of disciplines*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

ANGERMÜLLER, J. (2007): *Nach dem Strukturalismus. Theoriediskurs und intellektuelles Feld in Frankreich*, Bielefeld, transcript.

ANGERMÜLLER, J. (2011): "From the many voices to the subject positions in anti-globalization discourse. Enunciative pragmatics and the polyphonic organization of subjectivity", *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, pp. 2992-3000.

ANGERMÜLLER, J. (2012): "Fixing meaning. The many voices of the post-liberal hegemony in Russia", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 11, 2, pp. 115-134.

ANGERMULLER, J. (2013): *Analyse du discours poststructuraliste. Les voix du sujet dans le langage*, Limoges, Lambert Lucas.

BACHELARD, G. (1971): *Épistémologie*, Paris, PUF.

BENVENISTE, E. (1974): *Problèmes de linguistique générale,* 2, Paris, Gallimard.

BILLIG, M. (1982): *Ideology and Social Psychology*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

BOURDIEU, P. (1988): *Homo Academicus*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

CAMIC, C., M. LAMONT and N. GROSS (eds.) (2011): *Social Knowledge in the Making*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

CLARK, B.R. (1983): *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

COLLINS, R. (1998): *The Sociology of Philosophies*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

CRANE, D. (1972): *Invisible Colleges. Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press.

ECKERT, P. (2000): *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice. The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*, Oxford, Blackwell.

EDWARDS, D. and J. POTTER (1992): *Discursive Psychology*, London, Sage.

EHLICH, K. (2007): *Sprache und sprachliches Handeln*, Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter.

FLOWERDEW, J. (ed.) (2001): *Academic Discourse*, Harlow, Pearson.

FOUCAULT, M. (1972): *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, New York, Pantheon.

GOFFMAN, E. (1981): *Forms of Talk*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

HAGSTROM, W. (1965): *The Scientific Community*, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin.

HALLIDAY, M.A.K. (1978): *Language As Social Semiotic*, London, Edward Arnold.

HARRE, R. and B DAVIES (1990): "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20, 1, pp. 43-63.

HYLAND, K. (2005): *Metadiscourse. Exploring Interaction in Writing*, London/New York, Continuum.

JESSOP, B. and N.-L. SUM (2013): "Competitiveness, the Knowledge-Based Economy and Higher Education", *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 4, 1, pp. 24-44.

KNORR CETINA, K. (1981): *The Manufacture of Knowledge. An Essay on the Constructivist and Contextual Nature of Science*, Oxford/New York, Pergamon Press.

KUHN, T.S. (1968): *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

LACAN, J. (1978): *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, New York/London, Norton.

LAMONT, M. (1987): "How to become a dominant French philosopher: The case of Jacques Derrida", *American Journal of Sociology*, 93, 3, pp. 584-622.

LAMONT, M. (2009): *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

LATOUR, B. and S. WOOLGAR (1979): *Laboratory Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

LYNCH, M., E. LIVINGSTON and H. GARFINKEL (1984): "Temporal Order in Laboratory Work", in *Science Observed. Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*, London, Sage, pp. 205-238.

MAINGUENEAU, D. (1993) : *Le Contexte de l'œuvre littéraire. Énonciation, écrivain, société*, Paris, Dunod.

MASSCHELEIN, J.M. SIMONS, U. BRÖCKLING and L. PONGRATZ (eds.) (2006): *The Learning Society from the Perspective of Governmentality*, Malden, MA, Blackwell.

MEYER, J.W. (1980): "The Effects of Education as an Institution", *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, pp. 55-77.

MÜNCH, R. (2011): *Akademischer Kapitalismus. Über die politische Ökonomie der Hochschulreform*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp.

MUSSELIN, C. (2005): *Le marché des universitaires. France, Allemagne, Etats-Unis*, Paris, Sciences Po.

NØLKE, H., K. FLØTTUM and C. NORÉN (2004): *ScaPoLine. La théorie scandinave de la polyphonie linguistique*, Paris, Kimé.

PÊCHEUX, M. (1975): *Les Vérités de La Palice*, Paris, Maspero [trans. *Language, semantics and ideology. Stating the obvious*, London, Macmillan, 1982].

PRICE, D.J.S. (1965): *Little science, big science*, New York, Columbia University Press.

RHOADES, G. and S. SLAUGHTER (1997): "Academic Capitalism, Managed Professionals, and Supply-Side Higher Education", *Social Text*, 51, pp. 9-38.

SACKS, H. (1986): "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children", in *Directions in Sociolinguistics. The Ethnography of Communication*, Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 325-345.

SEARLE, J. (1992): *Speech acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

STRAUSS, A. (1959): *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*, Glencoe, Free Press.

WEINGART, P. (2003): *Wissenschaftssoziologie*, Bielefeld, Transcript.

Johannes Angermuller is Professor of Discourse at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick (UK) and research group leader at EHESS (Paris, France) for the ERC DISCONEX project ("The Discursive Construction of Academic Excellence"). Having obtained a PhD from the Universities of Paris 12 and Magdeburg in 2003, he was a Professor in the sociology of higher education at the University of Mainz (Germany). While addressing questions of power, knowledge and social change at the language/society nexus, he has pursued research on academic as well as political discourses. His publications include Nach dem Strukturalismus (2007), Field of Theory. The Rise and Decline of Structuralism in France (Hermann, 2013, Continuum, 2014), a book on poststructuralist discourse analysis (Lambert Lucas, 2013, Palgrave, 2014) as well as Discourse Studies Reader, edited with Dominique Maingueneau and Ruth Wodak (John Benjamins, 2014). More on his work can be found at http://www.johannes-angermuller.net. You are invited to check out http://www.discourseanalysis.net to register and get the latest news in discourse analysis.