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SOCIOLOGY

The Sociology of Space

Materiality,
Social Structures,
and Action

Martina Löw



Cultural Sociology

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Translated from the German by Donald Goodwin

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

In her strikingly original intervention *The Sociology of Space*, Martina Löw rejects objectivist understandings of space as material and external, the “absolute idea of space” as a “container.” It may have “become normal to conceive space as a configuration of things,” but Löw forcefully objects to “the problematic idea that spaces seem to come to an end within the realm of the material.” Instead, she proposes to understand space as a meaningful horizon, as an “atmosphere” constituted by the subjective experience of material things. Even as an atmosphere seems outside us, it is not part of a “visible world of things” but, rather, an “external effect” of the spatial arrangement of social goods and people “as realized in perception.” Spacing arranges social goods and people, creating the distribution of materiality in a potential scene. Perception drives a complementary but distinctive process Löw calls synthesis, the interpretive act of imagining that, by linking together people and goods, creates a space: it is the “symbolic components of an action situation that make it possible for institutional arrangements to condense into patterns of space.”

With these signal arguments, Löw brings the sociology of space into the scene of cultural sociology, particularly into the midst of recent investigations into iconic consciousness and the materiality of meaning. She opens up a new perceptual space for cultural sociology to think with. This catalyzing connection will surely create new theoretical and empirical syntheses in the years ahead.

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

In the past few decades, it has become customary in Anglo-American and in Francophone geography to refer to space and spatiality as social products. This has, at least since the turn of the millennium, been evident in sociology and many neighboring disciplines as well. Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Claude Raffestin, and many others have done pioneering work in this area. Many have gained the impression that by virtue of the spatial turn the humanities and social sciences were able to abandon one-sided material or territorial ideas of space at the turn of the millennium. Briefly stated, the spatial turn stands for the insight that all spaces (architectural spaces, urban spaces, regions, nation-states, bedrooms, recreation parks, river landscapes, etc.) are always also results of social production: not only in the sense that there are professions that plan and design these spaces, but also in terms of the challenging insight that spaces only become spaces for people inasmuch as they are—again and again and again—produced socially. In other words: the constitution of space is a performative act. At the moment of placement, we establish relations between elements (and classes of elements) with the result that we join these elements (the table, the door, the church, the lines on the map of a region) to yield a space. In sociological terms that is neither a purely cognitive act nor a pure phenomenon of perception, but is socially pre-structured and takes place by way of institutions, conventions, discourses. How we perform the synthesis between objects, how we span the space between things and people is a highly conventionalized, objectified practice, one that is pre-structured by professions such as planning and architecture.

Even in the 1990s, and despite the work of Lefebvre, the claim that spaces are social could cause provocation at sociology conferences. I myself have experienced numerous debates in which it was argued that, as materialities, spaces were not an object of sociology, but rather of planning or geography. Such argumentation is hardly imaginable today. On the one hand, geography has become more social and more cultural; on the other hand, sociology accepts space as a field of study. Moreover, the disciplines planning and architecture emphasize the fact that they quite naturally work on the basis of relational spaces.

Nonetheless, more than twenty years after the “spatial turn” (Soja 1989), the outcome gives less cause to be euphoric than was at first to be expected. Ulrike Jureit (2012) justly criticizes the fact that a relational concept of space is simply prefaced to many studies, but that this conceptual commitment often has little influence on the course of the study. In the journal *Environment and Planning*, Jeff Malpas (2012) argued that a standpoint based on a relational theory of space has become dominant, but that this has wrongly given rise to the impression that we now know how we should understand space. Unfortunately, he continues, many academics are not much interested in understanding space, but rather use a rhetoric and imagination of space to establish political argumentation. It is easy to find examples as documentation for this argumentation: fortunately, insights into the multiplicitous and heterogeneous nature of space and spatiality compel us to challenge linear logics of cultural development. However, this does not at all mean that at the same time the complex processes of the constitution of spaces in late modern society are being analyzed. Perhaps we are too quick to assume that any form of space appropriation by socially marginalized groups is a success, while failing to take the complex spatial structure assumed by social phenomena as a systematic object of study.

Just as urban sociology rarely actually studies cities, but rather analyzes phenomena in cities (Löw 2013, 2012), space often remains vague in space research. Malpas criticizes, among others, Doreen Massey, Ash Amin, and Nigel Thrift because the idea of moving relational spaces obscures the difference between space and place and because space itself as a concept becomes increasingly unclear. Space becomes a vortex of paths and streams. If boundaries are in focus at all, they are always flexible and in motion. It is then of little help when Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones (2008) suggest that every analysis of space must be structured around the categories “territory, place, scale, and networks” because

while they formalize what is already in use for heuristic purposes, they do not provide a theoretical framework for these elements. Hence, it is not very surprising that even Doreen Massey, as well as Rob Shields, Phil Hubbard, and Rob Kitchin now speak of space as a theoretically underdeveloped concept (Massey 2005; Hubbard and Kitchin 2011, 7; Shields 2013, 1).

Sociology is not a casual bystander of this deficient conceptual clarity and theorizing. Space is still a rarely invoked concept in social theory (Frehse 2013; Löw and Steets 2014). It seems that the predominant impression is that specialists are supposed to attend to spatial phenomena (e.g. sociology of architecture or urban sociology) but that society, or, to put it in terms less charged with presuppositions, the social can be largely understood without a theory of space. That is, it is accepted that spaces are social, but the social seems not to be spatial. Despite the works of Georg Simmel, Norbert Elias, Anthony Giddens, and others, it is rare to find articles in sociological journals reflecting the spatial structuredness of the object of study. But even research on methods shows that many methodological problems cannot be solved without further elaboration of the theory of space (Baur et al. 2014). Let me repeat: of course there are many empirical studies of specific spatial phenomena, many of them excellent. These studies often apply the methods of qualitative social research (especially ethnography, but also biography research and visual procedures); and there are also some publications in quantitative sociology that systematically examine the spatial dimension of objects of study that are central for sociology such as social inequality (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007b). Overall, however, it has to be acknowledged that sociology finds it difficult to analyze the spatial dimension of the social and that after a promising first phase of the “turn” and the desubstantialization of the concept of space, theories of space—from an interdisciplinary perspective—are beginning anew to enable us to understand space more precisely.

Hence, I am very pleased that my proposal for a conceptualization of space as a basic sociological concept, first published in German in 2001, is now available in English. By identifying space as a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods, I develop a theoretical concept with which such diverse formations as networks, scales, and territories can be understood as specific arrangements of objects and people. They can be distinguished according to symbolic dimensions and a material dimension, they require different placements, and they are based on varying operations of synthesis, but they are all spatial formations that can be socially contex-

tualized. Places, for their part, are a presupposition and result of space-related action. From the way in which spaces are spanned and take form, inferences about the organization of the social can be made, whether on the level of individual biographies or on the level of the nation-state's territorial development, global financial markets, or media networking. Only when it is understood that such diverse spatial formations as diaspora, colony, territory, zone, dump, storage, network, cloud, and stratification are variations of relational arrangements can the social order that is supposed to be (and often is) generated by virtue of these arrangements be understood specifically and in reciprocal relatedness. None of these spaces can be conceived apart from power, but at the same time, this concept of space does away with the idea of space as subject to the unimpeded play of forces, whether of capitalism or the modern era; it is only in resistance that appropriation can be successful here and there. There is no social phenomenon free of space. By developing a shared understanding of space, this book raises the question as to how various dimensions of the social are structured by means of which spaces (including overlapping spaces) and how these spaces are reproduced, whether intentionally or routinely, in everyday action.

THE SPATIAL TURN AS A MARKER OF A SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

With more temporal distance to the "spatial turn," not only can the continuing conceptual fuzziness be more clearly recognized, but also the social changes that motivated the transformation of the conception of space. It has been amply demonstrated that in the modern era the social organization of space has fundamentally changed. In recent years, research on the early modern era has worked intensively on territory as the central form of organization of space and shown that between the sixteenth and eighteenth century essentially three practices of territorial marking have changed (Landwehr 2007; Gugerli and Speich 2002). These are topographic surveying, statistical and cartographic record keeping, and the idea that territoriality can be generated by means of the state, an idea that is closely aligned with Enlightenment thinking (Jureit 2012, 22; Raffestin 1980; Osterhammel 2000; Balibar and Wallerstein 1990). The European model of the space of the territorial state defined by clear-cut boundaries, or more specifically the nation-state variation of this model, prevailed and

was transported to the global South in the course of colonial conquests, especially in the nineteenth century. Cartography developed to become the dominant medium of spatial representation. Accordingly, the historian Charles S. Maier identifies territoriality as the key concept for dividing the last century into periods (Maier 2000). This refers to the obsessive idea that people and things can be controlled by controlling spaces (an idea that guides not only conceptions of the nation-state and urban surveillance, but also, for example, the planning of playgrounds, which are also an invention of the twentieth century).

The construction of state territorial spaces, conceived as exclusive spaces, is paradigmatic. It is here that the tendency of the modern era to order the world as delineated, inwardly homogeneous spatial units becomes clearest. Homogeneous space can become a commodity. Homogeneous space can be subjected to uniform control strategies. Homogeneous space can be subjected to a master plan (cf. Harvey 1982). This construction is first ruptured by, above all, the metropolis. The metropolis assumes the role of the heterogeneous, socially inclusive entity with unclear boundaries, becoming a spatial counterpart of the territorial state (Held 2005). In the course of increasing economic complexity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the enhancement of global networking in many nation-states goes hand in hand with the constitution of national territory (Conrad 2006). Accordingly, Sebastian Conrad speaks of “regimes of territoriality,” that is, of “changing relationships between nation and state, population and infrastructure, territory and global order” (p. 324).

Although container space as a description of modern society became prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in everyday life as well as in many sciences, especially the human and social sciences—a point that in this book I shall document in detail for sociology—counter-movements can always be identified. In the twentieth century, opposition arose to the idea that space could be adequately described as container, surface, or territory, unsettling knowledge of space in waves coming at different times for each discipline. In mathematics, the demonstration of non-Euclidean geometries in the middle of the nineteenth century initiated a process that rendered space relational; striking evidence was found for it in the theory of relativity at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Cubism and Expressionism, in Theater of the Absurd and Dada Literature, relational figures of space are articulated. Together with art, architecture underwent its first spatial turn. It is not necessarily safe to imagine that

architects assume that they build or design spaces. Though architecture was already termed the “art of space” (Raumkunst) in Schelling’s lectures on the philosophy of art in the middle of the nineteenth century (Schelling 1859), it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that August Schmarsow (1894) prevailed with the position that architecture is a designing of space. “What,” he asks, “is there in this university hall in which we are assembled just as well as in the retreat of the scholar pursuing his thought in solitude? What does the seat of the Supreme Court of the German Reich over there have in common with the concert hall or the library next to it, with the Pantheon in Rome and with Cologne Cathedral, with the Eskimo’s igloo and the nomad’s tent? ... they are one and all spatial structures” (Schmarsow 2011, 41f.). The provocation rests in the fact that the idea of an architect creating space no longer admits of a distinction between base and superior building forms. By contrast, one decade previously Gottfried Semper had objected to comparing the Carib hut with architecture as art (Semper 1884, 294). But the provocation continues. Schmarsow has hardly defined “the essence of architectural creation” as constitution of space when he curtails the effect of creation with a Kantian gesture, emphasizing that space only emerges where the subject sets it up around itself and imagines it of necessity (Schmarsow 2011, 43). Sigfried Giedion develops this point in 1941 in his book *Space, Time and Architecture*—now regarded as his major work—in which he challenges the idea that architectural space can in some way be devised as a container for social actions. He argues instead for the inclusion of perception in the analysis of the constitution of space. Spaces can only be described relative to one’s own standpoint. The variety of spatial phenomena cannot simply be derived from the building form; rather, it forces us to recognize that the emergence of space is not only bound to the materiality of the objects built, but also to the movement of bodies.

The new knowledge of space in art and architecture, mathematics, and physics took effect, but it was not sufficient to change everyday consciousness or even to stimulate other sciences to undertake systematic reflection on space. For Charles Maier (2000) the period of territorialization therefore only ended about 1970 with the triumph of globalization. The enhanced transnationalization of capitalist markets, acceleration of cash flow, and the concomitant global trade of cultural goods and objects result practically and theoretically in a refiguration of space. These dynamics are linked with the emergence of the “information age” (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998) in which communication structures fundamentally change, result-

ing in an enormous increase in the complexity of social relationships. The years from 1965 to 1975 marked the height of the Vietnam War, which became the symbolic center of the period of transformation that is also identified with the year 1968, during which in many societies totalitarian action patterns and linear historical narratives lost legitimacy. In social movements, new spatial figurations become established as if they were self-evident when, for example, front yards are declared to be nuclear-free zones in the course of the peace movement, thus linking global threats with local action in a way unheard of until then (Schregel 2011). At the same time, the women's movement as well as the gay and lesbian movements fundamentally challenge notions of unity and order such as the concept of identity; this has an effect on the model of container space and its claim that its elements are internally homogeneous and that difference is external (Mol and Law 1994). The 1970s also represent a crisis of modern urban development, posing the question as to how much multiplicity and specificity urban space needs in order to be experienced as attractive.

When we today—in all disciplines—turn our attention anew to the theory of space, the events around 1970 prove to be a more decisive turning point than we realized at the time of the “spatial turn” in the nineties and the first decade of the new millennium. We suspected that we would have to change our understanding of space in order to continue to understand the world, to retain our relatedness to space, to construct spaces that are experienced as desirable. Inasmuch as we have begun to think more in terms of relationality, to develop relational concepts of space, and have ceased to regard space as something at rest, “a kind of stasis,” while time marches on (Massey 1994, 253; cf. Massey 1993, 118), we have gained a new perspective on the social and material world. What is now becoming clear is that the insight into the necessity of a relational understanding of space is only the beginning of theorizing, not the result. We now know that in the past decades both the spatial organization of the social and the social organization of spaces has again changed fundamentally; but we also recognize that we have only very vague descriptions of what new forms these refigurations have assumed (network society: Castells 1996; fluid spaces: Mol and Law 1994; stratification, placement, and interlacing: Deleuze and Guattari 1997; Foucault 1986a). This lack of understanding of new spatial orders can only be remedied by systematic empirical research. The presupposition is a more precise definition and articulation of the concept of space in sociology as proposed in this book.

SPACE AS A FORM OF RELATIONSHIP

In the following discussion, it is my proposal that space be understood initially as a relational arrangement of social goods and living beings at places. For me, talk of a duality of space expresses the view that spaces do not simply exist, but rather are created in action and as spatial structures are embodied in institutions that pre-structure action. Container space or territory is one possible, though comparatively rare form of spatial constitution. Proceeding from this relational definition, the question arises for theorizing as to what consequences are to be drawn from this definition. Doreen Massey ends her book *For Space* with the words: “If time presents us with the opportunities of change and (as some would see it) the terror of death, then space presents us with the social in the widest sense: the challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness” (Massey 2005, 195).

Space makes us realize that things can hardly be experienced in isolation, but only exist in arrangements, that is, that they can be synthesized to spaces, calling upon us to make connections between them. An empty bowl on a table may look dismal, but if a bouquet of roses is placed next to it, the same bowl suddenly shines splendidly, almost full of promise. In the Shanghai Museum, a Chinese jar from the Sung dynasty looks more magnificent than a comparable vase in the Museum for Applied Art in Frankfurt am Main, not because it is in China where it belongs, but rather because in Shanghai the vase is positioned so that its spatial arrangement in the cabinet displays it to better effect. That is, things are dependent on the spatial arrangement in which we place them; and the other way round, in their spatial arrangement they have a specific effect on us.

In sociology, the constitutive force of being in a relationship is a part of our culture of theoretical reflection, but is usually limited to human existence as a question of identity and as a possibility of solidarity. For Émile Durkheim, in modern, increasingly individualized and structurally differentiated society solidarity emerges from the awareness of being mutually dependent on each other. In a society based on the division of labor, solidarity is based on the necessary insight into fundamental interdependence (see, among others, Durkheim 1893). Norbert Elias (2012) articulated this in the concept of figuration: dependency on the specific historical situation and on one’s own position vis-à-vis other people. With Judith Butler (2012) we think of the experience of alterity as constitutive of identity. With Jacques Lacan (1949) we realize that at the beginning of any life there is not the experience of being alone, but rather the bond

with the mother. Before we can conceive “one,” we realize that there are two, perhaps even three or four.

Although these figurations can indeed be constitutive of space (it is not by chance that Sloterdijk chose the term “bubble” for the mother–child figuration in 2011), the theory of space forces us to focus on the role of things in interrelationships just as well as other people, such as Lacan’s famous mirror. According to Lacan, it is only by looking in the mirror (or in the glint of a smooth water surface) that we understand the limits of our own selves. In the mirror we recognize ourselves, but the point is that we recognize ourselves mirror inverted, distorted, and at another place. To put it in other terms: just as the bowl looks more splendid next to the roses, figurations do not only emerge between people, but also between people and things. Up to now, we have tended to call arrangements of human beings figurations, and arrangements of things spaces. The examples show how artificial this division is: not only the empty bowl, everybody and everything looks more splendid next to a bouquet of roses! And nobody looks into the mirror without becoming a part of a complex spatial figuration. That is, what we are and who we are and how we appear to others depends on the space in which we are integrated and which we at the same time form with our placement. The question that every analysis of space poses to us is how parts of space make it possible for other parts of space to take effect in relation to each other. This applies to networks, territories, classes, and so on and for their association with each other.

The crux of the matter is this: today we have to assume that spatial overlapping and intermixing will increase even more. Whereas toward the end of the nineteenth century Durkheim was still able to derive solidarity from mutual dependency in French society constituted as a nation-state, today we must presuppose intensified, spatially structured dependencies accompanied simultaneously by global interrelationships and transformations of the world of media. Against the intuition that means of rapid transportation and new media make space become insignificant, we can—as, for example, AbdouMalik Simone (2011, 363) put it—discern a “spacing out,” a process of generation, development, and extension of spaces in which mapping is always behind, always attempting to grasp the current constellation.

It is complicated: the bouquet of roses and the bowl form a space, at the same time almost every object is integrated in worldwide generation of spaces. It is not a rare thing for a rose to be bred in Europe, cultivated in Ecuador, and sold in Chicago. The bowl was imported from Copenhagen

through eBay. That is, the dining room may define boundaries, but the space that emerges by virtue of the flowers and the bowl is not a territorial space. It is local and global at the same time. And the fine flowers of French faience color the atmosphere of the space differently than do the patterns of Uzbek potters, which are deliberately designed to look rural and authentic.

Global-local formations of space are encountered not only in simple examples of the arrangement of goods in a domestic setting. In the political realm, new spatial units are being constituted, for example in the framework of processes of integration in the European Union; in the economic field networked spaces are emerging in the context of new processes of production and distribution, in the scientific field refiguration is encountered in the internationalization of the transfer of knowledge. To put it in more general terms: non-territorial forms of space such as place making, networking, and rescaling (Taylor 1994; Brenner 2004) are becoming more widely documented in the social field. The social does not exist in a single type of space; rather, relational thought of space is the presupposition for focusing on the fundamental dependency surrounding the individual thing or person. Spatial figurations can substantially illuminate what it means to be a social being. These figurations have dimensions that are material and symbolic.

PLACES AND BOUNDARIES

In the case of a publication dating back more than ten years, the question always arises as to how the debate has continued. For the English publication, I have made only modest alterations. In a few instances, new statistics have been adopted; in other passages Anglo-American references have been added in order to enhance the contextualization for an Anglo-American readership. A few references to very recent publications have been added. In a few passages I have deleted references that seemed to me only to make sense in the context of the debate in Germany. Overall, however, it will be and should be noticeable that the book was written in a specific cultural context; in my view, this determines not so much the contents as the authors with whom we debate, and makes certain systems of reference (e.g. Europe) more prevalent than others.

Of the numerous debates and adaptations in German-speaking sociology that have emerged around this publication, I would here like to mention only a few aspects that seem to me to be particularly important

for further theoretical development: the relation between space and place, the concept of boundary, which is hardly considered in this book, the question as to whether spaces can have effects of their own, and the aspect of time.

In the present book I define places as the goal and result of placements. They are indissolubly intermeshed with spaces inasmuch as they are generated by spaces (sense of place develops with placement) and inasmuch as in terms of location they are a presupposition for the constitution of space. In contrast to spaces, places are always markable, nameable, and unique. This differentiation has effects on the way in which cities are conceived. A debate has been going on for some years on the possibilities of understanding intrinsic logics of cities in which structural similarities and differences between cities can be identified and even limited prognoses on development can be made (see Berking and Löw 2008; Frank et al. 2013; Löw 2013; Berking et al. 2014; Baur et al. 2014). This perspective is based on the differentiation of space and place. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (2006) wrote of our research on the intrinsic logic of cities: "Löw also considers distinctions between a differential logic of spaces and an intrinsic logic of places" (Rehberg 2006, 46). It does indeed seem to me to be reasonable to deploy space and place as two perspectives on the theory of space. If we look from a sociological point of view at a formation as a place, which is often endowed with the unifying force of a name, strategies and structures (whether individual or collective) that are oriented on identity come into focus: traditions, memories, shared experiences, and so on. Space, by contrast, directs attention to the linking of entities that are alien to each other together with their own specific localizations. This means that an extended space can receive different meanings or that at one place different spaces can be spanned; nonetheless, it is characteristic of places (whatever spaces are connected with them) that they endure in time either as individual realms or, with more sociological relevance, as collective realms of meaning. This becomes especially clear in the case of cities when people identify themselves with reference to the place from which they come. Greg Myers (2006), for example, examined the minutes of forty focus groups convened in England between 1994 and 2003 as to how people introduced themselves at the beginning. As a rule, the moderator suggests that they do a round in which everybody says their name. The participants generally respond with two items of information at the same time: "I'm Nick from Kirkham," or "Mike Hannah, and I'm from Preston." Mentioning the town as the place from which one comes is regarded as a basic item

of information in addition to one's name when introducing oneself and initiating communication. People thus invoke knowledge of the intrinsic logic of the place and position themselves in a spatial structure that sets towns in relation to each other.

This distinction between the constitution of space and the constitution of place also makes it possible to rethink boundaries. On the basis of the sociology of space proposed here, Gunter Weidenhaus (2015) has developed the thought-provoking argumentation that boundaries are a special case of space constitution inasmuch as they cannot be understood solely in terms of the arrangement of social goods to yield spaces because they always involve the constitution of two spaces and several places, even when the second space is conceived merely as "outside" or "surroundings." Even when the boundary is drawn in order to create an interior, the second space is by virtue of the drawing of the boundary constitutive for the first (on this point see also Schroer 2006, e.g. p. 165). Accordingly, the boundary is never only at one place and it is never one space, but always already two. It is itself processual and constitutive of space. What we now see is a debordering, an increasing permeability of territorial boundaries and a reduction of the capacity for sealing off (Albert and Brock 2000, 20). At the same time, we can also see a rebordering, the establishment of new boundaries and enhancement of border controls, which also involves attempts at reterritorialization of space (*ibid.* 39–40). In this context, the boundary can territorialize a space, at the same time opening the other space or spaces. Rebordering can be understood as "social phenomena within the framework of an overall debordering of the world of states ... as a specific reaction to the debordering processes that are actually taking their course within the framework of globalization" (*ibid.* 42f.).

Spaces, places, and boundaries are enduring precisely because they are socially constructed. "Actions constitute spaces and places, but spaces and places are themselves also 'objectified mind' (to use Max Weber's apt wording about bureaucracy)" (Rehberg 2006, 47). As objectified mind, they are not simply a mirror of society, but they can also have effects. With reference to examples such as high-rise housing, the point is often made that it is not the space of the high-rise building that provokes deviant behavior, but rather social factors such as unemployment, stigmatization, and the like; in cultural comparison between European cities with their different appreciation of high-rise housing, this has been shown to be plausible. It is true that social action cannot be planned in spatial terms. Nonetheless, it is not only Pierre Bourdieu who has shown with his stud-

ies of the Kabyle people (1977) that spatial structures shape communities in the long run and suggest manners of acting in a canonized manner as a matter of course, but also Andreas Dafinger (2001) for African villages, Tovi Fenster (1999) for the Bedouin in Israel, and Hillier and Hanson (1989) for cities such as London. Let us take for example Tovi Fenster's analysis of the Bedouin tent. In everyday life, the tent is the family's shared space. When a stranger comes to visit, curtains are used flexibly to create a visitors' area that is out of bounds for the women of the family until the guest leaves the tent. Such a practice could only be developed in mobile living constructions and is today embodied in routines to such an extent that the organization of gender relations is no longer even conceivable without this supporting spatial structure. The Israeli practice of supporting house building for the nomadic population results in almost insurmountable difficulties in reconciling respect for the guest with acceptable spaces for women. Accordingly, the feelings for a house often remain ambivalent. For most Bedouin, it long seems to be quite impractical. In the long run, social practice changes due to the spatial structures of the house. To put it in other terms: the social always has a spatial mold that is never the only possible one, and which accordingly calls for explanation or at least description. Spaces or buildings are like artifacts—as Silke Steets (2015) puts it—important aspects “of the structures of subjective and intersubjective orientation in the world in several respects: As physical elements in the world within immediate reach which are susceptible to direct sense perception, they are allies of body techniques and influence our bodily sensing. As materialized witnesses of past cultures, they are—in analogy to language—objective bearers of subjective meaning contents. They thus convey to us in signs something about the history, order, and structure of the world within our potential reach” (Steets 2015, 105). As an institutionalized arrangement (e.g. in the form of the floor plan of a dwelling), space has consequences because the conscious or unconscious recognition of spatial pattern has a structuring effect. Spaces take their full effect when actors have the impression that they are not influenced in their conventions by spatial structures. Accordingly, the synthesizing of social goods to yield spaces, the drawing of boundaries, and the constitution of places take place effectively when they can rely on existing knowledge that is already established in conventions and routines. Let me come to my last point: this conventionalization also takes place in the systematic interlocking of space and time.

In the following discussion, little attention shall be devoted to time. It is regarded as a fundamental principle that space and time must be separated for analytical purposes, but as widely accepted as this is, it is by no means authenticated in sociology. It often seems that reference to Hermann Minkowski (or Albert Einstein) is enough to point out that space and time must be thought together—but this does not mean that there are many who are able to focus equally on space and time. Gunter Weidenhaus has recently published a book adducing “empirical evidence for a connection between space and time” (2015, 12). Weidenhaus speaks of “social space–time” when the constitution of space and that of time logically belong together. The simple fact that an event takes place sometime and somewhere without a systematic interrelation is no reason to assume a coherence of space and time. Consequently, a connection between space and time cannot be theoretically derived, but requires empirical research.

Weidenhaus convincingly reconstructs three types of life story: the linear type, the cyclical type, and the episodic type. He demonstrates that within the framework of biographies, people construct a historical life structure by placing past, present, and future in a specific relation to each other. This establishment of relatedness adheres to one of these three patterns. As in the case of time, he can distinguish for space three different types of constitution of life space: the network type, the concentric type, and the island type. According to the author, how a person lives their spatial being in the world is different according to how they relate life spaces to each other, where and whether they locate a home in it, whether they establish the notion of a center, and what role boundaries, control, and identity coupling assume in it.

The point is: if the constitution of life space is studied in the time sample and the constitution of life story in the space sample, Weidenhaus demonstrates that linear biographization is associated with a concentric constitution of life space, episodic with network, while cyclical people constitute their spaces as islands. That is, the way in which past, present, and future are set in relation to each other corresponds to how life spaces are structured. In other words: biographical decisions can be better understood when space and time are taken into consideration equally in the analysis.

If the suspicion can be confirmed in the long term that social space–time can be demonstrated not only on the biographic level, but also takes effect on the social level (e.g. if in Norbert Elias’s terms a parallelism of socio- and psychogenesis can be conjectured), completely new perspectives will result. For example, we will have to ask whether differing constitutions of

space in political conflicts or economic practices are also associated with differing conceptions of history which can be taken into consideration to open new options for action. Overall, one of the great scientific challenges in the future seems to me to be this: understanding the typology of relational arrangements—together with their interlocking with constructions of time—systematically as spatial orders of the social. Or to speak with Marc Augé: space is (also) no longer what it used to be (Augé 1994, 34).

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Why Should Sociology Concern Itself with Space?

Every conventional space is brought about by the typical social conditions which are expressed in it without the disruptive intervention of consciousness. Everything that is denied by consciousness, everything that otherwise is diligently overlooked, is involved in its constitution. The images of space are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyph of any image whatever of space is deciphered, the ground of social reality becomes manifest. (Siegfried Kracauer: “Über Arbeitsnachweise” [On employment certificates], 1929)

As if it is the most natural thing in the world, most sociologists assume that there is no human existence outside of space and time. There is not much to be said against this as long as space and time are understood as something that must be constituted instead of viewing them in essentialist terms. But it is astounding that with the same certitude with which time is interpreted as a social construction by means of which people organize the difference between past and future, space is conceived as a material substrate, territory, or place. Such noteworthy sociologists as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), Talcott Parsons (1977), and Anthony Giddens (1984) proceed in this way. The result of this understanding of space as a primarily material object is that in many sociological projects space is regarded as not worthy of any particular attention, at best as an “environmental condition” to be excluded from study. When Elisabeth Konau published her book *Raum und soziales Handeln* [Space and social action] in 1977, she spoke of “a neglected dimension of sociological theorizing.” Fourteen years later, in 1991, Dieter Läßle still comes to the

conclusion in his much quoted “Essay über den Raum” [Essay on space] that the dominant social sciences are characterized by an obvious “space blindness” (Läpple 1991, 163).

This is slowly changing. Though it is still the case that the category of time is much more systematically discussed as a resource for the construction of social reality than is space—biography research is being established as a genuine science of time¹—in recent years, numerous sociological papers on the topic of space have been published (e.g. Urry 1985, 2010; Gieryn 2000; Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007a). In her book *Kindheit, Geschlecht und Raum* [Childhood, gender, and space], Ursula Nissen (1998) comes to the conclusion “that after a long period of neglect of the category ‘space’ in social scientific theorizing, in the past ten to fifteen years increased efforts have been made to overcome this situation” (Nissen 1998, 136). But the criticism remains that space as an analytic category is still under-theorized (Massey 2005; Malpas 2012).

This newly developed interest is a sign that our certitudes about space are in a severe crisis. Due to rapid transportation technologies, instant transmission of information all over the world, and finally, the new possibility of moving in virtual spaces, space in the sense of a material substrate seems to have become completely meaningless.² Accordingly, in the mass media, there is much talk of the dissolution of space. The German weekly newspaper *Die ZEIT*, for example, regularly publishes articles with the tenor that the human being is the “being that has fallen out of its spatial dimension” (Guggenberger 1994, 43). The author and director Heiner Müller explains to Alexander Kluge in a TV production and in the subsequent publication that the worst thing is “that there is now only time or speed or the passing of time, but no longer space” (Kluge and Müller 1995, 80). The French architect and philosopher Paul Virilio advocates the often quoted proposition that “the populating of time supplant[s] the populating of space” by the human being (Virilio 2012, 159).

In fact, it is not that space is “disappearing,” but rather that the organization of proximity is fundamentally different when a letter takes weeks to get from Europe to the USA or an e-mail is conveyed in seconds. And although the development that allows for information to be transferred in progressively shorter time spans is not new, it now seems to be penetrating deeper into our consciousness thanks to newest technological achievements. Other social processes, too, such as the reorganization of urban spaces, the increasingly complex and individuated experiences of socialization—experiences that we could call “insularized”—and changing ideas

of the body all contribute to the development that space is again being perceived as a problem.

In the German context, the temporal distance to the territorially based expansionist policy of the German National Socialists is making a gradual rapprochement to the category of space possible. In the post-War period, all reference to space was initially tabooed so as to repudiate any possible suspicion of argumentation in terms of politics for a “people without space” (Volk ohne Raum). Even in the nineteen-seventies, it was often held to be reactionary to concern oneself with space. Thus, for example, Michel Foucault, who throughout his scholarly work was concerned with space phenomena, depicts a typical dispute in conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot:

I remember ten years or so ago discussing these problems of the politics of space, and being told that it was reactionary to go on so much about space, and that time and the ‘project’ were what life and progress are about. (Foucault 1980b, 150)

Moving time is deemed to be the topic of the future. Space is not only encumbered by the idea of rigidity, it is also reminiscent of geopolitical argumentation in the Second World War. In sociology, the negative connotations of the term “space”—far beyond the borders of Germany—result in a renunciation of theoretical analysis of the concept of space. Today, some authors logically demand that a renewed exploration of phenomena of space be coupled with a theoretical discussion of the concept of space (e.g. Läßle 1991; Gieryn 2000).

Because it was tabooed, the concept of space has hardly been elaborated upon in recent decades. Today, it can be observed on the one hand that spatial restructuring can be empirically studied as a social process, but on the other hand that the concept used in analysis leads to the conclusion that space is merely becoming abstract. Now we cannot help but pose the question as to whether the concept used still comprehends the social phenomena and the presumable conditions of its development.

Space is indeed sporadically listed as a basic sociological concept, for example in reference works such as Bernhard Schäfer’s *Grundbegriffe der Soziologie* [Basic concepts of sociology] (1995), but for the most part, the category of space is lacking in synoptic works such as *Key Concepts in Sociology* (for a very recent example see Brahm 2013). It is here that the present work takes its point of departure. The underlying question of this

book is how space can be specified as a basic concept of sociology in order to formulate a sociology of space on the basis of this conceptualization. The following discussion is intended to clarify the point that sociology cannot do without the concept of space since it is used to describe the organization of proximity. Microsociology needs the concept of space in order to describe those configurations that arise from the connection of various social goods and people with each other and, as such, structure action. Macrosociology, for instance, can use the concept of space to grasp relational links that arise as a result of technological networking or urban restructuring and as such influence living conditions.

To this end, it is not straightforwardly possible to take recourse to an already developed concept of space. Starting points could be the use to date of the concept of space in sociology or in neighboring disciplines. It will become clear that the use of the concept of space for territories or in the sense of a localization at places only grasps aspects of constitution. This also applies to the sporadic use of the concept of space in Kant's sense as an *a priori* ordering principle.

Up to now, theoretical approaches to reconceptualizing space have rarely sought to systematically derive a set of analytic concepts, but rather have attempted to propose new perspectives on space. Since these works are mostly articles or short essays in books on another topic, the discussion, which cannot help but be brief, will usually remain unclear to the reader who lacks training in the theory of space.

Empirical social research has generated a number of studies on the social organization of spaces, but up to now, a theoretically consistent idea of the links between individual case studies is lacking. Thus, there are numerous empirical studies on, for example, possibilities for the use of built-up space, structural exclusions from public space, symbolic effects of spaces, and so on, but hardly any ideas on the interactions of the various factors: spatial structures, action, symbolism, and so on. Without a theoretical idea of how spaces develop and are reproduced—a process that is supposed to be made communicable by means of the concept of space—many empirical findings cannot be sufficiently explained, as shown in Chap. 6.

In particular, the conceptualization of space as place or territory cannot make the link among the various aspects of constitution since it does not grasp the process of constitution, but rather presupposes the result of the process—the emergence of places, limited territories, and so on. The individual aspects of the complex social process as a result of which spaces are developed or reproduced (and sometimes modified) go undetected since

space as territory or place is presupposed as something already known. The image of space as territory is a temptation to use the concept of space metaphorically, or it results in the assumption that space is a geographical, but not a sociological object.

In order to be able to analyze processes of constitution and changes to them, I shall in the course of the book derive space from the order of people and social goods, that is, I shall no longer presuppose two different realities—on the one hand, space, and on the other hand, people and social goods. Thus, space will be integrated into the course of action, and thus interpreted as a dynamic structure.

This way, sociology shall gain a concept that enables it to study the relational intermeshing of social goods and people, which have their own immanent potentiality. By virtue of studying the spatial distributions of people and goods, it becomes possible to analyze processes and situations of inclusion and exclusion in new ways. Changes in the organization of proximity will become comprehensible as a social transformation in the constitution of space, and no longer appear to be phenomena of dissolution.

Hermann L. Gukenbiehl (1995) gives a two-fold determination of the function of a basic sociological concept:

On the one hand, they are related to ‘social reality,’ which they designate and about which they are intended and supposed to inform... On the other hand, these concepts are related to theoretical models, to sociology’s general notions of social reality. (Gukenbiehl 1995, 13)

Accordingly, basic sociological concepts serve as means of communication and as means for the analysis of social reality, which is at the same time constituted by the choice of concept. This results in two sets of problems for the elaboration of a sociological concept of space:

1. What theoretical models are behind different concepts of space?
2. How does a concept of space have to be devised in order to grasp the changes to structures of arrangement detected in empirical studies?

In order to answer the question as to how space can be determined as a basic sociological concept, it is necessary to analyze the ideas of space that have influenced social scientific research on space up to now (Chap. 2). Furthermore, empirical studies must be examined with a view to what