

Urban discourse – city space, city language, city planning: Eco-semiotic approaches to the discourse analysis of urban renewal

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Abstract. Sustainable Urban Planning has to be understood as a communicative process connecting city architecture, technology, city district management and social infrastructure of neighbourhoods. The focus on sustainability raises the question of the necessary discourse conditions that allow architects and city planners enter into a dialogue with other urban stakeholders, citizens, local administrators and politicians, and discuss which cultural heritage should be preserved and where sustainability takes precedence. Looking at the style of discourse in urban communication brings also its socio-cultural modalities into focus. At the intersection of communication and discourse studies, urban ecology and sociology, the article focuses on the growing interest in architectural communication and, taking current approaches as a starting point, seeks to clarify which conversational maxims and discourse requirements by mediation, moderation, and integration are promising for achieving a new urban quality.

Keywords: Urban Discourse; sustainability; spatial sciences; eco-semiotics; energetic renewal; urban planning; Tempelhof Airport Berlin

1. Motivation

The everyday quality of life in urban areas is determined not only by development concepts such as architectural profile, economic interest, profitable remodelling and change management, but also, and decisively, by an ecologically *as well as* culturally integrated city development which, on the one hand, will consider the stock of historical buildings and, on the other hand, includes all stakeholders in the discourse with an eye towards a broad social acceptance of necessary innovations. Starting from current concepts of urban planning, which are energy-sustainable and conform to strict energy policy demands (in Germany generally subsumed under the header of '*Energiewende*' = 'energy turn') without destroying the historically

evolved infrastructure and social settings, this contribution attempts to raise the methodological consciousness of the complexity involved in these communicative processes in order to deal with the challenges of ecological urban development with the dynamics of “new urban quality”. Its goal is therefore to systematically analyse the communicative infrastructure in the discourse about urban energy concepts of the future.

Thus, this article undertakes the interdisciplinary task of bringing together a number of different traditions and strands of research that have recently caught the public’s attention without being aware of one another or even having developed a methodically integrated set of instruments that could do justice to such a complex task as reconciling ecologically sustainable as well as (largely) socially non-disruptive urban development. Such discursive fields involve not only the rather technical disciplines of civil engineering, geotechnics, energy economics as well as urban planning and administration, but also – especially after the so-called “spatial turn” – ecosemiotics, spatial sciences (in German, ‘*Raumwissenschaften*’, not to be confused with space research), linguistic inquiries into urban languages and urban sociology’s research into city neighbourhoods and milieus. Before we sketch some examples of urban transformation processes, it is necessary to introduce *intradisciplinary* positions in such an *interdisciplinary* dialogue. This ensures that all participants are sensitized to the polyperspectivism necessary for such discourse. In view of the methodologically-driven and discourse-analytical aim of this article, I will restrict myself to the fields of spatial sciences, eco-semiotics and urban language research before I develop a programme of analysis of the communicative infrastructure of energetic urban transformation, using the example of one of the recent controversies in Berlin (such as, for example, the debate about the reconstruction of the Berlin Castle, the “*Schloss-Debatte*”, the “never-ending story” of the new, massive Willy Brandt Airport, the gentrification of traditional working-class and student neighbourhoods such as Neukölln or Kreuzberg, privatized urban gardening and so forth), namely the incipient transformation of Tempelhof Airport.

2. Spatial sciences

After various *linguistic turns*, *pragmatic turns*, *iconic* or *visual* or *pictorial turns*, *performative turns*, *cultural turns*, *postmodern turns*, *postcolonial turns*, *medial turns* etc. in Arts and Humanities as well as in Social Sciences (cf. Münker 2009: 18 f.), the *spatial turn* was announced and countless disciplines started to look to it for salvation. A useful survey is offered in the 2009 volume on spatial sciences (*Raumwissenschaften*), edited by Stephan Günzel, which explores the meaning of ‘space’ in a variety of fields, ranging from aesthetics and architecture through ethnology and mathematics to sociology and

theology. In his parsimonious introduction, the editor offers a sketch of the history of spatial science (which had been exclusively Euclidean for a long time) since Kant. He rightfully points to psychological and physiological “*Ansätze zur empirischen Rückbettung des Apriorischen* [Approaches to an empirical re-embedding of the a-priori]” (Günzel 2009: 7), such as a forgotten study by Friedrich Carl Fresenius on *Die psychologischen Grundlagen der Raumwissenschaft* [The Psychological Foundations of Spatial Science] from 1868, or a 1870 lecture by Hermann von Helmholtz on “*Ursprung und Bedeutung geometrischer Axiome* [The origin and significance of geometrical axioms]”. This should suffice to refute the ever-popular charge of just following the latest fashion.

Even in my own field of German Studies (i.e. the study of German language and literature which is notably missing from the volume just mentioned), the ‘space paradigm’ has been influential. The often-used metaphor of ‘text as space’ indeed raises text-theoretical questions, which have long been discussed in a narratological context and have affected other scholarly approaches to texts. Terms such as ‘textual space’, ‘linguistic space’, ‘literary mapping’, ‘literary topography’, ‘heterotopia in literature’ are often adopted as concepts from other disciplines which operate in entirely different terminological networks. Thus, a multitude of currents has developed which, for example, focus on the technical and cultural ways of representing spaces (‘the topographical turn’) and should not be confused with approaches which focus on the description of literary spaces and spatial structures in aesthetic products (‘the topological turn’).

As is often the case in historically informed textual research, these approaches have been traced back to numerous forerunners (from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing through Karlfried v. Dürckheim to Ernst Cassirer and Otto F. Bollnow). Against such rather subject-centred phenomenological approaches (excepting Lessing), the founder of the Tartu School, semiotician of culture Juri Lotman (long ignored in the West) maintains that the symbolic space of literature is already a result of a specific, culturally determined use of signs: by treating the relation of narrative texts as ‘abstract models of reality’ to the ‘world view’ of a specific culture as analogous, he translates his semantic model of space into a pragmatic, cultural-historical socio-environmental context (cf. Lotman 1974).

In Linguistics, Winfried Nöth proposed to conceptualize ‘text as space’ semiotically already early on (cf. Nöth 1994; cf. Hess-Lüttich 1998). He detected text-space especially in the use of metaphors and found a wealth of examples for the geometry and topography of textual space, as he called it. For him, the findings serve as proof of the cognitive origin of linguistic expressions referring to one’s orientation in space (cf. Schmauks 2002). Indeed, cognitive semantics derives this remarkable accumulation of spatial metaphors in everyday language use from the biological

significance of the orientation of people in their immediate environment during the process of language acquisition (Lakoff 1987: 269–292). In her book *Space, Space Language and Language Spaces*, a student of Nöth's, Karin Wenz (1997) further developed this approach and investigated the semiotic relations between spatial cognition and textual representation of spaces (cf. Wenz 2009).

Out of methodological-terminological interest, I began tracing the metaphor of space, so common in many disciplines nowadays, beyond disciplinary boundaries to its origin in the spatially oriented Earth Sciences (Hess-Lüttich 2011). With critical intent, I summarize the development of the term 'space' from traditional geography to the more recent cultural geography. The spatialization of *social* facts (and their visualization) came to my attention as well. In attempting a synthesis, I explored possible points of contact between literary (or literary- and textual-critical, respectively) and cultural-geographic concepts of space and established the premises for a contemporary understanding of 'space' with an eye to the tension between placeless medial networks and local assertions of identity eventually to reveal literary texts as transmitters of culturally-specific codes and symbols of 'space'.

The potential for insight in a cooperation of cultural-geographical and literary topographies remains untapped, as does that of a semiotic integration of topological relations in (literary) texts as model-creating systems (in the sense of Lotman), which point to the world view of a specific (in this case, urban) culture as abstract (aesthetic) models of reality. The topological approach in the tradition of the Tartu School is more consequential in its programme to interpret geo-scientific mapping and literary fiction as models of reality of specific cultures with their attendant significative relations, above and beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Given the increasing complexity of a multidimensional, interconnected world, the impulses given by Lotman unexpectedly become relevant for a dialogue between cultural and natural sciences, between linguistics and literary studies, media and communication sciences, insofar as, e.g. literary texts are interpreted as vectors of culture-specific self-assessment and as witnesses of a changed (and changing) perception of space – such as the understanding of the role of Metropolises in literature and film (cf. Hess-Lüttich *et al.* 2010).

3. Eco-semiotics

In these days of climate change and “the energy turn” to which the German government finally committed itself in the wake of the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in 2011, ecological conflict communication becomes a necessity for all concerned groups and disciplines, as infelicitous communication may hinder or even prevent ecologically necessary measures, especially while growing criticism of the costs of

renewable energy (sun, wind, water, biomass) is abused by the lobbyists of big energy companies and by local interest groups to inhibit or even obstruct the overdue remodelling of energy supply in metropolitan areas. What I said a few years ago in the volume *Eco-Semiotics* (Hess-Lüttich 2006) about *environmental communication* from an intercultural-institutional perspective (media) and *developmental communication* from an intercultural-interpersonal perspective (dialogue) can now be put to use for a future-oriented urban planning.

In all cases, a careful discourse analysis of interdisciplinary and inter(sub)cultural communicative constellations serves the aim of transforming and, if possible, enhancing discursive practices. In group communication of such both highly specific and heterogeneous constellations the danger of misunderstandings is very real, as opposing interests, (disciplinary) language differences and (sub)cultural contrasts as well as regional divergences in the use of language, signs and rituals can impede communication. The willingness and ability to communicate beyond disciplinary and cultural boundaries is paramount here, and discourse research with its interdisciplinary orientation can contribute to theoretical reflection, empirical observation and fruitful application and mediation.

Analogous to the long-established branches of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, patholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, *ecolinguistics* has tried to establish its own profile in recent years. As always, this aspiration was first met with full-bore distrust on part of those who saw it as yet another attempt at introducing yet another fashionable term into the discussion. In my introduction (Hess-Lüttich 2006) I therefore mentioned, just to be on the safe side, the long tradition in which Einar Haugen, the well-known American scholar of Norwegian origin, applied the term *ecology* – defined by Jena biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 as “*Wissenschaft von den Beziehungen des Organismus zur umgebenden Außenwelt* [the science of the relation of the organism to its environment]” – to language and proposed to explore ‘language ecology’ systematically as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment” (Haugen 1972: 325).

Even today, however, the technical term *ecolinguistics*, which evolved from this research, is not used in any clear-cut sense. Many different things are subsumed under that alluring title, as Alwin Fill has shown in his numerous works on the topic (Fill 1993, 1996, 1998; Fill *et al.* 2002). I will not go into the various branches of ecolinguistics here; instead, I will pursue those approaches which emerged from extralinguistic-ecological interests and paid attention to the effects of language use on the ecological equilibrium of nature in order to gain a much clearer picture of the relation between linguistic and ecological biodiversity than had been achieved before.

These approaches, however, must be extended into a methodologically sophisticated eco-semiotics in order to form a systematic locus from which the

transdisciplinary research of the semiotic interrelation between organisms and their environments can proceed. We may assure those sceptical of “faddish” terminology that the interest in this topic goes back beyond Peirce (Nöth 1996): perhaps its origins lie in Hippocratic medicine (Böhme 1996), but it can certainly be traced back to medieval scholasticism (Thomas Aquinas), continues into the Renaissance-era doctrine of signatures (Paracelsus) and goes beyond Peirce, for example into the eco-semiotic models of ‘environmental science’ by Jakob von Uexküll (Thure v. Uexküll 1998) or into the functional circles of ‘semiotic ecology’ by Bernese psychologist Alfred Lang (1998). From there, we can draw connections to sociological and system-theoretical models of ‘ecological communication’, as proposed by Niklas Luhmann (2004[1986]) with his differentiation of functional systems; this also inspired Trampe (1990) to his ‘eco-linguistic’ approach, which he later suggested to be expanded into an eco-semiotics. It is only from such a base that we can ask eco-semiotic questions about the communicative conditions of the implementation of energetic urban renewal and conduct a discourse-analytical inquiry into the dialogue between experts and interest groups.

4. Urban language research

The city as a ‘space of communication’ and, thus, a linguistic object in the narrow sense, was only (re)discovered in the 1970s (after a few dialectological predecessors). The development of sociolinguistics brought renewed interest to the spectrum of varieties of language use, first in geographically defined, then also in socially differentiated spaces. In the beginning, there was a focus on the dialectal varieties in rural spaces, in which dialectology sought its purest expression. After some time, however, urban space with its incomparably greater variety came into focus. This complexity, in turn, required an entirely different set of methods than those offered by traditional dialectology, even in its most sophisticated approaches. After the methodologically ground-breaking work by Joshua Fishman, William Labov or Lesley Milroy, urban language research established its own field of research between sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication, language contact and multilingualism research, language change and youth language research (cf. the research summary in Dittmar, Schlieben-Lange 1982: 9–86).

However, these early works were focused on a correlation of phonological variables (Labov) or models of variation grammars (Dittmar). To me, this perspective seemed methodologically sophisticated and adequate from a linguistic point of view, yet too narrow in a discourse-analytical sense to do justice to the complexity of structures of communication in urban spaces. Already in my book *Angewandte Sprachsoziologie* I called for a description of urban languages as networks of

interaction, ordered by group-sociological categories (Hess-Lüttich 1987: 68–72). Thus, with an eye on John J. Gumperz on the one hand, and Michael A. K. Halliday on the other hand, I wanted to integrate ethnographic and socio-semiotic methods of analysis into a polyperspectival-multifactorial discourse analysis of urban communication, including its symbolic-sublinguistic modes of expression.

This demand was met in the German-speaking world in an exemplary way by the task force of the *Institut für deutsche Sprache* in Mannheim, which conducted a project entitled *Kommunikation in der Stadt* [Communication in the city] (cf. Kallmeyer 1994, 1995). In this project, the linguistic conduct of token multicultural groups of denizens (long-time residents, recent settlers, migrants, foreigners) in specified neighbourhoods was documented over the course of several years. Research into the resulting corpus was focused on the actual processes of linguistic communication in a variety of constellations, but also on the communicative networks in which they took place. The methodological precondition for this is the consideration of the ordering of social spaces of people in the city, and thus of anthropological and socio-psychological approaches to the research of such networks. Gumperz' differentiation between 'social setting', 'social situation' and 'social event' makes relevant the connection between discursive processes and the territorial spaces in which they take place.

Our inquiry can be tied to this approach to modern urban linguistic research and others that build upon it (cf. Stienen 2006; Krefeld 2008; Löffler, Lorenz 2010) by asking about the role of the relation between place, motivation and interest in group construction, by asking about the significance of norms, knowledge, collective and individual attitudes to language of group members for their communication, their view of themselves and their differentiation from other groups and by asking how all this is semiotically manifested in group-typical forms of communication, patterns of discourse and ways of arguing.

5. Urbanism

The currents of research we have mentioned may now converge into what, for quite some time now, has been called Urban Studies, to conform sociologically to the tendency of staking out disciplinary claims and establishing academic reputations. In this framework, stakeholders concerned about technical innovation and urban planning (such as engineers, energy providers, architects, city planners, communal politicians, citizen's committees, tenants' and consumer associations) can be sensitized not only to the economic, legal and political implications of their actions, but also to their social, cultural, linguistic and historical premises. The observation of the development of cities, especially mega-cities, with their

countertendencies of expansion and fragmentation is especially suited to a discourse-analytically integrated inquiry such as ours, into the communicative infrastructure in (technological) processes of innovation (such as the energetic urban renewal), as the need for a connection of technological policies of innovation, political control and social practices has become more and more obvious in the course of the discourse of sustainability in the last quarter century (cf. Hess-Lüttich 2007).

This is accompanied by a development within the formerly quantitative-economically oriented Urban Studies, in which the aforementioned categories (social, cultural, linguistic, historical) become more important, as ‘sustainability’ without the participation of those affected by the (technological) changes is just about impossible to achieve. These new approaches which operate both quantitatively as well as qualitatively are accorded special importance by Gesine Schiewer (2013) insofar as they are concerned with cities as physical spaces with specific urban infrastructures and socio-political biotopes. The international differences between European types of cities with their historically grown centre, accompanied by a compression of infrastructures (compact cities, mobility, neighbourhood management) and the polycentric megacities in some threshold countries with their tendency to fragment in a physical, economic and social sense (slums, gated communities, ethnical segregation etc.) are enormous. Therefore, interdisciplinary research into this topic is faced with new epistemological challenges.

The discourse-analytical approaches of Urban Studies seek to meet these challenges by accommodating the social divergences, objective interests and cultural as well as linguistic conditions of the stakeholders on the one hand, and the possibility or necessity, respectively, of urban planning and political control on the other hand. For urban planning to be possible at all, Schiewer (2013) contends that the cacophony of voices of those concerned must lead to a consensus-directed dialogue in which public and private premises and interests as well as social and economic goals can be negotiated in an approximately rational manner. Such a collaboratively oriented dialogue management needs to keep in mind at all times the relation between power relations, interests and the goals of planners, because an assumption of the symmetrical set-up of dialogue (in the sense of Habermas’ rational discourse) is, of course, not very realistic in actual practice. Dialogue management in this sense must assume that city planners “engage in discourse, conversation, negotiation and persuasion with several groups in society which tell different stories” (Albrechts, Denayer 2001: 372). Not only do they have different interests, they do not even share the same knowledge and norms; their world views, i.e. their interpretation of reality, differ. According to Albrechts and Denayer (2001: 372; cf. Schiewer 2013), this leads to the fact that

[...] public discourse suffers from the implicit divergence, because societies like ours have political mechanisms only for resolving conflicting interests, not for conflicting views of reality. *Because* the mechanisms for dealing with conflicting world-views, discourse communities are lacking (and because in discourse, we mainly stick to our own group and the language we ‘understand’), we only seldom notice that perceptions and not only interests in society differ markedly.

We therefore need a broad research agenda in order to describe *urban communication* as a complex, historically and culturally specific process of negotiation. This is exactly the goal of a new project of the Urban Systems research profile at the University of Essen. It deals with the styles, themes, relations, conditions and functions of those communicative practices, which serve to articulate and constitute a certain view of urbanity within such a process of negotiation. Here, urbanity as a result of cultural-historically specific processes of communication is understood as “*Distinktionskategorie im Sinne der habitualisierten Form sozialer Abgrenzung*” [“category of distinction in the sense of habitualized patterns of social demarcation”] (Gurr *et al.* 2012: 4). The structures of meaning produced in such communicative processes are themselves bound to their media of articulation, meaning semiotic resources such as language, pictures, sounds, illustrations, maps, notations etc.

6. Communication infrastructures in energetic urban renewal

The research-historical and terminological premises we have developed so far shall now be illustrated by applying them to our established research goal. The development of innovative renewable energy concepts, which aim at the reduction of greenhouse gases and the emancipation from fossil and nuclear fuels under the point of view of sustainability belong among the planning, architectural and engineering challenges faced by programmatic cities in the 21st century (cf. Nerdinger, Wolfrum 2009). About this, there is a consensus in Germany (though not in the European Union, let alone the rest of the world, as evidenced by the results and rituals of the annual climate conferences) after landmark political decisions about the so-called ‘energy turn’ since the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. If centralized mono-functional top-down models of urban development fail more and more often in practice, then perhaps it is more promising to think about sustainable urban planning (in terms of our premises developed above) as a communicative process, which conceives of urban construction, technological development, housing and the urban social structure as being interconnected. In this sense, there is the question of the conditions under which all parties concerned may be brought to the table. With the forms, structures and functions of their communication, their socio-cultural

systems of premises come to the fore, and with them, the historical framework (building stock, monument preservation, milieu preservation etc.). Our research goal is informed by a growing interest in “architectural communication” (Fischer, Delitz 2009) and seeks to clarify which conversational maxims for a new urban quality through mediation, moderation and integration seem more promising than hitherto existing practices.

The goal of ‘new urban quality’ is not only the development of ecologically sustainable concepts of construction and renewal, but also an instigation of socially, historically and culturally informed and participative urban development in the interest of a broad social acceptance of processes of innovation. This can be shown with the example of urban energetic renewal (that is, the development of architectural concepts which take into account all possibilities of conservation of energy resources, accompanied by the use of various forms of renewable energy from the very beginning) with a view to recent urban discourses, postmodern concepts of life and controversial debates about major construction projects, whose costs have to be justified to voters by political decision makers.

The transmission of socio-political necessities, technical possibilities and individual needs of those concerned will be among the central tasks of urban communication. The research of communicative infrastructures is therefore a supplement to the analysis of city development, such as inquiries into material science and energy demands, considering the fact that the days of cities running on fossil and nuclear fuels are numbered. New urban quality often appears to be a task of communicative coordination of different interest groups with their disparate premises, interests and systems of values.

If new urban quality is also understood as a *social process*, then the participation of citizens in urban planning decisions can serve as a counterweight to tendencies of social fragmentation. Urban space, in the sense of the concept of space developed above, is to be understood in the broadest sense not only as an immediate, physically coherent space, but also as socially constituted and, through digital networks, medially potentially ubiquitous. Therefore, it must be accessed communicatively, should it be relevant for the reconciling of complementary ways of life and the identification of citizens with their city (neighbourhood).

In other words, we need to consider not only the obvious factors of architectural-technical and economical-financial feasibility, but also those of social acceptance of innovation and the cultural coding of building stocks, i.e., the production of consensual knowledge in the dialogue of the stakeholders, which, in the European context, is also a commandment of the democratic constitution of urban communities. Of course, considering the use of ‘ecology’ as a marketing strategy, an apparent consensus on the ecological future of cities may remain contested, especially

when the habitually ecological way of life of the urban middle class is anything but representative in the context of migration and demographic change. Therefore, a fundamental change in energy systems must be attended by a fundamental change of consciousness regarding the interrelation of energy supply and resource consumption – a communicative task *par excellence*.

Our main research questions, therefore, aim at (i) the communicative structures, which determine the implementation of concepts for urban energy renewal in society in the future; (ii) at the stakeholders in these structures or networks, respectively; (iii) at their interests and their access to the public in a city; and (iv) at the conditions of a positive perception of the ecological city as a result of communicative negotiation and mediation.

Mediation as a discursive transfer of knowledge is especially important. From the wealth of negative experiences in the past, we finally need to draw the right conclusions and critically expose the inadequate structures of past urban communication. A city with a positive energy balance and with active participation of its denizens are equally important goals, for economic productivity and social cohesion are dependent on each other. The economic narrowing of the term ‘sustainability’ to a mere marketing strategy could be overcome by including perspectives of Semiotics, Sociology and Communication Research in urban planning.

The theoretical requirements have already been established. Both *communication in the city* and *communication about the city* are on the agenda (Warnke 2011; Gerhard, Warnke 2011). The concept of new urban quality in this sense connects construction and spatial planning with communicative infrastructure (cf. Schrenk *et al.* 2013) and city development in the balance of innovation and identity (Ivanisin 2006). Urbanism, therefore, is not only a product of architecture, but of a synthesis of patterns of experience of stakeholders and their perception of quality of life (cf. Löw 2001, 2008). In the tradition of social interactionism, there could be a sharper profiling of the mechanism by which shared knowledge is produced through communicative action and by which construction planning is negotiated dynamically (cf. Christmann 2004; Matthiesen 2008; Berking 2008). City development needs public debate, the dynamics of which are subject to social and media control (demographic change, linguistic change, change in ways of life, local media, etc.) and social developments (heterogeneity, migration, multilingualism, marginalization, gentrification etc.).

The methodological requirements for an analysis of communicative networks of urban stakeholders (see above on urban language research) as well as for the dependency of energy use on social spheres and technical parameters (Genske *et al.* 2010) have been established too. The interaction of logics of action of media and institutions on the macrolevel, local stakeholders on the mesolevel and

their interpersonal networks on the microlevel (group formation and linguistic landscapes) can thus be subjected to empirical observation, for example through the establishment of discourse corpora on urban energetic renewal via explorative interviews with planners, citizens' initiatives, interest groups as well as the linguistic analysis of pertinent media reports. New insights into individual and public constitution of knowledge on new urban quality could be achieved through qualitative and quantitative assessments of corpus data compiled of interview protocols and textual sources within the framework of a multi-level analysis (e.g. according to DIMEAN cf. Warnke, Spitzmüller 2008; Spitzmüller, Warnke 2011; for another multi-level model of semiotic analysis cf. Siefkes 2013). The connection of urban planning and architecture to social research, linguistic analysis and communication science can contribute to an empirical, interdisciplinary spatial science with immediate practical uses, insofar as it allows for the establishment of transdisciplinary expertise for urban and neighbourhood policies, which provides empirically grounded basic knowledge to government and administrative decisions for a sustainable planning of space and its use in city construction.

7. 'The Big Open' in Berlin: '*Tempelhofer Freiheit*'

A recent example of this in Germany is the current debate about the future use of the Berlin Tempelhof airport area, which was closed down on October 30, 2008. Here, the "availability of space" and the "historical physiognomy of the place" face off in an exemplary way (Assmann 2009). The defunct airport with its Tempelhofer Feld is historically so charged with significance that we can speak of a palimpsest of history that will affect the uninhibited repurposing by urban planning. The arrangement of layers can be sketched with a few strokes. The history of the place begins long before architect Ernst Sagebiel conceptualized the airport.

The field got its name in the 13th century from the fact that it housed the convent of the Order of the Temple (*'tempelhove'*). In the 18th century, "soldier king" Frederick William I of Prussia used the area as a drill ground and it aroused international attention a couple of hundred years later through the famous "three emperors' parade" of 1882 before Emperor William I, Czar Alexander II of Russia and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria (Trunz 2008: 11). The sensational air shows by the Wright brothers in September 1907 foreshadowed the later significance of the place: Tempelhof became Berlin's central airport in 1925. In 1935, Adolf Hitler and Albert Speer ordered an expansion of the place into a representative "world airport", as an architectonic sign of their idea of the political significance of the Third Reich, whereas its true face was, of course, revealed by the Columbia concentration camp on

the margins of the field, which was the only concentration camp on Berlin soil. Until its dissolution in 1936, it housed prominent prisoners such as Rabbi Leo Baeck, actor and cabaret artist Werner Finck, and Communist leader Erich Honecker.

As the Reich lay in ruins, the unfinished airport was repurposed by the Allies for their legendary airlift that ensured the survival of the people in West Berlin that was blockaded by the Soviets. A monument by Eduard Ludwig on Platz der Luftbrücke commemorates these events up to the present day (cf. Trotnow, v. Kostka 2010: 15ff). Only in 1962 was the civilian airport reconstructed, inspired by the original plans of Ernst Sagebiel. It became the “gate to the world” for the besieged citizens of Berlin and a medially omnipresent point of entrance for visitors from around the world (cf. Trunz 2008: 114). After the defeat of a citizens’ initiative to preserve it, first Tegel airport and then the new Berlin Willy Brandt Airport were scheduled to take over both functions. Willy Brandt Airport, however, will not be constructed on time and became a disaster in terms of planning and constructions – but that is a story for another day.

The monumental terminal in Tempelhof with its intimidating space dimension is now empty and the surrounding area lies idle. The historical layers are gradually supplanted by new functions. Planning started in the mid-1990s, first in the narrow circles of planning bureaus and expert committees, then with participation from the populace in Internet forums and surveys. In 2010, a contest for landscape planning was called, in which the original idea of a park was supposed to gain more prominence (cf. Seidel 2012: 32). As people were already using the space as *Tempelhofer Freiheit* for their own purposes, the city senate planned a careful building development from the fringes (by preserving the central park) to connect the “Feld” to its adjacent neighbourhoods. Since the release of the master plan in May of 2013, opponents and proponents of the plan are fighting bitterly in committees, the media and forums.

The layers of the palimpsest play an important role here. The architecture got its semiotic imprint from the influence of Albert Speer on the plans of Sagebiel; the buildings of the airport represent both the monumentalist state architecture as an expression of the Nazi regime’s will to power in stone as well as a figurehead of German engineering in the style of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (‘New Objectivity’, cf. Reichhardt, Schäche 2008: 23 ff.). The semiotic ensembles of both functions (space dimensions, the relief of the imperial eagle, the materials, the reinforced concrete construction) are still operative today. Embedded in the megalomaniacal *Germania* plan, with its axial orientation to the Kreuzberg monument by Karl Friedrich Schinkels as the place of National Socialist solstice celebrations, the building points towards the architectural concept of the NS ideology (cf. Reichhardt, Schäche 2008: 100; Raichle 2010) and, through the Columbia concentration camp and the fighter

plane production of the Weser aircraft factories, it becomes the place of its execution, a “protagonist of the war”.

After the war, new functions and layers of significance were added. ‘Tempelhof’ stood for ‘airlift’, for survival and the will to freedom and, later on, for the connection of an island enclosed by a socialist dictatorship to the “free West”, as a symbol of the change in perception of the Western allies: “an *occupying force became a protecting power*” (“*Aus Besatzern wurden Beschützer*” – Geppert 2010: 137). After the historic events of 1989, this function lost its meaning. New meanings must be found for the empty building and the empty field. Tempelhof as a historical place has left signs (cf. Assmann 2009: 16f.), history is inscribed in it, it is semantically charged in several ways, which explains the commitment in the debate about the transition from historical place to public space. Whether “any given geographical area is perceived as place or space is not a question of their inherent qualities, but a question of stance, perspective, current interests in taking action” (“*eine gegebene geographische Fläche eher als Ort oder als Raum ansieht, ist nicht eine Frage ihrer inhärenten Qualität, sondern eine Frage des Blicks, der Perspektive, des aktuellen Handlungs-Interesses*”; Assmann 2009: 22).

This historical, functional and semantic change must be reconstructed layer by layer; the semiotic changes resulting from a change in function and a loss of function must be defined, if the debate is to yield anything. Interpreting ‘Tempelhof’ as a sign means assigning new and additional meaning to the historically charged semantics of the signifiers ‘airport building’ and ‘air field’, considering their loss of function (cf. Eco 2002). This is the meaning of the plans for its development as a model project of future urban planning. The strategies for the energetic development of the Tempelhofer Feld, commissioned by the Berlin senate administration, could be a blueprint for this. Currently, the energy demand of the landmarked building is enormous (150 kWh/m²a), while the area is energetically unutilized. The potential contribution of possible energy sources must therefore be assessed.

The masterplan for an energy-neutral repurposing of Tempelhof airport presented by Thomas Herter and his team (www.arup.com) at the International Congress for Sustainable Building (*Consense. Internationaler Kongress für Nachhaltiges Bauen*) in June 2010 in Stuttgart aims at providing for the energy requirements through the integration of several sources such as the supplementation of an in-house co-generator with solar and geothermal energy, biogas plants and moderate peripheral development according to most recent energy standards to bridge adjacent neighbourhoods, which promises a sustainable supply of energy in summer and winter (cf. Herter 2010). The discussion of such or similar proposals allows us to add another layer to the Tempelhof palimpsest without consigning the deeper layers to oblivion: from the memory of totalitarian will to expression arises the demand to make the

democratically negotiated design of future urban spaces ecological, financially feasible and humane (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Integration of planning and development (Herter 2010).¹

A first step towards achieving such a goal was a referendum on May 25th, 2014 on a citizens' initiative called "100% Tempelhofer Feld", which argues for the *status quo* of the field without any alteration and housing development. An alternative proposal submitted by the Berlin House of Representatives suggests not only the preservation of some 230 hectares of the green area for recreational purposes, but also a moderate development of the borders of the field as a bridge to the neighbouring quarters, using the possibilities of urban energy renewal (see Fig-s 2, 3 from Michaelis-Merzbach 2014: 14, 28).

Given the fact that Berlin has a net growth of some 50,000 people *per annum* and the cost of living is constantly rising, one would have expected a clear majority vote for the second proposal. However, the people of Berlin voted for the *status quo*. The campaign serves as a forceful example of miscommunication between politics, city administration and the public and is a strong argument for the necessity of improving this very process of urban renewal, which can only be successful if all the parties involved work together and understand one another's objectives.

¹ Herter, Thomas 2010. Energieneutraler Masterplan am Beispiel ehemaliger Flughafen Tempelhof. Available at: www.dgnb-international.com/.../ThomasHerter_ManahmenkonzepteEnergieeffizienz_Consense2010.pdf (accessed 24.04.2014).



Figure 2. The Tempelhofer Feld according to the citizens' initiative "100 % Tempelhofer Feld".



Figure 3. The Tempelhofer Feld as proposed by the Berlin House of Representatives.

8. Postscript in Winter 2016

It was for only one summer that the citizens' initiative "100 % Tempelhofer Feld" enjoyed its victory and "the Big Open" for recreation, football, games, roller-skating, picnics and fun on the weekend. The campaign, on which the participants had spent more than 40,000 Euro of their own money, had been successful. A new Act guaranteed the *status quo*, an open space for the people in the neighbourhood, a vast area of grassland in the middle of the city, free of housing investment and speculation, which in the view of the initiative was a sign of a citizen-oriented capital, a sign of freedom and humanity.

Yet in Autumn 2015, Berlin was confronted with what has become globally known as the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe. Within one year, more than one million people fled from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Maghreb to Germany alone. At short notice, Berlin had to cope with some 80,000 refugees in need of shelter, as the temperature was falling below 0° C (= 32° F). In the name of humanity, the people had to be accommodated somehow. Those who voted for the wasteland mostly consider themselves as politically leftist, ecologically minded, anti-capitalist. The same people also argue for welcoming the refugees, and for their integration into the community. It is a classic dilemma, in which one argument for humanity stands against the other. What is there to do?

The Senate of Berlin had to make a quick decision. On 28 January 2016, the majority of the House passed a new Tempelhof Act repealing the existing Tempelhof Act which had been passed after the referendum. The new Act allows a camp for refugees to be provisionally set up in the apron area between the hangars and the runways, but not in the field itself. The huge hangars had been partly used for hundreds of refugees already, now an additional space of nearly 120,000 square metres could be used for temporary accommodation (“*mobile Unterkünfte*”) without even touching the grassland. Only 3.5% of the field would be used for the purpose, the Senate argues, but it would provide room for more than 7,000 people in urgent need of shelter. According to the new Tempelhof Act, the temporary buildings should be erected for three years and then be removed to assure the restitution of the *status quo ante*.

Besides the temporary accommodation for the refugees, the new plans suggest providing halls for childcare facilities and language instruction (‘school’ 4,500 m²), sports fields (4,800 m²), football grounds, a multifunctional market place, a job centre and a centre for medical treatment (3,200 m²), a canteen kitchen (2,000 m²) where the refugees could prepare their own food, workshops for vocational education and craftsmanship (1,600 m²), storage space (3,600 m²), in short, a multicultural village for some 7,500 people in the middle of the city, but not a ghetto for refugees from Islamic countries, at least according to the official statements of the Senate and the city administration (see Figure 4; cf. Czienskowski 2016; Schönball 2016).

Although the planners and the politicians asserted that the recreation area would not be affected at all, the opposition to these plans for Germany’s largest refugee camp is grimly determined to stop the materialization of the project. It argues that a camp of this size would prevent the refugees from alien cultures to be integrated into German society, the estimated cost of 1,200 € per month per capita would be too high, the private space available per person would be too small, the risk of conflicts among people of different religious orientations would be too high, the lack of work and insecure perspectives would lead to frustration and depression and aggression.

The same people who, in the name of humanity and citizenship, opposed the initial plans for social housing on the edge of the field for ecological (or “anti-capitalist”) reasons now oppose the erection of accommodation units for refugees. Some of their arguments sound more or less overtly xenophobic. Members of the Green Party suspect that the Senate is attempting to turn their victory in the referendum into a defeat and to circumvent the original Tempelhof Act preventing the city investing on the fringe of the field.

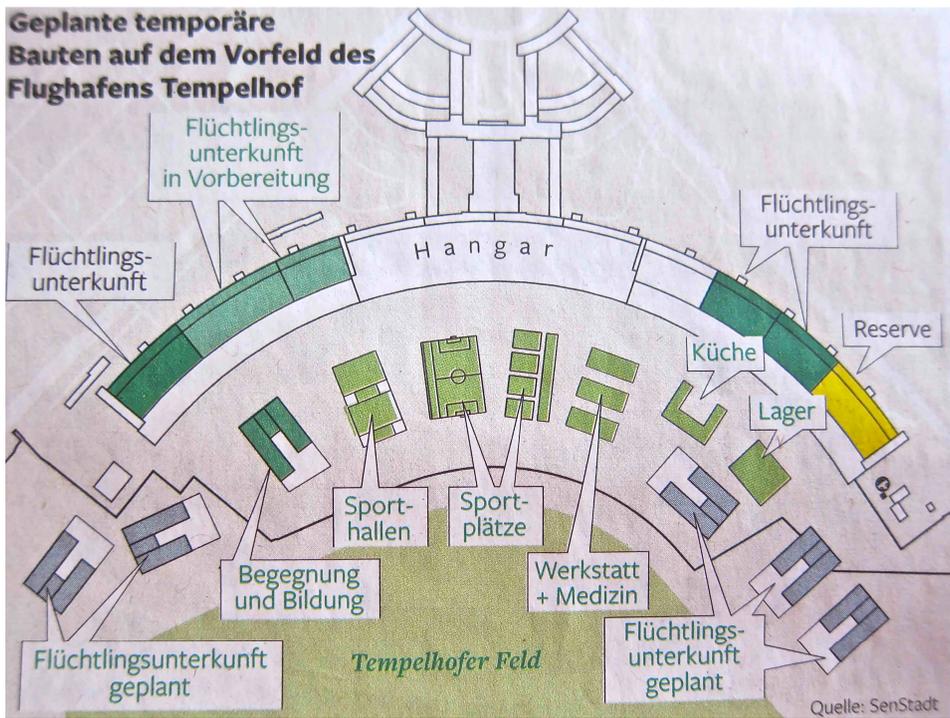


Figure 4. Plans for a refugee camp on the Tempelhof airport
(*Berliner Morgenpost* 29 January 2016: 9).

The latest news is that the Belgian art historian Chris Dercon, the new director-elect of the *Volksbühne*, one of the leading theatres of the German capital, who, until 2015, was director of the Tate Gallery of Modern Art in London, wants to realize large art projects at the airport. The hangars probably remind him of the huge turbine hall of the Tate Gallery. With Hangar 5 having been used for fashion fairs and pop festivals already, will there now be room for new utilization concepts on a more permanent basis or do these ideas simply reveal the helplessness of urban planning and city administrators in dealing with public space and buildings too large for practical or cultural purposes like the Humboldt Forum in the new City Castle (*Stadtschloss*)? The debate is open. It will go on, as the famous last lines of Karl Scheffler's book *Berlin – ein Stadtschicksal*, first published in 1910 and newly edited by Florian Illies (2015), remain topical – namely that “Berlin is a city condemned forever to *becoming* and never *being*” (“Berlin ist eine Stadt, verdammt dazu, ewig zu *werden*, niemals zu *sein*”).

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Дискурс города – пространство, язык и планирование: Экосемиотические подходы к дискурсивному анализу обновления города

Жизнеспособное планирование нужно понимать как коммуникативный процесс, связующее звено между архитектурой, технологией, администрированием и социальной инфраструктурой окрестностей. В статье поднимается вопрос о необходимых условиях дискурса, позволяющих архитекторам и планировщикам вступить в контакт с заинтересованными лицами, жителями города, местной администрацией и политиками, чтобы в ходе дискуссий выяснить, какую часть культурного наследия нужно сохранить и какие изменения необходимы с точки зрения перспективного планирования города. Рассмотрение стиля городской коммуникации также фокусируется на ее социокультурных модальностях. Настоящая работа, находясь в точке соприкосновения изучения коммуникации и дискурса, городской экологии и социологии, сосредотачивается на растущем интересе к архитектурной коммуникации. Принимая во внимание последние разработки, автор стремится прояснить, какие максимы общения и дискурсивные требования наиболее перспективны в процессе опосредования, модерирования и интеграции для достижения нового уровня в развитии города.

Linnadiskursus – linnaruum, linna keel, linnaplaneerimine: Ökosemiotilised lähenemised linnauuendamise diskursuseanalüüsile

Jätkusuutlikku linnaplaneerimist tuleb mõista kommunikatiivse protsessina, mis seob linna arhitektuuri, tehnoloogiat, linnaosade administreerimist ja naabruskondade sotsiaalset taristut. Keskendumine jätkusuutlikule linnaplaneerimisele tõstatab küsimuse vajalikest diskursuseatingimustest, mis võimaldavad arhitektidel ja linnaplaneerijatel alustada suhtlemist teiste linna huvigruppide, linnakodanike, kohaliku administratsiooni ja poliitikutega, ning läbi rääkida, milline osa kultuuripärandist peaks säilima ja millisel juhul on esmatähtis jätkusuutlikkus. Linnakommunikatsiooni stiili vaatlemine seab fookusesse ka selle sotsio-kultuurilised modaalsused. Kommunikatsiooni- ja diskursuseuuringute, linnaökoloogia ja sotsioloogia kokkupuutepunktis asudes keskendub käesolev töö kasvavale huvile arhitektuurilise kommunikatsiooni vastu ning, võttes aluseks praegusaegsed lähenemised, püüab selgitada, millised suhtluspõhimõtted ja nõuded diskursusele on kõige paljutõotavamad vahendamisel, modereerimisel ja lõimimisel, et saavutada uus linnaline kvaliteet.