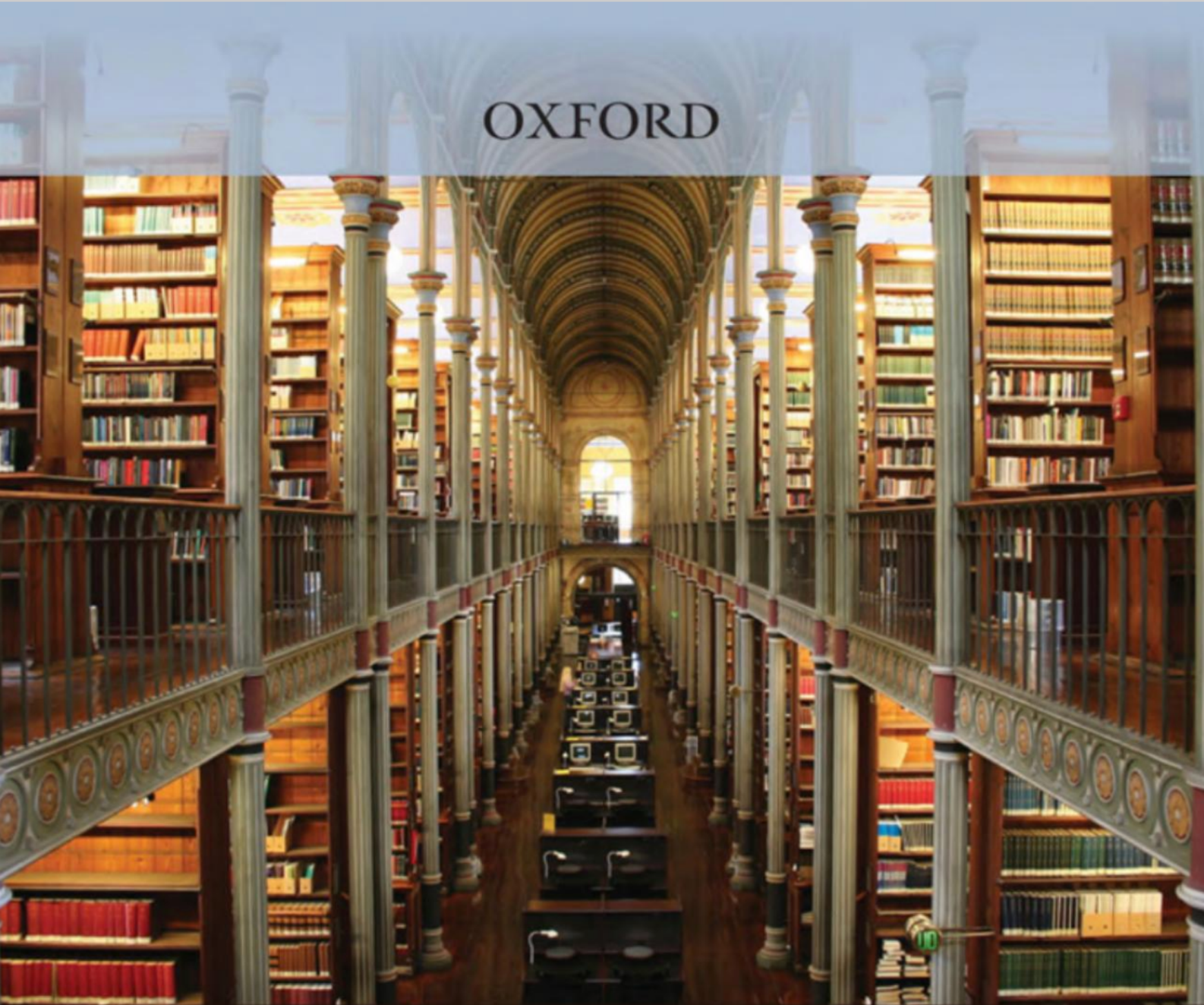




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Maarten A. Hajer

The Politics of Environmental Discourse

Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process

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sort of deliberations were the basis of a given claim. Discursive dominance or hegemony is thus seen as an essentially socio-cognitive product, whereby the social and the cognitive are seen as essentially intertwined. Hence arguments can convince because of some property they have—e.g. plausibility—that countervailing ideas lack, but one has to reckon that in such cases plausibility is the product of persuasion which is not a purely cognitive process.

This struggle does not take place in a social vacuum but in the context of existing institutional practices. One should analyse in which practices discursive dominance is based and by what means specific contentions are furthered. In other words, institutional arrangements are seen as the pre-conditions of the process of discourse-formation. Yet the organization of science, of policy-making, or of democratic procedures does not determine this process: from Foucault and Harré we derive the insight that institutions (and the practices that constitute them) need discursive 'software' to operate and produce effects. In terms of research this implies that we should find out how institutions are made to operate through subject positionings and structure positionings that lend closure to an institutional machinery that can be put to different uses.⁵¹ In this respect discourse analysis should illuminate two things. First, the way in which cognitive and social commitments are routinely reproduced. Second, the way in which discursive 'interpellations' take place, whereby interpellations are understood as those moments where routinized proceedings are interrupted. The focus of analysis here is on those discursive practices which, drawing on the work of Harré, can be understood as the inter-discursive transfer points where actors exchange positional statements and where new discursive relationships and positionings are created.

Discourse has been defined as a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities. We will speak of the condition of discourse structuration if the credibility of actors in a given domain requires them to draw on the ideas, concepts, and categories of a given discourse, for instance, if actors' credibility

⁵¹ Obviously, some institutional arrangements can also be found to have a structural bias against certain applications.

function only to the extent that they are constantly reproduced in actual practices, these routinized institutional practices tend to have a high degree of salience.⁴⁶

A perhaps more serious limitation to the usefulness of the positioning perspective for political science can be derived from Habermas's argument that the intersubjective element is precisely what has been marginalized in capitalism and is increasingly being replaced by money power.⁴⁷ Focusing on the intersubjective moment might therefore obscure the understanding of the real power relationships. However, even money power assumes some sort of discursive interchange, whether as a threat to withdraw investments or, more likely, as anticipated reaction, in a discussion among dependent actors. In the former case the relevant discursive practice is the exchange between a firm and the state, in the latter case the relevant discursive practice is localized within government (in cabinet meetings, parliamentary debates, or in departmental deliberations). Both can be investigated.

2.4. THE ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE-COALITIONS

From the two traditions presented above I derive the social-theoretical foundation of a new approach to the analysis of discourse in political contexts. It directs attention primarily to the socio-cognitive processes in which so called 'discourse-coalitions' are formed.⁴⁸ My 'argumentative' approach⁴⁹ focuses on the constitutive role of discourse in political processes as described above and allocates a central role to the discoursing subjects, although in the context of the idea of duality of structure: social action originates in human agency of clever, creative human beings but in a context of social structures of various sorts that both enable and constrain their agency. The transformational model of social reality then maintains that society is reproduced in this process of interaction between agents and structures that constantly adjusts, transforms, resists, or reinvents social arrangements.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See Douglas 1987. ⁴⁷ Habermas 1986: 390 ff.

⁴⁸ The notion 'discourse-coalition' is also developed and used by Peter Wagner and his collaborators (Wagner 1990). Although his conceptualization is likewise derived from a reflection on Giddens, Bourdieu, and Foucault there are some important differences which I will indicate below.

⁴⁹ See Forester and Fischer, 1993; Billig 1989.

⁵⁰ See Giddens 1984.