

Abstract

The Creation of Places in Traffic through Performative Action. Publications edited by the Department of Geography, University of Gothenburg. Series B no 98, by Mikael Jonasson.

The creation of places is integral to human life. Just as we orient ourselves through geographical notions like inside and outside, and navigate the body in terms of what is up, down, behind, north, south, and so on, we create places through our own thoughts-and-actions. The aim of this thesis is to investigate how traffic places are constructed from a geographical perspective with emphasis on practice. The purpose is to interrogate key elements in applied traffic safety and traffic management discourses and other traffic products. The second purpose is to present a new perspective on how traffic can be studied from a geographical perspective. The third purpose is to exemplify this through two empirical studies that emphasize the complex rather than univocal character of the creation of places. Results from this study show different latent conflicts emerge in the discourse. With relevance to applied traffic safety and management studies, the most important result from this work is a paradox. Discourses seem to be filled with stories about conflicts, accidents, struggles, and powerlessness, while non-verbal action seems to be almost all about smoothness, cooperation and negotiation, except for the small numbers of actual collisions. Applied traffic safety and management deals with discursive projections of what is thought to be real and rational problems in different traffic-worlds. Notions of rules as strategies unusual within applied traffic safety studies. Instead, notions of rules as taken-for-granted norms tend to be seen as absolute and perfect non-negotiable fundamentals and necessary means in order to reach a clearly defined goal. Humans are creative in traffic. Traffic works not due to traffic rules, but because we participate as responsible and obedient creatures who detect and repair an imperfect network.

Keywords: geography, place, performative action, culture, situated improvised rules, structure, traffic participant, nonverbal action, cooperative action, competition, positioning, conflicts, discourse, narrative, constructivism, applied traffic safety and traffic management, traffic culture, power, ideology, hierarchy, ethnomethodology, the morphology of culture, presentational presence, participant observations, interpretation, interviews, social rules, continuity, interruption, artifacts.

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