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**Interdisciplinarity and ‘Field Research’ Methods in Discourse
Studies:
Political Discourse Theory, Cultural Critique and the
‘Gift’ of an Ethnographic Ethos**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on questions of interdisciplinary exchange regarding methods for collecting research material. The specific focus is on initiating a creative dialogue between political discourse theory (PDT) and contemporary socio-cultural anthropology. The aim is to highlight the need for the extension of the critical work already being undertaken in political discourse theory at the levels of epistemological grounding, theory construction and political analysis, to the practice of *doing fieldwork*, i.e. the moment of the researcher’s setting off on a journey from the *desk* to an—always puzzling—*out there* in the field of research.

Key words

Political discourse theory, socio-cultural anthropology and cultural critique, fieldwork and ethnographic sensibility, interdisciplinarity and research methods, articulation

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INTRODUCTION

Political discourse theory (PDT) is a research programme in political science that was institutionally established in the 1980s through the *Ideology and Discourse Analysis PhD Programme* at the University of Essex. PDT has been moulded through a broad and creative exchange between various fields of the social sciences and the humanities (from political theory to philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis). Since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, a text that has operated as a landmark in the development of PDT, the programme has focused on providing rich epistemological groundings for identifying the significance of *discourse* in the formation of socio-political phenomena. At the same time, it has offered nuanced theoretical perspectives and analytical tools for connecting the description of such phenomena with explanation and critique.¹

I take PDT to form a *research programme* in the terms laid out by Imre Lakatos (1978; on this see also Howarth 2005: 317). The ‘hard core’ of the programme is anchored to a post-structuralist perspective in which the contingent and open character of structures (from signification structures to societal ones) stand at the very centre. At the same time, its ‘positive heuristic’ and ‘protective belt’ (ibid)—i.e. the theoretical and methodological arguments that have been developing around this ‘hard core’—are expanding as new generations of scholars explore different directions of research. This expansion has led also to a decentralisation taking place through the diffusion of PDT into a wider global network of scholars working in the field.²

This ongoing expansion/diffusion of PDT in both institutional and disciplinary terms means that while the ‘hard core’ of the programme is epistemologically shielded, modifications and diversions will characterise the condition at its ‘protective belt’ and in its ‘positive heuristics’.³ As new directions of research are explored, new interdisciplinary conversations are initiated and new methods are incorporated, there are—inescapably—moments where certain ‘grey’ or less-developed areas become evident (cf. Norval 2000; Glynnos and Stavrakakis 2003; Townshend 2004; Howarth 2005; Torfing 1999; 2005). Particularly, as Jacob Torfing notes, ‘the challenge for discourse theory to reflect more on methodological issues is the most demanding, and it requires a more lengthy response’ (Torfing 2005: 26).

Following this thread of thought, this paper focuses on questions of interdisciplinary exchange in methods of collecting research material. The specific focus is on fostering a creative dialogue between *political discourse theory* and *cultural critique* – a post-1980s critical strand of thought in socio-cultural anthropology. The aim is to highlight the need for

the extension of the critical work already undertaken in discourse theory at the levels of epistemological grounding, theory construction and political analysis *towards* the practice of ‘*doing fieldwork*’, i.e. the moment of the researcher’s setting off on a journey from the *desk* to an—always puzzling—*out there* in the field of research. By suggesting the initiation of an interdisciplinary dialogue between *political discourse theory* and *cultural critique*, this paper aims to rethink the researcher’s *presence* in the field, in a creative, self-reflexive and critical way; a way that exists but is latent in PDT’s theoretical toolkit.

The paper follows two interrelated movements while building the overall argument. In the first part of the paper, I explore the prospects for and predicaments of initiating an interdisciplinary dialogue. I first suggest that interdisciplinary work, which is generally accepted as a safe means of selecting research methodologies in the broader terrain of *discourse studies*, can and should be something more than a mere borrowing of methods or tools from other disciplinary fields. I argue that more nuanced methodological tools can be moulded, if the divergences and convergences that arise while crossing disciplinary and theoretical frontiers are scrutinised through the method of *articulation*. Then, drawing on the post-structuralist affinities between *political discourse theory* and *cultural critique*, I present those points of convergence that stand out as the conditions of possibility of this proposed dialogue.

In the second part of the paper, I turn to the specific example of my recent PhD thesis in which the incorporation of a ‘cultural critique’ literature affected the preparation of my research and the retrospective theorisation of my research trips and fieldwork. More specifically, I introduce George Marcus’ proposal for a ‘multi-sited research’ in order to highlight the need for rethinking the researcher’s *presence* in the field of research as a process of defining and dynamically articulating the *object of study* and the research problem itself.

1. BEYOND ‘PICKING AND CHOOSING’? QUESTIONING INTERDISCIPLINARITY

1.1 Discourse Studies and Research Methods beyond Disciplinary Borders

The points of divergence within the broad scholarly group signified as *discourse studies*, comprising political discourse theory, critical discourse analysis, mediated discourse analysis and others, are not insignificant.⁴ However, in most cases, these programmes share a similar focus on and interest in the theoretical and epistemological grounding of methods *of analysis*. Most of the critical work in discourse studies provides and develops specific analytical techniques *applied to* the discourses and discursive practices which constitute the empirical material of their object of study.

There seems, however, to be little need for a development of a *sui generis* method of data collection, since the various existing methodologies—developed within other disciplinary fields—are considered to be, as Michael Meyer notes, a ‘cluster of approaches’ from which discourse analysts can choose a suitable mode for their research (Meyer 2001: 23; see also Wetherell 2001: 380-381).⁵ I perceive Meyers’ point to mean that there is a twofold field kept deliberately open in the discourse studies terrain: on the one hand, for a more concrete re-theorisation of the interdisciplinary procedure as such, and, on the other, for an ad hoc,

detailed, elaborated link with specific—‘borrowed’, invented, adapted—methodologies from the wider field of social science. This also follows from Teun van Dijk’s comment that ‘good critical discourse analysis ... should integrate the best work of many people, famous or not, from different disciplines, countries, cultures and directions of research ... [It] should be essentially diverse and multidisciplinary’ (Van Dijk 2001: 96).

In political discourse theory (PDT) especially, ethnographic methods of producing empirical data have been dealt with mainly as supplementary or have been only marginally addressed and used, while the gathering of already textual forms of material (newspapers, speeches, etc.) holds the lead (Howarth 2000: 140). Apart from the work of Andries du Toit, who has done extensive ethnographic work in South Africa and has also elaborated on the convergence between post-structuralism and ethnographic methods (Du Toit 1993; Du Toit 1996; Du Toit 1998), there are only few other texts that draw theoretically from the field of political discourse theory studies while incorporating ethnographic methods in the making of their research, like Druliolle (2011) and Harvey (1998). Thus, I find this terrain to be open for creative re-articulations of theories of method and methodological practice through the opening up of interdisciplinary explorations.

However, movement between disciplinary grounds is intriguing but not easy to perform. Or, as I will argue, it *should not* be easy to perform. On the contrary, it requires painstaking work on the elaboration and juxtaposition of concepts and methods. If a discipline is, as Jacques Rancière puts it, ‘a certain distribution of the thinkable’ which is always at ‘war’ (2006: 8), then engaging in this kind of war—or at least some battles—is probably unavoidable when objects when objects of study are simultaneously viewed by different disciplinary gazes: For instance, when the same socio-political phenomenon or practice becomes the object of different strands of political science, sociology, international relations theory or social anthropology. Even if in each case the questions might be different both analytically as well as normatively, still, the answers given by each perspective cannot but encounter each other since both the *object* of study and the *field* of study do not lie in a different ‘universe’ from that of the disseminated scientific discourses. As Glynos and Howarth rightly argue, we cannot even regard as separate the ‘contexts of discovery’ and ‘justification’ in the social sciences (2007: 18-48).

In this respect, while it is a pure ‘sclerosis’—to borrow James Clifford’s word (1997: 191)—to deny that the ‘products’ of research work carried out within the limits of a specific discipline can be borrowed, iterated and hybridised by others, it is also a fact that disciplinary borders exist and that contestations for power and hierarchy are intrinsic logics of academia, especially in long-established disciplines. Interdisciplinarity cannot, and maybe should not, be seen outside the reality of disciplines: they are actually ‘twins’, as argued by Michael Moran (2006). The very conditions of possibility for critical interdisciplinary work are, in fact, such divisions and frontiers that, on the one hand, permit in-depth explorations within the ‘protective’ environment of one’s discipline, department, institute, and, on the other, can be performatively turned into frontiers that are porous and permeable. In this respect, a critical interdisciplinarity cannot avoid trespassing frontiers; neither can it avoid ‘war’.

Therefore, pursuing an interdisciplinary exploration of methods means taking these difficulties and tensions into account. Instead of a mere ‘borrowing’ of specific

methodological tools, one needs to mould thoroughly elaborated, reflective methodological hybrids through *articulation*.

1.2 Articulation as inter/anti-disciplinarity

The concept of *articulation* holds a core role in PDT's theoretical presuppositions in describing 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 105). Articulation as a method, in contrast to a 'pick-and-choose' logic or a 'methodological anarchism', brings complexity and tension into the picture instead of shoving them under the rug. Dealing with such complexity or tensions involves not only tracing similarities but also engaging with differences (Andersen 2003: 50). When following an interdisciplinary articulation as a strategy, instead of a mere 'borrowing' of specific methodological tools, the researcher is called to engage with the debates, the 'wars', over those specific tools within their 'source' disciplinary context, to compare and test the ontological presuppositions between the source and target disciplinary or theoretical fields, and finally, to perform a nuanced operation of 'extracting' them and 'resituating' them in new contexts. This is maybe the only way to produce well-informed *translations* from one disciplinary context to another, or *articulations* of thoroughly elaborated reflective methodological hybrids. As David Howarth notes, one should be critically situated against 'the balkanisation and reification of methodology' because 'method is not synonymous with a free-standing and neutral set of rules and techniques that can be applied mechanically to all empirical objects' (Howarth 2005: 317). Indeed, even in Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method*, a book that could be read as the 'holy bible' of a methodological anarchism, the author distances himself from a 'naïve anarchism' that dismisses any kind of rigorous methodology (Feyerabend 1993: 231).

If such a viewpoint on interdisciplinarity is adopted, one cannot but stand critical of terms that appear to treat the movement across disciplinary borders as a serene stroll, as in the case of the softer concept of 'multi-disciplinarity' used by van Dijk (2001: 96); and one should similarly be suspicious of descriptive terms that identify a passage to a whole 'new' condition, as is the case with the term 'post-disciplinarity' used by Sayer (Sayer 1999).

In this light, the more radical term *anti-disciplinarity*, which the social anthropologist George Marcus introduces (1995: 97; 1991: 123), can be regarded as complementary instead of contradictive to such an interdisciplinary perspective. *Interdisciplinary work cannot but also be anti-disciplinary* since the articulatory practice not only introduces something new, a new theoretical or methodological hybrid, as the outcome of articulating pre-existing parts, but it does so by modifying the very same parts that are combined. As Roland Barthes notes in his extensively quoted phrase, 'interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one' (translated from French and quoted in Clifford 1986: 1).

Still, working *against* the disciplines in the social sciences does not mean dissolving disciplines while chasing a chimera of a unified science of the social. Instead it means realising the contingent and unnecessary character of the positioning of disciplinary borders.⁶ Disciplines are themselves discursive formations, institutionalised, historical and sedimented

constructions which cannot be immune to dislocations or new articulations (Laclau 1990: 31-36). As Laclau and Mouffe note about the practice of articulation,

[it] consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 113).

Articulation as a method of research has already marked an indispensable path to theory construction, which stands at the core of PDT. Articulation has been recently expanded and suggested as the cornerstone of the problematisation and formation of research methodologies (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth 2005). Here I argue, consequently, that articulation can be also seen as a useful strategy that should inform any interdisciplinary endeavour, reflecting the need for treating specific problems with specifically modified, moulded lenses and theoretical tools that are brought into dialogue. It is to the conditions of possibility of such a dialogue that I turn my attention now.

1.3 Post-Structuralist Affinities: Discourse Theory, Social Anthropology and Cultural Critique

The positive disposition towards interdisciplinary communication and the possibility of reconfigurations of disciplinary structures are reflected in what George Marcus called—already in the mid-1990s—‘interdisciplinary arenas’ (Marcus 1995: 97), i.e. arenas where the theoretical and ontological presuppositions carry more importance in constructing links and convergences between fields of study and research programmes or paradigms than do institutional disciplinary belongings. These specific arenas of communication to which Marcus refers have been specially fostered by the post-1960s critiques of positivism and took a more substantive form in the 1980s with the turn from high theory to the practice of research methodologies and case studies (Marcus 1986: 166, note 2). They were directed, as Arjun Appadurai notes, towards a ‘rather turbulent river: the many post-structuralisms (largely French) of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, and their many sub-schools’ (Appadurai 1991: 195).

It is in this emergent, inter-/anti-disciplinary terrain that I see the intersection of political discourse theory with the post-1980s cultural critique of anthropology as a potentially fruitful interlocution on method, especially because of the need outlined above for reconceptualising and problematising the ‘field of research’ in discourse theory methodologies.

And it is precisely because anthropology is still considered to be the ‘mother discipline’ of ethnography (Schatz 2009: 12), and because *doing ethnographic fieldwork* has been—and continues to be—the main distinctive approach that defines social anthropology as a separate terrain of knowledge production, that much of the most interesting, self-reflexive and challenging conceptual work on field-research methods is produced on its disciplinary terrain. This intense production of work on theory of method and methodology has been elaborated most particularly since the 1980s, a period when the more exotic, long-term field work that was characteristic of a ‘traditional’ social anthropology approach was challenged by

innovative ideas fostered by a post-colonial and, in particular, a *cultural critique* (Ortner 1984; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1999; Geertz 1980).

The publishing of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* by Clifford and Marcus in 1986 and of *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* by Marcus and Fisher in the same year signalled a critical turning point for research practice in social anthropology by initiating a creative dialogue, and by drawing productive ties outside its own disciplinary borders, with feminism, deconstruction and literary critique (see introduction to the 2nd edition in 1999 of *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique*. Cf also Marcus 1991: 122-123). Those publications, along with the emergence of the journal *Cultural Critique*, published by the American Anthropological Association, initiated heated debates and passionate controversies about the ways of conducting ethnographic research. ‘Cultural critique’, as a strand of thought and a terrain of critical exchange more than a distinct school, brought about several exploratory ways of doing research and of writing ethnographic texts, which problematised the role of the researchers in the field and their relation to their objects/subjects of study.⁷

In this light, it becomes clear, to quote a point stressed by Marcus, that ‘it is unfortunate ... that anthropology has been received in such a limited way, associated more with its exotic subject matter than with its distinctive mode of understanding reality’ (1986: 168, note 164). The idea that an ‘anthropological perspective’, ‘ethnography’ or ‘thick description’ are tools needed only when someone is studying an ‘alien’ culture has been the most frequent mistake of political science research when considering anthropology.

On the contrary, as Clifford notes, sometimes ‘the exotic is uncannily close’ (Clifford 1988: 13). Indeed, as I will argue in what follows, the most thought-provoking element in engaging with contemporary anthropological writings and debates—as observed from a PDT perspective—is the problematisation of the relation between the *self* and the *other*. A problematisation which—from this anthropological perspective—turns our attention to the role of the researcher’s *own identity* in relation to her/his own ‘others’.

1.3.1 Creative Tensions: Culture and Identity

At this point I should engage with an objection that could be raised, before any endeavour to map the possible directions of articulation is undertaken: An objection that might alert us to the incompatibility of the two traditions of research-practice that I am trying to bring into dialogue. It is true that a phenomenal tension can be traced between the different conceptualisations of *identity* in contemporary socio-cultural anthropology and political discourse theory. On the one hand, in PDT, *identities* are generally conceived as *negative constructions* (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 128; Laclau and Mouffe 1987: 89; Mouffe 1995), i.e. images of the ‘self’ that emerge out of an opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’. On the other hand, within an anthropological approach where the element of *culture* is considered as a key factor in subject formation, *identities* seem to acquire a *more positive character*, produced and constituted by (cultural) elements commonly shared between actors and groups like kinship,

intimacy and familiarity, an approach that is seemingly incompatible with the anti-essentialist presuppositions of discourse theory.

However, I argue, these tensions can only be considered as creative terrains, on which the distinctive dynamics of an interdisciplinary articulation must fully develop, i.e. by engaging with the inner debates of the scientific fields, brought into communication. Indeed if such an endeavour is undertaken one can find at least two points where such tensions are turned into points of convergence.

The first point is that after the systematisation of *cultural critique* in socio-cultural anthropology, the idea of ‘culture’, one of the basic terms under which anthropological work has been constituted as a specific field of the study of social identities and relations, has undergone a severe challenge. Lila Abu-Lughod in her classic essay ‘Writing against Culture’ (1991) critically addresses a genealogy of ‘culture’. She stresses the fact that while culture replaced race in much of the scientific discourse centred on difference, and thus, seen from this perspective, signified a move away from racist theories (since culture is something that is ‘learned’ and thus can change), the time has long since come for a dethroning of the term ‘culture’ itself. Despite the advantages of substituting ‘race’ as an analytical term, ‘culture’ has been used in its most rigid senses to impose inescapable frontiers of power. These can be traced, for instance, in the various forms of colonialist and orientalist discourses. ‘Culture’ has been turned into the primary material for essentialist approaches to identity, even by those who have tried to challenge power structures, since they, more often than not, remained trapped in the limitations initially set by the use of the category itself (1991:143–7). For this reason, Abu-Lughod clearly called for new directions in research and texts that would analytically and empirically challenge the concepts of culture in social anthropology and that would foreground the relational construction of identities.

Second, within political discourse theory there have been solid, emerging critiques of a tendency to privilege ‘the dimension of negativity in the individuation of identity’ (Norval 1997: 57; also in 2000: 223-225). Aletta Norval exposes the drawbacks of an over-rigidified depiction of identity formation reduced to a friend/enemy binary mechanism, which is evident in the early work of Laclau and Mouffe. Drawing from Derrida’s critique of binary logics, from psychoanalysis concerning the blurring of the ‘self–other’ relation and by stressing the impurity of frontiers, Norval tries to put forward a ‘non-essentialist account of identity formation that does not privilege the antagonistic over the differential dimension of the identity’ (2000: 223), making explicit that ‘the relation between “the self” and the “other” is infinitely more complex than any dichotomous distinction allows’ (ibid: 224). Following a deconstructive logic, she seeks to highlight that these more subtle accounts of identification are existent in the later works of both Laclau and Mouffe (ibid). The direction which Norval suggests that PDT should follow in conceptualising identity is one where ‘the argument concerning the necessity of distinguishing the self from an other in order to individuate identity [has] to be separated from the *further* question concerning the problem of when such “oppositions” become exclusionary and antagonistic’ (1997: 70).

1.3.2 Articulation as a 'gift' exchange

The double movement discussed above directs us towards a convergence between cultural critique and political discourse theory within the wider post-structuralist arena on the basis of inner changes in their own 'protective belts'. However, there is another, third, point that further reveals the creative possibilities of interdisciplinary articulation. This third point alludes to the relation of the researcher to her object of study, a relation that has been extensively reflected upon by both traditions, but from different—and as I will argue complementary although not yet in mutual dialogue—perspectives.

For PDT there exists a well-elaborated position that stresses the primacy of the role of the researcher as the *subject that articulates* and actually *constructs* the problem. According to David Howarth, discourse theorists, 'instead of applying theory mechanically ... argue for the *articulation* and *modification* of concepts and logics in each particular research context' (Howarth 2000: 139). And as Glynos and Howarth stress, '... an object of study is constructed. This means that a range of disparate empirical phenomena have to be constituted as a problem, and the problem has to be located at the appropriate level of abstraction and complexity' (2007: 167). It is in these terms that the researcher becomes a genealogist or a deconstructionist situated at the core of the processes of the description and critique of socio-political phenomena. According to Glynos and Howarth such a critical involvement of the researcher should not constitute only *a moment* in the research procedure but should extend, in a *retroductive manner*—i.e. in a *continuous oscillation*—between all stages of research: from the very first instance of the 'discovery' and the description *of* the problem, to the ethico-critical exploration of different possible political answers *to* the problem and, finally, to the necessary persuasion of a scholarly society or the respective society/ies at large in relation to one's account *about* the problem (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 208).

However, as already argued in the introduction, the logic of self-reflexivity as a method in PDT remains, today, mostly focused on the conceptual practices of problematising, analysing, writing, and persuading. What seems to be less developed, in such an epistemological grounding of the researcher's agency in PDT, is a similar consideration of the significance that the very act of collecting research material might have for this *retroductive character* of research.

This brings us to the core argument of this paper: Being *there, in the field of research*, tracing, connecting, finding links and access to, recording and collecting, 'material', i.e. enacting the bodily performance of gathering those 'discourses' to be analysed as parts of a problem is also an active part of the problematisation procedure itself.

It is exactly at this point where a substantial literature on self-reflexivity produced within the wider terrain of cultural critique can shed ample light on the *researcher's presence in the research field*. Such literature includes ethnographies that take the form of a 'fieldwork account' (Clifford 1986: 14) in which autobiographical information about the researcher, her 'first person singular', and stories from the field become, consciously, significant parts of the analysis; or where the dialogical character of the researcher's interactions with interlocutors

and informants takes the lead in the ethnographic text (for such instances, see Rabinow 1977; Crapanzano 1980; Dwyer and Muhammad 1982; Clifford 1986; Altorki and El-Solh 1988; Abu-Lughod 1999; Appadurai 1996; Marcus and Holmes 2005).

What these ethnographies call for is closer attention to the process of 'being there' as a researcher and more thorough consideration for those moments when 'self and other, culture and its interpreters appear less confident entities' (Clifford 1988: 113). This is because being 'in the field' means leaving momentarily aside the *safety net* of anti-essentialist presuppositions and *engaging* with all those rigid constructions existent in the ontic version of 'reality'. As Michael Herzfeld rightly argues, 'distrust of essentialism in social theory should not blur our awareness of its equally pervasive presence in social life' (Herzfeld 2005: 27). In this respect, being 'there' means trying to navigate through rigidly fixed categories of 'culture', 'class' and 'nation' with which the everyday life that one tries to access is structured and constructed. It means experiencing the force of an identification process directed towards oneself as a researcher: by one's interviewees, collocutors and informants; or by institutions and power structures one comes to encounter while in the field. Most of cultural critique's intellectual production highlights the fact that being *in the field* might trigger experiences that can not only shift the direction of the research but can also destabilise the positionality and identity of the researcher in relation to her objects of study. And therefore these experiences call for a self-reflexivity of the researcher that in turn re-defines the 'problem' of research.

If the chimera of absolute objectivism is long gone in the qualitative and problem-driven social sciences, a more nuanced problematisation of the role of the researcher diving into this social complexity of identifications and interpellations can only be enriching. Bringing about this dialogue between political discourse theory and cultural critique and creatively thinking about the moulding of new ethnographic 'sensibilities' produces a double positive effect.

On the one hand, from the perspective of political discourse theory, the self-reflexive identity of the researcher as a genealogist or a deconstructionist can be expanded to reconsider one's role as an interviewer, an archive-reader, a participant observer or even an ethnographer. I propose to see this as the 'gift' of an ethnographic ethos offered by cultural critique and social anthropology to PDT. I argue that such an expansion can be sought more productively by crossing the disciplinary frontiers, while staying on generally common theoretical and ontological grounds, instead of remaining within the disciplinary grounds of discourse studies and by crossing theoretical and ontological frontiers. It is through these debates *within* and *about* social anthropology, that many insightful answers to the valid concerns that David Howarth expresses in relation to the appropriation of interlocutory ethnographic tools in discourse theory can be derived (Howarth 2000: 140). This 'gift' will be explored in more detail, through the specific case study of my recent PhD research, in the second part of this paper.

On the other hand, however, as the anthropological theory of the 'gift' has it, reciprocity might always enter the game (Mauss 1990). And if the gift stimulates oscillation, it might, then, seek to be returned to its origins. While this could be the stimulus for another paper, here we can only briefly point to the direction which Lila Abu-Lughod advocates when suggesting methods to 'write against culture'. One of the strategies she adopts is the study of 'discourse and practice' as a locus where 'culture' is demystified (1991: 147). On a similar

line of thinking, Akil Gupta argues for the need to combine the ‘being there’ of ethnography with an account of the discursive constructions that exceed but at the same time shape the specific and local understandings of wider structures, like that of the ‘state’ (Gupta 1995: 376-377).

I argue here that the nuanced theoretical framework offered by discourse theory can offer solid analytical strategies by articulating a semantic, a psychoanalytical and a deconstructive perspective, and, by this, forming a set of ontological presuppositions that resiliently connect language and practice under the concept of discourse. An understanding of discourse as an infrastructure which includes not only the symbolical aspect of language but also the materiality of its products and the performativity of its circulation can enrich epistemological debates within anthropological theory and bridge elements that seem, in many cases, to be disconnected in theory while being part and parcel of the ethnographic practice.

In a period when calls for ‘detachment’ and ‘objectivity’ seem to signal the emergence of a new counter paradigm in social anthropology that stands against cultural critique’s main presuppositions,⁸ discourse theory can offer a rich toolkit for responses from a post-structuralist perspective. The rigorous explorations of an epistemological grounding of the ethico-critical aspect of social science (Stavrakakis 1999; Glynos 2002; Glynos and Howarth 2007), the defence of the scientificity of problematisation (Howarth 2005; Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000), as well as an ardently articulated *attachment* to a democratic ethos (Norval 2006; Norval 2007), which are all part of contemporary explorations in the discourse theory programme, can work as argumentative frontiers, in alliance with cultural critique, in these new arenas of contestation.

2. LINKING THE SITES OF RESEARCH AND DEFINING THE ‘OBJECT OF STUDY’

In the first part of this paper I argued in favour of a creative interdisciplinary communication about research methods as a means to supplement political discourse theory’s research toolkit. Exploring its epistemological pre-conditions within a common post-structuralist arena, I suggested a specific dialogue between PDT and *cultural critique*, a strand of thought in contemporary socio-cultural anthropology. I stressed that such a dialogue can be more productive if structured upon a method of *articulation*; i.e. if convergences and divergences are taken into account, are considered and worked through. In what follows I present the way in which such an articulatory methodological approach informed my PhD research between 2006 and 2009. More specifically, I will highlight the convergences and affinities between political discourse theory and George Marcus’ method of a *multi-sited* ethnographic approach.

My research project focuses on the politics of Turkish–Greek reconciliation since 1974. Amidst the long trajectory of Greek-Turkish relations marked by enmity, conflict and tension, my thesis explores the ‘other side’ of that history, focusing on initiatives that have promoted contact between the two societies and encouraged rapprochement. Drawing on post-structuralist discourse theory I argue that the omnipresent repetition of the signifier ‘Greek-Turkish friendship’ has played a crucial role in the consolidation of a rapprochement movement in Turkey and Greece.

‘Greek-Turkish friendship’ has been a motto that has acquired different content in its meanings and has represented quite diverse political practices. It first appeared as a vision for perpetual peace uttered by the respective state leaders in the 1930s, then, during the Cold War, it became a label of diplomatic language on the lips of high state officials reflecting a Greek-Turkish strategic coalition with anti-communist overtones under the umbrella of NATO. It was later, in the 1970s, transformed into a message used by the radical or the parliamentary Left as a means for pursuing internationalist aspirations, while it was also adopted by liberal anti-nationalist intellectual elites in both countries. Finally, after 1999, and following some events that changed more or less radically the course of bilateral state relations,⁹ ‘Greek-Turkish friendship’ became an over-circulated collocation in mass media, a title for yearly festivals, a subtitle for every instance of economic cooperation, or even a product.¹⁰

I take ‘Greek-Turkish friendship’ to be a discursive formation that can operate as a unique *prism* that reflects Ernesto Laclau’s position that the name eventually ‘becomes the ground of the thing’ (2005: 104). *Thinking through* and *going through* this prism, I have been able to explore the historical conditions that made possible the pursuit of reconciliation and rapprochement in and between Turkey and Greece and to unravel the complexity and multiplicity of actors and ideologies that have operated under the name ‘friendship’.

2.1 Coping with Dispersion: Multi-Sited Research and the Following of Traces

In respect of the above, there was a double strategy followed while planning and doing this research. On the one hand it was *thinking through* ‘friendship’, (i.e. tracing the first genealogical lines of ‘friendship’ as a *naming* and trying to assess its significance and weight

for the case study) that provided the necessary problematisation for defining and constructing the problem, the questions to ask and the ethical aporias to consider. However, on the other hand, it was *going through 'friendship'*, (i.e. by penetrating the empirical and the specific, coming into actual contact with the sites, the *topoi* where Turkish–Greek 'friendship' was enacted and performed) that a whole new set of questions of method, lying in the borderland between the research plan and the 'field', arose.

Going through these discursive performances of 'Greek-Turkish friendship' meant looking at a diverse variety of loci: from journalists' writings and think-tank workshops to academic conferences, from artists' exchanges to music festivals, from the solidarity actions for refugees organised by leftist groups proposing another alternative to the 'friendship between the peoples', to the nomination ceremonies of 'prizes in Greek–Turkish friendship', from EU-funded conflict-resolution projects to the student exchanges between universities, from the initiatives and associations in the urban capitals to the local cultural exchanges between neighbouring municipalities in the Aegean Sea or Western–Eastern Thracian frontiers.

The diversity of such sites of performance and sites of research meant that, from the very first moment, there existed a double challenge. First, how *to trace the connections* between these various moments of the utterance of friendship, which, at certain times, yielded extreme degrees of heterogeneity (i.e. the heterogeneity of different levels of institutionalisation from high-politics to corporate initiatives, from civil society projects to the inter-personal encounters of pro-rapprochement actors). The second challenge was how to *select from among those sites the more significant* for the argument, for the 'problem'; and what the criteria of this significance would be.

The question of a research method that could conceptually embrace and, at the same time, disentangle this perplexity and tackle the shift between national and local terrains became one of my basic concerns from the very first of my research trips to Greece and Turkey. Following this line of problematisation, a reflexive approach in gathering material 'from the field' offered by *cultural critique's* texts on ethnographic research seemed to be potentially something more than a 'supplement' to this research. In particular, the idea of a *multi-sited research*, a concept developed by George Marcus, resonated at the centre of my methodological concerns about designing this phase of the project.

Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with the explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (Marcus 1995: 105).

Dealing with a case study that was, on the one hand, very specific but, at the same time, extremely dispersed, these 'chains and paths' had to be worked out, followed and connected. There are six alternative techniques that Marcus suggests for 'following' elements and 'traces' from which one can choose those that suit one's specific case. The first two consist of *following the people*—for example, immigrants or diasporas by exploring and following their routes—and *following the thing*, or as Marcus puts it, following a 'manifestly material object of study such as commodities, money, gifts, work of arts' (1995: 106). More innovative

techniques consist of following *the plot-story or allegory*, where the plot or stories of lives are gathered and then tested ‘against the reality of ethnographic investigation that constructs its sites according to [a] compelling narrative’ (Ibid: 109); or following *the metaphor, the life and biographies, or the conflict*.¹¹

Following the metaphor is the technique that Marcus suggests when the thread or trace that one ‘chases’ is a discourse or mode of thought. This seemed to be the most adequate tool to start with in the case of ‘Turkish–Greek friendship’ because, in such research, the ‘circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors [guide] the design’ by tracing ‘the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language uses and print or visual media’ (Marcus 1995: 108). Following the traces of ‘friendship’ meant plentiful border crossings, the number of which multiplied during the study since the metaphor’s trajectory did not unfold linearly but through events, eruptions, dispersed and disrupted narratives, iterations and transformations.

The research expanded over a period of two and half years, overlapping many times with the writing procedure, and was marked by an unavoidable dispersion. Following the ‘metaphor’ of friendship meant tracing the continuities and discontinuities between the past and the present; a past of discursive performances already completed and a present of memories and narratives, representations or traces of such performances. This following meant, first, that *archives*—national, local and private—dispersed in many different loci from Athens to Istanbul to towns of the Aegean Sea borderline and Western Thrace, became themselves sites of exploration. At the same time it meant that the *following of the metaphor* was transforming into a *following of the people*. Exploring the past through narratives offered by the protagonists of different peace initiatives meant that while I was moving between different sites and meeting different people, they would—in turn—refer me to other sites and people, to other initiatives in other places on the other side of the border, disclosing aspects of this past of ‘friendship’ that were previously obscured. A map of performances of friendship and a map of relations of friendship, comradeship but also contestation between people, was gradually created and populated.¹²

On the other hand, while following friendship as a ‘metaphor’ in its contemporaneity, I conducted participant observation every summer, for three consecutive years, within one of the most longstanding post-1999 peace initiatives, the ‘Turkish–Greek Friendship Festival’ held every June in a pair of different cities, one in each country. The metaphor was turning itself into a *thing to follow*: Through its repetition from place to place, year to year, between shifting urban, rural and national contexts and borders, the festival of ‘friendship’ stimulated a material flow of posters and banners, people and funding, and therefore became an invaluable source for comparative information.

These followings started to provide the answers to my two initial questions about how to cope with dispersion and how to select from different dispersed performances and initiatives. In the first case it was my own travelling between sites of research, archives, loci of performances and places of memory that connected the parts of the argument of the ‘problem’. In the second case it was the network of collocutors, the chains of narratives and social networks that I was following which actually revealed the more salient or marginal character of the

different ways in which the ‘metaphor’ had been performed or materialised in different instances.

In this respect, this corporeal/material to-and-fro movement between sites suggested by a multi-sited research strategy resonated with a parallel to-and-fro movement between research practice, observation, theory, understanding and explaining, i.e. a retroductive circle of research. As Glynos and Howarth note,

this active process of problematisation involves the constitution of a problem—or an explanandum to use more traditional terms—which invariably results in the transformation of our initial perceptions and understandings. Work is then started on furnishing an explanation that can render the recalcitrant phenomenon more intelligible. This process is understood in terms of the logic of retroductive explanation and theory construction, which involves a to-and-fro movement between the phenomena investigated and the various explanations that are proffered (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 34).

2.2 A Form of Literal Presence: Crisscrossing Borders, Others and Selves

However, it was not only this corporeal, intense travelling between Greece and Turkey that built the map of performances while constructing the object of study. It was also a continuous journey between levels of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’. In the case of my own travelling during this research, my journeys from coast to coast brought to the fore different identities with which I, as researcher, was identified by interlocutors, librarians, journalists, local governors, activists and politicians, generating each time different degrees of otherness; and this identification/interpellation process could not escape the actual articulation of the ‘problem’ itself.

A certain ‘grammar’ of identity positions was already set from the start. Being part of a network of academic circles that openly challenges the negative stereotypes of the ‘other’ in Greek society, having completed my studies at the Department of Political Science and History at Panteion University (a vanguard department in building links with scholars from Turkey) and working on ‘taboo’ issues related to the Turkish minority in Greece while spending a year learning Turkish in Istanbul, meant that I was unavoidably already positioned by many external observers as part of a ‘Greek–Turkish friendship’. This meant that I could not avoid being interpellated as such by a marginal but vociferous anti-rapprochement discourse that was eager to connect every instance of communication and the building of ties with the ‘Turkish side’ as part of a traitorous or, to their eyes, empty, ‘friendship’.¹³ In this respect, frontiers of shifting horizons of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ were already set from the very start.

While in the field, conducting interviews and meeting people, my interviewees wanted to know what I knew, where I situated myself in relation to the questions of national identity and political ideologies. As a result, every encounter produced tighter or looser links; different possibilities for subject positions; hybridity; and a dynamic balance of horizons of insiderness/outsiderness. While travelling in Turkey, access to cultural meanings and

acceptance in everyday circles was easier for me than it might have been for a northern European or North American researcher, who would be regarded as ‘an outsider’, at least during their initial encounters. The narrative of a cultural and affective ‘closeness’ between ‘Greeks’ and ‘Turks’, coupled with the circulating ‘friendship’ discourse, usually augmented such positive dispositions. In Greece, especially when visiting the periphery, I was regarded as the ‘student’ from ‘Athens’ working on Greek-Turkish issues and I sometimes needed to overcome the initial suspicions this provoked. In a few extreme cases my ‘outsiderness’ would be projected as that of a possible ‘spy’.¹⁴ Being ‘there’, from the very start, maintained a tension of a ‘dialectic of experience and interpretation’, a ‘continuous tacking between the “inside” and the “outside” of events’ (Clifford 1988: 34), a continuous reconfiguration of the problem and the object of study.

It is this literal, physical presence in multiple sites and the tensions that this entails between such a play of identifications which—in turn—stimulate the researcher to become a ‘reflexive activist persona’. As Marcus argues,

in contemporary multi-sited research projects moving between public and private spheres of activity, from official to subaltern contexts, the ethnographer is bound to encounter discourses that overlap with his or her own. In any contemporary field of work, there are always others within who know (or want to know) what the ethnographer knows, albeit from a different subject position, or who want to know what the ethnographer wants to know. Such ambivalent identifications, or perceived identifications, immediately locate the ethnographer within the terrain being mapped and *reconfigure* any kind of methodological discussion that *presumes a perspective from above or ‘nowhere’* ... In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and *as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation* (Marcus 1995: 112, my emphasis).

While far from adopting the role of an ‘ethnographer’ for myself,¹⁵ these insights offered by Marcus and the contemporary anthropological literature provided me with a rich background of ‘ethnographic sensibility’ in order to contextualise and understand my own positionality in the field. My encounters with sites and people while following ‘friendship’ around the two Aegean coasts were always at the limits of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’—in their fluid andaporetic sense—and did require a renegotiation of the self.¹⁶

Speaking to a environmental activist, a Turkish refugee in Athens or the pioneers of a business cooperation, meant not only that a different aspect of my story had to be presented on my behalf, but that this story would also *change the way that my object of study could be thought, problematised and conceptualised*. A new story to tell about my research meant understanding my research through the eyes of my interlocutor, meant trying to persuade my interlocutor about my existing interpretations and critical accounts of the problem constructed. My literal presence between shifting sites, and the encounters with diverse contexts of interlocution and interlocutors where identities were under negotiation, was becoming a retroductive move between theory and practice.

2.3 Something More than Contextualising the Specific. Re-Evaluating Literal Presence

In late June 2008, I visited the coastal city of Dikili for an interview with the mayor of the municipality, a pioneer figure of Greek–Turkish rapprochement during the 1980s and 1990s at the level of local government initiatives, and organiser of one of the first post-1974 local peace festivals in Turkey to which Greek delegates were invited. At the time of my visit, I was already preoccupied with some issues raised in previous interviews, during my field-trip to the Turkish coastal areas. One of these issues was the repetition of a grievance, on behalf of my Turkish interviewees, related to the fact that in order for them to attend the commonly organised initiatives in Greece, they had to go through the tiring procedure of obtaining a Schengen visa. This meant travelling to Izmir or even to Ankara (since sometimes the Izmir consulate would block or delay the procedures), just to get a permit to enter Greece for a few days, while their Greek counterparts could freely travel back and forth, combining holidays with activism. For the Turkish citizens, even if they were going to Greece as official delegates representing their local governments, the visa would be valid only for the minimum duration of the event for which they had applied. A five-day festival, a five-day visa. This grievance would sometimes take the form of a feeling of uneasiness, expressed implicitly as a secondary issue, but in other moments would be expressed explicitly as a major problem, followed even by anger. I still remember the outburst of Sedat, my informant in one of the coastal towns, who in previous years had been a strong advocate of ‘Greek–Turkish friendship’ and had actively worked for supportive projects, but during the three days I spent with him, now displayed his agitation. After a few beers together, he started raising his voice about the imbalances that ‘the Greeks’ do not care about and do not understand. It had been clear to many of my collocutors that the Greek consular authorities had frequently followed a ‘hard line’ on visa issues, sometimes even in contrast to the publicly expressed political intentions of the Greek central government or the consulate general.¹⁷

Bearing all this in mind, I was walking around the port of Dikili trying to find the ticket office for a boat to the Greek island of Mytilene, where I would continue my zigzag trip around the Aegean Sea conducting interviews and examining archival research in local newspapers. While strolling, I approached the vendor of a small mobile canteen, asking where I could get a ticket to ‘Midilli’, the Turkish name for the island. Being sure that there was a ferry three times per week, since I had seen the leaflets and advertisements on the internet, it came as a surprise when he gave me a blunt reply: ‘You can’t. It doesn’t go ...’ Surprised by his certainty, I tried to infer whether he was just mocking a foreign tourist who was speaking in somewhat broken Turkish or if there was something true in his remark. ‘But’, I told him, ‘I know that a boat comes every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. I’ve read about it.’ ‘Yes’, he replied, ‘It does come ... They come. But it doesn’t go.’ More puzzled by this, for clarification I murmured, through an incipient puzzled chuckle, ‘but ... how?’. How could the boat only ‘come’? I pressed him for an answer as I started losing, once again, my faith in the prospect of fully grasping Turkish as a language, and began to suspect that it was me who had the problem in understanding. ‘They come, yes, and then they go with the same boat, but if you’re from here you cannot go.’

This last remark made everything clear. But the connotations revealed by this moment’s particularity and perhaps its overall insignificance seemed uncanny. While hitherto my interlocutors had more or less passionately discussed the problems of obtaining a visa, this man, in a somewhat irrationally formed belief, had fixed on the idea that ‘only the others can

come'. The map of 'Greek–Turkish friendship' with its local initiatives was suddenly painted with many more colours and infused with much more content. Issues of class, issues of the elite configuration of the initiatives I had been following, but also the fact that the distinction between 'elite/non elite' might mean different things on the two sides of the Aegean Sea in 2009, under the specific European border regime, were all reflected back. It was now not only a question of who might participate in these pro-rapprochement initiatives but of those for whom this could not even be imagined, for whom the metaphor I was following was not positive or negative but a message with no-meaning... a message of no interest. 'Greeks' to the vendor's eyes could be only the tourists 'who come', 'who can come.' And I, as a Greek/European citizen doing this research, could easily criss-cross, zigzag, the Aegean, across European borders, unproblematically.

In this respect, this encounter with the 'specific' brought about an 'aspect dawning'¹⁸ for me, i.e. it turned my focus to grammars of political meaning that hitherto had eluded my research perspective; a grammar of the wider economic and political regimes through which borders, class, embodied practices and worldviews of other actors—different from my own research 'objects'—would sketch a map in which, and in contrast to which, my research object was being redrawn.

Following this thread, one could see here how the exploration of *political subjectivity*, an exploration gaining importance in PDT, can also become a vital tool for the exploration of the subject of the critical researcher. Aletta Norval directs our attention to the moment when actors start seeing things in a different, innovative way, a way which would have been unimaginable or foreclosed as a possibility before because of the sedimentation of existing and dominant political grammars (Norval 2006).

Indeed, is not the reflexivist persona that Marcus talks about another name for a *claim to subjectivity* with an ethical denominator? As Norval stresses, 'the experience of aspect change foregrounds the moment of the subject, of identification. The accompanying awareness of multiplicity helps to establish the minimum conditions we need in order to get a democratic dialogue under way' (Norval 2007: 106). It seems then that this experience of a democratic dialogue can also be a dialogue with oneself and in relation to the surrounding socio-political context within which one works, observes and intervenes as a researcher. It seems that the self-reflexive and ethical elements of a *reflexivist persona* can and—perhaps should—be thought of as elements of a *democratic stance*. Furthermore, 'aspect dawning' could be re-conceptualised not only as a unique moment traceable in our objects-subjects of study, but as an invaluable moment in which the tensions, anxieties and paradoxes of presence in the fieldwork and the play between detachment and attachment can potentially foreground our own subjectivity; a moment when a different image emerges connecting or re-connecting the specificity of our experience with wider discourses and structures that shed a different light on our 'problem' under study.

In this respect, physical presence *in* and *between* different sites brings into the picture, sometimes in uncanny ways, an excess of information pointing to links beyond their own territoriality: An excess of fragmentary information which—if linked together—makes up the 'argument of the ethnography', as Marcus would argue, or the 'articulation of the problem' in the language of PDT. The physical, literal presence of the researcher at the *micro-level* of the

multiple 'fields' can, then, actually become the technique to expand the notion of the 'field' beyond presence itself. The links drawn between the multiple sites lead to a mapping of a macro-level where presence as such is impossible.

George Marcus's introduction of the concept of 'multi-sited' research was aimed exactly at highlighting the need for a convergence between macro- and micro-perspectives. More particularly it was a call for ethnography—which hitherto had pioneered the exploration of local and micro sites (villages, neighbourhoods, etc.)—to include an account of macro changes and macro-global-structural powers that affect localities (Marcus 1986: 169-173). In 1986, Marcus introduced the concept of 'multi-locale ethnography',¹⁹ calling for fieldwork research in more than one place by locating *locales* which are 'mutually linked by the intended and unintended consequences of activities within them' (Marcus 1986: 171). The aim was not merely to 'demonstrate random interdependencies' but to:

start with some prior view of the system and to provide an ethnographic account of it, by showing the forms of social life that the system encompasses and then, leading to novel or revised views of the nature of the system itself, translating its abstract qualities into more fully human terms (ibid).

The move towards the term '*multi-sited ethnography*', did not, however, simply involve a renaming of the proposed practice. On the contrary, the 1995 development by Marcus of a more thorough conceptualisation of the idea of the 'world system' meant that *multi-sitedness* no longer presupposed a preconceived 'system', but became an *active procedure of problematisation*. By exploring the possible links between sites—foreseen by intuition and moulded in the process of doing the research—of social activity that are not seen merely as a part of a broader system, the links themselves become constitutive of a picturing of the system as such.

From the viewpoint of political discourse theory, this technique can be regarded as an 'embodiment' of an 'ethos of problematisation' (Howarth 2000: 135), which brings to the fore the active role of the researcher in the construction of the 'field'. Such a method resembles what David Howarth calls 'constitutive' theories, where 'the empirical accounts have to be evaluated as particular interpretations of the research objects they have constructed, and not as conforming or refuting instances of a separately constituted empirical theory' (Howarth 2000: 130).²⁰ Therefore, in convergence with a PDT perspective, Marcus' multi-sited research sets off to examine:

the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. It develops ... a strategy or design of research that acknowledges macrotheoretical concepts and narratives of the world system but does not rely on them for the contextual architecture framing a set of subjects. This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity ... Just as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites ... [it] may begin *in* the world system, but because of the way it evolves its object of study, this mode comes circumstantially to be *of* the world system as well (Marcus 1995: 96, my emphasis).

This move from ‘*in*’ to ‘*of*’ should be taken as a very crucial element of the modality. It resituates the methodological perspective on a level that does not merely serve to locate segmented parts within a system, but rather tries ethnographically to represent a system by its nexus of fragments (of discourses, cultural practices, etc.), i.e. by the very solid ways in which more to less dominant discourses, structural confinements and ideologies are enacted, performed and experienced.

In this respect we can see this line of thinking resonating with resemblances to Ernesto Laclau’s conceptualisation of the *universal* and the *particular* at the level of a formal analysis of the political. In Laclau’s schema, universality is construed as a horizon which can only be addressed through the claims and demands of different particularities that try to present themselves as universal and thus construct universality as such (Laclau 1996: 20-35). This impossibility of accessing the global as such, of dwelling in it, the impossibility of being present in it, but only *approaching* it *through* the local and the fragmentary, through one’s literal or even imagined presence at specific sites, is what multisited research is also about at the level of methodology and theory of a method. ‘[T]here is no global’, Marcus argues, ‘in the local–global contrast now so frequently evoked. The global is an emergent dimension of arguing about the connection among sites in a multi-sited ethnography’ (1995: 99).

2.4 But ... Is, Finally, Multi-Sitedness Something New?

I should anticipate here, before proceeding to the end of the paper, a valid objection that may have occurred to the reader: is the idea of multi-sitedness something new or innovative in the first place, beyond the limits of social anthropology?

And the answer is that, of course, *it is not*. As Marcus himself notes, cultural history is very much multi-sited (Marcus 1995: 100), and—we could add here—research in political science is also multi-sited, comparative, or even un-sited, since this methodological movement between sites ‘is unproblematic’ in these disciplinary fields.

However—and this is the main point addressed here—it is precisely because a binding to a single specific site of research was the dominant element of social anthropology as a distinct discipline that the questioning and challenging of such boundedness *from within*, has offered some of the most nuanced ways to rethink the *unproblematic* fashion in which we, political discourse theorists, define our fields and sites of research. Through rethinking this, we can provide the potential links between the micro- and macro-perspective; as well as elaborate bridges to connect theory, methods of accessing empirical material, methods of analysis and the objects of study itself, issues that have long been located at the heart of the problematisations of political discourse theory.²¹

It seems then that this paper’s overall suggestion is for a deeper engagement—theoretical, methodological, but also political—with the *movement between sites*; sites which, on the one hand, can be *disciplinary ones*. I have argued that this movement between disciplinary sites and the crossing of their borders can provide more creative results if elaborated through an

articulatory process, rather than taking the form of a loose drifting and a ‘pick and choose’ logic. Thinking about methods in such critical inter- or anti-disciplinary terms means that affinities or differences between ‘disciplinary sites’ are debated, elaborated and moulded into new methodological prisms or methodological strategies. The aporetic character of the disciplinary borders has to be taken into account here: borders can be creative as long as they are permeable. Following this line of thinking, I have argued in favour of a dialogue across those disciplinary borders, by crossing and trespassing them. The proposal for a deeper communication—a ‘gift’ exchange—between political discourse theory and cultural critique follows on from this argument.

On the other hand, as I have argued, these sites can be performative ones. They can be the sites that are *turned into* the empirical containers of our research by the specific link that we, as researchers, create with them, by connecting them, problematising them and thus turning them into our ‘field of study’. I argued that, on the one hand, an ethnographic ‘ethos’ and sensibility enriched by the vast literature on self-reflexivity, drawing mainly from the work of George Marcus, has a lot to offer a discourse theory perspective in terms of rethinking the researcher’s relation with the ‘field’ and the practice of collecting empirical material.

In this respect, this paper might also be read as a call to political discourse theory to engage more with a literal presence in the ‘field’ as a means for stimulating the necessary tensions which will bring about a ‘reflexivist persona’. However, as a final clarificatory note, I am not arguing that incorporating ethnography (especially a multi-sited one) can be the answer to all issues of method collection. On the contrary, I tried to show that viewing my research trips in light of multi-sitedness occurred precisely because I tried to distil the specificity and to articulate ways of constructing *a particular* methodological trajectory to respond to the *particular* phenomenon of ‘Greek–Turkish friendship’. If seen from this perspective, the question of how to collect the material becomes a question that cannot be different from the one concerning the identification of the object of study itself. In this respect, the articulation of an interdisciplinary approach to methods of collection can perhaps do much more than helping a stage in the research procedure. It can actually become an indispensable part of the definition of the problem, the delimitation of the object of study and the identification of the loci where this object is to be found.

If there is a general point to be made by this paper in relation to methods collection in political discourse theory then, it would probably be that *anything goes*; from archival research, to ethnographies of the internet, to oral history, to political comparative analysis. But in order for it to *go* creatively, this means engaging with an articulatory process where the parts that are combined have their identity changed by the process itself. This articulatory process means engaging with the heart of the debates over the methodological strategies one aspires to adopt and follow; An engagement that can be creative and collaborative, but also conflictual; it may have moments of success as well as moments of failure.

Notes

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¹ In political discourse theory, the term ‘discourse’ is used to capture the wider infrastructure of social practice. It, therefore, covers a semantic terrain much larger than a mere *linguistic* performance. At an initial level, discourse is the medium through which intentional and unintentional, reasonable and unreasonable messages are transferred and circulated, as in the case of language, signs, representational practices, etc. At a second level, however, ‘discourse’ distils those aspects of signification processes that remain active elements of material and social relations even in the absence of linguistic interaction. For instance, the term ‘discourse’ tries to capture the way in which materiality itself is always ‘haunted’ by the meanings invested in it. Furthermore, ‘discourse’ encapsulates the fact that non-linguistic practices are themselves surrounded and infused with invested meaning, and that through their occurrence they produce meaning which is immediately linked with already available modes of interpretation (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1987: 82-84; Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 105-114; Laclau 2005: 68-71; Laclau 1993; Howarth 2000: 101-104; Glynos and Howarth 2007: 109).

² See the IDA World network at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/idaworld/index.html>. Cf. also Torfing (2005: 2) and Townshend (2004), for a sketch of the development of the research project during the last decades.

³ In using Lakatos’ schema, I acknowledge that he himself was quite reluctant as to whether this could be applicable in the social sciences and whether social sciences constitute sciences or—instead, in his terms—pseudosciences (Lakatos 1999: 107). Furthermore I take into account that his ideas about the ‘expansion’ of the protective belt of a research programme were related to a specific view of knowledge growth in which prediction holds the lead. However, on the one hand, Lakatos is ambiguous in relation to the character of social sciences since he clearly recognises Marxism and Freudianism as research programmes (ibid: 106 – albeit degenerating ones). On the other hand, the role of prediction as the scientific denominator in the social sciences has come under severe criticism (see Glynos and Howarth 2007: 20-24). As Glynos and Howarth note, in social life, ‘predictions are parasitic upon practices, and since practices are mediated by changeable first-order beliefs and meanings, predictions are as fragile as the agents’ self-understandings and interpretations that partly constitute such practices’ (ibid: 221).

⁴ Most of the different strands of discourse studies are anchored to or affiliated with different disciplines like political science, psychology or sociology. A recent exploratory attempt to clarify points of convergence and divergence in discourse studies had been hosted by the Centre for Theoretical Studies at the University of Essex through its participation in the ESRC Networks for Methodological Innovation. In the workshops and conferences of the Discourse Analysis Network that were organised throughout the academic year 2008–9, many of such differences were productively discussed and debated. See Glynos et al. (2003).

⁵ Here, however, we should note that Q-methodology, an approach that is followed by scholars who participate in the communicational network within the wider field of discourse studies, seems to be the only approach that offers its own distinct way of collecting research material and data (see Watts and Stenner 2005).

⁶ Following this comment, some clarification is necessary, especially during a period in which the social sciences departments in the UK and worldwide are under attack, facing forced mergers or even closure. First, one should reiterate here the fact that the very conditions of possibility of critical interdisciplinarity are actually the conditions of its impossibility: Critical interdisciplinary work means finding ways to trespass, improvise one’s ways, build bridges and initiate communications between disciplinary fields; in other words, it involves working with obstacles. It does not mean turning interdisciplinarity into an institutionalising logic or into rigid structures which would replace disciplines. This would simply lead to the actual annulment of any critical element in interdisciplinary explorations; it would cease being *critical* by no longer being able to challenge and shake norms and frontiers of thinking; it would actually cease being *interdisciplinary* since the domination of a non-disciplinary, all-inclusive institutional regime of ‘social sciences’ (like the one put forward by educational policies in the UK nowadays) would enforce conditions of impossibility for interdisciplinary work. In such a non-disciplinary institutional setting, the dominant paradigms and methodological perspectives which connect better with ‘applied’ research, and expose the linear connections between research and the market, would simply dominate the field of social sciences, since they are already ardently researched by neoliberal educational policies at the levels of faculties and departments. In this respect, the opinion expressed here recognises and endorses the political argument for the recognition of the use-value of the disciplinary divisions in the social

sciences as regards the intellectual and scientific development of academia and society at large. The ‘war’ that Rancière writes about is a creative intellectual war that has to be kept open as a continuous possibility, with no absolute winners or losers. Social sciences are multi-paradigmatic arenas and the domination of a single paradigm is not only unforeseeable but also undesired (Koniavitis 1993: 19; see also Ritzer 1975). Thus, articulation as an *inter-* and an *anti-disciplinarity* means that even if while defending disciplines at the levels of educational policies, social science research funding and their status within university institutions, while working within these *partial fixations* of discursive disciplinary regimes that constitute our terrains of engagement, the possibilities of reconfigurations, emergences of new perspectives and the reformulations of the epistemological structures remain open; they are deliberately *kept* open.

⁷ The effects of this critique are evident in the fact that it still stimulates major debates in social anthropological circles and in the fact that the experimental strategies proposed 20 years ago still incite passionate criticism (see for instance Candea 2007).

⁸ See the ESRC supported ‘Detachment Collaboratory Project’ at <http://detachmentcollaboratory.org/>. See also Matei Candea’s work on detachment (Candea 2010; 2007), the ESRC conference ‘Reconsidering Detachment: The ethics and analytics of disconnection’ (organised by Matei Candea, Tom Yarrow, Jo Cook, and Catherine Trundle), Girton College, Cambridge, 30th June – 3rd July 2010, as well as the edited volume by Henare *et al.* (2007).

⁹ I refer here to the consecutive, deadly earthquakes in Greece and Turkey in 1999 and the mutual help the two societies offered each other, as well as the withdrawal of a long standing Greek veto against Turkey’s accession to the EU during the same year, events that according to many changed the course of Turkish-Greek relations by bringing about a prolonged climate of cooperation and normalisation.

¹⁰ The initiation of my fieldwork coincided with an advertising campaign organised by the Turkish mobile phone operator *Turkcell* in which Greek-Turkish friendship became the main theme (Karakatsanis 2011: 183-286).

¹¹ Marcus complements his six categories with one more; the ‘strategically situated (single-site) ethnography’ which is actually a re-conceptualisation of traditional single-sited ethnographic fieldwork while taking into account the wider globalising phenomena that affect the concept of locality (1995: 111).

¹² For detailed reference to those research trips, locations and interviews see Karakatsanis (2011: 114-115).

¹³ For paradigmatic examples of this discourse see *ibid*:289-295.

¹⁴ Once I was actually asked to present my student ID since my interlocutor argued that ‘there have been spies that came to me presenting themselves as university professors’, while the ‘spy’ joke also came up several times in other encounters, yielding the micro play between insidership and outsidership. Procedures of identifications and interpellations, projections and micro-politics of identity could not but be always at play.

¹⁵ There has been a vibrant debate for years in and around social anthropology—but also recently emerging in political science—about what ethnography *is* and how someone can claim to be an ethnographer? For the latter, in political science, see for instance Schatz (2009). I recognise here the sensitivity of the question posed in relation to several issues of disciplinary and institutional belongings. I also recognise the fact that doing extended ethnographic research for one to two years can be a method with a totally different quality of experience, existentially different and in most cases having a deep effect on the kind of access to a wider set of subtle, deep information about one’s field. Nevertheless, this is not a question that can be ‘solved’ at the abstraction of the naming of practices with a yes or a no, but must be solved in the juxtaposition of specific research elaborations and problematisations, research outcomes and texts.

¹⁶ The alternative insights offered by anthropological literature provide subtle elaborations regarding the positioning of the insider/outsider dichotomy in the field, by making these categories more fluid and aporetic than in their famous sociological origins in the work of Robert K. Merton (1972). Following those more nuanced distinctions between an ‘experience-near’ and ‘experience-distant’, like the one Clifford Geertz had already proposed in 1973 (Geertz 1973), or the more recent focus on hybridity (Narayan 1993; Abu-Lughod 1991) and the multiplicity of belongings, the blurring of what is ‘home and away, same and different’ when one begins the field-trip (Clifford 1997: 206) enabled me to see these categories in a more problematised, maybe aporetic, way. Following this line of thinking, the play between insiders/outsiders should be regarded as positioning oneself in relation to distant horizons which are themselves ultimately *impossible*. One can never be fully an insider (as the ultimate ‘inside’ of a group would equate to an essentialist account of an imagined merged totality of the diffused subjectivities of its members). Translated back to the research experience, such impossibility can be traced even in the case of my engagement ‘from within’ the initiatives and associations of ‘Turkish-Greek friendship’ that I followed closely through participant observation. Because of internal groupings and micro-politics *within* the groups, I could interpret ‘inside’ affairs from the perspective of the lens offered to me by my interlocutor or informant. Access to an absolute ‘inside’ would remain impossible, despite the fact that in many cases I was given equal access to that of long standing members and I actually did feel

attached to the worries, aims and efforts of their initiatives. The issue to understand here is that the more 'insider' one becomes, the less consistent this 'inside' seems to appear. The depiction of groups of categories with clear-cut limits is only an illusion when someone stands from the 'outside'. At the same time, the 'absolute outsider' seems also an impossibility since there will always be different 'outsiders' whose alterity in relation to a group bears different degrees of salience. For instance, a Kurdish immigrant in Istanbul might have been much more 'outsider' than I in relation to the Turkish groups of elites I was approaching and interviewing. Such aporetic experiences in the field, and the continuous play between feeling an *insider* and/or an *outsider* resonated, once again, with the theoretical anxieties that political discourse theory has been preoccupied with. The empirical realisation of an impossible clear-cut dichotomy between the inside/outside echoed the ontological argument about the impossibility of closure, the always inter-relational character of the two horizons and the impurity of the dichotomy (Norval 2000: 224; see also Marchart 2004: 62).

¹⁷ I can also report here the incipient laughter and murmurs as traces of cynical responses by many people when, during a reception offered by the Greek Consul in Istanbul on the occasion of the meeting of the TurGreSoc students' initiative, the Consul himself, clearly in all honesty while delivering his speech and praising such initiatives and exchanges, addressed the Turkish students, telling them 'and whenever you need a visa, please come straight to me to settle this right away ...'. Everybody in that room knew that the competent Greek officials responsible for granting visas did not share the Consul's open-minded approach. It was only a few years later and while writing this paper that the first report about the Greek consulate authorities and visa issues appeared, disclosing publicly something that everybody 'knew' (see 'Study Sheds Light on Turks' Visa Hardships at Hands of EU ' 2010).

¹⁸ With the use of the Wittgensteinian concept of 'aspect dawning', Aletta Norval directs our attention to the moments when actors start seeing things in a different, innovative way, a way which would have been unimaginable before, due to the sedimentation of existing and dominant political grammars (Norval 2006). For an elaborated use of such a concept in relation to Greek-Turkish reconciliation initiatives see Karakatsanis (2011: 254-260).

¹⁹ The term was introduced in Marcus (1986). Later, a more detailed and complete account of the methodological aspects of the 'tool' appeared in his 1995 article (Marcus 1995).

²⁰ Howarth contrasts the idea of constitutive theories with empirical and normative ones.

²¹ Exceptions, or more nuanced approaches in relation to the field/site of research, are of course to be found in other disciplines. For example, within the wider field of discourse studies, Ron Scollon provides a set of tools and concepts for approaching fieldwork, suggesting, among other strategies, detailed analysis and a following of a 'nexus of practice' (Scollon 2001: 177-180). Scollon argues for an ethnographic approach in which the researcher seeks to unearth the connections and links between practices that supersede a mere situational enquiry (i.e. tracing the bonding elements between the different practices of an actor) and calls for observations that focus more widely on a *genre nexus of practices* and *community of practices* (Scollon 2001: 179). However, in Scollon's concept there is a presupposed question that needs to be addressed in order for these nexuses to become useful as a heuristic device: whether 'the linkages among practices and the sequences of mediated actions are recognizable to participants as defining groups or genres or situations' (ibid). In contrast to this, what this paper tries to distil out of George Marcus's contribution is exactly the opportunity to move beyond the rigid limits of the self-representations of our informants and our research subjects, and obtain richer information than the images they themselves have about the 'system' or the nexus of their practices. And while Scollon himself tries to overcome this restrictive perspective by arguing for the need for a contextualisation of the findings within larger structures like neo-capitalist or globalist ones (Scollon 2001: 161), this does not seem to be enough. Such a strategy is based on a mere juxtaposition of local practices with a pre-constructed and pre-conceived world system (or sedimented 'systems' already named, like the 'nation-state' or 'civil society'), a restricting binary that Marcus's toolkit seems able to overcome.

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