



COMMUNICATION AND DISCOURSE THEORY

COLLECTED WORKS OF
THE BRUSSELS DISCOURSE
THEORY GROUP

EDITED BY LEEN VAN BRUSSEL,
NICO CARPENTIER AND
BENJAMIN DE CLEEN

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Introduction

Discourse Theory, Media and Communication, and the Work of the
Brussels Discourse Theory Group¹

Nico Carpentier, Benjamin De Cleen, and Leen Van Brussel

Introduction

This book brings together a selection of work by the members of the Brussels Discourse Theory Group. Even if the label appears to be highly localized, it is the best possible term to refer to an international group of media and communication studies scholars, who work on the deployment of discourse theory (DT) within their field, and who have been, or are, affiliated to the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB—the Free University of Brussels) in a variety of ways. What creates the coherence in this group is not their nationality, their presence in a particular city, or their position in the academic hierarchy, but their commitment to using DT to support media and communication research while fully respecting the theoretical sophistication of discourse theory.

In the last fifteen years, the Brussels Discourse Theory Group has drawn on the poststructuralist and post-Marxist DT first formulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), in order to analyze media and communication. The Group has, as two group members described it in a 2007 article (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007), attempted to bring discourse theory into the field of communication and media studies, where it had been largely absent until then—at least explicitly, for as Dahlberg and Phelan (2011: 8) rightly indicate, DT's poststructuralism and post-Marxism do resonate with tendencies and concepts (discourse, for example) that have been present in communication, media, and cultural studies since the 1970s. In doing so, the Group has also aimed to contribute to the advancement of DT, by increasing its sensitivity to the importance of media and communication, by showing discourse DT's empirical applicability beyond politics, by strengthening the discourse-theoretical methodology, and through theoretical contributions to DT cross-fertilized by theories on, and analyses of, media and communication. This collection showcases some of this work, illustrating the benefits of a discourse-theoretical approach for the analysis of communication and media, and highlighting some of the contributions that the Group's work has attempted to make to DT more broadly.

Our aim in this introduction is to briefly reflect on the interaction between DT and the study of media and communication, and the Group's contribution to it. This introductory chapter starts with a concise discussion of the main tenets of DT that inform research carried out at the intersection of DT and media and communication studies, including the Group's own work. Building on this first section, we ask ourselves what it implies analytically and methodologically to perform discourse-theoretical research. We point out the specificity of discourse-theoretically inspired analyses, by first situating them in the field of discourse

studies, and then describing the basic principles of discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA). We then discuss how DT has been put to use in the analysis of communication and media. We distinguish four thematic areas: (1) communication, rhetoric, and media strategies, (2) discourses in media organizations, (3) media identities, practices, and institutions, and (4) media and agonistic democracy. In the next part, we single out two areas that are currently being developed in the Group, and have thus far remained under-developed, theoretically as well as empirically, from a DT perspective: the relation between the discursive and the material, and the relation between media, communication, and audiences. Finally, we provide a short overview of the chapters in this book.

The main tenets of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory

The chapters in this book deal with topics ranging from journalistic identities to resistance to the radical right, and from the reality-TV program *Temptation Island*, to euthanasia and palliative care. All of these chapters make use of poststructuralist and post-Marxist DT, in one way or another, and combine DT with other theories, including political theory, political philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, audience studies, and journalism studies. What these chapters exactly use from DT depends on the needs of the specific research projects, but all of them take from DT its discursive (and thus deeply political) perspective on the social, as well as some parts of the DT conceptual framework, in order to perform their theorizations and analyses.

The major reference for Laclau and Mouffe's DT is the seminal *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). This remains one of the key works in the field of DT, next to Foucault's theoretical elaborations on discourse, which we can find especially in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). Laclau and Mouffe have, mostly in individually authored works, further developed their theoretical reflections, which features most prominently in Laclau's (1990, 1996, 2000) continuous development of a DT of politics and identity, and in his conceptualization of populism (2005), and in Mouffe's reflections on the political and her proposal for an agonistic democracy (1993, 2000, 2005, 2013). Laclau and Mouffe's work has also generated a considerable amount of secondary theoretical literature, most notably by students of Laclau at Essex University (e.g., Critchley and Marchart 2004a; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth 2000, 2013; Smith 1999; Stavrakakis 2007; Torfing 1999) as well as empirical work, mainly situated within political studies (e.g., Howarth et al. 2000; Howarth and Torfing 2005) but also in the study of work, organizations, and management (e.g., Glynos 2008; Jones 2009; Grant et al. 2009), public health (policy) (e.g., Durnova 2013; Glynos and Speed 2012; Glynos et al. 2015), education policy (Rear and Jones 2013), and, of course, in media and communication studies (for an overview of some of the most important works in the latter area, see below).

In order to grasp how the work of the Brussels Group, and others' work in the field of media and communication studies, draws on DT, it is helpful to briefly consider some of the

main tenets of Laclau and Mouffe's contribution to the development of a poststructuralist and post-Marxist DT. Somewhat schematically speaking, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* can be read on three strongly interrelated levels (Smith 1999): their ontology, their political identity theory, and their democratic theory of radical pluralism. Laclau and Mouffe's later work also fits into this basic model, as many of their later publications contribute to further developing one or several of these levels.

On the first level, Laclau and Mouffe make an ontological contribution (Howarth 2000: 17), by theorizing the discursive (Howarth 2000: 8-10).² DT looks at the social as a non-exclusively discursive reality, focusing on how it is constructed through these structures of meaning. This does not imply, for Laclau and Mouffe, that the discursive is all there is. Even if Laclau and Mouffe strongly privilege the role of discursive structures in their analytical focus, they never deny the existence of the material (or of human agency, for that matter). Their careful positioning between materialism and idealism allows them to acknowledge the significance of the material, while emphasizing that the discursive is needed to generate meaning(s) to the material world.

Discourses are then seen as always incomplete attempts to fix meanings within a particular structure of relations. Or, to use Howarth and Stavrakakis' (2000: 3) definition, a discourse is a "social and political construction that establishes a system of [meaningful] relations between different objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify." These signifiatory relations are generated through the practice of articulation, which implies the interlinking of different signifiers in networks of meaning. But, as Laclau and Mouffe's (1985: 105) definition of articulation entails, the process of articulation has consequences for all the components that are articulated into a discourse, and for the discourse as a whole. They define articulation as "any practice establishing a relation among elements³ such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice." The articulation of the signifier freedom in different discourses is one example of this mechanism. Freedom, as a signifier, features in many different discourses, including neo-liberal and communist discourses, where it obtains very different meanings (even if it is the same signifier), which makes this signifier float. But inversely, the presence of the signifier freedom, in both discourses, affects both of them as a whole, albeit in different ways.

Importantly, Laclau and Mouffe take a non-essentialist position, and emphasize the always-present possibility of change, or, in other words, the contingency of the discursive. At the same time—and this is one of the significant merits of their work—they have a strong interest in how social structure is generated through the fixation of meaning. Their work balances a context of instability with practices of stabilization. It is important to stress this crucial role of contingency—which is very much in line with their poststructuralist position—which results in discourses being seen as overdetermined, never having the capacity to reach "a final closure" (Howarth 1998: 273). This is (partially—see later) because a discourse is never safe from elements alien to that discourse⁴: There is always a surplus (or a residue) of elements—which Laclau and Mouffe call the field of discursivity⁵—that offer

themselves to articulation, and that thus prevent the full saturation of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112), allowing discourses to change. But this does not mean that discourses are necessarily and continuously unstable: Their articulation gives them a certain rigidity and viscosity, without which no meaning would be possible in the first place.

Furthermore, discursive stability is enhanced by the role of privileged signifiers, which Laclau and Mouffe call nodal points. Returning to the earlier example of liberal discourse: It is hard to imagine liberalism without the signifier, freedom. Torfing (1999: 88–89) points out that these nodal points “sustain the identity of a certain discourse by constructing a knot of definite meanings.” Simultaneously, the field of discursivity has an infinite number of elements, which are not connected to a specific discourse at a given moment in time. Instability enters the equation through the idea that these unconnected elements can always *become* articulated within a specific discourse, sometimes replacing (or disarticulating) other elements, which affects the discourse’s entire signification. Due to the infinitude of the field of discursivity and the inability of a discourse to permanently fix its meaning and keep its elements stable, discourses are vulnerable to re-articulation and/or disintegration.

Equally important for Laclau and Mouffe is the relationship between the discursive and the subject, which is mediated through the concept of the subject position, drawing on Althusser and Foucault:

Whenever we use the category of “subject” in this text, we will do so in the sense of “subject positions” within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations—not even in the limited sense of being endowed with powers that render an experience possible—as all “experience” depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility.

(Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 115)

Laclau and Mouffe’s DT has been criticized as both voluntarist/subjectivist—as denying structural constraints on the human subject (e.g., Therborn 2008), and as denying the subject’s political agency by reducing the subject to mere subject positions constituted within discourse (Žižek 1990: 150–51, see Howarth 2000: 121; 2004: 264). We would argue that DT takes a middle position between structure and agency. It rejects both approaches to humans as rational self-interest-maximizing subjects and to approaches that deny agency by subsuming it under the reproduction of structures (Howarth 2000: 121; 2004: 254; Torfing 1999: 137–54). Instead, the DT position—strongly influenced by, among others, Althusser’s theory of interpellation (see Laclau 1977; Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Sawyer 2002: 443), Foucault’s decentering of the subject, and Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory of discourse (see Sawyer 2002: 444)—is one that sees human subjects as *constituted as* subjects within discourses (Howarth 2000: 108), but simultaneously sees these discourses (and therefore the subject’s identity) as contingent, changeable, and moldable (Howarth 2000: 121), which generates human freedom. Because of the plurality of discourses, an actor can identify at the same time with more than one subject position (e.g., woman, working class, black, feminist).

It is here that the space for agency lies (Howarth 2000: 108–09, 121). It is precisely the discursive contingency that creates the space for subjectivity and the particularity of human identity and behavior. In this way, a structuralist position is avoided, and a poststructuralist stance is taken.

The second—and strongly related—level on which *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and much other DT work can be read is what Smith (1999: 87) calls Laclau and Mouffe’s political identity theory, which is tributary to conflict theory. Here, the focus is on the political nature of construction processes. The political is defined in a very broad way here, as “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations” (Mouffe 2000: 101). This allows seeing the fixation, sedimentation, and contestation of particular discourses, as well as the discursive struggle for hegemony between different discourses, as political interventions.

As mentioned before, discourses have to be partially fixed, because the abundance of meaning would otherwise make any meaning impossible. Laclau argues that contingency requires decisions to constantly supersede the undecidability (1996: 92). In Laclau’s vocabulary, the notion of the decision is used to refer to the moment of fixation, where discourses are articulated in particular ways and discursive struggles are waged, leading to particular outcomes. But these fixations (or decisions) are also political interventions that privilege specific meanings over others. Mouffe (2000: 130) stresses this in her call for a “proper reflection on the moment of ‘decision’ which characterizes the field of politics.” She adds to this idea that the decision—as a moment of fixation—entails “an element of force and violence” (Mouffe 2000: 130). Even when fixations appear to be permanent, because discourses will eventually lose their contested political nature and become sedimented in social norms and values, later in time they might become contested again, which implies their re-politicization (Torfing 1999: 70; Glynos and Howarth 2007).

In DT, fixations are not only intra-discursive, but also generated through inter-discursive political struggles. Discourses are often engaged in struggles, in an attempt to attain hegemonic positions over other discourses and, thus, to have their meanings (and not others) dominate the particular realm of the social. Through these struggles, “in a field crisscrossed by antagonisms” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 135–36), and through attempts to create discursive alliances, or chains of equivalence (Howarth 1998: 279), discourses are altered, which also produces contingency. In contrast, when a discourse eventually saturates the social as a result of a victorious discursive struggle, stability emerges. Laclau and Mouffe use the concept of hegemony for this stability, a concept that they borrow from Gramsci. Originally, Gramsci (1999: 261) defined this notion as referring to the formation of consent rather than to the (exclusive) domination of the Other, without however excluding a certain form of pressure and repression: “The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony [...] is characterized by the combination of force and consent variously balancing one another, without force exceeding consent too much.” Following Laclau and Mouffe’s interpretation of the concept, Torfing (1999: 101) defined hegemony as the expansion of the discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action. In this scenario, a dominant social

order (Howarth 1998: 279), or a social imaginary, is created, which pushes other discourses beyond the horizon, threatening them with oblivion.

On a third level, Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist plea for a radical democratic politics—and later for a left-wing populist strategy and for an agonistic democracy—contributes to democratic theory as well as to left-wing political strategy formation. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 190) still situate themselves within the “classic ideal of socialism,” but they argue for a “polyphony of voice” in which the different (radical) democratic political struggles—such as antiracism, antisexism, and anticapitalism—are allotted an equally important role and are linked to each other (Mouffe 1997: 18). From traditional Marxist positions, serious objections were launched against this post-Marxist decentralizing of the class concept. For example, Gledhill (1994: 183) called Laclau “a disillusioned Althusserian Marxist of the 1968 new left vintage who now declares himself a post-Marxist.” This critique actually touches upon the heart of the theoretical project of Laclau and Mouffe, which aims to de-essentialize Althusser's and Gramsci's work (and thus indirectly also the work of Marx and Engels). The decentralization of the class struggle allows incorporating other relevant societal struggles and identities (for instance those related to ethnicity and gender) and thus correcting the traditional Marxist negligence for these areas, and allowing the construction of a broad progressive alliance (Torfing 1999: 291). Moreover, this post-Marxist position links up with a broader ontological rejection of classical Marxism's economic determinism.

Moreover, Mouffe's (2005, 2013) agonistic democracy is aimed at democratically transforming antagonism and violence in order to limit their damaging impact. In 1993, Mouffe (1993: 153) captured this idea as follows: “Instead of shying away from the component of violence and hostility inherent in social relations, the task is to think how to create the conditions under which those aggressive forces can be defused and diverted and a pluralist democratic order made possible.” For Mouffe, the aim of democratic politics is “[...] to transform an ‘antagonism’ into ‘agonism’” (1999: 755), to “tame” or “sublimate” (Mouffe 2005: 20–21) antagonisms,⁶ without eliminating passion from the political realm or relegating it to the outskirts of the private. In other words, this implies the transformation of the other-enemy, to be destroyed, into an other-adversary, who can still occupy the same (political) symbolic and material space.

All of the contributions in this book draw on the first two levels—DT's discursive theorization of the social and its contribution to understanding the political; some chapters also draw on Laclau and Mouffe's contributions to democratic theory and to the development of a progressive political strategy.

Mapping discourse-theoretical analysis

Before we turn to a discussion of how DT has been, and can be, used in communication and media studies, and what the specificity of such analyses are, this section reflects more generally on the methodological translation of discourse theory (DT) into discourse-theoretical

analysis (DTA). Of course, when discussing methodology, the multitude of approaches is reminiscent of the equally immense variety of conceptualizations and theorizations of discourse. Discussing both—conceptualizations and methods—in a structured way is helpful to provide a first map on which to situate DTA.

Here, it is important to keep the specificity of DT's approach toward discourse in mind, as it has a significant impact on its analytical and methodological operationalization. DT sees discourses as structures of meaning and aims to understand how these structures of meaning—or frameworks of intelligibility—work in society. This broad (and abstract) approach toward discourse also produces a particular perspective on language, which is seen in DT as one of the many ways that these meanings can be condensed, materialized, and communicated. Or, in other words, DT's interest lies in what is *behind* language, without ignoring the complexities and contingencies of the relationship between discourse and language. This, in turn, renders DT different from the discourse analyses that have their origins in the field of linguistics—or that are more hybrid—as these approaches remain more concerned with the close empirical analysis of written, spoken, or audio-visual texts, which they call discourse. Of course, DTA also draws on such texts as empirical material, and some of the more linguistic types of discourse analysis are also concerned with ideology, but DTA remains mainly concerned with the discursive (or ideological) constructions behind linguistic (and other signifying) practices.

This diversity of meanings of the signifier discourse is something that the field of discourse studies has always had to come to terms with. These meanings range from spoken language (as opposed to written texts), spoken and written language, the language use of a particular actor, language use associated with a particular institutional context or genre, text in context, a particular view on a particular part of the world, a structure of meaning, a particular perspective on the social in its entirety... This signifiatory diversity is caused by (1) the term being used by different disciplines (linguistics, psychology, literary and cultural theory, critical theory, political theory, organization studies, etc.) with rather different traditions, purposes, and ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as (2) it being used in several ways and on different levels of abstraction within the same discipline and by one and the same author (see among many, many others: Blommaert 2005; Fairclough 1992: 3; Howarth 2000; Philips and Jørgensen 2002; Mills 1997; Sawyer 2002; Titscher et al. 2000: 25–27; Wodak 2008: 1–6).

Using Van Dijk's (1997: 3) definition of discourse studies as the study of “talk and text in context” as a starting point, this diversity of meanings can be structured—and the specificity of DTA explained—by distinguishing between micro and macro-approaches toward both text and context.

In the micro-textual approaches of discourse, the concept's close affiliation with language is emphasized, an approach we can also label, following Philips and Jørgensen (2002: 62), discourse-as-language. Van Dijk's (1997: 3) definition of discourse provides us with a helpful illustration: “Although many discourse analysts specifically focus on spoken language or talk, it is [...] useful to include also written texts in the concept of discourse.”

Macro-textual approaches use a broader definition of text, much in congruence with Barthes (1975), seeing texts as materializations of meaning and/or ideology. In this macro-textual approach, where discourse becomes discourse-as-representation, or discourse-as-ideology, the focus is placed on the meanings, representations, or ideologies embedded in the text, and not so much on the language used. One related (but not entirely overlapping) strategy to distinguish between more micro-textual and more macro-textual approaches is Gee's (1990) distinction between "big D" Discourse and "little d" discourse, where the latter refers to "connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays [...]" (Gee 1990: 142). Big D Discourse is "always more than just language," and refers to "saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" (Gee 1990: 142—emphasis removed). One could argue that "thinking" and "knowing" should be added to Gee's list, to describe the approaches at the very end of the macro-textual part of the micro/macro-textual spectrum, but Gee's approach remains important in mapping the diversity in the field of discourse studies.

A second distinction that enables us to map the different meanings of the discourse concept is that between micro- and macro-contextual approaches. Micro-contextual approaches confine the context to specific social settings (such as a speech act or a conversation). We can take conversation analysis as example, where—according to Heritage's (1984: 242—our emphasis) interpretation—context is defined at a micro-level: "A speaker's action is context-shaped in that its contribution to an on-going sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context—including, *especially, the immediately preceding configuration of actions*—in which it participates." Heritage (1984: 242) continued: "every 'current' action will itself form the immediate context for some 'next' action in a sequence [...]" Another example is sociolinguistics' emphasis on the linguistic rule system, the syntactic and lexical planning strategies, and speech codes to define discourse, as Dittmar (1976: 12) explained. But it would be unfair to claim that micro-contextual approaches remain exclusively focused on the micro-context, even if that is where they are rooted. Sociolinguistics, with its emphasis on social groupings, class positions, social relations, and sociocultural and situational rules (Dittmar 1976: 12) is a case in point. Nevertheless, the role of context in macro-contextual is structurally different, as these approaches look at how discourses circulate within the social, paying much less attention to more localized settings (or micro-contexts). This leads to much broader analyses, for instance, how democratic discourse (which brings us back to Laclau and Mouffe) or gender identity (Butler 1997) is articulated within the social. Again, the emphasis on the macro-context of the social does not imply a complete disregard of the micro-contexts of language, social settings, or social practices, although the starting point of these approaches remains embedded in the macro-level. A more streamlined version of this debate, and the many different positions, can be found in Figure 1.

DTA, based on Laclau and Mouffe's work, is macro-contextual and macro-textual. The interest of this approach lies primarily with the analysis of the circulation, reproduction, and contestation of discourses-as-structures-of-meaning, not with language-in-use per se.

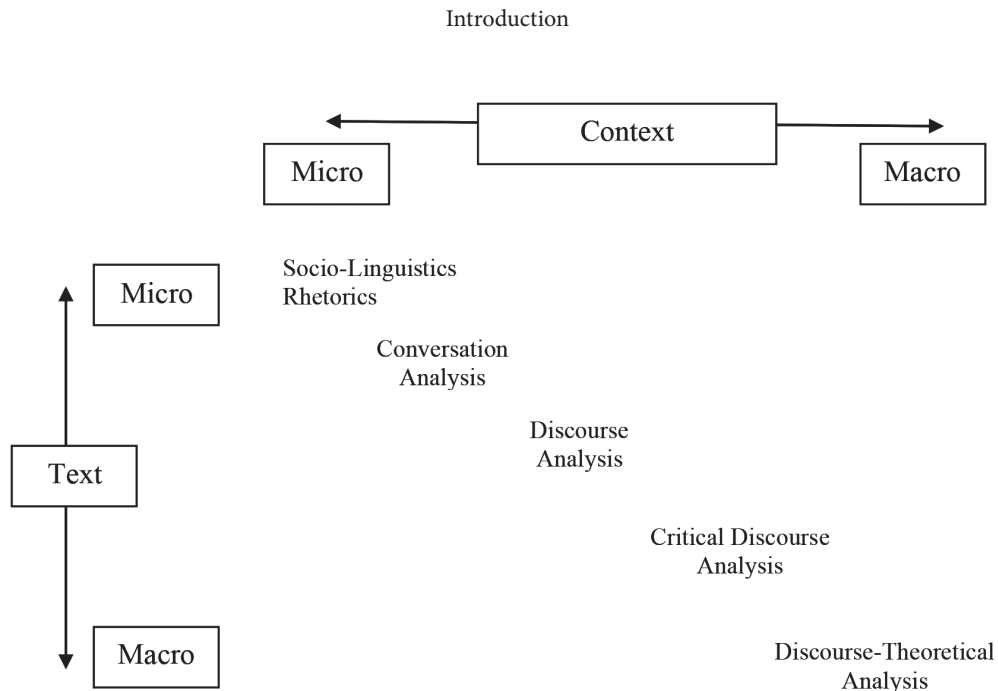


Figure 1: Textual and contextual dimensions of the discourse definition. Carpentier and De Cleen 2007: 277.

DTA uses a much broader definition of discourse than is common in linguistically inspired forms of discourse analysis. In contrast to, for example, CDA, that sees discourse as a dimension of the social that stands in a dialectical relationship to other dimensions that do not function discursively (Philips and Jørgensen 2002: 19, 61), DTA does not regard discourse “merely as a linguistic region within a wider social realm,” but offers a more encompassing conceptualization of discourse that “insists on the interweaving of semantic aspects of language with the pragmatic aspects of actions, movements and objects” (Torfing 1999: 94). As Laclau and Mouffe (1990: 100) phrase it: “This totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic is what we call discourse.”

In other words, DT “rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 107). Although Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 107) (unrightfully, we would say) criticize Foucault for making such distinction, they are actually very much in line with Foucault and Hall by claiming that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. Hall (1997: 44–45—emphasis in original) constructs his own language game in order to make this point, and to avoid the critique of idealism:

Is Foucault saying [...] that “*nothing exists outside of discourse?*” In fact, Foucault does not deny that things can have a real, material existence in the world. What he does argue is that “*nothing has any meaning outside of discourse*”. As Laclau and Mouffe put

it: “we use [the term discourse] to emphasize the fact that every social configuration is *meaningful*.”

Discourse theory and methodology: The procedures of discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA)

While DT provides a very valuable conceptual framework for poststructuralist analysis, it has been subjected to significant methodological critiques (e.g., Marttila 2015; Torfing 2005; Zienkowski 2012). In 1998, Howarth (1998: 291), for example, stated that:

Laclau and Mouffe need to lay down, however minimally, a set of methodological guidelines for practitioners, as well a set of questions and hypotheses (à la Lakatos) for clarification and development. Thus far, the only clear methodological rule consists in a “non-rule”: rules can never be simply applied to cases, but have to be articulated in the research process. [...] The lack of adequate responses to the epistemological and methodological questions pose significant problems for researchers working within discourse theory.

Since then, there have been considerable steps in the methodological development of DT. Glynos and Howarth’s (2007) *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (see also Glynos 2008) proposes an analytical focus on the identification of social logics (that characterize practices in a particular field), political logics (that explain how practices emerge and normalized, and are politicized and contested), and phantasmatic logics (that explain how practices and ideologies “grip” subjects) as a way forward for discourse-theoretical research (for a critique of this logics approach, see Marttila 2015). Howarth and Glynos also reflect on what it means to analyze social reality from the perspective of DT, what kind of knowledge this might produce, and the kind of research strategies that are needed to make empirical analysis compatible with DT’s ontological and epistemological principles. Such reflections can also be found in Philips and Jørgensen’s (2002) work on social constructionist discourse analysis (which also discusses CDA and discursive psychology) and in Marttila’s (2015) work on post-foundational discourse analysis. Some of the other notable advances in operationalizing DT-inspired discourse analysis include Glasze’s (2007) proposal for combining qualitative and lexicometric methods in the identification of discourses, Nonhoff’s (2007) hegemony analysis, which focuses on the detailed identification of hegemonic strategies, and Angermüller’s poststructuralist discourse analysis (2014), which focuses on enunciative pragmatics.

In the work of the Brussels Group, a set of methodological procedures were developed to support what has been labeled DTA (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007; Carpentier 2010, 2017). Crucial in the development of DTA was (and is) the notion of the sensitizing concept, as it provided the methodological bridge between the DT framework on the one hand, and the

empirical research data to be analyzed on the other hand. Sensitizing concepts help analysts, as Ritzer (1992: 365) explained, in “what to look for and where to look [...]”. These concepts are not intended to dominate and foreclose the analysis, but are kept in the back of the mind of the analyst and provide support when interpreting particular social realities and applying the categorization logics of qualitative analysis (Maso 1989; Wester 1987, 1995). Within discourse studies, it is (not surprisingly) the notion of discourse that features as primary sensitizing concept, whether we are dealing with DTA, discursive-material analysis,⁷ critical discourse analysis, or (linguistic) discourse analysis. DT itself then enables the production of a considerable list of secondary sensitizing concepts, which includes the concepts of articulation, nodal point, floating signifier, and subject position, but also contingency and overdetermination, chain of equivalence (and difference), antagonism, agonism, hegemony, and social imaginary.

Given the specificity of each research project, sensitizing concepts external to DT, but necessary for the theoretical grounding of the research project, remain also necessary. The latter set of theoretical notions form the third layer of sensitizing concepts, and these are indeed very much specific to each research project. To avoid an ontological and paradigmatic schism between the internal and external sensitizing concepts, there is a need to translate these external theoretical frameworks and bring them into the realm of DT. This re-reading of existing theories consists of a DTA of theory not dissimilar to Derrida’s deconstruction, even though he takes aim at more philosophical texts. The outcome of these re-readings is discursive-theoretical versions of originally non-discursive-theoretical theories, which are made consistent, or calibrated with the ontological-paradigmatic assumptions of DT (see also Howarth 2005; Glynos and Howarth 2007 on the logic of articulation).

Discourse theory and the study of media and communication

In line with its history as a political-theoretical intervention in its own right, DT has mainly been used in the study of politics, focusing on political movements, parties, leaders, and ideologies. Discourse theorists have traditionally paid rather limited attention to media and their crucial role in contemporary politics and society more broadly (see Dahlberg and Phelan 2011; Dahlgren 2011: 224; but see Mouffe’s (e.g., 2007) work on arts and politics). For example, the absence of much reflection on the role of media institutions and of mediated communication has been seen as a weakness of Laclau’s theory of populism (Moffitt 2017; Simons 2011). DT can benefit from including communication and media in its analyses, and from engaging with literature on communication and media (and with some of the more linguistically and empirically inclined approaches to discourse studies that have focused more on media—especially critical discourse analysis—and that are more frequently drawn on in communication and media studies). Students of communication and media, for their part, have much to gain from engaging with DT. While DT still has a relatively modest place in communication and media studies, the last decade has seen the publication

of a variety of work—some of which can be found in this book—that uses the DT framework to better understand aspects of communication or media.

While largely focused on political movements and ideologies, DT's conceptualization of discourse and its theory of hegemony are quite easily applicable beyond the field of politics proper. DT's stress on the so-called primacy of the political means that a particular social order, an identity or a practice that is sedimented, can always be questioned, and turned into an object of political struggle. In this respect, DT is rather more explicitly political than other forms of social constructivist thought (that are also used in communication and media studies) that stress how meaning is produced through social interaction. DT aims to make visible the political nature of the social, also exposing attempts to make that inherently political nature invisible.

This deeply political perspective on the social has great potential for the study of communication and media. For one, on an ontological level, the recognition of the contingent and profoundly political nature of the social urges communication and media scholars to turn their attention to how media representations and practices link up with hegemonic processes (e.g., in the representation of national groups or economic processes). But it also stimulates looking at what might seem like inevitable or evident communication and media *practices and institutions*, asking how these practices and institutions are underpinned by particular discourses (e.g., the public broadcaster as an institution rests on particular views on the role of the state in society, on the functions of media, etc., see Carpentier 2015). This ontological position also has an important critical potential, because it allows us to question the inevitability of particular representations of society, and the unchangeability of particular ways of doing and organizing communication and media. This, in turn, opens up spaces for envisaging alternatives (see Dahlgren 2011). The distinction between institutionalized politics and the political also makes clear that communication and media scholars can use DT not only for the study of the relation between communication, media, and the field of politics, but also for analyzing the ever-present political dimensions of media and communication in a broader sense.

Even if DT has not become a mainstream theoretical model in the field of media and communication studies, we can still identify four thematic domains in this field, where DT has effectively been deployed.

Communication, rhetoric, and media strategies

While often largely ignoring the role of mass media and the specificities of mediated and unmediated communication, the bulk of DT work analyzes political rhetoric or other forms of political communication in one way or another. As far as the study of political communication goes, DT has played a particularly prominent role in the analysis of populism. Drawing on DT in general and on Laclau's seminal discursive theory of populism (1977, 2005) in particular, a number of authors have further developed and empirically

operationalized Laclau's work by putting it to use and confronting it with the empirical analysis of concrete populist political rhetoric and communication strategies. The work of Yanniss Stavrakakis and the Populismus group in Thessaloniki is of particular importance here (e.g., Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Stavrakakis et al. 2017; also De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, but also Mouffe's (2018) latest book, *For a Left Populism*, has to be mentioned here). Some authors with a closer affiliation with communication and media studies have focused more specifically on the cultural and media dimensions of populism (see Moffitt 2016, 2017), asking for instance how social media relate to populist mobilization (Husted 2015) or how popular culture and high culture acquire political significance in the populist juxtaposition of the people and the elite and in attempts to reclaim "the people" and "the popular" from (radical-right) populists (De Cleen 2009, 2013, 2016; De Cleen and Carpentier Chapter).

The specificity of online communication and media strategies of political actors have been a topic of interest as well, also for some of the authors included in this collection (Akdoğan chapter; Filimonov and Svensson chapter). For example, the online strategies of the radical right have been scrutinized using the DT framework (Askanius and Mylonas 2015; Kompatsiaris and Mylonas 2015), as have progressive forms of activism, such as climate change activism (Askanius and Uldam 2011), the Occupy Movement (Husted 2015) and feminist activism (Filimonov and Svensson chapter).

Other areas of communication that take up a prominent place in media and communication studies have hardly been approached from a DT perspective. One example is medical communication, which has received more attention from within more linguistic approaches of discourse analysis (which have been far more concerned with interpersonal communication more generally than has DT) (e.g., Gotti and Salager-Meyer 2006; Roberts and Sarani 2005). Another area where a considerable potential for DT exist is advertising and marketing (see Stavrakakis 2007; Boje and Cai 2008; Carvalho 2008)—an area where good use could also be made of DT's connections with psychoanalytical theory.

Discourses in media organizations

Much of the DT work within the field of media and communication studies proper has been concerned with analyzing the presence of particular discourses in (mass) media organizations ("discourses in media"). A significant share of the work of the Brussels Discourse Theory Group can be situated in this realm. The DT framework has been applied in the analysis of the media representation of a wide range of topics—from the strictly political (political parties, economic policy, war, nationalism) to the political dimensions of the representation of life and death (Van Brussel 2012, 2014; Carpentier and Van Brussel 2012; Van Brussel and Carpentier 2012, 2017)—by and through a wide range of mass media related practices, from journalism to cinema. For example, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, a number of authors have used the DT framework in critical analyses of the role of mainstream journalism in reproducing neo-liberal capitalism by

ignoring or undervaluing the systemic dimensions of the crisis, delegitimizing alternatives, and “culturalizing” the crisis. Especially the coverage of the crisis in Greece, by Greek as well as by international media, has received extensive attention, as in the work of Yiannis Mylonas, a text of whom is included in this collection (Mylonas 2012b, 2015, 2017, chapter; Mylonas and Kompatsiaris 2013; Doudaki 2015). The discursive construction of the self, the enemy, and the victim in the media representation of war has also been approached from a DT perspective, one of the areas of interest of one of the editors of this collection. These analyses have included mainstream journalism (Carpentier 2005; Cammaerts and Carpentier 2006, 2009; Carpentier and Trioen chapter; Bogaerts and Carpentier chapter), documentaries (Mylonas 2012a), film (Carpentier 2007), and alternative media, including also pro-war military blogs (Carpentier 2008). Nationalism and national identity has also been a topic of interest beyond the context of war, for example in studies of cinema (Martínez Martínez 2008), visual arts (Cuevas Valenzuela 2008), and of Chinese and Taiwanese journalism (Lams 2008), of the journalistic coverage of the 2015 “refugee crisis” (De Cleen et al. 2017; see also Phelan 2009).

Beyond these obviously political themes, DT has also been put to use in the study of the political dimensions of what could be called life-political domains, an expansion of the reach of DT to which the Brussels Discourse Theory Group has also contributed. Such analyses have included sexual fidelity, seduction, and hedonism (Carpentier 2009), the representation of death and dying (Van Brussel 2012, 2014; Carpentier and Van Brussel 2012; Van Brussel and Carpentier 2012, 2017), gender identity (e.g., Glynos 2000; Wang 2008), social care (West 2013), and ageing (West et al. 2017).

Media identities, practices, and institutions

DT has also been used to analyze discourses *about* media identities, practices, and institutions (that also partly circulate in media, of course). The Brussels Discourse Theory Group has been quite active in this domain. Our work has for example focused on discourses about public service broadcasting (Carpentier 2015) and about journalism (Carpentier 2005), on recording industry rhetoric about music piracy (De Cleen 2008), activists’ discourse about the role of ICT in social change (Akdoğan 2012), and on the conceptualization of the audience in Chinese communication studies work on new media (Xu 2013). Other examples are the analyses of mainstream journalistic coverage of selfie photography (Tomanić Trivundža 2015), the discourse on the media-politics relation in Russia (Toepfl 2016), and the discursive construction of the “creative industries” (Mäe 2015).

These analyses of discourses about media have also been part of work that uses DT’s conceptualization of the discursive construction of political identities to analyze media-related identities, not only through discourses about media, but also through media production practices and institutional arrangements. Here too, the Brussels Discourse

Theory Group has published a series of contributions. The Group has approached the identity of community media (e.g., Carpentier et al. 2003; Carpentier 2017a) in this manner, as well as journalistic identity and the identity of media professionals more generally (e.g., Bogaerts and Carpentier chapter; Carpentier 2005; Carpentier and Trioen chapter), the identity of media audiences (Carpentier 2004), the identity of “ordinary people” participating in media production (e.g., Carpentier 2011, 2014), and the identity of the visitor in museums (Lepik and Carpentier chapter in this book).

It is here that DT’s conceptualization of discourse, as encompassing more than language, becomes most obvious. These analyses point to how media practices and institutions are strongly informed by, and contribute to, a variety of (also competing) discourses about the media. That is, discourses about what particular media are and should be (about what journalism is and should be: objective or explicitly critical, for example), about the role of different actors involved in media production (e.g., about the respective roles of media professionals and of ordinary people in talk shows), and about the audience (for example, do public broadcasters view the audience as consumers, as citizens, and/or as masses?).

Media and agonistic democracy

The discussion of the use of DT in the study of communication and media so far has pointed out the critical potentials of DT’s ontological positions of contingency as well as of its conceptual framework for the study of hegemony and political identity construction. Beyond this, the radical democratic proposals formulated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, together with Mouffe’s work on agonistic democracy have also inspired critical work in communication and media—some of which is less concerned with the DT framework itself. An early example is James Curran’s (1997) attempt to articulate a radical democratic (normative) theory of the media, which he distinguishes from the more traditional liberal, Marxist, and communist theories. Although Curran does not explicitly refer to Laclau and Mouffe’s work, a clear link with their radical democratic theory is present. Pieter Maesele and his colleagues have drawn on Mouffe’s work on agonism to analyze the degree of pluralism in mainstream and alternative media coverage of a range of topics, including economic policy and biotechnology (e.g., Maesele 2011; Raeijmaeckers and Maesele 2015). Schou (2016) explicitly reflects on the normative potential of Laclau’s post-Marxism for the critical study of capitalist media—that is, its critical potential beyond the use of DT to deconstruct and reveal contingency. Phelan and Dahlberg (2014) also reflect explicitly on the relation between DT and critical political economy, considering the ontological differences between them. In the Brussels Group, the ideals of agonistic democracy have been put to use in the analysis of community media interventions in bridging antagonism in Cyprus (Carpentier 2015, 2017a) and the analysis of barter relations and the field of consumption (Airaghi 2013, 2014).

Some ways forward

As the discussion above indicates, DT has been used to analyze a range of communication and media phenomena. While the focus has mainly been on communication and media contents, there have also been considerable advances in the DT study of media professional identities and media production practices.

The Brussels Group is currently developing two areas that have remained under-analyzed as well as under-theorized in DT work on media and communication: the material and its relation to the discursive, and the ways in which audiences relate to media and communication. Both of these developments draw on media and communication theories and analyses, but both are relevant beyond the field of media and communication as well. The development of these two areas should be seen in the context of an (ongoing) process of a critical (self-)reflection on (lacks within) existing work within the field of DT research into media and communication—including the contributions gathered in this volume. There is a need to further develop both areas, and we will discuss them, focusing on how the theorization of these dimensions can be strengthened and how they can be analyzed empirically from a DT perspective.

The discursive and the material in media and communication

One area where progress can still be made is in further thinking through the entanglement of the discursive with the material. The strong emphasis on the discursive has provoked strong critiques, for instance, labeling Laclau and Mouffe's position as idealist. As Joseph (2003: 112) wrote: "the idea that an object only acquires an identity through discourse is a clear example of the epistemic fallacy or the reduction of intrinsic being to transformative knowledge." He continued that Laclau and Mouffe's idealism "reduce[s] material things to the conceptions, not of an individual or a *geist*, but of a community" (Joseph 2003: 112—emphasis in original). Others, in particular, Geras (1987: 65), were harsher in their language, accusing Laclau and Mouffe of a "shamefaced idealism." This critique in turn provoked responses of disagreement with Geras' rather extreme position, even if some maintained the idealism thesis. For instance, Edward (2008) argued that it was appropriate "to label Laclau and Mouffe as idealist because their discourse analysis concentrates on how interpretations and meanings are given to the world from humans. This is their 'constructivist idealism' [...]."

In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985, 1990) work, as mentioned before, we do find a rather clear acknowledgment of the materialist dimension of social reality, which is indeed combined with the position that discourses are necessary to generate meaning for the material. This—what Howarth (1998: 289) calls their—"radical materialism" opposes the "classical dichotomy between an objective field constituted outside of any discursive intervention, and a discourse consisting of the pure expression of thought" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108).

Several other authors have defended Laclau and Mouffe's claim on a non-idealist position (e.g., Glynos and Howarth 2007: 109). Also Torfing (1999: 45–48) argues that Laclau and Mouffe's model is materialist because it questions the symmetry between the "realist object" and the "object of thought." This—what Torfing calls a—non-idealist constructivism presupposes "the incompleteness of both the given world and the subject that undertakes the construction of the object" (Torfing 1999: 48).

But there are also more specific traces of the material in Laclau and Mouffe's DT. A first trace can be found in Laclau's use of the notion of dislocation. Although this concept already featured in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, it took a more prominent role in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, where Laclau used it to further theorize the limits of discursive structures. In most cases, dislocation gains its meaning in relation to the discursive, for instance, when Laclau (1990: 39) claims that "every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time." At the same time, there is also a more material use of the dislocation, for instance, when Laclau (1990: 39) talks about the "dislocatory effects of emerging capitalism on the lives of workers": "They are well known: the destruction of traditional communities, the brutal and exhausting discipline of the factory, low wages and insecurity of work." This connection between the dislocation and material events becomes even clearer in Torfing's (1999: 148) description of the dislocation, which, according to him "refers to the emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be represented, symbolized, or in other ways domesticated by the discursive structure—which is therefore disrupted." Despite the theoretical importance of the dislocation as a link to the material, its exclusive negative load necessitates an addition. One of us (Carpentier 2017a) has suggested using the concept of the invitation for this. The invitation captures processes where the material—through its materiality—calls upon the discursive to attribute particular meanings. Contingency remains present, as the invitation can always be declined, and other discourses can be used to provide meaning to the material.

There are other traces of the material in Laclau and Mouffe's work. As Biglieri and Perelló (2011) have argued, it is particularly in Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2005) that the material⁸ is introduced, through the concept of social heterogeneity. Laclau defines this concept as a particular exteriority: "the kind of exteriority we are referring to now presupposes not only an exteriority to something within a space of representation, but to the space of representation as such. I will call this type of exteriority social heterogeneity" (Laclau 2005: 140). Biglieri and Perelló (2011: 60) label it "a structure with a beyond." It is through the invocation of Lacan, for instance, when Laclau writes that "the field of representation is a broken and murky mirror, constantly interrupted by a heterogeneous 'Real' which it cannot symbolically master" (Laclau 2005: 140), that the material regains more prominence. Another trace of the material in Laclau and Mouffe's work occurs through the performative. For instance, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they write "we will affirm the material character of every discursive structure" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108—emphasis removed),

a position they then illustrate by referring to Wittgenstein's famous language-game and the performative dimension of language.

Even if there are traces of the material, (mainly) in Laclau's work, and despite Laclau and Mouffe's plea for a position that Howarth (1998: 289) termed "radical materialism" as a "tertium quid," their strong orientation toward the analysis of the discursive components of reality, and more specifically toward the analysis of discourses such as democracy, socialism, and populism, remains. Practically speaking, this means that in their specific analyses they will pay considerably less attention to material components of reality (as for example bodies, objects, organizations, technologies, or human interactions). Here we would like to argue that there is a need for a non-hierarchical approach of the discursive and the material, which theorizes the entanglement of both, in what has been called the *discursive-material knot* (Carpentier 2017a).

Discourses, audiences, identifications

While discourse theorists have analyzed media representations, media politics, media organizations, and media professionals, the way audiences relate to media and communication has largely remained outside the scope of DT. One of us recently carried out a discourse-theoretical reception study of media coverage of the right to die (Van Brussel 2018) and found this approach to be particularly useful in enhancing the understanding of how discourses operate on the level of the subject. The case study focused on media coverage of euthanasia and the right-to-die ideology, but it goes without saying that the discourse-theoretical approach to reception studies can be adopted to investigate how subjects invest in a variety of discourses and (political) ideologies. Discourse-theoretical reception studies also create opportunities to gain insight not only in audiences' investments in discourses that circulate *in* media coverage, but also in discourses *about* media, shedding light on how audiences relate to discourses of—for instance—public service broadcasting, media professionalism, objective journalism, and so forth.

Studying practices of identification is relevant also beyond the domain of media and communication, of course. Outside the domain of media and communication exist a variety of possibilities to delve into how subjects relate to discourses. To study how subjects invest in the right-to-die discourse, one could, for instance, also look at medical practices and legal frameworks. On a broader level, the study of identification can contribute, theoretically as well as empirically, to the development of discourse-theoretical studies into different forms of non-mass-mediated communication, including political rhetoric, cultural communication, organizational communication, but also interpersonal communication in, for instance, the medical field that thus far largely remained outside the gaze of discourse theorists.

At the same time, audience reception is more than merely an entry point to the study of the way discourses operate on the level of the subject. Media texts of any kind—in traditional media, digital and social media, and all kinds of hybrid media texts—are omnipresent and play an important role in "mediating" between the discourse and the

subject. Media are, and continue to be, important signifying machines. A key advantage of integrating reception studies and DT is that such an approach, by shedding light on how subjects relate to discourses, can answer to the need of DT to develop in a more *empirical way* the phantasmatic logics of discourse that, as Glynos and Howarth (2008: 165) argue, “furnish us with the means to explain the way subjects are gripped or held by a practice or regime of practices.”

Through a better understanding of how media texts work, and are received, we can argue that media texts activate discourses; they operate as platforms for the struggle over meaning and the (attempted) construction of social imaginaries. As location of these struggles, which implies that they serve as catalysts of a multitude of discourses, they also offer audiences a multiplicity of identification points. The acts of identification, in which audiences engage when they encounter media texts, are to be seen as moments of human agency and individuality, where subjects invest in particular discourses (and not in others). It is precisely this notion of identification that theorizes the reception of media texts as phantasmatic sites where discourses work upon the subject, succeeding (or failing) in getting a hold on them.

But identification, in the context of audience reception, cannot be theorized in isolation from the process of *interpretation*, i.e. the process of allocating meaning to the text. From a DT perspective, two distinct logics affect the process of interpretation: the logic of *recognition* and the logic of *identification*. The logic of recognition is reminiscent of Hall’s (1980) concept of preferred reading and refers to the way audiences tend to recognize the discourses that are put to work in media texts. The logic of recognition follows from the broader hegemonic discursive formation shared by media producers and media audiences, which indeed implies that the latter will often—without a high level of reflexivity—recognize the hegemonic meanings inscribed in the media text. The logic of recognition uses the framework of DT to rephrase the structured agency that Hall acknowledged, but which is also present in audience reception studies more in general. Along the lines of DT, Hall’s decoding (1980) can indeed be seen as an active form of reception that “must be understood as a particular intervention, as minute as it may be, into the very meaning structures of a given hegemonic formation” (Marchart 2011: 75). At the same time, the logic of recognition draws attention to how textual openness and the possibility of polysemy (“many meanings”) (Fiske 1998; Hall 1980) are not endless. While audiences may evaluate the media message in different ways, they often share a particular reading of its meaning. They produce what Hall (1980) called a preferred reading, which implies that they engage in the logic of recognition.

But recognition does not speak to how subjects *invest* in some of the identification points that are offered to them. The logic of identification, as mentioned earlier, refers to how discourses (that are activated in media coverage) get a hold on (a member of) the audience. When subjects identify with a subject position that interpellates them, through a media text, they invest in a discourse that they come to embody and enact. Still, contingency also lurks here. Identifications are always incomplete, and they never exactly coincide with

the subject position itself (Glynos 2012; Glynos and Howarth 2008). It is also through this process that human subjectivity and agency are achieved. As Marchart (2011: 75) argues, “no subject is fully ‘subjected’ to the force of interpellation.” Identification is thus often partial, when audiences actively and creatively negotiate and combine discourses and subject positions in a way that caters to their sense of subjectivity. But human subjectivity can also manifest itself in the form of dis-identification, when audiences mobilize (and identify with) alternative discourses and subject positions. Identification, in this case, becomes a matter of de-subjection, subversion, disagreement, and dissent—thus allowing for “shifts within the hegemonic balance of forces” (Marchart 2011: 75). At the same time, subjectivity and agency are not completely disconnected from discourse; they “only proceed through the process of identification” (Laclau 1990: 44). Identification still creates connections between the subject and existing discursive structures and subject positions that are outside the subject (Carpentier 2011: 178). In identifying *and* in dis-identifying with discourses, activated in media texts, audiences remain reliant on the discourses that are “available” in media texts *and* in society—discourses that provide them with subject positions to identify with and which, in turn, allow them to “speak.”

Outline of the book

The contributions to this volume are divided into five sections. The section concentrates on DT-inspired analyses of political ideologies, and their manifestation, reproduction, and contestation in media, communication, and culture. Yiannis Mylonas’ article, “Crisis, Austerity and Opposition in Mainstream Media Discourses in Greece”, deals with the ideological dimensions of how the Greek media have covered one of the defining moments in the recent history of the European Union: The financial crisis and its consequences for Greece. Kirill Filimonov and Jakob Svensson’s chapter “(Re)Articulating Feminism: A Discourse Analysis of Sweden’s Feminist Initiative Election Campaign” focuses on the hegemonic project of feminist politics in Sweden. Benjamin De Cleen’s chapter, “The Stage as an Arena of Politics: The Struggle between the Vlaams Blok/Belang and the Flemish City Theaters,” finally, analyzes how nationalism, conservatism, and populism are combined in the rhetoric of the radical-right-wing party Vlaams Blok/Belang, against the Flemish theaters.

The second section moves away from the strictly political to turn its attention to the political dimensions of life-political issues. Leen Van Brussel’s chapter deploys DT to probe into the discursive struggles to define “The good death” in media representations of euthanasia. Nico Carpentier turns his attention toward the discourses on relationships and sexuality produced by reality television in “Putting Your Relationship to the Test: Constructions of Fidelity, Seduction, and Participation in *Temptation Island*.”

The third section groups contributions that mobilize DT to perform critical-culturalist analyses of the role of discourse in media and communication production, the identities of

media professionals, and media practices. In “The Postmodern Challenge to Journalism: Strategies for Constructing a Trustworthy Identity,” Jo Bogaerts and Nico Carpentier analyze how the journalistic hegemonic discursive formations, build around a number of core journalist values, is being dislocated in the era of liquid modernity. The next chapter is Nico Carpentier and Marit Trioen’s “The Particularity of Objectivity: A Poststructuralist and Psychoanalytical Reading of the Gap between Objectivity-as-Value and Objectivity-as-Practice in the 2003 Iraqi War Coverage.” Carpentier and Trioen turn their attention to one of the central signifiers in mainstream journalistic discourse, objectivity, and analyze how war journalism creates tensions between rhetoric about objectivity and actual journalistic practices.

In the fourth section, the focus shifts toward audiences and how audiences are invited to participate in different media and communication contexts. In “The Articulation of ‘Audience’ in Chinese Communication Research,” Guiquan Xu critically analyzes the construction of the identity of the audience in Chinese communication studies. Then, Krista Lepik and Nico Carpentier zoom in on the processes of “Articulating the Visitor in Public Knowledge Institutions.” Nico Carpentier and Wim Hannot’s “To be a Common Hero: The Uneasy Balance between the Ordinary and Ordinarity in the Subject Position of Mediated Ordinary People in the Talk Show *Jan Publiek*” focuses on the ambiguities of how media practices construct the identity of the participating audience.

A fifth and final section brings together analyses of the role of media and communication in activism, resistance, and empowerment. Giulia Airaghi’s chapter on “Online Barter and Counter-Hegemonic Resistance” analyzes the practice of online barter as an emergent phenomenon of resistance and potential counter-hegemony. Itır Akdoğan concentrates on how Turkish activists perceive the role of ICT in social change, thereby mobilizing a number of “activist fantasies.” In the last chapter of the book—“Contesting the Populist Claim on “The People” through Popular Culture: The 0110 Concerts versus the Vlaams Belang”—Benjamin De Cleen and Nico Carpentier turn their attention toward how popular culture acquires meaning in the discursive struggle against populist radical-right politics.

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Notes

- 1 Parts of this introduction have been published before (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007; Carpentier 2010; Carpentier 2017a, 2017b).
- 2 The term discourse then refers to more particular components, namely the many discourses that circulate in society, and that provide meaning to particular processes, phenomena, actors, objects, etc. It is here that the emergence, functioning, and changing of the multitude of analytically distinguishable discourses can be analyzed.
- 3 Laclau and Mouffe see elements as differential positions, which are not (yet) discursively articulated. Moments are differential positions that are articulated within a discourse.
- 4 Later on, (mainly) Laclau will refer to the Lacanian concept of lack to theorize this structural openness.
- 5 Differences in interpretation arise on the question whether the analyzed discourses are part of the field of discursivity or not. In this text the first interpretation is preferred (in contrast to Philips and Jørgensen 2002: 56), so the field of discursivity is defined here as the combination of actual and potential articulations.
- 6 In *Agonistics*, Mouffe (2013: 109) argues that “this antagonistic conflict can take different forms,” in order to introduce the distinction between “antagonism proper” and “agonism,” underneath the umbrella term of “antagonism.”
- 7 See Carpentier (2017a, 2017b).
- 8 To do justice to Biglieri and Perelló’s (2011) work, they refer to the Lacanian Real. Of course, with this argument we do not want to equate the Real with the material.

COMMUNICATION AND DISCOURSE THEORY

COLLECTED WORKS OF THE BRUSSELS DISCOURSE THEORY GROUP

THIS VOLUME GATHERS THE WORK OF THE BRUSSELS DISCOURSE THEORY GROUP, A GROUP OF CRITICAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS WHO DEPLOY DISCOURSE THEORY AS A THEORETICAL BACKBONE AND AN ANALYTICAL RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE. DRAWING ON A VARIETY OF CASE STUDIES, RANGING FROM THE POLITICS OF REALITY TV TO THE REPRESENTATION OF POPULISM, THE BOOK HIGHLIGHTS BOTH THE RADICALLY CONTINGENT NATURE AND THE HEGEMONIC WORKINGS OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES. THE BOOK SHOWS THE VALUE AND APPLICABILITY OF DISCOURSE-THEORETICAL ANALYSIS (DTA) WITHIN THE FIELD OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES.

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