



Bartlett, T. and Montesano Montessori, N. (2020) Towards webs of equivalence and the political nomad in agonistic debate: contributions from CDA and scales theory. *Journal of Language and Politics*, (doi: [10.1075/jlp.20046.bar](https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.20046.bar))

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/226013/>

Deposited on 6 November 2020

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Towards *Webs of Equivalence* and the *Political Nomad* in Agonistic Debate:
Contributions from CDA and Scales theory

Tom Bartlett, School of Critical Studies, Glasgow University

Nicolina Montesano Montessori, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht

Discourse theorists often defend their extreme discursive stance on ‘reality’ and the material with reference to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985:108) well-known quote that while an “earthquake or the falling of a brick...exist externally to thought” it is not the case that “they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence”.

While we fully endorse this statement, we argue that such a stance does not licence discourse theorists to consider discursive formations as divorced from their material context, but rather obliges us to account for the constraints and affordances of the material conditions on the structuring of the emergent discursive field itself. Drawing on a case study and other published work (Bartlett 2019; Montesano Montessori 2011), we argue that, in the limiting case, material conditions may render the discourse systems of potentially allied social groups as *incommensurate*, with the result that they cannot be articulated through chains of equivalence within a radically restructured field. We suggest as a way forward the concept of the *nomadic politician* continually traversing between *equivalential systems* in order to reconfigure and renegotiate key signifiers within the materially-constrained discursive fields of each.

Keywords: discourse, sustainability, equivalence, incommensurability, rhizome;

1. Introduction

In this paper, we draw on a case study of discourses around the key concept of *sustainability* to identify a problem with the concept of *chains of equivalence*, as formulated within Mouffe’s (2013) agonistic vision of democracy. Mouffe’s vision assumes the capacity for progressive forces to unite around shared signifiers in opposition to a democratic adversary, a position which rests upon the idea that all discursive formations are contingent and therefore open to political reformulation, for good or ill. While we accept this premise, in this paper we argue that we cannot ignore the role of materiality in the formation of discursive fields and that, in the limiting case, differences in material context can undermine the potential for forging chains of equivalence between progressive discourses.

In order to make this point, we first consider the disputed place of the material in Discourse Theory and argue that the Saussurean concept of pure values on which this is based does not, in fact, divorce semiotic pure values from the material base of society but rather sees them a distinctly demarcated but inherently interconnected orders of experience. In other words. Laclau and Mouffe’s oft-quoted assertion (1985, 108) that objects are only constituted as such within a specific discursive field does not by necessity deny the influence of the material on the emergence of the discursive field itself.

We then present a case study from a fishing community to illustrate the way in which the systematic meaning relations constituted around the key signifier ‘sustainability’ are tied to the material conditions of existence of that community. We contrast this with the system of meanings constituted within the supralocal discourse of sustainability, as formulated by Scottish Natural

Heritage (SNH), and suggest that the meanings of signifiers within these competing systems are not only distinct but *incommensurate*. As a result, we suggest that, despite the progressive principles of each, there exists a ‘double whammy’ preventing the forging of a chain of equivalence between the two groups inasmuch as: (i) there is no common or higher order signifier around which the two groups can identify; and (ii) the discursive repositioning necessary to create an allegiance to a supralocal identity (Torfinn 1999, 255) would entail a denial of the local system of signification and, given the material contingency of that system, such a denial is not possible in practice

In the final section we draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987 [1980]) figure of the *rhizome*, in combination with the concepts of *orders of discourse* from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and recent advances in *scales theory* (Blommaert 2015, 2007; Bartlett 2017), to suggest how DT practitioners might integrate the material and discursive in understanding localities as distinct hegemonic systems with their own orders of discourse. From this perspective, equivalence across such groups is not established through a continuum of shared meanings, but through continuous *transversals* (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 75) between localities at different scales and an ongoing process of rearticulation of meanings within the discursive field of each. Rather than *chains of equivalence*, therefore, we can talk of *equivalential systems*, defined in opposition to a common agonistic adversary, yet with the discursive field of each constructed according to its own internal logics.

2. The Return of the Material

The relationship between the material and the discursive within Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory (DT) has been the object of much discussion with Carpentier (2018, 275-277) providing a succinct overview of what Howarth (1998, 289) labels their *radical materialism* and the critiques of this position. The key passage from Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 108) is worth repeating in full here:

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of “natural phenomena” or “expressions of the wrath of God” depends upon the structuring of the discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertions that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.

While we agree with this basic premise, that the relation of meanings that define an object within a specific discursive field or for a specific community of speakers are discursive and contingent, Laclau and Mouffe’s formulation leaves unanswered (rather than denied) the converse question: *can discursive conditions of emergence constitute themselves independently of the material objects that constitute their environment?*

In order to answer this question we can turn to Thibault’s (1997, 60ff) discussion of Saussure’s seminal concept of *pure values*. For Saussure, as with Laclau and Mouffe, signs are defined entirely in opposition to each other and not in terms of any essential content of their own. However, as further discussed in Thibault (1997, 46), the concept of pure values is only one aspect of Saussure’s theory, a necessary reaction to the essentialist view dominant in Saussure’s time that linguistic terms served merely to label a preexisting reality. Saussure’s opposition to essentialism clearly resonates with Laclau and Mouffe’s position above. As Thibault (1997, 46) explains, however:

This does not mean that language does not, in part, function to classify objects, events, happenings and so on in the material world. It does; but it is wrong to think that it does so on the basis of a direct and unmediated link between word and object. Saussure's argument is that the value producing resources which are internal to a given language system cross-couple with the 'concrete real'. Further, the ways in which it does so are specific to particular cultures. It is these culturally specific cross-couplings which produce the consciousness, awareness and experience which agents have of phenomena in the 'concrete real'.

The position here is subtly more complex than a reliance on pure values alone in two important ways. Firstly, while signs may be defined entirely in opposition to each other, the differences in both signifier and signified themselves must be *sensible* both in order for the differences to be understandable and reproducible by the speaking subject (cf. Tomasello [2003, 75] on individual language development in response to exposure in context). While, at an advanced ontological and phylogenetic level, these differences may be only apparent to the higher order senses, they must ultimately be rooted in and built upon differences that are available to the primary senses and therefore material. And secondly, Saussure's point is not that pure values in the semiotic realm are independent of the concrete real, as if the sign system served purely to communicate itself, nor that there is no real outside of language; rather Saussure makes the point that the two systems are distinct yet integrally linked through the very process of cross-coupling by which the ultimately unknowable concrete real is transformed into the cultural contingency of semiotic reasoning, or truth values. Building on these two points together, we can make the claim that, while the *formal* relationship between a signifier and signified might be said to be arbitrary and the relationship between signs that of pure value, *the act of articulation is itself a functionally significant act that relates to the material conditions of existence of a speaking community* (cf. Torfing 1999, 95).

In other words, it is possible to maintain the position that the material, or concrete real, only becomes specified as an object in terms of the set of relations within a discursive field, while also granting a role for the material in shaping the ways in which the discursive fields themselves are constituted. Thus, the relationship between the material and discursive is one of *mutual prehension*, the term developed by Whitehead (1978 [1929]) to suggest that the flint grasps the hand as much as it is grasped, and that the two evolve together. From this perspective, therefore, alongside the need to consider how discourse shapes the concrete real, there is a converse need to consider the way in which the discursive field itself is contingent on the material conditions of its production and the cyclicity of the relationship between the two. In short, while we accept that material objects and relations are discursively construed, this does not excuse analysts from considerations of *the role of the material context in shaping what relationships are possible, impossible and actualised in practice*. (See Carpentier 2017 for a further critique of Mouffe and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) lack of attention to materiality).

Not that the role of the material has been entirely overlooked in Discourse Theory. Carpentier (2014, summarised in Carpentier 2018, 277-282), for example, is a study of participatory discourse in Cyprus which considers in depth the relationship between text and the materiality of context in terms of the constraints and affordances of broadcasting technologies, the use of different languages and the institutional structure of the radio station in question. While these are all essential elements in a discussion of the relationship between text and (material) context, we would argue that these aspects of materiality are limited to an analysis of the radio station as a *medium* of transmission that produces specific constraints and affordances on both the aspects of the discursive formation which are likely to be selected for talk and the ways in which discussion is conducted. These are far from insignificant points, as instrumental factors on the reproduction of

existing formations will have lasting effects on the formations themselves while the manner of discussion will feed back into interpersonal relations in the longer durée. We would argue, however, that the logics at play between the material and the discursive go beyond the shaping of discourse according to the constraints and affordances of the medium of transmission and can be extended to the conditions of emergence of the discursive field itself, as demonstrated in the following section.

As a preface to the case study presented in brief below, let us reconsider Laclau and Mouffe's example as a volcano rather than an earthquake (thereby taking advantage of a slip that appears to have arisen in several commentators' discussions of the example). At a very basic level, we can claim from the outset that while the significance of the volcano as an object is the product of its relations in the discursive field and that meanings cannot be made for the volcano independently of this field, it must also be the case that the meanings attributed within the semiotic field are limited by the subjects' material experience, such that the volcano cannot be semiotised as a producer of ice, a good place to fish nor even a portent of an upcoming attack, as such imaginings would be contradicted over the shorter or longer durée. Moreover, over the longer durée, we can see more significant and further-reaching effects of the volcano on local discourse systems. For example, while volcanoes cause havoc in the immediate term, the ash they produce creates over time a certain type of highly fertile soil that favours the establishment of sedentary agricultural communities with forms of production and distribution that favour specific economic and hierarchical forms of organisation and control, which are themselves potentially reinforced by the continuing threat of eruption. Similar examples of how the material presence of coal and oil is a defining feature in the emergence of sociocultural systems and the construction of discursive fields are provided by Buell (2012), and in the following section we present a more detailed account of the tie between materiality and discourse from the first author's own fieldwork before considering how such ties might prove problematical for the concept of agonism (as discussed in Mouffe 2014) and the realignments of discursive formations this demands.

3. A Case study: Discourse Formations, Materiality and Incommensurability

In this section we present a short case study illustrating the contested nature of the concept 'sustainability' between a fishing community in the Western Isles of Scotland and the government organisation Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as the latter seeks to operationalise European Union (EU) policy at the national and local level (for fuller accounts see Bartlett 2019 and Bartlett, Montesano Montessori and LLOYD 2017). We use this example first to demonstrate that the meanings of sustainability and its component elements are linked to the specific material conditions of each group. We then suggest that, in this specific circumstance, the meanings of key signifiers for the two groups are not just different but incommensurable. By this we mean that the individual signifiers derive their significance within alternative systems of meaning such that they cannot be used across contexts without losing the significance they carry for one or other of the groups. We go on to argue that such incommensurability undermines attempts to forge chains of equivalence across the discourses of these group, before suggesting an alternative approach based on the continuous rearticulation of concepts within distinct but equivalential systems.

The island of Barra, at the southern end of the Western Isles of Scotland, was a major herring port until the middle of the last century, and the economy has always been heavily linked to maritime industries. Despite the decline of the herring industry over the last century, Barra remains a fisheries-dependent community (Brennan 2015:6) and a recent report (Halcrow Group Limited 2010:19) states that "as many as a quarter of the working population of Barra is involved in fisheries;

either directly as fishermen, or working in the fish processing sector, or indirectly in sectors such as administration, transport, equipment maintenance and marketing”.

The decline of the herring industry has been accompanied by a halving of the population, from 2,545 in 1901 to 1,264 in 2011, and the spectre of depopulation looms large in the islands as economic opportunities are diminishing and youngsters are more likely to leave the island permanently. As a consequence, the Western Isles have been designated as economically fragile and, in the words of the local enterprise agency, in need of sustainable development opportunities which combine economic, social, cultural and environmental attributes (HIE 2014, in Brennan 2015:6).

Environmental impacts such as the depletion of fish stocks have had an immediate effect on local fishing and fish farming industries, and this has led to tensions between those involved in the industry and policy makers at the national and European level. In 2013, waters around Barra were designated Special Areas of Conservation (mSACs), which are, according to the UK’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs¹:

...strictly protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive. Article 3 of the Habitats Directive requires the establishment of a European network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the 189 habitat types and 788 species...

This move has increased the social and economic pressures on the island community and has led to heated debate over the key concepts of *sustainability* and *sustainable development*, as expressed in the following remarks from a local pressure group, published in the community newsletter, *Guth Bharraidh* (31/5/2013):

There is only one version of sustainability acceptable to those who have influence on political powers in Scotland. It is rigorously imposed via SAC’s, SPA’s and National Parks and, in the near future, through MPA’s. It is partly based on the mistaken belief that food production and access to our natural resources, specifically in the north and west of Scotland, is no longer of primary importance. It dictates that the needs of wildlife and habitats are more important than the needs of human beings. Some people believe an environment without people is a good thing. This view should not be legalised in any civilised society.

The language here brings out the different ways in which the key concept of sustainability is constituted by the local community and supralocal policy-makers. For the islanders, sustainability refers to the social sustainability of their community, of which fishing is an integral part. This is captured in different ways in the following texts:

Since the last century our community has been striving to stem the relentless loss of influence over the environment and resources around our shores. We have for the first time an exciting opportunity to create a structure which will empower the people who work here to actively manage our resources.

Western Isles Councillor Donald Manford²

Action group Southern Hebrides Against Marine Environmental Designations (SHAMED), doubted whether eco-tourism would compensate for reduced fishing revenues. Chairman Angus MacLeod said from his prawn boat in the south Minch: ‘We have lost all faith in the government and their promises and assurances.

'The minister has stated it will be of benefit to tourism – but Barra already has a very good tourism industry as it is.

'The government's own report has recognised that designation will hit the economy to the value of £1 million per annum.

'There is no way tourism will make up that kind of balance and even if it did Barra does not have the infrastructure to deal with that.'

FishUpdate 14/7/2013³

For policy makers, in contrast, sustainability refers primarily to environmental sustainability, with fish stocks seen as one example of ecological diversity:

...in order to ensure the restoration or maintenance of natural habitats and species of Community interest at a favourable conservation status, it is necessary to designate special areas of conservation in order to create a coherent European ecological network according to a specified timetable.⁴

Whether looking at your local coastline or the undersea cliffs around St Kilda you will discover a range of spectacular examples of marine biodiversity in Scottish waters. A number of our best examples of species and habitats have been selected for protection as a type of Marine Protected Area.⁵

We can see in these examples (though of course many more would be needed for a representative analysis and comparison) that the meaning of the key signifier *sustainability* is, as Laclau and Mouffe claim, contingent upon the structuring of the discursive field. At the local scale, for example, the term *fishing* may be a sister signifier of *schooling*, *jobs* and *housing* within the field of social sustainability, while at the national and international scale, *fishing* would be a sister of *marine pollution* and *renewable energy* within the fields of global environmental sustainability and economic cooperation. This shows, firstly, that the key concept (or nodal point) *sustainability* is differentially structured for the two groups. And, secondly, it means that the individual elements that comprise these concepts gain their meaning within distinct systems of oppositions. The local and supralocal discourses can therefore be labelled *incommensurate* in that they lack semantic common grounds and cannot be reconciled at a higher order of signification. As a result, the use of shared terms such as *fishing* in mutual communication presents an illusion of common ground as, in reality, the two parties are talking about distinct concepts, differentially defined in terms of the semantic oppositions operating in the two discourse systems. Moreover, the case study also demonstrates how the discursive fields of both the local community and organisations such as SNH are contingent on the material conditions in which they are produced. To recap a point from an earlier section, this does not contradict Laclau and Mouffe's assertion that objects cannot "constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence", but rather makes the supplementary point that the discursive conditions of emergence are themselves a functional correlate of the material conditions of existence of a speaking community. For the people of Barra *fishing* is more than a concept in a system of significations, it is the main source of income on the island and the survival of the community as a social system is largely dependent on the interrelation of fishing with other material elements of the system. For SNH, the problems of diminishing fish stocks and marine degradation are material realities with potentially devastating consequences for the global environmental system and food production.

4. Problems posed for the concept of agonism

In the years following the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), Mouffe (2013, 2014, 2018) has been turning away from a rather exclusive focus on a position in which the construction of a hegemonic discourse is the result of an antagonistic struggle between enemies, with each striving to eliminate the other, toward a more pluralist vision in which proponents of different versions of democracy are seen as adversaries to be recognised and debated with. This is not to say that the concept of antagonism has been removed from the theory, but that this concept is reserved for the relationship between the proponents of democracy, in whatever form, and anti-democratic forces, with the latter representing the *constitutive outside* (Torfing 1999, 51) against which the democratic forces are defined in common. Within the arena of agonistic politics, one of the opposing sides will achieve predominance through the construction of a chain of equivalences that links a range of potentially disparate social issues in terms of a shared opposition to a defining feature of the common adversary. For Mouffe, it is the role of the democratic left to make just such a chain of equivalences, uniting a variety of struggles in the social, economic arena against the dominant neoliberal model of democracy. Within this chain of equivalences, Mouffe (2018, 52) recognises sustainability, or sustainable development, as a key node, replacing the classical Marxist “compromise between capital and labour” with the need “to articulate the ecological and social questions” - precisely those aspects of sustainability that are the locus of the dispute between the Barra fishing community and SNH.

For Mouffe (2018, 62), therefore, the goal is, on the one hand, to forge chains of equivalence between progressive struggles over the environment and other issues, such as gender and class, and on the other, to persuade those who benefit from the present neoliberal order that environmental degradation represents a significant threat to their position and so to win them over. The case study above, however, represents a different situation. Here the two sides can both be seen as progressive in that they would define themselves in opposition to the neoliberal model of exploitation and the environmental devastation it causes, yet they are negotiating *within* the single key issue of sustainability. This relationship, therefore, fits neatly into neither the agonistic category of adversaries (given the common rejection of the neoliberal model of exploitation) nor of friends (given their competition for hegemony over the terrain of sustainability).

This presents us with a dilemma that has largely been avoided within agonistics: how to forge meaningful and durable chains of equivalence between groups with competing interests and operating at different scales within a single arena – in other words, how to build on chains of equivalence as an electoral strategy to an agonistic strategy for comanagement across scales - which is what a left populism entails if it is to be a working and emancipatory practice.

Within Discourse Theory there are two ways in which equivalential links can be forged in opposition to a constitutive outside: by common adherence to a social imaginary, such as *communism* or *Christianity*, that subsume the differences between the groups under a superordinate signifier; or, in Mouffe’s later formulation, through the forging of chains of equivalence that highlight intersecting interests between groups while backgrounding non-overlapping features.

Addressing the concept of chains of equivalence first, we would claim that, with regard to the case study above, this is not a feasible option. For Mouffe, the concept of chains of equivalence refers to the linking of discourses which, while necessarily sharing certain features, operate over different terrains and, as such, are not in direct competition with each other. This extends to chains of equivalence between different democratic systems and the possibility for the coexistence of “divergent interpretations of shared ethico-political principles” (Mouffe 2013, 23), a conceptualisation of a “pluriverse” rather than a universe (Mouffe 2013, 64). In contrast to this conception, the discourses of sustainability of the local and supra-local communities, while sharing

many features, compete as discursive formations over the same terrain and are, as such, mutually exclusive: it is not possible for both systems to continue in relatively independent and peaceful coexistence.

This forces us back to the earlier conception of equivalence as mutual adherence to a superordinate ideal. This superordinate can be take the form of an issue, such as *sustainability*, or a geopolitical region. Both cases are included in Mouffe's (1994, 111) concept of *nomadisation* as:

...the attempt to undercut the allegiance of a specific identity to a certain place or a certain property, and thereby to show that all identities are constructed in and through hegemonic power struggles. This will tend to denaturalise social and political identities and make them more negotiable.

Torring 1999, 255

In terms of the first possibility, identifying a superordinate issue (or property), while not demanding that each subject identifies with each and every subordinate component, does, however, presupposes a consistency of meaning relations among the set of subordinate elements. Given the incommensurability of the discourse systems around *sustainability* at the local and supralocal level demonstrated in the case study above, it follows that these two discourses cannot meaningfully be combined under *sustainability* as a coherent superordinate signifier in anything but an adversarial manner. With regard to supralocal regional identities, Mouffe's conception of nomadisation suggests that subjects need to reduce their allegiance to the local in order to re-negotiate their identity at the higher level. She seems to soften this opinion in response to more recent events when she claims (2013, 44) that "[i]t is naïve to expect people to relinquish their national identity in favour of a post-national European one". It is not entirely clear how she resolves this conundrum, but she appears to be proposing the possibility of multiple and multi-scalar identities when she states (2018, 67) that "[t]o act *qua* citizen as the political level to radicalise democracy does not mean discarding other forms of identification and is perfectly compatible with being involved in democratic struggles of a more punctual nature". However, as argued above, the incommensurate nature of the discourses at the different scales would mean that allegiance to a supralocal identity would entail a denial of the local system of signification and, given the material contingency of that system, such a denial would constitute a repudiation of existing practices at the local scale.

In other words, just because a community is imagined (Anderson 1983), this does not mean it is not real. And, unlike Mouffe's nomads, inhabitants of communities with a strong material connection, are able to switch identities without significant consequences. As Laclau (2005, 130) warns:

If the demands forming the equivalential chain are subordinated to the extent that their differences can no longer be articulated, the chain can no longer act 'as a ground for the democratic demands,' holding them together.

The point of the study is not to return to a pre-Gramscian conception of the economic system as the ultimate determinant of political ideology but rather that the material conditions of existence affect the emergence of all kinds of sociocultural structures, including but not prioritising the means of production and the wider economic system. A focus on the discursive construction of power and ideologies should not, therefore, underplay the role of socioeconomic and material factors in determining the possible in politics. In other words, while the political may be primary, it is not autonomous. Or, in the words of an earlier work (Bartlett 2012), there is a need to contextualise

discursive interventions into social issues in terms of both the material and discursive conditions of possibility. In the following section we suggest a way forward for Discourse Theory in this regard.

5. A Potential Way Forward: From Chains of Equivalence and the Nomadic Subject to the Political Nomad and Networks of Intension

In the case study presented above, it should be clear that the community in Barra cannot be viewed as a simple subsystem of any supralocal social system, whether this refers to the national or European level. Rather the community in Barra can be seen as an integrated social system in its own right, but in continuous interaction with other systems, each operating according to distinct, potentially incommensurate and materially contingent discursive formations. There are connections between groups and membership is distributed rather than exclusive, but the network of interconnections is complex with horizontal and oblique linkages and areas of incommensurability rather than the neat and hierarchical (if unfinalisable) system envisaged in other approaches.

This leads us to adopt Deleuze and Guattari's (1987 [1980]) analogy of the *rhizome* as a means of conceptualising the system of social structures at the grand scale. In botany a rhizome is a mass of roots, a cluster or asymmetrical connections and lateral bifurcations, as typified in the image of the ginger root or the hidden networks that link the blades of grass in a field. Deleuze and Guattari (1987 [1980], 3ff) contrast this rhizomorphic imagining to that of the tree structure, with its strict hierarchies and directionalities, that typifies western modes of classification (with their greatest scorn being reserved for the field of linguistics). Rhizomorphic structures are neither top-down nor bottom-up, but flow out from innumerable middle-points and intersect at multiple points across all dimensions. Within this complex flow, however, there exist *assemblages* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 24) where semiotic flows, material flows and social flows coalesce. Assemblages can exist at any scale - a book, for example, or a social order - to the extent that such confluences, while inherently non-finalisable, can be imagined as holding across time and space. In order to establishing equivalences across scales we, therefore suggest a three-stage process as a potential way forward for Discourse Theory.

The first is to understand a specific social order as a confluence of material, social and semiotic *moments*. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 110), moments represent individual semiotic *elements* that have been successfully articulated in the formation of a hegemonic discourse. Within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Fairclough 2010, 400; Montesano Montessori 2011), however, following Harvey (1996), the concept of articulation has been extended to consider discourse itself as one moment in a social process, along with material practices, power, social relations, institutions/rituals and beliefs/desires/morals⁶, a list which can be seen as an expansion of Deleuze and Guattari's triad of the material, the social and the semiotic. Importantly, as with Saussure's interconnection between a semiotic system of pure values and the material conditions in which it operates, as discussed above, each and all of these moments can be articulated, yet no moment is reducible to any other. For CDA (Fairclough 2010, 265, after Foucault 1971), the dialectic of forces between these different moments give rise to *orders of discourse* as the systems of discourses, styles and genres that are normalised, and hence hegemonic, within a given institution or, as in Bartlett (2012), a given social system.

The second step is to recognise that each local social system and order of discourse are related to other discursive and social orders at different scales through a rhizomorphic multiplicity of interconnections at all points⁷ and to undertake to *map* these connections (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 12).

And the third is to commit to a continuous *transversal* (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 75) of the pathways between different zones of the rhizome in an unfinalisable process of engagement with social systems. Deleuze and Guattari (1987 [1980], 422-3) refer to this as a nomadic process of understanding, involving the *deterretorialisation* of each assemblage's semiotic flow, and their *conjugation* and *reterretorialisation* in alternative assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 9, 11).

In this way we see a reversal of responsibility from Mouffe's formulation, with the nomadic subject being asked to sacrifice their local identity on the altar of a greater good, to the figure of the political nomad, forever transversing between social orders and weaving webs of equivalence between them. Within such an approach, the concept of chains of equivalence *across* social groupings is now replaced with a process of rearticulation *within* each group, in accordance with the other moments that comprise that social system, and in such a way that the discursive formation in no one social system compromises the formation in any other, while each can be defined in opposition to their common agonistic adversary. We move therefore from the formation of chains of equivalence to the formation of *equivalential systems*.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.
- Bartlett, Tom. 2019. Scaling the Incommensurate: Discourses of sustainability in the Western Isles of Scotland. In N. Montesano Montessori, J. Mulderrig and M. J. Farrelly (Eds) *Critical Policy Discourse Analysis*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Bartlett, Tom. 2017. Context in Systemic Functional Linguistics: Towards scalar supervenience? In T. Bartlett and G. O'Grady (Eds). *Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bartlett, Tom. 2012. *Hybrid Voices and Collaborative Change: Contextualising Positive Discourse Analysis*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bartlett, Tom, Nicolina Montesano Montessori and Harriet Lloyd. Contesting Key Terms and Concepts in the Civil Sphere. In Peter Garrett and Josep Cots (Eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Language Awareness*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2015. Chronotopes, scales, and complexity in the study of language in society. *Annual Review of Anthropology* (44): 105–116.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2007. Sociolinguistic scales. In *Intercultural Pragmatics* 4(1): 1–19.
- Brennan, Ruth. 2015. *What Lies Beneath: Probing the Cultural Depths of a Nature Conservation Conflict in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland*. University of Aberdeen. Unpublished PhD Thesis.
- Buell, Frederick. 2012. A short history of oil cultures: Or, the marriage of catastrophe and exuberance. In *Journal of American Studies* 46. pp 273-293.
- Carpentier, Nico. 2017. Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA). In John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (Eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 272-284.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1987 (trsl B. Massumi) [1980]. *A Thousand Plateaus*. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Errejón, Iñigo and Chantal Mouffe. 2016. *Podemos: In the Name of the People*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2010 (2nd edition). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1971. *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Halcrow Group Limited. 2010. *Impact Assessment of the Proposed Designation of Two Inshore*

- Special Areas of Conservation in the Sound of Barra and East Mingulay*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available online from <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/295194/0106277.pdf> [accessed 27 April 2015].
- Harvey, D. 1996. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. London: Blackwell.
- HIE. 2014. Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Outer Hebrides. Available online from <http://www.hie.co.uk/regional-information/area-information/outerhebrides/overview.html> [accessed 27 April 2015].
- Howarth, D. 1998. Discourse theory and political analysis. In E. Scarborough and E. Tanenbaum (Eds) *Research Strategies in the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 268-203.
- Laclau, E. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Montesano Montessori, Nicolina. 2011. The design of a theoretical, methodological, analytical framework to analyse hegemony in discourse. *Critical Discourse Studies* 8(3), pp. 169-182
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. London and New York: Verso
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2014. Agonistic democracy and radical politics. *Pavillion* <http://pavilionmagazine.org/chantal-mouffe-agonistic-democracy-and-radical-politics/>
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2013. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London and New York: Verso.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 1994. For a politics of nomadic identity. In Robertson *et al.* (eds) *Travellers' Tales*. London: Routledge, pp. 105-113.
- Thibault, Paul J. 1997. *Re-Reading Saussure: The Dynamics of Signs in Social Life*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tomasello, Michael. 2003. *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, U.K.
- Torring, Jacob. 1999. *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1978 (1929). *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press.

¹ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-23>

² <https://blogs.gov.scot/marine-scotland/2014/02/20/barra-step-forward-for-community-management-of-sac/>

³ <https://www.fishupdate.com/dismay-at-barra-conservation-outcome-fishupdate-com/> accessed 27/9/18

⁴ [Council Directive 92/43/EEC](#) of 21 May 1992

⁵ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/protected-areas/international-designations/sac/marine-sacs/> Accessed January 2018.

⁶ Fairclough has values rather than morals but we have altered this to avoid confusion with the Saussurean meaning of values in the same paragraph.

⁷ A relationship Bartlett (2017) refers to as *scalar supervenience*.