

# Post-foundational Discourse Analysis

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## Introduction

Post-foundational discourse analysis denotes here an approach to the study of discourse drawing from discourse theory as initially developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. This approach is interested in the political nature of discourse and discursive nature of politics, and assumes that all discursive phenomena is ineradicably contingent. Post-foundational discourse analysis as an empirical research program is perhaps not as systematic or complete as some other approaches presented in this volume. To stay true to its theoretical background, however, we believe that post-foundational discourse analysis should not strive uncritically towards becoming such. It must remain open to a certain degree of theoretical and methodological anarchism. While this might frustrate those in search of strict self-contained frameworks ready-made for application, we see this ineradicable degree of openness and incompleteness as a productive and inspiring feature of post-foundational discourse analysis.

## Theoretical background

What we here term post-foundational discourse analysis<sup>2</sup> has been developed mostly under other headings: Ideology and discourse analysis (IDA), the Essex-school in discourse analysis, post-Marxist discourse theory, the Logics Approach, post-structuralist discourse theory, political discourse theory, or, simply, discourse theory. While these names can capture minor differences in scholarly self-understanding, or function as pejorative labels for others, they have a shared theoretical foundation and a related perspective on discourse. Should a text be singled out as setting in motion the work conducted from this perspective, it would be that of

<sup>1</sup> We have written this chapter as equal partners and our names appear in alphabetical order. Taavi Sundell's work on this chapter was supported by a Finnish Cultural Foundation grant for doctoral research.

<sup>2</sup> Tomas Marttila (2015a; 2015b), whose work is discussed in more detail below, has labelled his own approach to discourse analysis post-foundational discourse analysis (PDA). When referring specifically to this approach, we will capitalize it to Post-foundational Discourse Analysis.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2001 [1985]).<sup>3</sup>

Here Laclau and Mouffe ventured to deconstruct the Marxist and socialist traditions through a reading of the historical development within them of the concept of hegemony.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the exercise was to point out how political contingency had been exorcised from their theoretical and political debates. This had been the result of essentialist and reductionist interpretations of class and economy, whereby the function of politics was reduced to articulating together pre-existing political identities derived from a fixed economic structure. For Laclau and Mouffe, politics and ideology did not pertain only to the “superstructure” or “false consciousness”. Instead, they were necessary for the actualization of all discursive identities or structures. As such, identities and structures result from the drawing of lines of distinction and affinity. *Hegemony* describes how particular signifiers are connected to each other, thus forming temporarily effective discursive structures and identities. *Ideology*, in turn, captures how the contingent origins of identities and structures have to be suppressed in order for them to function. The centrality of the category of “mode of production” in Marxist social analysis was thus to be replaced with that of “hegemonic formation” (Laclau 2014, 7).

Furthermore, they proposed a basis for a new approach to the study of discourse. The concept of *discourse* was interpreted as an ontological category. This made it possible to explicate the relational, contingent, partial, and changing nature of all social meaning and meaning-making. Through this “creative misapplication” of the concept, Laclau and Mouffe broadened its scope to “all dimensions of social reality and not just the usual practices of speaking, writing, and communicating.” (Howarth 2004, 265) In other words, when it comes to meaning and meaning-making, they denied a distinction between the linguistic and extra-linguistic (Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985], 107–10). Discourse denotes a differential and structured system of meaning containing both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic aspects of the world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This work presented in an fully fledged form a break from Laclau and Mouffe's previous work situated firmly within the Gramscian and Althusserian traditions of Marxism. For this earlier work, see, e.g., Laclau 1979; and Mouffe 1979. For an early version of some of the books main arguments, see, Laclau 1983. For a similar call made at the time to articulate together Marxism and deconstruction, see, Ryan 1982.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the development of this concept in Laclau and Mouffe's work, see, Howarth 2015, 7–12. For a highly concise presentation of this argument, see, Laclau 1991.

<sup>5</sup> For the rest of this chapter, Laclau's work since *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* takes precedence over that of Mouffe's. As described in Sonnichsen, Hansen and Jensen (2014), after having outlined their common framework, they each ventured to develop further different aspects of it. As Laclau's subsequent work is more relevant for the purposes of this chapter, that will be our focus.

The roots<sup>6</sup> of such a conception of discourse stem from the transcendental turn in modern philosophy which shifted the focus from facts to their conditions of possibility (Laclau 2015 [1993], 23). More contemporary sources of inspiration have been the various responses to Saussurean structuralism, such as the works of Louis Hjelmslev and the Copenhagen School, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan (Ibid., 24–7). The most common theoretical reference point has been post-structuralism. Whereas Torfing (1999) and Howarth (2000) have placed emphasis on Michel Foucault’s work, Laclau himself has claimed more affinity with Derrida and Lacan’s thinking (Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014, 261–2). The influence of late Wittgenstein has also been discussed (Howarth 2000; Norval 2008), as well as that of Paul de Man (Laclau 2001). What makes Laclau and Mouffe’s perspective unique in this theoretical network, however, is its explicitly political perspective to discourse, and conversely, discursive perspective to politics.

As for the concept of *post-foundationalism*, for Oliver Marchart (2004, 56), this captures the “strictly philosophical” aspect of Laclau’s work. Marchart traces the term back to the notion of ontological difference—the difference between the ontological and the ontic—in Martin Heidegger’s thinking, later developed by Jacques Derrida (1982) through his concept of “différance”.<sup>7</sup> Post-foundationalism implies here a “constant interrogation of metaphysical foundations—such as totality, universality, essence, and ground” (Marchart 2007, 2), in distinction from foundationalist theories assuming that societies can be “grounded on principles that are (1) undeniable and immune to revision and (2) located outside society and politics” (Marchart 2007, 11, quoting, Herzog 1985, 20). Post-foundational thinkers are interested in the processes of grounding and ungrounding of all social being (Marchart 2007, 9), theorizing the conditions of possibility for discursive structures and identities to appear, as well as the conditions of impossibility for them to ever become fully constituted and saturated. One of the basic premises of Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001 [1985]) discourse theory is accordingly that the contingent and uneven field of meaning is criss-crossed by antagonisms which articulatory acts then attempt to cover up.

Such an understanding of discourse has been interpreted as implying an anti-foundationalist epistemological doctrine (Bevir 2009). However, the existing literature on post-foundational discourse theory offers little knowledge on how to read it as an epistemological

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<sup>6</sup> For a more in depth view on the theoretical background of post-foundational discourse analysis, see, Torfing 1999; Howarth 2000; Marchart 2007; and Marttila 2015a. Torfing’s work contains a useful glossary of the key terms of this strand of discourse analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Chantal Mouffe (2005, 9), amongst others, has reiterated the ontological difference as political difference: “This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted.” Besides Laclau and Mouffe, Marchart (2007) identifies as thinkers of the ontological/political difference, or as he names them, the “Left-Heideggerians”, figures such Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben.

stand concerning the formal structure and justification of an edifice of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Neither should it be confused with anti-foundationalism understood as the complete erasure of the figure of the ground (Marchart 2007, 2; see also Marttila 2015a, 34). Rather, as already stated, post-foundationalism shifts the perspective from the search of *the* ground or *the* foundation upon which societies are built, to the ways in which these grounds are discursively constructed as meaningful entities.

We agree with Marttila (2015a, 5–6), that this “strictly philosophical” reading of post-foundationalism must be supplemented with a more empirically oriented research program. At a minimum, more transparency and reflection on the practice of carrying out research from this theoretical perspective should take place. The focus on the ontological level has not been limited to the “strictly philosophical” aspect of Laclau’s thinking. As pointed out by David Howarth (2004, 266–7), his work is concerned almost solely with ontological questions.<sup>9</sup> As such, it runs the risk of resulting into too thin and formalistic conceptions of both the ontological and the ontic levels. Hence, the need for a post-foundational discourse *analysis*.

## Methodological frameworks

The development of post-foundational discourse analysis has not been methodology-driven, that is, “motivated more by the techniques of data-gathering and analysis than by a concern with the empirical phenomena under investigation” (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 167 ). Instead, it can be argued that a certain theory-drivenness has prevailed, meaning research “driven by the impulse to vindicate a particular theoretical outlook” (Shapiro 2002, 601), sending researchers in worst-case scenarios into “esoteric goose chases that contribute little to the advancement of knowledge” (Ibid., 598). However, the goal has rarely been to apply pre-existing theory as such, but rather to “articulate [...] concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 5). This, in turn, has led to a situation where the grafting (e.g. on Derrida, Culler 1982, 134) of shared methodological procedures for post-foundational discourse analysis has not taken place to any significant degree (Torfing 2005, 25–8; Howarth 2005, 316; Glynos & Howarth 2007, 6; Marttila 2015a, 2).

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<sup>8</sup> Foundationalism as an epistemological stance, the “doctrine of the given”, can be described as stating that: “The knowledge which a person has at any time is a structure or edifice, many parts and stages of which help to support each other, but which is supported by its own foundation.” (Chisholm 2008 [1964], 80) Post-foundationalism might be compatible with the less linear coherence theory of truth, which believes that “[...] nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief. Its partisan rejects as unintelligible the request for a ground or source of justification of another ilk.” (Davidson 2008 [1989], 126). There is no room here to examine this question further.

<sup>9</sup> Laclau (2004, 312) is happy to bleed guilty to this criticism with the caveat that “I do not see it as a criticism at all. I have located my theoretical intervention at the theoretical and philosophical level and it is at this level that it has to be judged.”

This section briefly introduces three attempts to operationalize post-foundational discourse theory for empirical analysis: Ideology and Discourse Analysis (IDA), Logics Approach, and Post-foundational Discourse Analysis (PDA). The empirical application of post-foundational discourse theory begun as the Ideology and Discourse Analysis MA and PhD programmes were established at the Government Department, University of Essex, in 1982. *IDA* focused initially on the analysis of political identities, identity politics, social movements, social imaginaries, ideologies, and radical democracy (e.g., Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000; Torfing 1999; and Smith 1998). The initial articulations of the heuristic tools of IDA can be found from edited volumes (see, Laclau 1994; Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000; Howarth & Torfing 2005).

In line with the assumptions of post-foundationalism, IDA's main focus has been in demonstrating the contingent character of various discursive identities by studying meaning-making and the identifications produced in the process. Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000, 3) have framed this in broad terms as "the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms". This has often implied mainly a rearticulation of such data through the concepts provided by post-foundational discourse theory, and as such, IDA has arguably at times risked becoming a theory-driven approach.

Some of the key concepts used in IDA have been as follows. Meaning is seen as being partially fixed through hegemonic practices to *elements* and *nodal points*, and as such, it is can always be subverted through alternative articulations (Torfing 1999, 99, 102–3). Meaning is also seen as resulting from the *limits* and *frontiers* drawn in relation to such possible alternative articulations (Norval 2000). *Empty signifiers* are common discursive headings representing a range of other signifiers, thus generating temporary discursive unity. As such, they are overburdened with signification and become "emptied out" of their prior particular meanings. In contrast, a *floating signifier* names discursive conflicts: they are signifiers torn between two or more competing relations of meaning, or *signifying chains*. (Laclau 2005, 135) A *logic of equivalence* captures attempts to divide a social space by condensing meaning around two antagonistic poles, whereas a *logic of difference* aims at dissolving such poles and incorporating the disarticulated meanings into an existing order. (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 12) Breaks in signification are designated as *ruptures* or *dislocation*, whereas *myths* sediment common reference points in a particular discursive setting. By transcending particular contexts, myths can turn into *imaginaries*, common horizons structuring the society at large.<sup>10</sup>

For example, it could be analysed that in the Nordic Countries "welfare state" has been a prevalent political imaginary which has recently been put into question, thus perhaps

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<sup>10</sup> On myths and imaginaries, see, Norval 2000, 227–8; and Laclau 1990.

reducing its role into a mere myth to be replaced by a more limited “welfare society”. Features such as universality and publicly funded state provision (elements, nodal points) define what welfare state means in that context through their articulation into signifying chains, which leave something out (limit), perhaps privately organised health service functions. At a certain moment privately provided services may be reintroduced into the welfare function demonstrating the drift from the previous understanding and new (floating signifiers). This may imply that in the signifying process rupture or dislocation emerges, and the meanings, policies and practices associated to welfare state are also challenged.

Some methodological clarification, further theorization, and a new focus for analysis was achieved by Jason Glynos and David Howarth in their *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (2007; see also Glynos and Howarth 2008; and Howarth 2005). Their *Logics Approach* aims at answering criticisms concerning IDA’s “methodological deficit”.<sup>11</sup> Its goal is to provide “an approach that respects the self-interpretations of social actors, while not reducing explanations to their subjective viewpoints alone”. This it aims at doing through “a type of explanation that admits of a certain generality, provides the space for critique, and yet respects the specificity of the case under investigation”. (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 4, 6).

To enable the explanation and critique of discursive social regimes and practices more systematically than possible with IDA, Glynos and Howarth (2007, 132–64) develop a grammar of logics<sup>12</sup> as theoretically informed middle-range concepts to grasp empirical phenomena. *Social logics* capture in a synchronic fashion what a particular discursive practice or a regime is. *Political logics* focus on the diachronic aspect of how these practices and regimes are constructed, stabilized, strengthened, or weakened. Lastly, *fantasmatic logics* aim at explaining why specific practices and regimes “grip subjects” by keeping their contingent foundations concealed. (Glynos and Howarth 2008, 12) Hence, these might also be termed “ideological logics”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For an account of such criticisms, see, Marttila 2015a, 3–4. For a critical take on Glynos and Howarth’s logics approach as an answer to these criticisms, see, Marttila 2015a, 119–24.

<sup>12</sup> In reference to the ontological difference discussed above, while social logics describe practices and regimes residing on the ontic level, political and fantasmatic logics focus on their ontological conditions of possibility (Glynos and Howarth 2008, 13).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Laclau 1990, 92: “So, it looks as if we can maintain the concept of ideology and the category of misrecognition only by inverting their traditional content. The ideological would not consist of the misrecognition of a positive essence, but exactly the opposite: it would consist of the non-recognition of the precarious character of any positivity, of the impossibility of any ultimate suture. The ideological would consist of those discursive forms through which a society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences.” For ideology thus defined, see also, Žižek 2008 [1989]. For the relationship between the concepts of ideology and discourse, see, Purvis and Hunt 1993; and for a more critical take on this relationship, see, Eagleton 2007 [1991], 193–220.

Besides these new concepts through which to structure empirical analysis, Glynos and Howarth's approach provides also guidance on how to: (i) construct and problematize the object of study; (ii) explain it retroductively through the conceptual grid of social, political, and fantasmatic logics; (iii) articulate the theoretical and empirical elements of analysis together into a "singular explanation"; and (iv) choose and compare case studies. (Glynos and Howarth, Ch. 6).

For example, the welfare state in the Nordic countries could be seen as a set of social logics maintained through a fantasmatic logic which sees the state as the only possible provider of universally accessible basic services (e.g., healthcare, education) funded through taxation. Attempts to institutionalize new sets of social logics by legitimizing non-state actors as providers of such services and by limiting universality of access have rendered this fantasmatic logic behind the traditional welfare state more visible while also questioning its legitimacy.

Tomas Marttila (2015a; 2015b) has formulated to date perhaps the most systematic approach derived from post-foundational discourse theory. He argues the Logics Approach is not sufficient in terms of guidance for conducting discourse analysis (Marttila 2015a, 123). Furthermore, Marttila has aimed to theorize "discursive materialization" manifested by institutions and subject roles, a theme little discussed elsewhere in the literature on post-foundational discourse theory and analysis (2015a, 137–8). Marttila's *PDA* is based on the analysis of *discursive relations* and *discursive identities*. These are developed as middle-range concepts with which to link post-foundational discourse theory with empirical phenomena (Ibid, 112). Marttila (2015a, 129) has provided a typology of seven such discursive relations: contrariety, antagonism, dissociation, incommensurability, representation, difference, and equivalence. Discursive identities in turn can be mapped through the following categories: values (ethical ideals, antagonistic others); subjectivity (protagonist, opponent, helper, destinator, receiver); and activity (actions, interactions, objects, resources, strategies). Marttila has formulated specific analytical stages and steps for conducting empirical analysis from a PDA perspective (Ibid., 133).

According to Marttila (2015a, 150) discourses are most readily available in texts although he sees discourses as multimodal linguistic and extra-linguistic. Empirical research methods must remain varied and can range from structuralist approaches to narrative analysis, to enunciative pragmatics and situational analysis. PDA relies on "conventional wisdoms of qualitative research methodology" (2015b, section 5.2<sup>14</sup>; see also 2015a, 146–51), as long as the methods used for gathering and interpreting data are compatible with the overall framework

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<sup>14</sup> Having been published in an online journal without pagination, we will cite the section from which we are drawing from.

of post-foundational discourse theory. For him, this framework is built around the premises of second-order hermeneutics and methodological holism (Ibid., 100–2, 110–3).

This implies a research focus on supra-subjective social structures recurring in multiple contexts. Marttila thus excludes methods like ethnomethodology as incompatible with PDA, as it relies on first-order hermeneutics and strives to make visible subjectively conscious and intersubjectively shared everyday conceptions of the world. (2015b, section 5.2) Here we see Glynos and Howarth (2007, 6) as being more in tune with Laclauian post-foundational discourse theory with their call to respect “the self-interpretations of social actors, while not reducing explanations to their subjective viewpoints alone.” Hence, we would argue that first-order hermeneutical approaches should not to be ruled out categorically as possible methods for post-foundational discourse analysis. The structural-formal bent of Marttila’s purely second-order framework might be counterproductive at times.<sup>15</sup> Post-foundational discourse analysis, in our view, should be able to account also the moments when the supra-subjective social meaningfulness of an object breaks down and has to be articulated anew, or, when it is under critique aiming to transform it. Such instances might be addressed, for example, through rhetorical analysis drawing on Laclau’s work on the topic (2014).

For example, the transformation from welfare state to a more limited welfare society and beyond hinges on the construction of new discursive identities for social subjects. Marttila (2013; see also, 2015a) has studied the discursive construction and dissemination of discourses on the entrepreneur and entrepreneurial society. A focus on discursive identities (entrepreneur, citizen) and the discursive relations within the larger constellations within which these are embedded in (entrepreneurial state, welfare state) would address both the diachronic and the synchronic aspect of discursive identities and relations.

In view of the section below presenting a case study of post-foundational discourse analysis, three steps of a research process can be abstracted from this brief discussion of the methodological procedures of IDA, Logics Approach, and PDA. As step one, the research object is delineated, explored, and problematized from the perspective of post-foundational discourse theory. Often initial working hypotheses are formulated. As step two, concepts from post-foundational discourse theory, at times together with concepts from other theoretical traditions, are operationalized for analytical purposes. Finally, as step three, the more practical methods of data gathering and analysis, taken to be compatible with post-foundational discourse theory, are articulated. Actual designing of a research process is obviously not limited to these three steps alone. Often research proceeds in a non-linear fashion and these

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<sup>15</sup> Both Glynos and Howarth, and Marttila, display a Foucaultian ethos in their focus on wider societal transformations, whereas Laclau (Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014, 261–2) stressed the influence of Derrida and Lacan on his theory of discourse. For Laclau, Foucault’s theory of discourse ends up totalizing discourses in their positivity, resulting in an inability to account for moments of change.



steps are repeated. Particularly steps two and three can be interchangeable as you can see from the example from below.

## Relevance for social and sociological analysis

To conduct discourse analysis from a post-foundational perspective means to approach all things social as temporarily fixed discursive formations which could always in principle be organized otherwise. Social denotes a situation where the contingent relational origins of discursive entities have become forgotten, thereby turning them into relatively sedimented discursive structures (Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014, 260). Distinct structures of societies, such as the political, the economic, the cultural, the familial, or the academic, are thus social insofar as they have become sedimented and de-politicised. However, as these are inherently contingent, there always remains a possibility for their re-politicization and rearticulation. A perception of society or any of its component parts as closed totalities governed by their own endogenous laws is thus a mirage from a post-foundational perspective. The same applies to post-foundational discourse analysis as scientific practice and discourse. As the social is not constant but changing, particularly crucial for this approach has been the attention to social and political transformations (Howarth, Norval, Stavrakakis 2000).

We would argue that the relevance of post-foundational discourse analysis stems in large part from how it enables a move beyond a post-structuralist analysis of determining—even if decentered and contingent—structures appearing to govern subjects from above. Post-foundational discourse analysis aims instead to account the ways in which such structures are created and shaped in the first place through articulations and contestations from below. These two theoretical traditions have a lot in common, and in many ways post-foundationalism might perhaps be read as an immanent critique of post-structuralism. Post-foundational discourse analysis might thus be seen as supplementing rather than replacing the deconstructive insights of post-structuralist theory with its focus on the reconstructive and reconfiguring aspects of hegemonic articulations.

This is not to say that deconstruction and reconstruction of discursive foundations would take place all the time all over the place. These can be matters of the *longue durée*. Just think of the ones in place concerning gender and property. But when such foundations begin to shake, the results can be dramatic, as witnessed in contemporary debates on Brexit, the European Union, and Trump presidency, or the more general worries captured by concepts such as post-truth and post-democracy. Post-foundational discourse analysis has put such discursive breakdowns, disruptions, dislocations, and instabilities at the centre of its focus

(Macgilchrist 2016, 264–6). It has developed a rich conceptual apparatus to tackle such developments, as from this angle democracy, politics or truth were never fixed for good. Post-foundational discourse analysis can thus provide valuable conceptual tools and a unique perspective for a variety of disciplines dealing with such phenomena.

Furthermore, as briefly touched upon in the discussion of its theoretical background, post-foundational discourse theory and analysis has aimed, and arguably succeeded, at explicating the political nature of discourse, and the discursive nature of politics. Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse was initially firmly rooted in a Gramscian and Althusserian tradition of Marxism, which it then juxtaposed with other critical traditions of social analysis. As such, there has always been an emancipatory impulse to be found from within it. While Laclau's work after the *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* aimed at developing post-foundational discourse theory in an ontological-formal register, we believe that this emancipatory potential for the analysis of contemporary societies is still there to be tapped in by a wide variety of disciplines.

## Typical fields of application and research questions

Post-foundational discourse analysis has gained its strongest foothold within political science (Marttila 2015a, 3–4). As argued by Torfing (1999, 291; 2005, 25–6, 225, 291), here the focus was initially on “soft” topics of identity politics ignored by more established traditions of political analysis. Often the context has been that of a nation state. Conversely, it steered clear of “hard” topics and “mainstream issues”, such as historical forms and relations between the state and the economy, stable institutions of modern capitalist societies, or questions concerning social reproduction.

Within political science broadly conceived, studies addressing the contingent foundations of the social have focused, for example, on the constitutive rhetorical aspects of campaigning (Griggs & Howarth 2004), or deconstructed discourses on political migration and family (Squire 2004, Reyes 2004), as well as the Apartheid discourse (Norval 1996; Norval & Howarth 1998). Studies focusing more clearly on particular analytical tools and articulatory logics, such as empty or floating signifiers, have researched humour in Italian fascism and women's movements (Mascha 2010), European Union's cultural policy (Palonen 2014), revolutionary traditions (Palonen 2011), the institutionalisation of slow food movement (Van Bommel & Spicer 2011), and, for example, urban planning (Gunder 2010). Studies on populism—a prevalent topic in contemporary research within this theoretical perspective—has

ranged from the more metatheoretical reflections to the more detailed empirical studies (Stavrakakis et al. 2017; Moffitt 2016; Palonen 2009; Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005).

Post-foundational discourse analysis has indeed been useful for (interpretive) policy analysis, and in the journal *Critical Policy Studies* (on the approach see e.g. Paul 2009; Howarth 2010). Related studies include inquiries on sustainable airport expansion (Griggs & Howarth 2013), or other logics approach takes on policies (Hawkins 2015). The approach has been developed with an increased awareness on the transparency of the research process.

As for the application of post-foundational discourse theory and analysis' insights outside the disciplinary boundaries of political science, to name but a few, this has taken place in: sociology (Marttila 2013); organizational studies (Kenny & Scriver 2012; Cederström & Spicer 2014); political economy (Daly 1991, 2004; Gibson-Graham 1995; Dahlberg 2014); international political economy (de Goede 2006); international relations (Doucet 2005; Hansen 2006; Solomon 2009; Methmann 2010; Paipas 2014); international law (Koskenniemi 2012); history (Martin 2002); education studies (Clarke 2012); and, cultural and media studies (Dahlberg & Phelan 2011).

## Short example

Post-foundational discourse analysis can be used to study material practices and forms as carriers of meaning. Our example studies street names, memorials and architecture. As Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu (2017, 1) argue “there are few spaces as ordinary and mundane, yet politically charged as a city’s streets.” In some street naming contexts such as Eastern Central Europe—our case being that of Budapest—these change regularly with the change of power-holders and dominant ideologies. This transforming cityscape is a field within which one can study the founding processes of meaning. Post-foundational analysis often starts from a re-politicisation or de-mystification process whereby the given meanings come to appear not as given but instead contestable. This can be done by contrasting what is seen as constant to another case: for example the Stalin Road in Colchester was uncontested in the city’s map as there was no tradition of changing street names and memorials in the UK and the Yalta winners’ names were left untouched. In contrast, after WWII several waves of renaming of streets had taken place in Hungary. As a first step we hence establish the political potential in the cityscape and hypothesise that its publicly sponsored and even regulated transformation is important in demonstrating political changes.

When looking at the transformation of the city-text or the cityscape in Budapest in the studies we have conducted so far (Palonen 2006, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017) primary data has simply included lists of names and memorials; when they have been named, changed or introduced in the city scape; lists of replaced memorials; and information on newly established

or demolished architectural buildings. Already the city-text itself – and the practices of unfolding it – functions as a field of meanings (Palonen 2017). Debates on these have been used to explore and illustrated what are the meanings assigned to them serve as primary or background material. On the basis of the discussion we could formulate hypothesis, but we can also use the city-text itself as material that reveals something beyond the already thought. We can explore logics of meaning making that are at stake in the practices and material realities of the cityscape. Post-foundational discourse analysis offers different analytical concepts that address logics behind practices and other forms of meaning-making, and exploring the case through engagement with the material or literature and definition of the analytical concepts that would explain, illustrate or account for what is interesting in the case.

Analysing the city-text in Budapest, one logic we found was that the street names present various canons that are repeated in the city-text, and meaning-making is established through these canons and their transformations (Palonen & Nagy 2002, Palonen 2006): these street names function as nodal points in a discourse. In one of the studies the nodal point of transnational street names was explored in more detail (Palonen 2015). Another logic presents exclusion from the canon: a set of statues was recognised and removed from the city to a particular Statue Park of communist era statues (Palonen 2008). Those who are no longer with “us” were named beyond the limit of the discourse. The naming of the constitutive outside or other of the current order constituted a political frontier. The third observation was that there was constant battle between the districts and the municipality regarding street naming, as the socialist-liberal municipal council vetoed changes proposed by the districts (Palonen 2008). The question of who are “us” in Hungarian politics was politicised rather than taken for granted and the battle over commemoration kept this distinction alive (Palonen 2006). Particular events and personalities were elevated on the level of myths and imaginaries were rewritten in the streets and memorials (Palonen 2012). Besides commemorative items in the streetscape or the city-text, other linguistic elements may be included. The Orbán government and the Hungarian parliament ruled that the street names referring to the dictatorship of the previous centennial should be removed. The list included names of Lenin and red stars as well as other elements which were debated. Post-foundational perspective allows attention to the moments of founding meaning which this constitutes (Palonen 2008). Furthermore, the discursive elements may be architectural, when they have been assigned meaning through the public debate or simply as the power-holders have opted for one style over another (Palonen 2012).

In such analysis different data management techniques can be used. We would argue that it is important to use transparent data management tools and not merely to rely on naming a logic. The consistency of that logic in the materials needs to be shown. Furthermore, the

analytical concepts in themselves do not bring much value to the case if nothing can be argued through them. To find an empty signifier or an identity or point of identification does not bear value as such. Each of the instances of using one of these concepts associated with post-foundational discourse analysis needs to be substantiated. So what if memorials can function as empty signifiers for a discourse for the power-holders? What does it mean? What effects does it have for further meaning making in this case, what practices enable it and what practices follow from it being an empty signifier for a wider political movement?

## Limits of the approach

While the works described in the section on methodological frameworks have covered important ground in developing the methodological and practical aspects of post-foundational discourse analysis, it is safe to say that plenty of ground remains uncovered. Whether this means developing new methods and methodological procedures, or adopting existing ones from a post-foundational perspective, this is up for debate. However, we would argue that either way, this is of utmost importance for transforming post-foundational discourse theory into a fully-fledged approach to discourse analysis. This should be done for pedagogical reasons as well. It should be pointed out that post-foundational discourse theory can also be useful for developing further other approaches to discourse analysis. As proposed by Macgilchrist (2016), critical discourse studies would benefit from an engagement with the post-foundational perspective in order to challenge its own limits, and as shown by Rear and Jones (2013), it can also be combined with critical discourse analysis within a single study.

While there have been attempts to study and theorize the materiality, or materialization, of discourse from a post-foundational perspective (Marttila 2015a and the examples above), this is also an area where more work needs to be done. Discourse, as understood from this perspective, after all, contains both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic aspects of reality. While some have argued that this cannot be done through a post-foundational perspective (e.g. Jessop & Sum 2013, 131–2), we see no reason for this being necessarily so. However, this might be done in ways different than those proposed by the critics. Indeed, we cannot see how to “account of the relations between semiosis and structuration in a social world beyond discourse” (Ibid. 2013 132), as social world beyond discourse is an oxymoron from a post-foundational perspective. That said, material processes do have dislocatory effects on discursive formations, and vice versa, and these relations will have to be theorized and analyzed in more detail within post-foundational discourse analysis.

A third aspect where the current limits have to be trespassed concerns accordingly the issue of causality. While relying on causal language and reasoning in describing discursive

phenomena through concepts such as empty signifiers and floating signifiers, post-foundational discourse theory and analysis have next to nothing to say on how causal relations function here. Positioning post-foundational discourse theory in relation to other philosophies of (social) science, such as critical realism, Glynos and Howarth (2007) have discussed their logics as an alternative explanandum to those of causal laws and mechanisms. The way in which logics can provide novel answers to questions concerning causality in discursive phenomena remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, we see no reason why post-foundational literature should not incorporate especially non-Humean notions of causality as developed elsewhere. This should be done at least to the extent that these are (made) compatible with its basic theoretical premises, whereby also reasons and constitutive rules can be considered as causes (e.g., Kurki 2008; Paul 2009).<sup>16</sup>

From the methodological perspective the weaknesses of the approach has been on the one hand lack of transparency on precisely how the research has been carried out and on the other hand how the analysis moves beyond recognising logics to the analysis of their significance in the context. Attention to the potential for comparative research has been drawn (Paul 2009). With the enhancements in the data gathering, management and analysis techniques that go beyond the appearance of particular forms, practices or indeed words, the approach will have significant value in recognising, analysing and explaining various social transformations and their political edges.

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<sup>16</sup> For a problematization of the perception of Derrida and Foucault as anti-causal theorists, see, Kurki 2008, 80–4. While she provides an highly enlightning and important discussion on this topic, it should be pointed out that she (2008, 82n71) also makes an offhand comment in a footnote which seems to argue that Laclau and Mouffe propose a purely "idealist", "ideational", and "(inter-)subjective" conception of discourse. She does not offer any citation to back this claim up—perhaps because such does not exist.

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