

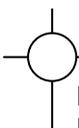
The place of critical discourse analysis at a time when fieldwork relations in ethnography are changing

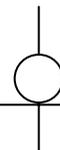
Abstract

This paper provides a position for critical discourse analysis at a time when fieldwork relations in ethnography are changing. Emergent ways with which objects of study are defined necessitate different orientations towards research. Performing relations of times past often denies the complexity of lived experiences that are now developing in the context of mobility. Beginning with a critical perspective, this paper raises questions about the history of a postgraduate group working with critical discourse analysis. Bringing forth the ways in which the group initially demarcated what counts as the application and theory of discourse analysis allows questions about knowledge production to be raised. The latter part of the paper repositions this perspective towards a more generative approach. It suggests the notion of 'situated discourse' as a way of undermining the themes of an assumed world system that continue to be performed through the kinds of critical orientations that appear in the former part of the paper and in critical discourse analysis. The extent to which these tools can be useful in defining objects of study through the changing relations between ethnographic subjects is brought into question. This paper is a contribution towards the larger project of continuing to produce an imaginary for multisited ethnography.

Introduction: Discourse analysis and the formation of a group

Just shy of a year ago and as a result of 'corridor conversations', a few people in my faculty, including me, who have a common interest in discourse and power initiated a discourse analysis group at the University of Melbourne. This was largely a postgraduate-led formation in the Faculty of Education supported by, and attended by, a number of generous staff members. It happened during a time of upheaval as our faculty was about to realise a so-called 'restructure'. Many members of this group had expressed the need for postgraduate pedagogic spaces that would allow us to share our research ideas, push us in our scholarly pursuits, engage with people from other faculties and the general public as well as generate opportunities to engage in various research activities. This paper begins with some of the issues with which I have grappled as a member of this group and then situates these within my own research. In a presentation to the group, I raised these issues in a very messy and multiply connected way





to hint towards the paradoxical possibility of greater clarity from views other than those produced by a linear (re)view, of which there are many (see, for example, Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & O'Garro Joseph, 2005).

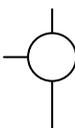
'Critical discourse analysis' is the name and loosely the focus of this reading group. Under this category we began by including all approaches to discourse analysis and considered more closely the writing of Gee (2005),¹ Jørgensen & Phillips (2002), Luke (1995-1996), Fairclough (through Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002), Collins (2001) and Blommaert (2005). Outside of discourse analysis we looked at the use of narrative (Riessman, 2002) through our workshop with Laurel Richardson (1994; 2000a; 2000b; and forthcoming), questioned how and 'when' (Lee, 2005) the texts we analyse are constituted and have the perspectives of many of the participants who are themselves engaged with a wide range of other forms of discourse analysis. Admittedly for the rest of this paper, when I refer to 'discourse analysis' this includes the forms of discourse analysis our group has encountered that incorporate a critical perspective and I run the risk of not representing the total spread of this area exhaustively.

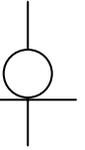
I want to explore 'critical discourse analysis', the category that includes all ways of critically analysing discourse, by first troubling an assumption I believe the group made concerning what we thought was our object of study; that is the texts which we assume are 'already pre-constituted, already formed and present' (Lee, 2005, p. 351). In our attempts to grapple with definitional issues (i.e. what is critical discourse analysis?), with most of us encountering it for the first time, I believe we were guilty of holding under-theorised positions. What I suggested to the group in response is a certain kind of sociological reflexivity (Marcus, 1994) that allows us to form relations between our work, theory and the social conditions in which the work we consider and the work we produce has arisen (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This is a perspective that brings epistemology to the fore.

Alison Lee helps me articulate the importance of epistemology over the micromanagement of tools and definitions that I believe had kept us preoccupied (we had been mostly focused on how to 'do' discourse analysis) for too long:

The movement between text, discourse and the world is problematic and complex, a fundamental matter of epistemology, or what is to be counted as knowledge. This kind of problem requires epistemological work that precedes method (Lee, 2005, p. 351).

Pierre Bourdieu, whose work has influenced my own thinking, was most passionate about demolishing and reconstructing 'givens' that disguise themselves as scientific facts (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1991). Here, building on Bourdieu along





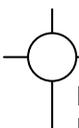
with Lee, I believe we had been taking 'texts' as given. Furthermore, by neglecting to locate this work within particular epistemological traditions we had failed to grasp the complexity of some of the taxonomies that we often used so liberally.

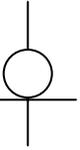
I raised some questions to the group in one of my presentations that I hoped would challenge us to think more deeply about what we had been taking for granted and what the epistemological assumptions that support these 'truths' might be. What theoretical concerns should precede discussions about method in thinking about discourse analysis? What is our object of study? How have the practices of discourse analysis been constituted historically? What knowledges do methods for analysing discourse contribute now? Why is the use of discourse analysis currently proliferating across so many disciplines and, why are we, as educational researchers, so interested in it now? What contribution do we hope to make to discourse analysis? These were difficult questions to answer.

I followed Nancy Fraser (1992), for political clarity, to align our interests in discourse, as educational researchers and members of the critical discourse analysis group, with those of feminists in the early 1990s. Because we are working in a suffocating neoliberal (Davies, 2003) climate, I believe we are somewhat similarly driven. Fraser (1992, pp. 51-52) says that a theory of discourse can help us understand at least four things: 'how people's social identities are fashioned and altered over time'; 'how, under conditions of inequality, social groups in the sense of collective agents are formed and unformed'; 'how the cultural hegemony of dominant groups in society is secured and contested'; and, how discourse analysis 'can shed light on the prospects for emancipatory social change and political practice'. I would add a fifth contribution, which is, that it can also help us understand the limits such a theory might have, in its own right, for actually producing any kind of change.

So what theoretical traditions had we been drawing on and how have these helped us accomplish the above? Most of the theoretical tension, between the various versions of discourse analysis we had been using, is actually around the extent to which either end of a macro-micro distinction is privileged and in what ways. This is played out within and across the disciplines of linguistics, philosophy, sociology and literary studies with mostly structural and poststructural accounts of discourse, as well as within the subsequent application of the analytical tools for researching discourse as an object of study.

For example, structuralist versions of discourse reduce it to a semiotic system whose order is derived by the abstract separation of the object of study from the context in which it was generated. This theoretical move allows the object of study to be bounded and suspended in time thereby rendering it 'conquerable' (Bourdieu et al.,





1991). To draw on an overused explanation, within linguistic versions of discourse analysis, this is realised through the legacy of Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) separation of 'langue' from 'parole'. This is a necessary move for legitimating the study of language within a positivist epistemology. However, within the questions framed above this allows virtually no possibilities for understanding identity, change or power. Many subsequent developments in discourse theory attempt to either negate, redress or respond to these limitations of the Saussurean framework. It is important to ask how much of the work that we had been considering is situated in one way or another within or against these developments over the past century.

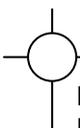
From a different perspective to the one above, I returned to Alison Lee's (2005) question, 'when is a text?', to consider an argument based on the poststructuralist assumption that '[w]hatever "the real is, it is discursive' (Lather, 1991, p. 25) with which Maggie MacLure offers a sharp critique of qualitative research methods. Her response to the oversimplification of the experiences of schooling is as follows:

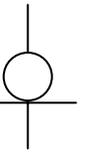
Research method generally tries to render down that complexity [of the experiences of schooling]. Analysis, for instance, often involves looking for the themes or categories that underlie the surface linguistic disorder of the 'data'. Interview technique invites the real person to emerge from behind the false fronts. 'Triangulation' is used to eliminate ambiguity or resolve conflicting meanings. And research writing is expected to keep its distance, as already noted, from the taint of deliberate technique, literary pretension or journalistic leanings (MacLure, 2003, p. 8).

This raises a number of questions. Firstly, what is the connection between reality (or the real) and discourse? Secondly, do we accept the structuralist, and in some cases the poststructuralist, 'reduction of discourse to symbolic system' (Fraser, 1992, p. 68)? Thirdly, how do we take up the challenge against 'analysis', a term in the very title and practice of what it is that we do with discourse? Consider Bourdieu's position in response to the second point above specifically with regards to language:

'As soon as one treats language as an autonomous object... one is condemned to looking within words for the power of words... where it is not to be found' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 107).

Here, Bourdieu (1991, p. 107) embraces Austin's illocutionary force but rejects that the power relations can be found 'in the very words... in which that force is *indicated* or, better, *represented*'. He (dis/re)locates the power distributions, from the discourse itself, partly to 'the *delegated* power of the spokesperson, and his speech' claiming that 'the substance of his discourse and, inseparably, his way of





speaking – is no more than a testimony, and one among others, of the *guarantee of delegation* which is vested in him'. In other words, there is a 'surplus of meaning', which is extra-discursive; this provides discourse its 'illocutionary force' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 109). Again, this points to the distinction between greater or less emphasis to the macro- or micro-. This distinction relies on world system themes which work towards producing the separation of the general and the particular. In the next section I consider other ways of identifying objects of research that do not rely on this separation.

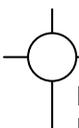
Moving from transfixing interlocutors to becoming their accomplices

I will now respond to some aspects of the above questions through my own attempts to understand something which has been troubling me in my work, that is, the notion of 'situated discourse' (Marcus, 1999, p. 7). My interest in situated discourse comes from my attempts to articulate a theoretical orientation for realising the figure of 'complicity' (Marcus, 1997) in fieldwork. In my thesis, I attempt to do this through an analysis of situated discourse in what I have been referring to as multi-sited ethnography following George Marcus' suggestion for a multi-sited ethnographic imaginary (Holmes & Marcus, 2005; Marcus, 1995; 1999; 2002).

My initial attempts to re-imagine the method of 'interview' in more collaborative ways fail for the exact same reason the work of the discourse analysis group had been unable to answer many of the questions raised above. Epistemological naïveté reduces the theorising of interviews to a 'stupidly positivist' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 39) attempt to produce some assumed rigor that relies on scientific standards (for example, by asking questions about how we can establish the best 'rapport' (Marcus, 2001) without even asking why it is that we are attempting to do so). The interview thus becomes:

a "technology" that invents both notions of individual subjectivities and collective social and political patterns and then obscures the operation of this process beneath notions of objectivity and science—or, in the case of journalistic and television interviews, of insight and art (Briggs, 2002, p. 913).

The interview does this precisely because the research is attempting to excavate the major themes of an assumed world system context in, or at best with, a particular set of subjects (or so-called 'participants'). The challenges of collaboration are by-passed with the mobilisation of the concept of rapport (Marcus, 2001). For example, in a case study focusing on how heteronormativity is reproduced through language in a school categorised as 'working-class', subjects may be



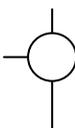


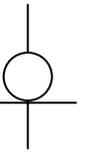
interviewed with questions about gender and class. In order to increase the extent to which some assumed level of collaboration is reached the concept of 'rapport' is evoked and subsequently the data, as well as the analysis, may be 'checked' by the subjects. Theories about the assumed world system themes of class and gender will then be used as 'lenses' for dissecting, in a removed and 'clinical' context, what was initially a situated exchange between researcher and researched. This is essentially a process of othering and points to a concern that has been troubling ethnographers for over a century.

Within anthropology, the challenges to this process became more focused though a number of responses (Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989) that all 'argued for a more ethical, humanistic, interpretive, intersubjective, dialogic and experimental ethnography' (Lassiter, 2005, p. 93). This so-called 'crisis of representation' was followed by what has been called a 'literary turn'. When naïve notions of reflexivity are employed under these conditions, the literary turn can actually serve to legitimate representational tricks. For example, the textual illusion of collaboration through research devices such as 'member checks', can in such cases present the interests of the researched to be in line with those of the researcher, when this may not have been the lived experience. These moves have gained popularity in qualitative research but have done very little for troubling the relational nature of what goes on during the fieldwork itself. This is not to say that the products of this process may not be used for emancipatory or other political ends, however, the process itself from the outset rarely begins with a detached sense of power. This is often precisely because the object of study is derived from and restricted to the world system and not from the situated context. My resistance to constrain the object of study within world system categories comes from a dissatisfaction with 'the kind of academic colonialism whereby the deep assumption permeating work is that the interests of the ethnographer and those of her subjects are somehow aligned' (Marcus, 1994, pp. 390-391). Educational research is not immune from this condition.

It might be thought that issues of colonialism are tangential to educational research, at least if one considers this is a purely 'domestic' affair. But many of the methods of qualitative research are inherited from ethnography, and carry the traces of its colonial past and postcolonial guilt (MacLure, 2003, p. 104).

I agree with Maggie MacLure in this regard and align myself with George Marcus who is unsatisfied by the response to this challenge through representational politics *alone*.² Through projects such as the *Writing Culture* critique 'the dialogic metaphor came to replace the textual metaphor in interpretive anthropology [and], the



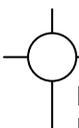


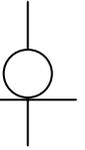
collaborative metaphor came to replace the dialogic metaphor in critical anthropology' (Lassiter, 2005, p. 93) but the full potential of this challenge to the whole research complex is yet to be realised. Here, I am interested in the relations of fieldwork. How might fieldwork be reconfigured to invest 'in the figure of complicity' (Marcus, 1998, pp. 119-120)? In response, I want to suggest a number of preliminary shifts in orientation. First, this ethnographic imaginary accepts that the goal is not to find, discover and/or conquer the 'truth' about a predetermined object. Instead, the object of study is identified and followed through the fieldwork. Second, the object needs to be derived in such a way that even though the mode of ethnographic research 'may begin in the world system... this mode comes circumstantially to be of the world system as well' (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). Third, the ethnographer is a 'circumstantial activist' (Marcus, 1995, pp. 113-114) who makes so-called methodological choices as the process unfolds (and folds). Finally, reflexivity is complicit and allows for these choices to be located.

Critical discourse analysis and ethnography

Discourse analysis does not make a significant contribution in facilitating the identification of research objects in the ways that I have described above; like all tools it is not just its reliability nor just the ways in which it is employed but also all of the various practices in which this tool is being engaged. The way that discourse is conceived will subsequently constrain what these objects can be, therefore, it makes sense to question the theoretical assumptions about discourse itself. More specifically, in accepting 'that anything can be a text, depending on location, circumstance or occasion' (Lee, 2005, p. 2) the power of the researcher to manipulate the legitimacy of these objects is locked into being hegemonic and the voicelessness of the subjects is inevitable. The collapse of discourse to symbolic system is a premise that makes these relations possible. The researcher subsequently expresses the postcolonial guilt that MacLure refers to above through attempts to re-inject the subjects' absent contribution under the guise of concepts such as 'voice' and in the name of ethics. Hence, emancipatory ethnography, rightly places greater emphasis on notions such as 'catalytic validity' where 'research participation' is accepted (Lather, 1991, p. 68).

The relationship between ethnography and what has come to be understood in multiple ways as 'discourse' is quite problematic. It appears as a point of concern most recently in the applications of social research practices to the specialised fields of modernist professions. Consider, for example, Max Travers' (2006) article which





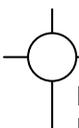
claims to bring together ethnography and conversation analysis for law and society studies to constitute what he calls a 'third way'. Here, Travers is attempting to reconcile the problems that have variously been considered an 'issue of context' (p. 446) as a way of bridging the gap between world system themes and the study of what I am arguing is situated discourse. In response, John Conley (2006) draws superficially on one of the central debates within anthropology, that is, the boundary issue of what constitutes ethnography, to expose the normative ways in which Travers treats ethnography and thus undermines the way in which he arrives at this third way. He says:

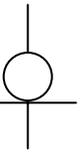
To equate ethnography with context or privileged perspective or critical analysis is thus inadequate. Finding the line between discourse analysis and ethnography has become an even more difficult task, and maybe an illusory objective (Conley, 2006, p. 473).

This is quite a serious claim and one that should not be dismissed on the basis of the specificity of the specialised field to which Travers and Conley are applying it. It points directly to the assumption, discussed above, that the interests of the subjects are somehow aligned with those of the researcher, in this case a discourse analyst. In multi-sited ethnography the 'relational spaces' are brought to the fore and the consideration of situated discourse 'complicates this taken-for-granted trope in ethnographic research' (Gustavson & Cytrynbaum, 2003, p. 268).

Situatedness and relational spaces

As an example of 'how ethnographers can make use of complicity to reorient the craft of ethnography, from fieldwork to text', Gustavson and Cytrynbaum (2003, p. 254) write from their own experiences, respectively, in a year-and-a-half-long ethnographic study of 'the situated social aspects of youth creative practices' (p. 261) and four years of ethnographic research in a high school exploring 'how students... negotiate the intermingling of democratic social ideals and competitive market principles' (p. 260). The relational spaces of research, they define as 'those moments when the originally intended purposes of the planned data collection activities get pushed to the periphery and the relational dynamics of the research take center stage' (p. 253). They draw on de Certeau's distinction of place and space, combining it with how Peshkin (1988; 1991), Cintron (1997) and Nesper (1997) 'talk about, theorize and put into textual practice the social relations... inherent in the practice of ethnography' (Gustavson & Cytrynbaum, 2003, p. 257). Their work is part of the same larger conversation with which I am engaging concerning relations in





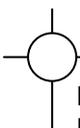
ethnographic practice. Cytrynbaum describes an encounter he has with two students, Mike and Jack, who question his identity and the legitimacy of the research he is conducting. He later reflects on his initial reactions to this confrontation:

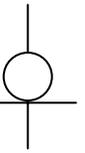
... I was clearly attempting to use humor and honesty to build "rapport." I wanted to explain my presence and purposes at the school so we could get on with the research. My goal was not so readily accepted, as Mike and Jack did not seem interested in letting this happen (p. 264).

Somewhat similarly, Gustavson is confronted for his qualities of otherness by Gil, a former student of his and a subject in the research. By exposing his own vulnerability (Behar, 1996) in the description of a phone conversation with Gil, Gustavson's writing is emotive but also indicates the inadequacy of the concept of 'rapport' to address or redress the complexity of their relationship. Furthermore, it becomes quite clear that 'Gil pushes the research to multiple sites' (Gustavson & Cytrynbaum, 2003, p. 266) suggesting the necessity for multi-sitedness as a way of reconsidering the spaces, places and objects of research.

The danger, in thinking through what it might mean for discourse to be situated, is in the scientific logic that structures what is *in situ*, as separate from what is not. This is dangerous because it assumes that the logic can sit outside of the situation which gave rise to this logic. That is, the particular is always part and whole of the general which is related through the particular. Or, in other words, there is neither a view that is from nowhere, nor, a view that is from somewhere but nowhere else. Donna Haraway (1988), in grappling with this same issue in her earlier work, attempts to reclaim the embodied nature of objectivity by 'placing metaphorical reliance on... vision' (p. 581). Insisting on embodiment 'and not giving in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing allows us to construct a usable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity' (p. 582). Our own discursive limits are highlighted in accepting the necessity of continuing to learn, or perhaps learning for the first time, 'how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name' (p. 582). Haraway's notion of reflexivity, similar to that of Bourdieu's is a 'committed return to objective knowledge' but unlike Bourdieu's it 'defines a space of juxtapositions and unexpected associations formed by a nomadic yet embedded analytic vision that constantly monitors its location and the partiality of its perspective in relation to others' (Marcus, 1994, p. 402).

The challenge, thus, remains in how the relations that ethnography produces, as well as the relations that produce it, can be understood as part of defining an object of study in a situated manner.

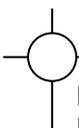


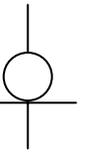


Although Gustavson and Cytrynbaum (2003) suggest that we place greater emphasis on the relational spaces of research, through the recognition of complicity in the process of identifying such an object that Marcus suggests we follow across multiple sites, they do not consider how the ontology of relationality determines how this is realised. For example, by not exploring the ontological nature of these relational spaces, it is not clear whether they are only humanly mediated or whether they allow for posthuman relations. How is the 'act of relating... a constitutive feature of human agency' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1689)? In other words, how do we view the act of *relating* as the process that produces what they have called relational spaces whilst also accepting that *viewing* is situated, embodied and a part of the relations themselves in such spaces?

It is necessary to assume that there is a materiality that exists in excess of relations already made, as well as relational meanings that have not yet come to existence, in order to provide any possibility for change. Robert Cooper suggests that human agency comes into being by human work which 'consists of constructing mimetic representations out of the raw matter of the environment' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1690). Disconnectedness is necessary for the maintenance of connections and both exist in the 'interspace' between the individual human agent and the objects of the environment. In this sense, relationships are networked around objects which are not fixed by structures that are self-referential, but rather, that these objects become 'carriers and transmitters of human agency in space and time' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1691). This renders the 'relative event' as the 'suspended, pre-objective space and time of relativity itself' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1691) wherein 'relationships between the human agent and its environment are not only situational but are also densely intermeshed so that its experiences are more like unique *events* that bind together agent and situation' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1691, emphasis his). So what implications does this have for discourse analysis and what Marcus (1997) has been calling the 'changing *mise-en-scène* of anthropological fieldwork'?

The many methods of 'critical discourse analysis', have served the purpose of revealing how human social relationships are produced and reproduced through representations. Discourses are thus analysed for their structural properties which in turn enable such processes to be realised. The majority of tools have been fashioned to work on the 'taken-for-granted world of everyday objects and meanings which are translations and realizations of the latency inherent in all human actions and thinking' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1693) but pay little or no attention to aesthetics and embodiment for example. That which is pre-objective and yet to be realized is denied precisely because it has not yet come into being. Focusing almost exclusively on the 'positions of opposition





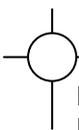
and resistance against dominant structures and processes of the past century and more of world history' (Marcus, 2000, p. 1) places the majority of discourse analytic research in a particular kind of tradition of critical inquiry. Although this may end up showing 'much about the complexities of certain kinds of situations, the construction of the oppositional or resistant subject as the frame for selecting and constructing *all* specific subjects is extremely limiting' (Marcus, 2000, p. 2). Making these spaces of resistance the sites in which the tools of discourse analysis drill, to excavate predetermined objects of study, short-circuits the possibility of doing anything other than further legitimating so-called structures that have already been brought into being.

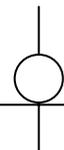
Conclusion

I want to suggest that critical discourse analysis, on its own, may in fact hinder the possibility of realising the figure of complicity in ethnographic research. The knowledge it produces continues to perform 'what remains of this century's narratives of leftist social and cultural criticism' that are so burdened by an 'overdetermining moral economy and redemptive function' (Marcus, 2000, p. 2). It may be necessary to limit the utility of these discourse analytic methods to researching the kinds of questions for which they have been designed; that is, critical questions that focus on how power and other human social relations are represented. In order to invoke the notion of relationality to redress how objects of research are found through a figure of complicity, it may be necessary to think of new ways of approaching sociomaterial time and space in the practices of ethnography. In these, the research site as a spatially unbounded object, is assumed to have not only relational 'interspaces' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1690) but also a background of pre-objective space and time from which a multi-sited ethnographic imaginary makes other sites available. Accepting that these relations are not outside the object of the research itself in the practice of ethnography across multiple sites, is, at this point, about the possible which has not yet come into being.

¹ Our engagement with this work included a workshop with James Gee himself who carried us leaps and bounds ahead in our thinking from where we had been previously.

² I stress 'alone' because George Marcus was one of the key figures involved in mounting a literary challenge against the ethnographic text, for example with the *Writing Culture* project (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), therefore he is by no means

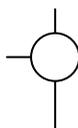


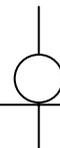


disinterested in matters of textuality. Rather, he has also turned our attention back towards the fieldwork itself, as well as the representational texts.

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