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Materiality, affect, and space: dialogues with discursive social psychology

Abstract: Interest in materiality and nonhumans in social and cultural practices is commonly set against discourse studies. In this paper, we outline possible avenues for dialogue between materialist and discursive concerns in a strand of discourse studies called »discursive social psychology« (DSP). We argue that, in terms of theoretical commitments, DSP enables fruitful points of departure for empirical research that incorporates the material and the discursive. However, we also point out some crucial differences between DSP and contemporary materialism(s) that, we argue, remain unbridgeable. We conclude that combining discursive and materialist approaches is possible but requires careful reflection.

Keywords: actor-network theory, affect, discursive practice, discursive social psychology, identity, materiality, new materialism, space

Zusammenfassung: Das Interesse an Materialität und nicht-menschlichen Aspekten sozialer und kultureller Praktiken wird in der Regel gegen die Diskursforschung abgegrenzt. In diesem Beitrag skizzieren wir mögliche Wege für einen Dialog zwischen materialistischen und diskursiven Anliegen in einem Teilbereich der Diskursforschung, der »Diskursiven Sozialpsychologie« (DSP). Wir argumentieren, dass die DSP in Bezug auf ihre theoretischen Annahmen fruchtbare Ausgangspunkte für empirische Forschung bietet, die das Materielle und das Diskursive gleichermaßen einbezieht. Wir weisen jedoch auch auf einige entscheidende Unterschiede zwischen der DSP und dem zeitgenössischen Materialismus bzw. Materialismen hin, die u. E. unüberbrückbar bleiben. Wir kommen zu dem Schluss, dass eine Kombination von diskursiven und materialistischen Ansätzen möglich ist, aber sorgfältige Überlegungen erfordert.

Schlagwörter: Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie, Affekt, diskursive Praxis, diskursive Sozialpsychologie, Identität, Materialität, Neuer Materialismus, Raum

1 Introduction

The role of materiality in social life has created intense discussions in social science, specifically during the past two decades, even though the roots of the debates date back to the twentieth century and beyond (Coole/Frost 2010). How can social science acknowledge the central importance of material and nonhuman actors in social and cultural life? How can social science transcend the human-centeredness of its key concepts, theories and methodologies? According to the call for papers for this special issue, these

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»debates also and especially touch on discourse research, since the material turn is repeatedly and explicitly positioned as a (defensive) reaction to the linguistic or discursive turn.« (Egbert/Bettinger 2020)

Materialist critiques typically argue that discursive research overestimates the role of human actors and discourses and underestimates the role of nonhuman and material actors in shaping social phenomena (Barad 2007; Coole/Frost 2010; Ratner 2009).

Discussions about the role of materiality and discourse in social life have crossed the boundaries of disciplines such as sociology, geography, and anthropology, effectively bringing social scientific scholarship together. While similar discussions have taken place within the discipline of social psychology, there has been little dialogue between social psychology and wider multidisciplinary notions of materiality. Thus far, the so-called »material turn« has had a limited impact on social psychology, and contributions on the part of social psychology to the discourse-materiality debate have not been influential among researchers from other disciplines, with some exceptions, which we review in this article. We find this lack of dialogue surprising and regrettable because social psychology was, for many years, at the vanguard of discourse theory development, with important and original contributions that helped to establish discourse studies as a recognisable area of academic work (e.g., Billig 1987; Davies/Harré 1990; Edward/Potter 1992; Potter 1996; Potter/Wetherell 1987).

»Discursive social psychology« (DSP) typically focuses on the micro-practices of everyday interaction. Therefore, in this paper, we approach materiality with an emphasis on such micro-practices, focusing especially on embodiment and space and how they entwine with processes of identity construction. As far as social psychology has a specific perspective on discourse, it is worth asking whether DSP also enables specific perspectives on the discourse-materiality debate. In this article, we argue that in terms of theoretical commitments, DSP could enable points of departure for research that aims to incorporate (at least some) materialist and discursive concerns. In empirical DSP, however, such incorporation has remained marginal. The type of incorporation we suggest here is aligned with a growing interest in applying DSP to study phenomena that are commonly understood as material, such as embodiment (see, e.g., Durrham/Dixon 2005; Potter 2005; Wiggins/Osvaldsson Cromdall, 2020). This growing interest makes it timely and pertinent to discuss the potentialities and pitfalls involved in such endeavours. We argue that what needs to be considered in these discussions is the fact that, even though DSP enables particular kinds of perspectives on materiality, due to the inherent plurality of approaches in the broad field of DSP, the practical possibilities of combining an analytical interest in discourse and materiality offered by these perspectives vary significantly within DSP itself. Furthermore, we describe some of the metatheoretical aspects that require consideration when combining discourse and materiality by discussing the points of convergence but also differences that it is good to be aware of in such attempts. Thus, while identifying potential avenues for dialogue between materialist and discursive concerns, we also point out some crucial differences between DSP and some contemporary materialist work, such as »Actor-Network Theory« (ANT) and »affect studies«. Conse-

quent to our interest in metatheoretical aspects of the discourse-materiality debate, our primary emphasis is not on practical-level methodological aspects of bringing DSP and materialist approaches into conversation, although we do engage in some methodological reflections that aim to open up that conversation.

The following section begins by presenting the origins and basic premises of DSP, together with a summarised review of its various strands of work. This basic characterisation is then placed in conversation with materialist approaches by pointing out affinities and critiques that help us to articulate potential connections between discourse and materiality when we take discursive work in social psychology as a starting point. We continue by reviewing work that can be situated in or, at the very least, has been influenced by DSP. More concretely, we discuss research in the areas of affects and spatial identity that have pointed out limitations in approaches that focus exclusively in text and talk. Through the formulation of such limitations, potential alternatives are also formulated. These are especially directed at the consideration, in discourse studies, of embodiment and the role of nonhumans. In the concluding section of the paper, we summarise the relevant metatheoretical and practical aspects that we argue must be considered in any analytical efforts to combine DSP and an interest in materiality.

2 Discursive social psychology

2.1 Origins and premises

Discursive social psychology is a strand of a wide field of research called »discourse studies« or »discourse analysis«, which encompasses a broad range of approaches with different emphases and entry points (see, e.g., Burr 2015; Johnstone 2018; Jørgensen/Phillips 2002; Wood/Kroger 2000). Discursive social psychology originates from two influential books published in 1987, »*Discourse and Social Psychology*« by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell and »*Arguing and Thinking*« by Michael Billig. The discursive approach delineated in these books explicitly draws from ancient rhetoric, John L. Austin's speech act theory, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EMCA), semiotics and poststructuralism, and sociology of scientific knowledge. Both books emphasise the discursive nature of psychological entities and processes, such as attitudes, identities, categorisation and thinking. Since the beginning, DSP has been challenging mainstream cognitivist psychology and its idea that individuals' internal psychological states can be accessed through language. Discursive social psychology is anti-cognitivist by nature: it posits that psychological phenomena, which cognitive psychologists assume to be the results of cognitive entities and processes, are talked into being during interaction (e.g., Billig 2009).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, DSP grew in popularity. At the same time, it became an increasingly fragmented approach. Potter (2010) divides DSP into three strands: the first strand focuses on the cultural resources of discourse (e.g., Billig 1987; Edley 2001; Potter/Wetherell 1987), the second strand focuses on the discursive construction of psy-

chological phenomena (e.g., Edwards/Potter 1992), and the third and the latest strand is intertwined with conversation analysis (EMCA) (e.g., Stokoe/Hepburn/Antaki 2012). The first strand later developed into an approach called »critical discursive psychology« (CDP) (e.g., Wetherell 1998; see also Edley 2001). As distinct from CDP, the second and third strands of DSP are sometimes called merely »discursive psychology« (DP) (Taylor 2015; Wiggins 2016). Because DSP adopts an anti-cognitive perspective and is not interested in linguistic questions *per se* (such as the organising principles of linguistic structures, for instance), studies that focus on socio-linguistics or the interface between discourse and cognition (e.g., van Dijk 2014) are usually excluded from DSP (Potter/Wetherell 1987).

Sorting discourse studies into those that represent DSP and those that represent some other type of discourse analysis is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless, there are general features that differentiate DSP from other lines of discourse studies. Firstly, in DSP, the term »discourse« refers to all forms of everyday talk and text (Potter/Wetherell 1987). By everyday talk, DSP refers to the communication people do on a daily basis in various contexts. Thus, everyday talk and text, including written language, encompass instances of language in contexts as varied as newspaper reporting, parliamentary debates or mealtime conversations among family members. Empirical DSP focuses on situated discursive micro-practices, such as categorisation, evaluation or identity construction in face-to-face interactions (or technologically mediated interactions). The extent to which DSP focuses on the macro-societal dimensions of these discursive practices, such as political ideologies, however, varies between DSP strands. Critical discursive psychology, which draws from poststructuralism, is generally more interested in questions of ideological power than the other strands (Wetherell 1998). In general, empirical DSP does not focus on tracing large-scale, periodic and historical transformations in discursive practices. This is what clearly differentiates DSP from, for example, genealogically oriented discourse studies (e.g., Foucault 1978, 1991).

Secondly, DSP is characterised by a strong emphasis on the action orientation of discourse. Text and talk perform (either deliberate or unintended) action, which draws on cultural resources such as words and rhetorical commonplaces (Potter 1996, 2013; Potter/Wetherell 1987). Compared to other strands of discourse studies, DSP grants a greater level of agency to language users. Among the key questions are what people do with text and talk and how do they do it (e.g., with what meaning-making resources). This practice orientation distinguishes DSP from those types of discourse studies that mainly focus on dominant discourses as powerful, muscular and normative (social) forces, substances or entities that shape human conduct and/or sense-making (unless people resist them) (e.g., Alvesson/Willmott 2002; Elder-Vass 2012; Perren/Jennings 2005).

As stated above, in DSP, discourse refers to practice – not a force. There are no abstract or idealised discourses apart from concrete discursive practices (Billig 2009; Potter/Wetherell 1987). Nevertheless, it should be noted that DSP is by no means the only strand of discourse studies that views discourse – in one way or another – as a form of practice (e.g., Fairclough 2005; Keller 2011). However, unlike Fairclough (2005) for example, DSP has not drawn a distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices or focused

on illuminating the links between these two. Rather, DSP has focused on discursive practices and ways in which the material either takes part in discursive practices or is discursively »talked into being« (Edley 2001). Material can take part in discursive practices, for example, via gestures like a handwave. Material can be »talked into being« when versions of material artefacts are discursively constructed. A car, for example, can be constructed as a status symbol (see Edley 2001). In the following section, we discuss DSP's interest in practices in light of the criticism discourse studies have faced from researchers interested in materiality.

2.2 DSP, practice-orientation, and a materialist critique of discursive power

Discursive social psychology is generally unwilling to conceive of »the social«, »the symbolic« or »the discursive« as abstract factors or forces that affect humans, irrespective of the concrete practices in which social, discursive and symbolic ideas, categories, concepts and actants are invoked, enacted, performed and negotiated. This practice orientation invokes a clear analogy with the so-called »practice turn« (Schatzki/Knorr-Cetina/von Savigny 2001) that has inspired materialist sociology, including »science and technology studies« (STS). The early proponents of »Actor-Network Theory« (ANT), for example, presented forceful critiques of mainstream sociological (e.g., Durkheimian) research practice, which invokes idealised, social and symbolic forces as routine elements of sociological explanation (e.g., Latour 1996b; also Mützel 2009). Bruno Latour (2003, 2004) has further extended this critique to what he calls the »critical« (sociological) tradition and »deconstruction«, which, while aiming to deconstruct, expose and unmask powerful discourses in order to emancipate people from ideological subjugation, overestimate the power of discourse over human subjects. Unlike the targets of Latour's critique (allegedly), DSP scholarship has, however, been less concerned with the power of discourse (e.g., Burr 2015).

Instead of highlighting the power of discourse, DSP typically conceives of discursive language use as a practice that is contradictory, dilemmatic, precarious and fragile and that, rather than automatically producing social or psychological stability, must always be studied *in situ* (e.g., Alvesson/Karreman 2000; Potter 1996, 2010). A classic example is Billig and colleagues' (1988) criticism of the Marxist (i.e., »critical«) tradition, or at least one version of it, that tends to conceive of institutionalized ideologies as powerful intellectual machines that have the capacity to produce relatively docile citizens who follow societally ordered behavioural patterns. Billig and colleagues (1988) have instead insisted on conceiving of ideologies as inherently dilemmatic and contradictory systems of thought that, due to their inherent contradictions, cannot produce societal order or behavioural patterns – aside from the relatively fragile patterns with which people manage »ideological dilemmas« in situated interactions. Instead of a research practice that refers to powerful »intellectual ideologies« as explanations for societal phenomena, Billig et al. (1988) promote a research practice that focuses on everyday situations in which

»lived ideologies« are invoked, enacted, produced, reproduced and negotiated through complex, dilemmatic and relatively unstable discursive processes. Some DSP scholars (e.g., Wetherell 1998) have promoted similar alternatives to studies, including some lines of Foucauldian or poststructuralist discourse analysis, which tend to highlight the power of institutionalised discourses in the production of human subjectivity. For many DSP scholars, subjectivity is constantly produced and reproduced *in* discursive processes, instead of being conceived of as a durable entity that is produced *by* other durable entities, such as powerful, institutionalised mega-discourses or Discourses with a capital D (e.g., Alvesson/Karreman 2000).

In sum, DSP scholarship rarely engages with the powerful and all-explanatory understanding of discourse that Latour criticises (rightfully or not). Instead, it enables a critique that resonates with that of ANT in that it targets reductionist and simplistic understandings of discourse that are silent about everyday and situated practices, pointing at a complexity that can be put in conversation with Latour. In advocating for that complexity, Latour does not reject the significance of discourse either but, rather, refuses to be bound by its attachment to »text« and »meaning« (Latour 1996a). This is practically illustrated by the reliance of some rather classic ANT works and analyses on historical text as a form of inscription that can be read through the lens of ANT (Nimmo 2011). Discursive social psychology, as explained above, has been primarily concerned with text and meaning but has not always been restricted to their analysis, with occasional attention being dedicated to embodiment, space and temporality, as we illustrate in this article.

In the above sense, DSP has some surprising – and often unnoticed – commonalities with (at least some versions of) ANT. Like DSP, ANT also draws on ethnomethodology, semiotics and the sociology of scientific knowledge (in addition to Goffman, whose ideas have also been important for DSP) (e.g., Latour 1996a; also Callon 1984; Potter 1996). Some concrete collaborations between DSP and ANT scholars have also taken place, as is demonstrated by the interdisciplinary theme issue on »Humans and others, agents and things«, published in *American Behavioral Scientist* (Ashmore/Wooffitt/Harding 1994). In their 1995 defence of »relativist« social science against »realist« critiques, »Death and Furniture«, Derek Edwards et al. draw heavily on Latour, who has, in turn, cited Edward et al.'s text as a »marvelously funny rendering of the realist gesture« (Latour 2004, S. 246). In the book »Representing reality: discourse, rhetoric and social construction«, Potter (1996, S. 10) regrets *not* discussing DSP in connection to ANT as one of the book's greatest shortcomings. Unfortunately, these connections remain scarcely reflected in contemporary social science. A comprehensive reflection falls outside the scope of this article as well, even though we do point out some connections and differences that are relevant for the scope of this article.

In some respects, DSP and (at least some versions of) ANT seem to complement one another. Both lines of inquiry are critical of adopting sociological or psychological concepts and categories – such as attitudes, identities and structures – as reified, taken-for-granted things-in-the-world and, as such, as routine elements of social scientific explanation (also Mützel 2009). While ANT is most often interested in socio-material practices that produce »sociological« or »scientific« facts and phenomena (Callon 1986;

Callon/Latour 1981; Latour/Woolgar 1979; Knorr-Cetina 1981), DSP, particularly its second strand, has focused on discursive practices that produce »psychological« facts and phenomena (e.g., attitudes and identities). Both DSP and ANT are thus interested in the practices through which the apparent »thingness« of the objects in the world (whether they are scientific, sociological or psychological facts) is collectively achieved and accomplished. They both argue against the reification of human concepts and, instead, approach human concepts (including sociological and psychological ones) as means through which people make sense of reality.

Of course, important differences remain. According to the classic and strongly ethnomethodological principles of ANT, empirical research inspired by ANT

»follows the actors in order to identify the manner in which these define and associate the different elements by which they build and explain their world.« (Callon 1986, S. 201)

While DSP is committed to similar principles in empirical research, the vast majority of DSP has investigated how *human* actors interactively build and explain their world in connection to discursive resources (e.g., interpretive repertoires, categories and rhetorical devices). How materiality and nonhuman actors participate in this building and explaining is usually ignored in empirical discursive social psychology.

A further difference between DSP and many materially oriented lines of social science, including some of the most influential works of Latour (1996b, 2003, 2004, see also Callon/Latour 1981), is that DSP, for the most part, is not specifically interested in the constitution, durability and transformation of societies. Discursive social psychology usually refrains from making any claims about how such sociological processes depend on, for example, symbolic, social and discursive elements or, as materialist sociology forcefully and convincingly argues (e.g., Latour 1996b, 2003, 2004), material objects and infrastructures. According to Latour (e.g., 1996b, 2003, 2004), it is nonhuman actors in particular, not, for example, discourses (in the macrosociological sense), that generate durability and continuity across temporally and spatially distinct moments of human interaction. In principle, most DSP scholars should have no trouble accepting Latour's argument. Regarding sociological disputes over the constitution and durability of societal practices, DSP has few stakes in the game. Discursive social psychology is mostly interested in short-term, nano-level sequences of social interaction, without the specific aim of explaining what makes these sequences possible or durable across social settings. Here, DSP aligns with, for example, ethnomethodology (Lynch 1996). Potter further argues that DSP »does not tell us all we need to know about social life – nor is it intended to« (Potter 2003, S. 787).

From a sociological perspective, this lack of interest in the constitution and durability of societal practices is perhaps a shortcoming of DSP. However, DSP can offer a clean start for research that aims to incorporate discursive and materialist concerns into the empirical. When approaching societal and interactional phenomena, DSP is not theoretically committed to offering »explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse«

(Latour 2004, S. 229) or any other force or factor, which is, the main shortcomings that Latour associates with the »critical« tradition and »deconstruction«. Discursive social psychology can be interested in discursive practices simply as a site of communication, identity negotiation, affective persuasion and so forth. Discursive practices can constrain and enable human action, but discursive practices are always a work in progress – their outcomes must always be empirically demonstrated. The construction of identities in local interactions, for example, is often a fleeting, contentious, precarious, fragile and insecure achievement. Therefore, few DSP scholars would argue that discursive practices alone can ever hold societies together. As we move on to argue, these premises can provide both benefits and obstacles for material-discursive research within the DSP framework, especially regarding time, space and the durability of societal phenomena.

3 Does DSP ignore materiality? Perspectives of critics and responses to the criticism

Even though DSP has the theoretical ability to orient itself towards material objects, like many other strands of discourse studies, it has faced criticism for over-emphasising talk and epistemology and disregarding materiality and ontology in empirical research practice (e.g., Corcoran 2009; Durrheim 2012; Durrheim/Dixon 2005; Hammersley 2003). This criticism can be divided into two main points. Firstly, scholars have argued that, in order to understand personhood, DSP must acknowledge the embodied, psycho-biological nature of human beings (e.g., Corcoran 2009). Secondly, scholars have argued that DSP must acknowledge the spatio-temporal aspects of discursive practices (e.g., Durrheim 2012). Discursive social psychology highlights the situational nature of discursive practices (Potter 2013), which are therefore seen as specifically located in time and space. However, DSP views discursive practices as sequentially and rhetorically situated rather than spatially situated (see Potter 2013). According to the critics, DSP tends to disregard the material context and remains, consequently, ontologically mute – a stance that, from the viewpoint of materialist critique, is regarded as too limiting and unavoidably leading to a lack of analytical attention being paid to materiality.

Discursive social psychologists have responded to the materialist critique in various ways. Potter (2010), for example, argues that embodiment is taken into consideration in DSP, especially in the EMCA-inspired third strand of DSP, which analyses video recordings of naturally occurring events from a multimodal perspective. According to Kent and Potter (2014), there is also a growing need for this type of research. Over the years, there have also been more explicit attempts to incorporate embodiment into discursive analyses (Durrheim 2012; Wetherell 2012; Wiggins/Osvaldsson Cromdall 2020). These attempts, however, have remained somewhat on the margins of DSP. In the following section, we discuss one of these attempts, namely the »affective-discursive approach« developed by Margaret Wetherell.

Regarding this alleged ignorance of time and space, DSP scholars have presented various kinds of defences. First, Potter (2010) argues that DSP is not interested in ontological

issues, such as objects in the world, and thus should not be criticised for disregarding them. Instead of objects as such, DSP can examine the discursive practices through which people interactively give meanings to objects (e.g., Edwards/Ashmore/Potter 1995). Second, referring to Austin's speech act theory, Potter and Wetherell (1987) do acknowledge that successful speech acts depend on material elements. »I bet you a pound that Ludvig wins the 3.15 at Kemptown« naturally becomes a problematic utterance if there is no horse called Ludvig or a racetrack in Kemptown (Potter/Wetherell 1987, S. 16). This theoretical understanding of the intertwining of discourse, time and place, however, has led to few empirical DSP analyses in which materiality play a *key* role. In addition to these more-or-less anecdotal accounts of materiality in DSP research, there are instances of more elaborated attempts that consider the connection between materiality and discourse. After discussing Wetherell's »affective-discursive approach«, we discuss how empirical DSP has approached time and place in the study of spatial identities.

4 Affective-discursive practices

One recent approach with an explicit practice orientation and a related interest in the entwinements of the discursive and the material was developed by Margaret Wetherell (e.g., 2012). As pointed out in the introduction, Wetherell's work represents CDP, which was essentially born out of her efforts to combine insights from ethnomethodology and poststructuralism into a synthetic discursive-analytical approach (Wetherell 1998). Within the last decade, Wetherell (2012) has moved more pronouncedly toward attempts to combine an interest in discursivity with analyses of affects and embodiment. Such an interest is not completely novel for DSP researchers, especially those working in the vein of CDP (see, e.g., Taylor 2015; see also Scharff 2011). Wetherell's work represents perhaps the most elaborated effort to take the recent calls to attend to material, embodied factors into account in developing tools for discursive-material analyses. Wetherell has proposed attuning the analytical attention to affective-discursive practice, which is conceptualised as partially patterned and partially open-ended social action, in which both affective/embodied and discursive dimensions of meaning-making are integral and inseparably entwined. This conceptualisation intentionally departs from the approaches generally advocated in affect studies (e.g., Gregg/Seigworth 2010), based upon which the notion of an »affective turn« as a part of a broader »ontological turn« has been formulated (Clough/Halley 2007). In the majority of affect studies, affect is conceptualised as the abstract forces, currents, intensities, rhythms or atmospheres that are impactful in shaping the dynamic unfolding of events, including human action and their emotional, embodied experiences. As a concept, »affect« is distinguished in this line of work from the emotions, which are instead seen as relying on discursive meaning-making and labelling and, thus, as different and (at least implicitly) separate from the unruly non-volitional automaticity of the effects of »affect« on bodies (Blackman/Venn 2010). This conceptualisation of affect is generally associated with an analytical orientation based on movement away from discursive analyses, in favour of creative analytical experimentations aiming to tap more

directly into the embodied and material aspects of human and, significantly, often also nonhuman life (e.g., Knudsen/Stage 2015).

Wetherell's (e.g., 2012) vision of fruitful avenues in affect research is largely based on a critique of these commonly advocated approaches in affect studies. Her critique is based on the view that such approaches portray affects as unnecessarily mysterious forces that escape systematic empirical inquiry. Wetherell sees that this creates an image of affects as acting separately from human action, which, for her, is an untenable point of analytical departure. Specifically, approaches to affect within cultural studies that heavily draw on works of authors such as Brian Massumi (2002) are seen by Wetherell as unfruitful because, in such approaches, affects are explicitly conceptualised as non-representational – i.e., as operating beyond and prior to linguistic representation. This creates a dichotomisation of the material and the discursive by placing affects in the realm of the material/pre-discursive and placing any sense-making activities, including attempts to label affect using emotion categories, into the realm of the discursive/representational. In critiquing such conceptualisations, Wetherell has also questioned the validity of the associated claims put forward by affect scholars concerning the nature of discursivity and discourse studies being rigid and limiting due to placing too much emphasis on the force of discourses in shaping reality. Wetherell points out that such claims do not take into account more micro-oriented discourse studies developed within the DSP framework, which she sees as quite capable of accommodating flexibility and multiplicity and, therefore, more compatible with an affect studies orientation than, for instance, macro-oriented post-structural discourse theories.

As an alternative to the approaches to affect she criticises, specifically in an effort to allow for an analysis of affect(s) that includes an interest in discursive meaning-making, Wetherell (2012) has developed her synthetic affective-discursive approach based on various practice theories, such as those derived from the works of Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Sherry Ortner, John Heritage and Valerie Walkerdine. The resulting approach, based on the conceptualisation of affective-discursive practice, guides researchers toward multidimensional analyses with a combined interest in the material and, specifically, the embodied and emotive aspects of people's lives and the ways in which these are shaped by both historically continuous, macro-level discursive regimes, as well as context-specific micro-level interactional patterns. In utilising such an approach, Wetherell suggests that we should analytically attend to patterns such as »normative episodic sequences« (Wetherell 2012, S. 84 f.), which refer to local interactions that work to stabilise various societal power relations by shaping institutionalised affective environments. The more concrete analytical tools proposed by Wetherell (2012; also Wetherell et al. 2015) for affective-discursive analysis are primarily based on her previous work in developing the CDP approach, namely »interpretative repertoires«, »subject positions« and »ideological dilemmas« (for a detailed discussion of these tools and CDP, see Edley 2001).

In her attempt to extend the use of these concepts and thus accommodate an interest in material, embodied and affective dimensions, Wetherell has, for instance, proposed attending to the ways in which the positions one adopts entail certain possibilities for emotive states and reactions (Wetherell 2012, S. 87). Also, interpretative repertoires and ideological

dilemmas, as the building blocks of commonsensical understandings, enable certain kinds of affective movements and alignments that essentially build people's relationships with one another and the surrounding world and inform the practices that constitute and maintain those relationships and associated social positions (Wetherell et al. 2015). Wetherell maintains that what makes these conceptual tools particularly useful for an affective-discursive analysis is their capacity to illuminate processes whereby certain understandings and positionings come to make sense and gain social and moral acceptability. Such processes contribute to the normalisation of certain ways of acting, being and feeling, and thereby inform people's everyday lives in multiple ways. Wetherell et al. (2015) have, for instance, used an analysis of newspaper portrayals of a national commemorative day labelled »Waitangi Day« in New Zealand to illustrate how embodied/affective and discursive reactions among citizens are shaped and justified and, thereby, normalised in ways that primarily work to reproduce the perspectives and privilege of white settler (i.e., Pākehā) cultural projects. In other words, their analysis illustrates how discursive portrayals work to legitimate certain ways of emoting, as well as how these become tied up with certain kinds of positionings (Pākehā vs. Māori) and, in doing so, collective activities that create and sustain »broader patterns of relations« (Wetherell et al. 2015 S. 60).

Wetherell's approach can be considered a potentially useful step toward extending the scope of discursive analyses in ways that allow attending to affect and the related material, embodied aspects of meaning-making. One of the key benefits of Wetherell's approach is that it includes an attempt to view sense-making and the related constructions of humans' sense of their own identities as consisting of elements of both continuity and context-specific fluidity in a fashion that is somewhat compatible with the perspectives on temporality and spatial identities we turn to in the next section. More specifically, while retaining an interest in situated interaction in line with the bulk of DSP work, the approach attempts also to consider the cumulative effect of repetition in situated identity performances, as well as how such repetition shapes personalised interactional trajectories and related possibilities for sense-making and emoting (Wetherell 2012, S. 4, 96–100). By doing so, this approach attends to the critique directed at DSP outlined in the previous section and proposes an affect studies-informed remedy for the claimed shortcomings related to a circumscribed focus on isolated instances of interactional accomplishments regarding people's sense of who they are.

This analytical angle aligns particularly well with the interests of researchers working in the field of psychological sciences, but it also has a great deal to offer to the social sciences more broadly as well. This is particularly the case with, for instance, cultural studies or any other fields and analyses with an interest in the ways in which the social, the material, and individual embodied lives entangle (Scharff 2011; Taylor 2015). Indeed, even though its impact on the field of affect studies has been somewhat limited thus far, Wetherell's approach has inspired, at least partially, research on a wide variety of topics, including political rhetoric on immigration (Ojala/Kaasik-Krogerus/Pantti 2019) and in the context of men's rights advocacy (Venäläinen 2021), women's talk about embodied issues such as weight management (McAvoy 2015), illness experiences produced in medical practices (Sointu 2015), social care managers' engagement with politically conten-

tious recruitment practices (Olakivi/Wrede 2021) and imprisoned women's talk about their past violent encounters (Venäläinen 2017).

Despite these promising elements of Wetherell's approach, there are also some limitations in terms of the extent to which it allows for shifting the focus from a sole emphasis on discursive action toward a discursive *and* material analysis. First of all, it can be questioned whether the same concepts developed for a discursive analysis, namely »(affective) interpretative repertoires«, »subject positions« and »ideological dilemmas«, allow tapping into embodied, materially manifested and experienced dimensions of meaning-making. After all, these concepts have been designed to capture the characteristics of discursive resources based on an assumption that people utilise such resources at their disposal specifically for the purposes of engaging in linguistically mediated interaction. Furthermore, by suggesting that affective practices should be understood as largely dependent on and inseparable from linguistic human interaction and what people accomplish through their engagements with different sense-making resources in its context, Wetherell's approach actually does not move very far from DSP's original focus. As a result, material elements, as well as non-human agency, which, for instance, Deleuzian-inspired affect studies tend to foreground, continue to play a somewhat marginal role in the suggested analytical approach. Relatedly, the material aspects attended to in this approach are largely limited to affective forces seen as animating humans in one way or another – indeed, as forces that retain a sense similar to emotions in psychologically informed analyses – and not so much as forces that act upon nonhuman elements or rely on the agency of nonhuman actors.

In sum, in her efforts to make affects more readily analysable and escape portraying affect as an indeterminate force that cannot be convincingly captured in empirical analyses, Wetherell assimilates an interest in affect(s) into a discursive-oriented approach in a fashion that largely retains the orientation and background assumptions of the latter and, in the process, assigns affects meanings consistent with it. Because of this, Wetherell's approach essentially departs from some of the core interests of the bulk of materialist-inspired analyses, especially in the framework of new materialism (e.g., Coole/Frost 2010). However, the tools suggested by Wetherell for an affective-discursive analysis and the associated analytical systematicity and concreteness may, in turn, appear more palatable for more discursively oriented researchers looking for ways of addressing affects' role in meaning-making.

5 Identity, place and nonhumans

Another strand of work that emerges from critiques of DSP's focus on verbal interaction is the study of social and psychological phenomena in connection to time, place and nonhuman actors (see, e.g., Durrheim/Dixon 2005; Michael 1996). These critiques do not argue that time, place or nonhumans cannot be studied using discursive approaches but, rather, that there has been a lack of attention paid to these elements in DSP. In other words, the argument would highlight that, in the way analytical work is often laid out in DSP, there is an implicit – and sometimes explicit – parcelling out of time and space

(Michael 1996). Textual material is often separated from what comes before and what will come after it (e.g., whether a conversation continues a previous interaction or will be picked up again later) or separated from the spaces in which those conversations take place. In attending to time and space, nonhuman social actors play a key role because they are instrumental in making those elements that emerge in everyday discursive formations – and have concerned DSP researchers – durable (e.g., Latour 1996b). This call to recognise the role of nonhumans in generating temporal continuity helps to overcome the need to rely on fixed social and cognitive structures as constituents of social action (as proposed by cognitive psychology), also allowing researchers to conceptualise and analyse subjectivity in terms of both patterns and fluidity in a similar sense to Wetherell's proposal.

Perhaps, one of the most interesting cases in which these critiques have been addressed is the study of place attachment, or »spatial identity«, which we will further discuss below. These studies serve as another example of approaching a psychological phenomenon, i.e., identity constructed in relation to space, with an interest in the ways discourse and materiality both contribute to its construction process. In line with other approaches in DSP, work on spatial identity has emerged as a reaction to cognitive understandings of place-related identity that have been especially prevalent in the field of »environmental psychology« (see, e.g., Lalli 1992; Korpela 1989; Proshansky/Fabian/Kaminoff 1983). For the most part, the work that has aimed to provide alternatives to a cognitive understanding has remained focused on symbolic meaning-making, with less emphasis on the material dimensions of spatial identities. In such studies, material objects and environments have mainly functioned as »projection screens« (Latour 1996b, S. 235) for the symbolic and discursive meanings that humans give them, rather than being active participants in such meaning-making practices. As we illustrate below, there are, however, also some DSP-related attempts to recognise the relevance of materiality and the role of nonhumans in the articulation of identity in relation to its surroundings. In addition to reviewing a few examples of studies in this vein in the following sections, we argue that there is potential to take such endeavours further.

Discursive social psychology's most important contribution to the study of identity is the push to move away from the individualistic, mentalistic, uncontested and apolitical character of identity that continues to reign over psychology. In dominant psychological conceptions, identity has mostly been formulated as, in short, a process of the »internal self« (Dixon/Durrheim 2000). Writing at the turn of the century, John Dixon's and Kevin Durrheim's objective was, instead, to rethink the interrelationship between place and identity, relying on the then-emerging field of discourse studies, with special emphasis on the role of rhetoric and ideology. In opposition to environmental psychology's proposal, this meant relocating place-identity »by removing it from the vault of the mind and returning it to the flux of human dialogue« (ibid., S. 32). Paying attention to communication in this sense allows researchers to account for the collective character of identity constructions by situating such construction in the realm of dialogue and discursive interaction. This allowed identity researchers to focus on discursive aspects of place identity; for instance, such perspectives ena-

bled viewing national identities as a form of »place-identity« in the sense studied by Billig (1995). Such an approach does not completely ignore the material components of identity construction, such as flags or maps, but, rather, views them as symbolic elements that feature in interaction, rather than as integral material elements that contribute to identity as a social process.

According to some scholars, such a discursively oriented approach to place identities does not adequately address the relevance of physical surroundings in their formation. Because the focus in such approaches is on talk and social interaction, the physical surroundings are taken into account mainly in the sense of how they are »talked into being«.

Criticism toward such an indirect orientation toward materiality has been put forward, for instance, by Dixon and Durrheim, who have specifically pointed out discursive social psychologist's »tendency to ignore the role of natural and built environments in sustaining self-definition« (Dixon/Durrheim, 2000, S. 41). For the purpose of illuminating durable patterns of identity construction, these authors have argued for a wider understanding of textuality that goes beyond conversational and written texts. According to them, such an understanding will also better accommodate a systematic analysis of the ways in which the material environment contributes to identity construction.

Within this line of enquiry, we find works such as those of Andrés Di Masso and Dixon (2015), who have further contributed to building a discursive-material approach to place identity. Their work is specifically based on a criticism and closer examination of the dualism that divides discourse and space; while the former focuses on how the physical world becomes real through discursive practices, the latter studies how »real« features of the world affect our emplaced experiences. In trying to bridge this dualism, the authors engage with Foucauldian traditions while retaining a »focus on talk-in-action as a *distinctively discursive* and rhetorical property of place construction« and calling for a recognition of »the wider assemblage of material locations and bodily practices« (ibid., S. 46) with which subjectivity is inevitably intertwined. The formulation of this approach from a DSP perspective requires, however, that Di Masso and Dixon rely on increasingly interdisciplinary modes of approaching discursivity. More concretely, they engage with Deleuzian poststructuralist philosophy and urban geography in order to formulate a proposal that can transcend the »futile split between the discursive and the material« in the research of spatial identity (ibid.). What Di Masso and Dixon do is important because it shows two things. First, discursive understandings of social psychological phenomena can consider material aspects of such phenomena and benefit from such considerations. Methodologically, Di Masso and Dixon achieve this through a) a wider range of kinds of empirical data that includes photographs and videos produced by the various actors involved in the studied social phenomena, as well as first-hand experience and involvement on the part of the authors, and b) a concrete analytical focus designed to identify episodes in which textual and material elements coexist and interact. Second, their article shows that engaging in dialogue with disciplines other than social psychology can support a richer understanding of durability and transformation by simultaneously attending to discourse and materiality. This approach requires considering spaces, embodied practices and talk-in-action to be shaping one another.

6 Further developments in engaging with materiality in DSP

There are also other attempts on the margins of DSP that are attempting to highlight the role played by nonhumans in the configuration of identity, among other social and psychological phenomena. As an example, researchers such as Mike Michael (1996) have repeatedly argued for the relevance of taking a more hybrid approach to our understanding of identity. Michael argues that DSP's understanding of identity does not explain how the representations that emerge in discourse operate in the »mutual and durable (re)construction of the self and the interlocutor« (Michael 1996, S. 23). According to Michael, DSP has a tendency to disregard the wider networks – both actual and potential, both proximal and distant – that allow researchers to conceptualise identities as resulting from contingent co-production. Michael's own work on hybrid identities provides a further example of efforts to establish dialogues between DSP and materialist concerns well before the most recent influence of new materialist thinking.

We argue that the shortcomings of DSP voiced by Michael are not inevitable considering DSP's basic premises but, rather, emerge from the dominant empirical and analytical preferences in the field. Michael's work provides us with a fruitful starting point for an analysis that overcomes such shortcomings. Michael has built on his critique to propose an understanding of identity that incorporates notions derived from ANT and thus examine how the configuration of our identity extends not only beyond the internal self – as already argued by discursive researchers – but also linguistic meaning-making. Paying attention to nonhuman actors and their material features allows us to think about identity in terms of the agentic capabilities produced in hybrid networks (Michael 2000). This understanding, as well as the more recent enquiries into materiality made by discursive researchers (e.g., Di Masso/Dixon 2015), departs from earlier conceptualisations of the physical environment as something that affects individuals' internal cognitive process in identity formation and, instead, views the environment as an integral part of spatial identity construction; Michael's understanding also departs from the discursive tradition that only conceives of »the home«, »the neighbourhood«, and »natural landscapes« as symbolic elements – or following Latour's (1996b) vocabulary, as projection screens – that allow for the self to take shape or feature in discursive and symbolic interaction. By focusing on shifting processes in which identities are co-produced in close entanglement with the above-mentioned spatial elements, Michael's work not only emphasises the surroundings in which identities are displayed, invoked, enacted and performed in interaction with other human and nonhuman actors but also the temporal instability of both the surroundings and identities.

Taking the emphasis on material surroundings further than is common in DSP, as Michael does, also invites innovation in science communication. Indeed, such innovation is, in many ways, necessary if we wish to avoid accessing and gaining insight into the material aspects of the examined phenomena only through their linguistic representations. This can be done, for instance, with the incorporation of visual materials into both the analysis and the reporting of research results, as Di Masso and Dixon (2015) have done as a result of their methodological and analytical proposal discussed in the previous section. Other

methodological innovations (Agaard/Mathiesen 2015) suggest a move toward an emphasis on material presence and the incorporation of participant observation (i.e., seeing and experiencing) to complement language-based methods (i.e., listening and reading). This is not merely an intellectual discussion. Rather, it can shed new light on vital social phenomena, such as the pressure under which identity processes and the accompanying place attachments are placed in the context of different types of socio-natural disasters and human-led responses to them (Berroeta et al. 2017).

The question that discursive research – and we as authors – face here is one of identity and self-recognition. It seems clear that the limitations of language-based methods and analysis have pushed a number of authors to exceed the conventional boundaries of DSP by drawing on materialist and multimodal approaches to illuminate important phenomena that discursive approaches are not able to fully account for, including durability, continuity and change in patterns of identity construction. This raises the question of whether such research, in which language, text and talk are not prioritised but rather taken as one of several elements of different natures in wider assemblages, can still be considered as belonging to the field of DSP. Can such research activities that make hybrid use of discursive methods combined with participant observation or ethnography, with a pronounced focus on the material dimensions of social phenomena, be labelled as discursive? How much materialist thinking, how much human-decentering, and how much analytical sensitivity to space and objects can we include in our discursive research before it becomes something else?

7 Discussion

A central purpose of this article has been to examine possibilities for empirical attunement to the material aspects of social life in discursive research by charting relationships between such analytical concerns within DSP and discussing the associated potential to carve out new spaces for even more emphatically interdisciplinary work around these timely questions. Our discussion of the specific features of DSP has highlighted several areas of fruitful dialogue between DSP and materialist analyses. One characteristic of DSP is the centrality of an action orientation within discursive analyses and the associated background assumptions of discursive meaning-making as situated and fluid social action that shapes social reality and its meanings. These processes often escape top-down analyses of discourses as straightforward systems of social regulation that produce a predictable, singular reality and durable identities. We traced the emphasis on fluidity in DSP specifically by pointing out that at its core lies the notion of practice, referring to constant doing whereby meaning-making is arrived at, and discussed the ways this emphasis overlaps with broader theoretical strands in the social sciences. We suggest that these characteristics ultimately make DSP more compatible with materialist inquiries than, for instance, top-down interpretations of poststructural work and research that highlights the power of discourse (as a social force) in shaping human realities. At the very least, DSP is not explicitly antagonist toward materialist theories of the social world.

Furthermore, we have shown that these compatibilities are, in fact, to be expected due to the partially shared historical roots and influences of DSP and materialist-focused work, for instance, in the field of STS. Because STS has drawn from, for example, ethnomethodology and semiotics to incorporate aspects of discursivity and materialism into empirical research, DSP, drawing from similar intellectual sources, has the potential for similar incorporation.

Despite such convergence, however, we have pointed out that, in practice, DSP has been developed specifically as an analytical approach to examining talk in interactions, mostly with only marginal or no attention being paid to material factors in the unfolding of social reality or, more specifically, in the processes of human interaction, apart from studying how materials are talked into being. However, there are indications of a somewhat marginal but strengthening movement toward expanding the focus of DSP to incorporate a firmer interest in the material aspects in social meaning-making into the discursive emphasis that lies at the heart of DSP. As examples of such attempts at integration, we have discussed Margaret Wetherell's development of the affective-discursive approach attuned to embodied meaning-making as well as fairly recent analyses of place identity combining an interest in discursive meaning-making and more durable, material aspects of the environment to which those identities are attached. We have also recognised the growing interest in embodied, multimodal interaction in the EMCA-inspired strand of DSP (Kent/Potter 2014; Potter 2010; Wiggins/Osvaldsson Cromdal 2020). In considering the possibility of strengthening the role of materiality in discursive work based on DSP's premises, we therefore suggest that fruitful soil is already in place. However, we wish to simultaneously point out that treading carefully and reflexively in any synthesising effort is warranted. Below, we will first suggest ways forward in terms of synthesising efforts, followed by a few words of caution.

To widen the room for material concerns in discursive work with a DSP orientation, we suggest the following paths. Firstly, we suggest taking the key thoughts in new materialism seriously by shifting the focus from the primacy of human agency in interactions toward considering *the participation of nonhumans in the shaping of meaning-making practices*. This would assist in narrowing the gap between materialist interests in decentering human beings and DSP work and might even contribute novel insights regarding the unfolding of interactional sequences, as well as the shaping of possibilities for meaning-making in any micro-level or macro-level context. In order to do this in ways that are compatible with DSP, the analyst must start from an examination of concrete interactional practices. This examination, however, can be extended to asking how nonhuman actors contribute to the shaping of these practices. This question can be asked repeatedly until it no longer produces insights that are relevant regarding the research interest and the key observations generated in the analysis; for instance, if the analyst is interested in diagnostic practices in doctor-patient interactions, they may find it much more illuminating to note the role played by the material equipment used in the diagnostic process than the car that brought the patient to the hospital.

Second, continuing the development of conceptual and analytical frameworks that allow for discerning the interplay between *embodied experiences and contextually specif-*

ic linguistic meaning-making holds the promise of attending to the concerns motivating much of the new materialist work. In a word, this allows for decentring »discursivity« (despite retaining an interest in it) for the sake of a renewed interest in material embodiment. Third, combining the broadened theoretical interests with that of empirical methodologies allows for producing more multidimensional research materials, which are necessary to plausibly conduct analyses based on a combined interest in discursive and material dimensions. Research materials compliant with such analyses would need to exceed the recording of linguistic interactions (Agaard/Mathiesen 2015), including a combination of data collection methods, such as ethnographic observations and/or video-recorded materials, which are regularly used in EMCA.

What one must be aware of when taking these directions, however, are the different trajectories of development that have shaped specific methodological focuses and epistemological stances in DSP work, on the one hand, and various lines of materialist inquiry, on the other. While, for instance, new materialist inquiries have often been built on the notion that epistemology has been granted too much space in social scientific work, DSP has, instead, been largely built on an all-encompassing epistemological wariness. This orientation has often resulted in restricting analytical efforts to exploring processes of language-based meaning-making without claiming to provide knowledge of events falling beyond such discursive activity. To incorporate an interest in materiality, then, requires revisiting orientations adopted in relation to both epistemology and ontology in DSP because such an interest requires both broadening the gaze from a mere focus on questions of epistemology to attending more closely to those regarding ontology.

In addition, one should not lose sight of the fact that a certain level of human-centredness cannot be completely escaped in any discursive analyses, nor is this necessarily a desirable goal, because to do so would make an interest in »discursivity« redundant. Rather than establishing clear-cut criteria for measuring whether a discursive approach has sufficiently decentered the human, a materially oriented DSP approach should pay specific attention to the active participation of »other-than-human« elements in the enactment of everyday life encounters and interactions. Despite DSP's unavoidable emphasis on human interaction, we see potential in combining this emphasis with an examination of how »other-than-human« elements enable, guide and generate human interaction and meaning-making. Indeed, such elements may be found to play crucial roles in producing the contextually shifting variability in interaction (which DSP attempts to highlight), for instance, by introducing new objects to become oriented toward in meaning-making, as well as identity construction, which may do important work in keeping these processes in constant motion.

To summarise, although DSP can incorporate materialist concerns, a full-hearted adoption of the new materialist interest in decentring humans may not be possible when drawing upon DSP – or any other discursive approach or, for example, those lines of STS that retain an interest in scientific knowledge production – and may indeed result in analyses that are no longer recognisable as DSP analyses due to departing from DSP's basic premises. This creates the need to consider perhaps the most crucial points of difference between DSP analyses and new materialist inquiries in their most undiluted forms,

namely the fact that they tend to be motivated by research interests that lean in different directions. While DSP is principally geared toward illuminating interactional patterns in the production of mainly linguistically mediated meanings among human interlocutors, new materialist inquiries tend to be motivated by a broader goal of shedding light on the processes of materialisation, such as processes of becoming in which discursive meaning-making may play a role but is not granted a central one and, therefore, is not seen as meriting such a close, circumscribed inspection as it does in any discursively focused analyses. Disregarding these differences in the primary concerns in these approaches risks a failure to speak to the inherent interests of each approach and may thus result in stifling the dialogue between them instead of cultivating it.

8 Conclusions

We argue that efforts to foster dialogue between new materialist and discursive work with a DSP orientation hold promise for fruitful, novel analytical emphases. However, there is also a need to acknowledge the limits of and dilemmas involved in any such efforts. Such developments must be informed by a thorough consideration of not only the similarities but also the differences of these orientations. In particular, novel hybrid analytical approaches should be dedicated to explicitly articulating the background assumptions concerning the role of humans and their agency as meaning-makers, their epistemological and ontological orientations and their compatibility with efforts to tap into non-linguistic aspects in meaning-making. One must also consider the underlying research interests guiding analyses. Perhaps, researchers who are mostly interested in research questions that can be easily addressed with a sole focus on discursivity or materiality may find little motivation to develop such hybrid approaches, especially considering the amount of friction they can potentially generate. However, we believe that it will be in those cases in which the interest lies in social phenomena that demand a consideration of both material and discursive aspects – as is the case with the shaping and stabilisation of subjectivities or identities in time and space discussed above – that the work and effort required to combine materialist and discursive approaches will be worthwhile.

In order to succeed in this potentially complicated endeavour, the necessary engagements with the underlying assumptions and the potential friction between them must be combined with attending to the question of the nature of materiality that is set in dialogue with discursive approaches, which a hybrid analysis attempts to incorporate. This requires thorough theoretical consideration, as we have attempted to provide in this article, but also rigorous methodological commitment that attends to the difficulties attached to implementing this type of approach in practice. Because our focus in this paper has been primarily on the theoretical underpinnings and broader discussions about the nature of combining an interest in materiality with the perspective of DSP, our engagement with concrete methods of analysis in doing so has been unavoidably limited. What we hope to see in the future is a continuation of our work that addresses, in more detail, the practical-methodological guidelines that we have begun sketching in this paper. In

sum, we suggest that such endeavors begin with a consideration of both the theoretical background assumptions of any approach one draws upon, as well as the distinct features of the material concerns that one wishes to examine because such features also require different conceptual frameworks and concrete analytical tools. In other words, we suggest that the first two questions any discursive-material analysis should engage with are as follows: what is referred to with the concept of materiality here, and what kind of possibilities does our theoretical approach allow for in terms of conceptualising its relationships with meaning-making?

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