

## CHAPTER 6

# Conclusion: Embracing Tensions

### Introduction

This book explored an approach to language and culture teaching as part of a general language class, which I called the *cultuurtekst* approach - a way of reading texts as culture. The underpinning rationale for my *cultuurtekst* approach is that language and culture are complex, and that teaching language as if both language and culture are stable notions creates a distorted representation of the cultural and social reality of people's lives.

The study on which this book is based consisted of a deeply reflexive process, which originated in my disquiet with contemporary language teaching practices at the time I started my study. This reflexivity consisted of a constant interplay between ideas and practice. On the one hand, I reflected on theories of language, culture and of pedagogy in order to develop the approach. Conversely, in looking at how students responded to my approach I reconsidered the theoretical premises on which language teaching practice is based, including my own practice. I developed notions such as 'being a text ethnographer' and 'Dutch articulation', and utilized the notion 'discourse mapping', as an important rationale of the *cultuurtekst* approach as a way of being a critical intercultural language user. The reflexive process of looking at my own practice was a profoundly uncomfortable one. In listening word for word to my tape recorded lessons, and looking at transcripts of these over and over again, I was confronted with everyday failings, such as not picking up on points students made, cutting off students, misinterpreting comments, leading discussions too much or not leading them sufficiently and many other of these awkward defi-

ciencies, which most of us are probably liable to as teachers. More significantly, however, because of what at times seemed to be only embryonic understandings and, perhaps more worryingly, because of the resistance shown by one student, Sarah, in particular, I started to doubt whether my approach was a worthwhile addition to teaching methodology. Was my contribution to the development of a new paradigm in fact worth exploring further?

However, in this micro observation of my own teaching I became aware of two things. First of all, after the discomfort of potential failings, either in actual teaching or the methodology, was dispensed with, I realized that neither learning nor teaching are linear and straightforward processes. During the lessons it was exactly the hesitations, the ruptures, the discomfort in students which indicated valuable learning moments, much more so than the occasions where confident answers were given. Equally, it was when students responded in personal ways, rather than in distant, seemingly objective intellectual ways, that real engagement took place. Moreover, it was the resistance of Sarah in particular, which pointed not to the failing of this approach, but to the fact that I had, in her words, not gone 'far enough' with it. An important conclusion then is that whilst students had taken a step towards discourse mapping, interculturality and understanding the complexities of culture and being a text ethnographer, what was lacking was precisely the consideration and reflection on students' own subjectivities. And by extension, it was through my reflections on my own subjectivities, my own teaching and the discomfort I had felt, that I was able to progress in my own lessons to open up more space for personal engagement.

Before I come back to this later in this chapter, I summarise and conclude the findings of this study here, relating these to the theoretical concepts I developed, before discussing how this contributes towards thinking about a new paradigm of language teaching which fits in with the current demands of preparing students for their future complex mobile lives, linguistically, culturally and personally. In discussing the findings I will also refer to significant data from student interviews, which indicate these learning moments and processes.

### The Student Interviews

For the purposes of this book I have looked in detail at the classroom data I collected during my study, and which I analysed in chapter 5. I am not affording the same amount of time and space to the interview data in this chapter as I did to the classroom data in the previous one, because the interview data were intended particularly to triangulate the classroom data. In this final chapter, where relevant, I refer to some of the interviews to illuminate some of my research findings in greater detail. In doing so, I focus on only two students, Claire and Sarah, particularly because of their contrasting views.

Out of all the students, Claire had engaged most with the conflicting discourses in the *Men's Health* text and with the cultuurtekst pedagogy. In the interviews, however, Claire showed that she was still struggling with the concept of cultuurtekst to some extent. Yet her conceptualisation of cultuurtekst in relation to her own lived experience added substantially to my own interpretation and theorisation of cultuurtekst for language pedagogy, as I will show below.

Similarly, Sarah's responses added significantly to my understanding of how students can engage with the idea of cultuurtekst, and how their assumptions of what communication is have a bearing on how they conceive their language learning. Moreover, it also helped me to locate the further conceptualisation of cultuurtekst pedagogy in a philosophical context. Even though Sarah had not been present during the second lesson, which was part of the analysis of the previous chapter, I have still opted to refer to data of Sarah's interviews here, because her resistance to my approach offered valuable insights into her learning experiences in relation to my pedagogy, and indeed has consequences for my reflection on how to take this pedagogy forward.

To understand the depth of Sarah's resistance, I need to point out that a few weeks into the course Sarah had approached me to ask whether she could be excused from attending the classes and just take the course on a self-study basis. She did not like the course because of its focus on 'style' in relation to the audience and purpose of the text. As the data show, Sarah had not even started to engage with the notion of discourses. It has to be remembered here that, as I mentioned in chapter 4, I had at the start of the course used the term 'style' in order to refer to 'routinised ways of talking' about certain topics, as that seemed a more acceptable notion to students because of its more obvious link with the idea of improving one's language skills in the class, rather than the term 'discourses'. But the idea of people adapting their language use in different situations had had a profound effect on Sarah. She suddenly felt that she could not communicate effectively anymore with people because she was worrying and wondering about what to say and how to say it, whereas before that would have come automatically. The idea that people use different kinds of languages in different situations, that people 'switch codes' was very unsettling in a psychological way. In fact, she mentioned at the time, 'it had rocked her to the core'; it made her feel that on the one hand she could not trust people anymore to say exactly what they meant, and that on the other hand, it made her very self-conscious about her own use of language in English, both in writing and speech.

We managed to resolve the conflict between us by agreeing that Sarah would attend classes and do her homework, but that she did not have to participate in class discussions if she did not want to. After a few lessons, Sarah started to participate fully in class, but it always remained clear that she continued to be resistant to this approach.

## The Research Findings

### Introduction

The overall question I attempt to answer in my study is ‘How do students engage with the cultuurtekst pedagogy?’ The sub questions in relation to the two lessons in which the *Men’s Health* text was discussed were: ‘What different levels of reading do the two perspectives of text and cultuurtekst yield?’, and whether students make the journey from ‘text’ to ‘cultuurtekst’. In answering both these questions I was particularly interested in whether students would recognize the complexity of the discourses at the cultuurtekst level of reading, whether these different levels of reading would also relate to different levels of criticality, including that of engaging with the text as a text ethnographer, and finally, whether students recognized any Dutch articulation in the text.

Below I discuss the ambiguities between text and cultuurtekst which emerged both from the classroom data and the interviews, and how this linked to criticality as well as, in the case of Sarah, views of communication.

### From Text to Cultuurtekst: Different Ways of Being Critical

As I showed in chapter 5, over the course of the two lessons students gradually moved from seeing the text as ‘text’ to seeing text as ‘cultuurtekst’. However, this progress was not neat and linear, and there were considerable differences between students. Understanding of the text at a cultuurtekst level seemed to be incidental - occasional nuggets of insights, which students would not necessarily build on later. It became clear that it is not easy to separate the different ways of reading as students move in and out of different positions towards the text. It also became clear that we cannot separate reading a text for its content, structure and immediate context as a stable entity separate from cultuurtekst, because students invested the text with cultural and social meaning, even when reading the text at the textual level, as was the case in the first lesson. However, despite attributing meaning to the text, at the textual level of reading, students did so in the light of only one of the discourses reflected in the text. During these discussions, some students stayed close to the text and aligned themselves with the text or the author, but others went beyond the text, and were indeed aware the text was showing representations, rather than facts. Moreover, in the first lesson, students talked in a very confident manner about their analyses, as they seemed to interpret the task to be one of a traditional language classroom: that of assuming a ‘correct answer’ was required.

Discussing the text at cultuurtekst level in the second lesson, on the other hand, did seem to give students more insights; students became less confident in their voice as they interpreted the task as needing more careful consideration.

It is the hesitancy with which students try out ideas as part of dialogic group discussions, which I considered to be important learning moments. Questions which assume a correct answer do not allow any space for dialogue, engaging with other ideas, or for reflection. In the lesson focusing on the text as cultuurtekst, there was more 'discussion around the text', and students used these discussions to re-interpret the text in the light of what had been said. Again there were considerable differences between students. There were occasions where students showed an intercultural stance in their attempts to understand the text from the inside, i.e. engaging with the cultural meaning of the text in relation to the context of text production as well as engaging with their own lived experiences. Interestingly, the deeper insights by students occurred when they moved away from the exercise of text analysis and made the discussion their own. The 'talking around the text' became the most dialogic, insightful and, even academic, discussions of the two lessons, where students critiqued the power structures embedded in the text, i.e. those that regulate women's personal life choices in terms of career and motherhood. Moreover by relating their experiences again to the texts, students were also becoming aware that the text was making 'claims to truth'.

### *Claire*

Whilst tentative conclusions after the second lesson pointed to a deeper engagement with the discourses in the text, the interviews with the students showed that some of the learning of the cultuurtekst lesson had not necessarily been transferred. Claire, for instance, had shown most understanding of and engagement with the discourses in the text during the lessons, including the conflicting ones, and had recognized these to be culturally significant. During one of her interviews, however, she took a different view; that these conflicting discourses showed a lack of clarity and poor argumentation. She showed her unease with the notion of cultuurtekst as she describes the process she followed in reading the text.

First she reads the text as a language learner making sure she has understood all of the vocabulary, then she reads it for content, critiquing both the stereotypical representations in the text as well as empathising with the women in the text who are dumped by their lover for a younger woman, before addressing the text at cultuurtekst level:

*Claire: When I did the, well, what I tried to do was read it for the vocabulary so that I understood it fully because it was annoying to leave (...) and then read it again on the train without writing anything and without having read your [framework], and then it was that I started to see the kind of... I find it very patronizing, em, there are lots of sentences that I don't like, the whole cliché, cliché thing, you know, oh her true lover left her for*

*a younger woman. Well, you know, that's quite a horrible thing to have to deal with, you know, you don't have to be patronizing about it.*

*But then, when I read it with, what I did was when I needed to write out the text that you wanted for the cultuurtekst question, I wrote down all the questions that were asked and then I read it each time so I went through it thinking, how are women portrayed here or how are the people in this story portrayed, and then kind of underlining a word and using some of the things that I saw, and the more I read it, the more I realised that it's not a very, well, that the argument isn't very good because it sort of skips from one thing to the other, and it never actually says anything, it kind of moves around and around this point but it never makes any statement about, you know, or conclusion.*

Claire's representation of her process of reading is significant for various reasons. Her reading at the content level is not just a 'preferred reading', looking at the position from which the text asks to be read (see chapter 3), but her response to the text in this phase of reading was one of both critical and personal engagement. On the one hand she critiques the stereotypical, patronising and mocking approach of the text. But at the same time she responds from a personal perspective: she talks with a voice of empathy with the women who are being dumped by their lover for a younger woman. In my own framework of reading I had not taken account of this personal engagement which was also a significant point to emerge from my classroom data. But whilst she is critical of the text in terms of its ideological stereotypical representations of women, her critique here occurs at the content and textual level of reading. She sees the final cultuurtekst level of reading as an *academic* exercise, answering the questions about representations. Rather than this resulting in a firming up of the critique of discourses, it led her to a more traditional perspective of reading: being critical of its poor argumentation.

It seems then that her view of cultuurtekst carries within it a traditional view of text as containing stable meaning and text as a product. This dual view of text could be the result of giving students a framework which carries within it these two views. Critiquing representations is for Claire achieved through an engagement with the content from the perspective of people being represented in the text. She tries to inhabit the place of the 'characters', as it were, and to see the world momentarily through their eyes.

However, later on in the interview, she comes back to the distinction between text and cultuurtekst more specifically and this time she relates the notion of personal experience and interest with the idea of cultuurtekst.

*Claire: [...] because we talked about it as a cultuurtekst not just necessarily as an article, because as an article you can take it apart.*

*G: Right*

*Claire: You know, but as a cultuurtekst it's very interesting, because it, you know, it talks about a cultural phenomenon, which you know, and I found the way it used, you know, because if you think, you know, I don't read many things by men, so I think that's quite interesting and, you know, yeah. No, I found it a very, I thought yesterday was really good fun, I really enjoyed it, because it was, you know, especially as you're talking about something which is actually quite interesting for someone my age, you know, talking about politics or economics is something that is not so relevant to me now, em, but social values, sex, things like that, is quite a sort of, that is something I would realistically discuss with a friend, you know, you're not kind of making a you know, fake situation.*

*G: Well, it's very much part of life and society.*

*Claire: Exactly*

Claire sees text, or 'article' as she refers to it here, as a product you can analyse, 'you can take it apart'. She juxtaposes this with reading or discussing the text as cultuurtekst, which she interprets now as 'talking about a cultural phenomenon' you can relate to and engage with as you would in your everyday life: 'it's something I would realistically discuss with a friend'.

Whilst in the first fragment she indicates that the academic cultuurtekst exercise of looking at the way women were represented, made her realise the text was not a 'good text' in the traditional sense, Claire's conception of reading as cultuurtekst is quite different. Here she relates cultuurtekst not as an academic exercise looking at representations, but as reading as a 'communicative experience', relating the text to one's own (or other people's) experiences. For Claire this happened particularly when discussing the text in class. It was this communicative experience as dialogue which personalized the cultuurtekst phase of reading. Whilst Claire does not mention it in this fragment above, this experience becomes intercultural if the text is produced in an environment, and is about a social group, the reader is not familiar with. By relating the text to everyday lived experience and reflecting on that, Claire is reading, at least to some extent, as a text ethnographer. With Claire engaging with the text as a reader for her own interests, a topic she can relate to and would realistically discuss with friends, her description of the process of cultuurtekst seems to parallel the dialogic spaces which opened up in class when students engaged with the text by 'talking around it'. Reading 'as an experience', and classroom discussion as a real life activity, not a 'fake situation', as Claire called it, might then provide students with an opportunity to see things from different perspectives.

In summary, in her retrospective engagement with the text in the two sets of data above, Claire employed various positions of criticality. She had critiqued the text from a liberal humanist conception of critical thinking. From this perspective the text did not stand up to scrutiny as a 'good text'. She also employed ideology critique. From this perspective the text consisted of ste-

reotypical representations. And furthermore, Claire employed also a personal level of critique; she critiqued the text, as it were for its misrepresentations and mocking approach, as if the women in the text were characters of flesh and blood with whom she could empathise. Through inhabiting the represented characters, she saw the world temporarily from their perspective. An approach in reading which is not unlike the idea of sympathetic imagination with is afforded in literature.

Sarah on the other hand, read the text in a very different way, one which is more distant and from a liberal humanist perspective. However, as we will see below, personal engagement also played a role for her, but in quite a different way from the way that Claire engaged with the text.

### *Sarah*

Sarah rejected the notion of cultuurtekst quite strongly and she had not engaged with the idea of discourses. It must be remembered, however, she had not taken part in the second class where we discussed the text at a cultuurtekst level. In one of her interviews, when I ask Sarah what the notion 'cultuurtekst' means for her she says she feels it is to do with lifestyle. She distances herself from this particular genre, or 'cultuurteksts' as she perceives them, because they are 'manipulated' and written for specific audiences.

*Sarah: So I don't, so for me it's em it's quite clear when I read an article in a newspaper or a or a em whatever piece in a lifestyle magazine, that it's that it's just em that it's quite, well, manipulated for a particular audience to try and appeal to a certain type of em frame of mind.*

*G: Mm.*

*Sarah: And I don't, I don't like the idea of em of em being so manipulated, so I'd rather not read them.*

Sarah thoroughly dislikes the idea of being manipulated through language. As she had said to me at the start of the course, she had previously always thought that people were 'honest' in their communicative behaviours and stayed true to themselves by speaking the same way regardless of who one spoke to or what one wanted to achieve.

With relating cultuurtekst particularly to the genre of lifestyle texts, Sarah may think of cultuurtekst as linked to 'low' culture; the popular mass media, which may contradict Sarah's own sense of culture and identity. Later in the interview when asked what kinds of texts she does read, she says that she prefers to read books, 'founts of knowledge', and would much rather learn about topics in class that are personally interesting to her, such as, for instance, Erasmus, rather than 'these cultuurteksts'.



What is interesting is that Sarah considers lifestyle publication as the same genre as newspapers. Her dislike of texts being manipulated is less geared to critiquing ideology, it would seem, then to an 'ideal' view of communication, as she makes clear below.

But the process of having discussed texts in class according to the questions in my framework for analysis, had led her to reflect deeply on the nature of communication. Her resistance to the course was not only caused by the fact that the texts seemed to be manipulated, or by her sense of identity as a reader who wants to read texts of a certain academic, or perhaps literary, standing, she also worried about how as readers you can interpret texts 'correctly'. For her the issues of 'trust' and 'honesty' emerge. As a reader you not only need to be able to trust a writer not to manipulate you, conversely when you write you need to trust your readers to interpret your text the way you intended:

*Sarah: So you can, so you can, not only does the writer make choices and so structure a text that it says what he wants to say, but also a reader by interpreting it in different ways understands it differently, so that's why the whole idea of, that's why I think you get lost, anything you read or you listen to or anything, any kind of communication, there's such a lot of room for error, just because em if you are going to interpret it one way or another and you mean it one way or another.*

*G: Yeah yeah.*

*Sarah: There's so much potential to em confusion.*

*G: Yeah.*

*Sarah: Despite it being what you might call a better communication, it doesn't mean, I don't know a good communication has got to do with listeners as well as speakers or readers as well as writers.*

*G: Yes, yeah.*

*Sarah: And you can't, and so to, so you have to rely on your audience and so that's why if you're going to, if you think you can manipulate them, well if they can't rely on you, em I suppose (...) so I think the whole trust thing is that you read a, it would be nice to be able to read a text and em for them not to be playing with you and it depends on genre so if you, I don't know, if you're like criticizing things and don't mind reading crap then you can quite happily read different things that I wouldn't be able to read because I, I don't know, I don't like that so...*

*G: Right, okay.*

*Sarah: Does that make any sense?*

Sarah is clearly trying to make sense of very complex ideas about communication which the course has made her think about. Firstly, she is very much aware of the complexity of the process of a communicative event and the important role the reader has in interpreting a text. Secondly, she contrasts what she knows is happening in communicative events with what she feels *ought* to happen.

To start with the first point, Sarah realizes that in communicating, not only does the writer need to make linguistic choices, the reader also has to be able to decode those. Whereas in earlier comments, Sarah seemed to hold on to a view of text as stable and universal, here she is introducing the importance of the reader's interpretation. However, Sarah sees the reader's role as a potential problem, since there is such a large potential for error and misunderstanding. Sarah assumes that the writer has a particular meaning which the reader must interpret 'correctly'. This fits with Sarah's interpretation of the *Men's Health* text in class, where she tried to align herself with the author (as I described in chapter 5). Sarah's view of communication accords with that of the structuralist model - a view of communication which many students hold subconsciously, that in sending a message in a communicative event the message has to arrive exactly as the sender had intended it.

Sarah sees the relationship between audience and writer or speaker as one of trust. As the reader you need to be able to trust the writer that he is not going to manipulate you. Sarah seems to hold to a view of 'ideal communication' which is similar to one of the maxims of Grice's cooperative principles: that of being truthful. Sarah's view of reading is one of text as 'text' and not as 'cultuurtekst'. Her criticality is rooted in the liberal humanist view of 'critical thinking', rather than seeing text in relation to contexts.

Whereas we saw that for Claire discourse critique was achieved through relating the text at a personal level and looking through the perspective of the women who were represented, seeing them as real characters as it were, for Sarah it worked the other way. She resisted the course, precisely because of affect. She felt uncomfortably because discussing texts brought to the fore the different personalities and backgrounds of students in the class:

*Sarah: But I realise that, well, it's a course with a clear aim and a clear method to follow up, but at first I found it difficult because I don't like, I don't like it.*

*G: Right, well tell me a bit more about...*

*Sarah: So if you read the specific, anything, any kind of specific text we looked at, em, say, I don't know, it maybe depends on generation or em background or anything, like, so different people will read the same text in a different way. It could be a way of finding out about the person I suppose by their interpretation of it, I suppose you can't really get away from that can you?*

*G: Yeah, no.*

*Sarah: So em unless it's a subject that really doesn't affect you personally, then you can't really leave your own background or ideas behind. And so although you, although you're just discussing one text, if you read it with different people like we did, you'll see that it meant different things to different people, say em that text about [London] or something, em, we did quite near the end [...]*

*G: Oh right, yes.*

*Sarah: Yes, so that said something different to, I suppose we looked at it all in different ways, Andy, Emma, and I suppose our class was quite good because, for this course, because you couldn't get probably six more different people, all next to each other in the same class.*

*G: Did you find that useful? Did you feel that em there was a dialogue going on between you as a class, and was that beneficial?*

*Sarah: Well, I did think that em it's quite interesting, because if you just forget the texts but look at the class, I think that em for whatever reasons, in the end people identified with each other differently than at the beginning.*

*G: Was that with one another or with the texts?*

*Sarah: Yeah, with one another, and I actually think it might have to do with probably to do with the course because it was so much based on discussion and interpretation [...]*

Sarah's experience in class of discussing texts with the other students showed her that the texts meant different things to different people. We saw earlier that Sarah has a strong notion of correct interpretation. But what Sarah finds significant here is not whether people's different interpretations are valid, but that people's interpretations say something about who they are. The way you interpret the text says something about your identity. Sarah turns it around: not only does your experience, your lifeworld knowledge inform your interpretations, it also reveals who you are.

As Sarah makes this point in the context of citing an example of what she did not like about the course, we can surmise that Sarah feels uncomfortable about the idea of revealing something about herself. Reading a text the way we did in class, has a challenging aspect because it forces students to engage and show something of their personality and experience with other people. Sarah may be worried about giving too much of herself away by interpreting a text.

An interesting notion emerges from this. Whereas the previous set of data pointed towards the fact Sarah holds a stable view of communication, in the data above, by making a link between interpreting a text and what it reveals about someone's personality, Sarah comes closer to a social view of language and

communication. She acknowledges that there are multiple interpretations of a text, depending on one's experiences and even personality. Even if Sarah deploys the notion of personality and identity as unchanging, by seeing a strong correlation between interpretation and who you are, in this set of data she is holding an almost dialogic view of text.

Even though the lessons stopped short of making a more explicit link between students' interpretations and their experiences and lifeworld knowledge, including discourses they have been familiarized with, Sarah already made this link. Although for Sarah this link was less in terms of social knowledge, but rather related to a stable individual identity.

In the next set of data Sarah makes the link between personal experiences and communication more explicit. Whereas in earlier data she may have felt uncomfortable about unintentionally revealing things about herself, below she states quite explicitly the connection between individual personalities and communication:

*Sarah: But we're talking about communication, communication is (...) so you could say it's endless, so yes, it's endless because em em there's superficial communication and there's all different types going on at the same time and so if you're talking about communication, to really talk about communication, you do have to ask all those big questions so and we haven't done that, so that's why well...*

*G: Ah okay, so you feel that's what you would've liked to address more.*

*Sarah: I suppose, okay I suppose, it didn't occur to me before but now we're talking, I suppose, there are other aspects of communication, em, that we haven't talked about at all, so...*

[...]

*G: And what sort of questions are they? What sort of questions would you have liked to have addressed?*

*Sarah: Well. I suppose em if you're talking about communication, then yes, ways, genres are quite safe em types of text where you look at em a text and say where's it from and what is it called and all the, that's kind of safe, and when you go down into and then you can, then the problem is that that's when it gets personal and so if that hasn't occurred to other people then fine, so then if you really wanted to know about what somebody is writing and why, and then you'd have to go sort of it would also become em em, it would have to do with individual personality and em yeah, I don't know.*

Sarah feels the course should have gone deeper and further in addressing the 'big questions.' The course had stayed at a safe level, talking about 'superficial communication' and genres and ways of writing. These big questions, Sarah suggests, relate to the individual; they are about finding out what somebody is

writing and why. Whereas I had designed the course to address those questions about what is communicated, how and why at a social, political and cultural level, Sarah felt these questions should be explored at a psychological level: what influences an individual to communicate in a particular way and to what degree this is related to personality. Rooted in a view of language as stable and communication as expressing individual thought, Sarah's view contrasts with my aim to look at language at a social level. Nevertheless, my intention as I set out in the first chapter had been to rearticulate aspects of the liberal humanist paradigm, particularly the idea of expressing thought. Even though in Sarah's experience these views clashed, it is precisely in the dialogic space in the classroom, where students were expressing thought both as a collaborative social activity and conceptually in relating language to its cultural discursive contexts. Whilst Sarah was worried about revealing too much of herself, it would precisely by trusting the communicative other which would make dialogic relations possible.

So for Sarah, the personal was an extra analytical layer to lead to insights into why we as individuals communicate the way we do. For Claire the personal helped her to be critical of the text partly as a responsibility to the women represented in the text: she spoke with a voice of empathy. For Claire the personal also had an ethical perspective: during class she had also shown a concern with the injustice of the stereotyping and gender inequality.

Sarah also showed an ethical stance, but for her that was located in the use of language: not obfuscating arguments and making sure that readers could interpret correctly what you as a writer wanted to convey.

### **Being a Text Ethnographer and Intercultural Communication**

The process of critical engagement with the ideas in a text, as I have found through analysis of my data, is partly occasioned by students reflecting on their own experiences. I have called this process 'being a text ethnographer'.

Being a text ethnographer, I contended in chapter 3, is looking at text both from an inside and an outside perspective. However, I do not conceive the inside perspective as trying to understand the text from the perspective of the author or even of the intended audience. Helping students to engage with otherness in a text is more likely to come about in engaging with ideas within the text. Ideas, moreover, which do not have to be understood and agreed with, but can also be critiqued from their discursive and ideological perspectives – their claims to truth. However, the research findings showed that the richest moments of engaging with texts and the ideas embedded within were those moments where students abandoned the text temporarily and related the ideas to their own life, their experiences and their knowledge about society. It is this aspect of 'engaging with' which comes close to being a critical intercultural lan-

guage user. The most intercultural moments were then largely instigated by the students themselves.

However, despite this engagement, students stopped short of reflecting on their own interpretation of the text and their own culturally located position as a reader. So as such they did not make their own reality 'strange'. This was not surprising, as I had not invited students to engage with that level of reflexivity during the classes. In fact, I had only conceptualised text ethnography as a result of this data analysis. This notion of reflexivity as part of reading a text as a text ethnographer is an area for further theoretical development.

### **Dutch Articulation: The National Dilemma**

Mapping discourses is not only a critical activity. It is also a way of conceiving of the relationship between language and culture at a generic level, rather than the one language, one culture relationship which has influenced much of national focused language teaching. *Cultuurtekst* forms this bridge between language and culture; it is the space where different meanings can be created and recreated. It reflects as well as constructs culture, the latter through discourses. These discourses reflect transnational concerns and ideas, and so do not limit looking at cultural environment as a national process. Yet, due to historical processes and structures in society, which are formed along national lines, these discourses, I contended in chapter 2, may take on a national articulation. As I explained, I do not mean that a national articulation relates to essentialist practices, behaviours or ways of conceptualizing our world around us, but rather that certain accentuations may be more prominent, or more acceptable in public discourse in certain social and cultural environments, including national ones. These articulations are not stable in themselves, but can also be rearticulated in different contexts and over time. This Dutch articulation is not a feature of all texts, but it seemed prominent in the text I used for this study, in its very traditional gendered perspective on women and the implication that their natural roles are to be mothers and wives.

As chapter 5 showed, students did not recognize the Dutch articulation that I had identified in the article, as they felt this text could have been written in the same way in an English publication. They saw the text not in a national, but in a global perspective. Students recognized instead the global intertextual references of British and American soaps and films. Marijke, one of the Dutch exchange students, was the only student who had been prepared to consider the notion of a Dutch articulation, although she phrased this very carefully. The text, she said, was not incongruous with other things published in the Netherlands in certain social environments. However, none of the other students pursued this notion of a Dutch articulation.

In class the notion of Dutch articulation did not lead to any significant insights, except confirming stereotypes. The notion 'backfired' as it were. In

the interviews students were more prepared to consider the notion, although Claire and Sarah saw this in different ways. Claire tried to understand texts from the context in which they are produced, whereas Sarah saw Dutch articulation as related to the content of the text: a text about Dutch culture.

*Claire: And that is always going to be problematic and I suppose in a way I'm much more aware of Dutch texts and the cultuurtekst behind them because I actually have to research and I have to read it with my eyes very very open and see all the different things and I think to myself, well, I don't understand that, is that because that's a cultural thing, is that a cultural difference or is it just because I don't get the grammar or whatever, whereas in French and English I don't tend to think about that.*

Claire is aware of her position as a culturally located reader. Being an intercultural reader, i.e. not being the intended audience, actually helps in understanding the cultural articulations of a text, Claire suggests, as it forces her 'to read with her eyes very very open'. As a bilingual speaker of English and French she does not have to think in the same way when reading a text in those languages as when she is reading a Dutch text. Being a foreign language reader then makes you stop and think and be more reflective about the text. It helps you to stand 'outside' the text and consider the particular cultural meanings.

*Claire: But I do think that it's a, it's an interesting way of looking at a piece, especially if for instance, I mean it's always interesting to look at other cultures, but to look at your own culture, to look at an English text written by an English person for an English audience, and to look at the analysis, you know, look at the way it's written, em, I do, I tend to do that a lot more than I look at the actual culture and the discourses behind it and the, it's affected by other things, em, I don't tend to look at the culture because it just seems natural to me.*

G: Yes.

*Claire: And I suppose one of the things that I've learnt in the last year is that, to look at it from someone else's point of view, in a way, and so when I write I try and think about other people, but also when I read I try and think about well gosh, how are people going to interpret that or how are they going to understand it.*

Claire explains that when reading English texts she does not look at 'the culture' or discourses because they seem natural to her, whereas, she seems to suggest, she does do that with Dutch texts: 'it is interesting to look at other cultures'. She then explains that what she learnt from the course is writing from a reader's perspective. By linking these statements, Claire seems to be saying that her awareness of discourses and culture is helpful in addressing people from differ-

ent cultural groups. So Claire sees her responsibility towards her own readers then also in intercultural terms in the sense that when she writes, or even when she reads, she almost tries to 'step into the shoes of the other', by imagining how they will interpret the text. Claire is seeing being intercultural in an ethnographic way: a sympathetic imagination of the possible reader.

Sarah on the other hand interpreted Dutch articulation as the content of text about a culture, which was only significant and valuable when treated in a comparative way:

*Sarah: Well, I think em because we sort of mentioned that before, haven't we, and that what I said em em was that you can only talk about em a sort of certain way of doing things in one place or another if you compare two, so where you've got a text say for example the nostalgia text or the text [about London], for example, that's where you've got a Dutch person in an English context, so when you're comparing two, then it might be more obvious, where as if you are just looking at the text, so if it's like a Dutch text about, just in a Dutch, in Dutch society, say like the what was it, the text, the Men's Health or other lifestyle magazine or whatever, it's not comparing Holland particularly with any other country.*

G: No.

*Sarah: So I don't really, I think it depends on the content of the thing, not in terms of what it's saying but em whether it's Holland as opposed to something else, if there's, if it's like comparing or there's two contexts, but it did say, didn't it in the [London text] it was saying that this is different in Holland or something.*

Sarah interpreted my question about recognizing a particular Dutch articulation in the text as asking whether we can learn anything about Dutch culture, i.e. 'Dutch ways' of doing things. She feels that any specific Dutch aspect will come through only if the text is *about* a Dutch person in an English context or vice versa. So Sarah assumes that any understanding or insight into Dutch society from a text relates to the *content* of the text, rather than the way the content is written, reflecting underpinning cultural values, ideologies and discourses.

It is in retrospect not that surprising that students did not engage with the idea of a Dutch articulation in the way I had intended, i.e. as a discursive articulation in a particular historical national context. The concept of 'discourses' is complex enough for students to consider in its own right, and Sarah had not engaged with this notion. The idea of a 'flavour' or articulation of a discourse is indeed very subtle, and for students to recognize this would require them to be enculturated in a range of discourses in various areas of social and cultural life current in both, and possibly other, countries.

Intertwining a cultuurtekst approach focusing on discursive mapping in global perspectives, with an approach that highlights cultural particularities in



the form of looking at Dutch articulations, is one of the tensions that underpin this study. This study showed that dealing with this 'national dilemma', as Risager phrases it, is not easy in the classroom.

Finally, in terms of comparing the two students whose interview data I discussed in this chapter, it may be tempting to conclude that Claire was more successful as a student engaging with this pedagogy than Sarah, as Claire's engagement was more in line with my intention. However, Sarah's discomfort had led her to go through the greatest transformation as a learner. In turn it led me to realise that discomfort is perhaps a necessary process in education. Being intercultural, and trying to engage with other ideas, will mean stepping outside the familiar. It is about exploring the possibilities of who we can be, and how we can relate to one another. It is not only about being intercultural, it is also about being human.

### **Conclusion: Tensions, Ambiguities and Incompatibilities**

The study on which this book is based has been born out of and marked by tensions and ambiguities. These tensions were present from the very start of the study and were part of the context in which it took place – a traditional university which was characterized by a strong adherence to the liberal humanist paradigm in language education, but operating in a wider context which emphasises instrumental aims.

Tensions were also located in the actual pedagogy itself. Looking at texts as products, employing an approach to criticality which is rooted in the liberal humanist paradigm, i.e. that of taking critical distance, conflicts with the cultuurtekst level of looking at texts. The latter employs a poststructuralist critique, looking at multiple discourses in texts, which I referred to, following Pennycook (2001), as 'discursive mapping'. This means looking at texts as a meaning making process, whereby the cultural contexts of both the text producing environment, but also that of the reader, have a bearing on the interpretation. The tensions between these two perspectives led to some confusion where students critiqued the text on the one hand for its ideological positioning and on the other for its poor argumentation and structure.

I already referred earlier to the conflict embedded in my pedagogy of the centrality of discourses in the cultuurtekst approach and the concept of 'Dutch articulation'. This particular tension led to students referring in discussions to wider global contexts and intertexts and their personal experience on the one hand, yet reverted to national stereotyping on the other.

These tensions, conflicts, resistances and seeming incompatibilities not only formed the backdrop of the study, but also inform my conclusion and point to the way forward. I am arguing that the different perspectives on text, educational philosophies and criticality are not necessarily incompatible as such. After all, ambiguities are part and parcel of students' everyday realities. They

live with diversity, with supercomplexity, with cultural, linguistic and philosophical tensions. One of the important conclusions of this study then is that language teaching needs to embrace these tensions if it is to develop pedagogies which acknowledge cultural complexities on the one hand and the existence of cultural patterns on the other.

In chapter 1, whilst rejecting the tenets underpinning the liberal humanist paradigm, i.e. the assumptions of objectivity and truth, and its denial of humans as being, at least in part, shaped by cultural forces, I argued for a re-articulation of some of its concerns. These were located, I contended, in 1) the idea of criticality and intellectual engagement in language classes, 2) the notions of morality, which I interpret here as a concern for others, and 3) the importance of Self.

I have discussed the different perspectives on criticality in detail throughout this book as one of the tensions which I am embracing. The concern for others is an element which I did not purposefully include in my pedagogy, but it emerged naturally as students engaged with the text and its fictional characters in discussions. This concern for others also emerged in students' writing as they showed an awareness of the other they were addressing. In a similar vein, the emphasis on Self and individual agency emerged, as students themselves engaged with the text and with one another explicitly referring to their own personal experiences.

In this way, the three elements which I highlighted contributed to and fed into one another. This criticality embedded in the cultuurtekst approach was then partly achieved through the intellectual engagement with the text and through a consideration of the analytical questions I had asked in class and the framework I used. However, it was equally the personal engagement as a group, the more intimate dialoguing with one another and relating the discussions to themselves that led to this criticality. The dialogic space in the classroom which students created themselves, opened up an imaginative, personal and intimate human perspective through which collaboration and exploration of ideas took place. In doing so, students showed empathy and placed themselves into the shoes of others and into their future imagined selves. It was through sympathetic imagination that critical interculturality started to take place.

### Pedagogical Implications

Because of the time which has lapsed between the data collection and the completion of this study, my pedagogy has since had time to evolve as I reflected on the implications of my findings. After the initial data collection, but before the analysis of the data, I responded particularly to the resistance shown by Sarah. I also felt that the overt critical analytical stance of my pedagogy could irritate students as their main aim for this course is to improve their language skills, i.e. they do not feel they need to learn how to analyse a text. As a result my initial response was to tone down my cultuurtekst approach, so that discussing

texts in class is not seen as explicit 'text analysis', but instead as 'talking about the text', which is part and parcel of conversations building up linguistic skills. My cultuurtekst pedagogy initially became even more implicit than the one I described in this book.

However, since I have analysed the data and completed the study, I have come to the conclusion that rather than making my approach less explicit, I should make it more so. In order to deal with the tensions thrown up by using conflicting perspectives in class, I should embrace rather than avoid them. Indeed, when looking at texts and carrying out tasks, I now explain explicitly from which view of text and criticality we are operating; whether we are looking at text structures, whether arguments are convincing and whether we focus on writing solidly argued texts ourselves, or whether, in contrast, we are engaging in discursive mapping. I do not tiptoe around the notion of discourses any more, but address these explicitly in class, if relevant. My pedagogy is still one of explicit heteroglossia; we read texts from a large variety of genres - each text including multiple voices and discourses - which we analyse whilst discussing the issues thrown up by these. This way, students adapt their writing more consciously to a variety of readers, drawing on discourses more consciously and explicitly.

The personal in language learning also needs to be embraced more explicitly. I now ask students on occasion to relate their own experiences to the texts we read and the tasks we do in class. I also ask students to reflect on their own interpretations of texts and how these relate, not only to their particular set of experiences, but especially to their understanding of these experiences in relation to discursive forces. Moreover, I ask students to be reflexive about their own writing in relation to their own and the other (culture's) context: why they have written a particular text in a particular way. Bringing the Self into students' language tasks like this, resonates with the point that Sarah referred to in her interview: that the course should look at what makes individuals communicate the way they do. So far, I have only included this reflexivity as part of class discussions, but in future I will embed this more thoroughly in the syllabus by asking students to write down these reflections in diaries.

Being explicit to students about the conceptual framework I use is not an insignificant point. It goes against the expectations students have about what a language class should be. Moreover the concepts which are touched upon are possibly also in conflict with students' views of what language, culture and communication are, and how they interrelate. Provided students feel they are at the same time gaining practical language skills, being open to students about the concepts and conflicting perspectives can avoid resistance such as shown by Sarah. In the end it was not so much the fact that my course addressed notions with which she disagreed, it was the fact that I did not address these issues more explicitly and in further depth. If you touch on issues of communication, 'real communication', she asserted, you can't leave issues hanging mid-air.

Even though my cultuurtekst pedagogy took a global perspective from the start, the notion of a Dutch articulation brought the national back into focus. This particular notion, I showed, proved not to be that useful, and to be fully exploited also needs to be used explicitly for it to make sense to students without it leading to stereotyping. However, I have since only referred to the notion on very rare occasions. Indeed it has become almost an incidental part of my pedagogy. Students themselves tend to take cosmopolitan perspectives in class, as one of my examples of such a task below shows.

By linking students' experiences with practical language tasks we can create opportunities in class for communicative encounters where students can engage their own beliefs and belongings to imagine themselves to have real impact on the world – creatively and responsibly with an interest in and concern for their communicative partners.

### *Example*

My study consisted of only two lessons out of a whole year long course where I focus on reading and awareness raising. All the same, I have observed that that awareness of how language and culture interrelate also benefits students' language skills, as they will learn to think about and consequently adapt their own language use as part of showing responsibility in communicative events.

Claire had said in one of her interviews that when reading in the foreign language, she was 'reading with her eyes very very open, – with an alertness to cultural connotations. I am arguing that in using the cultuurtekst approach, students apply this awareness to the way they communicate in general – with an alertness to cultural connotations and to how relations are constructed discursively. I discuss here two examples of tasks which I am using now in my pedagogy where students write or speak 'with their eyes very open'.

Whilst I reject instrumentalism in its focus on skills at the expense of personal development, ethics and engaging with criticality, that does not mean that language classes cannot include work related tasks. My examples below use work related contexts and I illustrate how my approach differs from functionalist skills-based teaching. In instrumentalist-oriented language classes and text books, the task of giving an oral presentation, for instance, tends to be accompanied by advice on structuring, how to introduce and finish a presentation, and by providing some useful phrases. In a cultuurtekst-oriented approach preparing students for an oral presentation could indeed include some of these aspects (after all, students need to know the conventions before they can choose whether they want to deviate from these or not), but emphasises particularly the relational aspects of positioning themselves towards the audience. This means a reflection on how they are creating and conducting relationships. It is through evoking the personal that students can start looking at communicative situations critically.

In my advanced language class I start preparing students for an oral presentation by asking them to reflect on their own previous experiences, either in a personal social sphere or a work environment where they have had to present information. This led to considerations of how their previous holiday jobs, for instance, such as working in the visitor centre of London Zoo or being a tour guide for Dutch tourists in Notre Dame in Paris, had been instances where they had to consider and make decisions on their positioning of others, as well as their positioning of themselves towards their imagined 'clients'. In this process students recollected situations in which they had to make on the spot decisions on how to present information in ways that could be understood, and showed concern for their communicative partners.

The next stage of this particular task is to look at other presentations found on the internet and students try and imagine themselves in the role of the intended audience. How do they feel they are being positioned as an audience? Do they feel they are treated with respect? How does the context inform the presenter's style? Has he/she taken note of their possible viewpoints and previous knowledge? Are there particular assumptions which are underlying some of these presentations? When students prepare their own presentations in a work context of their own choosing, they try and get under the skin of the imagined role they have set for themselves and also that of their imagined audience, so they can decide what to present and how to do so. Elsewhere I describe how students engage creatively with this task from a position of justice, equality and respect for one another – how they utilize their cosmopolitan empathy. They do not address an imagined monologic other, but a complex one which necessitates them using multiple voices (Quist, 2013). Their presentations feel authentic and do not employ the bland ready-made style which tends to be found in course books using vocationally-oriented language tasks.

Another example in my current course is the task of writing emails or letters in a work-oriented situation. Students start with reflecting on uncomfortable writing situations they have experienced where they were unsure how to address their addressee or what tone to adopt. The writing task I give them has a clearly described context of relations, e.g. they have to imagine themselves to be the Head of a school who writes to parents to explain particular changes in the structure of the school. Students consider what tone to use, how to position themselves as the Head, and how to position the parents. Students then read out their finished work in class and receive feedback from the other students, who imagine themselves in the position of the receivers of the text. Students often comment on whether the text is too authoritarian to their liking or conversely too hesitant in its tone, and differences in opinion about this are discussed. Frequently this leads to hilarity as students, unsolicited by me, start to relate these different styles and indeed discursive constructions, in this case to do with education, to the individuals who wrote the texts. They often joke about whether this tone fits with the perceived personality of the text writer.

In engaging in tasks such as these which combine the personal and the critical in very practical language tasks, students create dialogic spaces where they can discuss in intensely personal and intimate ways why they have chosen the communicative styles they have been using. This comes close to what Sarah had said she had wanted to gain from the classes.

My pedagogy is still evolving, but by reflecting on discourses, multiple voiceness, and on interpersonal and intercultural relations, we do not only offer chances for students to being intercultural, but also to being human - to use their sense of responsibility towards, and engagement with, others. This can be applied to all manner of genres and tasks using all manner of language varieties and purposes, from academic to journalistic to creative writing – all of which invite students to reflect on conscious linguistic choices and encourage experiencing the communication process. These reflections also bring to the fore the fluid process that communication is; it brings a realisation of the changeability of communicative situations, the ‘ruptures’, the fragility of our own positions, and of text as culture. It also engages students’ cosmopolitan attitudes using their sympathetic imaginations (Quist, 2013).

### **Towards a Theory of the Personal and the Critical: Embracing Incompatibilities**

The practical examples of the language tasks above, which combine an ethical, individual as well as a critical perspective with vocational concerns is not meant to be a simple marrying of liberalist and instrumentalist approaches. The accentuation of cosmopolitan and ethical concerns which may have found its origin in the liberal humanistic paradigm transcends that particular philosophical perspective, and can just as easily be taken on board by the poststructuralist critical perspective of discursive mapping.

The seeming incompatibility and tensions which underpin this study in the perceived philosophical conflicts in many of the concepts I have been advocating, is perhaps not as much of a problem as is sometimes assumed. In this I am reminded of the term Romantic Conceptualism, an art scholarly term, described in 2006 by the Dutch critic Jan Verwoert to refer to conceptual art. The two terms are not as incompatible as they seem. Conceptual art, whether installation, video or performance, is often associated with a cold intellectual approach to art and rigorous attention to simplicity of form. However, many conceptual art pieces do in fact frequently draw attention to the actual processes of producing meaning, relying on memories and expression of emotion. The conceptual is thus being romanticized. In a similar way an intellectual engagement with text, language and writing can draw on the actual processes of meaning making and include personal reflections, creativity, a concern for others, and relating one’s own every day communicative experiences to the wider cultural forces.

We are at the turning point of another shift in language teaching. One which affords a greater role for personal stories and self exploration. The call for romanticism as a new paradigm has been mooted by Ros i Solé and Fenoulhet (2013) who propose a 'Romantic turn' in language learning, emphasising an engagement with learners' subjectivities, emotions and an acknowledgement of the discomfort of interculturality.

In the seeming incompatibility of the personal and the critical, I am reminded of the traditional Sufi image which Elif Shafak (2011) conjures up of the upside down tree, extending its roots in the air. Its life force, its cultural environment, is provided by the arc of the vast blue sky full of the promise of possibilities. In a similar way our students feed from this vastness to create their own stories as they go about their journey: critical, accepting, adopting, adapting, making choices and creating their own stories of belongings.