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**Critical discourse analysis as dialectical reasoning: the Kilburn Manifesto**

Abstract: I introduce the Kilburn Manifesto (KM) and summarize its treatment of discourse (debate and vocabularies). I then present the latest version of my approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) which views the latter as a form of ‘dialectical reasoning’, and discuss how it might fruitfully both take up KM’s notion of ‘terms of debate’ and help to take further this and other aspects of KM’s view of neoliberalism and political struggle against it.

The Kilburn Manifesto

The Kilburn Manifesto (KM) is a political manifesto for eliminating and replacing neoliberalism (Hall, Massey & Rustin 2015). KM arises from a larger body of analysis and debate centred recently around the journal Soundings but extending back to the 1970s crisis and emergence of neoliberalism and including earlier manifestos, in which Stuart Hall’s Gramscian political approach in cultural studies (focusing upon conjunctures, articulations and hegemony) has been particularly influential. His analysis of Thatcherism informed my approach to interdiscursive analysis (Fairclough 1989, 1992). I discuss here how CDA might learn from and help to take further KM’s view of neoliberalism and the political struggle against it. The aim is a dialogue which may lead to give-and-take between the critical analysis of CDA and the politics of (for instance) the KM group. I shall refer to parts of the KM by chapter apart from the introductory Framing Statement (e.g. ‘KM Chapter 2’).

Discourse in KM

Hall, Massey & Rustin (KM Framing Statement: 8) begin by stating that ‘mainstream political debate does not recognise the depth of the crisis, nor the consequent need for radical rethinking ... We therefore offer this analysis as a contribution to the debate, in the hope that it will help people on the left think more about how we can shift the parameters of the debate, from one concerning small palliative and restorative measures, to one which opens the way for moving towards a new political era and new understandings of what constitutes the good society’. Debate - and therefore discourse – is at the heart of KM. The idea that a social ‘settlement’ like neoliberalism (or a part of it such as marketised universities) has its particular ‘parameters’ or ‘terms’ of debate, which must be changed in changing the settlement, is particularly important. It can be incorporated into CDA, and CDA can also help to take it further.

Discourse figures in two main ways in KM, as debate (a form of dialectical argumentation) and as ‘vocabularies’. On the one hand, the terms of debate (including what can/cannot be politically debated, and how this changes as settlements change, e.g. from social democracy to neoliberalism) and forms of argument which feature within it; on the other hand, the vocabularies which are predominantly used to describe people and things, world views and the theories which underlie them, the various social (political, cultural) effects they have, and again how they change as socioeconomic settlements change. There is a separate chapter by Doreen Massey on vocabularies (KM Chapter 1). They are ‘enacted’ in practices (e.g. the ‘freedom of choice’ ascribed to individuals is enacted in the ‘mandatory exercise’ of ‘free choice’ e.g. in choosing your doctor), and both of them ‘embody and enforce the ideology of neoliberalism’, affirming that one is ‘above all a consumer, functioning in a market’. Such vocabularies affect our identities, our relationships, and
our world, contribute to forming ideologies and ‘common sense’, and contribute to placing us in a 'political straitjacket' by limiting the options we have. 'Discourse matters'. In the changes of vocabulary associated with the emerging hegemony of neoliberalism, people are enjoined to be ('interpellated as') 'consumers', be they students, patients, passengers or whatever. The 'so-called truth underpinning this change in descriptions' is that 'individual interests are the only reality that matters' and these are 'purely monetary', and the 'theoretical justification' which lies behind this is 'the idea of a world of independent agents whose choices, made for their own advantage, paradoxically benefit all' (KM Chapter 1: 9-11).

The connection between debate and vocabularies is suggested in: 'Neoliberal ideas set the parameters – provide the “taken-for-granteds” – of public discussion, media debate and popular calculation' (KM Framing Statement: 17). This is indirect, because it connects ideas and debate, but neoliberal ideas appear in actual instances of debate in the form of neoliberal vocabularies, so I think we can say that vocabularies, or ‘discourses’ in the sense of particular ways of representing aspects of reality, set the terms and provide the ‘taken-for-granteds’ of debate.

**CDA as dialectical reasoning**

In Fairclough (2013) I noted that CDA itself is a form of discourse and suggested that it is a form of practical argumentation, which leads to the perhaps surprising conclusion that, in political discourse analysis, CDA is a form of practical argumentation which critiques practical (political) argumentation. Why so? In political discourse analysis, CDA moves from critique of discourse, via explanation in terms of existing social reality of why it has the flaws identified, to identifying/advocating action to transform social reality for the better. But this is practical argumentation: argumentation from a set of premises to a claim about what should be done. Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) suggest that the premises in practical argumentation are: a Circumstantial premise which represents (and evaluates, problematizes, critiques and explains) an existing state of affairs, a Goal premise which specifies an alternative state of affairs as goal on the basis of a Value premise (the values and concerns one is arguing from), and a Means-Goal premise which claims that the advocated line of action in the Claim (conclusion) is a means of achieving the goal. The elements of critique and explanation in CDA are part of the Circumstantial premise, and the line of action is advocated for reasons drawn from both the latter and the Goal (and indirectly the Value) and Means-Goal premises. Since political discourse is primarily practical argumentation (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, Coleman, Fairclough, Fairclough, Finlayson & Hay 2013, Fairclough & Fairclough forthcoming), CDA is a form of practical argumentation which critiques practical (political) argumentation. This is not so surprising given that CDA like politics is seeking a critical explanatory understanding of existing social reality as a basis for changing it for the better, though unlike politics it develops academic theory and methods. Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) note that ‘values’ is too narrow a term ('concerns’ might be better), passions and feelings also drive argumentation (see the section on the Kilburn Manifesto).

I want to further argue that CDA is ‘dialectical reasoning’ - this is the method of CDA. The main genre of dialectical reasoning is practical argumentation, but it also has explanation, a different genre, embedded within the Circumstantial premise: it moves from critique, via explanation, towards action. The element of critique is actually more complex because it includes both normative and explanatory critique. So we have:
1. Normative critique of discourse.
2. Explanation of flawed discourse in terms of existing reality.
3. Explanatory critique of existing reality.
4. Advocating action to change existing reality for the better.

Explanatory critique makes the transition between explanation and action. It is critique of aspects of existing reality on the grounds that they cause normatively flawed discourse. This is a factual claim (x causes y) but it is simultaneously a value claim (x is a flaw in existing reality) and a deontic claim (existing reality should be changed to eliminate/replace x), see Bhaskar (1989).

Dialectical reasoning is first dialectical in the argumentation theory sense: it is primarily dialectic rather than logic or rhetoric. Dialectic is the dialogical aspect of argumentation, dialogical exchange and deliberation. This is dialectic in an epistemological sense, a way of determining the right thing to do through a process of separating good from bad arguments. Dialectical reasoning is deliberation because its critique is critical questioning and comparison of arguments that have been made. Practical argumentation can be critically questioned in three main ways (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012): a Claim can be questioned on the grounds that the consequences of the advocated action would undermine the goal(s); premises can be questioned in terms of truth or reasonableness; the argument itself can be questioned on the grounds that the Claim does not follow from the premises. Critical questioning involves identifying contradictions, which may be internal to the argumentation or external (contradictions between what is claimed/assumed in argument and what is really the case). Questioning a Claim on the grounds of consequences is identifying both internal and external contradictions: if your goal is to increase economic growth, and the means is to cut public spending which leads to reduced economic demand, hence less growth, there is an internal contradiction between goal and means, and an external contradiction between the assumption that cuts in public spending stimulate private expansion (hence growth) and the reality that they do not (or have not in fact).

Fairclough & Fairclough (2012) take goals (in Goal premises) to be imagined states of affairs which action advocated in the Claim is a means of achieving, to replace flawed states of affairs represented in Circumstantial premises. There is a relationship here between dialectic in the epistemological sense and dialectic in practical, ontological and relational senses (Bhaskar 1993), which are articulated together in practical argumentation. Epistemological dialectic is a way of determining the right thing to do by separating good arguments from bad ones. But doing so contributes to separating good from bad actions (practical dialectic), states of affairs (ontological dialectic), and relations between discourse and other social elements (relational dialectic), in each case eliminating the bad in favour of the good. There is a general sense of ‘dialectic’ common to these various dialectics: ‘any process of conceptual or social conflict, interconnection and change, in which the generation, interpenetration and clash of oppositions, leading to their transcendence in a fuller or more adequate mode of thought or form of life, plays a key role’ (Bhaskar 1993). Dialectic can produce arguments, states of affairs (including relations between discourse and other elements) and actions which are ‘more adequate’ than those which it begins from by removing constraints on transcending what currently exists. This broad view of dialectical argument contrasts with the view in argumentation theory that argumentative dialectic is not connected to dialectic in this wider critical sense. What are the reasons for rejecting this?
Dialectical argumentation in deliberation (evaluating, selecting and rejecting arguments) is a way to determine the 'right thing to do', meaning both the right way to change reality (the right goal to have), including relations between discourse and other elements, and the right way to act to achieve that (the right means). It is not just a way of acting on discourse – sorting good arguments from bad, perhaps selecting the 'better argument', perhaps as the argument/opinion that we can all agree upon, resolving differences and conflicts in discourse (Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004). It is a way of acting on discourse which helps us to know how to act upon reality, what to change and how – acting on discourse as a part of acting on reality. There are interpretations of Aristotle’s view of dialectic which support the broad view: dialectic has a role in the achievement of truth, including the practical truth of the right thing to do (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, Fairclough 2014).

In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle characterizes politics as action in pursuit of the highest good, based upon decisions, which arise out of deliberation (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012). Change in reality is implicit in this sequence ('pursuit of the highest good'). So change requires action, action requires decision, decision requires deliberation; deliberation is a part of action and change, or a precondition for them. We should analyse deliberation (dialectical practical argumentation) as a part of this sequence, recognizing that it both specifies what needs to be changed through critical questioning and explanation of representations (Circumstantial premise), and prefigures a changed social reality (Goal premise) and action to achieve it (Means-Goal premise and Claim). It is more than argumentation and acting upon argumentation: argumentative pre-figuration is a crucial part of change and action to achieve it. We can capture this by seeing it as dialectical reasoning and as an epistemologically/argumentatinally-centred configuration of epistemological, ontological, relational, and practical dialectics. It is primarily argumentation, but it is argumentation as a necessary part of action and of change. From this perspective one can see why critique of discourse might be seen as a starting point of critical method, as it was for Aristotle (starting from phainomena and from endoxa, generally accepted beliefs and opinions, what people say, ordinary people or “the wise” Fairclough & Fairclough 2012) and Marx, who begins his critique of political economy with a critique of the discourse of the political economists (Fairclough & Graham 2002), and why CDA has a crucial contribution to make to critical social science.

Why discourse matters in politics

What does ‘opening the way’ mean in the quotation from Hall, Massey & Rustin above (‘shift the parameters of the debate, from one concerning small palliative and restorative measures, to one which opens the way for moving towards a new political era and new understandings of what constitutes the good society’)? I argued earlier that deliberation needs to be analysed as part of the sequence deliberation – decision – action - change. The character of political debate (a form of deliberation) is shaped by its place in this larger whole. Political debate is not in itself action and change, but it is part of action and change. Moreover action and change are prefigured in it, and changing the terms of debate includes changing how they can be prefigured (what can be envisaged), which is a move towards new sorts of action and change. The possibilities for action and change, how radical and far-reaching our objectives can be, depend upon how open and inclusive the debate is. Furthermore, political debate integrates epistemological (argumentative) dialectic into
a more comprehensive critical dialectics (including ontological, practical and relational dialectics), so that changing the terms of debate is actually changing more than the debate (the argumentation), it is a move towards changing the existing social reality (ontological and relational change, the domains of ontological and relational dialectic) and changing the political action which can achieve this (practical change, the domain of practical dialectic). But what can these CDA ideas contribute to the political aims of KM? They can perhaps help people grasp how important it is to critique and change the terms of debate – how existing discourse can block social change, how changing the terms of debate can open it up.

To open the way to radical change, debate needs to include explanation of existing social reality and to connect critique, explanation and action. If we’re to act effectively to change existing reality, we need an explanatory understanding of its flaws and ills (discourse included), what causes them and what effects they have, what it would take to overcome them and how feasible that is, the likely consequences of actions, how discourse can block or open up change. Not all political debate provides this, (adequate) explanation is often lacking, which is a major issue in struggles over terms of debate. It is also an issue in debates over different approaches to CDA, some of which neglect explanation (Fairclough 2014). KM is very much concerned with explanatory understanding, though it does not explicitly connect explanation to critique and action. Would it gain by doing so? Perhaps being more conscious of the connections could help make political action more effective.

Changing the terms of debate involves changing explanation as well as argumentation because the former is a part of the latter. Changing explanation can mean adding it where it is absent, or improving it where it is present. Flaws in both argumentation and explanation are partly a matter of what discourses are included/favoured and excluded/disfavoured, providing reasons for or against lines of action in argumentation, and formulations of causes and effects in explanations, and defining and limiting what is reasonable in argument and what is explanatory in explanation. Critique of existing terms of political debate includes critique of what counts as reasonable or explanatory, and changing the terms of debate includes changing both. Highlighting ‘reasons’ and ‘causes’, and as I suggest below ‘motives’, might give a useful focus to the ‘educative’ political aims of KM.

I referred earlier to the problem-solution character of practical argumentation, and to ‘problematization’ of the existing states of affairs. Problematization is itself a form of explanation: it takes experiences of flaws in existing reality, identifies what causes them (i.e. explains them), and designates that as the ‘problem’. But flaws (effects), causes and problems are represented in terms of included/favoured discourses, so one issue with the terms of debate is how the character of the problem is limited and constrained by discourses. But how we define the problem also limits the range of possible solutions. This makes a particularly clear connection for political activists between changing the terms of debate (changing the ‘problem’) and opening up possibilities for action and change.

The terms of debate

So what are the ‘terms of debate’? They include which discourses (vocabularies) are included or favoured, and the representations, problematizations and solutions, goals and values, reasons for or
against particular lines of action, and ideas of what is reasonable or explanatory which they accommodate or favour. They also include the assumptions (‘taken-for-granteds’) associated with the included/favoured discourses which are incorporated in the premises of arguments and cause-effect relations of explanations (e.g. taking the need for continuous economic growth for granted). Neoliberal ideas set the terms of the debate in providing the ‘taken-for-granteds’, but to comprehend this and its implications we need to spell out the connections between ideas and the elements just listed - discourses, reasonableness, problematizations etc. - which the dialectical reasoning approach helps to do. Comprehending a particular settlement and its terms of debate requires analysis, but also interpretation and evaluation including ‘diagnosis’ of what underlying problems explain its flaws and ‘ills’, and identification of the potential within the existing settlement for transforming it in ways which may overcome them. This centres upon identification and analysis of contradictions in the existing settlement, because as Newman & Clarke (KM Chapter 6: 168) say ‘contradictions create the cracks and spaces of possibility out of which alternatives recurrently emerge’. Comprehending these connections may help political activists to take on and seek to change the existing reality.

The notion of the ‘terms of debate’ is a powerful idea which CDA should take on board. Hall, Massey & Rustin (Framing Statement: 21) state that the purpose of KM is to develop ‘a political project which transcends the limitations of conventional thinking as to what is “reasonable” to propose or do’, and I just suggested that ideas of what is reasonable are part of the terms of debate which depend on included/favoured discourses. Habermas (1982) says that participants in discourse ‘must assume that in the inescapable pragmatic presuppositions of rational discourse’ (the ‘ideal speech situation’) only ‘the non-coercive coercion of the better argument gets a chance’. Yet reasonableness (what counts as the better argument) in actual debate is relative to particular terms of debate, not an ideal speech situation. The ‘non-coercive coercion’ of the better argument is for Gramsci coercive coercion, for the consent which the former implies is the historical effect of past coercion (Ives 2004: 168-9), and ‘coercion is such only for those who reject it, not for those who accept it’ (Gramsci 1985: 130). Habermas’s resort to the purely intellectual construct of an ‘ideal speech situation’ which is not grounded in real speech situations (or grounded only in the special sense I shall come to) is echoed in the influential ‘pragma-dialectical’ theory of argumentation, where reasonableness is defined in terms of the construct of ‘critical discussion’ in (Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004).

The perspective of political action (in KM for instance) is crucial. Both Habermas and Eemeren & Grootendorst recognize that (without using this term) the terms of debate in real speech situations fall short of their constructs. The question – a political question - is how to change that (as well deciding what the terms of debate ‘fall short of’, i.e. what the goal should be). The key to doing so lies in what both neglect, ‘the gap between intellectual production and the mass of society’ (Ives 2004: 169). For Gramsci and KM, political action must start from and engage in struggle over ‘common sense’, from the naturalization of ideologies in common sense, but also from the fragmented, composite and contradictory character of common sense, which includes what Gramsci called a ‘healthy nucleus’ of ‘good sense’. It is because of the composite nature of common sense that the intellectual constructs do have a limited grounding which means that people can recognize them as versions of how things should be, indeed sometimes come close to being. But this should not be taken as evidence that such constructs as such are somehow already implicit in real speech situations. Shifting actual terms of debate in such directions can only be achieved through a political
struggle over common sense, its ideologies, its assumptions, and its disparate and contradictory character which includes both obstacles to and possibilities for change for the better, a struggle to change as well as learn from common sense.

_The ‘educative’ function of politics_

Hall & O’Shea (KM Chapter 3: 22) formulate a strategy for left politics and a view of its ‘educative’ character:

The left and the Labour Party must take the struggle over common sense seriously. Politics, as Gramsci insisted, is always “educative”. We must acknowledge the insecurities which underlie common sense’s confusions and contradictions, and harness the intensity and anger ... Labour must use every policy issue as an opportunity, not only to examine the pragmatics, but to highlight the underlying principle, slowly building an alternative consensus of “popular philosophy”. It must harness to this the already strongly existing sense of unfairness and injustice. In other words, it must engage in a two-way learning process, leading to what Gramsci called “an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding”.

The fourth sentence (‘Labour must ...’) advocates what amounts to a way of arguing and deliberating in political debate: in its argumentation over policies, the left should argue about goals and values (‘highlight the underlying principle’) as well as means to achieve goals (‘examine the pragmatics’), aiming to change the terms of debate (‘building an alternative consensus of “popular philosophy” ’). It should also debate not only with other political positions but also with ‘common sense’ argumentation, and ‘engage in a two-way learning process’ which both transforms its ‘confusions and contradictions’ and ‘harnesses’ its ‘feeling-passion’, seeking to convert it into ‘understanding’ and to achieve an ‘organic cohesion’ between the two, thereby taking ‘struggle over common sense seriously’ and seeking to shift common sense towards a new consensus. I think Hall & O’Shea are advocating for the left a shift in the terms of debate, though they don’t put it in this way, which is at the same time a shift in common sense, but drawing upon common sense to do it: drawing upon the ‘passion’ and ‘sense of unfairness and injustice’ to shift values but also converting it into ‘understanding’ by formulating goals and actions which resonate with it. In so doing it is also seeking to form political constituencies and political subjects, which do not exist ‘ready-made ... they have to actively be constructed’ (KM Chapter 11), but also political agents to bring about change.

Drawing upon the ‘feeling-passion’ of common sense, e.g. people not just believing and claiming that something is unfair but feeling and being moved or angered by the unfairness, is drawing upon ‘values’ (in Value premises) and how people evaluate things on the basis of them. But ‘values’ as I have said is too narrow. People argue from motives which animate and even drive them, including their passions (also greed and gross self-interest), they argue from their emotions and feelings, not just from values arrived at through reasoning. There is a difference between acting on the basis of reasons and arguments (and analysis and evidence) and acting on the basis of feelings and passions, but they are not simply alternatives: people argue and deliberate (i.e. evaluate and respond to others’ arguments) on the basis of affective concerns, motives, which shape their interpretation of circumstances (how they ‘problematize’ them) and the goals and actions which they advocate. This
dialectical view of argument as merging reasons and motives, as well as causes, resonates I think with the Gramscian perspective which informs KM.

But shouldn’t the left’s attempt to shift the terms of debate also include a shift towards dialectical reasoning? Dialectical reasoning is a powerful political as well as analytic tool which can be of service to would-be political agents (anyone seeking to change reality for the better - politicians, party members, political activists, active citizens) as well as to critical social analysts as I suggested earlier. It starts from critique of discourse (i.e. from things which are largely discernible though not always discerned - flaws in discourse and arguments) then seeks to explain such flaws in terms of less discernible (partly ‘underlying’ features of existing reality, thereby extending critique beyond discourse to the wider social reality, thereby identifying what aspects of reality need changing, what change is possible, and how it might be achieved, as a basis for a practical conclusion about what action to take. Critique of discourse (and debate) is an effective wedge to open up the wider social reality to analysis/critique and thereby action/change because the discourse is a part of the wider reality, a step towards action and change which prefigures them as well as representing and explaining the existing reality. This is not a novel view. As I said earlier, Marx’s critical method, drawing upon Aristotle, takes critique of discourse as its point of departure. Moreover, seeing and critiquing argumentation not in isolation but as the beginning of action is interpreting its dialectical character in a materialist rather than idealist way.

Politicians and political activists are used to deliberating and debating, and identifying and engaging with the arguments of others, but what Hall & O’Shea are proposing is an art of political debate which is not easy to achieve and requires learning, in formal education (including party and trade union schools) or practical politics or ideally a combination of the two. So too does dialectical reasoning. Part of what is involved here is struggles over changes in schooling (language education) similar to the ‘critical language awareness’ advocated within CDA as a part of ‘education for democracy’ in the 1990s, as part of the educational conditions for achieving radical social change.

What would people need to know about dialectical reasoning? Here is a list of essential elements.

1. How to recognize an argument. Arguments are often partly implicit, and need to be reconstructed from texts, i.e. formulated in an explicit way.
2. How to identify what type of argument it is.
3. How to identify the premises and conclusion of an argument, including which discourses are drawn upon and what reasons are given.
4. How to evaluate (critically question) an argument: its Claim, in terms of its likely consequences; its premises, including values, goals and the representation/problematization of circumstances; and inferences from premises to conclusion. Evaluating the critique of existing discourse and reality, the explanation of existing reality and its flaws, and action advocated to change it.
5. How to identify reasons, motives and causes, and the connections between them.
6. How to evaluate and critique argumentation as the first step in the sequence: deliberation-decision-action-change.
7. How to develop counter-arguments.
8. How to identify the terms of debate and their flaws and limitations, how to approach changing the terms of debate.
Conclusion

Gramsci (1995: 297-303) argues that dialectic is a ‘new way of thinking, a new philosophy’, but also ‘a new technique’ which he calls ‘the technique of thought’, which will ‘provide people with criteria’ to ‘carry out checks and make judgements’ and ‘correct distortions in common sense ways of thinking’. It is ‘as important to teach this technique as it is to teach reading and writing’. Dialectical reasoning provides a technique of thought and a way of arguing and deliberating which can identify, explain, critique and open the way to changing the terms of debate (including ideas of reasonableness and the better argument), itself as part of a way of acting to change existing reality. It is I think consistent with the Gramscian perspective of KM and it can be learnt and taught and transmitted through left politics in a form which meshes with Hall & O’Shea’s view of the struggle over common sense. It is perhaps a way for CDA to contribute to political action to change existing reality for the better.

I have envisaged people in CDA opening a dialogue with those involved in political action. Often the same person does both, so the dialogue might be in part between different sides of oneself. Working in a transdisciplinary way with colleagues in Sociology or Politics departments can also be seen as opening a dialogue, and the dialogues that a particular CDA practitioner gets into may be numerous and may shift. The dialogue with politics seems less transient and more a matter of what we do anyway. This new version of CDA accentuates the link of critique and explanation to political action to change reality for the better, so an orientation or leaning towards political action is part of the normal CDA way of working. The perspective of political action should be consistently brought into what do, and we need more reflection on the connections and the differences between analytical (critical-explanatory) concerns and political concerns. CDA and politics are different but connected, and it’s important to insist upon both the connection and the difference if we want to avoid confusion. In terms of the Aristotelian sequence, CDA contributes to deliberation (as do politics and active citizenship), but decision and action are not part of CDA but of political action.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Doreen Massey for her valuable comments on a draft of this paper.

References


