Critical realism, critical discourse analysis and the aporetics of a critical ontology

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Aporia

- 'The difficult or the impracticable, the impossible passage'; (Gk) *aporous* - literally 'without way' - that which cannot be traversed or resolved; an edge or limit; 'the existence of an uncrossable border' (Derrida, 1993: 8, 20).

Overview

1. To trace the correspondences and linkages between CDA and CR.

2. To interrogate from a poststructuralist perspective the critical realist understanding of the semiotic triangle of signifier, signified and referent and the relationship between the transitive (epistemological) and intransitive (ontological) dimensions of reality.

3. To explore the nature of the truth claim which is presupposed by the insistence on judgemental rationalism in CR.

4. To introduce a model of discourse analysis which meshes CDA with CR having considered the issues raised by 1, 2 and 3.

What is critical discourse analysis?

- Critical studies of language […] have from the beginning had a political project: broadly speaking that of altering inequitable distributions of economic, cultural and political goods in contemporary societies. The intention has been to bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis through the analysis of potent cultural objects – texts – and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order. The issue has thus been one of transformation, unsettling the existing order, and transforming its elements into an arrangement less harmful to some, and perhaps more beneficial to all the members of a society. (Kress, 1996: 15)

What is critical realism?

- A movement in philosophy, social theory and cognate practices that seeks to underlabour for science and other ways of knowing in order to promote the cause of truth and freedom, hence the transformation of social structures and other constraints that impede that cause and their replacement with wanted or needed ones, or emancipation. (Hartwig, 2007, *Dictionary of Critical Realism*: 96)

The *critical* in critical discourse analysis

- Approaches to discourse analysis that avoid combining a model of grammatical and textual analysis (of whatever sort) with sociopolitical and critical theories of society and its institutions are not forms of critical discourse analysis. (Gee, 2004: 20)

The *critical* in critical realism

- Critique is the 'critical' in critical realism, oriented to demystification, hence emancipation, and ultimately grounded in the human capacity reflexively to accept or reject (transcend) the received socio-cultural tradition […]. (Hartwig, *Dictionary of Critical Realism*, 2007: 105)

Approaches to analysis in CDA

1. **Critical language awareness** – Pedagogic approach to CDA (e.g. Clark, Fairclough, Ivanič and Martin-Jones, 1990, 1991; Wallace, 2003), originating in Freirean critical pedagogy, critical linguistics (e.g. Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew, 1979) and CDA (Fairclough *passim*).
2. **Socio-cognitive approach** – No direct relation between discourse structures and social structures. They are mediated by personal and social cognition (e.g. van Dijk, 2003).
3. **Discourse-historical approach** – Studies of discursive construction of sexism, racism, anti-semitism via immanent and socio-diagnostic (i.e. 'demystifying') critique (e.g. Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).
4. **Social semiotic (multimodal) approach** – Analyses multimodal representations of meaning in their relationship to social formations. (e.g. Kress, van Leeuwen, Machin, Jewitt, *passim*).
5. **Dialectical approach** – Discourse as a *moment* of social processes dialectically related to other moments. Studies of globalisation, language of politics, enterprise discourse, terrorism (Chouliaraki, Fairclough, Sayer, *passim*).
6. **'Post-critical' approach** (Pennycook, Rajagopalan, Blommaert, Luke, *passim*) – people as discursively and historically situated within networks of power (Foucault *passim*). Questions emancipatory modernist and late modern/quasi-poststructuralist iterations of CDA (e.g. Chouliaraki and Fairclough). Promotes in its place 'the restive problematization of the given' (Pennycook, 2001: 8), and a persistent questioning of all categories.

Six moments of critical realism

- **FIRST MOMENT**   **Transcendental realism (= CDA1-5; = / ≠ CDA6)**

- **SECOND MOMENT**   **Critical naturalism (CDA 1-6)**

- **THIRD MOMENT**   **Explanatory critique and ideology (= / ≠ CDA1-3, 5; 4?; ≠ CDA6)**

- Ideologies are often (though not necessarily) false or ungrounded constructions of society. (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 275)

- The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to be made use of [because], like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. (Foucault, 1980: 118)

Fourth Moment

- **Emancipatory axiology (CDA 1-3; 4?, 5?, ≠ CDA6)**
  - [A]n objective process of universal self realization, eudaimonia or flourishing (-in nature) (Bhaskar, 2008, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*: 176)
  - Characteristically the transition from an unwanted, unnecessary and oppressive situation to a wanted and/or needed and empowering or more flourishing situation. (Bhaskar, 2008, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*: 397)
  - [The objective of CDA is] to help to increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation. (Fairclough, 1989/2001: 1)
  - My view [...] is that there is no escape from questions of power, no escape from ideology or discourse. (Pennycook, 2001: 88)

Fifth moment

- **FIFTH MOMENT**

Dialectical critical realism (= CDA 3 and 6)

- – Immanent critique [in CR] proceeds, via a process of transcendental argument, essentially by identifying theory practice inconsistencies, contradictions and anomalies in rival discursive formations and remedying the constitutive absences or incompleteness that give rise to them, thereby effecting a move to a fuller, richer conceptual totality. (DCR: 99)
- – 'Text or discourse immanent critique' aims at discovering inconsistencies, (self)contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text internal or discourse internal structures. (Wodak, 2001: 65)
- – In […] immanent critique, 'objects' (e.g. social institutions, ideological concepts and beliefs) are judged according to whether they meet their own criteria of truth; that is, according to their own conceptions of what they think they are. (O'Regan, 2006a: 99)
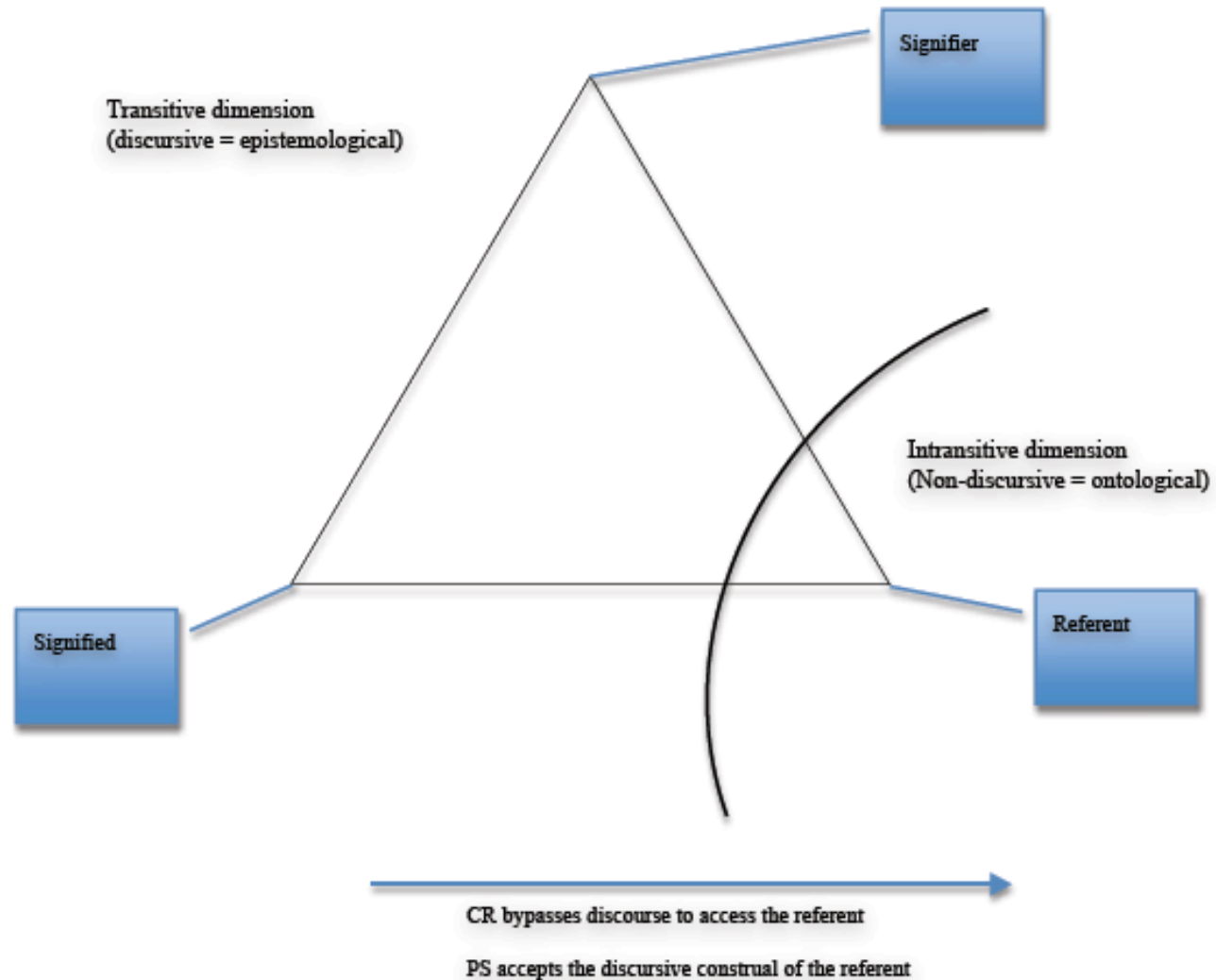
Sixth moment

- **SIXTH MOMENT**

Philosophical discourse of modernity (= CDA1-6)
  - The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilise this accumulation of specialised culture for the enrichment of everyday life, that is to say, for the rational organisation of everyday social life. (Habermas, 1981: 9)

The semiotic triangle

Signifier

Transitive dimension
(discursive = epistemological)

Intransitive dimension
(Non-discursive = ontological)

Signified

Referent

CR bypasses discourse to access the referent

PS accepts the discursive construal of the referent

The aporiai of discourse and truth

- Critical realism appears to hold that true knowledge of the non-discursive object can be known without having to resort to any discursive description of it. In this, critical realism seems to be able to bypass the Saussurean sign itself and yet still gain access to the referent.

- Discursive representations by being just that, *representations*, cannot be relied upon to be (once and for all) true representations, they are always imperfect, and may even be completely false. It is the problem of the intransitive dimension that discourse has to stand in for it.

Ontological realism

- Critical realism posits:

  - Ontological realism > epistemic relativism > judgemental rationalism

- Poststructuralist CDA posits:

  - Ontological realism > epistemic relativism > judgemental *care*

  - We must imbue our judgements with the care that they may not be true, for science cannot tell us this.

4D discourse cube + 4D method cube of CR and CDA
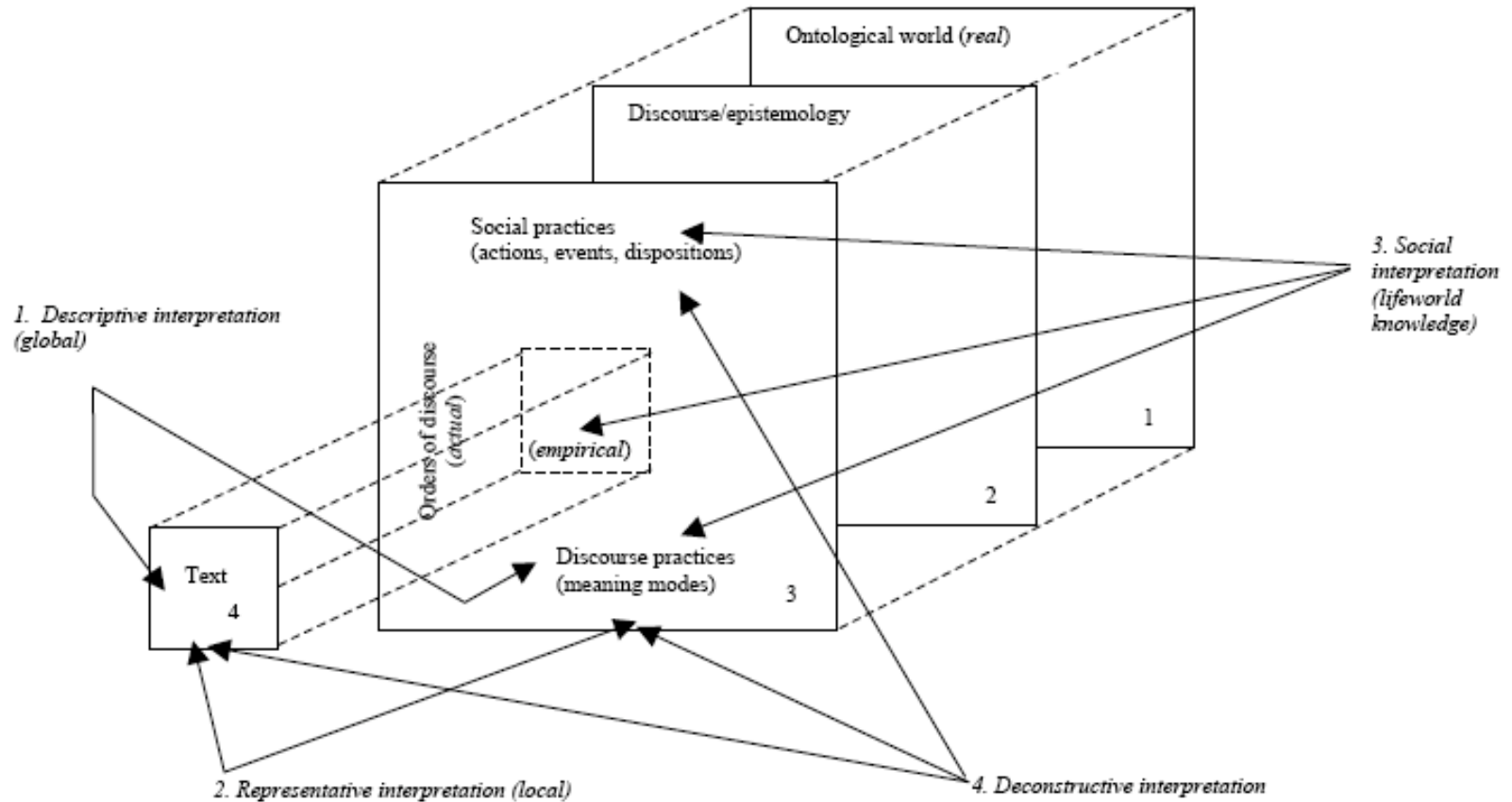
Closure

- A discourse which is oriented to closure seeks to suppress difference through the employment of truth as an organising principle. '[T]he spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total' (Adorno, 1973: 146). A discourse which is oriented to closure is not a loose framework of beliefs guiding individuals' everyday actions and choices. Rather, it seeks through the practice of its utterance and its dissemination a permanent reordering of social relations according to the truth which it conveys. (O'Regan, unpublished MS)

Be CRITICAL

C   is for critical. Be critical; resist closure

R   is for respect. Respect how the text seems to want to be read

I   is for interpretation. Interpret the text from within

T   is for teaching. Teach your interpretation to others

I   is for investigation. Investigate the interpretations of others

C   is for cooperation and communication. Cooperate in order to communicate

A   is for analysis. Analyse the construction of knowledge

L   is for learning. Learn from the knowledge of others

- Thank you
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