

Knowledge, Discourse and Text: Critical Reading in Academic Contexts

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Abstract

In this paper I wish to present a framework for the critical analysis of texts in the university classroom. The framework combines elements of critical and poststructuralist theory in providing a rationale for this type of textual analysis. The critical theory dimension draws upon the immanent criticism of the Frankfurt School and upon Habermas's understanding of the public sphere as a site of discursivity. The poststructuralist dimension is influenced by some elements of Derridean deconstruction, as well as postmodern perspectives developed by Jameson, Rorty, Harvey and others. The paper has two main objectives. First, to demonstrate that the discourses of modernity and of postmodernity are not necessarily incompatible, especially when they are brought together over texts in the classroom, and second, to argue against a perceived closure of the university as a public sphere due to the increasing focus on transferable skills in the delivery of subject-based knowledge.

Introduction: universities and knowledge production

Universities have always been centers of knowledge production and dissemination but it has only been over the last 15 years or so that universities have become *mass* educational centers of this kind. Since the mid-1980s in the UK for example universities have witnessed an unprecedented government-led expansion of the university sector with even greater numbers of young people entering university than ever before. This has come to be viewed as desirable and necessary by politicians, employers, media commentators and indeed universities themselves. The reasons for this vary, but from the perspective of this paper a major theme stands out: the gradual collapse of the Keynesian post-war settlement, beginning in the 1960s, and the rise in the late 1970s of monetarist neo-liberal discourses in tandem with the discourses of globalization. This discursive sea change was epitomized in the UK by the conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979-90), and in the USA by the two terms of the republican administration of Ronald Reagan (1981-89). Where the 1960s and 70s had opened universities to a wider cross section of the population, the 1980s and 90s opened them to a wide range of neo-liberal market discourses in which universities were to deliver knowledge in the form of essential skills and training for the supposedly burgeoning and by now widely accepted globalized world economy; hence the enthusiasm of governments for a greatly expanded university population. Putting to one side obvious questions of whether this is being matched by increased government funding or whether this type of expansion on these kinds of premises is a positive step or not, we may suppose that today in the 21st century more people than ever before are going to university.

This is an opportune moment to pause and reflect. If more people than ever before are going to university, what essential kinds of knowledge ought they to be exposed to? Subject knowledge in students' chosen fields of study, yes, but what kinds of value-added skills and competencies should accompany this? In the UK much emphasis is placed on knowledge in the form of skills and training for the workplace, commonly known as

transferable skills. Transferable skills include the ability to research, analyze and synthesize information, to work to deadlines, give presentations, work as a part of a team, write reports, use information technology and so on. With skills such as these it is assumed that students will make better workers and be more readily adapted to the demands of working for businesses in the global market place. In some areas emphasis is also placed on critical thinking skills: being able to react quickly to changing situations, to take stock, to be aware, to be analytical and *critical* in the evaluative sense, to be able to judge between different arguments and possibilities, to be able to see the bigger picture. All well and good, but is this enough? Are there other forms of knowledge, especially critical knowledge, which might be included here? Should transferable skills and the work-oriented discourses which accompany them – efficiency, organization, accuracy, reliability, flexibility, competitiveness etc – be the principal foundations upon which the teaching of an academic subject rests? Are there additional as well as alternative discourses which can be developed in the classroom, what are they, and how do we go about introducing them?

Critical discourse awareness: treating the text as a critical object

In this paper I wish to introduce my own approach to these questions through the fine-grained, critical reading of texts. I have decided to call this form of competence critical *discourse* awareness, as opposed to the more familiar critical *language* awareness of pedagogic critical discourse analysis, and the approach to reading which it adopts Text as Critical Object (TACO). Critical discourse awareness is an awareness of how discourse is used publicly to present multiple representations of the truth, or validity claims (cf. Habermas, 1981; Foucault, 1984). The public statements of political leaders, media organizations, national and international business corporations, companies, industries, pressure groups and international non-governmental organizations are but a small number of the very many validity claims which daily circulate as discourses in the public domain. Critical discourse awareness in this context is the educational act of highlighting the social constructivism of such public discourses in order to introduce a problematizing distance between the apparent givenness of their validity claims and the individuals, institutions and concepts which they are supposed to represent. Knowledge of how public discourse is used locally, nationally and globally by social, political and economic groupings in order to present validity claims on a range of subjects would seem to be an important component of a university education and yet in the large print of the university prospectus and even in the small print of university regulations and degree subject specifications critical discourse awareness is more notable by its absence than it is by its presence. One reason why I believe that critical discourse awareness is useful as a form of publicly sanctioned critical knowledge is that it encourages questioning as a first principle, givens are not treated as self-evident, and apparent truths are problematized. In a world of circulating signs and images, in which spectacle and simulation appear to have supplanted the real, this is a necessary democratic act.

That said, I harbor few illusions regarding the possibilities of critical discourse awareness becoming a central plank of knowledge formation in the university, or indeed of the discourses of critical discourse awareness displacing or even cohabiting on a formal basis with the neo-liberal discourses associated with transferable skills. Derrida's *Right to Philosophy* (1990) is an encouraging intervention in this respect. For Derrida the right to philosophy should be enshrined in our educational institutions as a means of opening up future possibilities in the institutions of society, 'the point is still to seek out new themes

that are taking form and that call for new kinds of competence' (Derrida, 1992: 110). Similar arguments have been made by Billig (1991) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). They concur that universities need to take on the role of public spaces where argumentation and dialogue can be encouraged and developed around the public discourses of society. Making critical discourse awareness integral to the knowledge forming aims of the university curriculum is an exercise in developing this kind of competence. From the perspective of this paper one means of achieving this kind of inclusion is through a recontextualization of critical research on discourse with the objective of producing a framework and procedure for the critical analysis of texts in the classroom.

This paper represents my own attempt to do this. My approach is derived from work in critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1995; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Kress 1985, 1993, 1998; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996), critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 1994, 2001) and in critical language awareness (e.g. Wallace, 1992, 1999; Clark, 1992; Clark et al, 1990, 1991; Ivanič, 1990). Critical discourse awareness is discursive, it values classroom discussion and debate around texts. The texts in question are usually written but might also be transcribed from speech and are ones which have been taken from discourse designed for public consumption: newspapers, advertisements, texts of speeches, news reports, documentary programs, official documentation of various kinds - brochures, prospectuses, political communiqués, statements etc. Although I have drawn extensively upon the analytical frameworks of critical discourse analysis and critical language awareness, my own approach is rather different. This is because it involves a theory of the text as an educational or *critical* object. This kind of theoretico-educational approach to the text is not to be found in either critical discourse analysis, henceforth CDA, or its pedagogic arm critical language awareness, henceforth CLA, and is recognized as an absence in this approach to texts: 'critical discourse awareness programs will be concerned to recontextualize this body of research in ways which transform it, perhaps quite radically, into a practically useful form for educational purposes' (Fairclough, 1999: 80).

An educational theory of the text: modernity and postmodernity

In order to develop an educational theory as well as a practice of the text I have reviewed approaches to CDA (as well as CLA) and at the same time subjected to critical reexamination the social theories with which it is usually associated; primarily Marxist Hegelianism (Hegel, 1998; Marx, 2000) Frankfurt School critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/1997; Marcuse, 1964, 1968, 1941/1986; Habermas, 1981, 1987, 1989a, 1989b) and the work of Michel Foucault (1972, 1980, 1984). I have also incorporated into my critical framework social theories with which CDA is not usually associated, but which seem very suitable to a critical educational practice around the text. For example, ideas and principles which have presented themselves as being relevant in the work of more postmodern thinkers such as Nietzsche (1967, 1976), Derrida (1990, 1992, 1995, 1967/1997), Harvey (1990) and Jameson (1998). I have found these thinkers to have a great deal to offer a critical educational practice around the text and I have in part been drawn to their work because theirs, particularly Nietzsche's and Derrida's, is an approach which is usually rejected by mainstream CDA. This is because Nietzsche and Derrida along with Foucault are usually presented as representing philosophies which are incompatible with the largely modernist interests of CDA (see Pennycook, 2001), although Foucault's *excurses* on power are a major exception. CDA has been much more

aligned with neo-Marxist positions on the possibilities of social change and emancipation and with attempts to reestablish, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, rationalist foundations of knowledge and truth. Nietzsche and Derrida by contrast are associated with postmodern, anti-rationalist, anti-foundational and deconstructive approaches to the same issues. Whatever the philosophical differences between these two positions, and there are very many, there are good educational grounds for bringing them together as I hope to demonstrate in the course of this paper. Arguments between the two positions, modern and postmodern, structural and poststructural, have tended to be conducted at the extremities of the differences between them; Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) and Habermas's *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) for example are extended polemics of this kind. Less attention is paid to actual and potential similarities in the two positions, particularly with regard to the interpretation of reality, the practice of critique and the purposes of discursivity. There are thus a number of intriguing complementary positions to be found between the two tendencies which may assist the development of an educationally useful theory and practice of the text.

The adoption of poststructuralist perspectives introduces as might be expected an element of uncertainty and slippage into many of CDA's practical and theoretical points of reference, such as the interest in emancipation, the nature of the text and reading, and the notion of ideology versus truth. These cumulative changes to the premises of CDA are not entirely new; Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 32) for example claim that in their CDA they are now 'working within a post-structural perspective, but without adopting either post-structuralist reductions of the whole of social life to discourse, or post-structuralist judgemental relativism.' Despite their qualifications and possible protestations however, Chouliaraki and Fairclough can claim to have been the first to move CDA decisively in a 'post' direction. This has led me to describe their recent moves as not so much critical discourse analysis but *post-critical* discourse analysis (O'Regan, 2001), although I am sure they would reject the term.

Final readings of the social: final readings of the text

So, why a post-critical turn in CDA? Firstly, there has been an increasing recognition that CDA has presented itself, perhaps unintentionally, as having a privileged access to texts, a knowledge of the text in itself. This has served as the principal focus of attack by critics who object to the kinds of textual exegesis employed writers in CDA. Foremost amongst these has been Henry Widdowson (1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998, 2000a, 2000b) for whom CDA is at best suspect and at worst downright duplicitous in its readings of texts. I believe Widdowson is largely misinformed as to what CDA is about because in his own words 'how it stands as social theory, I am not competent to judge' (Widdowson, 1995: 516). This lacuna in his competency is a considerable one. It is difficult to see how it is possible to critique CDA in any effective sense without some familiarity with the social theories upon which it is based.

That said, there is something Widdowson says which does have a major bearing on this paper, although for completely different reasons to those he would have intended. One of his major criticisms of Fairclough is that he presents textual exegesis as an exercise in uncovering the truth of the text (Widdowson *passim*). What he is referring to, although he does not call it this, is textual exegesis as a final reading. If you look at the work of the major critical discourse analysts, Fairclough and van Dijk for example, it is evident that they are concerned with approaches to knowledge construction which are on the

whole foundational, that is, with knowledge as the uncovering of truths about social relations, social practices, the exercise of power, ideology, prejudice and domination. Fair enough, the problems only really start once textual exegesis is presented as knowledge of the text as it really is; i.e. not only knowledge of what the author intended but also what s/he did not intend. The problem with this is twofold: first, it suggests a privileged access to truth and knowledge on the part of critical discourse analysts (the 'are we all stupid?' problem) and second, the textual analyses which are presented as exemplars of the approach always seem to privilege the interpretation of the analyst over other possible interpretations of the text. The result is a textual exegesis which appears to be a final reading. The analyst's critique thus tends to be presented as giving access to what the text is *really* saying (and doing) as opposed to what it *seems* to be saying (and doing). These are common criticisms (Hammersley, 1996; Toolan, 1997; Cameron, 2001).

The predilection in CDA to present textual exegesis as a final reading is I believe a reflex which is derived from CDA's self-association with the emancipatory project of modernity. This project has been subject to a sustained postmodern critique on the grounds that it promotes a closed and totalising view of the future (Lyotard, 1984) where difference is suppressed in the interests of consensus and conformity to a predetermined emancipatory goal. This new system, once introduced, represents in Lyotardian terms a final reading of the social. I believe that the final reading of the social which seems to ensue from the modernist project may be said to have encouraged a reflex final reading of the text in CDA; a default reading which is intended to illustrate for the reader the operations of power and ideology in texts. The privileging of the default reading in CDA has occurred at the expense of alternative readings. Rather than releasing readings of texts, CDA has appeared to do the reverse and imposed them instead. The act of releasing readings should be the first principle of any educational practice around the text. One way to do this is to introduce more postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms *in addition* to the modernist ones with which CDA is usually associated. What implications does this have for a critical practice around the text? I like the advice of Foucault on this:

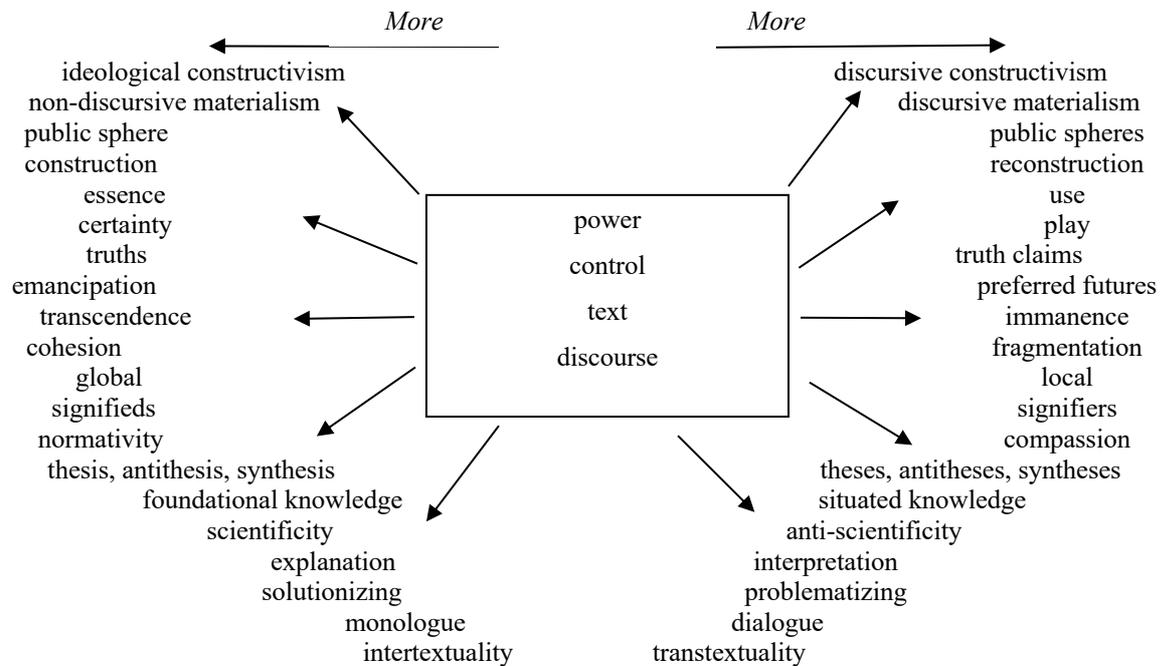
Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true or false. (Foucault, 1984: 60)

In an educational post-CDA this translates as seeing *textually* how apparent truths, i.e. validity claims, are presented in discourse, and problematising them. Thus, rather than an essential truth to be uncovered, a post-CDA sees in the text a range of interpretations to be argued over.

A speaker puts forward a criticizable claim in relating with his utterance to at least one "world" (text); he thereby uses the fact that this relation between actor (reader) and world (text) is in principle open to objective appraisal in order to call upon his opposite number (partner) to take a rationally (textually) motivated position. The concept of communicative action presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching of understanding, in the course of which participants (readers), through relating to a world (text), reciprocally raise validity claims (interpretations) that can be accepted or contested. (Habermas, 1989a: 153. Items in parenthesis are mine)

Figure 1. represents some of the principal schematic differences between critical discourse analysis and post-critical discourse analysis (post-CDA) as I see them. At the center we have central concerns in CDA and post-CDA, issues of power and control, the nature of the text and discourse.

Fig. 1. Schematic differences between critical discourse analysis and post-critical discourse analysis



On either side of these we have tendencies in CDA and post-CDA. Thus CDA is more ideologically constructive where post-CDA is more discursively constructive. CDA tends towards a view of social relations as largely constructed in ideology. Post-CDA, on the other hand, tends towards a view of social relations as largely constructed in discourse, in signifying practices, in signs. Similarly, CDA is more materially oriented where post-CDA is more discursively oriented. CDA is more materialist because of the distinction it makes between the discursive and the non-discursive and because it orients itself to a Marxist base-superstructure model of society. Post-CDA, by contrast, tends more towards a social constructivist view of society in which knowledge of the world emerges in discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, 1990). Habermas's unitary public sphere is multiplied in post-CDA to include all the discursive spaces of the lifeworld (the world of every day life): the classroom, the public meeting, social movements, businesses, educational, legal, political and economic institutions and the myriads of sub-spheres attached to them. To do post-CDA is to *use the text* (Rorty, 1992) for discursive purposes and to engage critically with the apparent certainties it presents. Rather than pursuing the implied universalism of the critical project, post-CDA is content to work at the more local level of the classroom and the text in order to be able make educational observations about the wider social world. Post-CDA does not seek a template for human understanding, but tries to catalogue the use of discourse at specific textual junctures in order to determine how this or that discourse has come into circulation, and what role it seems to be serving. It is thus interested in situational knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Pennycook, 2001) rather than foundational knowledge. Above all, post-CDA pursues,

like Derrida, an interminable questioning in the interest of keeping the social (and the text) open and deferring final readings.

The only attitude (the only politics – judicial, medical, pedagogical, and so forth) I would *absolutely* condemn is one which directly or indirectly, cuts off the possibility of an essentially interminable questioning, that is, an effective and thus transforming questioning. (Derrida, 1992: 239)

The theorizing practice of post-CDA impacts upon the classroom use of texts in the following way. In the classroom to treat the text as a critical object is to problematize the preferred representations of validity claims in texts; i.e. the preferred reading (Hall, 1980, 1997). The preferred reading is the reading which seems to accord with the way a text wants to be read. But rather than opposing the preferred reading to a deeper and more foundational truth, problematizing the text means opening the text up to dispreferred readings and dispreferred possibilities: the readings and the possibilities which the text discounts and yet which are still integral to the text. In other words, to problematize the text we must use the text against itself.

This may be achieved by relating social institutions and activities (texts) to the values (preferred readings) they themselves set forth as their standards and ideals ... If subjected to such an analysis, the social agencies (texts) ... will disclose a pervasive discrepancy between what they actually are and the values they accept. (Horkheimer, quoted in Held, 1990: 186. The parenthetical comments are mine)

Horkheimer called this type of practice immanent criticism and it is a practice approaching this which post-CDA envisages with texts. The text should be criticized on its own terms in order to open up spaces between the text as it appears to want to be and the anti-text(s) which its texture *implicates*, in the sense of both *implying* and *involving*: the text implies meanings in its reading but it obviously may only do so by involving readers. The meaning of the text is thus neither entirely in the text nor entirely in the reader, but is in an intertextual, or even *transtextual* meeting of the two. Just as the text is a mosaic of other texts (Kristeva, 1986, Bakhtin, 1986; Barthes, 1977), so the reader is a mosaic of a similar kind: a transtextured self, of social, sexual and political experiences which have been absorbed and transformed and brought to bear upon texts. Using the text against itself therefore also entails using the reader against the text.

From social theory to text as critical object

Social theory has much to offer the educational problematization of the text. A number of these contributions are summarized in the table on the following page.

Postmodernist positions largely dismiss Hegel and Marx and yet their dialectics of reason and of materialism are useful metaphors for the determinate negation of the text through immanent criticism. As Pope (1995) observes, reading a text is to rewrite it. It is also to deconstruct it (Derrida, 1997). Similarly, the relation between the text and the reader is the similar to that of the master and the slave in Hegel's dialectic (Hegel, 1998) – one depends upon the other for his existence. Without the reader there is no text, and without the text there is no reader. Resurrecting the dialectic as a poststructuralist determinate

Hegel And Marx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • master/slave dialectic (Hegel) • dialectical reason (Hegel) and dialectical materialism (Marx) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text/reader-reader/text dialectic • dialectical textualism, reader/text dialogism
Frankfurt School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immanent criticism, negative dialectics and non-identity/non-instrumental thinking; there is nothing outside history (Horkheimer and Adorno); determinate negation, negative thinking (Marcuse) • public sphere and communicative action, (Habermas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • holding a mirror to the text, deconstructing the preferred (instrumental) reading • discursive knowledge formation as intertextual and intersubjective knowledge formation
Poststructuralism and Postmodernism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiperspectivity; anti-nihilism/sameness (Nietzsche) • the formation of objects, discourses form the objects of which they speak (Foucault) • incredulity toward metanarratives – final readings of the social, language games (Lyotard) • intertextuality, dialogue (Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes) • standpoint theory, structures of constraint, cognitive mapping; nostalgia and pastiche (Jameson) • discourse theory, the discursive emergence of the object, (Laclau and Mouffe) • time-space compression (Harvey) • deconstruction, the other; <i>il n'ya pas de hors-texte</i> - there is nothing outside of the text (Derrida) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • textual dialogism, multiple readings, dispreferred readings • 'texting' - the text as social practice/classification • incredulity toward the preferred reading – final readings of the text, discursive intervention, deconstructing the preferred reading • signification, the multimodality of the text (sign, signifier, referent), hybridity • discursive mapping, texts as inventories of the social; texts as rewordings (and reworkings) of the past • discursive materialism – the text as social sculpture (cf. Foucault) • text-space compression/aestheticization, textual gratification • critical reading, problematising practice, dispreferred readings; discursive materialism (cf. Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe)

negation of the text need not entail a new totalizing synthesis, but it might entail new kinds of *syntheses* (plural), or *partialities*.

The idea that the dialectic must lead to a single synthesized totality seems exaggerated, as it did to Adorno, (1973; also see Chaffin, 1989), and yet many postmodern thinkers appear to have set out their philosophical stalls in reaction to this basic premise; Derrida and Foucault are amongst them. Why should the dialectic lead to totality when it can be employed as multiplicity?

Not thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis but theses, anti-theses, *syntheses*; or better still, theses, anti-theses, *partialities*. Hegel's *Aufhebung*, 'a relation between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence' (Spivak, 1997: xi) need not be an annulment of the thesis, nor a stepping up to a higher level but a problematization of them which leads to change and difference and back again to interminable questioning. In other words change can occur without it being total. The teleology of Hegelian philosophy is short-circuited but the efficacy of the basic principle of the dialectic as an approach to knowledge construction remains. In this light, Derridean deconstruction may be understood as a dialectic of difference in which the signifier is privileged over the signified as a means of problematizing the text, and indeed the dialectic itself (Caputo, 1997).

Just as the problematizing potentialities of Marx and Hegel seem to have been neglected by postmodernists so it seems have those of the Frankfurt School. There are for example notable similarities between the immanent criticism of Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School and Derridean deconstruction. Just as Horkheimer subscribed to immanent criticism as a means of turning the truth claims of institutions back upon themselves, so Derrida employs critical reading to turn those of texts back upon themselves. Derrida (1995) employs what he calls a *Khôran* critique of texts, *deconstruction* by another name, and an *exorbitant method* by yet another. He takes the name *Khôra* from the philosophy of Plato. For Derrida *Khôra* stands for the things in the text which fall outside the preferred reading. When Derrida reads a text he takes the preferred reading and throws it over the text like a blanket. He then looks for the bits that don't fit, that stick out, the parts which aren't quite covered by the preferred reading. He pays close attention to these and begins to pull at them. In this way readings are released which transgress the *logos* or preferred reading of the text. The critique of logocentrism in Derrida's exorbitant method can thus be read as the critique of the preferred reading in Frankfurt School immanent criticism. To transgress the text and release readings the critical reader must undertake a doubling commentary. In the first commentary the reader passes through the preferred reading, the *logos* of the text, in the second the reader transgresses the text.

This moment of doubling commentary should no doubt have its place in a critical reading. To recognize and respect all its classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened* a reading. (Derrida, 1997: 158).

When Derrida talks of an indispensable guardrail he is referring us to the preferred reading. As Caputo (1997: 78) notes 'we cannot establish the relationship between what

the author commands and does not command if we do not first get a command of what the author says or, better, what is being said in the text.' The preferred reading is thus the indispensable reading which permits the release of further readings. It is therefore not possible to say anything about a text, the preferred reading protects the text against this, it is the position from which critique begins. And for Derrida the preferred reading must be transgressed, it must be problematized, because the *logos* represents the closure of the text. By transgressing the preferred reading the text is kept open to other readings. Furthermore it is kept open according to the terms of its own architecture, as it is in immanent criticism.

Derrida's interest in the non-closure of the text has curious parallels with Habermas's interest in the non-closure or 'reconstruction' of the public sphere. Habermas (1975, 1981, 1989a, 1989b) sees the public sphere as in crisis due to the colonization of the lifeworld (the world of everyday life) by instrumental reason: a technocratic consciousness which stifles any reflective approach to the activities of individuals or to the problems of society. These are instead dealt with as technical issues with (predictable) technical explanations and/or solutions (Held, 1990). For Habermas the spread of instrumental reason represents a form of domination, and if people are to be freed from domination, it is necessary to struggle against this tendency and to preserve and maintain discursive spaces ('a critical publicity') within the lifeworld. According to Habermas (1996: 235) 'The outcome of the struggle between a critical publicity and one that is merely staged for manipulative purposes is still open,' and it is the extent to which the former prevails which 'gauges the degree of democratization of an industrial society' (ibid: 232).

The goal is no longer to supersede an economic system having a capitalist life of its own and a system of domination having a bureaucratic life of its own but to erect a democratic dam against the colonializing (sic) *encroachment* of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld. (Habermas, 1992: 444. Emphasis in the original)

While Derrida and Habermas completely disagree on the philosophical basis for the need for openness, it is evident that openness is nevertheless a concept which is central to their thinking. Both views also fit quite well into a problematization of the text for educational purposes. Derrida's exorbitant method provides a theoretical justification for opening texts to critical reading, and Habermas's public sphere for opening texts to classroom-based discussion.

It is worth noting too that Habermas does not insist that unconstrained consensus must be the outcome of a critical publicity oriented to communicative action:

For both parties the interpretative task consists in incorporating the other's interpretation of the situation into one's own in such a way that in the revised version "her" external world and 'my' external world can – against the background of our life world – be relativized in relation to 'the' world, and the divergent situation definitions can be brought to coincide sufficiently. Naturally this does not mean that interpretation must lead in every case to a stable and unambiguously differentiated assignment. Stability and absence of ambiguity are rather the exception in the communicative practice of everyday life. (Habermas, 1989a: 155)

Bringing Habermas and Derrida, modernism and postmodernism, together in this way may represent for some a fusion of opposites, but there appear to be sufficient grounds for suggesting that this opposition, at least in an educational context if not in an academic theoretical one, has been exaggerated. The question that remains is how to translate this into a pedagogic framework and procedure for the classroom.

The following section represents an attempt to do this. Included here is a framework and procedure for a classroom-based critical educational practice around the text and some suggestions for activities. In the framework presented I have tried to build on already existing frameworks and procedures in critical discourse analysis, most notably those of Fairclough (1989, 1992a), Kress (1985, 1998) and Wallace (1992, 1999),¹ while adding my own take on these in the light of the foregoing discussion. An overriding concern for me has been to make the framework accessible to classroom use with as wide a range of students as possible, and not just with students of applied linguistics or communication, and so I have tried to avoid where possible the need for extensive recourse to linguistic terminologies in describing the characteristics of texts. That is not to say they are absent, and no doubt it would be possible for example to apply to this framework the Hallidayan systemic-functional model favored by many critical discourse analysts. I have chosen not to do this because it is not part of my aim to write a critical grammar, but to adumbrate a framework for a problematizing practice around texts in the classroom. I also feel that if such a problematizing practice is to be operationalized across different disciplines with different kinds of students, and if dialogue is the one of the main aims of this practice, then the framework should encourage that and not be dependent upon an extensive linguistic metalanguage.

Text As Critical Object

Methodological framework

Textual boundaries:	The frame of the text. What is included in the text?
Modes of representation:	The visual semiosis of the text. How does the text look? How is it laid out? What sign systems are used (colors, shapes, textual arrangement)?
Topic:	What is the topic? How is the topic being written about?
Reading position:	What is the preferred reading? What does the text want us to know, learn, understand? What shared knowledge is the reader assumed to have?
Discourse values:	What values can be attached to the discourse features of the text (lexis, grammar, genre)?
Identity:	Does the text refer to the writer (self) and reader (other)? How does the text refer to the topic?

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Catherine Wallace at the Institute of Education, London, whose comments and advice have helped me to reach a better understanding of what I wish to say about texts.

Social orientation: What social frameworks does the text belong to/evoke? What social schemas does the text rely on/evoke?

Steps to go through

Description:

The formal properties and features of the text; representative conventions (meaning modes: visual, lexical, grammatical, rhetorical); the topic; the preferred reading.

Representative Interpretation: The representative conventions being drawn on and how they are used.

Social Interpretation: The social frameworks and schemas of the text. Cultural contexts of power and dispower. Social contexts of knowledge (gender, race, ethnicity, economy, politics, family, class, income, age, sex, property, geography etc)

Summary of questions

1. What is included in the text?
2. How does the text look?
3. What is the topic?
4. How is the topic being talked about?
5. What is the preferred reading?
6. What shared knowledge is the reader assumed to have?
7. What values can be attached to the discourse features of the text?
8. Does the text refer to the writer (self) and the reader (other)?
9. How does the text refer to the topic?
10. What social frameworks does the text belong to?
11. What social schemas does the text rely on?

Discourse features:

Vocabulary

1. What items are collocated with the main and minor participants in the text?
2. What social relationships are signaled by the vocabulary? Does the choice of vocabulary seem to appeal to any particular social group? Does the choice of one vocabulary item over another with the same meaning have any social significance?
3. How formal or informal is the text? What effects do these choices have on the reading of the text?
4. Are any metaphors or euphemisms employed in the text? What are they applied to? Do these seem significant?

5. What words are given capital letters, italicized, underlined, put in inverted commas? Are any of these choices significant? How do they affect the text?

Grammar

1. What grammatical structures are used in the text? Are these affirmative, imperative or interrogative? How do these choices affect the text?
2. What personal pronouns are used? When and how does the writer use them?
3. What modal verbs are used? How do these choices affect the text?
4. In the text as a whole which information is put first? What is thematized? What is given prominence?
5. When are active and passive constructions used? Are there any common themes attached to the use of these different voices? What is usually foregrounded or backgrounded? Are agents animate or inanimate?

Genre/rhetorical structures

1. To what genre does the text belong? Is there mixing of genres (discursive hybridity)?
2. What larger-scale structures does the text exhibit (problem/solution; general/specific)?
3. Are there ways in which one participant controls the contributions (turns) of others (formal/informal situations)?

Some activities:

1. Intertextual tracing. What links similar texts together? What makes them different (genres, discourse practices)?
2. Text ethnographies: Making the familiar strange by rewriting the preferred reading. Reposition the subject. What new subject positions are produced?
3. Discourse as an ethical practice. What discourse practice? Whose discourse practice? Discourse practices are ethical practices. They presuppose a right and wrong way of doing things. What are ethical practices does the text promote?
4. Imagining. Take a participant in a text. Imagine yourself in their position. Be their voice. What would you say? What problems do you experience in doing this?
5. Rewriting the writer. In non-personalized texts where the writer does not self-refer (use 'I') make changes to the text which personalize it. Do the reverse in personalized texts. What kinds of changes is it necessary to make?

Conclusion

At the start of this paper I asked whether transferable skills and the work-oriented discourses which accompany them ought to be the principal foundations upon which the teaching of academic subjects in universities should rest. It ought to be clear from my paper that I am answering this in the negative. In the more than probable absence of governmental will to counter the ways in which discourses of marketization and globalization have come to determine the purposes of a university education, I would argue that it is important that universities do as much they can to fill this critical vacuum. Universities should be taking a leading role in articulating public counter-discourses to prevailing trends in the practice of knowledge formation in university disciplines. The articulating of these are arguably the priority of academics and (less optimistically) senior management, but at the level of the classroom it seems right that critical discourse awareness as a problematizing practice be included as a counterbalance to the apparent givens which are currently dictating the purposes of a university education. The university as a public sphere is under threat of closure by the narrow focus on instrumental skills acquisition. Knowledge formation as an iterative and instrumental practice ought to be matched by knowledge formation as a discursive problematizing practice and a necessary tension maintained between the two. The framework and procedure for a problematizing classroom practice around the text which have formed the basis of this paper are my own contributions to the maintenance of this tension.

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Autobiography

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