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# Language and power

*Norman Fairclough*

*Sala*



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not defined in terms of their social class. In this respect, the Thatcherite 'public' is a mere local variant of other versions. And there are affinities between politics and various other institutional domains in which some mass 'public' is constituted – for instance, the 'consumers' of advertising, where again social class, position in processes of economic production, and so forth, never figure.

## CONCLUSION

I have suggested immediately above that *mr's* discourse is characterized by a relationship of containment between what is ideologically creative and what is ideologically determining, the former developing only within limits set down by the latter. This is a particular illustration of the general claim that I made at the beginning of this chapter about the relationship between individual creativity and social determination. Individual creativity, in discourse and more generally, is never the wilful and extra-social business it is commonly portrayed as being; there are always particular social circumstances which enable it, and constrain it, and which may even (as in this case) partially vitiate it.

## REFERENCES

I have drawn extensively for this chapter on Kress G 1985, which contains a helpful discussion of relationships between the subject, creativity, and social determination in discourse. The work of Foucault, especially Foucault M 1972, is a general backdrop to this chapter. Two interesting approaches to political discourse are those of Faye and Laclau and Mouffe – see Faye J P 1972 and Thompson J B 1984, Ch. 6, on the former and Laclau E, Mouffe C 1985. On Thatcherism see the periodical *Marxism Today*, and the collection of papers taken from it edited by Hall and Jacques (Hall S, Jacques M 1983). On the discourse of Thatcherism see Harding S 1983. Candlin C N, Lucas J L 1986 gives a suggestive analysis of the creative combination of discourse types in the discourse of family planning counselling.

## EIGHT

### *Discourse in social change*

CLS (critical language study) should direct its attention to discursive dimensions of major social tendencies, in order to determine what part discourse has in the inception, development and consolidation of social change. This implies concentrating our attention upon changes in the societal order of discourse during a particular period. In this chapter, I hope to make a modest beginning, by looking at the relationship between certain social tendencies and certain tendencies in orders of discourse in contemporary capitalism. Readers will recall that I briefly discussed this relationship in Chapter 2 (pp. 35–36). Although I shall be referring to Britain, both social tendencies and discursive tendencies seem to have parallels in other similar societies.

### TENDENCIES IN SOCIETY AND DISCOURSE: A SUMMARY

At the centre of Jürgen Habermas's analysis of contemporary capitalism is the claim that it is characterized by a degree of 'colonization' of people's lives by 'systems' that has reached crisis proportions. The 'systems' are money and power – or the economy, and the state and institutions. On the one hand, in the form of *consumerism*, the economy and the commodity market have a massive and unremitting influence upon various aspects of life, most obviously through the medium of television and in advertising. On the other hand, unprecedented state and institutional control (specifically by 'public' institutions) is exercised over individuals through various forms of bureaucracy.

What I want to suggest is that those forms of 'colonization' of people's lives are partly constituted by 'colonizations' in the

societal order of discourse. A societal order of discourse is a particular structuring of constituent institutional orders of discourse, and (as we saw in Chapter 7) given structurings may be de-structured in the course of social struggle. The social tendencies identified by Habermas can be seen as imposed in struggle by the dominant bloc, and as involving the de-structuring of previous societal orders of discourse. Many readers will I am sure be conscious of this process, and specifically of the way in which discourses of consumerism and bureaucracy have 'colonized' other discourse types, or expanded at their expense. Readers will find it useful to have examples of their own in mind as they read through this chapter.

We can think of these restructurings in terms of changes in salient relationships between discourse types within the societal order of discourse. Discourse types of consumerism, most notably the discourse of *advertising*, and discourse types of bureaucracy, such as the discourse of interviewing, have come to be particularly salient or prominent within the order of discourse. This means not only that they have a high profile – that people are aware of their importance – but also that they constitute models which are widely drawn upon. They are both types of what we might call, following Habermas, *strategic* discourse, discourse oriented to instrumental goals, to getting results. Strategic discourse is broadly contrastive with *communicative* discourse, which is oriented to reaching understanding between participants. And their salience is therefore interpretable as a general colonization of communicative discourse by strategic discourse in the societal order of discourse. (Notice that this is a special and unusually narrow sense of 'communicative'.)

These impingements of the economy and the state upon life have resulted in problems and crises of social identity for many people which have been experienced and dealt with individually, rather than through forms of social struggle. A great many people now seek some form of 'help' with their 'personal problems', be it in the casual form of 'problem' columns or articles in magazines, or through various forms of therapy or counselling. The discourses of therapy, counselling, and so forth have correspondingly come to be a further socially salient group within the societal order of discourse. As in the case of consumerist and bureaucratic discourse types, they are a 'colonizing' centre within the order of discourse.

In what follows, I shall discuss these aspects of the societal order of discourse in turn, under the headings:

Advertising and consumerism

Discourse technologies and bureaucracy

The discourse of therapy

And, to avoid any impression that the tendencies which I have identified above are the only ones in contemporary capitalism, which they are not, I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of other, in one sense contrary, tendencies in society and discourse.

## ADVERTISING AND CONSUMERISM

I begin this section with a discussion of 'consumerism', and then go on to look at the British Code of Advertising Practice as a way of identifying the ideological 'work' of advertisements. Three dimensions of the ideological work of advertising discourse are then discussed in turn: the relationship it constructs between the producer/advertiser and the consumer, the way it builds an 'image' for the product, and the way it constructs subject positions for consumers. These dimensions constitute respectively the constraining of relations, contents and subjects, in the terms I have used throughout the book. I then discuss the relationship between verbal and visual elements in advertising, and the increasing salience of visual images. Finally, I come to what I referred to above as the 'colonizing' tendencies of advertising discourse.

### Consumerism

Consumerism is a property of modern capitalism which involves a shift in ideological focus from economic production to economic consumption, and an unprecedented level of impingement by the economy on people's lives. Let us briefly trace the emergence of consumerism before looking at its contemporary impact.

Consumerism grew out of sets of economic, technological and cultural conditions which have mostly developed since the early decades of the twentieth century; although we can identify consumerist tendencies in the earlier part of this period, in the 1920s for instance, consumerism has grown in salience through

the period as these three types of conditions have developed. And, indeed, it has helped to feed its own growth by contributing to these developments, particularly in the cultural sphere.

The economic conditions relate, firstly, to the stage of development of capitalist commodity production. Consumerism is a product of mature capitalism when productive capacity is such that an apparently endless variety of commodities can be produced in apparently unlimited quantities. The second aspect of the economic conditions is the position of the workforce: consumerism is dependent on wage levels which leave a substantial section of the population with a significant residue after meeting subsistence costs, and on a reduction in working hours which creates significant amounts of leisure time.

The technological conditions are, firstly, a modern press, which was already in place at the beginning of the century; but secondly, the development of film, radio, and television. It is with the emergence of television not only as a technology but as a cultural institution which has absorbed a high proportion of the leisure time of a high proportion of the population, that consumerism has really 'taken off'.

The third set of conditions, and the one which is in focus here, is cultural. Capitalism, in the processes of industrialization and urbanization, has fractured traditional cultural ties associated with the extended family, the local or regional or ethnic community, religion, and so forth. In certain circumstances, these traditional ties have been replaced by ties generated by people in their new urban and industrial environments, notably ties of class.

But this has not always happened, and even where such ties have existed, they have in many cases been undermined, by de-industrialization for example. Many readers will be familiar with the ways in which people experience loss or lack of a community: rootlessness, the loss of a sense of reality, uncertainty about one's own social identity, and so forth. For many people, these are perceived as purely *individual* experiences. This cutting off of people from cultural communities which could provide them with senses of identity, values, purposes, is what underlies the growth of, broadly, therapeutic practice and discourse, as I argue later.

Of more immediate concern is the way in which capital, through the mediation of the advertisers, has been able to purport to fill these gaps. Advertising is of course the most visible practice, and discourse, of consumerism, and its most immediately

striking characteristic is its sheer scale. We are all exposed to massive daily injections of advertising. Readers might like to work out how many advertisements they see or hear each day, on TV, radio, in newspapers and magazines, on hoardings, coming through the letter box, in shops and shopping centres, and so forth. It is on the basis of sheer quantity that advertising is able to achieve its most significant qualitative effects: the constitution of cultural communities to replace those which capitalism has destroyed, and which provide people with needs and values. Or *displace* rather than replace: ersatz communities are offered as alternatives to real ones. These communities have been called *consumption communities*. The unprecedented degree of impingement of the economy on people's lives, which I referred to above, consists in this. The next question is, how?

### Ideology and the British Code of Advertising Practice

I shall approach the question of how advertising constructs consumption communities indirectly, by way of a discussion of some extracts from the British Code of Advertising Practice, a voluntary code of practice administered by the Advertising Standards Authority, which applies to printed material and cinema. The Advertising Standards Authority is financed by the advertising industry, though it claims to be independent. A rather similar compulsory code applies to radio and television, administered by the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Here are three short extracts from the abridged version of the Code:

1. All advertisements should be legal, decent, honest and truthful.
2. The Code's rules on truthful presentation place no constraint upon the free expression of opinion, including subjective assessments of the quality or desirability of products, provided always that
  - it is clear what is being expressed is opinion;
  - there is no likelihood of the opinion or the way it is expressed misleading consumers about any matter in respect of which objective assessment, upon a generally accepted basis, is practicable.

3. No advertisement should cause children to believe that they will be inferior to other children, or unpopular with them, if they do not buy a particular product, or have it bought for them.

The main point that I want to make is that the Code is directed at controlling more surface-level features of advertising which relate to its nature as strategic and more particularly persuasive communication, in the sense of being oriented to selling things (see further below), but ignores what I suggest is the societally more important *ideological* work of advertising. For the short answer to the question of how advertising constructs consumption communities is, 'through ideology'

1 above sums up a central part of the Code, and 2 is part of the more detailed specification of 'truthful' advertising. It shows the Code working with a sharp differentiation between matters of fact, which are open to objective assessment, and matters of opinion, which are subjective. In the case of matters of fact, advertisements are required to substantiate claims with proper evidence. The options of 'fact' or 'opinion' are the only ones available in the Code when an advertisement is evaluated in terms of its relationship to truth.

But this is based upon a very superficial view of the relationship of discourse to truth, in the sense that it takes account only of explicit claims and evaluations. What about *implicit assumptions*, where discourse takes truth for granted? Implicit assumptions are a necessary part of all discourse, and, as we saw in Chapter 4, typically of an ideological nature. The Code manages, in ignoring the implicit side of truth in discourse, to overlook ideology. This oversight is, I think, strikingly evident in 3: it is my impression that advertisements do cause children to have the beliefs referred to on a significant scale, not by openly alluding to detrimental peer-group consequences for the child who fails to buy a particular toy (let us say), but implicitly, by ideology.

In the sections below, I shall spell out in some detail how advertisements work ideologically. Let me summarize what I shall be saying:

1. *Building relations*. Advertising discourse embodies an ideological representation of the relationship between the producer/advertiser of the product being advertised and the audience, which facilitates the main ideological 'work'.

2. *Building images*. Advertisements get their audiences to draw upon ideological elements in their MR in order to establish an 'image' for the product being advertised.
3. *Building the consumer*. Advertisements, using the 'images' which audiences 'help' them to generate for products as vehicles, construct subject positions for 'consumers' as members of consumption communities; this, as I suggested earlier, is the major ideological work of advertising.

### An example

We shall be working with the example shown in Text 8.1 throughout the rest of the discussion of advertising.

### Building relations

The Miele advertisement, like advertisements in general, is 'public' discourse in the sense that it has a mass and indeterminable audience. It also has a complex and indeterminable (from the point of view of the audience) producer, made up in part of the team who produce the magazine it is taken from (*Radio Times*), in part of the advertising agency team which designed it, and in part of the manufacturer of the washing machine who is trying to sell it. And it is 'one-way' discourse in the sense that the producer and interpreter roles do not alternate – the advertiser is the producer, and the audience are interpreters. Advertisements, of course, share these properties with the discourse of the mass media in general.

Both the mass and indeterminate nature of the audience, and the complex and indeterminate nature of the producer, present the advertiser with a challenge. For it will be individual members of the audience who will read the advertisement and (perhaps!) buy the product, and so somehow the advertiser needs to direct an appeal, presupposing a determinate appealer, to individual audience members. Both producer and audience need to be *personalized*, but because of the actual conditions of production and interpretation of advertising discourse, this has to be *synthetic personalization* – recall the introduction of this term in Chapter 3 (p. 60).



Text 8.1 Source: Miele Company Ltd

Look, with attention to textual features, at how the synthetic personalization of the audience member and the producer are achieved in this advertisement.

In part, the synthetic personalization of the audience member is a

matter of the position which is constructed for the consumer, which is discussed below. But it is also in part a matter of the personalized relationship between producer and consumer, as evidenced in textual features which are widespread in advertising discourse – direct address of audience members with *you*, and imperative sentences (e.g. *think of it as a load off your mind*).

The synthetic personalization of the producer is partly achieved through the fact that individual audience members *are* directly addressed: that implies an individual addresser. The addresser is not specifically identified; this text differs from others which have the ‘corporate’ *we* to identify the addresser as spokesperson for the company which produces the commodity. However, the addresser is individualized through the expressive values of textual elements she (purportedly!) selects. Notice for instance the structure of the sentences in the body of the text (i.e. excluding headings): the familiar advertising elements (appeal to readers, account of the commodity and its benefits, invitation to readers to follow up the advertisement) including a lot of claims about the machine are concisely packed into mainly short, snappy sentences. It is the syntax of concise, no-nonsense, to-the-point efficiency, and the constructed addresser is individualized in terms of these properties. So, as I argue below, are both the machine and the consumer: the addresser speaks to the audience member in her own voice, about a commodity which chimes with both.

### Building images

Advertisements get their audiences to draw upon ideological elements in their MR in order to establish an ‘image’ for the product being advertised. How does this work in the case of the Miele advertisement?

It works I think through cues in the advertising text, both verbal and visual, evoking a frame for a ‘modern’ lifestyle, roughly that associated with younger and more dynamic fractions of the middle class, which is then used to ‘interpret’ the product as part of this lifestyle. The visual cues are the elegant, unfussy and spotless decor of the room, which bespeaks an efficient and sophisticated household, and the defocused garden scene on the right, with (one assumes) the woman and man of the household enjoying the fruits of their efficiency. The verbal cues are the many expressions for the priorities of the ‘modern’ lifestyle – ease, efficiency, economy, beauty: *a load off your mind, easy to use, economical, efficient, reliable, durable*, and so forth.

The product image is produced by association, so to speak: by being

associated with the elegant and efficient 'modern' lifestyle, the washing machine becomes a part of it. Its properties as a physical object, as a piece of engineering, are enhanced in the process of image-building, in that it comes to have cultural properties in addition to its physical properties. This process of enhancement is crucial for modern commodities, especially when several products with more or less the same material properties are in competition for a particular market.

But in what sense is this an ideological process? It is ideological because the frame it evokes, for what I have referred to as a 'modern' lifestyle, is an ideological construct which is both used as a vehicle for the generation of the product image, and produced and reproduced in its own right in the process. The frame packages together social subjects in particular sorts of relationship, activities, settings, values, and so on, in a powerful prescription for how one should live, or at least what one should acknowledge to be the best way to live, in the modern world, together with the myth that this lifestyle is open to everyone. It is ideological because the keynote values of this lifestyle overlap with the preoccupations of contemporary capitalism – with maximal *efficiency* as a target not only in economic activities (where it has long been familiar) but in all the details of a person's 'private' (but no longer so private!) life. By leading people to acknowledge and pursue this lifestyle (see below), advertising is helping to legitimize contemporary capitalism.

### Building the consumer

I said above that the major ideological work of advertising was constructing subject positions for consumers as members of consumption communities, and that this work used the images which members of the audience generate for products as vehicles. Let us now see how this works for the Miele advertisement.

Characterize the subject position that is set up in the Miele advertisement for the reader. What sort of community would the ideal occupier of this subject position belong to? How does the reader's image of the product contribute to positioning the reader as a consumer subject?

The answer to this question follows closely upon the answer to the last one. The subject position set up for the reader is defined precisely in

terms of acceptance as naturalized common sense of the ideological frame which one needs to interpret the advertisement and assign an image to the product. The ideal occupier of this subject position belongs to a community whose needs and values and tastes are those embedded in this frame. It is a community which is preoccupied with the easification of life at the least possible cost. That is, it is a community of *consumers*, for these preoccupations are ascribed generally to consumers. It is a community which requires its easified environment to have practical and aesthetic properties such as those represented here – functionality, ease of maintenance, unfussy elegance – and which has a particular idea of leisure, alluded to in the garden scene. That is, it is a community with very particular tastes.

But in what sense can one talk of advertisements *building* the consumer, or the consumption community? Advertising has made people into consumers, i.e. has brought about a change in the way people are, in the sense that it has provided the most coherent and persistent models for consumer needs, values, tastes and behaviour. It has done this by addressing people as if they were all commonsensically already fully fledged consumers. The general point is that if people are obliged day-in day-out to occupy the subject position of consumer, there is a good chance that they will become consumers. What may begin as a sort of game, a suspicious experimentation for audience members, is likely through the sheer weight of habit to end up being for real.

What applies to consumers applies also to specific consumption communities. Advertising can show people lifestyles (and patterns of spending) which they might not otherwise meet, but also invite them to 'join', and to come to see their chosen consumption community (for it is claimed to be merely a matter of choice), with its rapid transformations, as one of their primary memberships. In the process, other memberships are likely to be diminished; the great loser has arguably been communities of production – the social classes, and particular fractions and sections of social classes (such as craft communities, or trade unions).

### Verbal and visual elements in advertising

The combination of verbal and visual elements to constitute texts



is becoming increasingly important in our society, and advertising is at the forefront of it. Television as a medium produces only such composite texts, but advertisements in printed materials also give ever greater emphasis to them. And the visual element is progressively becoming the more important in advertising. The salience of the image has been taken to be one of the main characteristics of contemporary 'postmodern' culture.

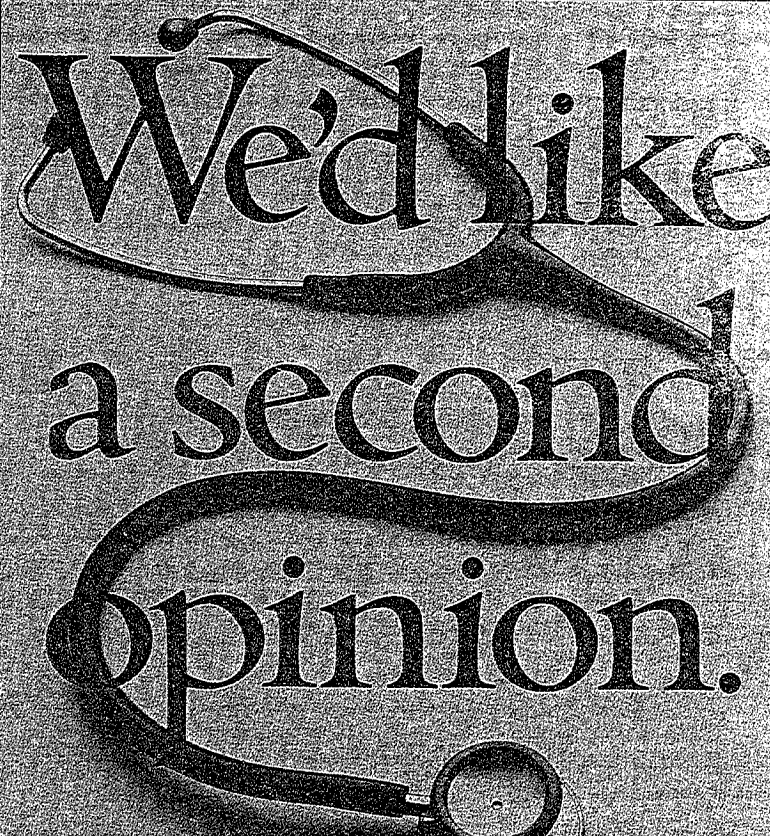
This tendency accords with what I have been saying about the ideological processes of advertising. On the one hand, visual images underline the reliance of the image-building process upon the audience: where visual images are juxtaposed the interpreter *has to* make the connection, whereas in language connections can be made for the interpreter, though as we have seen they are often not. On the other hand, the building of 'consumption communities' is more easily achieved through primarily visual means, because the visual medium lends itself more easily to the production of 'simulacra' in Plato's sense: identical copies for which no original has ever existed. To put the point more plainly, visual images allow advertising to more easily create worlds which consumers may be led to inhabit, because of the strength of the ideology expressed in the saying that 'the camera doesn't lie'

Look at the Miele advertisement in the light of these comments. How do the visual and verbal elements interact in the building of an image and of a consumer and consumption community?

### Colonizing tendencies in advertising discourse

There is an immediate sense in which we can conceive of advertising as a colonizer: the dramatic increase in the volume of advertising in the past three decades, in the extent to which people are exposed to advertising on a daily basis, and in the 'penetration' of advertising into non-economic aspects of life, notably its penetration into the home through television. The family and family life have been penetrated by the economy and by the dominant class forces within the economy, and these colonizers have had some effect in restructuring family life as well as other aspects of non-economic life.

But we can also trace more concrete colonizing trends whereby other discourse types are influenced by advertising discourse. Text



**We'd like  
a second  
opinion.**

As caring professionals, your family doctor, dentist, pharmacist, optician, district nurse, health visitor and midwife are concerned to make the service they provide even better.

Collectively, the services they offer are known as Primary Health Care. And each and every day over a million of us use them.

We spend over £5,000 million a year on these services.

Yet they have never been comprehensively reviewed in all their forty year history. Until now. The Government has put forward a discussion paper called 'Primary Health Care' to act as an agenda for public debate.

Basically, its objective is to raise standards and make services more responsive to the changing needs of the people who pay for them.

Yes.

To find out exactly what's being proposed, fill in the coupon for a leaflet or write to us. It's your Health Service and we need your views on how to make it even better.

To: Primary Health Care, Curzon House, 20-24 Lansdowne Road, London, NW6 6RD.

Please send me the leaflet 'Primary Health Care'

Name

Address

**Primary Health Care**

Text 8.2 Source: Department of Health and Social Security

8.2 is an example from the discourse of public information - official communications from public authorities to 'the public'. This text clearly uses a familiar advertising format, yet there is no obvious product being advertised, and on the face of it this looks like simply the giving of information and soliciting of opinion -

not advertising at all. However, in a sense there is a 'product' whose image readers are called upon to build: the source of information and solicitor of opinion, which is (if one reads the small print in the bottom right-hand corner) the Department of Health and Social Security (the Health Service).

What advertising features does this text have, in respect of building relations, a 'product' image, and a subject position for the 'consumer' ('the public')?

The text has synthetic personalization of audience members (*you*, imperatives, *Please send me the leaflet*), and the producer is personalized with exclusive 'corporate' *we* – in the last sentence (*It's your Health Service and we need your views*) – though inclusive *we* (*a million of us use them*) is also used. An image is built for the Health Service through cues which evoke in the reader a frame for 'the doctor' in the picture which accompanies the text: it consists of a picture of a stethoscope with a snatch of 'doctor talk' printed over it (*We'd like a second opinion*). From this frame, values of professionalism, a high sense of responsibility, and so forth, which are ideological attributes of doctors, are transferred to the Health Service. The subject position set up for the reader is that of a member of a 'public' that is concerned and informed, that will want to know what is proposed, and that will be able to contribute a worth-while 'second opinion'. The image of the Health Service is further enhanced through the postulation of such a public as a public authority which respects 'the public'.

We can connect back at this point to the concern in Chapter 7 with the de-structuring and restructuring of orders of discourse. This text can be analysed as a mixture of features which partly draw upon an advertising discourse type, and partly draw upon a traditional discourse type of public information. This mixture can be seen as indicating a rearticulation of the order of discourse of health administration (and public administration more generally) as an effect of the colonization of that order of discourse by advertising. It also brings together what I identified at the beginning of the chapter as two main colonizing discourse types, showing an interpenetration of consumerism and bureaucracy, and the latter feeding off the former. See p. 221 below for a further example.

In the light of this example, it is possible to see how the discourse types of politics, and specifically the discourse of Thatcherism which we were looking at in Chapter 7, have come

to be colonized and shaped by advertising. Margaret Thatcher, as we saw, builds a relationship with 'the public' based in part upon synthetic personalization, provides carefully managed cues for her audience to construct an image for a woman political leader, and constructs 'the public' as a community of political consumption, so to speak, which real people are induced to join. As in the case of the Health Service advertisement, the producer and the commodity coincide: Mrs Thatcher is trying to sell herself. Party politics, in becoming increasingly conducted through one-way public discourse in the media, with advertising as its model, is increasingly retreating from two-way, face-to-face discourse. Door-to-door canvassing, political debate and argument, and political meetings, are decreasingly significant elements of the discourse of politics. Under the impact of the generalization of the economic relationship of consumption, party politics is losing its base in people's lives. People's involvement in politics is less and less as citizens, and more and more as consumers; and their bases of participation are less and less the real communities they belong to, and more and more the political equivalents of consumption communities, which political leaders construct for them. Of course, the process is reversible, and there are counterveiling tendencies – see the section *Other tendencies* below.

#### DISCOURSE TECHNOLOGIES AND BUREAUCRACY

In this section, I develop the suggestion made at the beginning of this chapter that state control through bureaucracy has had major effects on orders of discourse. I discuss first of all the social tendency towards increased control over people through various forms of bureaucracy, and then turn to an examination of what I shall call *discourse technologies* – types of discourse which involve the more or less self-conscious application of social scientific knowledge for purposes of bureaucratic control. The argument will be that the effect of bureaucracy on orders of discourse is via the 'colonizing' spread of discourse technologies. I then give an example of the application of social scientific research to discourse technologies, so-called *social skills training*, and refer to one

Notice the producer's question in turn (6). What is the counsellor telling the client, or rather presupposing, in (4)? And is the presupposition of a therapeutic nature, or a disciplinary nature associated with work, or both?

What is presupposed here is the whole of *by handling . . . grow and mature as a person*. The presupposition actually merges the specific case ('you individually will grow as a person because of this experience'), which is referred to in the subordinate clause, and the universal common-sense assumption which makes sense of the specific case ('someone who handles emotional stress, etc., grows and matures as a person'), which the main clause (*you actually grow and mature as a person*) partly articulates. The equation of success in dealing with emotional crises and personal growth and maturation is part of the common sense of counselling. What is interesting here is that this proposition is flexible enough to include the stress and hassle arising from work. Stress and hassle, and the associated families of illnesses, are increasingly familiar aspects of people's working lives as those still in employment are subjected to ever greater pressure to increase their productivity. They are, of course, in no sense necessary (still less desirable) accompaniments of work. If employment counselling is attributing to these a positive role in 'personal growth', it would seem to be helping to legitimize them.

## OTHER TENDENCIES

The tendencies in society and in discourse which I have discussed in this chapter by no means account for everything that is going on socially and discursively in contemporary capitalism. To underline this, let me conclude the chapter by referring briefly to tendencies which are in a sense contrary to those I have discussed, in that they are indicative of increased fragmentation rather than increased integration.

I have referred to one way in which people have reacted to the increasing impingement of the economy and the state upon their lives: through seeking individual solutions to their disorientation, loss of identity, and so forth, in the various forms of therapy, counselling, and 'helping' services. But people have also, to varying degrees, reacted collectively, through forms of struggle. It is a well-known feature of the contemporary political situation that there is a plethora of organizations and movements which

traditional channels of political action, via the political parties, the trades unions, the churches, etc., have been unable to contain (though there is a view that alliance with these more traditional channels, and with each other, is the only route to pushing back the system). The very diversity of these *new social movements*, as I shall call them, reflects the scale of the system's impingement upon life, and the many aspects of life that it has put under pressure.

Any listing of the new social movements reflects their bewildering variety, for the movements are often quite incomparable in such matters as the size and nature of their social base, the breadth of the issue(s) they are concerned with, the (in)directness of their relationship to impingements by the system, and so on. A list might include: the women's movement, ecological and antinuclear groups, national movements, alternative lifestyle groups, the black movement and ethnic groups, the gay liberation movement, the peace movement, animal liberation groups, and so on.

Just as the integrating tendencies discussed earlier are manifested in colonizing integrations in the societal order of discourse, so these tendencies to fragmentation are manifested in a proliferation of types of discourse, and particularly in a fragmentation of oppositional political discourse. The newspaper extract in Text 8.7, for example, represents a feminist discourse; it is the opening of an article in a feminist newspaper.

Focus upon the vocabulary of this text, and in particular on how the feminist discourse type upon which it draws words the rapes and forms of protest action against them, and responses to this action.

The wording of the rapes shows a vocabulary feature characteristic of the text as a whole: compound expressions which are vocabulary items in feminist wordings: *male violence*, *crimes against women* and *rape survivors*. Notice that such vocabulary items belong to a distinctively feminist classification of the persons and events of the feminist domain of political action: *male violence* is not just something which happens, but a key phenomenon (and target) of the domain. Notice also that there is a wording for a category of person that goes unworded in other discourse types, the *rape survivor* (*rape victim* is not equivalent – it can refer to someone who does *not* survive a rape); the choice of wording is politically significant, not only suggesting that rapists sometimes kill their victims, but also focusing upon rape as a disaster

## Misogynist hysteria unleashed over Molesworth rapes

Three women were raped at Molesworth peace camp over the past 12 months, as reported in *Outwrite No. 50*. The four known rapists have been and still remain, active in peace circles. Meanwhile, sections of the peace movement agonies, with little apparent success, over how to effectively deal with male violence and feminist anger. In addition, the demand made by the rape survivors and their supporters that Molesworth peace camp be closed altogether, in recognition of the crimes against women committed there, crimes which have gone ignored, trivialised and even disbelieved, remains unmet.

Predictably, the response of some male pacifists exposes rampant misogyny. An examination of some of the letters published in recent issues of *Peace News* speak for themselves. Opinions range the spectrum of typical patriarchal reaction – disbelief at the occurrence of the rapes; likening the efforts of the women to close the peace camp to those of Tory MPs and bailiffs; condemnations of the 'violence' of the women for taking direct action at Molesworth in protest; accusations that the women are dividing the peace movement, and so on.

Almost all objectors withdraw support from *Peace News* for what they describe as its biased, ignorant and offensive stance on the issue. The stance in question is *PN's* support for the women demanding the closure of the camp. However, *PN's* non-editorial stand on this would seem to be contradicted by their decision to publish offensive, anti-woman statements in their letters pages. *PN* comments, that they see their role as 'seeking to change these views (misinformed and misogynist views on rape) by allowing open debate whilst making our own positions clear in editorial statements.' They go on to claim that suppression of such views would alienate rather than bring about changes, a position that is at once questionable and potentially dangerous. The protesting women are angry, declaring that *PN* has violated its own anti-sexist policy.

Still, it is clear that these virulent attacks on the women, disguised as moral outrage, reveal fear at women's anger. The causes

of the anger, i.e. the rapes of the women by individual men, seem to have been forgotten and buried as accusing fingers point at the women who, in their anger, destroyed some property at the camp and spray painted bunkers and caravans. After all, violence against property must be punished, while violence against women, the commonest crime of all, continues to go unnoticed.

What is being displayed is the paucity of understanding of issues surrounding rape and male violence against women and women's anger. Can non-violent strategies work effectively against individual acts of male violence against women? The failure of the peace movement to work out effective strategies, strategies that permit expression of anger rather than containment of it, is emerging.

Perhaps the most offensive letter published in *Peace News* 17th October, is the drive delivered by Keith Olett who protests that 'Molesworth is becoming the scapegoat for all rapes against all wimmin throughout time', and goes on to whine about the women who want to close the camp and who 'are trying to enforce that with violence' (our italics). 'Instead of diminishing, the violence and anger of the women is growing. It seems that venting their rage and grief, rather than helping them and healing them, is damaging these angry wimmin even more. Instead of dispersing in destruction, they are drawing strength from that destruction, a dreadful, fearful strength... are the angry wimmin acknowledging the vigiliantes,

the lynch mobs, the bailiffs they are becoming?' Fear

regus, is the man trembling? This self-opinionated bigot then suggests that both peace and feminist movements take a long very hard look at what they are doing, and also, that male violence must be dealt with. But how? No strategies are offered. Must we conclude that communally sipping camomile tea by the campfire is the true expression of harmonious fraternal relations?

The rape survivors, and supporters, themselves are undeterred, and continue their campaign, addressing meetings, forcing the issue and getting an inevitably mixed response of abuse (they have been compared to the NP!) and support. CND groups are being asked to stop supporting Molesworth peace camp, which continues to function as a mixed camp, and a proposal is to be put to CND National conference in mid-November asking that groups withdraw support. CND office has expressed its deep concern and has claimed that since it doesn't set up peace camps, it is not empowered to close them, but 'condemns unequivocally all violence'. The outcome remains to be seen. That the issue is now being debated and is even on the agenda of the CND National conference is a victory in itself. But only partial, considering the overwhelming reaction that the women had to battle with, and the fact that the rapists remain free.

Shailla

Contact the rape survivors and supporters at: Kati, c/o Box MW, 3 Fleethills Terrace, Cambridge

and an outrage – one 'survives' earthquakes and shipwrecks, but also bomb attacks and attempted murder.

Turning to the protest action, again there are a number of compounds: *women's anger*, *angry women*, *feminist anger* and *direct action*. The comments above about *male violence* apply also to *women's anger* and variants of that expression: this is a wording of a politically significant, and mobilizing, category in feminist politics, not simply a way of referring to the fact that some women happen to be angry. Feminists have probably taken *direct action* from the peace movement.

The wording of responses to the women's action draws upon the most obvious feminist political vocabulary – *misogyny*, *misogynist*, *patriarchal*, *anti-woman*. A final point to notice is the extent to which key expressions, such as *male violence* and *women's anger*, are repeated through the text. They include the word *women* itself. There are a number of points in the text where one might expect *women* to be 'pronominalized' (or replaced with a pronoun), or omitted, yet it isn't. The last sentence of paragraph 2 is an example – *their 'violence', they are dividing* could substitute for *the 'violence' of women, the women are dividing*.

## CONCLUSION

In a society as complex as ours, tendencies in the societal order of discourse will not be a simple matter of progression in one direction, but contradictory and difficult to sum up. This chapter has offered only broad and preliminary answers to the neglected question of what characterizes the contemporary order of discourse and the direction of its movement, but I hope that readers will at least take from it a sense of the importance of this question within the more general social exploration of the present.

## REFERENCES

For tendencies in contemporary capitalism, new social movements, *strategic* versus *communicative* discourse, I have drawn upon Habermas J 1984. Mey J 1985 is focused around the question, 'what kind of language do we use in a modern, industrialized economy?'. I have found both Leiss W *et al.* 1986 and Williamson J 1978 useful on consumerism and advertising. My