

## Notes on a More Encompassing Theory of the Other in Critical Discourse Analysis

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In this paper I claim that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as a school of thought aimed at identifying the discursive mechanisms reproducing material and physical power dynamics between people, would benefit from incorporating alternative schools of thought also concerned with the role of language in sustaining power dynamics between people. French feminism is one key example: its thinkers explore the linguistic construction of gender and othering and, as such, offer an opportunity to theoretically underpin and frame CDA's focus on othering in discourse. To demonstrate this, I provide a close reading of Ruth Wodak's recent text *The Politics of Fear* (2015), which analyses the discursive mechanisms of right wing populist parties, and apply Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to that reading. CDA as exemplified by Wodak's text has a specific understanding of othering which, with the help of Kristeva, I name 'negative othering'. Alternative approaches to 'positive othering' can also be found in thinkers associated with French feminism such as Luce Irigaray and with Discourse Theory such as Chantal Mouffe. This latter positive approach to othering theoretically substantiates and frames the critical and emancipatory dimensions of CDA insofar as it aims to contest rather than reproduce material power dynamics between people.

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of my paper is to exemplify the potential theoretical insights which can benefit CDA were it to incorporate alternative schools of thought, such as French feminism, into its analysis. To do so, I critically engage with a recent application of CDA in Ruth Wodak's *The Politics of Fear* (2015), demonstrating that Wodak's analysis of right wing populist discourse would be further theoretically substantiated were she to incorporate Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.<sup>1</sup> A close reading of Wodak's analysis of right wing populist discourse demonstrates the disjointed nature of her analysis, potentiated by a lack of theoretical underpinning which the likes of Kristeva can provide. Wodak's analysis provides empirical examples of the discursive construction of the 'Volk' and the 'Other', us and them, failing to theoretically explain the link between them. In addition, Wodak alludes to the socio-economic and political conditions which emerged after the 2007-2008 financial crash and the resulting social instability, but fails to link that instability with the rise of the specific type of othering characteristic of right wing populist discourse.

Kristeva's theory of abjection theoretically explains the relationship between the 'Volk' and the 'Other' within the context of existential instability (to which Wodak is alluding, given her focus on the 2007-2008 financial crash): it situates the negative and derogatory presentation of the other as a means of creating and stabilising subjectivity at the collective and individual

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<sup>1</sup> By no means does Kristeva exhaust the list of thinkers belonging to alternative linguistic schools of thought who can benefit Wodak's analysis (or CDA in general) but is a clear example of the theoretical insights which can emerge from appealing to such thinkers.

level in light of socio-economic and political crises which threaten that subjectivity. This is ‘negative othering’ which epitomises Wodak’s, and by extension CDA’s, typical portrayal of othering. In this paper I also point, albeit more briefly, to another French feminist Luce Irigaray, and to Chantal Mouffe (belonging to Discourse Theory) who both provide an alternative type of othering. Here the Other is not treated as an Other solely in the service of the subject, but treated as a subject in their own right. This ‘positive othering’ avoids the potentially dominating relationship between self and Other, the latter of which is always a threat, given that for the self to exist, it must exist in relation to what it is not, an Other. This is in keeping with the emancipatory and critical dimensions to CDA.

To make the argument above, my paper will adopt the following structure. Firstly, I introduce CDA and its primary tenets before providing a close reading of a recent CDA text in Wodak’s *The Politics of Fear* (2015). In this first section I emphasise her particular approach to CDA, as well as her empirical findings and the disjointed nature of those findings. Secondly, I introduce Kristeva’s theory of abjection, distinguishing abjection from its psychoanalytical roots and emphasise its sociological characteristics. In this second section I also apply Kristeva’s theory of abjection to Wodak’s empirical findings concerning the ‘Volk’, the ‘Other’ and the socio-economic and political conditions after the 2007-2008 financial crash. Such an application situates the type of othering identified as ‘negative’ and I explain precisely what this entails. Moving then finally to the third section of this essay, I return to CDA in general and discuss, albeit briefly, how Irigaray and Mouffe provide an alternative conception of othering which is inherently more positive and grounded on parity between the subject and the Other.

## 2. CDA, Wodak and the *Politics of Fear*

To begin this brief introduction of CDA, I want to emphasise that CDA is concerned with the degree to which discourse – that is to say, the sphere in which meaning is produced, contested and articulated – reproduces, or to a lesser extent subverts, physical and material power dynamics (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 449). CDA partly originates from Foucault’s focus on discourse and applies the sphere of meaning production, contestation and articulation to a specific object of talk and text. This results in a rigorous methodology orientated around the examination of specific linguistic features and strategies from an otherwise abstract theory (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000: 448). In addition, it is clear that throughout CDA there is a distinction between discourse and the physical material world that discourse simultaneously conditions and is conditioned by. This is the basis of Fairclough’s, one of the founders of CDA along with Wodak and others, notion of the dialectic (Fairclough, 2016: 60). The dialectic for Fairclough is based around the idea that discourse is both conditioned by the material world, but also acts back and affects that material world, assuming all the while a clear distinction between discourse and the material. This is in clear contradistinction to Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory which denies any meaningful distinction between the physical and the discursive (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2008: 18-21).<sup>2</sup>

A point I wish to emphasise at this early stage is the absence of any thorough engagement with other schools of thought equally interested in theoretically outlining the linguistic dimensions of power and explaining how language can affect material relations between people. French feminism, with its focus on the linguistic construction of gender (Poovey, 1988) is an obvious, but by no means the only example of an alternative school of thought CDA may wish to appeal to in order to theoretically substantiate the link between its empirical analyses and the material power relations it is commenting on. Indeed, a brief examination of key texts

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<sup>2</sup> The degree to which CDA is right or not in insisting on a distinction between discourse and the material is not important for my purposes here. This paper is not a critical evaluation of the primary tenets of CDA but an attempt to further theoretically substantiate those tenets, in particular the analysis focused on othering.

within CDA clearly demonstrates the failure of this approach to incorporate other schools of thought which are concerned with power dynamics, discourse and subjectivity (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007; Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough, 2016; Lazar, 2005; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Richardson, 2009; and Wodak & Meyer, 2013). With this in mind I can now move on to provide a close reading of Wodak's text.

Wodak (along with Norman Fairclough) stands as a key figure in CDA, central to its formation and development since its conception. Part of her contribution to CDA has been the development of the discourse-historical approach (DHA). DHA is fundamentally a synchronic analysis of the content and form of discourse and the relation between the two specific to any historical period in question (Wodak, 2015: 50-51). In other words, the content of a specific discourse, for example in a political speech, is firstly contingent on the thematic ensemble on offer at that point and is secondly contingent on the material forms (genres) in which that discourse is articulated (television, social media, a poster). To take her own example, Wodak suggests that given the development of social media, politicians attempt to present themselves simultaneously as celebrities who are (somewhat paradoxically) one of us, rather than the elite. This is a specific discourse of what it means to be a politician drawing on discourses of the ordinary person and celebrity culture. Additionally, this is only facilitated by modern media, in particular the effective use of Facebook which blurs the lines between the politician, the celebrity and the ordinary person (Wodak, 2015: 136-137).

Using DHA, Wodak identifies three central features of contemporary right wing populist discourse. These are: a) the establishment of the Volk; b) the establishment of the Other; and c) the socio-economic and political context within which right wing populist discourse emerges. DHA thus allows us to identify the intertextual and interdiscursive characteristics which have contributed to the process of Volk-making and othering. My claim is that she fails to establish in detail the links between the two.

To begin with Volk-making, a central argument of *The Politics of Fear* is that right wing populist discourse attempts to create a homogenous people or collective (Wodak, 2015: 21). Right wing populist discourse attempts to establish a particular notion of the 'Volk' (the people) according to arbitrary lines, for example, in the case of the Dutch Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders, according to the population's Judeo-Christian heritage (Wodak, 2015: 57), or a population's shared culture, territory, historical experience (Wodak, 2015: 77). A metaphor, Wodak maintains, is created in which the population in question is described in terms of the body politic (Wodak, 2015: 77). *The Politics of Fear* thus provides empirical data from various genres utilised by right wing populist parties (social media, television, posters) to exemplify this discursive creation of a body politic. This body politic is ultimately a consolidated homogenous space revolving around what Laclau and Mouffe would describe as 'nodal points' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 100-199), central organising (yet ultimately arbitrary) signifiers designating what is it to belong to the 'Volk'.

Keeping in mind that the discourse in question is that articulated by *right wing* populism, Wodak explains that as such, the discursive attempts to create a homogenous body politic are characterised by an exclusionary as opposed to inclusionary discourse typical of left wing populism (Wodak, 2015: 8).<sup>3</sup> Additionally inherent in the homogenized portrayal of the populace is the denial of difference within that populace (Wodak, 2015: 9). Any antagonism, such as class, which threatens to displace the homogeneity of the Volk for heterogeneity is denied and salience is given to those arbitrary signifiers we have in common, such as skin colour, language or shared territory. This is then the first central feature of right wing populist discourse, namely the creation of a homogenous Volk organised by arbitrary signifiers with the aim of denying difference inherent to that populace. Any threat to the Volk is located outside rather than within, thus necessitating an excluded Other which constitutes the second central feature of right wing populist discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> I will not be able to engage in any detail the specific characteristics constituting left wing populism, but it is important to appreciate *prima facie* the distinction between the two.

In introducing othering, Wodak explains that where homogeneity and sameness are stressed with the Volk, differences are emphasised at the level of Others who do not fit into the Volk (Wodak, 2015: 54). In keeping with the body politic as this unified homogenous populace, the Other is situated outside the body and by extension presented as a threat to that homogeneity. Where the Volk is constructed by arbitrary signifiers, so too is the Other, but here right wing populism presents the Other as an external threat. Wodak's *Politics of Fear* thus conducts a multimodal analysis of the presentation of the Other as a threatening externality: for example, she examines speeches by right wing populist leaders which describe Muslim refugees in terms of a 'flood' (Wodak, 2015: 57), texts which present Jews as insidious and subversive collaborators (Wodak, 2015: 65), or posters which articulate a discourse of the Other as a parasitic mosquito which will feed off the body politic (Wodak, 2015: 75). Wodak's analysis explores the many manifestations in which a discourse of the Other is constructed and articulated parallel to the creation of the Volk.

The Other's many manifestations are contingent on the country in which the right wing populist party exists and are contingent on the historical experiences of that country (Wodak 2015: 185). The point is, however, that Wodak's analysis of the Other is never intertwined with her analysis of the discursive construction of the Volk. Wodak fails to explicitly link these two separate examinations or suggest that there is an instrumental relation between the creation of a collective (or individual) subjectivity in the form of the Volk and the creation of an Other whose positioning stabilises or consolidates that subjectivity. This problem of the disjointed nature of her analysis becomes clearer when we turn to her final observation, namely the socio-economic and political context of the 2007-2008 crash, after which right wing populist discourse emerges with fervour.

Wodak claims that the financial crisis brought to bear underlying economic antagonisms, causing high inequality and unemployment (Wodak, 2015: 6-7). As a result, conflicts and struggles begin to emerge between people who otherwise ought to be part of a homogenous group, thus challenging that homogeneity. These antagonisms challenged the social stability of the Volk *from within*. The emerging right wing populist discourses in different countries which simultaneously emphasise a collective subjectivity, whilst juxtaposing that subjectivity with an Other, are clearly potentiated by the 2007-2008 financial crisis and yet, for Wodak, this crisis occupies a small part of her analysis. Wodak presents the crisis as a central precondition for the emergence and electoral efficacy of these discursive tools but fails to explain in detail what is precisely going on. In light of the lack of theoretical underpinnings, Wodak's text treats these as three separate analyses despite her objective being to provide a uniform engagement and explication of right wing populist discourse. It is in this context that I now turn to Kristeva, whose theory of abjection theoretically underpins the type of othering and its relationship to subjectivity outlined above, before turning to Irigaray and Mouffe who offer an alternative strategy to othering which contests the treatment of the Other in right wing populist discourse.

### 3. Kristeva and Abjection

Julia Kristeva introduces abjection in *The Powers of Horror* (1982), originally published in French. *The Powers of Horror* introduces abjection in the context of a psychoanalytic examination of subject formation. Abjection, Kristeva writes, 'has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*' (Kristeva, 1982: 1, italics in original). That is to say, abjection is the construction of an object opposed to the subject but one which is repulsive to and repulsed by the subject. She introduces abjection initially in the examples of food and waste which incites responses such as abhorrence and disgust (Kristeva, 1982: 2-3). Turning from food and waste, abjection is immediately situated in the context of the destabilisation of the subject, when the borders distinguishing the 'I' become confused, writing that; '[i]t is not

lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva, 1982: 4).

The abjected object is an Other who is constructed as a mechanism stabilising the borders constitutive of subjectivity, but as such it is a constant reminder of the instability of subjectivity and thus accompanied simultaneously by repulsion and fascination (McAfee, 2004: 47). Returning to the psychoanalytic context within which she is writing, Kristeva claims that the first abjected object is the mother (Oliver, 1993: 60). Prior to Freud's Oedipus Complex, and prior to Lacan's Mirror Stage, Kristeva claims the infant gains a sense of self as distinct from the world by separating itself from its mother (Kristeva, 1982: 13). The mother for the first portion of the child's life constitutes the world; the mother provides for the child's needs and, to that end, the child is unable to distinguish itself from the world, as the mother automatically satisfies its needs. A sense of self is thus contingent on distinguishing oneself from one's mother. The child therefore gains a sense of self by pushing the mother away, by creating a distance between itself and its first object, the mother.

There are two points we need to recognise here, the first is that abjection is constituted by its derogatory treatment of the Other, the second is that abjection occurs in the context the subject's destabilisation. Additionally, although Kristeva initially treats abjection as a psychoanalytic concept, it clearly has wider sociological connotations. This is evident in her later exploration of the construction of the abjected Other in literature. For Kristeva, literature is a practice in which can articulate the abjected Other in order to consolidate the troubled subjectivity of the author (Harrington, 1998: 141; McAfee, 2004: 50). A particular case in point is Louis-Ferdinand Destouches who wrote under the pseudonym Céline. Kristeva's analysis of Céline is clear. The context within which Céline's writings appear are those of a destabilisation of Céline's subjectivity (Kristeva, 1982: 135), itself precipitated by socio-economic and political instability in the wake of the Wall Street Crash and the trials and tribulations that followed. Céline's response to this is the creation of an abject Other pejoratively portrayed in form of the Jew. Céline's adherence to Nazism manifest in the repulsion of the Other (Jew) is an attempt to consolidate his own subjectivity by situating himself firmly opposite to that Other (Kristeva, 1982: 136). In other words Céline is what the Jew is not.

The example of Céline not only exemplifies the specifically pejorative and degrading treatment of the Other in the context of destabilisation of subjectivity. It also emphasises that Kristeva's theory of abjection is not limited to a psychoanalytical treatment of the early development of subjectivity but can equally be extended to a sociological exploration of subjectivity (be it collective or individual) in light of socio-economic and political crises. I should also note that in my reading of Kristeva, at no point is it clear to me that Kristeva presents abjection as inevitable, but rather as a specific strategy for consolidating subjectivity. This pejorative treatment of the Other is in no way inevitable but one particular strategy for treating the Other, in the hope of consolidating an otherwise tenuous subjectivity. For this reason I understand Kristeva to be pointing to a particular type of othering, namely 'negative othering' which seeks to discursively instrumentalise the Other, presenting the Other in a repulsive light. This repulsion facilitates a distance between 'us' and 'them', a distance which consolidates a sense of self by not being that Other. Mouffe, who I return to later, in citing Derrida, acknowledges that subjectivity is contingent on Others, the 'constitutive outside' who, by virtue of being different from the self, constitutes the self (Mouffe, 2005: 114). The point is that even if we accept that subjectivity requires an Other to obtain, 'negative othering' is a specific treatment of the self grounded in a dominating and exploitative relationship between the self and Other. Othering may be necessary, but 'negative othering' is a specific relationship to the Other specific to a particular discursive strategy of othering. Alternative strategies can be grounded in parity; these strategies occupy my final section.

Returning to Wodak, clearly Kristeva's theory of abjection theoretically underpins Wodak's empirical analysis. Where Wodak predominantly describes the phenomena of Volk-making and othering witnessed in right wing populist discourse, and the socio-economic and political

context in which that discourse emerges, it is clear that Kristeva is a good example of what incorporating theorists from other schools of thoughts has to offer to CDA. Kristeva's theory explains in a way that Wodak simply does not the precise relationship between Volk making, othering and the financial crash of 2007-2008. The crash precipitated (predominantly economic) struggles between those otherwise portrayed as part of a homogenous collective subjectivity. As right wing populist discourse attempts to repeat what it means to be part of that collective subjectivity, recognising this will no longer suffice, it produces an Other whose abjected status as repulsive creates a distance between the Other and the self. This distance grounded in a form of degradation and dehumanisation reproduces a sense of self given that self *is not the Other*. In other words: I am what I am because I am *certainly not that*.

Abjection is clearly functioning in Wodak's first vignette where Austrian right wing leader HC Strache posted a caricature on Facebook depicting the Jew as the banker whose actions are responsible for the plight of 'das Volk', depicted in the image as emaciated (Wodak, 2015: 13). The Other is a discursive mechanism used to externalise the financial crash as something not intrinsic to the inherent antagonisms of society, but the product of an externality, an Other who continuously threatens the Volk. Abjection is also present in vignette 14, image 7.2 (Wodak, 2015: 161) which entails a dichotomous depiction of a welcoming, friendly, uniformly white group juxtaposed with several veiled Muslim women, one swearing at the camera but all presented as aggressive. The distance or gap between the two groups, of what it means to be a member of one rather than the Other, and the particularly degrading depiction of the Jewish and Muslim groups in both vignettes serves to homogenise 'us', the white group of people in one vignette or the emaciated Volk in the Other. In the second vignette, the distance consolidates the presentation of the white group of people as to be without internal differences, ultimately a process of simplification made possible by the repulsive characterisation of another.<sup>4</sup> Kristeva's theory of abjection tells us precisely what is happening and why, in the sense that it theoretically substantiates and links what are otherwise Wodak's disjointed empirical observations. This is therefore a good but by no means exhaustive example of what it would mean if we were to incorporate alternative schools of thought interested in language and power, like that of French feminism, into CDA.

#### 4. Negative and Positive Othering in CDA

I mention above that my application of Kristeva to a close reading of Wodak's text points specifically to 'negative othering' characteristic of right wing populist discourse. I also briefly mention, by reference to Mouffe, that othering is necessary to subject formation but by no means is 'negative othering' inevitable. Rather, the type of othering witnessed in right wing populist discourse is a constant risk, given that the subject needs the Other to obtain. Here I wish to turn briefly to Luce Irigaray and Chantal Mouffe, who go beyond Kristeva in her provision of a theoretical framework depicting negative othering, to the provision of an alternative discursive strategy I have named 'positive othering'.<sup>5</sup> What partly distinguishes CDA from other forms of discourse analysis is its assumption that discourse is instrumental behind the preservation and contestation of material power dynamics, and the 'critical' element of CDA is grounded in the desire to contest those dynamics at the point of discourse (van Dijk, 1995: 18). I think positive othering is a means of achieving precisely this and a further testament to the opportunities other schools of thought offer to CDA.

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<sup>4</sup> In the same way one may wish to cite Scharff's (2016) analysis of discourses surrounding Muslim women as not only an example of the performance of repudiating feminism but also a verbal performance of abjection.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to note that although Irigaray is a member of French feminism, and Mouffe a member of Discourse Theory, neither explicitly engage with Kristeva in the context I am discussing them. Rather, my discussion of them both emphasises the variety of other thinkers and schools of thought focused on language and power who can contribute to CDA.

To begin with Irigaray, she argues that male dominated language denies the separateness of women, and to that end fails to account for experiences specific to their positionality.<sup>6</sup> By this she means that men are constructed as the standard and women are mere deviations from that standard (Irigaray, 1989; Irigaray & Guynn, 1995). In Irigaray's model, women are not linguistically accorded an autonomous sense of self, indeed they are not even an Other but rather a lesser extension of men. Consider, for example, liberal western philosophers whose concern about the equal treatment and opportunity of all citizens is limited by their silence on the political nature of the domestic sphere (the family) despite women predominantly being isolated within that sphere (Baier, 1987). Silence is a linguistic tool specifically denying the separateness of one half of the population (women) and universalising the experiences of the other half as standard (men).

Returning to the context of positive othering within which I am discussing Irigaray, the advocacy of a 'feminine language' typical of Irigaray and others within French feminism (Poovey, 1988: 53) is precisely an allusion to positive othering as an emancipatory approach to the Other. Feminine language is the insistence of women as Other and subject in their own right, avoiding the pejorative presentation of the Other. The distance between 'us' and 'them' being discussed here is not facilitated by some sense of repulsion found within abjection or negative othering, rather it is a distance grounded in respect for the Other, recognising that where they as Other constitute our subject, we as Other constitute theirs. Indeed, precisely because that gap between the self and Other is not characterised by repulsion, the gap itself fluctuates as, clearly, the Other is not always commensurable to us, thereby challenging the homogeneity of the self in the first place, which was guaranteed by *certainly not being that designated as Other*.

Turning then, finally, to Mouffe: writing against liberal discourse which attempts to create homogeneity at group level, Mouffe claims that every attempt to construct a 'we' is contingent on the simultaneous construction of a 'them', in the same way individual subjectivity is contingent on an Other who is not 'I'. In fact, attempts to create homogenous groups will exacerbate the inevitable process of othering and create an 'enemy' of the Others who are not in the group (Mouffe, 2005: 114). This is what we saw above with Kristeva and negative othering, even though Mouffe does not explicitly discuss Kristeva. The repudiation of the Other is necessary in order to consolidate the homogeneous group, itself a forced construction of otherwise heterogeneous participants. Mouffe suggests that making an enemy of the Other is not inevitable but specific to the forced construction of a homogenous group, what Wodak observed as a primary characteristic of right wing populist discourse. Herein lies Mouffe's theory of radical democracy of 'agonistic pluralism' (Mouffe, 2009: 135). It is the belief in a democracy which respects plurality and in so doing respects the Other as an Other. This does not foreclose unity and political practice, but is an honest recognition that such practice is based on antagonisms, or rather 'this [unity] does not imply the elimination of social antagonisms' (Mouffe, 2005: 129).

Irigaray and Mouffe are thus two different thinkers, from different schools of thought, who both advocate in their own terms what I have described as positive othering. They provide the theoretical preconditions for an empirical analyses of othering which treats the Other as a subject in their own right whilst accepting that for the self to obtain the Other must exist.<sup>7</sup> Wodak, when theoretically substantiated with Kristeva's theory of abjection provides an empirical analysis of negative othering. Irigaray and Mouffe provide theoretical insights which can lead to empirical analyses of strategically alternative approaches to the Other, grounded in parity and thereby in keeping with the emancipatory and critical objectives of CDA. What this paper has shown is that CDA can benefit substantially if it appeals to thinkers belonging to

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<sup>6</sup> Clearly then, Irigaray would contest Kristeva's theory of abjection which assumes emphasis is applied to the gap between the self and Others, whereas for Irigaray the Other is assimilated into the self.

<sup>7</sup> In addition positive othering clearly brings into question the homogeneity and stability of subjectivity be it at the collective or individual level, however the implications of this cannot be thoroughly explicated here.

other schools of thought equally concerned with theoretically outlining the linguistic dimensions of power.

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