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Some thoughts on CDS and its Marxist political economy bases

David Block

ICREA, Departament d'Anglès i Lingüística, Universitat de Lleida, Lleida, Spain

ABSTRACT

This paper is about Marxist political economy and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) as a field of inquiry. It begins with a discussion of the traditional role of Marxist political economy in CDS, arguing that for the most part it has been limited and partial. It then considers an example of a serious attempt to carry out a Marxist political economy analysis of discourse in society – Claudia Ortu's [2008. The denial of class struggle by British Governments in their anti-union discourse (1978–2007). *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5, 289–301] analysis of the denial of class struggle and anti-union discourse in Britain in the period 1978–2007. This leads to a discussion of the author's recent research on material and discursive class warfare in contemporary Spain, focussing specifically on conflicts arising between a right-wing government defending the interests of the banks and elites and a grass-roots organisation defending the interests of the popular classes, in particular those who either have lost, or are in danger of losing, their homes due to mortgage default. The paper ends with some thoughts on the future of CDS, with or without a clear Marxist political economy base.

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Introduction

In this special issue on Marx and Discourse Studies, my contribution is about the specific links between Marxist political economy and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) as a field of inquiry. By Marxist, I mean an approach to the analysis of contemporary realities that is grounded in foundational concepts that Marx and Engels developed over a century and half ago in their critique of capitalism as historically shaped and situated, such as capital accumulation, exploitation and alienation. By political economy, I mean the study and analysis of the relationships between the individual and society, on the one hand, and the market and the state, on the other, as well as how social institutions, their activities and capitalism interrelate. Marxist political economy is by definition critical of the current dominant form of capitalism in the world today (i.e. 'neoliberalism'), as it takes on inequality and class-based conflict.

I begin this paper with a discussion of the traditional role of Marxist political economy in CDS, arguing that for the most part it has been limited and partial. I then discuss Claudia Ortu's (2008) analysis of the denial of class struggle and anti-union discourse in Britain in

CONTACT David Block ✉ dblock@dal.udl.cat

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the period 1978–2007 as an example of a serious attempt to carry out a Marxist political economy analysis of discourse in society. I here suggest that it is class warfare more than class struggle that we should be using as a key framing construct when examining the state of capitalism today, which in turn leads me to a discussion of my own recent research on material and discursive class warfare in contemporary Spain. Specifically, I focus on an ongoing conflict between a right-wing government defending the interests of the banks and elites and a grass-roots organisation defending the interests of the popular classes, in particular those who either have lost, or are in danger of losing, their homes due to mortgage default. I engage in a brief discussion of winning or losing in discursive class warfare and winning or losing in material class warfare, making the point that while the capitalist class is not always successful in the first insistence, it always prevails in the second (or has done until now). I then end the paper with some thoughts on the future of CDS, with or without a clear Marxist political economy base. In taking this stance, I do not wish to suggest a division tout court between the discursive and the material, as I recognise that discursive practices can have material effects, just as material practices have discursive effects. However, I am biased towards the idea that that 'conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of [human beings] … appear as the direct efflux of … material behaviour' (Marx & Engels, [1846] 1998, p. 42), and not vice versa.

(Marxist) political economy in CDS: a spotty history

The critical analysis of discourse, independent of whether it travels under the acronym CDA or CDS (where the former is perhaps more narrowly about the analysis of texts and the later includes a wide range of ethnographic approaches), has always been a broad church. On the one hand, it has emerged at the crossroads of a fairly wide range of disciplinary traditions – 'rhetoric, text linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, sociopsychology, cognitive science, literary studies, and sociolinguistics, as well as in applied linguistics and pragmatics' (Wodak & Meyer, 2016a, p. 2). And it has intellectual and conceptual roots in a long list of scholars who have examined society critically with a view to uncovering underlying ideological structures and regimes of truth, deemed to generate and/or shape surface social phenomena and human behaviour, with Gramsci, Habermas, Derrida and Foucault being perhaps the most influential.

Marx (and Engels) cast a long shadow in any discussion of ideology and power, but for many CDS scholars Marxist thinking has either never really been a part of the equation, or has simply fallen by the wayside over the years (except, of course, in its residual form as seminal to the thinking of the scholars who are cited). In any case, Marxism generally goes unacknowledged as a base for CDS/CDA and in surveys of the field, it seldom if ever gets a look-in. One example of what might be called Marxist erasure can be found in a book chapter covering the basics of CDA written by Teun van Dijk (2003). I cite this piece not to single out the author, but to present it as exemplary. Indeed, having read a good number of introductory texts on CDS/CDA, I see that they express very similar ideas about the nature and purpose of the field and many share a certain aversion to and alienation from Marxist scholarship. The latter line of thought comes through clearly in van Dijk's chapter, where the author does not cite Marx or Marxism even once, offering the following general definition of the field:

> Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 352)

One could say 'fair enough' with regard to a researcher's right to clearly demarcate his/her field of inquiry: 'I do a, b and c (and by default, *not* x, y and z)'. However, surely if one claims to be doing 'dissident research' which ultimately will lead people to 'resist social inequality', and in the process overthrow 'social power abuse, dominance, and inequality', some attention needs to be devoted to the underlying causes of these societal ills. For my money, these are to a great extent (though not entirely) political economic, and material, and we ignore this state of affairs at our peril. For if we follow the logic that inequality, for example, is caused by discourse, then this means a complete marginalisation of the material in our lives. In other words, if all is discourse, then it is enough to combat the ills of society at the discursive level because there is no other level at which to combat them. What I write here is not new, as Marnie Holborow said as much some two decades ago, stating matters thusly:

> The distinction between interpretations of history and history itself, between the power of discourse and social power, is crucial not only in the understanding of history but also in the understanding of language. Language is of a different order to historical events. Such a distinction was critical for Marx. … Marxist dialectal materialism does not explain practice from the ideas but the formation of ideas from practice. (Holborow, 1999, p. 194)

The word 'inequality' appears twice in the van Dijk quote, and this leads me once again to express a degree of wonder at the marginalisation of Marxism (and, once again, I must insist that van Dijk is far from being the only CDS/CDA researcher taking this tack). Indeed, if there is any one topic which has been of interest to Marxist political economy over the past three decades, it is the inequality which has come with neoliberal economic policies and practices that have come to be predominant in this period of time. Surely then, political economy, and in particular the Marxist version within it, is essential to any thorough understanding of what is in play and what is at stake when we take on inequality as a real-world phenomenon.

Meanwhile, in the introduction to the third edition of their highly successful collection *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Wodak & Meyer, 2016b), the authors only cite Marx to say that for many CDS/CDA researchers, ideologies are understood to be 'schematically organized complexes of representations and attitudes with regard to certain aspects of the social world' and not as 'Marxian … according to the economic base/superstructure dichotomy' (Wodak & Meyer, 2016a, p. 8). However, Wodak and Meyer then add that Fairclough is one researcher who has stuck fairly close to Marx over the years, seeing ideologies as 'representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218). This seems in line with the Marx and Engels notion that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' (Marx & Engels, [1846] 1998, p. 67), even if it does not clearly invoke political economy as a key to understanding the alluded-to 'relations of power, domination and exploitation'.

Indeed, since the 1980s, and Fairclough's foundational work (Fairclough, 1989), CDS/CDA researchers have worked in varied ways as they have attempted to document and analyze the many inequalities and injustices that exist in contemporary societies. However, as I have suggested, there is little in all of this that has much of a political economy angle, and specifically, a Marxist political economy angle is notably absent in most work. A perusal of the back issues of this journal bears this out, with the notable exception of two special issues – 'Class and discourse' (Machin & Richardson, 2008a) and 'Post-Marxist discourse theory and critical political economy' (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2014a). It is interesting to examine how the editors of these two special issues framed their intentions at the time of publication. For their part, Machin and Richardson wrote about the demise of class as key construct in media and cultural studies in the 1980s, just when CDS was taking off as a discipline:

> In academia in the 1980s, there was a … shift … from … class and inequality to … consumerism, lifestyle and post-modern identities. The old monolithic ideas of class and stratification seemed old and very clumsy in comparison with heterogeneity and an inventory of shiny new (often hyphenated, or hybrid) identities and concepts. … Academics specifically in media and cultural studies seemed to forget about issues relating to structural political economy as they moved to look at culture through the prism of the empowered audience. (Machin & Richardson, 2008b, p. 282)

They then argued for an approach that not only took into account discourse but also included 'an awareness of the structuring power of social and material contexts' (Machin & Richardson, 2008b, p. 284).

Six years later, in the introduction to their special issue on post-Marxist discourse theory and critical political economy, Phelan and Dahlberg (2014b, p. 255) saw the need to 'revisit the relationship between discourse theory and political economy, asking what discourse theory might offer to an analysis of "the economy" and "capitalism"?'. The use of 'revisit' seems somewhat odd here when, as I note above, political economy has never really been on the agenda for many CDS researchers. Nevertheless, the important thing about this statement is how the authors, in essence, echo Machin and Richardson's message, namely, that there is a hole in the CDS conceptual edifice.

Meanwhile, in the same year, the third edition of Fairclough's *Language and Power* appeared. In the introduction to the new version of a classic work, first published in 1989, he called for a 'radical view' of CDA as follows:

> A radical view of CDA … emphasises the power *behind* discourse rather than just the power in discourse (how people with power shape the 'order of discourse' as well as the social order in general, versus how people with power control what happens in specific interactions such as interviews). It correspondingly emphasises ideology rather than (just) persuasion and manipulation. It views discourse as a stake in social struggle as well as a site of social struggle, and views social struggle as including class struggle. It sets as an objective for CDA raising people's consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, as a step towards social emancipation. (Fairclough, 2014, p. 2)

Here Fairclough seems to want to remind CDS researchers that the field has political economy and Marxist (or at least quasi-Marxist) roots, or in any case, the corner occupied by Fairclough has always has had such roots (Fairclough, 2010). Thus, we have his pioneering work on the creeping marketisation of institutional discourses and how this was clearly linked to economic globalisation (Fairclough, 1992). However, Fairclough stands out as something of an exception, even if there have been other exceptions. There are the special issues of *Critical Discourse Studies* mentioned above and book-length efforts such as John Richardson's (2007) *Analysing Notepapers*. In the introduction to this book, the author lays out his stall clearly, first noting how his aim is not only to examine, document and analyse how discourse is constitutive of and constituted by oppressive and repressive social structures (inequality, discrimination, the abuse of power and so on), but also to do all of this from a particular political position, as a Marxist concerned with the exploitation and repression of the working class and poor in capitalist societies. He thus positions himself as politically partial, unashamedly and unreservedly 'tak[ing] an overt moral and political position with regard to the social problem analysed' (Richardson, 2007, p. 2).

Ortu (2008) and the denial of class struggle and anti-union discourse in Britain

A similar overtly Marxist self-positioning can be found in Claudia Ortu's contribution to the above-cited special issues of *Critical Discourse Studies* (Machin & Richardson, 2008a). Starting with the premise that 'class struggle is fought through discourse' (Ortu, 2008, p. 289), and following Marx, Ortu sees class as a social reality which arises in capitalist economies, having to do with individuals' and collectives' positions relative to the ownership and control over the means of production of goods and services. There is the objective state of workers, exploited for surplus value by the capitalist class – Marx's 'class in itself' – and there is the more existential realm of class consciousness, the realisation by workers of their class interests, which stand in opposition to those of the capitalist class – Marx's 'class for itself'. Both of these relations come together in class struggle, as both are necessary ingredients in the constitution of said struggle. Specifically, Ortu examines the anti-union discourse of successive British governments over three decades (1978–2007), including the 18 years of Thatcher and Major (1979–1997) and the ten-year reign of Tony Blair (1997–2007). During this time, successive prime ministers used a variety of *topoi* in their efforts to sway public opinion to their side in the conflict with unions. For example, to make effective the argument that class conflict did not exist in Britain in 1978, the then-prime minster James Callaghan criticised the media, as Ortu (2008, p. 294) explains, for putting out 'a distorted image of trade union action'. Callaghan's argument, based on a '*topos of division'* was that only a minority of workers were involved in strike action, as most labour-related problems were resolved via negotiation. Nearly three decades later, in the 1997 Labour Party manifesto, another Labour prime minister, Tony Blair, was to continue with the anti-union discourse, using what Ortu sees as the '*topos of modernity*' when he said it was time 'to put behind us the bitter political struggles of left and right that have torn our country apart for too many decades', adding that such 'conflicts have no relevance whatsoever to the modern world – public versus private, bosses versus workers, middle class versus working class' (New Labour Party, 1997: cited in Ortu, 2008, p. 295).

Blair's 'bitter political struggles … that have torn our country apart' is a clear reference to the British miners' strike which took place from March 1984 to March 1985 (see Milne, 2014, for a fairly recent account). The strike stands out as a clear example of class struggle and conflict (and indeed, class warfare – see below) in both material and symbolic terms. There was very real material battle on the ground, with the unions and the striking miners and their families on one side and the state apparatuses – the Tory government, the police and the legal system – on the other. The balance of power lay with the latter and the miners were doomed to defeat once the Thatcher government took the decision to go for victory at any cost. This was made more than clear in what has come to be known as the 'Battle of Orgreave', which took place in on the 18th of June 1984. On this day, armed police armed with shields and batons and unarmed pickets clashed violently in and around the eponymous South Yorkshire village in scenes one might expect to see in a film depicting events in the medieval era. However, as was disclosed with time, the police instigated most of the violence on that day, as the Thatcher government was determined not only to win the miners' strike but to defeat and humiliate trade unionism. And while their victory was effected through their control over material resources, it was also aided by the use of the crudest physical violence, a reminder that those acting as the guardians of capitalism will act with little or no inhibition if the system is deemed to be under threat.

In the meantime, and against the backdrop of violence perpetuated by those who have the monopoly on the use of violence in the society, there was a discursive battle taking place throughout the strike, one which was equally biased in favour of the Thatcher government, as much of the British media took their side against the striking miners. Thus, as Ortu notes, there was a need for Thatcher to gain control of the semantics of strike from the beginning. The following excerpt is taken from an interview with Thatcher conducted some seven months after the strike had begun:

> At the moment the main striking union is causing violence against its own members, against the police, against people whose only crime is they want to work to keep their wives and children. The mob violence we are seeing is a blot on Britain's reputation. It is doing immense harm. You think that what we see on television shocks us, but they are seeing it the world over. The fantastic reputation of Britain which has been built up over the years as fair, honourable and law-abiding, is suffering badly. (Thatcher, 1984; cited in Ortu, 2008, p. 298; Ortu's use of italics removed)

As Ortu notes, throughout the strike Thatcher positioned the striking miners as 'the enemy within', a common topos in any attempt to discredit and delegitimize an opponent in the political sphere. It is of little surprise, then, that she here accuses the striking miners of 'mob violence' and even of turning on fellow union members who did not follow the strike, people 'whose only crime is they want[ed] to work to keep their wives and children'. However, the most interesting aspect of this excerpt is how Thatcher hyperbolically elevates the importance of what is occurring to the level of a matter of state and ultimately, the very survival of the UK as a liberal democracy. Britain's reputation as a 'fair, honourable and law-abiding' nation was said to be at risk because of the selfish and unpatriotic behaviour of a few who would harm British society as whole. Thatcher is unequivocal in framing the situation as one of struggle. The key, however, is that it was not a case of class and class struggle, the existence of which she could not possibly have countenanced; rather, it was a struggle between Britain as a unified nation against the enemy within, embodied in the striking miners who for some unexplained reason had decided to sabotage British society. This is quite a discursive feat on Thatcher's part, but it is one which she pulled off masterfully. Importantly – and here we see the power of the residual Thatcherism in the discourse of Blair and New Labour – Thatcher's words are an essential basis for

Blair's public denial of the existence of class and class struggle 1997 and his overall embrace of the enterprise culture which Thatcher implanted in British society during her time as prime minister.

Taking stock: another example

As I have argued elsewhere (Block, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c), in order to understand conflicts in contemporary society it is best to frame events and phenomena, not only in terms of class struggle, that is, conflicts between individual and collectives over conflicting class interests (Wright, 2005), but also in terms of class warfare. Class warfare seems an appropriate term to use because 'the neoliberal policies adopted over the past four decades around the world have constituted not only a point of conflict and struggle in the pursuit of opposing class interests, but also an actual attack on the well-being and even survival of the popular classes' (Block, 2018a, p. 140). In Ortu's research, I see class warfare at work in the UK over several decades as the conditions of the working class and the relative power held by unions in production and distribution chains have worsened and been eroded, respectively. These ongoing worsening and eroding processes have been material and had material consequences, but they have also generated a great deal of political activity, which has been reliant on discursive constructions of events on the ground. And this is where Ortu's research is effective, showing how the rise of the dominant neoliberal ideology of individualism over collectivism, competition over cooperation, greed over sharing and so on, has meant that unions, ideally based on collectivism, cooperation and sharing, have been singled out as impediments to the onward march of progress and modernity. As if singing from the same hymn sheet, a series of Tory and Labour prime ministers have hammered nail after nail into the coffin of the social democratic spirit that was so strong in Britain after the second world war.

Nevertheless, we need to be careful not to get carried away with discursive analyses as the be-all and end-all of research which aims to examine critically political economic events, phenomena and behaviour. Above I cited a phrase from Ortu's article – 'class struggle is fought through discourse' (Ortu, 2008, p. 289). I would have inserted 'also', although I hasten to add that Ortu is careful to situate her critical analysis of the denial of class struggle and anti-union discourses in Britain from 1978 to 2007 against the material backdrop of class conflict arising from the progressive neoliberalization of the British economy and British society. In this sense, her article is relatively exceptional in CDS, as researchers have tended, as Holborow (1999, p. 194) puts it, to 'explain practice from … ideas' as opposed to examining 'the formation of ideas from practice'. In the publications cited above, I have attempted to do just this, charting how material events, framed as instances of class warfare, come to generate what in effect are instances of discursive class warfare. Specifically, I have examined how the 2007 economic crisis led to a marked increase in mortgage defaults and home evictions in Spain. I have framed this situation as an example of class warfare, as wealth and property shift from working and middle-class citizens to financial institutions and global elites. Paralleling Marx's notion of 'primitive accumulation', the 'historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production'(Marx(1990 [1867]); David Harvey (2010); has recently described called such shifts 'accumulation by dispossession'.

In the midst of the growing number of instances of accumulation by dispossession, in 2011 an organisation known as the PAH – *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform for those Affected by Mortgages) was founded with the express purpose of defending the interests of actual and potential evictees in Spain. Apart from providing general information and legal counsel to those in danger of losing their homes, organisation members have always been present at evictions, acting has human shields and obstacles to police action. In 2013, in an attempt to pressure the governing *Partido Popular* (hereafter PP) into changing the 1946 mortgage law that overwhelmingly favoured the interests of banks over those of home owners, the PAH began to carry out more focused demonstrations, known as *escraches*, in which groups of activists protested outside the homes and/or workplaces of PP members. Meanwhile, and as the PAH's discourses around the unfairness of home evictions, which directly targeted the unethical and uncaring actions of banks and the inactivity and insensitivity of the government, were gaining traction in the media and among the public at large. Fearful of losing the war for hearts and minds, the PP did not stand with arms folded. However, government ministers were finding it difficult to defend their position, which was, in the face of pressure, to make very minor changes to the mortgage law while leaving it clearly favourable to the interests of banks. Above all, they would never change its most unfair aspect, whereby a mortgage defaulter not only loses his/her home, but is also obliged to pay off the remainder of the mortgage. As the ultimate defenders of the neoliberal order in Spain, PP members were no doubt aware that they were winning, and indeed always would win, the material class warfare of accumulation by dispossession being perpetuated on the poorest in Spanish society. However, they were wary of ceding discursive ground to the PAH and their sympathisers and feared the prospect of losing what amounted to discursive class warfare. After all, siding with banks in crisis-ridden Spain was never going to be the most popular stance to take.

In the end, the party's response was not dissimilar to that seen during the miners' strike in mid 1980s Britain, when Thatcher and her government took off their gloves and took on the unions in the media in an extremely aggressive manner. Typical of the PPs response in 2013 is the following statement that Maria Dolores de Cospedal, the General Secretary of the PP, made while speaking at a meeting of PP members several days after the PAH had controversially carried out an *escrache* outside the home of the vice president (i.e. deputy prime minister) Soraya Saenz de Santamaria:

> Harassment/physical and verbal violence/attacks on people/on their homes/ their families (3) that only reflects a totalitarian and sectarian spirit/and that's the most contrary to democracy (1) [applause] we have in our memory/fortunately it is well documented/how in the 30s certain people were pointed out/for belonging to certain political ethnic cultural or religious groups/ and they said/*there they are/and you have to go and attack them* (1) but what is this attempt to violate the vote? (1) this is pure Nazism (1.5) I know they are going to criticize me for this (1.5) [smiling] but this is pure Nazism. (Rachide, 2013, npn; translation from the original in Spanish by David Block)

This text clearly designed to shift the focus of debate from government support for the interests and actions of banks, that is, from class warfare perpetuated by the ruling class on the popular classes, to a claim of victim status for members of the PP and a dubious debate about democratic principles. It brings together several key features that CDS researchers have identified over the years. First, it is highly intertextual, bringing

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forward into the present genres, voices and other elements from texts produced in the past (Fairclough, 2010). In this sense, it incorporates the ‘topos of history as teacher’ (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999), drawing on a well-known and often-invoked discourse about the horrors of the Nazi Germany, while making the case that we must learn from the errors of the past and condemn the ‘totalitarian and sectarian spirit’ of the PAH in the present. In this version of events, Partido Popular members targeted by *escraches* are the persecuted Jews of our time, while PAH members are Hitler’s henchmen. The analogy, for all its absurdity, is a good example of what Wodak calls ‘anything goes’, that is the adoption of ‘discursive and rhetorical strategies’ that:

(1) ‘combine incompatible phenomena’: PAH members are victimisers of the powerful.
(2) ‘make false claims sound innocent’: PAH members are practitioners of ‘true Nazism’.
(3) ‘say the “unsayable” and transcend the limits of the permissible’: PP members are like the persecuted Jews of Nazi Germany (quoted words: Wodak, 2013, pp. 32–33).

However, the text lacks coherence in the context in which it is produced, as beyond its shock value, crassness and insensitivity to the descendants of Holocaust victims, the intertextual twist that it incorporates and its appeal to history as teacher are rather shaky. I say this for two reasons. First, although post-civil war Spain was a fascist regime (and Franco had very little sympathy for the Jewish people), it was also officially neutral during the Second World War. There was, therefore, no direct experience of Nazi Germany during the second world war, and as a result, Spanish people do not respond to ‘just like Hitler’ claims in the same way as the citizens of countries which went to war with Nazi Germany (e.g. the UK, France, Holland). Second, there is the PP’s clear and unequivocal historical links to Franco’s fascist regime. Indeed, the *Alianza Popular* (Popular Alliance), the party’s early incarnation, was founded in 1978 by a former Franco era minister, Manuel Fraga. Given these Fascist roots and Franco’s aforementioned anti-Semitism, one could argue that PP members arguably have far more links to the persecutors of Jews in 1930s Nazi Germany than the persecuted Jews themselves. In the end, the PAH = Nazis intertextual turn comes across as a cynical rhetorical ploy and ultimately it only ever worked for the most faithful followers of the party.

Conclusion: grand hotel abyss or taking it to the streets?

Taking into account everything I have written thus far in this paper, some questions come to mind. Perhaps the most important of these is: What do we do with this kind of analysis? Discursive class warfare may be won or lost by the state apparatuses and those in power. Thatcher certainly won her discursive war in Britain, making real her famous statement that `[e]conomics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul’ (Butt, 1981, npn). Meanwhile, the PP in Spain was not so successful in the case described here. Nevertheless, in both Britain and Spain, and indeed elsewhere in capitalist societies, it is at the material level that the most important events are taking place and we should not be blinded to this fact by our interest in how communication, language and discourse function. Thatcher and her government were successful in breaking union power in the UK and more generally transforming not only the economy, but also British society. Since coming to power in Spain in 2011, the PP have managed the economic crisis in the interests of global banking and global and local elites. And while there have been protests and opposition to the wide-ranging enforcement of austerity measures, these have not been widespread or sustained enough to worry the powers that be. And so, the PP and global capitalism and global and local elites can be said to be winning the material class war taking place on a day-to-day basis. At the time of writing, Spain is being converted into a paradise for venture capitalist and entrepreneurs looking for cheap and flexible labour (Navarro, 2015). But what can CDS researchers do?

In his collective biography of members of the Frankfurt School, Stuart Jeffries (2016) repeatedly makes the point that for the most part, scholars such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin, though adept at identifying and analysing the ills of capitalist society, were not themselves activists working hand in hand with the dispossessed of the system that they so acerbically critiqued. In a sense, they did not heed Marx's early exhortation to philosophers to become activists: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change it*.' (Marx, [1845] 1972, p. 109; italics in the original). Indeed, as Jeffries notes, they seemed to be living in what György Lukács called 'the Grand Hotel Abyss', which he described as 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity' (Lukács, 1971, p. 21). Lukács's metaphor was meant to capture the Frankfurt critics' tendency to paint a bleak and hopeless picture of the world from their comfortable environs, without suggesting what might be done about it. It was none other than Marcuse himself who noted that `[t]he critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. (Marcuse, 1968, p. 201)

Fast forward more than half a century and we have CDS as field of inquiry, which owes at least some of its existence to the work carried out by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school. But are the CDS researchers of today the ivory tower academics that Jeffries portrays in his book (and Lukács so savagely criticised), who snipe at injustice from a distance but do not actually descend into the streets to take on class warfare directly? Well, yes and no. There are no doubt CDS researchers who are engaged in activism, albeit, I would argue, activism which is more about (mis)recognition, oppression and marginalisation based on gender bias, xenophobia, racism, LGBTQ-phobia, religious bias and so on, and much less about exploitation and class warfare. As I have stated several times in this paper, with notable exceptions, Marxist political economy has dropped out of most CDS research, rendering activism directed at the aforementioned issues on the whole unable to take on the political economic bases of inequality and injustice in society. Thus, neither as critical discourse analysists, nor as critical activists, are those who aim not only to *interpret* the world, but to *change it*, likely to mount a serious challenge to the current version of capitalism that is leading humanity towards a veritable political economic *cul-de-sac*. What is missing, as Peter Jones puts it, is 'positive and integral knowledge of the historically developing practice of humanity and of the place of the alienated and fractured spheres of political, economic and other forms of activity within that practice' (Jones, 2004, p. 122). Only this, he further explains, 'will do as the foundation and premise for a concrete understanding of the import and implications of the relevant discourse' (Jones, 2004, p. 122). In more common parlance, there is the need to move away from a state of affairs whereby the discursive tail is wagging the material dog.

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Notes on contributor

David Block is ICREA Professor in Sociolinguistics at the Universitat de Lleida (Spain). He has published on a variety of language-related topics, which he examines drawing on scholarship in Marxist political economy, sociology and anthropology. His books include Second Language Identities (2007), Social Class in Applied Linguistics (2014) and Political Economy and Sociolinguistics: Political Economy, Neoliberalism and Social Class (2018). He is currently completing the book Post-Truth, Ignorance and Corrupt Discourses.

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