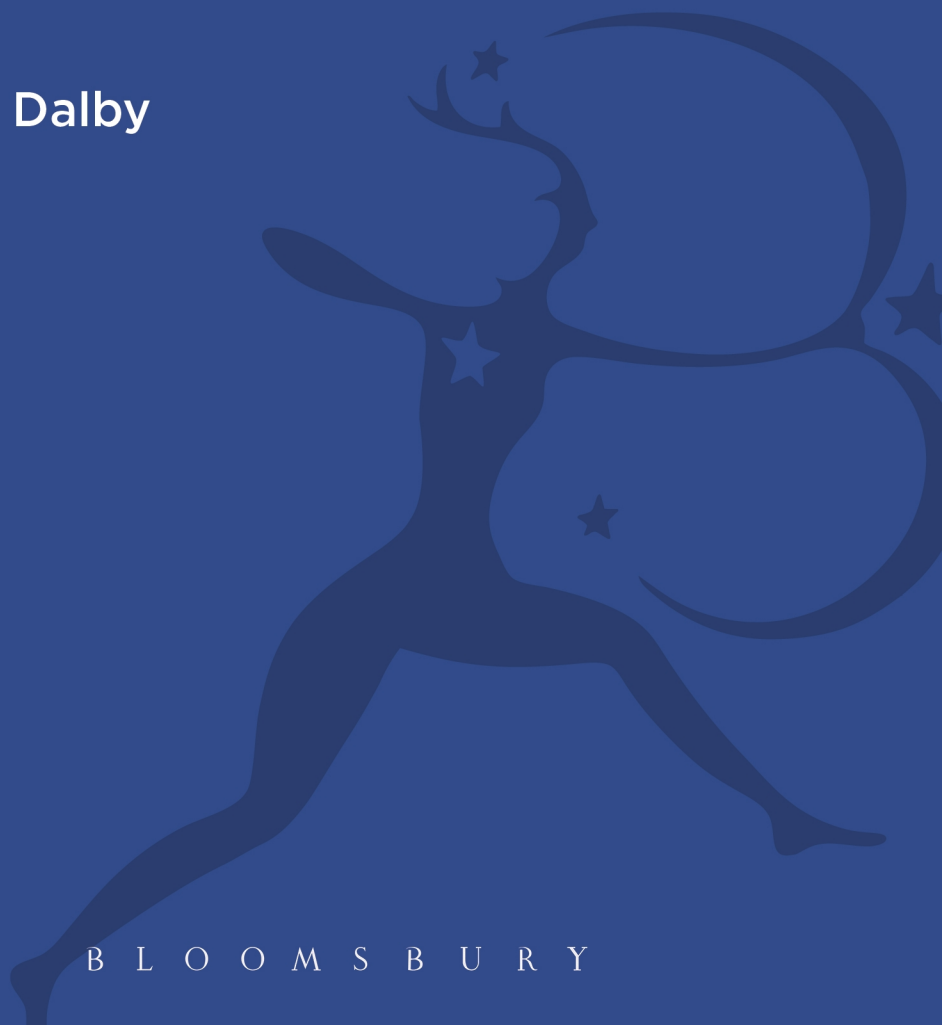


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The Discourse of Politics

Simon Dalby



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Simon Dalby

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For Cara

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List of abbreviations

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missiles
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CPD	Committee on the Present Danger
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DEAD	Destruction Entrusted Automatic Devices
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
MAD	Mutual Assured Destruction
MIRV	Multiple Independently Targeted Re-Entry Vehicle
MPS	Multiple Protective Shelter
NUTS	Nuclear Utilization Theories and Strategies
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
SIOP	Single Integrated Operational Plan
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
TNF	Theatre Nuclear Forces

Preface

To claim that the world is in a state of crisis has become somewhat trite in the age of nuclear winter scenarios, greenhouse effects, debt crisis, arms races and nuclear pollution. But trite or not, the global political situation gives numerous grounds for serious concern. It is increasingly clear that contemporary international political arrangements are often ineffective in offering workable solutions to contemporary problems. Indeed international political arrangements often seem antithetical to a better world, a sustainable future or a just world peace. In this context critical scholarship has a role in charting the dimensions of our current dilemmas and crisis, exploring how we came to our present state of affairs and suggesting how we might act and think differently.

One key to the current crisis lies in better understanding the dimensions of the militarization of political arrangements in the contemporary world. Essential to these processes are how states understand and legitimize their functions in terms of the provision of national 'security'. In superpower terms this theme is related to the larger canvas of geopolitics, of global superpower rivalry on a finite planet.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the processes of superpower *détente*, arms control and the US withdrawal from the Vietnam imbroglio suggested the possibility of reducing the military dimension in global politics. But the processes of militarization were again accelerated in the late 1970s by the renewal of the Cold War geopolitical contest between the superpowers. Superpower *détente* came to an acrimonious end amid vociferous arguments concerning the danger of the 'Soviet threat' to 'Western' security. Well before Ronald Reagan entered the White House as President, the political mood in Washington had shifted from one of international diplomacy and negotiation to one of harsher rhetoric and military preparation. The USSR was once again portrayed as an implacable foe, an untrustworthy rival who understood only force, a competitor for world domination that would use any means at its disposal to advance its position in the global geopolitical competition with the USA. This process involved shifting political discourse away from matters of international economic interdependence, development and environmental concern. US political discourse in the late 1970s once again specified global politics as an arena of military competition; a harsh world of power, in which the provision of military security was the primary *raison d'état*.

This book is about the arguments of those in the USA who campaigned against *détente* and arms control agreements and who supported the

renewal of Cold War and geopolitical competition as the overarching priority of US foreign policy. In particular it investigates in detail the writings of a number of intellectuals connected with the influential political lobby organization, the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), many of whose members subsequently held important posts in the first Reagan administration. This is not a book about the history of these events, which have been extensively investigated by other authors, nor is it about the details of superpower rivalry in any of the arenas in which the conflict or rivalry was conducted. Instead, this book investigates these matters of geopolitics in the light of the concerns in contemporary social and political theory with the interconnection of matters of discourse and politics.

This study analyses the forms of security discourse the advocates of the second Cold War used in specifying political reality in terms of a Soviet threat and a US response. It investigates the structures of the discourses used and how they were mobilized in the critique of *détente* and the campaign to renew the Cold War. The purpose of the investigation is to draw attention to the intellectual processes whereby the world is specified in particular ways which enable political actors to behave in specific manners with certain political consequences. It is concerned with how politics is made, how conceptions and descriptions of the world, 'geo-graphs' in the current jargon, are constructed and legitimized; how intellectual activity contributes to political practice. It is a contribution to contemporary social theory concerned with critical approaches to geopolitics, international relations and nuclear discourse.

Of particular importance to this book is the exploration of how geopolitical discourse works to construct domestic identities and to exclude foreign 'Others'. It operates to construct certain understandings of who and where 'we' are, and who and where are 'they', the potential if not the actually hostile enemy. These specifications of 'them' and 'us', we and Other, are central to political discourse in the West, where 'we' are usually discursively constructed in antithesis to some 'Other', be it the Oriental, the terrorist, or in this case, the USSR and the threat of 'international communism'.

The task of a critical geopolitics as understood in this study is to investigate how those discursive structures are constructed, to seek their roots in intellectual life in the societies in which they are produced, and in the process show their flaws and (often hidden) assumptions. Critical geopolitics asks questions of how geopolitical discourses might be deconstructed to reveal their complicity in contemporary power relations. As such this text is a very different approach to matters of traditional geopolitics with its surveys of the geographical features of empires or nation states, their 'natural resources', industry, population, political systems and war-making potentials. Instead, it investigates how these modes of knowledge are used to maintain or construct geopolitical spaces. It shows how these specifications were used in the late 1970s to perpetuate and promote militarization in a world where the stakes of military action were already extraordinarily high.

Simon Dalby

'What you don't know is that the colleague couldn't find me when he got back to England. So he gave it to the authorities. People of discretion. Experts.'

Goethe turned sharply to Barley in alarm and the shadow of dismay spread swiftly over his fraught features. I do not *like* experts' he said. 'They are our jailers. I despise experts more than anyone on earth.'

'You're one yourself, aren't you?'

'Therefore I know! Experts are addicts. They solve nothing! They are the servants of whatever system hires them. They perpetuate it. When we are tortured, we shall be tortured by experts. When we are hanged, experts will hang us. Did you not read what I wrote? When the world is destroyed, it will be destroyed not by its madmen but by the sanity of its experts and the superior ignorance of its bureaucrats. You have betrayed me.'

John Le Carré, *The Russia House*

Part One

Context

Introduction

This book draws on contemporary social theory's concern with language and discourse to inform its inquiry into geopolitics. The first chapter begins this discussion with a brief review of the concepts of discourse that are relevant to the subsequent analysis. With ideas of discourse go those of political practice, ideology and hegemony. These concern the use of particular discourses for political ends and the matter of intertexts, the linking together of texts and discourses, in this case, by experts and politicians, to define political positions and policies.

Chapter 2 shows how the perennial themes of dualism and dichotomies in Western philosophy are linked into how discourses construct their objects of knowledge as 'Other'. Discourses of 'Otherness' are important in producing Western metaphysical conceptions and ideological structures. The Other provides a useful way of illuminating the categories of time and space which so fundamentally structure the discourses of social and political theory.

Political theory, in particular the theory of international relations is the subject of the first part of the Chapter 3. As will be made clear there, the central political concept of security is formulated as the exclusion of Otherness, an exclusion that is a geopolitical exercise of power. In part geopolitics is about power and military force and the threats posed to the international order by military threats. But geopolitics is much more than this; Chapter three suggests how geopolitics can be reformulated in terms of discourse.

Chapter 4 shows an example of geopolitical discourse in practice. It presents an analysis of the Committee on the Present Danger's 'threat discourse' in the 1970s in which they constructed the presence of a massive and growing Soviet geopolitical threat to US national security. This chapter shows how their geopolitical discourse is constructed and analyses the ideological moves they make in attempting to render their position the accepted premises for political discussion.

Chapter 1

Social theory and security discourse

'Postmodernism' and global crisis

Amid the numerous reports, commissions and expert panels on matters of the contemporary planetary predicament, the journals of policy analysis and the thinktanks replete with political experts and policy advisers, there is a smaller contingent of critical intellectuals asking far-reaching questions concerning how the philosophical presuppositions of the policy debates shape and limit what it is possible to do and say within the established institutional patterns and structures of political discourse. These critics challenge the conventional formulations, examining the taken-for-granted assumptions of policy advice and the analytical procedures and methodological devices of the practitioners of international politics and foreign policy (Der Derian, 1987; Dillon, 1988; Shapiro, 1988; Der Derian and Shapiro eds, 1989; Walker, 1986), as well as analysing specifically the discourses of nuclear strategy (Chilton, ed., 1985; Cohn, 1987; Klein, 1988; Wertsch, 1987). Concerned with the discursive practices, constructions and strategies of the policy texts these 'postmodern' investigations cast a sceptical analytical gaze on the rhetoric of state policy-makers and the 'advisers to the prince'.

These approaches are concerned with matters of power and discourse, the use of socially organized linguistic and semiotic constructions to mobilize meanings in the service of power. Taking theoretical inspiration, although not a formalized 'method' of inquiry from Frederick Nietzsche, and more recently Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and others, the postmodern sensibility questions how the social construction of reality is formulated; and how 'Others' are created as the external antagonist against which internal identity is mobilized. They examine discourse, systematically organized ways of writing, talking, etc. in terms of how concepts legitimate and hence reproduce structures of power. They investigate how discourses operate to foreclose political possibilities and eliminate from consideration a multiplicity of possible worlds.

In particular they challenge the conventional categories of the self-understandings of particular disciplines, subjecting their histories and conceptual structures to a genealogical critique and reconstruction. They show how contemporary cultural structures carry within them the institutional and discursive residues of earlier political struggles. 'Postmoderns' are

reluctant to prescribe grand theories, they refuse predictions, rather they open up possibilities, investigate points of struggle and divergence in plural histories rather than chart the unfolding of a univocal History. Above all the postmodern concern is with power, its rituals, its dramas, its modes of representation. Borrowing Klein's (1988) use of Shapiro's phrase, we can say that the postmodern concern is 'to leave power nowhere to hide'. This book is inspired by this postmodern concern with the politics of representation; the use of particular modes of discourse in political situations in ways that shape political practices, implicating political discourse in world-making. In dealing with these matters this book draws loosely on a number of important concepts and modes of analysis from contemporary social theory and applies them to tackling the Committee on the Present Danger's geopolitical arguments for the militarization of US foreign policy and the prosecution of Cold War.

Social theory: discourse

Recent social theory is particularly concerned with issues of power and knowledge, with the role of language and particularly, discourse, in the maintenance of political arrangements of domination. In particular the current 'postmodern' concerns are with questions of power and discourse drawing on concerns in linguistics, philosophy and literary theory to critique the contemporary cultural practices of modernity (Said, 1982; Shapiro ed. 1984, 1988). This shift of focus from positivist approaches and epistemological concerns with correspondence rules of truth, involves conceptualizing social existence as human practice. Social life is active creation, albeit within created frameworks of custom, economy, power and language. Social life is understood in and through language, and hence the structures of language reflect and create social life.

But language practices are integrated in specific ways of articulating together linguistic formations. Language is socially structured as discourse. In contrast to hermeneutic approaches, postmodern approaches are concerned with matters of power, how texts and discourses are exercises in power and repression, in addition to just significations (Thompson, 1984; Shapiro 1988). In Foucault's terms discourses are much more than linguistic performances, they are also plays of power which mobilize rules, codes and procedures to assert a particular understanding through the construction of knowledges within these rules, codes and procedures. Because they organize reality in specific ways through understanding and knowing in ways that involve particular epistemological claims, they provide legitimacy, and indeed provide the intellectual conditions of possibility of particular institutional and political arrangements.

The rules governing practices, often implicit and not clearly articulated, but understood by practitioners, are socially constructed in specific contexts. Hence discourses have institutional origins and commitments. The knowledges they produce and encompass are thus political products; discourses

are implicated with power. Kress (1985, 85) goes as far as defining discourses in terms of institutions thus: 'Discourses are systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not to say. . . .' If, for example, one takes an academic discipline as an institution, then the term discourse can apply to the oeuvre of that discipline's practitioners.

Foucault has analysed the discursive practices of medicine, sex and penology, showing how the conception of madness is created in antithesis to reason, deviance to normalcy and delinquent to reformed. His concerns are often with the structuring of identity against the boundary of an external Other.

Discursive practices are characterised by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus, each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designates its exclusions and choice. [Foucault, 1977, 199]

These 'regularities' transcend single texts or writer's works, and do not necessarily coincide with a recognizable discipline or field of study. Discursive practices change in complex ways that are not necessarily related solely to internal developments.

The transformation of a discursive practice is linked to a whole range of usually complex modifications that can occur outside its domain (in the forms of production, in social relations in political institutions), inside it (in its techniques for determining its object, in the adjustment and refinement of its concepts, in its accumulation of facts), or to the side of it (in other discursive practices). [Foucault, 1977, 200]

Discursive practices are more than simply ways of producing texts. 'They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them' (Foucault, 1977, 200). Discourse involves not only language but also practices and social positions which embody power; the psychiatrist who designates who is reasonable and who is mad, the therapist who pronounces on normalcy, the parole officer who judges when the delinquent has reformed. Thus, discourse refers also to the rules by which behaviour is structured, regulated and judged.

Focusing on a particular discipline in terms of its discursive practices involves examining how the discipline constructs its field of study, its object or Other, and hence how it situates itself in relation to its Other (Fabian, 1983). This also involves discussing the internal divisions of that inquiry and how the methodological conventions, and importantly the categorical devices that are used, structure the knowledge that results. These categories and divisions shape the discipline's knowledge, which in turn structures how it is possible to act by defining 'reality' in specific ways. Foucault's analysis makes clear the role of the creation of the Other as the excluded against which behaviour is judged and defined: the mad defines the sane; the

deviant the normal. Otherness is inherent in the analysis of discourse. It involves the social construction of some other person, group, culture, race, nationality or political system as different from 'our' person, group, etc. Specifying difference is a linguistic, epistemological and crucially a political act; it constructs a space for the Other distanced and inferior from the vantage point of the person specifying the difference.

Practices function on the bases of these definitions: prisons are built to incarcerate the delinquent; mental hospitals to shut away the mad. Both operate to exclude the Other, shutting Otherness away in regimes where it can be monitored, surveyed and hence known and controlled. In 'security' matters the enemy is specified in a series of security discourses, tied to the functioning of the state security and defence agencies. The practitioners of penology or medicine practise on their objects, prisoners or patients, but they do so in socially constructed positions of authority and power; by regulating the Other they also regulate the rest. Likewise, security discourse, while ostensibly dealing with external Others, has important domestic political effects.

The penologist's and the therapist's positions are justified in terms of moral criteria of reform or cure; their specialized knowledge gives them power to act in positions of authority. To deal with discourses one has to deal with their political conditions, to look at their audience as well as the practitioners, and to understand how the practices of the discourse also legitimize the authority of the practitioner. One looks at how the practitioners delineate their object of study, and how they create and designate the correct norms and rules for dealing with that object. Much of what follows below relates to the processes whereby the CPD attempted to establish their ways of dealing with the USSR as the correct ones. In their discourse the USSR is the dangerous Other that has to be contained, controlled and monitored using their superior and their 'correct' knowledge to ensure the security of the USA.

Readers bring a series of pre-existing discursive practices to a text which are used to operate on the received text and render it meaningful. Thus, for example, a newspaper text on a criminal trial relies on its readers' preconstructed categories of criminal and innocent. Hence discourses also involve the capabilities, in terms of a socio-cultural background, which are used by people to construct meaning. Thus discourse 'is not simply speech or a written treatise on a topic but a set of capabilities, qua rules by which readers/listeners and speakers/audiences are able to take what they hear and read and construct it into an organised meaningful whole' (Agnew and O'Tuathail, 1987, 6). Discourses are about how reality is specified and how social practices are structured in the terms of these realities.

Foucault's focus is on the discourses themselves, in contrast to Marxist approaches to history, class struggle, ideology and, particularly, hegemony. Foucault (1972) is concerned with the analysis of discourses emphasizing discontinuities and ruptures rather than linear totalizing schemes. He is concerned with their structures and practices rather than with their historical evolution; an approach, which in Ashley's (1987, 409) words, 'involves a