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Reading Postmodernism in Contemporary Conservative Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins by confronting the public controversy surrounding Prime Minister David Cameron's social ideology 'The Big Society'. Responding to journalistic and political claims of it being an unspecific and muddy notion, the essay conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on key campaign speeches outlining 'The Big Society', with the intention of attributing its lack of distinction and clarity to it's origins as a postmodern discourse. Alongside this, the project deliberates and contests an article by Dr. Ingolfur Blühdorn entitled 'Sustaining the Unsustainable'.

Largely agreeing with Blühdorn's central notion of postmodern political discourse sustaining a counter-productive hyperreal rhetoric, it argues with the methodological process in which the article comes to its conclusion. By employing a CDA of Cameron's speech, it acknowledges that the communication of the 'Big Society' is part of this unsustainable political discourse, yet contrary to Blühdorn, that postmodernity is traceable through local textual analysis, and not merely on a broad theoretical plain that 'Sustaining the Unsustainable' suggests. This is justified using the work of Norman Fairclough, whose work connects the interpretation of socially located texts to critical and social theory.

The technical approach of the study is to look at three theoretical motifs related to postmodernity and uses a structured linguistic analysis to recognise these qualities in Cameron's speeches. The implications suggest that postmodernity is readable into texts, subsequently rendering the 'Big Society' a postmodern discourse. The conclusion in two parts finds that initially, the essence of the 'Big Society' from a discursive perspective, is an interpretable layer of nostalgic rhetoric, packaging future Conservative policy implementation, creating in Blühdorn's mould a process of 'sustaining the unsustainable'. Secondly it finds that postmodern discourse can be approached against Blühdorn's theory, and when used as a heuristic device to recognise certain phenomena - it holds greater effect than the static circular arguments that perpetuates it in theoretical discussion.

INTRODUCTION

'In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible [...] Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.'
George Orwell, *Why I Write*

'Big Society – that's not just two words'
David Cameron, *Our Big Society Idea*

'The Big Society' first unveiled by David Cameron in the run up to the 2010 General Election, is supposedly the key philosophy underpinning his modernised Conservative party's vision for Britain. It has gathered significant media attention, in its first apparition it was supposed to provide the ideological and political momentum to win an election; and after only partial electoral success, it has since been re-launched two months later under a Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government, where Cameron passionately announced in a speech in Liverpool that there were: 'Things that fire you up in the morning, that drive you, that you truly believe will make a real difference to the country you love, and my great passion is building the big society'[1] (2010 c). The current Prime minister has since placed this notion at the centre of his political communication and policy agenda for the foreseeable future. Yet there remains an important factor in the coverage of this idea, namely that there is no clear consensus as to what it actually, or at least appears to, mean.

Official Conservative documents from the Cabinet Office outline 'The Big Society' as a way to 'give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want.'[2] After which they outline in bullet points initiatives to boost local activism, responsibility and a plan to further empower local government. However before discussing the development of this idea any further, the ambiguity of the concept should be noted, as there has been severe discontent within Cameron's own party as to what the 'Big Society' actually is; former Conservative leadership contender David Davis described it as 'Blairite Dressing' (Grice, 2010), implying an indefinite centrist rhetoric employed purely for party political purposes. On a broader scale, a common complaint during the election campaign was that it was incredibly hard for grassroots campaigners to sell such an opaque concept at the doorstep (Helm, 2010). The Guardian had one unnamed senior Tory off the record declaring that, 'The 'big society' is bollocks. It is boiled

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[1] Cameron, David, (2010), The Big Society, accessed on the 12th August, 2010:
http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572
[2] This document can be found at www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf

vegetables that have been cooked for three minutes too long. It tastes of nothing. What is it?' (Helm, 2010). Similarly when pressed in an interview on the Today programme three days before the country went to the ballot box, Michael Gove, then shadow education secretary, found it near impossible to get to the detail and policy of 'The Big Society'. Today presenter Evan Davis concluding, 'If we don't have a specific example, it all falls into a big fluff that nobody understands' (Davis, 2010).

To clarify for the purposes of this essay, at the heart of the 'Big Society' is an attempt to create an ideology that colours in the gap lying between the state and the market. Through its purely descriptive name, it tries to conjure an impression of a destined prevailing social ethos, a sense of 'civic-ness' lying ahead, where a transcendental belief in society, expressed through voluntary work and empowered local activism, protects individuals and families from the control of state power and the ruthless competition of markets. It ranks citizens and local organisations as significant interdependent social and political actors, comparative to government and economic forces. Skeptics have branded this a purely strategic notion, a 'people power' initiative that happens to be timed perfectly with an era where municipal cuts will be so great, citizens will be forced to help themselves anyway, 'Big Society' or not. However, this study doesn't intend to analyse the political environment that surrounds Cameron's 'Big idea' (Cameron, 2010 b), as even before it is located in a competitive political setting, there are elements of its very representation and presentation that converge with developments in academic political discourse analysis; a study of which could hopefully illustrate arguments about both the discourse of 'The Big Society', and the relevant theory in which it is embedded.

Below the surface of 'The Big Society' lies its central theoretical influence, *Red Tory*, authored by academic and media personality Phillip Blond. A review of Blond's work in The London Review of Books by Jonathan Raban (2010: 22), provides a convenient way to introduce 'The Big Society' as a postmodern discourse:

> [T]he closing notes of The Archers' maddeningly memorable, merry-men-of-morris theme music... [have] been chiming insistently with my reading of Phillip Blond's Red Tory and my listening to David Cameron's 'big society, small government' speeches. When Cameron speaks of Britain's 'atomised' and 'broken' society, and calls for a return to a 'broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation', or Blond writes about the 'revival of the associative society', in which the 'common good' is 'cultivated organically from within', it's Ambridge that they have in mind. The rhetoric of both men seems to be shot through with plaintive rural nostalgia for the small, self-contained life of the village; for a world where 'frontline services' are 'delivered' from within the community by the church, the WI and the Over Sixties Club, where no one dies unnoticed by his neighbours, the pub serves as a nightly local parliament... In the

> Ambridge I remember, everybody pulled together to win the Borsetshire Best Kept Village competition; in Cameron's new Britain, he promises to appoint himself to the chairmanship of the Best Kept Nation committee.

Here we begin to see Raban pulling together the two texts and criticising their holistic remedy for Britain's ills. As well as describing Blond's prose as a 'smokescreen of jargon and false logic' (2010: 22) Raban is making an important point, that on top of much of the vague rhetoric outlining the basis of their idea, the texts primarily create a positively nostalgic collage of Britain. Whether Blond is asking for 'organic' change or Cameron commends the 'can-do' attitude of citizens, Raban astutely points out that there contains a unique wistfulness and intangibility about their vision, something more akin to a rural soap opera like The Archers, than the usual terminology-heavy language of policy, or generic 'catch-all' wording of political speech.

Nostalgia is a key term that Raban introduces. This nostalgia, that lies at the heart of 'The Big Society', is one of the central characteristics of Cameron producing discourse familiar to theories of Late Modernity. Frederic Jameson most famously used the term within the context of late capitalism as an effect of his crisis in historicity (1991), and similarly Lyotard (1979: 13) has a very neat definition of the phenomena:

> The Postmodern would be that which, the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.

Cameron manages to do this to full effect, in laying out his vision of 'The Big Society' he is presenting the unpresentable, and combined with the common criticism of ambiguity and vagueness in delineating his concept, he manages to create what could be read as postmodern rhetoric and theory. In reading these texts, it is possible to come to a critical perspective upon postmodern political speech and the arguments surrounding it. So, running alongside the Critical Discourse Analysis of key speeches relating to 'The Big Society', there will be a sustained criticism of Ingulfor Blühdorn's Sustaining the unsustainable: Symbolic politics and the politics of simulation. The analysis of Cameron will provide dual perspectives on both 'The Big Society' and Blühdorn's thesis on political speech.

The essay will be structured to investigate surrounding theoretical issues before conducting an extended critical discourse analysis of Cameron's 'Big Society' addresses, using methodology acquired from Norman Fairclough's school of CDA. Blühdorn's article creates an unnecessary tension in postmodern discourse, where there lies a polarisation between the dichotomous

symbolic politics of theorists such as Murray Edelman and Norman Fairclough (who can roundly contribute to the theoretical as well as methodological aspects of the essay - in separate capacities), and the slightly more complex Baudrillard inspired notions of postmodern simulation, simulacrum and hyperreality. Using the argumentation and concepts of Baudrillard in a study of 'The Big Society', should do a number of things in response to this. Initially, it should assert the representation of 'The Big Society' as a postmodern discourse, and could in this role contribute to a broader multidisciplinary study of the idea as a politically strategic or insubstantial project. Secondly, that the hallmarks of reproduction and other Baudrillard inspired concepts are readable into texts, contrary to Blühdorn's article - and also that the method in which it is read into the texts, from looking at interdiscursive and linguistic motifs, should be a way to prove that the theoretical groundwork offered by Blühdorn in his article, needs to be more layered and gradual than the polarised theory he describes. Finally, while allowing for a more pragmatic theoretical position to be reached compared to the extremes of Blühdorn, the paper should conversely agree with his argument that like all postmodern political discourse, the 'The Big Society' sustains the unsustainable, but in a more modest and readable way than Blühdorn permits - at the point of the text itself, rather than at the forbidding 'societal' level Blühdorn claims; (2007: 251).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This chapter aims to outline appropriate theory and concepts, eventually narrowing down the various arguments to some refined research questions that will be approached in the analysis. The key texts after Ingolfur Blühdorn's 'Sustaining the Unsustainable' include Murray Edelman's 'The Symbolic uses of Politics' and Jean Baudrillard's work 'Simulations' and his collection of essays 'The Gulf War will not take place'. It is important to note that the work of Norman Fairclough has different roles at various points. Methodologically, Fairclough provides the basis for the techniques used in this essay to analyse discourse with, as well as providing a theoretical justification to approach texts when discussing postmodernism; however his work is also relevant in his book 'New Labour New Language', where he has a valid contribution as a political discourse analyst, separate to his work on methodology.

Situating Cameron's speeches into postmodernism is straightforward enough, the texts even at first glance emit a rootless nostalgia as Raban pointed out, as well as the language upon close inspection seeming overly vague and without referent. Its connection to Blühdorn's work is not by chance, as the pairing of the two texts compare on broad social level. Blühdorn describes a contemporary need to 'Cut through the rhetoric! Get down to the issues!' (2007: 252) at a time where political elites and electorates are bored and anxious of politics' inability to prove itself

proactive in times of need. Similarly Cameron's urgent tone, and repeated salesmanship of 'The Big Society' contrasts with the fact that he couldn't secure a majority in Parliament, failing to woo a voting public disillusioned by a long stint with New Labour, and the MP's expenses crisis. It illustrates that this discursive phenomena isn't just occurring in the ivory tower of academia, but is a justified representation of a current political situation. This relevance is significant as it can also counters the common criticism of studies into postmodernism as being more than, in Blühdorn's words, 'an irrelevant privilege' (2007: 252), showing that it has significant bearing to a real social issue, than merely possessing the trappings of an overly reflexive bourgeois pursuit.

Blühdorn lays out his argument initially working from the framework of 'Symbolic Politics', where he quotes Meyer to illustrate the exhaustion of this particular paradigm:

> The phenomenon of symbolic politics…[in] its quality and function have, I will argue, fundamentally changed. Its rise has been facilitated by a range of factors including…the relocation of political discourse and competition into the mass media and the crisis of legitimacy in contemporary politics…surely there must be limits to the capacity of glossy rhetoric and political marketing to compensate for the progressive degeneration of politics…There must be a point when "the social crisis can no longer be concealed by symbolic activity"(Meyer: 1994); (2007: 252).

Blühdorn calls for the augmentation of symbolic political theory because of its failure to adapt to modern communications. Quoting Meyer, he highlights how symbolic politics cannot account for the multiplicity of media outlets and constant presentation of crisis in modern politics. Blühdorn sets out that something more significant is needed. He carries on:

> [T]he meta-critique of the paradigm of symbolic politics and the narratives it implies, this contribution develops the concept of 'simulative politics' which challenges a series of assumptions that are implicit in the notion of symbolic politics. The main argument to be elaborated is that despite their vociferous critique of 'merely symbolic politics' and their declatory resolve to take effective action, late-modern societies have neither the will nor the ability to 'get serious'. Their 'performance of seriousness' however, is an effective response to certain challenges which are particular to the late-modern condition, and the discourses of symbolic politics are an important part of that performance. They are an integral part of the 'politics of simulation' by means of which late-modern society manages to sustain – at least for the time being – what is known to be unsustainable (2007: 254)

Here Blühdorn encapsulates a lot in one paragraph. Largely he states that the phenomena the public experiences in current political communication is beyond the application of symbolism and mythmaking that previous theories described. Instead Blühdorn argues, in a time where crisis is consistently reported in a vast plurality of media, political discourse feigns 'getting serious' in what Blühdorn calls the 'additional layer of performance' (2007: 254). Blühdorn clearly states that this performance, the result of late modernity, prevents actual political progress, as the discourse of simulation and performance creates an empty rhetoric perpetuating a damaging or 'unsustainable' politics.

Blühdorn reaches this argument through an explication of Murray Edelman's work on symbolic politics. 'For Edelman symbolic politics was clearly a matter of political elites making strategic use of symbols, myths and rituals in order to deceive and control the mass public' (2007: 254) There follows a diagram Blühdorn creates between the 'Authentic' and the 'Symbolic' qualities of politics; clearly illustrating a dichotomy within Edelman's project. Finally the section concludes that Edelman found that audiences suffered from the normalisation of democratic deficit, where politicians no longer addressed the masses' problems and the public didn't expect them to. Here Blühdorn comes to a contrary point, namely that within the condition of late modernity, publics actively anticipate and even want governments that are purely symbolic, and then complain about the 'mere symbolism' they are constructed of.

This leads to the key effect of late modernity within Blühdorn's article, namely that the 'performance of seriousness' grounded in a simulative politics is in the words of Meyer, 'an exercise in which 'the fusion of presentation…and imagination…of politics replaces its production' (2007: 254). Or in the words of Baudrillard modern politicians 'rejuvenate…the fiction of the real' (1983: 184), where they perform supposedly serious rituals knowing they will not be taken seriously - yet act because the performance is necessary to normalise 'unsustainable' political processes. Simulative politics in other words extends and criticises both the symbolic political model and theories of postmodernism itself, adapting Baudrillard's work on simulative cultural processes to political discourse.

Blühdorn has created a clear theoretical lens in which to look at current political rhetoric. There is obviously a need to develop the area, and Blühdorn's lasting point – that discourses of late modernity perpetuate a detrimental politics, locked in a self sustaining Baudrillard inspired hyperreal discourse – is an argument that this essay will on the whole agree with. However, looking over Bluhdorn's representation of symbolic theory, there are two points worth making, that will segue into responding to the article with other criticisms.

Blühdorn recognises a consistently undemanding way of looking at political discourse – and if we look back at two key works of political discourse through the lens of Bluhdorn's paper, there is a coincidental logic, that both illustrate a dichotomy or somewhat overly simplistic symbolism. Edelman, in his work 'The Symbolic Uses of Politics', declares that 'It will appear that the meanings of each language style for unorganised, uninvolved mass audiences, as revealed in their responses, are often directly contradictory to its meanings for directly involved groups' (1964: 88). Here Edelman is outlining something similar to Blühdorn's interpreted dichotomy, in that he is clearly stating upon broader levels of meaning, there is a divide between private and public discourse.

Norman Fairclough in his study into the discourse of the Labour Party in 'New Labour New Language', coincidentally came to a very similar conclusion. Here Fairclough recognised a gulf in what he saw as 'rhetoric and reality' where 'The gap between rhetoric and reality…is the gap between the language of the bill and the language of New Labour's political discourse' (2000: 147). There is a strong similarity between the two works, especially between Fairclough and Edelman's recognition of private 'directly involved' discourse and the language of public politics. Viewed in this way, it is possible to see Blühdorn's presentation of symbolic politics as a concept that is not sophisticated enough to represent contemporary processes of late modernity. It was important to bring Fairclough in at that point, as his methodological work structures and justifies the CDA techniques for this study and it shows that without the development of theories of late modernity, the symbolic paradigm (or in this case the alternatively named 'rhetoric and reality' concept) keeps reproducing itself.

However, while it is important to note this dichotomous approach, it is not as simplistic as Blühdorn's argument makes out. There are multiple interpretations of Edelman's work, one interpretation in particular, which many including Edelman himself, began to see that - in the words of Sanford F. Schram - 'Symbols were the real substance' (2002: 7). Similarly Fairclough may have come to a comparable dichotomous conclusion to Edelman, yet the greater body of Fairclough's work including methodological work cited in this paper, suggest a more sophisticated understanding of discourse. In fact both Edelman and Fairclough appreciate 'styles' of discourse and their interdependency to create and sustain meaning (Fairclough, 2001; Edelman, 1964), making the symbolic/substance divide a less concrete and defunct model than Blühdorn illustrates. Blühdorn's reductive representation of symbolic politics is problematic in this respect, as his review of symbolic politics and critical 'extension' to the development of self-perpetuating simulative politics, is a rather severe and polarised theoretical position to take, where the space in between these two areas deserves recognition

and definition, otherwise it leaves the progress of late modern political discourse static, held at extremes.

There are further issues that Blühdorn's paper asserts which are problematic either in argumentation or theoretical content. A central issue lies in Blühdorn's justification for his paper. From stating that this transition to simulative politics is only traceable at a 'societal' level, not at the point of the text, he justifies this saying:

> So the question for empirical evidence is misconceived because the whole point is to reach beyond established societal self-descriptions whilst anything that is acceptable as empirical evidence would invariably just reproduce these societal self descriptions (2007: 271).

Blühdorn later also claims that because society hasn't the tools to totally recognise the late modern condition, simulative politics offers an alternative representation of society, not a more 'valid' or ultimate one. Blühdorn claims it is fundamentally a heuristic device. This justification seems fairly solid except for the fact that towards the end of the article it is claimed that analysing simulative political phenomena is significant as Blühdorn wishes for it to be 'Transcended' (2007: 271). This is a key argumentative flaw, where Blühdorn lays out an intangible theoretical phenomena claiming engaging with texts merely reproduces simulative activity, and then describes his notion as a socially heuristic device that should work towards transcending or overcoming the late modern condition. Blühdorn is rather awkwardly outlining a process impossible to interact with or study at a textual level, and then calling for the condition he creates to be approached. This it seems, is common flaw in the circular logic of postmodern thought. Theorist Paul Patton elucidates this issue:

> The flaw that runs through all postmodern thinking is a confused epistemological argument which begins by denying that we have any means of access to 'what happens' other than what is provided by the media, and ends by concluding on this basis that there is no 'operative difference between truth and falsehood, veridical knowledge and its semblance. (1995: 16)

Patton recognises the sense of paradoxical inertia at having no 'access to what happens' that runs through Blühdorn's article, where on reflection, it also seems absurd in this way for postmodern thinking to be so utterly centred around changes in culture, politics and society yet to not be able to interact with it - its total rejection of objectivism hampering its very purpose. It also brings up another issue within this vein of postmodern thinking, namely that while postmodernists like Blühdorn, find it hard to make textual truth claims, citing lack of 'access', the theorists he uses to form his notion of late modernity, make localised textual claims themselves in order to engage with, and define postmodernism on a larger theoretical plain.

Patton continues to say that in texts such as 'The Gulf War Did Not Take Place', the works of Baudrillard were not making bold universal claims about the collapse of the real into its representation, but instead making close ontological claims about elements of a current social reality (1995: 18). In a similar way a contemporary of Baudrillard, Frederic Jameson, made similar interpretations of social and cultural realities, observing postmodern characteristics citing events, objects and texts. This is not to say that Baudrillard and Jameson did not make bolder theoretical claims influencing Blühdorn's broader societal theory, yet it illustrates that there is a complex theoretical strata recognising the effect of late modernity in society, ranging from the macrocosmic theoretical claims to the microcosmic textual observation. This is perhaps the space that Blühdorn's polarised representation of symbolic to simulative theory neglects, and should account for.

While accepting Blühdorn's central notion of 'sustaining the unsustainable', it should be justified how this essay can approach the texts contrary to Blühdorn's argument. Analysing texts in this manner would certainly not be operating on the 'societal' level Blühdorn implies, it would be within the theoretical space that Patton claims it is possible to operate within, i.e. between Blühdorn's reductive interpretation of the symbolic/substance dichotomy and his notion of simulative politics. It is of course impossible to read simulation into a text, but his other ideas of a self-sustaining anti-politics, and the additional layer of the 'performance of seriousness' are somewhat less impossible to approach - especially when justifying it using the work of Baudrillard, as Blühdorn's article does.

Norman Fairclough justifies the engagement with texts with late modernity. Firstly by stating the differences between various work on discourse, in that there is analysis which is purely theoretical, and analysis that is centrally linguistic. Here Fairclough's method seems appropriate to combat Blühdorn's theoretical approach, as CDA aims to operationalise both facets of discourse, and construct meaning between the two. Fairclough stating 'No real understanding of the social effects of discourse is possible without looking closely at what happens when people talk or write.' (2003: 3). Similarly Fairclough argues that discourse or at least his branch of the project, CDA, should be a post-disciplinary study with a genuine aim for social research. To operate purely in theory, and then demand that the theoretical condition be 'transcended' as Blühdorn does, seems to fall into Fairclough's criticism, where he states 'it is time social theorists and researchers delivered on their promissory notes about the importance of language and discourse in contemporary social life.' (2003: 3). Here, Fairclough is challenging the boundaries of theoretical projects, baiting their ability to actually function as empirically social researchers.

Fairclough also justifies engagements with texts theoretically, with his notion of 'discourse as social practice', where unlike Blühdorn, he does not see texts as separate entities to broader social theories, but as a 'product of the process of text production.' (2001: 4). Granted that simulative politics may not be directly readable as a product of postmodern discourse, yet there are other characteristics of late modernity – to be later outlined by Baudrillard and Jameson – that allow an analyst to come to a similar conclusion as Blühdorn, but using empirical engagement and not theoretical dislocation to arrive there.

Fairclough further defines 'discourse as social practice' explaining,

> My view is that there is not an external relationship 'between' language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship. Language is part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena. (2001: 18)

This explains things differently to Blühdorn who sees all text and analysis thereof as reproductive of the phenomena it criticises; 'Discourse as social practice' sees textual empirical activity not even as an illustration of the phenomena as Blühdorn does, but in the words of Fairclough as, 'a *part* of those processes and practices' (2001: 19) even going as far to say regarding political discourse that, 'Politics partly consists in the disputes and struggles which occur in language and over language. (2001: 19)

Blühdorn seems to infer that an empirical reading of postmodernism and Baudrillard's hyperreality and simulation would be aimed at finding a 'conscious strategy' (2007: 271) to perform the 'act of seriousness'. This is disputable and misleading, a textual analysis looking for postmodernism does not want to prove a conscious strategy on the part of David Cameron, but merely to provide a method to reach and develop the same theoretical position as Blühdorn, using empirical linguistic evidence to contribute towards what Fairclough calls discursive social research. Blühdorn's paper illustrates a fascinating self perpetuation, or circular social phenomena where discourse 'sustains the unsustainable'; yet by recognising this circular phenomena, Blühdorn has employed circular logic to interpret it.

Specific Research Aims

To reiterate, there are some central research aims in this paper. They intend to guide the analysis and to clarify what the dissertation is trying to contribute towards. These aims will be responded to in the final conclusive chapter.

The dissertation uses Blühdorn's article and Cameron's speeches to illustrate that, when the meanings and analysis of the texts are compared to each other, they bear significant implications for the reading of each. Using Blühdorn's notion of 'sustaining the unsustainable' on an analysis of Cameron's 'Big Society' speeches should reveal that it is a postmodern discourse; comprised of a textual 'hybridity', existing as a self perpetuating hyperreal concept that is inherently postmodern. Conversely this study should tell us something about the work of Blühdorn. Although attempting to agree and develop his point that modern political discourse is self sustaining and anti political, it hopes to prove that methodologically it is possible to access and analyse these findings through a linguistic critical discourse analysis. The study of Cameron should enable the essay to discuss Blühdorn's broader notions about discourse, but break free from his circular theoretical paradigm where theorists of post modernity have no empirical ground to texts and events, yet should transcend the condition.

If the analysis is fruitful, after these research aims have been discussed in the analysis and conclusion, then broader implications will be considered. Equally, it will be also considered how a broader multidisciplinary project could refine claims of the 'Big Society' existing as a hyperreal discourse.

METHODOLOGY

Before elaborating on the methods and linguistic devices that will be used to conduct the analysis; there should be a justification for the chosen methods and texts. While this essay has chosen to employ Fairclough's school of CDA, other relevant works on discourse is important to note, Teun Van Dijk's recent analysis of Tony Blair's speech to the House of Commons justifying the Iraq War (Van Dijk: 2009), provides a new 'context' based paradigm with which to look at discourse. There is a definite overlap in interest with this project in terms of its political content, yet Fairclough's work on analysis provides a tight technical model that is prepared to look at theories such as postmodernism, and as stated earlier in the essay, this study aims to locate 'The Big Society' as a postmodern discourse in its textual form, before it becomes embedded in a party-political discursive 'context'. However, this is not to say that schools of CDA do not influence each other, which is why to account for this, Fairclough's later

methodological work will be employed from his book 'Analysing Discourse', as well as elements from his older works 'Discourse and Social Change' and 'Language and Power'. Fairclough offers a prepared and detailed framework, that is theoretically justified to engage with texts and equipped with a positive research outlook. That is to say, it both encourages the methodological agenda of this essay as well as promoting proactive ways to apply textual analysis towards social research.

The texts chosen for this essay almost choose themselves. They are the two key speeches delivered by David Cameron in the run up to the 2010 General Election that centrally promote the notion of 'The Big Society'. They represent the first major attempt at outlining and in turn, selling the idea to the public at large. There are other texts that could have been included, the Hugo Young Lecture given in 2009 that introduced the concept, the latest re-launch after the election in Liverpool, and the fairly significant body of literature from various Conservative Party websites. They were not included for a variety reasons, firstly the scope of the dissertation needed to be considered, where having too many texts to study would have allowed for less rigor and a less focused textual examination, given that an intertextual study with 'Red Tory' is to be undertaken as part of the analysis; and secondly that these speeches were delivered close together under the pressure of a campaign, where the communication of the notion was at the forefront of the text. The campaign speeches fit in with Blühdorn's concept of 'sustaining the unsustainable', where this vague postmodern discourse resulted in a partial election victory, showing how unsustainable campaign rhetoric sustains political advancement.

Approaches to the Texts

As stated previously the analysis will use Norman Fairclough's dissection of text, acknowledging the linguistic tools and devices he refined to do so. However while using the analytical tools of Fairclough, the aims will be augmented from the original. In 'Language and Power', Fairclough outlines the purposes to study texts is in order to unearth power relations, ideology, and other more traditional Marxist characteristics (Fairclough, 2001: 20). This dissertation intends to - while approaching texts at the same linguistic level - use the work of Baudrillard and Jameson to interpret key postmodern elements into the text instead.

This mixed method is actually authorised by Fairclough himself, and so while deviating from his previous aspirations, the study is actually progressing under his endorsement:

> A number of social researchers and theorists have drawn attention to ways in which social boundaries are blurred in contemporary social life, and to the forms of 'hybridity' or mixing of

social practices which results. This is widely seen for instance as a feature of 'postmodernity'...The analysis of interdiscursive hybridity in texts provides a potentially valuable resource for enhancing research based upon these perspectives, offering a level of detailed analysis which is not achievable with other methods. (2001: 35)

Here Fairclough is advocating the interpretation of texts to come to conclusions for theoretical social research, but focusing upon interdiscursive hybridity – the study of how various discourses, styles and genres of communication work together often simultaneously. This study of multiple discourses and styles into one text is a direct result of postmodern theory. Many theorists centre their ideas around 'hybridity', and Fairclough is illustrating how a theoretical concept can be translated directly into techniques of textual interpretation. The convergence or multiplicity of discourses in one text, relates directly back to the beginning of this essay where Lyotard's quotation described a condition of 'nostalgia' inherent to postmodernity. Jameson attributes the notion of nostalgia as an illustration of the crisis of historicity in late modernity (Jameson, 1991: 25), similarly Baudrillard recognises a similar phenomena in his analysis of the simulacrum:

> The political sphere entirely loses its specificity when it enters into the game of the media and public opinion polls...This convergence of language between the economic and the political is furthermore...by the same token its end, since the two spheres are abolished in an entirely separate reality or hyperreality . (1983: 86)

This illustrates a number of ideas, it establishes that there is a consistent pattern amongst theorists, whether Baudrillard, Jameson or Lyotard, in recognising a nostalgic phenomenon brought about by multiple reproductive processes. It also highlights the vague hybridity of specifically post modern *political* discourse. Baudrillard discusses both the idea of 'convergence' (or hybridity in CDA's case) and the idea of the text becoming hyperreal (the founding concept for Blühdorn's notion of sustaining the unsustainable), both notions being key principles to this essay.

The quotation also brings about the technical detail of how postmodernity would be read in the analytical chapter following this one. The elision of referent in a sentence structure that constructs a vague hybrid text, would be one way to operationalise an analysis in conjunction with what Baudrillard discusses in the quotation. Similarly there are other tools such as focusing on meaning relations, the inclusion and exclusion of voices and actors, and the concrete and abstract representation of events, which can begin to deconstruct the speeches. These are just a few ways of studying the text, that will be based around the formal structures of address and technical linguistic properties, in order to highlight the postmodern aspects of the

discourse. Direct quotations and textual evidence from Baudrillard and Fairclough will be used during the analysis to reinforce any theoretical interpretations made from the texts.

Clarifying an Analytical Paradigm

To define the approach, the analysis will be split thematically into three postmodern motifs. Within each of these will be structured technical analysis attempting to explicate how that particular motif or postmodern theme is realised through the discourses in the texts. It will start with close textual analysis leading up to bolder macrocosmic themes and theoretical implications in a synthesis of method and theory. This approach is more suitable as while attempting this study there is a constant relationship between theory and text; meaning that the more laboured paradigm advocated by Fairclough in his earlier work 'Language and Power' entitled 'text, interaction & context' will be appreciated but not applied strictly. The text and theory are so intertwined and interdependent, that dividing up the analysis in this way detracts from the articulation of the study.

The motifs will be divided into Hybridity, Reproduction and Fragmentation. These are all key themes, and relate back to the specific research aims as mentioned earlier, each being a different effect of the postmodern process. Having used Fairclough to illustrate hybridity, fragmentation is central to creating Jameson's 'nostalgia' and 'pastiche', as reproduction is to forming Baudrillard's 'simulation' (1983: 31). These concepts build the basis for defining the 'ahistorical' (1991: 22) plurality that constructs postmodern theories, and each motif and examination will be supported by clear theoretical citation.

These divisions are purely created in order to allow the most productive way of analysing the texts, it should be said that they are not separate entities, they are reliant on each other to create meaning and effect. This is merely a system that refines the process to extract various discourses in a method to see how while working simultaneously, the 'Big Society' speeches create a typically plural postmodern text.

ANALYSIS

Hybridity in 'The Big Society': Colloquial & Authoritarian Discourses

To begin to look for hybrid discourses within the texts means that there have to be clear identifiable genres, styles and grammar (Fairclough, 2003: 73), independent, yet entwined with each other, allowing for a discursive multiplicity in the texts. In this section of the analysis, there are two key discourses that are identifiable in Cameron's speeches, the abstract colloquial, and the concrete authoritarian. There is an obvious clash here - and its implications will be considered in full after the textual evidence - the methods of recognising the discourses will derive from the colloquial techniques of address, to the authoritarian assumptions that lie beneath them. This appreciation of hybrid discourses will lead to a greater point being conceived about the nature of the texts, and any broader postmodern elements that can be drawn from it.

The colloquial discourse running through Cameron's 'Big Society' speeches are both obvious and discreet. If we understand 'colloquial' as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'used in ordinary or familiar conversation; not formal or literary' (OED Online: 2004), then just from the definition Cameron's attempt to engage the audience with a familiar discourse is apparent in the vocabulary and conversational structures he adopts. On the surface level of the text, there is a plethora of colloquial vocabulary that illustrate Cameron's brand of rhetoric, or as Fairclough would describe 'style' (2003: 73). Vocabulary such as: 'rubbish', 'fudge' (in verb form), 'grab' 'stuck' 'crazy' 'big bossy state'. These immediately confirm the colloquial discourse of Cameron as a deliberate linguistic strategy, as they present a pre-written speech with words that would more conventionally be used flippantly in casual conversation. However, while these are the obvious techniques, there are as stated previously, more discreet colloquial processes structuring the sentences.

The opening of 'Big Society versus Big Government' speech encapsulates the colloquial dialogue of Cameron, 'This general election has suddenly got a bit lively. It has suddenly got a bit interesting. Something quite big has happened.' The lack of formal address, with short sentence structure establishes the tone Cameron wants to take with his audience. His repetition of the word 'suddenly' illustrates a feigned surprise, as he tries to establish that in the context of an election it is possible for him to remain unconcerned with 'sudden' events, this is again stressed when he states that the election has only got a 'bit' livelier than it was before. This repetition also implies something about the opening paragraph of the speech, namely that it evokes an anticipation of what that 'something' is, and it provides Cameron with a tone to deliver casual

rhetoric and rhetorical questions, bypassing the conventions of public address, attempting to bring a sense of urgency and the unexpected before establishing a central premise to the speech. This assumption of Cameron's that he can bypass convention establishes the familiarity he tries to conjure, whereby in a speech given without formal introduction, the speaker considers the audience as equals prepared to absorb to his soapbox rhetoric.

This issue of levelling with the audience, where Cameron uses the colloquial in place of the formal, is expressed in his repeated use of rhetorical questions. When describing the current state of Britain this technique is rigorously applied:

> Just consider the scale of the problems we face in this country…How are we going to change those things?…Take Education. Does anyone really believe on extra piece of legislation, one more little instruction from Ed Balls going out to every school is going to make all the difference?

With this approach, there is a refusal on Cameron's part to recognise himself as the deliverer of a speech, having little to no mention of the context, where Cameron as a political party leader is both executor of political dialogue and spectacle on stage. The discourse of colloquialism alleviates him from this pedestal, and levels his status with the audience, media, and electorate. Similarly, while posing these questions to the audience there is a constantly shifting identity with them. Cameron moves from 'we' to 'you' to 'let's' to 'the British people'. The more familiar recognition of the audience fits with the rhetorical question begging, as it establishes a linguistic relationship for further implied meaning to be built upon. When Cameron declares 'where we are today' this is a reference to his levelled status with his audience, as he can then build policy implementation upon an enforced linguistic sense of plurality or an artificial 'togetherness', having locked in the audience as if they were those directly involved and supporters in his project.

There is an abstraction to this representation, where a colloquial introductory verb (i.e. 'take', 'think') as described above, is paired in a sentence with one of the more of the common colloquial phrases. It portrays an apolitical and familiar figure of Cameron's mediated personality. Even without the introductory verb this effect is felt, for instance the sentence, 'For decades, politicians have basically been treating the British public like a bunch of mugs.' Here Cameron introduces the sentence casually dismissing the need for specific historicity with the audience ('for decades'), and then uses a fundamentally speculative terms ('basically') to describe or claim some form of political process, and finishes with the result of that process outlining the attitude of politicians towards the electorate as treating them negatively, like a 'bunch of mugs'. There is no reference to events, actions, specific actors or

places, the sentence being at such an abstract level of social representation, that the language and utterance of the sentence fulfil the real meaning - the ability to employ the colloquial discourse in this public address. It is here where Meyer's postmodern notion of 'the fusion of presentation…and imagination…of politics replaces its production' (2007: 252) comes to the fore, as in this example the discourse of colloquialism takes a more significant role than the meaning.

 This Conversational style leads to a type of 'genre mixing', where Cameron introduces a speech as a conversation or impersonal address. This creates in the text a hybridity within a hybrid discourse, as we find colloquial formations within the structure of a formal address leading to a plurality of genres and discourses. The intention is clear, Cameron chooses informal vocabulary combined with uncommon sentence structure for formal speechmaking. This could perhaps be seen as evidence of political strategy and the industry of communications behind the 'Big Society'. However as well as an inner hybridity and colloquialism, the familiar vocabulary ('crazy…bossy…' etc) also conjoins and intertwines the other key discourse in the texts, namely that of concrete authoritarianism. Conceivably in Fairclough's terms, one could describe the conversational terms and phrases as 'texturing' the two representations of Cameron. Beneath the colloquial familiarity of Cameron the electable conversationalist, lies a discourse that carries assumptions, values and ideologies that paint a more stern and rigid picture of the Conservative leader. For a start, the rejection of the 'bossy state' already implies an underlying value system leaning towards a free market conservatism.

The authoritarian discourse is presented in a way that can be read through discursive value assumptions and a contrasting concrete representation of events, as opposed to the colloquial abstract representation of events. Value assumptions are rife in both speeches, Cameron declaring 'There are now more people working in quangos than we have trained soldiers.' Here is the first of many value assumptions from Cameron, when discussing how to reel back the power of the state, he creates a direct comparison to Britain's military force. An unlikely paradigm is created in terms of assumed values, where mass employment in the public sector in this discourse of Cameron, equates to dismantling Britain's ability to defend itself, and perhaps the symbolic institution of the army itself. Austere value assumptions are inferred in texts other ways, their linguistic formation casting firm moral judgements as the public are represented, but their views dictated to them:

> [P]eople doubt whether change can really happen. They see drug and alcohol abuse…They see deep poverty in some of our communities…They experience the crime, the incivility…They see families falling apart…

Here a repeated 'They see', where a figurative public are encapsulated in a pronoun, providing a vehicle for Cameron to cast moral claims. The public is passivated, and in Fairclough's terms 'backgrounded', centrally to be used as a rhetorical device.

Similarly when discussing politics in this vein, Cameron becomes clearer in his rhetoric, naming institutions and outlining Tory policy, in a very concrete representation of events. They contain strong modal verbs that infer a strong sense of commitment:

> Getting rid of centralised bureaucracy that wastes money. Breaking state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises and companies to provide public services...Opening up public services to new providers...

Cameron and his conservatives are 'Getting...Breaking...Opening' in their aim to reduce state intervention in what is obviously a desirable ideology of the 'Big Society'. These sharp modal verbs outline the linguistic shift in David Cameron's discursive character, from describing former education policy as a 'little instruction from Ed Balls' to clearly naming active social agents ('charities, social enterprises and companies'). Cameron delineates a clear political concept, grounded on value assumptions as described previously, where the application of modal verbs show a clear commitment to follow them. However what is ultimately authoritarian, is that despite discussing society, the modal verbs suggest that only Cameron's Conservatives whether represented in the communal or colloquial 'us' or 'we', are allowed to execute action or possess agency. In the rhetorical universe Cameron creates, institutions are powerless unless 'allowed' to 'provide', similarly there is little to no acknowledgement or voice given to the citizens that it effects, the electorate's voice having a notable absence apart from when Cameron states what they believe, 'People think: 'you're all the same, none of you will make a difference'.

The hybrid discourses of the colloquial and authoritative Cameron, create a discordant process of communication and ideology, using vague colloquialisms in a familiar tone to frame traditional conservative beliefs and authoritative statements. It is even more apparent when it occurs in the same sentence. Following on from the quotation used in the analysis of authoritative modal verbs, comes the very colloquial discourse after a strong right-wing commitment.

> Opening up public services to new providers and saying to charities and private companies – 'if you've got the ideas and the people to tackle our most deep rooted problems', come and play a role in our public services.

In one sentence, there is a concrete Tory policy initiative, followed by a colloquial hypothetical dialogue for none-state actors to figuratively 'play a role'. Coincidentally for Cameron, this figurative effect infers to exactly what he is doing. The hybrid discourses of colloquialism and authority perhaps give an insight into how once deconstructed, it is possible to see how political communications situate competing discourses in the same texts. The layering of grammar and value assumptions suggest that there is a concerted effort to keep colloquial language in the transcript of key policy speeches, texturing the rival discourse of traditional conservatism.

As stated previously, it is impossible to read Blühdorn's added 'layer of performance', as simulation cannot be technically read, however while recognising the linguistic strain of colloquial speech in the text, it may be possible to read this hybrid discourse not as an intangible, theoretical 'layer of performance' but as a strata of postmodern discourse; relating back to the justification that postmodernism is not merely held at theoretical extremes (between the symbolic and simulation) but could be read in a gradual, stratified way. Harking back to the introduction of this essay, Jonathan Raban in his review of 'Red Tory' described a 'Big Society' vision where 'the pub serves as a nightly local parliament', rather ironically in terms of the substance of Cameron's political ideology, he may want to bring parliament back to the local pub, but in his strategic political discourse however, he brings the local pub to Parliament.

Fragmentation in 'The Big Society': The nominalisation of 'change'

Fragmentation is a significant postmodern notion and effect, due to the subscription of many postmodern theorists (including Baudrillard) to epistemological constructivism (Aylesworth, 2009), the postmodern structures of discontinued narratives, and the historicity of the nostalgic. Fragmentation is obviously connected to Fairclough's notion of textual 'hybridity'; and provides another analytical route towards discovering the multiplicity and discursive plurality of a text. To further this idea of hybridity, it would be useful to revisit a quotation used previously from Baudrillard, where he mentions how this convergence of discourses in one text, can be expressed as entering a new postmodern reality 'This convergence of language…is…by the same token its end, since the two spheres are abolished in an entirely separate reality, or hyperreality' (1983:40). Here Baudrillard spells out the consequences for hybrid texts, that the convergence of different discourses in this mediated fashion produces a hyperreal condition, detached from political actuality. In a broader sense, this disconnected hyperreality created from the convergence in the texts, read through a study of its linguistic fragmentation, can help

search for textual evidence of 'The Big Society' perpetuating an 'unsustainable' political discourse.

Within the discourse of David Cameron is a particularly noticeable phrase - 'change' - used in many ways, to mean many things. This phrase was most famously used in recent memory as the basis of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign slogan, and in 2010, the Conservatives followed suit, declaring that the country should 'vote for change'. The term is used a total of forty-four times in both speeches, and as well as semantically fragmenting the text, on first sight the transcript is peppered with the word – the text's aesthetics mirroring its semantics.

The key process to analyse the impact of change is what Fairclough calls 'nominalisation'. This is where a social process or entity is represented by a noun or grammatical metaphor (2003: 220). In the case of the 'Big Society' Cameron's use of the word change provides a destabilising presence in the text. In the 'Big Society' speeches, nominalisation fragments the texts with many consequences, initially the reference to change is fragmentary due to its shifting linguistic usage as both a noun and verb, leading to an arbitrary application with inconsistent points of reference and meaning relations. This arbitrary and linguisitic wordplay means it is put into different sentences and loses a consistent semantic function, meaning that the only logical way to look at the way Cameron uses change, is to therefore assume that every time he uses the word, he is talking about an atomised individual 'change' separate from a broader frame of reference to a specific process.

This occurs often in the same sentence, where change is used as both a verb and a noun, 'I believe we can bring change to this country and I believe we can change this country.' Here the first change is a noun, supported by the verb 'bring' where Cameron establishes the fact that he believes 'we' (assuming he means supporters of the 'Big Society'), could initiate an undefined process to make British society to different than it was before; whilst in the second sentence change becomes a verb, the emphasis is now upon 'can', the focus is on the possibility of difference occurring. There is no reference to either the processes and details of each change, nor a reference to each application of the word being the same process. Here there is a problem, because the focus of the sentence differs when supposedly discussing change as a broader concept to a mass audience. In other words, depending upon the reference or sentence it is applied to, it is problematic to connect up the constant reference to change as one consistent meaning.

The inconsistency of its meaning is apparent alongside another important factor of nominalisation. Namely that it passivates institutions and actors of agency into one reductive metaphor. Consider the following excerpts:

> The British people are crying out for change, and they are going to make us work hard to deliver that change, but in the end, it is only...a decisive Conservative victory that can bring the change our country needs

> So if you want change, and this election is all about change, because we are all fed up with what we've got, the only way certain of change, the only way to get change that will get the job done...

An inundation of change highlights the two issues. There is an inconsistency with meaning in the first quotation, the first two uses of change are connected, the second referring back to the first ('that change'), then due to the ambivalence of the metaphor, the reductive process of nominalisation occurs, and there is change 'that the country needs'. This apparently would be achieved by a Conservative election victory, but there is no reference to whether it is the same change as the change 'people are crying out for'; it is the same word, but in a different context applied in a ambivalent manner, and as it is often flitting between its function as a noun or a verb, there is no regular pattern of reference or linguistic usage, rendering the expression of the text fragmented.

This reductive technique, where Cameron repeatedly represents a totally abstract process devoid of detail or agency, reflects elements of his authoritarian discourse as discussed previously; in so much as the use of change is way to politically refer to a kind of action or progression, whilst maintaining control and dictating the actors and events within the discourse. It is fragmented and static, with only references to 'people', the Conservative party and the general election. This ultimately highlights that – due to the dissonant semantic meaning relations constructing Cameron's notion of 'change' scattered across the texts of the 'Big Society' – in a truly unsustainable hyperreal sense, this element of the text is genuinely meaningless. As Baudrillard states, 'At this point it makes no difference at all what the parties are expressing historically and socially. It is necessary even that they represent nothing.' Clearly there is an element to these texts where Cameron wants to give the allusion to political action, using the splintered notion of change as its key proponent in order to further the party's political gain. In the process however, it creates a an exhausted symbol that purely through its constant application, renders the word devoid of political meaning. However, while there is a fragmentation in the text due to the inconsistence of the 'change symbol', it is possible to see the rhetorical value of this. The performative quality of Cameron's change illustrates that while it may fragment the text, its value as a symbol regardless of its political meaning or non-

meaning, has provided a form of positive classification, a logic of equivalence (Fairclough, 2003) that runs through the texts despite the lack of technical linguistic cohesion. This symbolic interconnection, through processes of nominalisation, means that change represents an abstract political positive and this fragmented discourse within it establishes references to mass publics, the Conservative party, and election success, as logical hyponyms of a the abstracted 'change symbol'.

On balance it could be seen that rather than the motif of fragmentation totally dislocating the text, it is the nominalisation process and chains of equivalence that actually create an abstract discourse connecting election victory and Conservatism together. The fragmentary semantics allow for a broader discourse, of abstract symbolic change to be fostered. Cameron's text using this plural and symbolically hollow postmodern motif to bolster his political persuasion and electioneering, where hybridity perpetuates the discourse of the 'Big Society'.

Reproduction in 'The Big Society': the Intertextual dystopia of 'Broken Britain'

Throughout the analysis, the elision of referent, ambiguity and abstraction have been key causes to study various discursive motifs in 'The Big Society'. This section aims to focus on how this style of rhetoric creates the final motif, that of reproduction. This means that by looking at how two related texts (already established as influencing each other in the introduction), can perpetuate or reproduce an unsustainable and symbolically empty discourse. Phrases, grammar and vocabulary used without reference or specificity will be looked at combining all the techniques established; their abstract social representation, discursive omissions of actors and events, and their classification and chains of equivalents. This study established on an empirical intertextual level, will allow a claim about the language of 'The Big Society' as a wider discourse, not just its textual presentation in Cameron's speeches. The definition of reproduction is not meant to infringe upon the concept of simulation – here this section looks at reproduced discourses of abstraction, not a direct simulation that replaces its original. Baudrillard noted that various elements of this phenomena has been normalised in modern political discourse:

> It is no longer necessary that anyone *produce* an opinion, all that is needed is that all *reproduce* public opinion, in this sense that all opinions get caught up in this kind of general equivalent...for opinions as material goods: production is dead, long live reproduction. (1983: 32)

Applied to the 'Big Society', there could be a general equivalent read into the reproduced discourse between Cameron's speeches and Red Tory, achieved through linguistic abstraction

and other discursive processes. So Baudrillard's concept in practice means that substantial ideological positions need not be produced, there just needs to be reciprocal discourse between the two texts, where they discuss the 'Big Society' and Blond's political vision, achieved on a logical discursive equivalent. Recognising this discourse should define the 'Big Society' as a postmodern discourse on two levels, both textually in terms of its hybrid qualities and intertextually in terms of its shared discourse.

The shared discourse between the texts is one of an abstracted dystopia. Common terminology occurs many times between Blond and Cameron, phraseology is significant, both putting a considerable emphasis on the popular term 'broken', whether Blond lamenting 'Broken Britain' (2010: 66) or Cameron describing how 'Britain's broken society will be on the ballot'; this is a phrase that is intertextually loaded with political purpose. Blond describes it as a 'thesis' (2010: 66) when even at first glance, it is more of a mediated buzzword than a delineated idea. However the fact that Blond describes it as a 'thesis', highlights the pattern of discourse between Blond and Cameron, where meaning is supplanted on a word, without the word or object necessarily corresponding to being what it has just been adopted as. The term 'Broken Britain' for instance makes little grammatical sense, yet it is typical of figurative speech which elides referents in its phraseology. It refers to nothing specific, neither the words, 'broken' nor 'Britain', are what Blond and Cameron are talking about when they attempt to describe the deterioration of society, yet it is used to semantically anchor the negativity of the dystopian discourses in their texts.

In the dystopian discourse, there are definitive linguistic traits shared by the two, even in a surface-level rhetorical sense, they utilise lists, evocative imagery and terse colloquialisms. To revisit Cameron's 'Big Society Idea' speech he begins with:

> [P]eople doubt whether change can really happen. They see drug and alcohol abuse...They see deep poverty in some of our communities...They experience the crime, the incivility...They see families falling apart...

In his 'Big Society versus Big Government' speech he references to how the nation is: 'stuck with the problems we have got now, stuck with the big state, stuck with the economy that isn't moving, stuck with the debt that's holding us back, stuck with a political system that isn't working for us.'

Blond takes the same rhetorical approach, 'What is this malaise from which we all suffer? We all know the symptoms: increasing fear, lack of trust and abundance of suspicion, long-term

increase in violent crime, loneliness, recession, depression, private and public debt' (2010: 1) Later describing: 'Our receding trust in others, the normalisation of anti-social behaviour, our fear of children in the streets, our political and civil disengagement... (2010: 73)

As well as the rhetorical techniques used by the two, this technique provides negative chains of equivalents through abstract descriptions of negative social processes; from being structured in the same list and sentences in Blond's work 'loneliness' is the negative equivalent of 'private and public debt' the same way for Cameron 'crime' is a logical equivalent of 'families falling apart'. These become interchangeable concepts when delivered in this way, and become terms of generic classification in strengthening the intertextual discourse. The fact that these terms are all abstract description only fortifies their common dystopian vision. The classification process is aided when the style of discourse is at the abstracted level of 'families falling apart', and not a description of an event, time, place involving significant actors or causes. These chains of equivalents create a discursive purpose for the 'Big Society'; as it creates a nightmarish discourse to contrast with the positive 'change' symbolism Cameron creates in the last study. The establishment of 'Broken Britain' and the positivity of 'change with the Conservatives' is bridged by the discourse of the 'Big Society', giving it an apparent relevance or discursive platform to operate from.

This evidence of competing dystopian and positive discourses, bridged by the 'Big Society' creates a simulacrum of an ideology, as the notion of the 'Big Society' fills the gap as a rhetorical discourse an ideology would otherwise occupy with theory. When describing the 'Big Society' or 'Red Toryism' as being ideologically empty – it is not ignoring many of policy suggestions made in both texts, for policy suggestions while being political concepts, cannot fully express ideology - instead the claim is established from the assumptions in the text: from the rejection of the state, the introduction of the free market into social services, to the 'ethos' of Red Tory's social attitude being derivative of Anglicanism[3] all of which are central tenements of traditional British Conservatism (Heywood, 2003)[4]. Subsequently, this study aimed to show how from recognising the way in which postmodernist discourse present the texts; Cameron's attempt to launch a new contemporary political concept with a 'big idea', is a hyperreal vision of traditional Conservative policy embedded in a set of abstracted, competing postmodern discourses entitled the 'Big Society'. This postmodern discourse is more complex than being David Davies 'Blairite dressing' or even the rhetoric/reality paradigm of symbolic politics, as ideology, language and policy suffer from a complex struggle in the same texts, not in

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[3] Several critics have noted this, but most relevantly for this essay, refer to (Raban: 2010) in full.

dichotomous communication and policy documents, leaving no discernable separation for the discourse of the 'Big Society' to be a 'dressing' or mask hiding a political agenda. Instead, it presents its audience with a postmodern discursive phenomena, where it's textual hybridity and presentation has become the exclusive self-perpetuating substance of the speech.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it would seem that from this relatively brief discourse analysis, that it is possible to refute Blühdorn's claim that textual studies of late modern discourse merely 'reproduce' the phenomena, as the study shows clear strains of hybridity defined within the same terms of Baudrillard as Blühdorn uses in his paper. On the other hand, Blühdorn's paper also helped the analysis approach the question of why both the content and communication of the 'Big Society' has been such a disputed notion. Using Fairclough's theory and framework to connect the ideas into practice has enabled the foundations of being able to determine the plural processes and political strategy behind the 'Big Society'. However, while a broader more multidisciplinary study analysing the idea is needed to make wider and more substantial claims about the project, it is interesting how the stratified discourses of postmodernism are so prominent and easily recognisable; the texts have so many discursive levels, styles and voices, it is possible to see how the construction of the texts imply an inconsistency and plurality in their construction, and for a critical audience of Cameron this perhaps plays a part of the complex an intangible sense of 'dressing' on the text.

In closing, and as stated in the second chapter, there should be a note on how Blühdorn and other theorists see postmodern political discourse - that there is a static nature to the debate, as many academics call for it to be 'overcome' or developed. To overcome or tackle the debate of postmodern discourse, one might see that if Fairclough can connect textual analysis with theoretical phenomena, than the answer to this static unsustainable language might need more than theoretical argumentation to either fully define the phenomenon and to see ways of 'transcending it'. While the discursive condition of political postmodernism is speculatively created by many processes, from policy implementation, the social practice of applied language, to the mediated processes in which it is broadcast; without textual evidence however, it fails to prove itself as a constant social condition, as there will be many occurrences where textual studies such as the one above may not be successful. Baudrillard describes a kind of 'metaphysical despair' (1983: 101) at the discovery of a hollow stimulatory object, yet there is a greater problem in claiming that the discourse of postmodernity is one of 'despair' or is 'unsustainable', when those postmodern theorists take a particularly subjective and constructivist angle on the postmodern phenomena they analyse. It is therefore more logical to

conclude that while we search for this phenomena in texts, as many are sure it is the cause of unsustainability and an inauthentic culture and politics, it is paradoxical to make broad unempirical attempts to define the character of the condition, that ultimately undermine the very concept they are trying to study.

The discourse of the 'Big Society' can be seen as hyperreal and unsustainable in this work; yet the real problem that lies at the heart of those who find discourses of this kind problematic or need to see it be 'overcome' is there is not sufficient theoretical or empirical evidence to show that postmodernity is a constant or absolute condition that truly pervades all social events and texts. Its circular justification for itself disables the ability to argue contrary to it's observations; and it is exactly this circular argumentation that precludes it from being a complete social theory, as it merely provides an insular, self reflective argument for itself whenever it is taken to task. However, the analytical Fairclough influenced paradigm developed in this essay, could possibly help develop the uses of postmodern discourse if analysts and academics reframed postmodern discourse of this kind as a phenomena to be examined, rather than evidence of a constant ethereal condition. Approached from this perspective, then it could perhaps begin to explain certain styles of texts and their critical and social reception, which in turn, could help contribute to a more practical socially scientific approach towards theory and texts than the arguments that exist today.

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