DEBATE AS A PRACTICE THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE DISCURSIVE APPROACH

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Introduction

Communication is the thickest social bond, of which existence represents and directs the social reality. There can be no talk about the existence of society when there is no communication since it enables us to transmit and consequentially form the meanings that establish our society/societies in a given historical moment. Although there exists a variety of theoretical approaches to the meaning of communication and its role in the shaping of social reality, some authors share a common framework regarding the definition of communication and that is that '*communication is a symbolic process through which the reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed*'[1].

Different approaches to the study of communication have developed through the history and went hand in hand with the social changes. The consensus over the impact of communication on the functioning of the society has been established; however, there still exists a definitional void with respect to the communication/reality divide. Through the history of communication studies there have been three prevalent approaches to this relationship: reflective, intentional and constructivist.

This paper will discuss the common points of two different theoretical approaches to the study of the role of language and representation. The discussion will focus on rhetorical and discourse theory with special emphasis on the application of these two approaches in formal debate. The primary source of this work lies in Maurice Charland's work, *Rehabilitating Rhetoric: Confronting Blindspots in Discourse and Social Theory*. The aim of this paper is not to provide a deeper theoretical reasoning in

the field of the before mentioned theoretical challenge but rather an application of these two approaches and their common points on this form of institutionalised educational discourse. At the end of this analysis I hope to offer possible interpretations of the meaning of formal debate as an educational practice in the sense of not only the training of methods of persuasion but rather as a forum in which critical argumentation can prosper. The evaluation of these two approaches is important in the sense of a perceived need for critical discourse in public discussions. In this sense it becomes important to gain a critical perspective on the object of persuasion which presents a step forward from simply gaining skills of successful persuasion. My notion is that critical argumentation which has its roots in the constructivist paradigm of language/reality relationship can provide for this. The main points of this inquiry will focus on concepts that are common to these two approaches: power, discourse, communication and culture.

Formal debate – where, when, who?

For the purpose of this analysis I would like to introduce the working definition of formal debate. This definition is needed in order to avoid dealing with format distinctions and the confusion of formal debate with its everyday use as a communication event with varying degrees of structure. Since formal debate comes in a variety of formats guiding this communication event, the definition has to come in a more general form. Definition of formal debate reads for the purpose of this paper as *communication event in which two or more teams are involved in the before established rules, that include time limitations and the structure of speech, on a given topic. The position of the teams regarding the position on the given topic is set arbitrarily.*

Formal debate as we know it today has many historical parallels, especially in ancient Greece. Socrates' dialectics bears obvious similarities. It was used to expose errors in the speech of fellow speaker in a given forum, the aim of which was to derive to a higher philosophical recognition. It was used as a method of pro et contra by which a controversial issue was discussed from two opposite standpoints and had questioning time at its core (Škerlep, 2004: 37). Discussion in the form of contrasting standpoints was a common practice of sophistic performances and their methods of education in general (Grimaldi, 1996: 19-43). Formal debate today shares

at least three characteristics with this method; two (or more teams) debate a motion from two opposing sides, they try to identify the mistakes in the speech of the opposing speaker and they use questioning time for the purpose of the direct engagement with the opposing speaker. Although the role of questioning (also known as cross examination) varies in different formats of formal debate it still provides for one of the fundamental building blocks of debate in general. The role of questioning in debate can be summarized as follows: to destroy material parts of the opponent's case, weaken material parts of the opponent's case, narrow the debate for a more direct clash, and advance one's case (Copeland, 1995: 10).

Considering the above mentioned components of formal debate a further insight is offered by Toulmin (Toulmin in Škerlep, 2002: 155), who talks of argumentation as advocacy and argumentation as inquiry. The first is used to describe the advocacy of personal opinions and interests of participants which points to the instrumental – strategic rationality of participants. By applying this notion of argumentation on formal debate we point at the competitive component of an event. Pursuing strategic interests of wining is an important element of formal debate, which we can not neglect let alone dismiss. The value of this element lies in evoking interest through the tension provided by the award system. Toulmins' other notion of argumentation, inquiry, could be applied to the second component of formal debate, which is the educational one. Invention and application of differentiating arguments on a given topic are the ones that create and provide for this component. These two traits of formal debate can not however be analyzed in isolation since they are and have always been deeply intertwined. The structure of formal debate circuit demands from participants to address both components through preparing for a certain motion/debate topic in the environment of their clubs on one hand and through attending debate tournaments on the other. Higher motivation for the preparation process derives from the desire to win the competition. Competitions provide the incentive to work harder and explore more and in this way these two components complement each other.

The third understanding of contemporary theory of argumentation derives stems from audience approach to this social practice. Perelman (Perelman, 1993: 26 – 29) distinguishes between persuasion of a particular audience and argumentation as the persuasion of a universal audience. With that we approach the notion of classical rhetoric which emphasizes the role of audience and sets the source of persuasion in audience. The

role of audience becomes important in analyzing the perception of different argumentation practices in formal debate with regard to judges. Can we really talk about *tabula rasa* notion of judges and what are the 'appropriate' arguments one can use in order to win the 'ballot'?

The ideal of rhetoric?

In the exploration of the meaning of critical rhetoric in the frame of formal debate we will follow and evaluate varying definitions of the ideal of rhetoric. In dealing with this analysis the emphasis will, above all, be on the question whether the usage of rhetorical tools in combination with critical argumentation leads to a wider social goal of rhetoric, namely the uncovering of the truth. In doing so we will rely on guidances as defined by Plato and Foucault. The combination of these two thinkers who stand as prominent representatives of two differentiating theoretical fields will help us to get closer to the praxis of critiquing. On one hand Plato is used as a classical representative of the theory of rhetoric and on the other Foucault as a representative of the constructivist paradigm and with both thinkers we find concepts related to the practice of formal debate.

In Phaedrus Plato sets four basic conditions to rhetoric: a speaker has to know the truth about the subject, the proof has to have a logical structure, a speaker has to pose moral integrity and a speaker has to know the psychological traits of their audience. While this conditions treat a speaker and audience components of a communication event and are still recognised as important today, there is another relevant component, namely that of space. Here we turn to Foucault who deals with the question of placement constrictions and the application of his notion of relevance for critical discourse. His main goal is to prove that the notion of truth seeking has to fulfil another requirement, namely that of a free environment in which the communication event takes place. His notion is that 'The work of profound transformation can only be done in an atmosphere which is free and always agitated by permanent criticism' (Foucault, 1982: 34). The hypothesis which we'll test in this part has two components: content and space. At first we will deal with the question whether critical argumentation presents a tool for achieving Plato's ideal of rhetoric through the practice of formal debate. The second part will deal with the question to what extent (if at all) the forum of formal debate presents the environment in which the power relations in the 'real world'

do not condition the power of the argument in this environment. At the end of this article I'll analyze through the prism of critical argumentation which goal is primary; the quest for truth or the possibility of a free revaluation of ideas.

An analysis will encompass the analysis and synthesis of secondary sources. In this part I'll rely on the work of post-structuralisms, new wave of theory of rhetoric and lectures of debate coaches.

Symbolical production of reality

Carey characterizes the production of reality as a 'miracle we perform daily and hourly' (Carey, 1992: 29). The production of reality presents the first step in the circle of constant changing of meanings that shape our daily reality. The main role in this process is occupied by symbols through which we 'represent reality' and which 'represent for reality', In the first instance we talk about the system of representation[2] of reality through shared symbols (language, signs, images) which form meaning that we consequentially decode in accordance with the prevailing cultural codes. In the second instance we talk about transcriptions of reality that are manifested as symbols through which the reality is pictured so that the symbols stand on the place of reality they represent (Hall, 2004: 37).

The production of reality, however, is not a process that would stand independently. Mere talk about reality is in a way an oxymoron since by talking about reality we at the same time transmit certain meanings and offer our insights about it. We talk about reality which we can neither comprise nor exceed. In spite of constant fluidity of meanings a certain concession to a 'prevailing meaning' is necessary in order to function and cooperate in the society. The same is true with debate. In order to engage in a meaningful practice, the participants need to establish certain rules guiding this communication event and they need to understand the ideas presented. As already indicated above the meanings change, have a certain measure of fluidity which presents the second step in the process of the construction of meanings, namely the renewal of meanings. This step relies on the component of time, the analysis of which shows that the prevailing meanings of social groups change through time as a consequence of constant criticism and attacks. A new practice that developed in formal debate recently is critiquing. While accepted as an established practice of argumentation in US formal debate circuit it still

has not gained momentum in Europe. The establishment of its meaning can only happen through challenging the established ideas and representations and introduction of new forms. Why?

The maintenance of certain representations and its meaning depends heavily on constant 'regeneration and resumption of its authority' (Carey, 1992: 30). But the process does not stop here. Certain representations wane and with this a certain vacuum emerges which has to be filled up with new representations, which consequentially form new meanings. The revaluation of established ideas is present everywhere. With the emergence of new social movements, distrust in the established forms of political representation, rise of apolitical youth and the ever greater fluidity of meanings the need for new forms of argumentation is established, if even only in the sphere of formal debate. With this step we close the circle of representation and the formation of meanings.

Formal debate can be applied to this circle as interpretation of reality through preset rules that are grounded in the theory of rhetoric. With this form of application we move away from looking at debate as a social practice as such and analyze the application of critiquing through this social practice. Further analysis will focus on the understanding of the circle of representation in a given 'debate round'. The forum of formal debate represents a laboratory environment for analyzing this practice of argumentation since it is established through given rules which enable all participants an equal starting ground. And it is precisely this rule security that in a way offers an ideal place for the confrontation and revaluation of ideas. In the continuation of this paper the focus will be on different types of critiques; *critique of language and its meaning, the critique of discourse and its implications and the critique of the presentation itself*[5].

On the representation of reality

The identification of the source of meaning becomes crucial in our understanding of the reality production process. Three main approaches have developed through the years and their main point of differentiation is identification of the source. These three main approaches are *the reflective, the intentional and the constructivist approach*. The reflective approach sets the source of meaning in the material object itself by which the language becomes a mere reflection of the reality, the language merely imitates the truth. The second approach grounds meaning in the

speaker who consciously creates meaning and if we follow this approach 'lays the meaning on the world' (Hall, 2004: 45). Both approaches have suffered great criticism which foremost stems from the fact that language is a social good with socially shared meanings which always have to be thought of in a wider social context (Hall, 2004: 44 – 47). The analysis of these consequences[4] becomes the argumentative battleground in which participants confront their ideas about the meanings engaged in a certain representation.

Constructivists[5] meet debaters

The foundation of this approach lays in the notion that all language is public and social – by that it denies the notion that the meaning could stem from either people or objects themselves. The representatives of this field claim that 'the meaning is not mediated by the world itself but rather in the language codes or any other system that we use for the representation of our concepts' (Hall, 2004: 46). Language and the conceptual map form two interrelated systems of representation that work together in the process of meaning construction (Hall, 2004: 38). The primary characteristic of each culture is a common language that enables the transmission of meanings between members of a certain culture and through shared meanings creates a social reality.

The arguments that stem from this contingency of language have gained ground also in formal debate. They are grounded in the analysis of a certain speech act and its use of language that connotes a certain ideological stance. The most common examples of such a language use include the language of development, the sexist use of language, 'third world language' (Morgan – Parmett, 2001).

McGee writes about ideographs[6] which he sees as ideologically defined terms in a certain 'text' that need to be analysed. As an example he discusses the term 'equality'. There is no pre-defined meaning for this word in today's society; the word is given its meaning through its use in describing a certain phenomena. The word carries meaning as long as this meaning is acceptable for certain audience. In different historical periods the term 'equality' doesn't carry the same meaning since its meaning changes with the situations through which we define 'equality' as a common denominator of a given moment. In spite of changes in the meaning this word retains a common value basis as a foundation of

situations that carries this word as a common denominator (McGee, 1999: 431). Also with the use of the term 'development' in a speech act there can't be talk about the 'harms of the speech itself' but has to be dealt with in a wider social context, where wider social meanings are attached to it and linked with praxis that defines that meaning. That leads to the identification of harmful consequences. Bare prohibition of a certain language use does not offer an answer to the implications that this kind of language causes. But the use of these terms as a foundation of argumentative analysis can be very successful since it offers a comparative review of different meanings in different situations.

The answer, however, still lies in social practices, which are the foundation of the meaning. Historical analysis of the changes in the meaning plays an important part in answering the questions related to the role of these 'ideographs' and can be linked to the presentation of the fluidity of meanings as described by Carrey. This kind of analysis paints the picture and questions the Truth. McGee agrees with the thesis that the meaning of the prevailing ideographs depends upon the prevailing ideology of a given historical moment and stresses the importance of a precise definition and description of that ideology. He also relates to the concept of ideology and defines it as 'a political language composed of slogan – like terms signifying collective commitment' (McGee, 1999: 435). Formal debate through the use of constructivist framework can be seen as a practical analysis of prevailing ideology since it questions collective responsibilities of a certain social group in a given historical moment. If we now return to the before mentioned usage of the term 'development' that is present in the majority of political discourse that deals with state relations then we can observe and criticize the social relations that abound from this. The role of critical rhetoric is therefore to revaluate the social responsibilities of different social groups, in this case, the responsibilities of the majority population that are harmed by this kind of language use and use argumentative structure to point to the linkage between the sole use of language and its consequences in the real world. The end goal is to analyse the way in which a certain use of language harms in each and every situation. It is (ab)used since it reproduces the power relations that produced its meaning today (in the case of 'development' the way it reproduces the system of inequality between states in the system of international relations).

This form of analysis bares close connection to critical discourse analysis that we turn to now.

What is there in discourse that is not right?

The definition of discourse that will be used in this part derives from M. Foucault (Foucault in Hall, 2004: 65), who expands the field of the construction of meaning from language to discourse. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, is 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect (Hall in Hall, 2004: 65). The production of knowledge is important from the standpoint of the directions of a certain society that provide commonly acceptable definitions of conduct in each situation. Discourse makes sense out of our everyday practices and guides our conduct in them. The discourse analysis focuses on which and in which way concrete rules influence the realization of ideas, carrying out of practices, the way we define reasonable ways of talking about a given subject. But above this, it also focuses on the way other discourses are excluded from this framework, the way in which certain themes, content and practices are made meaningless. Both sides, exclusion and framing, bare substantial consequences on concrete social consequences because of the influence of discourse on the formation of social functioning of social relations.

The question of knowledge is of crucial importance for Foucault and his discussion of discourse since he understands it as inseparably intertwined with power relations. Knowledge, in his opinion, has always been a consistent part of systems for the supervision of social behaviour in practice (Hall, 2004: 68). Foucault also denies Truth as absolute and provides it with an anti-pole of the regime of truth, a code through which it is shared by a certain social formation about a given social phenomena that guides mechanisms and instances that enable the differentiation between true and false statements. Foucault derives from this conceptualization of power, that is not just negative and suppressive but also productive and all-encompassing and which he gives a name of micro-physics of power that carries with it concrete consequences for the body (Foucault in Hall, 2004: 69–71). But it needs to be emphasized that there can never be talk about just one discourse, that would thread through all conceptualizations of a certain social phenomena. Instead of just one discourse there is a 'variety of discourses', that are mutually intertwined, as is exposed by Burr (Burr, 1998: 50).

The formations of identity through discourse, the sense of belonging to different groups together form the texture of individuals' identity. Out of the formation of prevailing social practices that form the system of the capitalistic economy real consequences for the individual in the society derive. Burr stresses that there can be no talk about a 'coincidental' choice about one's own role in the society, since it is created for us through the prevailing discourses, which with their prevailing practices and prescriptions form and re-affirm that reality (Burr, 1998: 54).

The construction of critical argument in this case is directly linked to the explanation of consequences that are transmitted and defined by the prevailing power relations through the formation of defining social practices. With this practice of argumentation debaters follow the idea of constructivist, who claim, that the models of representation should focus on wider social implications that derive from representations and not just with the sole text as the source of meaning (Hall, 2004: 64). Through the application on formal debate the stress is on *'not just the sole text'* by which the introduction of critical arguments offers a step back from classical methods of argumentative analysis and introduces a new field of argumentation. This group of arguments moves away from the message and attributes it with a new source of meaning. The main question with this form of analysis is what people do with their speech and/or text and what they wish to accomplish with it. This theoretical approach, that stresses the importance of discourse gives meaning foremost to the analysis in the way in which 'accounts are constructed and bring about effects for the speaker or writer' (Potter and Wetherell, Edwards and Potter, Potter and Reicher in Burr, 1998: 47). This is done through accepted forms of argumentation as defined by informal logic.

First we have to expose the 'hidden' assumptions of opponents, which in this case relates to the identified discourse and assumptions that it entails. If we turn away here from classical notion of assumption and turn to Barthes, that defines an assumption as captured in wider ideological frames through which we read off meanings. These assumptions are never explicitly proven (which is also true for the tradition of informal logic) but form a pool of meanings through which we read of the 'real meaning'. Debate is about reading off different meanings, about constructing the ideas around a given subject area and is always open to different interpretations. But not all meanings are accepted as equally valid. Critiquing does not just provide for another

arrangement of ideas, but offers an interpretation of how these interpretations came into being.

Representation works according to Barthes through two different, but in way related concepts; first is the connection between the signifier and the signified, through which the signs are related and form a simple denotative meaning. In this case we would talk about the structural analysis of argument that addresses only the structure of the argument and exposes the logical fallacies. But Barthes does not stop here and connects this denotative level with the second level in which this sign is attached with the second line of signifiers, namely the wider ideological idea. This second level is identified by Barthes as a myth (Barthes in Hall, 2004: 90). The process of critiquing identifies the 'ideographs' and exposes its hidden meaning. Schuster (Schuster 2003) stresses the importance of the identification of assumptions, rather than words. It is the assumption behind the word that is bad, not the word itself. As an example she talks about the discourse of development assistance. Of a crucial importance is the identification of practices and ways of thinking since they rely on 'wrong' perceptions about international relations (myth of the fair distribution), the perception of the ideal of development, not naming certain practices although the discourse implicates them but never explicitly talks about them. This leads to the second point of this form of analysis, namely the connection of the identified assumption with its harmful consequences. This step is primarily based on content analysis. It is important foremost in the sense of confronting two ideas that rarely meet in real life since they diametrically oppose each other and are discussed from different positions of power. In the forum of formal debate the component of power relations looses its strength since the strength of the protagonist of the idea does not lay in their social power. Power is replaced with the force of reason, which is grounded in the argumentative usage of knowledge that is not bound with any other relations.

The third step of the critical argument construction deals with the implications of argument. With this, the strategies of how to construct it can go into different directions. Snider lists three most important ones: the opponents have never properly identified the problem, the opponents will never solve the problem because of their assumptions about it or from working out of these assumptions, and bad consequences will follow (Snider, 2006). With this step the goal of critical rhetoric is addressed, that is according to McKerrow, to give an opportunity to include one's own

insights into the practical interpretation of social consequences (McKerrow, 1999: 442). Schuster and Meany analyze the language of 'Third World' and the hidden assumption of hierarchy of civilizations and the practical consequence of creating relations of inferiority and superiority (Schuster and Meany, 2002: 188). The strength of an argument in this situation can be detached from the strength that the umbrella discourse in real life possesses and can be revaluated on the basis of the confrontation in this given situation. Because of the preset rules in this communication event and because of the argumentative tools that are used to prove a given standpoint, there can also be no talk about the prevalence of *pathos* in the persuasion process. With this notion we approach Foucault's notion of the 'ideal, critical space'.

Through argument structure, that reveals the assumptions entailed in the argument and which are indirectly linked to the power relations, and the introduction of practical implications we also follow McKerrow. He claims that it is not enough to just identify the 'wrong discourses', but also to structure arguments in a way which identifies the integration of power and knowledge in a certain discursive practice. Only through this can the role of the power/knowledge relation as constitutive of social practices be identified (McKerrow, 1999: 451).

In round critical argument structure

We have revised the structure of the critical argument referring to the use of language and discourse. The in-round use of these arguments looses some of the above mentioned complexities and is adapted to avoid some of the theoretical pit falls. Let's revise the structure of these arguments and make them work for the praxis, one which can be used and consequentially achieve all the theoretical assumptions of using these arguments. In order to do so some basic assumptions of critical argument must be proven and here is where the paper turns back to debate theory (Meany and Schuster, 2002: 192).

- The proposition team makes assumption x (involves identification of the proposal of the affirmative team)
- Assumption x is bankrupt (or dangerous, or patently silly, or shamefully weak...) for the following reasons...
- Because we successfully criticize the identified assumption x we win the debate because...

- They fundamentally misunderstand the problem
- The misidentification of the harm undercuts any appeal to solvency
- Their proposal is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution
- Their problem will at least be unable to ameliorate the problem, at worst their proposal will make things worse. (Schuster and Meany, 2003: 192–193)

Some questions at the end: analysis of debate as a social practice

The analytical benefit of the theory of rhetoric derives from the tools it offers for the exposure and analysis of 'the structure of reason' in discourses that shape the reality of our day. The interpretive analysis is also important in the theory of discourse, since it enables the analysis of the structure of organization and the selection of the presented meanings (Charland). While the contribution of this tool for the analysis of presentation 'in a debate round' has been presented above, this section deals with the possibilities these tools offer for the analysis 'from the outside'; for the analysis of debate as an independent presentation, as an individual social practice.

If debate is to have an emancipatory potential, it has to fulfil certain standards, not just in the sense of content, but also in the sense of its own structure. McKerrow in his analysis of critical rhetoric talks about this structure and stresses the danger of the lack of communication power, which consequentially leads to the prevalence of the 'rhetoric of elites'. His thesis is, that the symbolic power of communication as a praxis has to be re-appropriated by the 'marginalized' if they want to gain power. But under the conditions in which the ruling elite control spaces of communication this can not happen. So in order to regain the symbolical power the rhetoric of ruling elite has to be replaced with heterodoxical rhetoric of these groups (McKerrow, 1999: 456). Is debate a place that contributes to this goal?

The achievement of this goal heavily depends upon the ability to freely develop discourses that bear the potential for transformation in an open environment, where the power of discourse does not depend on its real power in the world out there. While the world will not change because of one debate round, this social practice still bears substantial consequences for the people involved. Two questions are important in this regard. Does formal debate empower the already prevailing lines

of discourse and help them to regenerate in the environment of formal debate? And does it equip the already privileged individuals in our society with even more social skills? And if this is all true, where is the place of formal debate in the sense of its role as a social practice?

The aim of this section is not to offer any final answers to the questions posed above, but to look into critical theory in order to find questions that could help answer these questions. The questions can be found in Charland, who revaluates the theory of rhetoric from the standpoint of critical theory and asks questions to the communication event from the outside. He poses questions to the theory of rhetoric in the sense of agent, content, occasion and audience. When analysing debate as a social practice through the prism of critical theory, the questions Charland poses are as follows; *Why a certain speaker?* (Is there a gender bias? Is there a prevalence of any social group? Who is excluded?) *Why this occasion? Why a certain topic?* (Are the topics really set arbitrarily? Are there any topics that are excluded?) *Whose interests are represented? Which audiences are excluded? (In what way? Are there separated competitions?)* and *Is discourse adapted to the/because of audience?* (Charland, 1999: 472). While these questions have already been addressed to a certain extent (notably at the Istanbul Conference), they offer a good starting point for the analysis of debate as a social practice in the light of critical theory.

Although debate has only a limited reach (debate clubs) it is still necessary to evaluate and study the trends that determine it in a given moment. Charland with his synthesis of critical theory and the theory of rhetoric offers an important insight into this field. Instead of evaluating debate solely in the sense of attributing it with certain potentials, these potentials need to be revaluated in the sense of achieving their goals which help to identify it as a social practice, which is not solely the purpose in itself, but also for the society in a wider sense.

Conclusion

The power of a given theory depends upon its articulation, places of articulation in the power of its presentation. It is my opinion, that post-structuralism presents an important contribution to our understanding of society, social relations and the relations of power that form our understanding. But the power of articulation still heavily depends upon

the material relations of power. While it has gained momentum in academic sphere where it holds a status of recognized theoretical approach, its practical application still remains practically unrecognized. The majority of social practices still depend on the positivistic analysis of social relations, which has concrete social and material consequences. The usage of critical theory for the purpose of contributing to its academic reach seems reasonable in many ways. The practical application of critical argumentation (although in a limited reach) offers alternative answers of the taken for granted truths, that are otherwise used in education and offer alternative world views. On the other side, this kind of argumentation offers for critical theory a practical way of thinking about the application and its usage in the communication events which are still today closed for this way of argumentation.

While debate is primarily dedicated to the exploration of the rhetorical tools of analysis of the wider social themes, I believe that it is necessary to move away from the sole focus on audience. This is important in order to offer public revaluation of norms and to consequentially ascribe debate with emancipator potential. Because of the incorporation of debate into social practices also the meaning, values and ideas of post-structural theory gain importance in analyzing and understanding of social relations. Here I would like to turn once again to Burr, who exposes the importance of the inter-relation of discourse from its real, material events; discourses emerge in things that people say or write, and the meaning of things depends on its usages in the discursive framework in which they appear. This constant dynamics of interpretation that takes place within a given historical moment then becomes a source of changes and negotiation about meanings that are created through these discourses. Only constant negotiation leads to changes, that (though not always) result in social progress. The framework of formal debate offers 'laboratory environment' for the negotiation about meanings that are a part of the reality outside of this communication event. The use of tools of argumentation and the theory of rhetoric offer important foundation for the realization and negotiation about the prevailing opinions since they structure the communication event according to certain rules, that make content more understandable.

In my opinion formal debate should stand for more than just another school of speaking and offer alternative channels of gaining knowledge and the use of critical argumentation in the sense of combining the two

theoretical approaches mentioned above. The reluctance to new forms of argumentation is understandable, but should not hinder the development of debate through these channels as well. The structure of formal debate activity offers the possibilities of idea revaluation that we too many times lack in the real world even if it does so in a limited range for a limited amount of people. Therefore it is even of a greater importance not to close the channels to new ideas and approaches and not to just repeat the prevailing ideas.

Notes

[1] The author in this section refers to: Weber, Durkheim, de Tocqueville, Huizinga, Burke, Duncan, Portman, Kuhn, Berger, Geertz and the Chicago School (Carey, 1992: 23)

[2] 'That is because it consists, not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them' (Hall, 2004: 37)

[3] Sometimes the boundaries between the different types of critique are vague. The critiquing of language bears similarities with the critique of discourse, since the discourse is marked with certain words and is intertwined with the critique of thinking and values, since words and discourses rely on a certain value and thought set.

[4] 'Our private, intended meanings, however personal to us, have to enter into the rules, codes and conventions of language to be shared and understood' (Hall, 2004: 45). If we follow the intentional approach then we could never find meaning of the concept of love in its material form, and consequentially never derive to a common understanding which we could all (or at least the majority) agree upon.

[5] Here we follow the thought of Foucault and his discursive approach to language.

[6] An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal' (McGee, 1999: 435). A similar notion is found in Mouffe and Laclaus 'empty signifiers'.

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