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The discursive (re)production of flexible capitalism

From culture and trade to culture as trade

Abstract

In this article, a plan of action from the Norwegian government called “Culture and Trade” is analysed by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The document elaborates on how cultural life and business life can cooperate to become more competitive and create values. As a point of departure, a text and image analysis is undertaken, before the article builds up to a final discussion of the plan of action’s relation to society at large. The document is interpreted as reproducing and inculcating neo-liberal discourses on globalisation, competitiveness and flexibility. The conclusion drawn from the analysis is that the plan of action is a document on culture as trade, rather than a document on culture and trade. Through discursive work it contributes to normalising uncertainty in flexible capitalism and to legitimising an instrumental use of culture.

Keywords: culture and trade; critical discourse analysis; cultural political economy; neo-liberalism; globalisation; competitiveness; flexibility

Introduction

Today it is customary to speak of the collaborative potential of culture and trade to achieve a positive outcome in both cultural life and business life. This practice may circulate as an everyday norm of conduct, but it may also be more institutionalised, e.g. embedded in plans and documents as guidelines on how to act to achieve the potential outcome. In what follows, I will direct my attention towards a publication that corresponds to the latter description; namely a plan of action called *Culture and Trade* [*Kultur og næring*] published by the Norwegian majority government (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). The document of 30 pages is co-written by the Norwegian Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and the Ministry of Culture. According to the government, a better interplay between culture and trade may strengthen the value creation in cultural businesses, and contribute to a more adaptable business life, as well as to a positive local and regional development (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 4). They further emphasise that it is important to integrate aspects of both cultural policy and business policy to succeed in developing this new area. They argue that it is important that the authorities, business life, and cultural life think anew. One has to see the possibilities and solve the challenges in a more creative way. If one succeeds, the government claims, one may contribute to establishing adaptable businesses, more vigorous local societies and a cultural life with new possibilities (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 4). To support the argument, the document refers to research conducted by the Eastern Norway Research Institute (ENRI), claiming that the cultural businesses of language and literature, the visual arts of pictures, paintings and photographs, marketing, handicrafts, theatre, dance, music, architecture and design, including fashion design, represent approximately 3.5% of Norway’s gross national product (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 6). The plan of action presents various examples of win-win situations, where people and businesses have made use of design, dance, music, acting, or other cultural expressions, and gained a positive output from the collaboration. There are several pictures in the document that serve as constructions of their claims. At the end of the document the government launches 25 economic allocations directed to different priorities; many of them within the limits of a few million Norwegian kroner each (about 250 000 euro). I will not discuss the allocations in this article, but instead

look into how their importance is underpinned and justified through language (and more broadly, semiosis).¹ New semiotic systems invoke, repeat, or (re)articulate established discourses and they develop a “poetry for the future” that resonates with new potentialities (Jessop, 2004, p. 167). I will search for this “poetry”, and the adhering potentialities, by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

The methodology in this article is based upon Norman Fairclough’s version of CDA, and the way it can be used to analyse political rhetoric. Fairclough and Fairclough claim that social life can be conceptualised as the interplay between three levels of social reality: social structures, practices and events (2012, p. 82). Social structures are systems and mechanisms (e.g. capitalism) that influence social events and concrete instances of things that happen, people’s behaviour etc. The relationship between social structures and social events is not seen as a direct one, but as a relationship mediated by social practice (2012, p. 82). Structure, practices and events all have a partly semiotic character. Events in their semiotic aspect are texts, images, body language etc. The semiotic aspect of practice includes genres, discourses and styles (2012, p. 82).² A particular configuration of different genres, discourses and styles, constituting networks, social fields, institutions etc., are orders of discourse (2012, p. 83). This version of CDA is informed by “cultural political economy” (CPE) – which is a “political economy” that incorporates a theory of discourse and the dialectics of discourse (N. Fairclough, 2010b, p. 507). Discourses are not only representations and imaginaries, they also have transformative effects on social reality – enacted as new ways of (inter)acting and new ways of being (N. Fairclough, 2010b, p. 508). CPE claims that semiosis contributes to the constitution of social objects and social subjects, while orthodox political economy tends to naturalise or reify its objects (Jessop, 2004, p. 160). CPE distinguishes the “actual existing economy” (as the chaotic sum of all economic activities), from an imaginatively narrated (more or less coherent) subset of these activities (2004, p. 162). CPE views economic objects as (partly) socially constructed and historically specific. It examines the role of semiosis in the continual (re)making of social relations and the co-constitution of their extra-semiotic properties (Jessop, 2004, pp. 160-161). Fairclough uses the term semiosis in the most abstract and general sense to indicate that CDA is concerned with different semiotic modalities, of which language is just one (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 81) – but he does not give a conceptual account of how to analyse other modes than texts. Of course, a text may include images, but for the purpose of this article, I will treat text as synonymous with written language. To supplement my study, I have therefore incorporated some perspectives from multimodal analysis to analyse a selection of pictures found in the document.³ One may ask if the pictures are merely a kind of duplication of meanings already made in writing – or whether they have distinct “full” meanings themselves. If the latter is the case, then the route is taken into multimodal representation (Kress, 2011, p. 54). I have put most emphasis on the text, so the analysis is to be conceived as a CDA, including some aspects from multimodal analysis, and it is not meant to constitute a full-bodied multimodal analysis. However, since CDA is a critical approach, it is not sufficient to describe the document’s linguistic and visual features only. To assess the ideological effects that texts and images might have, one would need to link the micro analysis to a macro analysis (N. Fairclough, 2003, pp. 15-16). Thus, after having analysed the document’s semiotic features, I will move on to describe how the document dialectically relates to society at large.

The text as a semantic construct

One may distinguish between external and internal relations of texts. To analyse the external relations of texts is to analyse their relation to other elements of social events, social practices and social structures (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 36). It may also mean to analyse the relations

between several other (external) texts and how elements of other texts are intertextually incorporated in the text under investigation. To analyse the internal relations of texts – and this is my point of departure – includes an analysis of semantic and grammatical relations (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 36). I will start with the second, third and fourth paragraph from the section “Developments in culture and trade” – a particularly interesting section where the government describes the situation at hand and how to act upon it. In my translation from Norwegian, the word order has been somewhat rearranged as necessary to adjust to the English syntax – but all the original word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.) are retained. This is important to be able to use the CDA concepts with accuracy.⁴ I have used inverted commas and italics to mark a selection of nouns and verbs in the text that I want to address as follows:

1 The economic ‘development’ *leads* to increased wealth and in the last decades we
2 have had an increase in the level of education. This *has led* to a rising demand for
3 culture and has also made for a huge variety of cultural businesses (...). The production
4 of goods and services *is* to an increasing extent about adding a cultural surplus to the
5 products. The ‘globalisation’ *has resulted* in an increasing selection of goods on the
6 market. The product development *has become* a continuous process that makes great
7 demands on the creativity of the companies and their ability to innovate and readjust.
8 The creativity and richness of ideas which *is* found in cultural life *should* to a greater
9 extent benefit business life, and contribute to new and exciting products and a more
10 adaptable business life. Creativity and richness of ideas are properties that *are* found in
11 cultural life. There *is* a strong competition for the customers’ attention. If Norwegian
12 trade is to compete in the international ‘competition’, the collaboration between
13 art/culture and trade *should* become better than it is today (Ministry of Trade and
14 Industry, 2007, p. 5).

The government wants to merge culture and trade, and thereby gain a positive outcome for businesses and local communities. This overall interpretation is quite uncontroversial. However, I will now try to gain a more thorough understanding of the text and what is implied, assumed, and presupposed.

Nominalisation and agency

I have marked with inverted commas some instances of nominalisations in the text. Instead of representing processes that are taking place in the world as processes (grammatically, with verbs), nominalisation transfers them to entities (grammatically, with nouns) (N. Fairclough, 2003, pp. 12-13). Economic ‘development’ (1) and ‘globalisation’ (5) have been reified into entities without having been brought to life by any agents. ‘Development’ and ‘globalisation’ are construed as the actors “bringing about the unfolding of the process” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 282). In other discourses (recently illustrated through the economic crisis and the revolts in several European countries), such as anti-globalisation discourses or socialist discourses that criticises economic development for going in the wrong direction, the development may well be identified as an effect of agents’ actions. This is not the case in the plan of action as “nobody is in charge of globalisation” (N. Fairclough, 2010d, p. 459). Nominalisations can have the effect of obfuscating agency and responsibility (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 220). As a prolongation of the argument of the globalised and economic developed world, the document states that the ‘competition’ (12) is a vital part of the nominalised economic reality.

Modality and causality

I have italicised two forms of modality in the quotation – epistemic and deontic. The first concerns “knowledge exchange” and the second deals with “activity exchange” (N.

Fairclough, 2003, pp. 167-168). In the quotation, economic development *leads* (1) to increased wealth, and this development again *has led* (2) to an increasing demand for culture. The production of goods and services *is* (4) about adding a cultural surplus to the products, and the globalisation *has resulted* (5) in an increased selection of goods on the market. The product development *has become* (6) a continuous process with new demands, and creativity *is* (8) found in cultural life. The government does not say that development *may* lead to increased wealth, or that this development *may* have led to a rising demand for culture, but a causal chain of events is established by the use of categorical (epistemic) modality. On the basis of this description, the document also tells you how to act (deontic modality). The creativity and richness of ideas which is found in cultural life, *should* (8) to a larger extent benefit business life. The collaboration between art/culture and trade *should* (13) become better than today. Therefore, the document both describes what the new world order is, and how to act upon it. It is a variant of the TINA principle which is staged here – “there is no alternative” (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 99).

Assumptions

Whereas intertextuality opens up differences by bringing other voices into a text, assumptions reduce differences by assuming a common ground (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 41). The common ground in this document is the description (and existential confirmation) of a modern neo-liberal globalised and competitive economy. The value assumption is that the ability to compete and make economic progress is good and desirable. In the last sentence (11, 12, 13) an undesirable consequence of not being able to compete is indicated, but there is no need to make it explicit, because the text trusts the knowledge and recognition of the value systems it is based upon (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 57). In case of worrying about being deprived of choices, the government elaborates on the benefits from the situation on the document's following page:

Norway *has become* a part of a globalised world and the ‘competition’ *is* getting steadily tougher. This *is not* a threat, but a possibility the business life *can* utilise to increase value creation. The ‘globalisation’ gives Norwegian businesses a good opportunity to exploit the huge potential in an international market (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 6).

This quote follows the same pattern of nominalisation and modality as the first one, but it also introduces a structure of denial followed by assertion: a negative clause followed by a positive clause (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 175). What is assumed is that some people do perceive the globalised competitive world as threatening, but this room for different conceptions is eliminated by the rejection of the presupposed criticism (N. Fairclough, 2006, p. 175). It is also an instance of rhetorical re-scaling – of lifting Norway out of the primacy of the national scale and into the global market (N. Fairclough, 2006, pp. 65-66). The human actors become passive and subordinated to a neo-liberal global order.

Creative imagery

Unlike words, images and pictures are rarely composed of clearly constituent entities. It may therefore be difficult to describe or analyse visual representation in a linguistic manner (Kress, 2010, p. 47). However, images may also be said to represent what is most aptly represented by images (2010, p. 47), or what cannot be said in language (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 9). In the plan of action, they engage in a multimodal semiotic relationship with the text; both as a supplement and as a communicator in its own right. Pictures are also bearers of ideologies. Just as Fairclough points at the significance of an assumed common ground, Gunther Kress makes a crucial point about the unnoticed, and nearly invisible social and ideological effects of images that are often unremarkable and banal (Kress, 2010, p. 69). In

these images he identifies discourses and ideologies at work that are more effective than in more visible, and therefore resistible, instances (2010, p. 69).

Pace

The document contains several pictures of people who have established a relationship between culture and trade. One picture shows a dancer kicking down a hat from an oar (Figure 1).



Figure 1. ©Photo - Terje Heiestad/Millimeterpress.

Another picture shows an artist pouring blue paint on the ground (Figure 2).



Figure 2. ©Photo - Terje Heiestad/Millimeterpress.

It alludes to Jackson Pollock's splat paintings in the making. Another picture shows an actor who stands in the water, splashing it towards the camera (Figure 3).



Figure 3. ©Photo - Terje Heiestad/Millimeterpress.

A common denominator in these pictures is action, spontaneity and fun. They establish an immediate ground for their own irreproachability; nobody can arrest people for having a good time and for enjoying themselves. The pictures assume the value of playfulness as a good and positive thing. These images annul the possibility of having bad intentions by rendering themselves harmless. The pictures connote a “happy world of positive thinking favoured by contemporary corporate ideology” (Machin, 2004, p. 320). The pictures also visualise the prescribed creativity and adaptability in the text. The creativity depicted is not shown by a static old man sitting by his desk writing a novel or a screenplay. The illustrated activities have a special *pace*. They are snapshots of actions in motion; frozen in time at a point where they give a strong sense of excitement. If you fancied the photographs came to life again, both paint and water would splash into the spectators’ room, and the force of gravity would immediately bring the dancer back to the ground. Kress identifies a current fashion to value speed that is based on the assumption that slowness is boring and inefficient (Kress, 2010, p. 29). The swift pace visible in these pictures could be interpreted as an ideological underpinning of the properties needed to participate in the competition – the ability to turn around quickly and readjust strategies in the race for capital.

Work and leisure

Kress argues that the present valuing of speed should be supplemented by asking under what conditions a *slowness* of pace is essential (Kress, 2010, p. 30). As a matter of fact, the plan of action helps answer this question itself. One picture shows a business executive in a sportswear company leaning back on a boat deck (Figure 4).



Figure 4. ©Photo - Terje Heiestad/Millimeterpress.

He looks as though he is having a relaxing time, but it is not laziness that is depicted. The man is relaxing on a boat, which alludes to action and (well-earned) leisure. The slow pace is juxtaposed to the activity and speed potential of the boat. It could be said to visualise the ability to readjust that is prescribed in the text. The adhering text also stresses the importance of being active during leisure time – to be able to “live the brand” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 14). A harmonised corporate world of work, commodified leisure and individualism is depicted (Machin, 2004, p. 318). There is also a link between work and leisure in the picture of the actor who is splashing in the water. Next to the main illustration of

the woman, there is a thumbnail picture showing her in a black suit jacket, a white skirt and a blue tie (Figure 5).



Figure 5. ©Photo - Terje Heiestad/Millimeterpress.

The picture is cropped above her lips and below her tie knot. The white collar is loosely arranged and the tie nonchalantly knotted, as if to show that she has maintained her cultural integrity while simultaneously making money on her talent. The image could be said to be generic; illustrating classes of (successful) people, rather than specific people (Machin, 2004, p. 325). It may be interpreted as a visualisation of the collaboration of culture and capital, where the desired ability to be creative and innovative are utilised as means in the neo-liberal project.

Modality cues

Like verbal language, pictures also use modality markers, but are often less clearly articulated than those in texts. One may nevertheless look for a more general category of *modality cues* (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 128). From a diverse array of cues one may achieve an overall assessment of modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 163). There are three modality cues in particular in the plan of action that I want to address.⁵ The first two are colour saturation and colour differentiation (2006, p. 160). Each point of the scale has a certain modality value in terms of the naturalistic standard, from “less than real” to “more than real” (2006, p. 167). In the plan of action many of the pictures have colour saturation above the naturalistic standard. Most of the pictures also have a low colour differentiation and consist of rather few colours. Taken together these characteristics produce a simplified, conspicuous, and vibrant colour palette. One may say that these images coding orientations are sensory; the colour is a source of pleasure and affective meanings common in a marketing genre (2006, p. 165). The third type of modality I want to address is contextualization, running from full contextualization to an un-modulated background. Some of the images have a quality similar to those found in image banks; ideologically pre-structured and from non-descript locations (Machin, 2004). Others have identifiable backgrounds, but still serve mostly as examples of similar landscapes elsewhere. These types allow as many people as possible to imagine the space as their own (Machin, 2004, p. 321).

Genre fluctuation

It is difficult to define precisely what a genre *is*, as it has no stable meaning across different linguistic and sociolinguistic practices. Some genres have fairly established names within the social practices in which they are used; others do not (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 66). I will not elaborate on this issue in particular here, but for the purpose of this article, I will draw on two simple definitions of genre. One is the “use of language associated with a particular social activity” (N. Fairclough, 1993, p. 138). Another is a type of text that becomes “typical”

because of characteristics that can also be recognised in other similar texts (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 122). In line with such definitions, the plan of action follows a structure similar to the TINA principle, which is often attributed to policy documents where particular policies are made “inevitable” by the way the world order is described to be (N. Fairclough 2003, p. 99). More specifically, on the front page (below the departmental coat of arms), the document is identified as a “plan of action”. One must therefore assume that the document represents some sort of political genre – no matter how diverse this genre might be. However, this particular document – as I have already indicated through the description of the pictures – may also be said to incorporate elements from a marketing genre. It is a form of hybridisation realised by the multimodal articulation of text and pictures. A conspicuous and affective visual palette separates the plan of action from (more) typical text-based Norwegian governmental policy documents. The pictures supplement the message in the text in a peculiar way. The text may be said to represent a political genre, whilst the pictures may be said to represent a marketing genre.

Like texts, pictures serve both an “ideational” and an “interpersonal” function (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 15).⁶ The ideational function of the pictures is to visualise the creativity and innovation at play in concrete instances of collaboration between culture and trade. The interpersonal function is to establish a kind of warrant that if you act according to the request, you will get the success these snapshots visualise. Analogously to Kress’ (2010) description of the near invisible ideological effects of pictures, they appear to have no interest in fooling the reader or possible establishers of cultural businesses. They work in a way similar to a marketing genre – visualising success in a manner unusual in (more) typical written political texts. However, this warrant of success is more ambivalent when the addresser is the government and not the voices from the pictures and their adhering texts. When words and images interchange, they can take on different roles (Machin, 2011, p. 18). In the document the possible outcome of the collaboration between culture and trade is described as follows:

Making an effort in the fields of arts and culture *may* bring creativity and dynamics in local communities, which *may* again lead to the establishment of cultural based trades (...) *It may* also make the place more attractive to live and work in, and increase the interest in the place as a tourist destination (...) in this way, culture *may* also create new jobs (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 6).

Apparently, the positive outcome of the merging of culture and trade will not be certain. The effort *may* bring about creativity and dynamics; it *may* lead to new establishments; it *may* make a place more attractive etc., and it *may* create new jobs. The outcome may (or may not) occur. This switch to a less than categorical modality is a bit surprising, after having asserted what has to be done by necessity through an instance of the TINA principle. However, another possible output is described on the next page:

A trade development which is also based on culture, experience, and leisure, *will* contribute to investing a place with identity and attractiveness. Such culture based trade *makes* the place interesting as a place to live and *will* be able to create a place where one wants to live, work or visit (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 7).

The modality here has changed to a more assertive one. The culture based trade development *will* contribute to a place’s attractiveness, it *makes* the place interesting and it *will* create a place where one wants to live etc. The doubt is reduced and the positive outcome from the merging is established with greater certainty. However, there might be a natural explanation for this shift in modality. The government admits to lacking research-based knowledge of the

benefits from the merger of culture and trade, and therefore opens up the potential for a level of uncertainty (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 20). Typically (or ideally), the genre of political policy documents is based on firm grounds for decision-making, whilst the marketing genre has typically low (or no) moral constraints in guaranteeing success. This shift in modality may be interpreted as resulting from the fluctuation between a political and a marketing genre – not only between text and pictures – but within the text as well. As the genre fluctuates, the message becomes *resemiotised* and future prosperities are guaranteed (Iedema, 2000). This hybridity indicates change and a field in the making – but it does not change by itself. We are forced to choose our future from a limited set of possibilities. Since we all act in the present, but aspire towards the future, we require one or several mediating narratives – or discourses – that connect the two (Cameron & Palan, 2004, p. 9).

A nexus of neo-liberal discourses

Discourses not only represent the world as it is, but they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds that are different from the actual world (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 124). The plan of action may be seen to originate from a “nodal discourse” on globalisation (N. Fairclough, 2005, p. 57). The international market is taken as an objective fact, which serves to legitimate particular courses of action (N. Fairclough, 2006, p. 17). While the plan of action claims that we live in a globalised competitive economy, this is not entirely accurate; discourses select, exaggerate and/or reify certain trends at the expense of others (Cameron & Palan, 2004, p. 90). Consequently, discourses can be identified as representing the world from a particular perspective (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 129). I have already interpreted the document as representing a neo-liberal political and economic discourse, with consequences for the document’s ability to construe and construct the society in particular ways. According to the document, when Norway is forced into an increasingly intensive competition in a global economy, whose nature is unquestionable and unchangeable, then the policy of making Norway more competitive becomes the documents primary task (N. Fairclough, 2000, p. 29). Part of the strategy is “discursive simplification” in order to inculcate desired forms of behaviour (N. Fairclough, 2005, p. 55). The neo-liberal discourse of flexibility is put to work in this respect. The government claims the following: “To participate in the competition for the consumers’ attention, business life must become more innovative. Creativity and capacity to readjust are vital” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 6). To be competitive in the race for capital, one has to be creative and capable of readjusting – to be flexible. When committed to economic neo-liberalism, “flexibility” tends to stand for the whole neo-liberal project (N. Fairclough, 2000, p. 16). Several characteristics are required to achieve success. Throughout the document, the words “innovation”, “creativity” and “adaptability” are frequently used to describe the desired human capacities – analogously to those visualised in the pictures. These capacities shall contribute to “value creation” – a term that is over-worded (mentioned 67 times) to inculcate the government’s primary objective. However, the plan of action does not describe what the value creation actually consists of, other than asserting that “it is important that the collaboration between culture and trade is fruitful and mutually beneficial” and that in order “to get the best collaboration possible, there has to be a basic element of reciprocal respect for each other’s professions at the bottom” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 6). Despite the described reciprocity, the relation between culture and trade is articulated as an unequal one:

The plan of action shall contribute to strengthening the collaboration between culture life and business life to increase the value creation and contribute to more creativity and adaptability in business life (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 9).

Here, culture is staged as an independent variable that is to generate a positive outcome in business life. The quote does not say much of a potential cultural output resulting from the collaboration. The document also states that “if Norwegian trade is to keep up with the international competition, the collaboration between art/culture and trade should become better than today” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 5). This is a similar attribution of a character of instrumentality to culture and cultural life. However, the government forestalls possible criticism against its own argument:

The government’s goal to release the potential for value creation in cultural businesses is not an expression of the view that cultural life is to be commercialised or that the public funding of a diversified and rich cultural life is to be reduced. The goal is to release the potential of value creation in the borderline between culture and trade to actors in the cultural life who will run their own businesses (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 5).

There is a somewhat contradictory argument in this quotation. In most dictionaries the word “commercialise” is explained as making something commercial in character, i.e. by offering something on a market and gaining a surplus from it. This is also what is implied in the last sentence. How, then, can the government’s goal not be to commercialise cultural life? I venture to propose an answer. To “commercialise” is often used in a pejorative sense and connotes standardisation and lack of depth, whilst the more elusive term “value creation” is applicable to both cultural life and business life. Thus the latter term is chosen, but that does not level out the unequal relationship between culture and trade. Favourable characteristics of cultural life are encouraged as means in the quest for “value creation” – which turns out to mean economic growth. Viewed through a nexus of neo-liberal discourses, anything that enhances efficiency and adaptability becomes good and desirable (Fairclough 2003, p. 58). Consequently, it is possible to claim that the plan of action is a document on culture *as* trade, where culture is used as a response to the allegedly “non-negotiable external economic constraints” (N. Fairclough, 2006, p. 17), rather than being a document on culture *and* trade, as it claims to be.

The relation between discourse (semiosis) and society

The neo-liberal discourse is endowed with the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe, and should therefore be subject to a “reality check” (N. Fairclough, 2006, p. 19). One should investigate the relationship between the “global economy” as a fact, and the policy prescription of what “is” and what consequently “must” be done (N. Fairclough, 2005, p. 62). A vision of the world is partly actual and partly potential (N. Fairclough, 2000, p. 21). Any consideration of discourse that attempts to isolate it from other moments of the social process is myopic (Harvey, 1996, p. 86). As far as the government’s description of the world situation is concerned, there have been several discussions of what is the most appropriate concept for studying recent changes in production and capital accumulation, but we are justified in acknowledging a distinction between production based on the operation of flexible machines and combined flexible systems and networks that are combined to secure economies of scope, and the assembly line in classical Fordism (Jessop, 2002, pp. 96-98). Flexible accumulation has been accompanied by a greater attention to quick-changing fashions, which has brought about artifices of need inducement and a cultural transformation (Harvey, 1989, p. 156). Speed-up in consumption is aided by a relative shift from material goods to services. Capitalism has penetrated domains like tourism, cultural activities and leisure (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p. 442). This is also reflected in the plan of action. Late modernity has radically unsettled the boundaries between economy and culture and between the local and the global, and the result is hybrid discourses and genres (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 83). The plan of action may be interpreted as a

reflection of this societal and institutional change. In many ways the real material economy is becoming more like the cultural economy and thereby obtains the character of flexible specialisation (Lash, 1993, p. 206).

However, as mentioned above, CPE views economic objects as (partly) socially constructed and investigates the role of semiosis in co-constituting their extra-semiotic properties (Jessop, 2004, pp. 160-161). Language has become more salient and important in a range of social processes (N. Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 259). The rise of the competition state is reflected in, and reinforced by, changes in economic discourse(s) (Jessop, 2002, p. 132). The change from Fordism to flexible accumulation is inconceivable without discursive work bridging the old and the new (N. Fairclough, 2010c, p. 545). Globalisation is uneven, partial and far from global, but discursive work presents it as given and irreversible (N. Fairclough, 2000, pp. 27-28). The common idea that we live in a knowledge-driven economy implies that the economy is also discourse-driven (N. Fairclough, 2010a, p. 282). Consequently, there is room for (rhetorical) agency. The way the government construes and constructs its arguments, may speed up the process of transforming the actual existing economy:

Norway shall become one of the leading, innovative, dynamic and knowledge based economies in the world within the areas where we have an advantage. The cultural businesses and culture based industry and commerce are examples of areas in the economy that may contribute to more creativity and innovation in society at large. Therefore, the government wants to arrange for further development of these businesses (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 4).

According to the government, the Norwegian economic advantage is not only reliant upon oil, fish or other exportable natural resources – which (still) is a common conception in the Norwegian context – but upon culture-based industry and commerce as well. Consequently, the quotation works as a deconstruction of the preferred reading of what the Norwegian advantage *is*.⁷ However, the government also *re-contextualises* the economy from one that is material-based to one that is neo-liberal, globalised, and knowledge-based. Re-contextualising involves an institution or a theoretical practice that changes how other social practices can be recognised (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 31).⁸ Re-contextualising re-locates a social practice from its original context, and brings it into a new relation which is dictated by the internal logic of the latter (1999, p. 31). In the plan of action, culture is re-contextualised and brought into the logic of trade. Changes in genres and discourses are an irreducible part of this process – in a dialectical relation to non-semiotic elements (N. Fairclough, 2010e, p. 77). The nexus of neo-liberal discourses constitutes the (global) horizon in which culture is given meaning. However, re-contextualisation may also disguise different consequences (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 109). I will sketch some of these repercussions in the remainder of the article.

Cultural consequences of flexible capitalism

If culture is understood in the context of work and work culture, one may say that the plan of action works ideologically to “compromise labour, while rationalising the position of capital” (Gouliquer, 2000, p. 37). The view that capital accumulation is fundamental to human development is seldom challenged (Harvey, 1996, p. 375). The plan of action further inculcates this ideology. Critically assessed, the inculcation of flexibility may disorient action over the long term, loosen bonds of trust and commitment, and divorce will from behaviour (Sennett, 1998, p. 31). Problems have emerged (or may emerge) concerning how to balance a “hire-and-fire” mentality and the willingness to invest in human capital (Jessop, 1999, p. 30). If culture is understood in the context of cultural institutions, and/or performers of different

cultural expressions, there is also a contradiction between short-term economic calculation and the long-term dynamics rooted in resources that take years to create, stabilise and reproduce (Jessop, 1999, p. 30). In the modern neo-liberal economy, the life of many skills is short, and learning to do just one thing really well can be economically destructive (Sennett, 2006, p. 4). This consequence may be seen as resulting from the “illogic(s) of globalisation” itself (Jessop, 1999), but the plan of action also actively contributes to legitimising and consolidating a reality where short term flexible production is given a higher priority than the long term accumulation of cultural skills. Of course, there is nothing wrong in exchanging cultural knowledge with business life, or in establishing cultural businesses, but one should be aware of the plan of action’s possible ideological power to “delimit (and change) the repertoire of available discourses” and actions (N. Fairclough, 2006, p. 17). Some cultural performers sit uneasily in the institutions of flexible capitalism. Institutions based on short-term transactions and constantly shifting tasks do not breed depth (Sennett, 2006, p. 105). Neo-liberal discourse(s) contribute(s) to devaluating “quality-driven” work in the meaning of “obsessional energy” invested in forming a skill (Sennett, 2009, p. 243). The obligation to live as appendages of the neo-liberal market, rather than as expressive beings, shrinks the realm of (cultural) freedom (Harvey, 2005, p. 185). The plan of action claims that “the public funding of a diversified and rich culture life is [not] to be reduced” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 5). Still, it contributes to recasting the cultural ethos to one resembling the current economy.

Conclusion

Texts can bring about changes in knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 8). The plan of action may be read as an adroit semiotic assemblage able to reduce the scope of desired actions. A particular configuration of nominalisations and modality presents the world situation as inevitable. The ability to compete and make economic progress is implied as an assumed good. Multimodal articulations of text and pictures complement each other and develop a neo-liberal “poetry” that resonates with the potential for future economic prosperity. The images visualise the swift pace and the capability to readjust as prescribed in the text. The hybridisation of genres is part of the discursive and social process of establishing culture *as* trade. A nexus of neo-liberal discourses on globalisation, flexibility and competitiveness are put to work in this respect. The broad field of culture is encouraged to participate in the global race for capital. It is the ever-increasing cultural industry that is favoured – not the cultural expressions *per se*. In the long run, this preference may delegitimise the exposed cultural expressions and hamper the performers’ ability to finance their activities. The plan of action may be said to be an ideological underpinning of an external reason to engage in culture – culture as a response to the allegedly non-negotiable economic constraints. However, the external circumstances *are* negotiable; or more precisely, they are mediated through discourse (semiosis). Discursive work is part of the constitution and (re)configuration of an order of discourse where culture becomes increasingly tied to business. Therefore, it is important to remember that cultural expressions also communicate without having any pecuniary prospects in mind. They should be allowed to do so. My analysis – however – indicates that the plan of action is a step towards delegitimising this freedom.

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¹ When using the term “semiosis”, I refer to a broader category than written language, to be understood as including static images.

² In Fairclough’s approach, the semiotic aspect of structure is language. Language defines a certain potential and excludes others. Certain ways of combining linguistic elements are possible; others are not (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). However, since Fairclough’s approach is oriented towards the analysis of texts, he does not account for what might be the semiotic aspect of structures outside language. Still, he acknowledges that semiosis is an element of the social at all levels (N. Fairclough, 2003, p. 223).

³ CDA can look at other modes than written language and static images, e.g. font, spacing, size etc., but these are not the focus of my analysis. For a discussion of what a mode is, see Kress, 2009.

⁴ The original is freely accessible on the internet. The author’s mother tongue is Norwegian, and I believe that the translation to English is done adequately with due respect to the Norwegian original. Should there be overlooked translation issues, or nuances lost in the translation, I am responsible. However, I am not claiming that the meaning or possible ideology in the plan of action can be found in linguistic choices alone – or that one can reduce reality to language. My linguistic and semiotic analysis should be seen as part of the analysis as a whole, including aspects of content analysis, macro analysis etc.

⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen identify a total of eight types of modality. The other five are colour modulation, representation, depth, illumination and brightness (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 160-162).

⁶ Halliday also operates with a “textual” function which is about how the elements of a text cohere internally, but I have not paid attention to that in this article (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 15).

⁷ The term *deconstruction* is not used with reference to Derrida.

⁸ The concept *re-contextualise* is extensively based on Basil Bernstein’s sociology of education.