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Article:
Livesey, M. orcid.org/0000-0002-5979-8817 (2024) To look for another thing, and in another way: revitalising criticality with multimodal methodologies. Critical Studies on Terrorism, 17 (4). pp. 903-929. ISSN 1753-9153

https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2370612

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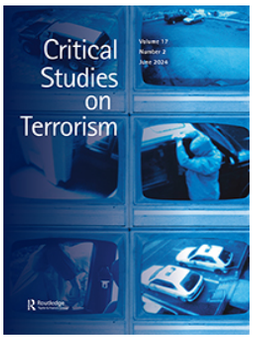

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Critical Studies on Terrorism

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rter20

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To cite this article: Michael Livesey (28 Jun 2024): To look for another thing, and in another way: revitalising criticality with multimodal methodologies, Critical Studies on Terrorism, DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2024.2370612

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2370612

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Published online: 28 Jun 2024.

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CRITICAL STUDIES ON TERRORISM
https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2370612

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To look for another thing, and in another way: revitalising criticality with multimodal methodologies

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes multimodal methodologies as a path to revitalising criticality in CTS. It begins by assessing the strengths of existing scholarship on "terrorism", whilst also noting this scholarship's overwhelmingly linguistic source materials. It considers shortcomings of such a monomodal methodology: including the reproduction of binary conceptual codes, which I argue are uniquely highly codified in linguistic sources; and an imbalance towards structured logics, rather than unstructured affects, in CTS' conception of terrorism discourses. The article suggests greater diversity of source materials can resolve these shortcomings: deepening our critical project by heightening our sensitivity to transformative, non-binary ways of knowing; and reorienting our analyses from logical to affectual modes of cognition. I demonstrate these possibilities with a review of multimodal materials from Northern Ireland's so-called "peace walls" (built by state security to contain violence of the "Troubles"). I end with reflections on why CTS might have operationalised a predominantly textual methodology to date – and, further, with a call for readers to integrate multimodality in disseminating our research, as much as selecting our source materials.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 9 October 2023
Accepted 16 June 2024

KEYWORDS
Multimodality; methodology; discourse; critique; Northern Ireland

Introduction

To look for another thing, and in another way – according to a plural thought – in the shaking of any beyond … (Khatibi and Yalim 2019, 3)

Recent years have witnessed rising concerns regarding a "crisis" in critical political thought. In 2019, Jonathan Austin, Rocco Bellanova, and Mareille Kaufmann suggested "today … critique has run into trouble" – with critical theory's sceptical, deconstructive ethos having emboldened "the rise of 'post-truth' politics", and with a downward spiral of global politics having highlighted critical thinkers' "failure to translate their theoretical sophistication into practical change" (Austin, Bellanova, and Kaufmann 2019, 4). Likewise, in 2021, Beate Jahn argued "critical theory is indeed in crisis" – with critical authors having entered too "intimate [an] entanglement" with "historical forces of neoliberalism" to be able to mount a compelling alternative (Jahn 2021, 1290).

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Critical terrorism studies (CTS, the discipline with which the present article is concerned) has not escaped this "crisis". Despite many advances since its creation 15–20 years ago, there remain "concerns" amongst CTS' proponents that the field "still fails to meet its own standards and expectations of criticality" (Achieng, Samwel, and Richard 2023, 69). Such concerns – whether grounded in CTS' failure to confront its internal coloniality (Khan 2024), extricate itself from impact pressures (Wright n.d.), or acknowledge its own violences (Sjoberg n.d.) – percolate through this special issue. Each of this issue's contributors expresses disappointment with CTS' present criticality – precipitating an urge either to revitalise the field through deeper critique or, alternatively, abolish it altogether. The extent of disillusionment across so many CTS stakeholders should prompt us to ask the same question Jahn posed, in response to critical theory's wider "crisis". Namely: "why, in light of these historical achievements, are so many critical theorists dissatisfied with their approach?" (Jahn 2021, 1276).

This article offers one answer to Jahn's question, and to its particular manifestations in CTS. My answer begins with the reflection from Abdelkebir Khatibi quoted above. This reflection captures much of what it means to do critical research, including critical research on terrorism. For, at its core, critique aspires to what Khatibi called "une autre pensée" (or "otherwise thinking", as interpreted by Mignolo 2012, 69): an ambition to remake politics anew, by unearthing and problematising concepts/practices/relations that sustain its present forms. Historically, CTS has been good at such otherwise thinking. Our discipline's foundational texts embodied its critical thrust: with their gambit being to show, firstly, that international politics work the way they do thanks to the prevalence of specific schemes for thinking/speaking about "terrorism"; and, secondly, that those same politics could be made to work "otherwise" through terrorism discourses' deconstruction/reconfiguration.

However, this gambit represents only the first half of Khatibi's vision for an other thought. For really thinking "otherwise" requires not only attaining *another thing* (coming to a different conceptualisation) but doing so *in another way* (getting there through recourse to new methods/materials). The imperative of Khatibi's "autre pensée" was not just to reconfigure oppressive discourses; but, further, to transform the very fabric by which those discourses were made. My contribution to this special issue, and to debates around CTS' criticality, pursues this imperative to method and material This article considers *how* CTS goes about its "autre pensée", through an assessment of methods that have shaped our critical intervention. Such reflections on method are not common in CTS. Past authors have spilt "comparatively little ink" concerning "methods of CTS, or how to systematically do this kind of research" (Stump and Priya 2016, 7). Yet, questions of method are central to the possibility of critique. As Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans put it in an important paper on "critical methods in IR", methods are not merely surgical techniques for assessing political phenomena. On the contrary, methods are a form of "practice", through which "worlds are enacted, both in the sense of being acted upon and coming into being" (Aradau and Huysmans 2013, 598). The choices critical terrorism authors make, in selecting sources and tools for our analyses, determine the scope of otherwise thinking our work enacts. If this scope suffers any constraint, it's as likely to derive from limitations in our research design/source selection – as from arguments/findings to which those designs/sources lead us.

This article develops the imperative for methodological reflection in three senses. First, I draw on a systematic review of all papers published in CTS' flagship journal (*Critical Studies on Terrorism*, henceforth *CSoT*) from 2008 to 2022, to clarify what methods CTS authors have employed in advancing their critique of terrorism. I find CTS' methodological self-conception pivots around methods of discourse analysis, with most *CSoT* papers advancing analyses of "terrorism" as articulated in some discursive context. I suggest these analyses make important contributions to CTS (and critical IR more broadly), including in reconfiguring orthodox studies' core ontological premises. However, I also note limits to this reconfiguration which arise from the specific operationalisation of "discourse analysis" pertaining to research in *CSoT*. For the overwhelming majority of discourse analytic work on terrorism proceeds through assessment of *linguistic sources* alone. Attention to non-linguistic materials remains slim. I argue this tendency to monomodality inhibits CTS' criticality in two ways. Firstly, CTS' monomodality risks the reproduction of binary ways of knowing, which are uniquely highly codified in linguistic materials – even, in the effort to subvert them. Secondly, CTS' monomodal methodology lends itself to an interest in structured linguistic logics ("logos" meaning, literally, "word"), as opposed to more ambiguous modes of cognition associated with material/aesthetic affect.

Responding to these shortcomings, I suggest CTS' stakeholders could meaningfully deepen our project's criticality by diversifying the range of sources to which we apply our analysis. This would mean combining CTS' existing strengths on linguistic discourse analysis with insights from wider, interpretivist social science's "multimodal" and "aesthetic" turns: adopting "a more expansive understanding of what constitutes a text" (Campano, Philip, and Grace 2020, 137), by integrating multimodal (material, visual, auditory, embodied, spatial, haptic, etc.) data in our research designs. I propose doing so would enhance the possibilities for transformation enacted by our work: drawing heterogeneous ways of knowing that inhere to multimodal expression/interpretation into our account of politics around "terrorism". Finally, I substantiate my argument on multimodality with an empirical assessment of spatial/visual materials from Northern Ireland's so-called "peace walls" (security infrastructures erected by state actors to contain violence of the "Troubles"). In considering these materials, I find multimodal analysis can indeed open doors to greater criticality for CTS: sustaining "other thought" on my specific case study, by reimagining its empirical referents.

I structure my article according to these layers of argument. I begin by exploring problems associated with CTS' methodological self-conception – including vis-à-vis the worlds enacted by our discipline's "impoverished conception of discourse" (Anaïs 2013, 124). I proceed to outline multimodality's promise for transforming such "enactments": first, at a theoretical level; then, through an empirical illustration. I conclude with hypotheses on past scholarship's monomodality, and with a challenge for readers to realise the possibilities of multimodality in *disseminating* our analyses, as well as selecting their inputs. Importantly, in making this argument I do not intend to discredit past scholarship. Nor do I claim CTS should abandon linguistic texts altogether. On the contrary, my intervention looks to build on CTS' existing strengths. I see the opportunity to bring multimodality into CTS' fold as one enabled by previous advances. Past authors have made it possible to argue for "discourse" as essential to the fabric of practices around

"terrorism". Perhaps future authors can adopt a more expansive understanding of materials by which that fabric is woven.

Before I begin, I want to add a note on the relationship between this article and the imperative for decoloniality in CTS. For, as it stands (and as recognised by *CSoT* editors' commission of a special issue addressing "abolition, decoloniality, and criticality"), CTS has "not been immune to . . . claim[s] that it remains trapped in the coloniality of the broader international relations and security studies fields" (Achieng, Samwel, and Richard 2023, 64). CTS' critics argue the field's "next phase" must involve "confront[ing] the structural reality of the coloniality of knowledge and its lingering effects" – particularly, as it pertains to critique itself (Achieng, Samwel, and Richard 2023, 73). The present article takes this claim seriously. It reflects on possibilities for methodological diversification, as one path towards CTS' "next phase": arguing a more expansive, multimodal operationalisation of "discourse" can help CTS "to think otherwise, to move toward 'an other logic'" (Mignolo 2012, 69–70), per imperatives of a decolonial ethos (especially that ethos' instinct to "eliminate dichotomies from our vocabulary" (Mignolo 2012, 337)). As we will see, multimodality enjoys a deeper freedom from dichotomy, binary, and codification than strictly linguistic analysis. Bringing multimodality into our analysis (and its dissemination) can, therefore, shift CTS towards more plural thought.

That being said, I do not frame this article as a piece of "decolonising" scholarship itself. Despite my belief in possibilities for epistemic transformation conferred by a multimodal conception of "discourse", I do not propose methodological plurality suffices for meaningful decolonisation. I agree with Rabea Khan: that meaningful decolonisation requires nothing less than the repatriation of ill-gotten lands and privileges (Khan 2024, 3). This article falls well short of such a requirement. However necessary I consider it to be for us to reorient our epistemologies, including through methodological diversification, I do not pretend such reorientation approaches the scale of work required to redress wrongs of our collective pasts and present.

Discourse analysis and CTS

This article grew out of a systematic review I undertook for all papers published in *CSoT* from 2008 to 2022.[1] In my review, I coded articles for primary research methodology. I also collected keywords and other metadata like temporal/geographical mandate. The principal question I sought to answer for the purposes of the present article was: what methods have CTS authors employed, in making critical interventions on "terrorism"?

I found methods of discourse analysis occupied a privileged position within CTS' methodological arsenal. 49.89% of articles in my review employed some form of discourse analysis. A further 10.50% of articles included the terms "discourse" or "discursive" amongst keywords (comparing favourably with *CSoT*'s most popular keyword, "terrorism", which appeared amongst 28.67% of keyword lists), and 5.03% captured the same terms within their titles. These returns affirmed discourse analysis' centrality to CTS, as already established by other reviewers. As Richard Jackson put it in his 2016 survey, discourse analytic works "have proliferated" in CTS – including amongst its earliest/most-cited works (R. Jackson 2005; Stampnitzky 2013) – and "now constitute an important body of research within the broader field" (R. Jackson 2016, 78). In another review of the same year, Jack Holland found "a focus on language and discourse has been

a consistent theme of CTS research since its emergence as a subdiscipline" (Holland 2016, 204) – with the sheer volume of work employing discourse analytic techniques prompting Holland to ask "why so much critical discourse analysis?" (Holland 2016, 204).

Holland answered this question by tracing connections between CTS' methodological self-conception (the prevalence of discourse analysis within CTS literatures), and its ontological stance vis-à-vis terrorism. In Holland's words, CTS' affinity to methods of discourse analysis arose "because [of our discipline's] discursive ontology and linked (sceptical) epistemology". For Holland, "to say that CTS has adopted a discursive ontology is to acknowledge that very many scholars working within the subdiscipline view the world as discursively constructed" – an ontological/epistemological start-point lending itself naturally to "the dominance of one … preferred methodological approach: critical discourse analysis" (Holland 2016, 204–5). CTS' ontological origins engender sensitivity to discourses by which "terrorism" is thought/spoken of – and, therefore, a disposition towards methods illuminating such discourses. CTS' founding parents' intervention against orthodox literatures began, in this vein, by reframing "terrorism" as an "empty signifier" (R. Jackson 2016, 81): "a social fact rather than a brute fact" (R. Jackson, Marie, and Jeroen 2009, 222) – one brought into being through "deliberately and meticulously composed … myths and forms of knowledge" (R. Jackson 2005, 2), rather than one enjoying first-order, phenomenological status. As Holland suggests, this foundational intervention (which continues to animate CTS) is, at its core, a discourse analytic one: one affirming "the ontological significance of discourse" (Shepherd 2020, 317), by approaching political analysis as analysis of the formation and dissemination of discursive truths. If, at the level of CTS' ontology, "there is no terrorism beyond the discourse of terrorism" (Ditrych 2014, 1), it follows that doing (critical) terrorism research requires attention to discourse, and recourse to discourse analytic method: exploring myths/forms of knowledge without which terrorism (and practices implemented in response) would be "literally inconceivable" (Campbell 1998, 6).

That half of all papers in *CSoT* employ discourse analysis is, in this sense, a natural reflection of CTS' ontological origins.[2] This tendency towards discourse analytic method is also core to normative claims that follow from CTS' foundational ontology. Per Holland, again, CTS authors' focus on discursive materials represents the major path to "otherwise thinking", vis-à-vis terrorism – with these same authors "analysing dominant discourses" not for their own sake, but "in order to challenge and resist their effects" (Holland 2016, 205). The point here is that, if politics work in part because events/actors have been constructed as "terroristic", those same politics could be made to work otherwise through attention to mechanisms by which this construction unfolds. As Jackson puts it, doing discourse analytic CTS not only means unsettling unstable ontologies; but, also, thereby opening doors to "a different social and political order" (R. Jackson 2016, 82). Possibilities for realising CTS' normative position pivot on discourse analytic methodology. Discourse analysis is CTS' most popular tool in part because it affords a route to unlocking our discipline's critical objectives.

CTS scholars have "produced an impressive body of work on the language and discourses of terrorism" (Achieng, Samwel, and Richard 2023, 65). This body of work affords substantive contribution to terrorism studies, and critical IR more broadly: sustaining CTS' core argument on terrorism's unstable ontology, alongside this argument's critical/normative ramifications. This is an important start-point for the

present article: recognising past scholarship's value, even in advocating renewal of CTS' criticality. CTS' discourse analytic position has been powerfully formative for many readers – including the present author, who learned critical research's "vertiginous possibilities" (Nietzsche and Smith 1996, 8) from early CTS texts. Nonetheless, there remain constraints in CTS' pursuit of its ontological and normative missions. My proposal in this article is that these constraints emerge from the specific *modes* by which CTS authors have operationalised their discourse analytic mission. My systematic *CSoT* review found that, of the roughly 50% of articles employing discourse analytic methods, fully 94.30% limited their analysis to discourse as constituted in *linguistic sources alone*. Conversely, only 5.70% of articles operationalised a "multimodal" application of discourse analysis – considering the significance of, say, visual, spatial, material, or embodied sources (amongst others) in constructing "terrorism". Over *CSoT*'s first 14 years, only one article featured "multimodal*" in its title, or captured the term amongst keywords (Wignell, Tan, and O'Halloran 2017). For all discourse's centrality to CTS' ontological, normative, and methodological self-conception, 99.78% of *CSoT* paper titles/keyword lists made no reference to its multimodal qualities.

CTS is thus a predominantly linguistic genre. In CTS, "discourse" is generally "taken as synonymous with language" (Jarvis 2023, 5): a narrow conflation, leaving minimal space for "other modes of meaning-making", vis-à-vis "terrorism" (Schlag 2019, 4).[3] I'm not the first person to note this narrowness. Eight years ago, Richard Jackson found one "important analytical challenge" for CTS lay "in the frequently narrow focus within discourse analytic approaches on language and text alone, to the neglect of the material world and the material aspects of discourse" (R. Jackson 2016, 86). Yet, a decade later, CTS' methodological focus remains logocentric. The problem here is that limiting CTS' operationalisation of discourse analytic method to an assessment of linguistic materials alone risks insensitivity to the full spectrum of modes by which terrorism discourses unfold. For "discourse is not a synonym for language" (Barad 2007, 146). On the contrary, discourses take shape across a variety of material/immaterial surfaces. As Michel Foucault put it, "language and statement are not at the same level of existence" (Foucault 2010, 85). Those seeking to expose the mechanics of "discourse", therefore, should always "avoid the idea that it is a purely linguistic term" (Kendall and Wickham 1999, 35). This article proposes that adopting a more expansive, multimodal understanding of discourse analysis can meaningfully deepen CTS' pursuit of otherwise thought on terrorism. Before I explain how, let me establish what constraints a strictly linguistic operationalisation of discourse enacts for our scholarship.

For, as noted above, methods are not only surgical tools for evaluating political phenomena. Rather, per Aradau and Huysmans, they are practices for "enacting" worlds. "Rather than being an application of a neutral procedure", our "use of method actively shapes knowledge production ... methods are practices of world-making" (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara 2020, 1215). Having answered my initial question concerning CTS' methodological self-conception, I now pose a follow-up: what worlds does this self-conception enact? What patterns of world-making does CTS' monomodality sustain? My answer to this question is two-fold. First, I argue CTS' monomodality tends to the reproduction of binary modes of thought – which are uniquely highly codified in language, vis-à-vis other discursive

modes. Second, I propose centring language in our assessment of "terrorism" also centres structured, logical forms of cognition within the worlds our works evoke.

I'll begin with the first of these arguments. In applying discourse analytic tools mainly to linguistic sources, CTS risks re-enacting those binary meaning codes upon which language rests. For, as a mode of knowledge production and exchange, language works precisely thanks to the systematicity of its meaning structures. This is not to say that language contains no interpretive heterogeneity – of course it does. But, by comparison to other discursive modes, language operates a more limited range of meaning outcomes. If it didn't, it would be just as impossible to communicate unambiguously through word[4] as through, say, interpretive dance or semaphore. In Foucault's assessment, what makes language useful – what makes it "exist", even – is that "below the level of identities and differences there is [a] foundation provided by continuities, resemblances, repetitions, and natural criss-crossings" (Foucault 1994, 120). Without this foundation, it would be hard to guarantee intelligibility in linguistic exchange; and it is a foundation that rests on the very dichotomous forms of knowing which Khatibi sought to eradicate from our vocabularies, in pursuit of otherwise thinking.

It's worth listening to Jacques Derrida's theory of language here. For Derrida, "Western thought" operates through "binary oppositions": "of which presence and absence, cause and effect … inside and outside are prominent examples. Oppositions of this nature constitute a powerful conceptual order: especially because we are often unaware we are using or relying upon them" (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 146). Further, according to Derrida, one core feature of such binaries concerns their particularly tight (and invisible) embeddedness in linguistically-mediated knowledges. In an interesting passage of his book *Positions*, Derrida quoted Ferdinand de Saussure in this regard – writing that, "as Saussure said, 'language [which consists only in differences] is not a function of the speaking subject'" for linguistic meaning depends "above all … on a system of differences and on movement between differences" (Derrida 1972, 41). The squared parentheses here were Derrida's own insertion. And they are an important one. Arguably, they institute a significant change in Saussure's meaning! What Derrida suggested by the parenthesis was that language works through binary codes. A word acquires its meaning (and its value for communicative exchange) precisely because it doesn't mean anything else. If words contained a more-than-manageable diversity of meanings, they would lose their value – falling into an ambiguous soup of semantic possibilities. For Derrida, language is thus as much a method of *ex*clusion, as one of *in*clusion. The word "terrorist", for example, acquires its meaning as much because of what it *doesn't* signify (e.g. "freedom fighter") as what it *does* ("illegitimate/irrational extremist"). In Derrida's conception, language operates through this matrix of inclusive/exclusive binaries: whose "play of differences presupposes, in effect [that] no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which is simply not present … There are, from logic to logic, only differences" (Derrida 1972, 37–38).

This is language's strength. Amongst discursive modes, language enjoys a closer connection to its "central authority structure" – its matrix of predetermined codes which "halt[s] the fluidity of terms and make[s] language meaningful" (Edkins 2003, 7) – than do other forms. Yet, this strength also means language reproduces binary logics more consistently than other modes. This relationship between language and codified binaries is a problem for any scholarship aspiring to "otherwise thought", whilst

simultaneously limiting that thought's material to sources inscribed in linguistic texts. CTS, for example, seeks to deconstruct, problematise, and reconfigure discourses around terrorism. But my review found it does so via an overwhelming preoccupation with those discourses as constituted *verbally* – a preoccupation that risks the reproduction of binary knowledges on which language rests, even in the effort to subvert them.

In the past, Rabea Khan has cautioned CTS regarding this elision between reproduction and subversion: noting paradoxes whereby critical scholarship on terrorism "require[s] the reproduction of dominant discourses for the very purpose of challenging them" – such that CTS finds itself "caught up in a post-9/11 counter-discourse that *ultimately reproduces the same language established by the dominant discourse*" (Khan 2021, 499–500). CTS may well differ from problem-solving terrorism studies, in the kind of thought it pursues – but its work looks remarkably similar, when it comes to the understandings its empirical sources confer. Khan raises this paradox between reproduction and transformation as a cautionary note on the "deep, sticky coloniality within which even CTS is embedded" (Khan 2021, 499). I return to Khan's paradox here to flag a different concern: regarding the equal impossibility of genuine criticality, for a discipline whose argument against hegemonic discourses rests so overwhelmingly on the analysis, and recirculation, of linguistic materials – and their associated codified meaning structures. There is no use for a project that seeks to build a new conceptual apparatus, out of the same rotten material that produced its antecedents. CTS' capacity to deliver Khatibi's "other thing" is inhibited by its perpetuation of an existing "way" of knowing – one that, like coloniality, remains deeply and stickily engrained in our discipline's monomodal sources.

The second element in my critique of CTS' methodologies speaks similarly to the type of thought enacted by a purely linguistic operationalisation of discourse. This is the highly-structured, rationalised mode of thought deriving from language's foundation in grammatical and syntactical "logic" ("logos" meaning, literally, "word") – as opposed to drifting, ambiguous, and affective forms of cognition associated with, for example, embodied and aesthetic materials. Language is a "rigorous" form of exchange and knowledge – one built on "the precision of syntax … in which the structural syntax of a set of statements is sufficiently precise as to produce a cogent argument, where 'cogent' means well-grounded, convincing, persuasively relevant, [and] appealing to the intellect" (Yanow 2015). By contrast to non-linguistic modes, language works through incremental, highly *reasonable* build-up of meaning: a sequential, logical form of cognition developing directionally across a clause, sentence, or paragraph. Any linguistic statement that did not follow the rules of a pre-established, sequential structure would be challenging to decode (inhabiting "a play of sense and non-sense, a chaos-cosmos", as Gilles Deleuze has it in his *Logic of Sense*, 1990, xiii). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault likened language, in this respect, to a mathematical formula – conformity with whose rules determines the possibility of rational exchange. Of each "group of words", Foucault found that,

> to decide whether they constitute a grammatical unit … it is necessary … to determine the rules according to which it was constructed. "Peter arrived yesterday" forms a sentence, but "yesterday arrived Peter" does not; A+B = C+D constitutes a proposition, but ABC + = D does not. Only an examination of the elements and their distribution, in reference to the system … of the language enables us to distinguish between what is and what is not a proposition, between what is a sentence and what is merely an accumulation of words … (Foucault 2010, 96)

CTS' operationalisation of discourse analysis exhibits a logocentric character, with most studies considering discourse as constituted in linguistic sources only. This logocentrism requires conformity with rules-based orders that make language work. It requires absorbing the rules of language into our critique – by means of both our substantive empirical materials, and analytical techniques we use to unpick them (techniques hinging on evaluation of grammar, lexicalisation, syntax, structure, etc. (Fairclough 2015, 129–30). Such orientation towards rules-based ways of discoursing lends itself to a particular mode of cognition, in the worlds CTS enacts – namely, a mode of cognition that is highly ordered, rational, and structured; as opposed to one grounded in unstructured forms of cognition like affect, or aesthetic. This cognitive bias carries ramifications for CTS' pursuit of other thought – which cannot but be grounded in the same structured logics that make up our primary source materials. CTS enacts a world that is as logical and rationalised as its source materials. Really transforming the discourses we set out to critique would require expanding materials from which we draw our analysis, and reorienting the modes of cognition those materials engage. This means not only searching for another thing, but doing so in another way.

Multimodality

This article proposes pursuing that other way does not require reconfiguring CTS' fundamental ontological orientation, nor the interest in discursive practices to which it leads us. On the contrary, CTS can deepen its criticality from within the bounds of its existing epistemological agenda – merely by diversifying the types of sources to which we apply our methods. So far, like others from critical IR, I've argued "limiting [CTS"] activities to the *alphabetical* … mediation of knowledge about world politics constrains our politicality and impoverishes our conceptual and empirical vitality' (Austin and Leander 2021, 83). But a richer politicality lies just around the corner: in a recognition that the same argument CTS makes regarding "myths and forms of knowledge" construed in language also applies to discourses' multimodal mediation.

For, though language will always be a necessary part of discourse analytic CTS, it can never be "sufficient" (Wignell, Tan, and O'Halloran 2017, 431). It "cannot account for social life understood as a whole" (Neumann 2002, 627). On the contrary, scholarship associated with discourse studies' multimodal turn finds language simply "isn't a big enough receptacle for all the semiotic stuff we felt sure we could pour into it" (Kress 2010, 15). Language represents only one part of discursive exchange. More significantly, language suffers limitations which do not apply to other discursive modes. Proponents of visual methodologies, for instance, find language frequently falls short of furnishing "the 'right' words" for the fullness of social experience (Wills et al. 2015, 472) – such that language becomes as much a barrier to, as an enabler of, discourse/thought (see for example struggles to accommodate non-binary sex identities in gendered languages, Hord 2016). It is a fact of social experience that discursive agents often turn to non-linguistic modes (material, visual, auditory, embodied, spatial, haptic, etc.), to create and disseminate "ways of knowing that escape linguistic expression" (Bliesemann de Guevara and da Silva 2023, 205). Bringing these modes into CTS' analytical arsenal is crucial to achieving genuine criticality: transcending language's boundedness, to "unearth affectual,

emotional, and embodied dimensions of knowledge that are often difficult to capture" through word alone (Bliesemann de Guevara and da Silva 2023, 222).

Much of this work towards more expansive multimodality has already taken place across wider critical IR. Literatures associated with IR's aesthetic turn find openness to multimodal sources "offers us possibilities to re-think, re-view, re-hear and re-feel the political world": affording empirical angles "that we otherwise would not be able to gain" (Bleiker 2017, 260). Such authors find greater heterogeneity of source materials can "force" us "to look differently" – "to see things" overlooked by monomodal data (Ferhani and Nyman 2023, 9–10), and make "visible" that which was "invisible" previously (Harman 2017, 792). In what follows, I reflect on these possibilities as they apply to CTS. In reviewing CTS' narrowly logocentric operationalisation of discourse, I outlined two major limitations for the scope of transformation this operationalisation enacts. Now, in proposing multimodality as a means of deepening CTS' criticality, I return to these same limitations – to establish how multimodality might carry us beyond them.

The first of these limitations concerns multimodal materials' capacity to transcend, rather than reproduce, binary knowledges. I've flagged language's inherent systematicity, and the consequent tendency towards reconstituting binary logics in analyses limiting themselves to linguistic sources. Multimodal exchange, by contrast, is "inherently ambiguous" (Shepherd 2008, 215). Knowledges evoked by images, spaces, or feelings are less strictly codified than those expressed through word – which is precisely why we generally resort to language as "the most central" (because the most straightforward) "means through which meaning is communicated" (McDonald 2008, 568). Their engrained ambiguity makes non-linguistic modes less efficient than language for the basic exchange of information. But it also makes them well placed for the reimagination of binary thought – the interpretation and expression of phenomena in the fullness of their complexity, rather than according to systematic codes.

This argument has been made outside CTS, to demonstrate how multimodal methods' inclusion in critically-informed analyses can expand the range of thinking those analyses engender. In wonderful research on textile multimodality in post-conflict communities, Christine Andrä found inclusion of creative, craft-based modes of knowledge exchange enabled her respondents to go "beyond what can be articulated in words" (Andrä 2022, 520) – to think through "different registers", vis-à-vis conventional verbal interview formats (Andrä et al. 2020, 344) – when conceptualising and communicating experiences of violence. Non-linguistic interaction empowered Andrä's participants to expand "the range of what can be thought, said, and felt about a conflict" by bringing "existing elements together in new ways" – including combining "potentially contradictory materials and meanings" within a single expression (Andrä 2022, 497–502). Whereas speaking through words forced Andrä's participants to reproduce common (binary) frameworks for thinking about their experiences, speaking through craft materials empowered them to reimagine that experience – to "express it another way", as one respondent put it (paralleling Khatibi – unintentionally, but suggestively, Andrä 2022, 515). This facility for ambiguity is important for any field aspiring to politics' unmaking/remaking. In contrast to highly-codified linguistic logics, multimodal expression is open to dichotomous thought's transversion, transcendence, and (thus) transformation. Multimodal methods are uniquely well placed to deliver critical scholarship's

ontological and normative ambitions: enjoying a power to bring nuance, ambiguity, and heterogeneity to the worlds our methods enact – precisely because multimodal materials are themselves so nuanced, ambiguous, and heterogeneous.

The second limitation I raised of CTS' dominant linguistic operationalisation of discourse concerned its orientation towards structured, logical modes of cognition. Drawing on Foucault, I characterised language as a hyper-rationalised mode of thought and speech – one operating through one-directional accumulation of meaning across individual statements. The opposite applies for non-linguistic modes. In the experience and assessment of multimodal artefacts (like visual materials, for example), the mind assimilates meaning in an unstructured way: drifting across the artefact without recourse to directed, sequential logic. Austin, Bellanova, and Kaufmann find this tendency "loosen[s] the … writer's grip on their text's argumentative form and, instead, engag[es] the reader affectively and emotionally" (Austin, Bellanova, and Kaufmann 2019, 15). Receiving information multimodally shifts cognition away from the "reasoned, civilised dialogue" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 17) typical of language, and towards affectual or perceptual knowledge centres (Rheindorf 2019, 226). The result of this "diversion" (Rheindorf 2019, 226) is the accumulation of a less ordered system of meanings (Deleuze et al. 1990, 58) – both in the multimodal material itself, and in the worlds its critical assessment enacts.

I want to make one final case for multimodal analysis in CTS, here, before proceeding to my empirical illustration. For there remains another conventional critique of CTS – which I didn't raise in my review of monomodality, but which an aspiration to multimodality can help us overcome. This is the critique that CTS, for all its interests in reimagining discourses on terrorism (and practices they permit), has tended to focus on those discourses' articulation amongst a limited group of fora – to the detriment of our understandings of ways terrorism discourses circulate in everyday practice. Others have noted CTS' core strengths in analysing "the 'high data' of political elites" (Hülsse and Spencer 2008, 579): with our discipline being "renowned for its analyses of US foreign policy discourse and the language of counterterrorism espoused by American policymakers and practitioners" (Holland 2016, 206) – but less so for its sensitivity to terrorism discourse "in the round" (as it circulates amongst a plurality of agencies). Much CTS scholarship (69.58% of all *CSoT* articles, according to my review) constrains itself to an assessment of terrorism discourses produced by "political, academic, and media elites … largely ignoring the way ordinary people and subaltern groups consume, mediate, and articulate their own discourses of terrorism" (R. Jackson 2016, 85–86). This limitation risks "omit[ting] – or worse, preclu[ding] – the voices of 'ordinary' people" (Jarvis and Lister 2015a, 3): with CTS "peering down on the world" from within its prism of anti-hegemonic critique (Solomon and Steele 2016, 268).

Such "methodological elitism" is a problem in its own right (Stanley and Jackson 2016). My concern with it here, however, has more to do with the "one-sided articulation" of terrorism discourses it evokes: framing terrorism as "a discursive formation … comprised of some security experts from governments, the media, and academics" (Beyribey 2022, 179)′ without "any form of sustained engagement" (Jarvis and Lister 2015b, 109) with "struggles … and counter-narratives" that formation encounters upon its production (Beyribey 2022, 179). This unidirectional framing seems counter-productive to genuine criticality. It leaves CTS little space to engage the relationality and multiplicity which inhere to all forms of discursive practice. Relationality is central to the work of critique.

Indeed, it is "one of the major tenets of critical scholarship" (Furtado 2015, 72) – per normative claims disciplines like CTS make in opposition to conceptual orthodoxies. Yet, such relationality is remarkably absent from large parts of discourse analytic CTS: which, by "emphasis[ing] dominant discourses and public narratives [also] overlook … the possibilities of … counter-narratives" (Beyribey 2022, 181) – collapsing the "multiplicity of discursive elements" always at play in the making of discourse, within a singular narrative (Foucault 1990, 100).

Where multimodality can help us through this critique is in the sensitivity to multi-agent relationality multimodal sources bring to our analyses. Here, I want to focus especially on multimodality as expressed on material artefacts – particularly those, as in Ioannis Tellidis and Anna Glomm's research on Norwegian street art, which are "physically located in the public domain" (Tellidis and Glomm 2018, 194), situated amongst the "day-to-day little nothings" embodying "everyday" practice (Ferhani and Nyman 2023, 9–10). The beauty of materials such as these is in their receptiveness to the interplay of forces comprising discourse – as well as their ability to capture this interplay upon the body of the artefact itself. Multimodal studies of public-realm artefacts take us on a journey through the various statements laid and overlayed upon them: enabling a vision of discourse that recognises the polyvalence of collective knowledge-making. William Parry's multimodal account of Israel's Segregation Wall, for example, told us not only of the oppressiveness of the artefact itself – but also ways its materiality was appropriated and transformed through the agency of communities through which it runs. Parry found large sections of the wall had been reinvented as "a giant billboard for … political messages" (Parry 2011, 9) – with local activists "completely cover[ing the Wall] with graffiti [that] symbolises the complete failure of the Israeli state to control … the imagination of the people" (Jones 2012, 180). Elsewhere, similar forms of discursive relationality are expressed playfully: with Palestinian communities "creatively" redeploying "the very same structure of violence" as a projector screen to televise football matches (Hasan and Bleibleh 2023, 2–9) – or with Mexicans living alongside their own border wall using it as a barbecue grill (Jones 2012, 179–80). Such transformation of multimodal artefacts doesn't just apply to border walls. Research on paramilitary imprisonment in Northern Ireland found prisoners reimagined their cells as "a space of escape" (Purbrick 2011, 279) or "liberated zone" (Rolston 2013), as much as one of disciplinary confinement, through decorative artwork and use of homely wallpapers.

I don't cite these examples to minimise the oppressiveness of security walls or carcerality. Rather, the lesson I take from these studies concerns ways they extend the analytical gaze – beyond the making of an initial statement, and towards its subsequent use/misuse. In these cases, the story of discursive practice doesn't end with the wall or cell – and what these artefacts tell us about state knowledges. Rather, when considered multimodally, that story continues: opening our eyes to how knowledge schemes are resisted, ignored, or merely navigated (since not all forms of relational agency require resistance, Ketola 2020), as they unfold. With material multimodality, the initial statement doesn't disappear into the ether (as with a linguistic proposition). Instead, it remains in place for subsequent re-inscription/re-interpretation. Such openness to the laying and overlaying of plural knowledges upon a single artefact renders these artefacts a useful material for relational (e.g. "otherwise") thought. Research entertaining artefactual multimodality *cannot but* travel through the layers of

alternative meaning-making to which its objects are subject. By the same token, artefactual multimodality *cannot but* re-enact those layers within its own world-making. Multimodal methods don't only make space for the ambiguity and non-systematicity necessary to deepen CTS' transformations of terrorism discourse. But, further, bringing multimodal materials into our project can resolve problems around our existing, one-directional enactments of discourse – centring plurality and heterogeneity in the analytical sources which produce our critical reappraisal.

Empirical illustration

My case for operationalising CTS' discourse analytic agenda multimodally is as follows: greater diversity of source materials can resolve shortcomings in CTS' pursuit of otherwise thinking – deepening our critical project by heightening our sensitivity to transformative, non-binary ways of knowing; and reorienting our analyses from logical to affectual modes of cognition. A multimodal operationalisation of CTS method can also bring relationality and plurality into our account of terrorism discourses. For, as Foucault proposed, discourse is not "something said once and for all – and lost in the past like the result of a battle, or a geological catastrophe" – but rather something which "circulates, is used, disappears … serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry" (Foucault 2010, 105). Multimodal sources are well placed to capture this "tactical polyvalence of discourse" (Foucault 1990, 100): given their receptiveness to a multiplicity of voices, as expressed upon a single artefact.

A question remains, however: how to unlock these possibilities in practice? Achieving multimodality is no easy task. If it were, no doubt discourse analytic CTS would have already resolved shortcomings outlined in this article. In Austin and Leander's words, "seeing things – *really* seeing them – is difficult" (Austin and Leander 2022, 213). Doing so requires inventiveness vis-à-vis our source materials and, above all, "aesthetic sensibilities" enabling us to elucidate meanings that emerge, in unstructured and unexpected ways, from the artefacts we consult (Austin and Leander 2022, 215). The third part of this article offers an empirical illustration of arguments I've made in favour of multimodality: considering spatial/visual data from Northern Ireland's "peace walls". I hope doing so can give insight regarding the scope of other thought which multimodal research enjoys in practice.

My assessment of peace wall multimodality is guided by a handful of methodological principles. The first of these is that there is no single way to read multimodally. As established above, their inherent ambiguity is part of multimodal sources' power. We shouldn't seek to impose systematic methods onto multimodal data. Nor should we subject them to a search for objective interpretation, since doing so risks gutting our materials of their capacity to enlarge non-binary/affectual cognition. Debbie Lisle quotes a conversation with Michael Shapiro to this effect, in which the latter articulated

> Who gives a fuck what the picture means! I want to know how you feel when you see it, and what happens to your mind, your senses and your body when you really pay attention to it. *That* is the sublime … (Lisle 2019, 7)

The first point here is that the art of reading multimodally is not in obtaining some singular truth, but in entertaining the emotional affect the materials solicit. The second, consequent point is that multimodal readings "do not [invite] a method template". The tools multimodal methodologists engage "cannot be mandated *a priori*" (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara 2020, 1212), since multimodal meaning-making's unstructured character requires freedom to navigate its sources without imposed direction.

That being said, there remain signposts on the path to multimodality – which I employ in my empirical illustration, and which others could assimilate, similarly, in pursuit of multimodality's advantages ("interpretive" research, as Dvora Yanow has it, "does not mean 'impressionistic'" research (Yanow 2015, 100)). A first element in what it means to do multimodality involves a leaning towards "thick description" of the sources at hand (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara 2020, 1214). Such thick description requires generosity of analysis – a willingness to dwell on each element of the artefact with a slow care that doesn't come naturally to conventional academic practice (Lisle 2019, 2). This slowness applies both to the initial encounter (taking time to view the materials, and digest their contents), and in the description thereof. In many cases (as in the present article), multimodality's requirement for slowness limits research design to a smaller number of sources than is otherwise common. This has implications for questions of generalisability: not so much in the need to acknowledge the non-generalisability of a single-source account, but rather in recognising the non-appropriateness (in this context) of large-*n* accounts which are, by nature, both *fast* and *thin*.

There are a handful of techniques one can use to engage a slow, thick reading of multimodal artefacts. My own exploration of material/visual multimodality below[5] follows Aida Hozić and Chris Miles, in attending to

(a) My materials' characterisations (who appears within the artefact), narrative arc (what they are doing), and setting (where they do it) (Hozić 2019); as well as
(b) Representations reappearing, mimetically, between different multimodal sources (Miles 2023).

In addition, my account gives heed to colour palettes by which such content items are depicted, as well as to their location in space (given that the question of *where* a relational discourse unfolds is as relevant as that of what it says).

Another element worth bearing in mind, when it comes to thick description of multimodal artefacts, is that this description can itself take on a multimodal character. This article confines itself primarily to a textual account of multimodality. But describing multimodal materials can also involve their visual representation: through inclusion of photographs, sketches, etc., that bring these materials to life in such a way as to "defer authority back to them … grant[ing] images their unique and untameable status and provid[ing] a set of commentaries that, ultimately, leave the last word with [the materials themselves]" (Bleiker 2018, 12). Of course, providing such a representation is not a simple case of the materials' unadulterated replication for readers. Rather, representation itself involves creation: mediating meaning through choices researchers make in interaction with their sources – such as ways a photograph is framed (what's included/excluded); or how the photographer navigates lighting (elevating/negating colour schemes) and even timing (per comments on materials in this article, whose interpretation is meaningfully

affected by the sun's angle at the time of capture). Working through these choices requires acknowledging multimodal research as a "practice of image-making" (Ferhani and Nyman 2023, 357) as much as surgical reproduction (with further implications for the possibilities of other thought, which I revisit in my conclusion).

The present article applies these techniques to a particular source of multimodal data: Northern Ireland's so-called "peace walls". A form of material, artefactual multimodality, the peace walls are "high, ugly, concrete walls" (Gregory et al. 2013, 2) built by state security agents during the "Troubles". Their infrastructures criss-cross the cities of Belfast, Derry, and Portadown (Community Relations Council 2008), particularly in working-class neighbourhoods (Gregory et al. 2013, 215). As multimodal artefacts, these walls emerged from two schemes for knowing Northern Ireland, which they also proceeded to manifest physically – in their brute materiality, and in embodied mobility patterns they imposed upon Northern Irish cities.

The first of these schemes concerns what Nick Vaughan-Williams calls a "frozen regime of thought" (Vaughan-Williams 2006, 521), that has long animated political practice/academic scholarship on Northern Ireland. This is the notion that Northern Irish politics, society, and violence can be understood by reference to a single, master cleavage between Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists. Part of hegemonic discourses on Northern Ireland since the latter's creation in 1920, this binary understanding represents a "habit of mind" (O'Callaghan 2006, 621) in political agents' interpretation of, and action in response to, Northern Irish questions. And it was this binary that animated peace wall infrastructures' conception, design, and targeting. In the words of the British Army's chief officer in Northern Ireland, the peace walls were designed to "hold the ring" between "two rival factions in the community" (CAB/9/G/49/8A 1969): one means of "coping with" the "basic problem of the areas of [inter-community] confrontation" (HA/32/2/52 1971) – by "separat[ing] physically areas containing opposing factions" (HA/32/3/2 1969) and "virtually ban[ning] or control[ling] movement" between them (CJ 4/1222 1975). Hence, the walls' placement: between predominantly Catholic/nationalist and predominantly Protestant/unionist areas.

The second scheme for knowing Northern Ireland which the peace walls embody is an understanding of Troubles violence as a "problem" of working-class people. As one commentator put it during the period of the Troubles' outbreak:

> The problem is one of the working-class. There have been no riots in the prosperous areas of Belmont or the Malone Road in Belfast. Here the well-to-do middle classes settle down in ecumenical harmony which has not broken down even under the tensions of the past years . . . (underlined in original, H. Jackson 1971, 5)

This same understanding served as a guide for Troubles-era security practice: with state agents approaching violence as an expression of "sheer hooliganism" (CAB/9/G/49/8A 1969) amongst working communities living in "problem areas" like west Belfast's Falls and Shankill roads (HA/32/2/52 1971). Such communities were thought to be "ready victims" to the "gut emotion" of sectarian violence (H. Jackson 1971, 5): with security agents obsessing over the "ordinary man on the Shankill Street" (HA/32/3/3 1970), and his susceptibility to "radicalisation", or even "hysteria" (HA/32/3/2 1969), as violence unfolded. The peace walls grew out of this way of knowing Northern Ireland/its "Troubles": being installed at the interface between working-class areas (Gregory et al.

2013, 216–17) – with the joint goals of separating them from each other, and from those of "intelligent and moderate views" in middle-class neighbourhoods whom the walls were designed to "protect" (HA/32/3/6, PRONI 1971).

As multimodal, material artefacts, the peace walls embody these two regimes of truth on Northern Ireland (a binary discourse around the "primordial antagonism" between Northern Ireland's two communities (McGrattan 2010, 182); and a series of assumptions regarding that antagonism's violent expression amongst "irrational" working-class people). These "frozen" schemes produced the walls – which they proceeded to re-enact, in their embodied spatiality, via a parallel "freezing of the ethnic geography of the city" (Boal 2002, 693).

However, the walls' story does not end with their status as security barriers. On the contrary, per arguments above concerning the relationality that always inheres to public-realm artefacts like these, there are multiple layers to peace walls' multimodality – of which their emergence from/reproduction of binary codes represents only the first. The second part of the peace walls' story, to which any assessment of their materiality must remain equally attentive, concerns their appropriation as a "canvas" for the expression of other knowledges on Northern Ireland, by communities through which they run (McAtackney 2011, 78). As Bill Rolston notes, Northern Ireland has "the longest continuous mural painting tradition in the world" (Rolston 2018, 370). Remarkably, the peace walls have been assimilated to this tradition. Rather than being left barren, many walls have been "appropriated, given meaning and interpreted" through local "place-making" (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017, 2): becoming sites for the expression of relational multimodality, whereby the walls are made to carry visual signs whose meanings differ (sometimes wildly) from their initial designs. Assessing peace walls multimodally requires attending to both strands of their barrier/canvas duality: traversing multiple layers of discourse captured upon these single artefacts. This brings me to the peace wall erected at Townsend Street in west Belfast (Figure 1).

Townsend Street runs north-south, between west Belfast's predominantly Catholic/nationalist Falls and predominantly Protestant/unionist Shankill neighbourhoods. In 1992, the UK Government's Northern Ireland Office built a peace wall across Townsend Street (Community Relations Council 2008) – to separate the street's own Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist "halves", as well as to extend the archipelago of peace walls already in place across west Belfast. Townsend Street's peace wall completed the "sealing off" of west Belfast's Falls/Shankill communities, begun in 1969 with the construction of Northern Ireland's first peace wall at Cupar Way. With the Townsend Street wall in place, a continuous line of security barriers now traversed the entirety of west Belfast: running from the Black Mountain in the west, to the Westlink motorway in the east – and inhibiting movement between Falls/Shankill throughout this sweep.

The Townsend Street wall generated poignant effects for its residents' mobility. Having previously afforded a link between Falls/Shankill, the street now became a dead-end stub – with no movement potential across it. Besides dividing Townsend Street's own residents from each other, therefore, the wall also marginalised them from Belfast's wider mobility network – by reducing throughway footfall. It's also worth mentioning the effects of the Westlink motorway here. Though not a wall itself, British security agents envisaged the Westlink's construction as part of the peace wall programme: adding an impassable, multi-lane "buffer" between

Figure 1. peace wall mural from Townsend Street, west Belfast. Copyright belongs to Michael Livesey.

sectarian communities (CENT/1/18/62A, PRONI 1990) – as well as between "troubled" working-class neighbourhoods and affluent parts of the city (the former being cut away from amenities in the city centre; the latter being able to bypass working-class areas when moving north-south, rather than travel through them). Townsend Street sits directly above the Westlink – at the periphery of west Belfast's mobility network, before it meets this motorway buffer. This edge position means Townsend Street suffered a particularly sharp reduction in its integration within Belfast's global mobility network, thanks to the walling/roading programme (not to mention reduced air quality and increased noise pollution – also negative effects of residents' adjacency to a motorway).

When it comes to the Townsend Street peace wall's analysis, the story seems bleak. As a "statement" of security discourses on Northern Ireland, the Townsend Street wall speaks to securitisation of Northern Irish space, segregation of binary identities, and marginalisation of working-class communities. But, approached multimodally, the Townsend Street wall's analysis cannot stop there. For it's impossible to see the wall without seeing its mural – as figure one clearly identifies. This mural (painted by community actors in 2014, Crowley 2020) develops the Townsend Street wall's story in three important senses. The first of these concerns how the mural envisages local space: its placement. Standing directly in front of the wall, one sees that its mural imagines Townsend Street before the latter's division through the imposition of a security barrier. The mural shows Townsend Street in perspective, as if there were no wall blocking the view – and, indeed, as if the terrace on the right (painted in vivid red) had not yet been demolished to make way for a motorway. Thus, the mural depicts Townsend Street's presbyterian church (on the left) as well as houses abutting Shankill Road (in the background) – both views which have now been obscured from the side of Townsend Street on which the mural was painted,

through the imposition of its peace wall. In imagining this vista, the mural speaks back to the securitising structure: harkening to a time before the fragmentation of local space.

All the more so, when we consider the second strand in the mural's story: the characters and narrative it portrays within its imagined pre-wall space. These characters are children from the local community: shown playing games traditional to inner-city, working-class neighbourhoods (girls with a skipping rope; boy in a lamp-post swing). Amongst these games, the wall also shows a cherished local figure: Mickey Marley, whose famous "roundabout" carousel toured Belfast's working-class neighbourhoods throughout the years of conflict. This scene, its characters and story, manifests an affective celebration of those working-class lives demonised as "troubled" and "violent" by the agents behind the wall's construction. The mural scene rejects the securitisation of working-class space, and long-standing assumptions about local communities on which such securitisation was based.

This image also transforms equally long-standing binaries concerning Northern Ireland's ostensibly immiscible Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist identities – the very binaries which produced the peace wall programme. It does so through subtle (and subversive) allusions to mixed inter-community lives, which appear via the third strand in my multimodal reading: the Townsend Street mural's colour palette. In selecting colours by which to depict pre-securitised local space, this mural's creators chose to reference the dichotomous communities logic from which British security's walling programme emerged. The mural's protagonists (children playing in the not-yet-divided street) are painted in green and orange – a palette speaking to their differing Catholic/Irish and Protestant/British heritages (the opposing "sides" of the street they "represent"). But the joyous affect of the children's interactions collapses – renders absurd, even – any assumption that the two identities exist in inherent conflict. The games the mural's children play together evoke a time of invisible, "low key" distinctions and "good neighbourliness" (as Marianne Elliott phrases it in her memoir of life in a mixed Belfast community, Elliott 2017, 110), before binary sectarian cleavages' imposition upon Townsend Street's physical structure. The mural's colour palette subtly parallels binary (and "frozen") understandings informing the wall's conception and placement. But it does so to subvert such understandings, rather than uphold them.

A final thing to mention about this colour palette is its sheer vibrancy. The Townsend Street mural is bursting with colour: the rich red of the housing, the greens/oranges of the children, and the blue of the sky. These colour choices play an important role in the mural's aesthetic affects: complementing, and amplifying, its defiance of local spaces'/identities' securitisation. By chance, I came to Townsend Street peace wall amid a brief, and unusual, spell of Belfast sunshine. This happy coincidence had important outcomes for my multimodal reading, of both wall and mural. For the sun's angle at the time of my visit threw the contrast between the wall's initial securitising function and its appropriation to community place-making into extra-crisp relief. As in figure one, the bright sunshine threw a shadow from the barbed wire atop the Townsend Street peace wall over its mural scene. In one sense, this shadow served a reminder of the peace wall's oppressiveness: its harsh, menacing obstruction of residential space/mobility. On the other hand, the barbed wire shadow also emphasised Townsend Street's mural creators' defiance of such obstruction, as expressed through their colour and character choices. The barbed wire's linear black falls upon the mural's face. But, in a symbolic way, it leaves

its bright palette – and nostalgic imaginings of undivided street life – unspoilt. The mural's children continue to play, and its sky remains full of blue promise, as if the shadow wasn't there. This interplay between shadow and mural returns us to multimodality's value, in reimagining our interpretation of security discourses "otherwise". Reading the wall multimodally, one *cannot but* be sensitive to the interplay of possibilities for thinking about Townsend Street's communities, and their experiences of Troubles violence, which this artefact expresses. By the same token, in bringing this interplay into our account of Troubles-era security, one *cannot but* re-enact a plurality of understandings on Northern Ireland – beyond the frozen binaries that have "straitjacketed" (Little 2003, 374) knowledge of its politics for so long.

This is just one example of multimodality, designed to illustrate the scope of arguments made across this article. Of course, as a single demonstrative application of those arguments, the account suffers limitations. Not all multimodal materials will tell the story told here. Indeed, I've already raised how arriving at the Townsend Street mural under different lighting conditions may have altered my interpretation. Nonetheless, this account gives pause for thought concerning possibilities for reorienting CTS' operationalisation of discourse analytic method, from linguistic to multimodal sources. Doing so in the case of the Townsend Street peace wall brought advantages to my analysis of Troubles security. Engaging a multimodal methodology raised my sensitivity to relational forces always at play in making discourse. Approaching the wall as a multimodal artefact, I could not ignore the plurality of knowledges manifested upon its surface. My analysis could not see the wall without also seeing its mural: bringing together two relational discourses within one artefact. Further, attending to these layers of relationality altered the kinds of thinking on Northern Ireland my work enacted. This thinking was defined neither by binaries common to Vaughan-Williams' "frozen regime of thought", nor by assumptions concerning working-class Northern Irelanders which drove the wall's construction. Rather, my thinking was animated by an alternative account of shared community lives in proudly working-class space. Bringing Townsend Street peace wall's spatiality/visuality into my analysis of Troubles securitisation invited possibilities to transform dichotomies for knowing Northern Ireland, rather than reproduce them – and, further, to enact that transforming through a reading prioritising emotive affect over syntactic logic. In my reflections on discourses around Troubles violence, multimodality opened the door to another thinking on Northern Ireland – by guiding that thinking in another way.

Conclusion

In this article, I've argued for inclusion of multimodal sources in critical terrorism scholarship. I've considered the contribution past discourse analyses have made, in realising CTS' ontological/normative interventions. But I've also noted discourse analytic CTS' dominant conflation of "discourse" with "language". I've suggested this conflation is a problem for the kind of thought CTS enacts. In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's words, our methods choices play a pivotal role in determining "what is in the foreground" and "what is in the background" of our scholarship (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 153). I've argued conflating discourse with language risks foregrounding binary knowledge codes and logocentric modes of cognition, both of which are uniquely central to linguistic meaning-making. This foregrounding undermines the scope of

transformation CTS' critique of terrorism discourses enjoys: recycling the conceptual apparatus from which the old thought was made, even in our efforts to subvert it.

CTS' foundational objective was to help us "see the world differently" (Austin and Leander 2022, 217), as compared with orthodox approaches. But, as interventions across this special issue exemplify, this objective remains imperfectly delivered. CTS presently faces multiple challenges in its pursuit of deep and meaningful criticality (challenges which Lee Jarvis recently described as "existential" for the discipline – precipitating the possibility of CTS' "diminishment, [or] even closure", 2024, 17–18). One of these concerns CTS' monomodal operationalisation of method. I've proposed diversification of CTS' methodologies is one way of bringing us closer to those critical transformations of practice/relations/discourses to which we aspire. Operating a more expansive understanding of discursive texts would open our intervention to multimodality's "rich possibilities": sustaining "different imaginations of the political" (Andrä et al. 2020, 354), by heightening our sensitivity to the full range of fabrics from which such imaginations are woven. This means fulfilling the second half of Aradau and Huysmans' formula on methods as "enacting worlds" – their vision of methods as a means for "disrupting" orthodoxies (Aradau and Huysmans 2013, 608). I've argued such disruption can involve reconfiguring our empirical sources, as much as our conceptual frameworks. "Thinking and doing 'otherwise'" (Lee 2022, 60) doesn't just mean drawing alternative conclusions, but doing so through recourse to alternative modes of knowing.

I'll end with thoughts on why discourse analytic CTS might have remained predominantly linguistic to date, and with a challenge for readers to act on this argument for multimodality – not only at the level of *analysis*, but, also, at the level of *communication*.

I suggest three hypotheses on CTS' monomodality/logocentrism. The first is that multimodal analysis is harder to achieve than monomodal (especially linguistic) analysis. Put simply, multimodal data are harder to collect than purely linguistic data (especially linguistic data stored in accessible and well-funded archives of documentary text). Doing so involves confronting logistical or financial challenges – the same kinds of challenges underlying terrorism studies' long-noted fieldwork gap (Maskaliūnaitė 2023, 93–94) – as well as challenges associated with slow, generous readings mentioned earlier. Despite long-standing comment on the need for disciplines like CTS to "incorporat[e] concrete methodological strategies that can fully cash out" their critical claims (Stanley and Jackson 2016, 225), actually achieving this goal remains tricky. Making space for multimodality's logistical/temporal difficulties requires adjusting our expectations of output. Methods involving greater investment of time, emotion, or money should not be expected to produce publications at the same rate.

My second hypothesis on multimodality concerns the assessment of data, once assembled. Not only are multimodal data hard to collect. They're also hard to analyse – as I've found in my own experience generating (and, more significantly, *defending*) arguments drawn from both linguistic and non-linguistic sources. As literary theorist Peter de Bolla argues, although "words are not concepts", concepts are still generally "expressed in words" (de Bolla 2013, 21) – especially in academic fora that privilege written/verbal forms of exchange (more on that below). From a discourse analytic perspective, it's much easier to locate, assess, or critique concepts in linguistic materials – given we normally use language to describe those concepts in the first place. The pathway for establishing a discourse analysis from non-linguistic sources is less clear – often

requiring conceptual leaps that bring the "rigour" and "objectivity" of the work into question (Yanow 2015). Of course, these leaps are in line with the non-codification and non-systematicity which I've argued make multimodal materials so apposite in pursuing otherwise thought. Nonetheless, they often solicit criticisms of cherry-picking, non-replicability, or an overbearing presence for the researcher that bring multimodal work's validity into doubt ("wrongly", as found by Bliesemann de Guevara and da Silva 2023, 204).

My final hypothesis on CTS' monomodality concerns our practices for disseminating findings. For all my arguments on non-verbal communication, this article included many words, and only a brief assessment of spatiality/materiality/visuality! Even in championing multimodality, I've resorted primarily to language to communicate my claims.[6] It would have been better for me to embrace non-linguistic modes to share my argument. Opportunities to do so when engaging with CTS readers are limited, however, since CTS remains a largely linguistic genre when it comes to *publication* – as much as *analysis*. Getting my proposals to a CTS audience involved conforming to our discipline's standards of written/spoken exchange. Perhaps it's time for us to rethink those standards ("altering the *style* of [our] critique", as much as its substance, per Austin and Leander 2021, 15), in revitalising CTS' criticality.

This suggestion brings me to closing comments: balancing my argument on integrating non-linguistic sources in our modes of analysis, with a further call for plurality in our habits of disciplinary exchange. In recent years, CTS scholars have done great work to diversify channels by which we communicate our critical take on "terrorism". Richard Jackson's *Confessions of a Terrorist* (R. Jackson 2015), for example, represents a subtle, nuanced, and highly-readable version of CTS' ontological/normative intervention. As Priya Dixit puts it, the novel "express[es] ideas that would otherwise be difficult to present in an academic journal article or book manuscript" (Dixit and Jacob 2016, 194). Similar diversity of communication applies to a recent "Call for Poems" issued by *Critical Studies on Security* – looking for authors to share their reflections on security discourses/practices in a more creative register than "scientific writing" permits. These innovations remain textual in nature, however. And, when it comes to unlocking multimodality's transformative possibilities (the fluid ways concepts are exchanged, when exchanged non-verbally), I would encourage CTS scholars to build on this trend: exploring avenues for sharing findings through visual, material, sonic, or embodied techniques (to name just a few). This has been done in other critical disciplines (e.g. Andrä et al. 2020; Harman 2017). But, to my knowledge, non-linguistic dissemination is not yet prevalent within CTS.

Besides enabling us to express our argument in nuanced ways, multimodal dissemination would also enlarge CTS' contribution to wider, non-academic, discourse (see footnote six for an example from my own practice). Viviane de Melo Resende has argued written publishing norms erect "barbed wiring" between academic and non-academic audiences. She suggests that, to achieve "the potential for social transformation that we attribute to our work, *we need to learn how to speak another language* ... above all, one that is more accessible to other social groups". For de Melo Resende, undertaking this learning (being able to communicate findings beyond a journal audience) is central to decoloniality. She proposes "to decolonise, opening space for a communion of knowledge, we need to deepen common knowledge and common communication; we need to speak a language

capable of communicating widely" (de Melo Resende 2021, 36–39). I've argued using multimodal sources in our discourse analyses can help us *think* otherwise: opening space for a plurality of voices in our *assessment* of security discourses, and for the transformative logics those voices express. Perhaps using multimodal sources to *disseminate* our findings can help bring our scholarship into conversation with other sources of otherwise thinking: enabling greater exchange between the worlds our findings "enact", and the wider world to which they matter.

Notes

1. 457 articles across 15 volumes/49 issues (excluding book reviews, editorial notes, special issue introductions, and corrigenda).
2. I don't accept, in this regard, Jonathan Joseph's claim that CTS "takes an approach that is overly epistemological, to the point where ontology often becomes a secondary issue" (Joseph 2009, 93); on the contrary, I think ontology is at the heart of what it means to *do* "CTS".
3. A critique made similarly of other critical security literatures – which, in their focus on "speech acts", direct analysis largely to "speech and language … effectively ignor[ing] 'non-verbal expressions of security'" (Nyman 2013, 60).
4. Combining subtlety (breadth of possible expression) with clarity (absence of confusion in meaning).
5. Note here that my empirical illustration dwells on material/visual/artefactual multimodality. There are elements of my analysis (both of my sources, and of multimodality generally) that will be specific to these materials, given the range of modes they capture. The point here is not to give a final say on multimodality as a whole – but, more simply, to get the ball rolling on its use in CTS. I hope this initial discussion might lead to further advances, regarding what multimodality can and cannot offer our discipline.
6. That being said, I also shared visual materials informing this article via a public exhibition in Sheffield in November 2023. Held at two venues over the course of one week, my exhibition was viewed by over 30,000 people (ranging from local elected officials to children on a school visit). The exhibition gave those who were unlikely to wade through my written publications a chance to engage with their findings, including through interactive elements. Viewers who left reflections on my materials shed new light on elements of my work, and opened new directions for future reflection.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank professors Lee Jarvis, Michael Lister, and Laura Sjoberg for their invaluable comments on early drafts of this article, as presented to the 2023 BISA and EWIS conferences. The author would also like to thank the editors of this Critical Studies on Terrorism special issue for their support, encouragement, and care throughout the article writing process.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council.

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