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## DISCOURSE ANALYSIS I: TEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY AND CONTEXT

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**key example:** a wide range of images picturing the East End of London in the 1880s, from maps and fine art paintings to book illustrations and newspaper graphics.

The chapter also discusses using online image banks and archives.

### 8.1 Discourse and Visual Culture: An Introduction

The previous chapter examined certain psychoanalytic approaches to visual images, and ended with the concerns expressed by some writers that psychoanalysis does not pay enough attention to the social construction of difference. This claim is made on two grounds: first, that psychoanalysis has very little to say about some forms of social difference, such as race and class; and, secondly, that it concentrates on the psychic and visual construction of difference at the expense of considering the social construction and consequences of difference. Very little attention is paid either to the ways of seeing brought to particular images by specific audiences, or to the social institutions and practices through which images are made and displayed.

One writer whose work is often turned to in order to address these absences in psychoanalytic theory is Michel Foucault. For various reasons, Foucault was quite hostile to psychoanalysis, but Foucault's approach does have some compatibilities with that of Freud. Most importantly, perhaps, Foucault's understanding of the subject is in some ways similar to that of psychoanalysis. Like psychoanalytic approaches to the subject, Foucault too considered that human subjects are produced and not simply born. Human subjectivity is constructed through particular processes, he argued, and much of his work consists of detailed historical studies of some of those processes at particular periods in Western history (actually, mostly French history). He wrote books on the emergence of the

seems to constitute the default method of a great deal of cultural and visual studies.) This chapter explores the methodological implications of discourse analysis I in six sections:

- 1 the first is this introduction;
- 2 the second is a general introduction to Foucault's work, which makes a distinction between two kinds of discourse analysis, which I call discourse analysis I and discourse analysis II;
- 3 the third discusses finding sources for studies using discourse analysis I;
- 4 the fourth explores the production and rhetorical organisation of discourse;
- 5 the fifth discusses discourse analysis I and reflexivity;
- 6 and the final section assesses discourse analysis I as a critical visual methodology.

## 8.2 An Introduction to Discourse Analysis I and Discourse Analysis II

Foucault was quite clear that discourse was a form of discipline, and this leads us to his concern with power. Discourse, he says, is powerful, but it is powerful in a particular way. It is powerful, says Foucault, because it is productive. Discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behaviour on a pre-existing human agent. Instead, human subjects are produced through discourses. Our sense of our self is made through the operation of discourse. So too are objects, relations, places, scenes: discourse produces the world as it understands it. Thus, to translate once more some of the arguments of the previous chapter, it might be said that certain kinds of masculinity are produced through a discursive visuality that is voyeuristic and fetishistic.

An important implication of Foucault's account of power is that power is not something imposed from the top of society down onto its oppressed bottom layers. Power is everywhere, since discourse too is everywhere. And there are many discourses, some of which clearly contest the terms of others. Foucault (1979: 95) claimed that 'where there is power, there is resistance ... a multiplicity of points of resistance', and by this he meant that there are many discourses that jostle and compete in their effects. We might define the efforts of feminist film critics like Silverman and de Lauretis, for example, as efforts to develop visual discourses that do not discipline looking in a phallocentric manner, but that produce other (ways of visualising) masculinities and femininities.

But certain discourses are nonetheless dominant, and Foucault was particularly concerned in his own work with the emergence of institutions and technologies that were structured through specific, even if complex and contested, discourses. And he suggested that the dominance of certain discourses occurred not only because they were located in socially powerful institutions – those given coercive powers by the state, for example, such as the police, prisons and workhouses – but also because their discourses claimed absolute truth. The construction of claims to truth lies at the heart of the intersection of power/knowledge.

We should admit ... that power produced knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and consume power/knowledge at the same time power relations. (Foucault 1977: 27)

Foucault insisted that knowledge and power are imbricated one in the other, not only because all knowledge is discursive and all discourse is saturated with power, but because the most powerful discourses, in terms of the productiveness of their social effects, depend on assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true. The particular grounds on which truth is claimed – and these shift historically – constitute what Foucault called a *regime of truth*. Foucault himself, in a series of four essays each on a specific oil painting, was especially interested in the emergence of realistic representation as an aim of Western art, and suggested that painting 'is discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effects' (Foucault 1972: 194). Some historians of photography have argued similarly that the 'realism' of the photographic image was produced, not by new photographic technology, but by the use of photographs in a specific regime of truth, so that photographs were seen as evidence of 'what was really there'. This argument will be examined a little more fully in the next chapter.

Foucault's work is radical in many ways. It has been adopted with enthusiasm by many working in the social sciences and humanities, but has also been greeted with hostility and even derision by others. His controversial status is in small part explained by his methodological programme (which is perhaps spelled out most clearly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1972]; see also Andersen 2003; Kendall and Wickham 1999). Foucault refused the premise which forms the basis of all the analytical methods that this book has examined so far. Content analysis, mainstream semiology and psychoanalysis all assume that analysis needs somehow to delve behind the surface appearance of things in order to discover their real meaning. Content analysis seeks out latent

meanings that it claims become evident only from systematic quantitative study; semiology searches for the dominant codes or myths or referent systems that underlie the surface appearance of signs; and psychoanalysis looks for signs of the unconscious as they disrupt the conscious making of meaning. This approach to the interpretation of meaning is widespread in the humanities and social sciences, and sub-tends many other methods apart from these three. Foucault rejected such 'penetrative' models of interpretation at the level of method, but also at the level of explanation, since he also wanted to avoid explanatory accounts of *why* power works in the way it does. He explicitly rejected the Marxist claim that meaning was determined by the system of production, for example; he was always vague about how discourses connected to other, non-discursive processes such as economic change; and while he acknowledged that power has aims and effects, he never explained these by turning to notions of human or institutional agency. Michele Barrett (1991: 131) says that his notion of causality and dependency was 'polymorphous'. Both methodologically and theoretically, then, Foucault rejected approaches that look behind or underneath things and practices for other processes that would explain them. Instead, as Barrett (1991) makes clear in her account of his work, he focused on the question of *how* power worked. How does it do what it does, how did it do what it did? Certainly his most satisfying works, to me, are his empirical accounts of particular texts and institutions, often focusing on their details, their causal assumptions, their everyday mundane routines, their taken-for-granted architecture, their banalities. It is these detailed descriptions that produce his most startling accounts of how subjects and objects were and are discursively produced.

Elaborating Foucault's method is not easy, however. As Barrett (1991: 127) notes, his methodological statements are rather vague, and Niels Akerstrom Andersen (2003: 8) comments that he often didn't follow his own prescriptions. More recent discourse analysis can also be rather coy about their methods. Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy (2002: 75) say that methods are 'emergent', for example, while Jonathan Potter (1996: 140) describes discourse analysis as a 'craft skill' and suggests that the only way to learn it is to get on and do it (although in fact these authors do also offer some guidelines; see Phillips and Hardy 2002: 59–81; Potter and Wetherell 1987: 158–76). This vagueness, combined with the huge amount of Foucault's work now available – which includes many interviews and pieces of journalism quite apart from his books, lectures and papers – and the fact that, not surprisingly, his ideas changed as his projects shifted, means that his methodological legacy has been complex and diffuse. (And, to complicate matters, there is also the 'critical discourse analysis' developed by Fairclough [2010], among others, which owes rather little to Foucault.) In exploring work that

does owe explicit allegiance to Foucauldian arguments, I will use my own terminology. This chapter and the next one will focus on two methodologies which I will call discourse analysis I and discourse analysis II. Both depend on specifically Foucauldian notions of discourse, but each puts Foucault's arguments to work in rather different ways, with rather different effects. I distinguish between them thus:

- *discourse analysis I*. This form of discourse analysis tends to pay rather more attention to the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts than it does to the practices entailed by specific discourses. As Rosalind Gill (1996: 141) says, it uses 'discourse' to 'refer to all forms of talk and texts'. It is most concerned with discourse, discursive formations and their productivity.
- *discourse analysis II*. This form of discourse analysis tends to pay more attention to the material practices of institutions than it does to the visual images and verbal texts. Its methodology is usually left implicit. It tends to be more explicitly concerned with issues of power, regimes of truth, institutions and technologies.

This distinction is not clear-cut. It is not difficult to find work that examines visual images, verbal texts, institutions and social practices together (see Green [1990] for example). However, in terms of current discussions of methodologies in the social sciences, it does seem to me that there is a case to be made for discussing these two methodological emphases separately, since they do produce rather different kinds of research work. Thus this chapter will examine the first type of discourse analysis, and the next chapter will examine the second. For convenience, whenever this chapter mentions discourse analysis, it is referring to what has just been characterised as discourse analysis I, unless the text specifies otherwise.

This first type of discourse analysis is centrally concerned with language. But, as Fran Tonkiss emphasises:

language is viewed as the topic of research ... Rather than gathering accounts or texts so as to gain access to people's views and attitudes, or to find out what happened at a particular event, the discourse analyst is interested in how people use language to construct their accounts of the social world. (Tonkiss 1998: 247–8)

Discourse analysis can also be used to explore how images construct specific views of the social world, in which case, to paraphrase Tonkiss, visuality is viewed as the topic of research, and the discourse analyst is interested in how images construct accounts of the social world. This type of discourse analysis therefore pays careful attention to an *image itself* (as well as other sorts of evidence). Since discourses

are seen as socially produced rather than created by individuals, this type of discourse analysis is especially concerned with the *social modality* of the image site. In particular, discourse analysis explores how those specific views or accounts are constructed as real or truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth. As Gill (1996: 143) says, 'all discourse is organised to make itself persuasive', and discourse analysis focuses on those strategies of persuasion. It also pays attention to the more socially constituted forms of discursive power, looking at the social construction of difference and authority, for example. Discourse analysis is thus concerned too with the social production and effects of discourses.

This chapter will explore the usefulness of these methodological foci through a case study of the work of several historians who have examined the discursive construction of the East End of London in the 1880s. These historians work with a variety of images and texts in order to examine the way bourgeois commentators produced an apparently truthful account of this working-class area, and to explore the effects that had on its residents in terms of the various institutional interventions legitimised by that 'truth'. Gareth Stedman Jones (1976: 10–11) points out that in the 1870s and 1880s, most British social thinkers assumed that economic progress would eliminate poverty. The fact that it did not – most blatantly in London's East End, an area with a seasonal and casual labour market and high levels of poverty – was blamed on what were seen as 'the still ungenerous poor: those who had turned their back on progress, or been rejected by it'. Jones continues:

This group was variously referred to as 'the dangerous class', the casual poor or, most characteristically, 'the residuum' ... In the explanation of the existence of the residuum the subjective psychological defects of individuals bulked even larger than before ... 'The problem was not structural but moral. The evil to be combated was not poverty but pauperism; pauperism with its attendant vices, drunkenness, improvidence, mendicancy, bad language, filthy habits, gambling, low amusements and ignorance. (Jones 1976: 11)

This particular definition of the problem – the truth it assumed – led to specific strategies to combat it: strategies that aimed to alter the morality of the poor rather than their standard of living.

Discourse analysis I thus addresses questions of power/knowledge. Because of this, it fulfils two of the three criteria for a critical visual methodology that were outlined in the first chapter. As a method, discourse analysis pays careful attention to images, and to their social production and effect. Phillips and Hardy (2002) also claim that discourse analytic methods are inherently reflexive. This is a controversial

claim, however. Foucault himself, certainly in his early work, was not at all sympathetic to notions of 'reflexivity' as they are currently constituted in the social sciences. He seemed clearly to separate his own practices as an academic from those of the thinkers he was discussing, and, in another parallel with psychoanalytic approaches, in the introduction to *The Archeology of Knowledge* he derided autobiographical efforts at reflexivity: 'do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order' (Foucault 1972: 17). In the section on reflexivity in their book on Foucault, Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham (1999: 101–09) echo this refusal and say very little about reflexivity as it is currently debated in the social sciences. Phillip and Hardy's assertion that discourse analysis is in fact reflexive depends on their argument that since discourse analysis 'involves a set of assumptions concerning the constructive effects of language' (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 5), any discourse analysis must implicitly constitute itself as constructed from the effects of language, or risk incoherence. Acknowledging its constructed nature is what constitutes discourse analysis's reflexivity, according to Phillips and Hardy. The final section of this chapter will return to their claim.

### 8.3 Finding Your Sources For a Discourse Analysis I

Doing a discourse analysis assumes that you are concerned with the discursive production of some kind of authoritative account – and perhaps too about how that account was or is contested – and with the social practices both in which that production is embedded and which it itself produces. Discourses are articulated through a huge range of images, texts and practices, however, and any and all of these are legitimate sources for a discourse analysis. When beginning a piece of discourse analysis, then, it is necessary to think carefully about what sorts of sources you need.

#### 8.3.1 Finding your sources: in general

For most sorts of research questions, some key sources will be immediately obvious, either from your own knowledge or from the work of other researchers. In the work of historians looking at the discursive construction of the East End of London in the 1880s, for example, a number of sources recur (Cowling 1989; Curtis 2001; Fishman 1988;

Jones 1976; Jones 1989; Keating 1976; Livesy 2004; Nead 1988, 2000; Walkowitz 1992; Warwick and Willis 2007). These are: contemporary newspapers, often London ones rather than national ones; contemporary accounts of visits to the East End by journalists, clerics, philanthropists and others, which often take the form of travel diaries and could be published in pamphlet or book form as well as in newspapers; novels and, less often, poems; and documents produced by various branches of government such as the Census, reports by local Medical Officers of Health, and other sorts of government reports. Many of these written sources are illustrated with figurative images – often engravings – or with maps or cartoons or other visual images. Almost all of these historians also use photographs of the area, some taken by philanthropic institutions and some by journalists, but the provenance of many of these is now hard to trace. It is important to note the eclecticism of these sources. They are not constrained by notions of genre, for example, or technology. Even a study concerned to examine just one sort of visual construction relevant to the production of the East End, such as Nead's (1988) study of 'art', uses a wide range of sources, including paintings, engravings and drawings, but also journalism, parliamentary reports and fictional and non-fictional writing. This eclecticism is demanded by the intertextuality of discourse. As Nicholas Green (1990: 3) says, discourse is 'a coherent pattern of statements across a range of archives and sites'.

In the face of the breadth of source material demanded by discourse analysis I, it is useful to begin by thinking about what sources should be selected as the *starting points* for your own research: the sources that are likely to be particularly productive, or particularly interesting, or 'provide theoretically relevant results' (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 66). This may mean you draw on sources that others have often used. Or it may mean that you need to locate and access previously unused materials. Or your key sources may already be to hand; perhaps stumbling across them was what started you off on this research in the first place. However, once the more obvious starting points for a discourse analysis have been established, it is important then to *widen* your 'range of archives and sites'. Ways of doing this are diverse. Those initial images and texts may well contain references to other images and texts that you can then track down. Reading what other researchers working on the same or similar topics have said about your area of interest will produce other leads. A discourse analysis may also be able to use verbal material; you may want to conduct interviews yourself, or to record naturally occurring talk (see Potter 1996; Porter and Wetherell 1994). And you also need to invest time in the kind of browsing research that leads to serendipitous finds. Some of the most interesting discourse analyses are interesting precisely because they bring together, in convincing ways, material that had previously been seen as quite unrelated.

If this sounds potentially time-consuming – it can be. Indeed, one of the difficulties of the discourse analytic method is knowing where to stop the data collection process. As you begin to find other texts related to the materials you started with, and then more materials related to them in turn, it becomes tricky to know when to stop without making your end points seem arbitrary. Andersen (2003: 13) quotes Foucault's presumably ironic suggestion that 'one ought to read everything, study everything'; but, clearly, reading 'everything' is impossible. What brings the intertextual search to an end, as both Phillips and Hardy (2002: 74) and Tonkiss (1998) note, is the feeling that you have enough material to persuasively explore its intriguing aspects. That is, discourse analysis does not depend on the quantity of material analysed, but its quality. 'What matters', according to Tonkiss (1998: 253), 'is the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed'. Thus you may quite legitimately select from all possible sources those that seem particularly interesting to you. As long as you have located some intriguingly complex texts, your discourse analysis can begin.

## focus

Suppose you are interested in exploring the ways pregnant women are visualised in contemporary Western culture. What might your initial sources be? Where else might you look for visual images and texts that construct the pregnant female body?

This task raises the question of different, possibly competing discourses that participate in that construction. For example, you may not be familiar with the conventional medical discourse of pregnancy, but this is perhaps the most powerful discourse a pregnant woman encounters as she attends her antenatal appointments. How might you access that particular discourse? And what others might challenge or confirm it? How might you access how some pregnant women construct their sense of bodily self for example? What about advertising? And are adverts showing pregnant women the only relevant ones? Or is the fact that pregnant women are very rarely visualised in what are called 'women's magazines' also relevant? That is, is the invisibility of pregnant women also an interesting issue to investigate?

## focus

Achieving this breadth of source material means spending large amounts of time working your way through lots of different kinds of source materials, often in some kind of archive.

Historian Caroline Steedman (2005) describes working in an institutional archive: this might be an impoverished local history museum, or it might be a well-resourced archive like the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas, Austin. Her essay includes some valuable practical advice: if you are staying in a hotel to work in an archive, remember to pack something to do in the evenings; take lots of clothes because archives are always cold, to preserve the papers they hold; keep up a rhythm of ordering up materials through the day so you always have something to look at. She also describes some of the feelings that archive work can induce: the physical feel of the materials and dust; the pleasure of discovery; the loneliness; the identifications.

However, in recent years, many archives have begun to put their documents, images and objects into online databases. Harold Short and Marilyn Degan's (2005) account of working with such digitised archives demonstrates that it is a very different experience from the one described by Steedman. The digital archive is wherever your computer screen is when you go online, which means you can stay at home or in your office, warm and clean, dressed how you want, working when you want.

Some historians have lamented the sort of comfort that online archives afford, suggesting that the true craft of the historian, forged in the archive, is at risk (Hitchcock 2008). Before dismissing these comments as nothing more than the historian's equivalent of the anthropologist's year of fieldwork – something you have to suffer before you can really claim to be a member of the profession – it is worthwhile pausing and gathering together the scattered comments already made in this book about working with online resources: whether archives or image banks.

Section 3.5 has already pointed out just what rich pickings there are on the Internet for projects interested in visual culture. Online image banks offer historical and contemporary images; they offer images of images in all sorts of media; they offer still and moving images; they offer commercial images, art images and documentary images. As Tim Hitchcock (2008) agrees, in theory such databases make the kind of discourse analysis discussed in this chapter very easy. After all, if you can find some relevant online archives and do a few keyword searches relevant to your topic, bingo: you've got all the source materials you need on your computer screen, apparently. No more dusty archives, no more boring overnight stays in expensive hotels, no more frustrating searches through piles of papers that turn out to be irrelevant to your project.

However, I have already offered a couple of words of caution about this scenario. The first was in section 3.5, which pointed out that online image banks – and online archives more generally – don't give you the same object as the one sitting in the physical archive. They give you digitised versions of those objects. While some aspects of the materiality of images, or documents, is retained when they are digitised, much is also transformed or lost. Size, colour, texture, dust and weight are all shifted or erased when an image is seen on a screen. This loss may or may not matter to your specific project, but you should certainly consider its consequences before relying entirely on digital data.

Secondly, as section 5.2.2 discussed, there are issues around how online archives or image banks label and sort their data, and relying on those labels – or 'tags' – can produce problems, such that Chapter 5 suggested that using image bank tags as ready-made codes for interpreting images was not necessarily a good idea. Another apparent time-saver in archive websites – that tempting 'search' box – can also hide a number of difficulties. Databases' search engines are driven by software algorithms following rules that are invisible to the user (van Dijck 2010; Wallace 2010); if, unbeknownst to you, there is a rule that brings up only the 50 most popular documents or images, you might never see material that could have been crucial to your project. Then, online archives or image banks' software search either for the tags that have been attached to an image or document, or for text within documents. This relies on the database's tags also means that you need to know what the keywords are that will bring up the documents or images you want. Discourse analysis I assumes, though, that keywords are not what you know before you start, but what you are looking for as you analyse documents. Using keywords to locate materials for a discourse analysis could therefore be putting the cart before the horse.

Finally, a point about the coverage of online image banks and archives. Digitising documents is time-consuming and expensive, which means it is only done for specific data sets; those considered particularly important in some way, or those held by organisations who can afford to do it or see a profit in it. You might find that the data you need simply is not available online, or, if it is, it is not affordable. Or you might find it is not in the right format: finding online newspaper archives that show the original page layouts, including images, is not as easy as you might think, for example. Conversely, depending on your topic, you might find yourself overwhelmed with online data (remember Jean Burgess and Joshua Green [2009] and their sample of 4,320 YouTube videos, discussed in Chapter 5).

I am not advocating physical archives over digital ones. Sitting for weeks going through original documents is not without its difficulties either. Physical archives are also sorted and labelled in particular ways, and they too have their gaps; plus you have to get yourself to them, which is not always possible. You should consider the pros and cons of both kinds of archive for your particular research question. What is certainly true is that the questions 'What is it? Who made it? And for what purpose?' are questions to be asked of all archives and image banks, online or not (Steedman 2005: 23).

### 8.3.2 Finding your sources: iconography

One method that does offer some clearer guidelines about what sorts of sources are relevant to understanding some kinds of visual images is iconography. Iconography is a method developed by the art historian Erwin Panofsky. Chapter 2 suggested that many art historians rely on having a 'good eye' which focuses almost entirely on how an image looks. Panofsky (1957: 26) distanced himself from this kind of eye by insisting that iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their 'form'. The subject matter or meaning was, for Panofsky, to be established by referring to the understandings of the symbols and signs in a painting that its contemporary audiences would have had. Interpreting those understandings requires a grasp of the historically specific intertextuality on which meaning depends.

Panofsky took care to spell out just how he thought this comparison between different visual images and verbal texts should work. Panofsky (1957) divides visual interpretation into three kinds, to which he gives various names:

1	primary	natural	pre-iconographic
2	secondary	conventional	iconographic
3	intrinsic	symbolic	iconological

The example he uses to explain the differences between these three kinds of images is 'when an acquaintance greets me on the street by lifting his hat' (Panofsky 1957: 26). He suggests that recognising that he has encountered a 'gentleman' with a 'hat' requires some interpretation, but of an elementary and easily understandable sort (p. 26). This is therefore interpretation at the primary or pre-iconographic level. (In methodological terms, this level has some parallels to the close observation demanded by compositional interpretation.) However, 'my realization that the lifting of the hat stands for a greeting belongs in an altogether different realm of interpretation' (p. 27). This different realm addresses images that have a specific symbolic resonance; this is the secondary level of interpretation, of a conventional or iconographic image. The third level of interpretation is brought to bear on visual images in order to explore their general cultural significance. Panofsky suggested that, in the case of his acquaintance with the hat, seeing that image in symbolic or iconological terms would mean interpreting the gesture of lifting the hat as a symptom of that man's whole personality and background. The iconological or intrinsic meaning of an image 'is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – qualified by one personality and condensed into one work' (Panofsky 1957: 30).

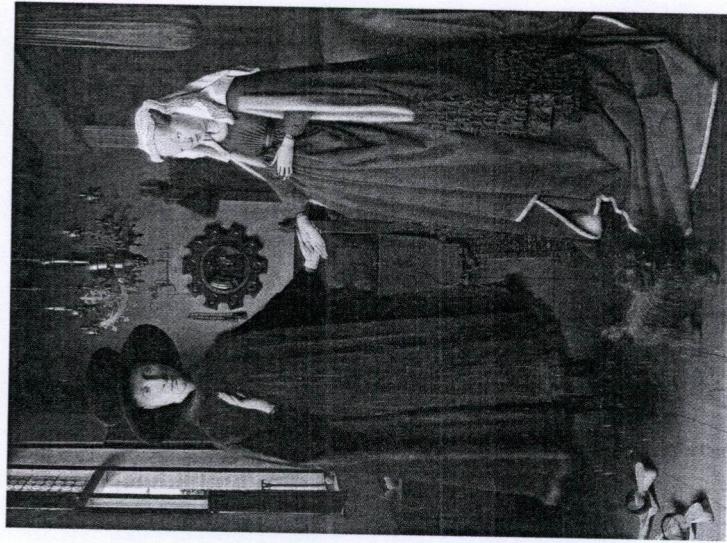


Figure 8.1  
Jan van Eyck,  
*The Arnolfini  
Wedding  
Portrait*, 1434  
© The National  
Gallery, London

As an example of Panofsky's method, we can turn to the portrait painted by Jan van Eyck in 1434 for the marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini, a merchant in Bruges, to Giovanna Cenami, and reproduced in Figure 8.1 (for other accounts of this painting, see Bedaux 1986; Hall 1994; Seidel 1993). Panofsky (1953: 201–3) offers a detailed iconographic interpretation of this image which depends on his knowledge of the iconography at work in early Netherlandish painting more generally. Thus Panofsky insists that, despite its location in 'a comfortably furnished interior', despite all its signs of worldly wealth (the lamp, mirror, jewellery, clothing), and despite its use of oil paint which, in Berger's (1972) analysis, makes the painting as much of a commodity as the objects it depicts, this is a painting that glorifies the Christian sacrament of marriage. Thus the hand gestures are those of the Catholic marriage ceremony, and the candle, clearly not needed for light since the room is bathed in sunlight from the window, represents the all-seeing Christ. The fruit on the window ledge and chest symbolise the purity of humankind before the Fall. The statue of St Margaret at the top of the bed is a reference to the

represents childbirth, and the dog symbolises marital fidelity. Moreover, the colours used by van Eyck also have symbolic meaning. John Gage (1993: 142–3) notes that the colours in the portrait have significance in relation to the ideas of contemporary alchemists about colours and the essential properties of matter. Deep purple and green – the clothes worn by the couple – symbolise fire and water, as does the jewellery hanging next to the mirror in the painting – amber beads and pearls. The painting thus suggest that this is not only a coupling of two people, but a complementary union of two elemental properties which will be harmonious and fertile. Both Panofsky and Gage rely on the notion of intertextuality in order to interpret the meanings this image would have had for its contemporary audiences, although they relate the portrait to different texts: Gage refers to alchemy books while Panofsky compares the portrait to other marriage portraits.

As an intertextual method, iconography is most often applied to Western figurative images and to architecture, usually from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. During that period, compendia of symbols (in the loose sense of the word) were written for both artists and for patrons. These explained the meanings of hundreds of visual motifs, allegories and personifications, and it is these compendia that art historians have consulted to produce iconographic interpretations of specific images. Iconography needs a thorough grounding in historical context to be successful, therefore, and Panofsky argued that actually, in order to understand the possible secondary and intrinsic meanings of an image, two things were necessary. One was that deep familiarity with the texts, both visual and written, that the artist producing a particular piece of work would have been familiar with, and this might need to extend beyond those published guides to symbolism just mentioned. The second thing was ‘synthetic intuition’ (Panofsky 1957: 38), or what other commentators on this method have called common sense. This second quality was important because, while various texts could provide important information and clues about iconographic and iconological meaning, Panofsky (1957) argued that they could never provide full explanations for a particular image, and their relevance thus had to be judged by the critic on the basis of his or her intuition.

There are some aids available for developing this requisite sense of historical context. Roelof van Straten (1994) provides a guide to the compendia of symbols that were used by artists and patrons. Another very helpful publication is the *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography* (Roberts 1998). This two-volume work consists of a number of long, illustrated essays on themes such as Crucifixion, Death, Arms Raised, Money, Whiteness, Pregnancy and Hair/Haircutting (to list some almost at random). Each entry explores the iconography of its theme and lists

relevant works of art from various periods. It also suggests other useful reading that can direct you to original sources.

As defined by Panofsky, iconography is not a Foucauldian method. Panofsky (1957: 41) suggested that iconographic analysis could show how the ‘essential tendencies of the human mind’ were translated into visual themes and concepts, and this reference to the ‘essential tendencies of the human mind’ is decidedly non-Foucauldian. As we have seen, Foucault insisted that there could be no ‘essential tendencies’ because human subjectivity is entirely constructed. Iconography has also been seen as close to more structural kinds of semiology, with Panofsky’s primary level of interpretation echoed in the notion of denotive signs, and his secondary level in connotive signs (see also van Leeuwen 2001). However, in their shared concern with intertextuality, there are some parallels between iconography and the sort of discourse analysis under discussion here, and the term ‘iconography’ is now often used in a loose sense to refer to the kind of approach to images that I am calling discourse analysis (I see, for example, Burke 2001).

A work that might be described as an ‘iconography’ in this looser sense is Mary Cowling’s (1989) study of ‘the representation of type and character in Victorian art’. Cowling’s work contributes to an account of the discursive construction of the East End of London in the 1880s too, since she points out that the East Ender was shown by Victorian artists as a particular social type. She argues that Victorian audiences assumed that paintings needed to be read – that their meanings required decoding – and that there were two, related, bodies of knowledge, both understood as scientifically true, that were used especially frequently for decoding images of social difference: physiognomy and phrenology.

In the Victorian age, physiognomy, or the indication of character through the facial features and forms of the head and body, was all but universally believed in. The more specific indication of character through the shape of the skull, expounded as a complete system in the form of phrenology, was also widely subscribed to. Whether the human face was looked at with the eyes of the artist, the writer, or even the scientist, belief in physiognomy characterised contemporary attitudes towards it. (Cowling 1989: 9)

Cowling shows how books like *Physiognomy Made Easy* (c.1880), *Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology* (1886) and *The Study of the Human Face* (1868), among many others, showed faces and heads divided into types that were differentiated in terms of their morality, social position and notions of race. Aspects of heads and faces such as nose profile, forehead slope, chin profile, skull size and lip shape were all presented as clues to the moral standing, social class and ‘race’ of an

individual, and these clues were used too in the work of cartoonists, novelists, scientists and artists. An example of how these shared interpretations of heads and faces were commonplace is given by Cowling (1989: 64–5), and it is also a neat example of her own method (see Figure 8.2). Plate 44 of her book shows a page from the *Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology*. There are two engravings on this page, one of a 'good head' and one of a 'bad head'. Cowling compares these in her plate 46 to a portrait of J.G. Lockhart, the son-in-law and biographer of Sir Walter Scott, by William Allen in 1876. The 'soaring brow and delicate features' of the latter (Cowling 1989: 65) are repeated exactly in the *Self-Instructor* as the 'good head', and would have indicated to Victorian audiences that this was a man of high moral probity, high social class and

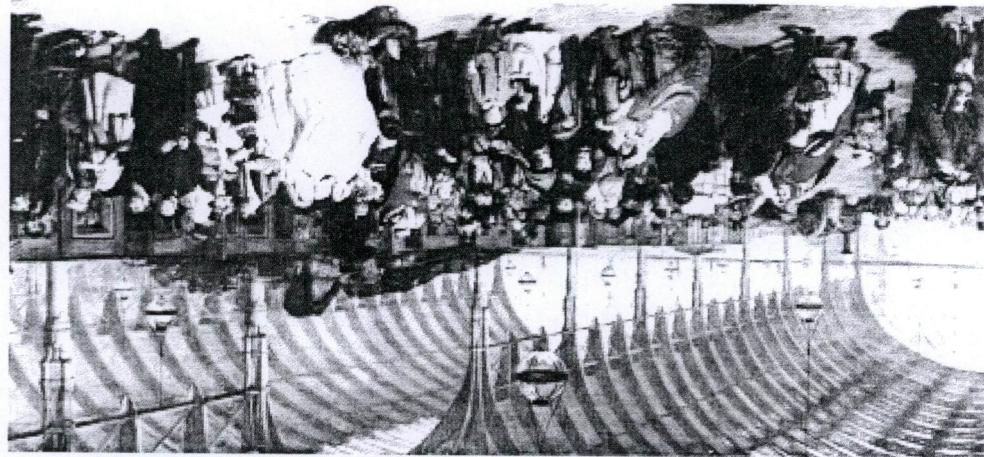


Figure 8.3 William Powell Fritte, *The Railways Station*, 1862



Figure 8.2 (a)  
'A good and bad  
head contrasted',  
from L.N. Fowler,  
*Self-Instructor in  
Phrenology and  
Physiology*, c.1886

Figure 8.2 (b)  
A portrait of  
J.G. Lockhart by  
William Allen,  
engraved by G.  
Shaw, from J.G.  
Lockhart, *Life of Sir  
Walter Scott*, 1871.  
Plates 44 and 46  
from Margaret  
Cowling's book  
*The Artist as  
Anthropologist*  
(1989)

Figure 8.2 these are plates 44 and 46 from Margaret Cowling's book *The Artist as Anthropologist* (1989: 64–5)

English origin. Cowling argues that Victorian audiences would have made these same connections and interpretations. And it is her method to make them too: to trace the relations between different texts in order to identify the meanings their viewers and readers shared.

Cowling's concern with intertextuality focuses on two particular images, however, one of which is particularly relevant to this discussion since Cowling (1989: 185–231) argues that it contains several images of East Enders. This is a painting by William Powell Frith, exhibited in 1862 and called *The Railway Station* (Figure 8.3). It is a huge canvas showing the crowd accompanying a train about to leave, and Cowling remarks that it was seen by contemporaries as an image of, and a commentary on, the modern London crowd. That is, its theme was social relations and social difference, and Frith and his audience both used physiognomy and phrenology to make sense of this painting. (It has also been suggested, however, that there is a tension in the painting between such 'types' and the painting's depiction of individuals who would have been recognisable to the contemporary audience; the two men on the right in top hats, for example, were famous detectives [Arscott 2007].) Having consulted books of physiognomy and phrenology herself, Cowling is able to offer her own key to the painting which notes the kind of social type each figure would have represented to its Victorian audiences (Cowling 1989: 242–3). Her key includes 'gentleman in reduced circumstances', 'his daughter, off to take up her first position' (as a governess) and 'villainous recruit – vicious type'. Cowling suggests that these latter sorts of images, of the various types from the residuum, would have been seen by contemporary audiences as East Enders. The social differences among Londoners were also understood as geographical differences in this period, and the residuum, certainly by the end of the 1880s, was always located in the East End of the city. Thus images of members of the residuum were also images of East Enders.

Cowling (1989) uses many sorts of texts to make her case for the importance of facial features and head types for understanding Victorian images of social difference, including magazines, anthropology books, novels, paintings and engravings, as well as those books on physiognomy and phrenology. As I have noted, this range of sources is typical of the kind of discourse analysis I am suggesting iconography is related to. Cowling's method is to look for the commonalities, both textual and visual, among these sources, and to establish these by citing the words and images they have in common: thus she quotes extensively from her sources and she also reproduces their images generously (her book has 370 pages of text and 340 plates). This search for recurring themes or visual patterns is also typical of discourse analysis. However, as the rest of this chapter will show,

the proponents of discourse analysis also suggest some further methodological tactics for interpreting intertextual meanings.

#### 8.4 Discourse Analysis I: The Production and Rhetorical Organisation of Discourse

Iconography, then, like discourse analysis, depends on intertextuality for its interpretive power. It also depends, though, on what Panofsky called 'common sense', and many discourse analysts also suggest that successful discourse analysis depends less on rigorous procedures and more on other qualities: craft skill, says Potter (1996: 140); scholarship, according to Gill (1996: 144); 'interpretive sensitivities', in Phillips and Hardy's (2002: 75) words. Nonetheless, there have been some efforts to make the procedures of discourse analysis more explicit, especially in the social sciences. This section explores some of those efforts.

In her discussion of discourse analysis, Tonkiss (1998) suggests that those efforts have been directed in two areas. First, there is the analysis of the structure of the discursive statements. Secondly, there is a concern for the social context of those statements: who is saying them, in what circumstances.

##### 8.4.1 Exploring the rhetorical organisation of discourse

One theme of discourse analysis is the organisation of discourse itself. How, precisely, is a particular discourse structured, and how then does it produce a particular kind of knowledge? In relation to visual images, many studies have been particularly interested in how social difference is constructed, and the previous section briefly discussed one example of this in relation to the East End: Cowling's (1989) study of the intersection between art, physiognomy and phrenology. Another example is Ruth Livesy's (2004) essay on middle-class women who did charity work in London's East End, and how they saw East Enders. Livesy's study is a useful reminder of the complex and often contested nature of discourse, since it begins by remarking that these women disliked physiognomy and phrenology as ways of seeing and understanding people; instead, they drew on a discourse of 'ethical individualism' (Livesy 2004: 46) which focused on individuals' moral character, and especially their capacity for self-control, thrift, duty and foresight. Hence when they looked at East Enders, they didn't look at the shape of their heads or the character of their faces, but rather looked for signs of cleanliness, sobriety

and rectitude in their dress and their houses. Livesy (2004) explores the rhetorical organisation of their discourse to establish this way of seeing, and indeed this kind of discourse analysis is interested in, for example, how a particular discourse describes things (although the power of discourse means that it produces those things it purports to be describing), in how it constructs blame and responsibility, in how it constructs accountability, in how it categorises and particularises (Potter 1996).

The first step in this interpretive process is, as Tonkiss (1998) and Gill (1996) both emphasise, to try to forget all preconceptions you might have about the materials you are working with. Although an important part of your preparation for your analysis might have been to study what discourses other scholars have suggested are relevant to your sources (and Sunderland [2004] recommends this), nonetheless, when you approach your materials, try your best to read them and look at them with *fresh* eyes. As Foucault (1972: 25) says, pre-existing categories ‘must be held in suspense’. They must not be rejected definitively, of course, but the tranquillity with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about by themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known and the justifications of which must be scrutinized’. In this way, the material may offer you insights and leads that you would otherwise have missed. For visual images, it may be that the tools of detailed description offered by compositional interpretation have a role to play here, in making you look very carefully at every element of an image, and at their interrelation. Allow this process of reading and looking to take its time. Try to *immerse yourself* in the materials you are dealing with. Read and re-read the texts; look and look again at the images.

Having familiarised yourself with your materials, some slightly more systematic methods might be useful. One is a version of the coding process described in Chapter 5 in connection with content analysis (Phillips and Hardy [2002] recommend a quite rigorous version of this). Familiarity with the sources will allow you to identify *key themes*, which may be key words, or recurring visual images. (Remember, though, that the most important words and images may not be those that occur most often.) Make a list of these words or images and then go through all your sources, coding the material every time that word or image occurs. Then start to think about connections between and among key words and key images. According to Foucault, the task is to examine:

relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them); even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other’s existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the

same, or even adjacent fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, political, social). (Foucault 1972: 29)

## focus

Look at Figures 8.4 to 8.8, all reproduced from Nead’s (1988) study. Consider each one in relation to the key themes identified by Nead: dress, bodily condition, location, looks. In particular, think about how each of those themes can be represented in different ways. Compare this relative flexibility in identifying themes with the coding process demanded by content analysis. Which do you prefer, and why?

Are there other themes that seem to you to be relevant to these images?

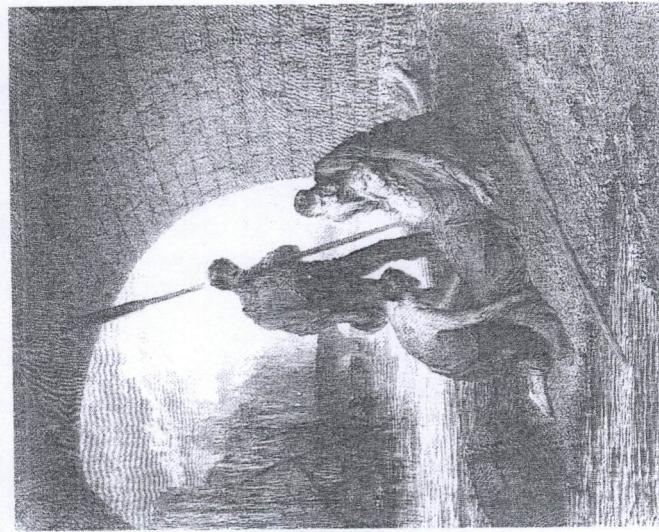


Figure 8.4 Gustave Doré, illustration to *The Bridge of Sighs*, 1878

(Continued)

(Continued)

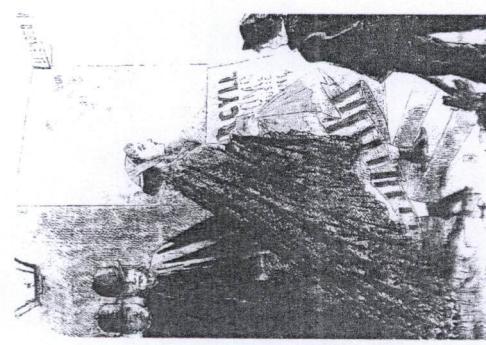


Figure 8.5 W. Gray, 'Lost', in W. Hayward, *London by Night*, c. 1870



Figure 8.7 Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), 'The River', an illustration to the novel *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, 1850



Figure 8.8 George Frederick Watts, *Found Drowned*, 1848–50

How are particular words or images given specific meanings? Are there meaningful clusters of words and images? What objects do such clusters produce? What associations are established within such clusters? What connections are there between such clusters (Andersen 2003: 11–12)? Foucault here also suggests the need to consider the broader, non-discursive context of discourse. These sorts of questions address the productivity of discourse in the sense that they focus on its production of meanings and things.

Nead's (1988) discussion of how 'the prostitute' was discursively constructed through recurring images of bodies and places is exemplary here. Nead accumulates a wide range of visual images of this figure, as well as written accounts, and shows how she was understood by pointing to the

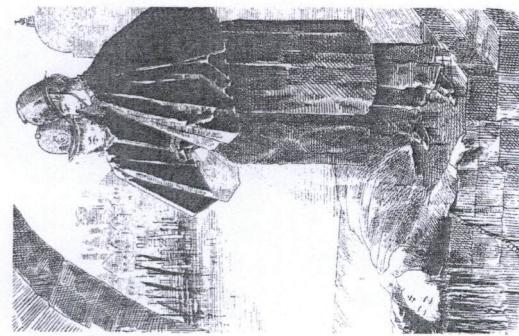


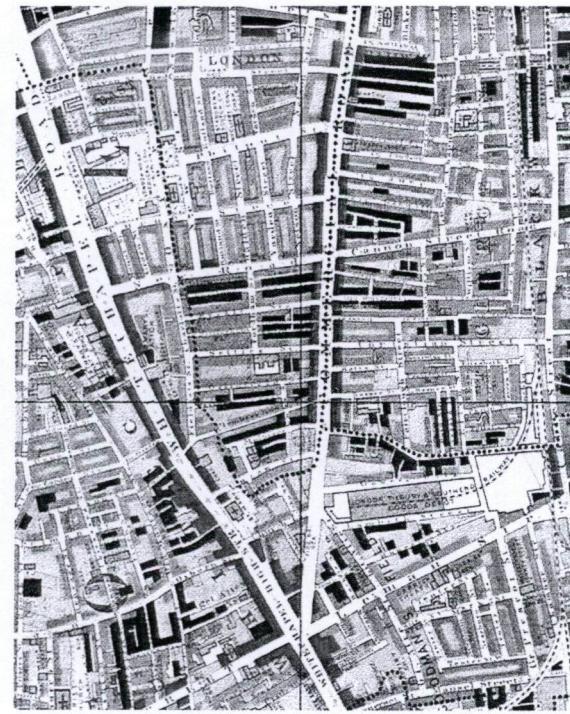
Figure 8.6 W. Gray, 'Found', in W. Hayward, *London by Night*, c. 1870

limited number of key visual terms used to produce her (see also Gilman 1990; Walkowitz 1992). The prostitute worked exchanging sex for money. She was therefore constructed as a particular sort of moral problem in bourgeois discourses of femininity, and was placed in the residuum. She could be seen as irredeemable or redeemable; prostitutes were portrayed as both evil women and as victims of an evil society. However, as Nead notes, both arguments worked to place her outside 'normal' femininity. This outsider status was signified visually in the way she looked (provocatively) and the way she looked, especially how she looked boldly at men. Since she was morally deviant, however, she was also pictured as paying the price of her sin. In visual and written narratives of prostitution, she was frequently visualised as losing her looks and her glamorous clothes, and simultaneously moving from the bright lights of the music hall to the dark streets of the East End, and, eventually, down into the dark and murky depths of the river Thames. This last location was often pictured as her final resting place: disease or pregnancy would take their toll, and her inevitable end, according to this discourse, was her suicide by drowning. The final stage of this visual narrative was the verdict passed on her by society. This was usually pictured by representatives of that society looking at the prostitute's dead

body. These representatives might be the rivermen who find her, the policeman who inspects the corpse, the passers-by who see it, or the doctor who dissects it; and these are shown either as pitying or condemning. Nead thus identifies several key visual themes in images of prostitution: dress, bodily condition, location, looks. She shows how these themes could be given different meanings in different images or texts – the looks at her dead body could be compassionate or grimly satisfied, for example, depending on whether the prostitute was being constructed as evil or as a victim – but the basic elements used to represent her were repeated again and again in a wide variety of contexts.

As this coding and interpretation process proceeds, other issues may start to become important to your interpretation, perhaps issues that had not initially occurred to you. Unlike content analysis, this does not mean that you have to halt your analytical process and start again with a revised set of categories. Discourse analysis is much more flexible than that. As new questions occur, prompted by one moment of coding, you can return to your materials with different codes in a second – or third or fourth or twentieth – moment of interpretation. While the Foucauldian framework of discourse analysis is giving you a certain approach to your materials, it is also crucial that you let the details of your materials guide your investigations.

An important part of that framework is how a particular discourse works to persuade. How does it produce its *effects of truth*? This is another aspect of discourse that your analysis must address. Often this entails focusing on claims to truth, or to scientific certainty, or to the natural way of things. As well as the visual and textual devices used to claim truth, however, it is useful to look for moments at which dissent from a discourse is acknowledged (even



**Figure 8.9**  
from Charles  
Booth's  
descriptive  
map of  
London  
poverty, from  
his *Life and  
Labour of the  
London Poor*,  
1889

## focus

Look at the map in Figure 8.10 and compare it to the extract of Booth's map reproduced in Figure 8.9.

The *Police Illustrated News* was a popular newspaper offering sensational crime stories. Darren Oldridge (2007: 47) discusses the emergence of this sort of newspaper in the late nineteenth century, which 'tried to create interest and sales through focussing on topics such as street crime, prostitution and sexual danger'. Do the maps carry the same claim to truth in both cases? Do they claim different sorts of truth? How?



income of every household in the East End. He then calculated how many people were living in poverty, and mapped their location (Figure 8.9). The survey was seen as scientific in a number of ways. First, its coverage was more or less complete in terms of the East End's population (456,877 people were included, according to Booth's figures). Secondly, its coverage was seen as complete in terms of its understanding, and here the visual effect of the map was crucial: the map seemed to lay the East End bare to a scientific gaze that penetrated what others described as its darkest recesses. And, thirdly, Booth's survey and the map classified its subjects in ways that were central to contemporary scientific procedures. Booth argued that while over one third of the residents of the East End were living in poverty, this was mostly due to fecklessness rather than moral depravity; only 2 per cent of the residuum, he argued, fell into that latter category. This sort of moral classification was central to other Victorian sciences, particularly those that constructed racial differences (and it is no coincidence that many journalists compared going into the East End of London with visits to Africa, as did General Booth's *In Darkest England*, published in 1890; see Keating 1976). Finally, Booth also relied on statistical analyses of his data which gave his arguments scientific authority too; Nead (1988) notes how some arguments about prostitution were also legitimatized by statistical claims. Through these various strategies, then, Booth's map was perceived by (most) contemporaries as scientifically true.

Another emphasis in discourse analysis is the *complexity and contradictions* internal to discourses. Discursive formations have structures but that does not necessarily imply that they are logical or coherent. Indeed,

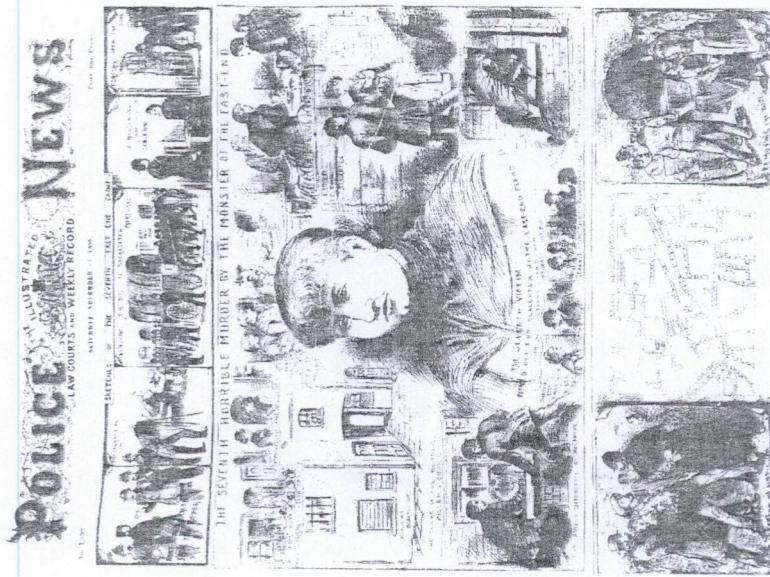


Figure 8.10 front page of the *Police Illustrated News*, 17 November 1888

if implicitly) and dealt with. Search for 'the work that is being done to reconcile conflicting ideas, to cope with contradiction or uncertainty, or to counter alternatives' (Tonkiss 1998: 255), because this work will highlight processes of persuasion that may otherwise be difficult to detect.

An example of an account of the East End of London that claimed to be true because scientific was the map of poverty first published by Charles Booth in 1889. Booth used 34 School Board Visitors (the local officials responsible for enforcing attendance at school) to survey the

part of the power of a specific discursive formation may rest precisely on the multiplicity of different arguments that can be produced in its terms. Potter (1996) uses the term **interpretative repertoire** to address one aspect of this notion of complexity.

Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms that are often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence and often organized around one or more central metaphors. They develop historically and make up an important part of the 'common sense' of a culture, although some are specific to institutional domains. (Potter 1996: 131)

Potter notes that interpretative repertoires are something like mini-discourses; they tend to be quite specific to particular social situations. The example he cites is a study of how scientists legitimate their own arguments, and the discovery that they use quite different techniques in their published research papers from those used in informal talk. Here, two interpretative repertoires are deployed in different circumstances, but both are part of a complex discourse of scientific truth. An example of a visual interpretative repertoire is offered by Nead (1988: 128–32). She discusses a watercolour by the Pre-Raphaelite Painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Called *The Gate of Memory* (Figure 8.11), it was painted in 1857 and shows a prostitute standing under an archway staring at a group of children playing. It visualises one of the final verses of a poem by William Bell Scott called 'Maryanne'. But while Scott's poem could describe the degraded body of this woman in some detail, Rossetti's watercolour cannot, says Nead, and this is because 'the prostitute has become the subject of "art" and "art" does not provide space for woman as physically deviant or unpleasurable' (Nead 1988: 132). That is, the Victorian discourse of femininity entailed a number of interpretative repertoires and the repertoire available to artists could only produce certain kinds of images.

An example of the contradictions inherent in discursive formations can be given by placing Jones's (1989) account of the 'cockney' next to other discussions of the construction of East Enders. As we have seen, from the 1880s if not before, the East End was constructed as marked, physically and visibly, by moral degeneracy. As Jones (1976), Fishman (1988) and Walkowitz (1992) emphasise, this was a construction that could produce considerable fear among the bourgeois readers of the newspapers, novels, pamphlets and poems through which it was articulated. Walkowitz (1992) and Nead (1988) both emphasise the horror of disease that prostitution might spread, for example (which could involve acknowledging, as it did for campaigners

against the Contagious Diseases Act of 1860s, that it was actually men who spread disease, and often bourgeois men visiting working-class prostitutes at that; a good example of the complexity of discourses). Jones (1976) and Fishman (1988) stress the middle-class fear of social unrest that a residuum with no stake in society might create. Hence, through the 1880s and beyond, as a counter to these fears, other images of the East Ender developed. The orderly dock strike of 1889, for example, was seen as evidence that the majority of the poor were decent at heart, and not likely to revolt, and Jones (1989) traces the elaboration of the 'cockney' as the acceptable face of the East End. The cockney was constructed as good-hearted, chirpy, with a resigned sense of humour and a particular style of dress, often a bit flash; they look out for their neighbour and, especially, are stoical under conditions of social hardship. Jones argues that the effect of this discourse was to counter imaginatively what was perceived as the threat to society posed by the residuum, by constructing the cockney as different but lovable. Jones (1989) suggests that this vision of the cockney was expressed most unambiguously in music hall songs at the turn of the century, but he also notes that much of the literature at that period 'veered incoherently' between this cockney and the other vision of the residuum East Ender. Thus Jones's work stresses the contradictions within the discursive construction of the East End, through a careful reading of a wide range of materials.

Finally, discourse analysis also involves reading for what is not seen or said. Absences can be as productive as explicit naming; *invisibility* can have just as powerful effects as visibility. Thus Jones (1989) ends his essay on the construction of the 'cockney' by noting that the cockney was always imagined as white, despite the constant presence of large black communities in the East End. The 'cockney' therefore erased racialised difference by making whiteness the taken-for-granted 'race' of the East Ender. As Jones (1989) also notes, however, this erasure did not last beyond the so-called race riots in Notting Hill in the west end of London in 1958. After that, 'race' could not be made invisible so easily, and the cockney fades as a meaningful cultural category.

Discourse analysis thus depends on reading with great care for *detail*. It assumes that the efficacy of discourse often resides in the assumptions it makes about what is true, real or natural, in the contradictions that allow it interpretive flexibility, and in what is not said, and none of these are accessible to superficial reading or viewing. Hence Gill's (1996: 144) emphasis on the scholarship entailed in discourse analysis: 'the analysis of discourse and rhetoric requires the careful reading and

interpretation of texts, rigorous scholarship rather than adherence to formal procedures.

To summarise the strategies for the interpretation of the rhetorical organisation of discourse outlined in this section, then, they include:

- looking at your sources with fresh eyes;
- immersing yourself in your sources;
- identifying key themes in your sources;
- examining their effects of truth;
- paying attention to their complexity and contradictions;
- looking for the invisible as well as the visible;
- paying attention to details.

## focus

Consider all the figures reproduced in this chapter. How might you go about finding the social locations of their production and reception? What does 'social location' mean in this sense? Does it mean class, gender, 'race', sexuality and so on? How might an institution be ascribed those characteristics?

### 8.4.2 Exploring the social production of discourse

As Gill (1996: 142) notes, 'all discourse is occasioned'. All discourse takes place in specific social circumstances, and the authors discussed in this chapter draw two methodological implications for their sort of discourse analysis from this.

The previous section looked at some rhetorical strategies that could visually or verbally assert the truth of a particular discursive claim. However, this is not the only way that certain discourses can become more dominant than others: the *institutional location* of a discourse is also crucial. Foucault, for all his reluctance to ascribe unidirectional causality, insisted on the need to locate the social site from which particular statements are made, and to position the speaker of a statement in terms of their social authority (Foucault 1972: 50–2). Thus a statement coming from a source endowed with authority (and just how that authority is established may be an important issue to address) is likely to be more productive than one coming from a marginalised social position. The work of the historians examined in this chapter demonstrates this point in a rather paradoxical way. For they are forced to rely almost entirely on the images and words of the socially and institutionally

powerful in their discussions of the discursive construction of the East End, simply because they are the only visions and words that are now available. The powerful had the resources to make their discourses substantial through books and pictures, and these were the materials then put into libraries and archives. It is therefore extraordinarily difficult now to pick up traces of the discourses about the East End articulated by those who lived there in the 1880s, for example, although Fishman (1988) suggests that some contemporary novelists were the faithful recorders of what they heard there. Thus the social location of a discourse's production is important to consider in relation to its effects.

The second way in which the social context of discourse production matters is in terms of the *audience* assumed by images and texts. The explanation given for the same event may be quite different if the audience for that explanation is different. Or the visual images of the same scene or event may be quite different, in terms of their technology or genre or in other ways, for different audiences. The visual images that surrounded the Jack the Ripper murders in the East End in 1888 are a case in point. Popular newspapers, for example, used sketches and maps to show readers the location of the murders and the victims' faces, as Figure 8.10 demonstrates. This was a kind of realism that might be seen as the visual equivalent of the sensationalistic journalism pioneered in the same decade (Curtis 2001; Walkowitz 1992). Other images were used for other audiences, though. Sander Gilman (1990), in his essay on the Ripper murders, notes that police photographs of the victims' mutilated bodies were used by the criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne in his 1889 book on sadism. The apparent veracity of photographs was thought necessary for a scientific text; but only an audience of scientists, too, was considered capable of seeing such images in an objective, scientific way. Notions about audience can thus affect the type of image used.

Thus discourse analysis also entails paying attention to certain aspects of the social context of discourse production. The authors cited in this chapter – Gill, Tonkiss, and Potter and Wetherell – tend to focus on the rhetorical organisation of a discourse's texts and images and on the impact on those texts and images of the social location of their production. This emphasis neglects to explore the social practices and effects of discourse, however, and this indicates the tendency of this sort of discourse analysis to focus more on texts and images than social institutions.

### 8.5 Discourse Analysis I and Reflexivity

The introduction to this chapter noted that Foucault himself was not sympathetic to the certain kinds of reflexivity, particularly those that

depended on descriptions of subject positions; for him, such descriptions were the work of the police. However, as Phillips and Hardy (2002) pointed out, from a Foucauldian perspective the social sciences are just as discursive as any other form of knowledge production, and in producing a piece of research you too are participating in their discursive formation. The social sciences are the descendants of those human sciences the truth claims of which Foucault analysed in detail. If you are writing a discourse analysis, then, the arguments about discourse, power and truth/knowledge must surely be just as pertinent to your work as to the materials you are analysing. Doing a discourse analysis demands some sort of critical reflection on your own research practice, then. For, as Tonkiss (1998: 259) says, 'the discourse analyst seeks to open up statements to challenge, interrogate taken-for-granted meanings, and disturb easy claims to objectivity in the texts they are reading. It would therefore be inconsistent to contend that the analyst's own discourse was itself wholly objective, factual or generally true'. Discourse analysts have a number of ways of addressing this issue.

The first is to think carefully about the rhetorical organisation of a discourse analysis. How should it be written? Since discourse analyses cannot argue that they are the only, true analysis of the materials discussed, discourse analysis aims to be persuasive rather than truthful, and this entails 'a certain modesty in our analytic claims' (Tonkiss 1998: 260). According to Phillips and Hardy (2002: 83–5), any discourse analysis should acknowledge that its language is constructing an interpretation rather than revealing the truth. Different voices, texts and images should pervade the analysis, they continue (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 85); you should acknowledge that you have made choices in what you discuss, emphasising some materials at the expense of others; you should open up your own work to other readings and interpretations, and be aware how your work engages with that of others.

This modesty is what discourse analysis substitutes for more conventional notions of reflexivity. Clearly, conventional, autobiographical versions of reflexivity are difficult in Foucauldian accounts, for they depend on a notion of human agency that constructs the author as an autonomous individual who then encounters a part of the world in their research. Just as this autobiographical form of reflexivity is inconsistent with psychoanalytic approaches to visual methods, it is equally incompatible with the Foucauldian notion of a subject constituted through the discourses in which they are saturated. Another example of a more modest, Foucauldian approach is Kendall and Wickham's (1999: 101–9) move, in their discussion of reflexivity in

relation to Foucauldian methods, towards discussing whether non-human objects or animals should be given the same status as knowledge producers as their human researchers. Their answer is yes. In the visual field, perhaps an equivalent move would be to recognise the power of visual images that in some way limits that of the researcher. W.J.T. Mitchell (1996) has addressed this issue in an essay called 'What do pictures *really* want?'. Although reprimanded by Hal Foster (1996) for a kind of commodity fetishism – and this strategy is also vulnerable to the criticisms of connoisseurship made in Chapter 4 – Mitchell suggests that the power of images always exceeds our ability to interpret them. He is perhaps articulating a further form of reflexivity that makes sense for Foucauldian discourse analyses. There must be others, but all would share that mark of modesty mentioned by Tonkiss.

However, a complication to this discursive reflexivity arises when the productive context (rather than the rhetorical organisation) of the analysis is considered. For being 'persuasive' or 'modest' depends on the interpretative context in which the discourse analysis is produced. And that context is the social sciences. Thus discourse analysis can end up with a rather conventional list of things to consider when writing up your work. Here are the sorts of things mentioned by Potter (1996: 138–9), Gill (1996: 147) and Tonkiss (1998: 258–60):

- using detailed textual or visual evidence to support your analysis;
- using textual or visual details to support your analysis;
- the coherence the study gives to the discourse examined;
- the coherence of the analysis itself;
- the coherence of the study in relation to previous related research;
- the examination of cases that run counter to the discursive norm established by the analysis, in order to affirm the disruption caused by such deviations.

Clearly, these criteria are unobjectionable in relation to the conventions of the social sciences. However, let us ask a Foucauldian question of them: what are the effects of these criteria? What do they produce? Well, they aim to produce a certain sort of text: one that locates the plausibility of the discourse analysis in the text alone. The effect of this is to erase (again, we might say) the institutional context in which a discourse analysis is produced. So perhaps another, reflexive strategy to mark the modesty of discourse analysis would be to note explicitly that the institution and its audience are the co-authors of the analysis, and to recognise the claims to interpretative authority that that co-authorship entails.

## 8.6 Discourse Analysis I: An Assessment

In terms of the critical visual methodology described in Chapter 1, the type of discourse analysis discussed in this chapter has clear strengths. It pays careful attention to images themselves, and to the web of intertextuality in which any individual image is embedded. It is centrally concerned with the production of social difference through visual imagery. It addresses questions of power as they are articulated through visual images themselves. And although reflexivity is a tricky issue for discourse analysis, there are ways in which the authority of the discourse analysis can be both marked (by acknowledging its context of production) and perhaps undermined (by rhetorical strategies of modesty).

'There are also some difficulties in the method, however. One of these is knowing where to stop in making intertextual connections, and another related to this is in grounding those connections empirically. Gilman's (1990) essay on Jack the Ripper illustrates the dangers (to me at least) of making so many connections that some start to seem rather tenuous. In order to understand why the murderer was seen by many as Jewish, Gilman cites a huge range of contemporary sources, including London newspapers, Wedekind's play *Lulu* and Berg's opera of the same name, the psychoanalysts Freud and Fliess, Hogarth the painter, medical texts, Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Hood's poetry, paintings, engravings and posters, the ideas of Hahnemann (the founder of homeopathy), 'Jack's' notes, criminologists Lombroso and Lacassagne, contemporary pornography, contemporary tracts, and novels by Eliot, Proust and Zola. The breadth of scholarship is extraordinary, but I begin to wonder how many of those sources could be said to have produced, even indirectly, the London newspapers' and police's description of the Ripper as Jewish? Some, of course, perhaps many. Maybe all. But Gilman's analysis does not attempt to trace such connections in any grounded way; instead, they are related in his work simply through the category of 'discourse'. Discourse as a result seems to become a free-floating web of meanings unconnected to any social practices. The practical problem posed by this sort of discourse analysis, then – where to stop making intertextual connections – can also be an analytical one – how to make the intertextual connections convincingly productive.

Another problem with discourse analysis, for some critics, is its refusal to ascribe causality. As section 8.1 noted, Foucault's project was in some ways descriptive; he wanted to account for how things happened more than why they happened. This means that discourse analysis too is not always very clear about the relation between discourse and its context. Few guidelines are offered about what that context might

be, other than the notions addressed in section 8.4.2 here about the social location of the producers and audiences of specific images or texts. There is also little attempt to outline what the relations between that context and discourse might be, specifically.

Both these problems are connected to the neglected issue in this form of discourse analysis: the social practices of discourse. As this chapter has noted at several points, this kind of discourse analysis is concerned more with images and texts than with the social institutions that produced, archived, displayed or sold them, and the effects of those practices. The next chapter, however, turns to a form of Foucauldian discourse analysis that does address just this issue.

### Summary: discourse analysis I

- *associated with:*  
The interpretation of wide and eclectic ranges of textual materials, both visual and written.
- *sites and modalities:*  
Discourse analysis is most concerned with the site of the image itself, although reference can be made to the site of production too. It is particularly strong at exploring the effects of the compositional and social modalities of images.
- *key terms:*  
Key terms include discourse, discursive formation, power/knowledge and intertextuality.
- *strengths and weaknesses:*  
Discourse analysis I is very effective at looking carefully at images and interpreting their effects, especially in relation to constructions of social difference. It is less interested in thinking about the practices and institutions through which such constructions are produced, disseminated and lived, however.

### Further reading

Historian Peter Burke (2001) puts a version of iconography to work in his book *Eyewitnesses: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*; although he does not refer to Foucault, his exploration of a wide range of images' 'modes of reliability' (Burke 2001: 184), and his insistence that 'we ignore at our peril the variety of images, artists, uses of images and attitudes to images at different periods of history' (and in different places, it should be added) (Burke 2001: 16), is consonant with discourse analysis I. More explicitly Foucauldian are a chapter by Tonkiss (1998), which is a good

general introduction to this form of discourse analysis, and Andersen's (2003) book *Discursive Analytical Strategies*, which offers a detailed and accessible exegesis of Foucault's own methods. Phillips and Hardy's (2002) book is also helpful, and discusses in some depth their discourse analysis of a collection of cartoons.

## 9

# DISCOURSE ANALYSIS II: INSTITUTIONS AND WAYS OF SEEING

## On the companion website

The website discusses discourse analysis is I and II together. It has two sets of resources based on Chapters 8 and 9. One set is found in the 'activities by method' part of the website, and links to some online discussions of museums. The second set of resources is found in the 'resources by method' part of the website. There you will find an activity which asks you to explore a set of museum displays as both discourses and as institutions. This will help you to explore both methods further and to consider the links between them.

**key example:** this chapter looks at how museums display images and artefacts, and discusses several studies of the American Museum of Natural History in New York.  
It also looks very briefly at Wii Fit as a Foucauldian technology.

## 9.1 Another Introduction to Discourse and Visual Culture

The previous chapter began with a brief introduction to the work of Michel Foucault, and suggested that there are two methodologies that have developed from his work. Although these two are related and overlap – most particularly because both share a concern with power/knowledge as it is articulated through discourse – these two methodologies have tended to produce rather different sorts of research. The first type of discourse analysis, discussed in Chapter 8, works with visual images and written or spoken texts. Although it is certainly concerned with the social positions of difference and authority that are articulated through images and texts, it tends to focus on the production and rhetorical organisation of visual and textual materials.

In contrast, the second form of discourse analysis, which this chapter will explore, often works with similar sorts of materials, but is much more concerned with their production by, and their reiteration of, particular institutions and their practices, and their production of particular human subjects. This difference can be clarified by looking at how two exponents of these two kinds of discourse analysis use the term 'archive'.