Paul Dowling is using the term, forensics, to refer to approaches to research that claim to uncover truths about the world that are somehow independent of the means of their uncovering. For some time, now, such approaches have been widely regarded as naïve, but it is not clear that the implications of this recognition have always been adequately or appropriately taken into account. In attempting to do just that, Dowling presents a mature exposition of his organisational language, social activity method (SAM) in dialogue with a wide range of cultural settings, texts and technologies. SAM has been developed over a period of some twenty years via the transaction between a fundamental, theoretical principle and empirical data. This principle asserts that the sociocultural is to be understood in terms of strategic, autopoietic action directed at the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions and the alliances and oppositions that are themselves emergent upon such action. This anti-forensic constructive description understands data texts, not as products of generative structures that lie behind them, but as instances of the organisational language, SAM, that will, ultimately, describe them and that is, in a sense, in front of them. Dowling describes himself as a theory engineer. The productivity of this work is in its potential to generate principled and articulated descriptions of empirical settings and texts, new ways of looking at them, not to direct, but to interrogate other practices relating to these settings and texts, to ask questions that would otherwise be left unasked.

The origins of SAM lie in the analysis of mathematics education texts in the late 1980s and early 1990s and one of the chapters in this volume is again concerned with mathematics (and science) education in the first part of the twenty-first century. Other settings that come under scrutiny include classrooms, film, art, literature, knowledge in various domains, the internet, and so forth. The book also includes fundamental engagement with forensics, in particular, the work of and work inspired by Basil Bernstein.
CRITICAL ESSAYS ACROSS EDUCATION
Volume 1

Series Editors

Alan J. Bishop, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
Thomas Popkewitz, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Ole Skovsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark

Scope

This new book series aims at providing readers with a set of monographs dealing with current educational issues from a research and theoretical perspective. In dealing with the many problems besetting our increasingly globalised world, education remains one of the most critical professions, with educational research and theorising being one of the most potent vehicles for comprehending and informing future policies and practices. Thus Critical Essays across Education intends to provide academics, policy-makers, research students and concerned general readers, with critical reflections on up-to-date ideas from the international research field of education. In particular this series will reflect the growing trend for borderland crossings in education, whereby cross-discipline research is creating new and important theoretical pathways.

Much theoretical and research-based writing in educational texts tends towards the inaccessible end of the readability dimension. So the brief for intending authors in this series will be to reflect on their research, and those of others, in such a way as to help educate the generalist, as well as the specialist, readership
Sociology as Method

Departures from the Forensics of Culture,
Text and Knowledge

By

Paul Dowling
Institute of Education, University of London, UK
In grateful memory of my mother, who taught me to read, and my father, who taught me mathematics
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface: Inside the Cave ix  
Acknowledgements xi  
List of Figures xvii  
1. From Forensics to Constructive Description 1  
2. Analysing Texts: The idea of an organisational language 15  
3. Mustard, Monuments, Movies and Media: A pastiche 45  
4. Treacherous Departures: Bernstein and Dowling framed 69  
5. A Timely Utterance 109  
6. Quixote's Science: Public heresy/private apostasy 125  
7. Pedagogy and Community in Three South African Schools: An iterative description (with Andrew Brown) 149  
8. Knower's Ark/A Ship of Fools? (with Soh-young Chung) 193  
9. Sociology as Method 227  
Appendix I: A Shooting in Hiroshima 253  
Appendix II: Eyeless in Ginza 257  
Postface: Inside Another Cave 265  
Glossary 267  
References 281  
Index 291
Inside the Cave

I’m inside a dark cave, but I’m looking out into the light, not at shadows on the back wall.

An elderly woman shambles out of the bathhouse.

“Domo arigatou”, she drawls as she hands bottles of body wash and shampoo to the attendant hiding in the kiosk. She moves to her shoes that have been waiting for her, glancing back at me. She thinks about a greeting, thinks better of it and shambles out. A young couple hurry in. Bolder, the girl bows and the boy mutters, “Konnichiwa.” And they hurry up the stairs to their room. A sporty team of boys step shyly inside the door. They enquire at the kiosk, take their bottles and shuffle into the bathhouse. Not much later, dampened, they shuffle out again, asking the way to the station (how did they get here, I wonder).

Two boys and a dog, a woman with an umbrella (it’s quite sunny out), a man with a briefcase and a traffic of cars and vans and scooters glide past without so much as a glance.

A middle-aged woman appears to say ‘tombo’—dragonfly—on her way out of the bathhouse; perhaps I’ve missed a syllable or two or, more likely, adjusted a couple of consonants.

Then a young American man, wearing shorts, stands in the doorway, looking at me, and asks,

“What kind of place is this?”

“It’s an onsen.”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s a hot spring bathhouse and hotel. You pay at the kiosk.”

“Cool”, he says and wanders off.

But it’s not cool at all. In fact it’s very, very hot—too hot—and very public. Which is why I’m sitting in the lobby and waiting for my friends and not in the bath.

Are you interested in all this? I guess the answer might depend on where it’s going. Well, it’s not going anywhere, right now.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over breakfast at the house in Tosashimizu, I’ve just been watching a TV programme on which the main feature was the eighty-eight-year-old manga artist, Yanasei Takashi. It appears that Yanasei-san doesn’t like formal speeches at awards ceremonies and so forth, preferring to offer a karaoke performance instead. Participants at a Japan Cartoon Association event happily clapped along and took mobile phone photos; he was a real star. What on earth did he think he was doing? Surely, awards ceremonies are about the award winners and their supporters. They are also about the awarding institution, of course, but that function, too, is best served by a celebration of the excellence of the competition and not by yet another opportunity for the adulation of the already notorious guest of honour. I think that it’s a general rule that formal presentations are never about the one giving the presentation, but, on the contrary, they properly subordinate the presenter to the alliance that has staged the event and, in particular, to its central contributors on this occasion. The formal speech is a key strategy in the maintenance and fostering of the alliance and, in this respect, can work however dull its content, however lacklustre its delivery. The acknowledgements section of a book is a bit like a formal speech.

The alliance that I want to celebrate is, of course, virtual, but no less for that. The ideas in this book have arrived over pretty much the whole period of my twenty years (and, currently, still going) tenure at the Institute of Education, University of London. It is an immense privilege to work in this place: it has its irritating aspects, of course (what doesn’t), but for a fair amount of the time I am allowed to sit in my office receiving visits from very clever people who bring me fascinating stories and complex thoughts and who also pay me the honour of listening—really listening.

I have been particularly fortunate in my present group of (sole and jointly supervised) doctoral students, many of whom are able to meet together every fortnight during the term time. I have benefited, I’m sure, at least as much as they from these meetings and from our individual meetings; they have all introduced me to worlds of which I had been completely ignorant. It seems inadequate simply to list them in alphabetical order, but to do otherwise would run the risk of the acknowledgements becoming another book. Sincerest thanks to Jeremy Burke, Soh-young Chung, Russell Dudley-Smith, Jaamiah Galant, Samuel Haihuie, Yuko Hashimoto, Dermot Kelly, Colin McCarty, Joanne Metivier, Mary Rees, Atsuko Suzuki, Yueh-Lin Tu—Irene—and now quite recently graduated, Darryll Bravenboer—who has extended my thinking into philosophy of education—Rod Cunningham—aspects of whose work are used in Chapter 7—and Natasha Whiteman. Natasha’s thesis (Whiteman, 2007) deploys and develops my organisational language and combines this with her own approach in a fascinating and highly original study of online fan communities. Dialogue with her on this...
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

project has been immensely formative in the development of much that is in this book; she initially continued to provide inspiration and education as a postdoctoral fellow and co-teacher on some of the programmes that I’m involved with and now holds a permanent position at the University of Leicester. The fortnightly meetings are often joined by others, including, quite regularly, Pinky Makoe and Claudia Lapping, a colleague on the Institute staff—my thanks to them for productive contributions.

A former colleague once asked me, in relation to another publication, why I had chosen to be publicly critical of the work of another colleague. I was naïvely surprised, ‘but this is a university; we’re not supposed to agree with each other, but, well, equilibrate, maybe even hegemonise.’ I will not simply exchange narratives with colleagues, or others, whose work is worth reading and worthy of engagement. So I am grateful for the academic and professional leadership of Gunther Kress, but also for the substantial developments in my own work that have arisen out of my misreading of his.

My position at the Institute has also provided numerous opportunities to work overseas and these activities have often led to periods of accelerated theoretical and empirical development. The work in South Africa (Chapter 7) was made possible by a UK Overseas Development Agency (ODA) funded link between myself and Andrew Brown, of the Institute, and the Universities of Cape Town and the Western Cape. I am particularly indebted to Paula Ensor and Joe Muller, of the University of Cape Town, and Cyril Julie, of the University of the Western Cape, for supporting this link. Andrew and I also benefited substantially from meeting and working with Zain Davies and Jaamiah Galant, at that time, both of the University of Cape Town. Intellectual and academic engagement with these and other South African colleagues in the course of the ODA link was immensely productive. Jaamiah and Ursula Hoadley both offered critical comments on an earlier version of Chapter 7 and also agreed to append some footnotes offering some clarification and contextualisation; the result has been a considerably improved chapter.

Chapters 2 and 3 in part originated as presentations that I gave in Seoul and I am grateful to Soh-young Chung and Yun-chae Noh for their hospitality, for generative conversation, and for introducing me to their colleagues and students at Sogang and Yonsei Universities, where the presentations were given.

Japan has been an important element in my personal and academic life since around the turn of the millennium and this is visible at various points in the book, notably in the two Appendices, but elsewhere as well. My western cultural expectations never cease to be astonished by Japan’s. Unlike the two main protagonists of Lost in Translation, however, I have been neither repelled back to a life that I thought I wanted to escape from, nor have I been enthralled into an attempt at ‘going native’. Japanese and western culture co-exist, for me, in pastiche, with Japan serving as a deforming technology, iteratively revealing more, not so much about itself, but about me; it also, I hope, remains uninstructed by my response. So I am grateful to Kimiko Takase for teaching me Japan and, of course, for a good deal more and grateful also to her family, particularly her sister,
Mitsuki; Japanese generosity and close attention to the needs, even the whims, of its guests, though not everywhere apparent, are surely unsurpassable, where they are.

There are a small number of others who have had, in very different ways, a major impact on the form and content of this book; I shall mention them in the reverse of the order in which I met them.

Most recently, but, nevertheless, for most of this decade, I have been lucky enough to have been the teacher, student and friend of Soh-young Chung. She has already appeared twice in this section and will make another major appearance as my co-author in Chapter 8. Though first my student on a masters programme and then as a doctoral student, Soh-young already had a doctorate in English Literature, had held academic posts in South Korea; she is one of the sharpest thinkers whom I have ever met and, though it is not her first language, she writes far better English than I do. She came new to sociology as I came new to literature; I can only say that I hope she has gained and will continue to gain as much as I have in the relationship.

Jeff Vass and I have conversations to die for. Conversations that last whole train rides (once we even acquired an audience en route), whole days, whole weekends. Quite apart from Jeff’s superb intellect and prodigious knowledge, that he seems to aim at openness and I at closure entails that we can never step into the same discussion twice. Irony is always the subtext of our literal talk; the literal always gushes from even our most extravagant ironic play. At the end of a session I feel as if my IQ has been boosted by twenty points; it’s a lot of fun as well. I fear that I’ve objectified Jeff, somewhat, where he appears in this book. This is perhaps inevitable—he’s too big for the book—but his impact on the rest has been very considerable.

Andrew Brown and I started at the Institute on the same day in 1987. Since that day we have worked together, not continuously, but frequently and extensively in research and in writing and teaching at the Institute and in numerous institutions around the world. It has frequently been noted, in respect of our public presentations, that we work extremely well together and much of our published material had its first outings in teaching. This is how it should be; why give the students secondhand stuff? Andrew is able to do most of the things that I can do at least as well. But he can also do most of the things that I never seem to be able to do. Andrew’s contribution to this book extends far beyond the co-authored Chapter 7, indeed, I wonder how much of my nominally sole-authored work would have been produced at all without the intellectual energy of our work together and his work on his own. Thank you, Andrew.

I met Basil Bernstein a year or so before I joined the Institute. He has had a tremendous impact on my work, but I will defer my tribute to him until Chapter 4.

Parin Bahl collaborated with Andrew Brown and myself in the research that is represented in Chapter 7, but she had been my partner and advisor for some years by that time. It was Parin who first introduced me to sociology and who, in the early days (and some of the later ones) would offer stinging criticism that always
jolted me into doing better. I wonder what I would be doing now had it not been for Parin; not this, that’s for sure.

***

There are other acknowledgements that are of a different nature, but nevertheless crucial. Firstly, I am grateful to Alan Bishop for his role as series editor at Sense and also for initially suggesting that I approach Sense with the proposal for this book. I am also grateful to Peter de Liefde for making the publication process painless and for running a publishing house that looks forward rather than backward.

*Madonna in Maestà*, tempera on wood panel by Cenni di Pepo Cimabue is reproduced as Figure 2.1. The original is in the *Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence and is reproduced here *su concessione del Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali*. No further reproduction of this image from this book is permitted without the permission of the Ministry.

*Deposizione di Cristo*, painting on canvas by Giotto di Bondone, is in the *Capella degli Scrovegni*, Padova and is reproduced as Figure 2.2 with the permission of *dell’Assessorato ai Musei Politiche Culturali e Spettacolo del Comune di Padova.*


Figure 4.3 is a re-drawing of Figure 9.3 that appeared on page 175 of Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*. London, Taylor & Francis and is published here with the permission of Taylor & Francis Books (UK).

Figures 5.6, 5.7 and 5.9 include an image of the Institute of Education, University of London homepage (www.ioe.ac.uk) as it appeared in February 2005. This image is reprinted with the permission of the Institute of Education, University of London.

Chapter 6 was originally a contribution to an edited collection that had been requested by Bill Atweh—thanks for that, Bill, and thanks for the continuing interest in my work. The chapter appears in Atweh, B. *et al* (Eds). (2007). *Internationalisation and Globalisation in Mathematics and Science*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 174-198, copyright by Springer Science and Business Media and is reprinted here, with some minor amendments with the permission of Springer Science and Media. Figures 1-15 in the original version are reprinted here as Figures 6.1-6.15 and Figures 16 and 17 are reprinted here as Figures 3.2 and 3.1 respectively. Figures 6.1-6.14 were originally sourced from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) website at http://www.iea.nl/iea/hq/ and are reprinted here with the permission of the
copyright holder, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Figure 8.4 is a modified version of Figure 3.1 that originally appeared on page 54 of Maton, K. (2006b). On Knowledge Structures and Knower Structures. Knowledge, Power and Educational Reform: Applying the sociology of Basil Bernstein. R. Moore, M. Arnot, J. Beck and H. Daniels. London, Routledge and is published here with the permission of Taylor & Francis Books (UK).
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Madonna in Maestà by Cimabue 30
Figure 2.2 Deposizione di Cristo by Giotto 31
Figure 2.3 Structure of Hodge’s and Kress’s Analysis 36
Figure 2.4 Comparison of Analytic Strategies 40
Figure 3.1 Modes of Interactive Social Action 46
Figure 3.2 Modes of Authority Action 53
Figure 3.3 Modes of Authority and Some Signalling Texts and Practices 57
Figure 3.4 The Dynamics of Authority Strategies 58
Figure 4.1 Classification and Framing 77
Figure 4.2 Schema for Constructive Description 85
Figure 4.3 Bernstein’s Discursive Map 88
Figure 4.4 The Dual Modality of Practice 94
Figure 4.5 Practical Strategic Space 95
Figure 4.6 A School Mathematical Investigation 101
Figure 4.7 Equivalent Patterns 102
Figure 4.8 Primitive Bubble Arrangements 103
Figure 4.9 A Complex Bubble Arrangement 104
Figure 5.1 Elephant 1 111
Figure 5.2 Elephant 2 111
Figure 5.3 Elephant 3 112
Figure 5.4 Examples of Textual Modes 113
Figure 5.5 Textual Modes 114
Figure 5.6 The Institute of Education WWW Homepage as at February 2005 115
Figure 5.7 The Institute of Education WWW Homepage Framed in a Browser Window 116
Figure 5.8 The Institute of Education WWW Homepage on My (Old) Computer Screen 117
Figure 6.1 TIMSS (USA) Home Page 131
Figure 6.2 ‘Explore Your Knowledge’ (NCIS Site) 133
Figure 6.3 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 4 Science 1 134
Figure 6.4 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 4 Science 2 134
Figure 6.5 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 4 Science 3 135
Figure 6.6 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 8 Science 1 135
Figure 6.7 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 8 Science 2 136
Figure 6.8 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 8 Science 3 136
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 6.9 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 4 Mathematics 1 137
Figure 6.10 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 4 Mathematics 2 138
Figure 6.11 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 8 Mathematics 1 138
Figure 6.12 TIMSS Test Item for Grade 8 Mathematics 2 139
Figure 6.13 TIMSS Answers Page 140
Figure 6.14 Information about International Performances on Selected TIMSS Test Items 141
Figure 6.15 3/4 + 3/4 = ? 141
Figure 7.1 Classroom Layout in Mont Clair Geography Class 157
Figure 7.2 Student/Teacher Identity 181
Figure 7.3 Regulatory Strategies 183
Figure 7.4 Leader/Follower Identity 189
Figure 8.1 Mary Douglas’s ‘Cultural Theory’ 201
Figure 8.2 Domains of Action 206
Figure 8.3 Grammatical Modes 207
Figure 8.4 ‘Legitimation Codes of Specialisation’ 219
Figure 8.5 Modes of Legitimation 220
Figure 8.6 Modes of Authority Action 221
Figure 8.7 Schema of Interpretation 224
Figure 9.1 Domains of Action at 2 Levels of Analysis 235
Figure 9.2 Domains of Action at 3 Levels of Analysis 236
Figure 9.3 Competing Discourses 237
Figure 9.4 Public Domain Contested by 5 Discourses 238
Figure 9.5 Discursive Comportment 240
Figure 9.6 Acquirer Strategies 243
Figure 9.7 Modes of Nostalgia 242
Figure 9.8 Suturing and Rupturing Identification 243
Figure 9.9 Distribution of Subjectivity in Pedagogic and Exchange Relations 244
Figure 9.10 Perspective/Value Schema 246
Figure 9.11 Aesthetic Modes 246
Figure 9.12 Acquirer Strategies 248
CHAPTER 1

FROM FORENSICS TO CONSTRUCTIVE DESCRIPTION

>> I sometimes wonder why you want to continue to address some of the
>> audiences you do.
>>
>> because I want to rearrange the deck chairs on the titanic; what else is there
>> to do?
>
>> --> join the orchestral ensemble?

I don’t like the music.

This is a representation of an email conversation between Jeff Vass (the first
speaker) and myself. It subsequently occurred to me that the response, though
accurate, was not entirely complete. It is true, I do want to rearrange the deck
chairs, but I first want to demonstrate that we are sinking without hope of
salvation. Only then can we feel comfortable playing musical chairs.

As I am writing this, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
has just published a report following a meeting in Brussels. This report does indeed
seem to indicate that we are sinking. Professor Michael Parry, co-chair of the
working group that authored the report outlined its findings.

“What [scientists] have done now is finally establish at the global level there
is an anthropogenic, a man-made, climate signal coming through on plants,
animals, water and ice,” he told reporters. “This is the first time, at the
international level, and for the IPCC that there has been confirmed this
signal.”

We are not entirely without hope yet, though, it seems: Parry’s speech included
reference to conclusions to the effect that we may still be able to attenuate or delay
the impact of our destructive activities. But what precisely is the origin of the
‘signal’ that is ‘coming through’?

A while ago, Soh-young Chung—my co-author in Chapter 8—gave me a
working paper titled ‘Towards Methodology’ (Chung, 2005). She began the paper
by juxtaposing extracts from two poems, one by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the
other by Wallace Stevens. The distinction that she made between them comes very
close to addressing the question about the origin of the ‘signal’ and very close too
to the transition that I am trying to establish in this book. Chung selected an extract
from Coleridge’s *Dejection: An Ode*—well chosen, because the Aeolian lute—the poet himself—played by nature is presented in contradictory duet with Stevens’ guitarist. But I’ll replace it with a section from *The Nightingale*, only because it seems to demand less in terms of knowledge of poetry.

  And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
  ‘Most musical, most melancholy’ bird!
  A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
  In Nature there is nothing melancholy.
  But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
  With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
  Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
  (And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
   And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
   Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
  First named these notes a melancholy strain.

  (www.online-literature.com/coleridge/642/)

‘Nature as it really is’ is for Coleridge, potentially tarnished by subjectivity, which must be eliminated if nature as it really is, in all its glory, is to shine through to us. Stevens strikes a different chord in *The Man with the Blue Guitar*.

I

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, “You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are.”

The man replied, “Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.”

And they said then, “But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are.”

II

I cannot bring a world quite round,
Although I patch it as I can.

I sing a hero’s head, large eye
And bearded bronze, but not a man,
Although I patch him as I can
And reach through him almost to man.

If to serenade almost to man
Is to miss, by that, things as they are,

Say it is the serenade
Of a man that plays a blue guitar.

(www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/blueguitar.html)

For Stevens, it is precisely the poet’s imagination that produces the poetry. Professor Parry probably meant to index the signal of science—he was, after all, celebrating an agreement, forged out of hard, all-night (he hadn’t changed his clothes since the day before), international bargaining and the initially cacophonous strumming of mutually antagonistic guitars, resplendently decked in their respective national colours. But for this signal to have its intended political impact, the orchestrated version would have had to be claimed to be playing at least roughly in tune with the planet. The scientific signal would have to be pointing at somethings as they are and, more importantly, at the culprits who/that have made things as they are as they are; this is what I am calling forensics. So, too, Coleridge and Stevens, though privileging different voices, both retain the idea of ‘things as they are’, undisturbed by subjectivity.

Parry himself seemed to be producing a discourse that would mediate that of science, something closer—despite the graphs and tables—to everyday language, what we might (and I shall) call the public domain of science. He didn’t get it quite right. As I recall from the BBC World live broadcast, for example, at one point Parry was unsure whether it was a build up of ‘carbonic’ or ‘carbolic’ acid that was being generated by the dissolving of CO2 in the sea. Nevertheless, Parry’s public domain discourse would seem to be a necessary mediation, because natural scientists often seem to generate rather unnatural ways of talking about the world. This is how at least one group of astrophysicists looks at the night sky:

Photometric redshifts can be routinely obtained to accuracies of better than 0.1 in Deltaz/(1 +z). The issue of dust extinction, however, is one that has still not been well quantified. In this paper the success of two template-fitting photometric redshift codes (IMPZ and HYPERZ) at reliably returning $A_V$ in addition to redshift is explored. New data on the 2nd Canadian Network for Observational Cosmology (CNOC2) spectroscopic sample of $0.2 < z < 0.7$ galaxies are presented. These data allow us to estimate $A_V$ values from the observed Balmer decrements. We also investigate whether the empirical value of $\gamma = 0.44$, the ratio between gas- and star-derived extinction, as determined by Calzetti, is necessarily the best value for this sample. (Babbedge et al, 2005, p. 1 of pdf version)
CHAPTER 1

This looks more like (what I shall call) the esoteric domain of science and will certainly need mediating for many people. As I understand the situation, though, there is definitely a forensics of the universe going on here.¹

Let’s look at it like this. For the most part, we routinely and earnestly engage in everyday discourse about our surroundings. This everyday discourse is generally quite loosely defined, quite context dependent—I will develop this general idea in Chapter 4. The physicists and climate change scientists have effected a sceptical separation from this everyday discourse via generally quite extended apprenticeships into their respective esoteric domains. These domains, in the case of the natural sciences, may be presumed to be strongly institutionalised. That is to say, we might expect there to be a high degree of regularity in their deployment within any given field; Bernstein (2000) describes these fields as characterised by ‘hierarchical knowledge structures’; I will also engage with this in Chapter 4. Further, these domains also incorporate instruments or, as Latour and Woolgar (1979) famously described them, ‘inscription devices’, that mediate (or construct) scientists’ perceptions of the world. This strong internal institutionalisation of the scientific esoteric domain discourse and the claimed (as it has to be) reliability of its inscription devices entail the claim of the elimination of subjectivity—a claim that, as I shall argue in Chapter 6, is also strongly made in the area of school science. These are instruments that, played by any competent musician, will each always produce consistent melodies. This, perhaps, is the music of Coleridge: each Aeolian lute acting selectively, but not otherwise transformatively on nature.

Many areas of the natural sciences are imbricated into diverse state and commercial institutions and practices within society including, for example, health care, engineering, the military and funding by the state and other sources for ‘big science’ is clearly very substantial compared with, for example, funding for the social sciences and the humanities. It is also worth pointing out that the mediated, public domains of the natural sciences, whilst far more weakly institutionalised, are nevertheless very widely and frequently elaborated in the mass media as well as on the school curriculum. This constitutes a strong external institutionalisation of the natural sciences.

So, the strong internal and external institutionalisation of the esoteric and public domains of the natural sciences has effected the making of our most secure truths about the world. There is a sense in which we cannot think beyond them. Yet at the heart of our most secure truths, there are fractures. We need alternative (and, at least in part, contradictory) discourses of physics for the everyday (classical mechanics and electromagnetic theory), the very small (quantum mechanics) and the very large (general relativity) (see Penrose, 1997). It seems also to be the case that many medical procedures performed routinely are not actually backed up by scientific ‘knowledge’ and are quite often ineffective (see The Guardian, 7th April 2007). The position that asserts that that which is true is that which is socially institutionalised as true is often referred to as ‘social realism’. But truths are always

¹ See Dowling (2006, cc. 4 & 5) for my interpretation (not authoritative) of what’s going on here and in this article.
open to challenge on the basis of at least three strategies. Firstly, shifting between discourses, as my reference to the alternative discourses of physics illustrates, but more radical redescriptions would result from a move from physics to, say, sociology. Secondly, shifting between levels of analysis. We can also use the physics example here: quantum mechanics might be interpreted as a consistent discourse; physics inconsistent. The third shift entails demanding elaboration: there would probably be general agreement on the statement that defenestration from a twenty-first floor apartment is likely to prove fatal, but there are innumerable ways to re-textualise this ‘truth’.

What holds together these various and often contradictory truths is generally some kind of claim to the fixity of ‘things as they [really] are’; at the centre of all forms of realism is a longing for the unobservable. Let me illustrate with a description of the game, ‘Mastermind’, an online version of which can be found at www.irt.org/games/js/mind/. The original game consisted of a rectangular plastic board with rows of (four or five—I can’t remember) holes that would accommodate coloured pegs. The row at one end of the board was or could be concealed by a screen. Behind the screen, the first player would arrange a row of coloured pegs. The second player—would guess the arrangement and fill the first row at the opposite end of the board with an arrangement of coloured pegs. The first player would ‘mark’ the second player’s guess by indicating how many pegs in the second player’s arrangement were both of the correct colour and in the correct position and how many were of the correct colour but in the wrong position. On the basis of the new data from the first player, the second player would fill their second row, which would, in turn, be marked by the first player, and so the game would proceed until either the second player made a correct guess, in which case they would win, or the board filled up, in which case the first player would win: a clear example of a forensic challenge.

I used to play a variation on this game with Parin Bahl. In our version, one of us would think of a five-letter word and the other would try to ‘guess’ the word via a similar process of trial and response. Following the first move, which would, generally, be a simple guess, the second player would deploy one of two strategies; I’ll illustrate with an example. Suppose Parin had thought of the word, QUARK and suppose that my first guess was MESON. Parin would inform me that there were no correct letters correctly placed, nor, indeed, were there any correct letters, wherever placed. At this point, I would know that none of the letters in my initial guess were correct. I could formulate my second move by producing a ‘theory’, which is to say, a guess that is consistent with the totality of the information that I had. An example of a theory would be LIGHT, though this would yield another null response. If the rule is that a theory has to be a recognisable word, then my

---

2 Interestingly, Austin (1975) describes how players generally—deliberately or otherwise—misrecognised the rules of this game as originally marketed. Of even greater fascination was the finding that, when the rules as published were changed in an attempt to match those that it was thought players were actually applying, most players continued to deviate from the rules that were packaged with the game.
options have become considerably limited, because I have only A, U and Y left as possible vowels. I could, of course, continue to formulate theories. But I might decide to try an ‘experiment’. The word, GLEAM, for example, has four letters that I know are incorrect, so trying this word will tell me if the letter A is in the target word. As it happens, QUALM would be a better experimental word, but I know this only because I’m playing against myself! In any event, the second player would continue to offer a sequence of theories and experiments until the target word was identified; sometimes the sequence of theories and experiments was quite extended, especially if the first player had chosen a word that was unknown to the second. In principle, though, the target word will always be found.

Suppose that we extend the game. Suppose that we imagine this entire book as the target ‘word’. Now, I think I’ll assume that this book accommodates all twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, but do we tell the second player how many words it contains? Whether or not we do, playing the game has now become something resembling another game involving a sufficiently large number of monkeys, each with a typewriter and having a sufficiently extended period of time to produce the works of Shakespeare (I’m not comparing my writing with that of Shakespeare in any other sense). But the book also contains some Japanese and Greek and mathematical expressions and various forms of emphasis and punctuation, diagrams, images, and so forth. In principle, these might all be coded and digitally rendered (as, presumably, my wordprocessor does for me) and the whole produced as a single binary number. I’m now wondering what number it would be! I’m also wondering whether turning the book into a number would make the game easier or more difficult and what the answer might tell us about language and numbers.

The presentation of statistical information about the book (how many words, how many pages and so forth) or its coding as a binary number are forms of textualising that are, in some sense, equivalent to the quantification of the heavens by Babbedge et al. Attempts to ‘guess’ the book in its original form would be more ‘qualitative’ in nature. In all cases, however, the game is constructed as a closed system that also incorporates the truth and a mode of interrogating the truth that will yield perfectly valid, forensic information about it. The theories and experiments produced by Babbedge et al operate within a system that is open because it cannot include the pre-coded universe, which is unobserved/unobservable.

Nevertheless, the proponents of realist approaches find it necessary to attempt in some way to capture the unobserved/unobservable. A particularly sophisticated realist approach and one currently much in vogue is critical realism, the principal exponent of which is Roy Bhaskar (1997, 1998). Bhaskar distinguishes between the ontological intransitive dimension of knowledge and the epistemological transitive dimension. The conflation of these two dimensions is what Bhaskar refers to as the epistemological fallacy and is tantamount to taking what we ‘know’ (transitive) to be what really is (intransitive). It is the separation of these dimensions that puts the ‘critical’ in critical realism: we must always maintain a degree of scepticism about what we ‘know’, however secure it may seem to be in
terms of making predictions. Indeed, for Bhaskar, prediction itself is problematic, even in the natural sciences. Bhaskar’s reality consists of three levels. The ‘real’ consists in ‘structures’ and ‘mechanisms’ that give rise to ‘events’ in the natural world and ‘relations’ that give rise to ‘behaviours’ in the social world. Events and behaviours constitute the ‘actual’ and produce our ‘experiences’ in the ‘empirical’. Here, it is important to note that the events of the ‘actual’ are produced whether or not they are experienced, so the answer to old question of whether a sound is made by a tree falling in the forest when no one is around to hear it is, ‘yes’. Bhaskar claims that the real world is generally ‘open’, so that regularities in events and behaviours are not generally produced; they may occur locally in the natural world, but not at all in the social world. Thus reliance on the ‘constant conjunction’ of events and the inference of laws on the basis of regularity is inappropriate and prediction, certainly in the social world, is not possible.

Now this last point may sound a bit strange and susceptible to the same kind of jibe that Alan Sokal has made in inviting relativists to jump from his twenty-first floor window (see Chapter 8). After all, I can predict pretty reliably that a whole bunch of students will turn up at my institution on the first day of term. But, of course, this is focusing entirely on the transitive dimension in dealing with the knowable; it isn’t getting anywhere in terms of what actually ‘exists’, the structures, mechanisms and relations of the ‘real’, to assume that it is, is to commit the ‘epistemological fallacy’. This kind of criticism is also applied to quantitative forms of research. In general terms, quantification must presume qualitative regularity (the word count for this book treats all of the words as the same kind of entity) and so, in a sense, presumes what the ‘real’ does not generate. Social constructionist approaches that understand reality to be constructed socially also, quite clearly, commit the epistemological fallacy in failing to recognise the need to investigate the underlying structures, mechanisms and relations. ‘Triangulation’ is an approach that is consistent with critical realism. Here, different strategies are combined in order to reveal some of the limitations of each.

This is very clever stuff. However, to insist on its relevance to my project would seem to entail a tacit claim that I am doing philosophy and I want to insist that I am not. Not everyone would agree; this is from an introduction to critical realism:

A good part of the answer to the question ‘why philosophy?’ is that the alternative to philosophy is not no philosophy, but bad philosophy. The ‘unphilosophical’ person has an unconscious philosophy, which they apply in their practice—whether of science or politics or daily life. (Collier, 1994, p. 17)

Now I’ve had this kind of argument before with the exponents of ‘ethnomathematics’. These are educationalists, such as Paulus Gerdes (1985, 1988), who seem to believe that anybody doing anything that can be described in mathematical terms—such as building a traditional African house—is actually doing mathematics and that, furthermore, revealing this to them is an act of emancipation. This is what Gerdes suggests:
‘Had Pythagoras not ... we would have discovered it’. The debate starts. ‘Could our ancestors have discovered the “Theorem of Pythagoras”?’ ‘Did they?’ … ‘Why don’t we know it?’ … ‘Slavery, colonialism …’. By ‘defrosting frozen mathematical thinking’ one stimulates a reflection on the impact of colonialism, on the historical and political dimensions of mathematics (education). (Gerdes, 1988, p. 152)

And here is the mechanism of emancipation:

The artisan who imitates a known production technique is—generally—not doing mathematics. But the artisan(s) who discovered the techniques, did mathematics, developed mathematics, was (were) thinking mathematically. (Gerdes, 1985, p. 12)

As I argued in Dowling (1998), Gerdes is constructing the practices of those he observes as the public domain of his gaze that is a mixture of European school mathematics (Pythagoras), Fordist production techniques (production is imitation), and European historiography (technologies are the inventions of ‘great men’). He is also prescribing his own version of conscientisation therapy. What he is not doing is allowing the African cultures that he surveys to stand as values in and of themselves and with their own voice: they are not doing mathematics, they are making their own culture. Similarly, I am not doing philosophy just because what I do can be described in philosophical terms. To claim otherwise is to engage in what I refer to as mythologising: treating the public domain as if it were ‘real’. But it’s not, it is recontextualised practices. I am not doing what Roy Bhaskar seems to think that I ought to be doing. I am quite unashamedly operating in his epistemological ‘transitive domain’. However, I deny the charge of epistemological fallacy on the grounds that I am not looking for or claiming to have found truths or real mechanisms, structures and relations. Rather, I am attempting to build a culture and this entails producing some kind of regularity in the same ways, in some respects, as the builders and designers of other artefacts: I am a theory/research engineer, providing an organisational language that potentially allows people to see the world in new ways that may be of interest or may be productive for them. I use the tools of sociology and methodology because they are the ones I have to hand and I have developed a small fluency with them—they are a part of my language, philosophy, in the sense of its problematics that span millennia, is not.

My position is explicitly anti-realist, but not in the naive sense ridiculed by Sokal and other realist critics of postmodernism that are discussed in Chapter 8. Indeed, I strongly suspect that earnest adherence to naïve realism generates an empty set, at least within the academic field. I don’t deny the existence of Bhaskar’s ontological, intransitive domain, I simply do not feel that faith in it has any clear implications for what I do. I suppose I lack the conviction that science or society are, in any clear and general sense, improving, though local ‘improvements’ (and deteriorations) are palpable. I guess I can just work on the arrangement of my little corner of the world without the need to be sure that I am doing
something of ineffable, but certain value. Walking past the cemetery near where I (sometimes) live in Yokohama, my friend noted that her brother had stated quite explicitly that he did not want any of the Japanese, Shinto-Buddhist pomp and ritual performed after his own death, but rather wished his ashes to be simply scattered, Hindu-style (he didn’t mention running water, so this didn’t seem to signal an actual conversion). My comment was to the effect that death rituals were for the living, not for the dead and it was not really his place to dictate the preferences of others. Unless, that is, he had an ontological commitment in some kind of afterlife or other after-death mechanisms, structures or relations that would justify his intrusion into the grief of those who survived him. Personally, I find the cemetery a rather attractive, peaceful place to get away from the traffic and to remember. If all I’m building is a cemetery, that’s fine by me—I guess this bears some similarities with rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

So, anti-realism does not necessarily entail a direct challenge to either the esoteric or public domains of natural science knowledge. All that it must do is reject the need to dwell in the mythical land of the unobservable. It is my contention that, at best, the insistence on the existence of a state of ‘things as they are’ is a political or marketing strategy. Indeed, Robert Alan Jones (1999) describes Émile Durkheim’s ‘social realism’ as precisely a political strategy. It provides an alibi for errors and contradictions, by positing an ideal state of perfect knowledge, unobtainable, but something that we are all trying to close in on. In respect of the natural sciences, the success of their predictions is often understood as evidence of precisely this, whereas their failures to predict are generally allowed to fade (or not published in the first place).

Unfortunately, realist pronouncements can have more damaging effects, limiting reflective thinking and debate. The constitution of the dual realms of knowledge and reality allows the bigoted debater to hop between two stools in an argument, thus, in response to a sociological analysis,

“But that’s not the way the world works.”
“How do you know?”
“Science tells us.”

An alternative example would be the attempt to hold on simultaneously to both modes of legitimation of anthropological commentaries that are offered by Clifford Geertz (1988): ‘being there’ and ‘being here’. ‘Being there’ legitimates statements on the grounds that the anthropologist has lived in the setting about which they write; ‘being here’ grounds legitimation on the anthropologist’s apprenticeship into the anthropological discourse, a discourse of the university—‘here’. As Geertz elegantly points out, the nature of ‘having been there’ is of course constituted by having ‘been here’ (see Chapter 8). You cannot have your cake and eat it, but the attempt is precisely what I want to avoid. I find it pervades so much of the discourses of the social sciences and educational studies, in particular. We might speculate that it is precisely the comparatively weak internal and external institutionalisation of these discourses that allows their infection by the virus of everyday naïve realism and, perhaps, contributes to their failure to develop strong institutionalisation.
So, what I mean by demonstrating that we’re sinking without hope of salvation is that we must not depend on a real real—‘things as they are’—as a lifebelt (or, if we encounter it as an iceberg, then were really sinking). Having established this—to my own satisfaction, at least—I can concentrate on rearranging deck chairs, or on my performance on my blue guitar. As Chung (op. cit.) has pointed out, Stevens aims at something beyond mere blueness. This extension is precisely Stevens/my subjectivity. There is more than one option. I might work to produce fiction. I might stay close to the weakly institutionalised, analogue discourses of the everyday and play with the empirical. Alternatively, I might engage in intertextual dialogue with other fiction and treat the empirical with a degree of abandon—some social theory seems to operate like this. I will not choose either of these options, though I share with both fictive forms the initial assertion that my (any) work is only a (re)textualising of perceptions: this is precisely the critical dimension of my discourse. I share with the first option the concern to engage with the empirical. I share with the second the concern to dialogue with, shall we say, the theoretical. I am concerned to establish a degree of pedagogic potential in my discourse and so I need to make its central principles explicit—as explicit as possible. This might ease, but certainly not ensure, its institutionalisation beyond the academic activities of myself and my students.

The pedagogy may not be easy or quick, however. Here is an extract from another Stevens poem, my use of which also follows Chung:

One must have a mind of winter
   To regard the frost and the boughs
   Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

   And have been cold a long time
   To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
   The spruces rough in the distant glitter

   Of the January sun; and not to think
   Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
   In the sound of a few leaves,

   Which is the sound of the land
   Full of the same wind
   That is blowing in the same bare place

   For the listener, who listens in the snow,
   And, nothing himself, beholds
   Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

(Stevens, 2001, p. 11)
The snow man acquires the gaze of winter after a long time in the cold, shedding the everyday apparatus that shivers against it. My metaphor, here, is the winter as my own discourse, that—simple and inadequately developed as it may seem—has been a long time in the making and has arisen out of dialogue and discussion with interlocutors and with texts and cultural settings. The result is neither closed nor complete, of course, but, more particularly, it is not realisable as a linear programme of development. All of this is the case with any culture capable of more than trivial descriptions and the failure to recognise these features of cultural systems permits mythologisings such as the school curriculum, with its steady developmental structure.

So this book has not been arranged as a developmental curriculum, other than in the inclusion of this introduction, a concluding chapter (Chapter 9)—that I hope is more than a summary—and the positioning of Chapter 2 before Chapters 3 to 8. Each chapter is its own departure—Chapters 2 and 3 depart from the same point, the former to the introduction of the idea of a sociological analysis of text, the latter to the presentation of aspects of and commentaries produced by my organisational language. Each chapter has arisen out of and is constructed as a conversation with one or more key figures, ideologies, texts, or places. They were all written with the current project in mind, though most can be traced back to more local events and one—Chapter 6—has been published elsewhere in a slightly different form.

The central figure with whom I am dialoguing is Basil Bernstein, my former mentor. This dialogue has been ongoing since 1986 and is the point of departure for Chapter 4—in more ways than one, the central chapter in this book. The chapter incorporates its own history, so I’ll not elaborate on this further here. The chapter is an attempt to mark out the key points of departure of my constructive description from Basil’s forensics. The dialogue with Basil is extended in Chapter 8 in which Soh-young Chung and I engage with some recent (and some not so recent) work that has sought to develop Bernstein’s sociology of knowledge. This chapter has its origins in my involvement in Soh-young’s work in the sociology of literary studies and also in my own methodological work, in particular, in the production of a module for a Master of Research degree for the University of London external programme (Dowling, 2006).

Chapter 5 and also Chapter 2 include parts of an important (to me) dialogue with my colleague Gunther Kress. Here, I engage in some practical textual analysis in attempting to establish the points of departure of my constructive description and sociological organisational language, on the one hand, and Kress’s linguistically motivated approach. Chapter 5 has its origins in a presentation that I gave at the European Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference and Workshop, held at King’s College London in August 2005. Some of the text analysis in Chapter 2—including the analysis of a work by the Florentine, Cimabue—began with a workshop on text analysis that I ran as a part of the pre-conference proceedings at the Southern African Association for Research in Mathematics and Science Education conference in Cape Town in January 1995, I used it again in a presentation at the University of Lisbon in 1999.
Chapter 6 began as, first a seminar that I ran as a part of a masters programme in 1988 and then as a chapter in an edited collection (Dowling, 1991a). Here, it constituted a dialogue with the discourse of technological determinism—I would say a dialogue with the ideology of technological determinism, but I am summoned by the utterance by Deleuze and Guattari, ‘There is no ideology and never has been’ (1987, p. 4)—this discourse is distinctly forensic in nature. In Chapter 6 I have picked up this dialogue and developed it into a critique of critique (I suppose). This chapter, in a slightly different form, is also an invited contribution to an international collection on mathematics and science education (Atweh et al, 2007).

Chapters 2, 3 and 7 and also Appendices I and II dialogue, in different ways, with places and cultures. I have begun both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 with the same anecdote that stands as a dialogue with India, though the chapters themselves move swiftly away from their starting points. Chapters 2 and 3 were both initiated as presentations that I gave at Yonsei and Sogang Universities in Seoul in the autumn of 2003. Chapter 7 is a more substantial dialogue with the Western Cape region of South Africa. The chapter is an original presentation and re-analysis of an empirical study carried out by Andrew Brown and myself in the mid-nineteen-nineties. The two appendices are of a different nature from the other chapters, perhaps more in the public domain. They stand as representative of an ongoing dialogue with Japanese culture. As is the case with all of these chapters dialoguing with places and cultures, they are not constructed, primarily, as commentaries on these places and cultures, but rather the products of transactions between a method and cultural texts that serve as much to introduce and develop the method as to relay their own tales.

Chapters 3 to 8 all include relational spaces that establish various strategic modes. For example, Chapter 3 introduces a fourfold strategic space constituting a modality of interaction and Chapters 3, 6 and 8 all deploy a space constituting a modality of authority action. All of these relational spaces have emerged out of the constructive description of empirical texts (though not necessarily the texts introduced in this book). Chapter 4 includes my schema for constructive description itself that was first introduced in Dowling (1998). The particular form that the constructive description takes is sociological and by this I mean that I am understanding the sociocultural terrain to consist in the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions through strategic, autopoietic action. It is the transaction of this foundational proposition with diverse empirical texts that generates the strategic spaces that I shall introduce and their commentaries on the empirical texts.

This chapter and Chapter 9—not begun at the time of writing this—bookend the main chapters in the book and, are intended to mediate them in respect of the central line of argument of the book as a whole. I shall not anticipate Chapter 9 here other than to say that it will include some speculative developments and additions to my organisational language. I began the present chapter with a snatch of an ongoing conversation between myself and Jeff Vass about audiences and the deck chairs and orchestral ensemble on the Titanic, pointing out that I don’t like the music of the latter. That music is the music of forensics, of dualisms.
Michael Parry’s presentation of the IPCC report on climate change opens a dualism in respect of the origin of the signals that it identifies: is this the voice of science, or is it the voice of the planet. Similarly, are Babbedge et al presenting the voice of science or the voice of the universe. In a discourse of the social sciences, Clifford Geertz articulates the same category of forensic dualism: is anthropology legitimised by being here (in the university) or by being there (in the field)? In the arts, Coleridge longs for the voice of nature, Stevens for the voice of the poet. We seem quite easily to be able to recognise the dualisms of the social sciences and the humanities as themselves constituting legitimate fields of contestation. The internal institutionalisation of these discourses tends, of course, to be quite weak, having nowhere a strong grip on language. Their external institutionalisation—their public domains—are even less strongly institutionalised; how many general readers have any clear idea of the commentaries generated by sociology or by educational studies? The natural sciences are different. Here, we might speculate that the strong external institutionalisation of their discourses supports their already strong internal institutionalisation (though perhaps this was less the case in the days of the amateur man [sic] of science).

The strong dual institutionalisation of the natural sciences seems to conceal its own dualism, so that science and nature seem naturally to be singing from the same hymn sheet. But the ventriloquising of the voice of the natural world by the voices of human discourse—what Hayles refers to as ‘the platonic backhand’ (see Chapter 2) and what I refer to as forensics—always creates a doubled space where finding an alibi for incomplete theoretical development is always possible. I have presented the game, Mastermind, as an ideal type for scientific investigation. Here, experiment and theory are meaningful because the game itself incorporates its own solutions as, in a sense, does science, which, in a sense, makes the world that it investigates. This, incidentally, is not a cynical voice—quite the contrary.

I am cynical, though, about the forensic postulation of ‘things as they are’. But this cynicism is not a challenge to philosophies such as critical realism. It is a challenge to the hegemony of philosophy. I am no more doing or dependent upon philosophy than is the engineer, the architect, the watchmaker or the novelist. I am doing sociology and, from time to time, think of myself as a theory engineer—a maker of theoretical machines. I start with the assertion that the sociocultural consists in the autopoietic formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions as a theoretical installation. I proceed via the transaction of this installation with culture, text and knowledge as pointers to empirical settings. The outcome is the generation of commentaries of these settings—constructive descriptions—and, at the same time, the development of an organisational language, currently (until Chapter 9) referred to as social activity theory. Philosophy may participate in dialogue in a kind of a pastiche arrangement, but may not hegemonise my discourse (see Chapter 3).

I am attempting to address a very diverse audience, including those for whom the central message of this chapter is not news, but also the forensic sociologists and educationalists, whom Jeff Vass thinks I may as well ignore. I am also addressing the antitheorists (a more difficult audience, perhaps). At a recent
(successful) viva of one of my doctoral students, one of the examiners asked what the point might be of all this technical language, why couldn’t the thesis be written in a language that would be intelligible in the settings investigated. But, of course, if the thesis had been in any meaningful sense intelligible in these settings, then it could not have stood meaningfully within an academic discourse—it should have failed! Some antitheorists operate a different version of forensics, a monism rather than a dualism. For them, ‘things as they are’ are transparently available to us. These are the precisely the critics of Stevens’s guitarist. Other antitheorists, perhaps, favour fiction and ‘playing with the empirical’. I’ll address them anyway.

In another conversation with Jeff Vass (as it happens, the other examiner of the very same thesis) I suggested that it occurred to me that theory is very often regarded much as are the biscuits passed round on a plate at committee meetings: delicious or not, it is they are no part of the real business of the university. Perhaps I’ll ignore those who think in this way.

As for the others, part of the message that I want to address to you concerns the importance of focussing on the matter at hand—constructive description, commentary, and organisational language—and avoiding mythical transport to the discourse of the real (whether or not you are a believer). The other part of the message consists of a marketing strategy. I am presenting you with a technology—an organisational language—and some illustrations of how it might be deployed and developed and also of what it is capable of producing in transaction with the empirical; the resulting commentaries are presented as what I hope are new perspectives on a whole range of settings. In presenting all of this I am, of necessity, having to adopt a pedagogic tenor, but, at the end of the day, the evaluation is yours: it’s really a matter of whether or not you find tuneful my particular style of blues guitar.
CHAPTER 2

ANALYSING TEXTS

The idea of an organisational language

Picture a scene in rural Rajasthan in December. A narrow, roughly metalled road divides fields of mustard plants. The road is sparsely lined with trees, foliage a darker, greyer green than the emerald mustard leaves. A tourist coach chugs along the road passing, every now and then a village of grey-brown low dwellings, men in drab walking or cycling along dirt paths. Women are working in the fields, resplendent in their brightly coloured saris, each one different. Now: how do you read this visual text?

***

Some years ago I took a coach tour in northern provinces of India. The fields of green mustard leaves behind the trees sparsely lining the road between Agra and Jaipur were radiant against the pale blue mountains in the distance.

“Look at the women in the fields,” prompted one of my fellow tourists, “aren’t their saris beautiful.” And indeed they were. Though quite a distance away and mainly bending down, working in the leaves, the women dazzled in purples and blues and reds, each one different, jewels in Rajasthan’s own vast emerald silk sari. The other passengers on the coach agreed and cooed and photographed and felt happy in the warm sun and the mild intoxication of beer at lunchtime. As a sociologist I felt obliged to speak.

“What about the men?” I asked.

“What do you mean, there aren’t any men; we haven’t seen any men?”

“Yes you have, you saw them in the villages that we’ve driven through. What colours were they wearing?”

“Well, mainly drab khakis and greys.”

“So you probably wouldn’t notice them even if they were in the fields.”

“No.”

“Tell me, in an agricultural environment in which people work spread out over a large area that is pretty much monochrome, what do you think is the best way to ensure that you can keep control of your women and still be free to get up to whatever takes your fancy?” My colleagues were aghast.

“You’ve ruined our afternoon.” And so I had, and perhaps mine as well. Jeremy Bentham could not have designed a more efficient rural panopticon; the vivid markings of this particular beast now merely warned of the sting in its tail; idyllic culture had been stripped of its lustrous garment to reveal the hard core of the social structure that wears it as a veil: sari-technology. Tourist discourse was a
cutaway to an idyllic dream; sociological discourse here, a beauty’s awakening, but I was no Prince Charming.

AN AMERICAN IN HAITI

In this chapter I am concerned with the analysis and with the mythologising of text and its meaning. The object text in the case of my Rajasthan example—what Barthes (1981) might have described as the text-as-work, the unread text—is no more than an assemblage of clips that we as un-self-conscious editors cut seamlessly together to constitute our text-as-text, the text that is read. We know what the text says because we know what game we are playing—I was playing my game in the wrong playground. Oddly, we audience real film in a similar way even though the titles and credits—not to mention our own commonsense—make it quite clear that a great deal of authorship has gone into the construction of the movie. We have no difficulties at all installing ourselves in impossible observer positions, hitching onto the plot en route to the denouement, achieving so much more than Coleridge’s (1817) suspension of disbelief. Even where there is an apparently deliberate attempt to disrupt our smooth ride, the ideal mythologised narrative form is the pattern against which our walk through the scenes is revealed as random. These playgrounds are well organised and at the corner of every street. Stranger still, where a text does not declare its authorship we seem to have an irrepressible urge to install one—God, patriarchy, whatever.

Not all playgrounds are as apparently uncontested. To invoke Roland Barthes once again, we might recall his French soldier on the cover of Paris Match (1973). But I’ll use a soldier of my own, this one American (see Brown & Dowling, 1998, p. 85, also Dowling & Brown, 2009). The soldier is suppressing a Haitian. The soldier is a very powerful man, rendered almost monumental by the camera angle. He is armed with a fearsome weapon, which he is prepared to fire—his finger clearly rests on the trigger. The soldier is vigilant, on the watch for further trouble. Yet this is a benevolent soldier. Although he holds a deadly weapon, it is pointed downwards and not at anyone. He holds the Haitian down with his knee—a minimum amount of force.

The Haitian contrasts starkly with the soldier. He appears physically small—a feature exaggerated by the foreshortening effect of the camera angle. He is weak and easily suppressed by the soldier who does not need to use his gun. A stick lies on the ground. This might have been a weapon dropped by the Haitian as the soldier pinned him down—a primitive weapon for primitive people. There are two groups of Haitians in the background. One group, on the left, seems to be engaging in a brawl. The members of the other group, in the top right, appear indifferent to the action. Behind the soldier, lies a pile of rubble. Behind him and to his left, a media sound recordist is recording the action for the news.

Clearly, some interpretation has already taken place in this description of the text. The stick might not, after all, be a weapon, for example. This interpretation

---

3 To see this image, create an account on the Associated Press website at www.apimages.com and search for image I.D. 9409290609.
has been guided by an orientation to another level of description that I want to make, that of the ‘mythical’ figures constituted in and by the image. The USA—signalled by the soldier—is a powerful, but benevolent state. This state takes on an altruistic responsibility for other, less developed nations, protecting primitive societies from self-destruction. Haiti is precisely such a society, characterised by criminality, apathy, and low-level technology; and already lying in ruins. The press, represented by the sound-recordist and by the photographer of the image (in the place of the observer), is shown as a neutral organ, telling it as it is.

Now the question you have to ask yourself is, does it matter where the photograph appears? If it appears on the cover of *Time* magazine, then we may well feel that the above reading is appropriate. Suppose, however, that it appears on the cover of *Living Marxism*. In this case we would probably reject the celebration of America and the disparaging of the Third World state. Rather, we would probably interpret the text as ironic: this is how America thinks of itself and of its neighbours and this is precisely the problem in contemporary global politics. After all, the gaze of the soldier resembles nothing so much as the optimistic gazes of the blond youths in so many Nazi images. In fact, the text is taken from the front page of *The Guardian*, a UK newspaper with a broadly centre-left editorial orientation. Here, perhaps, the text signifies the journal’s own neutrality in the play between the literal and ironic readings of the photograph.

To take another example: the city-as-work, how do we constitute it as text. I tend to village London according to the occupations and routine journeys and occasional visits of my own life history and these differ somewhat both from the historical, London-as-accretion-of villages and the zoning of new housing development, and from the sociological London-as-social-class-map. Each of these and all other readings hypertextualise the city to form unholy allegiances between boroughs, buildings, streets. In order to get their licence, London cabbies must ‘do the knowledge’:

All licensed taxi drivers in the capital must have an in depth knowledge of the topography of London, ‘The Knowledge’. For would be All London or ‘Green Badge’ holders, this means that they need to have a detailed knowledge of London within a six mile radius of Charing Cross. This is based on 320 routes (or ‘runs’) as set out in the Public Carriage Office “Guide to Learning the Knowledge of London” (the ‘Blue Book’) They also need to know the places of interest and important landmarks on the route and within a quarter mile radius of both start and finish points. (http://www.the-knowledge.org.uk/main/ (last accessed 06/03/07))

London is less an alliance of villages and more a library of narratives.

HAPPENINGS AND THEIR TEXTUALISINGS: BOUNDING THE TEXT

My examples are intended to point at two questions that confront us when self-consciously embarking on textual analysis, questions that must be addressed yet that defy security in response (as any good question must). The first question
invites us to specify the text. Barthes’ methodological (if I may call it that)
distinction between text-as-work and text-as-text is helpful, but to operationalise it
is to forget that the text-as-work has already been established as a text-as-text at the
point of its naming. The book on the library shelf—whether or not it has been
opened—is already a part of a larger text-as-work which we might establish as a
text-as-text by calling it the library, or the institution or practice that houses or
sponsors or manages it, and so forth. This issue of text and context (con-text) is
clearly a problem that is raised by my consideration of the photograph of the
American soldier. Allan Kaprow turns things around somewhat and might be taken
to imply that, insofar as it aspires to art, the book shouldn’t be in the library in the
first place:

... the better galleries and homes (whose decor is still a by-now-antiseptic
neoclassicism of the twenties) desiccate and prettify modern paintings and
sculpture that had looked so natural in their studio birthplace. [...] artists’
studios do not look like galleries and [...] when an artist’s studio does,
everyone is suspicious. I think that today this organic connection between art
and its environment is so meaningful and necessary that removing one from
the other results in abortion. (Kaprow, 2003, p. 85)

For Kaprow, habitat is vital:

The place where anything grows up (a certain kind of art in this case), that is,
its “habitat.” gives to it not only a space, a set of relationships to the various
things around it, and a range of values, but an overall atmosphere as well,
which penetrates it and whoever experiences it. Habitats have always had this
effect, but it is especially important now, when our advanced art approaches a
fragile but marvelous life, one that maintains itself by a mere thread, melting
the surroundings, the artist, the work, and everyone who comes to it into an
elusive, changeable configuration. (Ibid., p. 85)

The habitat is the atelier, presumably, which must house the artist’s entire
developing corpus (is it OK for a piece to be moved from the easel to allow work
to proceed on the next) and anyone who wishes to experience it. Is it more than
coincidence that Kaprow’s article was originally published in 1961, the same year
as Joseph Heller’s Catch 22? Kaprow escaped the catch by containing his art
temporally as well as spatially as ‘Happenings’. The first of these events, ‘18
Happenings in 6 Parts’ was performed in October 1959 in the Reuben Gallery,
New York. Clear, plastic walls divided the space into three rooms and the audience
were sent ‘props’ and told that they would participate in the work and given tickets
that showed individual timetables in terms of specified seats in particular rooms at
specified times. Events included an orchestra playing toy instruments, a girl
squeezing oranges and drinking the juice and actors reading placards whilst
moving through the rooms. We might interpret ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts’ as an
attempt to detexualise art. In a sense there is no art-as-work. It can be planned,
even scripted, but the participation of the audience—however limited this might
actually have been in practice—accentuates the spontaneity of the live theatre and
weakens even if only slightly the distinction between author and audience; the Happening is authored and audienced at least in some degree simultaneously. Further, no one at all sees all of the Happening, not even Kaprow, its originator, who may nevertheless hope to benefit from its mythologising:

To the extent that a Happening is not a commodity but a brief event, from the standpoint of any publicity it may receive, it may become a state of mind. Who will have been there at that event? It may become like the sea monsters of the past or the flying saucers of yesterday. I shouldn’t mind, for as the new myth grows on its own, without reference to anything in particular, the artist may achieve a beautiful privacy, famed for something purely imaginary while free to explore something nobody will notice. (Ibid., p. 88)

Did his ‘beautiful privacy’ entail another catch, I wonder.

The performance artist, Jack Bowman, includes Kaprow’s Happenings as examples of performance art.

When I did my first major performance art piece at the Cleveland Performance Art Festival on April 9, 1993, I handed out a flyer with the performance of Jack’s Theorem and the Primal Thought. On this flyer I wrote “The Act is TRUTH. Nothing that was ever recorded is truth. Nothing that was ever said is truth. Only the ACT.” This is the best definition that I am aware of for performance art. (Bowman, 2001/2006)

Bowman’s ‘definition’ neatly effaces the term ‘truth’ (nothing, including the definition, can be pronounced as true in speech or writing) and, together with it, any recourse to a meaning lying behind the performance. Homer Simpson put it perfectly, at the end of a family discussion on the possible moral of the story in the episode:

Lisa: Perhaps there is no moral to this story.

Homer: Exactly! Just a bunch of stuff that happened

Marge: But it certainly was a memorable few days.

Homer: Amen to that!

And the bunches of stuff that comprised Kaprow’s happenings and Bowman’s performances were also (it would seem) memorable, having left traces in the memories of participants and audiences and also in museums and video and image archives and in print publications and also distributed across the internet. The question is, has the art been detextualised in the sense that ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts’ never was and still is not a text-as-work. Well, it has in this sense. But then

---

this is precisely the condition of all text, which is to say, that it is always authored in its reading; the text-as-work is merely an analytic placeholder that reminds us that we need to be clear about just exactly where we are starting from. ’18 Happenings in 6 Parts’ is not the only object of interest that is unavailable as a prototype; this is also the case with my holiday trip through Rajasthan as with all other temporally contained objects. It is also the case with spatially contained objects that are unavailable for reasons of the social and geographical striation of space. Let’s say, then, that such happenings cannot in themselves become the direct objects of textual analysis. But we can have access to what I earlier described as an assemblage of clips, mnemonic or more tangible derivatives of the postulated prototype; in other contexts, this assemblage might appropriately be described as data.

My first question requires the specification of the text for analysis. The answer must delineate the assemblage, the dataset. In the case of the photograph of the American soldier, I must be clear on whether the text is comprised solely by the photograph—or a part of it—or whether it includes other information, for example, a verbal description of the scene including the location and nationalities of the figures, the Associated Press photographer’s note that was appended to a slightly different shot taken at the same time, the caption that appeared with the photograph, the name of the journal and where it was placed and so forth. I refer to this practice as bounding the text—establishing its extent.

In Doing Research/Reading Research: A mode of interrogation for education, Andrew Brown and I (Dowling & Brown, 2009, see also Brown & Dowling, 1998) proposed that a research process might begin with the establishing of an analytical distinction between theoretical and empirical fields. The former consists of general claims and debates connected to the sphere of interest. This field will include the conclusions of previous research and other documentation that might be construed as commentary. It will also include theoretical positions and debates that bear on the general theoretical line that is to be adopted by the researcher. At the most sharply defined point of the theoretical field we placed the research question or hypothesis. On the other side of the divide, the empirical field consists of local practices, experiences, utterances and so forth. In order to address the research question, we must construct an empirical setting in which to conduct the research. We do this through the processes of research design—for example, deciding whether the research is to be exploratory or experimental or some combination of the two—and decisions on sampling and on data collection and analysis techniques. When we have completed the research, we will have compiled, firstly, a set of findings. These are local statements about the empirical setting and are the sharpest end of the empirical field. The extent to which the findings adequately represent the empirical setting is a measure of their reliability. Secondly, we will have an answer to the research question, which may now be reformulated as a conclusion. The extent to which the findings address the research question as local instances of it is a measure of their validity.

Let me take an example. Suppose that I am concerned with the gendering of cultural practices in rural Rajasthan. The manner in which I have stated this interest
suggests a sociological or anthropological approach, so my theoretical field will include sociological and anthropological and possibly demographic literature and so on, relating to Rajasthan. I may be adopting a particular theoretical interpretation of gender; my off-the-cuff analysis on the tourist coach might suggest a general interest in a socialist or radical feminist approach and there is clearly a wealth of potentially relevant literature here. Unless I was to be adopting a strongly experimental line, I would expect my research question to develop over the course of the research. As a starting point, however, I might consider, ‘how do men and women recruit visible cultural practices such as dress in the reproduction of and opposition to dominant patterns of gender relations?’

Now I will return to the scene at the start of the chapter. This clearly suggests a possible setting for the research, at least in terms of location. What I now need to do is to generate one or more texts for analysis. Let’s suppose that the setting consists of a coach ride through Rajasthan on 29th December 1993 or, rather, the view from the window of the coach. This setting is spatially and temporally contained in the same way as are Kaprow’s Happenings. Like ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts’, even as a participant at the time—in my case, as a passenger on the coach—my experience of the setting is partial. There is, in this sense (and in others) no setting as such that does not invite an authorship, an omniscient God, perhaps, so that to capture the setting would be to attain God’s view. So, I refer to my own recollections of the scene—under other circumstances these may have included fieldnotes, photographs, even interviews with other passengers as observer-informants and with local people, had the coach stopped to allow it—the totality of this assemblage is to constitute my text.

Can I get closer to God by enlarging my text? No: if we insist on enumerating texts or their possible component parts, then the total number is always infinite and I can deal only with a finite number, any finite number as a fraction of infinity is zero. But this is only part of the answer, because it rests on the nature of my answer to my first question posed in engagement with textual analysis, the question, ‘what is the text?’ The second question is perhaps a little more subtle, ‘what is the text an instance of?’ Answering this question is, essentially, what I am attempting to do in the whole of this book.

**PLATO’S TENNIS: REFERRING THE TEXT**

If we stay on the coach in Rajasthan we will recall that at least two answers to my second question were advanced: the text—a view from the window of the coach as experienced by a given individual—is an instance of idyllic, rural beauty; the text is an instance of patriarchal oppression. The choice depends not on which window we’re looking from, but on what game we are playing, on whether we are tourists out to enjoy the day or whether we are sociologists of a particular kind—and there are many kinds, of course. Now there’s nothing really very surprising about this; we’re well used to the idea that beauty and ugliness lie in the eyes (or should it be the transactional gaze) of the beholder, especially after having learned well the lessons of poststructuralism. But what is surprising is that the language of so much
CHAPTER 2

academic utterance, as well as utterances in other regions of discourse, seems
difficult to reconcile with even the mildest of relativisms. Here, for example, is Lev
Manovich:

What follows is an attempt at both a record and a theory of the present. Just
as film historians traced the development of film language during cinema’s
first decades, I aim to describe and understand the logic driving the
development of the language of the new media. […]

Does it make sense to theorize the present when it seems to be changing so
fast? It is a hedged bet. If subsequent developments prove my theoretical
projections correct, I win. But even if the language of computer media
develops in a different direction than the one suggested by the present
analysis, this book will become a record of possibilities heretofore unrealized,
of a horizon visible to us today but later unimaginable. (Manovich, 2001, pp.
7-8)

Manovich’s theory of the present must clearly constitute a transformation of the
present—it is other than his record, which, itself, must be a selection. This is fine.
But he then claims that this will potentially provide access to a driving logic, the
engine of media language development. He further seems to suggest that this will
enable him to produce testable propositions that will, ultimately, be put to the test
of time. Even if they fail as predictions, his propositions will nevertheless
constitute a transparent window on today for the future. The text, it seems, is an
instance of its referential setting, the present, whether it is looking forward or
backwards. Manovich’s move here stands as an illustration of the forensics that I
introduced in Chapter 1 and, perhaps, what Katherine Hayles has tagged the
‘platonic backhand’:

The Platonic backhand works by inferring from the world’s noisy multiplicity
a simplified abstraction. So far so good: this is what theorizing should do.
The problem comes when the move circles around to constitute the
abstraction as the originary form from which the word’s multiplicity derives.
Then complexity appears as a “fuzzing up” of an essential reality rather than
as a manifestation of the world’s holistic nature. (Hayles, 1999, p. 12)

Pierre Bourdieu makes a similar point:

The science of myth is entitled to describe the syntax of myth, but only so
long as it is not forgotten that, when it ceases to be seen as a convenient
translation, this language destroys the truth that it makes accessible. One can
say that gymnastics is geometry so long as this is not taken to mean that the
gymnast is a geometer. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 93)

To recognize that beauty lies in the eye of the holder is to admit that the text is
an instance not of some external source, but of the system of categories and
relations that are brought to bear by the analyst: a gymnastic performance is an
instance of geometry, but only when viewed by a mathematician *qua*
mathematician (albeit one with a penchant for metaphor—see Chapter 8). This is
not to say that the viewer can only ever see what they have seen already. An encounter with a text is a point of the potential reformulation of the observer. Previously (see, for example, Dowling, 1998), I have used Piaget’s (1995) equilibration metaphor—the reading of a text is ultimately describable as a process of coming to a state of equilibrium. This metaphor is consistent with Piaget’s grounding principle of autoregulation or homeostasis. There is a problem with equilibration however in that it constitutes equilibrium as a property of the equilibrating system, either as an edenic or utopian state. Crudely, the system has to be able to ‘know’ which direction to move in (Dowling, 1998). It is not at all obvious that this is a helpful assumption; a poetic engagement with a text, for example, does not stand in any obvious relationship to equilibrium, neither do the rhizomes proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). As alternatives, I shall make pragmatic use of autopoiesis or emergence depending upon where I am positioning myself as authorial voice. Hayles (1999) associates these terms with the second and third ‘wave’ of cybernetics respectively and homeostasis predominantly with the first. I shall use autopoiesis—self-organisation—where I am identifying with the analyst and emergence where I am describing the formulation and reformulation of a system from outside of it, as it were; we might think of de Certeau’s (1984) two views of the city: walking through the streets; viewed from above.

My use of the term, autopoiesis, derives from the second order cybernetics of Humberto Maturana (see Hayles, 1999), but I am deploying it pragmatically and without general epistemological pretensions. The concept enables me to think about the internal organisation of the audience as (analytically) distinct from the structural coupling of the audience and text that enables the latter, shall we say, to surprise the former but not to communicate the meaning of the surprise. The latter is determined by audience self-organisation, which may involve greater or lesser equilibrium or stability, shall we say.

Both tourist and sociologist responses to the Rajasthan text exhibit a fair degree of stability to the extent that they are unsurprising to an observer who plays both games. Of course, there are likely to be variations in response between tourists and between sociologists, but it is nevertheless plausible to construct a stability in the respective discourses at some sufficiently high level of analysis. I shall refer to the extent of this stability is a measure of the institutionalisation of the discourse. The limits to the delicacy of the institutionalisation are revealed in empirical differences in response within the discourse, so that the delineation of such differences is really establishing the level of analysis at which institutionalisation is being described.

The way that I have described it suggests that the institutionalisation of a discourse or practice might be interpreted as the product or language of an alliance of subjectivities. Then the differentiation of discourses—tourist and sociologist, say—marks an opposition of subjectivities. I should make clear at this point that the term ‘subjectivity’ here refers to the subject or ‘speaker’ of the discourse and may be defined at any level of analysis so that an individual human subject, having been apprenticed into diverse discourses and practices, is appropriately interpreted as an articulation of subjectivities. Thus oppositions and alliances may be inter- or intra-subject.
At a higher level of analysis, we can interpret institutionalised discourses and practices as emergent epiphenomena on the play of structural couplings that constitute the formation of oppositions and alliances of authors and audiences. The distinction between author and audience merely directs our attention to the particular utterance or action that is of current interest. Viewed from within a system, autopoiesis looks like the acquisition or recruitment or deployment or construction or dismantling of an organisational language or, in its tacit form, a habitus (cf. Bourdieu, 1990), perhaps. From outside of the system, such organisational languages and habituses appear as epiphenomena or, perhaps, as ideologies—cultural practices in relation to social structure. Thus the transmission and acquisition of a discourse or practice, which is to say, pedagogy (whether tacit or explicit) may, from outside of the system, be interpreted as cultural reproduction emergent on the expansion of an alliance (social reproduction).

The decision as to whether we are within or outside a system is simply a question of the level of analysis at which we are operating, whether I am constructing or expositing my theory or considering its status. For example, I may think of my thoughts as the product of my consciousness (autopoiesis) or I may think of my consciousness as epiphenomenal in relation to, say, evolutionary or biological action. Crucially, as I have constructed them here, the languages of autopoiesis and emergence are isomorphic: structural coupling and organisational language correspond directly to social structure and cultural practice. Insofar as the language that I develop is able to sustain this isomorphism, the method will exhibit a fractal quality. That is to say, its deployment is independent of the level of analysis at which it is deployed and indeed, as I have suggested, the method may also be deployed in the analysis of itself.

A brief dismantling of a familiar metaphor may assist in the stabilising of my own organisational language; the metaphor is that of camera as observer. The camera is certainly structurally coupled to the world around it, principally (or ideally) through the medium of light. The camera automatically and through the agency of the photographer selects its subject and adjusts for focus, exposure, white balance and so forth and writes a record to film or digital memory. But there is no autopoiesis involved here in the sense that I am deploying the term. The inscription of the record—the photograph—is simply the structural impact of one part of a system on another; the camera has no organisational language. So there is no transmission of information as such. Information is constituted only at the point at which the photographer views the inscribed image, either in the viewfinder or on the film or LCD display and activates a photographic or tourist or domestic organisational language.

I am now in a position to return to my second question concerning the analysis of texts, that is, ‘what is the text an instance of?’ I can now say that the structural coupling between text-as-work and its audience (or, alternatively, the author of its reading as a text-as-text) is that which establishes the possibility of the text-as-text. However, the nature of the text-as-text will be given by the organisational language—the strongly or weakly institutionalised discourse or practice—that the audience deploys. The text, then, can only be construed as an instance of that
organisational language; any alternative would entail the reification of the text-as-work. As I have established, the latter is purely a placeholder; there can be no such thing as a text that stands outside of an audience’s reading of it; the unobserved falling tree, in other words, is not a text.

MYTHOLOGISING THE TEXT/CONJURING THE REAL

The language that I am constructing here has the advantage—for my purposes—of coherence and consistency, but the general claim that I am making here is widely recognised, at least; we might say that although there are counters to it, the claim is strongly institutionalised in academic writing in the social sciences. The question that this raises, then, is why is it so widely ignored? I have offered one illustration of this ignoring in the claims made by Lev Manovich who will certainly not be unaware of relativist epistemologies (if this is not an oxymoron), yet he is content to set his own work within the context of a naive realism—in this case, the postulation of generative structures that are, at least potentially, accessible. Here is Dick Hebdige responding to texts by Jean Baudrillard and others:

Whatever Baudrillard or The Tattler or Saatchi and Saatchi, and Swatch have to say about it, I shall go on reminding myself that this earth is round not flat, that there will never be an end to judgement, that the ghosts will go on gathering at the bitter line which separates truth from lies, justice from injustice, Chile, Biafra and all the other avoidable disasters from all of us, whose order is built upon their chaos. And that, I suppose, is the bottom line on Planet One. (Hebdige, 1988, p. 176)

We can certainly add a whole lot more ‘avoidable disasters’ since 1988. What seems to be disturbing Hebdige is that some people are having fun writing academic papers or making advertisements or kitsch watches whilst others are having somewhat less fun and that the one is entailed in the other in some kind of a master-slave dialectic. I feel inclined to point Hebdige in the direction of a story about a wealthy young man who wanted to know what he had to do in order to attain salvation (he can find a discussion of it in Chapter 3 and in Dowling, 1998); but I’m sure that the good Professor’s activities in film studies and art studio are, at this very minute, bringing practical relief to the suffering all over the world. Here is Stuart Kauffman setting the scene for his theory of order in the universe:

If the universe is running down because of the second law [of thermodynamics], the easy evidence out my window is sparse—some litter here and there, and the heat given off by me, a homeotherm, scrambling the molecules of air. It is not entropy but the extraordinary surge towards order that strikes me. Trees grabbing sunlight from a star eight light-minutes away, swirling its photons together with mere water and carbon dioxide to cook up sugars and fancier carbohydrates; legumes sucking nitrogen from bacteria clinging to their roots to create proteins. I eagerly breathe the waste product of this photosynthesis, oxygen—the worst poison of the archaic world, when
anaerobic bacteria ruled—and give off carbon dioxide that feeds the trees. The biosphere around us sustains us, is created by us, grafts the energy flux from the sun into the great web of biochemical, biological, geologic, economic, and political exchanges that envelopes the world. Thermodynamics be damned. Genesis, thank whatever lord may be, has occurred. We all thrive. (Kauffman, 1995, p. 10)

I am quite astonished at what Kauffman seems to be able to see from his window. Most of it seems to be composed of the constructs of the natural sciences. It is interesting, though, that when he gets to the social sciences, he sees economic and political order where Hebdige sees chaos. It is not entirely without relevance that Hebdige’s comment appears at the end of his paper and Kauffman’s is in the introductory chapter of his book. They stand as accessible metatheoretical postscript and preface to the substantive achievements of their respective works. What both appear to be doing is, firstly, making very strong claims on the existence of a reality that is independent of the observer; Kauffman’s window is very similar to my own, no doubt, and I only have to look out to confirm his facts prior to voting with him on the issue of the second law of thermodynamics. Secondly, both are painting the scenery with colours selected from very particular paintboxes. Kauffman recruits substantially from the natural sciences, but there is no shortage of tropic language—grabbing trees, sucking legumes, ruling bacteria. Hebdige establishes a chain of identification between sociological and commercial fun-loving tricksters to which he opposes sorry media eventalisings with janusian ghosts in-between. Both fine, prime-time examples of Hayles’ Platonic Wimbledon—forensics. The depictions offered by each author is a construction of their respective organisational languages, but their authorship is, here, hiding in the blinding light of their verbal virtuosity to emerge elsewhere in their more measured presentations of their analysis. The text-as-work—the potential view from the window, as it were—is a mythologised world; the transparency of the window passes unchallenged. In each case, the mythologising is a point de capiton that fixes an a alliance with those of the rest of us that have a need to believe that there is a reality out there that we really can reach, and predict, and control, and change.

There is another kind of mythologising:

We used to think of texts as being made out of words and sentences; now under the conjoined influences of postmodern theory and electronic writing technologies, we think of texts as being made out of text. The loom is still needed to weave the individual elements (unless they are ‘found objects’, lifted from other texts), but organization and linearization is now a two-stage process, the virtual text produced by the first stage serving as input to the second. While the writer remains responsible for the microlevel operations, she may bypass the macrolevel stage, thus offering du texte as a freely usable resource to the reader, rather than un text structured as a logical argument aiming at persuasion. (Ryan, 1999, p. 100)
Composition after Duchamp is idea-generative, not product-oriented. As data-interaction, its only directive: Take whatever data is recorded (call them, perhaps, these ‘having become’) and from them make a tracing. If three-dimensional objects give off a two-dimensional shadow, writing is now conceived of as a three-dimensional shadow of a fourth-dimensional process of becoming. (Sirc, 1999, p. 195)

These extracts—both from the same volume edited by Ryan (1999)—far from mythologising the text-as-work, etherealise all text. Just as Marcel Duchamp established, in his ‘readymades’, the act of the artist’s selection as the degree-zero of all art, so Marie-Laure Ryan and Geoffrey Sirc celebrate the action of the writer. Ryan’s author is the weaver of a gift to be admired briefly, or not, and to be unpicked and re-woven, in whole or in part, by the next weaver. Sirc’s composer is rather more Nietzschean. In either case, it is now the author rather than the text that is mythologised. Ryan and Sirc are seeking different alliances, perhaps, alliances with authors rather than the audiences that Hebdige and Kauffman are intending to impress. Because it is authorship itself that they are celebrating, Ryan and Sirc have no need to establish a metatheory as such, they can simply theorise.

We might think of the mythologising of the authors whom I have mentioned here—Manovich, Hebdige, Kauffman, Ryan and Sirc—as marketing strategies. It might even be useful to pin labels to their respective target markets: naïvely realist audiences in the case of the first three listed; and let’s say, for the time being, constructivist audiences in the case of the last two. The names aren’t crucial, here, they are merely potential strapline markers. They serve what Basil Bernstein (2000) might have described as ‘classificatory’ functions, distinguishing between categories, allowing the nature of what goes on within the categories—‘framing’—to be elaborated elsewhere. But the work of classification is not fully achieved simply by the marking out of categories. Naïve realists will also need to choose between Hebdige’s semiotic mode of analysis and left-political interest, and Kauffman’s natural science mode and his focus on biology. Constructivists may prefer Ryan’s weaving to Sirc’s becoming or the other way around. In other words, whilst the marketing or classification of a work may or may not appear to be separated from the work itself as packaging, such demarcation is never really possible. Nevertheless, authors do have strategic decisions to make in relation to marketing strategies. In my experience, packaging is a useful strategy if you have very little in the way of a product; if you do, then you run the risk of a clash, or of attention being focused on the package rather than the product. Unless, of course, the package is wholly consistent with the product, in which case, ‘packaging’ is probably the wrong term—it is perhaps more accurate to speak in terms of the public face of the product itself. My own preferred strategy, then, is to go for a product—and it will be recalled that I am referring to an organisational language here—that incorporates its own marketing.

5 See Chapters 4 and 8 for critical engagements with this categorising and with other Bernsteinian work.
CHAPTER 2

A FLORENTINE CASE STUDY

The organisational language that I shall be introducing is concerned with the analysis of text. I have already introduced two of its key aspects in terms of questions, which I shall now state in the form of principles:

- The text as object of analysis is to be bounded.
- The text is to be understood as an instance of the organisational language that is deployed in its analysis.

In order further to pave the way for the introduction of my organisational language, I shall provide contrasting analyses of a specific text. The text that I have chosen is shown in Figure 2.1. It is a thirteenth century Italian painting, *The Madonna in Maestà*, by the Florentine, Cimabue, painted around 1280. I have chosen this particular image because it has already been subject to a careful and sociologically relevant analysis by Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress (1988). A contrasting of this earlier analysis with my own will enable me to illustrate a number of the general features of the approach that I am taking that I take to be crucial. I shall first introduce and discuss the approach to the analysis that is taken by Hodge and Kress. In the course of this introduction I shall need also to provide some background on, as well as my own interpretations of some of, some of the work that they cite.

Hodge and Kress construct the basis for their ‘diagnostic social semiotic’ reading of the Cimabue work by generating a number of propositions from a discussion of sociological and sociolinguistic theory. In this discussion, they draw on a number of key theoretical antecedents including Émile Durkheim’s categories, organic and mechanical solidarity. These concepts are central in Durkheim’s work, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1984). In what was his doctoral thesis, Durkheim wanted to ask how it was that, if human beings could be characterised in terms of the destructive will proposed by Schopenhauer, human societies did not destroy themselves. He answered the question by proposing a modality of social solidarity. Certain societies are characterised by a simple division of labour and a segmental structure, that is, communities within society are essentially interchangeable with each other. The coherence of such societies—mechanical solidarity—depended upon a powerful state, repressive law, and a collective conscience. The latter established allegiance to a unifying idea such as a religion. As the division of labour becomes more complex, the collective conscience becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, but is replaced by interdependence within a society that can no longer be described as segmental. The responsibility of the state moves to the maintenance of restitutive law. This more evolved form was referred to as organic solidarity and was seen by Durkheim as an ideal. However, its development was inhibited by pathological forms including, for example, forced division of labour and the anomie form described in Hodge’s and Kress’s analysis. I should point out that Hodge and Kress do not actually cite *The Division of Labour*
Hodge and Kress align Durkheim’s organic and mechanical solidarity with a classification of speech types that they refer to as ‘high’ and ‘low’ languages which apparently correspond to Bernstein’s (1971) ‘elaborated’ and ‘restricted’ speech codes—Bernstein’s categories will be discussed in Chapter 4. Social organisations that exhibit organic solidarity and high languages are characterised, they claim, by ‘hypotaxis’, that is, hierarchical organisation. On the other hand, mechanical solidarity and low languages are characterised by ‘parataxis’, that is, they lack hierarchical organisation. Thus, they argue that hypotaxis and parataxis, which are linguistic categories, are ‘transparent signifiers’ of organic and mechanical solidarity, respectively. Hodge and Kress also draw upon work (influenced by Halliday’s sociolinguistics) on schizophrenic language, which is found to be markedly dis cohesive in terms of senseless syntagmatic connections, senseless references, and non-congruous relations between speakers. In view of this, ‘schizophrenia is interpreted as a transparent signifier of breakdown in the social order’ (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 110). This is summarised, in the sixth of seven propositions, as:

Absence or disruption of hypotactic and paratactic structures is a transparent signifier of the repudiation of kinds of social order and belonging: that is, of Durkheimian ‘anomie’. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 111)

In fact, the association between, for example, hypotaxis and organic solidarity may be less than ‘transparent’. Such transparency as might be apparent to another reader is probably contingent upon their acceptance of Hodge’s and Kress’s characterisation of organic solidarity as a ‘hierarchically ordered social structure’. However, there is, as far as I can see, nothing in Durkheim’s Division of Labour in Society (1984) that encourages this. Durkheim describes organic solidarity as established by cooperation and mutual dependence and law is predominantly restitutive, that is, facilitating. Hierarchical organisation is comparatively weak as Durkheim proposes:

In the appendix to their book Hodge and Kress gloss ‘transparency’ and its opposite, ‘opacity’, as follows: ‘Sign systems function most economically in producing meaning if there is a clear link perceived between signifiers and signified by all users of the signs. However, negative and hostile relationships within the semiotic plane motivate the opposite tendency, an inaccessible link between signifiers and signifieds, leading to systematic distortion of such links. Signs can therefore be ranged on a continuum between transparent and opaque, in terms of how clearly the link between signifier and signified is perceived by a class of semiotic participant’ (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 262).
Figure 2.1. Madonna in Maestà, tempera on wood panel by Cenni di Pepo Cimabue. Original in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. No further reproduction without the permission of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali.
To the extent that segmentary organs fuse together each social organ becomes larger in volume, and this all the more so because in principle the overall volume of society increases simultaneously. Practices common to the professional group thus become more general and abstract, as do those common to society as a whole, and consequently leave the field more open for particular divergences. Likewise the greater independence enjoyed by the later generations in comparison with their elders cannot fail to weaken the traditionalism of the profession, and this makes the individual still freer to innovate.

Thus not only does professional regulation, by its very nature, hinder less than any other form of regulation the free development of individual variation, but moreover it hinders it less and less. (Durkheim, 1984, pp. 243-244)
In mechanical solidarity, there is a necessity for repressive law to sustain the unitary collective conscience. Under these circumstances, some form of hierarchy would seem to be a pre-requisite. This is the reverse of Hodge’s and Kress’s description of these categories.

In drawing on Bernstein’s work, Hodge and Kress claim that:

Elaborated codes position participants at a distance from each other and from the world of referents, and hence must be explicit. Restricted codes can be implicit because they are context-bound, close to a context which links speakers and hearers in a common bond. So restricted codes express high solidarity, and elaborated codes the opposite. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 109)

This does not sit easily with either Durkheim’s or Bernstein’s sociology in the sense that these categories refer to modes rather than degree of solidarity, in the case of Durkheim, nor is it clear that Bernstein’s speech codes ordinalise solidarity. Hodge and Kress also introduce Bernstein’s early work on the classification and framing of educational knowledge. They describe, in particular, collection and integrated curriculum codes. In his introduction to Volume 3 of Class, Codes and Control (1977), Bernstein seems to be quite clear that the codes are derived from the more fundamental concepts, classification and framing, which I have already mentioned above. In Bernstein’s conception: ‘classification’ refers to the strength of boundary between contents and derives from the distribution of power within society; ‘framing’ refers to the organisation of relations within categories and derives from principles of control. It seems odd, perhaps, that Hodge and Kress mention ‘classification’ once (in parentheses appended to their own term, ‘grid’ (possibly a tacit reference to Mary Douglas (1970, 1996a), see also Chapter 8) and do not refer to ‘framing’ at all. Furthermore, whilst they appear to have acknowledged the paradox that Bernstein identifies towards the end of his paper, they have removed any reference to Durkheim. Bernstein’s description reads:

... the covert structure of mechanical solidarity of collection codes creates through its specialised outputs organic solidarity. On the other hand the overt structure of organic solidarity of integrated codes creates through its less specialised outputs mechanical solidarity. And it will do this to the extent to which its ideology is explicit, elaborated and closed and effectively and implicitly transmitted through its low insulations. Inasmuch as integrated codes do not accomplish this, then order is highly problematic at the level of social organisation and at the level of the person. Inasmuch as integrated codes do accomplish such socialisation, then we have the covert deep closure of mechanical solidarity. This is the fundamental paradox which has to be faced and explored. (Bernstein, 1971, pp. 224-225; 1977, p. 110)

Hodge and Kress recontextualise:

... the ‘integrated’ [code] is characterised by low boundaries and weak boundary maintenance, so that the form of the code is characterised by cohesion of the whole, though the whole that coheres in this way is
formidably complex, and only an elite could grasp it. So we have a contradiction between the meaning of this code as transparent signifier of solidarity and cohesion, and its function, to differentiate between an elite and the rest. Similarly, the ‘collect’ code, with its high boundaries, signifies the individuation of knowledge and society. But ‘collect’ codes declare and enforce the lack of power of the learner, because of a hierarchy of knowledge in which beginners have strict limits, while at the top specialists are excluded from a grasp of the whole. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 110)

Bernstein relates his concepts to the more fundamental concepts of organic and mechanical solidarity, which Hodge and Kress also want to use. However, Bernstein’s paradox challenges the ‘transparency’ of the signifying relationship between code, measured in terms of classification and framing, and social structure. Bernstein later resolves this difficulty via the notion of an ‘invisible pedagogy’ (1977). Hodge and Kress resolve the problem by dispensing both with the derived status of the knowledge codes and with Bernstein’s own language, specifically, classification and framing. They also omit all reference to the relationship of Bernstein’s work to Durkheim’s modes of solidarity, despite the fact that they were discussed in the paragraph immediately preceding the introduction to Bernstein’s sociolinguistics. Hodge and Kress retain Bernstein through the recontextualisation of his speech codes as transparent signifiers for mechanical and organic solidarity (the terms are reintroduced after the discussion of Bernstein has been completed). The trace of his classification and framing work is to be found in their second proposition:

High or emphatic boundaries in the syntagmatic or the paradigmatic plane are transparent signifiers of solidarity and cohesion (within groups) and non-solidarity and discohesion (outside groups); and low, weak boundaries signify the opposite. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 111)

‘Boundaries’ are thus operational indicators that are ‘transparent’ signifiers for the concepts of solidarity (within and between). The exposition on Bernstein and Durkheim seems intended to establish both the theoretical concepts and the validity and reliability of the concept/indicator link—the relationship between social solidarity and boundary strength—which appears to be presumed by the term ‘transparent’. The seven propositions that they present are the terminal level of Hodge’s and Kress’s theoretical discussion before moving onto the analysis of the painting. It is not necessary to my purpose here to discuss them all as I need only to raise the question of the relationship between the inputs from sociology— principally, Durkheim and Bernstein—and the analytic framework that Hodge and Kress develop and deploy. I shall return to this issue later. For the time being, it is

Bernstein’s recruitment of Durkheim itself entails a recontextualising of the latter. Specifically, whilst Durkheim’s types are related diachronically, Bernstein employs them to differentiate, synchronically, within a configuration. In Bernstein’s case this does not constitute a problem because he has adequately re-theorised the concepts in establishing his own coherent system.

7
enough to point out that, rather than the sociological theory motivating the semiotic analysis, it may be more appropriate to describe the apparatus of linguistic tools, including terms such as, syntagmatic, paradigmatic, hypotaxis and parataxis, as constituting an organisational language for the recontextualisation of the sociology.

Hodge and Kress describe the Cimabue painting in the following terms:

The text itself is marked by strong boundaries on the syntagmatic plane. The frame around the painting is emphatic, a simple angular shape covered in expensive gold leaf. Within this frame, the concern with boundaries continues. Haloes around the saints and angels not only enclose each in their own sacred space but separate their heads from their bodies. The chair the Madonna sits in is a massive barrier, and the saints below her are enclosed by architectural niches. The drawing style is linear, using lines rather than shading to indicate gradations in shape and mass. The represented social relations are similarly shown as fragmented. The society of angels has no internal structure: each relates loosely to the Madonna, or turns away. The saints below have no unambiguous relationship to anyone. The Madonna does seem to be aware of the presence of the Christ child on her knee, but this awareness is not reciprocated. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 113)

In terms of the ‘paradigmatic plane’, Hodge and Kress remark on the very limited range of colour, mainly flat and homogenous and close to the primaries. The social world is sharply divided into sacred and profane, the latter being excluded from ‘the presented world’. Other oppositions are male/female and human/angel with members within categories being hardly differentiated from each other. The symmetry of the painting, left-right, and ‘upper-lower dominance’ are paratactic rather than hypotactic and ‘the angels are strung vertically like beads on a string’. Overall:

The effect of the emphatic boundaries, added to the paratactic organisation, is incoherence in the picture as a whole. In Durkheim’s terms, it signifies a strongly anomic, egoistic and fragmented form of society. (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 113)

The authors support their reading by offering a brief description of late thirteenth-century Florence as ‘a city-state in turmoil’. They do not attempt an explanation as to why the dominant classes of a chaotic state would be expected to sponsor the production of chaotic cultural artefacts.

My reading of the painting is somewhat different. The throne does indeed constitute a powerful boundary, but it is marking a simple division of labour. The fundamental division is between Heaven (the Madonna, Child and angels) and Earth (the saints). The angels frame the Madonna and Child in a halo that, like the halos around all of the figures, bespeaks the sacred quality of the haloed. Indeed, the haloed/hallowed status of the figures is itself a style-marker, an emblem. The geometry of the painting is, in fact, very far from paratactic. The throne is a pyramid with its vertex at the head of the Madonna. The inclination of the Madonna’s head and the direction of her right hand draw the observer to the real
focus of the picture, which is the head of the Child, with his most elaborately embellished halo. The hierarchical ordering of the painting is clear. The angels and saints gaze in all directions, signifying, perhaps, the omniscience of God. But the gaze of the Madonna and of the Child is directly out of the frame at the observer. The Madonna’s hand is raised in a gesture that offers the Child to the world as its salvation. The Child’s hand is raised in the very act of the Benediction, blessing the observer.

The angels and the saints certainly lack individuality, but this, surely, seems inconsistent with the ‘cult of the individual’, which characterises egoistic society. The frame of the picture as a whole signifies the segmentation of the social within a simple division of labour. At its focus, the Word, in front, the World, the observer who, her/himself, is being offered the Word. This is precisely the simple division and unifying Idea of mechanical solidarity. The Idea, furthermore, which is emblemised in the central icon of Christianity, the icon that is formed by the heavy vertical line from the heavenly head of the Madonna to the two central, earthly saints and the line, which joins the heads of the two lowermost angels: the sign of the cross.

A crucial difference (among others) between my sociology, on the one hand, and the sociologies of Durkheim and Bernstein, on the other, is that whilst they are concerned primarily with social structure and its cultural realisation, I—despite occasional appearances to the contrary—prioritise strategic social action and, shall we say, structuration (Giddens, 1984). I, therefore, interpret mechanical solidarity as a form of activity that constitutes a simplification of the division of labour rather than being simply constituted by it. Maximum complexity would differentiate between each individual and even differentiate within individuals in respect of context. Contemporary commercial advertising might be taken, in general, as a strategy operating in this direction. Mechanical solidarity strategies simplify. They also privilege the unification of beliefs and sentiments. Such an activity must, clearly, construct markers of this unity. To describe thirteenth-century Florence as not very cohesive is hardly the point. If we make a general claim that all societies are constituted in and by the formation of emergent alliances and oppositions, then our analyses will always reveal strategies that are directed at the establishing, maintenance or destabilising of these. Insofar as the Church is constituted as an institutionalised alliance, then its official texts will be recognised as those given official sanction and tending to maintain the status quo. In everyday language, one might reasonably expect the Church authorities (who patronised Cimabue) to attempt to maintain their authority vis-à-vis the masses; whether or not they succeeded is neither here nor there.

Giotto di Bondone was a Florentine painter of the next generation (and was probably Cimabue’s pupil). Hodge and Kress do not offer an analysis of one of his paintings. They do, however, state that Giotto varied the ‘logonomic rules’ that they say characterise Cimabue’s painting. It is for this reason that he is regarded as a significant painter. It is certainly the case that Giotto produced very different paintings as is apparent from the briefest of glances at his Deposizione di Cristo, Figure 2.2. Christ, posthumously returned to his mother’s arms, is surrounded by
apostles and others. Hands are being wrung, even the angels are agonised in their expressions and their contortions. The simple geometry of the Cimabue work is gone; colours are more diverse. The simple division of labour between heaven and earth remains, however. This time, it is marked out by the hard line of the rock. But this line also participates in the essential icon of the cross, which again forms the fundamental organising structure of the painting. This time up-ended, its earthy foot penetrates the heaven. Christ—sent down to earth by God—and his mother are at its head and its cross-piece is represented in the line of individuals forming the diagonal at the bottom lefthand of the painting. The cross motif is repeated in the agonised acts of symbolic crucifixion by the angels and by one of the apostles at the centre of the painting. The unhaloed—the ‘observer’ is now included by Giotto in the painting itself—are carefully positioned at the three points of the cross, again receiving the offer of the benediction even at this moment of tragedy. The Giotto represents a markedly different style of painting, but the social semantics are the same: simple division of labour; unifying Idea, emblemed by the cross and the benediction—again, strategies of mechanical solidarity.

I want now to consider the semiotics of the analyses themselves. I have organised them structurally in Figure 2.3. In my description of their text, Hodge and Kress have first discussed antecedent work, the first explicit structural feature of their analysis, and I have focused, in particular, on the sociological contents, Durkheim and Bernstein. In the third column of the table I have indicated that this constitutes a selection (in the case of Hodge and Kress, part of their selection) from a theoretical field. The theoretical field itself is a construction, although it remains a tacit construction in Hodge’s and Kress’s analysis. They move on to construct their organisational language which comprises seven principles, two of which I have referred to explicitly here. This language includes both linguistic and sociological terms as well as less technical, but important analytical terms such as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Feature</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Field</td>
<td>General Statements</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents</td>
<td>Durkheim, Bernstein</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Language</td>
<td>Linguistics/Sociology</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Paintings (Cimabue, Giotto)</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>13-14th Century Florence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Field</td>
<td>Local Practice &amp; Experience</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.3. Structure of Hodge’s and Kress’s Analysis*
‘boundaries.’ I have described their setting as a selection from an empirical field of practice and experiences and they have divided this into a text—the Cimabue painting—and the historical setting within which it originated. Again, the empirical field of practice and experience is a construction that is tacit in this part of Hodge’s and Kress’s work.

Now Hodge’s and Kress’s book is titled Social Semiotics, which suggests—and this is borne out by the content—that they are placing their emphasis on their organisational language rather than on any particular analysis or on any specific setting; they are not, in particular, writing a treatise on 13th-14th Century Florence nor, indeed, on Byzantine or any other form of painting. However, it seems to me that their overt strategies tend to establish a unitary space comprising the structural features of their analysis. In demonstrating this I shall establish a logic of their text rather than its linear sequence in print. They do not, here, explicitly make reference to broader theoretical or empirical fields, so that their selections are simply points of entry into their text. They then work to establish a more or less seamless, deductive line from their antecedents—here, Durkheim and Bernstein—and their organisational language (their principles). Correspondingly, the tacit empirical field comes to meet them via claims about their setting—the kind of place that Florence used to be—and the presentation of their text as an instance of that setting. Having, so to speak, discovered their text, their organisational language goes to work on its analysis, which happily bears out their definitive claims about the original setting. Essentially, they cast out to the world beyond themselves, finding Durkheim, Bernstein and Cimabue and weave them together with their linguistic apparatus in a dexterous demonstration that they are all in agreement.

These are the more explicit strategies. Implicitly, however, they are locating authority for their construction outside of that construction, in the real world. The concurrence between Durkheim and Bernstein and Cimabue and common knowledge (or, at least, easily verifiable knowledge) about Byzantine Florence is itself that which underwrites, well, itself. The value of their organisational language lies in its facility to reveal this to us. Kauffman will deploy similar strategies, though in his case he will start with a dissonance between the second law of thermodynamics (a condensation of Ludwig Boltzman and others) and the view from his own window. This is the semiotics of conjuring: we know about hats and rabbits and we know that the former cannot at the same time be empty and contain the latter—abracadabra! One problem with conjuring is that, as generations of magicians and academics have shown, almost anything can be pulled from inside almost anything else including, I’m sure, hats from rabbits. So, were we to notice the barriers and lack of obvious hypotactical organization of Piet Mondrian’s Broadway Boogie Woogie we may be inclined to read it as a transparent signifier of a strongly anomic New York at a time (1942-3) when one might have imagined the powerful unifying ideology of patriotism to be holding sway. There is also the slight problem presented by Giotto. Whilst my reading of

8 See http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/mondrian/broadway.jpg (last accessed 10/03/07).
his painting constructs similarities with Cimabue’s, the suggestion of fundamental
difference by Hodge and Kress suggests that Florence managed to resolve its
anomie in pretty short order—the paintings were produced only about twenty years
apart. Not a problem for the conjuror as such, for whom alternative outcomes to
their wand-waving can only add spice, but perhaps a little sticky for the sociologist.

A second difficulty with the conjuring approach is that there is always the
danger that someone will uncover the trick. This, of course, has been the point of
my challenges to Hodge’s and Kress’s interpretations of Durkheim and Bernstein.
What in effect they have done is to establish a cut in the discursive field, placing
Durkheim and Bernstein in one hand and Cimabue in the other, then selected the
metonyms, boundary, strength (of solidarity) and hierarchical organisation, from
the discourses of the antecedent authors and from simple descriptions of Byzantine
Florence and Cimabue’s painting and tied these string-ends together using their
own linguistic categories; just blow on my hands and, hey presto, the string is
whole again. We can always find metonymic chains linking any two concepts (see
Eco, 1984, and his illustrations in Eco, 1989). This is a very common strategy in
the social sciences, we simply make someone else’s work say whatever we want it
to say; either we make it support our own line or we use it as a fall-guy in our own
line of repartee—ventriloquism either way.

There is a third problem with conjuring to the extent that the secrets of the trick
are not revealed in the performance. This is a problem because then we are left
with rabbits hopping about all over the stage chewing on bits of string. Some
conjurors—some of those mentioned here—do try to convince us that we really do
need rabbits and bits of string, but insofar as academic work claims to be
methodologically constructive—not to mention, teachable—then we really do need
to see the method. Hodge and Kress do not hide behind a magic circle. Rather, they
provide details of their organisational language, exemplified in (but not limited to)
the seven principles that they apply to Cimabue. The difficulty here is not in the
visibility of the language but in the overall incoherence of the attempt to deploy
linguistic language to the analysis of a painting in order to reach sociological
conclusions. Furthermore, their description of Byzantine Florence renders the
whole reliant upon an unexplored transcendental move wherein the ravaged state of
social relations are synthesised by the painter and, presumably, by the churchmen
who allow the exhibition of such icons. Despite their attempts to establish a unity
in the structure of their analysis, indeed because of the way in which they have
gone about this, their structural features are isolated from each other, strung out
like beads on a chain, or like the haloed heads of angels and, within the halo, their
language stands pristine; we just have to have faith.

My own strategy of course includes elements of conjuring and ventriloquism,
not to mention realist language. What I am attempting to do, however, is mark out
a method via the strategic alienation or at least damping down of these elements
even as they appear in my own writing. My starting point is in the middle of the
structural features, with an always already existing organisational language that
constructs and selects from theoretical and empirical fields in autopoietic action.
My concern here is to market the organisational language by apprenticing my
audience into it. Key features, then, must be explicitness and coherence and, of course, distinctiveness. In my analysis of the painting I am acting constructively and selectively on its features, constituting them as semiotic resources that are translatable into my own language. Here, that language includes a recontextualisation of Durkheim’s mode of solidarity as a strategic mode. I will not retain this feature in the further development of the language throughout the rest of this book, but it serves as a useful transit stage. I have placed the boundary around my object text—the Cimabue painting—so as to include certain details of its origination and placement in Byzantine Florence. But rather than claim the painting as an instance of an absent real world, I have constituted it as an instance of my organisational language. Similarly, I have described the theoretical antecedents in terms of my organisational language. For me, these antecedents include Hodge and Kress.

I can summarise my description of their analysis alongside my description of my own diagrammatically as in Figure 2.4. Clearly, insofar as my introduction of autopoiesis is intended as a general description of the engagement of an audience with a text, then the two columns might be expected to be identical. However, my claim is that whilst I am attempting to align my textual strategies, as far as is possible, with my description of autopoiesis in keeping with the proposed fractal nature of the organisational language, Hodge and Kress do not attempt this. Indeed, there is no reason why they should since they are marketing their own work and not mine. To put it in the simplest possible terms, whilst I claim that both analyses entail the analysts seeing what they want or are able to see in the objects of their gaze, Hodge and Kress must assume some kind of input or feedback into their organisational language in order to locate the authority for their argument outside of it in a supposed independent world which is potentially available to all for verification. Their column therefore describes their textual strategies rather than their substantive actions.

FROM MYTHOLOGISING TO ORGANIZING

This work—or any part of it—stands between two regions of myth just as Stuart Kauffman’s window stands between himself and the world outside. Behind my text, so to speak, I stand as author, as originator: in front of it stands the world to which my text provides access or, alternatively, which grants the world access to me and, through me, access to itself in an infinite loop. Or is it, perhaps, a hermeneutic helix: read my text, know me to understand my text better, better to understand yourself to understand my text better and so forth. Similar constructions are, of course, a part of everyday interaction—though possibly without the perpetual motion around a single utterance. But they are also institutionalised features of academic writing. In order to obtain a PhD a candidate must demonstrate that they have produced an original contribution to knowledge in the relevant field and that this is their own work (at least, this is the case in my own
The thesis, authored by the candidate, illuminates and enhances the field. Strange that such ritual persists even in areas where the work of Barthes, Derrida, Eco, Foucault, Lacan *et al* are standard, even regarded as texts by revered authors (itself, of course, an irony). My former mentor, Basil Bernstein once asked me whether I thought that it was possible to produce a postmodern thesis. Never one to be daunted by the rhetorical nature of a question, I offered, ‘yes, but in order to succeed it would have to fail.’ I was perhaps rather naïve over the divergences between the official and local practices of thesis examination. Nevertheless, insofar as the academy must reify its knowledge—which it must celebrate—its faculty—

![Table and Diagram]

*Figure 2.4. Comparison of Analytic Strategies*
whom it must venerate—and its students—whom it must graduate, there is no official defense of a thesis that undermines either authorship or field.

Institutionalisation reins and commodifies originality, which must always be established within the context of the academic regime of myth. But yearning for a de-schooled, convivial society (Illich, 1973) is no more than an appeal to another utopia, another myth. I am taking a different line here, a pragmatic line. I cannot hedge every potentially mythologising utterance, place every word under erasure (and of course place the erasure under erasure). Rather, I want to recruit institutionalised language in the construction and presentation of what Basil Bernstein (2000) and I, following him, referred to as a language of description. Here, I have introduced the expression, organisational language, which I feel is more consistent with, in this case, itself. Since I have introduced the term ‘pragmatic’, I should perhaps point out that my ‘organisational language’ is not the same thing as Rorty’s (1989) ‘final vocabulary’ and indeed is inconsistent with it, though there are resonances and I would certainly describe the position that I am adopting here as ironic or, at least, stereoscopic (see, for example, Bann, 1995). From my authorial perspective—albeit a self-reflective authorial perspective—my organisational language is that which constructs texts-as-texts out of texts-as-work that are structurally coupled but informationally decoupled. There is no original text-as-work in the sense of an information-transmitting object. The organisational language develops in a process of autopoiesis—self-organisation. Perhaps it is also worth pointing out at this point that, because my attention is sustained on a particular organisational language, it is unhelpful to inscribe in it any indelible predicate that belongs to another. This particular organisational language is for the construction of orderly and explicit description rather than for the evaluation of its descriptions in political or empathic terms; however my other organisational languages may function, here, I can accept Rorty’s irony, but not, as part of my organisational language, his liberal sentiment.

In the opening sections of this chapter I introduced two questions that seem to me to be invoked in any embarking on textual analysis. These may be glossed as: i) ‘what is the text in question?’ and ii) ‘of what is the text an instance?’ I have referred to the process of answering the first question as bounding the text—putting a boundary around it, so to speak. So, I am given an image of a sunset over the sea. I am entranced by its steely blues and greys and yellows, by the plays in line and form above and below the horizon and the movement that invites me into the sun’s gravitational well only to be pushed away in a gleeful fort da game, like the waves themselves, massaging the sand, I am intrigued by the islands—pebbles on the horizon. Then I’m told it’s a photograph and I wonder about exposure and white balance settings—are sunsets ever really that colour? Then I’m told the name of the photographer—a close friend—and I think fondly of her shambling along the beach, arm-in-arm with her husband who smiles as she giggles as the sun goes down over the cool waves, she pauses to record the gorgeous moment on her miniature digicam and, later, a twinge of disappointment—the colours were so much more than that. There can be no absolute answer to the question—I have to decide. And to give myself room to manoeuvre I’ll generally leave the answer to
this question just a little fuzzy, but I must always be aware that even this fuzziness has implications.

I have spent rather more time on the second question. I have argued that the text is always and only an instance of the organisational language that is deployed in its reading. As I push the boundaries of my sunset over the sea text I find that my organisational language shifts from, shall we say, my aesthetic language, to a photographic language to a language of creative play with emotionally charged memories. These languages vary in their level of institutionalisation. The play of memories is perhaps closest to an idiolect although it nevertheless recruits from film and other media images—I have never seen my friend in this kind of setting with or without her husband (though I have seen them together in other settings). The aesthetic language is still unschooled, but it recruits in a slightly more regulated way via its recognisable (to some) but undisciplined (to the cognoscenti) reference to Freud. The photographic language may or may not pose the right questions, but they do at least derive directly from my reading of the user’s manual for my newest digital SLR. The key issue is the decision as to whether this text is an instance of aesthetic experience or photographic practice or personal reverie; it can be all and more, but none of these languages facilitates translation into any of the others. In other words, the organisational language that is activated constructs the objects of which it speaks and there must always be, to a greater or lesser extent, an incompatibility between languages. Hodge’s and Kress’s linguistics will not, unless fundamentally re-organised as a sociological language, speak about the social and not even Durkheim and Bernstein can otherwise provide them with secure footbridges—they’ll have to make do with magic wands. All of this is a somewhat roundabout way of saying that my organisational language should construct objects that it is actually interested in and not simply project objects-at-hand into the unknown and thereby, unknowable, reified, mythical—forensics.

The basis of my own organisational language entails that it is not transmittable, that there is a sense in which it must remain idiolectical. However, the nature and extent of the structural coupling between human interlocutors entails, perhaps, that co-autopoiesis can potentially allow the negotiation or emergence of a functional methodological alliance; this sole authored book does, after all, include two co-authored chapters. So, I shall proceed in pedagogic mode and this will entail making the organisational language as explicit as possible, using rhetorical devices where this seems to be helpful. Because the action of the language is the construction of orderly and explicit description, order or coherence must be a characteristic and its development must involve the enhancing of coherence and, indeed, the enhancing of its relational coherence. Since the language does not specialise the range of texts that it can address, it must operate independently of level of analysis, that is, it must exhibit a fractal or zoom quality. In particular, it must be capable of describing itself so that there is no effective distinction between, shall we say, theory and metatheory; there is no space for an epistemology as such. To summarise the principles of text analysis and the criteria that are to be applied to my organisational language that I have introduced in this chapter:
The Text

1. The text must be bounded even if the boundary remains, for operational purposes, a little fuzzy.
2. The text is to be understood as an instance of the organisational language that is deployed and that develops in the analysis.

The Organisational Language

3. Structurally linked to the text-as-work but informationally decoupled from it.
   - So the text-as-work is a convenient placeholder, not to be mythologised.
4. Constructs the objects about which it speaks.
5. Should be as explicit as possible.
6. Should be as coherent as possible.
   - Should be as relationally complete as possible.
7. Should exhibit a fractal or zoom quality.
   - Must be able to take itself as object.
   - No detached epistemology.

I shall have cause—particularly in Chapter 5—to depart somewhat from item 6—too much coherence is necrotising—but structural linking with a succession of new texts should entail that the complacency of undue coherence is never achieved.

As for the limited details of the organisational language that I have introduced thus far and that I will augment just a little here, I have started with the proposition—introduced, in part, in Chapter 1—that the sociocultural consists of the strategic formation, maintenance, and dismantling of oppositions and alliances, which describe emergent regularities of practice. Alliances define subject positions as what I shall refer to as subject avatars in terms, for example, what may be said or done by whom. Clearly, an alliance defines opposition avatars as objects. The human subject might be understood as a complex of subject avatars grounded in the human body as singular (another myth, of course). Focusing attention on an alliance emphasises a regularity of practice and on identities constituted in and by this regularity. Focusing attention on the human subject emphasises subjectivity and the construction and deployment of organisational languages in alliance/opposition forming, maintaining, dismantling strategies.

To return to my own response to my opening text: I could have played the game and attempted to maintain my membership of the alliance of tourists on the coach. This would have given me a range of options including, perhaps, the introduction of contrasting or resonating narratives from previous holidays (being careful, of course, not to claim too much in the way of expertise or travel experience by the use of appropriate hedging). I chose, however, to oppose the tourist alliance by invoking a discourse that was alien to my companions. This gave me almost free rein on what I could say. The outcome may have been one of enthusiasm whereby one or more of my audience switched languages to take up the position of apprentice to my teacher thus forming, potentially, a new alliance. That this did not happen should have come as no surprise.