

# **Critical Discourse Analysis**

**Analyzing the Beauty Advertisement Discourse:**

***Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty***

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# Introduction

This paper aims at analyzing an advertisement campaign for body care products in order to investigate the intentions and techniques of consumer product companies to reach more customers and sell more products. The discourse fragment analyzed is a television clip for the brand *Dove*. It has been chosen because of its relatively unorthodox way to advertise its product (body milk): in contrary to most of the current beauty advertisements it does neither show professional models nor does it give any information about the benefits customers could gain from using this body milk. On the contrary, the message of the campaign could be summarized with 'stay as beautiful as you are already'.

The methodological approach selected is Critical Discourse Analysis with the research tools of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse. It allows focusing more on the production and reception processes of the discourse than just examining the discursive text. In that way the discursive context can be viewed from different theoretical perspectives such as social or historical sciences.

The *Dove* advertisement has been very successful both, in terms of tying customers to their brand and to increase sales. This was probably achieved through their extensive campaign, which could be considered more as being an image campaign for the brand itself than for their products. To establish a 'counter-discourse' contrary to the actual beauty ideal<sup>1</sup> seems to have been successful. However, it shall be argued that this is merely a clever strategy driven by economic interest and not by social or political commitment.

The findings of this study are limited in size and content, for intensive research of production implications could only be possible by analyzing more contextual material and integrating quantitative methods in order to be comparative. Nevertheless, a broad theoretical review on Critical Discourse Analysis is included to make the conclusion more understandable.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about common body practices and beauty Ideals see *H.P. Waldrich: Perfect Body*. (references).

## II. Theoretical Basics

This discursive analysis shall be based on sociolinguist and poststructuralist Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is supposed to be an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse. It views 'language as a form of social practice' (Fairclough 1989: 20) and focuses on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by 'text and talk'. Besides Fairclough, some further theorists shall be included to foster the understanding of what could be described as 'discourse' and as CDA.

### 1. What is Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis?

Viennese linguist Ruth Wodak states that the term discourse is used in different contexts ("in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines, including the applied branches of linguistics" Wodak 1999: 7), which has led to "considerable semantic fuzziness and terminological flexibility" (ibid.). James P. Gee confirms this by describing discourse as "language (oral or written) in use" and as a term with "more socio-politically orientated meanings" (Gee 2005: 1). In Britain CDA is built on Michel Foucault's theory of discourse (discourse = practice; discourse = a system of representation), and is linked to the systemic linguistic theory (Halliday/ Firth) and to social semiotics (Halliday) (cp. Wodak 1999: 7)). In this tradition Fairclough defines discourse "as just a particular form of social practice" (Fairclough 1989: 42), in the center of which power and ideology mutually influence and interact with one another. Wodak additionally emphasizes the historical dimension of discursive acts. She defines the subject of CDA as follows:

*"Critical Discourse Analysis centers on authentic everyday communication in institutional, media, political or other locations rather than on sample sentences or sample texts constructed in linguists' minds. [CDA] regards both written and spoken 'discourse' as a form of social practice. It assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive acts and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and, in turn, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it. (Wodak (et al.) 199: 8)" (Emphasis Y.H.).*

#### 1.1. The Aim of Critical Discourse Analysis

Discursive practices establish, conceal or transform power relations between those involved in a specific discourse. Wodak describes the approach of CDA as being "emancipatory and socially critical", such a way that scientists applying this method ally themselves "with those who suffer political and social injustice". In this sense CDA intervenes discursively in given social and political practices (ibid.).

*“The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use (ibid.).”*

Hillary Janks emphasizes again that social practices deal with existing social relations in different powerful ways (Janks 1997: 26). This is her definition of CDA’s paradigm:

*“Where analysis seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in relations of power it is called Critical Discourse Analysis (ibid.).”*

This way of conducting an analysis is called critical, as Fairclough confirms: it is not only critical “in the sense that it seeks to discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque”, but mainly because it is “committed to progressive social change; (...)

*CDA “has an emancipatory ‘knowledge interest’ (Fairclough 2001: 29).”*

## **1.2. What is ‘Context’?<sup>2</sup>**

Critical Discourse Analysts want to make “the reciprocal relationship between discursive action and political and institutional practices (ibid: 9)” transparent by using a methodologically pluralistic approach (historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives). This is based on the concept of context that allows to go beyond mere analysis of written text and to also take in consideration different sets of data from discursive practices like posters and brochures, psychological factors and motives of speakers, their environment, etc. (ibid.).

“Discourse Analysis is basically the analysis of “language in context”, affirms Gee (Gee 2005: 1). To him, “‘context’ ultimately means the very shape, meaning, and effect of the social world – the various social roles people play, the socially and culturally situated identities they take on, the social and cultural activities they engage in, as well as the material, cognitive, social, cultural, and political effects of these” (ibid.). The function of language is twofold: reflecting and creating context.

In terms of Fairclough’s three dimensional model for CDA, the analyzing of context has to do with analyzing of the processes of production and reception of a discourse fragment. Thus he “refers to the situational context [questions about time and place] and the intertextual context [looking for additional texts/information about or from producers and their product] as central for the process of interpretation (Janks 1997: 37)”.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of context is related with the terms discursive practice and social practice.

## 2. Methodology for CDA - the Three- Dimensional Model of Discourse

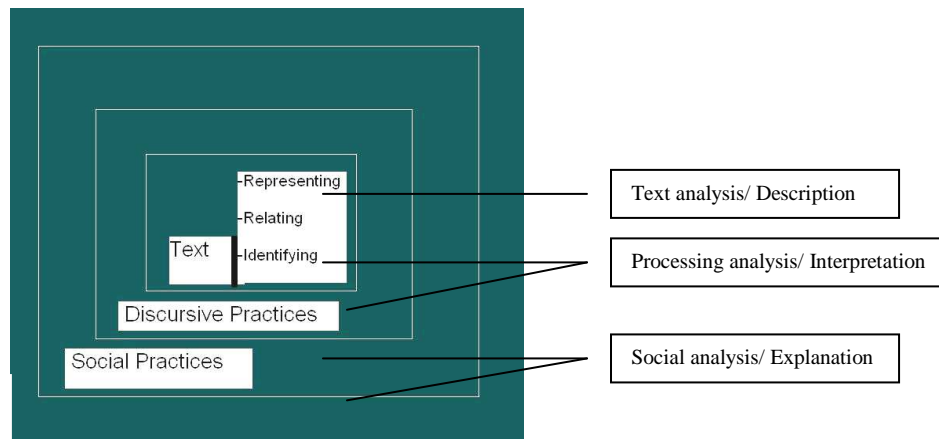


Fig.1: Fairclough's dimension of discourse and discourse analysis (Janks 1991:27)

(Inner square= 1st dimension, middle square= 2nd dimension, outer square= 3rd dimension)

Hillary Janks shows how CDA can be used as a research tool by introducing Fairclough's concept of the interrelated three dimensions of discourse (the dimensions being represented as boxes nesting one inside the other). The first dimension represents the discourse fragment, i.e. "the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts) (Janks 1997: 26)"<sup>3</sup>; the second dimension can be described as the aspect of context, or even the place where struggles over power relations in discourse happen, or, as Janks puts it, the dimension where "the processes by which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects (ibid.)" take place; and finally, the third dimension of discourse could be described as 'power behind discourse' or as social practices, because it is containing "the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes [of production and reception]" (Janks 1997: 26).

For each dimension there has to be conducted a different type of analysis: for the first dimension 'text analysis' or description, for the second dimension 'processing analysis' or interpretation, and for the third dimension it is the 'social analysis' or explanation (cp. ibid.). All dimensions are interdependent and therefore it does not matter with which kind of analysis one begins; they are "mutually explanatory" (ibid.: 27). In their interconnections "the analyst finds interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained (ibid.)". For a better understanding of each of the analysis processes there now shall be discussed some further theory.

<sup>3</sup>In a 'text' 'discursive participants' may be represented in different ways, and for that reason Fairclough divided the text dimension up into another three levels: 1.Representing (=Creation of knowledge and beliefs about the world), 2.Relating (=Creating a relationship between producers and consumers), 3.Identifying (Creating a subject position for the reader/ Creating an *ideal reader*). See also 4.2. *The functional model – a scheme for classifying linguistic structures*.

### 3. Power and Discourse<sup>4</sup>

To explain the relation between power and discourse we shall now take a look at Norman Fairclough's work *language and power* (London 1989: p.43-76), where he distinguishes between power in discourse and power behind discourse. Power *in* discourse as a form of social practice is exercised in various ways – for example in face-to-face encounters or in the discourse of the mass media. Power *behind* discourse describes the formation of the orders of social practices, which are themselves shaped and constituted by power relations. Besides that Fairclough discusses several effects of power, like naturalizations or conventions associated with a discourse type, and the constraints on access to discourses within an order of discourse. Moreover, he stresses that power “is never definitively held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through *social struggles* in which it may also be lost (Fairclough 1989: 43)” (Emphasis Y.H.).

In the following part the notions of the “social struggles for power” and the “powerful constraints on discourse” shall be described more detailed.

#### 3.1. Access to Discourse and Social Struggle

Before we may ask who is exercising power over whom and in what ways, we should first know who is able to do so. This leads us to the subject matter of social struggle and the question of access and constraints on access to discourse. To support his theory of the reproduction of the unequal class system through power discourses, Fairclough refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of '*cultural capital*', which is understood metaphorically as being analogous to economic capital. Cultural capital can be accumulated through the access to and the '*possession*' of several '*cultural goods*', such as education, use of language, access to exclusive social institutions and their practices, to high job positions, etc. These '*cultural goods*' are unequally distributed or unequally accessible in society, “so that members of (...) the '*dominant bloc*' (the capitalist class, the '*middle class*', the professions) have substantially more of them than members of the working class – they are richer in '*cultural capital*' (Fairclough 1989: 63)”. As being crucial for the reproduction of these differentials in access Fairclough names the educational system and other social institutions (i.e. the current power-holders in them), which again themselves are built on the system of class relations on the societal level. Nevertheless the notion of '*social struggle*' already implies that these class relations are not stable, and this applies even more to power relations in discourse: “ (...)”

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<sup>4</sup> For the three dimensional model of CDA the analysis of power relations and discourse would occupy the second and the third dimension (processing analysis and social analysis) of the model.

those who hold power at a particular moment have to constantly reassert their power, and those who do not hold power are always liable to make a bid for power (ibid.: 68).” To further explain his concept Fairclough divides the social organization into three levels - situational, institutional and societal organization - , and suggests that “any given piece of discourse may simultaneously be a part of a situational struggle, an institutional struggle, and a societal struggle [including class struggle] (ibid.: 70)”. In relations to power and discourse this means that struggle at the situational level could be seen as making efforts to gain power in discourse whereas the institutional and the societal struggles could be described as power behind discourse (cp. ibid.). Fairclough clarifies:

*”We might say that, in terms of ‘power in discourse’, discourse is the site of power struggles, and, in terms of ‘power behind discourse’, it is the stake in power struggles – for control over orders of discourse is a powerful mechanism for sustaining power” (Fairclough 1989: 74).*

Another interesting aspect of the struggles for power he discusses is the question why power is marked every time less overtly while exercised in discourse. In Fairclough’s eyes there is neither a ‘decrease of inequality’ nor is there a ‘international conspiracy for hiding power for manipulative reasons’ (cp. ibid.: 71f.) He interprets the exercising of *hidden power* “as a concession on the part of power-holders which they have been forced to make by the increase in the relative power of working-class people and other groupings of formerly powerless and disregarded people – women, youth, black people, gay people, etc. (Ibi.: 72).” Power-holders have to act more sensitive towards the strength of the ‘relatively unpowerful’ and therefore use new tactics to maintain their power like adopting forms of expression (speech, habits, clothes) or disguising their control through practices like counseling (cp. Ibid.).

### **3.2. Constraints on Discourse**

Fairclough differentiates between three types of constraints on discourse: constraints on *contents*, on *relations* and on *subjects*. Talking about Power relations in discourse, for the exercise of power in face-to-face encounters this would mean restrictions on firstly what is said or done, secondly on the social relations people enter into in discourse (what they are doing), and, thirdly, the ‘subject positions’ people can occupy (who they are). In short: Powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of non- powerful participants in these three ways; they more or less determine directly the discourse types exercised (cp.: 46f.). On the contrary, for discourses where participants are separated in place and time, like in the mass-media discourse, the nature of power relations and constraints is less obvious, and that is why Fairclough calls these hidden relations of power. Because of this division between

producers and consumers he emphasizes the `one-sidedness` of this discourse type: producers exercise power over consumers, or, in other words, the media mediates power relations (including class relations) between power-holders and the mass of the population. Fairclough's approach of analyzing discourses focuses on the signifiers that make up the discourse fragment: he asks whether they produce them in a hidden or overt manner (`Inculcation` vs. `Communication`, see 2.4.). Hillary Janks emphasizes that the processes of production and reception are always to be understood in their historical context and that they are socially constrained (cp. Janks 1997: 27). Another aspect of the mass-media discourse is that neither the producers nor the audience or consumers know who their counterparts really are. Therefore the media producers create their ideal viewers, readers or listeners, i.e. their *ideal subject* and thus control the discourse powerfully. Nevertheless is the audience able to negotiate their relationship to ideal subjects, and this can mean that they keep a distance to the sometimes manipulative influences of the media, or even try to fight against their power (cp.: 49ff.). Janks confirms that by saying that "what texts construct are only versions of reality (Janks 1997: 28)", and that is why "reading against the text [is necessary] to counterbalance reading with the text (ibid.: 29)". She calls these two practices `Estrangement` and `Engagement`. In terms of power relations she notes that it is often the people who lack `cultural capital` for dominant literacy or that are labeled as disadvantaged are able to read `against the grain` of a text and thus interpret it more critically (cp. ibid.: 28).

As far as power *behind* discourse is concerned, it is the conventions of discourse types which constrain the contributions of specific participants in terms of contents, relations and subjects. Contributions and constrained contributions to conventions of discourse types have `relatively structural and long-term` effects on the specific discourse and the social practices (social relationships and identities) enacted in it. These effects, says Fairclough, are "of a more general sort", and affect "knowledge and beliefs [constraints on contents], social relationships [constraints on relations], and social identities [constraints on subjects] of an institution or society (ibid.: 74)".

### **3.3. Mechanisms to achieve a `Coherent Society`**

A society is build, simplistically spoken, by diverse social practices and discourse types, but they need to be more or less consistent and coherent to make it function. To achieve this "coordination and commonality of practice in respect of knowledge and beliefs, social relationships and social identities (ibid.: 75)"; Fairclough distinguishes three main types of mechanisms: 1. *Naturalization*, 2. *Inculcation*, and 3. *Communication*. The first mechanism

describes social practices which are “universally followed and necessarily accepted because no alternative seems possible (ibid.)”, e.g. to wash and care for ones body every once in a while in order to stay healthy. The mechanism of Inculcation may be seen as exercising hidden power ‘behind’ discourse in order to “naturalize partial and interested practices to facilitate the exercise and maintenance of power [and maintenance of class domination and division] (ibid.)”. To stay with our example from above, we could think of economic power-holders who try to naturalize the practice of daily body care in order to control body practices and make economic benefits. The third way to gain commonality is the mechanism of communication, “a process of rational communication and debate (ibid.)”, which would be for instance an overt discussion about physical hygiene on different public platforms.

Ruth Wodak agrees on that “discursive acts are socially constitutive in a variety of ways. Firstly, they are largely responsible for the genesis, production and construction of particular social conditions [which could be compared with Fairclough’s mechanism of ‘naturalization’]. Secondly, they can contribute to the restoration, legitimation or relativisation of a social status quo. Thirdly, discursive acts are employed to maintain and reproduce the status quo [2 and 3 could be compared with ‘inculcation’]. Fourthly, discursive practice may be effective in transforming, dismantling or even destroying the status quo [which could be compared with ‘communication’] (Wodak 1999: 8)”.

To understand the power relations and struggles which work behind discourses and which form our social practices, it is crucial to ask who has access to discourses, whose access is constrained and through which mechanisms. Fairclough therefore suggests to focus on the mechanisms of communication and inculcation and their struggle in contemporary society: “a long term focus of the struggle over discourse is the issue whether constraints on contents, relations and subjects are to be imposed through inculcation [and it seems that this should be the main subject of CDA] (...) or coordinated through communication (ibid.)”.

#### **4. Ideology and Discourse<sup>5</sup>**

The notion of ‘ideology’ shall not be discussed intensively in this essay. Yet it is a vital concept in discourse studies. For that reason Roger Fowler’s (1991) conception of ideology in the media discourse shall be mentioned here, as well as his introduction to the ‘functional model’, developed by M.A.K. Halliday.

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<sup>5</sup> For the three dimensional model of CDA this analysis could occupy the first dimension (text analysis).

#### **4.1. Ideology in the Media**

From the perspective of critical linguistics, Fowler states that texts (or ‘representation of experience, of events and concepts’) already have been produced from a specific ideological viewpoint, and “that values, or ideology, differ systematically in different forms of expression[s used] (Fowler 1991: 66)”. The public is often unaware of this process. Even though people are able to occupy different (social) roles, to have different views of the world and to access numerous kinds of discourses, they do not seem to ‘use’ these skills. “People are not terribly conscious of linguistic variety, or if they are, they are normative [and narrow-minded] about it: they tend to believe that there is a ‘correct’ mode of discourse for a given type of situation, either their own, or that of some prestige speaker (ibid.)”. Fowler illustrates the diverse use of language to express ideology by introducing the ‘functional model’.

#### **4.2. The Functional Model - a Scheme for classifying Linguistic Structures**

Michael Halliday, the ‘father’ of the systemic functional linguistics, proposed that all language performs three interrelated functions: the *ideational*, the *interpersonal* and the *textual* function<sup>6</sup>. The ideational function of language stands for the ordering and the representation of experience, i.e. of ‘mental models’<sup>7</sup>. Ideology may be transmitted through different semantic concepts such as ‘transitivity’, ‘nominalization’ or a specific lexical structure. The interpersonal function is corresponding to the communication role adopted by a speaker in relation to others. This function could also be described as the mediation of social relationships and values through language (or ‘speech acts’, another term used by Fowler). The textual function of language means that discourse (as well as the first and second function of language) becomes possible because the speaker/writer is able to produce a text using it and the listener/reader can recognize the text. In this sense one could say that language makes links with itself and the situation or context (cp. Fowler 1991: 69).

Language is more than mere communication, states Fowler, and says that modern linguistics views language as practice or as a mode of action (cp. *ibid.*: 87). His critique on Halliday’s model therefore is that it implies that language use and communication are individually and intentionally exercised. It leaves aside the influences or determination of the social: “Content, speakers/writers, listeners/readers and roles are largely constructed through language. They

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<sup>6</sup> All three functions fit into the first dimension of Fairclough’s/Jank’s three dimensional model for CDA. They can be related to the three levels of the text dimension: ideational – Representing, interpersonal – Relating, and Identifying as well as the textual function.

<sup>7</sup> The notion of ‘mental models’ has been used by various discourse analysts (e.g. T. van Dijk). Fowler connects it here closely with the expressional function of language: the speaker/writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world as well as his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness (cp. Fowler 1991: 69). J.P. Gee puts it in more general terms: “Language mediates (stands between) the individual (“the mind”) and the social (“society”) (Gee 2005:1).”

are derived from the meanings of discourses (associated with the institutions relevant to the production and consumption of the text) (ibid.: 70).” Therefore he proposes that the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual function of language are sets of social options and not of personal choice. However he finds them helpful to analyze the specific purpose or ideological implication different use of grammar has (in its specific context) (cp. ibid.).

## 5. Criticism of CDA’s Paradigm

One of the reasons why so many different scientists are involved in this chapter of ‘theoretical basics’ is that there are actually many of them working on discourse. Even though ‘discourse analysis’ is a relatively new theory in the scientific world, it seems to lack some clear conceptual outlines of its position, which are present not only due to its short time of existence. Henry G. Widdowson (applied linguistics- background) sums this up by saying that ‘discourse’ is “in vogue and vague (Widdowson 1995: 132).” Regarding to the ‘*conceptual confusion*’, Michael Stubbs claims that there is no empirical proof for a relation between language and thought. How does language use (discourse) actually affect or shape habitual thought? (cp. Stubbs 1997: 207). Widdowson argues that first of all the term discourse has to be defined more clearly, and that CDA fails to distinguish between the terms of text and discourse<sup>8</sup>.

The next question discussed is whether it is useful or rather confusing to conduct interdisciplinary analysis. In terms of the ‘*scope of description*’ Widdowson claims that it should be made obvious whether one analyses his object with a linguistic approach investigating linguistic data or with a sociological approach, paying more attention to social factors and to context. Stubbs agrees on the point that data selection should be made more thoroughly and understandable. He calls for the inclusion of quantitative methods in CDA and for a greater amount of data investigation in order to increase comparability.

Another point of critique is the question of CDA’s *commitment* and its possible *circularity*:

“CDA aims at explaining not how social inequalities are reflected or created in language itself, as social semiotic, but in the use of language as social action. You cannot explain how people express their ideology by assuming in advance that ideology is already fixed in the language (Widdowson 1995: 142).”

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<sup>8</sup> Widdowson says: „I identify a text not by its linguistic extent [they can come in all shapes and sizes] but its social intent (Widdowson 1995: 138)”. Interpreting a text is where discourse comes in: Discourse “is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation (ibid.)”. He calls this process also “acting of context on code (ibid.)”. Therefore he also makes a difference between text analysis (internal functions of semantic signification) and discourse analysis (external function of pragmatic significance) (cp. ibid.:141f.).

Stubbs agrees that the textual interpretation seems to be rather politically than linguistically motivated, and adds in correspondence to the political commitment “that analysts find what they expect to find, whether it is absences or presences (Stubbs 1997.: 204).” He points out why he thinks that CDA is conceptually circular: the analysis, or, as he calls it, the interpretation is in itself historically bound and ‘disguised from a political correctness` (cp. *ibid.*). Widdowson separates the terms of interpretation and analysis clearly: interpreting means to find one particular meaning more valid than others, and analyzing tries to show the factors which lead to several possible meanings. For him the term ‘critical` in CDA therefore implies some form of ideological interpretation. He considers the name Critical Discourse Analysis as being a “contradiction in terms”, and declares it invalid as being some sort of interpretation (cp. Widdowson 1995: 133f.).

### **III. Analysis**

This paper aims at analyzing a discursive object with the means of the three dimensional discourse model developed by Norman Fairclough and here introduced through Hillary Janks (see *I. Theoretical basics*). The three dimensions of discourse have to be analyzed with a different focus. However, one should always bear in mind that they are interdependent.

The discourse fragment which shall be analyzed is an advertisement for a body care product – a television spot for body milk by the brand *Dove* broadcasted in Germany (released in 2004).

#### **1. First Dimension: Text Analysis – Description**

The first dimension of the discourse fragment and the corresponding form of analysis covers the description of the text – the term text meaning not only ‘linguistic units` of sentences or clauses, but all semiotic indications, such as (moving) images, different colors, sounds, signs, etc. (‘multi-modal` text). After the analysis there shall also be a short investigation of contents and social roles or role models being represented (Representing, Relating and Identifying).

### 1.1. The multi-modal Text of the Dove Advertisement Video Clip

We shall begin with the description of the video clip. Its length is 31 seconds, and it consists of about 18 scenes (each up to 3 sec. length). Their content can be summarized as following:

Scene	Camera	Female nr.	“Ethnic type”	Hair Colour
1 <sup>st</sup>	Skin close-up	1	light skin colour	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Tattooed back	2	light skin colour	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mouth and freckled décolleté	3		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Freckled face, concerned expression	3		Red hair
5 <sup>th</sup>	Tattooed back; shift to young face with pierced lip	2		
6 <sup>th</sup>	Star-shaped scar on belly with pierced navel	4		
7 <sup>th</sup>	Camera moving from chest up to face	4		
8 <sup>th</sup>	Pierced navel	4		
9 <sup>th</sup>	Long shot of Asian female	5		Black hair
10 <sup>th</sup>	Five women far advanced in pregnancy, standing in a semi- circle holding each other´ s hips. Focus on bellies	6, 7, 8, 9,10	2 dark skinned, 3 light skinned	
11 <sup>th</sup>	Feet of a baby in front of the woman’s belly. Baby gets lifted up, camera stays focused on the belly; where a caesarean section scar becomes noticeable.	11, (11a)	Light skin color	
12 <sup>th</sup>	Two faces: smiling woman and baby	11, (11a)		Blond hair
13 <sup>th</sup>	Crossed wrinkled hands on shinbone	12	Light skin color	
14 <sup>th</sup>	Friendly face of an about 60 years old woman	12	Light skin color	Grey hair
15 <sup>th</sup>	Camera moves up the legs, a scar on the knee is visible	13	Light skin color	
16 <sup>th</sup>	Belly with vertical scar, hands crossed, camera moves up to breast	14	Dark skinned color	
17 <sup>th</sup>	Giggling face	15	Dark skinned color	Black hair
18 <sup>th</sup>	White drop, “Jede Haut ist schön”, body milk bottle			

The camera style is ‘clean and clear` because of its slow moves, simple images and the close up shots. The color is monochrome and the background is neutral; there are no objects to be seen, just people. Nobody is speaking neither directly (actors) nor indirectly (commentators). There is only a light jazzy music, with a female voice singing these lyrics:

*You gotta have skin. / All you really need is skin. / Skin's the thing that if you got it outside, / It helps keep your insides in. / It covers your nose, / And it's wrapped around your toes. / Ain't you glad you've got skin? / Mmmmmm (humming)*

Finally, after the image of a white fluid dropped down, a blue fond appears, saying in German that every skin is beautiful (“Jede Haut ist schön”). In the left upper corner of the first letter of this fond appears the small little picture of a golden dove. This actually is the icon of the brand *Dove*. About one second later the *Dove* body milk bottle comes into view at the lower right corner of the screen.

## 1.2. Text Analysis

The video clip shows only women that do not look like typical models in beauty advertisements (thin, young, perfect skin, teeth, haircut, make-up, etc.). They come from various ethnic backgrounds and different age groups; all of them have diverse special features that may be categorized in the following way:

Natural	Artificial
Inborn → freckles, skin type and skin color	Intended → tattoo, piercing, hair cut
Situational → pregnancy, age, weight	Unintended → scars



Despite their body marks the majority of the women seem to be content and happy with themselves. One gets the impression of an intimate, natural and healthy/clean relation between them and their bodies. They show their scars, elder skin or freckles to the camera without shyness or embarrassment. Moreover, they seem to embrace life and to accept the role of being a mother, yet staying independent and still live their own lifestyle (e.g. expectant mothers meeting up with friends (cp. scene 10)).

This reception is reinforced by the camera style: it creates intimacy through close ups and purity through clear and simple images. The monochrome color emphasizes this again. It adds a sense of aestheticism to the bodies shown and gives a ‘timeless’ impression. The black & white style also supports the perception of diversity of the women. The viewer sees unique yet emblematic characters, because they symbolize different types of women like ‘the elder women’, ‘the young and wild girl’ (tattoos and piercing), ‘the independent mother’, etc. (the text level analyzed here could be described with Representing, see below). All these women seem to be both, very modern in terms of their body style and attitude, as well as ‘timeless’ characters in more general terms (women of all types are represented). This possibly appeals a wide range of female viewers, they can *identify* (or wish to do so) themselves with at least one of these role models.

This could be the reason why the lyrics of the song are in English, even though the clip aims at the German public: people from different backgrounds can be unified by a language. And even if they are all different, they all have 'skin' (title of the song) and feel the need to care for it. The habit of caring and styling ones body is traditionally female, so women are addressed here by only showing women dealing with their bodies. The singer is also female, and seems to be self-confident, personable and familiar (the voice could be or from a jazz singer of the 1940ies, proven by some scratches on the record, or simply 'the girl next door' singing in the shower). There are no distracting details in this video clip, the images and the music are clear and light and create a coherent mood and a sense of well-being. The intimacy transmitted furthers identification.

The clip culminates in the positive message that all skin types are beautiful. The effect of this simple but far-reaching message is reinforced through its deep blue color. This is the first time color is used at all in this advertisement. It seem to make a connection between the clip and the real life of the viewer as well as a link between the message transmitted through the clip and the brand *Dove*, as the same color is used for the fond of *Dove*.

At no time is there any verbal comment, explanation or connection being made between the video clip and the actual product, the *Dove* body milk. The images and music shall speak for themselves and make the viewer an active part of the process of meaning negotiation. In this sense one could also say that the real producers and their purposes are being mystified or hidden. The only thing that is declared openly is the ideological viewpoint on beauty: "Jede Haut ist schön". But then again we may ask: who says this and why? If we look at the second part of our analysis, we will realize that this ad is part of a whole advertisement campaign, the "Campaign for real beauty". In this way one could understand the video clip more as being part of a positive image campaign for the brand *Dove* in general than for body milk.

Considering the three levels of the text dimension, one could say that in terms of Identifying the subject position created is that of a healthy (cares for herself and her children), self-confident (diverse body features), content (happy), and educated (should be sensitive in terms of racism/diversity, should understand English →song) woman. Thinking about the level of Relating, it is clear that this is a sales-consumer relation, even though this is not obvious in the beginning of the video clip and there is no direct information about the product or its use. Concerning the level of Representation, the belief created is identical with the message of the advertisement: all skin types are beautiful (in their own special ways), and so is every woman, regardless of her age, weight or body marks. The self esteem of women shall be strengthened.

## **2. Second Dimension: Processing Analysis<sup>9</sup> – Interpretation**

This discourse dimension will be covered by the processing analysis – asking questions like who are the producers and what are their objectives? What is the context of the production?

First of all, the ‘situational context’ (Fairclough) of producers and the production shall be sketched out. The video clip has been planned by the German advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather which is operating internationally (offices in Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, and Stuttgart). The television advertisement for *Dove* has been made in Düsseldorf and was released in Germany in spring 2004. It has been created for the English-Dutch consumer-products giant<sup>10</sup> Unilever, which produces mainly two categories of goods: “food and home” and “personal care”. It distributes brands like *Dove*, *Axe*, *Impulse*, *Viss*, *Signal*, *Knorr* in Europe.

*“Unilever is one of the world’s leading suppliers of fast moving consumer goods across foods, home and personal product categories. Unilever’s portfolio includes some of the world’s best known and most loved brands (About Unilever 2006:1).”*

On its homepage [www.unilever.com](http://www.unilever.com) the Unilever group defines its philosophy:

*“Our mission is to add **vitality** to life. We meet everyday brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life (Emphasis Y.H.)”*

Unilever, like any kind of enterprise, aims at making profits and satisfying its shareholders.

*“Functions: Our five support functions (Finance, HR, IT, Communications and Legal) provide value-adding business partnership, strategic support and competitive services to the whole business (especially the regional and category organisations). They are organised around the model of business partners, shared services and expertise (ibid.)”.*

Let us now take a look at the ‘intertextual context’ (Fairclough) of the discourse fragment. The brand *Dove* exists since 1957 and started its success in the USA with soap, the “*Dove Beauty Bar*”. The market launch of *Dove* in Germany has been in 1991. In 2004 the brand introduced its break-through “Campaign for real beauty” there, being both, an advertisement campaign for *Dove* products as well as an attempt to fight “unrealistic beauty ideals”, says global brand director Silvia Lagnado (2005 *Dove Global Study*: 5). The whole campaign is based on several scientific studies and opinion polls<sup>11</sup> carried out internationally throughout the last years, among them: “Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs” (global study of 2005). The findings imply that many women and girls feel

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<sup>9</sup> There is a large appendix at the end of this paper in order to clarify Unilever’s and Dove’s position and interests. To integrate this information here, the appendix itself would have been needed to be analyzed. This again could be an interesting challenge for future studies.

<sup>10</sup> The number of employees in 2005 (in total): 206.000

<sup>11</sup> For example by Studies conducted in collaboration with Harvard University (Dr. Nancy Etcoff from the Harvard Medical School) and London School of Economics (Dr. Susie Orbach, psychotherapist). Interestingly, many of the leading figures here are female.

themselves put under pressure by the beauty ideals of today (to be thin, young, well-built, have healthy and clean skin, etc.). As a result, *Dove* built a Self-Esteem Fund, and also launched its advertisement campaign that shows only women of ‘normal beauty’ (not too thin, with little ‘imperfections’) – so called “second-best models”.

Considering the *reception process*, the reactions on this advertisement campaign have been diverse, yet mainly positive (the campaign was actively discussed both in the business and scientific world as well as on internet platforms<sup>12</sup>). Yet some people see behind *Dove*’s strategy of establishing a more “normal” beauty ideal only economic interest. As a matter of fact, since the release of this campaign sales increased.

### **3. Third dimension: Social analysis – Explanation**

The aspect of ‘context’ forms not only part of the second discourse dimension, but also of the third dimension on a macro level. The social analysis seeks to answer questions like: with what kind(s) of discourse(s) or social practices is the object of investigation interrelated?

#### **3.1. Discourse Types covered by the Dove Advertisement**

The *Dove* advertisement “Campaign for real beauty” in general and the video clip analyzed above in specific cover a great number of discourses such as inequality, globalization, health, and others. It would be impossible to investigate all of them in this paper; just three discourse types shall be chosen for the explanation: beauty/beauty ideals, gender and ethnocentrism.

As already discussed in the description of the perception processes, the *Dove* advertisement can be considered as being ambiguous: On the one hand it tries to cover diverse socio-cultural practices or discourses positively, but on the other hand the commitment pointed out can be criticized as being manipulative or fake for the simple purpose of selling products. There shall now be taken a closer look on three discourse types and the ambiguous way in which the *Dove* advertisement covers them

#### The ‘beauty discourse’

With its whole campaign, *Dove* seems to want to intervene in the current beauty discourse (‘counter-discourse’) and to change predominant stereotypes and unrealistic beauty ideals in order to modify women’s social position and self-image. This could be proven by the choice of working with non-professional models that represent the ‘normal’ women of a modern globalized society in a confident and positive way. Another indication would be the

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<sup>12</sup>See appendix, e.g. Institut für qualitative Markt- & Medienanalyse in Köln: [www.rheingold-online.de](http://www.rheingold-online.de) or [www.campaignforrealbeauty.com](http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com)

demonstration of “taboos” (e.g. scars) in a beauty advertisement. In addition, the clip tries to not (overtly) convince or push the potential customers to buy their products. It seems like *Dove* respects women as being independent and intelligent and therefore deliberately leaves the decision to buy or not buy up to them.

But there are also some arguments in contra to this positive reception. Even though *Dove* stresses that every woman is beautiful in her own way (and so probably tries to enlarge their potential target group), they actually show only attractive and confident people. No depressed, somehow disabled, overweight, or even skinny women are visible. No one suffering from skin diseases or hair loss is portrayed. Isn't this also part of 'normal life' and 'normal beauty'? The question is: how far can a brand actually go with creating a counter-discourse to the predominant beauty ideal? And does not the modern and individual picture of women drawn upon in the clip also form part of this ideal? Thus they create an incomplete and restricted reflection of “real beauty” and therefore no convincing counter-discourse. Furthermore, it has to be doubted that *Dove's* only interest is to promote a new consciousness of beauty or merely make respectful offers to get in contact with their products and their philosophy. The main aim, it seems, is to make profits; and to achieve this in a different, but also hidden manner.

### The gender discourse

The gender discourse is closely linked to the beauty discourse. The attempt of *Dove* is to promote the ideal of a self-confident, modern, independent woman. This is reinforced by only showing women in the spot; men are not needed to praise the product or to add a more serious or professional (e.g. scientific comments on the effects of the body milk) note to the spot. Women seemingly are independent of the views and opinions of others; they themselves define their beauty (and worth). This can be drawn from the fact that they show their body marks publicly by acting in this clip. The image of self-determining women is emphasized by showing several social roles they can occupy: being caring, loving mothers and at the same time independent, confident women. This skill is reflected by the looks of their skin. It can be both, shaped individually (tattoos) and through their role as mothers (caesarean section scar).

However, by advertising body milk the traditional convention is being reproduced that women need to take (more) care of their bodies (than men) if they want to be attractive. The importance which is given to the female body and skin could still put pressure on women to look pretty. What is more, they could feel as being objectified through this. Additionally, the traditional ideal of being a mother is reproduced, even though in a modern way. For women who are unable to have children, this can transmit a feeling of not being 'woman enough'.

### The ethnic discourse

Although the spot has been produced for German viewers and the font is in German, the lyrics of the song are in English. This could be an attempt to integrate non-German – speakers and emphasizes that *Dove* is for everybody. Through showing women from different ethnic backgrounds it becomes clear that all kinds of women can identify with it. In addition, none of the women shown act according to their traditional culture but according to their personalities. In general, the focus lies not on cultural differences but on equalities (self-confident women who decide and care for themselves).

Nevertheless, the purpose of using a song with English lyrics and to show women of different cultures could also be in order to create a “modern, international touch” of this advertisement. Anyway, the product body milk is mainly produced for and used in modern western societies.

To conclude one could say that the *Dove* advertisement campaign touches several important discourse types of current interest and deals with social problems that indeed exist in many societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether it is driven by mere economic interests or by pure social and political commitment is a question of interpretation. This shall now be discussed in the next chapter, where the findings of the analysis shall be represented.

## **IV. Findings**

In this section the analysis and the theoretical basics discussed in the beginning shall be linked to then eventually draw a conclusion. The main aim of CDA is to analyze and reveal power relations implicated in discourse. In the discourse type chosen in this paper, an advertisement campaign, the producer is the brand *Dove* (on a macro level it is the Unilever group). They exercise power through constraints on contents, relations and subject; it is them who control the course of the discourse. This again happens from a specific ideological viewpoint (see *II. Analysis, 2.1.*). Let us say that regarding the video clip as far as contents are concerned, *Dove* states contrary to current beauty ideals that everybody is beautiful in their own special way. In terms of constraints on relations, women are showing their skin and scars publicly without embarrassment or shyness. The subject position they occupy is the of ‘normal, imperfect’ yet

self-confident and happy women<sup>13</sup>. Concerning the reception process, one needs to bear in mind that consumers and producers are separated in place and time in the mass media discourse. Therefore the producer create an ideal subject, i.e. an ideal consumer (‘target-group’), which in this case could be a modern, independent, self-confident ‘middle class’ woman. Nevertheless, the actual viewer or consumer negotiates with this image, thus ‘working class’ girls could be appealed as well.

However, considering Fairclough’s definition of power behind discourse, it is clear that *everybody* within a discourse type is governed by its specific conventions: Power *behind* discourse is “the power effect whereby this discourse type comes to be imposed upon all of those involved (Fairclough 1989: 61)”, producers, consumers, designers, models, etc. “But the power behind the conventions of a discourse type belongs *not* to the institution itself (whatever that would mean)<sup>14</sup> but to the power-holders in the institution (ibid.) (Emphasis Y.H.)”. To sum up, this means that conventions of discourse types are shaped by those who have power behind discourse – and “such shaping is achieved through ideology (ibid.)”. Yet: “power, whether it be ‘in’ discourse or ‘behind’ discourse, is never definitively held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and *through social struggles* in which it may also be lost (ibid: 43)”. That is why current power-holders have to “constantly reassert their power (ibid: 68)”, because the ‘relatively unpowerful’ (of the particular moment) are liable to strive for it and grasp it.

This could be one reason why actual power-holders try to *hide* their power.

*“One dimension of power in discourse is arguably the capacity to determine to what extent that power will be overtly expressed. It is therefore quiet possible for the expression of power relationships to be played down as a tactic within a strategy for the continued possession and exercise of power (ibid: 72).”*

One tactic to maintain power is to act more sensitive towards the less powerful: to make concessions in terms of constraining contents, relations and subjects in discourse. An example for this tactic would be the ‘synthetic personalization’, “a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people ‘handled’ *en masse* as an individual (ibid: 62).” This could be applied both to the subject position created in the video clip and to *Dove’s* slogan “*Jede Haut ist schön*”<sup>15</sup>. From a linguistic viewpoint one could ask in terms of the hidden

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<sup>13</sup> These three spheres can be compared with the three functions of language, or, in this case, the functions in the multi-modal text (ideational, interpersonal and textual) to analyze ideological implementations.

<sup>14</sup> If the institution controlled its discourse continuously, power struggles (social struggles) or social change would become nearly impossible.

<sup>15</sup> The message of the video clip could also be interpreted as wanting to achieve a ‘unification’ of consumers. Fairclough notes on this term: “There is an economic basis for this connection between capitalism and unification: the need for a unified home market if commodity production is to be fully established. This in turn requires political and cultural unification (ibid: 56)”.

power for the “causality” in this slogan: “who is represented as causing what to happen, who is represented as doing what to whom (ibid: 51)”? Not to give any information is a form of the power to constrain Content. If we now ask why power-holders should hide their power, the answer would be: for manipulative reasons. In this way it *seems* like power relations would become to be balanced off against each other. In fact, the consumer/viewer still has only little power and constrained access to discourse.

Controlling a discourse type powerfully means to have the power to constrain Contents, Relations and Subjects, and therefore to shape knowledge and beliefs, Social relationships and Social Identities. The question CDA asks is: through which mechanisms are these constraints imposed? The two most salient mechanisms Fairclough makes out are Communication and Inculcation. Rational Communication and debate is the “mechanism of emancipation and the struggle against domination”, whereas Inculcation “attempts to naturalize partial interested practices to facilitate the exercise and maintenance of power (ibid: 75)”. The question considering our analysis now is whether the advertisement of *Dove* is a form of *Communication or Inculcation*. In terms of Communication one could say that they are obviously trying to transmit a new ideal of beauty and to establish a new perception of women in the media. Besides they are actively working on social projects such as the Dove Self-Esteem fund to enforce their efforts. This is the impression gained through grasping the three dimensions of this discourse fragment. After this analysis and with reference to the theories of CDA, the findings in this paper tend more to the speculation that Inculcation is the mechanism behind the *Dove* campaign. The suggestion is that the group behind *Dove*, Unilever, has already been a power-holder in the beauty discourse a long time before the campaign was launched, and so has *Dove*. To establish a counter discourse, in the beauty business and in general, according to Fairclough it is necessary to go through social struggles. In this case it is not the ‘unpowerful mass’ that claims a new beauty ideal, it is the brand itself. However, in its campaign it makes concessions to the needs of women of all ages and ethnicities. But this could also be a clever tactic to hide power or real (economic) interests for manipulative reasons and sustentation of position.

## V. Conclusion and Reflection

It shall be concluded that *Dove* still acts as a consumer brand whose interests are merely economic (i.e. to increase sales), and that simply chooses clever (advertisement) tactics and techniques to achieve its goal. Its background is neither determined by sociopolitical nor cultural commitment. The Unilever group forms actively part of the international business world.

The analysis was conducted with tools provided by Critical Discourse Analysis, with main reference to the theoretical concepts of Norman Fairclough. Regarding its interdisciplinary paradigm, a more sociological than linguistic approach was applied. However, this is only one possible way to analyze the discourse fragment. As CDA focuses on the analysis of the production process and the producers, it is difficult for an analyst to present 'true' findings. Even if the producers would be asked directly about their intentions and strategies, there would probably not be only one true answer. Every person involved in the production process could respond differently, depending on their own (subject) positions, the amount of 'cultural capital' accumulated, and on the discourse types they are shaped by and actively shaping. Yet the analysis carried out in this paper is valid, for it does not claim to provide the only logical explanation possible (this would be interpreting, cp. H.G.Widdowson). Neither was this analysis driven by the political commitment usually performed by CDA (i.e. to intervene in social practices to change them and to "ally with those who suffer political and social injustice", cp. R. Wodak). Nevertheless this study forms part of existing discourses such as discourses on 'manipulation through the media' or 'self-image of women and their representation in public'. Therefore it adds a vital contribution to current social practices.

### Reflections on the analysis process

The starting point for this analysis has been a discourse fragment – the Dove video clip. Without great knowledge in the field of discourse analysis, the three dimensional discourse model seemed to be an appropriate and easy-to-handle research tool. During the theoretical studies, it became clear that CDA focused mainly on 'text'-analysis (in the sense of written text, e.g. newspaper articles) and did not provide sufficient tools for the analysis of video clips etc. Concerning the analysis of the production process it seemed to be designed rather for the analysis of (social and political) institutions than of business companies. For completeness there should definitively be included more theories from theoretical and 'contextual' sources (& more space!). The definition of discourse analysis as being critical also bears the danger of under-analysis through side-taking. CDA also is fuzzy regarding terms (discourse)& concepts.

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<http://www.unilever.com>; 28.07.2006

# Appendices

## Dove



dove\_bodymilk.mov Dove Advertisement Video Clip

- “Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs”. Findings of the 2005 Dove Global Study. ([www.campaignforrealbeauty.com](http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com))
- Campaign for real beauty ([www.campaignforrealbeauty.com](http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com))
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## Unilever

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