TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: ANALYSING MEDIA TEXTS

Media & Texts (Culture) – F50FC8
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OVERVIEW

- How is meaning created?
- Semiology
- Textual analysis
- Conclusions

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?

Bagaimana bermaksud dicipta?

Làm thế nào là ý nghĩa tạo ra?

Come è il significato creato?

如何意义？

چگونه می شود به معنی ایجاد؟

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?

- Verbal and non-verbal language came first – i.e. sounds and body language
- The first writing developed in Mesopotamia c. 3,000 B.C.E.
  - Connected to accounting and counting
  - Also developed independently later in China, Mesoamerica (Bragg 2012)
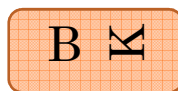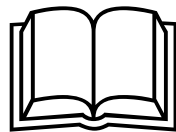- Pictograms, ideograms, alphabets

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?
DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

EYE   BEE   KING

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?
DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

EYE   BEE   KING

—   B   K

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?
DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

B К

HOW IS MEANING CREATED?

- "Any message, any meaning, can *only* be communicated through signs and a system of signs" (O&S: 134; emphasis added)

| Sender | ➭ | Message / Sign System | ➭ | Receiver |

(O&S: 134)

- Given meaning in a cultural context

SEMIOLOGY – THE 'SCIENCE OF SIGNS'

- "Semiology suggests that all communication is based on sign systems that work through certain rules and structures" (O&S: 133).

- "A sign is something physical, perceivable by our senses; it refers to something other than itself; and it depends upon a recognition by its users that it *is* a sign" (Fiske 1990: 41; original emphasis)

Saussure's elements of meaning
(Fiske 1990: 44)
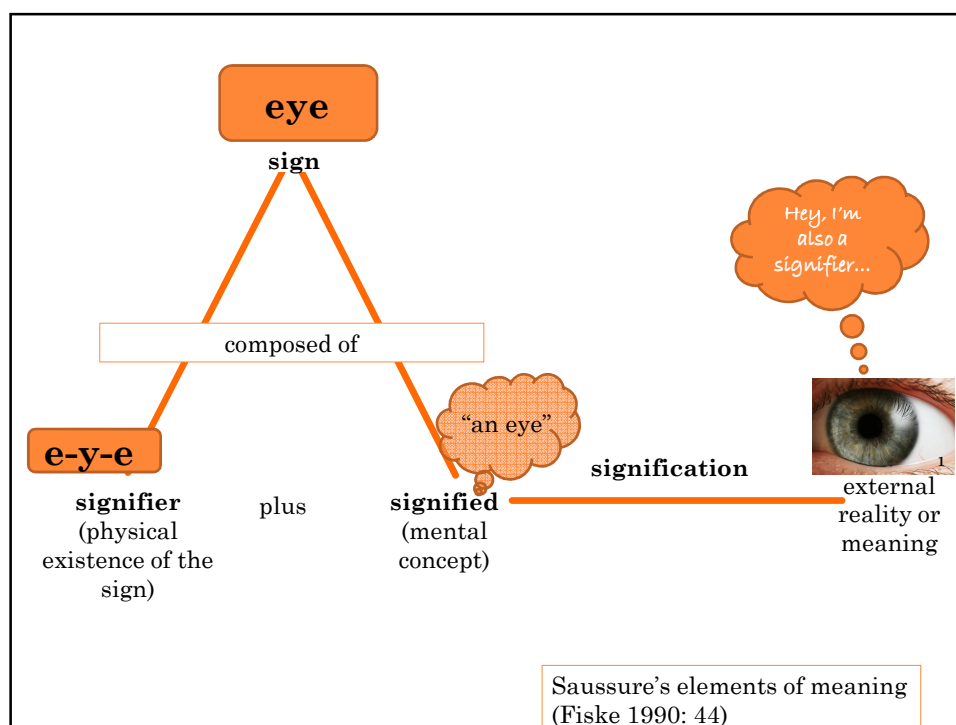
SIGNS

- Peirce: three categories of signs
- Icon: "resembles its object in some way" (Fiske 1990: 46)
  - e.g. A photo; a ☺
- Index: "direct link between a sign and its object" (Fiske 1990: 46) – not an analogue, but intrinsically announces it all the same
  - e.g. Smoke is an index of fire; a scream an index of fear
- Symbol: "no connection or resemblance between sign and object" (Fiske 1990: 46) – means something because people have agreed that it means something
  - e.g. These words and letters are symbols; ॐ $

ARBITRARY

TREE

ARBRE

ARBRE

TREE

ARBRE   **TREE**

ARBITRARY

SIGNS

- *Arbitrary*: where there is "no necessary relationship between signifier and signified" (Fiske 1990: 52)

SIGNS

- Iconic, indexical, or symbolic?

SIGNS

- Saussure:
  - "words don't mean anything on their own" (O&S: 137)
  - They are understood by what they are not
  - The signified is the way in which we divide up, categorise, our experience of the world
- "Meaning is therefore better defined by the relationships of one sign to another than by the relationship of that sign to an external reality" (Fiske 1990: 45)
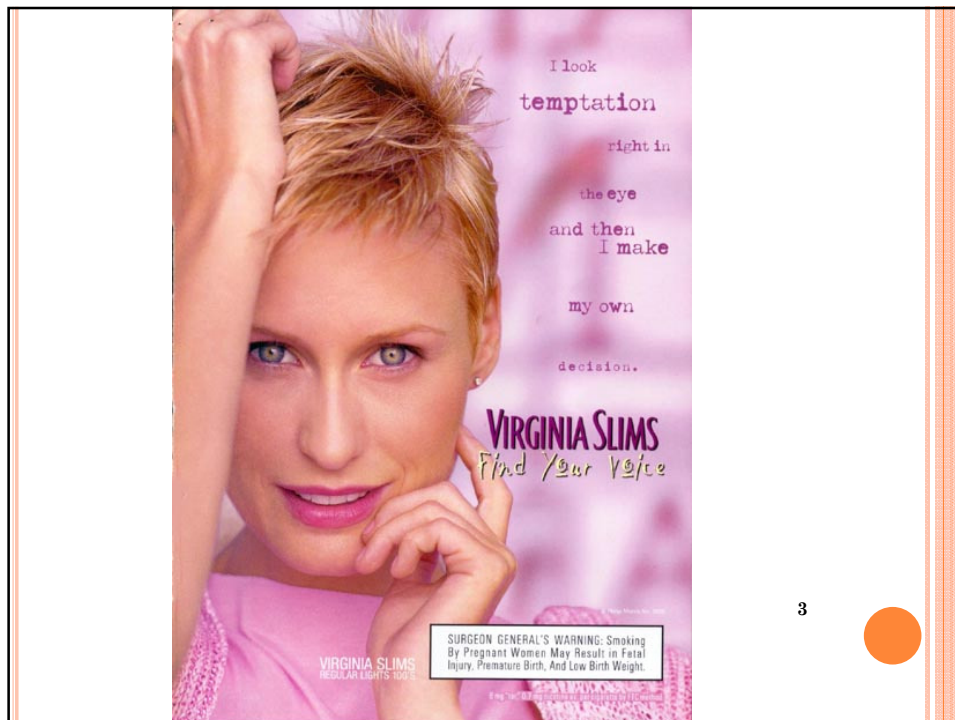
CODES & CONVENTIONS

- Code: "standardised formulae for communicating meaning" (O&S: 136)
  - e.g. Alphabet – formalised
- Conventions: "methods of organising signs to communicate meaning in ways that become habituated and widely shared over time" (*ibid.*)
  - e.g. Rhyming poetry, rap, debating styles
- Conventions are the habitual ways of putting together codes, they may be changed according to (sub)cultural context

DENOTATION & CONNOTATION

- Denotation: "attempts to describe without comment, evaluation, or judgements" (O&S: 137-8)
- Connotation: aka "associations" – signs "will remind the viewer of certain feelings, beliefs, or ideas that are attached to the signifier" (O&S: 138)
  - Individual connotations: not a useful focus for cultural analysis
  - Cultural connotations: based on learnt and shared values, practices, beliefs, etc.

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• Signs communicate through **codes** and **conventions**.
• These signs and conventions are **culturally shared** – they depend on cultural knowledge.
• Signs communicate through **systems of difference**.
• Signs communicate through **denotations** and **connotations**.

(O&S: 135-6; emphasis added)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- "The mechanical nature of semiotic analysis can be helpful in ensuring that we pay attention to each stage in the process of making meaning from a text" (McKee 2001: 148)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- "Most accounts of textual analysis turn out to be accounts of semiotics, which is neither the same thing, nor necessarily moves us very far from the intuitive"(McKee 2001: 138)
- "When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (McKee 2001: 140)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
REALITY?

- "There is no such thing as a single, 'correct' interpretation of any text" (McKee 2001: 140)
- "Never claim that a text is an 'accurate' or an 'inaccurate' representation; never claim that it 'reflects reality'" (McKee 2001: 142)
- "Whenever anyone claims that a particular text is 'accurate' or 'truthful' or 'reflects reality', what they are really saying is 'I agree with what this text is saying about the world'." (McKee 2001: 144)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
CONTEXT

- "context, context, context […] other texts that surround a text" (McKee 2001: 145-6)
- Three levels of context help to give meaning to text that is not totally dependent on the analyst's whims
  - "The rest of the text" – i.e. the text has its own internal logic
  - "The genre of the text" – includes conventions and unstated assumptions
  - "The wider public context in which a text is circulated" – e.g. the historical context

- Trailer example – Genre
  - *Brokeback Mountain*
  - *The Dictator*

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
RESEARCH

- *Content analysis* can complement textual analysis
  - Denotation is a form of content analysis
- What parts of a text to focus on?
  - Depends on the objective of the research

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- The text is produced and edited – what is left out is as important as what is in it

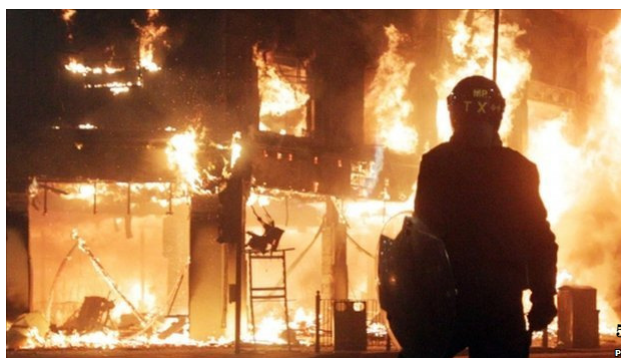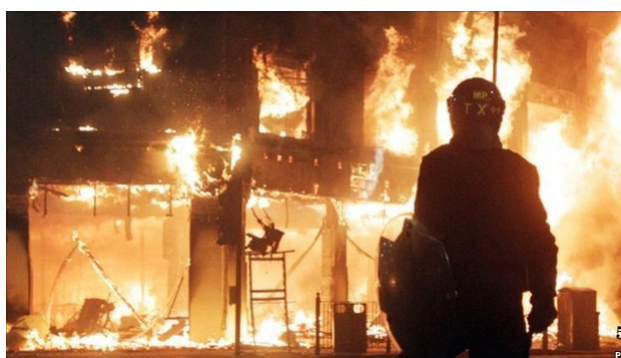Jessie Ooi decries harassment, vows legal action

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IMAGE ANALYSIS

- Anchorage: "the fixing or limiting of a particular set of meanings to an image" (Rayner *et al.* 2001: 35)
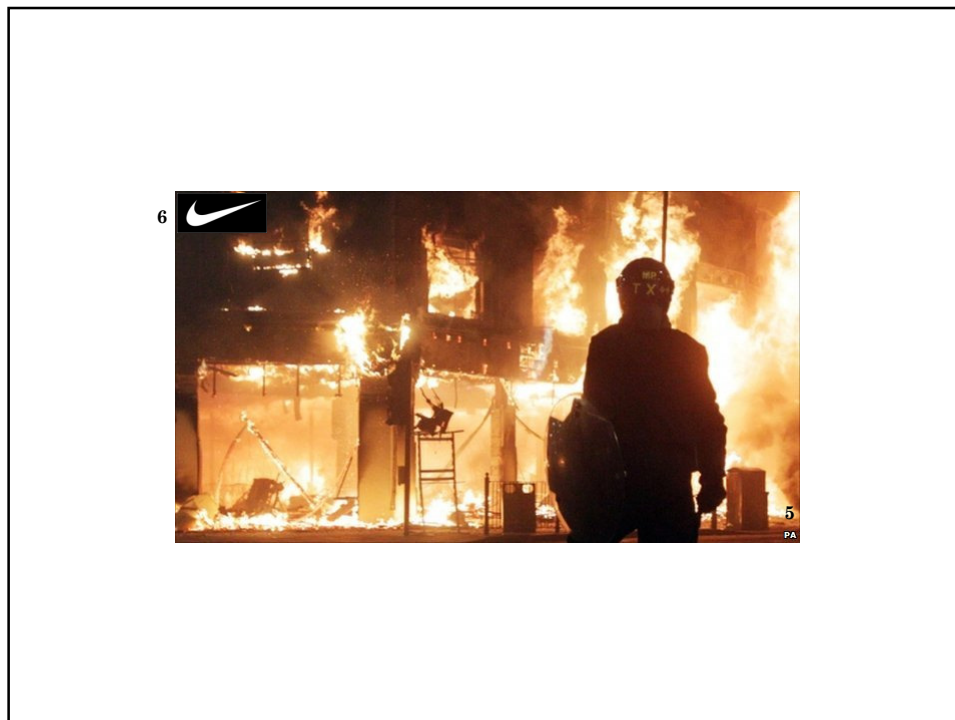
Police helpless as drug crazed looters burn down city

Police look on in indifference as houses burn

(Gambles 1998)

STEPS FOR TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- Decide on research question
- Denotation
  - Content analysis
  - Description of structure of the text
- Identify contexts
  - What type of text is it?
  - Who produced it?
  - What is the intended audience?
  - Who is the actual audience?
- Analysis
  - What are the most likely interpretations?
  - Is it possible to say there is one dominant interpretation?

CONCLUSIONS

- Semiotics and semiology
  - The sign is central to communication and texts
- But analysis must be done in context
  - Texts are produced and read in different contexts
- Contexts are also provided by theories relating to power, culture, field, etc.

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