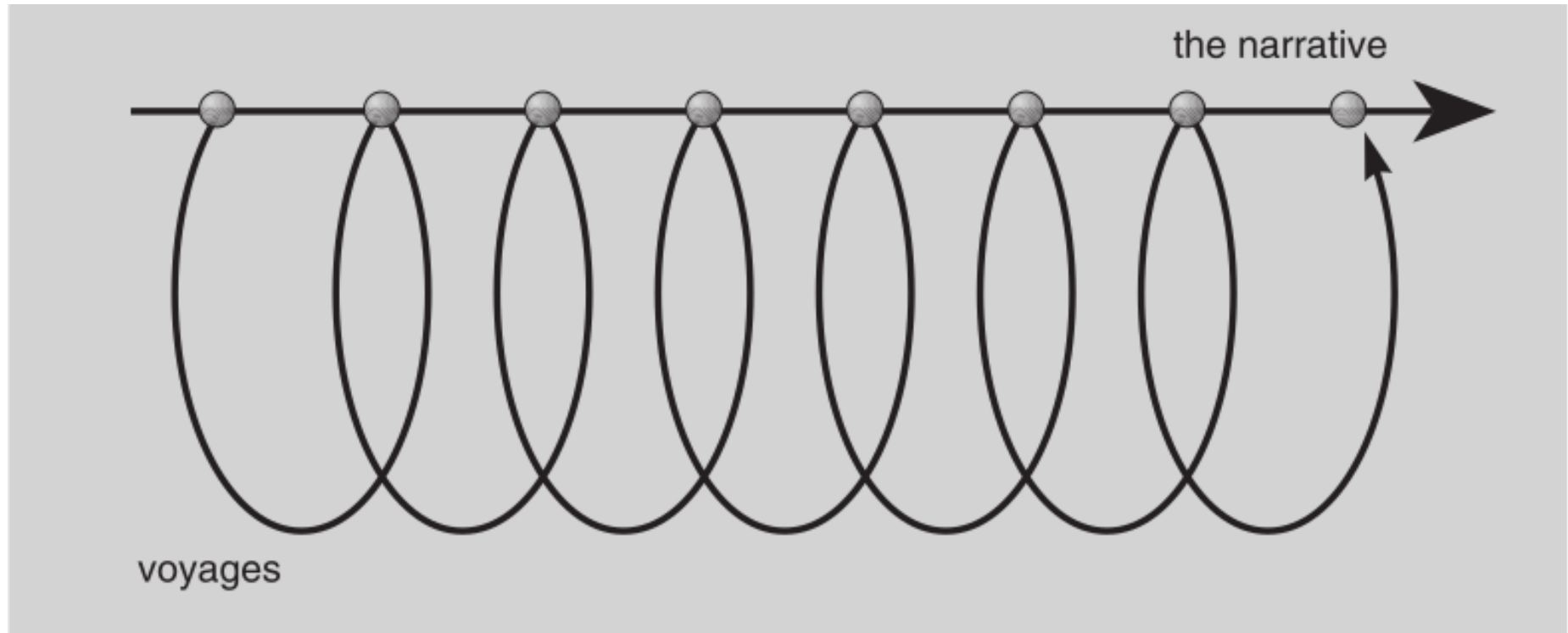


# Week 8: Research questions and materials



# Media and cultural studies

'We need the tools to think about, and research, cultural complexity in a manageable way' Couldry, *Inside Culture*, 2000, p.4

Why?



# Overview

- Review of the online projects
- Review of methods
- Research narratives and designs: exercises x 4
- Interview with Graeme Gilloch
- Essay question – if time permits (otherwise next week)



# Report on the online portfolios

- Groups going well, especially in relation to completeness, good examples
- Some analysis remains a bit superficial or unsurprising
  - Partly a problem of doing a group research project
  - Partly a problem of time!
- So try to ensure that each posting has some interesting finding, observation or problem in it
  - This can be done using comments or edits
  - No need to modify original post – better to show that you have been thinking more, or thinking collectively
- Also ensure that portfolio can be navigated by others (external examiner/moderator)!



# Some past group research projects to look at

Group 7: Sherlock Holmes worldwide <http://socl923-group7.blogspot.com>

Group South

<https://southborder.wordpress.com/>

Group North

<http://thenorthgroup.wordpress.com>

Group 12: Selfies of USA and South Korean celebrities

<http://pinkyellowgrey2014.wordpress.com>



# Methods overview

	images	texts	places/things	people	organisations
semiotics	X	X	X		
compositional analysis	X		?		
discourse analysis of documents	X	X			X
discourse analysis of institutions/practices			X		X
ethnography of audiences			X	X	X
ethnography of media objects	X	X	X		
Live methods	X		X	X	X

# Methods we did not cover much in the course

- **Psychoanalytic-influenced reading of texts (e.g. Lauren Berlant)**
  - Very important in film studies and some cultural studies
  - Key notion: texts are structured by unconscious processes of desire and reveal symptoms of desiring processes
- **Media archaeology (e.g. Friedrich Kittler, Wolfgang Ernst)**
  - Development of Foucault's archaeological approach to discourse, expanded to include media infrastructures



# Review of methods

- “thinking and analysis are not abstract processes or theoretical models or rules that occur purely in our heads, but involve the manipulation and orchestration of a range of materials that occur in specific places. It suggests that we need to start with the actual stuff of our interpretations, in terms of how we get to grips with (literally and figuratively) all the material we so diligently made in the field” Crang, 128
- Why so many methods in MCS?
- What do you do with all the materials you gather or produce in a research project?
- Analysis done in writing!





# Things we have covered but need to keep in mind:

- **How to 'get into' your research**
  - Remember the cultural studies approach to research includes the position of the researcher as key element
- **'Research design' - how do you bring different methods around a key question or questions?**
  - The other vital components of research – theoretical framings, and existing research



# How to first 'get into' your research project: the method of 'writing the implosion'

- A series of exercises to help **explore the fabric of an object**, and our relation to it
  - See Dumit, J., 2014. Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time. *Cultural Anthropology* 29, 344–362. doi:10.14506/ca29.2.09 (on the moodle)
- 'pick an artifact or a thing' – as a specific as possible
  - **Step 1: Brainstorm:** write notes about the thing in response to the questions on pages 351-354
    - Labour, epistemology, materials, technologies, contexts, politics, economics, texts, bodies, histories, parts, education, myth, symbolism
  - **Step 2: From knowledge-map to ignorance-map**
    - Look for patterns of ignorance in what you know about the object: why do you know some things and not others
    - Where/how could you get answers to what you don't know ?
  - **Step 3: Try to find answers**
    - Who controls the answers (experts, institutions, platforms, etc.)?
    - This is the work of **discourse analysis**: 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault)



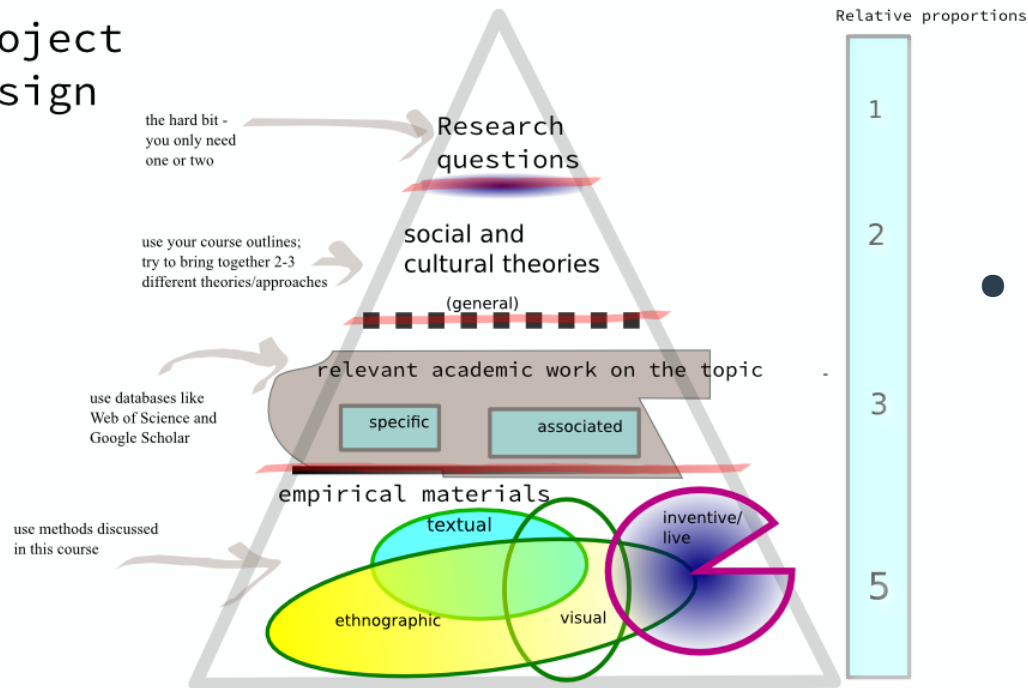
# Modes of analysis (Crang)

- Analysis as **disciplining** the materials
- Analysis as **assemblage/montage**
- Analysis as **making narratives/stories**



# Analysis by disciplining

## Research project design



- 'We tend to edit out how our ideas evolved in non-linear fashion' (Crang, 2003, 134)
- Contrasting possibility: see our work as producing an archive



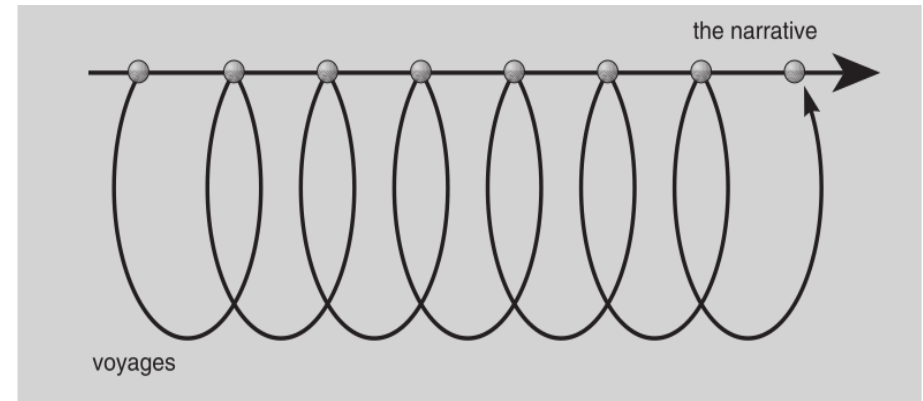
# Analysis by assemblage/montage

- “The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not represent ourselves in their space)” (Benjamin, 1999, p.206, H2, 3)
- Engage with a fragmented complex word by working with data/materials in the same way: juxtaposition, collage.
- No privileging of either empirical or theoretical materials



# Analysis as making narratives

- 'the story of our research frames the evidence we use' (Crang, 2003, 138)
- 'tension between thinking and production composed of a series of episodic circuits and the need for a plot giving a forward moving account' (141)
  - e.g. citations of other work
  - e.g. use of different methods or cases
- Produces a 'piling-up of insufficiencies' (De Certeau)
  - What are the gaps between the circuits?



# Exercise: analysis in the group projects

- Discuss as a group how you might use the different approaches to analysis described by Crang in 'Telling Materials'



# Bringing it together: the initial proposal as disciplining analysis

- Research materials relevant to the topic
  - Theoretical framings and other academic work
  - Empirical materials, data, texts
- Some research questions
- The aim is to write a 2-3 page **proposal document** that sets out main problems, theoretical framings, and a research design (what methods, what materials, where, what and when)
- This document is difficult to write – expect to re-write it 6-7 times before it feels right.
- Refer to this document through the research, and update it when plans change





# Exercise: analyzing the research materials using montage approach

- Going through the group portfolio, list **specific** materials, places, people or things that could be relevant to your project
  - This is a brainstorm – there might be too many to actually research here;
  - **specificity is good** (not just 'photographs' but 'photographs taken by X at Y')
- Make a table of these and suggest what methods would be appropriate to work with these materials
  - The idea of this table is to assemble **contrasting or alternative ways** of seeing the same topic
  - Good research designs often pivot on a contrast.



# Exercise: theoretical voyage: find some relevant theories and approaches

- Individually 'explore' 3 course outlines from courses you are doing this year; they can include sociology, gender and women studies, anthropology, science studies, etc.
- Choose 2 contrasting theories/**key concepts** from each – these should be major theories or approaches
- Decide as a group the **2-3 most relevant theories/approaches** for your project
- Write a brief description of how these approaches relate to your project



# Exercise: the research question as making a story

- **Individually** write two potential research questions.
- Gather in a group to discuss and **choose best two\*** for the project
- Rewrite best two for project in the light of the project

\* What does best mean? Best for what? Best given your time, resources, who and where you are, etc.



# Exercise: explore the research literature (if time permits!)

- Use Google Scholar or Web of Science to find *some* recent academic literature from [cultural and media studies](#) relating to your project topic.
- Two approaches:
  - 1. search by topic, concept or theory
  - 2. look at recent citations of theoretical work you think is relevant or significant for your project
- Use bibliographic software (zotero, mendeley, endnote) to manage all materials
  - I'll definitely show you Zotero live in class (again!)



# Entry for online project

- **Put the table of empirical materials and methods you started in class on the blog. The table should show:**
  - the empirical materials you will use, with numbers that quantify how many of each thing
  - the methods you will use to gather and analyse the materials
  - the order in which you will work on the materials
- **Annotate the list of academic references you found relating to your research topic.**
  - You should put a full bibliographic reference for each reference.
  - Rank or order the list of references in terms of their relevance to your project, and briefly describe why they are relevant.
  - Put the list of references on the group research blog.
- **Put the best two research questions on the blog, along with some discussion of how you arrived at them (300-400 words).**



# Interview question

- Following the usual practice, each group will prepare 2 questions about:
  - Media and cultural studies as a form of voyage/travel
  - Ways of working with and analyzing materials (empirical, theoretical and textual)



# Essay question (3000 words)

Our collective research topic this term has been 'fake news.' In your group projects you have investigated various ways of making sense of this recent controversy. Drawing on your experience of working on this topic, the various exploratory activities undertaken in your groups, and the in-class interviews with guest, as well as media and cultural studies readings, critically reflect on the following statement:

**'In its research practice, media and cultural studies is a way of making sense of a world that works primarily through, or in reliance, on media.'**

In writing your essay, you are not expected to carry out new research, but you should draw on readings, concepts and analytical approaches discussed during the course.



# Next week

- Revision of discourse analysis
- Catch up on Week 7 work
- Preparation for presentations
- Finishing group project portfolio

