

Week 8: Research questions and design



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?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XviR7esUvo>



Overview

- **Review of the blogs**
- **Review of methods**
- **The method of 'implosion' (Dumit)**
- **Research design: exercises x 4**
- **Essay question - if time permits (otherwise next week)**



Report on the blogs

- **Both 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 blog 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 blog is easily navigable for someone who wants to see whats on it (external examiner/moderator)!**



Some past group research blogs to look at

Group 7: Sherlock Holmes worldwide

<http://soci923-group7.blogspot.com>

Group 12: Selfies of USA and South Korean celebrities

<http://pinkyyellowgrey2014.wordpress.com>

Group 15: Privacy settings on Lancaster Facebook

<http://pandagrouplancaster.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



Things we haven't covered but still need to cover

- **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



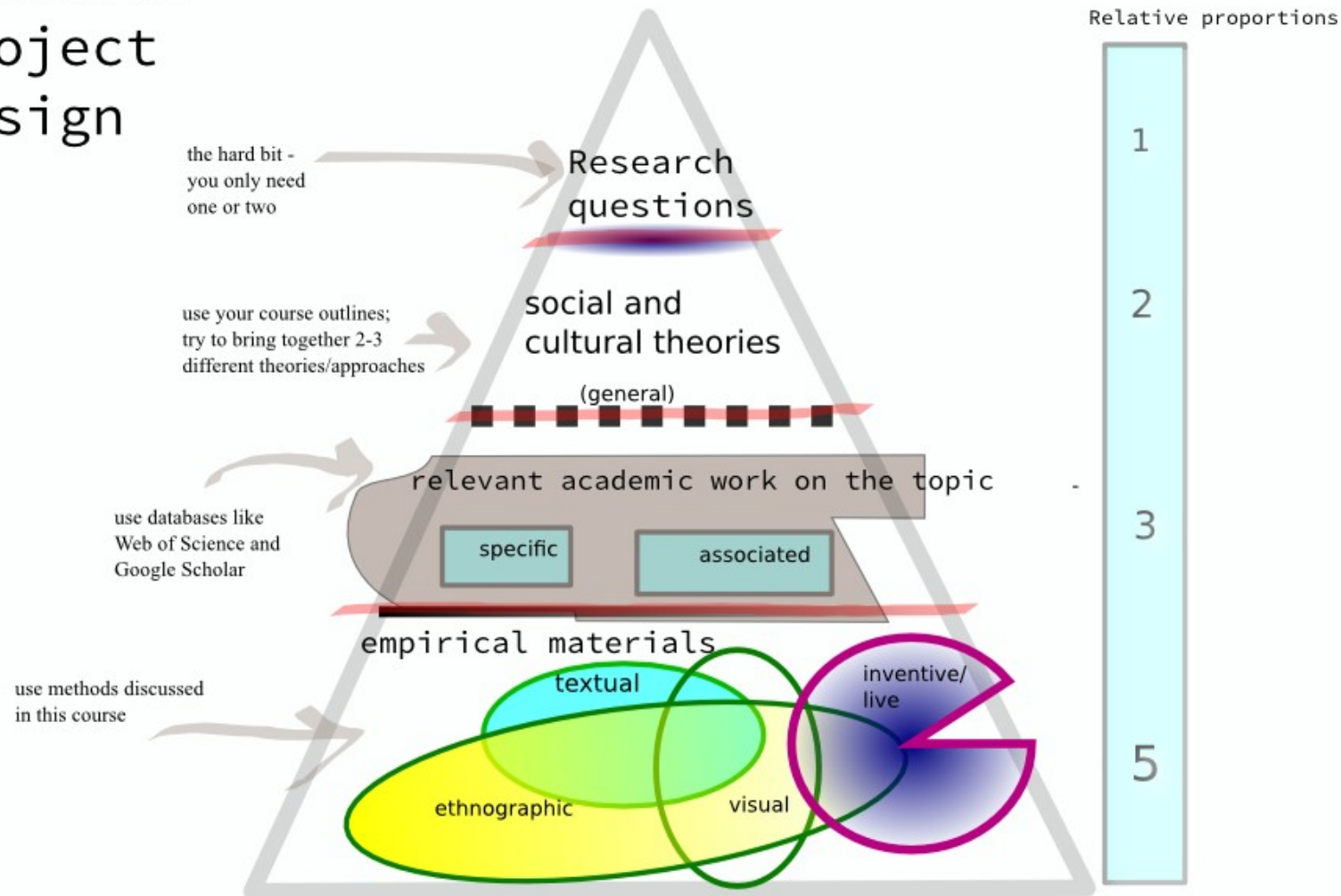
How to 'get into' your research project: The method of 'writing the implosion'

- **A series of exercises to help explore the fabric of an object, and thereby ourselves!**
 - 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)



Research design: how to bring things together?

Research project design



Report on the online projects?

- **Discuss as a group where you are up to, and prepare brief report**



Bringing it together

- Research materials
- Theoretical framings
- Some research questions
- **The aim is to produce a 2-3 page document - the 'design 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: the research materials

- **Going through your blog, list all the materials/places/people/things that could be relevant to your project**
 - This is a brainstorm – there might be too many to actually research here
- **Make a table of these and suggest what methods would be appropriate to work with these materials**



Exercise: find some relevant theories and approaches

- Explore 3 course outlines from courses you are doing this year; they can include sociology, gender and women studies, anthropology, science studies.
- Choose 2 contrasting theories/key texts 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 the most relevant approaches relate to your project



Exercise: the research question

- **Individually write two** potential research questions.
- **Gather in a group to discuss and choose best two** for the project
- Groups present to each other and discuss
- Rewrite **best two** for project



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).**



Essay question

Nick Couldry defines media cultures in this way:

I use the term “media culture” .. to refer to collections of sense-making practices whose main resources of meaning are media. The only criterion for identifying a media culture is that its members are likely to recognize its distinctiveness, its way of “hanging together”. When I say “sense-making”, I do not mean that media cultures are exclusively or primarily ways of making sense *of media*. I mean instead that they are ways of making sense *of the world* that work primarily *through*, or in reliance on, media' (Couldry *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. 2012, 159-160).

Critically analyse what this claim means for the practice of media and cultural studies research today. Describe how your group research project addressed the methodological challenges of empirically researching contemporary media culture. You will need to spend some time in your essay describing what your research was about, but this description should mainly support your reflections on the challenges of researching media cultures..



Next week

