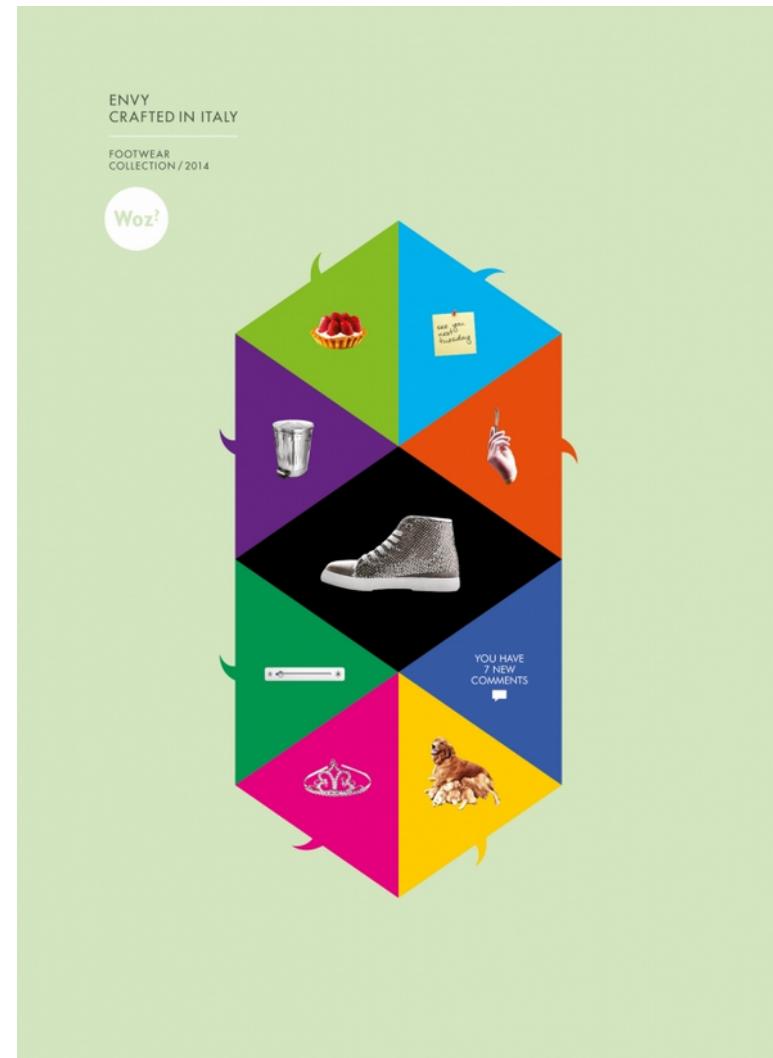


# Week 3 2017

## Textual analysis: from semiotics to textual environments



# Week 3 overview

- **This week: working with **texts** using semiotics, textuality and textual environments**
  - **Starting point:** MCS analyses texts, we can better understand how meanings, representations and values are shaped in particular ways (hegemonic, dominant, etc).
    - **Semiotics** as a method of exploring structure of a text and its meanings
    - **Textuality** as a method of exploring what a text does
  - **End point: **textual environments**:** MCS research also need to look beyond 'the text' itself (reading from Couldry)
- **Exploring implications of the textual environment for your research project**
- **Prepare interview questions**
- **Interview with guest**



# Key points from Couldry last week

- **Need for method in media and cultural studies (Couldry's view)**
  - to resist dominant or accepted view of culture;
  - to find voices that are not visible; to connect our own experience with others;
  - to address concerns with culture and power;
  - **to get inside culture**
- **Materialist, empirical, & reflexive methods**

# What is a text?



# What is a text?

- **Text** = 'complex of interrelated meanings which its readers tend to interpret as a discrete, unified whole' (Couldry, 70-71)
- **Most famous comment in recent text theory?**
  - *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* (Derrida)
- **Are these slides a text?**

# Methods for researching texts: Semiotics and discourse analysis as methods

- **Semiotics** – study of signs - how texts make meanings (Barthes); possibly most popular method in media and cultural studies
- **Discourse analysis** – analysis of a particular form of language and the practices/institutions linked to and shaped by that form of language (Foucault – more on this next week)

# Semiotic analysis and the production of meaning

- Often used to analyse **ideology** and how structures unequal power relations
- Approach text as **systems of signs** that produce meanings
- Meanings arise from relations between signs in the text
- Analyse text by mapping those relations



# Signs and meaning-making

- **Sign - key concept of basic unit of all texts**
- **Sign composed of signifier and signified, but can be attached to each other in different ways**
- **Semiotics identifies key signs in a text and analyses their relations**



Leave your  
MORNING  
MOOD  
behind.

M  
easy morning

List of signs

1. commuter train
2. absence of other people
3. workman clothes & toolbox
4. cactus boyd
5. McDonalds logo
6. Advertising copy



Leave your  
MORNING  
MOOD  
behind.



Relations between signs:

1. Logo + writing
2. Work clothes + cactus
3. Workman + train
4. Train + city

# Semiotics offers concepts to help think about relations between signs

- Various analytical concepts:
  - Denotive vs connotative
  - Iconic, indexical and symbolic signs (Peirce)
  - Syntagmatic vs paradigmatic (Jakobsen)
  - Synecdochal – part stands in for whole
- What signs do:
  - Signs may attach, produce or transfer meaning in a text
  - Signs may 'naturalise' a particular meaning (make it seem obvious and uncontestable) in a text
  - Signs may link to wider systems of meaning (codes - Hall; mythology - Barthes)



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### Overview

#### How it works

#### Success stories

English Cheesecake Company

Sarah P

Photography

#### Top questions

#### Step 1: Build your Facebook Page

Everything on Facebook starts with your Page. Create a page. It's a simple, free way to communicate with customers.

#### Step 2: Connect with people

Get people to like your Page. Create several adverts target-based on location, demographics and interests.

#### Step 3: Engage with quality content

Post quality updates and promote your posts with adverts to engage your customers and their friends. Start now.



#### New to advertising on Facebook?

Learn more about how it works.



#### Get the latest updates and tips.

Like the Facebook Marketing Page.





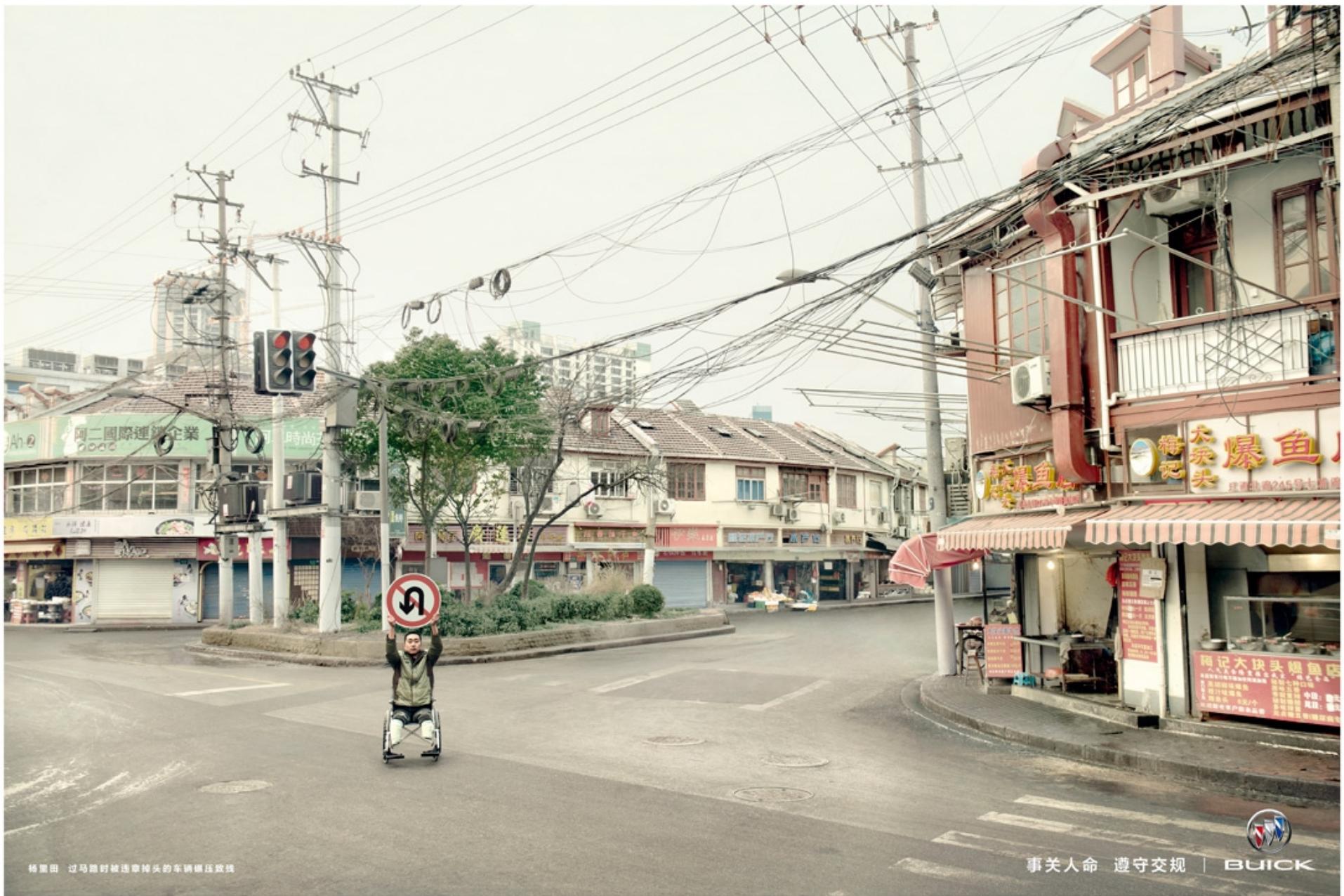
THEY TORE EUROPE TO SHREDS,  
BUT THEY COULDN'T EVEN ASSEMBLE A PORK.

During the Second World War, Czech riders dismantled their bikes and hid them amongst household objects so they wouldn't be confiscated and used to continue fueling the Nazi war machine.

These "parted out" bikes became symbols of hope that one day freedom would prevail and they could be put back together to reclaim their rightful home — the open road.

A piece of freedom





杨里田 过马路时被违章掉头的车辆碾压致残

YANG LI TIAN Hit while crossing the road by a vehicle making an illegal U-turn

事关人命 遵守交规 | BUICK

SIGNS ARE THERE FOR A REASON



# Exercise: semiotics and sign

**1 Identify linguistic and visual signs here, and describe their signifieds and signifiers**

**2 Describe some of the relations between signs and how they attach, make or transfer meaning in the text**

**3 Identify some wider systems of meaning (codes, etc.)**



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# The limitations of semiotics

- **Tends to treat texts in isolation and assume an 'expert reader' who analyses them**
  - Technical vocabulary can be confusing
  - Expert reader is not necessarily 'inside culture'
- **How to select the texts (Couldry, 68) and explain why they matter?**
- **Doesn't explore how a text is taken up in particular social, cultural or media settings.**

# Using semiotics today

- **Most effective where production of meanings is standardised or controlled:**
  - Fashion
  - Advertising
  - News
  - Certain well-defined genres of books, television and films (e.g. romances, westerns, soap operas)

# Expanded definitions of 'the text'?

- **Text** = 'complex of interrelated meanings which its readers tend to interpret as a discrete, unified whole' (Couldry, 70-71)
- **Textuality** – 'the different ways in which something can function as a text for its readers' (Couldry, 71)
  - Investigate **specific forms** of textuality;
    - e.g. to compare the textuality of a magazine with a museum exhibition, you would need to compare the physicality, visual forms, arrangement of forms and materials
- **Intertextuality** = relation between texts (e.g. film + merchandise)

# Textual environment: text and reader are co-produced

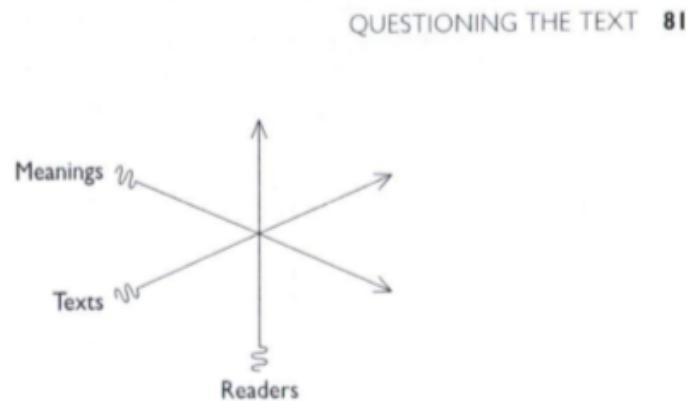


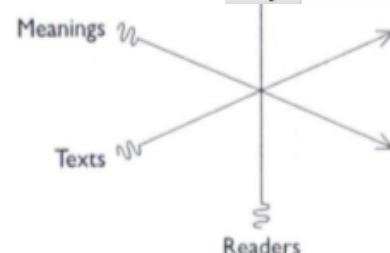
FIGURE 4.1 *The textual environment*

Couldry, 81

- Examine not just meanings, but flows of texts and readers
- Look at material structures of textual production and distribution
- Processes that order how we read, connect or screen out texts
- Helps us map what it means to be 'inside culture'
- Suggests need to 'read' texts in multiple ways

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Guest post: MN blogger Donna Wishart's self-esteem was destroyed by relentless bullying at school – but she now refuses to think herself as a victim.

It's Burns Night tonight...

Let THIS be the year you finally cook one of these fabulous Scottish recipes.

Burns night recipes More fantastic seasonal food

Matching your donations with UKaid

WaterAid

Will you give today and deliver the best gift ever?

FIGURE 4.1 The textual environment

# Group Research Project: fake news: from semiotics to the textual environment

- 1) Choose one or two contrasting texts relating to your project and do a brief **semiotic analysis** of how they make meanings
- 2) Using the same texts, describe the **textuality** of the texts
- 3) Using the same texts, describe some aspects of the textual production and distribution in the **textual environment**
- 4) How does an analysis of the **textual environment** differ from the **semiotic analysis** of the text in your examples?
- 5) Document the examples and your analysis of them on your group research site (400-500 words)



# Part II: The interview

- **Tracy Jensen and her research on online discussion forums**

# Exercise: prepare interview questions

- In your research project groups, frame 3 questions about how to study a website like Mumsnet in terms of
  - Production of meanings
  - Broader approaches to textuality, textual environments, etc.
- Remember:
  - You are **not** asking about what happens on Mumsnet
  - You **are asking** questions that help you understand how Tracey worked with the 'texts' on Mumsnet



# Overview

- **Basic techniques for analysing production of meaning in texts:**
  - semiotics
- **Expanding the notion of the text.**
  - Key concepts: textuality and textual environments
- **Next week: discourse analysis and visual materials**

