

Media and Society: 6

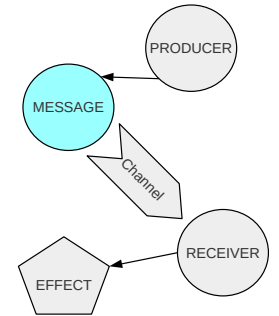
Theories and Approaches 3: Media Texts

Outline

- Reminder of Lasswell
- Approaches to 'texts'
- Semiotics
- Content analysis

Lasswell's model

- Who says **what** in what channel to whom with what effect?
- **Texts**



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Media Texts?

- Can we define a 'text'?
- How can we adequately describe a text?
- 'Multimodal' texts
 - What is a 'mode'?
 - How do we deal with this kind of text?

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Media Texts

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Radio
- Television / Film
- Web-based

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Semiotics

- Approaches texts as systems of 'signs'
- Signs carry meanings
- Often useful in breaking down *how* a text carries a particular meaning
- Results can often feel banal and obvious!!

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Content analysis

- Which texts are we interested in?
- Can we describe them somehow?
- What is 'in' them?
 - If we ultimately interested in the effects of texts on audiences then we have to be able to say what it is in them that is having the effect.

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Semiotics / Semiology

- Study (science?) of 'signs'
- Two primary theoreticians;
 - Ferdinand de Saussure (Switzerland, 1857-1913)
 - Charles S. Peirce (USA, 1839 - 1914)



Structuralism: Saussure

- Emerged as an approach in 1960s
- "systematic elaboration of the rules and constraints that work [...] to make the generation of meaning possible" (Hartley 2002, p217)
- Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault etc



Roland Barthes, 1915-80

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Umberto Eco

- Italian writer and academic
- *The Name of the Rose*
- *Foucault's Pendulum*
- *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays*



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'Truth' and 'lies'

"Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying **everything which can be used in order to lie**. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all."

Trattato di semiotica generale (1975) [*A Theory of Semiotics* 1976]

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'Truth' and 'lies'

"The attributions one might make from such a photograph would be empirically false, but **the picture would in all respects correspond to what it would look like if the senator had been there.**"

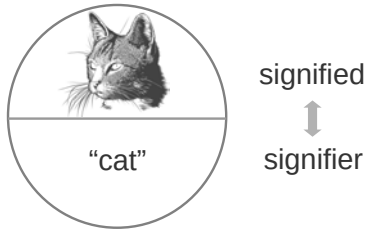


Millard Tydings hoax photo

Sol Worth, "Pictures can't say ain't" in *Studying Visual Communication* (1981).

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What is a 'sign'?



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Roland Barthes

- **Denotation:** (relatively) fixed, literal 'meaning'
- **Connotation:** more flexible social, cultural associations

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Signs are 'relational'

- Signs' meanings are always **related** to the meanings of other signs (eg. oppositional)
- Signs are (espec. images) **polysemic**
- Signs can be **anchored** by other signs, ie., meaning becomes more 'fixed' in context

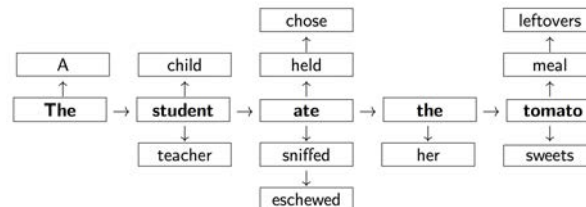
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Charles S. Peirce: 3 Types of Signs

- **Icon:** 'looks like' its referent
- **Index:** logical connection ('points to') referent
- **Symbol:** arbitrary / conventional link to referent

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Syntagms and Paradigms

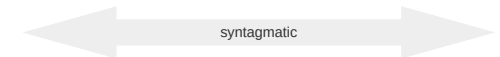
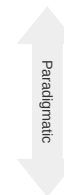


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Syntagms and Paradigms

p126, Hodkinson, P. (2017) *Media, Culture and Society*, SAGE

Terrorist	killed by	US drone strike
Father	assassinated by	US Government
Resident	slaughtered by	US bomb
Soldier	killed by	remote control
Murderer	punished by	lethal strike



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Magazine Covers



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Critique of semiotic approach

- Personal response?
- Disordered
- Not a reliable / valid 'method' ?

'Content Analysis'

In theory, *anything* that leaves a recordable trace in the world can be analysed as 'content'

- Personal Conversations
- Dancing (expressive movements)
- The Fine or Practical arts
- Govt. Papers (eg. policy documents etc)
- **(Mass) Media texts**

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Uses...

- Useful for describing the 'content' of a set of texts
- Useful for answering questions which require numerical responses
 - How much? How often? What proportion?

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For Example...

Online Media Use During 2013 Japanese Upper-House Election: A Content Analysis of Comments on Candidates' Facebook Pages

- RQ1: What kinds of comments were made on candidates' Facebook pages?
- RQ2: To what degree did candidates replied to voters over their Facebook pages?

Dou, X. (2014) Online Media Use During 2013 Japanese Upper- House Election: A Content Analysis of Comments on Candidates' Facebook Pages. *Kaio Communication Review*, (36),53-69

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Data Sample

- Facebook posts during campaign period before 2014 general election
 - 392 candidate messages
 - 1899 visitor comments

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Coding: 1

- **Author**
- **Expected receiver**
- **Type of comment:** support and encouragement, suggestions, questions, feedback, reports of current status or agenda, messages to others.

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Coding: 2

- **Political content** (discussion / mention of specific policies)
 - **Valence:** positive, neutral, negative
- All posts/comments coded by 5 native Japanese speakers (NOT the author!)

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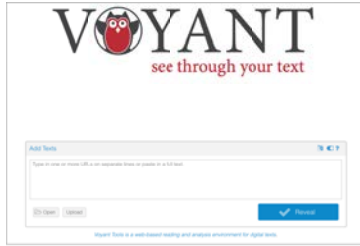
Example findings...

- **54.1%** of visitor comments were 'support and encouragement' for candidates
- **9%** of comments mentioned political issues
- **88%** of comments were 'positive'

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Modern CS often requires software

- Word and phrase frequencies
- Language analysis etc



<https://voyant-tools.org/>

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Data sets can get big!

TABLE 1 Descriptive Data: Candidate Twitter Use

	Democrats			Republicans		
	Hillary Clinton	Bernie Sanders	Ben Carson	Ted Cruz	Marco Rubio	Donald Trump
Number of followers~	6,112,796	2,892,378	1,311,590	1,089,765	1,350,812	7,908,579
Total tweets~	5,456	8,285	3,031	16,571	5,426	31,830
Date joined Twitter	April 2015	November 2010	February 2015	March 2009	August 2009	March 2009
Suspended campaign	NA	NA	March 4th	May 3rd	March 15th	NA
Tweets in our data	1,865	2,996	539	3,512	884	1,406
Tweets per day* (101 days in data)	18	24	5	34.8	9	14
Words in our data*	16,327	21,510	4,486	22,408	6,558	11,885
Words per tweet	8.75	8.98	8.32	6.38	7.42	8.45
Standard deviation	3.17	3.14	3.41	3.17	2.68	4.25
% of tweets original content	81%	67%	71%	35%	69%	96%

Note: *Includes period after suspending campaigns for Rubio, Carson, and Cruz. *After removing URLs, run-words, and stop words (uninformative words, e.g., "the", ~as of May 4, 2016 data accessed using <http://www.twitterjalytics.com/>.

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Ends

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