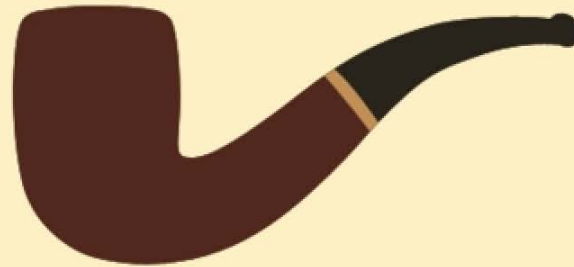


# De-mystifying Semiotics

some key questions answered



*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*

Lawes, R. (2002) *International Journal of Market Research*, 3 (44) 251-264

# Why de-mystify?

- under-used
- benefits



## 4 key questions

- what is it
- how is it done
- how to evaluate
- stand-alone or add-on



# What is semiotics & what can it do?

beliefs  
attitudes ↑ perceptions



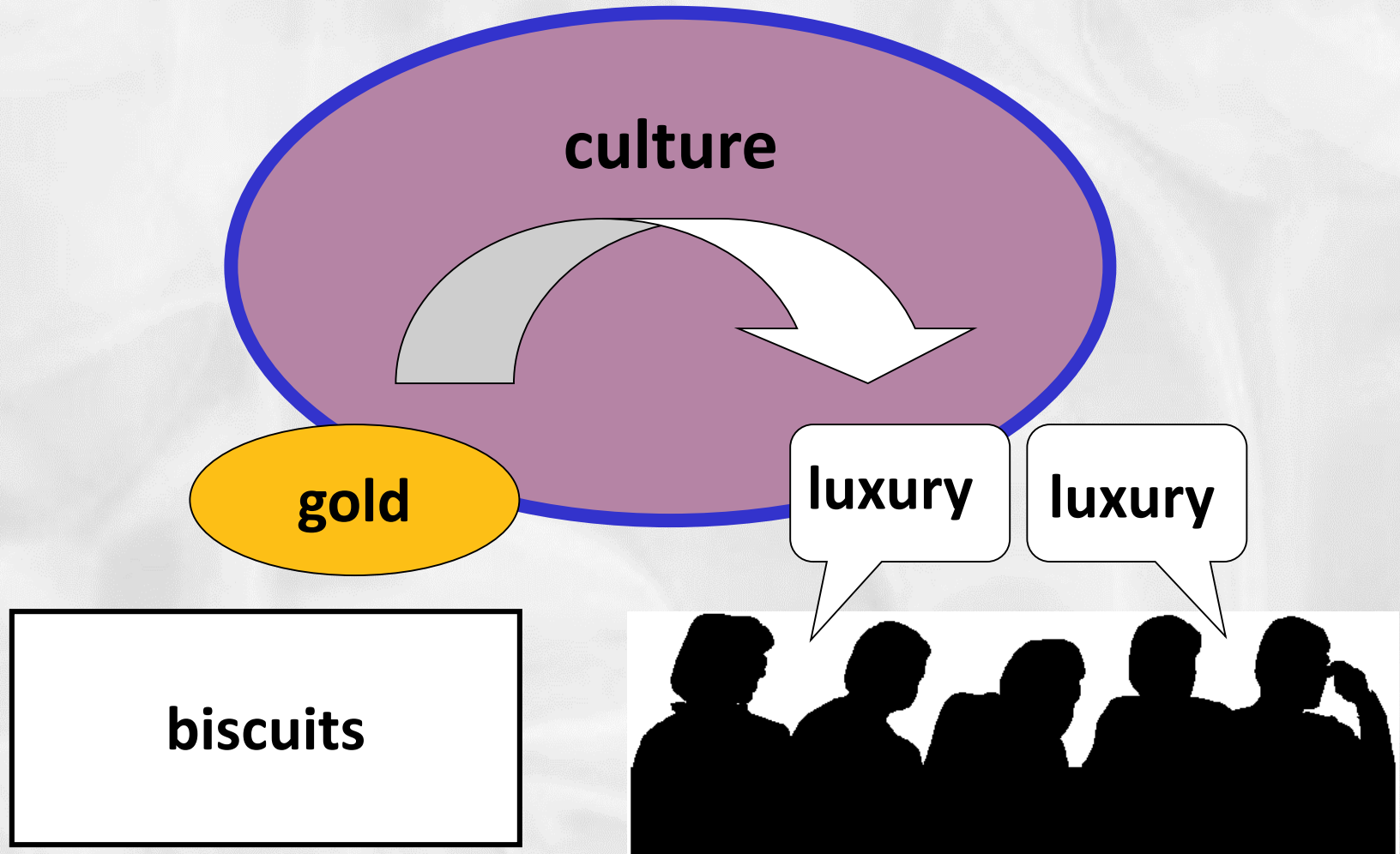
inside-out

culture ↓ culture



outside-in

- culture: human communications
- language, visual images and sound
- signs, rules, codes



**signs are prone to change**

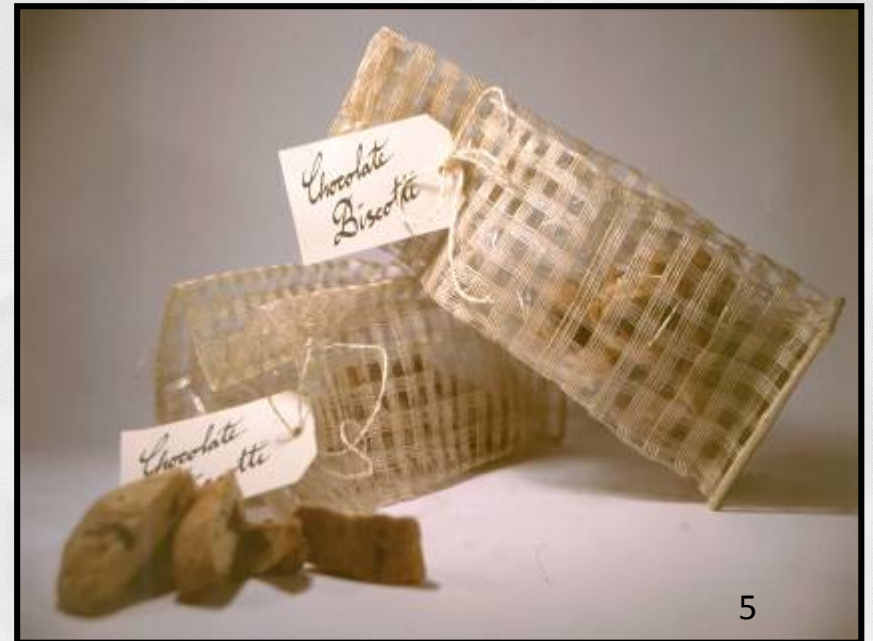


# Signs change over time

- bright, shiny gold
- thick chocolate, extra jam
- theme: excess, abundance



- understatement, restraint
- half dipped
- string, corrugated card
- 'natural' colours





# Signs change with other signs

positions of social power



purple adds prestige



purple + pink, orange = exuberant fun



Afford the  
**bigger** and  
**better** things in life

Credit Cards

Holidays

Personal Loans



7



# Applications

- understand communications
- packaging, advertising, literature, even retail spaces



- understand consumer culture
  - track changes for groups
  - develop strategies
- stay up-to-date
  - design communications
  - fresh & authentic



# How is semiotics actually done?

## Stage 1

- Brainstorming
- Data Searching

## Stage 2

- Analysis
- Semiotic Toolkit



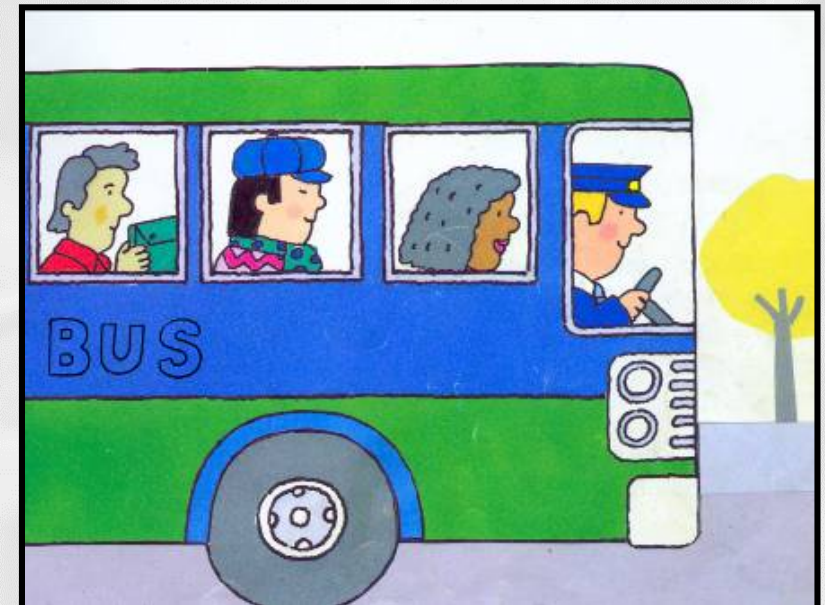
- signs: visual, linguistic, aural
- structures: information, text
- communication situations
- oppositions & contrasts
- genres, communication codes



- buses & bus travel
- prejudices, myths

- amenable to change

- rigid vs flexible





**specific questions**

**Stage 1**  
**Brainstorm**  
**Collect data**

**Stage 2**  
**Analysis**  
**Toolkit**

**together**

- **formal activity**
- **tools & research procedure**

# How to evaluate semiotic findings?



**consumers**

**specific marketing communications**

- own or competitors'

**How do we know that semiotic findings are true and not just subjective opinion?**

**Two ways to address the question**

- literally, face value
- more semiotic approach



- resources: experience
- cross-sector connections

- emergent code?

- corroboration



**How do we know that semiotic findings are true  
and not just subjective opinion?**

**contrast pair**

- **professional opinion vs amateur speculation**
- **second opinion vs uncorroborated diagnosis**
- **valid opinion vs mere conjecture**



**ambiguous  
figures**



# Applications

- truth is culturally specific
- keep studying culture



- intended meanings – and possible ones
- analysis predicts likely consumer take-out
- spot inadvertent messages



# Stand-alone semiotics or add-on to qual?

**Two ways to use  
semiotics with qual  
research**

**‘Star Trekky’**

**before fieldwork**

- **predict take-out**
- **structure discussion**
- **what to expect**

**after fieldwork**

- **explain findings**
- **verbal behaviour**
- **communicate**

## **stand-alone semiotics**

**research  
questions**

**forward  
looking**

**quick  
cost-effective**



# Key points to take away



**culture & communications**

**tools & formal procedure**

**evidence & expertise**

**use with or without qual**

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