Intertextuality describes the ways in which texts draw upon or refer to other texts. This relationship can be deeply referential (e.g., the influence of Homer’s Odyssey in James Joyce’s Ulysses) or relatively trivial (e.g., a Trojan horse used as a plot device in another narrative). The significance of the concept is that texts (or pieces of texts) can be employed for specific ends in different contexts, implying that the real meaning of the text does not necessarily reside solely within the words themselves but rather in the way they interact with one another: Context takes primacy over text. This understanding of language, speech, and literature views text production as a social practice involving the mingling of multiple texts, discourses, genres, and voices. One controversial outcome of this stance is the questioning of authorial originality. If an author writes a completely original detective novel, for instance, with a new narrative, set of characters, and plots twists, she is still interacting with the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the many pulp novels of the early 20th century that helped create the genre of the modern detective novel (and indeed back to Neolithic peoples telling stories around fires). If this author’s originality is based on a divergence from the generic conventions, one could argue she is even more indebted to those conventions.

In the view of intertextuality, meaning has no single original source. Although initially concerned with written text, intertextuality has also been used to describe speech, performance, modes of dress, and various other cultural practices and institutions. This entry provides an overview of intertextuality, exploring how it is used in cultural theory, in social and political contexts, and in digital media.

In Cultural Theory

The term (intertextualité) comes from the 1968–1969 work of Julia Kristeva, building from and reworking Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism from the 1930s. By applying these literary concepts to larger societal institutions and conventions, Kristeva provided a way to talk about the destabilization of power structures—a significant topic in France in the late 1960s—and helped spur what was becoming known as the linguistic turn in critical theory. Expanded upon by theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, intertextuality wrested the authority to define and explain things from deeply entrenched power structures, instead placing control in the contextual relations between these institutions and those on their margins, thus putting all parties on equal linguistic (and agentive) footing. This decentering of authorial and narrative power was part of a larger critique of the structuralist thinking that had dominated intellectual discourse throughout the 20th century up to that point.

Structuralism—derived from Ferdinand de Saussure’s structural linguistics of the early 1900s and brought into use as a cultural framework by Claude Lévi-Strauss in the 1950s—reasons that, along with the binary of concrete reality and abstract thought, there is a third order that mediates between the two, a structure through which all aspects of culture can be defined and understood. Kristeva and her fellow post-structuralists (though they almost never called themselves that) saw structural thought as ahistorical and blind to...
power relations, and they sought to reinsert historical context into their examinations of cultural concepts and recenter the seat of knowledge to that of the beholder. By the end of the 20th century, post-structuralist thought had largely replaced structuralism as a dominant intellectual paradigm in cultural theory.

In Social and Political Use
While attention to history can uncover how meanings have been created through a contextual interplay of texts, the actors involved in communication also have considerable influence on the process. Context does not just happen; it is enacted through a process of contextualization, wherein communicative parties bring associated meanings and assumptions to a text, foregrounding certain aspects while disregarding or sidelinging others. Through this process, the interplay of many texts becomes understood as a coherent and self-contained narrative. The opposite process of contextualization is entextualization, that is, cutting a stretch of text loose from its context so that it may be moved to another context. But, text cannot simply exist on its own; it must exist within a context of some sort, so after being decontextualized from its original context, it is recontextualized into the new one. However, when a stretch of text is recontextualized, there is always an intertextual gap, that is, not all of the text's previous contextual meanings can be retained, and some new ones come to light.

These processes of (con-, en-, de-, re-) textualization have proven useful in explaining and analyzing social language use and political power dynamics by looking at genres of performative language use. For instance, the United Farm Workers (UFW) initially used the phrase “Si se puede” in the context of Cesar Chavez's 25-day hunger strike in 1972. It became a rallying cry for the UFW (and the title of a 1976 charity album by Los Lobos benefiting the UFW). When Barack Obama adopted the translated “Yes we can” as a campaign slogan in 2008, he changed the context and genre from protest-voiced-by-marginalized-migrant-workers to mainstream-politics-voiced-by-rich-elites, which created some intertextual gaps. Largely due to Obama's prolabor platforms and the historic solidarity between unions and the Democratic Party, the gaps were narrow enough to be acceptable and endowed the phrase with new meanings. Along with a basic message of “hope” (Obama's central brand throughout the campaign), the phrase brought with it an implied history of social justice, left-wing activism, and unity with Hispanic Americans. When AeroMexico, however, filed a trademark application for “Si se puede” as a marketing slogan, the move to an advertising genre created an intertextual gap that proved too wide, and the UFW filed (and won) their own trademark application in response.

In Digital Media
Perhaps the most apparent mass media use of intertextual layering can be found in memes, the indigenous vernacular of social media. Understanding a meme's message most often requires knowledge of various different narratives and texts within popular culture and insight into the ways that these texts change when contextualized together. This is best understood by way of another example: A meme circulated in 2017 shows a picture of pop music star Ed Sheeran wearing a suit of armor in a forest, with the caption “SHE DOESN'T EVEN GO HERE!” To comprehend the meaning of the meme, someone would need knowledge of (a) who Ed Sheeran is, (b) the context of the photograph, which is a screenshot from the HBO series Game of Thrones, and (c) specific dialogue and context from the movie Mean Girls. Ed Sheeran had made a brief guest appearance on Game of Thrones as a soldier, and many fans of the show were outraged, harassing the singer online to the point that he deleted his Twitter account shortly thereafter. Fans felt that his presence (as a famous pop star) distracted from the fictional world of the show, which was primarily populated by a cast of either previously unknown or lesser known character actors. The quote “she doesn’t even go here” is shouted in a scene in the 2004 film Mean Girls in which a young woman tries to share her feelings in a group session at a school she does not attend. The meme expresses fan irritation through the humor created by a few intertextual gaps: the awkward mix of genres (violent fantasy drama and light coming-of-age comedy), the implication that the warring armies of
Game of Thrones are like high schools, and the gender mismatch created by retaining the “she” from the original quote.

Devin Proctor

See also Deconstructionism; Genre Theory; Internet Society; Linguistics; Meme; Social Media; Structuralism

Further Readings


INTERVIEWING

In a broad sense, the term interviewing refers to a situation in which an individual poses questions on a specific event, topic, or issue to another individual and the other individual responds. In the field of mass media studies and social research, interviewing concerns both a form of journalistic communication and a methodological and research tool of inquiry.

Journalistic interviewing, a fundamental method in journalism and media reporting, consists of a conversation between the journalist and the interviewee (or more than one interviewee). The journalist asks questions with the aim of gathering information (e.g., facts or statements) from the interviewee or interviewees. In social science research, primarily qualitative inquiry, interviewing is a method with which to understand social reality (e.g., through interviewees' representations, experiences, opinions) by means of a conversation between the researcher and one or more interviewees.

This entry describes the distinctive features of these different forms of interviewing, presents the key issues of conducting them, and explores their applications and their differences and similarities.

Journalistic Interviewing

History and Distinctive Features

The journalistic interview was born in approximately the mid-19th century in U.S. newspaper journalism, but it had difficulty establishing itself. In European newspaper journalism, interviews took hold at the end of the 19th century. The emergence of this kind of journalistic genre coincided with the rise of newspaper reporters as relatively autonomous workers with a well-defined professional identity. At the same time, as a result of this new journalistic genre, political leaders began to rethink their methods of public communication.

Before the invention of the tape recorder (around 1950), journalists manually transcribed interviews in notebooks, which could result in a lack of correspondence between statements made by the interviewee and statements published in the newspaper article. The act of recording interviews appeared to solve this problem. However, the literal transcription of an interview is often elaborated by the journalist at a formal and a symbolic level—that is, the journalist transforms it into a plain and fluent text, translates a specific lexicon or code into words comprehensible to the audience, offers a context or a background of the interview, or adds other information to explain the news story. Therefore, with these kinds of interventions, the journalist generates the news.

In the 20th century, interviewing became a well-institutionalized and salient genre in print and broadcast media, a routine technique, increasingly included in news stories. Interviewing is used in many areas of journalism (e.g., investigative, entertainment, arts, sports, politics, science).

An interview attracts the reader's attention because it allows a direct relationship between the