**Contextual and semantic analysis**

**Theoretical introduction – what are contextual and semantic analyses**

A contextual analysis is simply an analysis of a text (in whatever medium, including multi-media) that helps us to assess that text within the context of its historical and cultural setting, but also in terms of its textuality – or the qualities that characterize the text as a text. A contextual analysis combines features of formal analysis with features of “cultural archaeology,” or the systematic study of social, political, economic, philosophical, religious, and aesthetic conditions that were (or can be assumed to have been) in place at the time and place when the text was created. While this may sound complicated, it is in reality deceptively simple: it means “situating” the text within the milieu of its times and assessing the roles of author, readers (intended and actual), and “commentators” (critics, both professional and otherwise) in the reception of the text. A contextual analysis can proceed along many lines, depending upon how complex one wishes to make the analysis. But it generally includes several key questions:

1. What does the text reveal about itself as a text?
2. What does the text tell us about its apparent intended audience(s)?
3. What seems to have been the author’s intention?
4. What is the occasion for this text?
5. Is the text intended as some sort of call to – or for – action?
6. Is the text intended rather as some sort of call to – or for – reflection or consideration rather than direct action?
7. Can we identify any non-textual circumstances that affected the creation and reception of the text? [[1]](#footnote-1)

For deeper analysis of the messages from advocacy and political campaigns we can use **semantic analysis**, which is mostly used in linguistics, but also visuals are sort of texts. During semantic analysis we are analyzing structure and meaning of the message and thus revealing relations between its components – phrases, clauses; graphic elements, transitions, colorizations. It focuses primarily on the text itself, not the particular context.

**Practical part – contextual analysis**

Visit this website <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/> and choose two presidential campaign commercials, ideally of opponents’. Then conduct their contextual analysis and answer following questions:

1) What is key message?

2) What seems to be the candidates intention?

3) What is the occasion for the commercial? What does it respond to?

4) Is the commercial intended as some sort of call to – or for – action?

5) Can we identify any non-textual circumstances that affected the creation and reception of the text? Does it react on some events? Are there any historical/cultural connotations?

You can also conduct semantic analysis and focus on following aspects:

1) Links between text and visuals

2) Does the commercial work with emotions, or is it based on rational arguments?

3) How are the (key)messages ordered?

1. <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)