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# **Locating the power of *place* in *space*:**

## **A geosemiotic approach to context**

Jackie Jia Lou

### **Introduction**

In discourse studies, the physical circumstance of language use has always been considered an essential part of its context. In Dell Hymes (1974)'s SPEAKING grid, a mnemonic summary of the eight essential contextual components in ethnographic approaches to communication, the letter "S" stands for "setting and scene", with "setting" referring to "the time and place of a speech act, to the physical circumstances", and "scene" referring to the "the cultural definition of an occasion" (55). The communicative competence of a university lecture thus involves knowing where to hold a class, where to stand once inside the classroom, and knowing how to define the class as an occasion of learning. Perhaps because it is too obvious, the spatial dimension of context has received far less attention (but see notable exceptions such as Hanks 2001) than the other components in ethnographically oriented studies of language, some of which have even become the focuses of new sub-fields of discourse analysis. For example, interactional sociolinguistics is concerned largely with "P", standing for participants; genre analysis naturally with "G", standing for "genre", but also with "E", standing for "end" or purpose, and with "A" standing for "act sequence" (as in move structure, see Swales, Bhatia). On the other hand, geographic location has also always been an important variable correlated with language variation in traditional

dialectology. *The Atlas of North American English* by Labov and colleagues (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006) is a contemporary example. However, as research in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and linguistic anthropology in general has moved towards a dialogical view of context (summarized in Goodwin and Duranti 1992), it no longer seems sufficient to conceive space as neutral container of talk and place merely a location where language is sampled (Eckert 2004; Johnstone 2004).

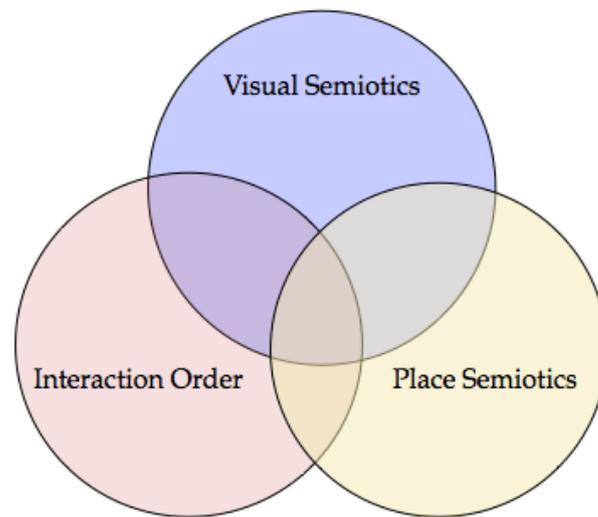
### **Goals of the Study**

The main purpose of this chapter is to introduce to the reader one of the recently developed theoretical frameworks in linguistics which brings space and place back to the centre of the study of situated meaning -- Ron and Suzie Scollon's geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon 2003). It will then demonstrate how the geosemiotic framework can be integrated with other approaches to context in an analysis of an advertising campaign attempting to legitimize the rapid gentrification that has transformed the Chinatown neighborhood in Washington, DC. Through this empirical study, the chapter argues that taking the spatial context of language seriously could in fact illuminate the link between the discursive ideology and political economy of *place*.

### **Introducing Geosemiotics**

The main theoretical approach to discourse analysis that informs the study is geosemiotics, developed by Scollon and Scollon in their book *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (2003). In general, it provides a useful framework for understanding the importance of the physical, material, spatial context for the meaning of language and signs. In geosemiotics, *place* is conceived as a "geosemiotic aggregate", defined as "multiple semiotic

systems in a dialogical interaction with each other” (12), including “interaction order”, “visual semiotics”, and “place semiotics”.



**Figure 1: The Geosemiotic Aggregate (Scollon and Scollon 2003)**

The first semiotic system in the framework is interaction order, a term borrowed from Goffman (1983) but also intended here to include any analytical tools concerned with “the current, ongoing, ratified (but also contested and denied) set of social relationships we take up and try to maintain with the other people who are in our presence” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 16). For example, in a coffee shop, we can observe many different types of interaction order. There is the line or queue either running parallel or perpendicular to the cashier; there is, of course, the service encounter between the customer and the cashier; there is the with, two or more people engaged in interactions with a common focal point; there is the single, an individual appearing to not interact with anyone else, for example, reading a newspaper; then, when there is anyone with a markedly loud voice or making unusual comments, everyone’s attention temporarily shifts towards this person, who in

Goffman's words, would have staged a platform event, however fleeting it may be. Scollon and Scollon reminded us, it is important to recognize interaction orders also as semiotic signs, which "give off" (Goffman 1959) social information about social actors. In addition to these "units of interaction order," Scollon and Scollon also include the five types of perceptual spaces developed by Edward T. Hall (1966) under interaction order. Because different sensory perceptions of a place also imbue it with meaning, in this study, they have been moved under the heading of place semiotics, which will be discussed later.

The second component system in the geosemiotic framework is visual semiotics, referring to "the ways in which pictures (signs, images, graphics, texts, photographs, paintings, and all of the other combinations of these and others) are produced as meaningful wholes for visual interpretation" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8). Here they opt for a narrower definition of the term as used in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). A broader definition of visual semiotics includes "all of the ways in which meaning is structured within our visual fields" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 11), which would significantly overlap with the other two component systems, as interaction order and place semiotics can also be perceived as visual signs. The current study adopts the broader definition and includes verbal along with the visual image.

As the third system of geosemiotics, place semiotics is coined by the Scollons in attempt to connect studies in fields such as urban planning and cultural geography to the studies of micro-level social interaction and language use. It is concerned with the meaning system of spatial organization, or inversely

defined as “the huge aggregation of semiotic systems which are not located in the persons of the social actors or in the framed artifacts of visual semiotics” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8). Place semiotics includes things such as a typology of spaces according to their uses, for example, *fronstage* versus *backstage*, *private* versus *public*, *display space* versus *passage space*. As mentioned in the discussion of interaction order earlier, I would also include Hall’s typology of spaces (1966) according to the five kinds of sensory perceptions under place semiotics. A modified outline of geosemiotics and its component systems is presented in Table 1 below.

<b>Geosemiotics</b>		
<p><b><i>Interaction Order:</i></b>            1. Interpersonal distance (intimate, personal, social, public)             2. Personal front (appearance, behavior)             3. Units of interaction order (single, with, file or procession, queue, contact, service encounter, conversational encounter, meeting, people-processing encounter (interview, screening, examination), platform event, celebrative occasion)</p>	<p><b><i>Visual Semiotics:</i></b>            1. Pictures (Represented participants modality, composition, interactive participants)             2. Material aspects of visual semiotics (moved from <i>place semiotics</i>): code preference, inscription, emplacement</p>	<p><b><i>Place Semiotics:</i></b>            1. Perceptual spaces (moved from <i>interaction order</i>): visual, auditory, olfactory, thermal, haptic.             2. Use spaces: <i>frontage</i> or <i>public</i> (exhibit/display, passage, special use, secure), <i>backstage</i> or <i>private</i>, regulatory spaces (vehicle traffic, pedestrian traffic, public notice), commercial space (e.g. holiday market), transgressive space (e.g. homeless hangouts).</p>

**Table 1: A modified geosemiotic framework**

It can be seen from the above summary that geosemiotics is a framework that integrates other approaches to discourse in context rather than excluding them. Looking at interaction order, it is drawing upon interactional sociolinguistics, an approach examining how language shapes and is shaped

by the relationships between and the identities of participants. Looking at visual semiotics, it is drawing upon social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, both of which explore how the use of language and signs reflects and reproduces ideology and power. Looking at place semiotics, it is drawing upon humanistic geography and architectural studies, in which place and space are seen as dynamically influencing and being influenced by human actions, including linguistic and semiotic practices. Thus, context, in geosemiotics, is not the background of text. Rather, it is an organic whole, of which text is a part. What Scollon and Scollon (2003) seem to be trying to do with geosemiotics is to introduce a multidimensional framework, which decenters the text and transcends the long-standing dualistic model which text is seen as the "focal event" and context the background (see Goodwin and Duranti 1992 for a summary of this conceptual model that underlies most approaches to discourse analysis).

### **Background of the study**

To demonstrate how these three components can be integrated to illuminate the complex interaction between language, space, and place, this study analyses an advertising campaign that appeared in Washington, DC's Chinatown.

Since the mid-1980s, the Chinatown in Washington, DC has undergone rapid gentrification. Language has become one of the few available means for the community to preserve and revitalize the neighborhood's ethnic characteristics, albeit also commoditizing it in the process. A small downtown

neighborhood with most ethnically Chinese-owned businesses concentrated on one block of H Street, its size has been continuously shrinking, as the residential pattern of Chinese immigrants shifts to the suburbs, and as more American national and transnational chains moving into this downtown neighborhood. Facing the challenge of Chinatown disappearing completely, Chinatown Steering Committee, formed in 1986 by a group of local Chinese-American entrepreneurs, has devised and implemented a policy in conjunction with the Office of Planning of Washington, DC Government to mandate all stores in the officially designated Chinatown area to carry Chinese-English signs on their storefronts. The result of this policy is a unique linguistic landscape which is not observed in other major North American Chinatowns: Chinese characters are inscribed not only on Chinese restaurants but also seen on the outside of American businesses such as Starbucks and AT&T.

This phenomenon has generated much discussion in the local press (e.g. Moore 2005; Gillet 2007) as well as in sociological (Pang and Rath 2007) and sociolinguistic research (Lou 2007, 2009; Leeman and Modan 2008). While Chinese-American entrepreneurs and city planners are usually held responsible for devising and implementing the municipal regulation which results in this symbolic commodification of urban space, a closer, geosemiotic analysis of the shop signs (Lou 2007) and an ethnographic of the neighborhood (Lou 2009) reveal a much more complicated picture.

In particular, large American corporations located in the area do not simply comply with the regulation, but they actively seek to make their corporate

identity a visible imprint on Chinatown's landscape. In addition to semiotic strategies such as minimizing the visual prominence of Chinese characters and maintaining corporate chromatic scheme in shop signs, corporations also employ other forms of discourse to legitimize their presence in Chinatown and also to build positive public image in relation to the neighborhood. To understand how such corporatization of urban space is accomplished through discourse, I will now turn to the analysis of an advertising campaign by one of the most prominent commercial establishments in the neighborhood, the Verizon Centre, an indoor sports arena.

### **Data & Methods**

Data in this study are an advertising campaign consisting of 14 billboard advertisements to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Verizon Center. The Verizon Center is a 20,000 seat multifunctional arena 'located in the heart of Chinatown' in downtown Washington, DC (Verizon Center, 2008; also see map<sup>1</sup> in Figure 2), owned and operated by the Washington Sports and Entertainment, LP. Until 5 March 2006, this arena was named MCI Center, which had been the arena's name for more than eight years since its opening in 1997, and which is still often used by many long-time residents and office workers in the area. After Verizon Communications closed their \$6.7 billion acquisition of MCI Communications in January 2006, the name change took place swiftly on all signs at the arena.



**Figure 2: Location of Verizon Center**

Launched on 27 September 2007, this yearlong campaign began with a project named ‘station domination’, which means all advertising spaces in Gallery Place-Chinatown Metro Station, the closest metro station to the arena, would be covered with this campaign for two months (Verizon Center, 2007). The campaign included 14 advertisements, each of which portrayed one or two individuals with a block of text next to their photos. The people featured in these advertisements included not only local political figures and celebrities, for example, Washington, DC Mayor Adrian Fenty and Washington Mystic’s All Star player Alana Beard, but also many ‘friends of the neighborhood’ (Verizon Center, 2007), for example, farmer’s market organizers, a bartender, a chef, the Spy Museum director, and even a costumed Shakespeare from the Shakespeare Theatre. Each of them wears a tattoo of the Verizon Center’s 10th Anniversary logo. During the two months leading to the anniversary on 2 December 2007, these advertisements were lined up on both sides of the

corridors connecting the underground metro turnstiles and the street-level entrances and occupied all available advertising space inside the station. In addition, the campaign also appeared outside the Verizon Center in the form of banners attached to street lampposts.

## **Methods of Analysis**

The advertising campaign was first noticed and photographed during my fieldwork in the Chinatown neighborhood, the focus of which is on its bilingual linguistic landscape, including mostly shop signs. The campaign caught my attention, as it skillfully employed a multitude of visual and textual resources to extol the role of the corporate in urban revitalization. In a previous article (Lou 2010), I have analyzed one advertisement directly relevant to Chinatown. In the current study, the entire campaign will be examined, in order to better understand the multiple layers of context. I will first do a critical discourse analysis and visual semiotic analysis of the 13 advertisements, and then apply the geosemiotic framework to analyze its context. I will conclude with the contributions of geosemiotics to the analysis of text in context, especially regarding the concrete connection this framework enables us to draw between power and ideology.

## **Findings & Discussion**

### ***Critical Text Analysis of the Advertising Campaign***

The first section of the analysis focuses on the ideological construction of place in the texts of the advertising campaign. Drawing upon the systemic

functional approach to language (Halliday 1978; Eggins 2004; Fairclough 2003), the following discussion will move from the ideational (how the text represents reality), to the interpersonal (how the text represents the relationship between participants inside and outside the text), and to the textual (how the text achieves cohesion internally and externally) meanings of this advertising campaign.

Ideationally, most advertisements in the campaign represent social events in which Verizon Center has brought positive change to the community or provided opportunity to individuals. The ad featuring then-Mayor of DC, Adrienne Fenty, carries the following text:

*Verizon Center has been an incredible catalyst for dynamic urban revitalization in the District of Columbia. It has become the heartbeat that has pumped life into downtown Washington and brought a renewed sense of pride about everything our great city has to offer.*

*(Ad #4)*

The first clause represents a RELATIONAL PROCESS (“catalyst for urban revitalization”, in which “Verizon Center” is the CARRIER with ATTRIBUTE (“incredible” and “dynamic”), and “in the District of Columbia” as CIRCUMSTANCE. The second sentence of the text represents the same event as two MATERIAL PROCESSES, namely 1) “the heartbeat (ACTOR) that has pumped (PROCESS) life (AFFECTED) into downtown Washington (CIRCUMSTANCE), 2) and “brought (PROCESS) a renewed sense of pride (AFFECTED) about everything our great city has to offer (CIRCUMSTANCE). All of these three processes represent the social events (i.e. the actual, concrete changes caused by the Verizon Center) at a high level of abstraction

(Fairclough, p. 138), first through nominalization as in “urban revitalization”, and second through a metaphor as in “the heartbeat that pumped life into downtown Washington.”

Such abstract representations provide a stark contrast to the text in the following two advertisements, the first of which carries a quote by Steve Buckhantz, a play-by-play announcer for the cable TV network, Comcast:

*Sitting courtside and broadcasting a game for the team I grew up rooting for is the most exhilarating experience I've never known. From the minute I walk into the arena, my heart pounds with anticipation. Bright lights, rabid fans and the best athletes in the world, who could ask for more? (Ad #11)*

The main clause in the first sentence of the text represents the RELATIONAL PROCESS in which “sitting courtside and broadcasting a game” is the “most exhilarating experience” (CARRIER+PROCESS+ATTRIBUTE). The second sentence metaphorically represents the MENTAL PROCESS (i.e. excitement) of the sports announcer as a MATERIAL PROCESS, in which “my heart (ACTOR) pounds (PROCESS) with anticipation (CIRCUMSTANCE).” Note here the Verizon Center only appears as “the arena”, the circumstantial element of the adverbial clause. Similarly in the following text quoting EZ Street, a local radio personality, Verizon Center is represented as CIRCUMSTANCE of a RELATIONAL process:

*Some of the best concerts I have ever seen are at the Verizon Center. Where else can you go in the city to see everything from Beyonce to Aerosmith? I've probably seen a hundred shows here and they've all*

*been incredible. I've also met a lot of interesting people. It's just a great place to go if you want to be entertained! (Ad #12)*

In addition, some ads in the campaign also the two kinds of representation as analyzed above. For instance, the ad featuring a bartender working in Matchbox, a pizzeria located a block away from sport arena carries the following short text:

***Verizon Center** has made a big impact on the community and on me personally. It has totally changed the face of Penn Quarter. Nothing was here before and now new businesses are coming in. I started out working at **Verizon Center** and it led me to Matchbox, which is my passion. I recently bought a condo nearby. I just love this place!*

The first occurrence of “Verizon Center” in the text is a grammatical ACTOR in a rather abstract MATERIAL PROCESS of making “a big impact on the community”, and the second occurrence is the spatial CIRCUMSTANCE of a more concrete MATERIAL PROCESS of “working”.

Table 2 below summarizes the ideational representations of Verizon Center in the text of the advertising campaign. A large number of occurrences represent the sports arena as the ACTOR in relatively abstract MATERIAL or RELATIONAL processes of change.

	VC as ACTOR	VC as LOCATION	VC as AFFECTED
Abstract	9	0	0
Concrete	3	4	2
Total number of occurrences of VC	12	4	2

**Table 2: Summary of ideational representations in the campaign text**

It should also be noted here that in the clauses in which the Verizon Center is represented as a catalyst for urban revitalization, a variety of place-names are assigned to the community that is said to have benefited from this change (the AFFECTED), ranging from Chinatown to Penn Quarter, which will be further discussed in the section on geosemiotic analysis, in connection with indexicality. Next I will first turn to the interpersonal meaning of the campaign.

Among the occurrences of Verizon Center as ACTOR, it is personified to various extents: it is the catalyst for change (ad 2 & 4), benefactor (ad 13), impact-maker (ad 1), and giver of opportunities (ad 6 & 7) to both the community and the individual. It is also “hailed” as “neighbor and most friend” in the ad quoting a costumed Shakespeare:

*For three and seven years the Shakespeare Theatre Company has been most proud to call Verizon Center neighbour and most deserv'd friend. From fantastical concerts and remarkable sporting tourneys to delightful ciruses and rallies of monstrous trucks, Verizon Center has something for everyone. For this alone I say 'Hail, Verizon Center. Hail, good friend.'* (Ad #10)

In dramatic contrast, the other occurrence of Verizon Center as object in the text simply represents it as what it is, a sports arena and company built by its owner Abe Polin, as in the following ad featuring two organizers of the neighborhood's farmers' market.

*Abe Pollin showed his passion for the city when he built Verizon Center, sparkling revitalization. Now we're part of that vibrant change as urban meets rural every Thursday at the Penn Quarter*

*FRESHFARM Market. Farmers unload their bounty and customers stroll down the city street, shopping and talking, reclaiming it for people and good food. (Ad #5)*

Thereby it also reveals the identity of the person whom the Verizon Center is represented as in the earlier discussion. The clearest instances of personification are the campaign slogans that appear on every individual ad:

1) A Passion that Shows, and 2) Happy Birthday, Verizon Center!

Thus, it would seem that people featured in the ads are speaking to Verizon Center or the man who built it. Yet, the visual representation makes it appear otherwise. As illustrated in farmer's market ad (Figure 3), the ads in the campaign show the featured individuals from waist above or higher. This creates a close *social distance* with those who look at the ads (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). Their eyes place a direct *gaze* upon the imagined reviewer, and their spoken words placed at the level of their mouths, reminiscent of speech bubbles, engaging the viewers directly on an equal footing.



**Figure 3: Farmer's Market Ad**

Thus, Goffman's (1981) three production formats are unified in the visual representations of these photographic portraits. They are not only *animator* of these quotes, but also *author* and *principal*. However, as we will see in the following analysis of the textual cohesion in the advertising campaign, these individual voices are infused with a strong corporate voice.

The 14 individual advertisements are linked together by several visual and linguistic ties. First, the intertextual cohesion among them is achieved by repeating the slogans "A Passion That Shows" and "Happy Birthday, Verizon Center". Second, the entire campaign uses Verizon Center's corporate color palette of black, red, and white. In fact, the individuals featured in the campaign were invited to the photo shoot wearing any of these corporate colors (interview with Stephanie Cheng, the daughter in ad shown below in Figure 4). The last visual device for cohesion among the ads is the tattoo. Everyone in the ad wears a temporary tattoo of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo, on the back of their hands, on their arms, or even on their chest.



Figure 4: Chengs

Within each individual ad, there is also a strong level of cohesion through the repetition of several campaign keywords. Take the word “passion” for example. It not only appears prominently in the slogan vertically placed on the left edge of every ad, but it is also found in the quotation texts of five ads, as listed below.

*Ad #1: ... “I started out working at Verizon Center and it led to Matchbox, which is my passion. ... ” (Layla Nguyen, Bartender at Matchbox)*

*Ad #5: “Abe Polin showed his passion for the city when he built Verizon Center, sparking revitalization. ... (Ann Harvey Yonders & Bernadine Prince, co-directors, Freshfarm Markets)*

*Ad #6: “Verizon Center gives me the arena to showcase my skills and express my passion for the sport. ...” (Alana Beard, Washington Mystics All-Start)*

*Ad #7: “My passion is my family and **Verizon Center** provides numerous opportunities for us to spend time together. ...” (Angie Reese with Daughter Anjali, Age 4)*

*Ad #8: “I’m blessed by the commitment Verizon Center and the Wizards have shown to us. They share our passion for giving. ...” (Wenners Ballard II, Director, The Salvation Army)*

In these examples except Ad #5, the passion is that of the quoted individual, for their work, for the sport, for their family; Ad #5 refers to the passion of a

non-present third individual, Abe Pollin, the owner and founder of the company. All of these individual passions are in various ways enabled by the Verizon Center: it led Layla to Matchbox, it gave Alana the arena to play basketball, it provided the mother opportunities to spend more time with family, and it shared the passion of the Salvation Army in giving. In Ad# 5, a cause-effect relationship is implied between the construction of Verizon Center and revitalization of the city, the passion of Abe Pollin. In short, the word “passion” in the rather abstract slogan is made concrete through these individual experiences, while at the same time the individual passions are made possible by the corporate benefactor.

The repetition of words such as “passion”, along with other visual cues such as the bolding of “Verizon Center” suggests that there is a much more complicated production format than what appears on the surface. Although visually, the quotation texts are represented as “reported speech”, they are in fact “constructed dialogues” (Tannen 1982). Based on information gathered during the interview, Verizon Center’s public relations department invited these individuals to photo shoots in a studio and conducted the interviews with them. Their answers were written down in a notebook. It is beyond the scope of the current study how many edits and changes were made between the interviews and the printing of the ads, but it is clear that the Verizon Center corporation is at least part of the *author* and *principal* of these texts.

To recapitulate, the foregoing analysis shows a strong corporate voice permeating the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings of the text. As Bakhtin (1981) points out, different texts are dialogical to various extents.

Although the campaign feature 16 individuals in 14 ads, it is more monophonic than polyphonic. The individual voices are deployed to construe a uniform story in which the Verizon Center is personified as an agent of urban revitalization, which has benefited not only the city but also the individuals. The key underlying assumption here is that urban revitalization has been necessary and beneficial. This is of course an ideological construal that benefits the corporate, improving Verizon Center's corporate image and making its owner, Abe Pollin's, other residential development programs in the neighborhood more acceptable to the public. Having analyzed the text of the advertising campaign, now I will turn to its physical context and discuss how it turns corporate ideology into corporate power.

### **Place Semiotics**

As mentioned earlier in the article, this advertising campaign inundated the Gallery Place – Chinatown Metro Station for two months before its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was seen on the wall of the corridors between the ticketing gate and the exit, on the pillars next to the escalators inside the station (, as well as light boxes on the platform. It also appeared on lampposts above the ground, just outside the station, and on the high-definition scoreboard hanging from the ceiling inside the arena. In Scollon and Scollon's gesemiotic framework, these spaces are part of the place semiotics, in a complex dialogical relationship with visual semiotics and interaction order. Here, I would like to suggest that these two other components could also be linked with the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings of campaign of the text, and will illustrate how in the following analysis.

It might seem natural that the main target location of the advertising campaign was the closest Metro Station, but the fact that the metro station is also located in Chinatown, as indicated in the hyphenated station name – “Chinatown – Gallery Place”, presents an intriguing contradiction to the array of place-names assigned to the neighborhood in the ideational representation. Among these other neighborhood names, Penn Quarter appeared in four ads. Take the quote by the chief chef at Zola for example:

*Verizon Center has been a great catalyst for **Penn Quarter**. It has given people yet another reason to visit **here**, live **here**, and open businesses in **this great city**. (Ad#2, Zola Chef)*

The indexical “here” is highly ambiguous, depending entirely on the position of the speaker. Since this ad was seen on the wall of the metro station, the “here” then physically indexes the area that emanates from the station. At the same time, the cohesive chain within the text names it as “Penn Quarter”. The metro station is also a *passage space*, “designed to facilitate or allow passage from one space to another” (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 214). One exit of the station connects to Verizon Center, and another exist leads up to 7<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, the center of Chinatown, where the Friendship Archway stands. Thus, the emplacement of the ad in the metro station creates an exophoric link between the ad and its geographic surrounding, making the ads spatially relevant to the passers-by and visitors in how they make sense of the places that they are going to see, are seeing, or have seen.

In the analysis of the visual representation in the ads, we have seen how gaze and size of frame are used to represent the participants in a direct conversation with the viewer of the ad, whereas the speech event in which the narrative was originally created involved the publicist of the Verizon Center as the audience and co-author. A stretch of spoken discourse is “resemiotized” (Iedema 2001, 2003) into a written text, resulting in an illustrative example of *secondary orality*: “even when printed it affects the style of personal spoken communication” (Cook 1992: 24). The illusory immediacy of interaction is further enhanced by the physical space. Following the analysis of Scollon and Scollon (2003), the metro station combines multiple kinds of semiotic spaces in one, and shapes an *interaction order* (Goffman’s term re-introduced in Scollon and Scollon 2003) that is particularly conducive to the circulation of commercial discourse (e.g. Lock 2003). First, the metro station is a kind of *exhibit-display spaces*, that “are simply to be looked at as we do other things in them or as we pass through them” (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 170). Compared with the vast array of competing visual messages above the ground, the corridor’s grey cement walls provides a monotonous background against which the ads would stand out. The dim lighting in the corridor also limits the interaction among passers-by, and their attention is instead led to the illusory participants by the dim lighting.

Lastly, the ads are printed on glossy paper, framed in black metal, and firmly mounted onto the wall of the corridor between the metro station and the street level, which further “indexes a longer time of preparation and a greater expense in production” (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 136) Whether mounting the advertisement as a billboard on the wall of the metro station or showing it

on the screens inside the arena require material and spatial resources that are only affordable by big corporations such as Verizon Center. With these material resources, the ad is concretely emplaced in the very physical *space* that it seeks to construct as a particular kind of *place*, stamped with its corporate identity. Marchand (1998) observes that the public relations department of giant American corporations during the first half of the twentieth century evoked “countless touching instances, in both sacred and secular lore, of powerful figures bestowing tender and beneficent attention upon frail subjects” (1). While at that time, corporations needed to create fictional towns and communities to “afford them a gratifying sense of rootedness and legitimacy” (Marchand 1998: 1), a century later, as we have seen from this analysis of ideology, power and resources in the narrative construction of Washington, DC Chinatown, this image of corporation as powerful yet benevolent figure is increasingly built upon real cities and neighborhoods, resulting in what Klein (2000) calls “the branding of the cityscape” (35-38).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have introduced Scollon and Scollon’s geosemiotic framework (2003) and applied it to the critical analysis of an advertising campaign celebrating the role of a corporate played in urban redevelopment as well as its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A geosemiotic analysis does not simply describe the geographic and physical context of the campaign, but it examines its dialogical interaction with the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings of the text, drawing upon a functional approach to grammar. The advertising

campaign under study effectively personified the corporation as a friendly agent of welcoming urban change, representing neighborhood figures sharing a homogeneous voice, and ultimately branded the neighborhood with a corporate logo. The strategic deployment of interdexicality made it possible for the campaign to redefine the neighborhood that it was located in.

In his synthesis on symbolic power, Bourdieu (1991) cautions us against “a pure and purely internal analysis (semiology)” of “ideological productions as self-sufficient, self-created totalities” (169). Instead, he argues, “symbolic power, a subordinate power, is a transformed, i.e. misrecognizable, transfigured and legitimated form of the other forms of power” (170). Thus, it is the task of the analysts to describe how other kinds of capital are transformed into symbolic capital. Geosemiotics provides one answer to the call by locating the symbolic power of place in its concrete spatial context.

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