ENGLISH 306F: INTRODUCTION TO SEMIOTICS (FALL/07)
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Office hours: Th 1:30 - 3:15 and by appt.

www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~amcmurry/index.htm

OVERVIEW:
Semiotics is the discipline that studies the capacity of humans (and, in some respects, non-humans) to make, disseminate, and understand signs. What is a sign? Basically, a sign is anything that can stand for something else. Obviously, then, the range of semiotic inquiry is very broad—from the dance of the honey-bee to the films of Chris Marker, from the expression on your face at this moment to a segment of your DNA.

In this course we'll have three main tasks: to read about the history and theory of semiotics; to learn some of the vocabulary and methodology of semiotics; to practice this vocabulary and methodology on all kinds of everyday things.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Roland Barthes, Mythologies
Thwaites, Davis, and Mules, Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: a semiotic approach
Grant Morrison and Dave McKean, Arkham Asylum
306F course book

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIONS:
Students are expected to complete all course readings for the week before class and come prepared to discuss them. Students will be apprised of the examination formats before they are administered. Assessment will be based on the following:

Weekly Interventions: 10%
Students will respond to at least 10 readings from the course material (the choices are noted in the schedule, below). For each cogent, thoughtful intervention—250-300 words filed no later than 3 PM on day the reading is to be discussed—students will be awarded 1%. Students are encouraged to read, and may respond to, each others' interventions; "responses to responses" will count as interventions. Students should also place a copy of each of their posts in their own folders. Students must sign into the "306F Fall 2007" discussion forum at www.nicenet.org using this key: 72Z248035Z

Midterm: 30%
The test will cover all terms and concepts studied to this point. The format is multiple choice, identification, and short answer.

Mythology: 30%
Students will analyze artifacts of their choice using the terms and methods we've discussed. The choice of artifact is open, but some which tend to conform well to the length and depth requirements include:

Pound objects (things you come across in your everyday
travels)
Advertisements
Buildings
Fashions
Foods, toys or other consumer items
Popular figures or icons
Activities (e.g., snowboarding)

Format: essay or annotation
(see Harris in the coursebook for an example of an annotation)
Length: not to exceed two pages (i.e., 600 ± 25 words)
Depth: Students should choose an artifact that will allow them to quickly demonstrate 1) their command of one or two semiotic principles and 2) their understanding of the ideological context in which the artifact is embedded. The analysis must be focused and concise: this is not an essay but a brief encounter with an object of interest using a semiotic framework. Compression of thought and elegance of style will be rewarded; slackness and prolixity won’t. Spelling and grammar count. See R. Barthes.

Final Examination: 30%
The exam will be designed primarily to test students’ ability to apply semiotic principles to supplied artifacts.

Schedule: (* indicates eligible readings for interventions)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 10</td>
<td>What is/are semiotics?</td>
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<td>Sept. 17</td>
<td>History of the sign</td>
<td>TDM 1 &amp; 2; Pierce; Saussure</td>
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<td>Sept. 24</td>
<td>Natural signs; structuralism; the semiotic square</td>
<td>TDM 3; Sebeok*; Flocch*</td>
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<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td>Textuality</td>
<td>TDM 4, 5, &amp; 6; Bowles*</td>
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<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>Semiotics and culture</td>
<td>Barthes, Mythologies*</td>
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<td>Oct. 23</td>
<td>Critical vocabularies: power, ideology, hegemony, and social change</td>
<td>TDM 7 &amp; 8; Williams*; Hall*</td>
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<td>Oct. 30</td>
<td>Midterm test</td>
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<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Film codes; screening of La Jetéé</td>
<td>Monaco*</td>
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<td>Nov. 12</td>
<td>Visual codes</td>
<td>Arkham Asylum; Batman in coursebook; Bishop*</td>
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<td>Nov.</td>
<td>Food codes; gender codes</td>
<td>Sahlin*; Adams*</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Authors</td>
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<td>Nov. 26</td>
<td>Proxemics, gaze, &amp; gesture; buildings and landscapes</td>
<td>Canetti*; Jencks*</td>
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<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>Post-modernism; post-everything</td>
<td>Jameson*; Vanderbilt*</td>
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<td>Dec. ?</td>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>Mythology due</td>
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Note on avoidance of academic offences:
All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infousec/Policies/policy71.htm).

If you need help in learning what constitutes an academic offence; how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission; how to follow appropriate rules with respect to “group work” and collaboration; or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your TA and/or your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean. Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infousec/Policies/policy70.htm.