ENGL 306F * INTRODUCTION TO SEMIOTICS
Winter 1992
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SYLLABUS

§ I. TEXTS


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§ II. COURSE DESCRIPTION

- Epigraphs

  - John Locke, 1690: "All that can fall within the compass of human understanding being either, first, the nature of things, . . . or, secondly, that which Man himself ought to do, . . . or, thirdly, the ways and means whereby the knowledge of both the one and the other of these are attained and communicated, I think Science may be divided properly into these three sorts . . . . The third branch may be called σημειωτική, or the Doctrine of Signs, the most usual whereof being words. . . ; the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs the mind makes use of for the understanding of things or conveying its knowledge to others. . . ."

  - Charles S. Peirce, 1868: "We think only in signs . . . . There is no element whatever of man’s consciousness that has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign that man uses is the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign . . . . Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought."

  - Charles W. Morris, 1938: "Human civilization is dependent upon signs and systems of signs, and the human mind is inseparable from the functioning of signs. . . ."

  - Umberto Eco, 1973: "I am speaking to you. You are understanding me, because I am following the rules of a precise code (the English language). . . . You understand me because there exists a code (a sort of inner competence shared by you and me) and there exist possible messages, performed as concrete utterances and interpretable as a set of propositions. I am using signs. The code . . . couples a sign-vehicle . . . with something called its meaning or its sense . . . . As a semiotic entity the sign is—according to Peirce—‘something which stands to somebody for something else in some respect or capacity’. . . . In [the] continuous movement [from sign to sign] semiosis transforms into signs everything it encounters. To communicate is to use the entire world as a semiotic apparatus. I believe that culture is that, and nothing else."

- Nature, Purpose, and Content of the Course

  As Arthur Berger says, semiotics is "the ‘science of signs’ and of the codes used to understand them" (p. ix), and "The key to finding meaning in things is to realize that we live in a world that is full of signs—a sign being something that stands for or represents something else. Semiotics teaches us
how to read or interpret signs..." (p. viii). Semiotics is also a vast field, touching potentially on every aspect of human experience, of the human intellect, and of the human and non-human environment. Charles S. Peirce, one of the founders of modern semiotics, once wrote that "the entire universe...all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (1906). In a world that is full of signs, in a universe perfused with signs, the signs formulate and identify contexts, relations, and networks of relationships; from the semiotic perspective, all meaning or knowledge constitutes, in the phrase of Thomas A. Sebeok, a "semiotic web."

The pervasiveness of signs means that semiotics as a field of study has relevance and applicability to a wide variety of disciplines in the humanities, the social sciences, and even in the natural and physical sciences and mathematics. The Introduction to Semiotics with which we are involved in ENGL 306F, though it will deal with a generous range of topics, will not comprehend all of the potential topics of semiotics but instead will be focused upon and directed toward those areas most relevant to the discipline of English—in other words, toward language, texts, and culture.

With this goal of an exploration of the semiotic dimensions of language, texts, and culture, the course moves through five parts intended to illuminate various aspects of these dimensions. Berger notes that, even though we may be unaware of being so, we are all semioticians by nature (p. x); and so the course opens with a look at the way in which people observe and interpret the signs which surround us and through which we define ourselves (Part 1). More formally, Part 2 of the course then provides a survey of some of the most important and influential semioticians of the twentieth century. Part 3 introduces several areas of semiotic theory; Part 4 focuses on the theory and application of text semiotics; and Part 5 deals with several aspects of culture and popular culture, semiotically considered.

- **Format, Structure, and Mechanics of the Course**

  The course meets twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, for one and one-half periods per course session. As the normal undergraduate course period in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo is fifty minutes long (that is, for example, 9:30-10:20), the one and one-half period session in ENGL 306F will normally be seventy-five minutes long (that is, 9:00-10:15).

  Each lecture of the course will be supported and accompanied by one or more overhead transparencies. The transparencies will include such materials as lecture outlines, select bibliographies, relevant quotations and other pertinent illustrations, and so on. Lecture by lecture, xerox of the transparency materials, as well as of all course handout materials, will be transferred to a Course Notebook which will be kept in the English Department Reading Room so that students may refer to it as they wish.
Some of the reading assignments for the course will be delivered in the form of lecture handouts. For an example of the format that these reading-assignment handouts will take, see Part 4 of the Course Schedule in this Syllabus (§ IV). When reading assignments are to be made in the form of handouts, they will be distributed one week in advance of the lectures to which they apply.

Written assignments of the course will be announced and distributed according to the schedule indicated in § III of this Syllabus.

With the exception of Lecture 17 (the Test on Theory), each lecture session of the course will open with what will be called a Daily Feature on the Life of Signs in This World. This Daily Feature will characteristically illustrate something of the semiotics of public and private conduct and behavior, of social and institutional forms, etc. The Daily Feature will be distributed, sent around, or displayed on overheads as students enter the classroom and seat themselves at the beginning of the period. The Daily Feature may or may not have anything to do with the specific content of the lecture which it heads; but most of the Features will eventually be mentioned within the course lectures, and most will involve sufficiently significant theoretical implications to warrant being remembered.
§ III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Reading requirements of the course include all works listed in § IV of the Syllabus, Course Schedule. Your reading of each work should be completed before the work is scheduled for discussion. As The Name of the Rose is long and difficult, you should get started on it well in advance of its appearance on the schedule. (The works listed in § V of the Syllabus, Works on Reserve, are not required readings. They are available for you if you have the time and interest to peruse them. To let you know which of the Reserve works are relevant to the various course topics, the Course Schedule in § IV of the Syllabus includes a number of listings identified as "Relevant, but not required, Reserve readings."

- Written requirements of the course are identified as Projects or Examinations. The papers required for Projects 2 and 3 should each be about 2 typed pages; for Project 4, about 10-12 typed pages; for Project 5, about 5-6 typed pages; for Project 6, about 4 typed pages. The two course examinations will include a 75-minute test (March 9) which will cover Part 3 of the course (Theory) and a three-hour final examination (to be scheduled during the April examination period) which will cover the material of the course as a whole (Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

Projects [55%]

1. Solution of cipher [0 weight; due whenever]
2. Brief Holmes analysis [5%]
3. Barthes-esque brief commentary [5%]
4. Term paper on one of Modern Classics [28%]
5. Text-semiotic comparative analysis of The Name of the Rose (novel) and The Name of the Rose (film) [17%]

Examinations [45%]

1. Test over Theory (Mar. 9) [17%]
2. Final Examination (all parts of course) (April examination period) [28%]

Schedule of Course Requirements

Jan 8: Assignment of Projects 2 and 3
Jan 20: Projects 2 and 3 due
Jan 27: Assignment of Project 4
Feb 26: Project 4 due
Mar 4: Assignment of Project 5
Mar 9: Test over Theory
Mar 25: Project 5 due
Apr ?: Final Examination
§ IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

Part 1. Introduction (4 periods -- January 6, 8, 13, 15)

• Preliminaries (Jan. 6)

• [Methodology] Sherlock Holmes -- Consulting Semiotician

Reading assignment from Doyle, *The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries* (Jan. 8-13): five stories, including "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (pp. 66-90), plus an additional four stories to be chosen from among "The Red-headed League" (pp. 42-65); "The Five Orange Pips" (pp. 91-109); "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (pp. 110-130); "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (pp. 131-156); "The Resident Patient" (pp. 200-219); "The Greek Interpreter" (pp. 220-238); "The Naval Treaty" (pp. 239-272); "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder" (pp. 314-337); "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" (pp. 338-362); "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" (pp. 383-404); "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (pp. 458-482).

See also the commentary on "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" in Berger, pp. 16-18.

(Note: The phrase "Sherlock Holmes--Consulting Semiotician" comes from p. 19 of the article by Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok which is cited in § V of this Syllabus. This article provides a fascinating analysis, and if you have the time you may wish to read it; it is not required reading, however.)
• [Approaches] The Mythologies of Barthes: The Life of Signs in the World

Reading assignment from Barthes, Mythologies (Jan 13-15): nine commentaries, including "The World of Wrestling" (pp. 15-26), plus an additional eight commentaries to be chosen from among "The Romans in Films" (pp. 27-30); "The Writer on Holiday" (pp. 31-34); "Blind and Dumb Criticism" (pp. 37-39); "Operation Margarine" (pp. 45-47); "Soap-powders and Detergents" (pp. 40-42); "Novels and Children" (pp. 56-58); "Toys" (pp. 59-61); "Wine and Milk" (pp. 65-68); "Steak and Chips" (pp. 69-71); "The Jetman" (pp. 78-80); "The Blue Guide" (pp. 81-84); "Ornamental Cookery" (pp. 85-87); "Striptease" (pp. 91-94); "The New Citroen" (pp. 95-97); "Photography and Electoral Appeal" (pp. 98-100); "Plastic" (pp. 104-106); "The Great Family of Man" (pp. 107-110).

(Note: The long essay "Myth Today" [pp. 117-174] is not included within the Barthes reading assignment. It will, however, be discussed in the Barthes lectures.)

Part 2. History of Semiotics (6 periods — January 20, 22, 27, 29, February 3, 5)

• Preliminary reading assignment (Jan 20): Innis, editorial framework to Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology (Introduction, pp. vii-xvi; headnotes to Peirce, pp. 1-4; Saussure, pp. 24-27; Vološinov, pp. 47-49; Bühler, pp. 66-69; Langer, pp. 87-89; Lévi-Strauss, pp. 108-110; Bateson, pp. 129-131; Jakobson, pp. 145-147; Morris, pp. 176-177; Barthes, pp. 190-192; Schapiro, pp. 206-208; Benveniste, pp. 226-228; Eco, pp. 247-249; Thom, pp. 272-274; Sebeok, pp. 292-293); Berger, two "Prefaces" and Ch. 1, pp. vii-x, 1-4; Barthes, Elements, "Introduction," pp. 9-12; Eco, Theory, "Introduction," pp. 3-31

(Note: The intent of the Part 2 preliminary reading assignment is to indicate something of the scope and of the preoccupations of semiotics as a field of academic interest and research.)

• Precursors of Modern Semiotics (Jan 20)

Reading assignment: handout materials as supplied

• Modern Classics

• Charles S. Peirce (Jan 22)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 1-4; Charles S. Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in Innis, pp. 4-23


• Ferdinand de Saussure (Jan 27)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 24-27; Ferdinand de Saussure, "The Linguistic Sign," in Innis, pp. 28-46


• Charles Morris (Jan 29)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 176-177; Charles Morris, "Signs and the Act," in Innis, pp. 178-189


• Roman Jakobson (Feb 3)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 145-147; Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in Innis, pp. 147-175

• Claude Lévi-Strauss (Feb 3)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 108-110; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism in Linguistics and in Anthropology," in Innis, pp. 110-128


• Roland Barthes (Oct. 9)

Reading assignment: Innis headnote, pp. 190-192; Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in Innis, pp. 192-205


• Umberto Eco (Oct. 9)


[Relevant, but not required, Reserve readings: Nöth 1990, "Eco," pp. 325-326]

Part 3. Theory: The Field (7 periods -- February 10, 12, 24, 26, March 2, 4, 9)

• Initial reading assignment (Feb 10): Berger, Signs in Contemporary Culture

(Note on Part 3 initial reading assignment: The Berger text has general relevance to most of the Part 3 topics as well as to Parts 4 and 5. You will probably find the book a quick read.)

• Sign and Meaning (Oct. 16-21)

Reading assignment: handout materials as supplied; see previously assigned readings in Innis by Peirce, Saussure, Morris; Bühler, "The Key Principle: The Sign Character of Language," in Innis, pp. 66-86; Thom, "From the Icon to the Symbol," in Innis, pp. 272-291; Barthes, Elements, "Signifier and Signified," pp. 35-57

• Semiosis and Code (Feb 12-24)


• Language (Feb 26-Mar 2)

   Reading assignment: handout materials as supplied; see previously assigned readings in Innis by Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Eco, Bühler; Vološinov, "Verbal Interaction," in Innis, pp. 47-65; Benveniste, "The Semiology of Language," in Innis, pp. 226-246; Barthes, Elements. "Language (Langue) and Speech," pp. 13-34


• Structuralism (Mar 2-4)

   Reading assignment: handout materials as supplied; see previously assigned readings in Innis by Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Barthes; see previously assigned readings from Barthes, Elements, pp. 9-57; Barthes, Elements, "Syntagm and System," pp. 58-88; Barthes, Elements, "Denotation and Connotation," pp. 89-94

• Nonverbal Communication (Mar 4)

Reading assignment: handout materials as supplied


• Test over Theory (Mar 9)

Part 4. Text Semiotics (4 periods -- March 11, 16, 18, 23)

• Textuality & Interpretation: Theory, Poetry, Narrative

Reading assignment (Mar 11-16): Handout materials as supplied
[handout includes MG summaries on Textuality and Interpretation; short poems by Frost, Marlowe, Ralegh, Lewis, and Nash; brief excerpt from Dickens, Great Expectations; Doyle, "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons," in The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries, pp. 383-404; see previously assigned readings in Innis by Jakobson, Barthes, Eco


• Applied Semiotics and the Text as Semiotic System

Reading assignment (Mar 18-23): Eco, The Name of the Rose

Part 5. Culture and Popular Culture (3 periods -- March 25, 30, April 1)

• Topics: Aesthetics, Architecture, Advertising, Print, Comics, Film, Television

Reading assignment (Mar 25-30, Apr 1): Handout materials as supplied; a week's worth of a specific comic strip from the most convenient newspaper (the week is to be Mar. 23-28, Monday through Saturday, plus the weekend color feature; the strip is to
be one of Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Peanuts, Shoe, Pogo, Doonesbury, or another strip which you clear in advance with the instructor; Barthes, Mythologies, "The Romans in Films," pp. 27-30; "Soap-powders and Detergents," pp. 40-42; "Wine and Milk," pp. 65-68


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§ V. WORKS ON RESERVE

P 37.B29H4 1977


P 99.O5x 1985

NX 650.N37C45 1978

Culler, Jonathan. Structuralist Poetics. London: Routledge, 1975. (For Ch. 1, "The Linguistic Foundation," p. 3; Ch. 3, "Jakobson's Poetic Analyses," p. 55; Ch. 4, "Greimas and Structural Semantics," p. 75.)
PN 98.S7C8 1975b


P 99.D398 1990

Deely, John, et al. Eds. Frontiers of Semiotics. Bloomington: Indiana, 1986. (For John Locke, "Coining the Name," p. 3. This work contains a number of other articles of interest, though the level of discussion in the work as a whole is quite advanced.)
P 99.F76 1986

P 99.E28 1979

Eco, Umberto. The Limits of Interpretation. Bloomington: Indiana, 1990. [On text semiotics; see especially the Introduction.]
PN 98.S46E26 1990

PR 4624.S53 1983

P 146.H3 1977b
Hervey, Sándor.  **Semiotic Perspectives.**  London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982. (For the work as a whole: the book constitutes a wide-ranging discussion of a variety of topics in semiotics. Originally, the book was ordered as a text for this course, but it unfortunately turned out to be out of print.)
P 99.H45 1982

P 99.W3813 1987

P 99.N6513 1990

P 302.P74 1977

Sayers, Dorothy Leigh.  **Have His Carcase.**  London: New English Library, 1974. (For chs. 25, 26, 28, 29.)
PR 6037.A95H3x 1971b

Sless, David.  **In Search of Semiotics.**  London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986. [An introductory discussion.]
P 99.558x 1986

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