

## **CAS 544: SEMIOTICS AND THE STUDY OF MEANING**

### **SCHEDULE**

#### **PART I. Basic notions and Views.**

- (1) **THE STUDY OF CULTURE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FIELD OF SEMIOTICS.** The symbolic species; co-evolution of language and the brain; theories explaining why and how culture may have originated; the evolution of consciousness; implications for the study of language; definition of culture in semiotic terms; definition of cognate notions (society, civilization, race, ethnicity, and nation); the primary spheres that compose the institutional orb of culture. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 1]
- (2) **THE SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO CULTURE.** Historical background to the semiotic study of culture; distinction between general and cultural semiotics; semiotics and communication science; semiotics and cognitive science; interdisciplinary aspects of semiotic analysis; principles of semiotic analysis; the science of signs and the signs of science. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 2]
- (3) **FUNDAMENTALS OF SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS.** The signifying order; semiosis, representation, and modeling; the sign; types of signs; denotation, connotation, and annotation; structural systems and relations; codes and texts and ciphers; dimensionality; effects of signs on perception and thinking; the capacity for artifice and deceit. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 3]

#### **PART II. The Semiotic Study of Culture.**

- (4) **NONVERBAL SEMIOSIS AND COMMUNICATION.** Cultural codes, conditioning, and nonverbal communication; kinesic, facial, proxemic, tactile, and gestural codes; hair and there: the semiotics of hair styles; clothing as an extension of bodily semiosis; nudity as the paradigmatic counterpart of clothing; the spell of the sensuous; dancing as bodily art; the exotic and the erotic: universal desires and the cultural coding of interests. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 4] Exemplars: Video, "A World of Gestures."
- (5) **FIRST TEST**
- (6) **THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CULTURAL SYSTEMS.** Origins of language theories reviewed; language and human nature; zoo-semiotics and cross-species communication; language and thought; naming; the roles of writing and discourse in cultural systems; writing degree zero and the language of mathematical systems; gendered communications: "male and female speak"; gay subculture and language; flags of the past: history, literacy, and the signs of the times; illiteracy and the sign of the savage. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 5] Exemplar: Video, "Discovering the Human Language: Colorless Green Ideas."

(7) **THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN SHAPING CULTURAL GROUPTHINK.** Definition of metaphor; metonymy and irony; relation between metaphor and language grammar; role of metaphor in the signifying order; metaphors we live by; travel as metaphor; “wine-i-ness” and signs of the wine; scientific writing; Heisenberg's search for language to describe the world of quantum mechanics. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 6]

(8) **THE CULTURAL MEANINGS OF TERRITORIES, SPACES, AND BUILDINGS.** Shelters and territories; maps as representational systems; spatial codes (public, private, sacred); architectural codes; the desert as sign; changing signs: the desert smells like rain; islands: portraits of miniature worlds; the sign of the sea; things to do in the ocean: surfer subculture. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 7] Exemplar: Video: "It's All True: The Lost Masterpiece."

(9) **THE IMPORTANCE OF ART TO CULTURE AND TO HUMAN LIFE GENERALLY.** Theories of art; performance art (theater, music, ritual); visual art; cinema; postmodern art; the culture and biology of beauty; tattoo you; makeup, piercing, and mutilation; circus culture and the art of mythic display. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 8] Exemplar: Music from Enigma, "MCMXC a.D."

(10) **SECOND TEST**

(11) **THE CULTURAL MEANINGS OF OBJECTS, ARTIFACTS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL PROCESSES.** Objectification; dolls; objectified consciousness; objectified art (pop art); food; Bury or bite? Bodies as objects, corpses; the sign of the cannibal; the raw and the cooked; citizen cannibals and the problem of truth; photos as text; prisonhouse of language; more on the capacity for artifice and deceit; fictions for the masses: Disneyworld and the Disneyfication of America. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 9]

(12) **THE CULTURAL FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVE.** Narrative representation; parables and the literary mind; theories of myth; Barthes on myth; human evolution as narrative; Little Red Riding Hood; the novel; the comics; ethnopoetics; Brazilian stories on a string; Santa signs and narrative. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 10] Exemplar; Video, "Letters Not About Love."

(13) **THE NATURE OF MEDIA; TELEVISION AND ADVERTISING.** History of bourgeois perception — media and the senses; nature and history of television and advertising; TV and advertising as social texts; McLuhan's view of media; analyzing the messages in ads; effects of media on individuals and cultures; more on mythic display: dangerous theater and the world of professional wrestling. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 11]

### **PART III. A Practical Synthesis.**

(14) **HOW TO CONDUCT SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS.** Macrosemiotic analysis; microsemiotics analysis; final thoughts on the Nature versus Nurture controversy. [Readings: Danesi and Perron, Chapter 12]

THIRD TEST.