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Course description.

The Semiotics of culture(s) and intercultural communication

This course will first endeavour to address central problems and questions concerning the description and understanding of culture or, more specifically, cultural forms. Indeed, in order to better understand the origin, structural stability and adaptability as well as the evolutionary dynamics of culture, we need a clearer picture of how to represent heuristically the object “culture” itself and approach it in a descriptive and comparative way. The course will be based on a structural approach to language [*langage*], discourse and culture, and will develop in the first three lectures a theoretical and methodological framework from which we will proceed in the following lectures to systematic investigations of particular contemporary cultural forms from a semiotic point of view. A glossary, a bibliography and a list of online resources will be also provided. The course will unfold as follows:

1. Understanding culture(s): fundamental notions in the study of cultural forms.
2. Language and culture.
3. Social communication and semiotic resources.
4. Media cultures and languages.
5. Digital cultures and websites.
6. Intercultural communication and translation.
7. Audiovisual documentaries and cultural translation.
8. Towards a (structural) semiotics of culture(s).

The first lecture will introduce four basic notions for the understanding of culture. The second lecture will be more particularly concerned with the often mentioned but arguably not always well understood relationship between language (especially verbal language) and culture. The third lecture will endeavour to propose a more systematic way of analysing and comparing functionally specialised languages, that is, languages developed, used and maintained by social actors for communication purposes.

Lectures four and five will be devoted to a general discussion of typical characteristics of the media and the new media cultures which play a central role in modern life. Lecture four will address the question of media language(s) and lecture five will consider websites understood as semiotic (rather than purely technical) systems in digital communication.

Lecture six will introduce from a theoretical, but also practical point of view the question of intercultural communication understood as a cultural translation process. In lecture seven, we will illustrate the cultural translation process by discussing (commercial) audiovisual documentaries and their contribution to a global social imaginary (i.e., cultural representation) of the other in his/her social, historical, geographic, scientific or even metaphysical reality. Finally, lecture eight will be more particularly concerned with theoretical and methodological issues regarding the semiotics of culture within the framework of structuralism and structural semiotics.