# Semiotics

## Prof. Armando Fumagalli; Prof. Paolo Braga

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

Students will be taught a theoretical understanding of the basics of semiotics and theoretical-practical knowledge of some of its main applications in the audio-visual realm, in particular for analysing and constructing stories for the general public (fiction and TV Series, film, written narrative).

At the end of the course, students will be able to explain the key concepts of semiotics, carry out an – at least overall – analysis of the structure of a film/TV fiction/any narrative product for the general public, identify elements such as story lines, character structure and transformations, and the strategies adopted to have an emotional impact on the audience, etc.

***COURSE CONTENT***

The course progresses gradually from the general to the specific: semesters 1 and 2 are therefore not equivalent. Semester 1 will cover some basic concepts, which will then be applied in semester 2. For this reason, students are strongly encouraged, when taking the course as a semester-long exam, to attend semester 1.

Accordingly, the exam syllabus does not distinguish between module 1 and module 2, but between those who are taking the year-long course (8-12 ECTS credits, depending on the faculty) and those taking the semester-long course (4-6 ECTS credits, depending on the faculty).

The two lecturers, Prof. Braga and Prof. Fumagalli, will deliver the course in close collaboration. They will also share the role of examining students, doing so together on the same day in joint sessions. For this reason, the name of the lecturer listed on the exam registration system as the examiner for a certain exam (e.g. for students taking the semester-long course) is irrelevant.

1. *General section*

The historical development of semiotics, its main theories and present-day issues.

1. *Special section*: The narrative components of audio-visual aspects of texts for the general public

– Narrative as a means of understanding the world and as an ethical benchmark. The unity of narrative in literature, theatre and film.

– Key aspects of written and audio-visual narrative: the structure of a story, the hero’s path, the importance of the theme, constructing characters and dialogues.

– Formats of audio-visual stories (film and TV movies, short television series, Italian-style TV series, long-running series and soaps) and their influence on narrative structures.

– Adapting literary forms to the audio-visual world.

– Special subject: il *dark side.* The role of the antagonists in traditional structure stories and the innovation attempt with dark or “chiaroscuro”– sometimes also referred to as “anti-hero” - main characters in cinema and contemporary tv series.

***READING LIST***

General section

G. Bettetini-S. Cigada-S. Raynaud-E. Rigotti (edited by), *Semiotica,* La Scuola, Brescia, Vol. .1, La Scuola, Brescia 1999 e vol. 2, 2003 (to study the following essays: Peirce on volume 1; on vol. 2 two essays to choose among Barthes, Greimas and Eco; the essay by Armando Fumagalli, *Le dimensioni retoriche del testo* is also required reading).

– Armando Fumagalli, *La comunicazione di una ‘Chiesa in uscita’*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 2015.

– Only for students of Linguistic sciences and foreign literatures: Wayne Booth, *Retorica della narrativa* (only the introduction and Part I, pp.1-172 and the afterword to the second edition: from p.417 to the end), Dino Audino, Roma 2016.

– Only for students of Faculties other than Linguistic sciences: Armando Fumagalli – Cassandra Albani – Paolo Braga (edited by), *Storia delle serie TV*, 2 volumes, Audino, Roma 2021 (Prof. Fumagalli will specify, by a notice, the parts of the volumes to be studied).

Special subject:

– Course notes

– Aristotele, *Poetica* (to be used by screenwriters, writers and playwrights), introduced, commented and noted by Armando Fumagalli and Raffaele Chiarulli, Audino, Rome, 2018 (study this edition of the Poetica is obviously important, its comments and introduction are an essential part of the contents that will be asked during the examination).

– A. Fumagalli, *L’adattamento da letteratura a cinema. Teorie, pratiche, esempi, 2 volumi*, Audino, Roma 2020 (both volumes will be asked during examination).

Students unable to attend lectures will study the following for the examination in place of their lecture notes:

– P. Braga-G. Cavazza-A. Fumagalli, *The Dark Side. Bad guys,* *antagonisti e antieroi del cinema e della serialità contemporanea*, Dino Audino, Roma, 2016.

Syllabus for the single-semester examination

Students studying for the single semester examination (4 or 5 or 6 CFUs) will read:

– Various authors, *Semiotica: only the essays on* Peirce and Barthes*.*

– Compared to the one-year syllabus, *they will not study* the volume *Poetica* and the book entitled *The Dark Side*.

***TEACHING METHOD***

The course will mainly be taught in lectures.

The lectures introducing the narrative structures of the tale for the general public will be supported by examples taken from the projection of famous film scenes. The concept of adaptation, instead, will be explained through a detailed analysis of the film “Sense and Sensibility” (1995).

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Oral assessment (duration: between 15 and 25 minutes). Students attending the annual course will be asked to answer a certain number of general and specific questions (from 4 to 6) on the texts included in the reading list. The final mark will result from the sum of the points obtained for each answer (e.g. four questions: 7,5 points each), plus a 1-2-point additional bonus for excellent answers.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

A basic knowledge of philosophy (usually acquired during high school) might be useful to get a better understanding of the topics explained in class, especially general semiotics. However, the course is structured in a clear and simple way, so that students who are not familiar with this subject are not penalised.

Students are advised to check the electronic noticeboard on the lecturer's website for any alterations to the aforementioned syllabus.

See above on the relationship between semester 1 and semester 2 (semester 1 serves as preparation for semester 2).

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.