**Semiotics and Embodied Cognition in the Digital Age**

*Vito Evola*

# Description

The Digital Age has brought forth new ways of interacting with the world around us and communicating our thoughts with others. From computer interfaces to online social networks, people share and interact with their worlds both physically and by means of mediated technology. This course will look at traditional theories of signs (semiotics) and how meaning is construed both at a productive level and an interpretative one, as well as related frameworks in Cognitive Science (embodied cognition, conceptual metaphors and conceptual integration) for alternative perspectives on human communication in the Digital Age.

A final project will be required for students where they will investigate a new trend emerging from the interaction of cyberculture and the digital age and contemporary societies and cultures (e.g. changes in language, new ways of meaning-making, etc.)

# Aims

* to investigate the mutual impact of digital media (compared to traditional media) and modern societies, cultures, and ways of communicating;
* to explore how questions relative to how the language of old and new media are dealt with by broader human and social sciences;
* to undertake and present the results of a small-scale research project.

# Learning Outcomes

*Knowledge and Understanding*

Upon completion of this module, students should be able to:

* critically appreciate how insights from cognitive and other human and social sciences inform current and past sociolinguistic and communication debates with regards to categorizing and representing concepts and persons in (real and virtual) societies;
* know how to plan a research design, collect and use data following scientific and academic ethics standards for quali-quantitative research to test hypotheses through empirical research methods;
* present theoretical notions and empirical findings both analytically and synthetically, and use this information to hypothesize on future research.

*Skills*

With this course, students will have acquired such practical skills as being able to:

* + formalize theoretical concepts pertaining to media and communication using basic methods posited by Media Studies, Digital Anthropology, and Cognitive and Communication Sciences, interpreting written, visual, and other multimedia texts, such as advertisements, newspaper articles, GUIs;
	+ apply Semiotics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to a variety of human-human and human- computer communicational situations.

# Assessment

1. Paper on a theoretical aspect of media studies and communication
2. Final research paper, investigating a new trend emerging from the interaction of cyberculture and the digital age and contemporary societies and cultures (e.g. changes in language, new ways of meaning-making, etc.)

# Theoretical frameworks

* Semiotic theory
* Media Studies
* Conceptual Metaphor Theory
* Conceptual Integration, or Blending Theory
* Phenomenology of the body
* Physical and virtual space
* Internet, the self and society

# Reading List

Bühler, K. (1990). The model of language as organon. *Theory of language: the representational function of language* (pp. 30-56). John Benjamins.

Goatly, A. (2007). *Washing the Brain – Metaphor and Hidden Ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Hanks, W. F. (1996). *Language & Communicative Practices* (Ch. 1). Oxford: Westview.

Kress, Gunther. (2010). Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication.

London: Routledge.

Manovich, L (2001). *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press.

McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. (excerpts)

McQuail, D. (2003). Teoria da Comunicação de Massas. Lisboa: F. C. Gulbenkian, 2003.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

McCulloch, G. (2019). *Because Internet: Understanding the new rules of language*. Riverhead Books. Other articles and digital resources distributed during class.