



This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics

Sean Hall

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Semiotics is the theory of signs. Signs are amazingly diverse: from simple road signs that point to a destination, to smoke that warns us of fire, to the culturally-conditioned symbols buried within art and literature. Our reading of signs is very much a part of everyday life. Yet semiotics is often perceived as a mysterious science. This introductory book decodes the mystery of semiotics using visual examples instead of abstract theory. Divided into 75 key semiotic concepts, each section of the book begins with a single image or sign, accompanied by a question that invites us to interpret what we are seeing. Turning the page, we can compare our response with the theory behind the sign. In this way, we actively engage in creative thinking. Read straight through or dipped into regularly, this book provides practical examples of how meaning is made in contemporary culture.

This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics Details

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From Reader Review This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics for online ebook

Christine says

It's another good one. I'll give you the skinny when I finish with it.

H.d. says

Ótima abordagem para uma introdução à semiótica. Para varias situações será o suficiente para um crescimento pessoal, ou como referência para consulta. E se você tiver interesse/curiosidade o livro indica uma ótima bibliografia.

Tara Brabazon says

What a fascinating and unexpected book. I am often underwhelmed by textbooks. Semiotics textbooks are the confirmation of that principle. However this was an unusual and incredible effective introduction and guide through semiotics.

It is an ideal book for any university library servicing media, communication and cultural studies programmes. It is useful for teachers because of its unusual and effective presentation. For visual learners, and there are many of them in every classroom, this is the best introduction to semiotics I have discovered.

Each of the 76 concepts presented is introduced through an image. On each right hand page there is a graphic, photograph or textual paradox. Upon turning the page, the reader learns not only about the previous text but the concept on which it is based. For teachers, this is a fine resource. For students who do not 'get' semiotics, this is a powerful and useful alternative guide through the field.

The book is also a triumph of design. A lot of thought has gone into the presentation of the ideas. Sean Hall's book is a surprising and welcome triumph in a dull and boring field for textbooks.

Al Bità says

This is a rather painless way of introducing oneself to the world of Semiotics. A lot of effort has been made in the design of the book (it looks great), and can even function as a coffee-table book... It appears to be designed to appeal to the Art world; but Semiotics is more than that alone. The text is presented in simple questions for the reader which help redirect our mental preconceptions, and an answer is then provided on the very next page.

Semiotics can be considered as the granddaddy of all the subsequent posturings we find in Modernism, Postmodernism, Deconstruction, etc. so, in a sense, it is the basis for a lot of modern writing about the arts in general. It deals essentially with Signs and their Meanings, then looks at Ways of Meaning (e.g. similes,

metaphors, Irony, etc.). It also examines the structures we use (Conceptual, Visual and Textual) and how we then manage to interpret them, or use them in storytelling within those structures. In a sense, it's all about asking what we mean when we ask whether something has a Meaning or not... and the answer is not always simple! One can end up so overanalysing everything that in the end we run the risk of being only more confusing than clarifying...

A useful quote that perhaps one should be aware of at the beginning is reserved by the author for the end of the book, where the author admits that, even at this 'basic' level, Semiotics had both a weakness and a strength. "It's weakness is that there is no body of knowledge of which semiotics can be certain. Its strength is that the absence of such a body of knowledge gives it the freedom to explore new ways of thinking, avenues of interest and novel ways of exploring meaning." This is a kind of aporia which perhaps should remain as the true paradox of all this, since the first sentence suggests that any of the 'new ways' of thinking of the second sentence cannot and should never be presented as certain — so what's the point?

Lenora says

I usually don't enjoy textbooks, but this book was absolutely amazing. It greatly helped my understanding and participation in my design foundations class, and I recommend it to anyone with even a passing interest in design. It's simple and extremely visual.

Bob Hartley says

I signed in to give a sign that I sign sign sign. Fucking excellent book.

web says

enjoyable read. recommended for any user.

Harvey says

- Semiotics is the science of signs
- signs are amazingly diverse: from the simple road signs that point to a destination, to smoke that warns us of a fire, to the culturally-conditioned symbols buried deep within art and literature
- this introductory book presents 75 semiotic concepts, using practical examples, of how meaning is made in contemporary culture
- an easy introduction to an abstract science

Eepman says

Sorry, Marly, I finished another one!!!

Jean-Michel Berthiaume says

Possibly the best intro and reference book on semiotics I've read. A great primer

Sara says

This was definitely not the first book I'd read on semiotics; however, it probably should have been . . . Maybe. I don't know. In a way this book was like a relief. It sorted out some of the murky stuff that I had been wading through. It cleared a few things up for me, and I feel excited to jump back into heavier reading. Semiotics is a lot of fun, and this is definitely a book for a dilettante. . . Which I am . . .

Ryan says

This Means This, This Means That is an introduction to Semiotics, and appropriately enough, was the first book I have read on the subject.

The layout of the book goes a long way in making the information approachable: individual ideas or questions are presented on right-hand pages, then explored in more depth on the following left-hand page. This call-and-response method was really effective, providing a perfect pace for digesting the book in small chunks.

The trouble this this book — and maybe the concept of Semiotics altogether — is that it was hard to figure out exactly how to apply this information to my design work. To be fair, the book isn't written for designers, but it didn't seem like the book was written for anyone else, either. Artists? Teachers? Students? Linguists? Writers?

After reading Sean Hall's book, I'll be much more careful about assuming the meanings of the words and images used in my design work, and try to have a more holistic view of what these things are really communicating. Beyond that, practical applications become much more fuzzy. Still, this was an easy and approachable way to get my feet wet, and should be good preparation for reading more in-depth and academic books about Semiotics.
