



TYPOGRAPHIC DESIGN

SEMIOLOGY

CURRENT APPLICATIONS

1. It represents a methodology for the analysis of texts regardless of modality. For these purposes, “text” is any message preserved in a form that has an existence independent of either its sender or receiver; and
2. It is a methodology that can be used by any other major discipline whether it be biology, anthropology, computing, engineering, graphic design, typography, linguistics, mathematics, philosophy, or psychology.
3. The concepts and methods are highly portable and may enrich understanding, for example, for improving ergonomic design in any situation where it is important to ensure that human beings can interact more effectively with their environments, whether it be on a large scale, as in architecture, or on a small scale in the configuration of instrumentation for human use.

Semiotics – also known as *Semiology* – is the study of signs, both individually and grouped in sign systems, and includes the study of how meaning is transmitted and understood.

Semioticians also sometimes examine how organisms, no matter how big or small, make predictions about and adapt to their semiotic niche in the world (*Semiosis*). Semiotics theorises at a general level about signs, while the study of the communication of information in living organisms is covered in biosemiotics.

The subject was originally spelled semeiotics to honour John Locke (1632–1704), who, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), first coined the term “semeiotike” from the Greek word “semeion”, meaning “mark” or “sign”. Semiosis or semeiosis is the process that forms meaning from any organism’s apprehension of the world through signs.

TERMS Semioticians classify signs and sign systems in relation to the way they are transmitted (*modality*). This process of carrying meaning depends on the use of codes that may be the individual noises or letters that humans use to form words, the body movements they make to show attitude or emotion, or even something as general as the clothes they wear. To coin a lexical word to refer to a thing, the community must agree on a simple meaning (*a denotative meaning*) within their language.

But that word can transmit that meaning only within the language’s grammatical structures and codes (*syntax and semantics*). Codes also represent the values of the culture, and are able to add new shades of connotation to every aspect of life. ¶ To explain the relationship between Semiotics and Communication Studies, communication is defined as the process of transferring data from a source to a receiver as efficiently and effectively as possible. Hence, communication theorists construct models based on codes, media, typography and contexts to explain the biology, psychology, and mechanics involved.

Both disciplines also recognise that the technical process cannot be separated from the fact that the receiver must decode the data, i.e. *be able to distinguish the data as salient and make meaning out of it*. This implies that there is a necessary overlap between semiotics and communication. ¶ Semiotics should also be distinguished from linguistics. Although both start from the same point, semiotics links linguistic facts to non-linguistic facts to give a broader empirical coverage and to offer conclusions that seem more plausible because, intuitively, humans understand that one can only interpret language in a social context (sometimes termed the *semiosphere*), often a chaotic blur of language and signal exchanges.

HISTORY The importance of signs and signification has been recognised throughout much of the history of philosophy, and in psychology as well. Plato and Aristotle both explored the relationship between signs and the world. More recently, Umberto Eco, in his “*Semiotics and philosophy of language*” has argued the necessity to uncover the implicit semiotic theories in all the history of thought.

IMPORTANT SEMIOTICIANS

SAUSSURE Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the “father” of modern linguistics, proposed a dualistic notion of signs, relating the signifier as the form of the word or phrase uttered, and to the signified as the mental concept. Charles W. Morris (1901-1979) achieved recognition for his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. He proposed to divide semiotics into syntactics, semantics and pragmatics.

PEIRCE Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), founder of the philosophical school of pragmatism and a notable logician, conceived of semiotics as “*the doctrine of the essential nature & fundamental varieties of possible semiosis*” where he defines semiosis as “an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a *sign*, its *object*, and its *interpretant*”. See the scheme of the Pierce’s Triangle below:

ECO Umberto Eco made a wider audience aware of semiotics by various publications, most notably *A Theory of Semiotics* and his novel *The Name of the Rose* which includes semiotic elements. His most important contributions to the field regard the concepts of Interpretation, Encyclopedia, and Model Reader.

LOTMAN Juri Lotman (1922-1993) was the founding member of the Tartu (or Tartu-Moscow) Semiotic School. He developed a semiotic approach to the study of culture and established a communication model for the study of text semiotics. He also introduced the concept of the *Semiosphere*.

