

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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For full references, see the Bibliography on pages 174 and 175

Chapter One. This chapter builds on the ideas first advanced by Shannon and Weaver (1948; reprint 1998), Lasswell (1948), and Gerbner (1956). **Intention** (pp. 21–22) uses Morris (1962). **Noise** (pp. 27–28) employs Sebok (1985).

Chapter Two. This chapter makes use of some helpful markers set down in Chandler (2002).

Chapter Three. The **Introduction** (pp. 53–54) to this chapter employs the seminal work of Levi-Strauss in Levi-Strauss (1969). **Subjectivity and Objectivity** (pp. 61–62) uses some ideas exploited by Nagel (October, 1974). **Sense and Reference** (pp. 67–68) employs a distinction made in Donnellan (1966). **Problem and Solution** (pp. 71–72) makes use of Adams (2001).

Chapter Four. Many of the concepts used in this chapter have received excellent discussion in Arnheim (1974), Arnheim (1988), Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), and Van Leeuwen (2005).

Chapter Five. Words and Images (pp. 97–98) employs distinctions from Barthes (1977). **Functions** (pp. 99–100) uses Jakobson (1969). **Placing** (pp. 103–4) utilizes an idea expressed in Lidwell, Holden, and Butler (2003). **Voices** (pp. 107–8) was inspired by Goddard (2002). **Intertextuality and Intratextuality** (pp. 109–10) and **Paratext and Paralanguage** (pp. 111–12) are motivated by Jackson (1999) and Adair (1992).

Chapter Six. The **Introduction** (pp. 113–14) uses Butler and Keeney (2001). **Concepts and Conceptions** (pp. 115–16) employs an idea by Putnam (1993) and this has its roots in Frege. His central ideas can be found in Beaney (1997). **Connotation and Denotation** (pp. 117–18) draws on Fiske (1990). **Combinations and Substitutions** (pp. 121–22) and **Tokens and Types** (pp. 123–24) make use of a discussion in Chandler (2002). **Rule-following** (pp. 125–26) is inspired by Wittgenstein (1953). **Conventions** (pp. 127–28) uses the seminal work of Gombrich (1986). **Classifications** (pp. 129–30) was aided by Bowker and Star (1999), and by some comments in de Duve (1996). **Understanding and Misunderstanding** (pp. 131–32) uses some information from Varasdi (1996).

Chapter Seven. Genres (pp. 137–38) and **Styles** (pp. 139–40) have been inspired by Van Leeuwen (2005). **Ideologies** (pp. 145–46) draws on Jaworski and Coupland (1999). **Discourses** (pp. 147–48) makes use of Fiske (1990).

Chapter Eight. Fact and Fiction (pp. 155–56) draws on Varasdi (1996). **Legends** (pp. 159–60) makes use of Dale (2005) and Harding (2005). **Characters and Personae** (pp. 161–62) employs Marquart (1998) and Lidwell, Holden, and Butler (2003). **Mysteries** (pp. 165–66) makes reference to Barnes (1995). **Turning Points** (pp. 169–70) has an initial idea that I heard John Le Carré discuss in an interview at the National Film Theatre, London. **Resolutions** (pp. 171–72) employs a story from Reys (1994).

CHAPTER ONE

1

SIGNS AND SIGNING

Signs are everywhere, but how exactly are they formed?

Signs are formed through the society that creates them, by the structures they employ, and via the sources they use. Let's look at how this works.

Signs are always produced and consumed in the context of a specific society. In the Western world we live in a society that is largely mechanistic and consumerist in outlook. So when it comes to discussing all manner of topics we often use the mechanistic and consumerist metaphors that reflect the dominant views of our society. If we take a fairly concrete topic such as health, we find we will talk in mechanistic terms about, say, the *war* against AIDS or the *fight* against cancer. The same thing applies when we speak about more abstract topics such as "time." Here we speak in largely consumerist terms: we talk about *using* time, *wasting* time, *saving* time, and *spending* time, as if it were a commodity like money rather than a process which unfolds. Signs, then, are shaped by different societies in different ways.

The signs that we find in each society are superficially different. However, they often seem to have the same

underlying structures. It appears that all human beings, whether ancient and modern, feel the need to tell stories. That is why we find folklore, fairy tales, legends, proverbs, sayings, and riddles in all societies, whether they end up in the form of anecdotes, novels, urban myths, soap operas, or "reality" television programs. Yet there are other structural similarities, too: most societies tend to create hierarchies, perform rituals, play games, adhere to moral systems, and engage in forms of symbolic representation.

Societies have two basic sources of signing: the first source is natural, while the second is conventional. For instance, we know that it is natural for humans to wear clothes in cold climates. The kind of clothes we wear, however, and how we wear them, is a matter for convention (*i.e.*, it depends on the "rules" of the particular society of which we are a part). Consider the wearing of shoes. Shoes can be practical and can afford protection from harsh terrain, but they can also take on meanings that have little or nothing to do with practicality. The wearing of high heels is an instance of this latter phenomenon. In spite of the fact that high heels are highly impractical, they have a very particular

SIGNS AND SIGNING

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conventional meaning as sexual symbols in Western societies. (Note, however, that in other societies the wearing of high heels may seem strange and eccentric.)

In due course we will have occasion to explore some of these themes in greater detail. Before that, however, we have to do two things. First, we must show how one thing means another. The concepts that will help us to explain this will include signifier and signified, sign,

The Journey of a Message

A designer
Wishes to design a vacuum cleaner
He designs a very efficient vacuum cleaner
The design is manufactured in plastic and metal
It is sold in a shop with complex instructions
A buyer purchases it
The buyer uses the product by following the instructions

A painter
Wants to paint a portrait
He paints a portrait that resembles the sitter
It is painted on paper with watercolor
It is hung in a gallery under artificial light, which changes its color
A viewer sees it and buys it
The viewer hangs it over his fireplace where it looks dull

A writer
Aims to produce a text on semiotics
He writes a book explaining the complexities of the subject
It is printed
A printing error occurs
A reader reads it
The reader, not detecting the printing error, is confused

icon, index, and symbol. These are the basic building blocks for meaning-making. Second, we must describe the sort of journey that a message may take as it travels from sender to receiver. The journey we will describe follows the path set out in the examples below.

The other key concepts we need to examine in this section, then, will include sender, intention, message, transmission, noise, receiver, and destination.

Key Semiotic Concept

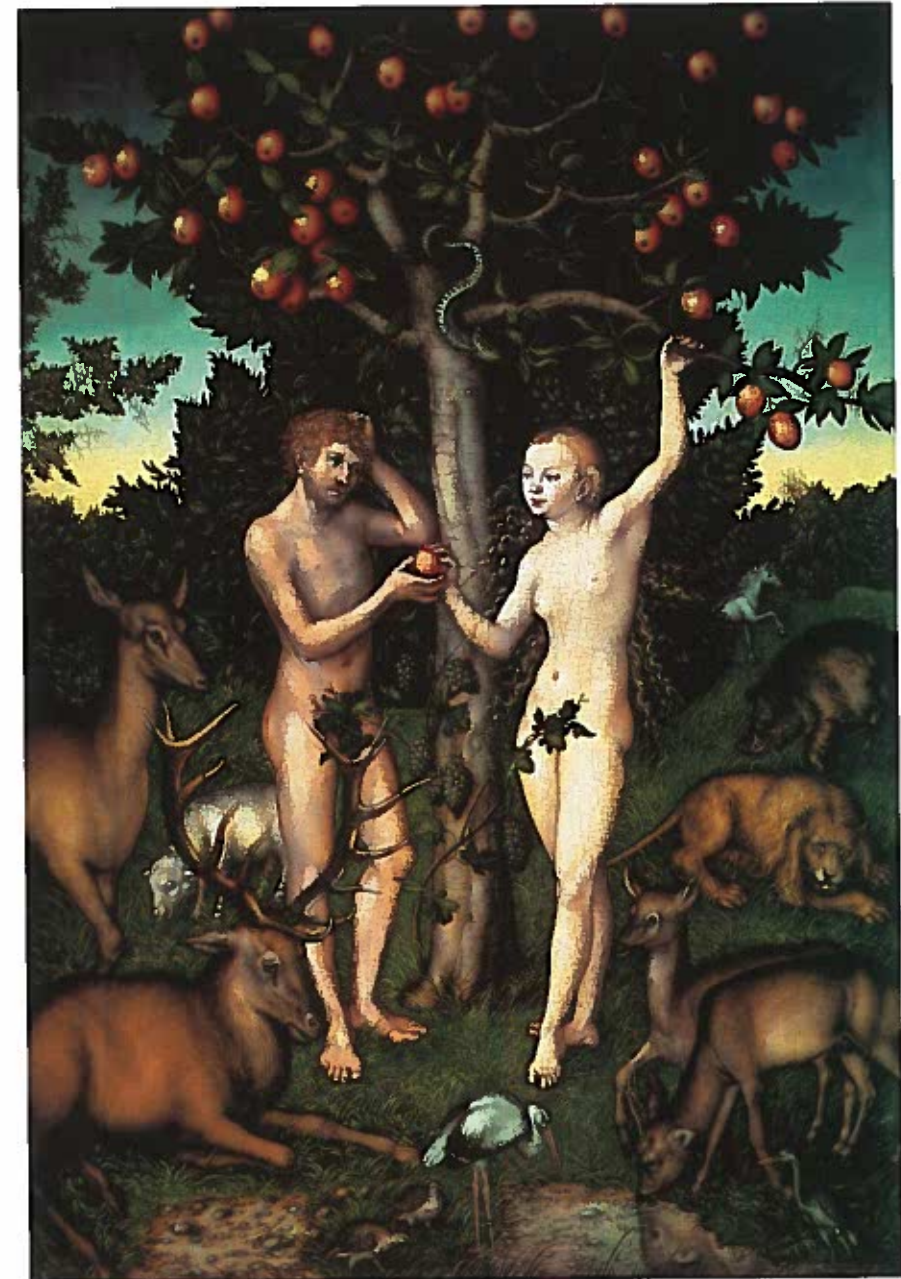
Sender (who)
Intention (with what aim)
Message (says what)
Transmission (by which means)
Noise (with what interference)
Receiver (to whom)
Destination (with what result)

Sender (who)
Intention (with what aim)
Message (says what)
Transmission (by which means)
Noise (with what interference)
Receiver (to whom)
Destination (with what result)

Sender (who)
Intention (with what aim)
Message (says what)
Transmission (by which means)
Noise (with what interference)
Receiver (to whom)
Destination (with what result)

WHAT DOES THE APPLE IN THIS PICTURE SIGNIFY?

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WHAT DOES THE APPLE IN THIS PICTURE SIGNIFY?

This painting by Lucas Cranach (1472–1553) depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The apple represents the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Satan, who takes the form of a serpent, uses the apple to tempt Eve. Eve picks the apple and gives it to Adam. With this act Adam and Eve fall from grace in the eyes of God.

It is easy to assume that the image of Eve being tempted by the apple accurately reflects the story in the Bible. But in the Bible there is no mention of an apple. Fruit is mentioned, but not apples. So perhaps it was really an orange that tempted Eve. Or a fig.

What seems to matter in the picture by Cranach is that the apple (what we call the “signifier”) is the fruit used to signify temptation (what we call the “signified”). However, while the apple means temptation, some other fruit could have been chosen to represent the same idea. It is only because there is already a well-established connection in our minds between the appearance of an apple and the idea of temptation that this fruit is used in the picture. It is this connection that makes the picture successful in terms of communication.

There are numerous relationships that can exist between signifier and signified. Two important things about the relationship stand out, however. One is that we can have the same signifier with different signifieds. The other is that we can have different signifiers with the same signifieds.

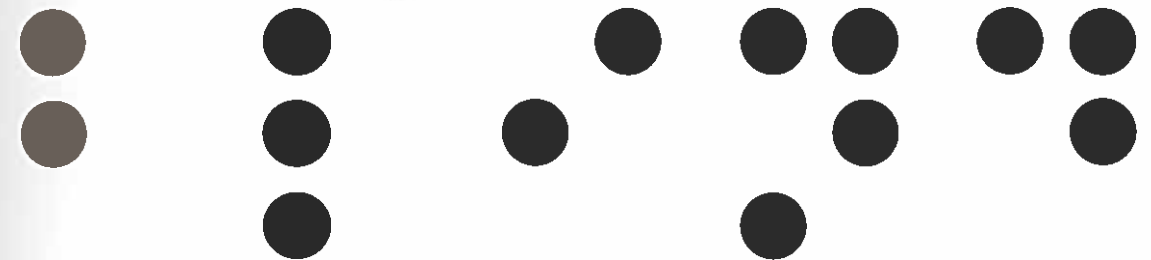
In the first three examples below, the same signifier gives rise to different signifieds:

Signifier		Signified
Apple	means	Temptation
Apple	means	Healthy
Apple	means	Fruit

However, in the next three examples, different signifiers (depending on whether the language spoken is English, French, or German) give rise to the same signified:

Signifier		Signified
Apple	means	Apple
<i>Pomme</i>	means	Apple
<i>Apfel</i>	means	Apple

CAN YOU MAKE SENSE OF THESE DOTS?





CAN YOU MAKE SENSE OF THESE DOTS?

These symbols are written in Braille. In order to decode them you have to know that each set of dots represents a letter, which in turn makes up a word. In this case the word is "blind." The word "blind" is the carrier of the meaning. This is the signifier. The meaning of the word, on the other hand, is what it signifies (*e.g.*, that someone lacks sight).

Signs are often thought to be composed of two inseparable elements: the signifier and the signified. One thing that is intriguing about the relationship between the signifier and the signified is that it can be arbitrary. For example, when I use the word "dog" in order to talk about a certain furry four-legged domestic creature, I employ a signifier that is arbitrary. The sound made by the word "dog," when uttered, is intrinsically no better than the made-up sounds "sog," "pog," or "tog" for talking about this animal. All these words could

have been used to communicate the meaning of "four-legged domestic creature that can make the sound woof." We just happen to use the word "dog," while in Germany they have chosen *hund* and in France, *chien*.

Many of the signs we use to communicate are arbitrary in the sense that they are not immediately transparent to us. For this reason they have to be learned with the conventions of the language in which they are embedded before they can be used. Once these conventions have been learned, however, the meanings that are conveyed by using them are likely to seem wholly natural. Yet by thinking of meanings as natural we do ourselves a disservice. This is because what is often seen as natural is just the product of various cultural habits and prejudices that have become so engrained that we no longer notice them.

WHAT IS THIS OBJECT?





WHAT IS THIS OBJECT?

This is an Inuit map. It is made from wood. Rather than being visual, it is tactile. The Inuit hold this map under their mittens and feel the contours with their fingers to discern patterns in the coastline. The advantage of this map is that it can be used in the dark, it is weatherproof, it will float if you drop it into the water, and it works at any temperature. It will also last longer than one that is printed.

Although the Inuit map is highly abstracted, it still resembles the shape of the coastline. While some maps follow the geography of the place that they represent in a fairly exact way, others do not. When specific information about the environment is represented on a map in an abstract way we tend to say that the map is

schematic, whereas when a map resembles the world in a more concrete and exact way we say that it is topographical.

With any icon there is some degree of resemblance between signifier and signified. The degree of resemblance can be either high or low (as we have just seen in the case of maps). There are many other examples. For instance, a portrait may look very like a real person or it may look a little like him or her—enough, say, for the person to be recognizable.

Here are some examples of an iconic relationship between signifier and signified:

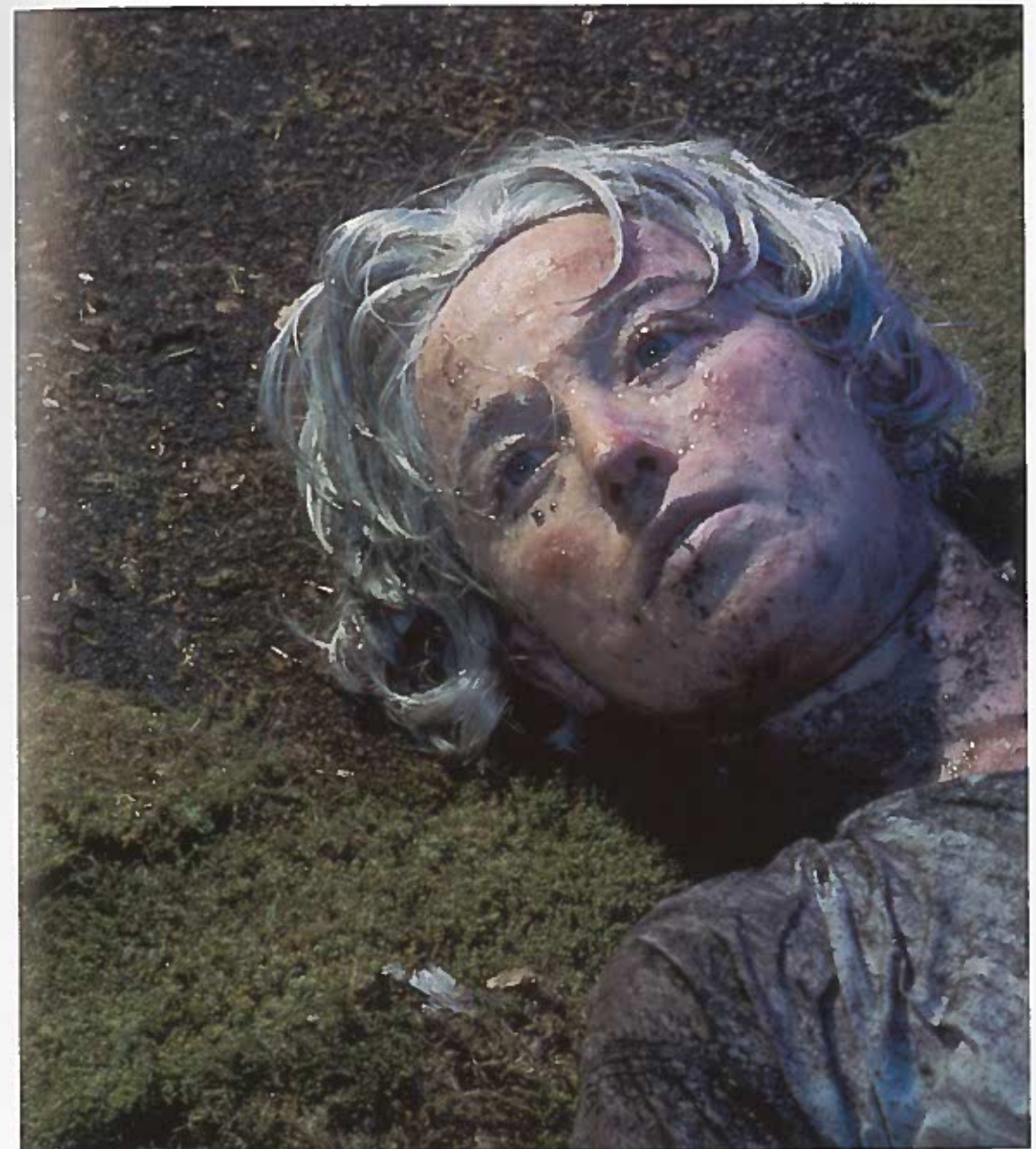
Signifier

Line drawing	resembles
Sculpted portrait in clay	resembles
Color photograph	resembles
Sound effect (of footsteps)	resembles
An organic compound	resembles
A chemical mixture	resembles

Signified

- The place depicted
- The person portrayed
- The object photographed
- Footsteps
- The smell of roses
- The taste of cheese and onion

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE WOMAN IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH?





WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE WOMAN IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH?

The woman in this photograph by Cindy Sherman looks as if she is dead.

Representational photographs present us with a problem because they often appear to have been caused by real events even when they have been faked. This photograph highlights the very real and disturbing difference between how we might feel about an image of an actual death as opposed to its mere simulation. The photograph also raises the question of how we would be able to tell the difference between the two in certain cases.

When there is a physical or causal relationship between the signifier (*i.e.*, the photograph) and the signified (*i.e.*,

what the photograph depicts), the non-arbitrary relationship that exists is said to be indexical.

Other examples of an indexical relationship are shown below.

If only for survival purposes, it is important that we can detect the causal link between a signifier and what is being signified. For instance, we need to know that smoke means (and is often caused by) fire, or that a thermometer changing means (and is usually caused by) a rise or fall in temperature. We can see that a failure to detect these things is important when we realize that such a failure can result in mortal danger.

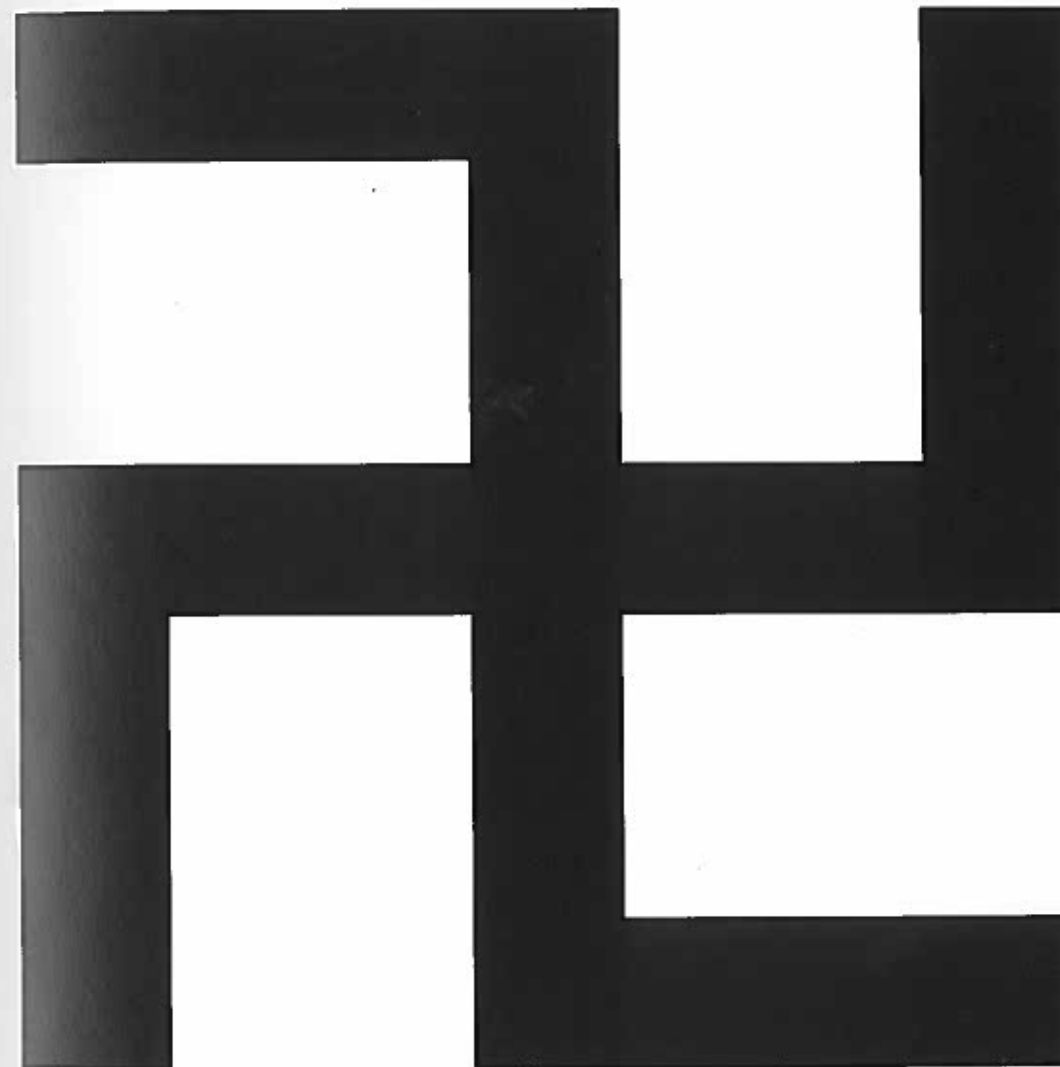
Signifier

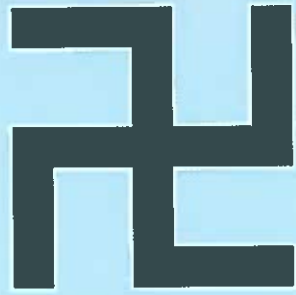
A black eye	is caused by
A thermometer changing	is caused by
Smoke	is caused by
A rash	is caused by
A knock	is caused by
A weathervane moving	is caused by
Ticking	is caused by
A photograph	is caused by
A recorded voice	is caused by
A defensive posture	is caused by
Handwriting	is caused by

Signified

A punch
A rise or fall in temperature
Fire
An infection
Someone at the door
The wind
A clock
A real place
A person speaking
An emotional attitude (<i>e.g.</i> , fear)
A person writing

WHAT DOES THIS SYMBOL MEAN?





WHAT DOES THIS SYMBOL MEAN?

The symbol on the last page looks like the Nazi swastika. In fact, it is an Indian swastika. In Hinduism and Buddhism the swastika stands for good luck. With the Indian swastika the "L" shape is inverted, unlike its Nazi counterpart.

It is often remarked that the Nazi swastika is a powerful and disturbing symbol. The word "symbol" in Greek means "to throw together." In semiotics one thing can be "thrown together" with another in such a way that a relationship is created whereby the first symbolizes the second. Here are some obvious visual examples:

Symbol	Meaning
Scales	Justice
Dove	Peace
Rose	Beauty
Lion	Strength

With these symbols, the meaning that is created is related to the nature of the object: balance is important for justice; doves are peaceful creatures; roses are beautiful; and lions are strong. However, there are some symbols where the relationship between the symbol and its meaning is less obvious:

Symbol	Meaning
Sword	Truth
Lily	Purity
Goat	Lust
Orb and Scepter	Monarchy and Rule

With these examples, we need to know what the symbols stand for in advance if we are to understand them. We can't work it out just by looking at them. In semiotics, the word "symbol" is used in a special sense to mean literally any sign where there is an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. In other words, it is wider than the more traditional sense of the word "symbol," as used above. The following, then, are also symbols in semiotics:

Signifier	Relationship	Signified
Shaking hands	Arbitrary relationship	A greeting
Black tie	Arbitrary relationship	A formal occasion
Brrring	Arbitrary relationship	The telephone needs answering
A black flag	Arbitrary relationship	Danger
Ice cream	Arbitrary relationship	The end of a meal
The word "cat"	Arbitrary relationship	A cat

WHO IS SENDING THIS MESSAGE?

I am black.
 I am six years old.
 I am an orphan.
 I am African.
 I am poor.
 I am a liar.

I am black.
 I am six years old.
 I am an orphan.
 I am African.
 I am poor.
 I am a liar.

WHO IS SENDING THIS MESSAGE?

The first five sentences in this speech bubble provide information that helps us to form a picture of the individual we think is sending the message. The information tells us who the person is, how old he is, where he comes from, and what his life is like.

However, the last sentence seems anomalous, and may lead us to ask certain questions. Is this a message from a child who lies about certain things? Is the whole message a lie? Is this a genuine message? Or is it just a fictional piece of dialogue?

A six-year-old black child did not write the sentences in this speech bubble; the author of this book wrote them. But has the "real" sender of the message, namely the author, chosen them for a special reason? Is he just using them to make a point about the difference between the real author (himself) and an authorial persona (the person he might pretend to be)? Or is there some other meaning that lies behind these words?

Consider the following speech bubble:

I am an author.
 I am 45 years old.
 I am not an orphan.
 I am English.
 I am not poor.
 I am not a liar.

These sentences provide us with vital information about another putative person. But, once again, we can ask: "Is this person real or is he fictional?"

It is always important to remember that where a message *says* it is from may be very different from where it is *really* from. The former is what we call the "addresser." This consists of a message that is constructed, and it may be real or imaginary. On the other hand, the latter is what we call the "sender." This consists of a message from a real person. Of course, whether we can always tell the difference between these two things may be another question.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS PICTURE?





WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS PICTURE?

Even if we *ought* to judge a picture, object, or piece of text in isolation from the intentions of its maker, this is hard to achieve in practice. Consider the painting on the previous page. There are several possibilities as to its creator. An adult, a child, or a machine might have made it. Surely if we can discover who made it, that will influence the way that we judge it, and whether or not it ought really to influence us.

In fact, a chimpanzee called Congo made this picture. Once you know that, it is hard to see it in the same way. Over the course of his life Congo completed around 400 drawings and paintings. He was the subject of a study into the drawing and painting abilities of apes by behavioral psychologist Desmond Morris. Morris argued that the fundamentals of creativity could actually be discerned in the paintings of apes. He claimed that a sense of composition, calligraphic development, and

aesthetic sensibilities are apparent (even if only at a minimal level) in the picture-making of apes.

Now imagine that I lied. Suppose a well-known artist created this picture. You might also suppose that the work of this (human) artist sells for vast sums of money. Once we know that a human being rather than an ape produced this image do we start to see it differently? Do we read human intentions and feelings into the picture where there were none before? Do we also begin to see aesthetic qualities in the image that were not present before? And do we also see monetary value in the picture that was not there before?

Whatever you think of this work, and however you would wish to judge the person or thing that made it, it is hard not to be influenced in our judgements by what we take to be the intention behind it.

WHAT IS THIS MESSAGE REALLY SAYING?





WHAT IS THIS MESSAGE REALLY SAYING?

The meaning of the message seems obvious. It appears to be saying that shopping gives us a sense of who and what we are as human beings.

Perhaps, though, there is a deeper message. To see this we need to understand that "I shop, therefore I am" is derived from "I think, therefore I am," which was used by the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes.

Descartes was the first modern philosopher. He believed that in order to build a system of knowledge, one must start from first principles. To find secure foundations for his philosophy he employed what he called "the method of doubt," which consisted in trying to doubt everything that it was possible to doubt. This led Descartes to the conclusion that there was only one thing of which he could be certain, the famous *cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"). The idea behind the *cogito* was this:

If I think, it follows that I think.

If I doubt that I think, it also follows that I think.

Therefore, either way, it follows that I think.

"I think, therefore I am" and "I doubt, therefore I am" were equally true for Descartes, because even doubting is a kind of thinking. This enabled Descartes to conclude that what I am, fundamentally, is a "thinking thing."

The deeper message behind "I shop, therefore I am," then, may be this: it is surely ironic that where once we tried to secure our belief systems on foundations gained by the profound activity of philosophizing, we now rely on the trivial and banal-seeming activity of shopping to tell us who and what we are.

We can scarcely imagine a world without the messages of advertising. But take a moment to think about how we would view the world if all advertising suddenly disappeared.

HOW IS THE MESSAGE OF THE MONA LISA TRANSMITTED?





HOW IS THE MESSAGE OF THE *MONA LISA* TRANSMITTED?

Messages are always transmitted through a medium. The medium carries the message from the sender to the receiver. The medium may be:

Presentational: through the voice, the face (or parts of the face, such as the mouth or the eyes), or the body (or parts of the body, such as the hands).

Representational: through paintings, books, photographs, drawings, writings, and buildings.

Mechanical: through telephones, the Internet, television, radio, and film.

The message of the *Mona Lisa* is transmitted through all three mediums. It uses the presentational medium of facial expression, the representational medium of painting (in its original form), and the mechanical medium of the Internet and television (in its digital form).

The enigmatic expression of the *Mona Lisa* is often remarked upon. To see how this expression is transmitted, consider the following drawings:



In both of these drawings the eyes are identical in terms of shape, tone, and position. What makes the eyes in the first picture seem happy, and the eyes in the second picture seem sad, is the mouth. The mouth is the transmitter of emotion; the eyes themselves are expressionless.

So even though we know that the charm of the *Mona Lisa* lies in her gentle smile, the lesson from these highly abstracted images of a face may be that very little is transmitted to us by the eyes. The eyes, it seems, are not the windows of the soul after all. The window of the soul is the mouth.

HOW SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE DANGER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS?





HOW SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE DANGER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS?

Imagine that you had to tell someone living 2,000 years from now about a danger that exists today. Commercial nuclear reprocessing has ensured that thousands of gallons of dangerous radioactive liquid will still be active in thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of years to come. And if we don't tell future generations where and how we have stored this waste, they may be exposed to it without suspecting that it is highly toxic.

Communicating danger to people in the future seems to be simple. But it isn't. This is because over such a long period a message can easily be distorted or altered without this being in any way intended. (This distortion or alteration in the meaning or method of transmission of a message, whether intended or not, is called "noise.") Languages, both written and spoken, always change. The meanings of symbols are often lost in the

passage of time. In fact, most messages are bound so closely to a particular period and place that even a short time later they cannot be understood. Therefore, ensuring that a message created now can be decoded by future generations is highly problematic.

How to pass on messages about this nuclear peril is not obvious. Perhaps we can use words, pictures, mathematical symbols, smells, and sounds to help us. Perhaps we can create a culture that will spread the myths necessary to deter any curiosity about the nature of these storage systems if they are chanced upon. The prospects, however, seem bleak. Even when you think that you have a message that is clear and precise in the present, it can still be misinterpreted. And that, as we know, can lead to disaster.

HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND HIM?

Suppose a grandfather says to his granddaughter:

*I didn't eat
Grandmother's
chocolate cake.*

Suppose a grandfather
says to his granddaughter:

*I didn't eat
Grandmother's
chocolate cake.*

HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND HIM?

Did you interpret it as one of the following?

I didn't eat Grandmother's chocolate cake.
(Paul ate Grandmother's chocolate cake.)

I didn't eat Grandmother's chocolate cake.
(I sat on Grandmother's chocolate cake.)

I didn't eat Grandmother's chocolate cake.
(I ate Susan's chocolate cake.)

I didn't eat Grandmother's chocolate cake.
(I ate Grandmother's fruitcake.)

I didn't eat Grandmother's chocolate cake.
(I ate Grandmother's chocolate cookie.)

How we make sense of this message depends on
how we interpret it and who we think is receiving it.
The message says that it is being sent to a certain

granddaughter. However, the granddaughter is
actually imaginary. The person who is receiving the
message is really a reader of a book on semiotics
(namely you!). That is why in semiotics there is a
distinction between the "receiver" (the actual person
who gets the message) and the "addressee" (the
person, whether real or imaginary, who is said to be
the target of the message).

Below are some examples of familiar fields of
communication with different senders and receivers.

In all these cases a message travels between a sender
and a receiver *in a specific context and through a
specific object*. The aim of the sender is to make sure
the message has reached the right receiver without
anything going wrong.

Sender	Communication	Receiver	Context	Object
Writer	Message	Reader	Literature	A book
Performer	Message	Audience	Drama	A play
Producer	Message	Consumer	Retail	Some clothing
Maker	Message	User	Design	A piece of furniture
Painter	Message	Viewer	Art	A drawing
Singer	Message	Listener	Music	A song
Transmitter	Message	Recipient	Technology	A telephone

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS PICTURE?





HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS PICTURE?

This photograph was taken on Sunday, November 24th, 1963. It shows the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby. Lee Harvey Oswald is said to have murdered President John F. Kennedy on the afternoon of November 22, 1963. However, many conspiracy theories remain surrounding the assassination.

The murder of Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of President Kennedy are well-known historical events. But how we feel about these events changes according to what historians (and conspiracy theorists) tell us. For example, you may think that the murder of Oswald is deplorable until you discover that he killed Kennedy. You may think that Oswald was not the person who really killed Kennedy and hence that his murder by Ruby was unjustified. Or else, the shooting may seem shocking when you discover that Ruby *may* have been a mobster, an intelligence agent, and small-time hustler

who allowed himself to shoot Oswald simply out of a sense of moral indignation.

When the message in this photograph has been successfully decoded and interpreted we can say that it has reached its destination. The destination is the end point in the journey of the message. One problem in semiotics is that the message that arrives at the destination is not always the same as the one that has been sent. The problem occurs because the message can be altered during its journey. This can happen due to the quality of the message, because of an ambiguity in its expression, or it can come down to failure in its transmission, whether intended or not. In this instance, our ability to decode and interpret the message depends very much on what we know about, and how we judge, the historical events that surrounded the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald.

CHAPTER TWO

2

WAYS OF MEANING

Sometimes we mean what we say. Suppose I look intensely at a painting. Then I remark, "The colors are very bright." What I have said may be literally true. Perhaps I have made this comment because the colors really are very bright. But what I say may not always be what I actually mean. This is because when I say, "The colors are very bright," I might say it in a sarcastic way. Sarcasm changes the meaning of what I have said. The sarcasm in my voice indicates that what I really mean is that the colors are dull. And in saying that the colors are dull, I may be implying that I don't approve of, or don't like, paintings like this. If I am being sarcastic, then I am literally saying one thing while meaning another.

There are various ways not to mean what you literally say. Strange similes and bizarre metaphors, clever metonyms and genuine ironies, little lies and genuine impossibilities, unusual depictions and curious representations are all of interest to those who study

semiotics because they allow us to say what we mean in a non-literal way. These non-literal forms of meaning enable us to make the familiar seem unfamiliar and the unfamiliar seem familiar.

Occasionally we have to work hard to understand what someone is really saying. This may be because what is being communicated is obscure, but it could also be because what they are saying is not literal. When we mean something other than what we communicate literally we may have to explain ourselves. This is because literal communication is more dominant, and more common, than non-literal communication. However, even though literal communication is very useful (*e.g.*, medicine would be very difficult without it), often non-literal communication is more interesting and no less important. That is why advertising agencies, poets, humorists, filmmakers, and painters often use it. After all, the truth about the world is often more beguiling if we have to do some work in order to