

# Semiotic Analysis: An Introduction



Designers can use semiotics to consider the values and meanings within different cultures or different groups of people.

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Semiotics is based on the premise that a 'text' which could be an image, an animation, a design, a website, or piece of music is in fact a complex set of signs. In this sense, design is a form of communication, where signs and symbols are shared between people (the sender and the receiver, or the designer and the user for example).

Semiotic analysis can help designers understand why a garment is fashionable, why an image is effective, and why a product is in high demand.

There are many steps to doing a semiotic analysis which take practice, and can greatly enrich your design research.

First identify a text. Start by asking what are the important signs in the text you are analyzing. Then ask what system of signs does this text exist within?

While there have been and still are many semioticians whose work is important to designer (French

philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure coined the term *sémiologie*), one of the most important is Roland Barthes because of the way he used semiotics to understand cultural material such as commonly used images and symbols.

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### References

- Barthes, Roland. ([1957] 1987). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, Roland ([1964] 1967). *Elements of Semiology*. (Translated by Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Jonathan Cape.