



A Theory of Semiotics

Umberto Eco

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..". the greatest contribution to [semiotics] since the pioneering work of C. S. Peirce and Charles Morris." --Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

..". draws on philosophy, linguistics, sociology, anthropology and aesthetics and refers to a wide range of scholarship... raises many fascinating questions." --Language in Society

..". a major contribution to the field of semiotic studies." --Robert Scholes, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

..". the most significant text on the subject published in the English language that I know of." --Arthur Asa Berger, Journal of Communication

Eco's treatment demonstrates his mastery of the field of semiotics. It focuses on the twin problems of the doctrine of signs--communication and signification--and offers a highly original theory of sign production, including a carefully wrought typology of signs and modes of production.

A Theory of Semiotics Details

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From Reader Review A Theory of Semiotics for online ebook

Kirk Lowery says

Before there was linguistics, there was semiotics.

Charlie says

I would strongly recommend this book to anyone who is a fan of language philosophy as the perfect counter point in which to observe what language does do rather than to meditate on how it does it. The other thing that is so refreshing about Eco is just how readable he is at the same time as conveying a great many very difficult concepts: Eco has no need to disguise ideas in murky rhetoric because he is a genuine intellectual who *understands* a great many complex phenomena.

There are of course many points on which I disagree with Eco: I feel in places he seems to bizarrely undermine the role of context, and he also seems to undermine the untranslatable modes of genuine communication that are particular to various mediums preferring to stress the multifarious manifestations that a given sign can take.

Ultimately I feel it is a massive injustice that a great many french structuralists have been given credit for there contributions to understanding language as well as a great many anglo-american philosopher, and whereas their epiphanies have often resided in their wonder at what they don't understand, Eco has been given very little credit for providing genuine solid ground work for genuinely understanding and getiing to the very root of a great many social phenomena.

George says

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Matthew B. says

I picked up Umberto Eco's *Theory of Semiotics* as an introduction to formal semiotics because I found the discussions of semiotic topics in *The Name of the Rose* interesting and pretty well-presented, so I thought Eco would be a good source for more information on the subject. He does in fact hit on a lot of the same points he would later put into the mouth of William of Baskerville, though in much greater depth and (of course) in the jargon of modern linguistics rather than mediaeval scholasticism. His explanations can be a little opaque because he frequently assumes the reader is familiar with terminology employed by particular earlier scholars (Peirce, Katz and Postal, *etc.*, so not obscure writers by any means, but ones I happen not to have read); he also sometimes (not often but every now and then) commits the cardinal linguistics-scholarship sin of not giving examples. But on the whole his exposition is pretty lucid, though the extremely brief last chapter is a little weird, partly inspired, I believe, by Marxist concepts which he does not quite fully

bring out.

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Conrad says

Contains one of the best jokes I know. To paraphrase:

Two worn-out dogs with mangy coats run into a third dog on the streets of Moscow. This third dog has a gorgeous, shiny coat, and appears well-fed. The two dogs walk up to the third and ask, "How the hell did you get so much food? We're starving out here!" The third dog goes, "Well, there's this doctor Pavlov who runs this psychology institute. I walk in and he puts me in a warm room and rings a bell. All I have to do then is drool a little, and these well-trained doctors bring me a meal!"

Other than that it's pretty boring.

Sal Coraccio says

This book makes me feel sooo stupid.

Stevie van der Kolk says

I feel like Eco's book occupies a sort of awkward position for a lot of semioticians. On one hand, it's overly descriptive for a lot of purposes, and this becomes evident when you look at critical theorists who utilise semiotics, i.e Barthes, Althusser, that there really is no particular need to delve into as much detail as does Eco, and so therefore it seems more useful to isolate certain portions of Eco's text for reference (i.e for an ideological critique, his sections on ideology). But on the other hand, one also cannot understand these sections without knowing Eco's particular terminology (i.e sememe, code-switching, expression and content

planes and so on).

It largely seems to depend on your purpose for reading the book. Analytic philosophers will no doubt find fascinating sections where Eco delves into the relation between semiotics and a t-theory (which, there is none, but he draws upon analytic philosophy heavily in certain portions), while communication theorists would no doubt find the entirety of the book useful. For someone with a more particular interest, such as that of critical theory, it might be more useful to once again, isolate and utilise only certain parts of the book that are relevant for your specific purposes. It is a highly detailed book containing definitions and explanations of even the simplest semiotic phenomena, such as denotation/connotation, which I probably will find useful in literary theory one day.

The book is not impossible to comprehend, it does delve into heavy linguistics and analytic philosophy oftentimes which can become tedious, and Eco seems to be a very careful writer in isolating what is semiotics, what is not semiotics, what is a sign, what is not a sign, and so on and so forth. This can no doubt make the reading experience frustrating but upon a re-reading everything should really become clearer, as Eco is not a particularly obscure writer by any means.

So, I don't know. I'll probably end up using some portions of this in the future. I don't know when, but until then I'll consider this book a good source to go back to once in a while.

Robert Foschia says

Do you need to know the intricacies of every counter- point Eco thinks if in terms of his theories? Hold this book two inches from your face because it demands you abandon the world. The last line is the only useful tidbit

Amanda says

Extremely technical and demanding, not to mention a bit dry, this book is worth the effort if you are interested in philosophy of language and understanding ideas. I read it in a class on semiotics so I imagine it would be even harder flying solo. I have heard "misreadings" is more indicative of Eco's personality and writing than this book is.

Maria Maniaci says

Impenetrable. But that's probably me and not him--he's brilliant, but I'm new to this and this is not a primer. I read it because I had to, at about 10 pages per hour, and they were very long hours.

It's a pet peeve of mine when someone is in essence lecturing on a topic and they slip in and out of foreign languages for paragraphs at a time, then go on to build their own arguments on the untranslated text. Of course if you're reading this of your own volition, maybe you've already read everything that Saussure and Hjelmslev wrote and that won't be an issue for you.

Rebecca Wood says

This was a difficult read, I didn't finish it all the way and had to return it to the library. Many of the terms were not defined and had to be learned from repeated context. It is not an introductory book on the subject, but an argument developed in detail within the field. It was thought provoking, but I can't really recommend it as a good book to read while nursing - ACK!?! what on earth was I thinking!?!

I blogged about how this book relates to art:

<http://www.artandtheeveryday.net/Arta...>

ValeBooks says

Umberto Eco afirma que el hombre ya no es el sujeto responsable del lenguaje porque no es el quien lo habla sino que es habitado por el lenguaje. De modo que el lenguaje se convierte en el fundamento del pensamientos y la realidad

Kim says

Definitely targeted an an audience already familiar with linguistics theory - be prepared to use your dictionary and favorite translation program.

Deep, systematic theory of semiotics that breaks down into theories of code production and theories of sign production.

I used it in a graduate class as an intro to semiotics and it was way too specialist and detailed for the purposes for which we needed it. I think, after discussion, that my students still got a lot out of it as it enabled us to talk about cultural and social influences of sign-production, as well as the role of the subject therein.

I only had the class read Chapters 0, 1, 2, and 4, so consequently I only read the same sections (hey man! pressures of keeping up with my teaching load - don't judge). I wish that I had time to read Chapter three, but that will have to wait for summer...

Alexander Smith says

There arent many books this complete on the subject, and this is the more scientifically applicable approaches. If someone has an ideological bent, however, one should consider Saussure's lectures first. My main complaint is that this book could have been better organized into more modular chunks beyond "Theory of Codes" "Theory of Signs" and "Production of Signs". It's hard to swallow all of this at once, and some of the subsections feel kind of nonsequitor-esque initially. There's not as much linear motivation for the organization. For that reason only, i suggest a new semiotician start with Peirce and Barthes, then read this.
