

Semiotics and Culture

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"Signs are shaped by the sources and resources that are used to make them, formed by the cultural structures into which they are woven, communicated through a series of diverse channels, and understood in terms of the nature of the societies that created them."

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Sean Hall from 'This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics' (Hall, 2012)



[Statue of Liberty](#). This image is in the public domain.

Although you might view this image as a neutral photograph of a well-known iconic landmark, viewers will also bring varying cultural and ideological meanings to the image.

Saussure was aware that if cultural conventions are responsible for how languages develop then it is likely that parts, if not all, of those languages may have values encoded within them.

When you come to study ideology in a later module, you will learn that all social relationships have at their heart a power struggle. In a similar way, all communication, including visual communication, is integrated within social and cultural relationships and as such involves power relationships.

It is likely that you will already be familiar with some of these debates for example in discussion and critiques of the power and influence of contemporary media and global corporations. As a graphic designer, you will be aware of the role of corporate logos within these debates.

If you recall the chart that Chandler (Chandler, 2007) uses in his text 'Semiotics for Beginners', you will notice that the choice of a specific word will contain value judgments. For example, when we see a person involved in a peaceful political protest described on the television news, do you consider them to be a 'campaigner', a 'demonstrator' or an 'agitator'?

You will find that one theory or methodology is often meshed into another. This is true of the twin methodologies of ideology and semiotics.

Ideology might suggest how power is incorporated into cultures and semiotics demonstrates the mechanics of how each act of communication reinforces or undermines that balance of power.

Sonia Corredor has updated mood_board_sonia_c
Creating and Sharing
Activity 7: Creating a
Board
18:04 13-03-2020

Megan Ormsby has updated to Activity 7: Creating a
Mood Board in Activi
Sharing Your Mood B
02:52 13-03-2020

Liam McKay has uploaded Activity 7: Creating a
Board in Activity 7: Cr
Your Mood Board
00:45 13-03-2020

[Elspeth Edmondson](#)
Graphic Design Esser
01:50 12-03-2020

Laura Banfield has updated 8f73bcad_ae18_42b4
to Activity 4: Sharing
4: Sharing Your Work
22:48 11-03-2020

Chandler, D. (accessed 2014). "Semiotics for Beginners". Available at: <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>
[Accessed 8 September 2016]

Hall, S (2012) This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics. Laurence King, London
