

Advertisement for my Elements (Second Edition)

To Readers in General—including novices. Mine should not be the only book on semiotics you read, but you don't need to read any other *before* you read it. Just don't rush. In this book, you join me in building a theory and, at the same time, learn a bit of the history of its subject.

Semiotics gives us tools for thinking about language, art, symbols, the social environment, the habits of thought and action that mark our acculturation in our turbulent society, in brief, all manner of representations in *new and old media*. Semiotics provides tools to compare media. You may discover both a rich store of ideas and a stimulus for new ideas. For academics, semiotics has offered concepts and excuses to explore aspects of their own specialties that had been neglected or *discouraged* by their professional colleagues. (We accept intellectual refugees.) Some people of talent and imagination who rely very extensively on their intuition find that semiotics helps them figure out better what they are already doing. Maybe even improve it. I think that is why a few professionals in the advertising industry have been interested in semiotics and why many artists are drawn to it. I don't know your case; I can not boast to newcomers what semiotics will do for them. For myself, it's been a powerful mental pep pill most of my last five decades. My motivations now are to make the best sense I can of semiotics and to share it.

If you read the whole book, let's be in touch. The problems of semiotics are not all solved. I hope you will contribute to their investigation.

To Readers Who Have Previously Explored Semiotics: My theory, which this book presents, acknowledges previous work, steals from it, argues with it, and aims at an independent synthesis. Many have suggested we need to integrate Peirce's conception of the sign and Saussure's notion of system. I think I've pulled that off. A unifying principle is acknowledging the competition between structure and reference. I emphasize a few formulations that I believe to be either original or newly utilized, adding more arrows to structuralism's quiver. The new *Preface* and old *Forward* spell out these claims. *Neo-structuralism* recognizes the limits of structuralism and gets on with job anyway. My theory is *general and comparative* with respect to sign media (that is, not logocentric) and in that sense a theory of wide scope, but the theory is restricted to matters of which we can be conscious, and in that sense more narrow than theories which claim to supervene on biology. I try to get at the workings of signs and not to get bogged down in interpreting signs, although interpretations, as examples, are needed and offered. My technical terminology, fairly strict, is limited and not fussy. I avoid ventures into epistemology and ontology but do brush, lightly and very naively, on questions in phenomenology, psychology and (at the very end) educational ethics.

To Teachers: *Elements* is interesting for students, perhaps because it is not a 'text book'. It's perspective is mine, and I never pretend to speak on behalf of a 'field' or community or a practice or a consensus. I think that makes for a stimulating, get-your-hands dirty, realistic entrée to semiotics. Students tell me that my historical orientation is helpful. It shows how what is basic for one author is not basic for another. (A good complement to this book is an anthology, like Robert Innes' wonderful collection of readings.)

I hope you will find my writing doubly respectful. First, respectful of semiotic theory. Some of the problems of semiotic theory are inherently difficult, and I do not gloss over the difficulties. Second, respectful of students. I strive to make issues and arguments as clear as I can and thereby not to let my exposition get in the way of their own original work and understanding.

D.L.