

Symbols and Semiotics

What is a symbol?

A symbol is anything that stands for, or represents, something else. In a story, a character, an action, an object, or an animal can be symbolic. Often these symbols stand for something abstract, like a force of nature, a condition of the world, or an idea.



If I say that my spirit animal is the wolf. This can mean many things. The wolf is the symbol that is abstract. It no longer is what it is. It now becomes something way more that can mean many things. It can describe my personality. There is still a lot of room for interpretation here though. Am I a pack

wolf? A lone wolf?

History of symbols



Since the beginning of time, humans have been drawing, etching, carving and scribbling. To this day some of the earliest known symbols and drawings are exist in caves. Why would early primitive humans do this? It could be for many reasons. To tell a story? And through the stories told, pass along knowledge? To record

memories? All of these possibilities are things humans do today. No matter if it is through language, symbolism or drawings. It is human nature to want to do this.



As humans developed the species eventually formed language. This is a logical process. Eventually, things tend to organize leading to an agreed upon language and meaning of symbols.

Evolution of the Alphabet



Which leads to further refinement and simplification.



And things come full circle?

There are many reasons humans create and see symbols in things. Naturally our minds want to make sense of the world we see and relate things to things we know. We also need to create order in our minds.

Types of symbols

Pictogram: represents a concept or object by illustrating it



Ideogram: abstract or arbitrary shape that acquires a particular meaning



Arbitrary: has no obvious visual connection to an object or idea. We have to learn what it represents



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qsn8QbEoyWg>

<http://www.snap2objects.com/2009/07/semiotics-a-powerful-communication-tool-for-designers/>

<http://www.awdsgn.com/introvc/wk11/introvc-wk11.html>

<http://www.creativebloq.com/computer-arts/semiotics-beginners-3059924>

What is semiotics?

What is Semiotics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7VA95JdbMQ>

- It is the study of signs and symbols.
- It looks at how signs and symbols are used to communicate and develop interpretations.
- Derived from the Greek word “semiotics” which means an observant of signs.

Brief history

Theorists

Ferdinand de Saussure



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Ferdinand_de_Saussure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_de_Saussure)
https://youtu.be/uBm4Gx7Xe_M

Roland Barthes



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Roland_Barthes#:~:text=Semiotics%20and
%20myth,-
Barthes's%20many%20monthly&text=For%
20example%2C%20Barthes%20cited%20th
e,signs%2C%20useful%20in%20these%20i
nterrogations.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes#:~:text=Semiotics%20and%20myth,-Barthes's%20many%20monthly&text=For%20example%2C%20Barthes%20cited%20th e,signs%2C%20useful%20in%20these%20i nterrogations.)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=8Ho2j973bbA&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ho2j973bbA&feature=youtu.be)

Stuart hall



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Stuart_Hall_\(cultural_theorist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Hall_(cultural_theorist))
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=B3ThZumdcV0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3ThZumdcV0)

Charles pierce



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Charles_Sanders_Peirce](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Sanders_Peirce)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=wwQLaCtGbHE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwQLaCtGbHE)

The signifier and the signified:

The image is the signifier, the concept or object the signified

History of semiotics:

<http://tinyurl.com/y8at6rnw>

<http://tinyurl.com/yde4tp99>

Slide examples:

<http://tinyurl.com/y8nucn8v>

<http://tinyurl.com/ya9c83xt>

<http://tinyurl.com/ycddo49s>

Signs and Symbols

- Sign is a symbol which is understood to refer to something other than itself.
- Symbol is an object that represents, stands for or suggest an idea or visual images.

There is a difference between signs and symbols.

The sign has a fixed meaning. In the example below, the stop sign has a

universal fixed meaning. It simply means to STOP. You can go anywhere in the world and even if you don't read the language, you can identify this sign. Also note the color of the sign. Why did humanity use red and not blue? Or any other color?

However, the YinYang symbol does not have a fixed meaning. On the contrary, this symbol can open up a whole universe of philosophy, meanings, understandings and outlooks. Furthermore I argue that depending on the level of consciousness of the observer of the symbol, the observer may have a higher or lower understanding/interpretation of the symbol.

(If you observe the world with a golfball sized consciousness, you will have a golfball sized understanding of the world. If you observe the world with a bowling ball sized consciousness you will have a

bowling ball sized understanding of the world).



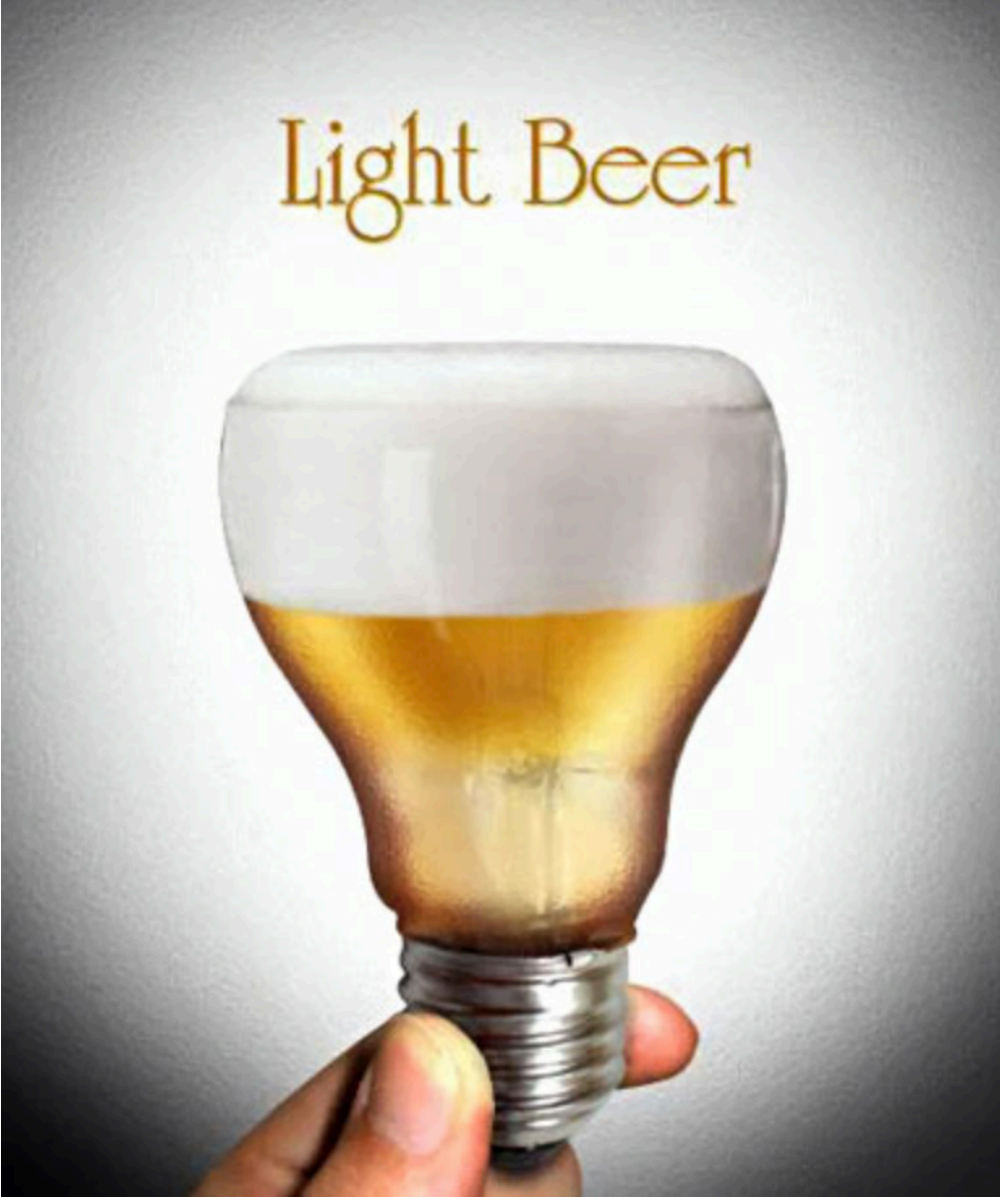
Book: Signs and Symbols by Adrian Frutiger

<http://tinyurl.com/y8p4rkxj>

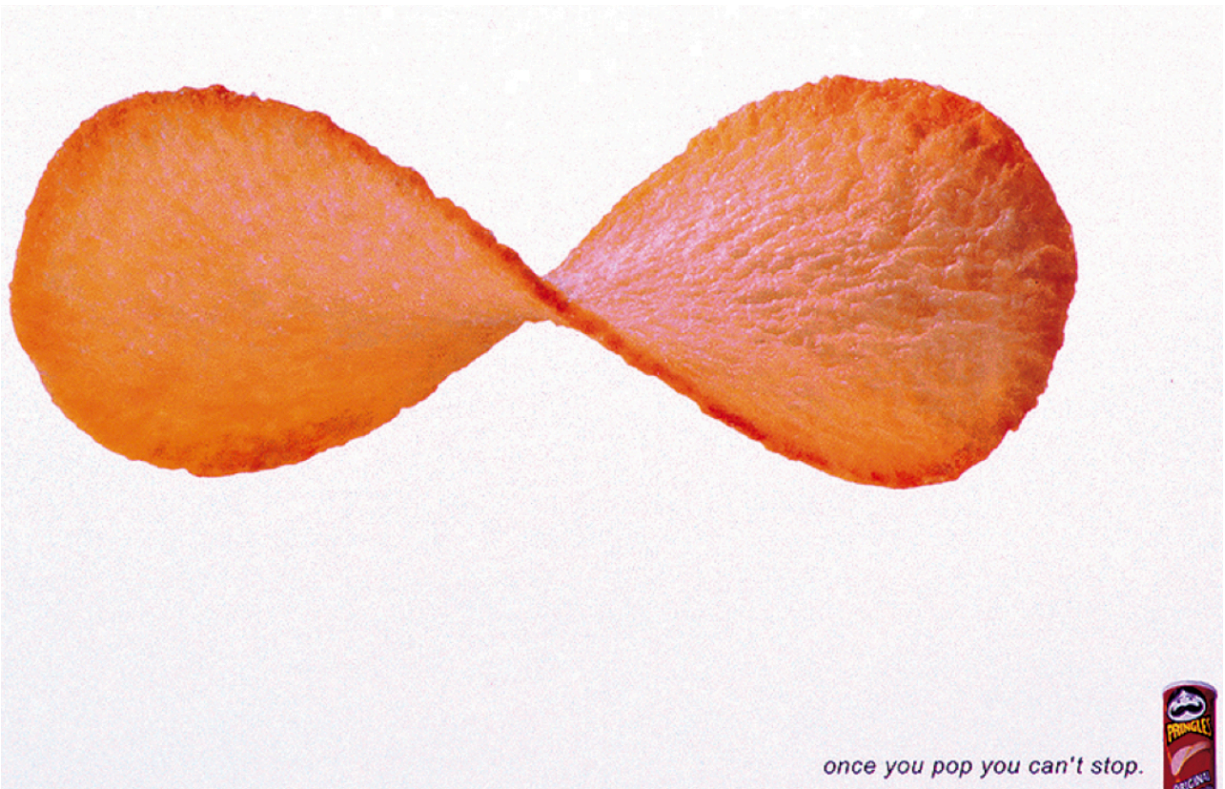
<http://tinyurl.com/y8p4rkxj>

Semiotics and Advertising

- Metaphor (Comparison between 2 things)



- Symbolism



- Hyperbole (Exaggeration)



Says who???

<http://tinyurl.com/yc%20q5r7py%20>

<http://tinyurl.com/y%207txnupl%20>

<http://tinyurl.com/y%209brnzjs>

Advantages of Semiotics

- Allows us to break down a message into its component parts and examine them separately and in relationship to one another.
- Allows us to look for patterns across different forms of communication.
- Helps us to understand how our cultural and social conventions relate to the communication we create and consume.
- Helps us to get beyond the obvious which may not be obvious after all.