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GD310

Advanced The designer manipulates typographic signs to achieve expressiveness in communication.
Typography

Syntax and Semantics

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Signs operate in two dimensions:

- Syntactic, concerning the *form* of a sign.
- Semantic, concerning the *meaning* of a sign.

All objects can function as signs:

- A smoke-filled city is a 'sign' for pollution.
- A beached whale is a 'sign' for extinction.
- Confetti is a 'sign' for a celebration.

Signs may exist at various levels of abstraction. For example...



Particular *syntactic qualities* (having to do with the form of presentation of a typographic sign) may offer visual information which suggests specific meaning:

- A series of repeated letters may signify speed.
- A single small letterform in a large void may signify isolation.
- Simple syntactic manipulations, such as the repetition of letters (as in stststutttter), or varying the weight of letters (as in **diet**) visually suggest verbal meaning.

In language, signs are joined together to create messages. Words can evoke meaning through mental association, in a *semantic* manner (having to do with the meaning of a typographic sign).

Denotation and Connotation

Two terms we may use to understand signs are *denotation* and *connotation*.

- Denotation refers to the objective meaning. Take, for example, a yellow 'o.' The denotative interpretation may be "This is a yellow letter 'o'," or, "This is a yellow circle."
- The connotative observation is drawn from prior experience. Using the yellow 'o' as an example, a connotative interpretation might be, "This is the sun," or, "This is a slice of lemon," or, "This is a golden ring."