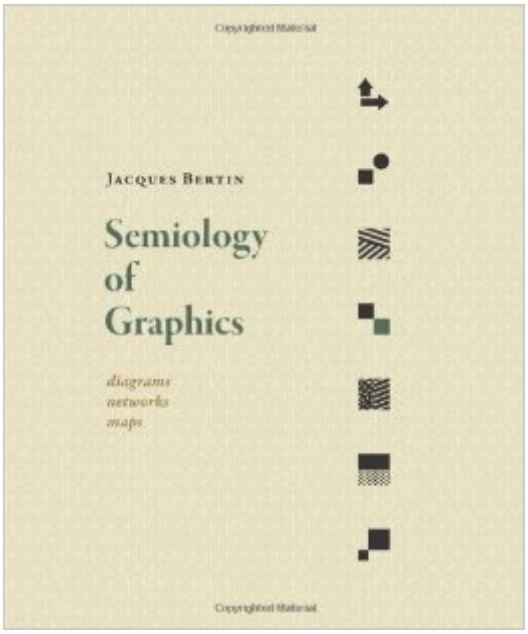
Semiology Of Graphics: Diagrams, Networks, Maps



Synopsis

Originally published in French in 1967, Semiology of Graphics holds a significant place in the theory of information design. Founded on Jacques Bertinâ ™s practical experience as a cartographer, Part One of this work is an unprecedented attempt to synthesize principles of graphic communication with the logic of standard rules applied to writing and topography. Part Two brings Bertinâ ™s theory to life, presenting a close study of graphic techniques including shape, orientation, color, texture, volume, and size in an array of more than 1,000 maps and diagrams.

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Customer Reviews

In the preface to the 1983 translation of the Semiology I emphasized the book''s importance as a guide to the future, for it seemed clear that we were on the cusp of an explosion in the use of graphical methods for both the exploration and communication of complex data. This prediction came true. In the intervening 27 years a huge amount of work has been accomplished to help us use graphical methods profitably. This work has been in hardware that can produce graphical displays quickly and inexpensively; software that can translate data files into graphical representations with the click of a mouse; and statistical and perceptual research that helps us know how to use these tools well.Let me briefly comment only on the latter two aspects. I choose to refrain from any commentary on hardware because my remarks would almost surely be out of date before they were printed. So first, graphical software: thirty years ago I was enthusiastic and optimistic about the future of graphical use, for, I thought, software will be built that has sensible

default options, so that when the software is set on maximal stupidity (ours not its), a reasonable graph would result. The software would force you to wring its metaphorical neck if you wanted to produce some horrible pseudo 3-D multicolored pie chart. Alas, I couldn''t have been more wrong. Instead of making wise, evidence-based, choices, default options seem to have been selected by the same folks who deny the holocaust, global warming and evolution. I could not have imagined back then that the revolution in data gathering, analysis and display that was taking place in the last decades of the 20th century would have resulted in the complexity of the modern world being conveyed in bullet-points augmented by PowerPoint and Excel graphics.

Tufte's books have captured a lot of Bertin's message regarding the visual aspect of graphics (which is, in my experience, now all that is meant by "graphics"), and in a more clear, succinct, and possibly even comprehensive manner. However, _Semiology_ is about much more than what can be seen - it deals extensively with how to get an interesting story from information, which (if I remember correctly) Tufte does not address. I've only seen one other author deal with the process of sifting/sorting/refactoring to find interesting correspondences - Charles L. Owen (in Structured Planning,) - though it is probably covered in many statistics curricula and is necessarily a part of graduate training in most fields, as Bertin predicts in this book's foreward.I would like to say that Bertin presents this important perspective/process in a compelling graphic way, but in fact the book is as dense and inconsistently structured as any of Tufte's great counterexamples. The figures are labelled in unpredictable orders on the page, some never mentioned in the text, and because of a mediocre printing job, many exhibit the very errors Bertin seeks to show how to avoid. Worse, these sort of problems are paralleled in the explication (especially with regard to showing a quantity vs. a quantity spread over an area, or Q vs. QS/S in Bertin's formalism), making it a significant challenge to figure out what is central to the argument and what is in the background.Still, the insight is in there, and the weaknesses are not too great to stop a determined or required reader. The book is full to bursting with myriad practical tips and tricks regarding not just how, when, and why to cram more information onto the page, but also how to decide what information the reader needs.

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