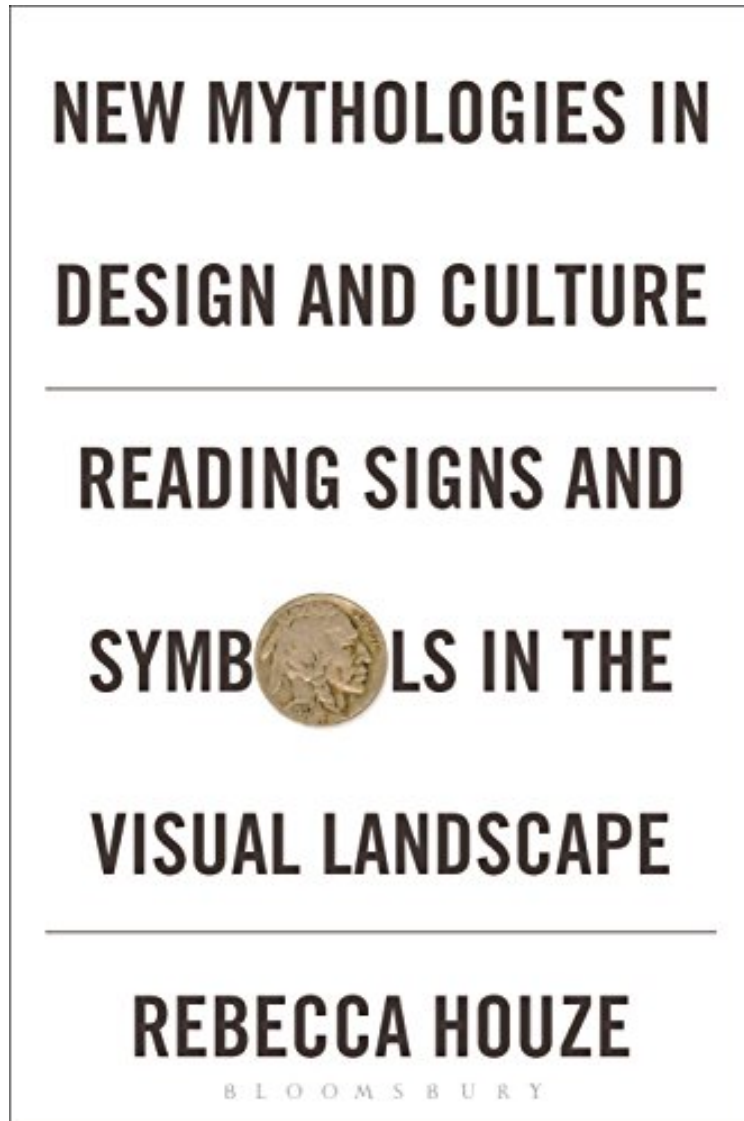


New Mythologies in Design and Culture: Reading Signs and Symbols in the Visual Landscape

Rebecca Houze

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Rebecca Houze : New Mythologies in Design and Culture: Reading Signs and Symbols in the Visual Landscape before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised New Mythologies in Design and Culture: Reading Signs and Symbols in the Visual Landscape:

Taking as its point of departure Roland Barthes' classic series of essays, *Mythologies*, Rebecca Houze presents an

exploration of signs and symbols in the visual landscape of postmodernity. In nine chapters Houze considers a range of contemporary phenomena, from the history of sustainability to the meaning of sports and children's building toys. Among the ubiquitous global trademarks she examines are BP, McDonald's, and Nike. What do these icons say to us today? What political and ideological messages are hidden beneath their surfaces? Taking the idea of myth in its broadest sense, the individual case studies employ a variety of analytic methods derived from linguistics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology, and art history. In their eclecticism of approach they demonstrate the interdisciplinarity of design history and design studies. Just as Barthes' meditations on culture concentrated on his native France, *New Mythologies* is rooted in the author's experience of living and teaching in the United States. Houze's reflections encompass both contemporary American popular culture and the history of American industry, with reference to such foundational figures as Thomas Jefferson and Walt Disney. The collection provides a point of entry into today's complex postmodern or post-postmodern world, and suggests some ways of thinking about its meanings, and the lessons we might learn from it.

From the arches of McDonald's to the bull's eye of Target, signs and symbols have rich stories to tell. In these smart, engaging essays, Rebecca Houze unlocks the tensions that dwell just beneath the surface of commercial iconography. Ellen Lupton, curator of contemporary design, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York City Rebecca Houze has unpacked some of today's most commonly known yet often misunderstood symbols, objects and eye-kons of our times. Through the design lens, she gives our everyday objective world an engagingly new and vividly clear perspective. Steven Heller, School of Visual Arts, New York University *New Mythologies* tells the much-needed political and ideological histories of the symbols embedded in the brand logos of our time. In doing so with the engaging style of a storyteller, Rebecca Houze's book is both a pleasurable and necessary study of contemporaneity and the visual landscape that sustains it. Dr Joao Florencio, Department of Art History and Visual Culture, University of Exeter In this book Rebecca Houze weaves a wonderfully vivid thread of meaning through things we thought we knew - from McDonald's golden arches to the Nintendo DS - analyzing their visual and cultural cues. In the process she elucidates their significance and their relevance to us all. Dr Harriet Atkinson, Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton This extraordinary book leads the reader through a series of case studies that illuminate our contemporary world of ideological signification. Rebecca Houze begins with Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, then elegantly weaves into her text all that has come after: brands and anti-brands, globalism, sustainability, consumption studies, and design history. Dr Stephen Eskilson, Art Department, Eastern Illinois University Inspired by Roland Barthes's classic *Mythologies*, designer and historian Rebecca Houze has produced a lively collection of essays on the ideological workings of visual codes in our contemporary world. Her topics range broadly--from analyzing the designations for "red" and "blue" states, reading children's primers, looking at graphic motifs in signage and brands, and examining the seductive force of products designed to optimize global consumption. Her insights are highly informed, critically sophisticated, and beautifully researched, and the essays show just how important it is to have designers read the graphically coded world for us. *New Mythologies* is a model of design writing and research. Johanna Drucker, Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles About the Author Rebecca Houze is Associate Professor of Art History at Northern Illinois University, USA, where she teaches courses on the history of design and the decorative arts. She is the co-editor, with Grace Lees-Maffei, of *The Design History Reader* (Bloomsbury 2010).