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This unique and fascinating book concentrates on the varying roles and functions that material culture may play in almost all aspects of the social fabric of a given culture. The contributors, from Africa, Australia and Papua New Guinea, India, South America, the USA, and both Eastern and Western Europe, provide a rich variety of views and experience in a worldwide perspective. Several of the authors focus on essential points of principle and methodology that must be carefully considered before any particular approach to material culture is adopted. One of the many fundamental questions posed in the book is whether or not all material culture is equivalent to documents which can be 'read' and interpreted by the outside observer. If it is, what is the nature of the 'messages' or meanings conveyed in this way? The book also questions the extent to which acceptance, and subsequent diffusion, of a religious belief or symbol may be qualified by the status of the individuals concerned in transmitting the innovation, as well as by the stratification of the society involved. Several authors deal with 'works of art' and the most effective means of reaching an understanding of their past significance. In some chapters semiotics is seen as the most appropriate technique to apply to the decoding of the assumed rules and grammars of material culture expression.



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Review

'In sum, in form and content this book represents the current state of the art; and, as its most interesting papers make clear, that art is the broad field of structuralist and semiotic investigation.' - *MAN*

'Clearly, The Meanings of Things is a thought-provoking volume.' - *American Antiquity*

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