

Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays Study Guide

Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays by Umberto Eco

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1 - Chapter I pages 1-30.....	5
Section II - Chapter I pages 31-58.....	6
Section III Chapter 2 pgs 59-86.....	8
Section IV Chapter 3 - 87-112.....	10
Section V - Chapter 3 113 -132.....	12
Section VI - Chapter 4 133-158.....	14
Section VII- Chapter 4 159-180.....	16
Section VIII - Chapter 5 181 - 196.....	18
Section IX Chapter 5 197- 218.....	19
Section X Chapter 6 219-238.....	21
Section XI Chapter 6 239-268.....	23
Section XII Chapter 6 269-278 Chapter 7 279-288.....	25
Section XIII Chapter 8 288- 307.....	27
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	33
Themes.....	35
Style.....	37
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	41



Plot Summary

Travels in Hyper Reality is a collection of essays written in various times and contexts by Umberto Eco, a self-defined semiologist. Semiotics is the study of the language of signs and how they are formed through language, communication, and organization. Eco takes the reader through various explorations of the different forms that these signs may take in day to day life, including behaviors, politics, artificial landscapes, and words. Eco suggests that freedom of thought arises through understanding the signs that are being employed through various agencies.

Eco spends a great deal of time in the first chapter discussing artificial landscapes, starting with a current laser/optical display of holography in New York and moving through every form of artificial landscape imaginable. He covers wax museums, modern art museums, Disneyland, restaurants and hotels. His suggestion is that all of these landscapes create a fictional reality that is often more detailed than the actual reality, hence the term hyper-reality. The end result is that the duplicate is so good, there is less focus on the original.

Eco next suggests that the Western world continues to be fascinated by the medieval period as evidenced by the popularity of books, movies, and games that portray medieval themes. He believes that this is because the root of our current issues began in the middle ages. Eco believes that the movement towards religion, including the formation of cults and terrorism, as further evidence of this idea.

Eco goes on to outline what he describes as a crisis of reason and gives five definitions for understanding reason. He describes the necessity for a kind of guerrilla warfare based on semiotics. The people receiving messages must be able to interpret them appropriately and not simply as the senders of those messages intend.

Eco discusses the importance of sports and how individuals can come to blur the lines between talking about sports and actually participating in them. It is a kind of spectator confusion that occurs in other semiotic layers as well. He continues on by talking about the origination and effect of cult movies, focusing in particular on Casablanca. Eco states that each movie has certain archetypes of narrative and that Casablanca attempts to use all of them. He suggests that this is the characteristic that makes it "cult".

Eco goes on to state that people have lost the interactional feeling of life and instead interpret experiences through images already created for them. He also discusses the dominance of the visual faculty in sensing, through the work of McLuhan. Eco then goes on to reiterate his idea that it is not the form, the media, or the content of the message that makes a difference, it is in fact how the message is received that makes the difference.

Eco describes the relationship between language power and force, paying particular attention to the ways that language can serve to apply and maintain oppressive

structures over people and culture. He concludes with some comments about comedy and how it transgresses given structures.



Section 1 - Chapter I pages 1-30

Section 1 - Chapter I pages 1-30 Summary and Analysis

Chapter one begins with a description of an art display. Two girls are in a crouched position facing each other and touch each other in a sensual manner. They are enclosed in a kind of plastic cylinder. However, it turns out the the girls are merely a hologram presented at an exhibit in New York. Eco suggests that holography is the natural and final extension of photorealism. He continues that America is a country that is fixated on realism, even to the point of obtaining "real" copies.

Eco uses the story of Superman as an allegory of America and suggests that he has need of returning to his "Fortresses of Solitude" from time to time. Superman has several robots that are such good copies of human beings that they don't appear to be robots. Eco suggests that these robots serve as a museum of memories for Superman, in German referred to as Wunderkammern. Eco continues that America has its own "Fortresses of Solitude" and it is the realm in which hyper reality is found.

Eco describes hyper reality as a situation in which the real is portrayed through the ultimate counterfeit. Hyper reality serves to confuse the boundaries of space and time. He discusses the use of crèche - or mini representations of a particular location or scene. Eco also discusses the idea of horror vacui - the fear of open or white space that is remedied by filling an entire piece of art with excessive detail in a neurotic fashion.

Eco continues by describing example after example of this type of creation and focus on realism including Ripley's museums, Hearst Castle, The Museum of Magic and Witchcraft, and the Palace of Living Arts. He suggests that in these places, the aim is to purchase a reproduction so that there will be no desire for the original. He continues that the horror vacui conspires to fill to the point of satiation. Hearst Castle is so full that it is unlivable and thus has presumably lost its original function as a residence.

Analysis

In the first thirty pages of the opening chapter, Eco is writing about the tendency in America to place a great deal of importance on realism. This is presumably to own a replica of something of great value without actually paying the kind of money that would be necessary. It has in fact commoditized several aspects of life.

Eco appears to be arguing that the focus on re-creating the real has led to a disconnection from the original experience. This focus has created a reality through wax museums and other media that provide so many lenses simultaneously that one is overwhelmed. It speaks to the culture of over consumption that exists in the United States in which more is always better.



Section II - Chapter I pages 31-58

Section II - Chapter I pages 31-58 Summary and Analysis

Eco has labeled the second section of chapter one the Monasteries of Salvation. In this section, he discusses museums that have made the effort to avoid falsified artworks. Eco puts forth the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California as being one of the museums that has demonstrated great effort in this regard. He states that Getty has gone to great effort to portray the pieces of art within the context they came from whether Greece, Italy, or France. However, given that the context created is artificial, Eco questions whether this is also unfaithful.

Eco continues on to the next museum, the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. Although the palazzo that was built to house the museum was in itself fake, the museum boasts works of art that are on a par with the Getty. The sculptures are reproductions, yet strictly speaking, they are correct in form and proportion. The question is where to draw the line between fakes, originals, and their inherent value.

Eco then moves on to the next section entitled the City of Robots. He describes that in America there are cities that are created purely for entertainment, such as Disneyland, Disneyworld, and Six Flags. Eco suggests that we are aware these cities are fake, but once inside, one is taken over by them. He continues that the "total fake" once agreed upon must be replicated exactly in order to be enjoyed.

Eco goes on to describe the audio-animatronic technology of Disney and suggests that the imitation of reality is so accurate that reality pales in comparison. He proposes that Disney also requires passivity and that patrons agree to behave in a robotic fashion similar to the robots created for their enjoyment.

Eco continues his argument by suggesting that in addition to art and history, nature is also a victim of hyper realism in the form of zoos and aquariums. One of the effects of zoos and aquariums is that animals have been erroneously humanized. He continues into the area of religion and suggests that these monuments that are being created are a form of timelessness that satisfies human desire for immortality.

Eco has pointed to three different realms in which hyper realism has been used. In the beginning, he focuses on art museums and the degree to which they have been able to remain faithful to time and place the artwork came from. However, he also suggests that fabricating an environment or context may be just as suspect as creating a reproduction of the artwork.

Eco also discusses the use of hyper reality with nature to create zoos and aquariums. He suggests that it is a demonstration of dominance over nature and it serves to allay the constant fears of living in a savage world. Finally, Eco proposes that all use of hyper

reality is an attempt to create a monument or a permanent structure that will allow for life to continue. It is a form of escape from mortality.



Section III Chapter 2 pgs 59-86

Section III Chapter 2 pgs 59-86 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning of chapter two, Eco discusses the current cultural fascination with the Middle Ages that he refers to as the "neo-medieval wave". The interest is taking two different courses, one focused on the more fantastical aspect, another focused on doing real historical scholarship to learn more about that period of history.

Eco suggests that the Middle Ages were the beginning of several practices and their concurrent problems that are still in use today. Included in these practices are: modern armies, a national state, capitalistic economy, and the "technological transformation of labor". He proposes that our fascination with the Middle Ages is related to a desire to examine our origins, the same way that a person might approach psychotherapy. Eco asserts that this re-visitation began shortly after the end of the Middle Ages and was a part of the renaissance.

Eco outlines ten types of Middle Ages in order to approach the subject in a disciplined way. The first five types are: the Middle Ages as a pretext, the Middle Ages as the site of an ironical revisitation, the Middle Ages as a barbaric age, the Middle Ages of Romanticism, and the Middle Ages of the *philosophia perennis*. The next five types are: the Middle Ages of national identities, the Middle Ages of Decadentism, the Middle Ages of philological reconstruction, the Middle Ages of so-called Tradition, and the expectation of the Millennium.

The next section Eco has entitled "Living in the New Middle Ages". Eco asserts that one of the hallmarks of the middle ages was the decline of a period of peace that was brought about by a superpower. The decline is due to the inevitable collapse of the superpower and its inability to internally regulate. He suggests that insecurity plays a large role in this dynamic. This is especially true of the times of the millennium and can be seen in the catastrophic possibilities of nuclear war, and ecological degradation.

Eco suggests that unlike the Middle Ages previous, we are now in a situation in which extremes of population, communication, and transportation make the cities unlivable and people are returning to more rural accommodations. He also comments on the fact that in the previous Middle Ages lack of technology caused nutritional distress; however, in this time, excess of technology is causing nutritional distress. Eco proposes that the two ages share the trait of "educational utopias" who barely mask their ulterior motive of mind control.

In this essay, Eco puts forth his arguments for the idea that we are not only looking back towards the Middle Ages, but we are in fact living a similar period. He supports his argument with several social dynamics including the US as a global empire, the excess of technology, the threat of apocalypse in the form of nuclear war, and "educational utopias".



Eco suggests that universities of today are parallel to the monasteries of the Middle Ages. Like the monasteries, universities will be responsible for saving information that was not valuable and throwing away priceless gems. However, Eco also states that perhaps this is the way something new must be born, as universities were born in the middle ages when so much was lost. He suggests that the middle ages preserved the past through constant use and re-invention versus "hibernation". This seems to add another layer to his question about the preservation of art and what is "authentic". It would seem that religion would be implicated here as well.



Section IV Chapter 3 - 87-112

Section IV Chapter 3 - 87-112 Summary and Analysis

Eco opens chapter three with the essay "The Sacred is Not Just a Fashion". He talks about Superman and his relationship to the American character. He suggests that the story of Superman heralds the return to religion and religious thought. In addition to the organized religions, Eco proposes that there is also a "new religiosity" for those who have been somewhat on the margins of society.

Eco contrasts two competing "ideologies of progress": the "positivistic-technological that seeks to improve the world through the use of science and technology, and the "materialistic-historical" that was focused on improving society by means of revolution. These ideologies are suggested by the media to be the foundation for the re-birth of religion.

Eco refutes this argument and states that religion never left. He argues that what in fact happened was the increase of personal religious practice outside of conventional religion. It was misunderstood as a trend pointing towards the secularization of the country. Eco continues that thoughts about God fall into two categories. The first category describes God as having attributes that humans do not possess. The second category describes God in the negative, through what he is not.

Eco suggests that the God that is not evokes experiences of the sacred that are at once terrible, beautiful, and ineffable. Eco believes that these new "negative theologies" may give insight into revolutionary thought.

The next essay is called "The suicides at the Temple". This essay focuses on the cult followers of Jim Jones and explores how and why this cult may have formed. He compares cults to Millenarian dynamics that he asserts have existed at least since the time of Christ. He suggests that these cults are inevitably formed in a time of crisis, and proclaims the end of the world and the coming of the "anti-Christ". The leader usually possesses a good deal of charisma, and often a kind of self-hypnosis, or drugs are used to create a sense of group identity and cohesion.

The final essay in this section is called "Whose Side are the Orixá on?". In this essay Eco describes sacred rites of the Afro-Brazilians. He suggests that these rites help to keep people more connected to their bodies and to the land. However, he also feels that the rites and the structured leadership serve to keep the people in line.

In these essays, Eco explores religions and how they serve to keep people in particular thought forms. He highlights the differences between group expressions of religion and individual experiencing of the sacred. Cults feed upon people's fears, especially of the millenarian variety which thirst for a renewal of ways of being. Eco seems to feel that

the exploration of individual "negative theologies" may be a key for exploring new thought forms.



Section V - Chapter 3 113 -132

Section V - Chapter 3 113 -132 Summary and Analysis

The first essay in this section is called "Striking at the Heart of the State". Eco opens the essay discussing the Red Brigades and insists that once again the truth of a communication lies in how it is interpreted more so than the form, content, or vehicle of the message. He goes on to talk about the idea of multinationals dictating wars, peace, and relationships throughout the world.

Eco continues that because of the multinational arrangement, there is no head of a particular government or country that can be toppled in order to change the status quo. There is no room for a Che Guevara type revolution. He discusses the fact that terrorism is exactly aimed at this type of system. They cause damage by creating instability in the system. Eco goes on to say that terrorism is a natural counterweight to this kind of system; it serves to keep the balance. Terrorism gives armed forces a reason to exist; they have something concrete to battle against.

Eco suggests that the multinational system is very stable and that the only danger to it is a situation of mass terrorism in which the whole world rises up against it.

The next essay in the section is called "Why are They Laughing in Those Cages?". Eco imagines Italy differently post World War II. Italy had been fighting Turkish fascism. The moral of the story was that human beings have pent up violence and need "sublimation" and "safety valves" to express that violence. Otherwise, people will look for ways to express it. He suggests that the expression of this violence gives people a sense of accomplishment; even the Manson "family" expressed this satisfaction with no remorse after the murder of Sharon Tate.

Eco finishes the essay by stating that real heroes sacrifice themselves for the community and who "act reluctantly". These heroes are always driven by circumstances, because if it weren't for those circumstances, they would not have acted. Eco states, "The real hero is always a hero by mistake, he dreams of being an honest coward like everyone else".

The final essay in this section is called "On the Crisis of the Crisis of Reason". Eco puts forth that there are five different meanings of reason. He introduces the modus ponens as a method for determining reason but laments about its misuse.

In this section, Eco underlines the importance of how communication is received and interpreted. He suggests that terrorism is a natural consequence to the development of multinational systems. This is a much higher level view than is generally espoused and suggests that terrorism be allowed and tolerated.

Eco asserts that people have aggressive drives that need to be modulated or sublimated. The implication is that in particular situations, human beings can be

expected to let out the aggression. This is particularly relevant for genocidal scenarios like the Holocaust and Rwanda. Finally, Eco completes the section with a call for a return to reason. He asserts that the ability to reason has been lost and it is causing major problems.



Section VI - Chapter 4 133-158

Section VI - Chapter 4 133-158 Summary and Analysis

The first essay in this section is titled "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare". Eco writes that media employees are often hampered by the form of the media to the extent that it is not a pure communication between the author of an article and the reader.

Eco goes on to discuss different philosophies regarding communication. One, put forth by Marshall McLuhan, states that the constant barrage of information leads to a passive ingestion of media. Others have faith that the inherent power or veracity of the message will win through. Eco suggests that the receiver of the message has free will and it is the exercise of that will towards interpreting the message that has more power than either the form or content of the message.

Eco creates a language for talking about this transmission in which there is a source that sends out a signal via a transmitter through a channel. At the end of the channel, the signal is picked up by a receiver and is coded into a message for the addressee or the focus of the transmission. Eco suggests that the point of coding can change the entire message depending on the meaning that the receiver assigns to it.

Eco suggests that guerilla warfare implies having the conversation that compares the coding at the receiver with the coding at the source.

The second essay in this section is titled "The Multiplication of the Media". Eco opens the chapter discussing Stanley Kubrick's film 2001. He states that the film was imitated so many times that people become confused as to the original. Thus the copy becomes thought of as the imitator. He then ties this phenomenon back to the mass production of art works.

The final essay in this section is called "Culture as a Show Business". In this essay, Eco discusses the fact that culture until recently dictated that things must be serious. In other words, going to see classical music is a cultural event but seeing a rock concert is not. Another aspect that Eco describes is that the crowd at an event must be non-participatory.

Recently people have started going to these kinds of gatherings in order to participate or be a part of a community. In effect, these gatherings have become events in the same way that rock concerts are events.

This section deals with three important topics. The first one suggests that people who are interested in making sure people get the right message must approach it like guerrilla fighters and attack at the point of coding the message.

The second part has to do with the media itself, which has become more diffuse in a sense because of all the times that themes or archetypes have been copied or

repeated. It is similar to the artwork Eco discussed in earlier chapters in which the copy or reproduction becomes better than the original and thus the original is forgotten.

Finally, the last section points at the commoditization of the culture - with each representation of it becoming an event - another thing to be consumed.



Section VII- Chapter 4 159-180

Section VII- Chapter 4 159-180 Summary and Analysis

The first essay in this section is entitled "Sports Chatter". Eco opens with the remark that it would be easier to have a protest in a church than a football field. He continues by suggesting that sports is a form of "chatter" that serves to distract and create wasteful talk with no actual purpose or value. He suggests that sports have a definitive healthy purpose, among them the channeling of aggressive drives.

Eco draws parallels between sports and his previous essay on culture. Sports have become a kind of performance and thus lost some vital essence. The watchers of the sport may expend some energy in the excitement of watching, but they are not gaining mastery of any elements the way the players are. Eco suggests it becomes further removed by the sports press. Now there is a practice of discussing the commentary of the sports writers as a practice of sports. In this scenario, we are twice removed from the actual participation in the sport.

Eco asserts that the sport now exists mainly for economic reasons and compares the distancing from the actual events to the political arena in which similar discussions occur. He then goes on to suggest that engaging in sport is now confused with discussing sport. He compares this state to that of the wax museums and horror vacui and makes the following comment, "On it and in it, the consumer civilization man actually consumes himself...".

The next essay in this section is titled "The World Cup and its Poms". Eco begins this essay with a personal account of his experiences with soccer. He was apparently very bad at it but wanted to fit in the crowd and thus extolled his father to take him to the games. He goes on to say that he approves of the passion around soccer in the sense that it improves the human race by facilitating the death of those who are out of control.

Eco states that spectator sports are a form of "hygiene", like war, which allows the aggressive impulses to be discharged. However, spectator sports are "morally superior" to war because they only involve willing participants. Eco compares spectator sports to the Roman coliseum and suggests that they are easier to talk about than politics and therefore distract the populace from serious political engagement.

The third essay in this section is titled "Falsification and Consensus". Eco discusses various forms of falsification including billing others for telephone calls, falsifying tickets, etc. He refers to this as a kind of "guerrilla protest" aimed at rebalancing the power differential. He then discusses the concept of consensus - the idea that a group of people agree to follow a certain course of action.

The overall message of these three essays has to do with power and re-direction. The sports culture has become so ingrained that a whole new set of taboos has been

formed surrounding it. In effect, it has become the most sacred thing we engage in. It also effectively distances us from the political conversations that should be taking place. Falsification is a form of protest against the power differential; however, it no longer works when there are better falsifiers that work for the target of the falsification. Consensus is necessary for the maintenance of community - but some issues that appear to run on a consensus actually are based on false premises.



Section VIII - Chapter 5 181 - 196

Section VIII - Chapter 5 181 - 196 Summary and Analysis

The first essay of this section is titled "Two Families of Objects". Eco opens this essay discussing the Milan Trade Fair. He suggests that this fair is in a sense a "temple" at which the semiotic signs of consumerism may be studied. He continues with commentary from Karl Marx implying that these centers are the very places in which the goods that are being sold actually lose all value.

Eco states that all of the objects for sale represent a kind of "undifferentiated desire". He describes two types of objects. The first is the "beautiful" object, one that is coveted perhaps and at least moderate attainable. These objects are singular in the sense that the consumer only wants or needs one. The other kind of objects are those like machines or equipment that have increased value with increased numbers. It is witnessing this second type of object that allows the consumer to purchase the first kind of object and feel they have made a choice in the matter.

The second essay in the section is titled "Lady Barbara". Eco begins the essay by relating his experience of having the song "Lady Barbara" burst into his head. He relates this experience to anticipatory applause and suggests that this kind of applause is being used as a technique to control the reactions of the crowd. He asserts that performances have been crafted in such a way that the crowd will be at first bored by it. Then the performer signals the release of the boredom and the arrival of a new experience which the crowd celebrates as if acting on their own accord. Eco concludes the essay by saying, "Only when the song has become entirely unpleasant will the audience feel happy at last".

The third essay in the section is titled "Lumbar thought:". Eco begins the essay with an account of his experiences with blue jeans. He has found blue jeans to be especially comfortable for travelling; however, due to some weight gain, he was unable to wear any that he liked. After shedding some pounds, he was again able to enjoy jeans again and discovered how they moved with his body as if they were a unit. He discovered the wearing jeans gave him a certain "demeanor", and he attributes this effect to the tightness of the jeans in the groin area. He concludes that the demeanor made him much more exterior versus interior focused, and that jeans are therefore a semiotic device.

Eco continues his exploration of the ways in which everyday experiences and objects have become disconnected or have been usurped. These essays demonstrate the importance of being able to recognize and interpret semiotic devices in order to live a life with an internal locus of control. The reader begins to get a frightening sense of just how many areas of life have been lost to unconscious thought and action driven by use of signs.



Section IX Chapter 5 197- 218

Section IX Chapter 5 197- 218 Summary and Analysis

The first essay of this section is titled "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage". Eco opens this essay talking about the movie Casablanca. He suggests that the movie is not a great artistic achievement; however, it does inspire a great deal of conversation and has managed to achieve cult status.

Eco suggests that in order to achieve this cult status a movie "must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world...". Eco also asserts that to achieve this status the movie must be breakable into sections, that it must have many main themes instead of one, and finally that it must have certain "textual elements".

Eco discusses some semiotic elements including form and motif. Motif is described as "the simplest narrative unit". However, Eco decides to use the idea of "frame". He discusses "common-frame" as "data-structures for representing stereotyped situations". He describes "inter-textual frames" as "stereotyped situations derived from preceding textual tradition", such as the final showdown between a crook and law enforcement. In particular Eco desires to find those inter-textual frames that have some essence that transform the movie into cult. He also introduces the idea of inter-textual archetypes.

Eco then reviews the inter-textual archetypes used in Casablanca and outlines twenty-four of them. Eco suggests that one of the aspects of cult is the witnessing of the archetypes having a conversation with each other. He concludes by stating that Casablanca became cult by accident and that other movies intentionally achieved this and thus they are qualitatively different.

The second essay in this section is entitled "A Photograph". Eco begins the essay by referencing an incident in which a radio station captured the live experience of being shut down by the police. He offers the following two conclusions based on this event. One is that "Life is lived as a work of art". The second one states that "it is the visual work which is now a part of our memory". It is through this second conclusion that he asserts that the younger generations understand their experience through a series of constructed images provided by media.

Eco next discusses the importance of spatial relationships and suggests that "the deployment of space is religion, politics, ideology". Eco continues by discussing an incident in Milan in which a policeman was shot. There is a photograph that depicts the shooter and Eco suggests that this image has taken on mythical proportions because it evoked the archetype of the "lone hero". The image showed a new face of a revolutionary.

In these essays, Eco delves deeper into semiotic structures and meanings. The essay on Casablanca demonstrates to the reader how cult movies help to create an experience that occurs several times removed from the individual dialog. It is a dialog about a dialog in the context of a dialog - more of a conversation between archetypal elements. In this state, the viewer is not directly engaged and is a passive witness.

The second essay explores a similar realm and discusses the disturbing thought that experience is understood through media-created archetypes. This is essentially a form of mind and behavior control.

Section X Chapter 6 219-238

Section X Chapter 6 219-238 Summary and Analysis

The only essay in this section is titled "Cogito Interruptus". Eco begins this essay discussing the experience of reading a book that has no logical flow and is thus difficult to talk about. It is precisely because there are statements of fact that have very little context around them. He uses the example of "And consider also, if you want to dispel any doubt, that four swallows flew past today". It is a kind of mass dispersion of "symbols" without any formula to describe how they are related.

Eco uses two books, one by Hans Sedlmayr called "Art in Crisis: The Lost Center", and another by Marshall McLuhan called "Understanding Media". Eco suggests that both authors use similar facts and arrive at opposite conclusions, one seeing the facts as "symptoms", McLuhan, the other as "symbols", Sedlmayr.

In particular, Sedlmayr explores the theme of the lost center through the changes in architecture over the years. He asserts that the "cantilever" is a rejection of the upward thrust of other buildings and implies that it means a disconnection from the earth. He is similarly unable to understand the architecture of spheres and insists that they also represent a loss of center. Eco believes that Sedlmayr's entire book exists to provide evidence of a conclusion that has already been made in Sedlmayr's mind. Eco goes on to discuss Sedlmayr's treatment of art in the same fashion - excessively reductionistic in order to support his argument. Eco finishes his treatment of Sedlmayr with disdain for his lack of scientific rigor.

Eco continues by discussing the work of McLuhan. Eco describes the concepts of hot and cool media. A "hot medium" is one that focuses on a single sense in order to foster a "high power of definition". A "cool medium" focuses on low definition so that the received must fill in gaps on their own. McLuhan suggests that the medium is the message - with particular reference to electronic media. He also suggests that the world is inundated with cold media that require a certain participation. Eco protests that McLuhan's arguments require the reader to make a false extrapolation similar to that demanded by Sedlmayr.

Eco introduces the idea of a code that translates a message into its meaning. He states that one of the drawbacks of McLuhan's position is that he makes no effort to break the message act down into its constituent parts.

In this chapter, Eco demonstrates the problem of cogito interruptus, which essentially points to an interruption in the flow of logic. He examines two authors, Sedlmayr and McLuhan, who are both guilty of this interruption but in different ways and who reach different conclusions. Eco believes that McLuhan has some interesting things to say but has difficulty with the fact that McLuhan has not shown his steps in developing his

argument. Instead, he seems to ask for a leap of faith. Eco believes that this expectation to leap is another part of the disconnect.



Section XI Chapter 6 239-268

Section XI Chapter 6 239-268 Summary and Analysis

The first essay of this section is titled "Language, Power, Force". Eco begins the chapter by discussing a lecture given by Roland Barthes in France on the subject of semiology. Eco uses this lecture to talk about the relationship between language and power. Eco quotes several of Barthes' lines, especially referring to the omnipresent nature of power transactions, the presence of blame in these transactions, and finally that power is encoded in the language that we use.

Eco continues his argument and suggests that language is fascist in the sense that "it compels speech". He goes on to describe how language encodes power because it forces one to use "already formulated stereotypes". Eco declares that the way to liberate oneself from this constriction is to "cheat" through the use of literature. He suggests that it is the creative interplay of the signs that is emancipatory. This is similar to the idea of the inter-textual frames that Eco used to describe the cult movie apparatus.

Eco examines the definitions of power given by Foucault and Barthes and suggests the following aspects: power contains both elements of "repression" and excitation, power is "plural", power is "exercised". He continues on and gives his definition of power, "...as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization". Eco argues that language is not an exercise of power itself because it is socially constructed. Rather, power arises within the context of the collective. Eco then goes on to refute Foucault's concept of language as fascist.

Eco brings in the work of Georges Duby to help clarify his position. Duby describes three "orders" that are spoken of in the Bible, consisting of the clergy, the soldiers, and the people. Eco then describes Duby's work of outlining the various ways that the orders have aligned themselves with or against each other throughout history, with some appearances of a fourth order. Eco claims that a common language with aspects of power served to structure and cohere these movements. As Eco states, "The power born from it becomes truly a network of consensus, beginning from below, because the relationships of strength have been transformed into symbolic relationships."

Eco suggests that language can be manipulated to create symbolic relationships that cause people to do things. He continues that causation and power are often confused. Eco contends that the interplay of the three or four orders is about putting a check on the forces that are at work. He believes that real force has a symbolic quality to it.

In this section, Eco builds arguments about language, force and power using the work of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Georges Duby. He discusses the idea of language as a form of power, and how power is never eradicated, it is instead checked or slowed. This section gives insight into the problem of language structures that may

be inherently repressive. In addition, Eco achieves a high level view of revolution dynamics and posits that they are merely the break point of a slow gradual shift.



Section XII Chapter 6 269-278 Chapter 7 279-288

Section XII Chapter 6 269-278 Chapter 7 279-288 Summary and Analysis

The first essay in this section is titled "In Praise of St. Thomas". Eco begins this essay by discussing the life of St. Thomas Aquinas and suggests that the worst thing to have ever happened to him was being named a saint. Eco declares that unfortunately, when this occurs, the person becomes "cliché". Eco describes the torments that Thomas frequently endured from classmates and others while progressing through the monastery. One of the stunts Thomas endured was to have a naked girl sent into his room while he was trying to become an abbot. Thomas apparently chased the girl out of his room with a brand, intending to burn her buttocks.

Eco states that during Thomas' time, the world was very much still in the thrall of religious thought. God was a being far away and the Earth and its processes were a happy byproduct of God's creation plan. However, any knowledge of those processes were in God's dominion only and no understanding was to be had apart from small glimpses. Reason was present during this time, but it was still vastly on the periphery and not accepted.

According to Eco, Thomas was able to use the keys that were provided by Aristotle and unlock the secrets of reason on the physical plane while still maintaining a presence in the spiritual plane. This fusion allowed "Aristotle to enter Christian culture". Eco states that Thomas had to unhook Aristotle's teachings from the use they were being put to by the Averroes a group that was Spanish, Moslem, Berber, and spoke Arabic.

Thomas was revolutionary in the sense that he reconciled. He found ways to bring divergent thought together. As Eco states, "he changed everything so that nothing would change". Eco implies that he so completely changed the church that it is now unable to change.

The second essay in this section is titled "The Comic and the Rule". Eco begins this essay talking about various forms of drama over the centuries, which appear to be universally understood in their expression. The comic, however, Eco believes is something that is more rooted in time, place, and culture.

Eco maintains that the role of the comic figure is to break a rule while holding a position that is in stature below the observer so that there is no fear of identification with the rule breaking. The observer thus experiences a vicarious pleasure from the fracture of the rule without the normally resulting shame. Eco then goes on to discuss the "conversational maxims of H.P. Price" and how they relate to the function of the comic.

At the end of the essay Eco states, "The comic is the perception of the opposite; humor is the feeling of it."

In this section, Eco covers to somewhat disparate topics. The first is how St. Thomas was able to bring Aristotelian thought into the church and expand both paradigms. The second has to do with the comic figure that helps people to vicariously transgress societal rules and take joy in it.



Section XIII Chapter 8 288- 307

Section XIII Chapter 8 288- 307 Summary and Analysis

The only essay in this section is titled "A Theory of Expositions". Eco begins this essay by discussing the qualities of the World's Fair or Expositions. He first suggests that they act as a form of inventory cataloging the various structures, furniture, art, home décor, etc. In a certain sense, expositions are like a display of all of the creations of mankind shown one last time before the end of days.

The next quality suggested is that expositions are like a collection of goods. In this sense, the items are elevated to the level of art or curiosity. They are no longer simply goods with an exchange value. The witnessing of these goods takes on an almost museum like quality, similar to the writings of Eco in "Travels in Hyper Reality".

The next section of the essay is titled "How the exposition exposes itself". Eco discusses the fact that when the production and exchange of items has become universal, the only way for a country to distinguish itself from the others is in how it chooses to present the items. Within this section, Eco also discusses the tension between the primary and secondary functions of a particular object. He uses the example of a throne, which at once is both an object to sit on, and an object to sit on "with dignity" and may also have physical differences from an ordinary chair.

The next section in the essay is called "What kind of communication?" Eco discusses how expositions can communicate especially symbolically. He uses the term "open symbols", meaning symbols that offer a wide variety of interpretations to the recipient. Eco refers to a particular building in the British Pavilion in Montreal that is so open symbolically that it seems to negate the values and spirit that it was supposed to convey.

Eco suggests that consistent use of a single "allegorical key" helps to avoid confusion of interpretation of symbolic messages. He contends that symbols which are consistently repeated over a long time in a particular cultural context tend to reinforce the symbolic meaning and limit confusion.

Eco puts forth three possibilities for the focus of expositions in the future. The first is as a collection of symbolic objects. The second is as an educational instrument. Eco then discusses some of the potential problems of each. In the first instance there is a possibility of unclear symbolic interpretation. In the second instance there is the possibility of losing the education for the sake of aesthetic.

Eco concludes the book by discussing expositions and the messages that are being conveyed. While he has several suggestions for improving this scenario, he also readily admits that his solutions are potentially problematic as well. He appears to be searching

for some kind of authentic communication that is not subject to the kind of secondary or tertiary process that has been the subject of most of the book.



Characters

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas is the most important person in this book because of the fact that he has an entire essay devoted to him. According to the book, he was forty-nine years old when he died in Fossanova on March 7th, 1274. He was apparently fat, and Eco states in the book that due to his girth and weight, it was impossible for the monks to carry him down the stairs. Eco suggests that the worst thing that occurred in Aquinas' life was when he was made a saint in 1323.

Eco describes St. Thomas as being slow and silent in addition to being fat and was often mocked by his peers in the monastery. However, when he became a teacher, he won the respect of his students. It was debated that he did not have sex, and certainly developed a reputation for avoiding women like the plague.

In his scholarly work, he studied various teachings and in particular was able to grasp the works of Aristotle, although at the time the teachings were considered heretical partly because of their association with Muslims and Atheists. However, Thomas recognized that Aristotle could talk about both God and the material world. According to Eco, Thomas was a "concordian", in other words, he brought things into relationship with each other.

Thomas was responsible for so radically changing the church that it is now essentially unassailable. He created through his actions his own set of doctrines that expand upon his thought. Eco posits that were Thomas alive today he would consider the works of Freud and Marx and would realize that the system is not concrete but is moveable.

Professor Marshall McLuhan

In the book Marshall McLuhan is a professor that has written a book called "Understanding Media". The focus of the book, similar to Sedlmayr's, is that man has lost his center. His argument states that all of the technological advancements of man should be seen as media which affect our "sensitivity". In effect, he is saying that the medium has become the message.

McLuhan suggests two different kinds of media known as hot and cool media. Hot media is focused, whereas cool media is more diffuse. McLuhan contends tv is cool media and pulls the viewer in to participate. He goes on to propose that people "integrate themselves" and view this as a natural process.

McLuhan also wrote the book "The Medium is the Message". He believes that "all media are active metaphors" in the sense that there is always room for new interpretation and thus new experience. McLuhan's main contribution to the book is the fact that he believes the medium to be the message, although Eco disagrees with him. Eco accuses



him of "playing a shell game" with the rational processes of logic that lead to his conclusions.

However, Eco agrees with McLuhan the "Gutenberg Man is dead". Eco suggests that McLuhan's popularity has more to do with the fact that he is so unreadable in his logic.

Professor Hans Sedlmayr

Hans Sedlmayr shares the focus of one of Eco's essays with McLuhan because he authored a book "Art in Crisis: The Lost Center", written in 1948. In this book, Sedlmayr, like McLuhan, is accused by Eco of not presenting the equations or formulas from which he draws his claims, a process that Eco refers to as *Cogito Interruptus*.

The focus in the beginning of the book is mainly on architecture and the movement from "the worship of form to the cult of technology". He states that man has lost the center and is falling. Eco suggests that by Sedlmayr's own methods one may conclude that man has always been losing the center.

Sedlmayr focuses on the invention of the cantilever as part of his argument for the loss of center. It is a horizontal movement that for Sedlmayr implies that the movement towards aspiration is lost. In addition, Sedlmayr maintains that this horizontal trend in architecture implies that man has lost his connection to his body and the earth.

Eco argues Sedlmayr's presumptions in part by discussing the recent advent of the construction of spheres. In addition, Sedlmayr contends that works of art show how humans have created images of themselves with distorted and horrific proportions and that these distortions point to the fact that man has lost the center.

Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes was the chair of literary semiology at the College de France. According to Eco, he gave his first lecture on January 17, 1977 as he accepted the position of chair. The lecture was given the title *leçon* and is separated into three parts. In the book, Eco focuses on the first part of the lecture having to do with power. Barthes opens by thanking his patron at the college, Michel Foucault, and then proceeds to discuss the particular aspects of power. Chief among them is the fact that power is not singular in nature, it is plural. In addition, power is seen in a transaction in which blame participates. He continues by stating that power is indestructible and that language is the conveyor of power.

Eco agrees with Barthes' statements in the sense that the language comes with certain forms and stereotypes, but argues that this aspect may be bypassed through creative use of language. Eco does say of Barthes' work that at least it comes with the conscious use of paradox.



Georges Duby

Georges Duby did a study on the theory of the three orders in his book "The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined", which was written in 1980. Duby's book explores ancient biblical writings that describe the people being divided into three orders: the clergy, the soldiers, and the people. Eco respects Duby's work a great deal due to the conscientiousness and rigor he puts into it.

The orders are closely followed by Duby and he even points to the existence of a fourth order from time to time and Duby suggests that each of these orders play off of each other in a series of checks and balances of power. In his book he asserts that the forces are also subject to the "rearrangement of symbolic figures".

Jim Jones

Jim Jones was the cult leader of the People's temple. All the members including Jones committed suicide, presumably as a means of escaping the coming apocalypse. According to Eco, those who knew Jones described him as "an altruistic preacher, a fascinating personality, a convinced integrationist, a good democrat". However, he was also accused of stealing from his followers, using drugs, being sexually promiscuous, and having turned a blind eye towards violence against those who deserted him.

Eco suggests that part of the incredulity of the events surrounding Jones is due to the fact that people often ignore what is right in front of their eyes. He contends that the pattern of the cult has existed for millennia. Eco references the book "Dreams Die First" as being almost a blueprint for this kind of behavior. Eco also links the People's Temple with Charles Manson's cult.

Eco suggests that Jones' cult, like the millenarian tradition, was started in a time of chaos, suggested an apocalyptic end was near, and was led by someone with a great deal of charisma. Jones invented the idea of "the congressman coming to destroy them" and led the retreat into the forest.

William Randolph Hearst

He was the creator and founder of Hearst Castle in Santa Barbara, California. Eco describes the building as "Xanadu of Citizen Kane". Hearst constructed his private "Fortress of Solitude", using pieces of different buildings in Europe and then importing them to the United States. The resulting building is a combination of abbeys, palaces and convents, and is as much a museum as a place to live.

According to Eco, Hearst bought several reproduction art works in order to fit in with the imported architecture. He has his own "projection room" in which he would show guests films of his own making.



J. Paul Getty

J. Paul Getty founded the Getty Museum in Malibu, California. Getty was very disciplined in the approach to obtaining and reconditioning original artwork. The dedication to providing an original experience extended to making attempts to re-create the context that the artwork was created in. Eco states of Getty, "the museum's philosophy is stern, learned, fiercely German; and J. Paul Getty has proved in face a cultivated patron, who wants to show the California public only works of unquestionable worth and authenticity".

Eco goes on further to state that all the assertions made by Getty in the guide are "perceptive and coherent". Any errors made are conscious errors - acceptable for what they contribute to the whole.

Lyndon Johnson

Lyndon Johnson was a former president of the United States. While he was still alive, he constructed his "Fortress of Solitude" in Austin, Texas. Within this "museum" are collected documents related to his political career, voice recordings of his career done by his wife, and other memorabilia. He even has statues made of wax of his two daughters Luci and Lynda. The structure is now referred to as the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, and contains within it a replica of the Oval office. Eco comments that this library is a form of attempting immortality through reproduction.

Stanley Kubrick

Stanley Kubrick was a director and was responsible for the direction of the film 2001: A Space Odyssey. According to Eco, during Kubrick's time he was considered "an innovator of genius". However, because of the number of copies made of his original thought that now surpass it, his work is seen as the imitation.



Objects/Places

New York School of Holography

The school that displays the holograph exhibit of two naked women sensually kissing and holding each other that Eco describes at the beginning of the essay on hyper reality.

Fortress of Solitude

The fortress is a fictional retreat in which Superman keeps all the memories of his past intact. Eco uses this term to describe similar retreats of actual people.

Ripley's Museums

A series of wax museums found throughout the country that are famous for their attention to detail and for having some truly unique objects found nowhere else.

Palace of Living Arts

A museum located in Los Angeles, California that is famous for having sumptuous recreations of various artworks including David.

Hearst Castle

The castle is a kind of living museum. Hearst built the castle through deconstructing various buildings in locations all over Europe and then shipping the materials to the United States to be re-assembled.

J. Paul Getty Museum

The Getty Museum is described by Eco as maintaining a fierce discipline towards faithful historic presentation of authentic works of art in the context in which they were made. The Getty is located in Malibu, California.

Sea World

Sea World is a name given to a collection of marine parks found throughout the United States. Eco suggests that these are the equivalent of the wax museums in the way that animals are portrayed.



Lyndon B. Johnson Library

The Lyndon B. Johnson Library is a museum that showcases the life and times of the former president. The museum is located in Texas, and went so far as to create a replica of the oval office.

The People's Temple

The People's Temple was a cult group led by the charismatic Jim Jones. They were located in the forest to hide from a fabricated danger that Jones created. The entire group committed suicide together to evade the coming apocalypse.

Casablanca

Casablanca is a cult movie that Eco uses to describe the entire genre. It is unique in the sense that it utilizes all the inter-textual archetypes available to it.

College de France

The college is the site in which Roland Barthes gives his first lecture as the newly appointed chair of literary semiology.



Themes

Authenticity

Authenticity is a major theme throughout this book, particularly in the first essay, "Travels in Hyperreality". Eco describes the creation and maintenance of "Fortresses of Solitude". The fortress was a place for Superman, whom Eco suggests is a good representation of an American, to go for solitude and to immerse himself in physical representations of his memories. The physical representations included robots that were so realistic they would easily be mistaken for being alive.

It is these physical representations that capture the interest of Eco. He is fascinated by the degree of effort that is put into copying life with such painstaking detail. The horrifying effect of this attention to detail is that life and non-life become indistinguishable. Eco shifts his attention to actual examples of Fortresses of Solitude that exist in America, including Hearst Castle, Disneyland, the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, and Ripley's wax museums.

He describes the way that each of these places has been consumed by horror vacui, or the fear of blank space. In order to compensate, every corner is filled with some object. Eco then discusses the lack of authenticity that accompanies the experience - especially due to the fact that the objects even if authentic have been removed from their proper context. Finally, Eco describes America's addiction to realism and suggests that it actually creates distortion.

Death

Another major theme that runs throughout this book concerns death. In all the discussions on Fortresses of Solitude, Eco suggests that the ultimate goal, although likely unrecognized, of amassing these living monuments is to achieve immortality through replication. In other words, if Lyndon B. Johnson can recreate every detail of his life and preserve it in a museum then his life will continue on.

This tendency is also shown in Eco's discussions on horror-vacui or the fear of blank space. Existentially, this fear can be thought of as the fear of nothingness, the void, or in other words, death. The antidote then is to amass as many things that copy life as possible so that people will be able to trick themselves into thinking that death doesn't exist.

Another way that Eco discusses death is in the context of the millenarian cults. One of the basic aspects of these cults is the fear of the coming apocalypse and the anti-Christ. In the case of the People's Temple, this fear was used to convince everyone to commit suicide.



Finally, the subject of death is raised in Eco's essay about the expositions. The observer of the exposition can feel as if they are walking through a display of man's achievements shortly before the coming apocalypse, the last tribute to the brilliance of the human race.

Communication

A third major theme in this book has to do with communication. Eco breaks down the act of communication into its constituent parts including: the source, the transmitter, a signal, a channel, a receiver, a message, and the "addressee". Eco believes that each of these aspects play a role in how information is transferred, but he places particular importance on how the message is created. Other authors focus on the media as the message such as McLuhan.

Eco also discusses communication in the form of dialectic between various factions. In his discussion of the "three orders" he suggests that each of these orders affect checks and balances on the others creating a kind of dance of power in which the roles of each party are understood.

Finally, Eco discusses sports and the degree to which the actual play of sports has been diminished. He suggests that sports have now been reduced to talking about the discussion of sports. In other words, it is a tertiary level of engagement versus a primary level in which the observer is directly taking in the action.

Semiotics

A fourth major theme of the book is semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs, how they are created, what they mean, and how they are used. Eco discusses the idea that power is communicated by symbol and that it exists in every exchange that we have because it is communicated by our language.

Eco also discusses the importance of consistent signs and symbology so that meaning does not become confused. He uses the example of a tower that was built in order to represent England. However, the architecture of the building was so open symbolically that several meanings could be made from the structure, most of which were inconsistent with the intent.

Eco also discusses through the work of Ledlmayr the idea of hot and cold media. Hot media is the attempt to generate a focus for the viewer. Cold media are more diffuse and attempt to engage the viewer in a particular way. TV is given as an example of cold media. Eco asserts that TV has created a large group of people that understand their experience only to the degree that they can fit it to a particular image from TV.

Style

Perspective

Umberto Eco is an academic writer, holding a faculty position as a professor of semiotics at the University of Bologna in Italy. As a semiologist, he is interested in the construction and meaning of signs and how they are used. Language is one of the media used for conveying signs and thus his writing is informed by his educational and linguistic perspective.

Eco states that he writes as partly out of a feeling of duty. He contends that academics in Europe are expected to write a great deal as part of their job, more than American scholars. In addition, he feels that it is part of his job as a citizen to write essays that add to the general conversation on such areas as politics, environment, social movements, etc. He acknowledges that some of these essays may contradict each other; however, it is because they are written in "the heat of the moment" when he was inspired.

The intent behind this particular selection of essays was to give the reader some tools for being able to see and interpret the signs that they are surrounded with on a daily basis. Through this knowledge, his hope is that people will be able to form accurate and insightful critique of current practices and dynamics.

Finally, Eco describes himself as an "insecure" person. The essay format allows him to write quick versions of his thoughts and then check to see if they are cogent. This is in contrast to writing an academic book which may take years and patience, which he admits to struggling with.

Tone

The book is divided into several chapters covering Eco's writing on various topics. Each of these chapters contains several essays that were written at various times for various audiences, thus the tone tends to vary depending on the essay. However, the tone is predominantly academic and has the feel of a debate. Eco is fiercely dedicated to following a logical method in making his arguments and demonstrating how he arrives at his conclusions. He is at once scathing and gentlemanly as he dismantles other thinkers - this is particularly evident in the essay on language, power, and force. He has a tendency to go into a great deal of abstraction, but he never loses his direction. Due to the fact that the writings are essays, there is often a conversational tone.

In some of the other essays including *Travels in Hyperreality*, Eco conveys a tone that is conversational with a trace of humor and lightness. This is despite the fact that the implications of the material that he is discussing are somewhat disturbing.



Particularly in his philosophic writings, Eco carries an almost haughty tone and points out obvious flaws and weaknesses in his colleagues arguments as well as preceding theories that he feels no longer work. He is diligent in providing examples, analogies, experience, and logic to support his various theses.

Structure

The book is structured in eight different chapters that cover different topic areas of Eco's scholarship. The chapters include Travels in Hyperreality, The Return of the Middle Ages, The Gods of the Underworld, Reports From the Global Village, Reading Things, De Consolatione Philosophiae, De Interpretatione, and A Theory of Expositions. Within each of these chapters are various essays that the author has written at various times and for various audiences.



Quotes

"This is the reason for this journey into hyperreality, in search of instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake' where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred, the art museum is contaminated by the freak show, and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of "fullness," of horror vacui."

p. 8

"What is falsified is our will to buy, which we take as real, and in this sense Disneyland is really the quintessence of consumer ideology."

p. 43

"An allegory of the consumer society, a place of absolute iconism, Disneyland is also a place of total passivity. Its visitors must agree to behave like its robots."

p. 48

"Thus looking at the Middle Ages means looking at our infancy, in the same way that a doctor, to understand our present state of health asks us about our childhood, or in the same way that the psychoanalyst, to understand our present neuroses, makes a careful investigation of the primal scene."

p. 65

"The sacred appears to us as "numen," as "tremendum," it is the sense that there is something not produced by man and towards which the human being feels at once attraction and repulsion."

p. 93

"We remain stunned not by Jim Jones but by the unconscious hypocrisy of "normal" people. Normal people try desperately to repress a reality that has been before their eyes for at least two thousand years."

p. 96

"The great systems are headless, they have no protagonists and they do not live on individual egoism either."

p. 115

"The Receiver transforms the Signal into Message, but this message is still the empty form to which the Addressee can attribute various meanings depending on the code he applies to it."

p. 139

"Contest disciplines and neutralizes the aggressive charge, individual and collective."

p. 161



"In a certain sense I could agree with the Futurists that war is the only hygiene of the world, except for one little correction: It would be, if only volunteers were allowed to wage it."

p. 169

"Certain forms of consensus are so essential to community life that they reestablish themselves despite every attempt to shake them."

p. 177

"A final reflection - in imposing an exterior demeanor, clothes are semiotic devices, machines for communicating."

p. 195

"From the worship of God to the worship of nature, from the worship of form to the cult of technology: This is the descriptive image of a "succession"."

p. 224



Topics for Discussion

What is the purpose of building a "Fortress of Solitude"? Why does the author suggest that this is a distinctly American phenomenon?

In the book, Eco talks a great deal about the real versus the fake. What defines reality? What makes something inauthentic? Why should anyone care about the line between real and false?

In the book, Eco discusses the mass suicide at the People's Temple and Millenarian dynamics. What about these cults is attractive to people? What is a sufficient amount of crisis to compel people to join? What, if anything, can be done to prevent the formation of these cults?

Throughout the book, Eco touches on the subject of death in various ways. What relationship does death have to the American fascination with Fortresses of Solitude?

Describe what is meant by the phrase "Man has fallen out of center".

How does the popularity of Harry Potter support Eco's thesis on the contemporary fascination with the Middle Ages?

Explain what is meant by the phrase "Reason is in a state of crisis" and give examples.