

Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero

By Brian Rotman

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This unusual book is a delightful analysis of the nature of zero as a sign intimately connected to the idea of nothing. Rotman draws interesting parallels using the textual code systems of mathematics, painting, and economic exchange and their respective meta-signs -- zero, the vanishing point, imaginary money -- which represent the absence of certain signs. Focusing on the Renaissance period, the author argues that the introduction of a meta-sign disrupts a code system that prompts the creating of new sign systems, as represented by the multifarious transitions from Roman to Hindu numerals, from iconic to perspective art, and from gold money to imaginary bank money. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach...Rotman builds a viable thesis for the semiotics of zero via a thorough examination of Montaigne's 'Essays,' Shakespeare's 'King Lear', the 'Kabbalah,' and Vermeer's paintings. - Choice

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