



# SEMIOTICS

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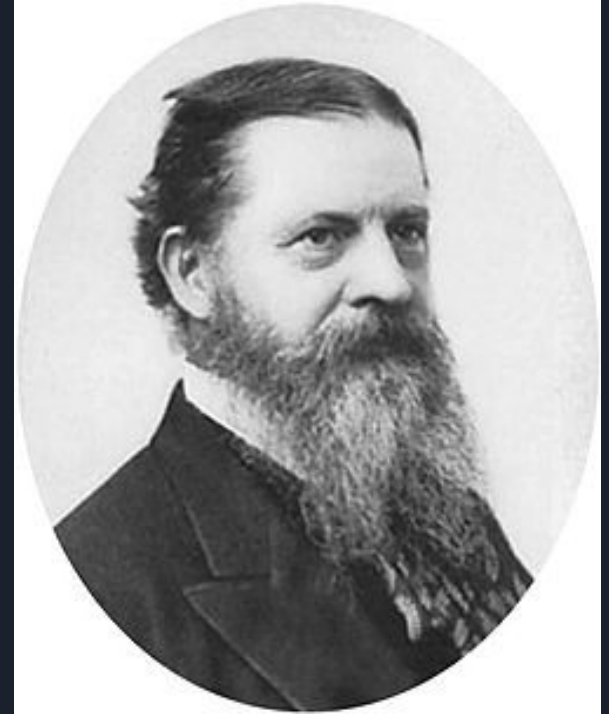


# What is Semiotics?

- study of sign processes (semiosis) / signification and communication, signs and symbols
- three branches:
  - Semantics - meaning of signs
  - Syntactics - mutual relations between signs
  - Pragmatics - use of signs; relations between signs and their users

# Firstness, Secondness, Thirdness

- founder of modern Semiotics - American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce
- Peirce`s work on Semiotics inspired by Immanuel Kant
  
- Firstness - pure modes of being, something that does not depend on our cognition or actions, e. g. feelings, senses
- Secondness - polarities of action-reaction, effort-resistance...involves acting and percieveing, the struggle etc.
- Thirdness - utmost importance in philosophy, ideas our minds produce, brings a first into relation to a second





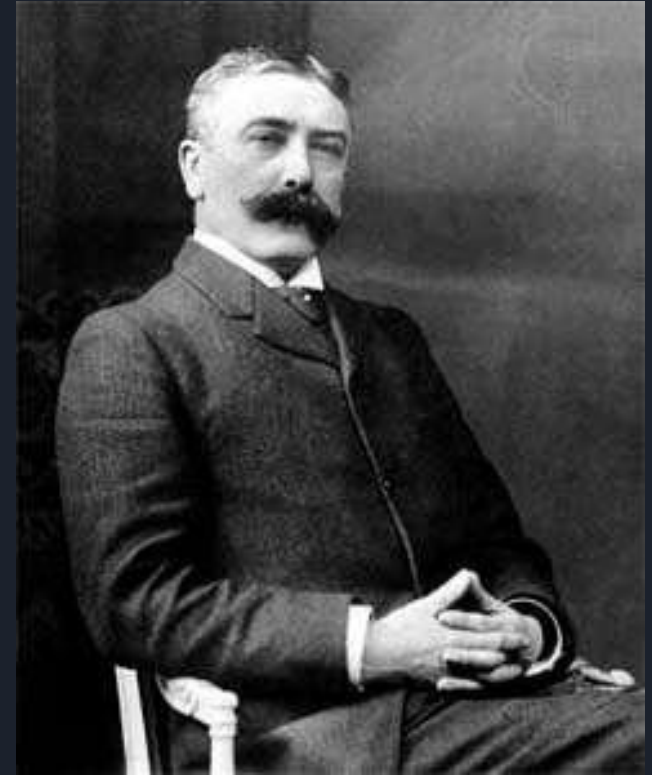
# Icon, Index, Symbol

- need of an interpretation that brings sign and object into relation  
  
=> Peirce`s distinction between icon, index and symbol
- icon - based on analogy/similarity, e. g. painting
- index - forces attention to a certain object, factual link e. g. smoke signifies fire
- symbol - signifies object via association or habitual connection, e. g. a word such as “dog”

# Life of **Ferdinand de Saussure**

\*1857, †1913

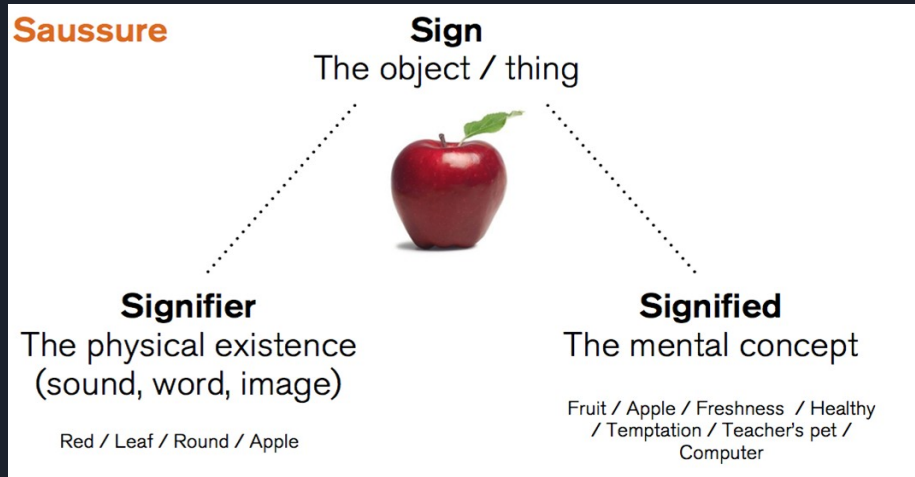
- Born in Geneva, Switzerland
- Very talented and intelligent from very young age
- Interested in studying languages
- He taught in Geneva, Paris and Leipzig
- **Founder of semiotics**
- Main work *Course in General Linguistics* published by his students after his death



# Sign, signifier, signified

Sign is a form made up of *signifier* and *signified*.

- **Signifier:** something physical – sounds, letters, gestures
- **Signified:** image or concept to which the signifier refers
- **Signification:** relation between signifier and signified





# Langue, parole and other key concepts

Saussure made distinction between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech)

- **Langue:** system of rules and conventions or habits which is independent on individual users
- **Parole:** its use in particular instances
- Emphasis on *langue* because most important are underlying structures and rules of a semiotics system as a whole

**Study of signs:**

- **Synchronic:** studying signs at given point in time
- **Diachronic:** how signs change in form and meaning over time

# Roland Barthes (1915-1980)

- concept of **myth**
- all the apparently spontaneous forms and rituals of contemporary bourgeois societies are subject to a **systematic distortion**
- objects are organized into meaningful relationships by narratives that expressed collective **cultural values**
- he was analyzing the popular, consumer culture of post-war France:



*The whole of France is steeped in this anonymous ideology: our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything in everyday life is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie has and makes us have of the relations between men and the world. (Barthes, 1972)*

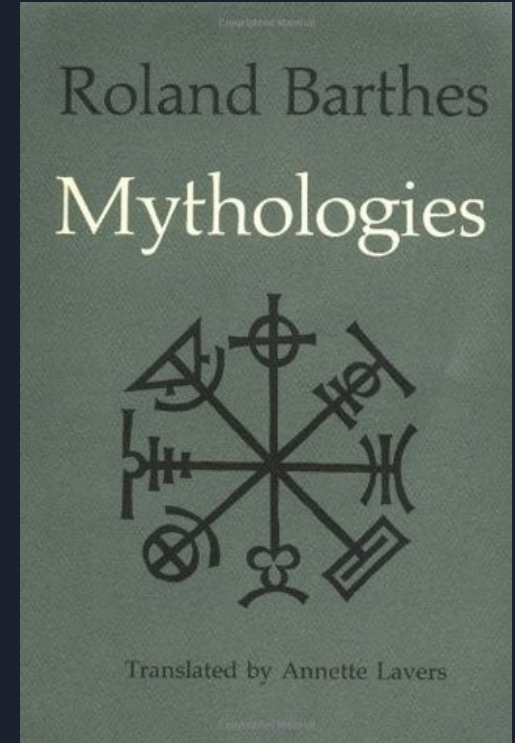
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# Mythologies

- Barthes' notion of culture **extends** beyond the library, the opera-house and the theatre to cover everything in everyday life
- everyday life is more insidious and more systematically organized than people think
- **Mythologies**: Barthes' collection of essays published in 1957
- he examined **hidden set of rules, codes and conventions** through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and "given" for the whole of society



# Examples

- myth = second-order semiological system



- (1) a gesture of loyalty,
- (2) "France is a great empire, and all her sons, without colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag"



- (1) an alcoholic beverage,
- (2) the idea of healthy and relaxing experience

Image sources:

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