

# **Roland Barthes and Photography**

20th January 2022





Roland Barthes 1915 - 1980

## SOME KEY TEXTS BY BARTHES RELATED TO PHOTOGRAPHY

**1957** Mythologies

**1961** "The Photographic Message".

**1964** Rhetoric of the Image

**1970** "The Third Meaning"



**1977** Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes

**1980** Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography



(Posthumously published:)

**2009** Mourning Diary

**2011** "Proust and Photography" in The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980



# SEMIOTICS

Is the study of signs and sign processes

Key sign theories:

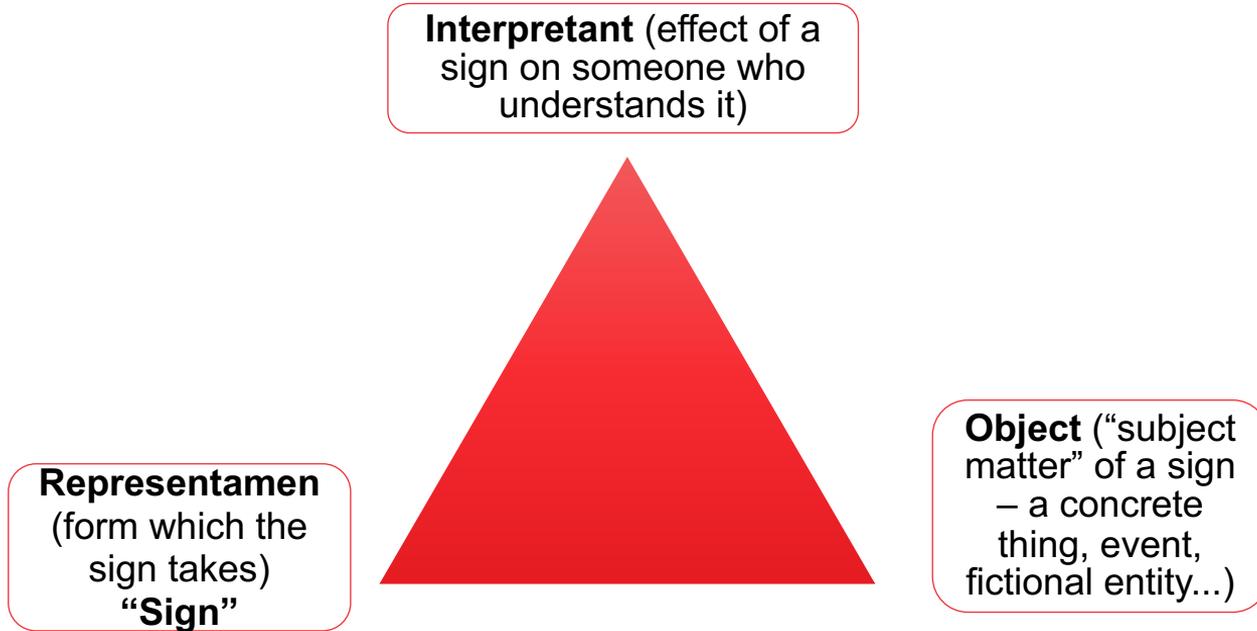
USA: Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914)

- indexicality of photography

Europe: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

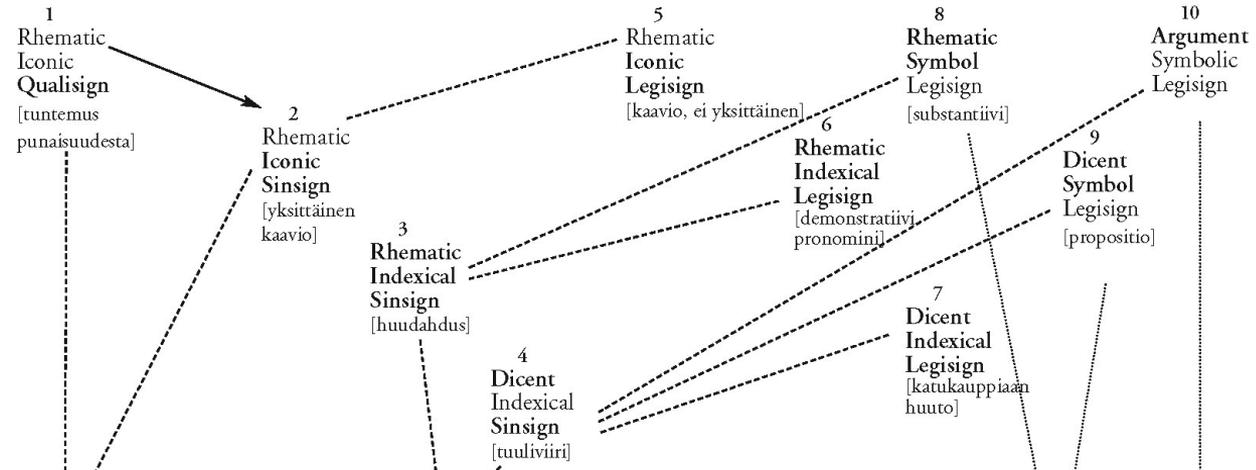
- Two part model of sign

# C.S.Peirce (1839-1914) Triadic model



"I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the later is thereby mediately determined by the former." (EP2, 478)

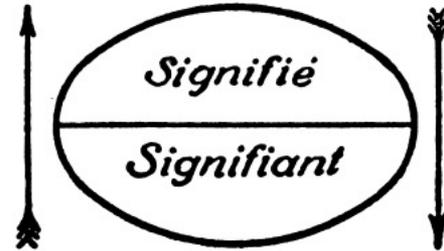
	Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
<b>Representamen</b> Suhde merkkiin (itseensä) <i>1st Correlate/Trichotomy</i>	<b>QUALISIGN</b> Laatu, ominaisuus	<b>SINSIGN</b> Yksi olemassa oleva asia tai tapahtuma ( <i>Replica on legisignin</i> ilmentymä)	<b>LEGISIGN</b> Laki, tapa (Ilmenee/tapahtuu <i>replicana</i> )



<b>Objekti</b> Suhde dynaamiseen (todelliseen) objektiin <i>2nd Correlate/Trichotomy</i>  [Merkissä representoidun ( <i>immediate</i> ) objektin luonne]	<b>IKONI</b> [kaltaisuus]  Kuvaava	<b>INDEKSI</b> [vaikutussuhde]  Osoittava	<b>SYMBOLI</b> [sopimuksenvaraisuus]  Yhdistävä, yleinen
<b>Interpretantti</b> Suhde loogiseen interpretanttiin (kuinka tulkitaan) <i>3rd Correlate/Trichotomy</i>  [Vakuutuksen luonne]	<b>RHEME</b>  [Merkki laadullisesta mahdollisuudesta]  Vaisto ( <i>abducents</i> )	<b>DICISIGN (DICENT SIGN)</b>  [Merkki olemassaolosta]  Kokemus ( <i>inducents</i> )	<b>ARGUMENT</b>  [Merkki lainomaisuudesta]  Tottumus, tapa ( <i>deducents</i> )

# Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

Sign/Merkki =  $\frac{\text{Ilmaisuu}}{\text{Sisältö}}$        $\frac{\text{Signifiant}}{\text{Signifié}}$        $\frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{Signified}}$



Merkitsijä (merkin materiaalinen asu)

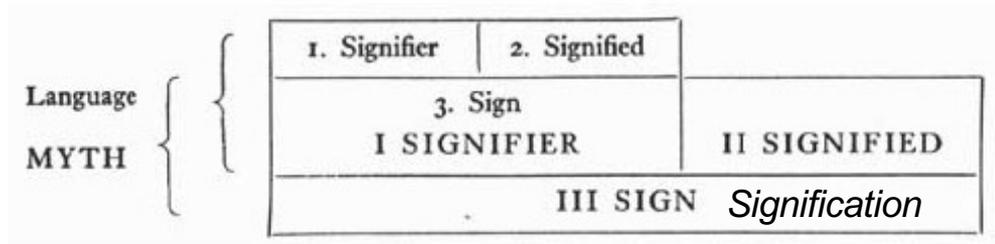
Signifier (Sound image)

Merkitty (merkin käsitteellinen sisältö)

Signified ("concept")

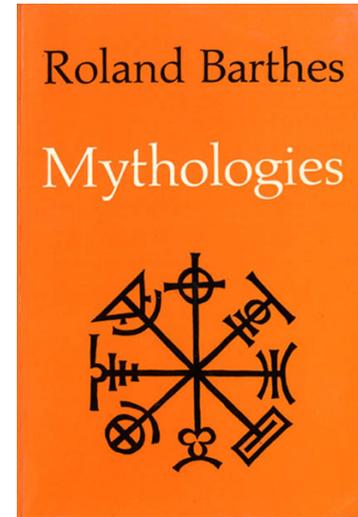
- Language not as historical, but as a system existing in the present moment
  - Opposition between speech and language
  - Connection of signifier and signified is arbitrary
  - Value is formed "without positive terms" by differences.

# MYTHOLOGIES 1957 (suom. 1994: Mytologioita)



Sign/Merkki =  $\frac{\text{Ilmaisuu}}{\text{Sisältö}}$   $\frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{Signified}}$

- First part of book: selection of short texts on various cultural phenomena
- Second part: Myth today (Myytti tänään)
- Myth is a "second order" semiological system
- myth helps to naturalize certain world views and beliefs (creates ideology)



# THE PHOTOGRAPHIC MESSAGE (Le message photographique, 1961)

(Communications 1/1961, suom. Sanoma valokuvassa, Kuvista sanoin 2/1984)

- The press photograph is a message.
- The “Photographic paradox”
- “Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: it is a message without a code; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn: the photo-graphic message is a continuous message.”

*The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art', or the treatment, or the 'writing', or the rhetoric, of the photograph); structurally, the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message (which is the - probably inevitable - status of all the forms of mass communication), it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message without a code.*

Denoted message (analogon itself)

Connoted message (“the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it”)

## **6 ways in which photography connotes:**

1. Trick effects (“intervene without warning in the plane of denotation”)
2. Pose
3. Objects (arrangements, inducers of associations of ideas (book-case=intellectual)  
[- interfering with ”reality”, arranging denotation]
4. Photogenia. (In photogenia the connoted message is the image itself, 'embellished' –by technique)
5. Aestheticism. (e.g. photograph alludes to a painting)
6. Syntax (sequences)

Connotations are historical and cultural, not natural  
Meanings are always formed in particular societal and historic contexts

Depends on the "readers knowledge"

Images are "verbalised" upon reception

Image and language aligned  
Exception: Traumatic images

"about which there is nothing to say; the shock-photo is by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting the signification. One could imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult is connotation"

Perceptive connotation, cognitive connotation (e.g. from clues in the image).

The reason for connotation is to reassure (institutional)

# RHETORIC OF THE IMAGE

## Rhétorique de l'image 1964

(Communications 4/1964, suom. Kuvan retoriikkaa, Kuvista sanoin 3/1986).

How does meaning  
get into the image? Where does it end?

Barthes "reads" the Panzani ad

The three messages:

- 1) Linguistic message (denotational and connotational)  
+ the double message:s
- 2) A coded iconic message (symbolic, connotation)
- 3) A non-coded iconic message (denotation,

Denotative image naturalizes the symbolic message



Connotative lexicons (A portion of the symbolic plane (of language) which corresponds to a body of practices and techniques).

*-icity* (Italianicity)

“This common domain of the signifieds of connotation is that of ideology, which cannot but be single for a given society and history, no matter what signifiers of connotation it may use. To the general ideology, that is, correspond signifiers of connotation which are specified according to the chosen substance. These signifiers will be called connotators and the set of connotators a rhetoric, rhetoric thus appearing as the signifying aspect of ideology.”

”It is even probable that there exists a single rhetorical form, common for instance to dream, literature and image.”

Polysemia. Underneath the image there is a floating chain of meanings, from which we choose some meanings and discard others



PATES - SAUCE - PARMESAN  
A L'ITALIENNE DE LUXE

# THE THIRD MEANING

## Le troisième sens (Kolmas merkitys) 1970

(Cahiers du Cinéma 222/1970).

Analysing images (stills) from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (-> "the filmic" which resists plot etc.)

Three levels of meaning:

- 1) Informational level
- 2) Symbolic level
- 3) Third meaning evident, erratic, obstinate.

*The obtuse meaning*

I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this - consequently incomplete - sign is composed: a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up, thick and insistent for the one, smooth and distinguished for the other; the former's 'stupid' nose



VII



VIII

**Camera Lucida:** 48 chapters, 2 parts

First part (the “nature” of the photographic image)

Second part (theory of photography of his mother) ”Truth” of her mother

Winter Garden Photograph

From semiotics towards phenomenology

Mix of general, theoretical discourse and personal emotion, and *bodily* response

Memory of mother / Mourning (Henriette Barthes died in October 1977)

Noema of photography = *that has been*

Studium / punctum 26-27

*Studium* = The studium indicates historical, social or cultural meanings

*Punctum* = prick, (subjective) meaning without invoking any recognizable symbolic system, detail, time (cannot become a general theory without losing individuality, but B’s comments become generalized)

Roland Barthes:

# Proust and Photography Examination of a Little-Known Photographic Archive

(in *The Preparation of the Novel*)

