Semiotics

1. First Level Signs: Sign, Signifier, Signified (Saussure)
2. Second Level Signs: Codes, Denotation and Connotation (Barthes)
3. The meaning of a sign: Polysemy, Anchorage
4. C. S. Peirce – Categories of Visual Signs
5. Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic
6. Weaknesses
Sign, Signifier, Signified

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Ferdinand de Saussure 1857-1913
*Course in General Linguistics* (1916)
Signifier?
Signified?
Second Level Signs: Codes, Denotation and Connotation

1. Saussure recognised that not enough attention paid to implications of semiotics, in particular links to ideology
2. Our decoding of a message is culturally and socially conditioned
3. This is dictated by *codes = codes* create a meaning that is shared by society as a whole
5. 2nd level – denotation and connotation
denotation and connotation
denotation and connotation

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Sign

Sign
denotation and connotation

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Sign

Sign
Barthes argues that signs help generate myths – shared meanings held by society and that these can change ...
Polysemy & anchorage

Barthes also argues that

1. Images are polysemic – they have alternative meanings or codes
2. Images can also be anchored – one particular interpretation can be fixed
Who or what might this be a picture of?
The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong, let them sue us.
1. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). "On a New List of Categories" (1867)
2. Established distinction between different types of visual sign
3. 4 types.
   Iconic (resembles what it is standing in for)
   Arbitrary
   Indexical (indicates something)
   Symbolic (represents something but is arbitrary)
Which of the below is **not** arbitrary

- Dog
- Knife
- Priest
- Submarine
- Hiss
1. Saussure argues that signs rarely exist as solitary units.
2. They generate meaning in relation to other signs e.g. Binary Opposition.
3. Two levels:
   a. Paradigmatic – the separate signs in any image.
   b. Syntagmatic – the combination of signs that form a whole.
Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic
Weaknesses of semiotics

1. Tendency to neglect the wider context
2. Possibility of neglecting different audience interpretations
3. Over-emphasis on latent rather than actual meaning
4. Semiotics is arguably more difficult to apply to moving imagery.