

SEMIOTICS

Ferdinand
de Saussure
(1857 - 1913)

Saussure was a Swiss linguist and philosopher but almost what is now known usually referred to as Semiotics. He wrote a course in General Linguistics in 1916 which is one of the most famous works.

The study of signs and symbols especially the relations between written and spoken signs and their referents to the physical world or peoples' interpretations



The Fathers of Semiotics



Charles
Sanders Peirce
(1839 - 1914)

Peirce was an American philosopher who came up with the Theory of Signs. He was also a founder of the new symbolic thinking. Today he is considered for his contributions to Semiotics.

DENOTATION
What you see

CONNOTATION
What you think

Signs

When a signifier (words or symbols) is used to represent a signified (the thing or concept it refers to), it is called a sign. The signifier is the word or symbol, and the signified is the thing or concept it refers to.

Signifier

A linguistic entity that includes sounds, images, or words and serves as a means for conveying the message. For example, the written word "DOG" is a signifier, but the concept of a dog is not.

DOG

Signified

A personal interpretation of a signifier. The sign of connotation is created when a signifier is used to represent the meaning of a signified (the thing or concept it refers to).

TOPIC 1 "SAY WHAT YOU SEE":
SEMIOTICS OR THE SCIENCE OF SIGNS

Hautlieu School
Media Studies
AS

STARTER

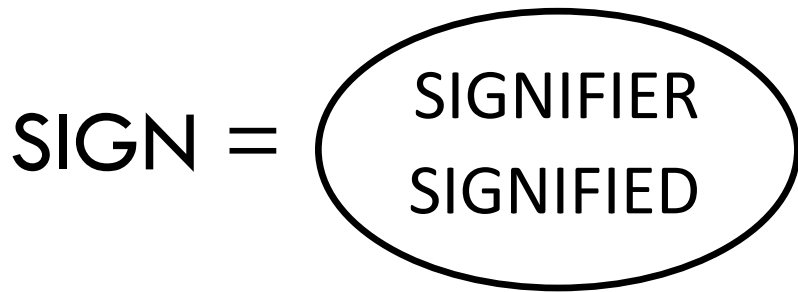
FLOWER

Draw the image you see in your head when you read this word. Add as much detail as you can.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

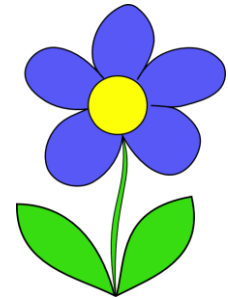
- All will explore semiotic theory through key terms and ideas of key theorists.
- All will apply Peirce's three types of sign to media texts.
- All will deconstruct print advertisements using Barthes ideas of Denotation, Connotation, & Myth.
- Some will deconstruct pre-1970s print adverts applying the approaches of three key theorists.

SEMIOTICS = *The study of signs and how they communicate meaning.*



SIGNIFIER = *FLOWER*
(symbol)

SIGNIFIED =
(mental image)



The word 'FLOWER' is a *signifier* which we all agree (if we speak English) signifies the same basic image of petals and a stem, usually of a bright colour.

The reason we don't all have exactly the same image in our head is because we all bring our own experiences and understanding of signs. Hence, we all read media texts slightly differently.

SEMIOLOGY - DEFINITION

‘Semiology’ is derived from the Greek word *semeion* (sign).

Semiology is an attempt to create a science of the study of sign systems and their role in the construction and reconstruction of meaning in (media) texts.

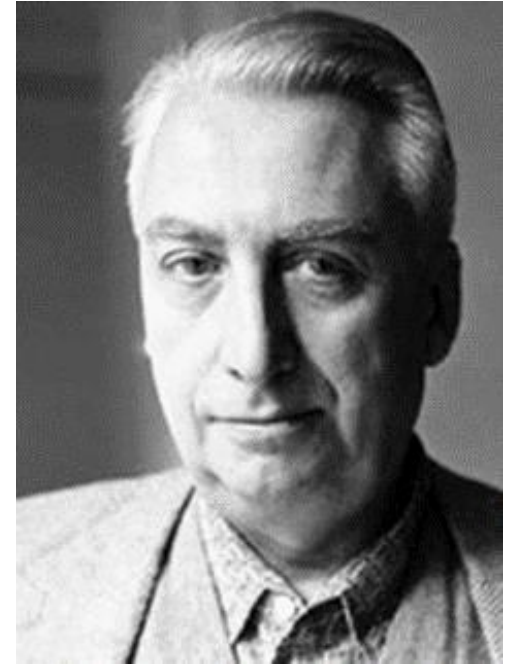


KEY THEORISTS

Ferdinand De Saussure

Charles Peirce

Roland Barthes



ACTIVITY 1 – KEY THEORISTS

1

Move from slide to slide in order to discover the approaches of each theorist.

2

Use the information on each table to fill in the table on the next slide and then add to your blog .

3

NOTE: You have 5 minutes with every theorist!

TABLE 1 (EXTENSION)

THEORIST NAME			
BACKGROUND INFO			
KEY IDEAS/TERMS			

TABLE 1

THEORIST NAME	De Saussure		
BACKGROUND INFO		American (1839-1914) expanded Saussure's ideas to include not just language but other 'social constructs' in society such as the way society itself is ordered, labelled and governed.	
KEY IDEAS/TERMS			Denotation (literal interpretation) Connotation (abstract Interpretation) Myth (Stereotype)

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

Ferdinand De Saussure promoted the idea of 'semiology' in *Course in General Linguistics* (1915): he saw language as a cultural creation, rather than something innate; a social system governed by a set of identifiable rules/codes.





Semiology & Saussure

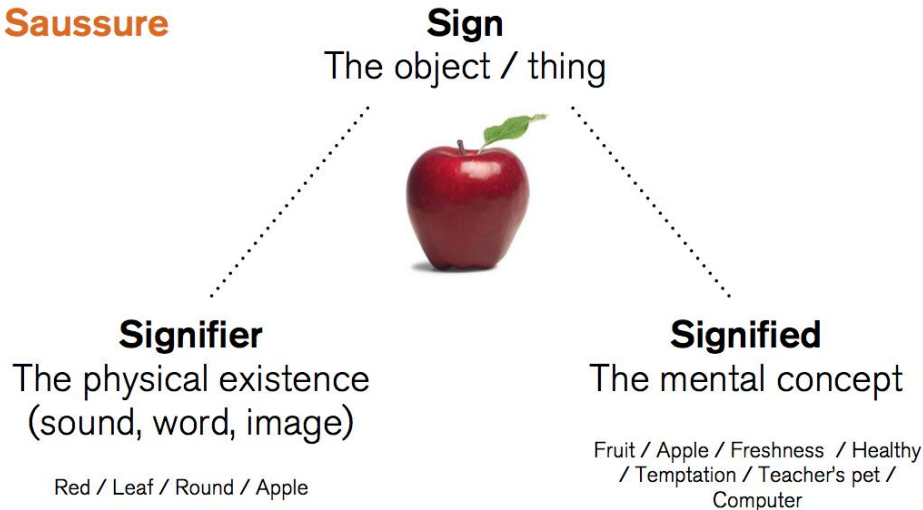
Saussure coined the term 'semiology': 'a science which studies the life of signs at the heart of social life'.

Before Saussure, many philosophers and linguists supposed that words are labels attached to things much as labels might be stuck to artefacts in a museum.

This idea works fine for 'Donald Trump' since the word denotes (refers to) a living person. But what about a word like 'city' or 'tradition'?

The Two Parts of a Sign

Saussure



Every meaningful sign is therefore made up of two components or layers:

**SIGNIFIER +
SIGNIFIED = SIGN**

The signifier is a physical object, e.g. a sound, printed word, advertisement.

The signified is a mental concept or meaning conveyed by the signifier.

WHAT WAS SAUSSURE'S VISION OF SEMIOLOGY?

Saussure tried to get around this problem by saying that 'the linguistic sign does not unite a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image'.

In other words, the thing referred to (the **referent**) is taken out of the sign.

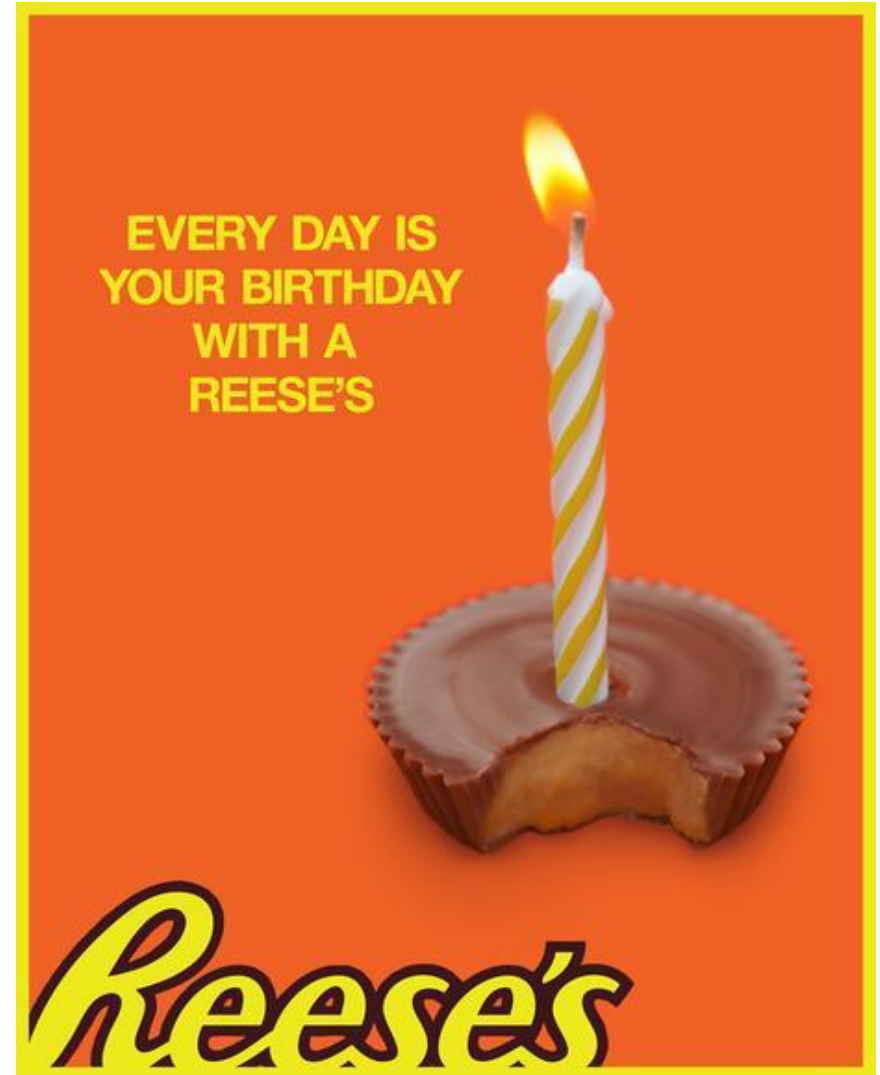
SIGNS

Saussure would say that this advert is a sign.

It consists of a signifier (the printed magazine advert itself)

and

something that is signified (the 'idea' or 'meaning' behind the set of images used in the advert) in this case Reese's Cups which are depicted as a "special treat" using the additional referent of the birthday cake.



CHARLES PIERCE

American Charles Peirce (1839-1914) expanded Saussure's ideas to include not just language but other 'social constructs' in society such as the way society itself is ordered, labelled and governed. Peirce introduced the term 'semiotics'.



PEIRCE'S THREE TYPES OF SIGNS - SYMBOL



ARBITRARY/SYMBOLIC SIGNS –

- **arbitrary** because their ‘meaning’ is the result of agreement among their users e.g. the English language

e.g. a red rose ‘signifies’ love. (But not in ALL cultures!)

- these signs do not have any intrinsic connection with what is being ‘signified’. You have to “learn” their meaning in order to know what they are.

- arbitrary signs can have several meanings that are ‘contested’

THE UNION FLAG'S SIGNIFICATION DEPENDS UPON WHO IS USING IT...



What's the difference?



PEIRCE'S THREE TYPES OF SIGNS - ICON

ICONIC SIGNS – Photographs are a good example of iconic signs. They have a physical similarity to the objects that they 'signify'.

Notice that there is a close relationship between the **signifier** and the **signified** when we are looking at iconic signs.

We are familiar with iconic signs in our everyday lives. In advertising, usually a person and a product are shown in order to directly advertise the brand.



PEIRCE'S THREE TYPES OF SIGNS - INDEX

INDEXICAL SIGNS –

indexical because the signifier is an 'index' of the signified and vice-versa; these types of signs have a direct connection with what is being 'signified'.

Smoke is often an index of fire. Facial expressions are indexical in relation to a character's emotional state.



Activity Two : Applying Pierce



Icon



Index



Symbol

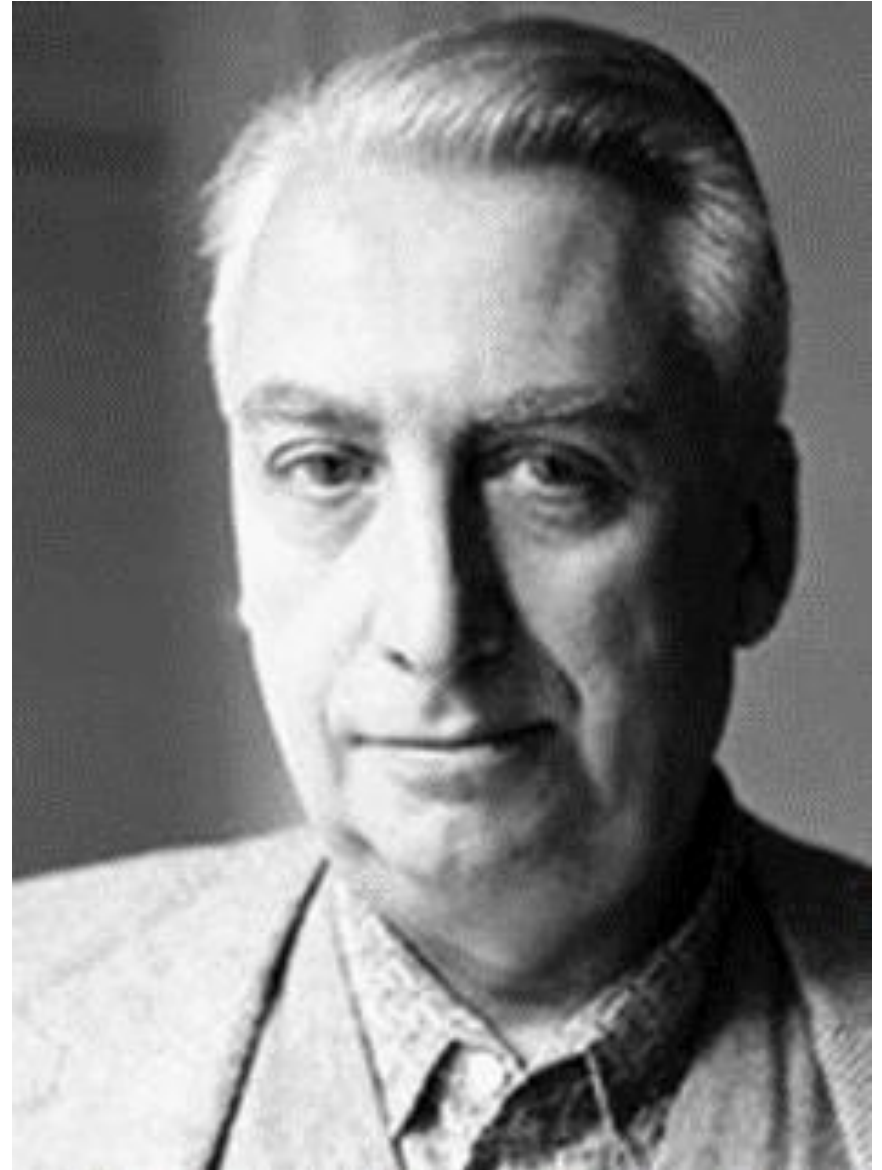
Try to identify examples of iconic, indexical and symbolic communication using adverts one to four.

EXTENSION- Now try to apply this to much older texts using the examples from the 40's, 50's and 60's.

Q- Can you draw any conclusions about the preferred styles of communication in the older advertising examples?

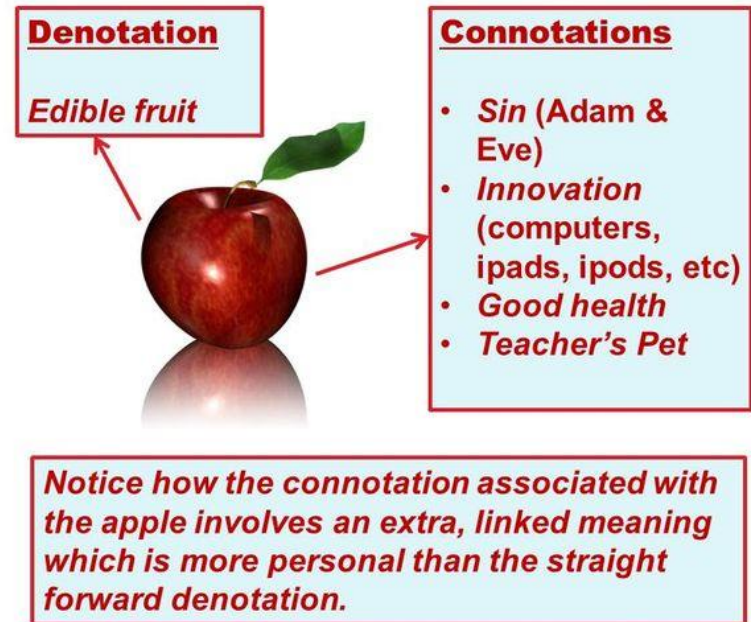
ROLAND BARTHES

Perhaps the greatest exponent of semiotics is Roland Barthes (1913-1980). His book *Mythologies* is still regarded as one of best 'readings' of popular culture using semiotics.



DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

According to Barthes (1967) 'readers' go through many stages when deconstructing the meaning of a sign(s). In order to understand how signs transfer meaning we must look at and think about the culture in which the sign is used.



THREE LEVELS OF SIGNIFICATION:

The first level - denotation : refers to what is actually reproduced in the text; it is a fixed and objective description of what you can see or hear.

There is a man depicted in the advert suggesting that the product is aimed at men.

The second level - connotation : at this stage the 'reader' adds his or her own pieces of information; these are associated meanings based on cultural experience and conjured up by the signified.

The man has a very muscular physique suggesting physical strength and power, two desirable attributes for men in Western Culture.





The third level - myth : refers to sets of pre-existing and value-laden ideas derived from culture and transmitted by communication. We have myths about national characteristics – the British are cultured, fair, aloof, good losers; we have myths about women and men. They are shared connotations, collective ‘subjective’ ideas. A straightforward way to think about myth is to connect these representations to the notion of “stereotypes”.

The image suggests that the man is a “conquering hero” and this works with the stereotype of men as competitive and dominant.

ACTIVITY 3

In pairs, deconstruct the advert assigned to you using Barthes ideas of Denotation, Connotation and Myth. Use the table on the following slide.

EXTENSION: Move on to deconstruct an example of an older advert.

Q. What myths about the groups represented (stereotypical views) in the adverts are being relayed by the producers of these texts?

ACTIVITY 3 : APPLYING BARTHES

Advert	Denotation	Connotation	Myth

ADVERT ONE - PANTENE HAIRCARE



Do you long for long?
NEW BEAUTIFUL LENGTHS
COLLECTION

Grow longer by getting up to 10x stronger against breakage.**
The Aqua-Current pro-vitamin formula helps protect every single strand of your hair from stress and damage, so you can get the length you've been longing for. Grow longer, grow stronger.** Healthy makes it happen.

PANTENE PRO-V **shine** | **VOICED BY HAIR CARE REAL**

© 2008 P&G. *Based on a survey among US females in a January 2008 consumer survey. ** Shampoo and conditioner strength against damage vs. non-conditioning shampoo.

ADVERT TWO- HEINZ TOMATO KETCHUP



Introducing Heinz® Ketchup
in new PlantBottle™ packaging.

**PLANT ONE ON
EVERY TABLE.**



• up to 30% made from plants
• 100% recyclable bottle
redesigned plastic,
recyclable as ever.

Now Heinz brings you the ketchup
your customers love in a bottle they can
feel good about, too. At absolutely no
additional cost to you. Think of it as our
investment in the future of your business,
your customers and our planet.



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ADVERT THREE — DOVE BEAUTY

campaignforrealbeauty.com 



Let's face it, firming the thighs of a size 2 supermodel is no challenge. Real women have real curves. And according to women who tried new Dove Firming, it left their skin feeling firmer in just one week. What better way to celebrate the curves you were born with? New Dove Firming. Lotion, Cream and Bodywash. For beautifully firm skin.



ADVERT FOUR - NIKE TRAINERS

THE ULTIMATE QUICK FIX.



The Nike Trainer One is not a magical toning shoe. It's a training shoe. Its DiamondFLX technology activates your muscles to work how they're supposed to, giving you faster results from all those squats, lunges and classes that you do. So you get fit faster.

THIS SHOE WORKS IF YOU DO.



nikewomen.com



PRE-1970

1940'S — IVORY SOAP

Keep your **BEAUTY** on duty!



Give your skin Ivory care, Doctors advise!



Defensive care for DRY SKIN!

Keep your skin looking its loveliest even when you're busiest. Give it this *correct* care approved by skin specialists:

1. Use a mild soap. Dry skins tend to be sensitive, to irritate easily. What gentler care could your beauty have than that advised by doctors for baby's sensitive skin...New Ivory Soap!

2. Use lukewarm water, never hot. And a soft washcloth. Plus Ivory's quick, luscious lather, it's so mild. Then lukewarm rinses.

3. Apply lightly a little cold cream. For summer's probably left your skin flaky-ly. And remember this: Ivory contains no dyes, medication, or strong perfume that might be irritating. Get Guest Size Ivory. Most convenient for toilet use.



OILY SKIN? Take the offensive!

You can receptors that cool, lovely look for your complexion. But your skin needs special care, persistent care. Skin specialists approve this cleansing method:

1. Cleanse thoroughly. Work Ivory's thick, lovely lather well into your face and neck, using a rough washcloth and lukewarm water.

2. Rinse well. Warm water, then cold. Repeat your Ivory lathering. Go after those oily areas: your hairline, forehead, nose, chin. Then another rinse.

3. Do this cleansing as often as 2 times daily. See how delightfully smooth and fresh Ivory's mildness leaves your skin. Compare the low price of Guest Size Ivory with that of your present beauty soap.



Most doctors advise New Ivory Soap for your skin, not baby's, than all other brands of soap together.

99 2/3% PURE

IT FLOATS



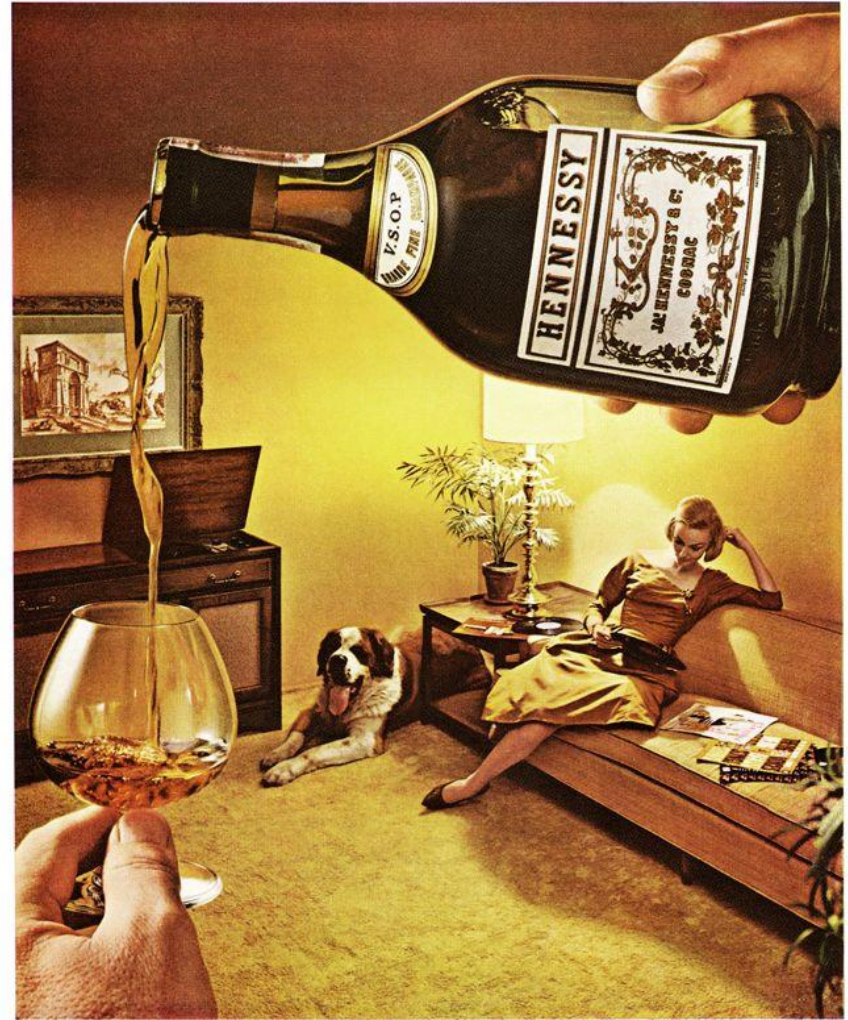
"Baby-care" is

Beauty-care, use

New Velvet-suds **IVORY**

*W. B. Company
Sept 42*

1950'S — HENNESSY COGNAC



YOUR GOLDEN HOURS CALL FOR THE LUXURY OF
HENNESSY V.S.O.P. (GRANDE FINE CHAMPAGNE COGNAC).

1960'S — KELLOGG'S CORNFLAKES

THESE ARE
PENNY & POLLY...



The Advertising Archives

made
richer by
the sun
in

Kellogg's

THEY LOOK ALIKE, TALK ALIKE—why, the twins think alike! At least they think alike about Corn Flakes: "They taste nice and sunny," they say. And that's not surprising, because Corn Flakes take on the good golden taste and colour of the sunshine they were grown in. "More please" is another expression the twins use a lot when there's Corn Flakes on the table. Mother's all in favour of second helpings of Corn Flakes—she knows the extra vitamins* Kellogg's have put into Corn Flakes are just what growing children need.

*Kellogg's Corn Flakes have been enriched with Vitamins B₁, B₂ and Niacin and the essential mineral iron. You get a sixth of your daily need for these in a 1 oz. serving.

30555195

CORN FLAKES *now enriched!*

QUICK TEST — IDENTIFY WHICH STATEMENTS ARE TRUE AND WHICH ARE FALSE

- A) Barthes' first name is Ronan.
- B) A skull is indexical in relation to the concept “death”.
- C) Using a celebrity to advertise a product is an iconic form of signification.
- D) Myth is the second level of signification described by Barthes.
- E) According to De Saussure, a sign is made up of two parts : the signifier and the signified.
- F) The English language is essentially “symbolic” in nature.