One very important triad is this: it has been found that there are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or icon, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse; the second is the index, which like a pronoun demonstrative or relative, forces the attention to the particular object intended without describing it; the third is the general name or description which signifies its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified.

There may be a mere relation of reason between the sign and the thing signified; in that case the sign is an icon. Or there may be a direct physical connection; in that case, the sign is an index. Or there may be a relation which consists in the fact that the mind associates the sign with its object; in that case the sign is a name.