

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics Theory

Semiotics is a linguistic discipline focus on the interpretation, creation, and communication of meaning. Semiotics goes beyond linguistic expression to encompass non-linguistic signs, such as the messages embedded in books, advertisements, images, and movies. According to Riaz et al. (2024) understanding the semiotics of images or visual media is crucial for gaining a deep insight of contemporary culture and societal norms. This means the meaning of a visual work lies not only in what is literally visible, but also in the hidden layers of meaning that reflect the existing power structures and identities within society Semiotics provides a comprehensive framework for deciphering how meaning is produce, convey, and understand across different forms of communication, making it indispensable for the analysis of complex cultural phenomena.

Semiotics have theory named Charles Sanders Peirce Semiotic Theory. Study by Cobley et al. (2005) explains the sign consists of three connected parts: a representamen or what we call a sign in everyday talk, which relates to a semiotic object or something as we experience it, and is mediated by the interpretant or the meaning that connects them. This framework extends beyond linguistic signs to encompass all forms of meaning-making, including internal representation and the broader process of inquiry. This triadic nature enables a richer analysis of the intricate interplay among signs, their referents,

and their interpretations, especially within the context of visual and cultural media.

Peirce's semiotics is identified by its three-dimensional, or triadic, model of signification. Peirce's model states that meaning emerges from the collaborative interaction of three interconnected elements:

1. Representamen (Sign): This is the form a sign takes, which stands for something else. It can manifest as images, words, sounds, gestures, or physical objects.
2. Object: This refers to that which the sign stands for or refers to. It represents the concrete or the specific social context that serves as the sign's reference point. Peirce further differentiates between an immediate object (that which is directly represented within the sign) and a dynamic object (the actual external reality that causes the immediate object to be presented).
3. Interpretant: This is the meaning or effect produced in the mind of the audience or interpreter by the sign. It is the conceptual understanding or thoughts generated by the sign, with the recipient playing an important role in determining its meaning and interpretation.

In Peirce's view, meaning is fundamentally discovered by this triadic relationship. The emphasis on the interpretant as a dynamic and evolving concept implies that the meanings conveyed by cinematic signs are not static or fixed. Humans use semiotic processes in storytelling not only to survive and share information, but also as a primary means of understanding an object or reality.

through the continuity between nature and culture (Lee, 2023). This suggests that the interpretation of cultural elements in “Thor: Love and Thunder” are not a static process. Instead, these interpretations evolve through a continuous process of semiosis. This dynamic nature is key to understanding how ancient symbols are reinterpreted and transformed, thereby opening up new interpretive possibilities in modern media.

According to Copley et al. (2005) Peirce continues his theory by classifying the relationship between the Representamen (sign) and its Object into three fundamental categories:

1. **Icon:** An iconic sign signifies its object primarily through resemblance or similarity. It looks, sounds, feels, tastes, or smells like the entity it represents. Common examples include photographs, portraits, or diagrams.
2. **Index:** An indexical sign establishes its connection to the object through a direct physical, causal, or existential link. It points to or indicates its object.
3. **Symbol:** A symbolic sign signifies its object through arbitrary convention, rule, or learned association; its relationship to the object must be culturally agreed upon and acquired. Examples include spoken or written language (words, phrases, sentences), numbers, traffic lights, or national flags.

It is important to note that complex signs, particularly within visual media, frequently incorporate iconic, indexical, and symbolic aspects together. A recent study by Dobson & Dobson (2017) on visual semiotics also states that

this type of 'sign' is useful both in describing and creating signs that simultaneously utilize symbolic and indexical qualities as their main connotations. This shows that an image never stands alone as a single representation; instead, the visual elements within it work in layers to construct a richer meaning for the audience.

In cinematic analysis, this means that the meaning of a cultural representation extends beyond what it merely depicts (icon) or indicates (index); it also encompasses how it influences the audience's understanding, emotional responses, and subsequent engagement with the narrative or the wider cultural context. An example of the use of Semiotic Theory in visual media is the research conducted by Goharipour and Gibson (2021), which shows that this theory can assist in the process of dynamic interpretation and how signs reveal social meaning in movies. This dynamic, consequence-oriented perspective makes Peirce's theory exceptionally well-suited for analysing the active role of media in shaping perceptions and cultural practices.

B. Nordic Culture

This paper primarily focuses on Nordic culture and its rich mythic traditions. Since cultural identity is deeply tied to indigenous beliefs, understanding Nordic culture demands an exploration of its foundational myths. Consequently, defining 'Mythology' becomes essential. Originating from the Ancient Greek *Mythos* (μῦθος, meaning story) and *Logos* (λόγος, meaning study), mythology refers to the systematic study of ancient cultural narratives that shape a society's worldview. From this etymology, it can be

concluded that Mythology refers to the study of stories that have existed within a society or among a people since ancient times (legends) or can also be described as cultural narratives deeply embedded in the lives of the people.

Narratives about culture are not merely ordinary discourse but are also deeply ingrained in the culture and beliefs of a particular community. This is supported by the findings of Devi & Roibin (2023), who define culture not merely as fictional stories, but as narratives believed or held to be true by their adherents or stories that include the creation of the universe, gods and goddesses, and so on. This statement also indirectly implies that culture serve as guidelines or models for those who believe in them such as regarding gods and goddesses, as well as good and evil.

The same themes are found in Nordic culture, which also recounts stories about the creation and end of the world, the forces of good and evil in the realm of the gods and goddesses, the existence of both benevolent and malevolent beings, and tales linking the gods to the human world such as the blessings bestowed by divine power. One example is a study conducted by Luo (2022) examining Johannes Ewald's "The Death of Balder", which recounts an ancient Nordic culture about Balder's story about how he was sought to be saved by the Æsir, the gods and goddesses of Asgard. This story depicts how Balder, the son of the god Odin and the goddess Frigg, dies and triggers Ragnarök. This emotionally charged tale is undoubtedly believed by anyone who holds faith in the gods and goddesses of Nordic culture.

Nordic culture is certainly embraced by the Nordic peoples, who are part of the cultures of Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. According to data from the Nordic Co-operation website on the Nordic Region: Statistics and Facts (2023), the countries included in the Nordic region are Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. These nations embrace and adhere to the values of consensus-building, equality, justice, and assertiveness, which are deeply embedded in the tales of Nordic culture. The depictions of physical traits and attire in Nordic cultural are also closely linked to the Vikings of Norway which known for their red hair and beards, as well as their weapons, such as spears and hammers. These cultural tales, deeply ingrained in the Nordic people's psyche, serve as a guide for how they view the outside world. The culture of Nordic culture naturally also serves as a source of inspiration for researchers and artists to create works inspired by the stories of the gods and goddesses of Asgard.

Technological changes and advancements have helped introduce Nordic culture to the world. One example is the book "The Gospel of Loki" by Harris (2014), which recounts the entire Nordic culture from Loki's perspective. There is also "What If... Loki Was Worthy?" by Roux (2024), which tells a spin-off story about Loki and Valkyrie in Midgard, the human world. The works mentioned above are based on the ancient tales of Nordic culture, with added "flavor" to attract readers and keep pace with the times.

Recent research indicates that Nordic culture has long been an important subject worthy of further study. For example, Waterman-Evans

(2024) study explains how elements of Nordic culture were used to foster social cohesion in the development of educational concepts and national identity, with cultures serving as a living language that unites society. In line with this, Konopka (2025) study on Carl Larsson's artworks, reveals that Nordic cultural motifs are not merely historical illustrations but key symbols linking the cultural heritage of the past with romantic aspirations and a pan-Scandinavian identity. Both studies affirm that the use of elements of Nordic culture in modern art and literature always carries a deeper meaning, both as a unifying tool and as a medium for expressing collective values in a contemporary context.

Nordic culture is no longer limited to written texts or books; it has also been adapted into TV series and movies that bring the visual elements of these cultures to life. One notable example is the adaptation of the story of Thor in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and Robert Eggers' "The Northman", which explores Nordic religious rituals and the deeply ingrained concept of fate. The examples above demonstrate that Nordic stories can be enjoyed and appreciated by people all over the world. These works certainly contain fictional elements to engage audiences. The elements of Nordic culture specially the cultural can certainly be re-examined using Peirce's Semiotic Theory.

C. Review of Relevant Research

This section summarizes the foundational and current research on Peirce's semiotics, the application of Peirce's semiotics in movie studies, and

the representation of Nordic culture in contemporary media. This review establishes a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for analysing “Thor: Love and Thunder” using Peirce's semiotics.

Semiotics is not just an academic pursuit, but rather a crucial view through which all human interaction and perception can be understood. If every action, message, or phenomenon can be conceptualized as involving signs, then the systematic study of signs becomes essential for navigating and interpreting the complex layers of modern culture and media. In addition, this discipline empowers individuals to deconstruct the dominant narratives that shape their social reality, transforming them from passive observers into critical thinkers.

Semiotics has significant analytical power, especially for analysing elements in media such as movies. Cinematic elements such as costumes, setting, narrative structure, scene design and props all function as signs, guiding audience engagement and interpretation (Vrasandyka and Azerharie, 2021). Semiotics offers a systematic methodology for reading these cinematic texts, allowing researchers to uncover the deeper socio-cultural values and often hidden messages behind the narratives. The dynamic nature of signs, where interpretations are constantly evolving, makes Peirce's semiotic theory particularly suitable for analysing the ongoing meaning-making process in movies. This approach makes it possible to examine the profound impact and influence that cinematic signs have on cultural perception and understanding.

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(index); it also encompasses how it influences the audience's understanding, emotional responses, and subsequent engagement with the narrative or the wider cultural context. An example of the use of Semiotic Theory in visual media is the research conducted by Goharipour and Gibson (2021), which shows that this theory can assist in the process of dynamic interpretation and how signs reveal social meaning in movies. This dynamic, consequence-oriented perspective makes Peirce's theory exceptionally well-suited for analysing the active role of media in shaping perceptions and cultural practices.

Studies focusing on visual communication further highlight the applicability of Peirce's semiotics. Research into the semiotics of photography, for example, emphasizes how this theoretical framework provides a means to understand the intricate link between images and society (Njiric and Miloslavic, 2016). Furthermore, Thellefsen and Friedman (2023) explored Peirce's concept of iconicity in visual communication, positing that his framework (which includes images, diagrams, and metaphors as hypoicons) is valuable for discussing how the meaning of visual signs is motivated. This implies that any analysis of "Thor: Love and Thunder" must consider how the audience's familiarity with Nordic culture and modern cinematic conventions shapes their interpretation of the movie's signs.

The theoretical basis of this research is Peirce's triadic model, which distinguishes itself through its three-part structure: Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. Based on previous research by Máthé (2018) examining the movie "Thor: Ragnarök" portrays ancient Nordic culture through the lens of

posthumanism, with the findings showing that Thor must let go of part of his cultural past and adapt to future technology in order to transform into a modern posthuman hero. In research by Jamasbi & Ghasvineh (2023) which integrating Charles Peirce's categories of signs, this paper demonstrates that logical discourse relations inherently involve semiotic activity. This new framework, which has been successfully tested on various movies and animated works, offers a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for analyzing cinema as a multimodal discursive construction. Furthermore, research by Kagaba (2024) shows that timeless cultures are used to raise fundamental questions about identity, morality, and existence. By framing contemporary narratives through cultures, storytellers offer a universal perspective that helps audiences understand and explore humanity's collective journey.

Peirce's semiotics has been widely applied in movie studies to reveal the meanings contained in cinematic texts. Research by Septiana (2023) applied Peirce's triadic model to analyse the representation of oligarchic power in the Korean drama "Healer", showing how the Representamen, Object, and Interpretant can systematically reveal power structures in visual narratives. There is also research by Marcella et al. (2025) using Peirce's semiotics to analyse family representation and communication in the movie "Home Sweet Loan", showing how semiotic analysis can reveal underlying social values and cultural meanings. Similarly, Ridho et al. (2025) analyse the movie "Farha" to reveal cultural values, using the concepts of icons, indices, and symbols to interpret cinematic signs and their cultural significance.

There are many other examples of the use of Peirce's Semiotic Theory in analyzing aspects of movies. Recent research by Leander (2024) uses the same theory to explore signs of racism in the movie "Green Book". There is also research by Natalia and Ratriandita (2022) that examines the relationship between siblings in the South Korean movie "My Annoying Brother", which also uses Peirce's semiotic analysis. All of the research results show that Peirce's Semiotic Theory has been used by many researchers to analyse the specific icons, indices, and symbols in modern visual media, especially movies.

The adaptation and representation of Nordic culture in modern media, particularly movie, has become a dynamic field of research. Máthé (2018) analyses "Thor: Ragnarök", highlighting how the movie combines Nordic culture with themes of posthumanism. The results of Suryavanshi's (2018) research highlight the continuity of cultural signs and symbols in modern adaptations, emphasizing the importance of semiotic analysis in understanding these transformations. The general academic landscape indicates a broad interest in how traditional stories are reinterpreted in contemporary cinema, and how Peirce's semiotics serves as a particularly suitable tool for uncovering those transformations. Therefore, this research serves as an expansion of semiotic studies focused on signs found in modern works.

D. Conceptual Framework

This research directly applies Peirce's Semiotics Theory to analyse the representation of Nordic culture elements within the movie “Thor: Love and Thunder”. The selection of Peirce's triadic model to comprising Representamen, Object, and Interpretant and his classification of signs into Icon, Index, and Symbol is central to understanding how cultural meanings are convey and reinterpret in a contemporary cinematic context. “Thor: Love and Thunder” serves as the primary object of analysis, with its visual imagery, character portrayals, and dialogue functioning as the representamens to be investigated.

The application of Peirce's framework to the research variables will proceed as follows Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. The application of Icon, Index, and Symbol to the research variables will provide a nuance understanding of the movie’s semiotic landscape: Iconic signs, Indexical signs, and Symbolic signs. The instruction to analyse "visuals, character portrayals, and dialog" through the lens of Icon, Index, and Symbol highlights that cinematic meaning is rarely singular. A single scene or character can simultaneously function iconically (by resembling a culture), indexically (by pointing to a consequence or cause), and symbolically (by invoking a learned cultural meaning). This multi-layered semiotic activity indicates that “Thor: Love and Thunder” is not merely adapting culture but actively re-signifying it, thereby creating a rich tapestry of meaning that necessitates a comprehensive semiotic approach. This underscores the need for an in-depth, rather than superficial, analysis.

This conceptual foundation will guide the systematic identification and categorization of specific scenes, visuals, dialogues, and character portrayals in “Thor: Love and Thunder” as representamens. It will inform the precise analysis of each representamen's relationship to its cultural object, classifying it as primarily iconic, indexical, or symbolic. Subsequently, the framework will facilitate the interpretation of the meanings generated by these signs, connecting them back to the broader themes of Nordic culture and its modern adaptation. This structure approach will ensure a coherent and comprehensive analysis of the movie’s semiotic landscape.

In the background, there is a particular gap in the scholarly literature regarding semiotic analysis that uses Peirce's triadic model to explore the in-depth representation of cultural elements in “Thor: Love and Thunder” by icons, indices, and symbols. This thesis directly addresses this gap by providing a detail understanding of how elements of Nordic culture are semantically depict in the movie. It contributes new theoretical applications of Peirce's framework to contemporary visual media. This research moves beyond the general semiotic analysis of movies to pinpoint the exact areas where new knowledge will be generate, demonstrating the unique value of this thesis and justifying the detail application of Peirce's specific classification of signs. The research is expected to demonstrate the explanatory power of Peirce's theory in analysing the complex meanings embedded in movie and serve as a basis

for future semiotic studies in the depiction of culture in modern media.

