

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations of the analysis of Film *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023), Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. It also offers a review of existing literature on semiotics, film analysis, and Indigenous culture representation to situate the contribution of this study in this background.

2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is a discipline that deeply explores the complex development of the human mind and its functions. This specific discipline, referred to as semiotics, is a foundation element that underpins the complex process of developing an understanding, especially when it comes to creating and interpreting meaning. Semiotics is not a temporary interest, but one of the essential studies that has become essentially integrated into the general theory of communication. The semiotic tradition is a heterogeneous set of theories that investigate how signs, such as symbols and gestures, denote a vast range of objects, concepts, ideas, states, situations, emotions, and other conditions that form part of our experience.

The mission of semiotics, as a discipline, is to excavate and uncover or interpret the hidden meaning that lies in a sign and thereby gain insight into the ways communicators create and present their messages to the world. This complex notion of meaning is inextricably connected with some ideological assumptions or values that people or groups might hold and also to concepts of culture that comprise the universe of thought within the society where the symbol is developed and lives. The cultural code, as a significant element employed to influence the construction of meaning within a symbol, is a primary consideration to be taken into account while comprehending the manner in which the message is established within the sign. It is the same process of construction of meaning that ultimately leads to the establishment of an ideology for a particular sign. Semiotics, a term renowned to be one of the most dominant fields of research within the realm of cultural studies, succinctly illustrates the manner in which culture is the underlying foundation for

the construction of meaning embedded within a sign. Semiotics is a branch of research that explores extensively the numerous systems, codified rules, and definite conventions combined to bring about the process whereby signs come to possess meaning.

Semiotics of communication has a keen focus on the intricate processes of generating sign theory. This highly fascinating field of research comprises three broad areas, which are as follows:

1. The sign itself actually consists of a set of determinate rules applicable to various kinds of signs, including the various manners in which various signs actually convey their intended meaning, and the intricate mechanisms by which these signs enter into connection with the individuals who actively utilize them and make them functional.
2. Systems or codes that are particularly designed to arrange various signs and symbols. This detailed examination involves the intricate way in which various codes are elaborately developed in a bid to fulfill the specific requirements of a particular society or culture, or alternatively to suitably use the various communication means available to facilitate the conveyance of these signs and messages.
3. The culture within which codes and sign's function is inherently related to the manner in which these same codes and signs are utilized, as their utilization is crucial for the existence of the culture itself and its structure.

2.2 Symbols and Meanings

A symbol is a sign that has a relationship with its object based on convention, agreement or rules. The term "**symbol**" should be understood as a **conventional sign** (based on habit or agreement), reclaiming its original Greek meaning rather than introducing a new definition. Etymologically, "symbol" (from Greek *syn* + *ballein*, "to throw together") historically denoted agreements, contracts, or shared signs.

A symbol is a socially agreed-upon sign that conveys meaning through convention, not inherent resemblance or causation. (Peirce, 1992) Words are symbols for concepts and objects. Labels can be ambiguous, can be verbal and nonverbal and can occur in face-to-face communication and communication using media. Symbols are gestures, images or objects that share a common culture.

Symbols are basically agreed upon within a group, but it is not uncommon for a symbol not to be understood outside the scope of a particular group. Therefore, symbols are called arbitrary. A symbol is a sign that has a relationship with its object based on convention, agreement, the rules of words are generally symbols. Symbol also means something that is given meaning by humans, which they use to communicate.

The symbol stands from gestures, language, norms, values, sanctions, customs and folk rules.

2.3 The theory of semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce

According to Charles Sander Peirce's Theory of Semiotics, semiotics is based on logic, because logic studies how people reason, while reasoning according to Peirce is done through signs. These signs according to Peirce allow us to think, relate to others and give meaning to what the universe displays. For Peirce, symbols are vehicles of thought that enable humans to communicate, interpret, and give meaning to the world. In this case humans have a diversity of signs in various aspects of their lives. Where linguistic signs are one of the most important. In this semiotic theory, the function and use of a sign is the centre of attention. Signs as a means of communication are very important in various conditions and can be utilized in various aspects of communication as he says *“The meaning of a sign is its translation into another sign... in which it is more fully developed.”* (Peirce, 1931-58)

2.3.1. Linguistics in Peirce's Semiotics

Peirce paid more attention to linguistic signs which he thought were very important. According to him, every sign generally applies to linguistic signs, but not necessarily linguistic signs apply to other signs. According to Peirce, signs are related to objects that resemble them, their existence has a causal relationship with signs or because of conventional ties to these signs. Therefore, in general, Peirce argues that his theory is generally applicable. Therefore, this linguistic sign in Peirce's theory is an important thing but not the only important thing. Various signs that are tested with their objects become a general discussion as Peirce wants to express in this theory. That the various signs created by humans in order to communicate are representations of linguistic language or linguistic signs that apply in general.

2.3.2 Classification of Signs according to Peirce

Peirce intended his semiotic theory to serve as a general reference for studying signs. As a result, he needs to conduct a more thorough investigation. Especially given how broad the scope of his thinking is. As a result, Peirce split it into various categories:

A. Classification Based on Ground

The "Ground" of a sign refers to the fundamental characteristics that enable it to function as a sign. Charles Peirce categorizes this into three types:

I. Qualisign

A Qualisign is the inherent quality or characteristic of a sign that contributes to its meaning. This could be the tone or texture of words used alongside a sign, such as gentle, harsh, or commanding language. Beyond words, the colors and visual elements associated with a sign also contribute to its quality. For instance, the use of red in warning signs emphasizes urgency or danger.

II. Sinsign

A Sinsign is a specific, tangible occurrence that directly represents an event or object. It is tied to actual existence. For example, in the phrase "The streets were

flooded after the storm," the word "flooded" indicates a real, observable phenomenon caused by excessive rainfall.

III. Legisign

A Legisign is a sign that conveys a rule, convention, or law. It dictates what actions are permitted or prohibited in a given context. For instance, a sign displaying a crossed-out mobile phone symbol in a movie theater signifies that phone usage is not allowed. Similarly, a pedestrian crossing sign sets an expectation for vehicles to yield to pedestrians at designated points.

B. Classification Based on Object

I. Icon

An icon is a sign that visually resembles the object it represents. It establishes a direct similarity between the sign and its referent. For example, a restroom sign with male and female stick figures visually represents the idea of public restrooms. Another common example is an emoji, where a smiley face directly represents happiness.

II. Index

An index is a sign that has a direct cause-and-effect relationship with the object it represents. It suggests the presence or occurrence of something based on observable evidence. A classic example is dark clouds indicating an impending storm. Another example is footprints in the sand, which indicate that someone has recently walked there.

III. Symbol

A symbol is a sign that gains meaning through convention or mutual agreement rather than resemblance or direct causation. It requires cultural or contextual understanding. For instance, a heart symbol represents love, not because it physically resembles a heart but because society has collectively agreed upon its

meaning. Another example is a currency symbol like "\$" or "€," which signifies money due to established usage rather than any intrinsic connection to wealth.

C. Classification Based on Interpretant

I. Rheme

A rheme is a sign that can have multiple possible interpretations. Its meaning is open-ended and dependent on context. For example, a person rubbing their forehead might be interpreted in different ways they could be experiencing a headache, feeling stressed, or simply thinking deeply.

II. Dicent Sign (Dicisign)

A dicent sign (or dicisign) is a sign that presents factual information or indicates an existing state of affairs. It provides a direct reference to a specific situation. For example, a wet floor sign informs people that the surface is slippery, warning them to be cautious. Similarly, a sign displaying a deer silhouette on a road indicates that the area is prone to wildlife crossings.

III. Argument

An argument is a sign that conveys logical reasoning or justification for a rule or condition. It explains why something is the way it is. For example, a sign stating "Do not swim Hungry Sharks" provides a reason for the prohibition, emphasizing the danger posed by the water conditions. Another example is a "No food or drink" sign in a library, which implies that eating or drinking could damage books and create a mess in the area.

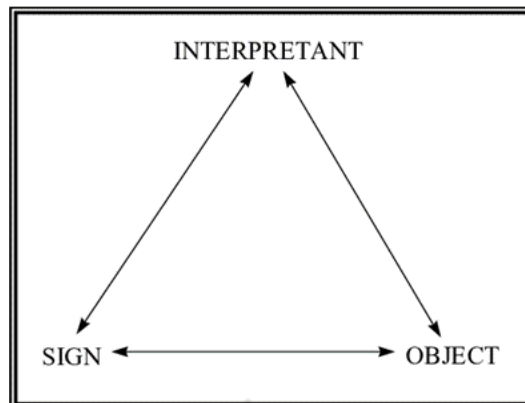


Figure 2.3 1 - Triadic Peirce Model

2.4 Previous of Related Studies

There are several previous studies that have similarities with semiotic topic research, especially using Pierce's semiotic theory or Stuart Hall representation theory to support the analysis of their research.

First studies that related with same theory of this research is titled “The Analysis of an IT Film Using Charles Sanders Peirce’s Semiotic Theory” by Michelle Valena Joesoef and Adrallisman (2023). The researchers applied Peirce’s semiotic framework to connecting between representament, object, and interpretant through horror elements in the film. Furthermore, they revealed that the recurring imagery of the red balloon (as an index of Pennywise’s presence) and the clown itself (as both an icon and symbol of distorted innocence) function as layered signs that trigger audience interpretation beyond surface-level horror tropes. This demonstrates the efficacy of Peirce’s model in dissecting narrative cues and visual symbolism.

Secondly, the study conducted by Muhammad Nur Daim (2021), “Representasi Persahabatan Dalam Film Bebas”, used Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics theory to analyze how signs shape the meaning of friendship in the Indonesian movie Bebas. Using Peirce's triadic model comprising icon, index, and symbol, Daim

determined how some visual and narrative prompts, like shared items and repeated dialogue, are signs that signify emotional connections, nostalgia, and shared memories between characters. For instance, the cassette tape featured in the movie is not just a prop (icon) but also a marker of shared youthful experience and a symbol of enduring loyalty. Daim's study demonstrates how semiotic analysis can reveal complex levels of meaning embedded in cinematic elements. Though Bebas focuses on the friendship theme, the study highlights the broader applicability of Peirce's theoretical model in revealing nonverbal and culturally relevant messages.

Lastly, Esch (2021) conducted a foundational study titled "Iconicity and Indexicality in Film: A Peircean Approach," published in *Sign Systems Studies*. This research systematically applies Peirce's semiotic framework specifically the concepts of iconicity (signs resembling their objects) and indexicality (signs causally linked to their objects) to visual storytelling in cinema. Esch analyzes how filmmakers use these signs to construct layered narratives, arguing that icons ground stories in tangible realism, while indices create implicit causal or emotional connections audiences intuitively decode. For instance, recurring weather patterns (indices of mood shifts) or culturally specific costumes (icons of identity) become narrative shorthand. Esch's methodology demonstrates how Peircean theory reveals subtextual meaning in film beyond dialogue or plot, validating semiotics as a tool for dissecting visual rhetoric. This study directly informs the present research, as it provides a methodological blueprint for analyzing Osage symbols (e.g., regalia as icons, poison as indices of trauma) in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, while emphasizing how cultural context shapes interpretants.