

READING THE LANGUAGE OF BUILDINGS: THE ROLE OF SEMIOTICS IN ARCHITECTURAL VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Ayub Muktiono

Krisnadwipayana University, Jakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

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As a medium of communication, buildings communicate in a language that not everyone can understand. Other communication media are needed so that the language used in the form of buildings can be translated into a language that is more easily understood by many people. Visuals are one of them. Semiotics, as the study of signs and meaning, is a theoretical basis for understanding how architectural elements can be interpreted as visual messages that convey information and experience. The aim of this research is to explore how semiotics can provide deeper insight into the process of reading and interpreting building language. The results of this research reveal that semiotics has an integral role in understanding building language and architectural visual communication. In analyzing elements such as shape, color, and space, semiotics helps identify symbols and signs that convey complex messages regarding cultural identity, function, and meaning. This research also highlights that semiotics is not just an analytical tool, but rather the key to developing an effective and meaningful building language, enabling architects to design buildings with elements that clearly convey the desired meaning. In conclusion, semiotics plays a central role in enriching the interpretation of every aspect of architectural design, making buildings not only as physical structures, but also as deep and telling visual narratives.

Email :

ayubmuktiono@unkris.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Architecture, often considered solely as the physical end result of building design and construction, actually involves a deep communicative dimension (Mulyadi et al, 2020). More than just its visual appearance and physical form, architecture creates spaces that radiate meaning and communicate certain messages to its occupants. In this case, architecture can be interpreted as a language that uses elements such as shape, color, texture and space as letters and words to convey complex narratives (Murtomo, 2008). Therefore, understanding the semiotic aspects of architecture is essential. Behind the physical design, each architectural element contains symbols and meanings that play a role in conveying the story, values and identity that the creator wants to convey (Churiah & Lukito, 2023).

As a communication medium, architecture must not only take into account aesthetic aspects, but must also ensure that the message to be conveyed can be well received by its readers, namely building occupants and users (Sutanto, 2020). Therefore, architectural design must include a deep understanding of the social, cultural context and function of the building (Siregar, 2011). In this way, architecture is not only a physical form that is seen, but also a medium that speaks to its occupants, creating a space that is not only physically

comfortable, but also stimulates a deeper understanding and experience of the meaning to be conveyed (Angkouw & Kapugu, 2012).

Architecture, as a result of human creativity, involves a dynamic relationship between architectural subjects and objects (Marcella, 2004). The subjects in this context are humans, who can act as architectural practitioners who design and create architectural objects, as well as users who interact with the resulting space (Maharika, 2018). The communication process in architecture occurs when architectural actors express complex messages through the physical form of architectural objects (Laurens, 2003).

However, there are important challenges to this communication dynamic. Even though architectural actors can convey their messages through building designs and structures, these messages are often difficult for most users to understand (Purwantiasning, 2011). Therefore, additional communication media are needed that can help translate architectural language into a form that is more understandable by users. One very relevant approach is the use of visual communication. Through visual elements such as diagrams, infographics, and signs, architectural practitioners can provide visual guidance that can help users understand the concepts, functions, and meaning of the architectural spaces they experience (Budiwaspada, 2017).

Visual communication refers to the use of visual elements to convey messages and information. This involves the use of images, graphics, colors, typography, and other visual elements to communicate without words or complement verbal information (Pangestu, 2019). The goal is to enrich the communicative experience, make messages easier to understand, and increase visual appeal. In various contexts, visual communication can be found, such as in art, graphic design, advertising, architecture, and even data presentations. The use of these visual elements allows the delivery of messages that are stronger, quicker to understand, and more engaging (Suyanto, 2004). Visual communication can also include the use of symbols, icons and graphics to represent complex information in a clear and simple way (Hadiprawiro, 2015).

Visual communication in architecture is the language used to convey messages and meaning through visual elements in building designs and structures. In every detail, shape and color, architects create a narrative that guides users to understand the purpose, function and values contained in a space (Anggraini & Nathalia, 2014). Buildings are not only physical structures, but also media that communicate identity, cultural values and aesthetic concepts. Through the choice of materials, colors and architectural forms, visual communication can evoke emotions, stimulate creativity and create immersive experiences (Yunianti, 2015). Architecture that speaks through visual communication not only facilitates practical functions, but also becomes a visual narrative that is able to embrace and interact with users, forming a dynamic relationship between the physical structure and the aesthetic experience that forms the built environment (Hakim, 2023).

This research aims to analyze the role of semiotics in building language, with a focus on architectural elements such as shape, color, texture and space. The aim is to understand the process of reading and interpreting building language and identifying the symbolism and meaning contained in architectural designs. It is hoped that this research can provide in-depth insight into how visual elements can function as signs that form the language of

buildings, so as to increase understanding of the messages that architects want to convey through their work.

METHOD

In this research, qualitative methods will be used, which is a type of contextual research that involves humans as instruments and is adapted to natural situations in collecting qualitative data. According to Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 2014), this method is a procedure for producing descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. The qualitative approach is characterized by the aim of understanding phenomena that do not require precise quantification because these symptoms cannot be measured. To make research more focused and easier to search for data, the research focus is determined first. The results of the analysis will be presented in the form of a rich narrative to understand the complexity of building language from a semiotic perspective. The descriptive qualitative approach is expected to produce an in-depth understanding of how visual elements in architecture interact and communicate, as well as how the messages contained in building language can be interpreted by users.

RESULT AN DISCUSSION

Architecture is not just a physical container that provides a practical function or use, but also a communication medium that conveys certain messages. Through elements such as form, space, structure and artistic value, architecture creates a visual narrative that enriches the human experience in interacting with the built environment (Wardani, 2010). In this context, buildings and spaces are not only places for carrying out daily activities, but also artistic expressions that contain certain meanings and values. Each architectural element becomes letters and words in an architectural language that speaks to its occupants, summarizing the identity, history and values that the designer wishes to convey (Sihombing, 2001). Architecture becomes more than just a physical presence, but also a work of art that is immersive and speaks through its visual dimensions, forming a richer and more meaningful spatial experience for its users.

Reading building language is a skill that requires in-depth understanding in the field of architectural semiology. Expertise in building semiotics is the key to deciphering and translating hidden messages in architectural elements (Adiyanto, 2021). In this context, architectural semiology functions as an interpretation tool that allows someone to identify symbols, signs and meanings contained in the physical structure of buildings. This involves understanding how shape, color, texture and spatial layout can be interpreted as elements in the language of building (Barthes, 2012).

Skills in building semiology also require the ability to understand the cultural context, history, and values that may be manifested in architectural designs. Thus, a skilled reader of building language is not only able to identify visual elements, but can also associate them with social, cultural, or even philosophical meanings (Sari & Pramono, 2008). This understanding helps unlock hidden layers of meaning in building design, making the process of reading building language a deeper and more contextual intellectual experience.

By honing architectural semiotic skills, a person can become a more skilled understander of the visual narrative conveyed through architectural works (Dharma, 2016).

The role of semiotics in architectural visual communication is very important in deciphering and understanding building language. The following are several aspects of the role of semiotics in this context:

1. Understanding Symbols and Signs

Semiotics, as a branch of study of signs and meaning, becomes an essential tool in understanding complex building language. In the world of architecture, elements such as shape, color and structure are not just physical aspects, but also carry a significant load of meaning. Semiotics opens the door to identifying and analyzing symbols and signs contained in architectural designs. For example, the shape of a building is not only a physical dimension, but also a symbol of the aesthetic values, functionality, or even cultural identity that the architect wants to convey. Semiotics helps to read the language of these buildings, allowing us to see more than just the physical structure, but rather involves a deep interpretation of the symbols that transform them into understandable visual messages.

Symbols in architectural form can also be interpreted through the use of color. Semiotics guides the analysis of the meaning behind each color choice in a building. For example, the use of bright, vibrant colors may communicate excitement or boldness, while soft, neutral colors may refer to simplicity or calm. With the help of semiotics, we can unlock the layers of meaning contained in each color palette, understand their impact on the visual experience, and explore the hidden messages that these colors want to convey.

Furthermore, semiotics extends to building structures as symbols that can be interpreted. Structural design is not just a physical support, it can also speak to the values of sustainability, innovation, or even freedom of expression. Through semiotics, structural analysis opens up space to find the meaning behind every material and construction choice. In this way, semiotics becomes an interpretive window that reveals the complexity of building language, helping us understand and appreciate more deeply the meaning of each architectural element that makes up our built environment.

2. Interpretation of Visual Meanings

Semiotics, as an analytical tool in architecture, is the key to unlocking and translating the visual meaning contained in every building design. In every architectural element, such as line, shape and space, semiotics helps unravel the complexity of the visual language created by the architect. The lines on a building, for example, can be interpreted as motion paths or visual directions that stimulate eye movement and shape the user's line of sight. In translating the form of a building, semiotics allows identifying the meaning behind the physical structure. For example, a curved shape may convey a soft or organic aesthetic, while sharp angles may refer to a more modern, futuristic design element.

In the context of space, semiotics opens up insight into the way in which space is defined and interpreted. Space can contain symbolic meaning, such as the use of open space which may indicate inclusivity or freedom, while the use of partitions or space boundaries may imply the concept of privacy or functional division. Semiotics also helps

identify concepts to be conveyed through the play of light and shadow in architectural spaces, creating nuances and atmospheres that can influence user perceptions.

By understanding how elements such as line, shape, and space can be interpreted as a visual language, semiotics provides a powerful interpretive tool for observers of architecture. This opens up space for a deeper appreciation of the meaning of each design element, enriching the aesthetic experience and broadening the understanding of the messages to be conveyed through the language of the building. Thus, semiotics is not only an analytical tool, but also a gateway to absorbing the rich meaning in every detail of architectural design.

3. Cultural and Social Context Analysis

Architectural semiotics functions as a key to unlocking meaning in the cultural and social context contained in building design. Through a semiotic approach, meaning analysis is not only limited to the visual dimension, but also opens up interpretive space to understand how building designs reflect and interact with social values and norms in society. The design of a building often contains hidden messages that can be deciphered through symbolism and certain signs.

The concept of architectural semiotics invites us to see how building design becomes a language that speaks to the culture and society around it. The symbols contained in architectural elements can represent cultural identity, history, or even the aspirations of the people who inhabit them. For example, the choice of certain ornaments, the use of traditional motifs, or even vernacular architecture can be an expression of a community's cultural heritage.

In addition, architectural semiotics allows the analysis of meaning in relation to social norms. Building designs can reflect the values that are respected or upheld in that society. The use of space in a building, for example, can illustrate the existing social structure and hierarchy. Semiotics gives us interpretive tools to read each architectural element as part of a larger social narrative, opening up understanding of the cultural and social dynamics manifested through building design. In this way, architectural semiotics enriches the interpretation of each building, presenting more than just a physical structure, but as a reflection and contributor to the cultural and social richness of a community.

4. Reading Visual Narratives

Semiotics, in the context of architecture, opens a window for us to read visual narratives that are realized through architectural elements. A building is not simply a collection of standing physical structures, but rather a work of art that tells a unique story through carefully selected spaces, structures and materials. In semiotic interpretation, each architectural element becomes part of a larger narrative, forming interrelated chapters and carrying its own meaning.

Viewing buildings as visual stories allows us to understand how elements such as spatial layout, use of structure, and choice of materials play a role in constructing that story. The spaces in the building can be thought of as distinct chapters, creating a flow of experiences for the occupants. For example, a library with a welcoming design and natural lighting can create a spatial narrative that supports understanding and knowledge. A

building structure, such as a staircase leading to an upper floor, may serve as a climactic point in a visual journey, giving a dramatic dimension to the architectural story.

Semiotics helps us read each chapter of this visual story by understanding the symbols and signs contained in the design. Every detail, from color choice to structural form, can be interpreted as storytelling elements that contribute to the overall meaning. Thus, semiotics is not only an interpretive tool, but rather the key to understanding the complexity and depth of the narrative that is manifested in each building. Through semiotic analysis, we can explore the visual story that the architect wants to convey, presenting deeper meaning and experience in permeating the architectural space.

5. Communication Identity and Function

Semiotics, as an interpretive tool in architecture, is key to understanding the complexity of the way a building's identity and function are communicated through its design. The identity of a building does not only lie in its physical dimensions, but also in the symbolic messages and signs implicit in each design element. For example, the choice of architectural forms, motifs and styles can create a visual identity that refers to the cultural values, history or even the mission of the institution that houses it.

The importance of semiotics in this context especially emerges when we observe how the function of a building can be interpreted through symbols and signs. Every detail, from the layout of the space to the choice of materials, conveys information about the purpose and function of the building. For example, a hospital design with friendly access accompanied by medical symbols on its facade can clearly communicate its purpose as a health facility. On the other hand, an office building that displays elegance and professionalism in its design can reflect administrative and business functions.

In this context, semiotics also helps identify the special characteristics of a building. The use of certain symbols can highlight the unique characteristics and features that differentiate a building from others. By understanding this symbolic language, we can read and interpret the specific characteristics desired by the designer, resulting in a deeper understanding of the essence and meaning that the architectural design wishes to convey. Thus, semiotics provides tools to clarify, communicate and enrich the meaning of identity and function of a building in a complex architectural space.

6. Effective Building Language Development

By utilizing semiotics, architects can spread the wings of their creativity to develop a more effective and meaningful building language. A deep understanding of semiotics gives architects the skills to translate complex messages into design elements that clearly convey the desired intent and purpose. For example, the use of certain geometric shapes, color combinations, or placement of symbols can be intentionally designed to build a cohesive and easy-to-understand visual narrative.

Semiotics opens the door for architects to articulate certain messages through building design. Every element, from lines and shapes to the materials chosen, can be considered part of the alphabet and grammar of the resulting building language. In this way, design is not just a pile of physical elements, but rather a visual communication that has a structure and articulation that is rich in meaning.

With this capability, architects are able to create environments that can "speak" to their occupants, communicating the identity, values and purpose of the building clearly and effectively. By assembling semiotic elements, architects not only create a physical structure that fulfills its practical function, but also a speaking work of art that is steeped in visual understanding. Thus, semiotics is not only an analytical theory, but also a creative guide that enriches expression and meaning in a unique and meaningful architectural language.

CONCLUSION

Semiotics plays a very significant role in the architectural context. As an interpretive tool, semiotics helps uncover the meaning behind architectural elements, allowing us to read and articulate the visual messages contained in building designs. Architecture is not just a physical structure, but a language that speaks through symbols, signs and visual meaning. Architectural semiotics plays an important role in reading narratives built in space, structure and materials. With an understanding of semiotics, every building can be considered as a visual story that can be deciphered and interpreted. Identity, function, cultural values and social messages can be implied through the symbolism applied in the design. Furthermore, semiotics opens up opportunities for architects to develop more effective building languages. Skills in semiotics provide the ability to arrange design elements so that they clearly convey the desired intent and purpose. By consciously assembling symbols and signs, architects can create buildings that not only fulfill their practical function, but also become works of visual art that enrich the experience of their occupants. Thus, semiotics is not only an analytical tool, but also a source of inspiration and creative guidance in designing buildings that not only stand as physical structures, but also as visual narratives that speak a unique and meaningful architectural language.

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