

Sebastian Andrew Juncaj

Professor Graci

COG 444

11/17/2021

## The Semiotics of Architecture: Function and Sign

### Introduction

A primary goal of this article is to provide me with chances to think about many aspects of architecture from a semiotic [[49]] standpoint. Except for the introduction and conclusion, each part will examine a different facet of architecture through the lens of a limited number of semiotic notions, frequently only one.

The second section of this paper will have the title, "Importance of Architecture," which will offer a perspective on how architecture has been used to convey messages ((1)). The biosphere [[1]], deconstruction [[10]] have been interpreted over the years. Architecture has been known as a form of emotive function [[13]] since medieval art times, and the aspect will be discussed in this paper.

The following section will be titled "Language, Signs, and Semiotics," introducing the reader to the study of architecture using an approach that focuses on signs and symbols instead of art or structural design ((2)). This section will tell the narrative behind the " sign [[51]]," "denotation[[9]]" and "semiotics" [[47]], and it will introduce the reader to some of their essential characteristics.

The fourth section is titled "Crawford's Theory of Architectural Semiotics," introducing the reader to a particular architectural theorist who has written extensively about architecture and semiotics ((3)). This author discusses how the representation [[45]] of architecture can be explained in terms of firstness [[14]], secondness [[46]], and thirdness [[64]] of a symbolic process and how the semiosphere [[48]] plays a huge role in the discipline. This section will summarize some key points from his works, which can be found in the literature review portion of this paper.

The fifth section is titled "Symbolically Significant Architecture," I will try to show how a building or a place can reflect a particular set of cultural values. Through kinesics [[25]], this section will analyze architecture as a mode of communication as it plays an essential role in understanding the role of architecture in people's cultures, societies, and human interaction (10)). In architecture, kinesics is reflected through different shapes and designs that form a significant part of building design ((4)). For example, tall towers have a certain sense of strength or power represented by their height, which is transmitted to passersby as they look at them with awe, telling them not to mess with those masters of the world up above.

The following section is titled "Culturally Significant Architecture," I will try to show how certain buildings and places reflect aspects of a specific culture that are highly significant to people living here. Architecture represents culture, which includes symbols to communicate messages from architects to its viewers using context '[7] ((5)). The relationship between semiotics and architecture is very similar to the relationship between language and culture. In language, there are two types of signs which are denotation [9], signs [53], and connotation [6].

The other section is titled "American Identity in Architecture," which will establish certain buildings around the country that have come to epitomize America. This section will mainly apply the concept of "metalingual function [[27]] of communication and how it has influenced the American Identity in Architecture. In architecture, kinesics is reflected through the use of different shapes and designs that form a significant part of building design. For example, tall towers have a certain sense of strength or power that is represented by their height which is then transmitted to passersby as they look at them with awe as if telling them to not mess with those masters of the world up above ((6)).

The following section is titled "Formal Qualities of Architecture," which will illustrate how the look and feel can also indicate cultural values. Modernism [[28]], myths [[29]], and infinite semiosis [[24]] have influenced the formality of architecture. In architecture, kinesics is reflected through different shapes and designs that form a significant part of building design. For example, tall towers have a certain sense of strength or power represented by their height, which is transmitted to passersby as they look at them with awe, telling them not to mess with those masters of the world up above ((7)).

The following section is titled "Designing Women," which will try to show how certain design decisions taken by architects can affect the architectural representation of women. The image of schema [[21]] has significantly influenced how architecture has represented women ((8)). In the postmodernism era [[39]], women have changed what they represent in society which can be observed in different aspects of modern architecture.

The final section is titled "Architecture as a Movement or Fantasy," in which I will try to offer some concluding reflections about how the semiotic approach to architecture has helped us better understand the subject in its hyperreality [[19]]. People today experience this state of hyperreality, but they do not recognize it since it is all around us, making us believe that we can never be tricked or deceived by a signifier without actually knowing whether or not we have been deceived in the first place. The concept tries to explain how society focuses more on how things look rather than learning something new from them even though they are empty inside ((9)). In other words, people pay more attention to the surface, to the simulacrum rather than what lies beyond it.

The conclusion of this paper outlines the semiotic notions incorporated in the examination of architecture throughout the paper.

### **The Importance of Architecture**

I want to write about the main concepts of architecture as a form of expression. I plan to focus on the impact that it has on societies and the evolution of different cultures. I would like my reader to gather the essential ideas in architecture and explain them to a broad audience.

- I will also use visual aids to help explain these concepts.
- I will describe what architecture exactly is all about and how it can change societies or even civilizations.
- I will talk about the movements that have changed the way we think about architecture today.

- I will use pictures, graphs, or even videos to show what I explain in this paper.

### **Language, Signs, and Semiotics in Architecture**

I want to write about the relationship between language and signs and its relation to what we do as architects and designers. I plan to focus on a designer's ability to understand the potential of signs and symbols as a catalyst for meaning rather than their functional or technical use. I would like my reader to recognize the power of words and images in architecture and utilize them to understand our work better.

- I will start by exploring how language and signs are used, the role of language in architecture, some examples from the history of architects who have successfully utilized symbolic means to create a successful building.
- I will then introduce some of the fundamental aspects of semiotics and signs to explain how we can better understand them.
- I will discuss the role of symbolism and meaning in contemporary architecture and how we can create buildings that communicate with our users rather than alienating them.
- I will conclude by providing a few examples of symbols and meanings and creating influential buildings.

### **Crawford's Theory of Architectural Semiotics**

I want to write about how Crawford's theory has played a significant role in the evolution of architecture regarding space and structure. I plan to focus on the structural elements that influence the design of architecture. I would like my readers to be aware that there has been a

movement in architecture where its surroundings and context more influence design for a while now.

- I will discuss how design has been more concerned with the big picture than focusing on more minor details.
- I will also discuss how the design should be more concerned with its context and environment and less about itself.
- I will also talk about the idea of how space is more important than structure.
- I will give examples where other architects lead by other fields like art, technology, and science have influenced architecture.

### **Symbolically Significant Architecture**

I want to write about the social, cultural, and symbolic significance of architecture as it has been acquired over time. I plan to focus on the built environment's impact on how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world. I would like my readers to consider the implications of architecture on their lives.

- I will begin with a brief history of architecture, from the earliest vernacular houses to contemporary deconstructivist spaces.
- I will analyze specific examples of notable buildings to highlight their most significant features and how they make us feel.
- I will draw from various sources to make my argument but will primarily rely on historical and contemporary architectural theory.

- I will end with a reflection on the importance of architecture in human life and how it shapes our identity.

### **Culturally Significant Architecture**

I want to write about the significance of architecture in culture as a fascinating concept because it seems like a unique opportunity for a society to come together and declare its values through architecture rather than events or words. I plan to compare and contrast three different societies: Rome, Germany, and the United States since the context of their cultures purely drove their architectural design. I would like my readers to understand better how buildings and art have been used to get their message across since ancient times.

- I will write three essays about different buildings in Rome, Germany, and the United States.
- I will compare and contrast the buildings' significance in each society to better understand an architectural phenomenon.
- I will write about how the aesthetics of the building is used to tell a story. For example, in Rome, they used sculptures on their facades, while in Germany, they built castles to tell stories of warfare.
- I will conclude with how buildings are essential in society and that the stories they tell allow each of us to learn more about our cultures.

### **American Identity in Architecture**

I want to write about something that's been on my mind for a while now: the influence of American architecture and urbanism in shaping young people's ideas about what it means to be

an American and what it means to be modern. I plan to focus on the '60s and '70s, but this phenomenon has continued to the present. I should note first that many people might consider me an odd choice for writing about American identity in architecture. I would like my readers to get a grasp of how architecture reflects American identity.

- I will start by talking about Frank Lloyd Wright and his designs for homes.
- I will then move on to the invention of the suburban home and how it came to be such a big part of American identity.
- I will then focus on "Googie" architecture and coffee shops, which became gathering places for the post-war baby boomer generation.
- I will finally talk about John Portman and the proliferation of his hotel designs in New York.

### **Formal Qualities of Architecture**

I want to write about modernism, myths, and ideologies about architecture by looking at some formal qualities of architecture in the sense of what architecture has to offer us aesthetically. I plan to focus on-site, the architectural object, global tendencies of architecture, and how these are perceived. I would like my readers to ponder what it means to be critical since I will use comparisons with other art forms (painting, music, films).

- I will try to make the formal qualities of today's architecture understandable by looking at them from different angles and giving enough context for my readers to build up their views on the subject.

- I will look at problems with today's architecture, but I will also try to show what is good.
- I will also focus on the qualities of older architecture.
- I will use examples from my own experience as a user of buildings.

### **Designing Women**

I want to write about how certain design decisions taken by architects can affect the architectural representation of women. I plan to focus on the representation of women in the built environment and architectural drawings and models. I would like my readers to be familiar with the modern movement in architecture, postmodernism, and feminist theory.

- I will use the term 'architecture' to refer to buildings, urban planning, and policy
- I will use the term 'audience' to refer to any person who encounters my writing.
- I will also use literature from other architects, planners, and feminists because I want them to read my work quickly.
- I will try to show that different design decisions taken by architects can affect the representation of women, and I will explain how women's experience is different from men.

### **Architecture as a Movement or Fantasy**

I want to write about this "hyperreality" that permeates architecture, not only because it is one of the central themes of Yaneva's book but also because I think that the increasing prevalence of this paradigm in architecture is precisely what makes it so relevant to contemporary thought. I plan to discuss how architecture must necessarily deal with this "hyperreality" and how the semiotic approach to architecture can contribute to our understanding of it and some pitfalls

associated with such an approach. I would like my readers to be the judge to see if these final reflections make sense.

- I will refer to a study by the architectural theorist Thomas This-Evensen, primarily because her article " Architectural Representation and Fantasy" (2011) treat topics important for grasping the role of fantasy in architecture.
- I will also explain how this fantasy that architects are not capable of understanding is at the same time connected to "hyperreality" and what I mean by it.
- I will relate all these ideas about hyperreality to how science fiction can help us understand architecture.
- I will finally attempt to draw some conclusions about what this means for the practice of architecture and the architect's role.

### **Conclusion**

The semiotics discussed in this paper will help the readers better understand the relationship between architecture and culture. The relationship between language and culture is like the one between symbols and architectural design, which emphasizes context. By examining different parts of architecture and how they connect to society, we can better understand the changes in society and how different cultures have come together through the study of semiotics. This field of study will help us better understand our surroundings so that we do not get lost in the hyperreality created by simulacra all around us.

## References

1. Edwards, Brian. *University architecture*. Taylor & Francis, 2014.
2. Preziosi, Donald. *Architecture, language, and meaning*. De Gruyter Mouton, 2012.
3. Hu, Fei, et al. "Semiotics Approach to Product Architecture Design: a Case Study of Cooking Activity." *Advances in engineering research* 38 (2015): 654-664.
4. Ionescu, Vlad. "Architectural Symbolism: Body and Space in Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Worringer." *Architectural histories* 4.1 (2016).
5. Bosman, Gerhard. "Ownership and care in culturally significant architecture: Three case studies." *Acta Structilia* 24.1 (2017): 1-26.
6. Dixon, Imani. *Revealing Identity Through the Lens of Appropriation*. Diss. University of Cincinnati, 2017.
7. Hubbard, Phil. "Conflicting interpretations of architecture: an empirical investigation." *Journal of environmental psychology* 16.2 (1996): 75-92.
8. Adams, Annmarie, and Peta Tancred. *'Designing Women'*. University of Toronto Press, 2016.
9. Wu, Wendan. *Architecture: Where Mutual Fantasy May live*. Diss. 2018.
10. Sahraei Loron, Afshar, and Mehrdad Sahraei Loron. "Virtual Reality of Fantasy Travel Utopia." *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences* 3.4 (s) (2014): pp-238.