
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Semiotic Study of the Interplay between People and Buildings

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the semiotic study of the interplay between people and buildings. It studies sign processes, which is any form of activity, conduct, or any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. It aims at examining the use of semiotics, deepening our understanding of the interplay between people and buildings and providing the basis for personalizing intelligent buildings using intelligent software agents. The data is limited to "Winged Bull", relying on Saussure's model. It is hypothesized that the concerned data is full of signs denoting different things. The present study is qualitative in nature since the researcher depends on herself in analyzing the data in question. It has been observed that "Winged Bull" is informative with signs. That is, each part of it denotes a certain thing enhancing people to think deeply.

KEYWORDS

Semiotics, building, sign, Saussure, signifier, signified

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1. Introduction

Semiotics enables the community to reflect on various related issues in the form of the architecture of the *Winged Bull*. This paper is conducted to obtain information that will be used to complement analytical semiotics methods. Data collection is based on the building of the "Winged Bull". The model is derived from Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotics refers to the study of the relationship between signs and how humans give meaning to an architectural form that can be used as an alternative to help understand the "Winged Bull".

It investigated how Iraqi people interpret the building of "Winged Bull ". Nevertheless, it has provided the theoretical background for semiotics as well as other topics that are interrelated. Additionally, it has also been analyzed "The Winged Bull" based on semiotics. The purpose of this study is to examine the usefulness of semiotics in deepening our understanding of the interplay between people and buildings and for providing the basis for personalizing intelligent buildings using intelligent software agents.

The study first decides on relevant approaches; the two approaches used here are i) considering design as communication and ii) particular techniques from a branch dealing with organizations, Organizational Semiotics - semantic and norm analysis, including ontology charting. These methods are applied to the overall building scenario as well as the personalization system. Recommendations for designers are to use this approach to focus on designing to influence behaviour and to use semantic and norm analysis to capture and embed norms explicitly.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Semiotics?

Hartman and Stork (1972: 205) mention that semiotics is the systematic of linguistic and non-linguistic -signs. Many disciplines have contributed to the elaboration of a general framework within which the philosophical, psychological, social and linguistic aspects of signs as symbols of communication' can be analyzed.

He (ibid) adds that semiotics consists of three main branches that are:

1. Pragmatics is the study of how signs and symbols are used by man to communicate in a particular language.
2. Semantics is the study of the relationships between symbols and their referents.
3. Syntax is the study of symbols in relation to each other.

Since Ferdinand de Saussure, linguistics and some of its branches have been shown to be capable of solving many semiotic problems and involved in applying semiotic procedures to practical problems, e.g. the study of stylistics (ibid).

On this occasion, Crystal (2011: 431) considers semiotics as the scientific study of the properties of signalling systems, whether natural or artificial. In its oldest sense, it refers to the study within the philosophy of sign and symbol systems in general (also known as semiotic, semeiotics, semiology, semasiology, semeiology, and significs). In this approach, linguistic, psychological, philosophical and sociological characteristics of communicative systems are studied together.

He (ibid) agrees with Hartman and Stork (1972: 205) when he says that philosophers Charles Peirce (1834–1914), Charles Morris (1901– 1979) and later Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) saw the field as divisible into three areas: *semantics*, the study of the relations between linguistic expression and the objects in the world which they refer to or describe; *syntax*, the study of the relation of these expressions to each other; and *pragmatics*, the study of the dependence of the meaning of these expressions on their users (including the social situation in which they are used).

For Chandler (2017: 2), beyond the most basic definition as ‘the study of signs’, there is considerable variation among leading semioticians as to the scope of semiotics. One of the broadest definitions is that of the late Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1932–2016), who states that ‘semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign’.

He (ibid) describes a sign as ‘something which stands for something else’ (in the medieval formula, *aliquid stat pro aliquo*). All meaningful phenomena (including words and images) are signs. To interpret something is to treat it as a sign. All experience is mediated by signs, and communication depends on them.

2.2 Signifier and Signified: Definitions

Martin and Ringham (2006: 185) suggest that the linguist Saussure establishes a sign consisting of two components: a signifiant (signifier) and a signifie (signified). The first component, the signifier, the sound and shape of a word, for example, refers principally to the concrete sensorial world. The signified, on the other hand, relates to the idea or concept expressed by the sign. The relationship between the two sides of the sign is one of presupposition; in other words, their indissoluble unity is a precondition for the sign itself. This definition of the sign applies to the linguistic sign, but it can be extended to other signs as well. The cross in religious rituals, the crying of a child, or the embrace of a couple are all signs composed of a signifier and a signified (ibid).

In contrast to de Saussure’s diadic sign, others, for example, C.S. Peirce, assume that the sign has a triadic structure and distinguishes between the material sign, the signified, and the speaker.

- **Arbitrariness** is the coordination between the signifier and the signified is, of course, predetermined by convention, yet nevertheless arbitrary, to the extent that it differs from language to language and the relation between signifier and signified is not motivated.
- **Linearity** is a sensually perceptible signal that the linguistic sign exists exclusively within the time framework (Bussmann, 1999: 1075).

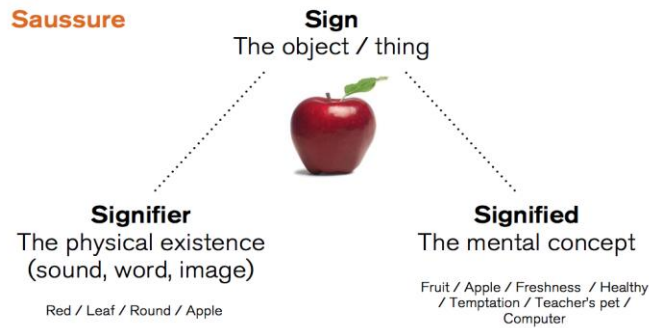
In sign theory, three areas of study can be differentiated that are:

- (1) Syntactic aspect, or the relationship between different signs (syntax);
- (2) Semantic aspect, or the relation between sign and meaning (semantics);
- (3) Pragmatic aspect, or the relation between sign and sign user (pragmatics), (ibid).

Consequently, Baker and Ellece (2011: 20) point out that a sign consists of a signifier which refers to the representation of something and signified, denoting the mental construct of what is being represented. Words are signifiers; for example, the word *blue* signifies the mental concept of the colour blue. The relationship is arbitrary and not necessarily fixed.

They (ibid) add that signifiers do not have to be words but can involve other forms of representation, such as images, traffic lights or gestures. Language users agree on the relationship between signifiers and signified. Such relationships can be denotative (literal), whereby the word blue signifies the mental concept of the colour. However, the relationship can also be connotative, whereby further

(often nonliteral) signifiers are ascribed to the signified. For example, blue has a range of different connotative meanings, which can differ across different cultures. Among other things, it can connote *nobility* (blue blood), *sex* (blue movie), *sadness* (feeling blue), *rarity* (once in a blue moon) or *coldness* (turning blue with cold) (ibid).



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=signifier+and+signified>

2.3 Semiotics as a Tool for Analyzing Architectural Works

Martin and Ringham (2006: 31) illustrate that the semiotics of architecture comprises the study of buildings and of the values attached to them. It would include an analysis of the structures of space, of places and objects and of the human activities associated with them. They (ibid) add that the term architecture denotes, therefore, a collection of elements possessing a particular syntactic status and determining the relations between the people interacting with it.

On this occasion, Taurens (2008: 68) states that reading architecture as text is both easy and difficult at the same time. It is easy because textual conditions are apparent in any building as an organization of space and materials, which are often understood as the work of some known individual. It can also be difficult because the reading activates a complex stream of significant areas, all of which are potentially addressable through semiotic analysis. The more obvious semiotic languages include use, movement, technology, and construction. The less obvious are languages of regulation, iconography, and symbolism. Each of these is regarded as a language of its own and has its own mix of natural and arbitrary characteristics. To sum up, Claflen (1992: 43) concludes that architecture is not a linear text and is not dominated by the author's intent. Rather, architecture consists of several texts simultaneously written in multiple languages, which sometimes involve multiple authors, each of which is intelligible only in a certain context.

3. Methodology

The present section is concerned with the analysis of "The Winged Bull" as one of the significant buildings. The Winged Bull sculpture is a sort of text that is not confined to some signs; indeed, its cultural signs go far beyond as they are open-ended and everlasting, and it lends itself to various horizons of interpretation. The recipient has to combine the signs of this sculpture, which belong to different patterns. Carved from a single block, it stands more than 4 meters high by 4 meters wide and is a meter in depth. The head is sculpted in the round, the rest of the body in high relief.

3.1 Data Analysis and Discussion



Source: <https://www.google.com/search>

With reference to the above architecture of the *Winged Bull*, it can be divided into parts for the purpose of analyzing it semiotically:

Part No. (1)



As far as the above part is concerned, it involves certain signs. The wing here is a symbol of the liberation of the imagination from the bondage of the temple after its owner submitted to divine servitude. That is, it is a symbol of the realization of the dream of ascending to the upper world, being saved from slavery and its imperfection, and joining the gods and their perfection.

Part No. (2)



As observed in the preceding part, the upright head denotes a sign of looking towards an open horizon. The height of the wing suggests an absolute space, so the extension of the wing to the top indicates that the winged bull has left the horizon of his physical world and entered the space of his spiritual world as if the head and the wing are a visual metaphor for the horizon and the lobe.

Part No. (3)



With reference to the previous part, the wide open eye is a symbol of alertness and anticipation, denoting that it communicates with us in a manner similar to an elegy discourse of history that will not be forgotten and will not return. Such a view also points out that there are some future things that will happen.

Part No. (4)



Concerning the ear involved in this present part of the "Winged Bull", it signifies to function as a monitor and protection at the same time. As for the nose, there is a study that affirmed that it was hated by some Assyrian people because it expresses humiliation and insult from their perspective. With reference to the lips, they can be characterized as full, and the upper part appears to be pressing against the lower, so the back of the mouth is closed, and its ends have risen towards the top. Thus, the mouth gives the face calmness, dignity as well as pride.

4. Result

As a result, semiotic tools are employed to interpret the architectural message of the building of "Winged Bull". Semiotics help to realize the meaning of the architectural text, which was created based on a complex interplay of codes or conventions that people of the present time are unaware of. The messages incorporated within architectural works consist of signs that are understood only through certain codes. These codes are used to organize these signs. These signs can be read by using semiotic tools.

5. Conclusion

The following points can be concluded:

1. Semiotics is the scientific study of the properties of signalling systems, whether natural or artificial.
2. Saussure establishes a sign consisting of two components: a signifiant (signifier) and a signifie (signified).

The first component, the signifier, the sound and shape of a word, for example, refers principally to the concrete sensorial world. The signified, on the other hand, relates to the idea or concept expressed by the sign.

3. In sign theory, three areas of study can be differentiated as follows:

- Syntactic aspect, or the relation between different signs (syntax);
- Semantic aspect, or the relation between sign and meaning (semantics);
- Pragmatic aspect, or the relation between sign and sign user (pragmatics).

4. The semiotics of architecture comprises the study of buildings and of the values attached to them.

5. As for data analysis, it is observed that semiotic tools were employed to interpret the architectural message of the building of "Winged Bull". Semiotics help to realize the meaning of the architectural text, which was created based on a complex interplay of codes or conventions that people of the present time are unaware of. Thus, the hypothesis of the study is verified, i.e., "Winged Bull" is full of signs denoting different things.

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