

Navigating the City: Architectural Communication and the Readable City

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Architectural meaning

- Review of architectural theoretical approaches
 - language of architecture / language about architecture
 - metaphorical or literal
 - positivist or structuralist
- The ‘form language of architecture’ would be theoretically more precise.
- On syntactic and semantic levels there are no relevant analogies between the components of natural languages and the components of the communicative system of architectural and city communication.
- Object Act Theory: on the level of pragmatics the theory of speech acts and picture acts to architecture might be extended to architectural and city communication.

Architectural theory and architectural language

Language of architecture vs. language about architecture:

Theory of Le Corbusier (1923, analysis by Boyer in 2011)

“In these major writings of the twenties, Le Corbusier defined for himself a distinctive style of architectural discourse, a telegraphic, aphoristic language about architecture. Using that language, he sought to state, investigate, and purify a “language of architecture,” a communicative system of architectural forms having its own parts of speech and grammatical rules, a tangible speech in which modern life itself might be stated, investigated, and purified.”

- By the term '**language of architecture**' we mean the idea that complex architectural products (building, cities, etc.) are constructed out of components according to the rules of 'architectural syntax'.
- By the term '**language about architecture**' we mean the terminological system we use to communicate the concepts of the specific conceptual framework in which we understand the meaning (communicative content) of architectural constructs.
- By '**form language**' we mean the formal features that may characterise architectural or other artistic periods (e. g. gothic - neo-gothic), styles (e. g. Socialist Realism) or individual artists (e. g. Jean Nouvel, Peter Zumthor).

Architectural theory and architectural language

Christopher Alexander: Pattern Language

- Space Syntax System
- Exploration of the connection between the space and the society, thus the public built environment as the place of the birth of social connections.
- 253 elements, vocabulary, syntax, grammar

Otto Neurath: ISOTYPE

- International System of Typographic Picture Education
- Unified picture language originally for data visualisation

Kevin Lynch: The Image of the City

- Wayfinding method, mental mapping, imageability



1 Levels of Scale



2 Strong Centers



3 Boundaries



4 Alternating Repetition



5 Positive Space



6 Good Shape



7 Local Symmetries



8 Deep Interlock



9 Contrast



10 Graded Variation



11 Roughness



12 Echoes



13 The Void



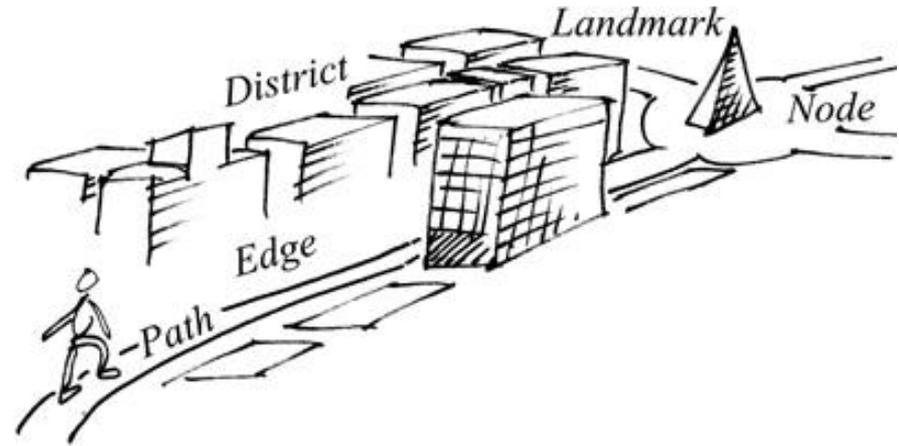
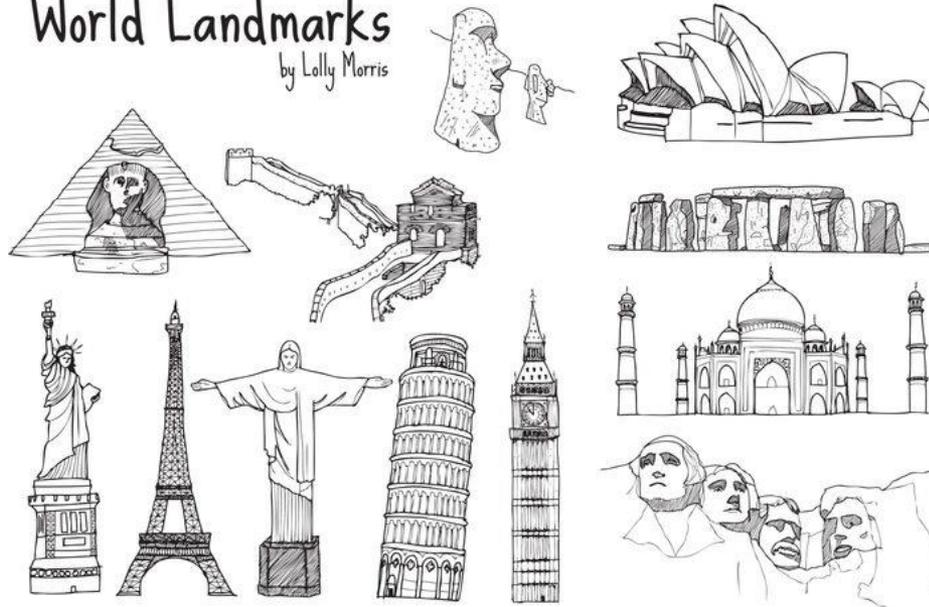
14 Inner Calm



15 Not-Separateness

World Landmarks

by Lolly Morris



Architectural theory and architectural language

Goodman's (1988) typology of architectural meaning types

- Denotation: Representing or depicting something. Whale shaped, sailing boat shaped, etc.
- Exemplification: Exemplifying or expressing properties. “That is, the building is designed to refer effectively to certain characteristics of its structure.” (Goodman 1988 p. 371) Formalist architecture.
- Expression: exemplification of metaphorically possessed properties; (exemplification: “literal exemplification” - p. 372).
- Mediated reference: allusion, for instance, finding something “contradictory” about a building, even if a building cannot convey a contradiction.

Architectural language, urban planning and smart cities

- Rehabilitation programs in East and Central Europe: transforming grey, concrete, inhuman built environments into colourful, modern, economical environments that are equipped with the latest technology
- Connecting early projects of readability in architectural communication to the latest attempts to design smart cities
- Theoretical and practical aspects of the project:
 - Theoretical: theory of architectural communication
 - Practical: developing practical guidelines for better results from increasing readability to planning smart city systems

Critical remarks

Architectural communication is visual (not linguistic)

- Accounting for architectural meaning consists of explaining how buildings and cities become the bearers of legible communicative meaning. For the inhabitants, who are the users of buildings and cities, there are two ways available, that make the built environment readable:
- [1] understanding the built environment on the basis of an artificially constructed, unified, simply decodable visual sign system that makes using of the city easier;
- [2] understanding the build environment on the basis of the existing visual elements of cities.

Speech acts, picture acts, and object acts

There is a person behind the glass.
There are clouds in the sky.



André Kertész: *Martinique*, 1972

The bulbs look melted.
These bulbs are very tired.



Pieke Bergmans: *Light Bulbs*, 2009

Pictures and objects don't have language, but they are still communicative 1:

Step 1: Speech acts (Austin, Searle)

- We perform actions with words and sentences.
 - Others interpret our words and sentences in order to figure out what we did with our words and sentences in the given context.
 - Meaning of words (literal meaning), syntax, intention, context.
 - Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary effect.
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- Great job!
 - I'm freezing.
 - I do. (Yes.)
 - I'll help you paint your house.

Pictures and objects don't have language, but they are still communicative 2:

Step 2: Picture acts (Searle, Novitz)

- We perform actions with pictures.
 - Others interpret the pictures we present to them in order to figure out what we did with the pictures in the given context.
 - Meaning of pictures (“literal” meaning): object recognition, visual processing of pictorial and spatial relations and arrangements, intention, context.
 - Pictorial locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary effect.
 - Although the “literal” meaning of pictures is visual, it is also possible to attach symbolic meaning to specific pictures or specific classes of pictures.
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- Pictorial locutionary act: the picture itself
 - Illocutionary act: the use of the picture interpreted
 - Perlocutionary effect: possible effects





This Man Is About To Die, New York Post, December 5, 2012

Pictures and objects don't have language, but they are still communicative 3:

Step 3: Object acts

- We perform actions with objects.
 - Others interpret the objects we design for them and present them in order to figure out what we did with the objects in the given context.
 - Meaning of objects (“literal” meaning): object recognition, visual processing of spatial relations and arrangements, intention, context.
 - Object locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary effect.
 - Although the “literal” meaning of objects is visual, it is also possible to attach symbolic meaning to specific objects or specific classes of objects.
 - Representational addition.
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- Object locutionary act: the physical object itself
 - Illocutionary act: the use of the object interpreted
 - Perlocutionary effect: possible effects



Brian Goggin: Defenestration, 1997-present Site-specific installation on the corner of 6th and Howard St. in San Francisco



Pieke Bergmans: Light Blubs, 2009



Hundertwasser: Waldspirale,
Darmstadt, Germany



Robert Bruno: Steel House, 1974-2008,
Ransom Canyon, Texas, USA



The Object Act Theory of architectural meaning

Architectural object acts

- We perform actions with architectural objects (architectural constructions).
- Others interpret the architectural objects we design for them and present them in order to figure out what we did with the objects in the given context.
- Meaning of architectural objects (“literal” meaning): object recognition, visual processing of spatial relations and arrangements, intention, context.
- Architectural object locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary effect.
- Although the “literal” meaning of architectural objects is visual, it is also possible to attach symbolic meaning to specific architectural objects or specific classes of architectural objects.
- Representational addition.

- Architectural object locutionary act: the physical architectural object (construction) itself
- Architectural object illocutionary act: the use of the architectural object interpreted
- Perlocutionary effect: possible effects

Examples

1. The Hungarian Parliament

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNbhTGT8NFA>

2. Heart of Jesus Church, Munchen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONsfcSrZTF8>

3. Jean Nouvel: Arab Center, Paris

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfHR_1Xfb1Q

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWgeXczf_0M

<http://gizmodo.com/5641012/arab-centers-wall-is-alive-with-30000-mechanical-eyes>

The Hungarian Parliament



The Hungarian Parliament

Goodman's analysis

- Denotation: The Hungarian Parliament does not denote. (vs. Whale and National Theatre)
- Exemplification: This building does not exemplify beyond the properties of its building material.
- Expression: Perceiving monumentality, impressivity, beauty, grandness, etc.
- Mediated reference: Its renewed gothic style refers to the golden age of the Hungarian Kingdom. The 96 m high cupola refers to the purpose of the building: remembrance to the Millennium of founding the Hungarian state in 896.

Our analysis

- Architectural object locutionary act: The architectural construct itself, the physical building
- Architectural object illocutionary act: The locutionary act interpreted in the context of the city, the culture and the history of the country
- Perlocutionary effect: Decoding representativeness, decoding it as a landmark, feeling of awe.

Heart of Jesus Church, Munchen

- Architectural object locutionary act: The architectural construct itself, the physical building.
- Architectural object illocutionary act: The context is the ancient Christian heritage combined with the highest level of technology. Its purpose is to help decoding the original meaning of Christian community. The door motif is analogous to the arms of Jesus. The transparent glass walls refer to the functioning of the building and the Church as well.
- Perlocutionary effect: Feeling the glory and the acceptance of God.

Jean Nouvel: Arab Center, Paris

- Architectural object locutionary act: The architectural construct itself, the physical building.
- Architectural object illocutionary act: The context is the ancient Arabic heritage combined with the highest level of technology. Arabic artistic motifs and patterns are transformed into geometrical forms. The functioning of the windows is analogous to the functioning of the camera (aperture). Moreover, there is an emphasis on the eye and vision, which are fundamental characteristics of the European culture.
- Perlocutionary effect: Perceiving the arabic culture as modern and European, and universally human.

Possible cooperative projects with Norwegian partners

- Architecture theory
- Architectural communication
- Readability, wayfinding
- Architectural meaning and smart city development projects: intelligent traffic lights, public transportation systems, intelligent flats and environment, sustainability, intelligent systems for people with disabilities (for instance, for people with hearing impairment)
- Comparative (Norwegian / Scandinavian and Hungarian / Central European) case studies
- Good practices
- Developing practical guidelines for architects and urban planners: increasing communicative efficiency
- Bringing the engineering background of BUTE to visual communication studies that are usually located at art and humanities faculties in Scandinavia.

Thank you for your attention

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