

An Analysis on the Architectural Elements of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan based on the Semiotic Theory of Umberto Eco

Abstract

Architecture, like other cultural phenomena, as a system of signs is a source for the study of semiotics. Since architecture is primarily created not to communicate but to perform a function, it is a distinct and challenging case for many semiotics; bearing this in mind, Umberto Eco has developed his theory of architectural semiotics. The data of this research have been collected by documentary method and examined by qualitative method and content analysis. Findings indicate that the relationship between form and function and the achievement of multiple layers of meaning in the structure under study (Imam Mosque of Isfahan) can be clarified based on the theory of echo architecture in which implicit meanings are placed in parallel with secondary functions. Thus, in order to corroborate its hypothesis that symbolic meanings belong to secondary functions, the present researcher attempts to apply the capacity of echo theory in response to the challenge between external and internal elements in Islamic architecture and to provide an analytical framework beyond one-sided perspectives.

Research aims:

1. Explaining the symbolic and esoteric meanings of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan.
2. Presenting a semiotic reading of the symbolic and esoteric meanings of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan in the light of the thoughts of Umberto Eco.

Research questions:

1. What is the role of symbolic and esoteric meanings in the architecture of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan?
2. How can a semiotic reading of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan be presented?

Keywords: Architectural Elements, Imam Mosque of Isfahan, Umberto Eco Semiotic Theory.

Introduction

The Italian philosopher and thinker Umberto Eco has famous works of fiction in which he has expressed his views in the form of stories. In addition, a number of his works are specifically devoted to the subject of semiotics. Semiotics, as the science of studying cultural phenomena, examines and analyzes such phenomena as a system of signs. Architecture as one of the cultural exhibitions of society can be the manifestation of semiotics. Architectural works are created by the architect in order to respond to a specific function in the first place, in other words, in order for the architect to satisfy a need, he designs and creates his work in response to that need. But it is rare for the same effect to be considered as components of a particular relationship. This is where Eco sees architecture as a challenge to semiotics and puts forward his theory.

Research in the field of architectural semiotics, although based on the basic principles of semiotic knowledge, but among them, the lack of a specific theory of architectural semiotics is clearly visible. Among these researches, the research work of Shafiq Ramzi (2013); Visual language in Mamluk architecture: Semiotic analysis of Sultan Coptic tomb collection in the collection of articles on the boundaries of architectural research - No. 2, pp. 353-338, (Shafiq Ramzi, 2013: 338) can be focused upon in which the symbols and signs of Islamic architecture are studied. In another investigation, Grabar stated in the article: "Symbols and Signs in the Interpretation of Islamic Architecture in Golestan Honar", No. 9, Fall 2007, that what he has collected are only disturbing views, ideas and interpretations that expresses the title of an alien in the form of objective and personal experience (Grabar, 2007: 13). Hottenhauer, in an article entitled "The rhetoric of architecture: a semiotic approach" on pages 77-71 of the Communication Quarterly No. 32, examines architecture as a language with communication and semantic capabilities, using a semiotic approach (Huttenhauer, 2016: 71). Although Umberto Eco's theory of architectural semiotics deals specifically with architecture and its capabilities, it has not been used as a theoretical basis for the semiotic analysis of architectural works. The mosque is a manifestation of visual beauty and a clear example of combining symbolic forms with deep beliefs. The architecture of the mosque carries a symbol that embodies the local concept of communication with God. According to the eco-classification of signs, the mosque as one of the architectural works is in the category of artificial signs with a combined function. The combined function of this building is due to the fact that in addition to having the primary function as a place for worship and communication with God, it also has a set of many secondary and symbolic functions. While emphasizing the prominence and necessity of recognizing the theory of architectural semiotics of this Italian philosopher, this research seeks to examine one of the practical aspects of this theory in order to provide a semiotic analysis of the building of Imam Mosque in Isfahan.

Conclusion

The most significant conclusion accomplished in this research emphasizes the application of a theory of architectural semiotics in response to the challenge between the appearance and interior of Islamic architecture, as well as the semiotic analysis of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan based on Umberto Eco theory and revealing its various semantic layers. Examining the theory of echo semiotics, it can be said that he considers what is known as "relationship" in semiotic analysis in architecture as the relationship between form and function of architectural work. Also, the well-known relationship between form and function basically means that the form of the object must clearly relate to the function for which the object is designed, and only if it clearly implies this function, it forces the person to use it in some way. The architect must first identify a set of social necessities and consider functions to respond to these necessities. Then, based on the system of forms associated with these functions, the architect should design the symbol carriers

associated with those functions; also, the artist should also design the primary function (literal meaning) which is relatively stable and opens the way for the secondary functions (implicit meanings and symbolic meanings) so that over time and in proportion to the emergence of various fields such as cultural, social and historical, the same form and architectural work created, new implicit and symbolic meanings are to be perceived.

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