

The Role of Semiotics in Reviewing Architecture

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Abstract: This article examined the development of architecture from the point of view of communication systems and understanding semiotics more deeply. The influence of modernization and postmodern forms a diverse architecture especially the architectural style that develops in the world. In appreciation of architectural work, it is required an understanding about communication that uses the theory of semiotics as the basic theory in the formation of language. With the communication system, the appreciation of architectural work will be hindered because of the understanding of semiotics. By using qualitative descriptive as a method, it can directly look at the phenomena and facts that exist in the field or object of research. The objects of research were residential and commercial buildings in Medan City. The results showed that the development of architectural style in Medan city is appreciated by observers as a work that refers to the locality and event background factors.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of science in many fields also influences architecture. This influence can be seen in the formation of different architectures in each period which is related to the development of technology. Architecture is a manifestation of a distinct culture in each different place. The distinctiveness of this architecture is an attraction for the place to visit. The form and shape of architecture depend on when and where the architecture grows and develops.

The development of architecture in the world is also in line with the development of developing science. With the development of science, the shape and hue of architecture also has differences that can be seen from the shape of the architecture as a whole. Hale divides architectural interpretations into 5 (five) are architecture as engineering, architecture as art, architecture as communication system, architecture as phenomenology and architecture as politics (Hale, 2000). These five interpretations have their respective emphasis on the growing architecture in the world.

The theme of the study is the architecture as a communication system because in appreciating the architecture; communication approach is always used. This article focuses more on communication approach using semiotics theory in language as the starting point of communication. The use of this

semiotic theory can make it easier to see the approach of communication systems in architecture.

To see the work of architecture or artwork is used the way of view of appreciation in the process of architectural communication. This appreciation is considered suitable for being used in viewing an art work and architecture (Gauldie, 1969). With the above explanation, the architecture is studied with semiotic approach which is seen through the process of appreciation to the object of research. For the object of study, it is selected to commercial buildings in the city of Medan and its surrounding.

The writing that takes the theme related to the sign system or architectural semiotics is done by Tjahyono who says that one of the experts who use semiotics in architecture is Umberto Eco, according to Eco in architecture, sign system can be divided into two; denotation and connotation (Tjahyono, 1992). He sees that in the building, the main or primary functions can be called denotation while the secondary function can be called connotation. From the function of the building, then the meaning that emerges from the architecture can be divided into 2 (two) namely primary meaning and secondary meaning. The primary meaning is the meaning which is originally desired by the planner or architect and the primary meaning is the meaning that after being built and occupied arises without going through the planning process of the architect.

Semiotics is a theory that speaks of signs. The initiator of this theory is Ferdinand de Saussure who studies the sign system and brings it to the realm of science (Cobley & Jansz, 2002). Saussure then divided his theory into 2 (two) major parts that are *signifier and signified* and if it is viewed as an object become *form / content* or *image / meaning*. The relationship between signified and signifier has arbitrary characteristic that there is no provision between form and content or image and meaning like traffic light, if the green light (*signifier*) this means the form and color is green, while the go straightaway (*signified*) is a meaning of the green light.

Charles Jenks uses this signifier and signified through the triangle of *Odgen-Richards* (1923) into architectural semiotics triangles (Eco, 1980). Jenks uses the term actual function to refer the actual function and meaning presented. In this triangle also described the relation of the three namely signifier which is a physical form of architecture and signified which is the concept of thinking from architecture. These relationships can be *index, icon, and symbol* (Jenks, 1980)(Broadbent & Jenks, 1980). The relationship of this triangle can determine the type of the sign (Figure 1).

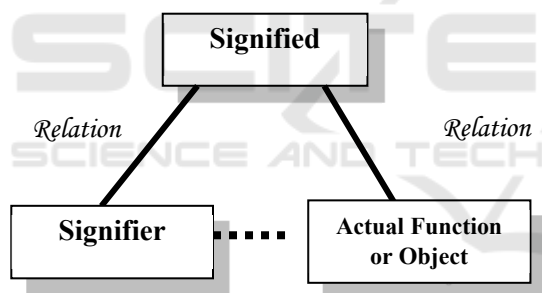


Figure 1: Triangle of Architectural Semiotics

Another approach which was done by Jenks derived from Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) which divides the sign into content as signified and expression as signifier. Content contains 2 (two) values which are *substance of content* (the value of philosophy contained) and *form of content* (concept in realizing the value of philosophy). In Expression, it contains 2 values which are *form of expression* (physical form) and *form of substance* (meaning that is present in the building) (Figure 2).

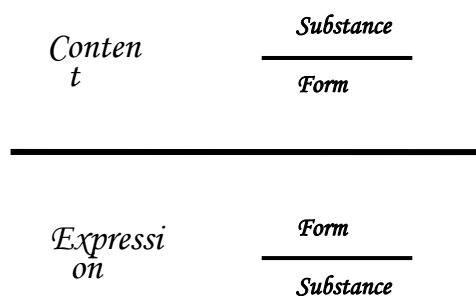


Figure 2: Scheme of Hjelmslev

In reviewing the semiotics of architecture required appreciation as a tool to read architecture as an art language that is understood through the flow of one's feelings. Gaudie discussed the appreciation from several ways for the work to communicate that are the nature of art; communication and interpretation; the roots of ugliness; the source of delight; scale, order and rhythm, weight, force and mass; the awareness of space; the dialogue of space and structure; the play of shape; the enrichment of form; the play of light; judgment and design; eloquence, aptness and style; place, time and society (Gaudie, 1969). These appreciation channels are different depending on the observers who observe the artwork of architecture and capture the meaning contained in there.

2 METHOD

In this study the method used is qualitative method, because the facts in the field can be analyzed by using the used theory as a tool of analysis. Qualitative methods use inductive approach and the fact in field as research object can be investigated more comprehensively (Moleong, 2004)(Sugiyono, 2009).

The object of research is focused on existing commercial buildings in Medan city namely Kuala Namu Airport especially passenger terminal in Deli Serdang area. This airport building is an airport that becomes one of the symbols of Medan and North Sumatra (Figure 3). This airport building is reviewed through semiotics to assist in appreciating architectural works. It is hoped that this method will be able to answer the approach of semiotics in architectural appreciation.



Figure 3: Kuala Namu Airport -Deli Serdang (Source: www.transonlinewatch.com)

The first stage of this research is the stage for collecting data that is preparing the survey and plunge into the field, searching and collecting data used as a case study. This stage will be done the sorting and compiling data based on the patterns of appreciation in the architecture. This stage will be analyzed to the data that has been taken with approach of theory of semiotics to appreciate the work of architecture.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theory is used to analyze case study. The chosen case study is passenger terminal of Kuala Namu Airport Medan. The first step of this analysis is looking at the overall appreciation of the building and the next step is analyzing the architectural communication system by using architectural communication triangle.

Kuala Namu Airport is the second largest airport in Indonesia, in 2013 officially operates and able to accommodate 8,1 million passengers/ year. The airport has direct access of airport train to Medan city. In terms of architectural appreciation that is the nature of art, this airport building has a character that inspires the observers' sense. This sense is built when we enter the airport area greeted by the gate as a marker entry to the location. The building was established with the intention as an art container that can collaborate with the function and structure of the building as a whole. Architecture created was a communication that was created and it was a style of language that can be understood by the observers. Appreciation from the point of view of communication and interpretation resulted that the building of this airport is an icon that shows the success of plantations in North Sumatra, especially Palm Oil. This is seen from the image that emerged from the façade of the building; it is seen the Leaf Strand of Palm Oil that unite and form the space below (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Front View that Shows the Leaf Strand of Palm Oil

From two elements of appreciation that have been used above is *the nature of art* and *communication and interpretation*, it can be continued to the analysis uses triangle architectural semiotics. From this analysis can be explained 4 elements of the triangle are:

3.1 Substance of Content

This study contains the philosophical values in the design to develop the planning of an architectural masterpiece. The fast-paced concept is the hallmark of modernism that has evolved and combined with existing local wisdom. The airport that has the latest facilities is the airport with icon of North Sumatra which successfully becomes the landmark of the region.

3.2 Form of Content

The concept of airport planning that moves the airport from the middle of the city to Deli Serdang area; make the acceleration of establishment in the region. The train facilities which connect the airport to Medan City do not become a problem as passengers can be on time until the airport. The form of the building displays local wisdom of North Sumatra seen from the design of the facade and some local ornaments used in the building. They are such as ornaments at the top of the passenger elevator, in the interior of the airport uses Karo ornaments (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Karo Ornament

3.3 Form of Expression

The expression that is present on the whole building is modern building by applying locality can be categorized to postmodern architecture. The building shows a solid impression by exposing the roof truss. Light enters the building to minimize electricity usage through glass around the building.

The shape of the railway station right in front of the airport merges with the direct circulation to the building (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Airport Railway Station

3.4 Substance of Expression

The overall meaning is a unified air and land transportation as well as recreation with the support of shops selling goods for passengers' needs. The airport was designed to release saturation for passengers to be comfortable and favorite for passengers.

It is an icon of North Sumatra that successfully open jobs chance for the surrounding society and this airport can be enjoyed by all levels of society.

3.5 Summary of Analysis

From the analysis of semiotics triangle it can be summarized as follows:

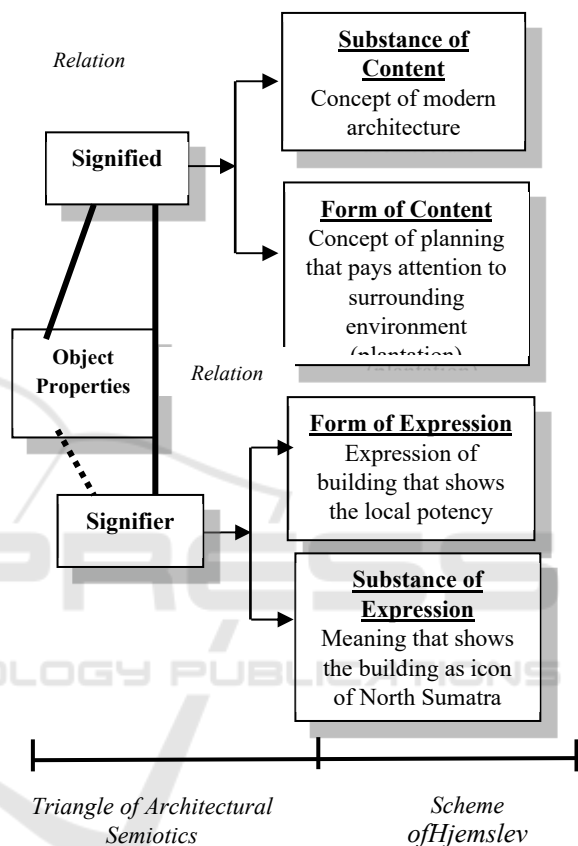


Figure 6: Summary of Analysis

4 CONCLUSION

Semiotics is an approach used to read architectural works. The results are the meanings that can communicate to the observer. The reading of architectural work is preceded by the appreciation felt by society and then proved by triangle of architectural semiotics.

The analysis result on the Kuala Namu Airport-Deli Serdang shows that this building has potential as a building that can be an icon of North Sumatra. The use of element or ornamentation of local wisdom

brings the modern building into a local one and eventually becomes the hallmark and pride of this region.

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