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THE CONFUSING LANGUAGE OF BUILDING FAÇADES OBSERVED ALONG CIUMBULEUIT ROAD IN BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore the signs and meanings of the new architecture created as a result of functional change in certain sections of Ciumbuleuit Road after the campus of Parahyangan Catholic University (UNPAR) was established. The methods employed for this study consist of the initial stage of charting a case study to analyze all shapes of the buildings created so far. Secondly, various theories have been used to classify cultural signs, such as those proposed by Venturi, Peirce and Morris in order to investigate their meaning. The outcome of this research study yields the conclusion that in practically all of the sections examined on Ciumbuleuit Road, there has been a marked change in terms of architectural signs (shop-houses locally known as *ruko*) that are indexical and that show a tendency towards pragmatic meaning (purpose or usefulness). The outward appearance of these *ruko* buildings that have been emerging tend to shout their identity from the top of the roofs, so to speak. This phenomenon has turned the character of this road's general appearance into a chaotic and confusing spectacle or street façade.

Key words: Language, signs, architectural meaning

1. INTRODUCTION

Economic aspects as a Generator of Growth behind the Expansion of the Ciumbuleuit Area

The area known as Ciumbuleuit situated in the north of Bandung was initially intended as an area to be used for villas and gardens or commercial agricultural enterprises [1, 2]. Ever since the campus of Parahyangan Catholic University (UNPAR) was built, the activities of the local community gradually drifted towards trade or commercial activities, providing the students with their daily needs. In the long run, the phenomenon triggered by this economic factor transformed the villas along this road into locations functioning as commercial units. In turn, this functional change affected the shape of the architectural forms to be encountered in this particular area. At present, Ciumbuleuit Road is already dominated by the architecture of the *ruko* or shop-house type. [3]

Up to now, the municipal government has established the area as a so-called floating zone. This phenomenon has not only taken place in the Ciumbuleuit area but has also spread to other areas situated around new campuses in the city of Bandung. [4,5]

This study focuses on reading the various new architectural signs that have emerged in a certain area, and furthermore on making sense of their meaning through interpretation. This research initiative may be classified as one that has rarely been conducted because so far, the academic studies made of urban architecture have shown a tendency to focus on following the well-trodden path of the rules and regulations concerning building-envelope and typology. Thus, this research paper forms an alternative way of reading the character of the façades of the buildings under scrutiny in this urban section as cultural artifacts completed by the process of making them operational.

The utilization and benefits of this research project include the following: first and foremost, a profound understanding of ways in which changes that have taken place on the façade of buildings along segments of the road examined here have actually affected the creation of the specific character of the urban façade. Secondly, a more comprehensive understanding of the methods to be employed and steps to be taken in order to interpret the character of the façades of these buildings by way of a sign-meaning or semiotic approach to the architectural design involved. Thirdly, a better

understanding or heightened realization of the importance of continuous developments and changes observed in certain activities.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Case Study

In 1917 a development plan emerged for the northern part of Bandung, referred to as *Uitbreidingsplan Bandoeng Noord* in the colonial language, that is to say, Dutch. The city of Bandung was expanded northwards, inspired by the concept of a veritable Garden City. This particular area became known as the European Business District or *Europeesche Zakenwijk*. [6,7] The Ciumbuleuit area situated in the north of Bandung used to be a quiet area full of gardens. Here, several permanent residences could be found that were exploited as villas referred to as flowers (Dutch : *Bloemen*) of the neighborhood.

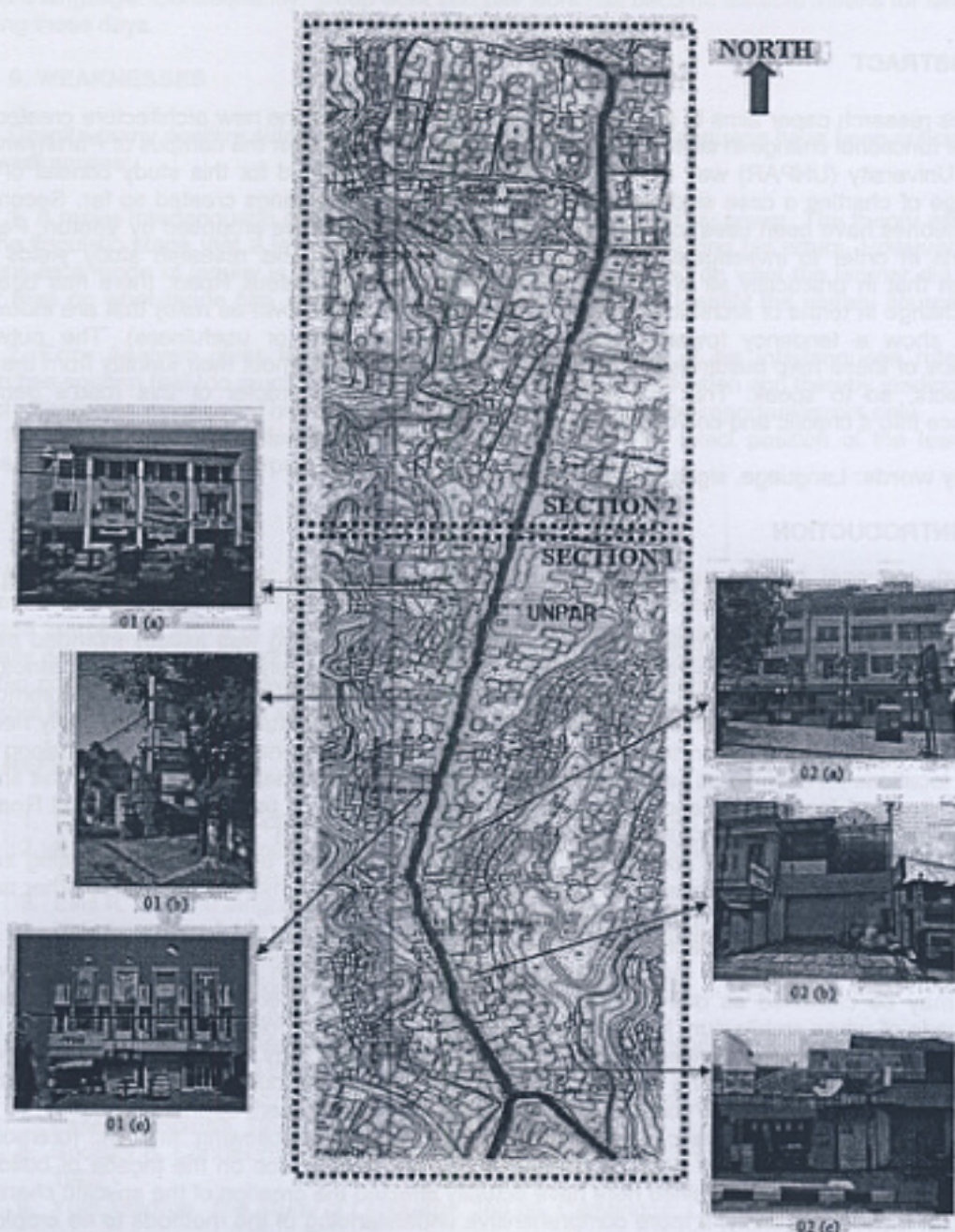


Fig. 01 Left (a)(b)(c): West Side Shop-house (ruko).

Fig. 02 Right (a)(b)(c): East Side Shop-house (ruko) [3]

These villas were built according to the local procedures prevalent in the colonial era, among which was the regulation stating that permanent residential buildings had to be equipped with an open, extensive piece of land bordering on the adjacent road.

In the 1980s, the original street façade was still intact. Today, the area around Ciumbuleuit is beginning to change into an area allotted for a study center for UNPAR students. The current student body of this private university is estimated at seven thousand students coming from all over Indonesia. As a result, commercial enterprises have sprouted up in the vicinity, which provide supporting facilities for campus activities. Many of the former "flowers" or villas have been transformed into commercial buildings. [8]

The functions of the present buildings located on this stretch of Ciumbuleuit Road are manifold. 80 buildings function as residences, 52 have some kind of commercial function, only 2 function as educational centers, while 5 serve as service-related buildings. These various functions have naturally shaped the two distinct characters of the façade.

The first takes on a commercial profile while the second displays the countenance of the new dwellings or residences. The road section before UNPAR (moving southward) is section 1 dominated by the commercial change in function in the shape of the *ruko* buildings that have been emerging. Section 2 covers the road past UNPAR (going northwards) dominated by the new residences.

Research Methods and Stages

With reference to the science of Semiotics, every sign can be considered as a medium of communication to establish an exchange of culture-related meaning. The same applies to every work of architecture, where a certain structure may be encountered with an underlying meaning for the designer, user and observer involved [9]. There are three approaches in compliance with this research that will be elaborated on in sharply defined terms so that they can be applied to the process of making things operational, to become a device for further interpretation.

1. Classification according to Venturi

In his book *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi proposes the thesis that a commercial building may be classified either as a Duck or Decorated Shed. [10] Ducks are buildings whose media of communication refer exclusively to the architectural shape used for their creation. Decorated Sheds on the other hand can be regarded as analogous to the buildings whose dominant trait lies in communicating with their signage or decorations on their façade. Taking this thesis as our starting-point, two extreme points of classification can be established in research. One extreme end or pole represents buildings that merely communicate by virtue of their shape, in other words, sign-related buildings. At the other extreme of the spectrum, one finds buildings that happen to communicate through commercial signs or sign-decorated ones.

Buildings that are hard to categorize using the two extreme categories mentioned above may be classified as ones that simply do not communicate effectively. The appearance of this type of building is considered insignificant when it comes to contributing to the specific character of the street façade to be encountered on Ciumbuleuit Road. The result of the classification at this stage reflects the dominance of the appearance of the existing buildings.

2. Classification according to Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was an American expert in the field of Linguistics who discovered the triadic concept of signs. [11] Based on its correlation with objects, a specific architectural shape can be the sign of an icon, index, or symbol. A building may be labeled an iconic sign if it bears a likeness (similarity) to another sign (building). By the same token, it can be regarded as an indexical sign if it enjoys a relation with (or is caused by) a reference to another sign (building). Finally, a building may be designated a symbolic sign if it happens to be related to another sign (building) based on agreement or convention. Even if we may encounter more than one architectural sign in a given building, there is bound to be one that is dominant. The result of classification at this stage may describe the dominance of the type of building sign in the kind of building referred to as sign-related building or sign-decorated one in the initial phase mentioned above.

3. Classification according to Morris

Charles William Morris (1901-1979) proposed a thesis in compliance with Peirce's theory concerning three levels of meaning. [12] According to Morris, pragmatic meaning clarifies the purpose of a sign, while syntactic meaning sheds light on the shape of the structural arrangement of a sign, and semantic meaning explains the meaning of the symbolism carried by the sign in question.

In this research paper, it is established that at one extreme, we find meaning that indicates architectural purpose (usefulness), while at the other extreme, we encounter meaning that points toward the symbolic-architectural aspect (symbolic meaning). The result of the classification made at this stage can be considered as a description of meaning or expression of a given building that makes a dominant contribution to the character of the street façade on Ciumbuleuit Road.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial stage of research

In the segment of Ciumbuleuit Road examined, there are 21 buildings that fall under the *ruko* category mentioned earlier, being combinations of shops and houses. On the East Side there are 10, and on the West Side there are 11. All of these *ruko* buildings can be typified as sign-related buildings. The latter is exemplified by 6 *ruko* buildings on both sides. On the East Side there are the *ruko* called *Ciumbuleuit Gallery*, *Idola* and *Sinar Terang*, while on the other side we can find the *ruko* called *Gubuk Dongeng*, *Yomart* and *Cabe Rawit*. Between both sides we can observe marked differences.

On the west side of the road leading to UNPAR the *rukos* expand to cover two or three parcels of land belonging to the shopkeepers, so that the shape of the *ruko* thus created is larger in comparison with the side located to the east of UNPAR, which only covers one plot on average. On both sides of the road the sign-related building type is consistently featured. This is marked by the buildings themselves that indicate their typical function, and not by any additional (added-on) signs or other decorations. The purpose of the signs on these *ruko* buildings is indicated by displaying the name of the shop in question, a common practice known as signage.

Secondary stage of research

Six of these *ruko* buildings of the sign building variety consist of the indexical sign type in their entirety. This is due to the fact that the shape of the buildings indicates their commercial function, which clearly distinguishes itself from the outward appearance of the residential buildings in their immediate vicinity. This can be gleaned from the variety of *ruko* types. Six of these neither play a role or serve as iconic signs, nor as symbolic signs. The *ruko* called *Galeri Ciumbuleuit* displays a typical shop in as many as 4 units. The *ruko* called *Idola* only indicates its name on a plain billboard or plank, showing its wares on offer to the general public.

The same applies to the *ruko* called *Sinar Terang*. The one called *Gubuk Dongeng* displays the shape of a typical shop-house divided up into 4 units and a total number of 3 floors or storeys. The *ruko* named *Cawit* adds its name on a plain board, presenting the activity involved (serving food and beverages) as its signage. Finally, *Yomart* shows 4 typical *ruko* units, such as the one called *Gubuk Dongeng*.

Tertiary stage of research

In the two previous stages, it has been concluded that six of the sign-related types of buildings representing all of the *ruko* buildings along Ciumbuleuit Road are dominated by indexical signs. In all of the *rukos* in place, the designers present the products offered as an expression of their respective buildings. Since their shape tends to be typical, each unit in this row of buildings endeavours to shout or stand out by showing their wares in the shop windows. The type of product on sale in each particular *ruko* unit is what can be observed in the sign on each of the buildings. The meaning derived from the previous indexical signs is related to pragmatic or useful meaning. Thus it can be said that in the first road section of Ciumbuleuit Road, buildings are characterized by indexical signs with a useful meaning.

The upper stretch of UNPAR happens to be a dead-end street. UNPAR, being located in between segment 1 and 2, is the cause or generator of all the activities conducted there. As a result, the circulation in both road segments tends to be directed towards UNPAR. Segment 2 tends not to have changed into a commercial function. This makes sense because it is part of the area extending past UNPAR itself. Apart from the fact that UNPAR forms the so-called be-all and end-all of its activities, this stretch of road happens to be a dead-end street leading nowhere, as noted above. In segment 2, the function of new residential buildings tends to dominate more.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of the analysis made, the following conclusions may be drawn:

First of all, building a new function such as a campus with a relatively large student body of seven thousand on a particular road stretch tends to make a certain impact on the change of function