Reading the Hidden Concepts in the Text of Tehran Highways Walls

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ABSTRACT: Because of the dispersion of activities in big cities, employing highways as the most important connecting way is indispensable. In today world, highways are connection arteries of cities transporting people to their social activities. Because of continual use of highway, their walls prepare a context for conveying many Social, Cultural, Economic, etc concepts. That is why most economic promotions,communication of social concepts and cultural teachings are provided on highways walls and margins.In few recent years, given the same potential, highway walls has created a site for appearance of street art. Street art is demonstration of author's personal signs on the walls and public places of the city and public audience decode the concepts embeded in the text of that art. Currently Tehran municipality, in a general policy, tried to spread and pay attention to street art particularly in the highways contexts. In this paper, we classify these designs on Tehran highway walls while indicating present examples and interpret the concepts lying in these designs from a semiotic view point.

Keywords: *Art context reading, Street art, Visual arts semiotic, Context decoding.*

INTRODUCTION

Tehran municipality has implemented various designs since some time ago in order to beautify and create diversity on capital highway walls. These designs are mainly big city pictures which have various messages like a text, starting a dialogue with their audience and convey ideas and thoughts of their author. Each street art creates a text comprising elements accompanying one another. Messages of the design's author, is conveyed to audience via accompaniment of the elements existing in the text. Idea and thought of author represent only upper layer of the meanings resulting from the design.

In other words, each design consists of numerous layers of meaning.These layers form the meaning and concept of the design and are flowing in the context of the design, and audience given his/ her social status and on the basis of his/ her coding teachings decodes and makes sense of each design. Each design can be divided in two mains.
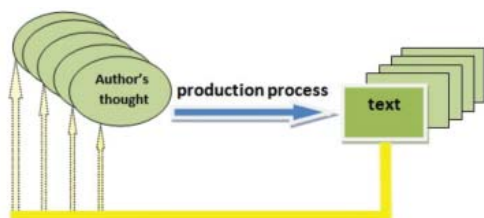

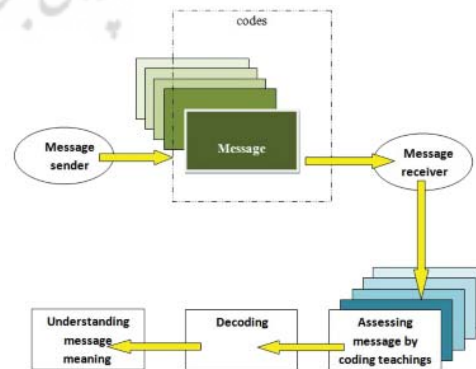Fig. 1: Process of text reading (Reproduction of text by audience)

Fig. 2: The text interface between author and audience

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Sorts:

a) Physical layers: layers enising in the text which are of the same kind as text and carrying the text physical messages with themselves. Indeed, physical layers form lines of a text.

b) Metaphysical layers: they are layers hidden and masked in the designs embedded in the text metaphysically and indeed form the space between the text lines. These layers carry meta-textual messages. Messages present in design are put in the design text by author using a set of codes. Physical codes of the design penetrate the design for mation in an abstract way and typically as implicit aesthetic and physical codes and via social- cultural codes. The audiences assess these codes on the basis of their code teachings and addresses decoding and making sense of the design. In most of these designs, audience has been neglected as a mobile entity. In such a way that only static audience is able to understand the concepts of these paintings. Text foundation in most of these design covers such concepts as Utopia, lost paradise, martyrdom, holy defence, etc which a static observer perceive it's text concepts by thinking and reflecting on the design. Of course, in some of these design, some tricks directed toward mobile observer are noticed. These tricks consist of :

1- Using sequential design and a design formation like frames of a film.

2- Presence of a fixed background and placing design icons with large distances between them.

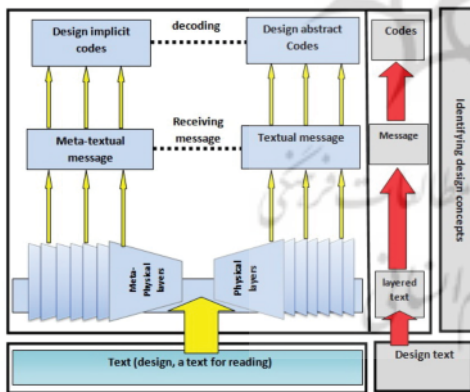3- Paying attention to create motion in design background and narrating design message on this background.

Fig. 3: decoding layers of each design as a text

Nevertheless in order to read these design, they can be sorted as follows:

a) Solely-covering designs (Niaiesh highway)

b) Narrative designs (Martyr Hemmat highway)

c) Composite-iconic design (Sadrand sattari highway)

d) Abstract design (Imam Ali (pbh) highway)

In this paper, it is tried to read, making sense of and interpret the text of these design on the basis of the above-said sorting and reproduce hidden meanings within inner layers of design.

Street Art

Besides works limited to art exhibitions, always creative designs have been present on city street walls informaly. These designs more often than not have many critical, ironical, cultural, political and social concepts within themselves rather than being an art work. Reading and decoding street art is based on deeply understanding and recognizing social issues in spatial-temporal trend. Usually young artists turn towards this art from an ironic view point in order to criticize society and understanding the messages present in these works needs closely focusing on current social problems. Using power of image language, is a characteristic this art severely exploit form. street art narrate current social problems and criticize them using it`s ironic literature.

Fig. 4:street art on Apadana town wall.
(Source: www.irangraffiti.com)

Fig. 5: street art on the wall.
(Source: http/forum.p30world.comshowthread.phpt)

Fig. 6: An example of street art on the street floor.
(Source: www.irangraffiti.com)

Fig.7: An example of street art using wall potential.
(Source: http/forum.p30world.comshowthread.phpt)

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Semiotics, a method for reading Street Art

Appearance of each art is similar to creation of a ((text)) which transfer a set of customs, values and thought to gether with it self. Production of each ((text)) is based on it`s context and cultural and intellectual bed of it s origin society. ((each text is an independent message from it`s sender and receiver and covers a set of signs. These signs are coded by author and audience decodes it on the basis of conventions and with the help of media relations)) (chandler, 2009, 3). Semiotics can be considered as a kind of knowledge towards understanding and recognizing world phenomena resulting from reading and interpreting sings present in each phenomenon. In other words, ((Semiotics is systemic and organized study of the set of factors influencing appearance and interpretation of the signs.)) (Zeimaran, 2003, 7).Semiotics is to study phenomena on the basis of denotation relationships which addresse's production and creation of meaning. ((Semiotics seeks to discover deeper layers of meaning appearance)). (Martin & Ringham, 2000, 118) Semiotics ((covers all readings resulting from decoding of phenomena)). (Johansen & Larsen, 2003, 3) .This knowledge acts in three main areas: ((abstract studies on signs and the relations between them, study of the relationships between signs and their enternal evidence, study of the relationships between users and a semiotic structure)) . In visual arts domain, semiotics is intended to search image signifier and reading discovering the signified appropriate to them in domain of society and reference culture of each artwork. Semiotics is an aesthetic attitude considering artwork as a text, getting meaning from it, is produced and received in a singnifying process. Semiotic is divided in to two main thought schools of structuralism and post-structuralism. Structuralist semiologists (Saussure, Jakobson, Straus) who mostly specialized in linguistic domain, typically consider a direct relationship between the signifier and post-structuralist semiologists, (Peirce, Eco, Barthes, Derrida) consider the relationship as an indirect one and seek to discover the implicit ((signified)) hidden in social, logical and aesthetic issues. In the view of structuralist semiotics, street art like language results from companionship of various elements

and a building`s elements like a sentence`s words communicate a general concept to audience while having individual roles and values. From post- structuralistic perspective, semiotics seeks to interpret and make a meaning for a street design. semiotics in addition to understand and identify the design structure, is used as a tool for recognizing metaphors and allusions existing in each design so that the deeper meaning hidden in inner layers of each design can be reproduced. After Saussure, semiotics is based on implicit denotations and seeks to discover absent layers of each phenomena. ((Jaques Derrida)) Considers an indirect relationship between the signifier and the signified so that the linear connection between them is interrupted regularly (Zeimaran, 2000, 38-39). This interpretion from Derrida (post-modernistic view) reveals shortcomings of Saussure`s linguistic shortcomings (modernistic view) because Saussure considers the relationship between the signifier and the singnified as a diect one and sees it as two faces of the same coin. In pierse`s interpretation, denotation system wich forms on the basis of ((Icons)) and ((Index)) is not a relational system and it should not necessarily considered as a tool for conveying. Only it is ((Symbol)) that can discover and extract the conception existing in each design according to it`s contents in the society and interpret it in semiologist words.
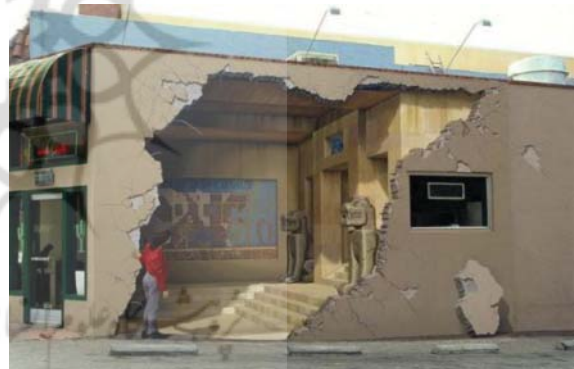

Fig. 8: creation of virtual space on the wall using 3d painting.
(Source: www.wordpress.com)

Saussure and Peirce used ((sign)) on a different meanings. Peirce considers the sign as a conventional relationship between the signifier and the signified which is acquired or natural like language and Saussure considers symbolic signs under a natural and reasonable relationship between the signifier and the signified, for example a ((Balance)) which is reasonably and tangibly a sign for ((Justice)). Derrida also considers discovering absent area of the sign necessarily for interpentation of each phenomenon because meaning of a word represents what that word does not signify. Indeed meaning exists in a chain of scattered denotations. Umberto Eco addresses the signifying role of each phenomenon each text, and believes that signifying role is a conventional relationship between expression and content. Of each text which should be examined in their social /cultural domain (Eco, 1998, 39). In
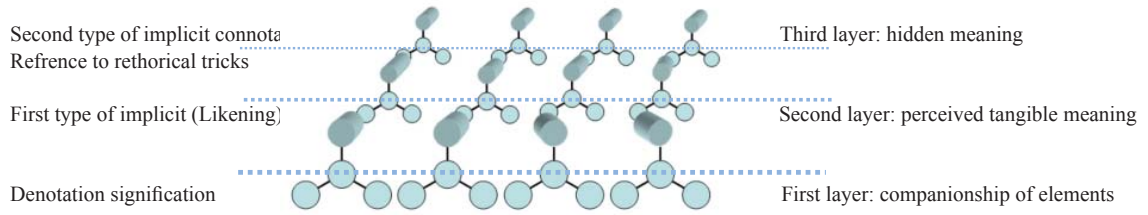
Second type of implicit connota...   Third layer: hidden meaning
Refrence to rethorical tricks

First type of implicit (Likening)   Second layer: perceived tangible meaning

Denotation signification   First layer: companianship of elements

Fig. 10: Companianship of design elements in each layer and obtaining the meaning in layers

order to interpret each sign, it is indispensable to access semantic and aesthetic criteria present in time-space of each design (text). Author encodes each text according to conventions and in the context of the literature of his/her own society. Message receiver also decodes the text considering his/her mental and code theachings. He/she recognizes the message through interpretation of codes (Ahmadi, 1992, 39-40). These codes are rooted in cultural and social relationships of their reference society. Author and audience both are bound to context and conditions which the art street has appeared in the framework of that situation. With respect to understand an artistic text, it is expected to present interpretive-empirical descriptions of it wich this perse needs presence of criterion for it`s correctness or incorrectness.These criteria are hidden in cultural bed of society. Our judgement about that text may be correct or incorrect. Meaning of any text is always obtained from it`s pre-existing texts sending to absence. ((Indeed, reading a text is similar to searching of what is in the middle of absence and forgetfulness)) (Zeimaran, 2000, 39). In each street design, meaning is always delayed so that intepetation of a text (design) presents itself as a new text and indicates the infinity of an interpretation in the text range. Indeed each interpretation plays with text continuosly and delays the meaning. In this way each text is an intermediate text of the other text which plays whit audience and invokes them to read again. Reader also enters the play an ((seeks a way to reproduce it)) (Sojudi, 2009, 126). At first, ((Peirce)) proposes infinity of meaning. He believes that each interpretation and perception of the text gives it`s place to a new representation and this trend continues infinitely.

While creating an artwork the author only has one or a part of meanings of the design in his/her mind, but the audience reads a world of meaning from sings and codes of each layer of the text. In this way, meaning is not of a difinite value, is like a fluid and is constructed by the audience.

[Representation, Interpretation, Object]
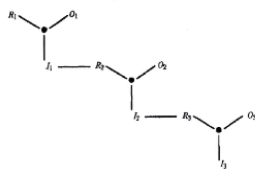 (Merrell, 1997, 15)

Fig. 9: process of converting each interpretation to a new representation

In general, each design of street art consists of numerous cultural, economic, political, social and historial layers enters city walls area by image rhetoric tricks and it`s code teachings.

Sorting Art Street in Tehran highways

Tehran municipality has employed street art in order to exploit from the capital highways. Of course, this street art is not of ironic type and does not criticize social issues and it mostly tries to raise cultural and social toughts and meaning-oriented values across the society in addition to beautifying it. These works often carry messages about building an ideal city with a surreal viewpoint.

Fig. 11: reflection of social values on street walls.
(Source: www.irangraffiti.com)

Fig. 12: searching for bluesky on city walls.
(Source: www.irangraffiti.com)

Solely-covering designs (Niaiesh highway)

In these types of designs which are attractive on the basis of their relatively low cost and because their implementation can be done very fast, only one aesthetic dimention is noticed turning to diverse coloring which provide a visual pleasure for

Figs. 13-14: covering design of Niaiesh highway body

mobile observer.These designs solely give a sense of covering to the audience and lacking any cultural and social concepts. In these types of designs, the following concepts are noted:

1.Using diverse colors.

2.Using different materials textures (wich because of uniformity in panel dimensions, it`s artificality is revealed).

3.This design, communicate with audiencedirectly and there is no impilicit denotation and deeper layers in it.

Narrative designs (Martyr Hemmat highway)

Narrative designs transfer a concept or story to their audience in a sequential way as a film. The selected design from Martyr Hemmat highway wall as a great wall of streetart recalls squences of the war period using icons from ((Holy defence)).

In decoding of this design following issues are noticed:

1.Martyrdom is induced by icon of Commander Hemmat, direct denotation to Martyr Hemmat picture.

2.Icons of soldiers represent war and fighting (icon).

3.Impilicit denotation (conotation) to firm belief of Iranian soldiers and their relying on ((5 bodies (pbut))). (symbol)

4.A symbolic reference to martyrdom through expression of abstract concept of fly, pointing to resistance and bravery of warriors by using metaphor of cypress as a refrence to resistance (metaphor).
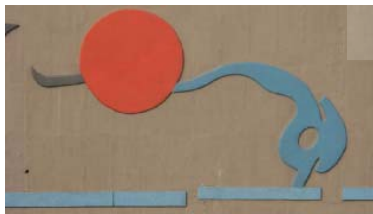
Figs. 15-22: Narrative design of Shahid Hemmat highway wall, companionship of icons in order to creat a conceptual sequence

Figs.: 23-25: Composite designs using icons of miniature paintings..

Composite-iconic designs: (Martyr Sattari highway & Ayat-ollah sadr highway)

In thes designs, authors convey the concepts completely relying on icons familiar to public audience and by referring to shapes typically present in miniatures, features such ideas as example Paradise, Utopia, Naturalism and point to holiness using sign of nature for example trees, sun, birds, clouds, mild breezes, dreamlike blue sky. (Figs. 23-25) are noticed on Sadr highway wall most significantly.

1.Design forms from companionship of icons from natural elements such as cypress trees, clouds, humans, etc by denotation (direct reference).

2.Fresense of a virtual light is indirectly sensible throughout the design in a way that all objects have a same shadow (connotation).

This shadow suggests presence of a single light (index).

3.The design totally denotes such concepts as Paradisegarden, human original status (Heaven garden), Utopia (ideal city). Wich is reminiscent of Paradise garden.

The following is concluded from reading of the Sattari highway wall:

1.Design forms from natural and familiar-to-mind icons. Icons e.g birds, sky, trees, sun, etc denotes design concepts directly.

2.Design points metaphorically to Paradise garden and lost places of the city (Paradise connotation)

3.Bird`s passion for fly indirectly points to flying of the Bird of Heaven garden

Abstract designs (Imam Ali (pbuh) highway)

In this design, the author wanted to reflect the concepts

Figs. 26-28: street painting of Sattari highway. (Source: www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/1.7.2010)

Figs. 29-32: 3d models of Imam Ali highway wall design. Designer: Amirmasoud Dabagh, 2009.

Figs.: 33-36: abstract design on Imam Ali (pbuh) wall; design (2009) and photograph by A.Dabagh.

of motion and speed on highway wall in an abstract way. Opposition of motion and stillness are conveyed to the audience using geometrical shapes. The following semiotic concepts are adopted from this design:

1.Reflection of futuristic thought (speed and motion) on highway wall.

2.Using some figures recognizable by public audience e.g eye, sun, sea waves in an abstract way.

3.Paying attention to reading of design by mobile observer wich is possible through spatial extension of the shapes.

4.Audience in any social statuse, perceive a fluid idea from this design.

CONCLUSION

Today,highway walls in addition to have high economical potential and conveying commercial advertisements, create

Table 1: Reading the hidden concepts in the text of Tehran highways walls

Sorting of street art at tehran highway walls	Design example	Type of codes present in design text	Relationship between design messages and signs	First layer of design: denotations	Second layer of design: Design connotations	third layer of design rhetoric tricks: (metaphor, allusions,etc)
Covering designs		Economical, aesthetic	----------------	Color texture	Contrast and harmony	-----------------
Composite iconic designs (repeat of conventional icons)		Aesthetic,cultural, historial	Iconic index	Icons from natural elements ,object shadows, yellow colour of background	Life,virtual light	Eternal life, utopia,eternal light (god)
Composite – iconic desings (invention of novel icons)		Aesthetic,cultural, literary	Iconic symbolic	Icon from natural elements, well-known mythological symbols	Life tree,simorgh mythlogical bird	Paradise garden,utopia, purification
Narrative designs		Aesthetic,social, literary	Iconic symbolic	Martyr icon,warriors, cypress,bird	Iranian youth representive, height, fly	Sacrification, resistance, martyrdom, freedom
Abstract designs		Aesthetic psychological	Iconic symbolic	Colour texture, from, level difference and shading	Wave, geometry circle, eye	Fluid meaning (sea),order and disorder ,truth (sun),reality (reason)

a basis for communicating historical, cultural and social messages, concepts and values to their audience via art language. These designs when are created by young authors in an spontaneous effort, have an ironic characteristic and critical viewpoint towards social conditions of the society, but when an urban organization like a municipality is resopnsible for it, it is expected that not only wall coverage and aesthetic aspect are considered, but also many significant cultural-social messages are also conveyed via image language.Absolutely image language conveyes social and cutural messages more strongly to their audience while creating a beautiful urban space, leads to enhancement of visual litercy of society and reminders the significant and neglected concepts and values of the society to the audience. As proposed in models (1) and (2) in recieving the message of a text, we should deal with different elements:

1.Desire and intent of the author

2.Audience perception

3.Text framework

in Modern Hermeneutics, there is a group of beliefes that reading and getting the concepts of a text is only possible by discovering the intent of it`s author. Another group also speaks of author`s death and audience birth. But the third group believes that while concepts can be diverse and extensive; but is incorporared in the text framework and indicates the text as the most significant basis of reception of the concepts of a social process.

Such individuals as Umberto Eco agree with this idea. This paper also studies the reading of the hidden concepts on highway walls according to the elements and social conditions influencing the text and does not try to reflect the intent of text authors and/or show the diverse readings of their audience. Finally, a table is provided in order to sort the data availabe on reading of Tehran highway wall designs according to selected examples.

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