The multiplicity of built form manifestations:
Situating the domestic form within interwoven syntactic and
semiotic domains

Shatha Malhis
University of Petra, Jordan

Abstract
Transformations in Amman’s economic and political status have triggered a number of
fundamental changes in the socio-cultural and urban forms of the city. Nourished
by the oil-boom of the 1970s, Amman, the capital of Jordan, has been subjected to
accelerated processes of change at every scale, creating a novel physical and socio-
cultural environment which bears little affinity with its older counterpart (Fethi et
al, 1996: 173). Post-oil-boom domestic villas have displayed formal stylistic features
of extreme eclecticism, ostentatiousness and extravagance, not readily comparable
with those of any previous era.

Amidst these representational stylistic varieties of villa form, the architectural
research in this paper is primarily directed towards the investigation of stylistic
differences as indicators of socio-architectural preferences within the contemporary
dynamic. Although understanding built form is an integral part of the objective of
any built-environment paradigm, a methodical understanding of how its architecture
is influenced by different socio-cultural aspects has been notably lacking. Most
researchers have treated the different tangible and intangible components of form in
isolation; their studies focused on one aspect of the multiplicity of built form
manifestations, spatial, stylistic or semiological, ignoring others or leaving them to
related yet independent research, without trying to situate the domestic form within
interwoven domains. The analytical and empirical methodology used in this paper,
for investigating the eclectic architecture of modern Amman-Jordan goes some way
towards rectifying these deficiencies. It was concluded that it is necessary to
reconceptualise the different manifestations of architectural form from a semiological
point of view, and to decode their components within a perceptual and analytical
perspective. Domestic forms are accordingly analysed at three levels: the stylistic
rules that operated to produce their facade complexity, the syntactic spatial principles
that structured the configurational properties of the layouts, and the semiological
perceptions which defined the way in which the architectural variety is grasped by
the owners.

Keywords
Tangible and intangible components, facade complexity, syntactic spatial principles, configurational properties, semiotic perceptions, duality of syntax and semiotics.

univbook@nets.com.jo