

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

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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 eclecticity, 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, semiological perceptions, duality of syntax and semiotics.

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