



# MEANING IN INTERIOR DESIGN

## SEMNIIFICAȚIA ÎN DESIGNUL INTERIOR

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**Rezumat:** *Semnificația, fiind o noțiune larg răspândită, cu o circulație specială în structuralism, a fost fundamentată la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și în prima jumătate a secolului XX în teoria artei și se referă în general la conținut sau mesaj, la conținutul operei de artă și nu la forma ei. În designul interior semnificațiile se nasc în procesul creației și receptării spațiului interior, în procesul comunicațional. Există semnificații cognitive și afective. Semnificația pornește de la un număr limitat de forme simple arhetipale, considerate cele mai simple, din combinația cărora se poate genera orice altă formă. Deși semnificația reprezintă principiile de coeziune ale sistemului compozițional, ea ține de problematica imaginării, designerul va da semnificație operei sale ținând cont și de doleanțele beneficiarului.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *semnificat, semnificant, simbol, semnificația în proiectarea artistică, design interior.*

Over the years, the idea of meaning has benefited from various theoretical contributions integrated into philosophical systems or into the conceptual construction of certain scientific disciplines. The investigations of the researchers R. Arnheim, U. Eco, P. Francastel, E. Kant, V. Vischer, E. Cassirer, O. Spengler, M. Eliade represent significant moments in the history of thought. The analysis of their contribution designates the defining features of the concept of meaning, presents the main topics, the points of view from which they were approached, as well as the proposed solutions. The combination of so many different elaborations, situated in the cultural context, particularly, contains rich thematic horizons, which led to the formation of certain related theoretical constructions and illustrates their explanatory power.

The studies on the meaning of an artwork were conducted in two directions, following independent projects. One direction belongs to Semiotics and has developed a deductive re-

search, trying to provide a uniform basis for the interpretation of all visual communications. The semiotic perspective constitutes an indispensable basis for studying the world of visual images, the meaning of the works of art, despite the tendency of describing rather itself. The second direction has chosen an inductive direction starting from very diverse imaging phenomena, from the differences between different types of images. In this case the meaning of visual signs aims to develop a typology of visual images.

Being a widespread notion, with a special spread in structuralism, meaning was founded in the late nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century in art theory, and generally refers to the content or message, to the content of the artwork and not to its form. It is oriented to a procedural character that unites the form and the content. P. Francastel states: "There are utility objects that are works of art and that are important values for knowing an ambiance; there are paintings and statues that do

not mean anything and that, after all, are neither artworks nor objects of civilization" (...). Knowing the images, their origin and their laws is a key to our time. [5, p. 63, 66] Meaning, in his opinion, exists only depending on the collective needs and conventions. "Few people express themselves, at least in the present state of society - with the help of lines or sounds. But this does not mean that lines and sounds are not signs, just as well as letters and words being able to express ideas and feelings (...). The plastic sign appears at the end of an intellectual as well as manual process, which meets the elements derived not from two terms, reality and imagination, but from three: perception, reality and imagination (...). It is neither only expressive (imaginary and individual), nor only representative (real and collective), but it is also figurative (related to the optical activity of the brain and to the technique of elaborating the sign itself)." [5, p. 142]

The Italian theorist U. Eco in his work "The Open Work" written in 1962, analyzing the poetic language as a means of communication and characterizing a certain orientation of Western art and culture from the stylistic perspective, with the help of information theory, notes that in some kind of open works, the meaning is established in the active participation of the receiver that reaches the unfinished structure, the free valences of the artistic consciousness. Thus, meaning implies the creative-reception unit.

In Interior Design, the designer must understand the message (the idea that he/she wishes to express and make it intelligible) before the beneficiaries do. The representation of messages must be associative and it must be expressed through characteristic symbols, physical signs or interior spaces

used in Interior Design. The beneficiaries, in their turn, must accept the message that aims to represent them.

Causing a reaction, an active participation, the meaning, represented by a symbolic configuration in Interior Design transgresses a simple passive reception. It becomes a dynamic, structured and structuring entirety, potentially bearing meanings. Any interior space carries a meaning that invests it with authority, security, wisdom, success, giving it either a serene or a ludic allure.

Meaning depends on the organizational scheme in plan and suggests the assembly of the elements chosen as significant due not to their compliance with certain models taken from the outside world, but according to their relation with the laws proper to the organizational scheme. Meaning represents the cohesion principles of the system and issues related to imagination. It is based on a limited number of basic forms, considered to be the most simple, the combination of which could generate any other form. In elaborating the meaning, the mutual relationship between the closed and open forms and the specificity of the general properties are important: direction of the lines, angular or curved shape, continuity or discontinuity of the line, regularity or irregularity, symmetry or asymmetry etc.

An important role in this context is played by the symbol, which within the limits of a determined convention, manages to convey allusively a certain amount of information and always represents an image full of meaning. The symbol is endowed with the inexhaustible versatility of the image. The symbol structure involves two components: the image (object, being, phenomenon, event etc.) and its meaning, without which the sym-

bol cannot exist. Using the symbol without an origin and a destination is illogical. Consequently, the symbol contained in the meaning works as a tool for reciprocal action between the transmitter and the receiver for mutual denoting and connoting, being codable according to the contexts.

By “symbolic”, the philosopher E. Kant meant an intuitive representation way, but indirectly, thus, a way of seeing the things that represent the concept only by a certain analogy. V. Vischer defines the symbol primarily as a relationship between image and meaning, using a term of comparison, in which the word “image” means a certain visible object and the word “meaning” – a certain concept irrespective of the circle of representations from where it comes”. For E. Cassirer, the symbol is an essential means by which one detaches from natural kingdoms and enters the world of intelligible forms. “The symbolic form, states E. Cassirer - must designate any of those spiritual energies through which a content of spiritual meaning is related to a sensorial perceptible sign, being directly attributed to it.” [2, p. 8]

The common tool, the only known to the soul in progress is a symbol of expanse. All that exists - O. Spengler affirms - is primarily a space symbol.

Hegel considers the symbolization process as an element of promoting the reason, the symbol being directly related with the sign or the imagination. In this context, he reveals three levels of interdependence:

- The symbol is merely a sign, i.e. the relationship between the meaning and the expression of the sign is arbitrary;
- When the sign has a meaning, it becomes a symbol;
- The symbol can be neither appropriate to the meaning, because it

would be an external and formal sign, nor appropriate, because it would correspond to the content of the meaning.

In his opinion, the symbol implies in fact a dialectics of the sign and meaning.

In the opinion of Mircea Eliade, the symbol has a cognitive value, it is an “autonomous way”, and at the same time, it is a “tool” of knowledge offering an alternative to the Western positivist thinking. Where reason faces difficulties, another way of reflecting the world shows its possibilities. The symbol provides power of simplification and a schematization of the interior space represented within an artistic project, it allows us to extract the most significant qualities of the interior space, to obtain a functional composition which has an immediate understanding. The process of symbolization, in this case, is compared to a world taken as reference, but rebuilt according to certain compositional regularities.

C. Jurov, in his monography “Se vinde arhitectura? – Arhitectura: concept, produs, marketing” (“Is architecture sold? - Architecture: concept, product, marketing”) analyzing the desires of beneficiaries of architectural products, referring to what does the required architectural space mean or should mean for them to be designed, states that there must be a concordance between the ambiance and the topic. “Thus, the contemporary architecture - C. Jurova states - must be understood and appreciated from the functional and aesthetic points of view in order to be possible to notice its cognitive meaning; this can be amplified by the emotional meanings for users, which are sent either as messages of the interior space or as mental experiences that should to be understood as interaction terms with the interior space, where the endogenous and exogenous influences

of the subjects interfere and interact. They become as complex and varied as the interlocutors' personalities or the circumstances that enter into relationship of semantic communication, fact which depends on the context in which the object is situated (for the visual ambiance) or on the context of use (for the visual ambiance). [3, p. 247].

"The form has a double dimension, one which refers to surface, appearance, and another with semantic value, the figure". R. Arnheim gives a psychological load to these two terms; the perceptual figure appears through the interaction between a physical object and the situation existing in the nervous system of the looker, but still it does not depend only on its projection on the retina, but it is "determined by all the visual experiences we have had with the respective object or objects, or with that type of objects in our lifetime." [1, p. 60].

In Interior Design, the concept of meaning is subdivided into two broad categories:

- cognitive meanings that refer to knowledge and pragmatism;
- emotional meanings that are made up of feelings and conventional symbols derived from spaces, volumes, shapes etc.

Cognitive meanings are the result of the functional correctness, geometry of the interior space, gravitational, functional and spatial vectors, spatial and volumetric structure, arrangement of the furniture and equipment etc., all these being able to influence the mental condition of the users of the interior space, so that an interior space, which will be sufficient in terms of capacity and satisfactory as optimum functional and structural relationships, will be less stressful than another interior space, which does not meet the requirements mentioned above.

Emotional meanings are broader and more subjective than the cognitive ones because they refer to interdisciplinary humanistic fields, to issues related to subjects with very diverse personality and very complex spirits that are taken into account when we want to create an authentic design, original as expression and personalization. The increase in the emotional meanings desired by the beneficiaries, based on which to create the ordered interior space should be the starting point in the concept of Interior Design in which the empathetic manifestations of the designers are subordinated to those desired by users.

Spatial concepts must be highlighted and supported not only by the spatial and volumetric structure, but also by the finishing materials that add precision to the lines, surfaces and architectural volumes, and through them, rigor, order and clarity to the designed contents. In Interior Design, transition to combining simple archetypal, intelligible shapes is easier, because in this case we do not speak about imitative art and naturalism, which occupy a large space in the fine arts. Interior Design has its own value by combining simple archetypal shapes. Circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, hexagons, cubes, parallelepipeds, spheres, cylinders, cones and other simple archetypal shapes surround us every day. It seems that inexhaustible vitality is focused in their laconic configuration.

The concept is the benchmark of all the important Interior Design projects. It is an abstract representation of the atmosphere that the created interior space will inspire, representation in which the sensations are referenced through materials, lines, surfaces, volumes, textures, colours and the balance between them.

When studying the interior space proposed to design, the data and information obtained from measurements are analyzed, which are then translated into bi-dimensional representations - scale plans and sections. All the elements that may influence the evolution in time of the artistic project are also taken into account: building structure, building history, building context (location, neighbourhood), environmental factors, etc. Based on previous investigations, the unique and original concept of the artistic project is developed.

The projects carried out by students from the II<sup>nd</sup> and III<sup>rd</sup> years at the speciality of Interior Design at the College of Fine Arts "A. Plămădeală" confirm the need for awareness of the importance of meaning in artistic design of the interior space.

### 1. Interior space for children.

When realizing the artistic project of an interior space for children, at the elaboration of the concept, the specificity of activities in that space were taken into account.

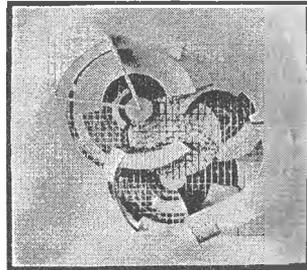
**Destination.** Interior study space for children (age - 5-6 years, destination - study activities and practical activities in the field of ceramics) requires not only a place endowed with safe and comfortable study equipment, but also a space that offers a wide and varied range of activities, where children can interact with each other, develop their personality, cultivate their creativity and inventiveness, and develop from the physical and social points of view.

**Zoning.** The study space concerned occupies an area of about 50 square meters. A distinctive feature of this study space is the division into two different areas regarding the design - the area with the study equipment and the area for the practical activities. This separation of the study area and the area for practical activi-

ties has the role to separate the active studies from the practical studies in order not to create mutual trouble during study, as well as to provide safety of excluding accidents.

**Compositional and chromatic organization.** Appealing to the simple an archetypal shape - circle - the author considered that mainly this shape means most obviously the potter's wheel and the shape characteristic to pottery pieces, while creating an atmosphere of focusing the attention inside the image. The circular shape signifies perfection, continuous motion, open mind, sensitivity. The colour range reveals the natural origin of the material: gray-brown, clay-colour and green, the colour of vegetation.

The abstract nature of the interior spaces encourages the development of the students' imagination.



### 2. Interior space for public alimentation - "Muzcafé" café.

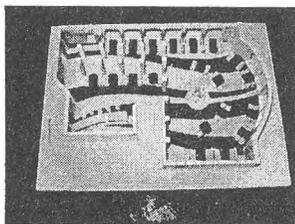
The concept of artistic project was developed based on an existing plan, being designed for a select, specific audience, lover of classical music.

**Destination.** Concerts, painting, graphic design, photography exhibitions are held within the café, people discuss about music, art. The interior space of "Muzcafé" is specific and it is intended for consumers who partake of the transparency, openness and prestige of the place in order to reconfirm their position both in relation to themselves and to others. Musicians, composers, writers, plastic artists, art critics who have common interests

and communicate informally meet here. The pleasant interior atmosphere contributes to the formation of a music lover and loyal audience.

**Zoning.** The interior of the cafe, conventionally, is divided into three areas: the bar area, the service area, and the area for cultural activities. The bar counter, one of the most important and richest elements of the café, is located closer to the entrance. The spatial location of the tables follows certain logic and the sofa style booths are strategically located on the lateral sides of the interior space, the rest of the tables being judiciously superimposed on the guidelines, creating the impression of musical notes.

**Compositional and chromatic organization.** The main symbolic element - the "musical scale" - is represented in plan by plastic, fluid lines. The elements in plan and the spatial shapes create an impression of the presence of certain musical instruments with keyboards. The integrity of the interior space is marked both by the relationship between content and form, and by the constructive formal and proportional logic of the parts and the whole. The compositional organization is clear; it is based on the guidelines, the force lines.



The dynamic of the composition elaborated in conjunction with the constructive structure and functional scheme is evoked by fluid lines that come into mutual relationship with straight lines and express a slowly, continuous sequence. The center of interest is - the scene - towards which the movement of the power lines is directed; it is visible from any point of the interior space. Although the scene is located more in the depth of the interior space, on the longitudinal axis, it is basically situated in the geometric center of the composition.

The color range includes a series of limited colors, the cool, medium saturation and light colors being predominant, which create an intimate atmosphere in the interior space.

**Lighting.** The use of targeted spots and neon bulbs focuses the light on the service areas and on the areas for activities, so it makes a visual, functional and decorative comfort. The lighting system contributes to the creation of a pleasant atmosphere and confers prestige to the place.

Due to the involvement of young creative designers, the meaning of the interior spaces, whose coded meanings serve as a way of representation of certain ideas, symbols of affection, becomes logical and clear. The increase of the share of cognitive and affective meaning in Interior Design will be the starting point in the communication between the designer, the generator of meanings, and the beneficiary who perceives them.

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