

Semiotics and the City
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What is a City?

A city, no matter how big or small, is a vast representation of the cultures, businesses, architecture, government, and people it holds within its geographical lines. These are all encompassing factors of a city's own personality and story. More so, cities are everything we intend to observe, while existing as a collection of striking, uninvestigated quirks and entities that we only see when we choose to open our mind's eye, and not just *see*. Even the most unattractive or seemingly uninventive parts of a city have a story to tell. "One man's city is the sum of all the routes he takes through it, a spur as unique as a fingerprint," (Raban, Chapter 5). Through all of Raban's texts, he alludes to the idea that a city is a projection of ourselves. This is to say that a city is as much of an individual experience as it is a collection of history, events, and a system of on-going lives in motion.

What is Semiotics? How is it used?

Similar to a city, Semiotics is about the way we look at the world, but it divulges more into the analytical spectrum of language, symbolism, and philosophical interpretation. Semiotics gives us a more focused lens on the city, when at times, when translating symbolism at least, it can feel like we're looking at the entire country. "You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours," (Calvino, *Invisible Cities*). Allowing the city to speak to you, while still processing the information it shares with you through a more intellectual point of view opens up a world of possibilities.

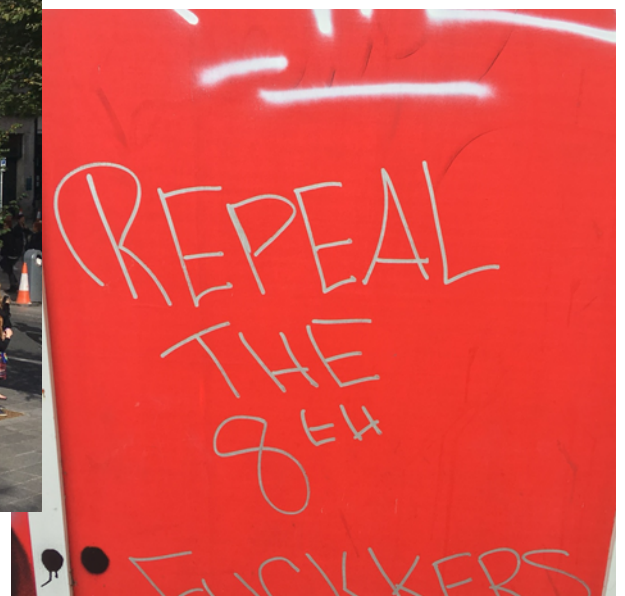
Semiotics can be used in virtually any context, because it is the study of meaning. In any and every field, one can apply the basic concepts of analysis and symbolism. It can be used as a persuasive device, a means for distinguishing between meanings, or simply just a translation of an ostensibly difficult explanation to that of a dictionary definition. You are a master of semiotics as you are a flaneur, "You're at the center of everything, yet you remain hidden," (Flaneur, pg. 36) One of the beauties of this kind of semiotic analysis is that it is personal, but individualistic to Dublin, sharing all its histories and endeavors while I get a hidden front row seat.

7 Themes of Dublin: A Gallery Walk of Meaning

Activism

As a self-proclaimed feminist, a psychology major, a millennial, and someone who cares about other human beings in general, the profound amount of activism in Dublin has been absolutely awe-inspiring. Pictured, you'll see that along the River Liffy, we discovered posters highlighting the issues involved with poverty and how Ireland has been and will be taking a stand against it. I later stumbled across a street artist expanding on his struggle with homelessness, telling everyone to remain kind and humble. Everywhere, I see propaganda urging to 'repeal the eighth,' an amendment that makes abortion illegal in Ireland, which eliminates women's reproductive freedom, and next to that is the March Against the Eighth that I was lucky enough to witness venturing through the city. Thousands of men, women, and children poured through the streets with signs, flags, and peaceful fists raised to the sky.

For a city with a long-standing history of being the underdog, the inhabitant's ability to stand up for their beliefs – and for what is right – speaks to just how progressive they are now. A community's ability to question authority is valuable in it being a catalyst for discussion, and like most things, discussion leads to change. In any history book, in any failing group project, in any terrible government administration, sometimes we require just a little change, and great things can happen. "The universe may not always play fair, but at least it's got a hell of a sense of humor," (Carrie Bradshaw, *Sex and the City*).



keeping these places of prayer to a certain standard. In our tours and travels, we have been consistently reminded of the fact that the majority of the dated buildings have been kept to their original condition. Personally, this speaks to the value of the church and how deep it is held to the heart of the city.

“In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.” This is the opening line of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916, which is their declaration of independence document from the United Kingdom. Though we have hints of the church in our own documents in the United States, I see the devotion in live action throughout the city. Every time I utilize public transportation, and we pass a church, people do the sign of the cross on their bodies; all ages partake, not just people of an older generation. Pictured, at Christ Church, a statue of Jesus is laying down on a bench is an evoking reflection of homelessness and what He gave up for us to live this life. This representation of the church is a humble one, because it speaks to many positive, influential characteristics of the church as well as nods a head to the homeless population of Dublin, provoking people to reflect every time they walk by.



History of Oppression

“We were born into an unjust system. We are not prepared to grow old in it.” - Bernadette Devlin, 1969. The Viking’s heavy hand and England’s dominant rein over Ireland have left permanent hallmarks in Dublin. The oppression of these leaders by no means has inhibited Dublin’s growth today, but rather, has embedded a mentality of ‘we will be better.’ All over the city are remnants of the governance over this now profoundly independent city. What I initially found odd was that things like England’s stamp are still found on posts everywhere, or that Viking Duck tours are given all over the city. “Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret...” (Calvino, pg. 44). Now I realize that Dublin actually embraces these previous encounters as a reminder, but more so, as an empowering mechanism of social change and culture. They turned their fears into a desired course of action and made it a way of life.

The people of Dublin are very easy-going, and unclear about the things they might want or need for other’s to get done. To any other American not looking at the city through a semiotic lens, one might think they’re rather lazy. However, as someone who understands that after thousands of years of being dictated by authority, Dublin just doesn’t want to come off as rude or officious. They embrace their history in other ways too, by being very culturally accepting; all over the city you see Vietnamese, Indian, Thai, Italian, and even American food eateries, as well as a very diverse populations of humans overall. Unlike their previous rulers, they persevere in the name of equality and diversity.



Pride/LGBTQ+ Community

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, it was important for me to feel safe and accepted here in Ireland, and Dublin has done just that for everyone. Same sex marriage was made legal on the 16th of November in 2015. After talking to many locals and a few members of the community here in Dublin, it's easy to tell that since then, the pride flag, in all its glory, has boomed. Places like The George, Panti Bar, and really any local pubs that hung rainbow flags outside sent ripples throughout the city. Young adults, working class citizens, older generations of all sexual orientations are seen enjoying a brew; everyone encompasses the community when it is allowed to flourish. What's even more impressive is how accepted and nurtured the LGBTQ+ culture has become.

Outside any of these kinds of places back at home, there's bound to be one or two protesters and a sea of complaints on how inappropriate or repulsive it is. "Social conditions in this increasingly numerous class is determined not by what a member produces but by what he consumes," (Raban, pg. 100). This is to say that, by fault, Dublin has already consumed an idea of kindness and empathy through its history, has initiated its progression through repealing law, and has accepted it as a city. The condition in Dublin Raban speaks of, from what I can see, is acceptance.



Construction/Gentrification

Dublin is an ever changing, ever growing metropolitan area. I never fail to see something being fixed or built around the city. From cranes, to construction, to big red ‘sold’ signs written on sides of buildings, there’s always a new or better ingredient to be added to the pot of soup that is the city. Part of the reason Dublin is so intriguing and quirky, however, is due to the timeworn allure. “...one may observe a honeycomb of fully-worked-out worlds, each private, exclusive, bearing little comparison with the nearest neighbor,” (Raban, pg. 65). Gentrification in the city worries me because it will slowly take away from what makes Dublin an Irish classic. Old shops turn into Starbucks and hipster cafes, old pubs turn into clubs, and those who have lived in these sacred neighborhoods watch as their childhood memories turn into a teenager’s ideology of an MTV music video backdrop. I’m all for a good economy and overall growth, but at what cost to culture?



Courts and Criminal Justice System

The Criminal Courts of Justice were built in 2010, and is the principal building for district, circuit, and higher courts in the Republic of Ireland. Their mission statement is as follows, “To manage the courts, support the judiciary and provide a high-quality and professional service to all users of the courts.” For me, being a Criminal Justice minor, it represents that, throughout its longstanding history of being under the thumb of major oppression and judgment, Dublin persists to be just in its endeavors. Its unique modern architecture, and overwhelmingly vast, stunning halls of the interior evokes so much emotion. Hundreds of thousands of people come through this building every year, to watch, to listen, to be sentenced, to do the sentencing, and though it may seem rather tedious, its unique ability to unite people in their weakest moments for the greater good can move mountains. In my internship, some of my clients talk about how their judges saved them by pushing them to be better people in their society. To me, that makes every hall and courtroom built in the CCJ worth something more.



Sports

Dublin certainly bleeds blue. “Personal identity has always been rooted in property,” (Raban, pg. 66). To Dublin, and to Ireland as a whole, their sport and their counties are very much their own. If one were to put on a blindfold, walk throughout Dublin on any given game night, and choose a pub at random, the atmosphere would be electric. Father’s bring their sons to watch rugby matches, sporting their team’s colors and jerseys so no mistakes can be made about whom they are cheering for. Sports have always been important in my life, playing and watching, so observing the nationality, pride, and strong family bonds in corner pubs like The Bleeding Horse or Ferryman Pub has never failed to add that extra sense of home and even belonging to an otherwise unfamiliar place.





What does this semiotic analysis of Dublin mean? I think, after all, semiotics is bigger than any individual, community, city or country. Allowing each other to gain our own perspectives in the spaces we choose to explore leaves room for a bigger discussion. We all arrive to new discoveries with a backpack full of things that we know to be true. Semiotics in Dublin has shown me that at least one of my truths is the same, or at least similar, to that of someone I know, and isn't that beautifully profound; that with a completely different set of eyes, set of experiences, set of opinions, one can see the value of family in a corner pub by the River Liffy; that one can feel the power of love vibrate from the music of The George; that someone can read the walls of the architecture of the city like a book, just like you. If every classroom in every corner of the globe assigned a paper on reconnoitering Semiotics of their city, the world might be a brighter place.

