

# Title: Architecture as Political Image: The Perspective of Advertising

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## **Abstract:**

In the realm of contemporary politics, the need to “communicate” is paramount. Some call political communication a process of manipulation, others a dark art of depict. Here, it will be examined as a form of promotion; as a form of advertising. However, it is an advertising typology that clearly appropriates architecture to its own persuasive ends.

The world of advertising has been subject to numerous developments throughout the course of its history. In the last three decades this has seen what had become the standard mode of visual communication, semiotics, replaced by divergent and ever more sophisticated systems. These systems, we suggest, require the application of phenomenology as an analytical framework if we are to fully understand how they work. However, the importance of semiotic systems of communication has not evaporated. They remain core to advertising and, although obvious to a now fully visually literate public, a reasonably effective technique. They also remain evident in the realm of architecture, political communication and, as we describe here, the combination of the two.

Examining two images of Barack Obama from the 2008 Presidential election in the United States, this paper underlines how core aspects of the standard semiotic system of analysis clearly reveal the promotional and persuasive techniques employed in “political imagery”. However, it also describes how they are incorporated into a broader framework of the politico-media-complex and how this has helped transform their communicative strategies into techniques which require the application of a phenomenological analysis. Employing the terminology of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Judith Williamson, Noam Chomsky and Maurice Merleau Ponty it will describe these images in fully advertising terms; an approach that turns the politics in play into a form of *commercial* exercise and the candidate promoted into a “product”. The communicative techniques revealed are of course applied by all parties and individuals operating within the competitive political arena but these images of Barack Obama are perhaps the ones that reveal the similarities between the advertising and politics, and their use of architecture, most succinctly.