

**A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE ARCHITECTURE**

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**MİMARLIĞI ANLAMA VE YORUMLAMA BAĞLAMINDA KAVRAMSAL BİR MODEL**

**ÖZET**

Kapsamlı bir tez çalışmasının özeti niteliğinde olan bu yazı, mimarlığı anlama ve yorumlamada, insan-çevre arasındaki dinamik ilişkiye dayalı fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım önermektedir. Mimarlığın diyalektik ilişkilere dayalı yapısı, geniş perspektifli anlama ve yorumlamalara imkan tanımaktadır. Bu amaçla anlam sorununu özne-nesne ilişkisi açısından farklı ele alan, dile dayalı göstergebilimsel, yapısal ve post-yapısalcı yaklaşımlar ile özne-nesne ilişkisi dayalı fenomenolojik ve hermenötik yaklaşımlar irdelenmiştir.

Bu alanlardan elde edilen gösterge, metin, söylem; görüngü, yaşantı ve hakikat gibi anlama ve yorumlamaya dayalı farklı kavramlar aracılığıyla eleştirel bir bakış açısı sağlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Göstergeden görüğüne, metinden yaşantıya, söylemden hakikate dönüşümün mümkün kılınmasıyla mimarlık çok yönlü bir değerlendirme imkanı kazanabilir. Bir gösterge olarak mimarlık ürününü dile dayalı sentaktik ve pragmatik kriterler çerçevesinde çözümlerken, onun bir görüngü olarak anlamak ve özüne ulaşmak; kültürler ve çağlar arasında kültür metinleri olarak işlev gören mimarlık ürünlerini kodlar, kanallar ve mesajlara dayalı olarak okurken, zaman – yer ilişkisini bir varoluş biçimi olarak yaşamak; söylemlerin dilsel mekanizmalar aracılığıyla ilettiği gerçeklikleri özne-nesne arasında gerçekleşen diyalektik bir süreçte hakikate dönüştürmek, bu modelin önerdiği yaklaşımdır.

Bu tür bir bütünsel bakış açısıyla tasarımcı, mimarlığın iç dinamiklerini oluşturan bilim-sanat, teori-pratik, ürün-süreç, özne-nesne gibi kavramlar arasındaki ilişkilere yeni yorumlar katabilir. Sosyal, kültürel, teknolojik, psikolojik pek çok faktörü değerlendirmek durumundaki mimarın, yeniyi tasarlarırken, anlama, yorumlama ve eleştiri sürecini de çok yönlü bir bakış açısıyla ele alması modelde sunulan ilişkiler yardımıyla sağlanabilir.

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, a conceptual model for understanding and interpreting architecture is proposed. The interpretation would be based on a phenomenological approach, which in turn relies on a dialectical relationship between man and environment.

In comparison to the semiology, structural and post-structural approaches to architecture based on objective meaning concerning language, phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches are based on studies involving inter-subjective meaning. This approach allows the understanding of wide range of concepts. It is tried to offer a critical approach to architecture through the concepts such as sign, text, discourse, phenomenon, experience and truth rooted in meaning and interpretation.

Architects would be empowered with a multi-dimensional evaluating ability as a result of the metamorphosis possible between sign and phenomenon, text and experience, discourse and truth. Understanding architecture as a phenomenon to uncover the essence of its hidden dimensions, instead of, analyzing it by syntactic and pragmatic criterias; understanding the architectural work in the pattern of relations of time and place through the concept of experience, instead of reading it in the frame of semiotic tools like codes, canals, messages ; transforming the discourses carrying the realities by the mechanisms in

language to the truth of life. These are the proposed relations that structure the conceptual framework in this model.

This sort of holistic approach would in turn help the architects to comprehend the inner architectural dynamics between science and art, theory and practice, product and process, object and subject. The architects who evaluate the social, cultural, technological and psychological factors, can use these relationships while designing the new.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Architecture was accepted as an art until the advent of the “Positivist Design Theory of Enlightenment”. Architecture emerged as an activity involving knowledge of science (the mind) and creating of art (intuition). The contrasting lines of thought allowed for a better understanding of the relationship between man and his environment. As a result architecture is now interpreted by its functional and structural performance along with communicational and semantic values.

### **1.1. The New Definitions of Architecture as a Consequence of the Interpretation**

Architecture is a design activity where ideology, experience, evaluation and application are inclusive to both theory and praxis.

Architecture is the process of turning the ideal to the reality within the life.

It is the process between design and criticism understood and interpreted through its paradoxes between science and art, theory and praxis and subject and object.

It is a multidimensional amalgamation of social, cultural, economic, technological and psychological factors.

### **1.2. A Conceptual Model Proposed for Understanding and Interpreting Architecture**

A conceptual model proposed in this research is structured according to a holistic approach to architectural interpretation involving a dialectical process in design. The aim is to initiate discussions of subject-object problem in architecture where the objective data taken in by the mind is analyzed by scientific methods. Besides, the reflection of subject’s inherent factors stimulates the creative process and shapes the works of architecture. Effective interpretation necessitates a meaning to the relationship between architecture and man in a circle of interest and knowledge combined with theory and praxis.

### **1.3. Methods of Understanding the Meaning of Architecture**

Approaches to understanding meaning of architecture can be classified into those based on objective values - semiology and those based on a dialectical relationship between subjective and objective values - phenomenology and hermeneutics. As a result of this new understanding of meaning, the dynamic structure of architecture has been accepted as an effective system of social communication and language between the cultures and epochs.

## **2. APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING MEANING**

### **2.1. Approaches to Meaning Based on Language**

#### **2.1.1. Semiology**

De Saussure envisaged the linguistic approaches and principles of semiology. Architectural language encompasses a wide range of concepts such as: 1.Language and speech, 2.Systematic and syntagmatic factors, 3.Levels of signifiers and signifieds, 4.Denotative and connotative

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meanings, 5.Synchronic and diachronic planes and 6.Importance of function and value. Semiology highlights the significance of different kinds of signs of all cultural systems. Text forms the basis for the approach to research. According to this approach meaning can be obtained from reading of the text and associating intertextuality with codes, canals and messages.

In semiology a work of art or architecture is taken as a draft that can be shaped by the interpretation of the reader or the user. Architecture becomes a dialectical process of the passage of messages between the past and future. This dynamic structure of the reading has two steps. Step 1:The explanation of text made according to inner relationships. Step 2:Interpretation by evaluating the semantic probabilities. If these planes penetrate into each other, aesthetic value can appear.

### **2.1.2. Structuralism**

Takes the approach of synthesizing an object as a part of an independent whole. The system and the functions of inherent elements by synchronic reading form the contents of the whole. Structural content gives meaning to an object in structuralism.

Structuralism enables both the reading of texts and the reading of cultures: through semiotics, structuralism leads us to see everything as 'textual', that is, composed of signs, governed by conventions of meaning, ordered according to a pattern of relationships.

### **2.1.3. Post-structuralism**

Post-structuralist thought, following Derrida's critique of what he calls the "metaphysics of presence", has taken an anti-scientific stance and, pursuing the infinite play of signifiers, has resisted the imposition of any organizing system.

An ideal example of this kind of approach is the "deconstruction". It aims to show the difference by destroying and dissolving the system's hierarchy and by showing the contradictions between the grammar and rhetoric figures. According to this new way of thought, contrasting elements work in an associative pattern and the strategy of deconstruction suggest the reversal, displacement and reconstruction of elements in a different form. In considering this language game occurred in discourses, possibilities of multiple interpretations of texts exhibits that meaning is inherently unstable due to the play of signs within language.

## **2.2. APPROACHES TO MEANING BASED ON INTERSUBJECTIVITY**

Some non-verbal philosophical approaches towards understanding meaning such as phenomenology and hermeneutics are based on the meaning and interpretation process between the man and the environment.

### **2.2.1. Phenomenology**

Has the principal purpose to study the phenomena, or appearances, of human experience while attempting to suspend all consideration of their objective reality or subjective association. The phenomena are those experienced in various acts of consciousness, mainly cognitive or perceptual acts, but also in such acts as valuation and aesthetic appreciation.

Phenomenology is concerned with an exploration and description of the environment aspects of everyday life aiming to uncover the essence of objects, by the method of reduction. Intention and reflection play an important role in this process. In conclusion this process is based purely on a person's perception of the dynamic subject-object relationship.

## 2.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics regards texts as means for transmitting experience, beliefs and judgments from one subject or community to another. The approach could be looked at from three different angles.

**a. Historical viewpoint:** According to the hermeneutic criticism, “experience” is the constant, which determines the variables of space and time in order to understand the world. Experiences form the essence of the cultural values of the society which in turn determine the inter relationship between product and activity. Every activity and its product can be accepted as the forms of Geist levels and these are the results of the known, shared and determined sphere of life of the society. According to this approach, life is a dynamic process being related to positions, correlations, perspectives of looking and experiences

**b. Ontological viewpoint:** Heidegger's the pioneer of the ontological way of thinking based the approach on the possibilities of existence of the character of “Dasein”. Heidegger brings hermeneutics from a theory of interpretation to a theory of existential understanding. As he explains, interpreting a situation or even a text, always means that we ‘re projecting our possibilities. This viewpoint is based on the concept of “being in the world” weaved around the interrelation between object and subject. Heidegger, opinioned that a dwelling for example had an authentic life of its own which acted as a secure area against the danger of homelessness of technology.

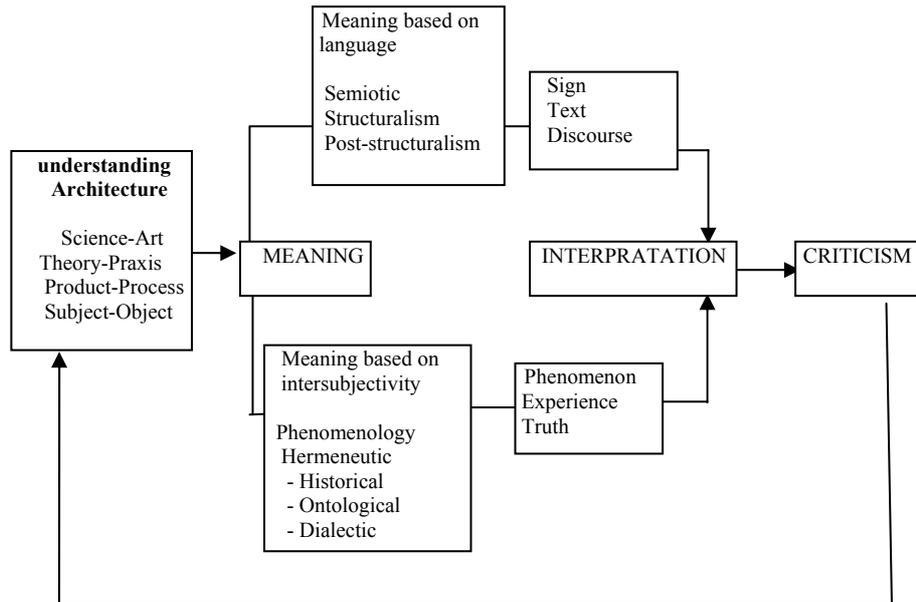
**c. Dialectic viewpoint:** This viewpoint germinated from Gadamer's philosophy based on the dialogue between object and subject. This is the concept used for an aesthetic experience re-constructed in the course of interaction between object and subject. A combination of traditional and modernistic way of looking at things determines the meaning and “truth” of the subject.

In conclusion, the approaches to understanding and interpreting architecture have different views of subject-object problem solving. While the linguistic and semiotic approach considers the subject and object as independent entities, the phenomenological and hermeneutic approach does the exact opposite. Subject and object are considered as an organic whole to be interpreted and understood and not as subject classifying, analyzing and understanding the object's characteristics, functions and structure.

## 3. THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE ARCHITECTURE

In the light of the approaches defined, a conceptual model for understanding and interpreting the architecture is proposed. The concepts, which reflect the subjective and objective character of architecture and also explain the “understanding-interpreting” are brought together in this model. The model aims to propose a wide-angled holistic critical view towards the meaning of architecture.

Architecture today demands the use of a multi-dimensional point of view in design. Over the past decade uncontrolled, and chaotic architectural environments have led to a loss of meaning. The need of the hour is to transform the product to process, theory and ideology to aesthetic effect. That is the reason for borrowing concepts for the proposed model from both linguistic and inter-subjectivity approaches.



**Figure 1.** 1.A conceptual frame work for understanding and interpreting architecture

#### 4. RESULTS

The conceptual framework proposed in this study is the result of a comprehensive study on interpretation and criticism in order to draw attention on a different perspective in understanding architecture. The following conclusions will help to open our mental locks that give rise to rethinking architectural criticism.

1. The work of architecture acting as a sign whether it is conceived as a phenomenon by pure conscious, the essence of architecture is seized.
2. Architectural works like texts are communicational instruments of culture and should be experienced by being in time and space.
3. Discourses originating the daily-life through mechanisms of language are carrying the reality about objective knowledge. The discourses become the truth in the dynamic relationship of subject and object patterned by cultural, social, historical, philosophical experiences.

To encapsulate, the thesis, "It is an attempt to understand the meaning of architecture based on objective and inter-subjective approaches, to the concepts supported by the metamorphosis of text to experience, sign to phenomenon and discourse to truth. Additionally the thesis aims to act as an effective tool in the complex and debatable process of criticism". Finally the model aims to help architects to think, to evaluate and to create the "new" in design process.

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